

***Doña Bárbara* by Rómulo Gallegos**

Chapter Synopses and Comments — Part 2

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

Chapter I. *Un acontecimiento insólito*

Synopsis

Santos Luzardo knows now that he has only one clear path forward, he must appear in the district Civil Headquarters and lodge a proper complaint against both doña Bárbara and the foreigner, Danger. He does just that, assisted by some intelligence from Antonio about the colonel or general — both titles were claimed by the man so he would not have to prove that he was worthy of the upper-crust title, “don Ño Pernalete”.

When Santos arrives in the district capitol, he finds that he had studied together years ago at the University of Caracas with the secretary of the Civil Administrator. The secretary arranges the process to cite Bárbara and Danger, without the knowledge of the general who is away from the city. The complaints are served, but by time the two defendants appear at the administrative headquarters, Ño Pernalete has returned from his trip and, in front of them, he lights into his secretary with a very severe reprimand. He commands that Santos Luzardo be found immediately and brought before the Chief Administrator.

Later, the five of them are present in the office of the Chief Administrator. Without acknowledging Santos’ greeting, the general begins by telling him that the two defendants are there to hear details of his complaints. Santos begs Bárbara’s pardon for starting with Danger, not without realizing that he and Ño Pernalete were exchanging knowing winks of collusion between them and that they had talked while Mujiquita had gone to find Santos at the inn where he was staying:

— *Es el caso que el señor Danger tiene en sus corrales reses marcadas con su hierro, pero que sin embargo, llevan las señales de Altamira.*

— *¿Y eso que quiere decir?*

— *Que no le pertenecen. Simplemente.*

He forces Danger to disclose to the colonel that he knows the law is perfectly clear that, given his status as a foreigner, he cannot rebrand cattle under any circumstances. He must build a wall closing the opening to his property, totally at his own expense. Once that complaint was resolved, Santos turned to doña Bárbara. The plan for the proceedings is strongly biased against him because Ño Pernalete can’t see anything clear or compelling in his position. Santos states that he has requested that the cunning Bárbara allow him to work on her lands to collect his cattle, and that the law of the plains obligates her to comply. She confirms her position. Then the general tells Mujiquita to bring the book containing the relevant statutes. With the book in his hand, the general says to doña Bárbara:

— *La ley soberana dice, efectivamente y es terminante...*

He rules in favor of Santos but she refuses to accept the decision. Santos stands up and bids farewell to everyone, adding for the Chief Administrator: should the lady and Mr. Danger fail to abide by the decision within eight days, he will bring suit against them before a tribunal.

With that the afternoon ends with a few more words from Ño Pernalete:

¡Eso no se queda así! Alguno va a pagar la altanería del doctorcito ese. ¡Venir a hablarme a mí de leyes!

Commentary

Things are getting more complicated and we can see the power struggles arising under the law itself based on misunderstandings. Ño Pernalete does not understand all the issues, and once Santos was gone from the headquarters, he gives Mr. Danger and doña Bárbara advice on how to resolve the problems of the fence and of allowing passage onto her properties. They all stop at the inn to have some drinks and both defendants promise to send the general appropriate gifts for the good counsel he had given them.

Chapter II. Los amansadores

Synopsis

Carmelito has broken in a young mare that is white in color and high-strung, but of great beauty and poise. Very tactfully, Santos Luzardo asks him to sell the horse while he is in the midst of working with it, but Carmelito refuses to do so. Nothing makes him lose faith that he can teach the horse to be content with its domestication.

With his training work now done, Carmelito wants to make a gift of the horse to Marisela. He does so with great show, but Santos doesn't like this very much because he believes the girl belongs to him in body and spirit.

Santos goes off with the beautiful girl, who is making good progress in learning to conduct herself in society, just as her father is learning to control his alcohol. Because the girl is making considerable advances in becoming an integral part of the day-to-day life at Altamira, Carmelito would like to accompany them and asks permission from Luzardo to do so. He grants his permission in consideration of the work he has done in taming Catira, the name given to the horse, but not without a certain reticence, especially when the hand says to him:

— *¡Ah doctor! Como que no somos tan mal amansadores, usted y yo. Véale el paso a la Catira, por lo que a mí me corresponde. Que en lo tocante a la obra de usted...*

Commentary

This chapter, entitled "Los amansadores" by the author, shows us the kind of work each of the characters performs at the ranch. Carmelito is an artist with horses just as Santos is with the behavior of people. The outstanding improvements he has achieved with both Lorenzo Barquero and Marisela border on the miraculous. They are the joy of Altamira.

Chapter III. Los rebullones

Synopsis

The birds of ill omen are thirsty for blood. The big and ugly birds invented by Juan Primito, the fool at the service of the sorceries of doña Bárbara, are being fed from pans filled with blood and placed strategically around the area according to Juan Primito's imagination and beliefs:

...los rebullones eran una especie de materialización de los malos instintos de doña Bárbara, pues había cierta relación entre el género de perversa actividad a que ésta se entregara y el líquido que él les ponía a aquéllos para que aplacaran su sed: sangre, si fraguaba un asesinato; aceite y vinagre, si preparaba un litigio; miel de aricas y bilis de ganado mezcladas, si tendía las redes de sus hechizos a alguna futura víctima.

Juan Primito was charged with delivering the news to Luzardo that before daybreak of the next day, the cunning, disagreeable woman would be waiting with her people so that he could satisfy his request to work her lands – this in exchange for forgetting his threat to resort to a suit.

Primito felt himself the boyfriend of Marisela because of the kindnesses he had shown her when she was abandoned by her father during his repeated drunken binges. Primito brought her leftovers from the ranch hand meals. She was the “niña de sus ojos”. As he was greeted on the patio of Santos’ home, he was mesmerized by the changes the formerly wild girl had undergone since she used to wander the abandoned farmlands where she lived with her father.

Juan Primito delivered the message from doña Bárbara and bid farewell to the girl. She could see in his expression that he was preparing his ominous birds and what was on their menu. When Juan Primito admitted that it was “¡con sangre!”, she dismissed him brusquely from the Luzardo estate.

Commentary

The omens are not good – sinister persons who are addicted to Bárbara’s two-timing maliciousness will appear. Primito is feeding his ominous birds – the ones they are always on the lookout for on the horizon – with blood from the pots he spreads about in accord with his imagination and living quarters. This will bring foreboding news for the near future.

The people who are the objects of the birds’ prophecies are still in the area. Meanwhile, Juan Primito feeds and protects his birds with the approval of doña Bárbara.

Chapter IV. *El rodeo*

Synopsis

Two groups of ranch hands, one headed by doña Bárbara and the other by Santos Luzardo, meet at the agreed upon time and in the designated place, Mata Oscura, to begin their roundup. Each foreman has his instructions, and because doña Bárbara has triple the number of men that Santos has, they know exactly what they are to do to disrupt the anticipated work. Santos and his foreman, Antonio, nevertheless insist that they do things the way they had proposed — they would split up into groups of four, each with three men from doña Bárbara’s crew and one from Santos Luzardo’s. In this way, they could better prepare the cattle to be driven where they belong.

Balbino Paiba was going to change the plans but, switching roles, doña Bárbara wouldn’t even let him think about directing the operation.

Antonio took charge of everything and they began a drive that, in only a short while, resulted in the plains being filled with a thunder of snorts and lowing from the cattle, and shouts from the men. When it appeared that everything was under control, one of doña Bárbara’s hands — one of the three Mondragon brothers who was called El Onza — got off of his horse as if he needed to tighten his horse’s cinch. When no one was looking, he provoked a fierce bull that took off through a breach in the perimeter, followed by the rest of the herd trying to escape with him.

The Mondragon brother ended up dying in the stampede and Santos, Antonio, Carmelito, and Pajarote had to hold tight on their reins, along with two cowboys from El Miedo. They took off to stop the ensuing stampede and after a dangerous pursuit, they managed to throw the rampaging bull to the ground. They subdued the animal and castrated him on the spot before the admiring eyes of doña Bárbara, who couldn’t believe the great exploit Santos Luzardo had performed.

After his success as a plainsman, doña Bárbara and Santos had a cordial talk in which she said to him with a smile:

-¡Ah, llanero bellaco que es usted! y que se le habían olvidado las costumbres de su tierra.

Still Doña Bárbara thought she could use her skills as a sorceress to end up dominating the intellectual and fearless plainsman Santos Luzardo was becoming.

Commentary

In this first encounter between Santos Luzardo and doña Bárbara, a cocky and vicious woman meets a man who is pursuing his own ends with a certain air of malice and vengeance. The feelings of both are seen clearly.

She would like to, and is trying to, add another line to her list of male conquests. Santos Luzardo claims that the plains must return to their former state — a decision he made after he forgot his plan to sell Altamira and committed to continue filling the breach in defense of the estate.

Chapter V. Las mudanzas de doña Bárbara

Synopsis

Bárbara wants to meet again with Santos. That goal consumes her and changes her thoughts and behavior. Her ranch hands hardly recognize her. She has even come to put aside her avarice and become a generous woman. One day she gave her men a large sum of money so they could celebrate a holiday.

The attraction she is feeling for Santos Luzardo has taken her from her work and caused her to go horseback riding for hours and hours around her lands, always looking toward Altamira – but the man she was seeking never appeared. Days passed and she waited.

She was feeling very strong desires for the man, but this time they were well-intentioned. They were not at all like the feelings she had had up until then. Those were based on the aversion she long felt for men, and that filled her with lust and brutality aimed at controlling them.

With her new neighbor everything was different. The old and pure love she felt for Asdrúbal when she was only fifteen years old is reawakened. At last, Santos shows up at her house out of the blue without announcing his visit. He is eagerly received but he immediately cuts the pleasantries short in order to make clear to her his reasons for coming — to present a request and a plea.

The request is that Santos wants to share a new fence between their properties. Even though he is the one who envisioned it, he thinks the cost should be split half and half. She pressures him to tell her where he wants to start locating the fence and he maintains that it should be from where the boundaries are now set. Bárbara says, “No way, the fence should be put where the boundaries were originally, before the law suit.”

Santos was surprised and refused that idea. She tried to insist, but ended up signing and sealing the document. He then took her aback, saying the before signing the papers, she had to listen to his plea:

— Espere un instante. Le agradezco esa buena disposición que me demuestra porque la ha precedido usted de unas palabras que, sinceramente, me han impresionado; pero ya le había anunciado que eran dos los objetos que perseguía al venir a su casa. En vez de restituirme esas tierras que ya las doy por restituidas, oralmente, haga otra cosa que le agradecería más; devuélvale a su hija las de La Barquereña.

The spell that had bound the course of the conversation to this point was broken. Doña Bárbara reverted to her old temperament. Her eyes showed only cruelty with the ever-present satanic intent, filled with evil, and with the capriciousness of her animosity toward anything that hints at being a man. She told him that she already knew Marisela was living under his roof, and that she is very beautiful and appears to be a new person.

Santos Luzardo was the one who blew up now and, on his way out the door, he said his final words to her:

— Vive en mi casa, bajo mi protección, que es una cosa muy distinta de lo que usted ha querido decir — rectificó, con voz vibrante de indignación — Y vive bajo mi protección porque carece de pan, mientras usted es inmensamente rica, como hace poco me ha dicho. Pero yo me he equivocado al venir a pedirle a usted lo que usted no puede dar, sentimientos maternos. Hágase el cargo de que no hemos hablado una palabra, ni de esto ni de nada.

Commentary

The characters continue to create situations of intense drama and contradictions of the same type that are the reason for an incipient struggle against nature. The woman is generous in the face of love and the possession of a man, while in contrast she denies a means of support to a daughter who at the very least provides the woman with part of her considerable wealth. But Rómulo Gallegos formulates for us, in his coded explanation, several core propositions about the people of the plains – everything is permissible except that which appears to be. Everything is accepted, up to that which is unreal, and in contrast that which is real is repudiated:

...Doña Bárbara se precipitó al escritorio, en cuya gaveta guardaba el revólver cuando no lo llevaba encima; pero alguien le contuvo la mano y le dijo: «No matarás. Ya tú no eres la misma.»

Chapter VI. El espanto del Bramador

Synopsis

On Maundy Thursday, Santos Luzardo's plainsmen prepared to end the life of a crocodile, the terror of the creek. It was the oldest reptile in the area and they never had been able to hunt it down. It was called "el Tuerto del Bramador" and was the very crocodile that tried to kill Santos Luzardo the day of his arrival at Altamira, and from which he escaped unharmed.

There was total silence since they couldn't hunt the animal with rifles and bullets. He was so old that his skin repelled any rifle shots, so they had to hunt him by hand. They disguised themselves under the shells of the gourd-like fruits of the calabash tree, called "taparas", with holes cut out for their eyes. Pajarote and María Nieves — the manliest of them all with the name of a woman — were hidden in the water. In a short time, everyone was shouting along the riverbank of the Arauca as the crocodile most feared by the river dwellers came to the surface, belly up and motionless.

The "espanto del Bramador" had stopped churning – and, in a similar way, all of the sorceries of El Miedo were destined to end.

Commentary

The side of the river where the crocodile lived belonged to doña Bárbara and she had prohibited anyone from attacking the reptile, called "el espanto del Bramador" by the common folk. They killed it because the crocodile was vicious and used to doze along the sandy shores of the river after the atrocities it committed in the waters and on the banks.

The reason Doña Bárbara forbade killing the beast is that she knew well the powers of “el Tuerto del Bramador”, and they helped her control who could cross the boundaries of her lands without being attacked and eaten by the reptile. That contributed to her feeling more secure.

Chapter VII. Miel de aricas

Synopsis

This is a short chapter that tells us how Melesio’s granddaughters enjoy eating the honey from bees called “aricas,” that populate the trees where they live together in the Algarrobo pass. The two friends, Marisela and Genoveva, the oldest of the grandchildren, are sitting on a bench near the table and talking about the various ideas of hygiene and studying that Santos forces them to practice. The two come to the conclusion that they are both enamored of the doctor.

But at the same time they feel depressed because they believe that the doctor prefers a woman in Caracas named Luisana Luján and that they are nothing compared to her:

...pero no se ha hecho la miel para el burro.

Commentary

For the first time we learn some details about Santos’ life in Caracas — especially, according to Marisela, the way his eyes light up every time he talks about his girl friends in the capitol. She discovered that whenever she mentions the name of a woman called Luisana Luján, he turns red all of a sudden and his voice trembles.

This gives her a way to be able to understand that the affection he has for the people of Altamira is only a portion of his more comprehensive feelings and gentlemanliness toward all the people he knows. He is all together a man.

Chapter VIII. Candelas y retoños

Synopsis

A combination of factors creates uneasiness about the weather. A plains wildfire begins to burn across Altamira and everyone knows and believes that it is a curse caused by spiteful doña Bárbara. Bonfires flare up and destroy the best of the vegetation but create a refreshed and flourishing dry land.

Even Marisela gives up studying and can think of nothing but returning to the wreckage of her former woodland. From the mountain range, the god of rain arrives. The storm clouds gather in the sky turning it leaden, and they burst open to cover all of the plains with rain water.

When the rains have finished, the savanna awakens everywhere in green. The terrible ashes disappear and doña Bárbara’s scorching hot sorceries cease to hold sway. Marisela returns to her studies:

...Y todo fue como los retoños después de las candelas.

Commentary

What is described here is like a miracle. Not even the Mondragones could have thrown more wood on the fire from “el Mecanillal”. Nor could doña Bárbara’s wicked evasions of her responsibilities have contributed more evil than that which would be produced were all of her vengeance transformed into cruel actions. The entire calamity came down to a fierce wildfire dedicated to destruction. But afterward, the rains sent over Altamira from the mountain range filled the entire savanna with new growth, satiating the thirst for vengeance, almost causing

Lorenzo Barquero to give up the alcohol that was destroying him, and making the plainsmen forget the natural forces of the prairies where the wild fires emulated human acts of cruelty.

Only the tenacious quest for justice championed by Santos Luzardo was victorious, urged on by the verdant renewal of the plains:

...Y un día amaneció toda verde.

Chapter IX. Las veladas de la vaquería

Synopsis

It is fiesta time after the roundup to divide up the cattle that have wandered off to the wrong ranch during the course of the winter. All of the tenant farmers from the area sent their best cowboys to review all of the animals. There is another skirmish with Balbino Paiba, who tries to keep the animals that belong to a rancher who could not join the roundup. Paiba intends to run off with them for himself, but Santos would not permit it. He grumbles but does not get the animals.

After a long day of grueling work, tired and having only their early morning coffee in their stomachs, the ranch hands have a light dinner and afterwards go to the dance, or “joropo”. The best harpists and musicians in the region were brought in and everyone chooses their partner. Santos is feeling down and does not dance – neither does anyone dare to invite Marisela to dance.

As the last round of music and dance approaches, Marisela suggests she would like to dance with Pajarote. He is startled and, under Antonio’s sour look, he says to her:

— *Eso me queda grande, niña Marisela.*

But Santos, watching the fiesta and aware of what is happening, orders her to dance – while Marisela nervously bites her lips. The ranch hand grabs her and shouts to the harpist as they fly through the air:

— *Apréciase, Ramón Nolasco, y sacuda bien los capachos, tuerto Ambrosio, que de oro debieran ser. Aquí va el Pajarote con la flor de Altamira, sin tenérselo merecido...*

Pajarote is so happy that the master has permitted him to dance with her that he shouts:

¡Abran campo, muchachos, abran campo!

Commentary

There are other resources available to explain the customs and modes of conduct of the plainsmen, but in the context of this work they take on a tangible reality as set forth by the author, Rómulo Gallegos.

He demonstrates that he knows the environment and has lived in it, and he makes patently clear to the literary world how much the people of the region stress living life to the fullest in spite of all the dangers that await them. It is marvelous to be able to read these passages that open the doors on the nature of rural life in the Venezuela of those times. No one but Gallegos has known how to express these images with such skill and refinement of language and storytelling.

Chapter X. La pasión sin nombre

Synopsis

Marisela's imagination is on a par with the circumstances. The fact that she is in love with Santos is written all over her face. Her proposal to dance with Pajarote was more a ruse to get revenge for her rising jealousies than anything else. During a pause in the dancing, she runs to find Genoveva to make her aware that she had made her love known to Santos:

... me lo quedé mirando y le dije: ¡Antipático!

That's how she thought she had opened her heart to the man she had fallen in love with. Genoveva goes to find Pajarote to dance with him, and Marisela remains alone and continues dreaming until Santos shows up. They declare their eternal love for each other. But nothing at all comes of any of this. It is all a result of the fertile imagination of the girl who finds it very hard to wake up from her daydream -- she is so very deeply in love with her guardian.

Commentary

This is one more chapter in which the author uses the expedients of love to soften the dramatic flare-ups that are coming. From another point of view, they complement those future events and even serve in part as their impetus. Anything is possible with the narrative skills Gallegos has. Nothing really important happens in this chapter, and it is rather insignificant from the point of view of the esthetics of the art of the novel.

But, with all the ferocity, cruelty, intensity, and intimidation of the novel's content, scenes of this sort help one take a breath amidst the general themes of avarice, death, and injustice.

Chapter XI. Soluciones imaginarias

Synopsis

We have a rather unusual author. He dedicates full attention in this part of the tale to three matters that are light, authentic, and unexpected. Luzardo studies the possibilities that might make it suitable for him to fall in love with Marisela. He has three stacks of papers of different kinds on the table in front of him and he puts both hands on the first stack and asks, "Does she interest me?" He then does the same successively with the other two stacks. In each case he judges and assimilates the possibilities, although for each of them he finds ambiguous answers that can lead to any preferred outcome.

He even comes to think about sending Marisela away from his house to study in the home of one of his aunts in Caracas -- in order to avoid what is inevitable now that she is in love with him. After a long negotiation with himself, he does not arrive at any conclusion:

...se veía obligado a confesarse que estas reflexiones pesimistas le producían un disgusto especial. (...) En cambio postergando al razonador, le era grato poner, de cuando en cuando, un poco poeta el corazón y repetir aquello de la moneda de oro del avaro — [que es quizá el más idealista de los hombres. La riqueza toda sueños, la seguridad de que nunca se comprará con ella una desilusión.]

Commentary

Throughout this chapter, Santos studies the pros and cons of the possibilities available to him to fall in love with Marisela. He passes judgment on each, one after the other, and sometimes ends up considering himself despicable and at other times feeling that he needs her presence. He finally concludes that there is no plausible decision now and that, with time, he hopes everything will sort itself out.

Chapter XII. Coplas y pasajes

Synopsis

It is hard to make a serious literary critique of this chapter. It seems best to count it as a lesson in social science because it really is nothing else. In a few pages, it tries to explain the nature of a plainsman's work – the crossbreeding of his animals and the use of various ranching procedures that haven't changed for centuries – such as the importance of cheese-making and the crucial significance of moving herds of cattle safely across rivers where the crocodiles are the embodiment of danger.

Antonio Sandoval says at one point about plainsmen, "... the way they live, sleep, suffer, love, and dance to have fun":

¡Llanero es llanero, hasta la quinta generación!

And nobody is going to change that – given the natural setting they want either to surround them as they live their lives or to serve in the miracle of their deaths. Nature is everything. Even Santos Luzardo, who wants to modernize the ranching methods during this year, continues the same. Moreover, things can only be changed by one who can remove all the obstacles in order to find himself with:

¡Marisela, canto del arpa llanera, la del alma ingenua y traviesa, silvestre como la flor del paraguayán, que embalsama el aire de la mata y perfuma la miel de las aricas!

Commentary

Los patos salvajes, las corocoras, las chusmitas, los gavanos y los gallitos azules, que no habían emigrado acudían a visitar a las viajeras (...) También habían regresado los chicuacos y contaban sus impresiones de viaje...

As we said above, this chapter is a tutorial on natural history with a strong rural bent. Everything moves as if part of the very life of a plainsman. There are no mysteries, only the truths of nature itself. One is a plainsman because one was born a plainsman – by his profession and by his fears, by his sixth sense and by his acts of bravery. All this is defined by one word, LLANERO...

Chapter XIII. La Dañera y su sombra

Synopsis

What was destined to happen finally has come about. Mother and daughter confront each other by the arts of hocus-pocus and magic. The senselessness of the unthinkable takes place. Sorcery comes to take place within easy reach of the young Marisela. Listen to how the Altamira cooks tell about Juan Primito coming to measure Santos Luzardo, and why:

...mujer que se amarre en la cintura la medida de un hombre, hace con él lo que quiera.

Primito takes Santos Luzardo's measure with a long cord, and he takes it to give to doña Bárbara who had asked him to get it.

Marisela finds all this out when Primito was already half way to the destroyer of men. She asks Pajarote to accompany her to give her the courage needed to enter El Miedo. He can't refuse and rides at her side up to the very door of the El Miedo ranch house. He remains outside but gives her a silent gesture that if they hurt her in any way, he will come to her aid.

Marisela, not without a certain burning in her soul, enters doña Bárbara's house for the first time. At the very moment she enters the dining area, Bárbara heads toward her sorcerer's altar in the adjoining room with the cursed cord.

She can't react in time to doña Bárbara, who is already reciting her incantation and ranting:

— *Con dos te miro, con tres te ato: con el Padre, con el Hijo y con el Espíritu Santo
¡Hombre! Que yo te vea más humilde ante mí que Cristo ante Pilatos.*

As she is about to affix the cord to her waist, Marisela lunges at her and takes the cord from her, destroying all the damnable conjuring started at Santos' ranch. Meantime Marisela calls out:

— *¡Bruja!*

That word is so painful in her mother's ear that they tangle themselves in a dogged and brutal fight – one of them trying to recover the cord and the other trying to keep hold on it. Santos Luzardo appears at that moment and when his authoritative voice is heard, the fighting stops abruptly and all that remains is Bárbara wicked and diabolic look.

She remains alone and prostrate on the floor, gathering the icons, fetishes, and amulets that Marisela had swept off the altar with one stroke of her arm. She begins to talk once again with her invisible and mournful "Socio" – with whom she has often spoken in the past and who has given her both good and bad advice. As the shadowy spirit slowly disappears, all that remains is total loneliness, even as it murmurs to her one last time:

— *Si quieres que él venga a ti, entrega tus obras.*

Commentary

This is the end of the second part of the novel, and by now the positions of the main characters are well defined – the animosity between mother and daughter, one of the crucial points of the work, and Santos' clear feelings of contempt for Bárbara, not even thinking of her as a woman but rather only as an enemy he has to deal with. Also we see that the situation at Altamira is improving, with things once again on the road to prosperity as a result of hard work and deep-seated integrity.