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Mary H. Shea
The University of Montana

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SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN SOME OF THE NOVELS OF MANUEL GALVEZ

Summary of Thesis

**Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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by

**Mary H. C. Shea
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Manuel Gálvez' first four novels: La maestra normal (1914), El mal metafísico (1916), La sombra del convento (1917), Nacha Regules (1919), and one from a later period--Hombres en soledad (1938)--are the five works selected for this study. The twenty-odd years between the first four novels and Hombres en soledad provide the element of time to help gauge the soundness and validity of his charges and to show the changes, if any, that may have resulted in his thinking.

In analyzing these novels for their delineation of conditions in Argentine life that present social problems challenging responsible citizens, any condition that prevents a considerable number of human beings from progressing in the right direction toward a better life is considered a social problem.

Argentina's relatively sudden rise to industry and world trade in the late eighteen and early nineteen hundreds helped to bring out in sharp relief certain social inequalities that had attracted little attention while the country's economy was largely agricultural. The rapid acquisition of great wealth by many of the upper class, accompanied as it was by an excessive interest in material things, led to an increasing application of materialistic principles to all

phases of living. It is a denunciation of materialism, prompted by a true patriotic concern for his country, that motivates Gálvez as he evaluates the services to his country-men of the basic social institutions under the impact of the new philosophy.

The first institution to be weighed is the school (La maestra normal). Here Gálvez makes use of his long years of experience as a national school supervisor to show up the inadequacies and failures of the school system. Under the administration of a director who thinks that any problem--social, moral, or mathematical--needs only to be dealt with in a "scientific" manner to insure a successful solution, the normal school in La Rioja offers multiple examples of the failures of such thinking. "Normalismo," as Gálvez dubs it, denies the need for the cooperation of the family in the education of the young, makes little of religious training, discredits tradition and the past, and in its effort to educate all the people, reduces all to the level of the least intelligent. He sees such education failing to make either good citizens or happy individuals. "Where," he asks, "will one find suitable leadership for the guidance of the country under such training?"

The glory of Colonial Argentina is ever present in Gálvez' mind as he appraises the current scene. The lethargy and decay found in the interior, in La Rioja, are con-

nected in his mind with the change in values that would forget tradition and the spiritual side of man. He sees it as another result of the failure of those in power to organize and administer the country efficiently.

Córdoba--"the city of churches"--is the setting for his portrayal of the effects of a rigid, unnatural interpretation of religion on the lives and happiness of people (La sombra del convento). He is particularly bitter against the influence of the Jesuits, whom he describes as sly and insidious. He chides the Church for being led into a denial of true Christian charity and complete living by submitting to the dictatorship of this order. Instead of offering the support and reassurance needed by her weak children, he finds the Church turning away. Her failure forces them into radical socialistic or communistic groups that try to deny all religion.

Gálvez tries to emphasize the great breadth of the Church, the fact that she has room for all people--learned and ignorant, rich and poor. His hope for liberalizing some of her doctrines shows him to be an unorthodox Catholic, as does the suggestion that the Church, in her battle against materialism, join with any and all who believe in God, the soul, and the after life, be they spiritualists, theosophists, or protestants.

In the other three novels under discussion Gálvez

turns his attention to the upper class and its influence on the life and culture of Buenos Aires through its administration of the government and through its position of social and intellectual leadership. He feels that the government under its capitalistic machinery is failing the people as a whole. Materialism holds full sway in Buenos Aires and its extreme evil effects can be observed in such great number and variety as to present a very hopeless and disconsolate picture.

These unfortunate people who are concerned with things of the mind and soul (El mal metafísico) rather than with bodily needs and wants have a very hard struggle to exist in the great capital. All the places where creative interests should be cherished and spiritual and emotional considerations should be supported are contaminated by the same excessive selfish interests in physical and temporal things. In the University, lawyers are taught the letter not the spirit of the law, and justice is salable; doctors are more concerned with the dollar return than with service to suffering mankind. The government takes no notice of writers. It places a premium on ability to conform and to "hold" the particular party line rather than on ability to express truth and honest conviction. Hence, oftentimes, experience as a writer is an obstacle rather than a help in seeking government employment. Among the writers themselves

the same evils can be found--ambition for wealth and worldly power, jealousy, non-cooperation and self-conceit. Among the well-to-do families money and position are the first consideration, beyond which they refuse to go. Writers, unless they are exceptionally strong, either adapt themselves or perish. Gálvez sees his country not only not making the cultural progress she should but in grave danger of suffering a decline in her civilization.

The government and the upper class are charged with the loss in individual happiness and achievement and the loss to society as a whole resulting from the prostitution of the women of the lower class (Nacha Regules). Several times in this novel Gálvez mentions the need for a change in government. He warns of a coming revolt by the poor, with socialism or communism as a possible result. Yet he draws back from any forthright support of such a change. The whole list of ills that are to be found along with prostitution are set forth with brutal clarity: the low moral standards of the poor due to the living and working conditions imposed on them--little or no education, miserable wages, crowded and unsanitary living quarters--their resignation to their lot, and their suspicious attitude toward any effort to help them.

Gálvez hits at foreign capitalists as well as those in Argentina who must have exorbitant profits. He scorns

the intelligentsia for their cowardly fear of any change. Even the supposedly good Christians practice their love of neighbor and charity only within their own small circle. Their own financial security has fenced them in with a high wall of smug complacency; they refuse to be aware of anything that might disturb their peace of mind. Government officials not only do nothing to relieve the lot of these poor people but there is collusion and graft that can be traced right to some of the highest officials.

As late as 1938 Gálvez is still intent upon the same theme--materialism dissipating the energy of the upper class and ruining the country. He shows the aimless, unsatisfying, unproductive lives of these people (Hombres en sociedad), whose major concerns are worldly position and power and sensual pleasures. He is concerned with the failure of the upper class to achieve success and happiness and to direct the country capably, and he is more hopeless than ever about the capitalistic control of the government.

Gálvez does not believe in our type of democracy. He is sincerely interested in giving to all people as good a living as possible. However, he does not seem to believe that this can be done by allowing the people to participate actively in their own government. In his portrayal of the failure of the school he points out that only those who have superior intelligence should be educated and that they should

be intrusted with the leadership of the rest of the people. Throughout these novels he seems to feel that a strongly organized state is the best means to a good living for all the people and the surest path to its rightful place among the nations of the world for his beloved country.