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ROMULO GALLEGOS INTERPRETER
OF VENEZUELAN LIFE

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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H. W. Thomas

Major professor

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INTERPRETER OF VENEZUELAN LIFE

by
LIGIA ESTER SIMONS DE ARMAS

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FOREWORD

Mr. Rómulo Gallegos is known in Venezuela and abroad not only as a statesman and educator, but also as a distinguished contemporary novelist. His novels give a vivid picture of a country whose hinterland has not yet emerged from the ignorance which has kept it in a state of almost primitive isolation. Our author is a gifted narrator and prose writer, for he knows how to infuse life into his characters and to describe realistically the landscape of Venezuela, which occupies a preponderant position in most of his books, with all its beauty, mystery, and tragedy. At the same time the reader is attracted by a style which, while often expressing both the phraseology and the spirit of the simple people, is a masterful example of the richest and purest modern Spanish.

This thesis is a study of the eight novels written by Rómulo Gallegos up to the present. It is an attempt, in particular, to show the scope of the interpretation of Venezuelan life revealed in these works. Attention will be given also to certain of their literary features.

It is hoped that the first chapter, a brief outline of the historical and geographical background of the writings of Rómulo Gallegos, will lead to a better understanding of the author's concern about defective conditions in his native Venezuela.

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Venezuela, the northernmost country of South America, is a tropical region made up of four major divisions: the Highlands of the Andes, the Maracaibo Lowlands, the Orinoco Llanos and the Guiana Highlands. The Venezuelan Highlands, a branch of the Andes Mountain Range, is the most densely populated division, because the large cities are located there. In the Maracaibo Lowlands, which are rated second in importance, there is an extensive fresh-water lake--Lake Maracaibo. Great oil fields are situated in this western area, attracting a large number of foreigners who, together with the tremendous wealth they have extracted from the soil, have produced social and economic problems of first magnitude. The third division is a vast plain--the Orinoco llanos--huge seas of grass that slope down from the south and southeastern base of the Andes toward the Orinoco River, which gathers in hundreds of tributaries watering half of Venezuela. This vast region has been the dwelling place of the llaneros (Venezuelan cowboys), as well as the birthplace of such leaders and dictators as José Antonio Paéz and Juan Vicente Gómez. Unfortunately, much of this area still lies unconquered by civilization. South of the Orinoco River is the fourth and least populated region--the Guiana Highlands--

which make up half of the total national territory.¹ A large part of the region is covered by forests of rubber trees. The attraction and mysteries of these forests have inspired many writers to make them the setting of their literary productions. Among the most outstanding of these are La Vorágine by José Eustasio Rivera, Canaima by Rónulo Gallegos and the world-famous Green Mansions by Henry Hudson. All these regions have molded the life of the Venezuelan people and have attracted many writers who have studied the physical, ethnographical, and political conditions of the country.

The population of Venezuela is made up of four million people. These are mostly mestizos living in the Highlands and Lowlands. There are also Europeans, who usually prefer the large towns and cities, such as Caracas, the capital, Maracaibo, and Valencia; Indians, who dwell in the hinterland of the Guiana Highlands south of the Orinoco River or in the forest west of Lake Maracaibo; and Negroes, usually to be found along the Caribbean coast in ports such as La Guaira and Puerto Cabello.² Another part of the population is made up of foreign investors. The wealth of Venezuela has lured men from all over the world, especially North American and European oil men who are often too exclu-

¹ Preston James, Latin America (New York, 1942), 49.

² Ibid., 46.

sively interested in their own economic improvement.

Venezuela, like most of its sister countries, has been prolific in the production of a literary genre--the novel. In regard to the realistic novel of Latin-America, Arturo Torres Riosco states:

La novela es, indiscutiblemente, la expresión literaria más importante de la América del siglo XX, y los novelistas hispanoamericanos modernos ocupan--por su vigor, su originalidad y su maestría estilística--un lugar junto a sus más distinguidos colegas del mundo moderno. Y esta novela es fundamentalmente interesante, no por su mérito intrínseco, que es grande, sino como reflejo de la cultura de todo un continente.³

Venezuelan writers, fully acquainted with the past and present of their country, have given their readers a truly realistic picture of its social, political, and economic situation. The problems arising from these various conditions have been clearly portrayed by such authors.

One can easily notice striking contrasts between the large cosmopolitan cities and the backward rural areas in the vast llanos. There are also contrasts in the men who have led Venezuela; for example, Simón Bolívar, the Liberator, and Juan Vicente Gómez, the Tyrant. The former disseminated democratic ideas, and the latter destroyed them. Along with Bolívar, Francisco de Miranda, a fore-runner of the Independence Movement, can be classified among the great patriots of Venezuela. He fought in the American and French

³ Arturo Torres Riosco, La Gran Literatura Ibero-Americana (Buenos Aires, 1945), 195.

• The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need. This is often done through market research, which involves gathering information about potential customers and their preferences. Once a market need is identified, the next step is to develop a concept for the product. This involves brainstorming ideas and creating a rough sketch of the product. The third step is to create a prototype, which is a small-scale model of the product that can be used to test the concept. The fourth step is to conduct a feasibility study, which involves evaluating the technical and financial aspects of the product. The fifth step is to create a business plan, which outlines the marketing and sales strategy for the product. The sixth step is to secure funding, which can be done through various sources such as venture capitalists, banks, or crowdfunding. The seventh step is to manufacture the product, which involves sourcing materials and hiring workers. The eighth step is to launch the product, which involves creating a marketing campaign and distributing the product. The ninth step is to monitor sales and customer feedback, which allows the company to make adjustments to the product and its marketing strategy. The tenth step is to scale the production, which involves increasing the volume of production to meet demand. The final step is to continue to innovate and develop new products, which allows the company to stay competitive in the market.

Revolutions and brought back with him the spirit of freedom. The spark of his liberal political philosophy, in spite of a number of setbacks, has been developed into an evergrowing flame in the hearts of his countrymen.

Simón Bolívar, who realized Miranda's ambitions, became the most outstanding political and military leader not only of Venezuela, but of the other four countries he liberated from the yoke of Spain.⁴ Bolívar's democratic concepts have been admired and followed by his countrymen. His greatest ideal was liberty, and for it he fought tenaciously until he freed the Latin-American countries from Spanish oppression. He will always live in the hearts of those Venezuelans who, like their hero, believe in freedom, equality, and peace. The political conditions of Venezuela, however, have been far from the realization of his great dream because of the few unscrupulous rulers who have obtained political power with the backing of military forces. Men of letters today who are great admirers of the Liberator (the only title he accepted) and enemies of the despotic heads of state endured by Venezuela for almost a century have satirized such dictators as Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez, whereas they have praised again and again the high ideals of freedom of the Liberator.

Since Bolívar's time there has been an almost unbro-

⁴ Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

• The first of these is the fact that the system is not self-correcting. If a system is not self-correcting, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The second of these is the fact that the system is not self-limiting. If a system is not self-limiting, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The third of these is the fact that the system is not self-regulating. If a system is not self-regulating, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The fourth of these is the fact that the system is not self-organizing. If a system is not self-organizing, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The fifth of these is the fact that the system is not self-maintaining. If a system is not self-maintaining, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The sixth of these is the fact that the system is not self-renewing. If a system is not self-renewing, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The seventh of these is the fact that the system is not self-sustaining. If a system is not self-sustaining, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The eighth of these is the fact that the system is not self-protecting. If a system is not self-protecting, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The ninth of these is the fact that the system is not self-healing. If a system is not self-healing, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The tenth of these is the fact that the system is not self-improving. If a system is not self-improving, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The eleventh of these is the fact that the system is not self-optimizing. If a system is not self-optimizing, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The twelfth of these is the fact that the system is not self-adapting. If a system is not self-adapting, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The thirteenth of these is the fact that the system is not self-evolving. If a system is not self-evolving, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The fourteenth of these is the fact that the system is not self-transforming. If a system is not self-transforming, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

• The fifteenth of these is the fact that the system is not self-renewing. If a system is not self-renewing, it will continue to grow and expand until it reaches a point where it is no longer sustainable.

ken series of dictators: José Antonio Páez, Antonio Guzmán Blanco, Cipriano Castro, and Juan Vicente Gómez. All had their turn as masters of Venezuela. The last one, who is commonly known as the Tyrant of the Andes, died in office on December 16, 1935. Gómez is regarded by Venezuelans as the worst of all the oppressors. Contrary to Bolívar's democratic ideals, these men seized the reins of government and directed it with unscrupulous greed. They aspired to power for personal gain, and should be held responsible for the backwardness of their people. Although Gómez was admired by foreigners because he got his country out of debt, he was hated by his own countrymen, who saw in him a harsh and tyrannical ruler. He stifled freedom wherever it appeared.

To the credit of a number of the dictators, it should be acknowledged that they did make some valuable contributions to the welfare of Venezuela. For example, Antonio Guzmán Blanco fostered the improvement and expansion of education. Gómez sponsored the construction of a magnificent system of highways and initiated the exploitation of the country's untapped oil reserves. Thanks to him, Venezuela is the only nation in the world that has no internal or external debt.

During the last dictatorship, men of letters who dared to show their sympathy for democratic ideals were forced to seek a more liberal environment abroad. Rómulo Gallegos was one of these voluntary exiles. He has become



the foremost novelist of Latin-America. Gallegos is representative not only of his country, but also of the Latin-American spirit. He has given his readers a picture of the various sections that make up Venezuela--the vast rolling plains, the mysterious jungles watered by the mighty Orinoco River and its tributaries, the cities and regions along the Caribbean coast, and the Andean mountains. He has given us a kaleidoscopic picture of these regions and a deep understanding of the lives and problems of his own people. An interesting characteristic of the writer is the tremendous importance he accords to nature in all of his works. He has also been attracted by the superstitions, customs, and folklore of his country and has succeeded in fathoming the soul of his countrymen. Undoubtedly, Gallegos is a writer of the land. His human touch has made him popular all over the world and has inspired love and admiration at home.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, on August 2, 1884, our author is the son of Rómulo Gallegos Osío and Rita Freire Guruceaga. Upon completing his elementary education in the public schools, he attended the Colegio Sucre and the Universidad Central. In 1912 he married Teotiste Arrocha Egui, and, forced to interrupt his study of law at the university for lack of funds, Gallegos devoted himself to teaching.⁵

⁵ Lowell Dunham, "Critical Introduction and Biography," appearing in his edition of Rómulo Gallegos, Doña Bárbara (F. S. Crofts and Co., 2nd. ed.: New York, 1944), xiii.

He held important and responsible positions in the field of education for 18 years. His work has been remarkably successful and fruitful. At the age of 28 he became Director of the Colegio Federal in Barcelona (Venezuela); six years later he accepted the same position at the Normal School for men in Caracas, and from 1922 to 1930 he was the Director of the Liceo Andrés Bello.⁶ While Gallegos was engaged in the teaching profession, he found time for creative literary works.

His most famous novel, Doña Bárbara, was published in 1929. Here he portrayed the Apure Region, calling attention to its backwardness, which he attributes to a neglectful dictatorship. Soon after, Gallegos began his political career when he was appointed Senator of the Apure Region by Dictator Juan Vicente Gómez. No doubt Gómez wanted a man like Gallegos to be his ally rather than his enemy. Gallegos did not seek this position and, because it was dangerous to refuse such an offer, he found an excuse to leave the country. Sending his resignation from New York on June 24, 1931, to the President of the Senate, he explained that ". . . so as not to have to express my solidarity with the decisions of that body, I have refused to attend this year's session as

⁶ This school is named after Andrés Bello, a great Venezuelan educator and writer, who lived during the 19th century.

well as last's."⁷ After that, it would have been dangerous to return to Venezuela. Gallegos chose to live in exile rather than to join Gómez' corrupt clan of politicians and, after living in New York, he decided to go to Spain. There he had to earn his living by working as a salesman for the National Cash Register Company; he found time, however, to write two of his most popular novels, Cantaclaro and Canaima, published in 1934 and 1935, respectively.

When the aged Dictator Gómez died in December, 1935, all the Venezuelan writers who had suffered spiritual oppression and penury rejoiced. At last they felt free to use their pens to criticize the government of the last two dictators, Castro and Gómez, who had oppressed them for thirty-six years. Many who had chosen to live in exile returned shortly after Gómez' death, and among them was Gallegos. The following April, Eleázar López Contreras was inaugurated as President, and Gallegos was chosen Minister of Education. When the latter tried to change the educational system and do away with the schools maintained by foreign church groups, the reactionary element forced him to resign.⁸ He had held this office for just three months. He then became the Director of the Moving Pictures Company, "Estudios

⁷ Panorama, no. 14 (A magazine published by the Division of Intellectual Cooperation--Pan American Union, Washington, July, 1940), 13.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long letter, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the country at that time. The President talks about the war with Mexico, and about the relations with Great Britain and France. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The letter is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

2. The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Treasury at that time. The Secretary talks about the receipts and expenditures of the Treasury, and about the progress of the Union. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

3. The third part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Interior, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Interior at that time. The Secretary talks about the land and mineral resources of the country, and about the progress of the Union. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

4. The fourth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the War at that time. The Secretary talks about the military operations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

5. The fifth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Navy at that time. The Secretary talks about the naval operations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

6. The sixth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the State at that time. The Secretary talks about the foreign relations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

7. The seventh part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the War at that time. The Secretary talks about the military operations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

8. The eighth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Navy at that time. The Secretary talks about the naval operations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

9. The ninth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the State at that time. The Secretary talks about the foreign relations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

10. The tenth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the War at that time. The Secretary talks about the military operations of the Union, and about the progress of the war. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the Union. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the country.

Avila".⁹ In 1937, he was elected a deputy to the National Congress for the Federal District, where he served as a member of the opposition until 1940. A few months later he was appointed President of the Municipal Council for the Federal District and was also nominated candidate of the opposition to run against General Isaias Medina in the presidential election of 1941. Gallegos was defeated in this election, which was not by popular vote, but by the National Legislature. The following year (1942), Gallegos founded and presided over the Democratic Action Party. Medina's government was overthrown by this party in 1945, but Gallegos refused the presidency which was offered to him at that time. Rómulo Betancourt, another outstanding member of the party, took over the government temporarily. Then Gallegos was nominated by his party and, in December, 1947, was elected President by the people of Venezuela. This time Gallegos was sure of a victory. The old system, which called for the selection of the president by the two houses of Congress, had been abolished on July 5, 1947, and had been replaced by a new constitution, which provided for the election of the president by direct vote of the people. This was done through secret ballot by all adults over 17.¹⁰ The election

⁹ Grismer, Zentz and Housel, Vida y Obras de Autores Venezolanos (Habana, 1945), 33.

¹⁰ Bulletin of the Pan American Union, LXXIII (February, 1948), 71.

day was a red-letter day for democracy in Venezuela. For the first time in one hundred and eighteen years of national independence, the people of Venezuela chose their president in a free democratic election. Gallegos was inaugurated on February 15, 1948.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 70.

CHAPTER II

THE VENEZUELAN LANDSCAPE IN THE NOVELS OF GALLEGOS

Very important in the scheme of Rómulo Gallegos' novels is the landscape of Venezuela, in the interpretation of which he has given much attention to the llanos, rivers, and forests, picturing their beauty and mystery throughout his novels. The cities have not been ignored, but their treatment has included only a few aspects of life within them. Their part in these stories, therefore, is relatively minor.

His understanding of, and warm feeling for, the land is especially noticeable in the description of the llanos. The interest of the author in this region is not simply an outgrowth of human sympathy. The prominence which he gives to this area is in reality an attempt to show by implication the urgent need to bring the benefits of civilization to it.

In the llanos or plains lying along the Orinoco River and its numberless tributaries, we find vast expanses of grass feeding an infinite number of cattle; crocodiles along the rivers prized for their valuable skins; and, in the rainy season, lagoons covered with precious white egrets. This sparsely settled region is semi-arid half of the year and inundated by torrential rains the other half.¹ In spite

¹ Jefferson Rea Spell, Contemporary Spanish American Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1944), 222.

of these disadvantages, it has a tremendous appeal. The author's artistic personification of it is that of a beautiful but terrible Circe which lures men to their death.²

Gallegos excels in describing the fascinating llano life in Doña Bárbara and Cantaclaro, two of his best productions. In Doña Bárbara, for instance, the story's actual protagonist is the llano itself, as is shown by the author in a number of passages. Following is one example:

La llanura es bella y terrible a la vez; en ella caben holgadamente hermosa vida y muerte atroz. Esta acecha por todas partes; pero allí nadie la teme. El llano asusta; pero el miedo del llano no enfri a el coraz n; es caliente como el gran viento de su soleada inmensidad, como la fiebre de sus esteros.³

The llano, a barbaric land of skies and horizons, is the scene of a struggle between nature and man, where the burning sun beats down on both and where muddy and yellowish rivers, like the Arauca and the Apure, filled with crocodiles, move along slowly to disappear into the far-away forest. This is the land of the Venezuelan cowboy, where there are cattle round-ups, breaking of stallions, alligator hunts, and other typical activities of the llano.

Doña Bárbara is undoubtedly a vivid translation of this Latin-American prairie. The reader can feel the real life of the region that stretches between the Apure and the

² Spell, loc. cit.

³ Gallegos, Doña Bárbara (7th ed., Buenos Aires, Sept. 1944), 69-70.

upper Orinoco Rivers, and he lives through all the episodes taking place in it. The llano itself, of which Doña Bárbara is the symbol, is known as "la devoradora de hombres" because of the malevolent influence that it exerts upon its dwellers, making them thieves, drunkards, and cold-blooded murderers.

In Cantaclaro Gallegos presents the llano lying between the Andes and the great Orinoco River as a limitless and desolate region where there is sweetness, violence, and mystery, and where superstitious beliefs play an important rôle in the lives of its people. This ominous setting gives the inhabitants the ever-present feeling of being on the threshold of a distasteful experience. The passage quoted is illustrative of that impression:

El vasto horizonte solitario, la sabana inmensa y muda, el río sin corriente visible y su vuelta temerosa, como para una súbita aparición espantable y su lejanía desesperanzada. . . . Le infundía miedo aquel panorama obsesionante que se apoderaba de la mirada, miedo supersticioso de algo tremendo que de un momento a otro fuese a suceder. . . . Un soplo de viento repentino doblegaba los pastos ardidados; gritaban las chenchenas. . . . Luego el silencio, que era más que ausencia de todo rumor, replegándose hasta el horizonte, como una resaca de algo menos que silencio, para el maretazo final del cataclismo.⁴

The llano is an illusory and solitary area covered with dry, brown grass during the summer season. It exerts a brutifying action on its inhabitants, lonely slaves of nature

⁴ Gallegos, Cantaclaro (3rd ed., Buenos Aires, July, 1944), 107.

who live in broken-down huts in the midst of filth, misery, and hunger. Ignorance makes them suffer both physically and morally.

In both Doña Bárbara and Cantaclaro the author shows that this backward region is in urgent need of modern civilization. This need is expressed in one of the last scenes of Cantaclaro, which is portrayed as taking place near the Arauca River. Juan Parao, a Negro, dies because his companions are unable to call a physician in this far-away desert, and a student, Martín Salcedo, deploring the situation, says: "Sí. ¡Sí se pudiera! Pero estamos en pleno desierto salvaje. ¡El desierto! El enemigo contra quien primero debemos luchar. La causa de todos nuestros males."⁵

The Venezuelan llano, though a region where there is almost primitive darkness, does not lack conditions which are propitious for worthwhile endeavors. Its distressed people suffer, but hope for a better future. In Doña Bárbara, Santos Luzardo, who is apparently Gallegos' mouth-piece, is hopeful of a civilized and prosperous llano. Dreaming of the day when railroads will provide transportation in these backward regions, he says:

"Algún día será verdad. El progreso penetrará en la llanura y la barbarie retrocederá vencida. Tal vez nosotros no alcanzaremos a verlo; pero sangre nuestra palpitara en la emoción de quien lo vea."⁶

⁵ Ibid., 265.

⁶ Doña Bárbara, 103.

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Sobre la Misma Tierra presents noteworthy descriptions of the western region of the Maracaibo lowlands, where the deserted llanura guajireña and the rich and powerful oil fields are located.

The Guajira plain is described as an isolated, white, nitrous region in which sickness and poverty are the products of the unconquered land of swamps and dunes. It is an abandoned land where lack of water during the hot summer kills the cattle, the only wealth of the poor and hungry, indigenous inhabitants. Around the arid monticules, infection and pestilence spring from the scattered dead cattle which provide abundant carrion for the repulsive, black vultures.

Not far away from this poverty-stricken region, the wealthy oil fields are described with all their modern equipment: comfortable, attractive homes and offices for the employers (who are mostly foreigners); tennis courts and lovely, green golf courses; and high towers raised to drill the Venezuelan subsoil in order to obtain incalculable riches. The foreign opulence of this land of promise has been contrasted by the author with the autochthonous poverty of the Guajira plain. His resentment of the disparity between the two is noticeable in the words of Remota Montiel: "La estupenda suerte ajena junto al descuidado infortunio propio, sobre la misma tierra."⁷

⁷ Gallegos, Sobre la Misma Tierra (Buenos Aires, May 1944), 131.

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The forest lying south of the Orinoco River and bordering on British Guiana is the exciting and fascinating setting of Canaima. This virgin forest is like a temple with millions of columns where the foliage is so thick that neither the wind nor the sunlight can reach the ground. The scenery is always the same, dark green and silent. The following quotation pictures its physical make-up:

Arboles, árboles, árboles. Una sola bóveda verde sobre miríadas de columnas afelpadas de muscos, tinosas de líquenes, cubiertas de parásitas y trepadoras, trenzadas y estranguladas por bejucos tan gruesos como troncos de árboles. ¡Barrera de árboles, murallas de árboles, macizos de árboles! Siglos perennes desde la raíz hasta los copos, fuerzas descomunales en la absoluta inmovilidad aparente, torrente de savia corriendo en silencio. Verdes abismos callados. . . . Bejucos, marañas. . . . ¡Arboles! ¡Arboles! He aquí la selva fascinante. . . .⁸

Rivers such as the Caroní, the Yuruari, the Caura, and the Cuyuni surround this mysterious region which civilized man has not yet penetrated, and where its aboriginal inhabitants have been abandoned to their primitive conditions. Although surrounded by innumerable rivers, the Guayana region is described as a land of "Mucho río, agua como para abastecer a todo el país, y sin embargo, tierras secas que dan tristeza."⁹

This territory which lures men to its abundant but dangerous resources, such as gold, diamonds, and rubber, is pervaded by a mysterious and malevolent atmosphere. It

⁸ Gallegos, Canaima (4th ed., Buenos Aires, 1941), 183.

⁹ Ibid., 36.

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awakens primitive passions and bad instincts in men, who sooner or later succumb to its maddening influence. Rubber and gold are usually called the blessings of the land, but they are really its curse. Many adventurers make their way into the Cuyuni, the Guarampin, and the Botanano forests in search of riches, but if they are able to return from these savage, insalubrious, and inhospitable lands, they are hungry, and sick in mind and body, and sometimes end up as debtors to their contractors. The latter, belonging to the privileged class, receive all the benefits of the land.

Canaima, the divinity of the guaicas and maquirita-res,¹⁰ the frantic god, the origin of evil, is in the hearts of wild beasts and in the hypnotic pupils of snakes. It strikes down huge trees, one of the greatest dangers of the forest, and it looses in the heart of man that tempest of primitive passions that lead him to kill.

Marcos Vargas, a native of Ciudad Bolívar, becomes a victim of the malignant influence of the evil spirit of Canaima and surrenders himself to it. Gallegos, however, gives an impressive description of a tremendous storm taking place in the forest during which man proves to be superior to nature itself. Marcos Vargas, seeing the trees and leaves trembling, feels himself superior to the forest since he does not fear the storm:

¹⁰ Indian tribes of Venezuela.

"El agua y el viento y el rayo y la selva! Alaridos, bramidos, ululatos, el ronco rugido, el estruendo revuelto. Las montañas del trueno retumbante desmoronándose en los abismos de la noche repentina, el relámpago magnífico, la racha enloquecida, el chubasco estrepitoso, el suelo estremecido por la caída del gigante de la selva, la inmensa selva lívida allí mismo sorbida por la tiniebla compacta y el pequeño corazón del hombre, sereno ante las furias trenzadas."¹¹

The atmosphere of Canaima is similar to that of José Eustasio Rivera's famous novel La Vorágine and W. H. Hudson's Green Mansions. Each author, however, has treated the forest in a different manner. Rivera describes the tragedy of the caucheros who die in slavery. He tells of life in the Colombian forest as it was really experienced by him. Torres Rioseco classifies Rivera among the romantic writers; Gallegos he considers a classical writer because of his excellent serenity in the descriptions of the exotic atmosphere of Canaima.¹² The scene of Hudson's novel is also the region south of the Orinoco River, with its countless tributaries, where the indigenous inhabitants have not yet experienced European influence. The two authors, however, have offered different interpretations of the forest in question. Hudson is the romantic poet, painting the beauty and charm of the forest, while Gallegos, himself a product of Venezuela, presents a realistic picture of it with all its gran-

¹¹ Canaima, 236.

¹² Torres Rioseco, Novelistas Contemporáneos de América (Santiago, Chile, 1939), 114.

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deur, horror, and bewilderment.¹³

Great contrasts exist between the aforementioned regions of Venezuela and that of the cities such as Caracas, the capital, Maracaibo, and certain parts of Valencia and Maracay, which have some of the characteristics of cosmopolitan centers.¹⁴

The city occupies a minor place in the landscape of Gallegos' novels. Although he was reared and educated in Caracas, and later held important positions there, he has not been inspired by its life, and the interpretation given in his novels of the city and its inhabitants has, so far, been limited.

In Reinaldo Solar, his first novel, the treatment given to the city is probably due to the influence of Gallegos' own youthful days when he and other young Venezuelan idealists edited the magazine La Alborada in the hope of reforming with their art the evil and disorder in their country.¹⁵ Only one view of the city is presented, and that portrays the general neighborhood where the young artists and students live and strive to better conditions in their country.

¹³ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴ Preston James, op. cit., 74.

¹⁵ Mariano Picón Salas, Formación y Proceso de la Literatura Venezolana (Caracas, 1940), 217.

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With the exception of Reinaldo, who comes from an old and wealthy family, the rest are poor students who occupy run-down boarding houses with poor lighting and ventilation. An example of this is the foul-smelling dwelling where Manuel Alcor, Riverito, and other students live. It is an old two-story building in a ruinous state. Inside, the kitchen and rooms are filthy, and the dark-green walls give it a somber appearance. Most of these city homes belong to old Colonial Caracas and are described as antique, dilapidated homes, with exterior walls blackened by grass and patios surrounded by cypress which evoke for the students the old times of the Colonial days.

Another phase of the city of Caracas is presented in La Trepadora. Gallegos again is critical of the city when he satirizes the exclusive aristocratic set of Caracas. He describes Villa Alcoy, the home of the proud aristocratic Alcoy family, as being extravagantly luxurious. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens where the rich ladies drink tea in the afternoon and by green lawns where the young people play tennis, while their luxurious cars and uniformed chauffeurs await them.

Don Rómulo also describes some of its first-class stores, showing the Parisian influence in the urban life. Thérèse is a small, decorated, Parisian-style store with puppets, expensive scents, bibelots, and other objects of the sort. It is here that the rich Alcoys buy their perfumes

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and have their dresses made by the Parisian-born Thérèse. French is also spoken by the aristocratic girls, who often travel to the "city of light," bringing back its culture. This can be noticed not only in the use of the language but also in their dresses, coiffures, and excessive make-up.

The reader may notice that the author has restricted his descriptions of city life to a few aspects in Reinaldo Solar and La Trenadora. This weakness, however, has been counterbalanced by his masterful descriptions and interpretations of the autochthonous regions of Venezuela, where he feels civilization should conquer the barbarism which still exists there.

CHAPTER III

RACIAL PROBLEMS

The various peoples composing the Venezuelan population may be classified as Whites of pure European extraction, mestizos of mixed European and Indian extraction, native Indians, and the descendants of imported Negroes. The frequent intermingling of Negroes with Whites and Indians has given origin to the mulatto and the zambo,¹ respectively.

Rómulo Gallegos has given special attention to this racial variety in Venezuelan life by trying to analyze the serious social and economic problems which it has created. Throughout his eight novels it is clear at first glance that equality of races, either economic or social, has not been achieved.² Gallegos, who is very much against racial prejudice and injustice toward the mestizo, Indian, and Negro, is eager to find a prompt solution, in order that there may be peace, tolerance, and justice in his country.

Opposing the idea that the white population, which is a minority, should be the ruling class, he has devoted much space in his literary works to showing the attitude of superiority assumed by these people, together with their treatment of the less cultured non-white population. Gallegos

¹ Zambo: a person having Indian and Negro blood.

² Spell, op. cit., 274.

has given the llanero, Negro, and Indian of Venezuela a place of importance in his literary creations which have won world-wide recognition. He has brought to his readers a picture of the personal problems of these mistreated people. It must be acknowledged, however, that while Gallegos has idealized and praised the non-white population, he has not been fair to the Caucasian race, which he has often satirized and ridiculed in individual cases.

The white population of Venezuela, composed of foreigners or people of Spanish descent, is represented throughout the novels by such families and outstanding individuals as the Alcoys and the Casals in La Trepadora, the Vellorinis in Canaima, the Solars in Reinaldo Solar, Doctor Payara in Cantaclaro, and Demetrio Montiel in Sobre la Misma Tierra.

All these people occupy a high social position, since they either belong to families of illustrious ancestry as do the Solars, Casals, and Alcoys--the latter's grandmother on the paternal side was nothing less than an English Duchess--or are rich foreigners like the Vellorinis. Because of their rank in society, most of them are pedantic and conceited personages who live in luxurious homes and lead frivolous lives.

Some of these families have a good cultural background, for they have travelled to Europe and the United States and have brought back with them foreign cultures.

Among them we may also find intellectuals like Reinaldo Solar, who tries unsuccessfully to reform the political conditions of his country, and doctors like Payara and Luzardo, whose education makes them realize the urgent necessity of bringing the fruits of modern technology to the llanos.

The white population is not only a part of the socially and culturally élite, but also of the well-to-do class. The Vellorinis, Corsicans established in Guayana for over thirty years and owners of the most powerful commercial house in Upata, are examples of white foreigners who acquire a fortune in Venezuela and become affiliated with the leading social class. On the other hand, Jaimito del Casal represents the white Venezuelan, a weakling aristocrat who commits suicide because he is a business failure and has caused the loss of his large family estate.

According to the Venezuelan literary critic Rafael Angarita Arvelo, the white population in Gallegos' novels is definitely singled out as the privileged class that oppresses the poor by taking advantage of their social and intellectual inferiority.³ The mestizo, belonging to this latter class, is also a product of two different races and cultures. Although his kind is in the majority, it has been among the groups oppressed.

The outstanding mestizo characters in these novels are

³ Angarita Arvelo, Historia y Crítica de la Novela Venezolana (Berlin, 1938), 137.

usually presented as the illegitimate children of opulent white landowners and their humble Indian servants, who are held in low esteem by the white families. Because of this unjust situation, the mestizo is impelled by a tremendous force to rise above his surroundings in order to vindicate himself and prove his mettle.⁴

Hilario Guanipa in La Trepadora, the son of the rich landowner, don Jaime del Casal, and a poor Indian woman, is a typical example of the mestizo and his struggles. Gallegos describes him as a handsome, arrogant, and brave young man, who is not only a great lover but a good and generous friend. On account of his humble birth, he is not accepted by his father's family. As a result, he determines to assert himself in order to become socially and economically acceptable. He reveals his pride by refusing to bear his rightful name coming from his father, while retaining his mother's common name of Guanipa. His ambition for power and wealth is increased when he falls in love with beautiful Adelaida Salcedo, whom he considers above him from a moral, social, and cultural point of view. Hilario is determined to reach his goal in life. To demonstrate his final success, the reward of his ambition, he buys the coffee plantation at Cantarrana from his ruined relatives--at a price higher than its real value--and marries the woman who is superior to him

⁴ Panorama, No. 14 (July, 1940), 12.

in every respect. •

On the one hand, he represents the mestizo who is led by his primitive emotions because of a lack of culture and education, and, on the other hand, he exhibits generosity, intelligence, and nobility of heart, and is capable of following the proper path of life.

Gallegos' recognition of the mestizo's rights is indicated by the rise of the less favored through acquisition of property in La Trepadora.⁵

Sobre la Misma Tierra offers another good example of the mestizo in Remota Montiel, the daughter of a Guajira Indian and the white Venezuelan smuggler and gambler, Demetrio Montiel. She represents the cultured mestizo who has been educated in the United States. Full of idealism and nobility, Remota refuses a marriage offer in order to devote all her time and attention to the Venezuelan Guajira Indians, toward whom she feels a responsibility because she considers herself one of them.

Gallegos tries to elevate the mestizo in the presentation of this character, especially when he says: "Y Remota . . . se encontró en lo mejor de sí misma con el propósito, sin amarguras ni repugnancias, de reparar los daños causados por su padre."⁶ Unlike her white father, she sac-

⁵ Spell, op. cit., 218.

⁶ Sobre la Misma Tierra, 214.

rifices her life for the people who were sacrificed by her father and tries to construct a better future for them.⁷

Two other characters of importance are representative of the mestizo in Venezuela: Victoria Guanipa in La Trepanadora, who will be discussed in detail later on because of her symbolism in the literary works of Gallegos,⁸ and also Doña Bárbara,⁹ who is considered by most critics his best character. With the presentation of Doña Bárbara, Gallegos does not try to elevate the good qualities of the race, but realistically presents the primitive and barbaric mestiza in contrast to the educated Doctor Luzardo.

The situation of the aboriginal inhabitants of Latin-America has often been the concern of our men of letters, who realize the urgent necessity of transforming their primitive customs and superstitions in order that they may also benefit from our scientific progress. Rómulo Gallegos is extremely interested in the betterment of the Venezuelan Indian and has devoted two of his novels, Canaima and Sobre la Misma Tierra, to a presentation of their customs and the conditions under which they live. He does this by contrasting them with the so-called privileged classes of his country.

⁷ Leo Ulrich, "Sobre la Misma Tierra," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 50 (Caracas, Venezuela, Mayo-Junio, 1945), 136.

⁸ See below, pp. 56-58.

⁹ See below, pp. 58-63.

The Indian is described in Canaima as having a kind and quiet mien. He is aware of the humiliation and defeat his race has suffered and, while willingly submitting to the civilized man, he fears exploitation. Women still use their native outfits of a handkerchief and a shawl, and men wear very short pants, shirts and hats, but no shoes. Families usually live together and, like the Chinese, they are very closely united. What belongs to one belongs to all, and they have a high sense of hospitality. Their backwardness is obvious in the way they live and eat. They all drink from one jug and eat with their hands from one main dish while seated on the floor. One of their most common superstitious practices is not to look each other in the face while they speak, but to gaze toward the ground, since to do otherwise would bring them death. They are not Christians, but have their gods of good and evil. Canaima is the god of evil and Cajuña the good god:

Canaima. El maligno, la sombría divinidad de los guaicas y maquiritaires, el dios frenético, principio del mal y causa de todos los males, que le disputa el mundo a Cajuña el bueno. Lo demoníaco sin forma determinada y capaz de adoptar cualquiera apariencia, viejo Ahrimán redivivo en América.¹⁰

Not only are poverty, tuberculosis, insects, and snakes the enemies of the Indians, but so also are the owners of the rubber and sugar plantations, who exploit and tyrannize them. They are forced to work day and night, and

¹⁰ Canaima, 191.

are paid only half of what any other worker would receive. Such are the conditions under which they live, for example, on Adrian Gadea's property in Sobre la Misma Tierra.¹¹

The Venezuelan Government pays little attention to the Guajira region where the Indians live, according to Gallegos. Surrounded by swamps, the Indian does not have clean water to drink and is obliged to walk miles from his home in order to obtain a small amount of water, which even then is usually dirty. The state does not provide any hospitals or schools for these people, following the policy of leaving them in a semi-barbaric condition. In order to assuage their hunger, they eat small lizards and teasel pulp.

Among the Guajiros, however, one can find wealthy individuals. These are owners of large ranches who have raised themselves above their level and have become partly civilized. Chuachuaime represents this type. He is respected by the entire region because he is rich, and, taking advantage of his economic position, he tries to marry the prettiest and youngest Indian girl of the Guajira, although he already supports other wives and children. In exchange for a pretty girl, the family usually receives from the rich husband-to-be a great herd of cattle and other valuable gifts.

Although Gallegos presents various types of individ-

¹¹ P. 226.

uals in order to give a representative picture of the races in Venezuela, he tends to attribute ideal characteristics to the Indian and Negro races. In Reinaldo Solar, for example, he introduces a minor Indian character, Guaicapuro Peña, perhaps with no other purpose in mind than to extol him as a representative of his race:

Era Guaicapuro Peña, un indiazco membrudo, de negras patillas que le bajaban hasta las comisuras de la boca, confundidas con el bigote. Un sombrero de "pelo de guama," de anchas alas, le cubría de sombra el rostro bien parecido, en el cual Reinaldo descubrió las mismas facciones de América y la misma expresión sensual. Es un bello ejemplar de la raza--pensó, mientras soportaba la mirada buida del hombre temible, satisfecho de sí mismo al comprobar que en sus músculos no había un estreñecimiento de miedo.¹²

The Negro even becomes an important character in Gallegos' novels, especially in Pobre Negro. Turning to historical events for the first time, he describes the struggles and hardships the Negro went through as a slave during the emancipation period in the middle of the nineteenth century. Dunham refers to Pobre Negro as a great novel that points toward an acceptance and solution of the country's racial problems.¹³

From the time they were brought by the Spanish colonizers to labor on the coffee and cacao plantations of Venezuela, the Negroes have been the victims of injustice.¹⁴

¹² Gallegos, Reinaldo Solar (Buenos Aires, Dec.1941),75.

¹³ Lowell Dunham, "Pobre Negro," Books Abroad, XII (1938), 56.

¹⁴ Erna Ferguson, Venezuela (New York, 1939), 10.

They planted cane under the whip of their overseers in the valleys of Aragua and Tuy, cacao, along the Barlovento and Maya coasts, and excavated the mines at Buria and Aroa, besides serving their masters as domestics and nursing their children.

The Negroes are as superstitious as the native Indians. They misuse the Spanish language and include a vocabulary of their own. Like the Indians, they enjoy sensual dancing accompanied by the mysterious rhythm of drum beats, which is a recompense for their hard labor.

Gallegos describes the Negro in Pobre Negro as a playful and frolicsome person. His well-proportioned body is strong and capable of hard work.¹⁵ With the character Juan Coromoto he illustrates the fact that the Negroes usually are faithful to their masters. This representative of his race is killed because of his loyalty to Pedro Miguel, and dies without realizing the great hopes in life which he had placed in his master:

Y Juan Coromoto, no era un hombre, sino el pobre negro, que es todo un pueblo, abandonado por el de espaldas al golpe artero, . . . Juan Coromoto . . . parecía un negro feliz. . . . Sobrellevó su carga, atravesó sus penas y tuvo sus gozos, sin duda; pero . . . no había existido realmente sino en aquel ademán de los brazos atrás, como para salirle al encuentro con todo el pecho a la gran esperanza de su vida. Pero Juan Coromoto se desplomó de su caballo de guerra sin verla realizada.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gallegos, Pobre Negro (Caracas, Feb., 1937), 18.

¹⁶ Ibid., 372-73.

Gallegos also portrays the evil nature of some of the Negroes. We meet Cholo Parima, a bodyguard and instrument of a white politician, and El Mapanare, another base creature, whose barbarism and cruelty leads him to kill his masters and seduce young white girls. He hates the white race and is the leader of a group of black bandits who murder and pillage during the revolution recorded in Pobre Negro.

Cholo Parima is described in Canaima as a gigantic and cunning zanbo with a scarred and deformed face--a proof of his crimes. After being saved from the local authorities by a corrupt politician, Miguel Ardavín, he enters into the services of the latter. With his name changed to Pantoja, he commits a series of crimes for the official, but is finally given some of his own medicine when Marcos Vargas avenges the death of his brother, one of Parima's victims.

In Cantaclaro Gallegos presents another loyal Negro, Juan Parao, whose philosophical ideals are as great as those of a well-educated person. He realizes that because of his race he cannot be a leader of a worthy cause, and so places his hopes in Cantaclaro, who is sympathetic toward him and has all the qualities of a good leader.

Having Juan Parao in mind, Gallegos introduces a beautiful description of the Venezuelan Negro at the end of Cantaclaro. Here he shows his great desire to see this race win proper recognition and enjoy tolerant treatment:

Negro bueno, pobre negro de mi pueblo venezolano, que supiste ser sufrido y rebelde al mismo tiempo. La traición de una injusticia te lanzó a cuatrero, fuiste ladrón y valiente y acariciaste tu idea, tu gran idea que no te cabía dentro del espíritu rudo y obscuro. Una voz de tu sangre, religión de tu raza mesiánica, te hizo luego seguir a un hombre en quien viste un jefe. /Pobre pueblo mío que siempre andas buscándolo! Y guerreaste con él, exponiendo tu vida para que fuese de él la fama del triunfo y para él trabajaste. ¿Quién canta el heroísmo negro de sumisión y la clara virtud de tu lealtad y el drama doloroso de tu culto al hombre que siempre te traicionará o te abandonará? ¿Quién expresará, sin humillarte, el ideal--tu gran ideal--que perseguiste cuando buscabas un jefe? Negro bueno, negro sufrido y rebelde. Pueblo mío que lo llevas en tu sangre como una vergüenza, y en tu pecho como una tormenta. Hasta cuando estarás muriendo a los pies de tu jefe?¹⁷

Gallegos' solution of Venezuela's racial problem is expressed by young Cecilio Alcorta in Pobre Negro:

"Nuestro negro es una raza en marcha, pero no un forastero de paso por nuestro suelo y si mal hicieron los que lo trasplantaron del propio, peor hacemos now cultivándolo como una planta ya nuestra. Aquí se reproduce, todavía con su alma intacta, pero también se mezcla y es así como el cuerpo de la nación va digiriéndolo; mas hay que incorporarlo también al alma nacional, dándole parte en el patrimonio común de la cultura. Además, no tendremos los blancos algo que agradecerle al negro? Ellos nos cultivan la tierra y nos explotan la mina; ellas nos sazonan la comida, nos dan leche de sus pechos cuando a los de nuestras madres les falta, nos sirven y nos cuidan amorosamente y de niños nos duermen con el cuento ingenuo por donde empieza la formación de nuestra alma."¹⁸

Throughout his novels Gallegos tries to find an end to Venezuela's racial problem through the intermarriage of Whites, Negroes, and Indians. In Doña Bárbara, we find that Santos Luzardo, a member of the upper class, marries Mari-

¹⁷ Cantaclaro, 268.

¹⁸ Pobre Negro, 164-65.

sela, the daughter of the mestiza, Doña Bárbara. In Canaima, Marcos Vargas, attracted by the mysterious life of the forest, finally marries an Indian girl, whose offspring is the fusion of two races and civilizations. Also in Sobre la Misma Tierra there is pointed out the blending of the White and the Indian in Remota Montiel who is an asset to the latter people. In La Trenadora, two cases are given: that of the mestizo Hilario and the aristocrat Adelaida Salcedo, and the marriage of their daughter Victoria to Nicolás del Casal, the grandson of the landowner and aristocrat don Jaime del Casal. The intermarriage of Indians and mestizos with Whites is commonly accepted in Latin-America today. Gallegos, however, has gone one step further in Pobre Negro, where he unravels the Negro race problem by having Pedro Miguel, a mulatto, marry Luisana Alcorta, a white girl of a wealthy family.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In a country where the government has been run from the beginning of its independence by ignorant and harsh dictators, where all or nearly all forms of material wealth are in the hands of the privileged few, where industry has hardly begun to develop, and where the peasants in the distant villages lack proper food and potable water, the resultant social problems are certain to be severe and difficult to solve. These problems have been one of the main concerns of Venezuelan writers, especially Rómulo Gallegos, whose approach to them is somewhat similar to that of sociologists.

Most of the landowners in the various novels are members of the aristocracy or upper-class group, descendants of the colonial society that established the feudal system in Latin-America. They are called "patricians" since they know or believe they know the history of their family tree for more than a century.¹ Some are described by Gallegos as conceited and proud individuals with no initiative or responsibility in life. The traditional honor and pride of these patrician families are brought out in the presentation of the Casals, Solars, Alcortas, and Vellorinis, all belonging

¹ Jose Semprún, "Una Novela Criolla--El Ultimo Solar," Cultura Venezolana, No. 14 (Caracas, Junio-1920), 130.

to the select aristocracy of Venezuela. Considering themselves superior to others because of their social, racial, and economic backgrounds, they have abused and oppressed the lower classes, not only materially but morally.

Don Jaime del Casal is a perfect example of the aristocratic landowner who is an honorable and highly respected person. In contradiction to the noble principles for which he is well known, he seduces an Indian servant who gives birth to a child. Since she belongs to a lower class, he is not allowed to marry her. His illegitimate offspring, Hilario Guanipa, suffers the consequences of this when he is old enough to notice the barriers between him and the family of the large and elegant home.

Gallegos not only pictures the pompous life of the aristocrats, but shows how their power in some instances has declined. Able and tenacious mestizos, such as Hilario Guanipa in La Trepadora and Yaguarín Gonzalez in Reinaldo Solar, have taken over estates because of their owners' lack of ability and initiative in the management of a large hacienda. These families, however, do not believe in selling their properties, for they consider this degrading to their social and economic status. Following is Jaimito del Casal's opinion in this respect:

"Nosotros no podemos deshacernos de Cantarrana, que es algo que está íntimamente ligado con nuestro apellido desde los tiempos de la Colonia. Una familia que ocupa nuestro rango social y que tiene las tradiciones de la nuestra, necesita tener una posesión agrícola. Eso,

por qué no decirlo?, eso forma parte substancial de la nobleza."²

Reinaldo del Solar represents another patricio and landowner who believes that because of his position he can mistreat women of inferior birth. He seduces a robust, young country girl who is to be married to one of his friends. When his friend Ortigales asks him whether he intends to marry her, he replies: "¡No hombre! ¿Quién piensa en eso? ¡Amor libre, como el viento que sopla por aquí!"³

Pobre Negro, too, offers a case in which the Alcorta family, of an honorable and illustrious ancestry, disowns Pedro Miguel, the son of an Alcorta and a Negro slave. The characterization of Pedro Miguel will be discussed later on in detail, because he represents one of the most important symbols introduced by Gallegos.⁴

The author presents other types of landowners who are far from being aristocrats but who have attained vast amounts of property through dishonesty and bribery. Doña Bárbara, Adrián Gadea and Hermenegildo Guaviare are in this group. Doña Bárbara, a wicked but beautiful mestiza who has acquired lands through killing, stealing, and attracting men with her seductive charm, does not hesitate to bribe the lo-

² Gallegos, La Trepadora (2nd ed., Buenos Aires, May, 1944), 72.

³ Reinaldo Solar, 79.

⁴ See below, pp. 69-70.

cal authorities and politicians in order to have the law of the plains replaced by "la Ley de Doña Bárbara."

Adrián Gadea, the brutal owner of Motilonia, a large hacienda near Santa Bárbara, is another type of landowner existing in Venezuela. He has not only a first-class dairy farm, but also immense cacao and cane plantations to add to his riches. His prosperity means the sacrifice of hundreds of Guajira Indians who are exposed to fatal malaria, venomous snakes, and the brutal whip which Gadea himself uses on them. This arduous work causes long illness in the starved slaves, who sooner or later perish because of the harsh and cruel treatment they have received.

In El Forastero Hermenegildo Guaviare is not only a landowner but a despotic politician who brings about distressing conditions among his people. Besides being a dangerous revolutionary and killer, he steals valuable properties, seduces women, and changes the course of the river for his own benefit, to the utter disregard of the misery he brings to his people. Leo Ulrich, a Venezuelan literary critic, describes Guaviare as the brutal and primitive tyrant, while his associate, General Parmenión, is the civilized tyrant and adulator. The latter begins his political career as Guaviare's puppet, eliminates his boss from the government affairs of the town, and finally, after killing

him, usurps his place.⁵

Some of the politicians in Gallegos' novels force honest and hardworking landowners to sell their property to them at a very low price. In case of refusal, they are liable to be killed or at best imprisoned. In El Forastero, Parmeni6n offers to return the river to its original course when Marcos Rogers, a virtuous citizen who is interested only in the welfare of his town, lets him have his hacienda in return.

Another land-grabbing politician and Jefe Civil is General Dionisio Buitrago in Cantaclaro. He has already taken possession of an hacienda by imprisoning its owners, the industrious Bejaranos, and is contemplating the possibility of obtaining El Aposento, the large property of the Coronado family. Then a revolution breaks out and Buitrago is killed by a poor peasant, Juan el Veguero, whom he also ruined a few years before by appropriating the little land he owned.

So, too, Cansina presents good examples of the Venezuelan politician. Coronel Apolonio Alcaraván, the Jefe Civil of El Callao is a humorous and well-liked administrator, but at the same time he knows how to procure monetary profits for himself whenever he sees the opportunity. For instance, needing money to pay for an expensive horse, he

⁵ Leo Ulrich, "La Invenci6n en la Novela," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 40 (Septiembre y Octubre de 1943, Caracas), 99.

has sixty negro miners arrested for boisterous conduct on the streets. They either have to go to jail or pay a fine. After the negroes agree to pay the fine, Alcaraván pays his debt. On another occasion, he meets a poorly dressed man from a distant town. Perceiving him to be as much a rogue as he himself, he proposes that the stranger pretend to be a priest in the village and then share the alms with him. The profit, of course, is great, for during Holy Week the pious people contribute large sums to the church.

In Canaima the Ardavines, or "the tigers of the Yuruari" as they are commonly called, are other interesting characters representing the politician of Venezuela. Miguel Ardavín, a poor soldier and a political trickster, has become the cacique of the Yuruari region. His cousin José Francisco, a cowardly but very impulsive individual, takes advantage of his political position to perform all those acts typical of a wastrel. Miguel, on the other hand, appears to be an honest citizen, when he is really a hypocrite who commits crimes by the hand of a Negro servant who doubles as a bodyguard. He is also planning to overthrow the government, but fails and ends in prison because of the betrayal of his cousin José Francisco. Referring to the Ardavines as representatives of the corrupt political caciques of Venezuela, Manuel Ladera, a respected business man, is made to say: "La eterna calamidad de los caciques políticos, que son el azote de esta tierra, pues no hay empresa productiva

que no la quieran para sí solos."⁶

Gallegos has transformed the humble and forgotten peasants of Venezuela into some of the most interesting personalities of his novels by recounting the story of their lives on the vast plains and coffee plantations, and in remote villages and wild forests. He has brought his readers in contact with their joys and problems and has presented them as victims of the social, political, and economic conditions of the country.

Most of the Venezuelan peasants are classified as mestizos; however, a great number of Indians and Negroes whose conditions were described in the previous chapter may also belong to this group.

The human dweller of the plains, the llanero, has enriched the meaning of much of Gallegos' literary production. Although he is a victim of his country's injustice and is exposed to hardships and a dangerous existence, he is a loyal and sincere friend to his master, and retains his good humor. The llanero is a born singer; to him singing is a kind of psychological lubricant which he needs in order to express his joys as well as his sorrows, and for every occasion he sings an appropriate copla.⁷ He is daring and enjoys adventure, but at the same time he is ignorant and su-

⁶ Canaima, 32.

⁷ Dillwyn F. Ratcliff, Venezuelan Prose Fiction (New York, 1933), 252.

perstitious. A perfect description of a typical llanero as given by the author follows:

Y vió que el hombre de la llanura era, ante la vida, indómito y sufridor, indolente e infatigable; en la lucha, impulsivo y astuto; ante el superior, indisciplinado y leal; con el amigo, receloso y abnegado; con la mujer, voluptuoso y áspero; consigo mismo sensual y sobrio. En sus conversaciones, malicioso e ingenuo, incrédulo y supersticioso; en todo caso alegre y melancólico, positivista y fantaseador. Humilde a pie y soberbio a caballo. Todo a la vez y sin estorbarse, como⁸ están los defectos y las virtudes en las almas nuevas.

Among the llaneros there are, on the one hand, such evil and corrupt men as the peons of Doña Bárbara's ranch, who are murderers and robbers, and on the other hand, some good and faithful workers. One of the latter on Santos Luzardo's estate, the cowboy Pajarote, reveals his loyalty to his master Santos when he says:

"El llanero no es peón sino en el trabajo. Aquí, en la hora y punto en que estamos no tenemos un amo y un peón, sino un hombre que es usted y otro hombre que quiere demostrarle que está dispuesto a dar la vida por la suya."⁹

In Cantaclaro Juan el Veguero, the poor peasant who had been ruined by an unjust politician, is presented in his depressing environment. On a solitary, broken-down ranch, where the land is so dry that he cannot get water near at hand or grow any food, he leads a miserable existence with his starved wife. The couple, living in this desert, surrounded by filth and bedbugs, has lost all their children

⁸ Doña Bárbara, 207.

⁹ Ibid., 260.

because of poverty and ignorance. Juan, who because of his own experience believes that work is not worthwhile (for while the poor work, the rich benefit from it), accepts his distressing situation by saying:

"Hasta los palos del monte
tienen su separación:
unos sirven para leña
y otros para hacer carbón."¹⁰

Perhaps Gallegos has not been fair toward the foreign population in his novels, as he has viewed them either as opportunists who come to get rich in Venezuela, attracted by its valuable resources, or as fugitives who have escaped justice by burying themselves in the forests and llanos of Latin-America. Doña Bárbara, Canaima, and Sobre la Misma Tierra offer a number of examples.

Mr. William Danger, in Doña Bárbara, is described as a great mass of muscles under a reddish skin, with blue eyes and blonde hair. He has come from Alaska, probably as a fugitive. This man typifies the attitude of North American superiority, considering himself better than the native because of his Nordic ancestry. Upon his arrival at the llano, the natives hope and expect that he will be a regenerating influence in their community. But such is not the case, for Mr. Danger has come to the llano to exploit its resources in order to acquire a fortune. All he does is hunt alligators, tigers, and all types of animals whose valuable skins are

¹⁰ Cantacolaro, 37.

exported in great quantities to bring him a fabulous income. In a short time he constructs a comfortable home and is the owner of a large farm where he has brought numerous cattle stolen from neighboring landowners. His friendship with Doña Bárbara, the cacica of the llano, has helped him obtain stolen lands. Charles Pearce, an American critic, speaking of these two persons in reference to the corrupt dictatorship of Gómez says: "For the most ideally minded, Doña Bárbara's activities and those of the unscrupulous empire-building American named Danger, represent the corruption of the Venezuelan government."¹¹ His ignorance about Latin-American honor is obvious when he tries to buy Marisela from her father by getting the latter drunk with his whisky. As a crude joke he obliges the drunken father Lorenzo to sign a paper acknowledging the sale of his daughter for five bottles of hard liquor. "Por la presente declaro que he vendido al Sr. Guillermo Danger mi hija Marisela por cinco botellas de whiskey."¹²

In Canaima we have the foreigner of the city, Vello-rini, who has become rich from the rubber extracted from the forest by his native slaves. Considering himself superior to Venezuelans, he does not wish to accept them as his sons-in-law. Mr. Davenport is presented as a wealthy North Amer-

¹¹ Charles A Pearce, "The Venezuelan Plains," The New Republic (Oct. 23, 1931), 304.

¹² Doña Bárbara, 250.

ican who has been a director of a mining enterprise in El Callao, and who now is the owner of a well equipped farm called El Varadero. He is humorous and very generous to his political friends whom he entertains with extravagant country parties. Another type of foreigner who has been attracted by the exotic tropical life is Mr. Reed. He is an Englishman afflicted with tuberculosis, who lives a secluded life in the Venezuelan wild country. Count Giaffaro, a highly cultured individual who is suspected of being a runaway prisoner from French Guiana, because of the fleur-de-lis branded on his back, typifies the foreigner who tries to hide out in Venezuela. Obsessed by its mystery, he remains in the Guarapín Forest until death.

Although Gallegos in Sobre la Misma Tierra shows his resentment toward the opulence of the foreign oil men in Maracaibo, he idealizes Alejandro Weimar, a German who marries a Venezuelan and who insists that he not be considered a foreigner but a real Venezuelan. Weimar is especially emphatic when he says: ". . . El más zulianísimo de todos los venezolanos."¹³ Mr. Hardman, an oil-well driller, typifies the tolerant and just North American worker who believes in treating the Venezuelan on an equal basis. I quote his remarks to Remota Montiel, who is interested in learning whether or not the Venezuelan oil worker doing the same

¹³ Sobre la Misma Tierra, 71.

amount of work is paid just as much as an American.

"Yo soy también un obrero y encontraré siempre muy justas las aspiraciones del trabajador venezolano a igualdad de tratamiento en igualdad de circunstancias, porque yo no concibo la vida sino bajo el imperio de una estricta justicia social, y en este sentido he cumplido también mi deber hacia mi compañero de este país."¹⁴

Gallegos has also included among the problems of Venezuela those occasioned by the interference of the armed forces in the political affairs of the country. This meddling is very evident in Reinaldo Solar, Cantaclaro, and especially in Pobre Negro.¹⁵ In them the professional soldier, as well as the citizen who temporarily becomes one during revolutionary periods, is regarded as detrimental to the well-being of Venezuelans. He describes the soldiers as killers and thieves and their leaders as unscrupulous and merciless. In the pursuit of their objective--power--they brook no opposition, and no method is too low if it promises success.¹⁶

Several of the characters created by Gallegos become military leaders in opposition to the government. In addition to the harm brought upon the nation by participants on both sides, the effect of the cruel warfare on the individual leaders is strongly emphasized. In Reinaldo Solar, for ex-

¹⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵ See below, p. 70.

¹⁶ For good examples see Cuarta Jornada, Part I in Pobre Negro.

ample, the protagonist's reaction to internecine war is almost fatal.

"Cerca de un año hacía que andaba en aquella revolución que ensangrentó al país en mil escaramuzas inútiles, en muchas de las cuales estuvo él, adquiriendo una siniestra experiencia.

"Sentíase definitivamente rendido, con un hervidero de gérmenes insanos en el cuerpo, con una vorágine de brutal animalidad desatada dentro del alma. Había matado, había robado, había perseguido con saña y castigado con crueldad, había sentido, en todo su horror, el salto del ancestro bestial dentro de su ser revertido."¹⁷

On the basis of the contents of his novels, accusations have been hurled at Gallegos as a godless anticleric.¹⁸ Superficially, this might appear to be justifiable, but careful reflection concerning his descriptions of the few clerics involved in those novels and the parts that these churchmen are made to play does not necessarily lead one to the conclusion that he is an enemy of the Catholic church in Venezuela.

La Trepadora taken alone could easily make one believe that Gallegos is contemptuous of priests. In it the Spanish parish priest of the small town near Cantarrana is a short, hairy man of fifty, not too clean. He is more interested in his maize fields and cattle ranch than in the spiritual welfare of his parishioners. He prefers revelry and hunting parties to the singing of mass:

¹⁷ Reinaldo Solar, 241.

¹⁸ "Rómulo Gallegos Biography," Current Biography, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May, 1948), 52.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. This section also outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze data, ensuring that the information is reliable and up-to-date.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the financial aspects of the organization. It provides a detailed overview of the budget, including the projected income and expenses for the upcoming year. This section also discusses the various financial risks and how they are being managed to ensure the organization's financial stability.

3. The third part of the document addresses the operational challenges faced by the organization. It identifies the key areas where improvements are needed and outlines the strategies being implemented to address these challenges. This section also discusses the role of the various departments in the organization and how they are working together to achieve the organization's goals.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the human resources aspect of the organization. It provides an overview of the current workforce and the various initiatives being implemented to attract and retain top talent. This section also discusses the importance of employee development and how the organization is investing in training and development programs to ensure that its workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the future.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the environmental and social aspects of the organization. It provides an overview of the organization's environmental and social impact and outlines the strategies being implemented to reduce its carbon footprint and improve its social performance. This section also discusses the importance of stakeholder engagement and how the organization is working to build strong relationships with its various stakeholders.

6. The sixth part of the document discusses the overall performance of the organization. It provides a summary of the key achievements and challenges over the past year and outlines the strategies being implemented to improve performance in the future. This section also discusses the importance of continuous improvement and how the organization is working to ensure that it is always striving for excellence.

. . . murmurábase que no eran tales ahijados, sino hijos suyos, aquellos muchachos de los campos que lo llamaban padrino y le pedían la bendición juntando las manos e hincando una rodilla en tierra.¹⁹

On the other hand the author gives us an example of a parish priest in El Forastero in a light which is not unfavorable. In fact, one might even say that the cleric is described with some praise and respect. Father Ramón Moreno is characterized as a friendly, honest, generous, and dutiful priest whose principal desire is to minister to the needs of his people and to help them achieve spiritual happiness. Sincere in faith, he is confirmed in his Christian conviction that only the spirit of truth and justice ought to reign on earth so that it would be spiritually habitable.

A third clergyman introduced by Gallegos in his novels appears in Pobre Negro. He is Rosendo Mediavilla of Río Chico. The author describes him as a "priest of souls," awkward but witty, and popular among his neighbors. The good clergyman is exemplary in his private conduct and has the zeal of an evangelist. His interests extend beyond his pious vocation. He belongs to the liberal party, which is opposed to the oligarchic administration, and is very active in politics. As a stimulant to the men in the small town, he brings together the interested adherents of both partisan camps in his parish home for discussion and debate, which, abetted by strong potions of coffee, last well into the

¹⁹ La Trepadora, 19.

night.

Father Mediavilla's activities involve him so deeply in politics that he is eventually led to take active part in the Federal Revolution against the government.²⁰ This finally is the cause of his utter ruin. As the result of a serious head wound Father Mediavilla becomes insane.

Rómulo Gallegos should not be thought of as an enemy of the church or its representatives, simply because the clergymen whom he portrays are usually individuals who do not confine themselves to their vocation. No generalization by the author which may strictly be considered anti-clerical has been noted by this writer. Gallegos, through the examples given in his novels, seeks to point out by way of implication that priests should restrict their work to the duties imposed by their vows. Therein lies one problem presented by the author.

²⁰ The Federal War of Venezuela took place in 1858.

CHAPTER V

MAIN CHARACTERS AND THEIR SYMBOLISM

The principal characters in Rómulo Gallegos' novels are the "tools" employed by the author to analyze the problems of the people of Venezuela. For each situation, he has created an individual who in a very real sense symbolizes a great difficulty which has to be overcome in order to carry to fruition the plans envisaged by leaders like the author. A number of characters represent questions of national import. Six of them are particularly interesting.

Rómulo Gallegos has drawn in his first novel, Reinaldo Solar, a character who is representative of the inconsistent youth of Venezuela. He is ambitious, idealistic, and patriotic, but also impractical, impatient at times, and again listless. Reinaldo tries to find his future; he tries to accomplish something worthwhile, but is in too much of a hurry to let time work for him, forgetting or, perhaps, ignoring the fact that very little of value is ever achieved in a day. Instead he jumps from one venture to another, never staying with one of them long enough to see it through to its completion or even to the point where success may be anticipated. He is naïve, gullible, and easily won over by parasites. Instances which exemplify these defects and at once present this character as a symbol of the failure of Venezuelan youth to become a wholesome and promising factor

in the country are related in the succeeding paragraphs.

Reinaldo's first undertaking is a novel he entitles Punta de Raza. It is a work he attempts as a result of the influence of ideas borrowed from such writers as Renán, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Tolstoi, and Darwin. He eventually ends the novel, but for some unexplained reason it remains unpublished. Obsessed by the ideals which he has incorporated in his book and not content with their mere fictional existence, Reinaldo decides to put them into practice on his plantation. He begins by converting the sugar cane and corn acreage to wheat. He agrees that it is more noble to plant the latter, because alcohol which is extractable from cane is a scourge to society, while from wheat a more useful food, bread, is produced. The replacement of corn is justified by him with the argument that the cultivation of wheat would bring with it the improvement of the race, because it is a fact proved by modern social studies that peoples who are fed wheat are more capable of developing a culture than those who are nurtured on corn:

Por otra parte, . . . considerándolo desde el punto de vista práctico y comparándolo ahora con el del maíz, el cultivo del trigo traería el mejoramiento de la raza, porque es un hecho comprobado por los modernos estudios sociales que los pueblos que se alimentan con trigo son más capaces de cultura que los que se alimentan con maíz.¹

On reading Los Enigmas del Universo by Haeckel, Rei-

¹ Reinaldo Solar, p. 61.

naldo becomes a "preacher" of a Monistic religion. He advocates a return to nature and to the simple, noble, and pure habits of living. In his enthusiasm he commences the construction of a church for the converts to the "new" faith. Soon, however, he meets and falls in love with an extremely attractive country girl, América, and promptly forgets both the naturalistic religion and the wheat-growing scheme. But América cannot hold his attention for very long, either. Deserting the girl, as well as his country inheritance, he moves to Caracas. There he joins a group of student artists and writers who make it a habit to meet regularly to discuss the regeneration of Venezuela through the creation of a national art comprising all its fields. During one of those gatherings, Reinaldo Solar reveals the spirit which moves him and, incidentally, his own generation:

"Ya es hora de que pensemos seriamente en explorar esa alma ignorada y hermética de nuestra raza para exprimirle la belleza auténtica: la de su absoluta desolación. Exploremos nuestro yermo espiritual, mostrando, desnuda y verdadera, el alma abolida de nuestra raza; sembremos nuestro dolor, la incurable melancolía de nuestra incapacidad, para cosechar nuestro arte."²

Again like so many Venezuelans he seeks the satisfaction of his great desire for adventure and personal recognition in Spain. Gallegos presents him as a typical Venezuelan.

Es amor a la aventura, al gran esfuerzo de un momento por incapacidad para el pequeño de todos los días. Reinaldo Solar caracteriza perfectamente este caso na-

² Ibid., 113.

cional.³

Following his return from Spain, Reinaldo learns from a friend that a revolution is afoot. This comes as a shock to him. In a mood of despair over the unhappy events which are about to take place in the country, he analyzes the common debilities of his compatriots which, without realizing it, he himself characterizes:

"Este mal es incurable. Está en la sangre. Somos incapaces para la obra paciente y silenciosa. Queremos hacerlo todo de un golpe; por eso nos seduce la forma violenta de la revolución armada. La incurable pereza nacional nos impulsa al esfuerzo violento, capaz del heroísmo, pero rápido, momentáneo. Después nos echamos a dormir, olvidados de todo. ¡Todo o nada! Pueblo de aventureros que sabe arriesgar la vida, pero que es absolutamente incapaz de consagrarla a una empresa tesonera. Al fin nos quedaremos sin nada."⁴

Another example of the debility which Reinaldo represents is his futile part in the organization of a Civic League. On his suggestion and with his assistance an "Organización Civilista" is formed in Caracas. Its members are pledged to aid in the improvement of the political and social conditions of Venezuela. His only wish is to work for a prosperous and healthy nation. But Reinaldo, the prime mover and leader of this experiment, fails again. The organization slips out of his hands and into those of professional politicians. As he did before, when the wheat project came to nothing, Reinaldo turns to a lady for solace. On confid-

³ Ibid., 137.

⁴ Ibid., 173.

ing to her the aimlessness of his life, "he symbolizes a nation which has not yet found its proper course, and which travels in every direction."⁵

"Ahora, al cabo de tantos años gastados inútilmente en buscar mi camino, me encuentro otra vez en la encrucijada, en la perenne encrucijada de la incertidumbre de mí mismo! ¡Esto es horrible, atroz! Buscar a sí mismo toda la vida, por todos los caminos, y no encontrarse. Ser una sombra que no sabe quién la proyecta. Una voz que no sabe quién la pronuncia!"⁶

Also symbolic of Venezuelan youth is Reinaldo's own contradiction of his previously stated views. Like his young countrymen seeking easy and quick success, he joins, in a moment of deep despondency after losing all his wealth, a new revolutionary movement against the government. In so doing he suffers those physical and moral ills which beset so many of the young men of the country when they take part in bloody revolts. He is left with only the memory of shattered dreams when, broken in body, he dies in the grip of malaria.

Gallegos appears to feel that the dominant ethnological group in Venezuela, the nestizo, which is still submerged, relatively speaking, will prove to be one of the most important assets to the nation.

Victoria Guanipa, in La Trepadora, who is created by Gallegos to represent this mixed blood, symbolizes the au-

⁵ Dunham, op. cit. (Introduction), xv.

⁶ Reinaldo Solar, 239.

thor's hope and confidence in the future solution of Venezuela's racial and social problems. She is the psychological mixture of Hilario Guanipa, a nestizo, and Adelaida Salcedo, a white aristocrat. Hilario himself is a product of two races, the white and Indian. His spirit is as noble and generous as his father's, on the one hand, and on the other, he has inherited the rude feelings and the wild individualism of the Guanipas.⁷ Victoria's mother Adelaida, a niece of Hilario's father, Don Jaime del Casal, is a refined young lady who has been educated with all the luxuries to which the rich aristocrats of Caracas are accustomed. She has a sensitive soul and is a lover of classical music. Victoria has inherited characteristics of both parents. She has the fighting spirit, strong individualism, and overbearing disposition of her father and the kindness and tenderness of her mother.⁸ As Victoria grows older, however, Adelaida realizes that her daughter has more of the Guanipa characteristics:

Pero comenzó a apuntar la mujer y Adelaida vió que sólo iba sacando el carácter del padre: la misma impetuosidad, la vehemencia en el propósito, la obstinación en lograrlo y un temperamento ardiente, una sangre apasionada, pábulo fácil de la llama sensual que ya le brillaba en los ojos.⁹

Victoria leads a perfectly contented and quiet life on the coffee plantation at Cantarrana. She is the happy

⁷ Felipe Massiani, "De El Último Solar a La Trepadora," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 13 (Caracas, Nov. 1939), 123.

⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁹ La Trepadora, 113.

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child of a doting and generous father who anticipates all her wishes; she is the darling of an adoring mother; she is popular among the children of the small community. At the age of sixteen, however, she hears that her proud and aristocratic cousins in Caracas, the Alcoys, are leading society girls, living in a beautiful mansion, perhaps the most luxurious in Caracas. This new world, replete with seductive pleasures and exciting adventures, for the first time awakens in her a tempting desire to break out of her sheltered and circumscribed sphere and seek the ostentatious prestige of social prominence enjoyed by her cousins in the class-conscious city of Caracas. Obsessed by this desire, she is finally permitted to visit her grandmother in Caracas.

As a mestiza, however, she is slighted by the aristocratic class of Caracas, including her own relatives, but impelled by an overpowering wish to prove her equality, she determines to marry one of their set. Opposed by this prejudiced and snobbish caste, she experiences bitter humiliations. Unbowed, Victoria does everything within her power to obtain social acceptance and happiness. This she achieves when she wins the love of Nicolás del Casal and obtains the final victory which the Guanipás had sought for three generations.

Victoria represents the struggling mestizo who, although conscious of his social and racial background, is determined to obtain social recognition, prestige, and happi-

ness. She is described as "a strange mixture of rebellion and arrogance, tenderness and emotionalism."^{9a} As her name implies, Victoria represents the Latin-American mestizo trying to find his level in a society hostile to his kind; she symbolizes the victory--the attainment of equality in society--of the mestizo over the white aristocrat as Gallegos would have it. Here the author reveals, by implication, his faith in the future of Venezuela:

Los brazos de Modesta estrechando a Jaime fueron los primeros brotes de aquella trepadora silvestre que venía enroscándose en torno al viejo árbol de la familia ilustre, brotes que ya eran gajos vigorosos cuando sus brazos se apoderaron de Adelaida, gajos que ya florecían en el amor de Victoria triunfante. Lo mejor de la sangre que corría por sus venas lo tomó por asalto Modesta de Jaime del Casal; con el resto de aquella, con la porción impetuosa, savia de la trepadora, se alimentaron su ambición y su amor: el zarpazo sobre Cantarrana y la presa hecha en mujer más noble de aquella familia; pero aún faltaba el nombre y ésta había sido la conquista de Victoria.¹⁰

Doña Bárbara, probably the best known of Gallegos' characters, stands out not because of her part in the plot, but because she symbolizes the barbarity of the virgin Latin-American land. Like the plains, she has qualities akin to the savage, is beautiful and terrible at the same time.

Her origin is lost in the dramatic mystery of the uncivilized regions of Venezuela. "De mas allá del Cunaviché, de mas allá del Cinacuro, de mas allá del Meta! De allá vino la trágica guaricha."¹¹ Born most probably of a white ad-

^{9a} Spell, op. cit., § 218.

¹⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹¹ Doña Bárbara, 26-27.

venturer and an Indian woman, she develops into a beautiful mestiza. At the age of fifteen while travelling on a small boat, she met her initial misfortune when several river pirates, in order to fulfill their immoral designs on her, murdered the youth who was her first love. Because of this experience, she becomes a hater of men and does everything within her power to destroy them in revenge for the wrong done her.

Doña Bárbara "is more a symbol of the irresistible power of natural forces than a real person, vividly as she is drawn."¹² She personifies nature when Gallegos parallels her characteristics with those of the Orinoco and Guainía Rivers:

El Orinoco es un río de ondas leonadas; el Guainía las arrastra negras. En el corazón de la selva aguas de aquel se reúnen con las de éste; mas por largo trecho [corren sin mezclarse, conservando cada cual su peculiar coloración. Así, en el alma de la mestiza tardaron varios años en confundirse la hirviente sensualidad y el tenebroso aborrecimiento al varón.¹³

Lorenzo Barquero, a landowner who abandons his law career because of her, is the woman's first victim. After skillfully appropriating the lands of the Barquero family, Doña Bárbara refuses to marry Lorenzo and, abandoning him and their infant daughter, Marisela, she launches into a

¹² Harriet de Onís, The Golden Land, An Anthology of Latin-American Folklore in Literature (New York, 1948), 280.

¹³ Doña Bárbara, 32.

career as land-grabber, thief, witch, seducer, and murderer.

Gallegos presents the superstitious beliefs of the llanos in this woman who, having learned the secrets of witchcraft from the Indians with whom she had lived during childhood, believes that she can destroy men just by her stare, through prayers to a devil whom she calls El Socio, or by giving them a beverage made of special Indian herbs. ". . . Todos le revelaron sus secretos, y a vuelta de poco las mas groseras y extravagantes supersticiones reinaban en el alma de la mestiza."¹⁴ In the belief that she possesses supernatural powers, she has a Socio, regarded by the townspeople as the devil himself, who often reveals coming events of importance to her.

Ella se creía realmente asistida de potencias sobrenaturales y a menudo hablaba de un "Socio" que la había librado de la muerte, una noche, encendiéndole la vela para que se despertara a tiempo que penetraba en su habitación un peon pagado para asesinarla, y que, desde entonces, se le aparecía a aconsejarle lo que debiera hacer en las situaciones difíciles o a revelarle los acontecimientos lejanos o futuros que le interesara conocer. Según ella, era el propio milagroso Hazareno de Achaguas; pero lo llamaba simplemente y con la mayor naturalidad: "el Socio" y de aquí se originó la leyenda de su pacto con el diablo.¹⁵

She also typifies the strong superstitious element in the llano when, after failing to charm Doctor Santos Luzardo into submission, she attempts to humble him through witchcraft. Tying around her waist a cord equal to Luzardo's

¹⁴ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37.

height, she repeats: "Con dos te miro, con tres te ato: con el Padre, con el Hijo y con el Espíritu Santo. ¡Hombre! que yo te vea más humilde ante mí que Cristo ante Pilatos."¹⁶

Profiting from the fear which her reputation inspires in the superstitious plainsmen and from the power of her stolen wealth, Doña Bárbara in a short time becomes one of the richest landowners of the llanos. This savage and beautiful woman permits no obstacle to bar her path and employs any method which will gain her objective. Besides being a briber and seducer she is also a cold-blooded murderess. When she has no further use for her paramours, she either has them killed by one of her bodyguards or murders them herself, as in the case of Colonel Apolinar, a politician who has helped her obtain legal papers for her stolen properties with the expectation of getting his share of the spoils. When Doña Bárbara no longer needs his legal advice and has spent all his money on her farm, she suddenly causes him to disappear. After getting him drunk, she pretends that she is going to bury a horse according to the superstitious tradition of the llano. Then the merciless cacica stabs the intoxicated Apolinar in the back, so that he falls in the same ditch in which the animal has been placed and is buried with it. La devoradora de hombres, as she is called by Lorenzo Barquero, like the llano, never forgives. In a

¹⁶ Ibid., 211.



conversation with his cousin Santos, Lorenzo brings out the resemblance between Doña Bárbara and the llano:

"Esta tierra no perdona. Tú también has oído ya la llamada de la devoradora de hombres. Ya te veré caer entre sus brazos. Cuando los abra, tú no serás sino una piltrafa . . . ¡Mírala! Espejismo por donde quiera allí se ve uno; allá otro. La llanura está llena de espejismos."¹⁷

Like the llano, Doña Bárbara has her calm moods. In a fleeting instant of self-pity the wretched woman admits to the young man that her past would have been different if she had found a person of his caliber during early womanhood. Santos, however, feels only contempt for "la devoradora" and also identifies her with the llano:

"La voz de Doña Bárbara, flauta del demonio andrógino que alentaba en ella, grave rumor de selva y agudo lamento de llanura, tenía un matiz singular, hechizo de los hombres que la oían; . . . aquella alma . . . mezcla de lo agradable y de lo atroz, interesante, sin duda, como lo son todas las monstruosidades de la naturaleza."¹⁸

When it becomes clear to Doña Bárbara that she cannot subdue Santos, she loses interest in life. Deserted by her peons and friendless, she determines to turn her back upon the scene of her failure. Mounting her horse, she disappears into the wilds of the river region, whence she came originally. In so doing she fulfills a philosophy which she has

¹⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸ Ibid., 149.

often expressed: "all things return to their place of origin."¹⁹ At this point, her withdrawal or death is symbolic of barbarism, which retrocedes when faced with civilization.

"The psychological study the author makes of Doña Bárbara is genuine literature. She is not a pleasant creature but she at least earns the sympathy of the reader as she finally succumbs not to her opponent or to circumstances, but to herself. Her character has all the inevitableness of Hamlet's."²⁰

Santos Luzardo, an educated young aristocrat and owner of the large neighboring ranch, is one of the most outstanding characters created by Gallegos. He symbolizes the civilizing influence in the llano that triumphs over barbarism. Santos constitutes a solution, a position, a thesis.²¹ He is the only man who is not bent to Doña Bárbara's will. When he returns to his estate, he learns that the notorious Doña Bárbara and her friend Mr. Danger have stolen his cattle and part of his land, and have corrupted his employees. He attempts to settle his disputes with Doña Bárbara according to law, but becomes disgusted and gives up when he realizes the utter dishonesty of the courts. Still determined, however, to regain what rightfully belongs to him, but by pacific procedure, he resolves to continue his efforts.

¹⁹ Ibid., 290.

²⁰ "Doña Bárbara," Boston Evening Transcript (August 22, 1931), 1.

²¹ Juan Marinello, "Tres Novelas Ejemplares," Literatura Hispano-Americana (Mexico, 1937), 143-63.

He begins by fencing his property to prevent further loss of cattle. In the llano, where might still prevails over right, the habit of appropriating neighbors' cattle when found on one's estate is a common occurrence. Santos believes that if every proprietor would provide his ranch with fences, it would not only foster a more neighborly feeling among the ranchers, but also stimulate and improve the breeding of better animals:

"Todo esto perjudica el fomento de la cría porque destruye el estímulo, y todo eso desaparecería con la obligación que las leyes de llano les impusieran a los propietarios de cercar sus hatos."²²

As the next step in his campaign of reform, Santos discharges his untrustworthy overseer Balbino Paiba, another of Doña Bárbara's victims, and assuming personal charge of the ranch, he introduces progressive methods in agriculture and animal husbandry.

Another improvement envisioned by Santos, but one which is impossible of immediate execution, is the elimination of illiteracy and ignorance among the people of the llano. Marisela, the forsaken child of the ambitious Doña Bárbara, is the personification of these uneducated people. Santos sets an example that points to the possible ultimate solution of their problem by progressing rapidly with her education. From an almost primitive state, Marisela is transformed into a well-mannered and poised young lady, ca-

²² Doña Bárbara, 102.

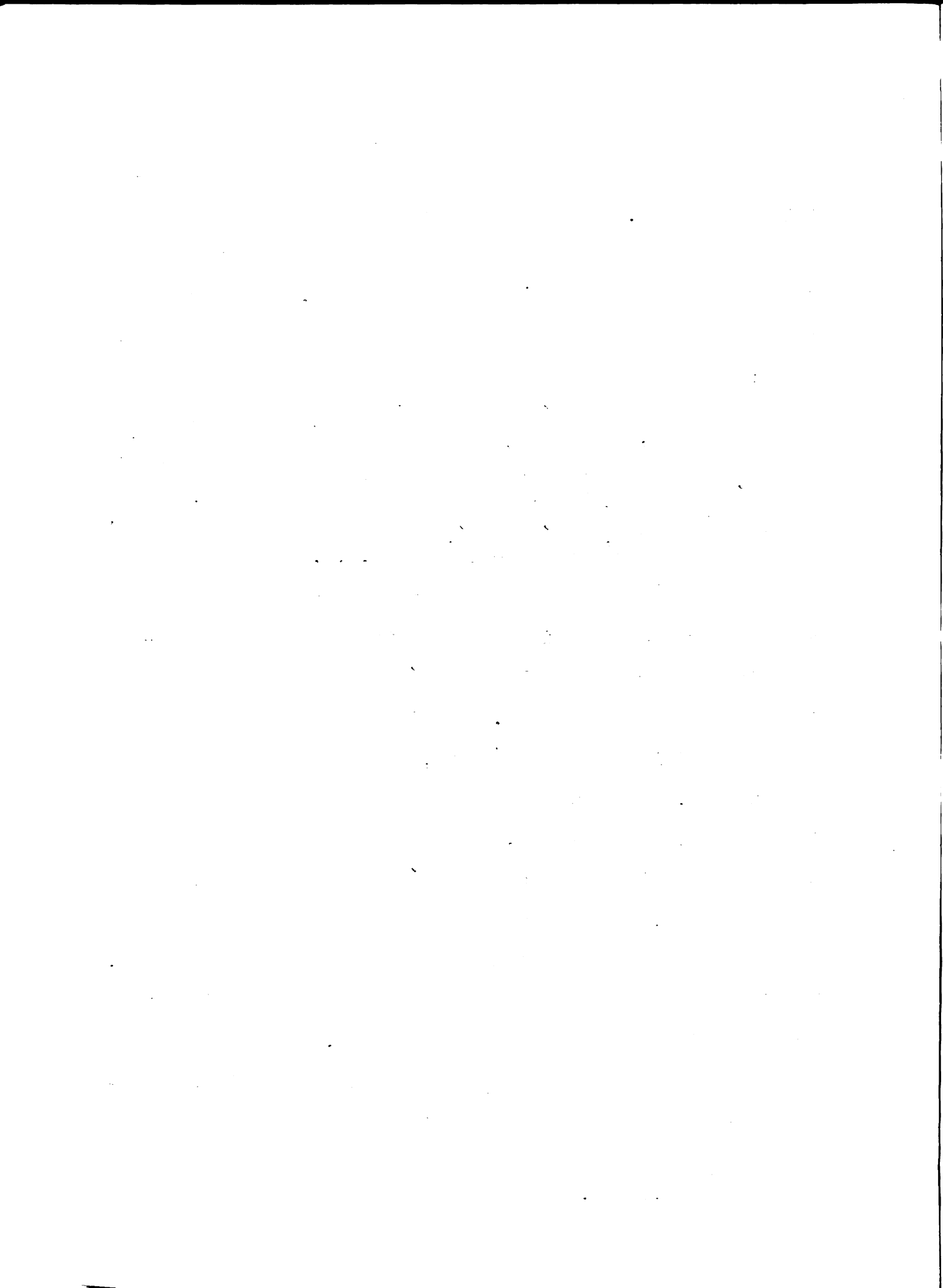
pable of independent thought and of assuming the responsibility of a home. Santos realizes the radical change which has occurred within her when she attempts to comfort him after a slaying which she could not prevent. Her argument is successful in convincing him that he is not guilty of the murder:

Era una luz que él mismo había encendido en el alma de Marisela, la claridad de la intuición en la inteligencia desbastada por él, la centella de la bondad iluminando el juicio para llevar la palabra tranquilizadora al ánimo atormentado, la obra--su verdadera obra, porque la suya no podía ser exterminar el mal a sangre y fuego, sino descubrir, aquí y allá, las fuentes ocultas de la bondad de su tierra y de su gente . . .²³

He also represents a regenerating force when he tries to put an end to the existing corruption of the local authorities who are bribed by Doña Bárbara to satisfy her wishes and cover her crimes. In his fight against the dishonest officials and Doña Bárbara, his civilizing efforts are thwarted, however, and Luzardo is forced to seek justice without the aid of the law. With revolver in hand, he starts by obliging three of Doña Bárbara's hirelings, one of whom he wounds, to burn down a hut (La Casa del Macanillal) that has served as a dividing line between their properties. The witch has been moving this hut back and forth with the purpose of increasing her own possessions.

Blinded by the dream of eliminating barbarism, Luzardo is once more made a victim of the violence that reigns in

²³ Ibid., 102.



the llano when he shoots in self-defense Doña Bárbara's body-guard "El Brujeador." Santos feels remorse for his own brutal behavior, which really was the result of the circumstances he has had to face. Later when he is convinced that it was not his bullet but that of his faithful peon, Pajarote, who killed the man, Santos recovers his spirit of hope and progress, and continues his endeavors to bring some enlightenment into the llano.

Rómulo Gallegos presents the conflict of the barbaric and civilizing forces of the Venezuelan plains in these two symbolic characters: Doña Bárbara, and Santos Luzardo. The latter obviously represents justice, modern culture, and the ideals and spirit of reform exemplified by the author. Doña Bárbara, representing the ignorance, hatred, evil, and untamed beauty which exist in the llano itself, is probably the best creation of Gallegos' pen. No other character produced by a Spanish-American can stand beside her in strength, breadth, or final tragedy.²⁴

The adventurous as well as interesting life of the Venezuelan plainsman is vividly portrayed in Cantaclaro. Florentino Coronado, whose nickname provides the title of the novels, symbolizes each and every llanero of Venezuela. He is the typical nomadic minstrel who wanders from place to place singing improvised couplets and possesses a natural

²⁴ "Doña Bárbara," Boston Evening Transcript (August 22, 1931), 1.

ability to compose verses, using the language characteristic of the people of the plains. Cantaclaro enjoys his songs and is at his best when, in the contests which are customary in the region, he is pitted against rival singers.²⁵ These lines are illustrative of his compositions:

"Desde el llano adentro vengo
tramoliando este cantar.
Cantaclaro me han llanado
Quién se atreve a replicar?"²⁶

Cantaclaro, like the people he represents, is a lover of adventure. Superstitious and inquisitive concerning mysteries which attract his attention, he is also daring, courageous, loyal, tolerant, understanding, generous, and kindly. At the same time, he is fond of intoxicating beverages and has a mischievous weakness for women, albeit his amours are not of long duration. This couplet sums up the minstrel's philosophy regarding the latter:

"Hoy te quiero y hoy te olvido
pa recordarte mañana,
Que si me quedo contigo
Yo pierdo y tú nada ganas."²⁷

Another defective quality of Cantaclaro's character is his lack of ambition and absence of concern for the fu-

²⁵ It has been said that without doubt he is "the best lyrical hero" that Gallegos has created. Leo Ulrich, "La Invención en la Novela," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 58 (Caracas, Mayo-Junio, 1943), 113.

²⁶ Cantaclaro, 9.

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

ture. Living only from day to day he spends freely and often wastefully for idle pleasures whatever he happens to earn. "Déjeme seguir cantandito mis canciones y enamorando a mis indias."²⁸ Finally, when Cantaclaro realizes that something should be done to help improve life in Venezuela, he also finds the same outlet, arrives at the same method of obtaining a cure to the nation's practical disease that occurs to so many of Gallegos' frustrated characters: revolution. His resolve to contribute actively to the country's welfare is firm:

"¡Se acabó Cantaclaro! Y se acabaron los amorcitos y los viajes sin rumbo... Hay que hacer algo más serio, Florentino... Hay que hacer algo para que en esta tierra un Juan el veguero no tenga tres hijos y una mujer y se le mueran todos, de hambre, y de fiebres y de brujos... Y de jefes civiles, como el que arruinó a Juan el veguero... Hay que hacer algo, Florentino...²⁹

The existence of a large mulatto population in Venezuela side by side with a dominant and, on the whole, prejudiced white group still poses a serious and challenging problem for all its people. This has not gone by unnoticed. Among others Gallegos, deeply conscious of the threat presented by it and extremely anxious to contribute to its dissipation and eventual elimination, has forcefully brought us face to face with its breathing reality in the well-known novel Pobre Negro.

²⁸ Cantaclaro, 156.

²⁹ Ibid., 184.

In the chief character of this moving story, Pedro Miguel, is centered the crux of the situation in which the mulatto finds himself. The author has drawn him as a representative of all his kind. Belonging to neither the white nor the Negro groups and confronted with the necessity of finding "his place," he is embittered by his mixed blood. Ignorant and depressed, he experiences great difficulty in finding a way out. As he says, "Yo no soy un hombre, sino un arrebatado de todo un pueblo, que se está arrojando en brazos de la muerte, por no encontrar el camino de su vida."³⁰

Pedro Miguel is the son of the negro slave Negro Malo and the white aristocrat Ana Julia Alcorta, daughter of the owners of a large hacienda. He is described as having a swarthy complexion, slightly rough but expressive features, dark curly hair, and beautiful black eyes. He is quiet and reserved and at the same time is capable of a deep anger to which he gives vent with a blind violence born of frustration, disappointment, and confusion.

Pedro Miguel is not savage at heart. He can be loyal, kind, generous, and selfless, but the environment into which he has been thrust by nature does not receive him with a smiling welcome. From birth he is an outcast. Since his own blood-relations disown him, he is placed in a foster home. This act is representative of the white attitude to-

³⁰ Pobre Negro, 329.

ward the mulattos. They are not good enough. They are excluded, ostracized, and "outlawed." These people are thought of as beings of a lower category, who should be submissive and obedient to the wishes of their betters. But Pedro Miguel, like his mulatto brethren, is not satisfied with the status to which he has been relegated by the group in control of government, society, and the economy of the country. He hates the white man and does not bother to hide his feelings. It might almost be said that he hates himself for being caught in a web not of his making and from which there is no escape.

The protagonist not only symbolizes the social and economic conditions of the white and Negro mixto, but is the personification of a race question as well. He is not the end product. The combination of the two races in him is not a final solution, and his union with a Caucasian is a suggestion, as it were, by the author for the possible healing of a "sore" on the soul of Venezuela. It represents a first step toward what Gallegos considers a desirable goal.

CHAPTER VI

IDEALISM - REALISM - COSTUMBRISMO - FOLKLORE

A reading of Gallegos' novels reveals that each one of them is written with a strong central theme which forms the core of one of the author's ideals. They represent his almost religious desire to promote the social, political, and economic welfare of his fatherland.

In Reinaldo Solar, for example, Gallegos' purpose is to make the Venezuelan youth conscious of Reinaldo's failure in the intellectual and political life of Venezuela so that they may profit from his experiences. In creating Reinaldo, Gallegos was not interested in the individual himself as the protagonist of his novel, but as a representative of the Venezuelan young manhood which does not take advantage of its intellectual ability and training in order to promote the future well-being of its country. Instead they wander from one activity to another, expending their energies wastefully, and apparently are unable to extricate themselves from the internal and external conflicts in which they are involved. Their resolutions are made in vain, for, because of their lack of will power and perseverance, they seldom appear to reach their logical conclusions.

Reinaldo's patriotic ideal is perhaps that of Gallegos. Although the author is conscious of the political corruption which permeates the country, he still believes there

are some good and honest citizens whose talent and patriotic zeal can make a better Venezuela for future generations. An instance of this patriotism is Reinaldo's attempt to establish a Civil Association. By its creation he hopes to found an organization to which able and virtuous citizens may belong and whose sole purpose is common labor for the common welfare.

Fundaría una asociación "sui géneris," especie de hermandad neo-mística, cuyo lema sería "Hacer Patria," formada por hombres de buena voluntad de todos los oficios, profesiones, rangos y aptitudes, que estuviesen dispuestos a cumplir este sencillo deber fundamental: trabajar honrada y tesonosamente, cada cual dentro del radio de su acción privada, sin miras políticas, ni bastardas codicias, a fin de que todas las formas de la vitalidad nacional fuesen fecundas, útiles, sanas, y fuertes.¹

Gallegos, defender of the mestizo, demonstrates in La Trepadora his desire to find a solution for the plight of this national group. Representative of his answer to the problem is the marriage of Nicolás del Casal and Victoria Guanipa, two of the principal characters in the novel. The latter is the daughter of Hilario Guanipa who is the illegitimate son of Jaime del Casal, a former head of the Casal family. This inter-racial and social "fusion" is the author's way of advocating the acceptance of all people, particularly the mestizo, regardless of their origin. The union in wedlock of these young people is a triumph of social justice.

¹ Reinaldo Solar, 158.

In Doña Bárbara the numerous efforts made by the young doctor Santos Luzardo to bring the advantages of modern civilization and technology to the llanos represent the author's hope of raising those regions to the level of the urban centers. He exemplifies the ideal and spirit of reform so dear to Gallegos.²

In the story, Gallegos describes the conflict between the primitive and brute culture of the prairies as personified in its chief character, Doña Bárbara, and the modern reform element represented by Doctor Luzardo. As the plot unfolds and comes to its logical conclusion, the reader may observe with satisfaction the mastery of civilization over barbarism. This new influence in the llano may be especially noticed in the change which comes over Marisela as she develops from a primitive and ragged creature to a well-mannered and poised young lady. A similar transformation is evident in the improvements effected on Santos' ranch by his own exemplary actions and his victory over the wicked and hard Doña Bárbara. Gallegos shows us here how backwardness and evil can be replaced by progress and justice.

The author's idealistic hope for the advent of twentieth-century civilization in this region and his desire to carry the reader along in the same spirit is evident at the conclusion: "/Llanura venezolana! Propicia para el esfuerzo como lo fué para la hazaña, tierra de horizontes abiertos

² Dunham, op. cit., Introduction, xvi.

donde una raza buena, ama, sufre y espera . . .³

Pobre Negro also presents for our consideration an ideal of a social nature--the assimilation of races. It is not proposed as the impractical answer of a starry-eyed visionary, but as a long-run and necessary solution to a problem which through continuous adjustment may contribute to the progress of Venezuela. The prejudice of today is contrasted with the victory of racial tolerance and equality in the romance of Pedro Miguel, an illegitimate negro, and Luisana, a member of a high-ranking white family. The social and economic gap bridged is a great one, and on the surface the marriage appears to be impractical. This disregard of logic, however, may be excused on the ground that it is simply a technique designed to impress the reader. The union of these characters, whose origin is vastly different and unequal, is symbolic of the union Gallegos appears to believe is essential if his country is to solve what he deems to be its most important problem.

Gallegos' idea of true democracy is displayed in the example of the younger generation as it is pictured in El Forastero. A group of students, among them Elio Monagas, Martín Campos, and Aníbal Pereira, in a patriotic desire to eliminate corruption in the politics of their community and to improve the lot of the poor and underprivileged inhabitants, revolt against the dishonest and entrenched political

³ Doña Bárbara, 296.

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gangsters. These young men, imbued by the author with those martyr-like qualities which make them willing to accept the adverse consequences of their acts rather than to submit, unfortunately end up in prison. There is no victory here. It is an appeal to youth to awaken to their responsibility and to put their energy to work for their birthright.

Another instance of this call to youth is the story of Remota Montiel in Sobre la Misma Tierra. It is the tale of a young lady who gives up the comforts and pleasures of modern life and takes up a primitive existence in a back country of Venezuela, the Guajira region, for the sole purpose of assisting backward Indians who are badly in need of aid. She assumes the burden, not as an escape from her former life, but as a patriotic and selfless duty toward her countrymen. She hopes that her efforts will contribute to the gradual improvement of these heretofore neglected people.

Through Remota, Gallegos exemplifies the spirit and direction which should govern the new generations of Venezuelans. He points the way and if the goal envisioned appears too remote, it may be overlooked as an excess of enthusiasm motivated by the most sincere hope for his country's future.

Although Gallegos' works are the interpretations of his idealistic approach to the problems of the people of his country, he presents a high degree of realism not only in

the landscape, the customs, and the problems but also in the creation of his characters who are representatives of the various social and racial groups of Venezuela. His characters are a sampling of the qualities of the people whom he treats in his works. They may be considered as symbolic as G  r  ldez' Don Segundo Sombra and Cervantes' Don Quijote, because they describe a people and embody characteristics which will probably outlive many generations.

In every novel, Gallegos has penned realistic descriptions of the Venezuelan geography, including actual names of cities, towns, forests, and rivers, as well as historical facts such as the emancipation of slaves during the middle of the nineteenth century and the discovery of Venezuelan oil during the second decade of this century.

The descriptive realism of the land can be appreciated in the following passage of Canaima where the author pictures the beginning of a tempest in the Guarap  n forest not from a lyrical but from an objective point of view.

Lo fundi   todo y de golpe el estallido de un rayo, simult  neos el rel  mpago deslumbrante y el trueno ensordecedor. Vacilaron las innumerables columnas, crujieron las verdes c  pulas, se arremolinaron las l  vidas tinieblas, se unieron arriba los bordes del hurac  n desmenu  ndolo la fronda intrincada y la vertiginosa espiral penetr   en el bosque, levant   una tromba de hojas secas, gir   en derredor del hombre, desnudo, silbando, aullando, ululando y luego se rompi   en cien peque  os remolinos que se dispersaron en todas las direcciones. Y se desgaj   el chubasco fragoroso.⁴

⁴ Canaima, 212-13.

The realistic picture of a dilapidated ranch in the deserted llano is presented as the home of a poor sick man who is a victim of the political corruption of Venezuela.

Era una choza despatarrada, en parte caney, en parte vivienda con abrigo de techo de palma y paredes de barro. Bajo el cobertizo abierto al viento sabanero, que aquella tarde no corría: un chinchorro mugriento, negras las cabuyeras de chinches repletas de la sangre sin substancia que le chupaban al dueño de aquella yacija; . . . Detrás del rancho, tres cruces de madera sembradas entre el monte, un topochal en torno a una charca, un rastrojo de yucas raquíticas. Y la sabana por todas partes desierta, inmensa y melancólica bajo la luz espesa con que se desangraba el sol degollado por el horizonte, entre la bruma de la humareda.⁵

Juan, whose home the old ranch is, is described as an emaciated and anemic individual whose bare feet are a nest of jigger fleas. Also his hair is packed with lice and is covered by an old, dirty hat. He is in such a deplorable condition that there is no spark of intelligence in his facial expression. In Juan we have a vivid example of the ignorant and forgotten peasant.

In Pobre Negro Gallegos refers to the reality of the past by using the names of historical figures and facts as well as geographical names in the chapter "La Furia." Names like Araure, Guanare, Santa Inés, Ezequiel Zamora, whom he compares to "El caudillo Boves," are inserted into his treatment of the civil war which occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century over the issue of Federalism.⁶

⁵ Cantaclaro, 33.

⁶ Leo Ulrich, "La Invención en la Novela," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 39, Caracas (July-August, 1942), 85.

Representative descriptions of this cruel conflict appear in the novel, picturing the brutality of the soldiers who satiate themselves with the primitive desires of killing, looting, and raping. The soldiers' behavior is illustrated in Commander Moyano, a federalist who, together with a number of his men, enters the grocery store of a young war widow. Accompanied by her twelve-year-old son, Manuelito, she waits on the soldiers, serving them free drinks. But not content with this they violate the poor woman in the presence of her tearful boy. Horrified by the crime, the child takes his life by hanging.

Doña Bárbara, one of Gallegos' most realistic novels, offers true descriptions not only of the llano itself and its activities and customs, but also of its characters, including Lorenzo Barquero, Doña Bárbara, and Santos Luzardo, who have already been introduced in preceding chapters. It should be noted that this Barquero, one of Doña Bárbara's victims, is also known as "El Espectro de la Barquereña."⁷ He is the prey of alcohol which, at first hidden in his food by Doña Bárbara, gradually claims him as an alcoholic. Finally, when she has despoiled him of all his wealth and he is of no more use to her, the despairing Barquero almost literally drowns himself with liquor in order to escape his past. Gallegos describes him thus:

⁷ Doña Bárbara, 81.

Sumamente flaco y macilento, una verdadera ruina fisiológica, tenía los cabellos grises y todo el aspecto de un viejo, aunque apenas pasaba de los cuarenta. Las manos, largas y descarnadas, le temblaban continuamente y en el fondo de las pupilas verdinegras le brillaba un fulgor de locura. Doblegaba la cabeza, cual si llevase un yugo a la cerviz; sus facciones, así como la actitud de todo su cuerpo, revelaban un profundo desmajeamiento de la voluntad y tenía la boca deformada por el rictus de las borracheras sombrías.⁸

Many comments have already been made concerning the activities of the llano as described by Gallegos, for example, his accounts of dangerous crocodile hunts, horse breaking, rodeos, and song contests. Nothing more, perhaps, need be said about them. There is, however, an excellent and realistic description at the conclusion of Doña Bárbara which merits some attention. It portrays the vain effort of a calf to escape the cruel coils of a large swamp snake. The struggle occurs as Doña Bárbara, on her departure from the plains, reaches the edge of a marsh, where she suddenly reins in her horse. Before her is the horrifying spectacle of a calf with its under lip held by a powerful water snake, the greater part of whose body remains submerged in the murky waters. With its hooves sunk in the liquid earth, its neck contracted by the desperate effort, and eyes white from fright, the captive beast exhausts its strength against the strong contraction of the reptile's coils. Finally the snake begins to stretch and brings its robust body out of the water, and the calf retreats, fighting to break the hold on her lower

⁸ Ibid., 83.

er lip. But then the reptile again constricts its body slightly, and the victim, already fatigued, gives in and allows itself to be dragged by the victor into the swamp. As the helpless animal sinks, it bellows horribly until the putrid water silences its pitiful death cries. The terrorized birds fly and scream without ceasing. Doña Bárbara remains unmoved. The birds flee, silence again is king, and the agitated swamp recovers its habitually morbid calm.

Reinaldo Solar likewise contains a number of realistic descriptions. Among the most typical is the Easter-Day public performance where Reinaldo on horseback is to prove his courage, ability, and strength by felling a bull by its tail. The only wide street of the town is crowded with clamorous people who cheer the bull fighters while the native joronos and Spanish pasodobles are being played. Reinaldo hopes to win the prized trophy in order to shine in the eyes of his beloved América Peña, a country girl, and to gain the respect of her brother Guaicapuro. All the contestants are on their horses behind the bull trying to grasp its tail. There seem to be an endless number of hands reaching out at once. Bodies jostle and push each other in a cloud of dust. Finally Reinaldo succeeds in grasping the civeted tail and with one deft, firm twist throws the beast on its back. The crowd goes wild:

La gritería se hizo ensordecedora; el potro, enardecido, se iba tascando el freno. Reinaldo, perdida la conciencia de sí mismo, llegó sin contenerlo casi, hasta

el extremo de la calle. A pocos pasos de la talanquera recobró las riendas, y empujándose sobre los estribos, con un golpe de consumado jinete, paró en seco a la bestia . . . ¡Bravo, Reinaldo! ¡Bravísimo! ¡Así se tumba compañero!⁹

The customs of the peoples of Venezuela have also been of interest to Gallegos. They have not only served the author as a vehicle for interpreting the lives of Venezuelans, but have enriched the literary value of his novels. Each racial or social group has its typical customs, which are treated by Gallegos with varying degrees of emphasis.

A part of Canaima and Sobre la Misma Tierra is concerned with the native customs of Venezuelan Indians. One very interesting example found in Canaima is a description of one of the festive celebrations of the Guaraúna Indians. These natives who live south of the Orinoco in a forest adjacent to the lower reaches of the Cuyubini River produce an alcoholic beverage from the Yucca plant which provides them with the spirit and energy needed to survive the strenuous and prolonged physical activities they are called upon to perform during the course of their festival.

For the ritual dance, which commences at nightfall, the chief is absent. His place is taken by the oldest member of the tribe, whose duty it is to play the maraguita. In addition he presides over the festival in which all neighboring tribes take an active part. By the time the dancing

⁹ Reinaldo Solar, 76.

is about to begin every member of the tribe, including the women, is heavily under the influence of alcohol. When the moon appears on the horizon, the chief's representative closes his eyes and, chanting "He, he he," commences to shake the maracuita close to his right ear as if attempting to produce the right tone. Finally, to signal the beginning of the dance, he strikes the ground with his right hand. Immediately the celebrants form a circle around him and, moving in a slow and monotonous cadence, shout repeatedly, as though in reply to the musician's chant, "¡Ja, ja. Tabis-có!" In the course of this activity many shed tears and cry aloud. The author appears to indicate that the latter is a manifestation of their sorrow because of their subjection and oppression by the white man. The dancing and drinking seem to have no limit except that imposed by nature. The celebration continues for days until they are overcome either by the effects of their beverage or by fatigue. When all of them collapse, the festivities officially come to an end.

A curious custom to which every adolescent Indian girl is required to submit is the blanqueo. Its purpose is to whiten the young girl's complexion so that she may become a beautiful bride. The blanqueo or whitening treatment is much like a religious ceremony. First the maiden's hair is cut, then, following the prescribed bath, she is robed in a manta which, as a sign of modesty, covers her body from head to foot, with the exception of her face and hands. Next

she is locked in a dark room where the future bride remains sometimes for months or years, depending upon the importance of her family. During the first week of the blanqueo the girl fasts in order to eliminate her childish weaknesses. Then she is fed very special foods and purifying liquids which are supposed to lighten the color of her complexion. During this period of confinement she is taught such domestic skills as sewing and weaving by her mother or aunts and is advised regarding her future rôle of wife and mother.

The custom is not without an ulterior motive and its ultimate objective is not unique. The parents seek material advantages. When they arrange their daughter's marriage, the agreement provides that the future husband must give them a certain portion of his wealth in exchange for the maiden. Since the prettiest girls make possible the most advantageous bargains, it is not surprising that parents bend every effort to beautify their eligible children.

In Sobre la Misma Tierra Remota Montiel is forced by her aunts to accept the blanqueo beauty treatment. They promise her to Chuachuaína, a rich Indian, in exchange for a share of his wealth. The night of the wedding, however, Remota, assisted by an Indian slave, escapes and joins her father.

In Canaina the marriage of Marcos Vargas and an Indian girl is another example. Two nights before the event, the Indians surround the bride's "prison" to see that she

fasts and to keep her awake. In the last act of the wedding preparation the girl dressed in her womanly robe is placed in the center of a circle of dancers, each of whom strikes her twice with a whip. After this ordeal the bride is finally allowed to depart with her husband. Following is the author's description of the whip dance:

Girando en torno a la guaricha, pintarrajeados de negro y de rojo y otra vez con gran algazara de cantos y gritos y provistos de bejucos de mamure, cada hombre debía propinarle dos azotes y luego uno a sí mismo, acaso porque en culpas de amor dos terceras partes son de la mujer.¹⁰

Venezuelan Negroes have mixed their pagan religion with the Christianity which they have adopted. Their religious activities are described in Pobre Negro. During the festivities of Corpus Christi Venezuelan Negroes, in keeping with their promises, don the costume of devils as penance for past sins. In their bright and varicolored dress they parade through the main street of the town and head toward the church. Right in front, in the atrium, they perform a pagan dance to the accompaniment of the beating drums. Each devil touches the wooden doors of the church with his tail three different times. Then he jumps and crouches hour after hour. When they all collapse exhausted by the strenuous dance, their promises are completed. While they dance huge crowds watch and try to copy their gestures:

Ahora comenzaba la zarabanda de todos los diablos.
La danza general, sin ritmo ni compás, sólo para meter

¹⁰ Canaima, 293.

ruido los tambores, torbellino de saltos, esguinces y agazapamientos que cubría todo el espacio del atrio, Africa primitiva aunque tal vez reproduciendo en América una escena de la Europa medioeval, poseídos por la farsa ya los ponía frenéticos y al asalto rechazado por la virtud de las puertas del templo y de este frenesí participaban los espectadores, cuyos gestos y ademanes copiaban las peripecias.¹¹

Another passage which gives us an example of a typical custom of the plains region describes the party given by the Coronado family for their workers just before the cattle drive. There is singing, dancing, story-telling, eating and drinking all evening and until daybreak. The llaneros are offered wine, rum, and brandy by their employers and for the women there are delicious crèmes, "cokes", and beer. The food consists of barbecued pork, candies and other tasty morsels. The plains people dance joronos accompanied by the guitar, the maracas, and a harp. While the old mestizo couples try to imitate the polka and mazurka of the white people, the younger set combines the pasodoble and foxtrot step with the native jorono. When the time for the story-telling arrives, the old men who are to take part, dressed in their Sunday suits, relate the most fantastic and humorous tales. The best one wins a young cow or pig. The following day the whole party attends another festivity at the home of the winner, who roasts his prize and serves refreshments.

"Las Veladas de la Vaquería" in Doña Bárbara presents

¹¹ Pobre Negro, 245.

a traditional event of the llano that takes place at the beginning of the rainy season. The absence of fences between one property and another has given rise to this custom. All the workers of the nearby ranches, banded together, take turns at the various estates branding unmarked cattle that may have happened to wander onto their land. These men work under the direction of a foreman who has been elected at a special meeting. Each ranch tries to select its best cowboy so that, as its representative, he may demonstrate his abilities as a centaur. After this contest the llaneros attend a dance given by their employers where they sing, eat, drink and dance until dawn. This festivity is famed for the well-improvised couplets which are sung to the accompaniment of the guitar and maracas. At this time the plainsman appears as a creator of popular poetry.¹²

In Cantaclaro, also, the plainsman is described as a born singer. The hero, Cantaclaro, who has already been mentioned as the symbolic minstrel of this region, improvises conlas as he wanders through the deserted llanos. He does this mainly to win the love of a peasant girl or to satirize opponents during singing contests.

An example of Cantaclaro's apt improvisation is a couplet sung while alone on a hot and distant desert. He calls: "Llano, llano, llano, llano." Without losing his

¹² Leo Ulrich, "La Invención en la Novela," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 58, 112.

good humor he continues:

"Cuatro veces to he mentado
Y a ninguna has respondido.
Quien me manda a estar buscando
Lo que no se me ha perdido?"¹³

Another diversion of the llanero is to have a party where the talented singers compete in the presence of the neighboring families dressed in their Sunday best. Cantaclaro attends one of these parties at Hato Viejo where he sings El almanaque llanero. It is a series of verses sung without stopping, in which he describes the various months of the year as they are experienced in the llano:

"Los días del mes primero
de sabana toda verde,
la hacienda en el conedero
retozando de lo alegre.
Las noches con sus luceros
y luna resplandeciente,
cuando el jazmín del estero
florrece sin que lo siembren.
. . . Y en la orilla del sendero
alcaravan que no dueme,
porque esas lunas de enero
no hay bicho que no desvelen.
Ah caramba, compañeros,
y el trasnoche en que los tienen!"¹⁴

As Cantaclaro comes to the month of February, he pauses to allow his enemy, El Guarique,¹⁵ to give the counterpoint. The latter, who is jealous of Cantaclaro's ability, betrays his envy: "Yo no sé de donde vienen sus palabras ni sus versos . . ." To which Cantaclaro replies: "Mis versos, de

¹³ Cantaclaro, 41.

¹⁴ Cantaclaro, 119.

donde quieren; mis palabras de mis hechos."¹⁵ Cantaclaro's superiority is made evident by el Guariqueño:

"No es menester que me advierta
como debo procedel,
pues yo no paso las puertas
que me deban dotenel."¹⁶

Cantaclaro answers artfully, criticizing his usage of the verb deber:

"Son muchos debes, compadre,
en pocos versos contaos,
pero aunque todos le cuadren
yo me atengo a Juan Parao
que es el amo de esta fiesta
tan cordial y tan rumbosa,
que su bondad nos obsequia
pa que yo cante mis coplas.
Y pregunto a su prudencia
si le puedo contestar,
a quien me busca pendencia
valiéndose del cantar."¹⁷

At this point Juan Parao, a Negro worker who is the host of the party, in order to avoid any more disputes between the two singers, asks Cantaclaro to continue his almanaque later in the evening and signals the musician to begin a joropo so that the girls may dance.

A festivity similar to the one mentioned immediately above is described in the chapter entitled "Décimas y Fuliás" of Pobre Negro. The Negro workers of La Fundación celebrate the month of May when orchids bloom and the four stars of la Cruz del Sur glitter more than usual. This cel-

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

celebration may be compared with that of Cantaclaro's "Corridos y Contrapunteos" and Doña Bárbara's "Las Veladas de la Vaqueería," where popular songs and poems are sung in the patios of the haciendas. Décimas are sung at this celebration. I quote the following excerpt:

"Mes de mayo, mes de mayo,
 Cuando las recias calores . . .
 Cuando los toros son bravos,
 Los caballos corredores."¹⁸

In order to give the reader a wider interpretation and a better understanding of the inhabitants of Venezuela, Rómulo Gallegos has introduced in his novels a number of folkloric elements. Among the most interesting of them is that of El Familiar in Doña Bárbara. This old superstitious belief of mysterious origin consists in burying an old horse or bull alive in the first palisade which is constructed at the stockyard of a newly established ranch. Each estate has its familiar who is to bring good luck by appearing as a ghost from time to time and by looking after the ranch and the people who live there.

In Cantaclaro we find two legendary stories that lend mystery and superstition to the life of the llanos, el Diablo de Cunaviche and La Aparición del Blanco. The former is an old tale of a devil who sank a small boat with all its passengers, because one of them had mentioned his name. This happened, according to the legend, at midday. Therefore, the devil was heard to haunt the nearby inhabitants

¹⁸ Pobre Negro, 142.

every day at noon.

When Dr. Payara's wife died because she drank a poison that had been placed near her bed, people attributed her death to the punitive acts of a ghost called El Blanco. He is thought by them to be an ancestor of Doctor Payara, Don Aquilino, who had been disappointed in a woman. In revenge he would not allow women to live at Hato Viejo. Any woman who happened to go there was haunted by him at night until she left. Having the power to pass through walls and doors, he had easy access to any room in the house. When any of the feminine inhabitants were slow to depart, he went to the extreme of shaking their beds after they were asleep.

Another superstitious legend is that of Pozo de Rosa, a picturesque story concerning a small stream in La Trepadora. It is narrated to Victoria by Taparita, an old Indian servant. The creek is located at Cantarrana in a shady area on Hilario Guanipa's property. Years before, it was a medium-sized stream, but of late, especially in the dry season, it has shrunk to a tiny creek. According to legend this is an enchanted location. The site is lonely and impressively dark. It is claimed that immediately after sunset sounds of anguish and lamentation are heard to come from the direction of the almost dry rivulet. No one really claims that he has heard it, but none dare to pass by it after dark. This is a story of love and vengeance. According to the legend, a pretty Indian girl named Rosa has de-

ceived her husband by falling in love with a Spaniard. When the former learns of her unfaithfulness, he becomes angry and then very sad. One afternoon he invites her to walk by the stream with him. As she sits on the edge of the stream, admiring her beauty reflected in the water, he sees his opportunity. Seizing her very long hair he strangles her with it, winding the strands seven times around the slender neck. (Since then, seven has been considered an unlucky number in the region.) The husband, consumed with jealousy, pushes his wife into the water. On returning home and finding himself alone, he regrets his crime and begins to call to her: *¡Rosa! ¡Rosa! ¡Rosa!* The legend also has it that each time he called her, a moan came from the river, which at the same time dried up more and more. By the following dawn the river had disappeared and in its place there were a great number of roses. On counting the roses, he discovered that there was one for every time he had called Rosa. From that time on, superstition has attached this name to the dying river of Cantarrana.

CHAPTER VII

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE OF GALLEGOS' NOVELS

Rómulo Gallegos began his literary career during the period when the modernistic school was at its height. Under this influence he wrote a series of seven short stories entitled Los Aventureros,¹ in the second decade of the present century. These stories are characterized by lyricism, by rhythmical prose, and by lack of objectivity. They emphasize form rather than content.

Gallegos forsook the fastidious refinement and lyrical tendencies of his early writings when he wrote El Ultimo Solar, his first novel. This production and the two which succeeded it, La Trepadora and Doña Bárbara, stress content, characterization, and expression. In the last two novels, especially, the plots are carefully planned; the characters are well thought out and not one of them is superfluous. Even the minor personages are fully developed, but in such a way that they make the leading one stand out in relief. In his later works, however, the author returned to the stylistic form of his earliest books. As a result, both the plots and characters suffered in quality. The former became confused and disconnected and the latter ill-defined and nebu-

¹ The seven stories are: Los Aventureros, El Aroyo, La Liberación, Sol de Antaño, Estrellas Sobre el Barranco, Las Novias del Mendigo, El Milagro del Año.

lous.

Because it was Gallegos' first novel and because he was not yet adequately trained in the writing of such creations, Reinaldo Solar² cannot be compared in quality with the two which followed it. The plot of this work is not well planned. It is confusing and disorderly and lacks continuity of action. The book has been expanded to include too many questions, thus dispersing its strength and reducing appreciably its intensity. The author is apparently not interested in the plot, for he pays so much attention to the protagonist that the former is neglected. But the principal character, Reinaldo Solar, is also faulty. As an individual he is unreal, because he portrays only the weaknesses of Venezuelan youths. Further detracting from the value of the novel, Gallegos in some cases treats so intensively the inner life of those secondary characters who come in contact with Reinaldo that one loses sight of the central figure. This occurs particularly in the development of Carmen Rosa, Rosaura Medieville, Antonio Menéndez, Riverito, and Manuel Alcor.

La Trenadora, his second novel, reveals the optimistic spirit of the author. He presents one of his best conceived and developed plots without the interpolations and asides which break the unity of Reinaldo Solar and at the

² El Ultimo Solar became Reinaldo Solar in the second and subsequent editions.

same time introduces well-drawn characters who are typically Venezuelan. The author makes a great effort ^{toward} simplicity. The plot, the characters, and the background chosen for the development of the story have been skillfully brought together. The first two-thirds of the novel takes place near Caracas at Cantarrana, the coffee plantation of the Casal family, which was acquired by Hilario Guanipa, the main character. In the last third, which takes place mostly in the capital, Hilario's daughter, Victoria, becomes the principal character. The two parts of the novel are intimately connected, their plots following each other in sequence toward the author's objective.

Doña Bárbara is probably Gellagos' best literary creation. The plot is simple and natural and the characters are excellently painted and clearly defined. It is a realistic as well as poetic novel. The work is truly a feat of architecture and of inner balance. One Latin-American reviewer has gone so far as to say that Doña Bárbara is the most perfect and well-balanced novel that has been produced since Cervantes' time.⁵ The background of this story occupies a preponderant part, for at times it is the real protagonist overshadowing the main characterization and plot, but this does not deflect the over-all emphasis from Doña Bar-

⁵ Manuel Pedro González, "A Propósito de Doña Bárbara," Bulletin of Spanish Studies, No. 28, Vol. 7 (Oct., 1950), 165.

bara, in whom Gallegos is profoundly interested. The beautiful descriptions of the landscape including its immense rivers and mysterious plains have been realistically portrayed along with the human and animal dwellers. This novel could be regarded as an epic of ranch life on the great tropical plains of Venezuela because of its powerful descriptions, characters, and customs of rural life of the plains. In the structure and style of this masterpiece the ability of Gallegos reaches its maximum height.

Cantaclaro, which is really a lyric of the Venezuelan plains, does not offer as good a plot as *Doña Bárbara*. The lovers of folklore and poetry would accept Cantaclaro as Gallegos' best production because of its beauty of language and description of rural customs. It is inferior, however, to most of his novels in consistency and narration of plot, the latter being disjointed and confusing. Gallegos has interwoven several arguments and by not giving the book a proper ending he has detracted from its merit. The plot appears to have no special purpose, for the characters just disappear at the end of the story, leaving the reader in doubt. Nevertheless it has been argued that Gallegos' artistic plenitude has been achieved in this novel, because nothing more beautiful has been said about the life of rural Venezuela and also because it has such lyric prose and spiritual gracefulness.⁴ The interest of the author when writ-

⁴ píoón Sales, op. cit., 220.

ing this novel was apparently not in plot or characters, but in the description of the region in a poetic style.

In Canaima the author also emphasizes background rather than plot and characterization. The mysterious atmosphere of the jungle is present all through the novel and the customs of the Indians have been faithfully narrated. Although Luis Alberto Sánchez, a Peruvian writer, avers that Canaima is the best production of Gallegos, it has been considered by most readers inferior to Doña Bárbara and La Trepadora because of its loose plot and absence of purpose in the presentation of some of its principal characters, especially Marcos Vargas.

Gallegos returns to his stylistic form of writing after reaching the culmination of his literary career in Doña Bárbara. He is no longer interested in a careful preparation of plots and psychological studies of characters, but becomes involved in historical and political matters and a rhythmic prose. This can be noted in Pobre Negro. The work pictures the life of the laboring class in the middle of the last century when negroes were still enslaved. Gallegos also brings to his readers a realistic scene of the Federal War during this period. When writing this novel, Gallegos is not only the novelist who may invent something possible, but also a historian who pictures reality. Pobre Negro, as well as El Forastero, is a series of disconnected scenes which make the plot rather loose and disjointed. In

El Forastero, for example, some of the characters pass through the book as mere shadows with no objective or purpose. Leo Ulrich classifies the two books as essays rather than as novels. He states that Pobre Negro should be termed, not a novel, but an essay of psychological history on the Federal War of Venezuela, and El Forastero, an essay of political psychology on despotism and its transition to democracy.⁵

In his last novel, Sobre la Misma Tierra, Gallegos appears not to be interested in a lyrical type of language, in plots, or in descriptions of landscape as he was in his first novels. He seems to be impelled by a stronger humanistic and patriotic feeling and a great desire for reform in the primitive regions of his country. He adopts a new style which shows a marked deviation from his preceding works, for these last creations have been written to be seen rather than to be read.

One critic believes that Gallegos wrote them with the idea of transforming them into motion pictures at a later date. That is the reason why they differ from his earlier literary works.⁶ This progressivism in Gallegos' writings has weakened rather than strengthened his reputation as a writer.

⁵ Leo Ulrich, Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 53 (Mayo-Junio, 1945), 110.

⁶ Ibid., 138.

An outstanding quality of Rómulo Gallegos' style is his exceptional ability to construct word pictures of characters which are so vivid that the people appear to be living beings whom one has known for some time.⁷ His descriptions include not only their physiognomy, but their personality as well--their very soul. Perhaps this clarity of expression is due in part to the author's projection of his own traits and of his own ideals into the figures who "live" in his novels.

Also worthy of note is the remarkable economy of words with which Gallegos describes each individual. At times in one brief phrase the distinctive characteristic is set forth as, for example, when Reinaldo Solar sells his property to the ruffian mestizo Yaguaraín González. The latter succinctly reveals to the reader what kind of person he is when he explains the scar on his face to Reinaldo: "Una machetacito que me dió el difunto, porque le quité la mujercita."⁸

Just as his style has qualities which merit praise, so Gallegos' novels have defects which cannot be ignored. One of them is the author's tendency to duplicate the traits of one character in other persons who appear in his novels. This lack of variety can be unfortunate. For instance, some

⁷ See Chapter V. .

⁸ Reinaldo Solar, 203.

of the people who represent the civilizing influence in the backward regions have many characteristics in common and very often are Gallegos' own mouthpieces. This is true of the aristocratic landowners such as Dr. Santos Luzardo, Dr. Juan Crisóstomo Payara, Reinaldo Solar, Don Jaime and Nicolás del Casal, Don Cecilio Céspedes and his nephew Cecilio Alcorta, Manuel Ladera, and several others. Also the political figures introduced are too often pictured as dishonest and despicable. Representative of this type are: Apolonio Alcaraván, General Buitrago, General Parmeni6n, Miguel Ardevín, 116o Pernalete, and Hermenegildo Guaviare. Many of the feminine characters appear to be cut from the same pattern. Common characteristic can be found in the girls belonging to the Casal, the Vellorini, and the Alcorta families. Mari-sela and Victoria, both mestizas, also seem to possess common traits such as rebelliousness, arrogance, and a high degree of emotionalism. Carmen Rosa reminds us very much of Adelaida Salcedo and Efigenia because of their sweetness, submissiveness, and patience. In almost every novel there is a peasant whom Gallegos lionizes as an intensely sincere servant and friend of his master, loyal even to the point of risking his life for him. Juan Coromoto, Pajarote, Antonio, Juan Parao, Taparita, Hinojoza, and Cabo Pisao, for example, are of this type. All fit the same pattern.

Another shortcoming noticeable in Gallegos' novels is the sometimes abrupt and unexplained exit of a number of the

principal characters, as well as of some of the minor personages. The effect of this practice is frustrating. It gives one the feeling that the story has been brought to an end before its completion. Cantaclaro, for instance, disappears at the end of the story and the only explanation given is that the devil took him away. Doctor Payara, who is also one of the main characters in Cantaclaro, loses importance as the novel nears its end and is finally forgotten by the author. Doña Bárbara, probably Gallegos' best characterization, also leaves us in ignorance of her future when she is withdrawn from the plot at the conclusion of the story. Gallegos disposes of Marcos Vargas in Cancina, and of Mariano Urquiza, Marta Elena, and the unknown foreigner in El Forastero in the same fashion.

Gallegos' tendency to repeat is evident, too, in his use and treatment of the typical ranchero evening gathering. The same scene showing the men singing in competition, to the accompaniment of native instrumental music, telling stories, and sometimes dancing, is duplicated with some minor variations in Doña Bárbara's "Veladas de la Vaquería," Cantaclaro's "Corridos y Contrapunteos" and "Cuentos de Vaquerías," and Pobre Negro's "Décimas y Fulías."

The poetic ability of the author may be appreciated in the meaningful verses sung at the song contests of the above-mentioned scenes. The same may be said of the author's able narration of tragedies of the plains in verse form. To

tell the horrible story of a man who was hanged by Doctor
Payara, Cantaclaro sings this corrido:

Iban los dos caminando
por la orilla del estero,
llevaba el indio la sogá
y el blanco el mal pensamiento.
El blanco, que bien sabía
que el indio no era cuatrero,
sino que el hambre le dijo:
"Anda y róbate el becerro."
Iban los dos caminando
a la luz de los luceros.

Llegaron hasta una mata
de un nombre que no recuerdo,
llegaron y se pararon
junto a la pata de un ceibo,
Y el blanco le dijo al indio:
"Arrodillándote, cuatrero.
Ya vas a ver lo que cuesta
Un mamantón de mi hierro."
Llegaron y se pararon
bajo la copa de un ceibo.

"Encomiéndate a la virgen,
échate la sogá al cuello,
pues sólo te queda vida
pa rezar un Padrenuestro."
Así y que dijo el blanco,
y el indio así, con empeño;
"Que yo no robando, naute,
que yo perdón te pidiendo."
Y esto lo estaban hablando
a la luz de los luceros.

Desde aquel día la mata
del nombre que no recuerdo,
la mientan la del ahorcado,
por el ladrón del becerro
que aquella noche colgaron
de los copitos de un ceibo,
según lo pone el pasaje:
a la luz de los luceros.
Iban los dos caminando . . .
Señores, no cuenten esto.⁹

⁹ Cantaclaro, 59-60.

Gallegos' novels are not overloaded with figurative expressions, but he has injected a sufficient number of them to give his stories a spicy and pleasant taste. Many examples could be cited, but only a few which seem to be especially lucid are quoted. From Doña Bárbara these sparkling samples may be considered typical: "La maldita llanura, devoradora de hombres."¹⁰ "La muerte es un péndulo que se mueve sobre la llanura, de la inundación a la sequía y de la sequía a la inundación."¹¹ "Por fin el amor de Asdrúbal, pura sombra errante a través del alma tenebrosa, se reposaba en un sentimiento noble."¹² "Ya no se habla en la balsa. Pero el río se ha puesto a cuchichear con las negras piraguas."¹³

A number of critics consider Gallegos' composition classical. Torres Rioseco, especially, is of this opinion. The latter states that by this definition he means "A racial style with that simplicity, clarity, robustness and strength, characteristic of Lazarillo de Tormes and Novelas Ejemplares."¹⁴

Many Latin-American writers who have attempted to

¹⁰ Doña Bárbara, 91.

¹¹ Ibid., 291.

¹² Ibid., 293.

¹³ Ibid., 290.

¹⁴ Torres Rioseco, Novelistas Contemporáneos, 101.

write realistic novels have used the unschooled language of the peasant as a pretext to avoid exposing their inability to express themselves in pure Spanish. Rómulo Gallegos has also employed the illiterate peasant dialogue, but unlike other authors has demonstrated his capacity to write clearly and forcefully in accordance with the accepted rules of rhetoric. He is a master of the language and at the same time treats it with respect. His descriptions are simple, but they are elegant and correct. He knows how to infuse life, emotion, and interest into the creations of his spirit and his style is excellent.¹⁵ He possesses all the qualities which ought to adorn the true novelist.

¹⁵ "Rómulo Gallegos," Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, Apéndice, V, Bilbao, Madrid, Barcelona, 1951, p. 675.

CONCLUSION

Rómulo Gallegos lived under the heavy atmosphere and spiritual indigence which the dictatorial rule of Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez created in Venezuela. They reduced, as might be expected, the limits of intellectual life and denied to Venezuelans the opportunity to discuss openly and freely their common problems. In the thirty-six years of these two dictatorships (1899-1935), some writers bowed to arbitrary power and others chose exile rather than a compromise of their principles. Gallegos is one of the latter group.

It is natural, then, to expect that the predominant theme in his novels should be an arraignment of the social, economic, and political backwardness, inequality, and disparity which are due to years of corrupt government. The novels convey a vital message, a message of reform to the younger generation, which is urged, by implication, to assume the responsibility for the initiation and execution of progressive measures. Gallegos is an extremely sincere democrat. He views with abhorrence a philosophy of government that permits the vested interests from within and foreign investors from without to exploit the people and the land on which they subsist. He looks forward, not without his moments of pessimism, to the elimination of political corruption in Venezuela, a great rise in the standard of living especially in the lowest income groups, the break-down of

all social barriers, and eventually the assimilation of races. These problems are treated with emphasis in his novels. El Forastero and Reinaldo Solar give special attention to the political and social diseases which have retarded the growth of Venezuela. La Trenadora expresses the author's contempt for the social obstacles maintained by the more economically fortunate classes; Pobre Negro points to a possible solution of the racial problem. Doña Bárbara and Sobre la Misma Tierra suggest the modernization of the interior regions in the interest of all Venezuelans.

While Callegos' main concern is to awaken his countrymen to the great need for progressive betterment, he has, at the same time, made a notable contribution to Latin-American literature. In the purely literary sense, this author has enriched the technique of the Hispanic-American novel by showing how the common mode of expression can be used without detracting from a fine Castilian style. Doña Bárbara is one of his best examples. In it he employs the plain vernacular language of the humble llanero with all its natural charm, as well as the most polished and correct Spanish. This novel is not equalled by any of his other works, but each one of them contains a characteristic which gives it a certain distinction and merit. Cantaclaro is noted for its folklore and lyrical descriptions of Venezuelan rural life; Cancina for its realistic descriptions of the jungle and the latter's influence on man; Pobre Negro for its stylistic and

poetic approach--the word painting, beauty of form and regularity of movement of its sentences.

As a native-born Venezuelan of humble parentage, as one who has studied the ills which beset Venezuela and who has ascended the social, economic, and political ladder through his own energy and intelligence, Rómulo Gallegos has had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the geography of his country and its people. He has accurate knowledge of their feelings, actions, traits, customs, and language.. In writing of his countrymen, the author has attempted to portray authentically and faithfully what he considers to be the genuine spirit which lives within them. Truly it can be said that Rómulo Gallegos is the interpreter of Venezuela.

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