

Doña Bárbara by Rómulo Gallegos

Chapter Synopses and Comments — Part 1

[Adapted and translated from [the original Spanish](#) by TC Rindfleisch from the *Colección Obras Maestras* edition of Doña Bárbara (2007).]

Chapter I. ¿Con quien vamos?

Synopsis

We begin at the start of a trip along the Arauca River in a pirogue (bongo). The boat's leisurely speed is set by the efforts of two pole men who:

...lo hacen avanzar mediante una lenta y penosa maniobra de galeotes.

Santos Luzardo is a passenger who, according to the assessment of the rough-cut pirogue captain, is:

...un joven a quien la contextura vigorosa, sin ser atlética y las facciones enérgicas y expresivas préstanle gallardía casi altanera.

The other passenger – there are only two in the boat – is a man who the author tells us is a disturbing sort of guy with Asiatic features and who, exhausted, appears to be sleeping out from under the boat's canopy.

Santos Luzardo is the one who arranged for the trip up to San Fernando and it is to him that the captain offers a stop to refresh his strength under a gigantic tree, a “palodeagua”. The other passenger suggests that it would be better to stop at a resting spot more distant called “El Bramador”. The captain responds that “he who pays decides” and since it was Luzardo who hired the boat for the trip, they will rest where he decided, under the palodeagua.

During the rest period, Luzardo asks the captain:

— *Dígame, patrón: ¿conoce usted a esa famosa doña Bárbara de quien tantas cosas se cuenta en Apure?*

For the first time we hear the name “doña Bárbara” mentioned, and the captain advises him not to trust the other passenger who he has allowed on board. He could be “El Brujeador”, plain and simple the right hand of the fearsome doña Bárbara. Since Luzardo is headed to Altamira, the captain forewarns him that that is the area where the tough, and at the same time wicked, woman operates.

They depart the palodeagua once they have rested sufficiently, but with one passenger fewer – the one who said his name was Melquíades and who almost tacitly admitted his relationship with doña Bárbara. He made no effort to pay for his passage and continued his journey on foot, forgetting about the captain, the boat, and Santos Luzardo.

The pirogue settled itself over the waters of the Arauca and continued on its way.

Commentary

This is a good start to put us in context and to begin getting to know doña Bárbara. In this chapter we only know of her what we hear in the give and take between the pole men who propel the boat hired by Santos Luzardo.

We already know that doña Bárbara, in fact and in legend, follows a path of anger and conquest rather than one of truth:

...Esa es una mujer que ha fustaneado a muchos hombres y al que no trambuca con sus carantoñas lo compone con un bebedizo o se le amarra a las pretinas y hace con ello que se le antoje, porque también es faculta en brujerías.

Chapter II. El descendiente del Cunavichero

Synopsis

Here we find out who Santos Luzardo is – the younger son of José Luzardo and doña Asunción, owners of half of Altamira and natives of the Cunaviche region in Apure. The older son is named Félix. The other half of this enormous Altamiran prairie belongs to another Luzardo, Panchita, who is married to Sebastián Barquero. Panchita and Sebastián have a son named Lorenzo.

The original Altamira cattle ranch was the creation of Don Evaristo Luzardo in years gone by, but had fallen into discord among the generations of inheritors until it was divided between José and Panchita. In spite of this agreement, the Luzardos and Barqueros were still disputing the boundary line between their ranches. José and Sebastián were enemies in every sense of the word, until one day, during one of the never-ending arguments between the two, José sent Sebastián to his reward.

This tragedy reached even further — it was during the war between Spain and the United States (1898). José took the side of his motherland, true to his blood, while Félix sided with the Yankees. In the end, the father and son had a quarrel, instigated by Panchita who was now a widow at the hand of José. Each threatened to kill the other and, in a fit of anger, José killed his son. José was so aggrieved when he arrived home that, standing in front of his desk covered with mementos of years gone by, he buried his knife in the wall of his office. A few days later he died as a result of refusing to eat because of his profound remorse.

His wife, doña Asunción, and the younger son, Santos, abandoned their part of Altamira, turning it over to an administrator (mayordomo). They lived in Caracas off the income from the estate, and Santos studied law. Just as he finished his degree, doña Asunción died with these words on her lips:

— *Mientras puedas, no vendas Altamira.*

Santos stuck to that promise initially, but when his trustworthy ranch administrator died and doña Bárbara took control of the other half of Altamira, his interest in the property had lost the appeal it had in years gone by. When he proposed to sell it, there were no ready buyers.

When a potential buyer finally appeared, he didn't want to close the sale without first seeing the ranch with his own eyes. They agreed to meet at the ranch at the end of the month. When Santos heard the advice of the pirogue captain and ran into El Brujeador, he decided to:

...lanzarse a la empresa con el ímpetu de los descendientes de El Cunavichero, hombres de una raza enérgica, pero también con los ideales del civilizado que fue lo que a aquellos les faltó.

Commentary

It's hard to add anything to the author's own words. We find ourselves facing the possibility of a new fight over the ownership of the Altamira prairie land, which was first divided among heirs and later almost destroyed. Now one can foresee the struggle between one protagonist with intelligence, culture, and legal training gained in the university against the other who uses brutality and sorcery born out of ignorance and a lack of education, but with much practical experience. Bribery, barbarity, and more are readily at hand and harbored deep in the heart.

Chapter III. La devoradora de hombres

Synopsis

We see “Barbarita” at 15 years of age, as a cook on a pirate pirogue that plies the waters of a river whose boat traffic reaches from Ciudad Bolívar to Río Negro. One day in Ciudad Bolívar, a young fellow comes aboard with a «cara de hambre y ropas de mendigo» who the captain hired as an assistant cook for the girl in exchange for transport to Río Negro. The stranger and the girl fall in love, but unfortunately their love ruins a business deal the captain had with a sadistic and leprous Syrian who wants to fill his residence with young and pretty women so he can transmit his disease to them before he dies. These are to be his farewell to the hate and lechery that led to his fate of dying of this disease.

Everyone wants to take advantage of the situation: the captain forces his second mate to kill the love-struck assistant cook, the crew rebels and kills the captain and assistant pilot, and in the end everyone dies except for Barbarita and the old pilot, Eustaquio.

He protects her and carries her across rivers and lakes to an Indian tribe where she learns by necessity about the arts of witchcraft through:

...iniciarse en la tenebrosa sabiduría que profesan toda la caterva de brujos que cría la bárbara existencia de la indiada.

Between her gifts as a sorceress she is cultivating and her unsettling beauty, she is changed into a specialist in the practice of evil, honing her skills constantly. When she arrived at Altamira, she cast her gaze on Lorenzo Barquero, owner of half of those properties. The outcome was that she became owner of the Barquero half of the estate. Because the other half was now abandoned, she was able to use her perfected skills at graft to alter the boundary between the two estates. Thus, little by little she became the effective proprietor of all of Altamira.

As we come to the end of this chapter, when Barbarita has become doña Bárbara, 40 years old, and very alluring, Rómulo Gallegos describes her as follows:

...Tal era la famosa doña Bárbara: lujuria y superstición, codicia y crueldad, y allá en el fondo del alma sombría, una pequeña cosa pura y dolorosa, el recuerdo de Asdrúbal, el amor frustrado que pudo hacerla buena.

This Asdrúbal is none other than the assistant cook she knew on the pirogue, where only the 15-year-old Barbarita survived along with the old river dog, Eustaquio.

Commentary

As we get ready to start Chapter IV and to weave together the many loose ends of this story, we begin to discover the numerous mysteries within the broad scope of these pages. We become imbued with the full value of the work as it highlights both the local customs of the people and the natural richness of the region. At the same time, we learn the secrets each character harbors and how they come to reveal them.

Chapter IV. Uno solo y mil caminos distintos

Synopsis

As the pirogue carrying Santos Luzardo docks at the Altamira cattle ranch, a number of his trusted men are waiting for him. These include Melesio, a long-time fixture in the Luzardo camp; his son, Antonio, and a companion and friend called Carmelito; as well as eight granddaughters of the old man laughing happily and wearing brand new outfits.

Carmelito and Antonio don't have much confidence that Luzardo has come to correct the problems that have been weighing down on them and the ranch – all the more so because the new administrator, Balbino Paiba, has shown a favorable disposition toward doña Bárbara and her machinations. For some time now, Paiba has not given Santos Luzardo any clear accounting of the state of the Altamira ranch.

The old man, Melesio, is happy with his family, the two young men are dubious about whether or not the rich young lawyer-owner will resolve the deteriorated situation at the ranch, and the grandchildren, the eldest of which is only 17 years old, are content, happy, and somewhat flustered by the presence of the head of Altamira, as he is dealing:

...con la emoción, que lo reconciliaba con su tierra.

Commentary

This chapter is intended to begin to give the background of the Luzardo family and its connection with doña Bárbara. It sketches the situation, along with the underlying reason for the presence of Santos Luzardo at the Altamira ranch.

Still the two main characters have not yet run into each other and there is no indication as to whether this will happen sooner or later in the novel. For the moment we simply have the feeling that confrontations are coming, but it is not clear how. We will have to wait to see how the author handles things...

Chapter V. La lanza en el muro

Synopsis

This is a short chapter intended to allow Santos Luzardo to assure himself that everything at the Altamira ranch continues much as before, but in a deteriorated state. The dwelling is in very bad condition and the wall in which his father buried the knife he used to kill Santos' brother is exactly as it was left after the death of don Félix. Even as Santos pulls the blade from the wall, he can see that:

...Era como sangre la herrumbre que cubría la hoja de acero

Before entering that room, locked tight for thirteen years, he had decided to sell Altamira. But as he stood in the place where his father died and withdrew the knife from the wall, he changed his mind. He said to Antonio, who accompanied him, it's high time to throw the knife far away from here and:

— Dispón de lo necesario para que mañana se proceda a la reparación de la casa. Ya no venderé Altamira.

Commentary

His memories, driven by the turn of events, force Santos to make contradictory decisions one after the other. But at last the rational choice Antonio has tried to lead him to takes hold. In a decisive moment Santos makes up his mind to fix up the house and to take up residence once again at the Altamira ranch.

When Rómulo Gallegos set out to describe the beautiful countryside, it wasn't just for the sake of those awaiting the arrival of the new master at Altamira, but rather for everyone in the region:

...Se ocultó el sol, pero quedó largo rato suspendido sobre el horizonte el lento crepúsculo llanero, en una faja de arboles sombríos cortados por la línea neta del disco de la llanura, mientras en el confín opuesto, al fondo de una transparente lontananza de tierras mudas comenzaba a levantarse la luna llena.

For Santos though, not even this spectacular and poetic twilight, with its unpredictable silences, could rouse his memories as much as seeing how his brother's blood still covered the steel blade of his father's knife.

Chapter VI. El recuerdo de Asdrúbal

Synopsis

Here we have a change in scenery and a shift of the center of action to doña Bárbara's ranch house. Santos' traveling companion aboard the pirogue on the Arauca, Melquíades el Brujeador, arrives. After the stop at the palodeagua, he continued his travels across the savanna to doña Bárbara's ranch. He finds her in the dining room with her lover, Balbino, the character who in his spare time acts as administrator for Santos Luzardo. Coincidentally they are having dinner just at the moment when Santos decides not to sell the house and the lands of Altamira.

As Melquíades describes the doctor of laws from Caracas, different opinions take form in doña Bárbara and in Balbino. The latter says that when he goes to Altamira tomorrow, he will take Santos down a peg by snubbing him and starting a run-in. For the woman, the description reminds her of the great love of her youth, Asdrúbal – the cook she came to love deeply and who reciprocated her love. In an act of sorcery, only understood by Melquíades, she could see everything through a glass of water raised to her lips.

He is tired from his trip and leaves a stack of gold coins for her that he made by selling cattle. This upsets Balbino Paiba as he notes that she does not take time to go over the accounts with el Brujeador, whereas she always looks into every last penny when she reckons with him over any proceeds:

...Balbino se manoteó los bigotes, no para limpiárselos, sino como maquinalmente hacía cuando algo lo contrariaba.

Commentary

So now the characters begin to reveal themselves along with the personal traits each of them has locked up inside. Among these traits are the evil spells doña Bárbara always includes in her dialogues and her traps, in words as well as in deeds. Balbino Paiba shows his characteristic and boundless ambition to enrich himself, as he plays her undoubtedly opportunistic and shameless lover.

Also we see in Melquíades a spirit that is, underneath it all, straightforward and candid – without for a moment ignoring his ever-present cruelty. The positive responses he gets from his boss, doña Bárbara, because of his direct manner of taking action make him strive to be dependable in all of the deeds and work she entrusts to him.

Finally, we glimpse the course over which the clash of passions and events moves, never losing sight of the source of the power that brings about what will happen at every turn. In these events one can see elements of avarice, terror, and the exercise of personal power churning, intermixed with memories that at times lend hints of happiness as an alternative to the persistent corruption:

...Lejos, en el profundo silencio se oía el bronco mugido de los raudales de Atures... De pronto cantó el yacabó.

Chapter VII. El familiar

Synopsis

The title of this chapter, translated into its real meaning, has to do with a primal ritual. When one founds a new ranch, one must bury an animal alive to protect against everything evil and to assure a future of wealth and success. This ritual is carried out directly in front of the place where the corral will be built. Faithfully following this old superstition:

...El de Altamira era un toro araguato que, según la tradición, enterró don Evarista Luzardo en la puerta de la majada, y decíanle también El Cotizudo por atribuírsele grandes pezuñas de toro viejo, vueltas flecos, como cotizas deshilachadas.

In an evening social gathering, the discussion centered on the great changes brought about by that act of conjuring as well as the appearances of El Cotizudo and their consequences over the years. These events, according to each of the participants, came at various critical moments, and were the basis for the aftermath that brought benefit to some and ruin to others.

For many years, since the moment of the death of don José, El Cotizudo had not reappeared at Altamira until the night when Santos Luzardo arrived. The group chatting at the gathering included Carmelito, the one who talked the least; María Nieves, who joined with Venancio in his theories; and the last two, El Pajarote and Antonio. Some expressed their incredulity at feeling the renewed presence of El Familiar or El Cotizudo, the two names for the animal buried alive long ago. He supposedly had the power to resolve difficult situations and, in any new situation, to prevent any damage and injury foreseen through sorcery.

Everyone at the gathering came to believe that the presence of El Cotizudo in the plains of Altamira once again was a sober warning to doña Bárbara and a sign that her end was approaching. With Santos Luzardo now present, her authority over Altamira was ended along with her sorcery, her thefts, and her other crimes.

When those gathered decided to go to sleep, everyone thought that the commotion they felt they had heard daily was nothing other than the fitful movements of El Familiar looking for the misfortunes and miseries that were now destined to fall back on doña Bárbara.

Commentary

Sorcery took hold of Altamira years earlier, as it did in almost all of South America. In particular in places where discerning views that promote the culture of the ordinary people are lacking, they cook up this storyline of beliefs and misfortunes that bring about bad situations. Even today in many places, the common people are not only addicted to these systems, but also encourage and defend them.

The region of Altamira was no exception, as Rómulo Gallegos so well describes it. In this chapter he tells in great detail and makes crystal clear how such a terrible atrocity, like burying an animal alive at the corral of a new ranch, can increase or decrease the ills experienced by its inhabitants.

His commentary is befitting and concrete, and explains categorically how and in what way the people maintain such beliefs, and how they are detrimental rather than beneficial.

Chapter VIII. La doma

Synopsis

The plains are at once beautiful and fearsome, and they embrace comfortably both stunning life and horrible death. Death lurks everywhere, but nobody fears it. The plains put one on edge, but

fear does not chill the heart. It is warm like the great winds from the sunbaked immensity of the region, and like the fever of its marshlands.

Everything begins to stir. The sun has not yet risen and everyone is already preparing for the job. On this occasion, all are nervous to see how the new boss, recently arrived from outside the plains, handles himself.

The ranch hands prepare a horse for Santos. Pajarote chooses a dark chestnut horse, an “alazano tostao”, for him. Everyone is taken aback by his boldness. When he goes to make the horse ready, Santos tells him that he will ride the horse from the beginning and that he himself will break him in.

In the meantime, a person shows up at the stable area and starts a quarrel with Antonio about horses, and in particular about the very horse they are outfitting with reins and harness for Luzardo.

Luzardo sees that the matter is getting out of hand and doesn't make sense. Balbino Paiba, the administrator, is pitted against Antonio, who is standing up on behalf of the loyalty that binds him with the owner of the homestead. Santos Luzardo approaches the men and reproaches their behavior. The administrator answers him with clear disdain:

— *Que este hombre se me ha insolentado.*

— *¿Y usted quién es? - inquirió Luzardo, como si ni sospechase quien pudiera ser.*

— *Balbino Paiba. Para servirle.*

— *¡Ah! - exclamó Santos continuando la ficción — ¿Con que es usted el mayordomo? A buena hora se presenta y llega buscando pendencia en vez de venir a presentarme sus excusas por no haber estado aquí anoche, como era su deber.*

After this confrontation between the boss and his administrator, doña Bárbara's lover, they saddle Santos' horse. When his helpers get ready to help break him in, Santos refuses their aid and orders that he himself will do the job. With a skill and competence that surprises Altamira hands and outsiders alike, Santos demonstrates that he can lead the whole team with dignity.

Even Carmelito, the one most skeptical of Santos Luzardo's chances for success, can't help but whisper:

— *Me equivoqué con el hombre.*

Commentary

This chapter gives a demonstration of the power and authority that Santos brings to Altamira. As he rides off at full speed on the tamed young stallion, he convinces everyone that he can and should be the one to defend the Altamira community against the ambitions of doña Bárbara.

In his first action as owner, he has captured the hearts of all of his employees, not just because he mastered a task only a truly qualified plainsman can pull off, but also because he dared to kick the deceitful administrator off the property. Paiba played all his cards to the detriment of Altamira y to his own benefit. His firing sends a strong response to doña Bárbara for her tricks.

Chapter IX. La esfinge de la sabana

Synopsis

This is a short chapter to further demonstrate that Santos Luzardo's arrival in Altamira has had an impact. On the way back to his new home, Balbino runs into the Mondragones, who are in

frenzy because they have gotten orders from doña Bárbara to restore the ranch boundaries and resituate the house at El Miedo to the positions decreed by the judges.

The cunning tactics used by doña Bárbara were to change the boundaries for the ranch and house at Macanilla through corrupt means. When the judges ruled that the fence post line relative to the house was a determined boundary, she would order that the ranch house and post line be moved together during the night so that nobody would think to protest and she thereby got more land. Now that the ranch house had been moved almost 2 miles over time, she turned around and ordered the Mondragones to return the house and fence at Macanilla to their original positions, something that made them boiling mad.

Balbino told them that for the moment it was he who was giving the orders and not to do anything until he resolved the problem. He went to doña Bárbara's office and asked her what was going on. She told him firmly to carry out her orders without further ado or discussion. Balbino, a bit perplexed, told her that the Mondragones could not complete the job in only one night by themselves. She replied in no uncertain terms:

– *Que se lleven la gente que sea necesaria; pero que mañana aparezca todo donde estaba antes.*

They accepted her orders and, once again, Balbino showed himself to be ridiculous. He wanted to look into the reasons for such an abrupt change in strategy, and whether or not it was because of the arrival of the moron from Caracas. At that point doña Bárbara cut him off saying:

– *Dios libre al que se atreva contra Santos Luzardo. Este hombre me pertenece.*

Commentary

Nobody can divine the underlying reason for doña Bárbara's new approach. In this chapter, Rómulo Gallegos is playing around with the scheme she has worked out to end up with all of Altamira – that is, he is laying the ground work for her to carry out a Machiavellian plan that would leave Santos Luzardo with no land at all — in the same way she outsmarted his cousin, Lorenzo Barquero.

Chapter X. El espectro de La Barquereña

Synopsis

Santos Luzardo searches for his cousin, Lorenzo Barquero, in the area where he knew he had taken refuge. The search was anything but easy until he comes across a girl who is clothed in rags, is filthy, and is unattractive. He asks her if she knows where Lorenzo lives and she points to a rooftop in the distance that looks from where they were like it might be the place.

He goes to the building the girl had indicated and finds a small squalid dwelling, half log cabin and half shack. The man he is looking for is there – haggard, thin, falling-down drunk, and turned into a human wretch. The already old man at forty years asks him what he is looking for in these parts.

Santos Luzardo tells him who he is and that he has come to offer him his friendship. Lorenzo doubts what he hears because it seems impossible that a Luzardo might come to visit a Barquero. They exchange memories while Lorenzo continues to drink directly from his jug. The memories lighten his sense of deep sadness and he begins to talk more clearly in spite of the fact that his drunkenness grows worse.

He counsels Santos “not to trust in the centaur”, meaning his baser instincts, which are something real and not the result of sorcery. Santos should proceed with caution because when he least expects it, the lion will leap. They go on to talk about his daughter and Santos tells him

that he would come to say hello often. Now at the point of falling over from pure drunkenness, Lorenzo says:

— ¡Santos Luzardo! ¡Mírate en mí! ¡Esta tierra no perdona!

Commentary

This chapter shows us just what the “devoradora de hombres”, doña Bárbara, is able to do to turn a man, who was formerly admired by his associates and filled with the culture of the country itself, into a wretch. He used to be a learned and cultured man and doña Bárbara turned him into the most contemptible and Dantesque being at El Miedo. Not only is he himself paying for his sins, but he has also made his own daughter into a participant in his disillusionment and treachery:

...Era una muchacha, desgredada y cubierta de inmundos harapos, que portaba un haz de leña sobre la cabeza y trataba de ocultarse detrás de una palmera.

Chapter XI. La bella durmiente

Synopsis

This is the most poetic chapter we have summarized so far. Santos Luzardo was feeling compassionate and caring about Lorenzo's daughter, whom he encountered as he left her father's ranch. Marisela was daydreaming atop a sandy area when she sensed that her cousin, Santos, was passing by.

He studied her at his leisure and saw that she had a beautiful body, but he couldn't see her face. His horse whinnied and the girl awoke from her daydream. They exchanged the usual pleasantries and he focused on seeing her face, now that he had had plenty of time to study her body:

...Bajo los delgados y grasientos harapos que se le adherían al cuerpo, la curva de la espalda y las líneas de las caderas y de los muslos eran de una belleza estatuaría...

He continued to praise her allure. As he was settling his gaze on her unpolished beauty, he decided to lead her to a nearby pool of cool, clear water. He showed her how she could wash herself and be rid of the dirt, leaving only the raindrops that made up the pool in contact with her body, so as to feel as if she were another person.

They departed. She was happy with this new contact with life and began to dream about the changes that were taking place in her daily wanderings where she was like a wild animal among the native underbrush and stands of reeds. She felt a sensation like she had just been reborn that very day.

Commentary

These two central characters have been carried away to different fantasies: Marisela has given up suddenly her wild and animal-like life in the harsh natural environment, and Santos sees the possibility of helping to guide a “sleeping beauty” from the dangerous and wild plains on to a better way of living.

He is satisfied with himself for having been able to bring about a miracle, that of converting a raw beauty and instilling in her a way of realizing her full potential — and, if possible, a mutual love, not just physical but that of living in harmony and well-being in a respectful human society. Rómulo Gallegos tries to tell us that Santos has to make her understand that things in life are neither all bad nor all good, and that we have to bring out the best even though hidden at first:

...El cántaro del pozo sube y baja sin descanso, y el agua subterránea que no conocía la luz corre encandilada por el núbil cuerpo desnudo.

Chapter XII. Algún día será verdad

Synopsis

A conversation between Antonio and Santos is taking place in the open land that fronts on Macanilla. They are talking about the possibility of fencing off the ranchlands in order to keep herding the native cattle roaming his lands. The fences would mean that other cattlemen could not enter the property of any arbitrary ranch to capture unmarked cattle that, according to the “ley de vida”, belong to whoever corrals them.

For the moment, Santos wants to investigate the laws, legal precedents, and documentation, and doesn’t want to move forward with the idea unless the law supports his actions. The next day they are inspecting other areas within his ranchlands. When they reach the crest of a high plateau, Antonio signals him to be silent. Antonio then cups his hands to his mouth to send a horrendous call that rolls across the plain in the silence of the night.

Almost without realizing it, there arose a bellow in that silence in which they had been talking over the fencing idea. It grew across the expanse they could survey from the high spot on the hill where they were, and a mass of many thousands of animals thundered in a mad rush as the herds of wild unbranded cattle scattered with their chaotic movements:

- ¡Escuche! – exclamó el peón –. Estos son millares y millares de orejanos que no conocen al hombre. Hace más de siete años que no entran caballos en este paño de sabana. Y esto que está oyendo es nada comparado con otras cimarroneras que hay más adentro, hacia el Cunaviche.

In order to sort out all that based on the law, thought Santos Luzardo, he would have to change the way the plainsmen lived their lives. He wanted everything at his leisure, without walls and fences that would reduce his freedom of action. At a suitable time he would have to think about the railroad though, that sooner or later would pass through these plains:

- Algún día será verdad. El progreso penetrará en la llanura y la barbarie retrocederá vencida.

Commentary

There is little one can argue with in this tour of Altamira. The description is an explanation of the current state of things, and an assessment of the near future, so as to work in accord with the changes progress will dictate. We will wait and see how the plainsman defends himself against the pile of adversities that the future of the railroad will bring to him.

Chapter XIII. Los derechos de «Míster Peligro»

Synopsis

In this chapter we are introduced to the final character — Guillermo Danger, whom everyone knows as “Míster Peligro”. We find him, a mass of muscles and red skin, visiting doña Bárbara and don Apolinar to celebrate the opening of a corral on her lands.

Doña Bárbara proposes that just the three of them go to place “El Familiar” in front of the new corral. They put an old live horse in the ditch that the hands have already dug.

Just as they begin throwing dirt and sand over the animal, Bárbara gives don Apolinar a hard shove. The man lies motionless in the bottom of the hole, and Danger notes that he is dead:

— *No lo compadezca, don Guillermo. Él también me tenía sentenciada. Yo lo que he hecho es andarle adelante.*

They make a pact of silence in exchange for further cooperation. When the American arrived back at his house, Santos Luzardo was there and introduced himself. They had a short discussion about whether or not Luzardo could close off the wide opening to Danger's lands at Corozalito.

Mister Peligro tells Santos that he has documents which show that he cannot do that because Danger has bought those lands from Santos' cousin, Lorenzo Barquero. He shows Santos the papers that have a signature which he feels certain is not that of his cousin. He will set out to verify that.

He leaves Danger's house and heads for Lorenzo's. Santos finds him in a state of delirium tremens because of his drunkenness. He decides to leave when he senses that it is impossible to bring Lorenzo around, much less ask him questions, and he doesn't see his daughter in the area. But as he reaches the threshold of the door, he runs into mister Peligro who is observing him. They exchange a few words when Marisela shows up.

Everything about her has changed. She is clean and spruced up with clothes that Santos had sent her. All this is the result of the words he exchanged previously with the girl.

As she sees that Danger is in the cabin, she heads toward him with the intent of gouging him again with her nails. Danger sees her, gets mad, and tells her that he has all the rights in the world to be there because he has bought the cabin from her father. We see that Santos must take action because the situation has turned ugly for the girl:

— *Ya es demasiado — exclamó sin poder contenerse — Le emborracha usted al padre, le despoja de su patrimonio y por añadidura no tiene usted delicadez para tratarla.*

They argue anew, about the rights each claims to have over Lorenzo Barquero and his daughter. Very angry, Danger leaves the cabin, reminding Santos that he had better know the limits of his rights before opening his mouth.

Santos mutters to himself, that soon Danger will understand whether or not he knows his rights and how to defend them:

...*Y decidió llevarse consigo a Lorenzo y a su hija, para librarlos de la humillación tutelar del extranjero.*

Commentary

Almost everything is already clear from the synopsis. There are no changes in attitudes or situation, although surely things have gotten more complicated in this fight between goodness and evil.

In contrast, doña Bárbara and all of her lackeys continue to be engaged in their trouble-making, their shady affairs, and all sorts of defenses of what is indefensible. We will see how the author, in the midst of this web of truths and lies, is going to resolve things. Because of all the drama we have seen, not only in the events we have read about but also the characteristics of the land and the people, it cannot come to anything but a tragic end.