CHARACTERIZATION AND PRINCIPAL THEMES IN
THE NOVELS OF GUSTAVO A. MARTINEZ
ZUVIRIA (pseud., Hugo Wast)

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THESIS

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY AND LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

Gustavo Adolfo Martínez Zuviría, who wrote under the pseudonym of Hugo Wast, was born in Córdoba, Argentina in 1883. He received his early education in the Colegio Nacional of Córdoba and the Colegio de la Inmaculada of Santa Fé. He earned the degree of Advocate at the Universidad del Litoral, Santa Fé, and in 1907 that of Doctor of Laws at the same institution. He was born in a family whose history is bound up with the political and literary development of the Argentine Republic, and his interest in literature as well as in politics and sociology received the constant stimulation of sympathetic environment and family tradition.

At a very early age he began to show evidences of a vivid imagination, which his avid reading of romantic fiction, particularly that of Defoe, Scott, Stevenson, and Jules Verne, stimulated and broadened. Much later, after his own position as a popular novelist was well assured, he frequently mentioned in his Confidencias de un novelista his debt of gratitude to these early models.

While still a student in the provincial university, Martínez Zuviría began to give proof of unquestioned literary ability. In 1902, at the age of nineteen, he published Los dos crumetes, a juvenile sea tale, and a controversial study
entitled El naturalismo y Zola; conferencias y artículos de polémica. The following year he reprinted Los dos grumetes with six new stories, and produced another pamphlet, La creación ante la pseudo-ciencia; artículos de polémica y estudios científicos. It was during this period also that he published forty-eight of his lyric poems in a volume called himas de amor. Years later, after he was married, the author made strenuous efforts to destroy all the copies he could find of this conventionally romantic bit of youthful self-expression.1

In 1906 Martínez Zuñiría began his career as a novelist with the two-volume Alegre, a pleasant but imperfectly-executed work such as might have been expected of a young man still under the influence of his youthful reading. Then, in 1907, he withdrew his attention from the romantic and exotic scenes of Alegre to deal with a situation in which sociology and economics played a more significant role. The result was his second novel, Novia de vacaciones, a story in which the author weaves into the conventional plot of tardily-requited love a convincing picture of the social conditions of the period. With the publication of this novel the literary apprenticeship of Martínez Zuñiría may be said to have ended, and he embarked upon a career which was to gain him such praise as: "Es de los escritores más leídos en su país y

1Hugo Wast, Confidencias de un novelista, p. 227.
muy conocidos en todos los de lengua español. "

In 1911, feeling that the critics of Buenos Aires were apt to overlook or else to consider lightly an unknown provincial author, he published his next novel as the posthumous work of one Hugo Wast, and it is by this pseudonym that he is known to the readers of all his literary works appearing since that date. The first novel to bear this nom de plume was the extremely popular Flor de durazno, which will be discussed later.

As is so often the case with Spanish American writers, whose literary careers are co-existent with their political or other professional activities, Hugo Wast has taken an active and constructive interest in public affairs since he entered the legal profession. He was appointed Professor of political economy in the Universidad del Litoral in 1911, and then served as deputy from the province of Santa Fé from 1916 until near the end of 1920. Since 1931 he has served as Director of the National Library of Buenos Aires, and was elected provisional president of the Comisión Nacional de Cultura in 1937.

Diccionario Enciclopédico Abreviado, ed. by Espasa-Calpe, Buenos Aires.

Unless otherwise indicated, all biographical information given thus far is taken from Hespelt's Introduction to Casa de los cuervos.

The data following this note are elaborations on the information given in outline form in Who's Who in Latin America, ed. by Percy Alvin Morton, p. 313.
He is a member of the P. E. N., Jockey, and Rotary Clubs of
Buenos Aires, and to balance his political and social activ-
ities, is also a member of the Academia Española de la Lengua
of Madrid and of the Academia Argentina de Letras.

Wast was awarded the Gold Medal of the Academia Española
de la Lengua in 1923, and the grand literary prize of the Ar-
gentine Government (30,000 pesos) in 1928. His novels have
flowed from his pen in an almost uninterrupted stream since
the publication of Alegre in 1907. The following list of his
writings will serve as proof of the fecundity of his imagi-
nation and the regularity of his literary production: Alegre
(1907); Novia de vacaciones (1907); Flor de durazno (1911);
Fuente sellada (1914); La casa de los cuervos (1916); Valle
negro (1918); Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre (1919); La cor-
bata celeste (1920); Los ojos vendados (1921); El vengador
(1922); La que no perdonó (1923); Una estrella en la ventana
(1924); Pata de Zorra (1924); Desierto de piedra (1925); Las
espigas de Ruth (1926); Myriam la conspiradora (1926); El
jineté de fuego (1926); Tierra de jaguares (1927); Sangre en
el umbral (1927); Lucía Miranda (1929); Quince días sacristán
(1930); Confidencias de un novelista (1930); El camino de las
llamas (1930); Don Bosco y su tiempo, two volumes (1932); Naves-
Oro-Sueños (1935); El Kehal-Oro (1936).

Since 1936 the literary efforts of Wast seem to have been
confined to the Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional de Buenos
Aires, of which he is the founder and director. The novels
listed above have been translated into most of the languages of western Europe.

There has not been much critical opinion written in regard to the importance of Hugo Wast in the field of the modern Spanish American novel. Arturo Torres-Rioseco appears to damn him with faint praise when he remarks:

Still another phase of exoticism on American themes is to be seen in the work of Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, 'Hugo Wast', (1883- )—a writer of popular escape fiction, adventure novels, and historical romances in the manner of Dumas—whose books, while not poorly written as one would expect from their great number, are not concerned with any aesthetic aims whatever.\(^5\)

In support of this criticism there is the frequent comment that Wast is more interested in the number of his readers than in the quality of his work. While he cannot fail to be aware of this opinion, the novelist has not taken the pains to express himself in any refutation of it. If anything, his own remarks lend substance to the charge. After observing, "Hay quienes creen más elegante declarar que leen a Proust o a Joyce, que están leyendo a escondidas El prisionero de Zenda",\(^6\) he goes on to justify the writing of light fiction in these words:

Obras que declaraban excelentes los maestros han desaparecido, y en cambio obras que sólo obtuvieron el sufragio del público y no el de los maestros, han durado hasta nosotros y resistirán siglos de siglos.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Arturo Torres-Rioseco, The Epic of Latin American Literature, p. 196.

\(^6\) Wast, op. cit., p. 31.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 33.
Thus the champion of the avowed aficionados of The Prisoner of Zenda affirms his faith in the ability of the readers to disregard the judgments of critics in their selection of literature. Not that Hugo Wast has any quarrel with the classics of any language; on the contrary, he is among the first to admit their greatness and to pay tribute to all masters of the written word. Wast himself has the saving grace of literary modesty; that is, he makes no claim to a position of eminence among contemporary writers, but prefers to derive his satisfaction from the certain knowledge that his works are popular. He has long enjoyed the reputation of being a "best seller" among modern Spanish American novelists. Some of his novels have been submitted to the test of universality, but they all must still stand the test of time. Meanwhile, Hugo Wast is accomplishing one of his aims as a professional writer: that of making a living from his work. The constant demand for his novels supplies an irrefutable reply to his own facetious question: "¿Quién dice que la literatura no es capaz de alimentar a su hombre?"

In a more serious vein he poses the same question:

¿Es posible, en las condiciones actuales del mercado de libros en castellano, que un novelista se gane decorosamente la vida escribiendo novelas?

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Creo que sí, a condición de ejercer este arte como se ejercen los otros—la pintura, la música, la escultura—cuando uno hace de ellos una carrera, trabajando con método, para obtener una producción regular.  

It must not be inferred from these quotations that Hugo Wast is a mere literary hack, nor that his sole claim to importance is his financial success in his chosen field. Admittedly, the novelist caters to public taste, and in so doing is more apt to incur the critic's censure than his praise. At the same time, the premiums, both nominal and substantial, which he has been awarded in recognition of his contribution to Argentine letters, are partial defense against charges of commercialism as the motivating force behind his writing.

If Wast subscribes to any trend in the modern Spanish American novel, it is that of Americanismo, whose articles of faith were propounded by the celebrated philosopher and interpreter of the modernista movement, José Enrique Rodó.

Rodó preached a return to the common mother; that we should forget for a time those none too clearly seen gardens of Versailles and the beauties of the Decameron to breathe the pure tonic air of our native pampas, and to sit for a few moments beneath the shade of our hospitable ombú; that instead of depicting the exotic gavotte and minuet we should record our almost forgotten national dances, which even if destined to disappear before the sophisticated and absorbing metropolis, still conserve the rustic poetry of times gone by, in which our country-sides lived the whole legend of the epos of freedom. Rodó would have us turn a filial glance to the native born, to the native soil, and do our work without exotic hothouse importations; to depict the beautiful landscapes basking in the full sunlight of heaven, to fill our spirits

Ibid., p. 104.
with the evocation of the untamed mountains, full of life and mystery.\textsuperscript{11}

In his concern over the problems of rural and provincial life, Wast is undoubtedly influenced by this spirit of \textit{Américanismo}, and his descriptions of the natural phenomena of his country are both photographic and lyric. He finds the history of his native land a rich source of romanticism and adventure, and popularizes that history with a conscientious if prolific pen.

It is not altogether fair to Hugo Wast, however, to attempt to classify him as an adherent to the tenets of any particular school of literature. Torres-Rioseco, in a more comprehensive and favorable criticism than the one cited earlier, says of Wast:

\textit{\ldots Es el novelista moderno más leído en castellano; algunos de sus libros han alcanzado la fantástica tirada de 130 mil ejemplares y muchos han sido traducidos al inglés y a otros idiomas. La crítica argentina ha sido demasiado severa con este novelista, olvidando que su único fin es hacer obras entretenidas y morales para regocijo de lectores poco exigentes.\textsuperscript{12} Wast cree en la novela de aventuras con su poco de ambiente, a la manera de Dumas y de Julio Verne: Lo demás—psicología exacta, análisis, ideas, estilo artístico—le tiene sin cuidado; no siente grandes inquietudes estéticas y lo único que le importa es que su público no se aburra con la lectura de sus obras.\textsuperscript{13}}}

This criticism does almost complete justice to Hugo Wast.


\textsuperscript{12}Italics those of the present writer.

\textsuperscript{13}Torres Rioseco, \textit{La Novela en la América Hispana}, pp. 220-221.
It not only points out the literary and artistic qualities whose conspicuous absence definitely relegate the novelist to a position somewhere below the upper level of literature, but at the same time it reiterates in favor of Wast the fact that his purpose in writing is to entertain and instruct a mass of uncritical readers. The undiminished popularity of his works offers convincing proof of the author's attainment of his goal.

There is, however, one aspect of the writings of Hugo Wast which the above criticism does not fully consider: the crusading spirit of the novelist, that is, his desire to influence with his religious ideas as many people as possible. This attitude on the part of the author lends to some of his books an evangelistic tone which may well be impossible of comprehensive evaluation by a non-Catholic and non-Hispanic reader.
CHAPTER II

ALEGRE

The novels of Hugo Wast usually lend themselves readily to classification or categorical arrangement according to theme, background, and characterization, but his first novel, Alegre, does not quite fit smoothly into any of the arbitrary divisions of this study. It will therefore be considered separately; although such consideration may be attributed not to special merit, but to various characteristic features which appear in this artistically imperfect and immature work.

Alegre is the first novel of Hugo Wast, written while he was only nineteen years of age, and it may well be said that its real significance lies not in its inept romanticism and unconvincing exoticism, but in the fact that an author so inexperienced was able to display such real ability. In justice to the author, it should be established in the beginning that this rambling and sentimental tale was written not only by a very young writer, and for the most part about even younger characters, but that it is designed to appeal chiefly to adolescent readers. While none of these facts can wholly excuse the mediocrity of the novel from an artistic point of view, the last two mentioned at any rate should cast some light upon the sustained popularity of the story.
Stripped of its plethora of verbiage and of many entertaining but unimportant episodes, the plot is simple enough. Alegre, a twelve year old Negro slave, is brought to Buenos Aires after traveling a number of years over southern Europe with his master, the owner of a small circus. He is befriended during the voyage across the Atlantic by Tio Delfin, an old sailor whose kindness to the friendless little slave earns the latter's undying gratitude, and whose tales of pirates, ships, and sailors cause the boy to decide that the highest goal which he can ever hope to attain is to live the life of a sailor. Alegre escapes from his master in Buenos Aires and flees toward Cruz Chica, an isolated farming and fishing village on the coast. After nearly dying of hunger and exposure on the way, he finds refuge in the home of a charitable and sympathetic priest, who undertakes to educate the waif, and finds him a prodigiously apt pupil. After a few months in the home of the priest, Alegre determines to go on to Cruz Chica to become a member of the family of Ludovico and his wife Marta. Ludovico is the brother of Tio Delfin, and to him the old sailor has entrusted the care of the homeless boy. Alegre is taken into the family as a son and begins a happy existence with his simple chores and his cherished boats. He becomes the intimate friend of Margarita, a girl of his age who is the only daughter of the wealthy and aristocratic Alvarado family whose summer home is in Cruz Chica. The children become practically inseparable. Their idyllic
association ends on a tragic note, as Margarita dies within a few months. Alegre then becomes a full-fledged sailor, rejoins Tío Delfín, and, when caught in a storm which wrecked their vessel, sacrifices himself heroically to save the life of his benefactor.

Considered as an individual novel apart from the main body of Hugo Wast's writings, Alegre would scarcely merit more discussion than that given above. However, its importance in an attempt at a critical analysis of the author's novels is apparent in the light of his statement: "Tengo ahora, acerca de lo que debe ser una novela, las mismas ideas que tenía cuando escribí Alegre."¹ Alegre was written in 1907, and the author's comment above was made in 1929, after Wast himself had emended the book in order to rid it of the most glaring imperfections.

It would not be wholly correct, in view of this statement of faith of a father in his literary first-born, to assert that in Alegre there may be found all the motivating forces behind Wast's numerous other novels, that his personages in this first book constitute models for all future character delineations, or that his creation and development of action conform always to any prescribed limitations established in this primitive effort. Rather, it may be said that in Alegre there appear definite indications of the direction in which Wast will travel, and certain peculiarities,

¹Hugo Wast, Introduction to Alegre, p. 12.
both creditable and unfavorable, which are clearly apparent in his more mature works.

In the first place, the result of the whole novel is consistent with the author's guiding principle in writing: to entertain and instruct his readers. Alegre is romanticism, pure and simple, and if the last-named adjective must bear the greater descriptive load, it is for the reasons mentioned earlier.

One uniformly favorable criticism of Wast at the hands of his reviewers and critics has been that he is at his best in the description of different aspects of nature. In Alegre are to be found many passages worthy of a far more experienced writer. The following lines are indicative of truly poetic simplicity and sympathetic observation of nature:

Comenzaba la primavera. Los campos se cubrían de verdes pastizales, esmaltados por las rojas corolas de las margaritas.
Los árboles tenían hojas nuevas. Reventaban las flores en los matorrales, y se perfumaban las brisas de la tierra.
Los pájaros preludiaban sus partituras de estío, culempándose al borde del nuevo hogar.
Las golondrinas, de regreso ya de las cálidas regiones adonde las arrojaran los fríos del invierno, volvían en bulliciosos escuadrones a invadir los aleros.
La comba de la mar era más serena. La lámina del cielo se había bruñido. La Naturaleza vestíase de fiesta. ²

Further along in the story, Wast gives an example of his talent for matching words with ideas, a practice which results happily in such vivid descriptions as the following one of the

²Wast, Alegre, p. 125.
sounds of a storm at sea: "El chasquido de las olas, el retumbar de los truenos, los aullidos del huracán, llenaban el mundo." 3

Another passage which might be called typical of Hugo Wast's descriptions is one in which both the ear and the eye of the reader are mentally called into play to conceive of the picture he paints of an approaching storm:

Como un escuadrón en línea de asalto, avanzaba desde el lejano Sudeste un formidable tropel de nubes cárdenas, cuyas orillas el sol doraba fantásticamente. De tanto en tanto ardía un rayo en sus entrañas, y se escuchaba el trueno, sordo y prolongado unas veces como si una torre se desplomara, otras crepitante y seco, tal una descarga de fusilería. 4

The pages of Alegre provide many other examples of technique and practices on which Wast elaborates in his later works. Chief among them is the portrayal of personalities through actions rather than through verbal analysis of the characters of the novel. The reader is not told in so many words that the priest of Brandzen is a kindly, noble, sympathetic párroco; one is made to see the philosophy of the priest in the actual development of his treatment of the unfortunate runaway slave. The author does not take time to elaborate on the generosity of Ludovico and Marta in sentimental terms; they merely receive the orphan with open arms and Ludovico gives him the boat which, to Alegre, is the most desirable gift imaginable. The callous mother of the dying

3 Ibid., p. 214. 4 Ibid., p. 288.
Margarita is not denounced as a heartless and inattentive
parent; she simply leaves her daughter to the tender mercies
of an unsympathetic governess. Similar observations might
well be made with regard to Tío Delfín, Jorge, Margarita, and
the minor characters.

An index to the sociological interests of Wast, so pro-
nounced in many of his later novels, is provided in the brief
treatment in Alegre of the Alvarado family, who are depicted
as typical members of the idle rich porteño class of Argentine
society. In this first novel, however, there is little more
than a faint indication of the studied attacks which the
novelist launched in subsequent elaborations on this theme.

While the sentimental element is abundant in Alegre, it
is primarily a novel of action, and as such, establishes a
pattern for its successors. The author does not intrude upon
the scene unnecessarily, and the rapprochement between the
reader and the characters is not often broken by interpolations
of explanatory or philosophical nature. Wast appears to have
learned early that his readers demand of their characters not
so much that they be something as that they do something.
The action of the story is never delayed or halted by de-
scriptive passages; rather, such passages are used with commend-
able skill to set the stage for action and to create or in-
tensify the desired mood.

Alegre differs from Wast's other novels in that, with the
exception of Don Bosco y su tiempo, and Lucía Miranda, it is
the only one in which any significant action occurs outside South America. The novelist learned quickly that he could write exotic fiction and still be realistic in matters of geography.

Characteristically, Alegre is filled to overflowing with incidents whose diverse nature results in a lack of unity, and whose faulty interrelation precludes a sufficiently plausible ending to the story. It is logical enough that two children with common interests, such as were Alegre and Margarita, should become fond of each other's company. However, when the sentiments of Alegre toward his aristocratic playmate began to border on the sentimental, the situation appears to have got out of hand for the author, and he had no recourse except to have her die. This would appear to be a form of literary murder for which the novelist would find a convincing motive rather difficult. But it must be remembered that Wast regards the novel as an instrument with which to influence as well as to divert his readers, and its influence for good or for evil depends not so much on what the author desires to say as on the ultimate interpretation placed upon his words by the reader. Or, as Wast himself phrases the idea:

Una novela, por el solo hecho de representar la vida, enseña, bien o mal, aunque su autor no lo haya pretendido. No es un cuadro, ni una estatua, es toda una cadena de principios y de consecuencias que se transmiten al lector como incitaciones al bien o al mal.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Wast, Confidencias de un novelista, p. 142.
In view of this principle, it is easier to accept the untimely end of the innocent Margarita. The novelist must have felt that any other solution to the situation which was beginning to develop would be of necessity either socially detrimental to his juvenile readers, or, escaping that, at least lacking in plausibility.

To catalogue or to comment upon the faults of this first novel of Hugo Wast is almost tantamount to whipping a dead horse. The author himself admits, with a candor which has no taint of hypocrisy, that it is a poorly constructed work, such as might logically enough be expected of an inexperienced writer. It is entirely too long for its simple plot, and it lacks the verisimilitude necessary even to sheer romanticism. To his credit, it may be said again that it is entertaining in its action, artistic in its descriptions, and exemplary in its moral precepts. Above all, it is worthy of consideration as a promise of better things to come from the pen of its author.
CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL NOVELS

In writing his historical novels, Hugo Wast has worked backward from a chronological point of view. His first work of this nature was La casa de los cuervos, written in 1916, which deals with revolutionary intrigues and uprisings in the province of Santa Fé in 1877. In La corbata celeste, which he wrote in 1920, Wast chooses for his background a period during the regime of Juan Manuel Rosas, who governed Argentina as a dictator from 1829 to 1852. Then, in 1926-1927, he produced the trilogy of Myriam la conspiradora, El jinete de fuego, and Tierra de jaguares, three volumes with a single set of characters and an extended elaboration of a single plot. This historical study is concerned with the counter-revolutionary sentiments and conspiracies of the Spanish loyalists in Argentina after the establishment of the Argentine Federation. Finally, in 1929, the novelist went back to the beginning of Argentine history and wrote Lucia Miranda, a highly romantic story of the attempt to make the first Spanish settlement in Argentina.

In these novels the author uses history as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. He is always the romanticist first and the historian second, and while the reader might not find the historical novels particularly
enlightening on the basis of facts presented, he is at the same time unlikely to find the action tedious. In keeping with the spirit of the time in which it occurs, the action is usually rapid, and often violent.

The events described in *La casa de los cuervos* occur during a few months of the year 1877. There exists a constant state of opposition to the government of the province of Santa Fé, an opposition which flares into open revolt under the leadership of influential *políticos* and *caudillos* when the time appears propitious. The young Captain Francisco Insúa, an *estanciero* from the northern part of the province, succeeds in evading the police agents of the government and joins Don Patricio Cullen and Don Pedro Montarón to plan the capture of the chief government officials at a dance which is to be given in the home of Montarón. This dance is to celebrate the betrothal of Montarón's daughter Syra to Carmelo Borja, secretary and aide to Braulio Jarque. Jarque, *jefe de policía*, who has devoted himself religiously to ferreting out and crushing conspiracies against the government, is the husband of Borja's sister, Gabriela. The conspirators use as a rendezvous the home of an impecunious schoolmaster, Don Serafín Aldabas, father of beautiful Rosarito. Rosarito and Francisco Insúa are distantly related, and were reared as brother and sister in the home of Don Serafín. By the time the action of the story occurs, however, Rosarito's affection for the gallant young revolutionist is no longer
of a fraternal nature. The rebellion begins according to plan, and Insúa kills both Jarque and Borja in self defense, but the revolutionists are quickly defeated, and in the brief street fighting Insúa is wounded by one of his treacherous followers. This traitor is the Indian, José Golondrina, who bears a grudge against Insúa's family because of a supposed indignity suffered by his mother years earlier. Insúa escapes after Rosarito binds his wound, and as a desperate resort, forces his horse to swim across a lake just in time to avoid being captured by government soldiers. He is rescued in an unconscious and moribund state by Gabriela, the young wife of Braulio Jarque and daughter of the mistress of "La casa de los cuervos". This house receives its name from the tame crows which roost in the dead tree near the house, and which act as shepherds for part of the flocks of the ranch. Gabriela and her mother care for the wounded man until he recovers, unaware at first that he is responsible for the death of Gabriela's husband and brother. Doña Carmen soon discovers the secret, but, knowing that the death of her son and son-in-law were the result of impersonal warfare, she forgives Insúa, and Gabriela falls in love with him against her own will. Having left Gabriela's home, Insúa returns after a few months to marry her, and Syra, who is visiting in the home of the latter, stabs herself during the ceremony. Insúa realizes then that he and Gabriela can never expect their marriage to be happy under its cloud of guilt and grief,
and he prophesies his own imminent death. This prophecy is realized soon after at the battle of Los Cachos, where he dies in the arms of Rosarito, aware at last of her love for him.

Characteristically, it is by description of the actions of his characters rather than by psychological analysis that the author expresses his sentiments. This statement must not be interpreted as an inference that the characters of Wast's historical novels lack vitality or interest for the reader; the point to be established is that, for the most part, events dictate the behavior of the characters instead of occurring as a result of the determination of any individual in the story. This is particularly true in *La casa de los cuervos*, which is a story of violent conflicts between opposing political factions, but in which there is little element of personal animosity. Captain Insúa kills Jarque and Borja, not because he dislikes them, but because they interfere with his activities. Don Patricio Gullen is executed not merely because he is a leader of the rebellion but because he happens to be in a position to become a victim of the senseless passion of a group of undisciplined soldiers. Even in the love story of Insúa and Gabriela, it seems that their interest in each other springs from the peculiar combination of circumstances which threw them together rather than from the fact that Insúa is handsome and brave, and Gabriela is beautiful and kind. The novel is not entirely devoid of psychological interest, however, as, in the portrayal of Syra, the writer depicts one of his many feminine
characters who are remembered for their intensity of feeling and tenacity of purpose.

There is one element in La casa de los cuervos which distinguishes it from Wast's other novels on historical themes. That is the use that he makes of the cuervos as symbols and harbingers of misfortune. This highly romantic treatment by a modern writer of a superstitious concept whose origin is buried in antiquity is handled with commendable skill. It is significant that the only character who actually gives words to his thoughts on the subject of the crows is the Indian, José Golondrina, when he says of them: "Son eternos. . . y cuentan los viejos que ellos saben y anuncian las cosas tristes que han de ocurrir."1 The uncertain but vaguely fearful attitude of the criollos toward the birds is aptly implied in the remark made about Alarcón, Insúa's lieutenant, when he saw the crows riding on the backs of the sheep: "Era risueño el caso, y no obstante, Alarcón no sintió ganas de reir cuando los ojuelos de uno de los cuervos, como dos brillantes oscuros, se posaron sobre él."2

Still another example of the author's subtle introduction of the element of augury into a late nineteenth-century setting may be observed in the beginning chapter of Part II of the novel. Here Gabriela's mother, having called the family and

1Wast, La casa de los cuervos, p. 32.
2Ibid., p. 83.
servants together for daily oraciones, names those for whom the prayers are to be said:

---Por las almas del purgatorio.
---Por los caminantes y navegantes.
---Por los príncipes cristianos.
---Por los parientes difuntos.

Y esa vez, cuando todos estuvieron de rodillas en la piazza que servía de oratorio, . . . , se oyó la voz de la dama:
---Recemos por el alma de los que hoy han de morir.\(^3\)

Almost immediately after this utterance, the strident cawing of the birds is heard in the patio. That same night, Gabriela, awakened by vague premonitions, sees her mother gazing out the window at a strange crow which had joined the other two. That was the night of the ball in Santa Fé, and the night when Insúa killed Borja and Jarque.

Very often wast's most forceful characters are women, and such is the case in this novel. In his portrayal of Syra, who was bereft of her novio when Francisco Borja was killed in the fight with Insúa, the author has presented a woman of the type depicted in more detail in his later novels dealing with psychological themes. Beautiful, passionate, and proud, her love for Borja is diverted after his death into a consuming desire for revenge upon the man whom she regards as his murderer. Fully capable of attacking him physically herself, she chooses the more dramatic and equally effective method of stabbing herself at his wedding, thus with one stroke ending her own hopeless existence and irrevocably

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 144.
barring Insúa and Gabriela from happiness together. Syra is by far the most interesting character in a story in which actions overshadow actors at times almost to the point of effacing the characters as individuals.

It does not always happen in Wast's novels that the protagonists are the most effective exponents of the novelist's ideas. In *La casa de los cuervos* is presented a type which is to recur in various guises in future works, that of the criollo, the native-born Argentine, who has inherited some of the dignity and grace of Old Spain, but who is the embodiment of the vigor, independence, and individualism of the New World. His description is incomplete but convincing enough:

Difícilmente se habría hallado un tipo de criollo más hermoso. Era nativo de San José del Rincón, donde una mezcla ignorada de sangres ha producido una casta especial de morenos de ojos azules y facciones caucásicas.

Alarcón era en los rodeos el más fuerte de la peonada, y sus brazos, firmes como un palenque, y sus manos sólidas como un torno bastaban para sujetar un novillo por los cuernos clavándolo en tierra sobre las cuatro pezuñas rígidas. In this novel the author is able to sustain to the end the atmosphere into which the story is projected. The feeling of constant change and uncertainty is always apparent. Politics was not in those days a matter of passing interest; it dominated the social and economic life of everyone. Partisans

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5Ibid., p. 75.
of different groups might be vague in regard to political theory, but the lines were clearly drawn between the parties: "En Santa Fé no era posible desinteresarse de la política; o se era opositor, o se era gobernista."  

Despite the fact that *La casa de los cuervos* is built more around events than around individuals, Wast shows in this novel that his skill in character delineation is improving with literary experience. Insúa, the typical caudillo of the times, is represented as having been accustomed to loyalty and obedience from the days of his boyhood, and his sudden presentation as a sort of feudal chieftain over his peons is quite plausible, even with due consideration for the social and economic stratification of Argentine society during the epoch described. In the person of Braulio Jarque, whose life in the novel was brief, but vividly portrayed, Wast gives his readers an artistically conceived example of the type to whom devotion to duty becomes an obsession, practically to the suppression of normal human instincts. The novelist was in all probability greatly influenced in the conception of this character by the famous, or infamous, prototype of Javert in Hugo's *Les Misérables.*  

Roserito is well enough drawn, but is of no special significance in the unfolding of the plot. The same may be said of her father, Don Serafín, except that he supplies an ephemeral element of levity to the story, which serves to balance

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6Ibid., p. 7.
the somber mood of conspiracy, violence, and sudden death.

Hugo Wast is justly credited with the ability to express a great deal in one terse phrase or sentence. Thus the whole attitude of the revolutionary soldier, his philosophic acceptance of temporary defeat, his determination to rebel again, and his recognition of the element of chance in rebellion are all summed up in one sentence referring to the fiasco of the proposed overthrow of the government: "Ya no debian atinar si- no a salvarse de caer prisioneros, para aguardar tiempos mejo- res, en que la suerte los acompanara."7 Similarly, the self-reliance, courage, and confidence of the gobernista leader Iriondo are presented in a few words in his conversation with Insúa at the ball:

--¿Ha salido solo?
--Sole.
--Yo ando siempre así,-observó el jefe de los gober- nistas. ...sobre todo cuando me dicen que hay peligro.8

Other such examples might be cited, but there will be additional discussion in this direction with regard to some of Wast's other novels.

In regard to its wealth of local color, this novel, together with practically all of Wast's works, serves as a dependable mirror in reflecting the author's minute and sympathetic observation of the background against which his plots unfold.

---Ibid., p. 125.  
---Ibid., p. 108.
If an apparently disproportionate amount of space is devoted in this study to La casa de los cuervos, it is because it is generally recognized as the classic example of the writer's contribution to this genre.

Wast's next historical novel, La corbata celeste, goes some fifty years back into Argentine history for its setting. Hespelt offers a brief critical observation which may be taken as a point of departure for more detailed discussion:

Buenos Aires is also the scene of La corbata celeste (1920), but here it is the city of the mid-nineteenth century, dominated by the dictator Rosas and torn by the civil strife between the Unitarians and the Federalists in their struggle to determine the respective rights of the central and the provincial governments. In order to avoid the inevitable comparison with Már mol's Amalia which any work dealing with this period of Argentine history must invite, Wast has divided his interest between the delineation of the tyrant Rosas and the problem of a father and a son who are in love with the same woman. As a result, neither subject occupies the center of the stage and the construction of the novel suffers. Wast is, however, more just to the character of Rosas than was Már mol for the obvious reasons that he writes from the longer perspective of years that have passed since those troublesome times and that he has no personal prejudice against the dictator to overcome.9

Not a great deal need be added to round out the plot of the novel. It is autobiographical in form, and the narrator, one of the protagonists of the novel, is José Antonio Balbastro, who is a confidential secretary to Rosas. His father is a prosperous merchant, a widower, who pays ostentatious lip service to the cause of the Restaurador de las Leves (Rosas) for commercial reasons, as well as for those of personal safety.

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A relative of José Antonio's mother, Tía Zenobia, acts as mistress of the household and foments intrigues designed to make herself José's step-mother. José Antonio is in love, half-heartedly at first and later passionately, with Leonor, who is the daughter of an ardent unitario. It soon develops that the senior Balbastro also desires to marry Leonor, and the son, upon learning this, renounces his claim to her hand. Leonor and her father flee from Buenos Aires and, after her father dies, her elderly suitor goes to marry her. He is detained in a northern province by Rozas for reasons which are never made quite clear, and finally José Antonio sets out to rescue him. After almost interminable and often loosely-related adventures, the family is reunited in Buenos Aires. The father then reveals that he has brought Leonor back to become the bride of José Antonio after learning of their love for each other, and Tía Zenobia finally arouses the matrimonial interests of José Antonio's father. In order to espouse the Unitarian cause, the whole family then escapes to Uruguay with the help of Rozas' daughter. The novel takes its name from the blue cravat which Leonor made for José Antonio before leaving Buenos Aires, and which he wears at the end of the story as a symbol of his conversion to unitarianismo.

It is not possible to give in specific outline the details of the action of this story. There is no single plot. Wast later built a good critical scaffold from which to hang himself for the literary sins committed in La corbata celeste when he
warned young writers against "un cambio de rumbo en la acción, de donde, resultaría una novela con dos argumentos, algo así como un ternero con dos cabezas." In this novel, moreover, the calf is hydra-headed. The simple story of the love of a young man for a girl of different political beliefs is not only complicated by having the youth's father also become enamored of her, but the separate story of the political conflicts of Unitarianism and Federalism revolving around the person of the dictator Rozas is linked after a fashion to the original plot. Added to this is the story of the Portuguese, Don Tarquino, and the mulatto servant, Benita and her mother Ñe Felisa. Also presented are the stories of Manuelita Rozas and of a few of the minor characters. These digressions may add interest to the novel, but they detract from its coherence.

As Hespelt remarked, Wast is certainly less violent in his portrayal of the character of the tyrant Rozas than were the latter's contemporaries. However, he does not fail to cite examples of the dictator's ruthlessness and capacity for intense and vindictive hatred of his political opponents, and of his almost pathological vanity in regard to his personal appearance. At the same time, Rozas is presented as a magnetic personality who did not have to rely upon fear alone to command the loyalty of his followers. In the novel José Antonio says of him: "¿Qué filtro nos hizo beber aquel hombre a la mitad de

11 Wast, La corbata celeste, p. 78, 126.
los argentinos, para que así lo amáramos y así lo sirviéramos, 
y así voluntariamente cerráramos los ojos a sus extravagancias 
y a sus crímenes?"12

Wast apparently tries to remain unbiased in his portrayal 
of Rozas, but in his description of the pageantry and ceremony 
attendant upon the display of the dictator's portrait on the 
altars, he cannot avoid overtones of censure. Rozas is made 
to remark regarding a priest of independent spirit who does 
not wish to prostitute his religious beliefs in return for an 
eclesiastical sinecure: "Como no cree que yo fui concebido 
sin pecado."13 But Wast does not paint the character of Rozas 
as that of a mystic, a second Messiah, or even, of an "ins- 
spired lunatic". Rozas plays upon the venality of the clergy 
where he finds it, and upon the credulity and superstition of 
the mob. The dictator is shown as a man who, for all his pre-
judices, vanity, and lust for power is still a cool-headed 
realist who is fully aware of the inevitable consequences of 
his actions. In reply to a mild remonstrance from the natu-
really charitable Balbastro in regard to his summary treatment 
of a man discovered conspiring against him, Rozas says:

---¡Cree usted que debo dejarlos conspirar, juntar 
ejércitos, comprar traidores, y pagar asesinos contra mí 
en mi propia casa? ¡Mis amigos! ¡Qué sarcasmo! ¿Qué 
clas de amistad es la suya? He gobernado a mi antojo; 
no han tenido lengua sino para alabarme. Un día se can-
san de mi y se meten a conspiradores. ¿Pero de qué se 
quejan? ¿Cuáles son mis crímenes? ¡Las mismas cosas que 
ellos han aplaudido!14

12Ibid., p. 126.  
13Ibid., p. 126.  
14Ibid., pp. 128-129.
But the personality of such a man as Juan Manuel Rozas cannot be comprehensively discussed in a novel in which he is only one of a number of significant characters. The criticism of Wast's defective composition in attempting to apportion the center of the stage equally between José Antonio and Rozas has already been noted. To the author's credit it may be said that in his incomplete picture of Rozas he has presented no detail whose factual basis may not be found in, or at least deduced from, historical events. Wast may well be criticized for what he did in assigning an active role to the dictator in this novel, but little fault may be found with his treatment of the character after he is introduced.

In his delineation of the young Balbastro, the novelist has departed from the practice he observed in his other historical novels. That is, he presents to the readers a hero who is not a hero in the conventional romantic sense of the word. Since the book is written in the first person, it is to be expected that the narrator be modest in regard to his own exploits. But the sad fact is that for young José Antonio there were very few heroic deeds to recount. His acceptance at first of the tyranny of Rozas is plausible enough; in his position any other course would have been fatal. But he appears as a rather inadequate figure in contrast with the more vivid characters of the story. His renunciation of his claim on Leonor's affection in favor of his father, while perhaps commendable enough in the nineteenth century from a standpoint
of filial duty, does little to make him seem worthy of the young lady. Throughout most of the story he is rather a vacillating creature of circumstance than a determined man of action who could at last defy the power of a tyrant like Rozas. He is shown as a naturally inoffensive person, more inclined to sentimentality and sympathy than to indignant opposition to oppression. After learning of his father's intentions to marry Leonor, he remarks: "La serviría siempre como un esclavo; sacrificaría mis convicciones y mi vida por ella; pero moriría con mi secreto, avergonzado de amarla."  

Later, in a conversation with Rozas' daughter Manuela, José Antonio reveals himself as a very young man who has a great desire to talk about his lady love, but who prefers that someone else drag his secrets out of his mind: "Yo no me atre- via a confiar a la amable criatura la inmensidad de cosas que destorbadaban en mi alma; pero tenía deseos de que me arrancara pedazo a pedazo mi lamentable historia de amor."  

In spite of his pacific and tolerant nature, José Antonio at last becomes convinced of the justice of the unitario cause and of the guilt of Rozas in the matter of brutality in the name of politics, and at the end of the story he appears to have grown to fit his times and background.

La corbata celeste is an entertaining book. Its characters are well drawn, but too numerous. The reader is forced to transfer his attentions from the sanguinary and undisci-
plined terrorism of Rozas' Mazorca to a pointless serenade under a lady's window; from the intrigues of Tia Zenobia or of Josefita Rozas to the puerile soliloquies of the young hero. For no apparent reason the history of Don Tarquino is dragged into the plot, and that of Manuelita Rozas is incompletely presented. The novel is rich in local color, but top-heavy with incidents. It reveals the author for once as a better historian than novelist. Roy Temple House, in a review of La corbata celeste offers the following criticism:

... Hugo Wast loves detail, and his endless program of dinner parties, flirtations and church services, the coming and going of his long file of minor characters, who rarely appear a second time, and differ from each other only as one star differeth from another in glory make for confusion rather than for culmination of effect.17

It is not so much by comparison with Marmol's classic Amalia that La corbata celeste suffers, as with Wast's own La casa de los cuervos, in which he established a pattern for economy of words, concentration of plot, and creation of atmosphere to which this and following historical novels failed to conform.

The next three historical books of Wast may not be properly called separate novels; the second and third of the three-volume series are not sequels in the popular sense of the word, but are merely elaborations of the plot introduced in Myriam la conspiradora. The same set of principal characters which is presented in the first volume is retained in the second,

Jinete de fuego, and, except for those who have met violent ends, are all present in Tierra de jaguares in the final solution of the original complications of plot.

The story deals with the attempts of the Spaniards of Buenos Aires to restore the new Argentine Federation of 1911-1912 to the sovereignty of the Spanish king, Ferdinand VII. With his characteristic fondness for details, Wast hangs upon this skeleton of plot the events and characterizations of the three volumes. However, despite the rambling nature of the narrative, in this historical study the writer has avoided the principal defect from which La corbata celeste suffered. There is only one plot in Myriam la conspiradora and its companion volumes, and all the action leads directly or indirectly toward its final solution.

The elements of the plot are simple. An influential Spanish loyalist with ambitions to become viceroy of the La Plata region heads a conspiracy to overthrow the provisional government of Rivadavia and the triumvirate which is attempting to govern the recently-liberated Argentine federation. This loyalist, Don Martín Alzaga is joined by another Spaniard, Don Santiago Altolaguirre, and because of her love and respect for her father, his daughter Myriam also joins the conspiracy. She does this at the cost of surrendering her own ideals of a free Argentina, since she, being a criolla of the most admirable type, feels an intense devotion to her native land. Added to this is her love for Captain Zavaleta, an ardent patriot and
officer in the army of the Argentine government. When it becomes necessary for Alzaga to communicate with the viceroy in Montevideo, the mission is entrusted to Don Santiago Altolaguirre, who makes the trip in his boat, and returns with smuggled arms for the rebels. Myriam, an experienced sailor, accompanies her father on the hazardous voyage, since he is unable to find a trustworthy crew among his employees. The third member of the crew is el sargento Chaparro, a non-commissioned officer of the Batallion of San Patricio, who has been outlawed because of his part in a rebellion against certain orders of the Hivadavia government. An interesting figure in the conspiracy is Fray Juan de las Animas, a vigorous and resourceful priest whose devotion to the loyalist cause often results in highly unclerical behavior. The first volume of the series does little more than set the stage for the loyalist revolt against the government. In Jinete de Fuego the uprising which is about to occur is nipped in the bud by Captain Zavaleta, who is warned of the conspiracy by Myriam's brother, Luis. The latter, still a boy of about fifteen years, knows nothing of the part played by his father and sister in the conspiracy, and does not know that he is betraying his father to Zavaleta. After the imprisonment of Altolaguirre, Zavaleta risks his life and his military honor in a plot to help him escape, a plot whose successful execution is due largely to the assistance of Chaparro and no Elpidio, a gaúcho whose admiration for the sergeant leads him to offer
his services.

Jinete de fuego ends with the execution of Don Martín de Alsaga and the flight of Myriam and her family into the swamps and jungles of the Paraná delta, where they expect to meet Don Santiago and Chaparro.

The third volume, Tierra de jaguares, deals with the adventures of the refugees on the savage Delta region. Their plight is made worse by the efforts of the unprincipled Monteagudo to find them. This man, a judge in the trials of the royalist conspirators, after having paid fruitless court to Myriam, offers to spare her father's life in return for her favors. Having been tricked by Myriam, his pursuit is more vengeful than amorous. The mulatto servant of Monteagudo, Chagas, who directs the search for Myriam and her party, is interested in capturing for himself the servant Viviana, who has repeatedly scorned his attentions before the time of the conspiracy. Finally Don Santiago succeeds in joining his family, and the whole party takes refuge on the ship of an officer in the Spanish squadron sent to defeat the Argentines. The troops of this squadron are routed decisively in a land battle with the forces under Colonel San Martín, whom Captain Zavaleta serves as aide. After the battle, Colonel San Martín requests Don Santiago to permit Myriam and Zavaleta to be married, and the story ends on the doubly happy note of freedom for the country and felicity for the lovers.

Myriam la conspiradora and its two companion volumes.
while much longer than they might have been in consideration of the simplicity of the plot, are nevertheless among Wast's most readable books. They abound in minute sketches of local color, and the characters have a freshness and vitality which lend an air of reality to the robust adventure they experience. Despite the well-founded charge that Wast often sacrifices character delineation for rapidity and diversity of action, in these novels he has succeeded in presenting the men and women of the story as individuals rather than as mere pegs upon which to hang events. The author is not subtle in his symbolism; the conflict between the old and new is clearly defined. While Myriam, the embodiment of oriollo patriotism, joins her loyalist father and his associates in an effort to crush the newly-won Argentine independence, there is never any doubt of the direction of her real sympathies. On the other hand, it is impossible not to accept at face value the sincere convictions of Don Martín, Fray Juan de las Animas, and Don Santiago Altolaguirre in their desire to re-establish the viceroyalty. The character of Chagas, the mulatto banchman of Monteagudo, appears at times a trifle overdrawn, but he is clearly intended to represent the result of the fusion of the worst qualities in the mixture of races of which he was the product. The emotional disturbances of the half-Indian Viviana in a primitive surrounding are much more convincingly presented than are the romantic and rhetorical effusions of the aborigines in Lucía Miranda, the author's next historical
novel. The boy Luis displays just about the proper amount of enthusiasm, temerity, and naiveté to be acceptable in the role in which he is cast. Properly enough, Captain Zavaleta is kept in the background until actually needed, so as not to detract from the primary interest of the reader in Myriam and her family.

The single outstanding character of the three books, however, is the indomitable and resourceful sargento Chaparro. In this almost legendary figure are combined many of the elements of a Lazarillo de Tormes, a Porthos, a Sancho Panza, and a Martín Fierro. What Myriam and Luis represent of the spirit of liberty and independence, Chaparro translates into action. He comes into the story as one of the leaders of a violent rebellion. The scene is in the building where the subordinate Batallón de San Patricio is being effectively overcome by government troops:

Pero el grueso del batallón se rindió y todos los sobrevivientes quedaron prisioneros.
¡Todavía! Un sargento que pateó en la bocacalle al pie de los cañones, que se replégó luego al cuartel, y con hercúleo empuellón cerró sus puertas y que siguió batiéndose a sablazos contra las chuzas de los asaltantes; que había perdido el sombrero y tenía la orgullosa coleta desgreñada y empapada en sangre propia y ajena, y tocado de rojo el blanco pantalón, el sargento Javier Chaparro, a quien todos conocían por el apodo de "el Largo Chaparro" se murió, ni se rindió, ni cayó prisionero. 18

In this spirit of open revolt against tyranny, either foreign or domestic, Chaparro personifies the militant spirit of the

18 Wast, Myriam la conspiradora, p. 14.
young Argentine Federation. It is significant that in following the activities of Chaparro while he is aiding the loyalists, the reader is never given cause to doubt the real attitude of the sargento toward the conspiracy. He merely joins them for personal safety, and any question of his patriotism and loyalty is effectively answered in the course of events in the three books, especially in the part he plays in the battle in which the Spanish naval force was routed by San Martín.\(^{19}\)

No small part of the appeal of this robust character is the humor of his language; particularly in such oaths as: "\(--!\)Por las tripas de Judas Iscariote!"\(^{20}\) and "\(--!\)Por las orejas de la burra de la abuela de don Martín Alzaga, que el diablo tenga en una guampa de aceite hirviendo!"\(^{21}\)

Wast is impartial in his portrayal of character in this study. His sympathies are obviously with the criollos, but his admiration for the better qualities of the Spanish-born loyalists is obvious. Don Martín Alzaga never develops into a character capable of inspiring affection, but he never lacks the respect of the reader. Some of the best writing of the three books is to be found in the description of the dignity and nobility with which he met his death.\(^{22}\) Don Santiago is

\(^{19}\)Wast, *Tierra de jaguares*, p. 340 ff. \(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{21}\)Ibid., p. 27. \(^{22}\)Wast, *Jinete de fuego*, final chapter.
a more human character, less formal and reserved than Alzaga, but still the inflexible advocate of the return of Spanish sovereignty to his adopted land. In Don Santiago and his family are typified the social factors which were to be found in Argentina just after the gaining of her independence. The characters are almost allegorical. The father represents the mother country, Spain; Myriam’s love for the new country is tempered by her sentiments of filial duty, which might be interpreted as a recognition of the claim on the Argentine of his Spanish heritage; but Luis, in his ardent enthusiasm for independence is completely criollo. Luis describes the situation when he says: "... ellos [sus padres] son españoles, y en ellos es una virtud amar al rey. Pero yo no soy español, yo soy criollo, y mi tierra es esta tierra."23 Don Santiago realizes, however, that the Spaniards are fighting for a lost cause in attempting to retain political control of Argentina. After the victory of San Martín’s forces, he soliloquizes as follows: "¡Necios, nacíos vosotros los españoles si no veis que ha llegado la hora de que América sea libre de nuestros reyes, porque mal puede nuestra pequeña nación dominar un mundo!"24 In a later speech to San Martín, the Spaniard embraces the idea of criollo independence with a mixture of humility and pride:

---Desde hoy, señor coronel, la patria de mis hijos es mi patria, para que cuando cesen los horrores de la guerra, haya en la tierra de los jaguares quien enseñe

23bid., p. 38.  
24bid., p. 214.
con amor la historia de los leones, que es la historia de España, y que es la mayor parte de la gloria de los americanos. 25

It would be impracticable to make more than passing mention of the minor characters of these three books. The gaucho, ño Elpidio is drawn with care, and presents an interesting contrast to the gaucho malo as represented by Barbadas in Myriam la conspiradora. 26 Myriam's mother lends little but comic relief to the story, with her boresome perorations on genealogy, and while the India Viviana excites the reader's sympathy, she plays no very important role in the presentation of the idea of the conflict between the old order and the new. The same may be said for Chaparro's wife, Nazaria, and the host of other individuals whose appearance in the story is often interesting, but of transitory significance.

In his last historical study, Lucía Miranda, the romanticist in Wast overcame the historian, and the result is a highly improbable mixture of fact and fancy.

Lucía Miranda is based upon the establishment of the first Spanish settlement in Argentina at Espíritu Santo, on the banks of the Paraná. The colonizing expedition, commanded by Sebastian Cabot, arrives in the year 1526. Among the colonists are about a dozen young women who have come to America to settle in the new land as wives of the colonists. Only one of them, Lucía Miranda, is married. She accompanies her husband, Sebastián Hurtado, one of the military officials.

25 Ibid., p. 349. 26 Wast, Myriam la conspiradora, p. 203.
of the expedition. With her is her young cousin, Urraca Moreno, who intends to marry another officer of the expedition, Bermudo Crespo, after the settlement is established. Urraca becomes the object of the attentions of Ruy Orgaz, a somewhat unscrupulous and determined member of the crew of Cabot's ship, who denounces a plot against Cabot in which Crespo is accused of participating. The young officer is marooned with the real leaders of the conspiracy, and Ruy Orgaz is left to force his amorous attentions on Urraca throughout most of the remainder of the novel. After the site for the colony is chosen, the settlers are visited by Mangoré, ruler of the timbúes, who are the Indians living around the Paraná delta. Mangoré becomes so enamored of Lucía Miranda that he befriends the Spaniards, and in doing so arouses the jealousy of his favorite wife, Iberahy, and the enmity of his younger brother, Siripo. After a few months, the Indian chieftain, realizing that he cannot gain Lucía by peaceful means, yields to the demands of the ambitious Siripo and Iberahy, and declares war on the colonists. He is killed by Lucía Miranda herself when he attempts to abduct her. Siripo then becomes ruler of the timbúes and carries Lucía and the other surviving women back to his camp after having completed the massacre of the colonists. Lucía spurns the advances of Siripo, even when her surrender to him would save the life of her husband, whom the Indians had captured after the attack on the settlement. Hurtado, before being killed, is forced to watch Lucía being burned at the stake.
That same night Bermudo Crespo, having escaped from the place where he was marooned, comes with a new expedition from Spain and avenges the death of the Spaniards, and at the same time rescues Urraca. The latter is one of the other three survivors of the massacre. The two remaining women refuse to leave their Indian masters now that all the men of the original settlement are dead.

Thus this highly romanticized and idealized account of the establishment and destruction of Cabot's colony ends on a note of prophecy. As Wast remarks in the concluding paragraph:

Las verdes orillas del Paraná fueron pues, el teatro del primer drama de amor en el nuevo mundo; y sobre las cenizas de aquella inolvidable tragedia, que es una de las más poéticas páginas de nuestra historia, nació la roja y ardiente flor de un nuevo idilio.27

Wast is never at his best in the creation of characters; he is, on the contrary, a skillful imitator of established models. In Lucia Miranda he has obviously relied for inspiration for the modeling of his Indians upon the figures of colonial epic poetry and upon those of nineteenth-century romantic writers who conceived their characters under the influence of the "noble savage" school of philosophy. The result is that members of a barbaric race, even with due regard for their own indigenous culture, are made not only to speak pure Castilian, but are forced to think in terms of European values. The matter of conversation without interpreters may be glossed over as necessary for continuity of dialogue, but the flowery

27 Wast, Lucia Miranda, p. 222.
sentiments of a Spanish courtier on the lips of a naked Indian cannot sound too plausible. For example, when Lucía Miranda goes as a representative of the Spaniards to try to secure the friendship of the timbúes, the following conversation occurs after Mangoré distributes her good-will offerings among his retinue:

--¿Y para ti nada guardas señor?--le preguntó Lucía.
--¿Qué más regalo para mí que el verte? Me basta ganar tu amistad y la de un pueblo tan grande como el tuyo, donde todavía hay quienes te sean superiores aunque yo no alcance a comprenderlo.28

This choice bit of flattery to the fair sex presents an odd contrast to the words of the same cacique when he offered the Spaniards a group of his feminine subjects as proof of his friendship:

--¡Hñ, jefe de los blancos, éste es mi mejor tributo! Una para ti, y una para tus capitanes. Son vírgenes tiernas, como las palomas recién amamantadas. Os pueden servir de esposas; os pueden servir de esclavas; y os pueden servir de alimento, porque su carne tiene el sabor del sopeño.29

Then again, having led the assault upon the hopelessly outnumbered Spaniards, and having fallen mortally wounded by Lucía after killing many of his victims, this anomalous character smiles tenderly at her and says: "--No te lamentos, Lucía, de haberme dado muerte, porque después de tu amor, que me has negado, no queda para mí regalo más dulce que la muerte dada por ti."30

28Ibid., p. 68.  
29Ibid., p. 88.  
30Ibid., p. 188.
On the whole, the character of Mangoré is carelessly portrayed and falls short of being convincing to any but the least critical reader. In choosing for his theme the love of an uncultured savage for a highly civilized woman, the author is consistent with romantic principles, but in presenting this interesting situation his technique is faulty. The characters of Siripo and Iberahy are not so improbable, but are still too sophisticated for any members of the primitive society to which they belong.

Torres Rioseco, while not speaking of this particular novel, makes the following general criticism which is aplicable in the present instance:

Si el romanticismo da excelentes resultados en la poesía en América, en la novela se establece una especie de lucha constante entre las fórmulas de esta escuela y el primitivismo de los personajes que nos presenta, y de esta desigualdad de elementos proviene la falta de armonía y de equilibrio estético.31

In his portrayal of the Spaniards, Wast is on safer ground, and is certainly better acquainted with his subject. In Lucia Miranda he has presented the type of woman who, had she lived, might well have been an ancestor of such criolla heroines as those who appear in Myriam la conspiradora, Desierto de piedra, El camino de las llamas, and other novels in which the spiritual and physical vigor of feminine characters is the significant element of the novel. She is typical of the adventurous spirit of Spain in the sixteenth century in

31Torres Rioseco, La novela en la América Hispánica, p. 194.
daring to go to a raw new land in the face of unknown dangers, and at the same time is the personification of the traditional ideal Spanish wife. She shows at all times implicit confidence in her husband’s valor and honor, and refuses to stoop to any deed, however advantageous, which would reflect discredit upon him. Definitely not the "clinging vine" type, she is quite capable of defending her own honor when necessary, as evidenced on the occasion when she overhears two sailors criticizing her for not yielding to the demands of Mangoré in return for the safety of the settlement:

—¿Qué estás platicando, gandules? ¿Qué dijiste de mí, tú, Domingo Ochoa, que tienes el alma negra como la pez con que embadurnas tus tablas?
—Nada que os importe un comino, señora.
—Y, tú, ¿qué dijiste, Juan García, más ignoble que la piel de tus tambores, que el piel de asno, por las cuentas?

Se irritó el tamborero ante aquel insulto, y repitió de mal talante su anterior agravio:
—Pues ya que le quieres oír, sabed que todos censuran a quien supo atraer al indio y no supo retenerlo; pues si aquello fué liviandad, esto no puede ser virtud.

No acabó su frase cuando saltó un juramento—¡Sangre del mal ladrón!—porque una tremenda bofetada de Lucía lo tumbó sobre el puente.

—¡Villano y cobarde, que osas agraviar a quien no eres digno de besar los pies! ¿Quién oyó jamás en lengua castellana palabras tan desabridas para una mujer? ¿Qué esperabais? ¿que me entregase a Mangoré y asegurarse con mi deshonra lo que vosotros no sois capaces de ganar con vuestros brazos? ¡Viles y necios! ¡Y tomad para vos, que nada recibisteis, Domingo Ochoa!

Escupió en pleno rostro al calafate... y se fué temblorosa de ira... 32

After this and other similar incidents, it is with little surprise that the reader sees Lucía put on armor and take her post among the defenders of the ship during the battle with

---Wast, Lucía Miranda, p. 104.
the Indians. Then, to embellish her already idealized character, the author adds a detail which is peculiarly appropriate for the wife of a sixteenth century conquistador. Having mortally wounded Mangoré, she uses a large part of what she expects to be her last living moments to convert the pagan to Christianity and to baptize him. In such a character, her exalted and impassioned speech to her husband just before her funeral pyre was lighted does not seem unnatural. Hurtado blames himself for having brought her to America on a venture which is to end in torture and death, but she answers:

—No me trajiste, que me vine yo, por el amor que te tenía; y cerca de tí la muerte será mayor dicha que la vida lejos. Cuando la fuerza del dolor me arranque ayés no los escuches como lamentos, sino como bendiciones; y piensa que mi voluntad es bendecir al Señor y darte ánimo a ti.

As the title indicates, Lucía Miranda is the principal personage in this novel. However, the minor characters are skillfully presented. Two of the most interesting among them are Fray Ramón and Fray Jonás, the missionary priests. Fray Ramón at the age of fifty has renounced a comfortable bishopric in Spain in order to bring Christianity to the Indians. Jonás, having served as artilleryman in his youth, is equally at home in a gun post or a pulpit. Wast seems to have a predilection for robust and militant clergymen, and in these two he has presented, from a chronological viewpoint, competent precursors of such priests as Fray Juan de las Animas of Myriam la

33Ibid., p. 192. 34Ibid., p. 219.
conspiradora, Hina’s friend and comforter in Flor de durazno, and the prophet of Ciudad turbulenta, the indefatigable Don Dimas. The crude and dangerous life of the New World had no place for parasitic and comfort-loving curates. The missionary priests had to be men who could shout letanías as war cries, and who could administer the sacraments or swing a cutlass with equal facility. Such men were the frailes, Ramón and his assistant, Jonás.

Lucía’s companion, Urraca Morena, is little more than another Lucía, although not of the same stature. Her faithfulness to her absent lover, whom she refuses to believe dead, marks her as a typical wast heroine. It is through the consolation that Lucía gives her companion that the novelist injects some of his most effective religious philosophy into the novel. Urraca reminds Lucía, shortly before the latter’s death, of her own earlier admonition:

—Yo he aprendido de ti a no perder la esperanza. Yo sé por ti que todos los milagros son del mismo tamaño para Dios. Yo te digo lo que tú me dijiste; déjale elegir la manera de ayudarte al que dispone de los vientos y de las olas.35

Lucía’s husband, Hurtado, shines for the most part in the reflected glory of her affection and virtue. He represents much of the nobility, courage, and devotion to duty of the conquistador, but he is completely overshadowed in the story by his wife.

Sebastian Cabot, the mysterious foreigner to whom the

Spanish merchants and the king have entrusted the founding of the settlement, appears with few of the graces of the Spanish gentlemen, but with an iron will and a professional competence which make him admirably suited for his role, but which inspire fear and respect rather than affection.

Ruy Orgaz, the scheming and unscrupulous suitor of Urraca, is a villain whom the author seems almost to have thrown into the story for good measure. However, since he was responsible for having Bermudo Crespo marooned early in the story, his existence in the novel may be justified on the grounds that he thus made it possible for Urraca's rescuer to escape the massacre and return to her at the most opportune time.

Naturally enough, *Lucía Miranda* is filled with the type of description for which Wast is justly noted. The virgin forests, unexplored rivers, and unknown animals of the part of Argentina which the novelist chose for his setting present both a challenge and a stimulus to his romantic imagination. Even in scenes of no historical foundation, Wast succeeds in sustaining the mood of novelty and primitiveness.

The idea of basing his novel upon a historical incident of which there were few survivors was a happy one for the author. He stands in little danger of being contradicted or of being called to task for the excess of imagination, and even if he were, the merits of *Lucía Miranda* as sheer entertainment far outweigh its defects of conception and construction.
CHAPTER IV

RURAL NOVELS

In his novels dealing with rural life, Wast is able to give full play to a talent which contributes much to his recognition as a capable writer. That talent is his power of graphic description and the creation of atmosphere in which his characters and actions assume the maximum of plausibility and verisimilitude. Wast not only knows intimately the rural life of Argentina; he has a warm sympathy for the problems of the estancieros, laborers, colonists, and, above all, for the women who play such a significant role in Argentine rural society. Moreover, there is the recurrent theme in these novels, apparent in all of them, but particularly so in Desierto de piedra, that the simple, unsophisticated, and practical virtues of country life can offer more than anything else toward the rejuvenation and strengthening of a decadent urban society which has come to conceal under its thin veneer of material progress and European culture many of the enervating vices of an old civilization. To quote one authoritative admirer of Wast's works of this nature: "In these novels Wast, the former professor of Economics and Sociology, is not very far behind Wast, the artist."1

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The novels of Hugo Wast might well be grouped in various categories according to several arbitrary classifications, but for the purpose of this study, the rural novels are considered to be those whose principal setting is actually in the country, as opposed to those whose background is a provincial town or the city of Buenos Aires. The order in which the novels are considered has no relation to their comparative artistic merit. They are discussed in the order in which they were written so that the scope and compass of Wast’s interest in problems of Argentine rural life may be considered in logical sequence. In Flor de durazno (1911) the principal theme is the corrupting influence of the artificial and immoral city dweller upon the virtuous but gullible country people. Valle Negro (1918) is the story of a feud between neighboring landowners over a disputed boundary. Una estrella en la ventana (1924) presents not only the conflict between rural and urban customs, but also the superiority of rural virtues. Desierto de piedra (1925) shows the actual transformation of the decadent and parasitic urbanite into a strong and self-reliant individual when faced with problems of ranch life, and, at the same time, contrasts the European immigrant with the criollo landowner to the latter’s disadvantage. Finally, in El camino de las llamas, the theme is one of unselfish patriotism as developed in the classic situation of the love story of a man and woman whose respective countries are hostile to each other.

Flor de durazno, the first of this group of novels, is
based on the unhappy experiences of one of the few characters in Wast's novels who stand out as individual personalities. Rina, an almost ethereally beautiful girl, is a simple serrana in the remote mountain village of Dolores. The little village comes to be a favorite spot for certain wealthy porteño families to spend the summer. Among these summer visitors is Miguel, a boy about three years older than Rina. The two children become intimate friends despite the great difference in their social positions. Miguel returns to Dolores at the age of twenty-two, after an absence of seven years. He is by this time a typical young sophisticate with practically no conception of moral values, while Rina has grown into a beautiful young woman whose simplicity and purity lend her an air of saintliness. She loves Miguel with all the fervor of her innocence and spiritual intensity. Miguel is gratified by her humble admiration and homage, and decides to profit by her inexperience to seduce her, not because he has any real affection for her, but merely to gratify his selfish whims. During Miguel's absence from the village, Rina has been forced into a betrothal with her cousin Fabián, a sober and uninteresting young man who has loved her since childhood. Fabián leaves for two years of compulsory service in the navy shortly after Miguel's return to Dolores. Rina's father, Don Germán, having become involved in a lawsuit over the title to his land,

2The term porteño is used in Argentina to designate any city dweller; not merely a native of Buenos Aires.
entrusts the case to Miguel. Miguel is not yet a qualified lawyer, but he lulls the old man into a feeling of security and uses the frequent examination of his deeds and records as a pretext for visiting Kina. She soon succumbs to his charms and meets him clandestinely for a few days, until Miguel, having tired of the game, returns to Buenos Aires. He leaves Germán hopelessly involved in a lawsuit which he cannot win, and leaves Kina not only deceived but faced with the unhappy prospect of bearing an illegitimate child. Kina, because of her fear of her father's anger as well as from her feeling of shame and guilt, flees one night from Dolores. Her friend the priest, Don Filemón, makes a vain search for her in Buenos Aires, believing she has gone to join Miguel. Kina works as a servant in Córdoba for a brief time, until the son of her employer tries to take advantage of her position. She then goes to Buenos Aires and works in a charity hospital until her daughter is born. After leaving the hospital she tries to earn a living as a laundress, but seeing her baby slowly dying from improper food, she at last goes to Miguel's house for help. His mother, Doña Encarnación, refuses to see her, fearing a scandal, and Kina decides to accede to the lecherous desires of an old man in order to save her daughter's life. On the way to his house, she stops in a church and, having received spiritual comfort and renewed strength, decides to return and beg her father's forgiveness. After going to the village priest, who absolves her of her
sin, knowing it was one of ignorance rather than of depravity, she then goes with her daughter to Germán's house. Her father meets her with a blow that almost kills her, but gradually softens in his attitude as his love for his daughter overcomes his sense of wounded honor. Fabián comes back to the village at the end of his period of conscription, ignorant of Rina's defection. At first he curses her, but finally, upon the advice of Don Filemón, he marries her. Rina bears him a son that dies in infancy, and Fabián's attitude toward her becomes a mixture of jealousy, resentment, and affection. Meanwhile, Miguel, now married, returns to Dolores with his wife. Fabián, hearing that the childless couple wish to adopt a baby, takes Rina's daughter and offers her to her father, but Miguel laughs at the offer, and proposes to give Rina a monthly allowance as expiation for his own guilt. Fabián chokes him to death and hangs himself in prison shortly afterward. Rina, hearing of these events, dies of no apparent malady, and the baby Dolores is left to comfort the remaining years of the repentant Don Germán and the chastened Mía Encarnación.

This novel, which is one of Wast's earliest, is at the same time perhaps the one for which he is best known. Its universal appeal may be attributed in a large measure to its classic simplicity of plot and the sympathy with which the author treats the subject of betrayed innocence and conflicting passions. It is one of the few novels by Wast in which character development is superior in interest to the action of the
story. It is interesting to note that this early work of the romanticist is characterized more by elements of realism than by those of exotic fancy. The language of the story is often sentimental, but the author never allows his sympathy for his characters to minimize their defects or to paint a biased picture of their lives. The narrowness, ignorance, and poverty of the serranos are depicted in a manner suggestive of similar characterizations by Pérez Galdós or Thomas Hardy. The decadence, immorality, and materialistic selfishness of the cortesano are discussed at greater length in some of West's later works, but the case is never more effectively presented than in Flor de durazno.

The dominating figure of this novel is Rina, and for the most part the author shows artistic skill in centering the interest upon her. West might be criticized for creating in her a symbol of all the virtues of rural life, while leaving the representation of its vices to minor characters. However, the personality of Rina is not difficult to accept. Her isolated home and the unsociable nature of her father would, naturally enough, limit her opportunities for the dubious behavior attributed to some of the other serranos, and her inherent purity and decency are well enough proved in the course of the story. At first she is caught in the grip of forces which are not only more powerful than she is, but which are also incomprehensible to her. Rina is not, at the beginning of the story, one of the unfortunates about whom the priest Don
Fílemon asks his friend:

... ¿le parece a usted poca lucha la que debe sostener la conciencia de una mujer pobre, que quiere conservarse virtuosa, cuando hay quien la sacaría de la pobreza, pagándole el vicio?  

Her surrender to Miguel has nothing of a mercenary element in it; she is rather one among those of whom the priest later remarked:

No a todas se les ofrece costear el vicio, porque felizmente no todas están en contacto con quienes pueden costearlo; ni todas se pierden por la plata, es verdad; ¡también se pierden por amor!  

Finally, when she can no longer withstand the unknown instincts which were compelling her toward her subsequent misfortune, Rina does not consider the moral aspects of the situation. She does not consider any aspects at all; as a child of nature she simply obeys the dictates of natural forces, completely ignorant of their implications and consequences. Wast is a bit poetic in describing her defection from virtue, but the lyric quality of his statement intensifies the contrast between Rina’s innocence and Miguel’s selfishness:

Como esas flores nacidas al borde de un torrente, que alguna vez caen y se dejan llevar por el agua impetuosa y turbia, un día cerró los ojos, y humilde y mansa e ignorante de las cosas de la vida, se dio sin protestar al que mandaba en su alma hacía mucho tiempo.  

Rina is innocent and susceptible, but possesses a strength of character and a spiritual integrity which help her bear the

3 Wast, Flor de durazno, p. 45. 4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., pp. 118-119.
blows of circumstance to which she is subjected. Her gentle nature is incapable of anger or bitterness against Miguel until he adds the crowning insult to his betrayal and neglect of her. When he meets her by chance on the street in Buenos Aires, he treats her as a casual acquaintance until her grief moves him to a clumsy effort toward charity:

Vamos Rina--le dijo--no llores. Yo te voy a ayudar, de cualquier modo que sea, pero me vas a decir la verdad, la pura verdad... esa chica... ¿es hija mía?

... 
Subió a su boca toda esa armadura revuelta, y la que había sido hasta entonces la humildad hecha carne, por primera vez habló con ese desdén orgulloso de los que nada esperan y nada quieren:

--Niño Miguel--usted no me conoce; usted que me engañó, porque yo tenía los ojos cerrados, no me ha conocido nunca y me ha creído una cualquiera. Bueno, usted es rico y yo no puedo ser más pobre; pero mi hijita, que es también su hija, no necesita su ayuda ni la de nadie; su madre trabaja y gana para ella... Adiós, niño Miguel, que Dios lo ayude.6

Even when Rina finally resolves to go to Miguel's mother for help, it is only after she realizes that her child is dying of malnutrition. For herself she asks and expects nothing. Then, when she is refused by Mía Encarnación and returns to her miserable room to find her scantly possessions thrown on the street and the room advertised for rent, she realizes that there remains nothing except to act as society expects her to do. The author's treatment of this theme of el gran galeoto is of particular interest. The first impulse of the harried creature is one of blind flight. Then:

Rina corrió algunas cuadras. Después, cuando se dio

6Ibid., p. 161.
cuenta de que todo el mundo la miraba, y que algunos cu- 
riosos la seguían, se calmó y se detuvo un rato a pensar. 
¿A pensar qué? ¡Ya todo estaba pensado! El mundo 
entero pensaba por ella . . . Si todos lo querían así, 
¡qué estupida era ella que pretendía luchar contra todos! 
¡Sería "eso"! Era su destino: sería "eso" que todavía le 
daba repulsión nombrar. ¡Bah! cuestión de tiempo y de 
costumbre. Suerte para ella que no rodaba hasta el fondo, 
cómo otras; bajaba sólo unos cuantos escalones. Iria a 
don Salvador y le diría: "¡Aquí estoy; hágame de mí lo 
que quiera!"7

This, however, is a mere gesture of desperation, and the 
sight of a peach tree in bloom, recalling to her the happier 
days of her faith and innocence, is sufficient to send her in-
to a church instead of to the humiliation of becoming Don 
Santiago’s mistress. While in the church her repentance, sim-
ple faith, and maternal sentiments are all expressed in her 
prayer to the Virgin:

--¡Madre mía!--exclamó desde lo más oculto de su co-
razón martirizado--, yo iba a perderme y me has salvado. 
Madre mía, yo no tengo madre a quien contarle mis tris-
tezas, y a vos te las cuento. Mi hijita se muere; yo te 
la doy para que vos la hagáis un angelito de su trono; 
y te la doy contenta; pero si me la salvaras, yo tendría 
en qué pensar y a quién querer y me serías más fácil ser 
buena, buena, ¡oh, mi madre, que buena sería yo si mi 
hijita se salvara!8

The remainder of Rina’s unhappy story is anti-climactic. 
Married to Fabián in order to have a protector for the child 
and her invalid father, she endures her husband’s affection 
and mistreatment with the same stoic resignation. The only 
meaning left to her life is the daughter whom she has appro-
priately named Dolores. Her death comes not so much as a 
culminating punishment, but rather as a merciful end to her

7Ibid., p. 172. 8Ibid., p. 175.
long succession of indignities and sufferings.

The supporting characters in Flor de durazno are types rather than individuals. With his usual facility, Waist has often drawn a large picture with only a few lines. There is nothing complicated about the character of Miguel. He is the product of his environment, and behaves accordingly. He is more amoral than immoral. On one occasion, when he first returned to the village after a long absence, he even shows traces of decency in resenting the loose talk about Rina that he hears from his companion. His character and disposition are fairly well outlined in the author's words:

A los veintidós años no era ni mejor ni peor que la mayoría de los hijos de las ciudades.
Producto de su época, resumendo esa inútil salud de los ricos ociosos, y ese suave hastío por las cosas del mundo, que tan bien siente a las gentes distinguidas, estaba hecho a todos los deportes y a todos los placeres.

Enemigo del esfuerzo, en la facultad perseguía, sin fatigarse demasiado, un título que no había de servirle de gran cosa; y sabía llevar con desdén la codiciada medalla del Jockey Club, y perder con displicencia buenas sumas en una tarde del hipódromo o en una noche de ruleta.

Miguel's excuse for his treatment of the innocent serrana is not only an index to his complete incapacity to appreciate Rina's character, but is also an indirect indictment by the author of the wretched destiny of the type of girl she represents. Touched by an evanescent twinge of remorse, Miguel brushes the matter aside: "Bah--se dijo una vez en el ambiente

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9Ibid., p. 73.  
10Ibid., p. 72.
bullicioso y alegre de la gran capital—yo o él, Fabián o cualquier otro, alguno había de ser el primero."¹¹ And he thought no more of it.

In presenting the character of Rina's father, Germán, Wast has provided an interesting psychological study. Germán is an avaricious and miserly man, yet he refuses to allow a rich woman to adopt the child who was the eje de su vida,¹² knowing that wealth alone would not make her happy. In his feeling for the land, he is typical of all peasants who seek in the solid security of the land some measure of compensation for the hardships of their lives. Wast says of him: "Era el supremo goce hundir la pala en una de sus valles y decir: ¡esto es mío! ¡y lo que hay debajo de esto también es mío!"¹³

Germán's treatment of Rina is paradoxical, and it is understandable only in the light of his selfishness and his genuine affection for her. When Rina tells him she does not want to marry Fabián, his first impulse is to punish her disobedience by beating her as he would beat a disobedient dog. Then, observing during the night that Rina is still shaking from fright, his thoughts are a mixture of repentance and obstinacy:

¡Su criatura! ¡Cuánto la adoraba! ¡la había golpeado! No permitiera Dios que ella volviera a decirle

¹¹Ibid., p. 119. ¹²Ibid., p. 10. ¹³Ibid., p. 38.
lo que le había dicho, porque volvería a golpearla. Era su dueño. Si ella se casaba con otro que no fuera Fabián, la perdería para siempre. Si ella no lo quería, acabaría por quitarlo. ¿Querías a otro ella? ¡Ah, la hubiera muerto! 14

The same confusion of emotions, the same mixture of tenderness and outraged dignity, complicate the sentiments of the old man after Rina's flight to Buenos Aires, and upon her return he again strikes her, only to become repentant later. The author exhibits creditable literary skill by creating in Germán a character who excites at the same time the reader's righteous condemnation and his understanding sympathy.

In Misia Encarnación, Miguel's mother, Wast outlined a type whom he was to describe in more detail later in Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre. She combines the faults of an indulgent mother with those of a naturally shallow and selfish woman. She not only lacks the moral strength to censure her son's loose living, but takes a vicarious pleasure in his exploits. To her credit it may be said that she exhibits evidences of a finer nature after Miguel's death.

As in most of Wast's novels, the priest in Flor de durazno is a significant figure. But practically all of his priests are cast in the same mold. Don Filemón is no austere theologian, nor is he the parasitic type of cleric who has appeared so often in Spanish American literature. He is a saintly man without being sanctimonious, equally able to give

14Ibid., p. 126.
spiritual comfort in his confessional and to rope a steer with the best of peons. In this story he is symbolic of the author's high regard for the rural priesthood of his country and of the militant and devout attitude he so often exhibits in regard to the teachings of his Church.

In *Flor de durazno* the minor characters appear only as they are necessary for the creation of background and local color. Fabián plays an important role, but there is nothing original in his delineation. It is in his conforming so closely to the type he represents that he achieves an air of naturalness, and his commonplace realism provides an effective contrast to the spirituality and delicacy of Rina.

*Flor de durazno* will probably never become a real Argentine classic. But it has many elements of universal appeal in its treatment of a timeless theme which may well reflect credit upon its author when some of his more artistic works are forgotten.

Wast's next novel with a rural setting was *Valle Negro*, which he wrote in 1918. It is an account of a feud between two families over property line disputes, and of the effects of this feud on the members of the families involved. The quarrel between Don Jesús de Viscarra and Pablo Camargo is typical of the ill feeling that takes on the nature of tradition between families who inherit the disputes of their ancestors. Constantly aggravated by rumors, gossip, and distorted truth, the feud merely becomes more violent after each
effort at a peaceful settlement. It is into this atmosphere of suspicion and misunderstanding that the young Gracián Palma comes when his father dies and Don Jesús de Viscarra becomes his guardian. Gracián leaves the colegio in Córdoba to spend his summer vacation at Valle Negro, the ranch of Don Jesús. There he and Mirra, the daughter of Don Jesús, become friends, and he finds favor with the mysterious Flavia. The latter is the ranch owner’s sister, and it is later revealed that she was at one time the novia of Pablo Camargo. This sole survivor among the men of the Camargo family is responsible, by his insults and actions, for the prolongation of the boundary dispute which Don Jesús is willing to settle peaceably. Pablo, however, has never forgiven Don Jesús for refusing him permission to marry Flavia. Unknown to her brother, Flavia had indulged in an illicit affair with Pablo, and had a daughter about the same age as Mirra. Camargo keeps this girl, Victoria, with him on the ranch adjoining that of the Viscarras. Flavia contrives to meet Victoria secretly and reveals to her that she is the mother whom the child had considered dead. Meanwhile, since Gracián and Mirra have become intimate friends, Flavia attempts to arouse Gracián’s interest in her daughter. Gracián returns to school after the vacation, having promised Mirra not to forget her. Camargo, after losing a lawsuit against Don Jesús, asks him again for permission to marry Flavia. Don Jesús replies that he can no longer dictate his sister’s actions, but that he is opposed
to the request. Camargo then kills him from ambush and Mirra is left in charge of Valle Negro. Flavia soon moves into Córdoba to be near her daughter, since Camargo has gone there. Eventually Flavia and Camargo resume their former relations, to which Flavia agrees because of her passion for Victoria. Gracían, now the heir of a rich uncle, returns after years of absence with the intention of resuming his former relations with Mirra. Instead, as a result of the machinations of Flavia, he becomes involved with Victoria, of whom he soon tires and whom he deserts after an affair in which the enamored girl loved "not wisely but too well". Gracían visits Mirra, who has grown into a beautiful and self-reliant woman, and is on the point of securing her consent to marry him when Flavia discloses his faithless treatment of Victoria. Mirra then orders the weak-minded Gracían to comply with his duties to Victoria, and resigns herself to a life of self-denial and service to her community.

The above summary merely outlines the action of the novel, but the chief value and interest of this story are equally divided between its exciting action and the excellent delineation of character. It is difficult to determine who is the dominant figure of the story, since the reader's interest must often be shifted from one to another. In Don Jesús the author has presented the best type of the Argentine rancher, a man of honor, of an equable disposition, devoted to his family, and sincerely interested in the welfare of his community and of
his less fortunate neighbors. Wast makes him the spokesman for some of his own economic theories in the well-meant but unheeded lectures which the ranch owner often gives to the shiftless peons who come to beg scraps when an animal is butchered:

E invariablemente, cuando él que acudía a recoger los despojos era el jefe de la familia, o algún paisano de edad apta para trabajar; lo llamaba aparte y lo sermonaba echándole en cara su indolencia, por la cual, en una tierra fértil, en condiciones propicias, se condenaban ellos mismos de perecer de necesidad.  

The racial and family pride of this descendant of the old Spanish hidalgos is clearly apparent in his conversation with Flavia after she denies having ever been guilty of any impropriety in her relations with Camargo. Don Jesús assures her, "No lo he creído, Flavia, porque sé la nobleza que hay en mi sangre, que es la tuya ... "

In his desire to end the quarrel with his neighbor, Don Jesús displays a commendable spirit of tolerance and forgiveness, but his dignity and sense of moral rectitude will not allow him to consent to Pablo's marrying Flavia. The final and most significant evidence of his nobility of character appears when he refuses to name his assassin, and instead asks Mirra to forgive the murderer without trying to learn his identity:

--¿Quién? ... ¿Quién?--volvió a clamar ella, y acercó la oreja, suplicante, para oír el nombre del asesino, y oyó esto:

15 Wast, Valle Negro, p. 63. 16 Ibid., p. 146.
Padre nuestro, que estás en los cielos . . . ,
perdónanos nuestras deudas, así como nosotros perdónamos . . . 17

In contrast with that of Don Jesús, in the character of
Pablo Camargo there appears no evidence of honorable instincts,
and none of the tolerance or fair-mindedness of the former.
He is somewhat symbolic of the undisciplined element of an un-
sophisticated society, heedless of its laws, and governed in
his conduct only by the dictates of blind passion. The author
does not needlessly emphasize the moral presented by his be-
havior; he simply portrays in a few words the ultimate futility
of his violence and baseness. When Gracián goes to Flavia's
house in Córdoba, he always finds: "... la impresionante fi-
gura de Camargo, clavado en su silla, la cabeza gacha, la mi-
rada viscosa y furtiva, las manos temblorosas ..." 18 Even
his mind has been affected by his behavior, as evidenced by
this description of Pablo:

... semidiota, recluido en un rincón, sin más expresión de
inteligencia que una llamarrada de odio en la mirada, cuan-
do veía a la pobre mujer Flavia, como si en sus facciones
le evocasen las de Jesús de Viscarra. 19

Wast is not guilty of the literary weakness of portraying
all his characters in sharply defined shades. Between the
black of Pablo Camargo and the white of Jesús de Viscarra ap-
ppear the gray half-tones of Gracián. With the firm hand of
Mirra to guide him, he is an unassuming and likeable enough

18 Ibid., p. 239.
19 Ibid., pp. 236-237.
young man, with no vicious characteristics and undoubtedly possessed of a genuine affection for her. However, when forced to rely upon his own initiative, he appears as a vacillating creature, incapable of constancy or of sustained effort, and apparently even at times devoid of the principles of common decency. Bereft of his parents at an impressionable age, he is greatly influenced by the effects of his association with the totally dissimilar by equally forceful women, Mirra and Flavia. His personality as a youth is of little significance; he is little more than a shadow of the stronger Mirra. As a young man, according to the description a casual acquaintance gave of him, he was a rather colorless individual:

---¿Gracían Palma? Era estudiante de medicina, mal estudiante. Abandonó la carrera y se hizo periodista; escribió algún libro de versos, que no tuvo éxito, y no cayó en la bohemia, donde invariablemente van a dar los individuos de su condición, con algún talento, pero poco carácter, porque su tío murió dejándole una fortuna, y su tutor lo mandó a Europa.20

Two facets of Gracian's unstable character are apparent in the author's interpolation after the young poet had told Victoria that he had never written verses for Mirra. He feels his talent is unworthy of her, but he lacks the moral courage to tell Victoria the true reason:

Y era cierto; nunca Gracían había encontrado la onda de su inspiración suficientemente pura y digna de aquélla, cuyo recuerdo se le aparecía mientras más lejano, más luminoso y casto; pero al decirle no dió la verdadera razón.21

---Ibid., p. 230.  
---Ibid., p. 238.
In his favor it may be said that Gracián at first honestly thinks he feels real affection for Victoria. But he soon becomes aware of his mistaken emotions:

Lo que había amado en Victoria era Mirra; lo que en ella había buscado era el espíritu de Mirra, los gestos inocentes de Mirra, y su desencanto nació de no haber encontrado nada de aquello que le cautivara con tan perdurable hechizo. 22

In his last conversation with Mirra, who orders him to return to Victoria, Gracián appears as if he were a small boy attempting to cajole his mother, instead of an impassioned lover pleading his cause:

--¿Debo irme de aquí?
--Sí.
--¿Y no volver nunca? ¿Ni aun después de haber cumplido con ese deber?
--No, nunca, nunca. Más vale así...
--¡Adiós, Mirra!
Le tomó la mano y fue a besársela, pero ella se lo impidió.
--¡Hay que olvidar, Gracián; tu deber está allá. Y lo dejó ir, vacilante, como un hombre golpeado en la cerviz. 23

In portraying Flavia and Mirra in this novel, the author has presented an intriguing series of comparisons and contrasts. The selfishness and domineering nature of Flavia are balanced by Mirra's generosity and gentle resignation. Where Flavia calls on all the forces of her proud and rebellious spirit to accomplish her own designs, Mirra, with equal determination and greater spiritual strength, seeks the solace of

22Ibid., p. 249.
23Ibid., pp. 284-285.
forgiveness and service. Flavia's rebellion against her brother's authority in the matter of her early relations with Camargo are responsible for the unhappiness that she experiences during the rest of her life. Her desire to interest Gracían in her daughter is understandable enough, but her willingness to injure Mirra in the process shows to what length she would go to accomplish an objective. She is a proud and beautiful woman who has the misfortune to be governed by instincts rather than by the principles of charity and honor. Mirra, on the other hand, is the embodiment of her father's precepts, conducting herself with quiet dignity instead of with overbearing pride, and gaining the respect of her dependents and associates by her charitable activities and mobility of character, rather than by the authority of her social and economic position.

With characteristic racial pride, Flavia feels herself dishonored when she becomes the object of Lázaro's affections. When the capataz attempts to explain his spying on her during her nocturnal trysts with Camargo, he ends by confessing that he loves her. Flavia's reaction is a mixture of scorn and indignant anger:

---¿Qué derecho tenés sobre mí para hablarme de ese modo?
---Usted me ha hecho hablar, y no creo que sea una ofensa decirle que la quiere.

Flavia se puso pálida como un sudario, tan violenta fue su cólera; él callaba y ella también, porque las palabras no se articulaban en sus labios temblorosos.

---Ibid., p. 197.
This unfortunate woman finds herself in the clutches of circumstances which render impossible a happy solution of her problems. She is not an evil person, but after her first tragic mistake her stubborn pride and her outraged maternal instincts wage constant war within her, with the result that her impulses for good are stifled by uncertainty. When she feels that she can no longer bear the audacious glances of Lázaro or the innocently questioning looks of Mirra, she is tempted to confess her wretched history to her niece and try to achieve some peace of mind and spirit. But she cannot be certain of her own ability to persevere in her good intentions:

A veces le daban ganas de llamar a su sobrina y decirle: "¡Yo fui esto! . . . pero ya no lo soy, y para no volver a serlo, quiero que me ayuden todos los de esta casa que es la mía."

Porque no estaba segura de su perseverancia, ni de que si Camargo le mandaba decir con su peón: "te devolveré tu hija si vienes conmigo", ella no correría a él . . .

¡Oh, la miseria insondable de su alma, que pesaba aún en la penitencia.\(^\text{25}\)

When she leaves the ranch after the death of Don Jesús in order to be near Camargo and Victoria, Flavia may conceivably have been governed as much by a desire for self-gratification as by the promptings of maternal instincts. However, when she realizes that her daughter is about to repeat her own sad history, she completely conquers her pride and goes to beg the help of Mirra, of whom she has always been jealous and envious. Mirra tries to persuade her not to remain kneeling before her,

\(^{25}\text{Ibid., p. 192.}\)
but Flavia refuses to stand: "—¡No, no! Así estoy bien; a tus pies, Mirra, humillada hasta el fondo del alma, en mi sangre, y escondiéndote la cara para que no veas mi vergüenza."²⁶

In conceiving the character of Mirra, the novelist followed closely one of his guiding principles in writing. That is, he wished not only to entertain but to instruct, and Mirra may well be offered as a model of feminine virtues. Her religious principles enable her to join her father in forgiving his enemies, and her affectionate nature later prompts her to go to Victoria with an offer of friendship. She attempts to put into effect her father's ideas for stimulating self-reliance and initiative among the rural laborers. After she becomes the mistress of Valle Negro, she is not only the owner, but a model to her tenants and laborers. "Mirra dirigía a los peones con un ardor que hacía más fructuosa su tarea; y era ésa la primera lección que recibían de ella sus espíritus apocados y fatalistas."²⁷ By training and by nature, she is well suited to the life she leads. Her childhood, for the most part spent alone, and the constant precepts and admonitions of her father, have engendered in her a spirit of self-reliance and initiative which serve her in good stead when she becomes the victim of the vicissitudes of fortune. When one of the paisanos comes to her for help after a snake has bitten his

²⁶Ibid., p. 282. ²⁷Ibid., p. 272.
novia, Mirra's first impulse is not to look for assistance, but to handle the matter herself. She takes the first mount available, disregarding the fact that it is a half-broken mule, and hurries to the hut of the helpless girl. There she brusquely declines the proffered help of a curandero, and sets to work:

"--Esas son agüerias--dijo Mirra, haciendo un tajo en cruz sobre la picadura.
Gimió la chicuelita y brotó la sangre.
--Hay que chupar esa sangre envenenada; con la boca.
... ¿Tienen tabaco? Denme un puñado.
Se lo dieron y se puso a mascarlo, y luego aplicó los labios a la herida y empezó a chupar con todas sus fuerzas."

In the concluding lines of the book, Wast presents a final example of exemplary behavior on the part of his heroine. After realizing that she is not destined ever to enjoy with Gracían the happiness of which she has dreamed, and with the feeling that her life apparently is doomed to frustration and emptiness, she seeks spiritual comfort:

Un mar de amargura se le embalsaba en el pecho; para mejorar esconder su flaqueza se encerró en su clase y, como en todas sus penas, se arrodilló ante el Cristo exangüe que había dulcificado con su mirada mortecina todos los dolores de Valle Negro y amparado la agonía de su padre.

No discussion of the characterization in Valle Negro would be complete without mention of Lázaro, the capataz of Don Jesús whose ill-advised passion for Flavia cast a shadow over her life as well as his. A member of a much lower social class than was Flavia, he nevertheless possesses a pride equal to

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hers, and even a measure of contempt for her mistakes. However, until goaded into action by circumstance, he prefers to dissimulate and wait for Flavia's own obstinacy and impetuosity to bring her down to his level. When Don Jesús clasps his hand in recognition and commendation of his undoubted courage after he had killed a lion with his knife, Lázaro feels a momentary surge of pride at being treated as an equal by his employer. But with the cunning of his race, he does not overestimate Don Jesús's generosity and tolerance:

El señor de Viscarra tendió la mano a Lázaro, comprendiendo . . . todo el peligro de la jornada. Un relámpago de orgullo lució en los ojos del paisano, que miró a Flavia, al estrechar aquella mano de su raza que se tendía a él. Pero duró menos de un segundo; porque al instante volvió a ser el siervo dócil y callado que todos conocían.

¿Podía el de Viscarra haber leído en aquella chispa fugaz la pasión de aquel hombre que aguardaba su hora, tranquilamente, al igual de un león que aguarda la presa que algún día ha de pasar ante él?30

When Flavia berates Lázaro for spying on her nocturnal tryst with Camargo, his stubborn refusal to be browbeaten is an index to his character and is a revelation of his sentiments toward Flavia herself:

---¡Gaucho trompeta! ¿Soy yo acaso tu novia para que me sigas los pasos?
---Si hubiera sido mi novia lo habría matado a él y luego a usted.31

Feeling that Lázaro's declaration of love is an insult to her, and at the same time humiliated and angry at the realization that her own rashness has given ideas of such a

30Ibid., pp. 107-108. 
31Ibid., p. 197.
nature to a man whom she considers an inferior, Flavia hastens to denounce the capataz to his employer, who strikes him across the face and orders him off the ranch. Then is revealed the depth of Lázaro's malice and the weight of accumulated indignities which he considers have been afflicted on him:

Cruzado en la cintura, Lázaro tenía su cuchillo y su mano estuvo a punto de empuñarlo para castigar al ofensor. Pero un pensamiento terrible fulguró en su cerebro. ¿Para qué matarlo allí? Tenía otra afrenta que vengar, porque su sangre, su raza, toda su larga estirpe de hombres sometidos y pacientes acababa de ser agravado por una mujer.

Se vengaría de ella matando al dueño de Valle Negro en circunstancias en que los ojos de todos se volvieran contra Pablo Camargo y lo acusaran de esa muerte.32

With his primitive capacity for hatred and his Spanish heritage of extreme sensitivity to personal insult, Lázaro, by his persecutions, adds more weight to Flavia's heavy load of unhappiness. His violent death at the hands of her devoted servant comes as an appropriate end to the life of this somber character.

There are few if any of Wast's novels which surpass Valle Negro in local color. By means of a series of incidents, the author presents a picture of rural life which is vivid and convincing, drawn with sympathy, but not idealized. Life on an Argentine ranch is hard, and at times may be brutal, and in this novel the author has conscientiously tried to present as many aspects of it as possible.

In his next work about country people, Wast has merely

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32Ibid., pp. 199-200.
used the rural atmosphere and color as a background against which to portray a psychological conflict. _Una estrella en la ventana_ is hardly long enough to merit being called a novel; still, its thesis is of a nature that could not be adequately developed in a short story. With a series of character sketches and swift-moving incidents, the novelist sets the stage for the development and solution of a problem of mutual adjustments in marriage which might have occurred in any setting. However, in choosing a rural background for his action, the author has used good judgement from the standpoint of reader interest, because of the clearly-defined difference in the personalities of the rancher Juan Ramón and his city-bred wife Dorita.

The plot is simple and rather obvious. The young ranch owner, Juan Ramón Gonzales, after the death of his mother, is persuaded by a solicitous relative to seek a wife. Disregarding advice he had received from his father in the matter of choosing a wife whose interests would be compatible with his own, he goes to Buenos Aires and becomes hopelessly en-amored of a pretty young woman whose chief aims in life are amusement and luxury. After realizing that Dorita, his wife, will not be content with the drab and often arduous life on the ranch, Juan Ramón agrees to live in Buenos Aires and supervise the ranch as well as possible on frequent trips from the city. The arrangement does not turn out happily; Juan Ramón soon finds his work on the ranch preferable to the giddy and
futile social whirl of Buenos Aires, and decides to remain in the country. In his loneliness and disappointment, he soon finds solace in the companionship of Carlota, a girl of a neighboring family, and finds that she can offer him the sympathy, encouragement, and domestic comfort which Dorita has been unwilling to grant. After a few months, however, the young wife, who is essentially virtuous, realizes that she cannot continue to live in town surrounded by flattering admirers, and at the same time avoid a compromising situation. She writes to Juan Ramón to join her, but he is completely disgusted with her frivolity and refuses to come. Dorita immediately suspects him of infidelity and appears at the ranch unannounced in time to see Juan and Carlota ride in together.

The customary stormy scene, with mutual recriminations, occurs, but, after a night of solitary weeping, Dorita becomes convinced of her share of the blame for Ramón's behavior. A tender reconciliation occurs just as the morning star is seen to shine through her window. Juan Ramón and Dorita take this as a good omen, and resolve to begin a new life together under these favorable auspices.

There is nothing subtle or complex about the characters of this story. Juan Ramón and Dorita are two young people who, while sincerely attached to each other, attempt to enter into a relationship which is foredoomed to failure unless one or the other can conform to his partner's demands. Juan Ramón makes an honest effort to adapt himself to Dorita's way of life
and finds it impossible. Then, being a rather single-minded and obstinate young man, he simply returns to his ranch and makes the best of things. His character is aptly portrayed in his rebuke to Doña Dionisia after she takes him to task for his indiscreet behavior with Carlota:

--¿Ha concluido, señora?
--¡Sí!
--Bueno; si usted no puede tolerar que en mi casa mande yo, y nadie más, tiene el camino libre para volverse como vino. De una vez por todas, sepa que yo soy el que no ha de tolerar que se corra hasta el codo cuando le doy la mano. 33

It is to the credit of such an obstinate and proud young man that he was willing to make the first move toward effecting a reconciliation after the tempestuous quarrel with his wife.

As for Dorita, the author gives a comprehensive description of her in a single page, and at the same time indicates that her faults were not of a vicious nature, but merely the result of youth and irresponsibility:

Dorita Medrano era una chica de moda, que tenía una corte de buenos mozos para admirarla y disputarse sus piezas en los bailes, y aplaudir sus menudas coquerías. Pero, como ocurre frecuentemente con las chicas de moda, de entre sus muchos amigos no salía un novio, porque al cabo de un mes de "flirteos", o ellos se iban, o ella los alejaba por atrevidos.

No ganaba con esto el buen nombre de la "inda criatura, que para casarse tenía que esperar el advenimiento de un provinciano sin perjuicios.

Ocurre también que estas chicas alegres y vanas cuando pueden serlo, por no tener mayores obligaciones, resultan excelentes mujeres de hogar y perfectas madres de familia, no bien las ponen a prueba en el crisol de una vida fuerte y seria. 34

33Wast, Una estrella en la ventana, p. 92.
34Ibid., p. 52.
It is on the minor characters of this story that the reader's interest is most apt to become fixed. Carlota's mother, Micaela Romero, with a large brood of offspring to support, does not quibble over the methods of doing so. Quite shameless in her attempt to force Carlota upon Juan Ramón's attention when he was still an eligible solterón, she beats her with righteous indignation when Carlota appears lacking in propriety after Juan Ramón's marriage. Carlota herself is an amiable creature who, having failed to gain the affections of the young man before his marriage, simply takes what comfort she can from his companionship afterward. She fills a niche that Dorita left vacant for a time, and quietly leaves when Juan Ramón's wife comes to the ranch to stay.

Una estrella en la ventana, aside from its obvious moralizing on the theme of conjugal rights and duties, serves also as an introduction to a theme which Wast develops fully in his next rural novel, Desierto de piedra (1925).

It is of this novel that the author himself said, when notified that it had gained for him the highest literary prize in Argentina:

Yo antes de escribir mis libros los veo, y Desierto de piedra es el libro que más he visto. Tal vez por eso sea que, aun antes de saberle tal honor, yo mismo lo prefería a los otros.35

Desierto de piedra is the story of a middle class porteño

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family which is forced by economic necessity to move to the ranch of a relative. Don Midas Ontiveros, the father, after studying a few years at the University, had interrupted his career to accept a minor government position, and had remained at that work until his office was abolished. Totally unprepared for any other work, he decides to take his family to the country to live with his uncle, Don Pedro Pablo Ontiveros. The latter, a bachelor well past his eightieth year, has been living on his estancia alone except for his overseer and housekeeper. Midas, his mother-in-law, and the three children, Marcela, Hector and Aquiles, move to his uncle's house, expecting to stay only as long as is necessary for Midas to find some means of supporting the family. They find Don Pedro Pablo to be a very unsophisticated and, by their standards, even an uncouth old man. However, he is delighted to have his relatives with him, and soon becomes strongly attached to Marcela. Midas, who is constantly seeking methods to restore his fortunes by lucrative negocios, has a child-like faith in his own financial acumen, but is in reality quite incapable of intelligent management of his affairs. He dabbles in any enterprise that appeals to his credulous imagination, with the result that he soon exhausts the resources of his indulgent uncle and becomes the butt of practical jokes of the unlettered but shrewd rustics among whom he lives. Meanwhile, Marcela realizes that her visionary father is undependable, and begins to assume the responsibility for her family. She is at first
merely resigned to living in the country, but gradually becomes interested in the ranch and enthusiastic over the improvements she plans to make. Don Pedro Pablo offers her little encouragement in her efforts to administer the ranch in a business-like manner, and is content with the wasteful and slipshod methods to which he is accustomed. The property adjoining the Ontiveros estancia is owned by a Spanish immigrant, Isidro Puentes, whose modern methods of agriculture prove far more remunerative than those of the oriollos, and as a result, the gallegos\(^{35}\) are regarded with a mixture of envy and distaste by the inefficient natives. Isidro's son, Alfonso, soon falls in love with Marcela, but she considers his interest as an impertinence from a man whom she feels is socially and culturally inferior to her.

Soon after her arrival at her uncle's house, Marcela meets a sinister and mysterious man who, as it soon appears, has just returned from a prolonged term in prison. This man, Roque Carpio, had at one time owned the land now occupied by the gallego Puentes, and upon his return has established himself in an isolated mountain ranch above El Real de San Eloy. The latter property is a part of that owned by Marcela's uncle. The ex-convict becomes enamored of Marcela, although he makes no formal advances to her until near the end of the story.

Don Pedro Pablo dies about a year after his sobrinos come

\(^{35}\)Not only Galicians, but all Spanish immigrants in Argentina are called gallegos.
to live with him, leaving El Real de San Eloy and the cattle to Marcela, and the rest of his estate to Midas. Marcela moves to the mountain ranch and applies herself to the task of wresting a living from the land while her father spends his time and money drinking and talking with the patrons of the nearest espadrero. One night Roque Carpio comes to Marcela's house after having arranged to have Midas detained by an accomplice, and attempts to abduct her, since she has already spurned his formal declaration and proposal. Marcela succeeds in trapping his foot in her door in such a manner that he can neither escape nor force his way in, and wounds his leg so severely with a pair of scissors that he dies before morning from loss of blood. A short time afterward, the whole family moves back into El Pozo de Ontiveros, the old home of their uncle, and Marcela finally realizes that her distaste for Alfonso Puentes has changed to affection.

If Hugo Wast had deliberately proposed to present a comprehensive and graphic picture of the life and local color of an Argentine ranch with no other object in mind, then Desierto de piedra would still be deserving of the high praise it has received. In addition to his usual masterly descriptions of natural features and weather, which at times he almost personifies, he has apparently searched the countryside for appropriate types to represent the rural class of people. The criticism, mentioned before, which the author has received because of the number and relative insignificance of his minor
characters in some novels, is not generally applicable in this instance. Instead of a large number of individuals whose common characteristics result in monotony rather than in intensification of local color, in Desierto de piedra most of the characters are endowed with particular idiosyncrasies and peculiarities. The result is that they stand out in the story as individuals, and at the same time the composite of their characterizations affords a complete portrait of the Argentine rural types.

To his familiar practice of delineating character in a few words by the skillful use of inference, in this story Wast has added an element of humor which does not appear very often in his works. The picture of the fierce-appearing but inherently timid Don Difunto being ordered about by his domineering wife is apt to strike a responsive and sympathetic chord in the minds of North American readers. Wast himself interpolates a bit of mild humor when he remarks of the crude statue of St. Peter used in the rustic oratorio: "No podía dudarse de que las llaves pendientes de su mano rígida eran las del cielo, por no haber en el mundo cerradura adonde pudieran entrar."37 Don Pedro Pablo, spry little octogenarian that he is, becomes a natural subject for humor, and his conversations range from gallant teasing of the grandmother, misia Claudia, to the robust humor of his advice to a peon after an unruly bull is.

37 Wast, Desierto de piedra, p. 137.
lassoed: "--¡Hijo de una tal por cual! Voltiálo, Froilán, y ¡sácale el cargo! para que no se haga el mandinga otra vez!"  

The ludicrous figure cut by Midas makes him an object of 
laughter, but of laughter tempered with pity for the real vic-
tims of his ignorance and misdirected energy. In describing 
the confusion and uproar during the religious procession when 
the fireworks frightened the animals and almost interrupted 
the ceremony, Wast has, for the first time in his writing, in-
jected a strain of levity into a solemn religious function, 
but he makes it seem so natural that there is no appearance of 
disrespect.

The element of humor is, however, of relatively little 
significance in this novel. Here Wast the writer of romantic 
escape fiction is supplanted by Wast the sociologist, and back 
of the detailed sketches of paisano, porteño, and gallego 
types there appears the serious purpose of the writer. After 
Marcela has lived in the country long enough to perceive the 
contrast between the porteño and the campesino, she realizes 
that the shallow and artificial life of the city must draw 
into itself some of the sturdy and elemental rural virtues in 
order to escape social and spiritual decay. The querulous re-
marks of her pampered father after he has failed to interest 
the hard-headed paisano in one of his impractical business 
schemes, cause Marcela to consider the fundamental differences 
between rural and city society:

38Ibid., p. 105.
Tenían como su padre, abundosa fantasía y movediza e
inagotable ambición, pero carecían de esa voluntad silen-
ciosa y tranquila, de esa sobriedad inversimil que hace
del más ruin paisano un hombre libre, si tiene un puñado
de yerba para el mate y un almid de maíz para la mezamorra.

Y su vigor no era solamente físico, sino más bien
moral. Se necesitaba una salud espiritual prodigiosa,
para vivir en la formidable prisión de aquellas montañas
inclementes y desoladas, y no sentirse vencido, como un
gusano bajo las patas de un búfalo.

La aristocracia de las ciudades va consumiéndose por
su alejamiento de la tierra, que es la fuente de todo vi-
gor. Su familia había comenzado a descender la escala
social; no sólo eran pobres ya, como los más pobres, sino
que su padre bebía a la par de los más infelices borrachos
de la villa, y sus hermanos corrían el peligro de concluir
miserablemente.

Y esta desventurada historia era la de muchas otras
familias más encumbradas todavía que la suya, y que sólo
se salvan de la degradación y de la ruina, sacrificando el
peso muerto de los prejuicios y renovando su sangre azul
empobrecida, con la sangre roja de las estirpes que em-
piezan a subir la escala que ellos van descendiendo.40

These lines contain the theme of the novel, and, in
proving his point, the author has made use of an effective
practice in gradually changing his heroine from a bored and
ineffectual city girl into a self-reliant and capable woman.
Marcela meets the challenge of arduous and dangerous life of
the estancia, and emerges from the conflict tempered and hard-
ened, but victorious.

The change in Marcela begins when she realizes that her
father cannot be relied upon to support his family, and that
the responsibility, of necessity, becomes hers:

\[39\text{Italics mine.}\]

\[40\text{Iwast, Desierto de piedra, pp. 117-118.}\]
Hasta que se dio cuenta de que su padre no tenía parecido con el rey de su mismo nombre; y por haber sido la primera en desenganarse, reservó sus figurines, no se sentó más en su ventana a la hora romántica de medianoche, para poder levantarse temprano, y pensó que su destino allí duraría muchos años, y que tal vez su familia no se salvaría de la degradación que venía tras de la ruina, sino por los recursos que ella encontraría en su corazón y en su voluntad.41

Having assumed responsibility first for the administration of the household duties, she is agreeably surprised to find that what she had regarded as an onerous task provides its own satisfaction: "Y cosa inexplicable para ella: había afrontado esas tareas con esfuerzo, nada más que por encarrilar los asuntos de su familia, y he aquí que sentía gusto en hacer lo que al principio le costó violencia ... 42

Marcela's decision to resign herself to life in the country, and her subsequent enthusiasm for her new life, did not result in an abrupt change in her sentiments and habits of thought. Having lived so long in the atmosphere of superficial values and artificial sentiments of the city, she was at first incapable of appreciating the real worth of the young gallego farmer, Alfonso Puentes:

Porque él la tenía, porque se sentía inferior a ella, porque no era el carácter bravo y dominante, capaz de interesarla y ganar su corazón; y porque a pesar de no ser nada de eso, la amaba y parecía seguro de que ella algún día, por la decadencia de su familia, descendería hasta él.

Se le había clavado aquella idea, y eso la sublevaba, hasta declararse a sí misma que si la condenaran a casarse en la sierra, aceptaría el amor de un paisano arisco, antes que el de Alfonso Puentes.43

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41Ibid., p. 39.  42Ibid., pp. 41-42.  43Ibid., p. 189.
The actual love story of Marcela and Alfonso in this novel is scarcely worthy of the name; Marcela is entirely too preoccupied with the grim realities of a struggle for existence to have much time for romantic dalliance. Her acceptance of Alfonso at the end of the story is an entirely satisfactory conclusion to her exciting history, but it comes almost too abruptly. There is little if any mention of a gradual change in her feelings toward him, and it appears almost as if she accepts his love as the culminating symbol of her happy resignation to life in the country, rather than because of her purely personal sentiments toward the man. However, the tender quality of the concluding scene in which the two young people express their mutual affection tends to alleviate the abruptness with which the situation is presented;

El tomó aquella mano y la besó castamente.
--¿Quiere, pues, que sea con usted como soy con todos? --preguntó ella con serenidad, y él turbadísimo contestó que no.

Al pie de aquel algarrobo destrozado, en que el viento gemía, su juventud irradiaba como una promesa de resurrección.

Tenía la gracia y el vigor de la naturaleza agreste, y la salud espiritual de las gentes sencillas; y en sus ojos verdes resplandecía el amor sin perjuicios, virginal y puro como el agua de una vertiente, ignorada en el corazón de una roca inaccesible.44

In Desierto de piedra perhaps more than in any other novel, with the possible exception of Don Bosco y su tiempo, the center of the stage is dominated by one person. It is the story of Marcela, who is the personification of a sociological

44Ibid., pp. 245-246.
ideal of the novelist, and all other characters are presented solely for color, atmosphere, and contrast. Appropriately enough, Don Pedro Pablo is depicted as an old man. He is the symbol of the ignorance, wastefulness, and inefficiency of the typical old-fashioned criollo rancher and farmer, but he is at the same time shown as the generous source to which a decadent element of Argentine society may repair to restore its failing spiritual and economic vigor. This lovable and crusty old man is one of the most interesting characters of the hundreds which Wast has portrayed in his novels. The author pokes affectionate fun at Don Pedro Pablo throughout the novel, until the final scenes, where imminent death precludes any levity. In referring to the old man's fondness for wine, Wast says:

Después de dormir una siesta a la sombra de las cañas verdes de su cañaveral a orillas del pozo, donde tenía una damajuana atado de un lazo por el cuello, don Pedro Pablo no acertaba a explicar si los hijos de Midas eran sobrinos o nietos suyos.  

This old rancher's reluctance to accept new ideas and his resentment toward the successful Spanish immigrants are tersely but unequivocally expressed. When Marcela asks him why he did not profit by the example of his gallego neighbors and plant feed for his stock to supplement the natural pasture, the response was immediate and violent: "¡Que me quede tullido de los cuatro remos el día que me dé por imitar a los gallegos! ¡Prefiero curear toda la hacienda!"

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45ibid., p. 27.  
46ibid., p. 52.
Typical of the unsystematic fashion in which he runs his ranch is Don Pedro Pablo's action in tearing down a section of his fence. Finding a fence of branches barring his way to another field, he says to Marcela:

--Vamos a entrar en el otro potrero . . .
--¿Por qué puerta, tío?
--Por ésta que voy a abrir--exclamó él riéndose. Cogió una rama y la arrastró a un lado; cogió otra e hizo lo mismo; y cuando apartó la tercera quedó abierto un portillo. El viejo esperó que la muchacha pasara y él la siguió.
--¿Y deja abierto el portillo?
--¡Bah! Todo el campo es mío; toda la hacienda es mía . . . Que vayan y vengan las vacas a su antojo, no me importa.47

After Marcela sees the cattle dying in droves from starvation, she asks her uncle why he does not drive them to the mountains to better pasture. The conversation relative to this incident not only reveals Don Pedro Pablo's wasteful method of ranching, but also shows that he was aware of his niece's aptitude for business. Having learned that there are ample pastures available at the cost of sufficient effort, Marcela asks:

--¿Y por qué no lleva a ese campo siquiera las que puedan andar?
--¡Psh! En eso debiera pensar Difunto [el capataz].
--¿Y cuando Difunto no piensa en eso, no puede pensar usted?

--¡Qué lástima, hijita, no haber topado con vos hace medio siglo! Yo tendría nietos grandes, y Difunto no estaría tan gordo, porque se movería más.48

After Don Pedro Pablo has been to his yearly confession, and has apparently been examined in spiritual affairs too thoroughly for comfort, he vents his displeasure on his friend the

47Ibid., pp. 74-75.  
48Ibid., p. 78.
priest with unconscious humor: "¿Y creerá ese santo varón del cura, que a los ochenta y tres años voy a andar inventando pecados nuevos?" For all his affection toward Marcela and his consequent generosity with her father, the old man is not deceived by the well-meant promises of Midas to repay his loans. He hands over to his nephew his sole cash assets, a handful of old coins and various paper notes, ignorant of the actual value of his small hoard:

Midas examinó con atención las antiguísimas piezas de oro y plata y pareció alegrarse, pero como hombre de negocios, reservó su juicio. Sacó su libreta y las inventarió prolijamente, y dio un recibo por ellas a don Pedro Pablo que salió meneando la cabeza y hablando bajito:

"Con este papel . . . voy a encender el fuego mañana."

Don Pedro Pablo was so deeply attached to his land and so profoundly affected by the radical changes made by his avaricious but inefficient nephew, that his mortal illness may be attributed as much to grief as to age. When he heard the sound of axes striking his beloved algarrobos, he suffered from the blows as he imagined the trees suffered and his death came in a matter of hours.

With regard to the minor characters of the novel, it has already been remarked that they provide a picture of rural life which is drawn with sympathetic understanding and careful observation. The malevolence and capacity for evil of Roque Carpio are often expressed by inference rather than by direct

49 Ibid., p. 133. 50 Ibid., pp. 147-149.
statement; however, the dramatic incident of his attempted assault upon Marcela leaves nothing to the imagination. The gallegos of the family of Isidro Puentes are impressive more for their works than for their personalities, and there are many other individuals in the story who contribute much to the color and background, but of whom it would be impracticable to make more than passing mention. Except for Marcela herself and her father, the members of her immediate family are purely incidental personages who simply serve as added weight to the heroine's burdens.

It is with good and sufficient reason that the author may say of this novel that it is the one "que más ha visto." It is without doubt a skillful presentation of a theme of universal interest, its descriptions are vivid, and its characterizations are adequate and appropriate to the central theme.

The last of the series of Wast's novels based on rural themes is El camino de las llamas, which was written in 1930. This might with considerable justification be classified as a historical novel, since the element of history in it is without doubt an important one, but its chief source of interest for the reader is more apt to be its intriguing presentation of conflicting interests and the excitement of its action in a rural setting.

The elements of the plot are comparatively simple. Matilde, the oldest of two children whose father had been robbed and killed, lives with her widowed mother and directs the business affairs of the family. She frequently drives
cattle across the border into Chile in order to profit by a better market. By accident, while trailing a herd of llamas through the mountains, her father had discovered a pass in the Andes which was never closed by the winter snows, and he left this secret with his daughter. With the exception of Matilde, no one knows anything about the pass, el camino de las llamas, although it is an object of constant speculation. Matilde has engaged a rather mysterious but capable man named Aguilar as her capataz, and she soon finds herself in love with him. Aguilar is in reality a spy from the Chilean army who, having heard of the secret pass on the frontier, has come to try to discover it for its military value to his country. Among Matilde's peons is another spy, a colonel in the Chilean army who pretends to be a feeble-minded buffoon. A beautiful araucana named Quilpara lives with Matilde as a companion and servant. She is in love with Aguilar, who returns her affection, but who pays court to Matilde as a part of his plan to secure the map of the camino de las llamas.

Two gauchos, Cardona and Pizarro, are in love with Matilde, and they decide to settle the question with a game of cards. The loser is supposed to leave the field clear to his rival, and the girl is not consulted. Pizarro wins, but Cardona has him murdered by Yango, Quilpara's reprobate father. This occurs while the two men are accompanying Matilde on a trip across the border into Chile with a herd of cattle to sell. Near the frontier Matilde learns from a young Argentine army
officer, a certain Lieutenant Moscoso, that a war is likely to break out between her country and Chile at any time. Soon after this she hands over the map of the secret pass to Aguilar in order to try to gain his love, but soon demands it back when Quilpara, moved by jealousy, betrays her lover to Matilde because she believes that Aguilar is in reality in love with his employer. Aguilar succeeds at first in persuading Matilde that he is innocent and is a loyal Argentine, but she soon learns the truth when she overhears a conversation between Aguilar and Tancredo. She denounces him as a spy to the tenientes Moscoso, but Aguilar, Quilpara, and Tancredo all succeed in escaping temporarily from Moscoso's soldiers. Tancredo is killed as he attempts to cross the frontier into Chile, and Matilde wounds Quilpara with a rifle shot, believing she is aiming at Aguilar. The latter escapes into Chile, but all threat of war is removed between the two countries and his valuable information is not used by his government. Matilde, meanwhile, having sacrificed her love for Aguilar to her loyalty as an Argentine patriot, finds in the gallant Moscoso a satisfactory substitute for her faithless novio. She gives him the map of the pass in order that the Argentine army may take the necessary protective measures against Chile in the event of a renewed threat of war, and he expresses the intention of going to Matilde's mother to obtain her consent to his marrying her daughter.

The action of this story is rapid and condensed, and covers only a few days. As in Desierto de piedra, the central
figure is a woman. What Matilde lacks in the refinement and
gentility of the heroine of the above-mentioned novel, she
more than supplies in vigor, courage, and self-sufficiency.
She commands the respect of the rough men who surround her,
and does so not so much by feminine charms as by equaling
their exploits with a horse, a lasso, or a carbine. In com-
parison with the mixed emotions of fear, outrage, and deter-
mination which Marcela displayed in _Desierto de piedra_,
Matilde's comment regarding a similar situation sounds some-
what callous.

¿Aguilar, sabes que un día en el campo, un indio me
halló sola, me sorprendió y me besó? Tenía más fuerzas
que yo, y esto hace ya años . . .
--¿Y qué hiciste?
--Lo maté de un tiro . . . Nadie supo quién lo había
muerto . . .51

By skillful portrayal of background and environment, the
author is able to depict Matilde as a determined and thor-
oughly uninhibited young woman who nevertheless escapes being
brazen. She is in love with Aguilar, and, contrary to the
customary procedure in such cases, tells him so without either
hesitation or simulated confusion:

--Yo no te echaré de mi casa. Si vos me querés, si no
pensás en otra mujer, serás para siempre mi capataz; mejor
que eso, serás mi marido . . .52

But this novel is no mere idyll of the sentiments, whether
tender or robust, of a simple mountain girl. It is developed

51_Wast, El camino de las llamas, p. 84. 52_Ibid., p. 86._
around the theme of the conflict arising between the natural instincts of men and women, and the more artificial but no less noble sentiments evoked by love of country. In the case of Matilde, the question is sharply defined, but she at no time displays any evidence of vacillation in her choice between her love for Aguilar and the welfare of her country. Patriotism was not for her an empty abstraction, but a personal emotion. When she heard the Argentine army officer say that there was a strong probability that Argentina and Chile might soon be at war, she lost sight of all other considerations. As Wast states it: "La alusión del teniente a una guerra, había levantado su corazón por encima de las vulgares pasiones que agitan a las gentes de su laya." 53 A few pages farther on, Matilde indulges in a peroration which is concerned with this same idea of patriotism:

--¡Ya ve qué clase de gente somos! Con razón cuando la policía nos persigue, porque se le antoja que entre nuestros animales va alguno mal habido y voltea de un balazo a traición a uno de nosotros, escribe en el parte, que mató a un bandolero, y nadie piensa más. Pero hay algo que vive en nosotros, la gente de las montañas, con más fuerza que en los hombres de las ciudades... Algo que sentimos palpitar de bajo del poncho o de la pobre camisa del gaucho más miserable, o de mi blusa de cuero, teniente, cada vez que pasamos la fontera...  

--¿Y es?...--interrogó el oficial.  

--¡El amor de la patria!... 54

In Matilde's opinion, merely to be born in Argentina is enough to insure that one is an ardent patriot. When the question

53 Ibid., p. 110.  
54 Ibid., p. 113.
arises concerning the doubtful loyalty of her capataz, whom she considers at the time to be a native of her country, she says: "A mi me basta saber que todos mis peones son argentinos." After she learns definitely that Aguilar is a Chilean spy she is able to appreciate his position, and even to forgive his having played upon her love to accomplish his mission. But she is a woman as well as a patriot, and her respect for his devotion to duty is tinged with natural resentment that he should prefer the humble Quilpara to her:

Yo no lo despreciaba: su larga comedia de amor y su energía para soportar las humillaciones mostraban el gran patriotismo de aquel soldado.
Pero su orgullo de mujer estaba mortalmente herido.
¿Qué encontró Aguilar en la India para amarla? However, her ultimate denunciation of the man she loves does not appear to be the revenge of a jealous woman, but rather the self-denying action of a loyal patriot in whom devotion to her country rises above purely personal emotions. After securing a measure of revenge on Aguilar for his deception by forcing him to pretend that he still intends to marry her, and doing so in the presence of Quilpara, Matilde reveals the secret of her false novio:

Matilde le golpeó en el hombro con la mano izquierda:
"¡Este es mi novio . . . es un espía. Préndalo! The story of the valiant Matilde does not end on this unhappy note. Her father had made her swear that she would

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55Ibid., p. 141. 56Ibid., p. 265.
57Ibid., p. 278.
reveal the secret of el camino de las llamas only to the man whom she married. Having confided the secret to Aguilar only to be betrayed, she decides after his flight to show the pass to the teniente Moscoso. On the road back to her home, her imagination speeds on a faster course:

Y viajó más lejos todavía, con esa vertiginosa libertad de la imaginación, viajó hasta el camino de las llamas, que pronto recorrería acompañando al teniente que sería capitán, y sin faltar al juramento que hiciera a su padre.58

Wast makes excellent use of the eternal triangle situation in this novel, and displays a disciplined imagination in his selection of characters to play the principal roles in it. It is no simple matter to separate the three individuals who are bound so closely together by conflicting interests. Matilde honestly loves Aguilar, but she is forced to choose between her sentiments for him and her devotion to her country. Aguilar just as sincerely loves Quilpara, but he has to feign affection for Matilde in order to perform his duty as a soldier and a patriot in spite of the repugnance which he feels toward such deception as an honorable man. Quilpara alone is able to pursue her course with singleness of purpose. The relations between her and Aguilar represent the sum total of her emotions and desires, and she is not restrained in her primitive passion by either a feeling of obligation to duty or of loyalty to Matilde. The interest of the gauchos Cardona and Pizarro is on a lower plane, and simply serves to complicate and amplify the

58Ibid., p. 292.
plot.

The first indication of the character of Aguilar is presented when he hears the patriotic Moscoso extolling the virtues of Argentina. Unable to remain silent when his country's honor seems to demand at least an oral defense, he exclaims: "Más allá de esta cordillera hay un país de esa laya, que se hace querer de sus hijos y no conoce ni la traición ni la derrota." 59 This patriotic fervor is more than he can sustain, however, when Tancredo, as his superior officer, suggests that he kill Quilpara if she disturbs his plans. Aguilar agrees to do so, but weakens when Quilpara herself admits knowledge of his intentions. More than once, in portraying Indians in his novels, Wast allows the romanticist to rise above both novelist and historian. The result, as already discussed in the section of this study devoted to Lucía Miranda, is that his uncultured aborigines express themselves in terms which place a strain on the reader's credulity:

--¿Ha pensado en matarme? ¿Qué fácil le sería si realmente quisiera! La muerte dada por usted, debe ser linda como cerrar los ojos cuando tengo sueño . . . ¿Eso es amor? . . . ¿Qué nombre tiene en su lengua esto que siento por usted? 60

The final proof of the profound affection of this simple creature is revealed during Aguilar's flight from the Argentine soldiers. Knowing that his mule will be recognizable in the night, she changes mounts with him, and receives the bullet

59Ibid., p. 114. 60Ibid., p. 107.
which Matilde intended for her false suitor.

The character of the pseudo-half-wit Tancredo is one of the most diverting of the story. He is an accomplished actor whose nimble wits and brazen audacity serve him well in the part he plays. His whole philosophy as a soldier of his country is expressed in his nonchalant reply to Aguilar's hope that the frontier guards will not kill him when he attempts to return to Chile: "---¡Bah! ¡Gran cosa! Mande decir misas por mi alma, y que Dios me perdone ... ¡Buenas tardes!"61

In the many well drawn scenes of this novel Wast has again provided a veritable album of pictures of Argentine rural life. The night camps of the cattle drivers, the branding of the wild horses, the sinister plots of the gauchos, and the crude but mordant humor of the conversation of the serranos all contribute to an appreciable extent to the interest and entertainment which this novel affords.

The discussion of El camino de las llamas is best concluded with a remark of the teniente Moscoso, who, as the author's spokesman, drops a subtle hint concerning the ideal of Argentine hegemony over her neighbor republics:

Aliados o enemigos, no podemos negar sus virtudes. Es cierto, don Aguilar, más allá de la frontera al norte y al poniente, hay tres naciones de gente aguerrida y patriota, Chile, Bolivia, el Perú, hermanas de la muestra por la sangre y la historia. Sólo Dios sabe de qué lado y contra quién nos tocaría combatir. Pero cualquiera que sea nuestro enemigo, la guerra será dolorosa como guerra de hermanos y las heridas sangrientas e incurables ... 62

61 Ibid., p. 260.  
CHAPTER V

PROVINCIAL NOVELS

The three books, which for the sake of convenience in this study, are classed as provincial novels, have little in common except their setting. The action of all three takes place in the city of Santa Fé, the capital of the province of the same name, or in the estancias of that region. The first of this group of novels, Fuente sellada (1914), was written when the author was still a very young man, and reflects much of his youthful sentimentality in some passages. At the same time, however, it presents convincing evidence of his ability to conceive interesting situations and to construct incidents enough to develop those situations to a reasonable conclusion. The paramount fault in Fuente sellada, as a matter of fact, is the superfluity of incidents, but the evident sincerity of the writer and his undoubted familiarity with the manners and customs of the locale in which he develops his plot are enough to save a loosely-written story from being insipid or tiresome.

Fuente sellada is the story of the rough course of true love and devious courses of provincial politics in and around the city of Santa Fé. Don Pablo Rojas, an ambitious estanciero, brings his motherless daughter, Evangelina, to be reared in the home of her grandmother, mamita Rosa. His two remaining children, María Teresa and Mario, choose to stay with him on
the estancia. Evangelina grows up in Santa Fé as the friend and devoted admirer of a pleasant young man, Juan Manuel, who is a distant relative of mamita Rosa. Juan Manuel is already old enough, at the time of Evangelina’s arrival, to be hopelessly in love with a fickle young lady, and during the years of Evangelina’s childhood and adolescence, he wastes his time vainly following the inconstant Clara Rosa from place to place, finally even spending a few years in Europe. At last he realizes that the game he is playing is not worth the effort, and he loses interest in it. Soon after that, having received news of his father’s death, he returns to Santa Fé to assume his position as head of his family, which is composed of his younger sister, Margarita, and his young and beautiful stepmother, Delfina.

Meanwhile, the other sister, María Teresa, has grown into a beautiful but undisciplined and passionate woman, and has indulged in a clandestine love affair with a certain Darma, who was an employee of a company exploiting the quebracho forests around her father’s lands. Because of a dispute over a cut fence, Don Pablo and Darma had become enemies, but this did not prevent Darma from visiting María Teresa secretly with the help of Damián, a peon of the estancia who was blindly devoted to María Teresa. Darma regarded the affair as the mere conquest of an innocent country girl, and having satisfied his vanity in the matter, left the region with no indication of even intending to see María Teresa again. The latter, having been seduced by
her own recklessness as much as by the false promises of her lover, swears vengeance, and enlists the sympathies of Damián. She promises to give herself to him when he has killed Darma, but her revenge and Damián's reward are delayed by Darma's disappearance.

By the time Juan Manuel returns to Santa Fé, Darma has established himself there as a power in local politics, and has a law degree and a huge fortune, both of which come from unrevealed sources. Juan Manuel learns upon his arrival that Evangelina has recently married the mysterious doctor Darma, and begins to realize that he has really been in love with Evangelina himself for years. Darma, who holds a municipal office at the time, presents himself as a candidate for a higher office in the provincial legislature, and then, with the aid of Juan Manuel's stepmother, Delfina, betrays his own party and subsequently another one which has supported him, and manages to be elected governor. Delfina, who had married Juan Manuel's father for his fortune, is in love with Darma, and is an ambitious and scheming woman by nature, whose plans for her lover's advancement are motivated by her own desire for power and prestige.

Don Pablo Rojas, whom Darma has forced into bankruptcy in order to destroy his political influence in the northern part of the province, confesses to María Teresa that he had persuaded Evangelina to marry Darma in return for the latter's financial support. Darma offered to endorse a note for Rojas,
but tricked him in regard to the provisions of the loan, and Don Pablo lost his lands to his son-in-law. When María Teresa learns of Evangeline's sacrifice and Darma's faithlessness, she moves to Santa Fé to live with mamita Rosa, and brings Damián along as a servant. Immediately after the announcement of Darma's election as governor, she persuades Damián to assassinate him at the door of his own house.

Meanwhile, Juan Manuel and Evangeline have become fully aware of their mutual love, but are determined to remain honorable in their conduct. Hence the title of the book: Evangelina's avowed love for Juan Manuel, frustrated and denied by the force of circumstance and the laws of society, as well as by their own moral principles, must be as a fuente sellada to them. But the death of Darma and María Teresa's confession of her complicity in his assassination finally resolve the situation so that the lovers can begin to enjoy the long-denied rewards of their self-sacrifice and rectitude.

These are the important details, somewhat trite in themselves, which the author develops into almost three hundred pages of fairly creditable characterization, intriguing action, and interesting local color. It is because of the last-mentioned element of the book that it is of particular interest. When Fuente sellada was written, its youthful author still lacked the literary experience and discipline necessary to the concise and coherent development of his main themes, but his close observation and descriptive ability were already apparent.
However, a consideration of the characterization in the novel is not without value, because in it are presented certain types which Wast was to employ in some of his later and more mature works.

Little need be said of Evangelina and Juan Manuel. They are the conventional, sentimental young lovers who so often appear in fiction, who neglect their early and obvious opportunities for happiness together, only to become aware of their love when fate and their own blindness have apparently separated them irrevocably; they sigh, weep, and soliloquize about the matter until fortune favors them with a happy ending to the story. Juan Manuel is an inoffensive but equally uninspiring hero, quite capable of exemplary moral sentiments in the face of a perplexing situation, but not unduly disposed to strike back against the blows of circumstance. Evangelina is apt to evoke more sympathy from the reader, but her self-denial and patience finally come to have an unnatural tinge of pessimism which contrasts oddly with the first impressions given of her. After she has immolated herself for her father's sake by agreeing to a loveless marriage, she apparently becomes a passive creature intent only upon fulfilling her unhappy destiny.

The author says of her:

Nunca había creído que las gentes vinieran al mundo para ser felices, ni recordaba haber puesto jamás empeño persiguiendo la dicha.

Muy pronto comprendió la vida, y dejaba correr su parte, como un río que Dios se encarga de guiar. Ni sabía, ni quería saber a donde iba.1

1Wast, Fuente sellada, p. 137.
Even when she has at last become fully convinced of her mistake and is suffering from the unhappy knowledge that only in the love of Juan Manuel can she ever find happiness, she refuses to try to alleviate her misfortune, "con la resolución de guardar su secreto, cerrando los labios de la queja, segura de que aquel sentimiento no podía ser malo mientras quedara escondido como el agua de una fuente sellada."  

Finally, torn by conflicting passions despite her determination to resign herself to her fate, she visits her friend and confessor, the Jesuit padre Palau, and receives his assurance that her sentiments toward Juan Manuel, if kept free from any sensual taint, can do her no spiritual harm. She accepts her situation, not with bitterness, but with a kind of gentle resignation. Fearing for Juan Manuel's happiness if he learns of his step-mother's unsavory intrigues with Darma, it seems at first as if such an occurrence can only add more to her own load of grief:

Se le oprimió el corazón con un lejano presentimiento. ---¡Dios mío!-- clamó llena de angustia; ---¿qué sucederá cuando los ojos de Juan Manuel vean lo que pasa? Mais sonaban aún en sus oídos las palabras del padre Palau: "Bástele a cada día su propio trabajo. ¿Para qué entristecerse por cosas que quizás no vendrán nunca? Y en su corazón, resignado a seguir las sendas que Dios le marca, entró la paz."

Wast apparently felt that the combination of virtuous behavior and genuine affection with which he had endowed his

---Ibid., p. 151.  
---Ibid., p. 197.
heroine was deserving of reward, and thus the death of Darma was made to result not only in vengeance for the dishonored María Teresa, but in the promise of a happy future for the long-suffering Evangelina.

María Teresa is by far the most natural character of the novel. She is the forerunner of the type which Wast developed in more detail in the portrayal of Flavia four years later in Valle Negro. In many respects their stories are parallel, particularly in their passionate and obstinate pride, and in their relations with socially inferior peons who become pawns in their single-minded intrigues. María Teresa is at first a creature of impulse, reflecting her environment and the lack of restraint with which her careless father has allowed her to grow. Apparently a hardy and self-sufficient young woman, she is at heart a romantic, and as such becomes an easy prey to the designs of the unprincipled Darma.

Quién la conocía, difícilmente hubiera imaginado que hervía en el fondo de su temperamento una levadura novellesca.

El ejemplo de su hermano Mario, volviendo tarde en la noche, con el rostro encendido, la mirada alegre, y la boca llena de alusiones a sus aventuras amorosas; el mismo ejemplo de su padre; su soledad, su juventud que se expandía como un resorte nuevo, la naturaleza en cuyo contacto vivía, aún las canciones inflamadas de Damián, la envolvían en una malla de ensueños y de aspiraciones cambiantes y bravías.

After she has surrendered herself to Darma with all the

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4 Refer to Chapter IV, pp. 62-75 for a discussion of Wast's Valle Negro.

5 Wast, Puente sellada, p. 33.
ardor of this romantic nature, and has been deceived by him, it is only natural that her disillusionment should result, not in Evangelina's patient resignation, but in unforgiving bitterness. When Juan Manuel idly remarks that the country makes him sad, she replies with a remark that shows how great has been the change in her formerly happy and carefree life: "La tristeza en el campo es la vida del alma."  

María Teresa's desire for revenge is more complex than even she conceives it to be. At first only the natural reaction of an impulsive woman suffering from humiliation and deception, her desire for vengeance upon Darma later is colored by jealousy. She is motivated by both love and hatred, although her conception of love has in it more of a primitive than of a spiritual element. Her attitude is best expressed in the following passages:

¿Cómo podían vivir libres de aquella terrible pasión que a ella la encadenaba? Le parecía imposible que hubiera en el mundo quien amando o habiendo amado no sufriera lo que ella, que así mandaba matar al hombre que amaba. ¡Ahí se imaginaba verlo caer ensangrentado, y habría querido estar allí para alzarlo y decirle al oído, cuando se estuviera muriendo:  

--Ves? Yo te quería, y te quería tanto, que te he mandado matar para que no fueras de nadie, ya que no eras mío.  

Despite her jealous and vengeful nature, María Teresa is not incapable of repentance and of nobility of sentiment after she has inspired Darma's murder. Knowing that her innocent sister will be blamed for the crime because of her desire to

---Ibid., p. 66.  

---Ibid., p. 261.
free herself from an unhappy marriage, María Teresa resolves to confess and to assume the blame. Evangelina assures her that she will never reveal her secret, but María Teresa refuses her sacrifice, and replies to Evangelina's remark:

¿Para qué vas a acusarte? ¿Quieres inutilizar lo que yo hago?
--Yo no podía con un solo crimen, --continuó María Teresa . . . --y callándome ahora, cometería otro, más odioso quizás . . .

The author leaves the rest of María Teresa's story to the reader's imagination, having thus brought her to an attitude of repentance and humility, and if the sudden change in her character seems to be an illogical contrast to her heretofore vindictive nature, it may perhaps be attributed more to Wast's rigid conceptions of morality than to the natural behavior of such a character as he has delineated in María Teresa.

In the case of the ambitious and unscrupulous Darma, the author never attempts to portray him adequately in mere descriptive passages; his actions always speak for him. He is typical of the ruthless egoist whose rise to power is marked by betrayal and ruin of his associates. He wrecks the life of María Teresa to gratify a sensual whim and to flatter his vanity, and just as coolly plans the financial ruin of Pablo Kojas for the political benefit which he receives from it. It is never explained exactly why he wished to marry Evangelina, since he certainly felt no affection for her, although it

8Ibid., p. 281.
might conceivably have been a part of his plan to thrust himself into the politics of the region that owed loyalty to his father-in-law. He changes his political allegiance as he would have changed his clothes, always with an eye to his own convenience and profit. Wast has portrayed him not so much as an individual villain, but rather as a composite of the types of corrupt politicians whose desire for power results in a mockery of political principles and in a tragedy in human relationships.

In Delfina Gross is presented a personality whose counterpart does not appear in any of Wast's subsequent works. She is coldly materialistic and practical, and almost completely a creature of mind rather than of spirit. The author has apparently felt that she does not conform to any known type of Argentine criolla with a Spanish heritage, so he has cast her as a woman of British ancestry. Incapable herself of unselfishness or disinterested affection, she naturally suspects Juan Manuel and Evangelina of dubious conduct when she learns of their sentiments toward each other. It is characteristic of the author's nationalistic sentiments that in the end the nefarious schemes of this unprincipled woman are frustrated by Maria Teresa, who, for all her faults of pride and obstinacy, is still the more admirable character.

In his desire to lend realism to his canvas of Argentine provincial life, Wast has at times applied his paint too copiously, with the result that where the novel gains in local
color it loses in unity. But it is in some of the incidental episodes and in the description of minor characters that he has achieved his most effective touches of realism. At times such passages border upon the inelegant, but are consistent with the nature of the people discussed. For example, when Don Procorro, the capataz on Pablo Rojas's estancia, wishes to warn the susceptible Juan Manuel against becoming attached to María Teresa, he does not boldly tell him that she has already been cast aside by another man. Instead, he calls a dog to him and addresses the animal in terms directed at Juan Manuel:

El capataz le cogió la cabeza con sus manos duras, y le preguntó, mirándolo fijamente:
---¿Comerías vos, que sos perro, una achura revolcado por otro perro? ¿No es cierto que no?9

In another instance, the author displays his ability to say much with few words when he describes Pablo Rojas as the typical caudillo of provincial districts, a man who received the votes and the loyalty of his followers for personal rather than for political reasons: "dueño de las libretas cívicas de todos los votantes de aquellos pagos, compadres o ahijados de él, cuando no parientes por detrás de la Iglesia."10

The political convention of the liberal party, held in midsummer under a zinc roof, and composed largely of rural delegates whose political ardor was no less evident than their physical warmth, provided the author with an opportunity for both realism and humor:

9Ibid., p. 93. 10Ibid., p. 153.
Bajo los rayos del sol ardía el techo de zinc, y la atmósfera se iba impregnando de un insóportable olor a políticos pobres.

—¡Uff!—clamó don Narciso sofocondo;—estos liberales deben ser como los avestruces, que sólo se bañan cuando llueve . . .

Perhaps the most graphic passages of the whole novel are to be found in the author's digression on the venality and lethargy of the government officials and shyster lawyers of the provincial courts. After listening to numerous instances of legalistic corruption, and seeing in all the offices examples of slovenly-administered public functions, Juan Manuel, as Wast's spokesman, decides to visit one of the court officials:

—Está "al despacho"—les dice un empleado.
—Por qué no le piden al juez que lo resuelva pronto?

Se deciden y entrar a ver al juez. Lo hallan estudiando un programa de las carreras de Buenos Aires, rodeado de papelotes amarillos, que duermen un plácido sueño.

After his description of the courts, where unfortunate people were so often the victims of the "law's delay" or of the aves negras, as he calls the dishonest lawyers, Wast asks as both jurist and sociologist:

En otros tiempos se fundaban órdenes para libertar cautivos; ¿por qué ahora, ya que no hay cautivos, no se fundan órdenes para defender a los pobres y a los ignorantes de las aves negras, en cuyas garras dejan la fortuna, cuando no el honor o la vida?

Considered as a work of art, Fuente sellada is far inferior to Wast's later novels. However, as a graphic picture

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11Ibid., p. 175.
12Ibid., p. 132.
13Ibid., pp. 133-134.
of provincial politics and local color, it is well deserving of consideration by any reader interested in Argentine life.

Wast's next novel dealing with events in and around Santa Fé was *La que no perdonó*, written in 1923. During the nine years between the appearance of *Fuente sellada* and this later novel, the author has polished his style and has developed the ability to restrict the extraneous matter which mars the unity of his earlier works. The result is that in *La que no perdonó* he has written a coherent and convincing novel in which the greater part of the action revolves around the central theme, that of the implacable resolution of an injured woman not to forgive her husband's infidelity.

The essential action of the plot is comparatively simple. Merceditas Virreyes, a wealthy young matron of aristocratic Santa Fé society, is the wife of Daniel Hernandarias, and the mother of five-year-old Judith. At the beginning of the story, Judith is just recovering from a serious illness and Merceditas, being a very pious woman, is in an exalted emotional state, filled with happiness over her daughter's recovery and with gratitude to Providence for the answer to her prayers. At this time Daniel, who has become momentarily satiated with the uneventful conjugal felicity he has experienced since his marriage, and desirous of easing himself of the tension and anxiety occasioned by his daughter's recent illness, decides to go to Buenos Aires for a few days. He tells his family he is going to his estancia, and he would have been able to enjoy
with impunity what he considered an innocent diversion in the cabarets of the metropolis, had it not been for the fact that the son of a gossipy neighbor of Merceditas's returns to Santa Fé in time to boast of having joined Daniel at a none-too-
sedate party. Merceditas, herself the soul of virtue, and at the same time jealous of her daughter's evident preference for her father, refuses to listen to any explanation or to forgive her penitent and thoroughly chastened husband. She moves to her country estate, forbids Daniel ever to see his daughter again, and rears Judith in the belief that her father is dead. She becomes obsessed with the idea that there can be no real happiness in a marriage based on physical or emotional attraction, and is determined to assure Judith of a peaceful life by marrying her to a dependable man who will never be tempted to infidelity or to even less serious misconduct. However, after Merceditas and Judith have been living on the estancia for seven years, during which time Merceditas has heard only occasional rumors of Daniel's activities, he is found to be lurking about the ranch, and in order to prevent her daughter's learning the truth about him, Merceditas takes her to Buenos Aires and puts her in school. As Judith begins to grow into a young woman, her mother decides to marry her to one of her own former suitors, a brilliant physician whom she had rejected because of his poverty and middle-class social position. Doctor Monzón, now prosperous and famous, has never outgrown the boorish habits of his poverty-stricken youth, but
has assumed an air of self-conscious dignity and the habit of pedantic speech since his professional success. He is still in love with Merceditas, but she is opposed to divorce. Even when Merceditas begins to realize that she is actually in love with Monzón herself, she still refuses to compromise with her conscience, and persuades him to become Judith's suitor.

Judith, meanwhile, has grown up in constant companionship with Pablo Medina, the son of her mother's overseer, and has been in love with him since early adolescence. Her mother unobtrusively opposes Judith's growing attachment for Pablo, sincerely believing that he can never give peace and emotional security to her daughter, and when Pablo embarks on a career in the navy, she intercepts his letters to Judith. Finally, convinced that Pablo has forgotten her, partly to salve her wounded pride and partly to please her mother, Judith agrees to marry Monzón. Pablo comes home on leave, but too late to explain his apparent neglect, and the marriage takes place.

Doctor Monzón is revealed as a class-conscious boor, still in love with Merceditas and still resentful toward Daniel Hernandarias for having married her. He takes Judith to live with his mother and sister, who idolize him, and whose constant vigilance over his bride, while meant as a kindness, in reality adds to Judith's wretchedness. She realizes that her marriage has been a tragic mistake and that she still loves Pablo, but resolves to suffer in silence. Three months after the wedding, Monzón is called to Europe to attend a medical congress, and
Judith returns to her mother's estancia to escape from her husband's relatives. There she again meets Pablo, who has been seriously wounded in a fight with a gaucho over a flower that Judith had given a neighbor girl. Pablo and Judith are unable to restrain the demands of their love, and Judith, knowing that he is soon to leave with no intention of returning, surrenders herself to a brief idyll of happiness with him. Pablo leaves, and Judith, upon hearing that her husband is due to return soon, becomes so conscience-stricken and filled with remorse that her health is affected. She confesses her indiscretion to her mother, who finally realizes that her daughter is now suffering for the sin of unforgiveness of which the mother has been guilty during all these years. Merceditas abases herself before Monzón in a vain attempt to secure his understanding and pardon for Judith, but he enjoys too much his multiple revenge on the father whom he hates, upon the mother whom he has vainly loved, and upon the wife who has wounded his pride. Judith, realizing that she can expect no forgiveness from her bigoted husband, prays for divine pardon and dies. Merceditas, now fully aware of the enormity of her sin of pride and her affront to a benevolent Providence in presuming to condemn what her religion taught her to forgive, begs forgiveness of her outcast husband and begins her life of atonement.

Hugo Wast seems to prefer women as the dominant figures of his novels, even in those in which action rises above
characterization as the source of interest. In this instance, the action is in itself of comparatively little significance except in its relation to the emotional reactions of the principal characters, and among these characters Merceditas Virreyes soon gains and holds the reader's interest. A significant index to her personality appears clearly when she vows to give up all ornaments in the matter of clothing and jewelry if her child is allowed to recover. This form of self-denial would have much less meaning in an older or less attractive woman, but Merceditas is young and beautiful. Throughout the novel, the one trait which distinguishes her is her determination to do nothing by halves. Having resolved to shut her erring husband out of her own and her daughter's life, she does not rely on mere words, but orders dogs to be secured to guard her house against any attempt of Daniel's to visit Judith surreptitiously. She is always determined to obey the letter of the law, whether civil or moral, regardless of how the spirit of the law may affect her. After being separated from Daniel for years, and with every intention of remaining away from him, she still refuses to listen to a declaration of love from her former suitor, Monzón:

--¿Usted, Monzón, mi único amigo, se olvida de quien soy? Una mujer casada no puede escuchar sin rebajarse ante sus propios ojos semejantes palabras.
--¡Casada! --exclamó él sarcásticamente--¿Podría jurar, Merceditas, que a estas horas no es viuda?
Esa réplica ha hiñió en su orgullo, por cuanto ponía en duda su inexorable honradez.
--¡Sí, casada! Y aunque yo no sepa donde vive mi
marido, le debo fidelidad y le soy fiel, no por lo que él valga, sino por lo que valgo yo.14

With the passing of the years, Merceditas's very appearance begins to reflect her inflexible will:

Los años habían marcado con vigor las líneas de su hermosura grave y fría, como la de un mármol. Vestía siempre conforme a su promesa, trajes de telas obscures, cerrados en el cuello, y quien la veía, aun sin conocerla, podía pensar: "He ahí una voluntad hecha carne".15

And that voluntad, when the time comes for the selection of Judith's husband, is strong enough for Merceditas to be able to suppress her own sentiments and to deny herself the man she really loves so that her daughter may marry him. No other suitor can be found who serves her purposes:

Cada uno le parecía un nuevo Hernandarias, con las mismas cualidades externas y los mismos vicios ocultos, incapaz, por lo tanto, de asegurar a su hija la paz, que era todo lo que ella anhelaba.

Placeres, abolengo, todo era a sus ojos una sola miseria, bajo distinto disfraz.

El único cimiento firme para la existencia de una mujer era el que ella iba alcanzando al fin, después de haber ahogado con su voluntad invencible la sombría tentación de dejarse amar por otro hombre.

Ese hombre era sagrado, desde que ella pensó en él para su hija.16

When her godfather questions the wisdom of Judith's marriage to her mother's middle-aged admirer, Merceditas tells him: "Tengo confianza en ella, tío Félix. No logrará la felicidad con el casamiento, porque la felicidad no existe en el mundo; pero si la paz, y sabrá cumplir con su deber."17 But Judith's

14 Wast, La que no perdonó, p. 126. 15 Ibid., p. 157.
16 Ibid., p. 130. 17 Ibid., p. 198.
marriage results in neither peace nor happiness, and Monsón's refusal to forgive his wife's defection causes Mercedes to perceive at last the tragic irony of the lesson she has taught him by her own example: "No la perdona, porque yo no perdoné." 18 She is afraid and ashamed to hear her daughter accuse her of her sins of pride:

Tenía miedo de cír en los pálidos labios de ella, lo que su conciencia le gritaba:
"Tu virtud es vana. Si hubieras sido humilde, habrías perdonado. No era bastante no caer, debiste dejar a Dios el juicio de caída ajena."

Una lógica despiadada la hacía arrepentirse de aquella orgullosa virtud que ahora el marido ultrajado esgrimía como un arma contra su hija. 19

Mercedes has the courage of her convictions and is consistent in her observance of her own interpretation of right and wrong, until the bitter fallacy of her conception is made evident. Then her grief, her admission of error, and her contrition are all suggested in the text which she chooses to have placed on one of the arches of the church that she intends to decorate: Misericordia quiero, y no sacrificios. 20

The personality of Mercedes dominates the novel to such an extent that most of the other characters appear dwarfed by comparison. Judith is a lovable person, but so conventionally portrayed and so subservient to her mother that her character presents little difficulty or incentive for analysis. Pablo, Don Félix, and misia Enriqueta all demand and deserve their

18 Ibid., p. 275. 19 Ibid., p. 276.
20 Ibid., p. 287.
share of attention and sympathy, but there is nothing original in them. The old isleño, No Crispo, is an intriguing individual, a typical example of the author's habit of portraying in single individuals the prototypes of different classes of Argentine society, but he contributes little or nothing to the central theme of the novel. The same may be said for the Bachí family, Pepa Osuña, and Monzón's mother and sister. All are drawn with care and are creditable examples of Wast's ability to paint graphic pictures of his minor characters. But all are overshadowed by the force and intensity of Merceditas, and, after her, by the extremely unpleasant but entirely realistic personality of Doctor Monzón.

This character, while often absurd because of his affectation, pedantry, and preoccupation with his valuable time, is one of the most repugnant creations Wast has ever presented. He is often awkward, but never humorous. There is an air of half-concealed hatred and envy about him which lends a sinister touch even to his attempts at observing social amenities. Always conscious of his humble origin, he resents the gracious customs of the upper class of provincial society, and when relieved of the necessity of a presentable professional appearance, he makes a special point of being ill-mannered and discourteous. He is unrelenting in his prejudices to the end, and takes a savage delight in the wretchedness of the woman whom he has so long desired in vain, and in the misery of the man who had won and lost her. It is difficult to accept the idea of
Mercéditas's being attracted to such a man, in view of her stringent conception of the fitness of things, but it must be assumed that she deliberately chose to ignore his obvious faults in favor of the qualities which, to her warped imagination, appeared as virtues. Monzón is adequately delineated as a partner to the intolerant Mercéditas, and is ideally portrayed as the agent of her destruction.

*Le que no perdonó* is one of the most consciously moralistic of Wast's novels. While its theme has a universal application, the choice of background for the story is especially appropriate. The intermingling of types and social classes in a provincial capital and on an *estancia* provide excellent opportunities for contrast and comparison, and if, as usual, the author errs on the side of generosity in his details of local color, the defect may be ignored in favor of the technical skill with which such details are portrayed. If this novel has not been acclaimed as an equal to *Valle Negro* and *Desierto de piedra*, it is perhaps because of its lack of a distinctive element of nationalism in its dominant ideas.

*Fuente sellada* and *Le que no perdonó* are both didactic in nature, and are characterized by intensity of emotion and a violent conflict of passions. The third book with a santafecino setting is a pleasant contrast to the first two. *Pata de Zorra*, which Wast wrote in 1924, is a lively and entertaining farce in which characterization results in caricature, and its sole object is the entertainment of the reader. It is not of
the highest type of comedy, and is definitely "dated" by its dialogue, customs, and descriptions, but at the same time it is a clever and amusing commentary on student and professional life at the provincial university.

The action of the story revolves around the desperate efforts of the hero, Belisario, to secure a passing mark in Roman Law under the tutelage of the eccentric professor, Don Triboniano Barbarossa, in order to escape being disinherited by a wealthy uncle. Don Triboniano in turn is obsessed with two sueños dorados: to be rector of the University, and to find a husband for his romantic sister, who is well past her prime. Having tried valiantly for five years to secure credit for the course in Roman Law without actually attending class, Belisario finally resolves to adopt the only alternative and presents himself as a novio for Maclovia, with the understanding that his sacrifice is to be rewarded by the coveted credit in the law course. The offer is accepted by Don Triboniano, and Belisario begins to visit his highly gratified novia with all the ardor of a client being measured for his own coffin. The professor's beautiful daughter, Beatriz, appears on the scene, with the inevitable result. However, the ambitious Don Triboniano has betrothed her to the aging Senator Balmaceda, whose influence with the Ministry of Public Instruction is to be exerted to secure the position of rector for his future father-in-law. The plot is complicated by a student revolution headed by Belisario and a ridiculous Russian student, Eleazar Kasin, who plots the revolution during the day to abolish exam-
inations and wisely studies half the night for the same exami-
nations in the event his plans miscarry! The revolutionists
establish their regime, elect Don Triboniano rector, award all
marks by popular vote instead of by examination, and are sup-
pressed by the police within three days. Don Triboniano is
retained as rector, however, and Belisario is forced to choose
between rat poison and Maclovia. He chooses the latter, and
keeps the former in mind for future contingencies. It is fi-
nally agreed that there is to be a double wedding for Belisario
and Maclovia, and for Beatriz and Balmaceda. The situation is
saved in good time by an astute charlatan who earns her living
as a fortune teller. This woman, Pata de Zorra, has been
visited in turn by Belisario and Beatriz and has learned of
their difficulties by clever interrogation of the two young
victims of circumstance. Then, on an occasion when all the
principal characters of the story wander into her shop by
chance, she plays upon the credulity of the superstitious Sen-
ator. Pretending to foretell the fate of Beatriz, she says
that the latter will be married twice, and that her first
husband will die after six months of marital bliss. Then her
second husband is to enjoy a long and prolific life of domes-
tic contentment. The gullible Senator wishes to be the second
husband of Beatriz, and Belisario nobly agrees to sacrifice
himself as the first. Maclovia is sacrificed in the interests
of posterity.

The scene then shifts to a time fifteen years later, and
Balmaceda and the still-hopeful Maclovía are shown watching a family group disembark from a street car. The group is composed of Belisario and his still radiant wife, and their brood of ten children. Pata de Zorra appears as a street mendicant, and offers to tell the fortunes of Balmaceda and Maclovía. She has previously confessed that she made a slight mistake in interpreting the lines of Beatriz’s hand, but her explanation did not satisfy the Senator. However, Maclovía succeeds in calming the impetuous Senator, who wishes to punish the oracle when he recognizes her, and they both agree that she has rendered them a service in directing their amorous interest to each other.

This story, which only by violent stretching of an indulgent imagination could be termed a novel, is for the most part written in dialogue form. No single conversational passage will serve adequately to represent the whole spirit of the comedy, but the following extract is as nearly typical as any of the mock-tragic sentiments of some of the characters. Beatriz has just been persuaded by her mother to descend from a wardrobe upon which she had climbed in una crisis nerviosa occasioned by her contemplation of her approaching marriage to Senator Balmaceda.

---¡Gracias a Dios!---dijo Inés.
---Creía que estabas loca. El senador te espera; ha vuelto a venir y se quedará a comer.
La muchacha miró de nuevo el ropero con evidentes intenciones de trepar de otra vez. Su madre le cogió un brazo y le dijo con ternura . . .
---¿No te gusta el senador?
---No, mamá.
---Pero a tu padre le gusta.
---Sí, mamá.
—Y te piensas casar con él?
—Sí, mamá.
—¿Sin amarlo?
—Sí mamá.
—¿Y qué harás una vez casada, si no lo quieres, infeliz?
—Le haré hacer testamento en favor de papá, y esa noche lo degollaré, y me casaré con...
—¡Ave María Purísima! ¡Estás loca! . . . 21

A North American reader may very likely find much of the humor of this story either insipid or puerile. It is never sophisticated, and it often descends to mere burlesque. But there is one passage which will sound familiar to many college students who have survived the horrors, real and imaginary, of a pre-examination "dead week". "Estaba en la época trágica en que los estudiantes viven sobre los libros, debilitados por el insomnio y el estudio, y al borde de la desesperación, y aun al suicidio." 22

Pata de Zorra has nothing in common with Wast's other novels, but it serves as a pleasant relief to some of his more sombre themes and violent incidents. The three novels discussed in this chapter are not generally considered among the best of the author's works, but they provide ample evidence of his skill in depicting local color, of his psychological insight, and of his capacity for levity.

21 Wast, Pata de Zorra, pp. 122-123.
22 Ibid., p. 47.
CHAPTER VI

NOVELS OF BUENOS AIRES

Wast’s novels dealing with various classes of porteño society may be considered in general as complementary to the works in which the rural element prevails. That is, in the novels in which most of the essential action occurs in Buenos Aires, the novelist describes the economic and social forces which result in physical, moral, and spiritual decadence. The theme of the virtues of rural life in the rejuvenation of the types who personify this decadence has already been discussed.

The first of the four novels considered in this chapter owes its classification more to its background than to its characterization, although, for the most part, its principal characters may be considered as typical of their respective classes of urban society. Novia de vacaciones, written in 1907, is one of the novels which Wast produced during his period of literary apprenticeship. While this second novel is evidently the product of stricter literary discipline and shows the beneficial effects of more careful attention to style than does Alegre, the author’s first book, still it has certain defects in common with the latter. The author’s youthful sentimentality is all too apparent, and the characterization often fails to achieve a convincing naturalness.
The story is well worthy of consideration, however, as it introduces significant themes which are to provide the foundation of Wast's later novels of a sociological nature.

The plot is not especially complicated, and has the virtue, absent in many of the author's novels, of employing no more characters than the action requires. It is the universally popular story of a simple and unsophisticated country girl who comes to the city, where her inherently wholesome nature not only enables her to preserve the integrity of her own personality, but also profoundly affects that of her associates. Angelina Smith, the beautiful daughter of a man of British ancestry, has an adolescent and perfectly innocent love affair with Julio Ocampo, whom she meets while he is spending his summer vacation near her home. Julio returns to Buenos Aires after promising never to forget her, but during the next few months Angelina receives only three postal cards from him, and she finally decides that he has forgotten his promises.

Meanwhile, Angelina's father, a widower, has married a sister-in-law of his wealthy employer. The latter is another Englishman, also named John Smith, but the two men are not related. They are designated in the novel as John Smith pobre and John Smith rico. Misia Tere, the wife of John Smith rico, decides that it would be an act of pure altruism and charity on her part to bring Angelina to Buenos Aires and rear her as a companion to Lidia, a daughter of Angelina's age. Misia
Tere is noted for her charitable activities, and is at the same time not averse to having a strong and obedient girl in the house to do much of the work left undone by undependable servants.

When Angelina comes to live in Buenos Aires, it has been three years since Julio left her, but she has not changed in her sentiments toward him. However, she learns immediately that Julio, now an employee of John Smith rice, is the novice of Smith's daughter, Lidia. Julio realizes that he is still in love with Angelina, whom he has attempted to forget because the bankruptcy and death of his father have left him with full responsibility for his family. By the time Angelina arrives in the home of John Smith, Julio's fortunes have improved, but he has drifted into the engagement with Lidia. Angelina refuses to interfere with Lidia's plans, and she discourages Julio's attempts to renew their former relationship. After a few months of her new life, Angelina becomes the object of the affections of Don Victor, a retired army officer and frequent visitor in the home of the Smiths. Misia Tere's sister Javierita has tried unsuccessfully for years to arouse the amorous instincts of Don Victor, but the latter, while he is fond of feminine companionship, has never showed any inclination toward matrimony, and has never encouraged the aging but ardent spinster.

Misia Tere, as president of the "Sociedad de Socorros al Pobre", goes on an errand of mercy to take some cast-off
clothing to one of her poor clients, and Angelina, who accom-
companies her, meets a wounded laborer and his daughter,
Magdalena. Magdalena's father has been wounded while marching
in a labor demonstration, and since he is a buelguista and an
immigrant, Misia Tere refuses to help him. Angelina secures
the help of Don Victor, and the colonel becomes the protector
of the orphaned Magdalena after her father dies. Magdalena
is now a beautiful young woman, and her profound gratitude
toward her guardian soon changes to genuine affection. She
becomes his mistress after receiving his promise of marriage,
but the colonel soon begins to feel that Angelina would make
him a more desirable wife. Angelina, having renounced Julio's
love to avoid complicating the life of her cousin, Lidia, is
now forced by her conceptions of morality to refuse the offer
of the colonel because she knows he has compromised the
trusting Magdalena. She persuades Don Victor to keep his prom-
ise to his ward when she reveals that Magdalena is to bear
him a child, and then resolves to find her own peace and se-
curity in a religious order. She enters the Hermanas de Cari-
dad and goes to Paris to serve her novitiate in a hospital.
She is then sent to Fort Arthur to nurse wounded soldiers of
the Russo-Japanese war. After her heroic rescue of a wounded
Russian soldier, she dies of wounds received in the act, and
thus ends her brief life of sacrifice and self-denial.

Angelina is the typical heroine of an unhappy love story,
but she lacks the vigor and aggressiveness with which Wast
endowed many of his feminine protagonists in later novels.
She is more inclined to gentle resignation to an unhappy destiny, and is portrayed in much the same manner as Evangelina in Fuente sellada. Her bitter realization of Julio's inconstancy marks the beginning of her life of frustration and unattainable dreams; and although she is little more than a child at the time, she begins to perceive her destiny:

Se acordó de la flor, imagen de su vida, y cuando sobre el agua, entre los cristales de la escarcha rota que más abajo se quebraban saltando entre las penas, el último pedacito se perdió de vista, escondió la cara y lloró; lloró como en su vida había llorado . . .

Había arrojado al agua la última de sus ilusiones, y el agua, como a la ramita florida, se la había llevado.1

Three years later, when she again encounters Julio and sees that, despite his engagement to Lidia, he is eager to recall the brief idyll of happiness they had experienced, her sentiments are a mixture of righteous indignation and sadness.

When Julio asks her if she has forgotten all that had occurred between them, she does not even try to put her feelings into words:

No contestó, pero lo miró de frente en los ojos, para que él pudiera leer en los suyos lo que pensaba.

Y fue una sola mirada necesaria para volver las cosas a su punto. Si la hablaba otra vez de aquel pasado muerto y enterrado bajo tres años de indiferencia, le volvería la espalda.

¡Estaba loco, loco! ¿Creía acaso que sus palabras iban a resucitar lo que él mismo había muerto? ¿Creía que ella, la protegida de los Smith, la confidente de Lidia, iba a dejarse festejar por el novio de su amiga, de su prima?2
After suffering from three years of neglect by Julio and being subjected daily to humiliation by the shallow-minded misia Tere and the jealous Javierita, Angelina begins to find peace and solace in the advice of her friend, Don Anselmo, the retired priest who, as a distant relative, lives upon the "charity" of misia Tere. He counsels her to look for happiness within her own spirit, and to ignore the blows of fortune and circumstance in worldly affairs. This is the beginning of her awakening to her real vocation, and her first promise of peace and security:

Angelina escuchaba en silencio, recibía aquellas palabras de vida como la tierra seca recibe el agua del cielo.

Entró en su alma la verdad y trocó su espíritu rebelde a las justicias del mundo, con el espíritu manso que animaba las palabras del anciano, y comenzó a edificar su alegría en sí misma.

Y una profunda paz, la paz de los humildes, llenó su corazón como una ola de verdad y de amor.  

When Angelina is accused of causing the suicide of the profligate Macario Sandes by her rejection of him, she sums up her character adequately when she begs her uncle to defend her: "Yo no soy capaz, usted sabe que yo no soy capaz de hacer a nadie un gran daño." It is this determination never to allow her own interests to interfere with the happiness of others which characterizes Angelina throughout the novel. She begins to see her way more clearly after she renounces the comfort and security offered by Don Victor, because she knows

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 115.} \quad \text{\textsuperscript{4}}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 199.} \]
that he is morally bound to Magdalena. She can now forego such material advantages as marriage with the colonel might offer: "Porque en el fondo de su alma había sentido nacer una ilusión más grande que todos, la ilusión de hacer el bien, de derramar la alegría y la felicidad alrededor de ella."5 And so, sustained and inspired by this resolution to seek spiritual rather than material rewards from life, Angelina took leave of the world: "Abandonaba el mundo con la alegría del pájaro que huye de la jaula..."6

The novel is primarily the story of Angelina, and despite her entirely conventional conception and delineation, she emerges as a rather admirable character. But, as is often the case in Wast's novels, some of the minor characters prove to be the more interesting. Julio is deserving of no more than passing mention. He is merely a respectable young man who plays a necessary role in the plot. His affection for Angelina is undoubtedly genuine, but he lacks the initiative and determination to try to shape the course of events. As a result of his preoccupation with feminine characterizations, Wast often allows the men in his novels, particularly the young men, to appear as little more than types or symbols.

In the delineation of Don Victor, the "viejo verde", the author has endowed him with more color and individuality. The colonel is a hedonist, but not a vicious man, and his

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5Ibid., p. 247.  
6Ibid., p. 279.
constant desire for self-gratification does not prevent him from acting honorably and charitably on certain occasions. He is vain in regard to his personal appearance, and conscientiously does his bit to assist nature in the matter:

Don Victor en su tocador era una dama; tal esmero ponía en higienizarse, en perfumarse, en alisarse aquellos bigotes hípicidas, en sacarse de encima, con algunos floretazos dados en la pared, o algunos ejercicios gimnásticos, la tercera parte de su cuarenta y cinco inviernos.
Pero hacía lo todo con tan buena mano, que nunca advirtió en él un detalle que desdijera de su postura varonil.  

After Angelina convinces Don Victor that he is morally obligated to marry Magdalena, his natural reaction is to think first of himself, once he has agreed to Angelina's request: "Bueno, ya que te ameñas... ¿Crees que la rubia me hará feliz?" Yet for all his vanity and fickleness, the colonel is essentially a kind man, and beneath his veneer of sophistication and egotism there appears a really sensitive and sympathetic nature. Of all the people who know Angelina, only the colonel, Don Anselmo, and the child Maria Esther really appreciate her nobility of spirit. When the news of Angelina's death reaches the Smith family, only Maria Esther expresses her feelings in tears. Don Victor attempts to comfort her, but not to stop her from weeping: "¡Llora, chiquita, llora! --le dijo amargamente. --¡Tú la comprendías!"
Angelina's cousin Lidia is a typical example of a spoiled and wealthy young woman intent only upon her own pleasures. When the suicide of her relative interferes with her plans, Lidia's reaction is consistent with her character; and in presenting her sentiments regarding Mario's death, the author comprehensively describes her vanity and superficiality:

Lidia, en un rinón de la sala, después de llorar un rato por el pobre primo a quien tanto quería y otro rato por el veraneo en Mar de Plata que se les frustraba, consolóse bastante pensando que a su fisonomía de rubia le sentaría admirablemente el luto.\textsuperscript{10}

The daughter, María Esther, Angelina's only true friend in the immediate family, is presented as a lovable child who instinctively recognizes and responds to Angelina's patient and charitable nature. She offers a sharp contrast to the spiteful and jealous Javierita, who senses her own pettiness when confronted with Angelina's nobility, and to misia Tere, who is deceived by her own hypocrisy. In describing the wife of John Smith rico the author says:

Era la gran señora, presidenta de la "Sociedad de Socorros al Pobre", y en ese carácter, desviviase por conocer las miserias humanas, para aliviárlas, lo que hacía con tanto gusto, que en el tristísimo pero felizmente improbable caso de no haberlas habido, las habría inventado. Porque así era de noble aquel gran corazón que Dios le había dado. En él había encontrado la bondadosa dama un famoso argumento en pro de la desigualdad de las clases. --¿Qué haría yo--solía decir en sus arranques apes-tólicos--si todos fuéramos ricos y felices, y no hubiera desgraciados a quienes socorrer?\textsuperscript{11}

The remaining characters of the novel are drawn with care;

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 194. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 65.
in fact, some of them have received more detailed attention than their importance justifies. Mario Sandes, the irresponsible protégé of misia Tere, appears as an excellent example of an inherently good but weak-willed young man who succumbs to the temptations of the city. Magdalena and her father represent the better class of immigrant workers in Argentina, and their story provides some evidence of the prejudice of the criollos toward gallegos and gringos. John Smith rico and John Smith pobre personify the popular conception of the materialism and reticence of the British, and at the same time show how the latter have become a part of Argentine social and economic life.

_Novia de vacaciones_ is primarily escape fiction, but there are pronounced elements in it of the conflicting ideals of rural and urban society, and a direct attack on the selfishness, frivolity, and materialism of porteño life. It is upon this theme that Wast bases his next novel about Buenos Aires, a work in which the moralizing and didactic element predominates over all other aspects of the story.

_Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre_ (1919) is a sermon in the form of a novel, and the text is the second verse of the twenty-second chapter of Isaiah: "Tú, llena de alborotos, ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre; tus muertos no son muertos a cuchillo, ni muertos en guerra." Wast sets out to prove that the city of Buenos Aires is indeed spiritually dead or dying, and that the wealthy aristocracy is not only a victim
of this decay, but also is the agent of the destruction of the lower classes. It is a long novel in comparison with most of the author's works, and contains so many characters that only the novelist's consummate skill in conceiving interdependent incidents prevents the involved plot from becoming hopelessly confusing. This very element of interdependence precludes the presentation of a plot outline in strict chronological sequence. The fact that the city of Buenos Aires rather than any individual character is the real protagonist of the novel adds to the difficulty of summarizing the story comprehensively.

"Doctor" Jairo, a provincial politician, moves to Buenos Aires as a diputado from Santa Fé. His wife and daughters expect at first to establish themselves among the aristocracy of porteño society, but soon realize the futility of their pretensions. The two older girls begin to devote themselves to the fruitless pursuit of security as represented by wealthy or socially-prominent husbands, while Salomé, the youngest, is torn between the temptations of the city and the restraining influence of her inherently virtuous nature. She falls in love with an eccentric young man, Jorge Paz Morera, who is a peculiar combination of aesthete and Don Juan, and after many temporary reverses, finally inspires his better nature to conquer his baser instincts and inclinations. Salomé's father supplements his legislator's salary by publishing El Porvenir, a newspaper which supports aspiring politicians and
current government officials in accord with the principles of expediency rather than of integrity. Jairo goes bankrupt, and the paper falls into the hands of "Doctor" Viyetes, a very wealthy man who fancies himself as a Heaven-sent gift to his country. He is always ready to sacrifice his personal comfort in the interests of the state, even to the point of accepting the presidency, were it offered to him. His faith in his divine mission is constantly strengthened by a group of sycophantic would-be statesmen who worship at their god's clay feet and from his profound silences and portentous phrases infer ideas which would shake the foundations of the government if they were put into effect. Cristina, the wife of Viyetes, has no illusions concerning her husband's stupidity, and, in a spirit of ridicule, announces to one of his friends that her husband is to be named a minister in the cabinet of the recently-elected president of the republic. The jest is taken as truth, and is the inspiration for a series of plans and political campaigns, all of which come to grief.

Cristina's mother, the immensely wealthy Doña Remedios, begins to come under the influence of the militant evangelist, Padre Dimas Carrizo. This priest, who more closely resembles an Old Testament prophet than a twentieth-century cleric, prophesies the destruction, figuratively speaking, of Buenos Aires because of the vice and frivolity of its wealthy class. He attempts to humble his aristocratic and snobbish parishioners by bringing a group of filthy and uncouth rag pickers
to receive their first communion in the church built by the wealthy communicants.

Maria Helena, the irresponsible daughter of Veytes, is betrothed to a serious young physician, Guillerme Sánchez, and her mother is also in love with him. Cristina, in order to escape from the shame she feels at seeing her daughter marry the man whom she desires for herself, asks her friend and admirer, the unprincipled Colonel Rodríguez, for assistance. Rodríguez deliberately provokes Sánchez to insult him, and kills him in a duel. Don Dimas then accuses Maria Helena of the moral guilt of the murder of her novio, and the impressionable girl falls mortally ill from shame and remorse. Meanwhile, fearing that the doctrines of the evangelist may result in his mother-in-law's turning her huge fortune over to the poor, Veytes has the priest beaten almost fatally and forces him to leave the city.

Maria Helena's brother Jaime is in love with Valentina Ocampo, but their love is thwarted by the history of a tragedy in the Ocampo family. Years earlier, Veytes has made amorous advances to Valentina's mother, whose husband forced her to take her own life when he learned of the affair from an unsigned letter written by Cristina. Valentina's father, now insane, is still a burden upon her and her grandmother.

Jaime, as the heir of the wealthy Veytes, is the object of the designs of Indiana, the foster daughter of another wealthy old woman, Doña Belén. The plot is further complicated
by the affection of Julieta Noel, an independently wealthy young woman, for Jorge Paz Morera; after she loses him to Salomé, she elopes with her chauffeur.

An immigrant Spanish journalist, Blas Gatin, recently arrived with his attractive wife Lola and his orphaned brother and sister, begins to work for Jairo as an editor and hack writer. "Doctor" Vieytes attempts to obtain the favors of Lola Gatin, and Blas becomes a helpless victim of poverty and insecurity.

Finally, all the grandiose political plans of Vieytes result in complete failure, with the attendant ruin of Jairo's career and the partial disillusionment of Vieytes himself. It becomes apparent that Maria Helena is dying, and Cristina realizes that she must bear the real blame for her daughter's death. She sends for the ostracized Dimas Carrizo to comfort her daughter's last moments, and the story concludes on a note of humility and charity in the Vieytes family. But the general impression of futility and emptiness remains.

The real essence of this novel cannot be presented in a summary. Its unwieldy plot is permeated throughout with the author's indignation at the social conditions he describes, and the unhappy history of most of the characters serves as convincing evidence of the necessity for spiritual regeneration and enlightened social consciousness.

The characters appear more as symbols than as individuals. The story does not depend upon any central figure, but the
various types lend their distinctive coloring, usually sordid, to the composite effect. The novel results not so much in a single picture of porteño society as in a montage composed of many sketches. The author employs bitter irony, satire, humor, pathos, and vehement denunciation to convey his moral precepts.

Salomé is the only character in the novel whose story ends happily. She symbolizes simple virtues which succeed in resisting the appeal of the false values offered in urban society, and the contrast between her and the other feminine characters is sharp and significant. At first she is undecided whether to resign herself to the drudgery of clerical work or to capitalize on her beauty at the expense of her moral scruples:

Tenía diez y ocho años, y la vida por delante. ¿Para qué franquear los umbrales de aquella sombría casa de estudios [stenographic school], que no le enseñaría a vivir más de lo que le enseñaba su instinto? Con que renunciara a tiempo a ciertos prejuicios, quedaría admirablemente armada para la lucha.12

Having won this first victory in her struggle with the corrupting influences of the city, she is able to take a more objective view of life, and to begin aiming at a definite goal. As the author says of her: "Todo Buenos Aires parecía una pista inmensa, en que jóvenes y viejos, ricos y pobres, corrían detrás de la misma vanidad, confesada u oculta, que no había de saciarlos."13 Even with her firm resolution not to yield

12Wast, Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre, p. 32.
13Ibid., p. 95.
to the constant temptations that beset her, Salomé does not find life very pleasant. The pressure of economic necessity, her desire for a share of the comforts of life, and above all the apparent inconstancy of Jorge Paz Morera, all impel her toward a compromise with her conscience, but she does not surrender. Her rectitude is rewarded in the end when her fickle lover renounces the fortune of Julia Noel and chooses instead the intangible but infinitely more valuable qualities that Salomé offers him. The sentiment that she inspires in this young man, convinced at last of his folly in neglecting her, aptly describes the character of Salomé. When she seems to be still doubtful of his reform, he tells her: "—Por más que usted no me crea, si yo en mi vida no hubiera dicho más que una sola verdad, ésa sería la que le dije esta noche."14

By contrast with Salomé, her mother and her two sisters appear in a sorry light. Their desperate struggle to establish themselves in Buenos Aires high society would be ridiculous if it were not pathetic. They refuse to accept the fact of Jairo's financial failure, and stubbornly ignore the implications of his political reverses. After being reduced to pawning their few jewels and other items of value in order to keep up appearances, misia Palmera decides to stake everything on what she terms a tour de force, and the family sets out for a vacation at an exclusive summer resort. There they

14 Ibid., p. 251.
secure accommodations in a second-rate hotel because, as Palmerita says: "—Pagamos lo mismo que en el Bristol . . . pero mamá sufre de los nervios y no puede soportar el bullicio." This attitude of snobbery results from the self-deception of a respectable provincial family which finds itself out of its element. The author accentuates the evil of the superficial aspects of city life by the fact that these good women experience moral decay because of their efforts to attain something of no real value. Misia Palmera and her two oldest daughters are not pleasant people, but they give the impression that their disagreeable qualities result not so much from innate weakness of character as from their delusions concerning the false values they are seeking.

"Doctor" Jairo is a typical example of a man who overestimates his abilities. He somehow confuses his own ambitions with the task of reforming society. He is, in the final analysis, little more than a charlatan deceived by his own eloquence. At first his motives are undoubtedly sincere, and he feels that his real vocation is that of teaching. The author says of Jairo at this stage:

Decía de sí mismo que tenía temperamento de maestro, y que nada había más eminentce para un hombre de corazón que el ejercicio de ese sublime apostolado. Cuando hablaba del Niño—el Niño en singular se les llenaban de lágrimas los ojos, y citaba a Pestalozzi y a Victor Hugo. However, he finds that politics offers a more fertile field

\[15\text{ibid.}, \text{p. 241.}\] \[16\text{ibid.}, \text{p. 21.}\]
in which to sow his eloquent platitudes, and he eventually comes to Buenos Aires where his self-appointed role as arbiter of the morals of government officials is not always consistent with his personal behavior. At a time when he is hopelessly behind in the payment of salary to his employees, he launches an editorial attack against the ministro de hacienda:

Es intolerable lo que ocurre en su departamento. El pago de la administración está atrasado quince días... La primera virtud de un ministro de esa cartera es la puntualidad en los pagos, aunque cuando haya que ahorrar sobre el hambre y la sed...17

Then the guardian of public finances proceeds to walk out of his office with the lion's share of the cash on hand, leaving his employees with their ears ringing with noble sentiments and their pockets empty as before. After Jairo has affiliated himself with the equidistant party of Vieytes, he finds ample opportunity to display his remarkable talents for saying nothing at great length. In order to calm the passions of his colleagues in a legislative discussion of a controversial political issue, he rises to sublime heights of eloquence:

Pongamos, honorables colegas... un freno a nuestra inercia. ¡Nada de política! En esta materia es urgente aguardar los acontecimientos. Enderecémos nuestra desorientación hacia la legislación social, en la que reina un vacío cuyas lagunas debemos colmar. Desgraciadamente nuestra sociología es una selva virgen, en la cual la mano del hombre todavía no ha puesto el pie...18

Jairo's original integrity and nobility of sentiment are

17Ibid., pp. 90-91.  
18Ibid., p. 305.
gradually forgotten in his unequal struggle with the realities of politics in Buenos Aires. He is not essentially a corrupt individual, but the confusion of his times, the instability of his character, and the demands of his wife and daughters all contribute to his final reduction to the state of an errand boy for more astute politicians.

The provincial diputado Piña supplies the only element of humor to the novel which does not have overtones of a sombre nature. In his single-minded obsession with a dead political issue and his interest in an agricultural reform of no political significance, he is representative of unsophisticated legislators who are so inflated with a sense of their own importance that they fail to recognize their impotence. Piña contributes little to the theme of the novel except to prove that an august legislative assembly, theoretically composed of high-minded public servants, is often graced with the presence of some members whose conception of government fails somewhat short of the ideal.

The figure of Blas Gutiérrez supplies interesting high lights to the novel, but his principal significance lies in the emphasis his story throws on the corrupt state of journalism, and above all, on the miserable living conditions of the "white collar" class of the era with which the novel deals. His wife, Lola, personifies the universal idea of feminine beauty at the mercy of corrupt wealth, but she appears more as an incidental victim of the ambitious Vieytes than as an inde-
pendent character.

Julia Noel is Wast's conception of the "emancipated woman" of the twentieth century, and his delineation of her is an undisguised attack on the tendency to concentrate on material values at the expense of spiritual strength and moral principles. Julia has only one guiding principle in her life, and that is the pursuit of pleasure. She is not a dissolute woman; she simply lacks a definite conception of worth-while objectives. When she is thwarted in her plans to marry the attractive Paz Morera, her reaction is typical of her impetuous and thoughtless nature. She elopes with her chauffeur, who has nothing to interest her but a kind of animal magnetism to which her loneliness and wounded dignity respond for lack of a more desirable source of comfort.

Jorge Paz Morera barely emerges in the novel as an individual. He is little more than an abstraction of the author's, presented to show one small but important aspect of Buenos Aires society. He represents the type of mysteriously attractive young man, half poet, half rake, and complete egotist, who appeals to the romantic nature of unsuspecting young women. Wast says of him:

Era Jorge Paz Morera, silueta habitual en Florida, donde conocía a todo el mundo y saludaba a las niñas con desgano, pero con superior elegancia. Tenía fama de poseur, y pocos adivinaban que detrás de sus actitudes escondíase una timidez de misántropo, dolorosa o agresiva, según los días, y de la que jamás se curó. Escribía en los diarios, con estilo rebosado y sobre asuntos transcendentales; y hablaba poco de lo demás y bastante de sí,
entornando los hermosos ojos pardos, llenos de lejanos ensueños. 19

Jorge is at first a rather unwholesome character whose custom it is to station himself near pawn shops waiting to exert his charms on attractive customers who, because of their apuros, are more likely victims. He remains a rather vague figure throughout the novel, but his character is presented in a more favorable light when he finally professes his love for Salomé.

In the character of Doña Remedios, the author has epitomized the hypocrisy, vanity, and vacillation of the porteño aristocrat. She is a very wealthy woman, proud of her exalted social position, and, at first, complacent in her carefully selected charitable activities. She proves that the decadent aristocracy of the city is not completely forgetful of the principles of the religion which it nominally practices. The primitive Christian ethics of Don Dimas slowly but surely begin to bring her to a desire for reform in her own spirit, but she lacks the moral courage to obey his counsels, until the tragedy of her granddaughter proves to her the ultimate vanity of wealth. She at one time decides to sell her goods and distribute them among the poor, but her family intervenes in time to save her from this crime against their code of behavior. She is symbolic of society's preoccupation with the outward forms of Christianity while it is

19 Ibid., p. 25.
at the same time lacking in the true humility necessary to profit by the spiritual significance of its religion.

The militant priest on the other hand is the embodiment of an idea. He is a prophet without honor in his own country because of his unpleasant habit of telling the unvarnished truth to his parishioners. His interpretation of the faith he preaches is meat too strong for the spiritual digestion of his listeners. Like an incarnate spirit of prophecy, he strides through the story setting an example by his own austerity for the practices he advocates, and finally suffers the martyrdom which society usually metes out to such men. There is something strange and more than a little disturbing about this modern reincarnation of an Old Testament prophet. His denunciations are directed primarily at the spiritual decay of Buenos Aires, but are of such a nature as to include by implication all the faults and vices of social and economic relations.

The family of the pseudo-statesman Viytes provides the nearest approach to a center of interest in the novel. Viytes is a man who, without apparently being aware of it, exemplifies the role of the owl in fables. Merely by keeping his mouth shut at the right time, he gains a reputation for profound wisdom, when, as a matter of fact, his silence is the product of a mental vacuum rather than a mask for sublime sentiments. He typifies the modern worship of wealth and ostentation. His profession of the equidistant craed in
politics is nothing but an unadmitted proof of his total lack of political convictions and an excellent device by which he can steer his course to take advantage of the prevailing winds of political thought. In describing the Jovian appearance of Vieytes, Wast employs a clever bit of irony when he speaks of "... su frente amplia y noble, y tersa, tan tersa que uno podía caminar un año entero por encima de ella sin tropezar con la arruga de un solo pensamiento." On the same page he remarks:

El doctor Vieytes no gustaba ni de las preguntas ni de las respuestas concretas. Adoraba las expresiones difusas y gelatinosas, en que caben sin esfuerzo todas las ideas, y su espíritu generalizador y abstracto se horrorizaba ante la cruda luz de ciertas explicaciones.

Vieytes is never forced to conceive any ideas himself. He merely assumes a thoughtful look and waits for one of his toadies to venture an opinion on the eventual product of his feigned cerebrations. If the observer's guess is appropriate, then "Doctor" Vieytes has no trouble in accepting the idea that he has really thought of it himself. Thus, when it becomes apparent that he is not to receive the ministry he expected, Vieytes immediately approves the assumption that he has refused it in order to avoid creating a delicate situation in the affairs of state. His comments never get beyond si yo fuera, followed by the words ministro, presidente, kaiser, médico, etc., and his loyal disciples immediately assume that

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20 Ibid., p. 129.
21 Ibid.
earth-shaking events are contingent upon that si fuera.

"Doctor" Veytes would be nothing more in the novel than a pompous ass, despised by his wife and deceived by his own stupidity, were it not for his influence on other characters. His wife's moral defection is due partly to her contempt for her husband, and the failure of María Helena's life is largely the fault of her unobservant father. Even the events of his past rise as a barrier to the happiness of his son Jaime in the matter of the Ocampo disgrace. He is a unique character among the many wast has created, and is one of the most interesting of this or any other of the author’s works.

Cristina Veytes is admirably conceived as the wife of such a man. Far more intelligent and equally unscrupulous, her life is governed by the desire for gratification of personal pleasures and sensual instincts, and not even her daughter's happiness can influence her to decent behavior. Her desire to rob María Helena of her novio is based partly on her natural reaction to the desirable qualities of Guillermo Sánchez, and partly on her own vanity. Even her certain knowledge of the immorality of her conduct does not deter her.

Sintióse clara y definitivamente en contra de su hi-
ja, por quien aquel hombre entraba en su casa.
Llamaba en ella la soberbia de rivalizar aún con la virginal hermosura de María Helena. Había puesto el pie en esa cuesta peligrosa, y el abismo la atrajo, aunque debiera hollar sus indestructibles convicciones.22

22Ibid., p. 142.
This unwholesome passion finally leads her to suggest to her faithful suitor, Colonel Rodríguez, that he spare her the shame of knowing she has lost the contest to her daughter. The resulting duel, which is nothing more than coolly-planned murder, leaves her unmoved. It is only when her daughter receives the punishment for the mother's duplicity that Cristina begins to realize the enormity of her crime.

María Helena is representative of the innocent victim of the failure of others. She is giddy and pleasure-loving, but not essentially bad, and lacks the selfishness which characterizes most of the other feminine characters. Her gratification at hearing the rather gross compliments of Colonel Rodríguez arises from youthful vanity and coquetry, but she has no idea of his serious purpose. When Don Dimas denounces her as the murderer of her novio, her whole giddy world tumbles about her, and just before her death she realizes the full implications of her wasted and frivolous life. Her empty hands, at the moment when death is imminent, are symbolic of a life in which she has accomplished nothing, and for which she can expect no reward. Her final words are: "¡Mira mis manos! ¡Están vacías! me voy del mundo con las manos vacías . . ." 23

The characters of Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre are too numerous for individual discussion. The ones mentioned

23Ibid., p. 346.
above are chosen because their histories present the most pronounced examples of the evils which Wast, through his spokesman, Don Dimas, is denouncing in this work. The minor characters are not without interest, but they serve only to emphasize rather than to modify the course of events already discussed. The author is thorough in his work. He not only points out the faults of his characters; he supports his case with ample evidence, and at the same time suggests the remedy.

The next two books by Wast whose setting is for the most part in Buenos Aires are Los ojos vendados (1921) and El vengador (1922). The second work is not a separate novel, but is a continuation of the first, with a change of theme. The same characters appear in both books, and the events occur in logical sequence.

Los ojos vendados is the story of a young woman who has secured a diploma authorizing her to teach, only to find that there are no positions available. Her training in the normal school arouses her desire to enjoy some of the advantages which her incompetent father cannot give her, and which she cannot expect to find in marriage to a man of her own social and economic class. The basic argument of the novel is an attack on the system which encourages girls to prepare for teaching and stimulates their interest in self-improvement and material advancement, and then fails to provide them with an opportunity to exercise their talents. The result is all too often not only disappointment and loss of illusions, but also
the ultimate moral degradation of these victims of dissatisfaction. The unfortunate girls, having spent years in preparation for their vocation, find themselves a drug on the market, and rather than forego the material advantages of which they have dreamed, accept the offers of men whose interest in them has nothing to do with pedagogy.

In El vengador, the second of these two volumes, the same set of characters is employed to develop a new theme: the triumph of maternal love over all other passions, and the vengeance visited upon a father who abandons his unborn child. The child himself becomes the vengador in the respect that the father, having tired of a fruitless life of sensual indulgence, wishes finally to enjoy the experiences and emotions of fatherhood. His bitter realization that he has forfeited his normal rights is the revenge he must suffer along with the actual longing to share in his son's life.

Little is needed to amplify the plot that has been suggested by the above themes. In Los ojos vendados, the story begins with an account of Don Pedro Garay, a retired provincial civil servant who moves to Buenos Aires in search of a position in the national government. The position never materializes, and the uncertain pension of Don Pedro is insufficient for his family's needs. The son, Pulgarcito, soon adapts himself to porteño ways of life and is shrewd and unscrupulous enough to make his own way. The older daughter, Laura, becomes a model of industry about the house, and Matilde, the younger, enrolls
in the Escuela Normal. She secures her diploma and sets out to find a teaching position, only to realize soon that there are none to be had. In desperation, she surrenders to the temptations of the unprincipled Mario Burgueño, a very wealthy young man who seduces her with a promise of marriage. Mario deceives the simple and unsuspecting Don Pedro with a position as inspector of cinemas, a position which actually does not exist and for which Mario bears the expense. Matilde tells her parents she is sailing for Brazil as traveling companion to an elderly lady, but goes instead to live with Mario after a short voyage. She has previously been engaged to a serious young medical student, Carlos Link, who rents a room in the Garay home.

Mario's tutor and friend, Roberto Fraser, is a brilliant but unsuccessful physician who, having lost his practice, is reduced to teaching chemistry in the normal school. He has a daughter, Ana Lía, or, as she is known, Liana, who is about the same age as Matilde. The story of Liana's mother is at first shrouded in mystery, but it develops that she had left Fraser after he killed her lover. The stories of Fraser and Liana run parallel to those of Matilde and Mario throughout both volumes. Fraser, who poses as a cynic and is at heart a wounded sentimentalist, tries to prevent Mario's seduction of the innocent Matilde, but is unsuccessful. Liana vainly seeks employment to supplement the income of her father, who often drinks and gambles away his small salary. She encounters the
same situation that Matilde does, but she does not abandon hope of an honorable solution to her problem. **Los ojos vendados** ends as Matilde, fully aware at last that Mario does not intend to marry her, feels that she dares not return to her parents, and that, even if she did, her love for the faithless Mario still renders her helpless.

**El Vengador** merely continues the story. Liana pursues her fruitless search for employment, and, while doing so, begins to hear hints that her mother has returned to Buenos Aires as the wife of a fabulously wealthy French nobleman. A year passes, and Matilde, who is still living with Mario, vainly hoping he will decide to marry her, reveals that she is to have a child. Mario finds the idea of an illegitimate child personally repugnant, as well as detrimental to his social standing; and he promises to marry Matilde if she will agree to an abortion. He consults Fraser in the matter, who lectures him on his moral obligations instead of agreeing to an unethical medical practice, and Mario, now bored with Matilde, tries to betray her into the hands of one of his parasitic friends. Matilde, who has to choose between her passion for the unworthy Mario and her normal maternal instincts, is advised by her sister Laura and by her confessor to return to Carlos Link and begin an honorable life. Link is fully aware of her moral deflection, but his love for her is so great that he accepts her and agrees to rear the child as his own. After Matilde's desertion of him, Link has become the **novio** of Laura,
but she knows that he can never forget Matilde, and she realizes that she can expect no real happiness with him.

Meanwhile, the sordid story of Fraser and his unfaithful wife is revealed, and the wife, Beatriz, returns in an attempt to see Liana. At first the vindictive Fraser denies her pleading, but finally, when Liana herself intercedes for her mother, the three of them are happily reunited.

Matilde moves to the province of Helvecia, where Carlos practices medicine, and adjusts herself to a quiet and happy life. Mario comes to the province and schemes with a corrupt local official to force Matilde and her son to return to him, but his plans are thwarted as he realizes that Matilde has outgrown her infatuation.

Fraser abandons his dissolute habits and begins to practice medicine again, and Liana is happily married to a young labor leader who has been instrumental in returning her mother to her.

In these two books, Wast has, in effect, written two novels simultaneously in the stories of Matilde and Mario on the one hand, and Fraser and his daughter on the other. However, he manages to link the two together, rather loosely at times, but the result is not without definite coherence. The central figure remains that of Matilde, who is a good example of the type who is more to be pitied than censured. Her disillusionment begins when she realizes that the diploma for which she has worked is more of a liability than an asset.
Matilde comprendió que el diploma colocaba a sus dueños en una condición híbrida. La instrucción, perfeccionando el individuo, desarrollaba en él necesidades espirituales más fuertes que las fisiológicas, necesidades de higiene y de elegancia, que eran noble afán de cultura. Pero no les daba cómo satisfacerlas.  

Even the desire for these necesidades espirituales might not have been enough to cause Matilde to stray from the path of virtue if her novio had not been called away at the time when she most needed his support and the security of his affection. She does not love Carlos, but she recognizes his sterling qualities and finds him a dependable refuge. Just before he is called to attend his stricken father, the following passage reveals the sentiments of both Carlos and Matilde:

"¿Quieres que le confíe mi secreto, Matilde?"
"Sí..."
"He tenido miedo de perderla..."
"¿Por qué?"
"Para qué decirle más. Debe bastarle saber que nunca la he sentido más mía que hoy."

Lo dijo con ingenua pasión y le tendió los brazos, y Matilde espontáneamente acudió a refugiarse en ellos como una paloma que se salva en su nido.

But with Carlos gone, she is unable to withstand the blandishments of Mario, and the result is inevitable. When Fraser visits her in a final effort to dissuade her from her proposed course of action, he arrives too late. Matilde admits her sin, but refuses to accept all the guilt. Her eloquent defense to Fraser is really the keynote to the theme of the novel. Fraser asks why she had not called him in time to help her,

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24 Wast, Los ojos vendados, p.23.  25 Ibid., p. 211.
and she replies:

—¿Qué sabe una mujer como yo cuándo es tiempo y cuándo deja de ser? En estos caminos se va con los ojos vendados. Si yo fuese una obrera de gustos simples, no habría caído. Pero me han educado; me han infundido ambiciones; me han hecho concebir esperanzas; me han quitado todas las fuerzas. ... ¿Qué culpa tengo yo, si todo lo que he aprendido no me sirve para ganarme honradamente la vida?  

Months later, when Matilde is now even more hopelessly involved in her wretched situation, she seeks the solace of the Church. Naturally her confessor refuses to absolve her unless she quits Mario’s house, and Matilde, not knowing where to go except back to Mario, leaves with her burden of grief even heavier. She feels that now she is lost "... para el mundo y para Dios."  

But Laura persuades her to return to Carlos, and from then on her story is anti-climactic. Her peace and security in Helvecia, her love for the child Carlitos, and her ever-increasing respect for the virtues of Carlos, all combine to blot out her unhappy past. When Mario tempts her again, and failing in that, resorts to threats of violence, she merely scorches him with quiet courage and returns to her husband.

Matilde excites the reader’s sympathy, but it is at times apt to be a sympathy mixed with exasperation. It is true that she is caught in the grip of forces more powerful than she is, but the question often arises whether she might not have been less yielding to the blows of fate. In the case of Fraser,

26Ibid., p. 269.  
27Wast, El vengador, p. 172.
the element of sympathy is not so important, as he is a more rational creature than the heroine of the story, and follows his downward course of his own volition, with full knowledge of the inevitable consequences. But he is by far the most interesting character in the story, and often serves as the author’s spokesman in condemning the forces of injustice.

Fraser sums up his unhappy life succinctly:

—Yo era "un señor correcto"—decía, recordando esa época;—enseñaba química en la facultad de Medicina; aprendía tonterías en la de Filosofía y Letras, y mi mujer me engañaba. Cuando me planté, cerré los libros; ya sabía demasiado; y dejé de ser un señor correcto. 28

Fraser is a bitter critic of the situation confronting teachers, as evidenced by his remarks to Matilde on the subject:

—En otros siglos . . . los hombres vendían el alma al diablo. Ahora se hace un tráfico parecido; una maestra es una niña que vende su alma al Estado, y de todos los modos de ganarse la vida que han dejado los hombres para el uso de las mujeres, ése es el más mesquino y el más fatigoso. 29

Further on in the novel he remarks:

—¡Yo no creo en los pedagogos! . . . Saben cuántos decímetros cúbicos de aire puro necesitan los pulmones de un niño en cada aula, pero no saben lo que necesita el alma de ese niño. Los pedagogos han muerto la alegría, porque la alegría es hija de la humildad, y el pedagogo es fatuo. 30

Fraser is a professed cynic who is blind to his own failings, but who shows a keen insight into the underlying causes of the

28Wast, Los ojos vendados, pp. 73-74. 29Ibid., p. 82.
30Ibid., p. 132.
faults of others. When Carlos Link says that Mario deserves to be killed for his deception of Matilde, Fraser defends his former ward. He knows that the fault is not all Mario's, but must be shared by the many people, some innocently ignorant and others merely irresponsible, who have thrown them together. He tells Link:

"Había que hacer una carnicería. Primero tendríamos que matar a esa tilinga de misia Presentación, y a ese pescucho de don Pedro Garay, a al cachafaz de su hijo, y luego al papanatas de Bistolfi, y a la bribona de su mujer. Todos son más culpables que Mario."

The cynical humor of Fraser provides some of the most enjoyable reading of the novel. When Bistolfi, husband of the fickle Mariana, tells him that his wife has promised him a tricornio napoleónico for a costume ball, Fraser makes a play on the word tricornio and assures Bistolfi that he will have his horns: "¡Ah, no le quepa duda, mi querido conde! Lo rara es que no se lo haya hecho ya."

In his final words in the first volume of the story, he utters the theme of the second. Attempting to comfort the desolate Carlos, he tells him: "Su amor pasará como todos los sueños. Sólo dura el amor a los muertos y el amor a los hijos."

When his pressing need for money drives him to borrow from Matilde's brother, Pulgarito, Fraser soon learns that the

31 Ibid., p. 259.
32 Ibid., p. 273.
33 Ibid., p. 285.
money really comes from Mario. He then feels that in taking Mario's money he loses any right to censure his conduct with Matilde, and feels that he is morally an accomplice to her mistreatment. But he does not return the money. However, Fraser is often honest with himself, and admits that he does not always practice the moral precepts which he preaches to others. When Mario seeks his advice about escaping the responsibility and disgrace of becoming the father of an illegitimate child, he replies not as a physician but as a philosopher: "... tu situación no se resuelve cobardemente, con una receta que te han de preparar en la botica, sino con una verdad que va a brotar de tu corazón."34

The complex character of this enigmatic man appears in many different shades. He professes to have lost his faith in humanity, and to believe that the only verity in life is the maternal instinct; yet in Matilde's darkest moment he advises her to seek the consolation of the Church: "Hay un lugar donde se toman fuerzas, como se bebe el agua en una fuente..."35

At last, when Beatriz returns and begs him to take her back so she can be with her daughter, Fraser's desire for revenge on his unfaithful wife seems to fade before Liana's request that he pardon her mother. But the real key to his previous behavior is found in his half-muffled exclamation as he

34Wast, El vengador, p. 141.  35Ibid., p. 162.
embraces Beatriz: "¡Pobre de mí que no dejé de quererte nunca!"

The other characters of the two books require little detailed discussion. Carlos Link is a very worthy young man, but passive and colorless. Fraser's daughter, Liana, experiences many of the difficulties that beset Matilde, but she emerges unharmed from her conflict with fate and circumstances. As for Mario Burgueño, he is quite typical of the conventional character he represents: not wholly bad, but certainly so blinded by his selfishness and egotism as to be incapable of honorable conduct. Laura is the familiar older sister who sacrifices her own chances for happiness to insure that of the favored member of the family. As is often the case with such characters, she deserves more than she gets as a reward for her self-denial.

Wast's novels about life in Buenos Aires are so consciously didactic that they lack the entertainment value of most of his other works. The artistry of the writer sometimes suffers as a result of his tendency to moralize and instruct, but there can be no question of his detailed observation of society or of the sincerity of his attacks on the flaws he finds. If the novels of porteño life lack the freshness and excitement of those dealing with rural scenes and events, it is perhaps because the average reader is more sympathetic toward

36 Ibid., p. 239.
descriptions of rural life. Regardless of their merit as sociological works, the novels discussed above can at least lay claim to presenting a detailed picture of the many-sided life of the city of Buenos Aires.
CHAPTER VII

RELIGIOUS NOVELS

The remaining two novels of Wast's which are to be discussed in this study have nothing in common except the strong religious element which appears in both of them. The two works, Don Bosco y su tiempo (1932), and El Kahal-Oro (1935-6), do not readily lend themselves even to the highly arbitrary classification which has been observed in the preceding chapters. Don Bosco y su tiempo is, in fact, more nearly a romanticized biography than a work of fiction, and while it is undoubtedly of a historical nature, it is not concerned with the history of Argentina. As for El Kahal-Oro, its treatment of religious and economic themes is so different from that of Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre and other novels about Buenos Aires, that it does not properly fit into that group. The two novels, so dissimilar in plot, setting, and characterization, are discussed in a single chapter because they, more than any of Wast's other work, reflect his profound interest in religious matters, and because each in its own fashion conforms to the author's conception of the philosophy which should permeate the works of un autor católico.

Don Bosco y su tiempo is the story of the life of Giovanni Melchior Bosco, the founder of a religious order known as the Salesian Society. The Society derives its name from
its patron saint, San Francisco de Sales. The story begins in 1815, when Juan Bosco is only a few months old. His parents are peasants in the hamlet of Becchi, near Castelnuovo in the Piedmont section of Italy. His father dies soon after Juan's birth, leaving "Mama" Margarita to rear Juan and his two older brothers, and Juan spends most of his early life herding the family's few cows and performing the usual chores of peasant life. At a very early age he displays evidence of a keen wit and an unusually retentive memory, and his desire to study amounts almost to an obsession. The parish priest gives him a fair elementary education, and in 1835, by dint of extreme sacrifice and constant work, he manages to enter the seminary at Chieri. Since childhood, Juan has known that his vocation is the priesthood, and it has been announced to him in a dream that his life's work is to be the education and protection of young boys. He proves to be an unusually apt pupil in the seminary, and becomes the leader of his classmates in games as well as in academic work. While still a child, Juan had taught himself tricks of juggling and sleight of hand, which he often uses to advantage to attract a crowd, and then forces the curious spectators to recite a few prayers or listen to a brief sermon in return for the entertainment he provides them. In 1841 he is ordained a priest and leaves the seminary to go to Turin. His duties there bring him in contact with many youthful prisoners whose crimes are usually the result of unemployment and a lack of guidance,
and he resolves to devote his life to helping these unfor-
tunates. In 1842 he collects a group of homeless boys, *los
biricchini* as they are called in the novel, and organizes a
religious club which forms the basis for his famous *Oratorio*.
This name is chosen because of the fact that prayer forms a
prominent feature of the organization's activities. The plan
suggests itself to Don Bosco as a result of his study of the
life of St. Philip Neri, who had engaged in earlier works of
the same nature. Don Bosco takes his *biricchini* on holidays
in the country, and encourages them to engage in wholesome
sports, and at the same time devotes himself to instructing
them in both religious and secular subjects. His attempts
to find dormitories for the boys who wish to stay with him
for study are at first unsuccessful, but he finally lodges
them in an open shed which is gradually converted into a suit-
able building. This rude beginning grows into a regular asy-
lum for homeless boys and a school for any poor students who
wish to attend. Don Bosco's mother sells her small farm and
moves to Turin to help her son care for the boys, and thus is
established the first of the many Salesian Homes which are to
result from Don Bosco's labors. The students number over
seven hundred at the end of a few years, and the school is
practically self-supporting with its workshops and other small
industries. The boys who live in the dormitories, as well as
most of the students who come from outside the asylum, are
the sons of laborers, and a large part of the instruction is
technical. The students and disciples of Don Bosco soon become so numerous that he decides to build a church for them. He has seen the church in a dream, and has been told where and how to construct it. With no money, but with abundant faith, he engages a contractor, and then in the course of a year raises a million francs (§200,000) to pay for the building. This money comes from a lottery which he organizes as an act of charity, and from gifts from thousands of Catholics all over Italy. In 1868 the church is dedicated to Maria Auxiliadora, and in the meantime Pope Pius IX commissions Don Bosco to raise funds for a larger church in Rome. He accomplishes this at great cost to his health, which is already gravely weakened by the rigors and sacrifices of his early life, and returns to Turin to begin the organization of a new religious order. Don Bosco and fifty of the priests and teachers who work with him in the school form this order under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales and call it the Salesian Society. This occurs in 1868, but the Pope gives them only provisional approval at first; then, after six years of constant effort on the part of Don Bosco and his associates, Pius IX gives his final approval to the organization. Don Bosco continues his work as an organizer and educator, and at the same time exercises all the functions of a parish priest for hundreds of his birichini. His piety, self-sacrifice, and strength of character become legendary, and after a few years he is the friend and confidant not only of Pope Pius IX,
but of many members of the anti-clerical government in Italy. He is constantly in debt for the operation of his schools, but he never hesitates to undertake new expenses and labors, always in full confidence that he is an agent of Providence and that the means to the end will be provided. He effects miraculous cures of hopelessly ill and deformed sufferers, and shows such keen insight and understanding of the problems of those who come to him for confession that often he recites their sins to the penitents before they begin to confess. In many respects he displays evidence of supernatural powers, and even upon several occasions correctly predicts the death of certain of his students. The Salesian Society begins to train its own priests, and sends many of them out as missionaries to foreign countries. Another divine revelation which has come to Don Bosco earlier describes to him a race of savages which he is destined to bring into the Catholic fold, and these prove to be the Indians of Patagonia. However, the first few Salesian missionaries to Argentina have more than they can do with the religious needs of the early criollos, and the missions to the Indians come later. Don Bosco lives until 1888, dying at the age of seventy-two after a life of prodigious labor, constant hardship, and heroic self-sacrifice. By the time of his death the Salesian Society is a flourishing organization, and its founder has come to be considered almost as a saint even before his demise. His actual beatification does not come until 1907, and it is entirely possible that the
next step, canonization, may be taken in the course of time.

The chronological outline which appears above of the outstanding events in the life of Don Bosco provides the framework upon which Wast has constructed his novel. Don Bosco was a voluminous writer, and his *Memorias* alone served the novelist as a rich source of material concerning the personal habits and the religious and philosophical sentiments of the remarkable man about whom he wrote. Wast argues from the premise that every political issue is fundamentally a question of religion, and he records and interprets the turbulent history of Italy during its struggle for unification in accordance with this concept. He devotes whole chapters to the international politics of Cavour, others to the activities of the secret societies such as the Masons and the Carbonari, and even describes in detail the proceedings of the Twentieth Ecumenical Council called by Pius IX for the purpose of promulgating the doctrine of papal infallibility. It must be conceded that a conflict between Church and State was the inevitable outcome of the spread of liberal philosophy over Western Europe in the nineteenth century. It is therefore logical enough that a certain amount of the history of civil war, political and religious conspiracies and dominant personalities of the period be included in a work of the nature of *Don Bosco y su tiempo*. However, in his religious zeal and unconcealed sympathy for the clerical party in the dispute, the author has defeated his own purpose. The superfluity of
historical detail detracts from the interest of the novel, and the decidedly partisan interpretation of events precludes their acceptance as authentic history. There is often little or no transition between the accounts of Don Bosco's heroic struggles to achieve his ideals, and the machinations and conspiracies of national and international politics and diplomacy. Despite the excessively laudatory character of the descriptions of Don Bosco, and the frequent eulogistic interpolations of the author, which often strain the credulity of a dispassionate reader, the worthy priest emerges as an altogether admirable individual. The mass of historical data, which should serve as a background for the story, actually at times almost smothers the essential plot. The biography of Don Bosco, if written with more restraint and with less emphasis on historical background, would make interesting reading even if the reader were disinclined to accept at face value the accounts of mystical experiences and supernatural manifestations. In Wast's version, however, he has sacrificed quality for quantity, and the result is that the reader is forced to accept a disproportionate amount of literary chaff in order to enjoy the wheat which is to be found in it.

Don Bosco is of course no mere creature of the author's imagination. On the other hand, neither is he just another historically important individual whom the author has selected as an appropriate subject for biographical research. To the devoutly Catholic writer, the Venerable Don Bosco is now a
being of transcendent nature, and this fact must be kept in
mind if his characterization of the man is to be given just
consideration.

From the earliest mention of Juan Bosco, the reader is
given an intimation that he is to rise above the humble level
of his birth, and that Providence has selected him for a di-
vine purpose. A veteran soldier from one of the many armies
that infested Italy in the wake of Napoleon's invasion stops
by chance at the Bosco house. In the course of the conver-
sation, the subject of the destiny of children comes up, and
the soldier remarks to Juan's mother:

---...Ni la historia del hijo de Napoleón, ni la
historia de su hijo están escritas. Pero sí a mí me pre-
guntaran, yo diría que la de este niño, señora Margarita,
va a ser más larga y más gloriosa que la del otro."

Juan's first annunciation of his mission comes to him in
a dream at the age of nine. In the dream he finds himself
among a crowd of boys who are indulging in wicked games and
uttering all manner of blasphemies. Juan attempts to silence
their impious speech with his fists, but he is restrained by
a gentle but compelling voice:

---¡Así no!--le dice una voz---No con golpes, sino con
dulzura y caridad, los atraerás, y te los harás amigos,
y les enseñarás.

---Yo te daré la Maestra que te enseñará para enseñar
ta los otros. Yo soy el hijo de la que tu madre te ha en-
señado a saludar tres veces al día.

Una mujer hermosísima, de vestiduras resplandecientes,

1Wast, Don Bosco y su tiempo, p. 19.
apareció, y llamándolo por su nombre, le mostró aquella multitud de muchachos transformados en osos, en perros, en lobos salvajes.

--Allí entre ellos debes trabajar. Con paciencia y humildad los cambiarás.

Repentinamente los animales ariscos se transformaron en corderitos, que vinieron balando.

Juan tries faithfully to prepare himself to fulfill this prophecy, but his poverty and that of his immediate family almost force him to change his plans and enter a monastic order instead of preparing for the secular clergy. Wast quotes the following passage from Don Bosco's Memories, in which the young man appears to be attempting to rationalize his proposed action:

Si me hago clérigo secular, mi vocación corre gran peligro de naufragio. Renunciaré al mundo; iré a un claustro; me entregaré al estudio y a la meditación, y combatiré mis pasiones, especialmente la soberbia, que en mi corazón ha echado profundas raíces.

He does not enter the monastic order, however, as he is warned against it in another dream, and a little later he is tempted by the idea of becoming a missionary and dying the glorious death of a martyr among savages. But his destiny lies closer at hand, and he is prevented from becoming a missionary by a providential incapacity for travel without becoming deathly ill.

Juan never lacks an aim in life; his whole existence is consecrated to his divinely-inspired mission from early

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2Ibid., pp. 25-26.
3Ibid., p. 63.
childhood. The author presents the following picture of him as a student in the seminary:

Observemoslo bien; todas sus acciones están marcadas por un propósito. Lo mueve una insaciable ambición. Quiere ganar a todos, quiere atraer a todos, quiere que todos lo rodeen, y lo sigan y aprendan lo que él va a enseñarles.4

Shortly before his ordination, Juan has an experience with the supernatural which places such a strain on his impressionable mind that he becomes gravely ill from nervous shock. He has agreed with a very close friend of his that the one who dies first is to return and tell the other of his salvation or condemnation. The friend dies soon afterward, and Don Bosco's later description of the occurrence on the night following the funeral is an excellent example of romanticism, regardless of the undeniable credence he places upon the event:

Cuando al sonar las doce de la noche, se oye un rumor sordo, que avanza desde el fondo del corredor, haciéndose más y más recio. Es como el de un carro tirado por muchos caballos, o como el de un tren. También puede compararse con el disparo de la artillería.

No sabría explicar aquel fragor, que hacía enmudecer de espanto, y que dejaba detrás de sí vibrantes las paredes, la bóveda, el pavimento, como si todo fuese construido de chapas sonoras de hierro y golpeado por un brazo potentísimo.

Los seminaristas se despiertan y permanecen mudos. Yo estaba petrificado de horror ... Se abre violentamente la puerta del dormitorio; sólo se ve un fulgor pálido, que parece regulado por aquel rumor. Luego un repentino silencio; la luz brilla más y oigo la voz de Comollo, que por tres veces me dice: "¡Bosco, Bosco, Bosco! ¡Me he salvado! ..."5

4 Ibid., p. 75. 5 Ibid., p. 39.
Immediately following his ordination, Don Bosco prescribes for himself a set of rules which are to govern his conduct in all matters not directly pertinent to his functions as a priest. No better index to his intense and consecrated character may be found in the novel than that which appears in the following list of self-imposed restrictions:

El sacerdote no va solo al cielo, ni al infierno. Al cielo va con las almas que ha salvado por su ejemplo. Al infierno con las que se han condenado por su escándalo. Por eso, me empeñaré en observar las siguientes resoluciones:

1. —No salir de paseo sino por grave necesidad, como visitar enfermos, etc.
2. —Ocupar rigurosamente bien el tiempo.
3. —Padecer, trabajar, humillarme en todo y siempre, cuando se trata de salvar almas.
4. —La caridad y la cultura de San Francisco de Sales me servirán de guía en todo.
5. —Me manifestaré siempre satisfecho de los alimentos que me ofrezcan, no siendo cosa nociva a la salud.
6. —Beberé vino agudo, y sólo como remedio, es decir, cuando y en cantidad que lo requiera la salud.
7. —El trabajo es una arma poderosa contra los enemigos del alma, por lo cual no daré al cuerpo más de cinco horas de sueño cada noche. Entre día, especialmente después de almorzar, no tomare ningún descanso, excepto en caso de enfermedad.
8. —Cada día emplearé algún tiempo en la meditación y en la lectura espiritual. Durante el día haré alguna visita, por lo menos una breve oración, al Santísimo Sacramento. Haré por lo menos, un cuarto de hora de preparación para la santa misa, y otro de acción de gracias.
9. —No conversaré nunca con mujeres, fuera del caso de confesión, o de alguna otra necesidad espiritual.6

It is little wonder that the Church has deemed worthy of veneration a martyr to his vocation who observed these rules of behavior faithfully during his forty-six years of conscientious ministry and ceaseless labor.

6Ibid., pp. 92-93.
It seems that most of Don Bosco's perception of divine will comes through his dreams. After years of sacrifice, toil, and temporary disappointments, he manages to build up his school for homeless boys to such a size that he sees the need for a church for his flock. The following conversation is typical of his attitude of faith in Providence and in himself as its agent, when another priest observes that the obstacles he has encountered are signs of divine disapprobation of his efforts:

---¡No, no, no! respondía Don Bosco tenazmente ...  
---Ustedes se equivocan. La Divina Providencia me ha mandado mis birichini, y si vienen más, ¡mejor! no rechazaré uno solo, y continuaremos reuniéndonos ...  
---Pero ¿dónde, si de todas partes lo han desalojado?  
---Hay una Iglesia, y un patio, y una casa de donde no nos desalojarán, porque será mía ...  
---¿Dónde está?  
---No puedo decir dónde está; pero sé que existe, la he visto en sueños ... 7

Don Bosco's philosophy of education, as summarized by Wast, is considerably in advance of the thought of his times. The religious precepts upon which he bases it are only to be expected under the circumstances, but the remaining principles in the following statement might appropriately appear in any modern textbook on education:

Preparemos al obrero para el gran papel que va a desempeñar en las Sociedades modernas como elector y muchas veces como elegido. Enseñámosle sus derechos y sus deberes. Hagámosle buen católico y lo haremos buen democrata; sabrá elegir y sabrá gobernar, y habremos hecho el bien de la patria y de la Humanidad.8

7Ibid., p. 135.  
8Ibid., p. 183.
Wast even credits this tireless teacher with innovations which are seldom associated with mid-nineteenth century education:

A pesar de la miseria de sus recursos, descubre nuevas formas de pedagogía. Implanta las primeras escuelas nocturnas en Italia; crea las escuelas profesionales, y con sus largas excursiones a pie, en el verano, alrededor de Castelmuvo, acompañado de muchos alumnos, inventa desde 1850 lo que ahora se llama el camping, vacaciones al aire libre, o el escotismo.9

Don Bosco is, in the opinion of Wast, and doubtless in that of many of his co-religionists: "Un santo moderno, ciertamente; pero que hace milagros como los de Jesús, como los de la leyenda dorada."10 Some of these milagros are cited, with the accompanying statement that they were observed by hundreds of witnesses. On one occasion, when six hundred of the birichini have prepared themselves for Holy Communion, the sacristan forgets to bring in the huge copón of wafers prepared for the service. Don Bosco does not discover the error until after the moment of the consecration of the Host, and of course after that it is too late to send for more. He finds a few hostias in a smaller container, and after a brief prayer to the Virgin, begins to administer the sacrament:

Coge el coponcito y empieza a dar la comunion, y aquellas pocas hostias se multiplican, y el sacristán, desesperado, asiste al prodigio y después de la misa muestra a Don Bosco el copón olvidado en la sacristía.

¿Cómo ha podido dar comunión a todos con tan pocas hostias? ¡Es un milagro . . .

9Ibid., p. 238.  
10Ibid., p. 245.
Shortly before this event, Don Bosco is reported to have given a small loaf to each of three hundred boys, taking the bread from a basket which held only fifteen or twenty panecillos when he began distributing them, and when all were fed, the basket still contained the original number of loaves.

Later, in the year 1880, Don Bosco visits a school founded by his Society in the South of France, and a boy who is scheduled to sing for him is too hoarse to speak. Wast describes this miracle as follows:

Don Bosco está en la primera fila de espectadores y manda llamar al pequeño artista desconsolado, y le habla al oído:

---Sube a las tablas sin miedo; yo te voy a prestar mi voz.

El chico, absolutamente afónico, obedece, sale, y canta. Y todo el tiempo que dura la representación, Don Bosco está ronco, a no podersele oír una palabra. Cuando se termina, las voces se entrecambian, y el chico va a la enfermería . . .

These passages may serve not only as evidence of the nature and personality of this truly remarkable priest, but also as an indication of Wast's attitude toward his subject. These and other reputed miracles of Don Bosco's are cited with no qualifying comments from the author. There is no necessity of adding further examples of the extraordinary events which occurred during the life of Don Bosco. The author has

---Ibid., pp. 247-8.  
---Ibid., p. 248.
him express the sum total of his character in one terse remark when the priest is accused of being unnecessarily intimate with certain statesmen who have been excommunicated:

--¿Que yo conservo amigos entre esa gente? ¡Bah! Sería capaz de llegar ante el diablo, sombrero en mano y sonriente, con tal que me dejara pasar para salvar un alma.13

The life and exploits of Don Bosco have been subjected to the jealous and exacting scrutiny of the duly constituted authorities of his faith, and his beatification is conclusive proof that he passed all their tests. It is to be regretted that so competent a literary craftsman as Wast has produced a relatively inferior monument to such a deserving character. The author’s sincerity cannot be doubted, and his enthusiasm for his subject never wanes. But despite all this and the undeniable fact that Juan Bosco was a truly remarkable man, Don Bosco y su tiempo remains inferior to most of the novelist’s works from a standpoint of literary merit.

The last novel of Hugo Wast is an expressive outgrowth of the new spirit of nationalism which began to dominate Argentine political and economic philosophy toward the end of the depression of the 1930’s. As mentioned earlier, El Kahal-Gro is included in this chapter on religious works solely because of the lack of a more definitive classification. The religious element of the novel takes the form of virulent

13Ibid., p. 416.
anti-Semitism on the one hand and of militant and mystical Catholicism on the other. The central theme is the constantly-repeated alleged determination of the Jews to dominate the whole world, to assume the position promised to the "chosen people" in their scriptural prophecies, and to accomplish this objective by financial astuteness, since their relatively insignificant number renders direct violence infeasible. The goyim, or non-Jews, are allegedly considered as legitimate victims by the Jews, and any chicanery, seduction, or betrayal of a Gentile by a Jew which adds to the power of Israel is not only pardoned but commended by their sacred writings. According to this thesis, all the wars, revolutions, financial depressions and panics, social upheaval, and moral and economic decadence of history have been engineered by international Jewry. The keystone of this arch of world-wide intrigue is the economic concept of the gold standard—the golden calf of the children of Israel whose symbolism for society has been changed into a harsh reality by centuries of planning and teaching by the Jews. They argue from the logical premise that when an insignificant percentage of the world's population gains full control of the world's material wealth, or, to be exact, of the gold which serves as the evaluating medium of that wealth, then their mastery of the world is assured. Admittedly, this sounds more like economics than religion, but the point to be made, as far as this novel is concerned, is that for the Jews the two terms are synonymous. The argument is simple: Israel's divinely-conceived mission is to rule the
world. The realization of this goal is best attained through control of the world's wealth. Therefore, financial manipulations which bring about a fulfillment of prophecy are in effect on the same plane of importance to the Jew as acts of piety and charity are to the Christian.

Wast, who is a student of pure economics, if the term "pure" may be used in such a sense, maintains that actual wealth should be reckoned not in terms of a metal of little intrinsic value, subject to the control and manipulation of forces inimical to society, but rather that it should be evaluated in terms of production and distribution of goods. In view of this, he offers the solution that has haunted the dreams of alchemists through all the ages, but with a novel adaptation of the alchemist's original objective. The ancient and medieval search for the "philosopher's stone" wished to find a substance which, by turning baser metals into gold, would increase the amount of precious metal in circulation to such an extent that all men would benefit by the possession of additional wealth. The basic idea in this reasoning is the assumption that gold has in itself the value which its scarcity and universal use have attributed to it. Wast's conception of the benefits of the alchemy of Julius Ham in this novel is diametrically opposed to that mentioned above. By being changed from base metals to gold through a chemical process, the gold becomes in time as abundant as the base metals, and, having lost the value of scarcity, it ceases to have any value
except that attributed to an industrial raw material. Thus all debts payable in gold could be liquidated, the dignity of labor restored, and, most important of all, the world rescued from the coils of the "symbolic serpent" of Israel!

The clash of ideals between Judaism and Catholicism which inevitably occurs in the novel is expressed in various fashions. Marta Blumen, the daughter of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, is herself symbolic of the conflict. The hopeless love of the devout Catholic Berta Ham for the pseudo-apostate Mauricio Kohen presents another aspect of the case. The ultimate conversion of Mauricio is the concluding argument by the author in favor of the superiority of his faith. The novel is unqualified propaganda, and Jews are consistently vilified, while the Catholics are just as consistently lauded. The blasphemy, avarice, and deceit of the former are constantly contrasted with the piety, altruism, and integrity of the latter. The author has learned a lesson from modern advertising methods, or more likely, from European Fascist masters of propaganda, and writes on the principle that any statement often enough repeated assumes an aspect of truth for the listeners. If he wrote the novel with an evangelical purpose; he has failed miserably. If, however, for reasons not impossible to find in the present political philosophy of Argentina, he was motivated by anti-Semitism, then his goal has been attained. It would be difficult indeed to find a more methodically-devised instrument for propagating and nourishing
distrust and hatred between Jews and Catholics. The most charitable assumption is that the devout Catholic and liberal economist has allowed his enthusiasm to express itself as prejudice and that the brilliant light of his own faith has blinded him to all but the shadows of another religious belief. This particular thesis could scarcely be maintained, however, in view of the frequency with which the author has cited scripture to his own purpose. His research has been exhaustive, and he has studiously avoided any fragment of secular or scriptural documentation which might intimate that the Jew is not completely vile. The Old Testament, the Apocrypha, the Talmud, the Torah, and even the famous Protocols of the Elders of Zion have all been blended into a noxious ink into which he dips a vitriolic pen.

Waist has practiced a commendable economy of characterization in this novel, preferring, as he occasionally does, to represent in one individual the distinguishing features of a whole social class. The story begins in 1867 with the twin brothers David and Matías Zabulón, Jewish merchants who are rapidly enriching themselves by supplying provisions to the Argentine army in the war against Paraguay, and by an equally lucrative contraband trade with the Paraguayan forces. Matías is captured while returning from the enemy lines, and is sentenced to be shot. He persuades his brother David, who is an identical twin, to substitute for him while he goes to the Argentine president, Mitre, to plead for clemency. He prom-
ises to return and comply with the sentence of death in case he is unsuccessful, but allows his brother to die in his stead. He returns to Buenos Aires and pretends that it was David who was actually captured trafficking with the enemy. He refuses to marry his brother's young widow, as she demands in accordance with their religious laws, and thus begins a feud between Matías, who now adopts the name of Zacarias Blumen, and Sarah Zyto, the widow, which is continued down through the second generation. Sarah marries Mauricio Kohen, who becomes an influential member of the Kahal. This organization is a sort of inner court and governing body of the Jewish community of which the Synagogue is the outward manifestation. Both families prosper, and in time, Zacarias, the son of elder Blumen, falls in love with Tamar, the daughter of Sarah and Mauricio Kohen. However, Blumen persuades his son to marry Marta Adalid, the daughter of an immensely wealthy criollo. Thus the Blumens gain an entrée into porteño society, and the ill will between the families of Blumen and Kohen is aggravated.

Zacarias Blumen inherits his father's huge fortune and continues to add to it. His daughter, Marta, grows into a beautiful and impetuous young woman. She is reared and educated in the Catholic faith, but becomes interested in Judaism when she falls in love with Tamar Kohen's younger brother, Mauricio. The latter, a man of about thirty-five, has become the head of his family upon the death of his father, and,
while ostensibly a Catholic, is in reality the Rosch, or chief
official of the Jewish Kahal. Before he meets Marta Blumen,
he becomes enamored of Berta Ram, the daughter of an eccentric
physicist on the faculty of the Colegio Militar. Ram is a
strange mixture of philosopher, chemist, and physicist who
has labored for years in an effort to discover the substance
needed to change base metals into gold. Berta returns Mauro-
cio's love, but realizes, as does he, that their different re-
ligions make any happiness together impossible for them.

The brother-in-law of Zacarias Blumen, Fernando Adalid,
is a criollo banker and agricultural pioneer who, by his heavy
investments in projects aimed at improving his country's agra-
rian system, has lost the greater part of the huge fortune he
inherited from his father. A younger brother of Fernando re-
turns to Buenos Aires from Europe and withdraws all his money
from Fernando's bank. This act, and his subsequent idle
boasting of his financial acumen, are responsible for a run
on Fernando Adalid's bank, which the banker meets by secretly
borrowing from the national bank, having convinced the Presi-
dent of the republic that the failure of a large financial
institution would precipitate an economic crisis. The Jewish
capitalists are naturally eager for the ruin of Adalid's for-
tune, since they are to benefit by it. Adalid subsidizes the
experiments of Julius Ram, and fosters the rumor that his own
unexpected solvency is due to the artificial production of
gold in Ram's laboratory. Jewish financiers throughout the
world at first discredit the rumor and advise their agents
to buy up all the gold offered for sale in an attempt to main-
tain its price. However, as the conversion of hoarded gold
into government-guaranteed paper money continues to increase,
the Jews themselves become panicky and secretly attempt to
dispose of their own enormous reserves. The result is that
the loss of confidence in gold and the apparently endless flow
of the once-precious metal into the Caja de Conversión com-
pletely destroy the metal's value as a medium of exchange, and
the whole economic system of the country wrests itself from
the clutches of the Jewish financiers. Finally, the would-be
alchemist Ram discovers that he has been tricked by his own
daughter and by Fernando Adalid, and he publishes a confession
of the hoax and dies soon after realizing his failure. Berta
has secretly mixed pure raw gold, supplied by Adalid, into
Ram's experimental mixtures, because she fears her father will
lose his reason if he continues to fail in his search. Ada-
lid's motive is not one of personal gain, but it is his desire
to destroy the myth of the intrinsic value of gold, and by so
doing, to free society from its slavery under Jewish financial
masters. The flood of hoarded Jewish gold which gluts the
market lends an air of authenticity to the rumor of Ram's
success, and by the time the hoax is revealed and the world
price of gold partially restored, industry and commerce have
learned that the only security needed for money is the guaran-
tee of a strong government. The repercussions of this
financial revolution are international. The threat of another and far more violent world conflict is averted [the book was completed in 1936] since international Jewry no longer is in a position to garner the lion's share of the profits through its control of industry and finance. The standard of living is raised, and with the increased prosperity and leisure of the masses there comes a revival of interest in religion. A Eucharistic Congress is held in Buenos Aires and hundreds of thousands of Catholics are exalted in the atmosphere of religious zeal which covers the country. Priests are given special permission by the Pope to absolve any sins, regardless of their nature, upon confession and evidence of penitence, and the Vatican Secretary of State himself comes as Papal Legate to the Congress.

Marta Blumen, whose Semitic heritage has at one time tempted her to dream of becoming the mother of the Anti-Christ, has returned to the fold of Catholicism, and Mauricio Kohen succumbs to the mystic force engendered by the Eucharistic Congress and finally becomes converted. He and Marta then realize that they are in love with each other, while Berta Ram, who has promised to take the veil if Mauricio is saved, retires to a convent to sublimate her mortal passions to a life of spiritual peace.

Wust has employed his genius for description with telling effect in this novel. However, instead of vivid passages concerned with natural phenomena, here he has devoted his talent
to the portrayal of symbolic or representative types through physical description of the personages of the novel. For example, the following two paragraphs descriptive of Zacarías Blumen evoke an image which has often appeared in caricature in the present times, and in the flesh not many years ago:

Levitón negro, relumbróceo en codos y omoplatos, Pastelito de felpa, color pasa de uva, cubriendo un cráneo piramidal, mezquimanente guarnecido de cabellos, que descendían en dos tirabuzones sobre las pálidas orejas. Pantalones estrechos y verdesos, como fundas de clarinetas, cuyos bordos luídos apenas llegaban a la caña de los botines elésticos.

Tez pálida, con la palidez ritual de un cabrito después que el rabino lo ha sangrado para que sea kosher (puro) y puedan comerlo los fieles. Ojos como pedazos de nullas, vivos, escrutadores. Barbás retintas y manos suaves, largas, alabastrinas, de uñas lutados.14

The author is particularly fond of the simile of the cabrito sangrado por el rabino, and he uses it when a likely occasion presents itself.

The contempt of the Jews for the honest labor of the Gentiles is expressed by one of the latter, who prefers to invest his capital in a less arduous and more remunerative fashion. Rogelio Adalid, the selfish younger brother of the altruistic and patriotic Fernando, tells the elder Blumen that he does not care to invest in lands, real estate, or cattle:

--- ¡Ni casas, ni campos, ni vacas! ¡Dinero contante! ¡Buenas hipotecas! Mi padre y mis hermanos son unos infelices. Echan las bofes por adelantar sus capitales; vienen comprando y viviendo; mejorando sus estancias, edificando sus terrenos; levantándose al alba y trabajando como negros todo el día.

14Wast, El Kahal-Oro, p. 33.
La gran ambición de mi padre es que lo llamen pionner [sic] del progreso argentino. ¡Qué estupidez!  

The character of the elder Blumen is deftly portrayed in the passage relative to his cheating his brother's widow in the settlement of her estate. Here also is presented an excellent example of the use Wast makes of the Jews' sacred writings to present them in an unfavorable light. After observing that the widow had in all probability received only a fractional part of the amount due her, the author goes on to say that:

... Zacarías no se habría permitido engañar a su hermano David, de estar vivo, porque el Talmud prescribe que: "No es permitido engañar a nuestro prójimo" (Baba Metsia).  

Pero Zacarías había averiguado que el infeliz, puesto en capilla, se dejó convencer por el capellán militar y recibió el bautismo católico, media hora antes de ser fusilado.  

Lo cual, lo rayaba del libro de los prójimos, y lo incorporaba al gremio de los goyim o akum (perros idolatrantes o cristianos).  

Y el mismo sagrado Talmud dice: "Es lícito estafar a un goy (Baba Kamma).  

Pues conforme a la doctrina talmúdica, el dinero de los akum es semejante a un bien sin dueño.  

Needless to say, the reaction of Zacarías to this situation is intended to be typical of all Jews, and not as a mere instance of individudal chicanery. A little later, the novelist is either ingenious or careless in relating Blumen's smuggling activities. For once in the novel, the Jew is depicted as no more venal than the Christian:

15Ibid., p. 53.  
16Ibid., p. 62.
En los gastos del negocio, Blumen incluía siempre una partida para el comisario de la región o para el jefe del resguardo. Lo que los argentinos llaman "coima". En lenguaje técnica se dice: "lubricante, materia viscosa y fluida que se deposite en los ejes y engranajes para evitar que chillen."

Wast neatly dodges the issue of the authenticity of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and at the same time uses the document to discredit the Jews. As the representative of the cultured, devoutly Catholic, and ardently patriotic Argentine, Fernando Adalid remarks in regard to the Protocols that:
"... aunque no sean las actas secretas del congreso israelita que se reunió en Basilea en 1897, pueden ser muy bien una síntesis fidelísima hecha por alguno de los congresales."

The novel abounds in general statements which are often difficult either to prove or to refute, but which invariably are unfavorable to the Jew. For example, the author offers the following observation on World War I:

La guerra mundial había sido calculada y dispuesta por los Sabios de Sión, con este resultado: la destrucción del imperio austronógaro, la mayor potencia católica de la tierra, y la transformación de la Rusia cristiana, en un formidable arsenal de ateísmo, donde se forjaban armas para cuantos que quisieran, en cualquier país, combatir a Cristo.

When the financial magnates of Buenos Aires meet to discuss measures to be taken against the inventor Julius Kam, whom they believe to have discovered the real secret of alchemy, one of them remarks that if Kam were only a Jew there

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17 Ibid., p. 64.  
18 Ibid., p. 137.  
19 Ibid., pp. 187-8.
would be nothing to fear from his discovery. Another voices
the hope that Ham may be avaricious enough to sell his secret
to them, which is an obvious absurdity, but which allows the
author to make another subtle attack on his victims when he
has a Jew remark that: "... Hay muchos cristianos que odian
a los judíos, y sin embargo los imitan, cuando se trata de
negocios."20

The author offers an enlightening observation of the
Jewish control of news dissemination. Again he has a Jew
present the case:

--No tenemos ejércitos, pero dominamos la mayoría de
los grandes diarios y de las agencias de publicidad, y gob-
ernamos los nervios de la humanidad. Asesinad cristianos
en México, en España, en Rusia, eso no tiene importancia,
no lo transmiten nuestras agencias, no lo publican nues-
tros diarios. Atropellad un judío en Alemania o en Polonia
y escucharéis la grita del mundo: intolerancia, pogrom,
antisémitismo. Y el mundo que no ha llorado al martirio
de un millón de cristianos en Rusia, rasgará sus vestidos,
porque a un profesor israelita le han quitado en Berlín
una cátedra, o porque en Buenos Aires a un rufián judío lo
han echado del país.21

Wast reveals an excellent sense of timing and proportion
in this novel. Few if any of the first three hundred fifty-
eight pages fail to bear, either by statement or implication,
some form of censure for the Jews. Then in the two final and
dramatic chapters he presents his conception of the inevitable
triumph of Catholic Christianity over Judaism. The innuendo,
ridicule, and studiously documented accusations of the first

20 Ibid., p. 251.  
21 Ibid., p. 254.
twenty-four chapters of the two-part novel are supplanted by the lyric description of the Eucharistic Congress, the mystical experience of a whole city in the mass demonstration of the efficacy of Catholic faith, and the symbolic salvation of the tormented soul of the apostate Mauricio Kohen. After an impassioned description of the manner in which thousands of men seize the opportunity to profit by the divine grace offered by the Church, the author adds simply:

Y Mauricio Kohen fué uno de ellos.
El locutor acababa de pronunciar las palabras de Jesús en el Evangelio de San Juan: "El que come de este pan vivirá eternamente." (Juan, 6, 52)
Y él se sintió traspasado por el ardiente dardo de la gracia y gritó desde el fondo de sus entrañas doloridas: "¡Señor, ayuda mi incredulidad! Yo también comeré de tu carne para no morir..."

Technically, El Kahal-Oro is an excellent novel. It is never boring, the characters, while they are types rather than individuals, are well conceived and convincingly portrayed, and the action appears logical enough if the major premises of the author are conceded. Ethically, however, it is a vicious book despite the unquestionable sincerity of the author. His object has undoubtedly been to drive the modern money changers out of the temples of society, but his appeal to prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry has cast doubt upon his qualifications for the task.

22Ibid., p. 378.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Hugo Wast is a prolific and capable writer who for the most part adheres faithfully to his self-imposed prescription concerning the ultimate purpose of his writing. He believes that his novels should be both diverting and instructive, and it is only when the emphasis on the second objective becomes disproportionate to that on the first that he may be said to fall short of his goal. In one respect he has been conspicuously successful. With commendable candor he admits that he writes novels as a means of earning money, and his reputation as the most widely-read novelist of South America attests to the fact that his profession has been highly remunerative. Wast is often a romantic in his conception of characters, his choice of background, and his development of plot, but in the matter of appealing to public interest he is a practical realist.

He prides himself on the fact that his books are never offensive to even the most delicate tastes—that they may be read with equal pleasure and benefit by young and old. However, it might be charged that in some instances he adheres more strictly to the letter than to the spirit of this literary gospel. He religiously avoids obscenity and salaciousness,
and, even in scenes dealing with primitive emotions and un-
controllable passion, he is guilty of no impropriety of
iction. However, the unrestrained virulence of his attack
upon a racial and religious minority in El Kahal-Oro, with
due regard for the sincerity of the author, is in dubious ac-
cord with the principles of charity, tolerance, and forgive-
ness which such a militantly religious writer might be expected
to observe. And there is at least a reasonable doubt whether
the young readers for whose entertainment and edification the
books are partly designed may derive the proper moral lessons
from the defections from virtue of some of the more attractive
heroines of the novels. In justice to the author, it must be
admitted that any violation of moral or statutory laws in his
stories is always followed by penitence and retribution, and
no criticism is intended with regard to his treatment of situ-
atations which arise frequently enough in actual life. The
point of doubt is whether all impressionable young readers are
capable of evaluating the defections in terms of their ultimate
punishment.

Wast has a rare talent for description, and the descrip-
tive passages in his novels not only reveal the author's mas-
tery of his native tongue, but even more noticeably, reflect
his minute and sympathetic observation of the innumerable de-
tails of local geography, colloquialisms in speech, and pecu-
liarities and idiosyncracies of individuals and communities.
He often overreaches himself in this matter of supplying local
color, with the result that, while the scenes and individuals which he describes are usually of undeniable interest, still they at times have little or no relation to the general plot of the novel. But despite the occasional superabundance of local color, the virtues of the descriptive passages in the novels far outweigh their defects. The pictures which he creates with words when describing a tempest or a sunny day at sea, the desolation of a drouth-stricken estancia, or the fury of a mountain storm, are graphic and poetic. His scenes of the activities on the ranches and farms; the cattle-branding, alfalfa cutting, the gossiping peons in the kitchens—all are eloquently expressive of his genuine interest in rural life and of his warm sympathy for the uncultured but sturdy and self-reliant men and women of the Argentine pampas and mountains.

While Wast writes largely for readers who are interested primarily in being entertained by the novels they read, it does not necessarily follow that he is a haphazard sensationalist who capitalizes upon matters of currently-popular interest. On the contrary, his novels are reflective of the author's philosophy, and are characterized by certain well-defined arguments or themes. It is, of course, impracticable to attempt to summarize here all the theses which Wast has developed in his writings. He is, despite his provincial origin, a cultured and well-read man with an extensive store of knowledge and a wide range of interests. There are, however,
a few salient features in his novels to which he devotes special and emphatic attention. Each of these points has received at least passing mention in the preceding chapters of this study, so the following discussion of principal themes will be little more than a recapitulation.

Above all else, Wast is devoutly Catholic. "Wast escribe, según él, 'para que lo lean sus hijos' y es un autor católico, y de tipo 'rosa'." The religious element appears in all of his works, both in the usual descriptions of routine religious activities, which are only natural in stories of Catholic countries, and in the frequent emphasis which is placed upon confession, penitence, and spiritual regeneration of the unhappy characters who seek and find solace in the Church. The priests in his novels are usually robust men of action, endowed with the sustaining faith and the sturdy physique demanded of their ministry in a new and growing land.

The clergy in general is seldom criticized, and only when extenuating circumstances are carefully presented. It is true that the evangelistic Don Dimas Carrizo of Ciudad turbulenta, cuidad alegre speaks disrespectfully of some of his consecrated brethren, but Don Dimas, for all his sincerity and fervor, emerges as a clerical Don Quijote. The religious motif in the above-mentioned novel has been discussed in a previous chapter, and nothing need be added concerning the Catholic

1Luis Alberto Sánchez, Historia de la literatura americana, p. 505.
philosophy and argument which fills the pages of Don Bosco y su tiempo and El Kahal Oro. Wast’s novels abound in litanical ejaculations, and in the novels which are primarily concerned with religion, the author frequently documents his arguments with direct quotations from Catholic scripture and from the writings of the Church Fathers.

There is a pronounced element of patriotism in the novels which at times borders upon a narrow nationalism. The trilogy beginning with Myriam la conspiradora presents in almost allegorical form the Argentine love of political independence and determination to maintain it, and the same theme is developed in El camino de las llamas. Wast frequently employs the term criollo in a restricted sense, as a noun or adjective referring to qualities or customs which are peculiar to Argentina, and as such, are superior to their foreign counterparts. Along with these patriotic sentiments of the author’s, there also appears a high regard for the more desirable features of the heritage of the conquistadores. In Lucía Miranda, the early Spaniards in Argentina are depicted as paragons of virtue and courage, while in the Myriam la conspiradora series the reactionary politics of the Spaniards does not prevent the author from dwelling at length upon their culture, piety, valor, and personal integrity. The modern Argentine, like all the Caucasian inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere, is a product of a heterogeneous culture, and he owes much of his fundamental philosophy to the Spanish legacy to the New World. As an
Argentine writer remarks in regard to this European influence on Argentine thought:

It is said that Argentina and Uruguay are essentially European, and this may well be true. No man can escape his environment; here along the Plata, Spanish culture has amalgamated with the French and Italian to form a Latin composite.2

In the case of Hugo Wast, the French and Italian influences are apparent in some of his liberal political sentiments and aesthetic interests, but in the matter of personal dignity, orthodoxy of creed, and frequent elements of mysticism, the spirit of his writing is criollo strongly colored with the tradition of Old Spain.

Wast is an economist and a sociologist as well as a novelist, and he frequently expounds theories which reveal his thoughtful interest in the material and social welfare and progress of his country. He is sympathetic toward the laborer and critical of the unproductive wealthy aristocracy. He condemns the antiquated and inefficient methods of criollo farmers and ranchers and praises the more modern and scientific practices of immigrants. The classic example of this occurs in Desierto de piedra in the contrast between the extravagance and neglect of Don Pedro Pablo and the efficiency and energy of his gallego neighbors. Wast is an ardent advocate of the wholesome simplicity of rural life as an effective counter-

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balance to the artificial and degenerative aspects of urban economy and society. The last-mentioned novel is based on this theme, as is the less-familiar *Una estrella en la ventana*. In *Novia de vacaciones* and *Flor de durazno*, the author is less concerned with economics than with the contrast between the unsophisticated virtue of country people and the selfishness and worship of false values of the porteños. He does not represent country life as idyllic, nor are all his rural characters so saintly as the pathetic Rina of *Flor de durazno*, so self-reliant as Matilde of *Camino de las llamas*, or so persevering as Marcela of *Desierto de piedra*. But on the whole, the city dweller in the novels cuts a comparatively sorry figure when contrasted with his country cousins. A further interesting sidelight on the economic theories of Wast is to be found in his attack upon the gold standard in *El Kanal-Oro*. While in this instance he has combined economics with religion, or more precisely, has confused the two, still his arguments are worthy of consideration because of the ingenious method with which he presents them.

In general, the style of Wast's novels is consistent with the author's purpose in writing: to construct an entertaining and edifying book which will appeal to a large number of readers. The descriptions, as mentioned before, are excellent, and are highly reminiscent of those of Pereda, whom Wast uses as a model and to whom he has been favorably compared. The action is usually exciting, rapid, and plausible enough for
fiction, although in the highly romantic *Alegre* and *Lucía Miranda* there are accounts of events which border on the incredible. There is an excess of sentimentality in some of the novels, notably in *La corbata celeste*, *Novia de vacaciones*, and *Fuente sellada*, but this is usually employed to accentuate the weakness of specific characters. The humorous element is not conspicuous in the novels, but the occasional flashes of it which do appear prove conclusively that the author's preoccupation with moral and social conflicts has not dulled his sense of the ridiculous. His farcical *Pata de Zorra*, while it is often obvious and sometimes trite in its humor, is nevertheless a highly readable book and a commendable example of Wast's ability as a humorist. Many words which are peculiar to Argentina alone are employed in the novels, but Wast, with a practical eye to the convenience of readers in other countries, usually clarifies their meaning either by definition or context.

It is difficult to classify Hugo Wast as a disciple of any particular literary school. To say that he is a romanticist in his conceptions and a realist in the execution of his novels is insufficient analysis of the problem. It is true that in such novels as the juvenile *Alegre*, the imaginative *Lucía Miranda*, or the dramatic *La casa de los cuervos*, he is almost completely romantic. On the other hand, *Ciudad turbulenta*, *ciudad alegre*, *Los ojos vendados*, *El vengador* and other novels of sociological nature contain many aspects of realism in their treatment of social and economic problems. There is
even a fleeting touch of naturalism in *Tierra de jaguares* when the gruesome episode of the wild dog being flayed alive is presented. But it may be safely said that Wast's frequently-defined conception of the restrictions governing the *autor católico* and the obligations of strict propriety imposed upon a novelist who writes for children as well as for adults, effectively prohibit his extensive use of the sordid and offensive material which is the stock in trade of a writer of naturalistic fiction. Wast is usually considered a romanticist and a writer of escape fiction. This general classification fails, however, to take into account his sober and realistic treatment of contemporary social and economic problems. It must suffice to say that Hugo Wast is a versatile literary craftsman who adapts his style to his subject, and, if popular acclaim is to be accepted as a true indication of merit, he does so with conspicuous success. In one instance, however, this eclecticism of style does not produce the usual happy results. In *Don Bosco y su tiempo* the inordinate amount of historical data and the exaggerated simplicity of diction and exposition, although designed, no doubt, to be consistent with the simple and unaffected personality of Don Bosco, have nevertheless had a different effect. This biographical novel about a truly remarkable man is unworthy of its subject, and is little more than a tiresome recapitulation of personal and political history which may well reflect credit upon the author's erudition and piety, but which will scarcely add
to his reputation as an entertaining novelist.

Wast is, in general, more concerned with ideas and action than with analysis of personality, and, as a result, his characterizations exhibit little originality. Hespelt remarks of Wast in this respect that:

In the delineation of his main characters, he is apt to over-emphasize certain traits to the point of unreality. His heroes and heroines become types rather than personalities. 3

An outstanding feature of Wast's characterization is his preference for feminine protagonists. Only a few of the men in his novels are apt to fasten themselves in the reader's memory; they are usually colorless individuals who play their assigned roles with varying degrees of success. It is true that some of them are deserving of special consideration. The crusty and lovable old Don Pedro Pablo Ontiveros, the sinister Roque Carpio, and the indomitable Sargentio Chaparro emerge as individual personalities from among the hundreds of men who are mentioned in the novels. But the reader of any considerable number of the books is more apt to recall the saintly and ethereally-beautiful Nina, the self-reliant and forceful Marcella, Myriam, Matilde, or Mirra, and the passionate and proud Mercedes or Flavia.

For all his emphasis on religious themes, the author shows a singular lack of originality in his characterizations of priests. It would be disrespectful to observe that all the

clergymen of the novels seem to be descended from the two valiant missionary frailes who helped Sebastian Cabot establish the ill-fated Espíritu Santo in Lucía Miranda. But the fact remains that nearly all of Wast's priests and frailes, and they are by no means insignificant characters, appear to have been cut from the same cloth. An exception might be made in the case of the eccentric Don Dimas of Ciudad turbulenta, ciudad alegre, and, of course, the statement cannot apply to the venerable Don Bosco. But the latter had only a very remote connection with Argentine history, and as the subject of a whole novel, and as a real, rather than a fictional priest, he naturally appears as an individual instead of as a mere type.

Wast relies almost entirely on the use of types in depicting the traditional gaucho, the gallego storekeepers and landlords, and, in most cases, the innocent country girls who succumb to the lures of the city or to the false promises of porteño gallants. In the matter of provincial families who move to Buenos Aires and suffer the usual disillusionment and defeat, there is little variation of description. The Garay family of Los ojos vendados and the ambitious but unsuccessful wife and daughters of "Doctor" Jairo of Ciudad turbulenta are cast in the same mold, and if the lazy Don Pedro Garay and the bombastic Jairo seem to be more sharply distinguished, it is in their physical reactions to their situations rather than in their sentiments and emotions.
In his treatment of the Jews in El Kahal-Oro, Wast deliberately personifies the race in the individual, and while he introduces a large number of these maligned characters, he attributes to all of them the same vices, and charges them equally with the same sinister designs on the world in general and on Catholic Christendom in particular.

It is needless to comment further upon the uniformity of delineation with which the wealthy porteño aristocrat is presented, or upon the conformity to type of the idle and amoral young men whose egoism and sensuality so often brought wretchedness and ruin to the gullible serranas and campesinas.

With his emphasis on action and background, Wast naturally neglects any sustained effort at psychological analysis. However, in the rare instances in which he has devoted his talents to this aspect of characterization, the results have been worth-while. The proud and egocentric Merceditas of La que no perdó, obviously inspired to a large extent by the prototype which Galdós created in Doña Perfecta, is a highly unpleasant character whose feeling of wounded pride has caused her natural affection for her daughter to be colored with a desire for revenge and by an unnatural distrust of men. The presentation of the spiritual conflict in the apostates Marta Blumen and Mauricio Kohen of El Kahal-Oro is dramatic and convincing, and the attempts of the unhappy Fraser of Los ojos vendados to mask a wounded sentimentalism behind an assumed cynicism provides the most interesting factor of this story.
As a creator of original characters, Wast leaves much to be desired. As an imitator of classic models, and in his use of types to personify general classes of society, he proves himself a competent and versatile writer.

Many of Hugo Wast's novels have been translated into other languages, and he enjoys a significant popularity in Europe and in other countries of Latin America. Some of his works have been edited by scholars in the United States for use in the schools of this country. He has achieved with enviable success his objective of gaining a comfortable livelihood from his writing. With commandingly few exceptions, in view of the number and varied nature of his works, he has creditably realized his aim of writing novels which are both diverting and morally edifying. But he regards the novel, in the final analysis, as an instrument more properly devoted to the instruction and improvement of readers than to their entertainment. He is not completely materialistic in regard to his profession, nor is he an adherent of the "ivory tower" school of writers who believe in the practice of "art for art's sake". Wast himself has established the criterion by which his contribution to literature should be properly judged:

Ninguna actividad humana tiene su fin en sí misma, ni siquiera el Arte. Toda labor en el mundo debe servir para un fin más alto que ella misma. Por consiguiente toda novela debe contener alguna especie de trascendencia, que la haga esparcirse en sentimientos o ideas grandes más allá de sus propias páginas.  

4Wast, Confidencias de un novelista, p. 42.
In the majority of his novels he has fallen somewhat short of this noble ideal. It remains for time and universal opinion to render a verdict upon the best of his works, and to accord him his proper rank among writers who employ the Spanish language.
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