

Doña Bárbara by Rómulo Gallegos Chapter Synopses and Comments — Part 3

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

Chapter I. El espanto de la sabana

Synopsis

Once again, with his habitual evil intent, Balbino starts a dispute between the plainsmen, while trying to get his own cut of the pie. He entrusts things to Melquíades, El Brujeador, who traveled with Santos in the rented pirogue in Part 1, Chapter 1.

In the aftermath of what happened previously, everyone at El Miedo understands that the efforts at reconciliation with Altamira have broken down. Balbino tells Melquíades that doña Bárbara believes the best way to do the most harm to Luzardo is to start rustling horses on his land at night again — as they say in the text:

...sorprender las yeguas dormidas al raso de la sabana y perseguirlas durante la noche y a veces durante días y noches consecutivos, de manera que se encaminasen hacia un corral falso, disimulado al efecto entre el monte.

Melquíades heads for Rincón Hondo and, shortly after arriving there, he finds the herd of mares and their stallion that Balbino told him doña Bárbara knew would be there. Melquíades can hardly believe it, thinking from the first that it was all an invention on the part of Balbino, with whom he had never got on well. Because he had felt restless for a time because of a lack of work, he even had thought about leaving El Miedo. Because of the loyal commitment he felt for doña Bárbara, however, he accepted the job from the administrator with the proviso that he would not steal from his patron.

He did his work in one night and might have captured the entire herd of horses in a false corral, except that Cabos Negros, the stallion of the herd of mares, refused to fall for the trap:

...vio al padrote — Cabos Negros — en el extrema opuesto del rincón de la sabana con el cuello erguido, mirándolo desafiador.

This episode, tangential to the main plot of the work, tells us many things about the capabilities of the stud stallions of these herds. After escaping the trap, Cabos Negros quickly took over as leader of another herd when he vanquished its stallion. When Melquíades saw the new herd of mares under his lead, he tried to lure it toward the false corral as well. After many nights of trying though, he couldn't make it happen:

...se dio cuenta de que el padrote era el Cabos Negros, que ya se había bellaqueado. Era la primera vez que a El Brujeador lo engañaba un caballo.

Doña Bárbara confronted him about this slip-up and had to remind him:

...esto nos sucede desde que en Altamira hay un hombre que no teme a los espantos de la sabana.

Melquíades Gamarra felt deeply offended at her bringing this up so directly, and wanted to set the record straight with his response:

— Cuando usted quiera convencerse de que no le tengo miedo a otro hombre, no tiene más que decirme: Tráigamelo, vivo o muerto.

Commentary

The earlier emotion, akin to a regenerated love, that moved doña Bárbara, changed quickly into hatred from the moment her daughter, Marisela, showed up at her house and was saved by Santos' intervention. We can now point out that that moment was a turning point, the beginning of the end. After that event, Bárbara unleashed an all-out war – if you want, a cold one that grew into a pitched battle, at times bloody.

All that was lacking were Melquíades' words and deeds, and their consequences, to put Bárbara in an altered state:

...se quedó pensativa, como si tratara de hacerle sitio a un nuevo designio dentro de sus tempestuosos sentimientos.

Chapter II. Las tolveneras

Synopsis

The situation brought about by Primito measuring Santos had its effect at Altamira too. After telling Santos her thoughts, Marisela did not want to see him anymore because she felt she was clearly the daughter of the “destroyer of men”. She was very depressed and confused, and only came out of her room when Santos was not in the house. This went on for several days, at which point the ranch hands returned with a magnificent harvest of heron feathers. This would now make it possible to build the long-anticipated fence to separate El Miedo from Altamira.

They sent Carmelito and his brother to the capital of the district with the load of feathers to exchange them for barbed wire to be used to raise the barrier. Those who returned though were two of No Pernaleté's security men leading Carmelito's horse tethered to the tail of the lead horse. They brought the unpleasant news that they had found a body at El Totumo ranch that “no se le pudo reconocer, porque ya estaba corrompido y medio comido por los zamuros” – “was unrecognizable because it was so badly decomposed and half-eaten by the vultures”. The brand on the horse indicated it was from Altamira.

They asked the officers about the heron feathers and about the companion of the owner of the horse they had returned:

— *¿que se había hecho de ellas?*

...Los mensajeros se miraron las caras... «Por allá no se sabe que el difunto fuera acompañado ni que llevara nada de robar.»

They decided that Santos should go to the capital to figure out what had happened. When Luzardo left, Marisela and her father returned to their property – she because she felt she should never have left it being at heart just her mother's daughter, and he because of his affinity to drink, something mister Danger was always ready to take care of.

Marisela gave her horse, Catira – the yearling that Carmelito had given her as a present – back her freedom. But when she went to rest in her old room, she realized her error, given that nothing resembled Altamira. There were no comforts, nothing to eat, not a single privilege – just a return to idleness in the midst of filth. To make matters worse, her father had already gone to see mister Danger to renew his addiction to alcohol. He gave up his freedom, and now Danger would pursue her as well and make her his property.

Everything seemed to be over with. She had no claim to any of her mother's rights and properties because when her father had entered her in the civil birth registry, he did not indicate who the mother was. For her mother's part, it was as if she never existed. Marisela tried to keep her father from going to see mister Danger, but even that was too little too late:

¡Ya las tolveneras se habían llevado todas las esperanzas!

Commentary

Rómulo Gallegos has written in clear terms the tragedy of the situation – the death of Carmelito, the flight of Marisela, and a re-appearance of Ño Pernalete, from whom Santos has to beg an accounting of the theft of the feathers and the killing of his trusted hand, Carmelito. All this is a portent of bad news that no one may be able to set right.

In the coming chapters, the hopes and dreams of the characters will disappear irremediably as portended by the maelstrom of the dust devils. All this is set in motion by the departure of Santos Luzardo from Altamira to search for justice where he surely will not find it.

The drama that lurks constantly for the plainsman causes harm in irreparable ways. It is raised to the fore by the evils, the avarice, and the uncertain destiny that describe the life of the plainsmen. These are men who, without a banner of liberty, given to rebelliousness, and at times for no reason, are completely lacking in unity and are becoming prisoners of globalization.

Chapter III. Ño Pernalete y otras calamidades

Synopsis

Just as Santos Luzardo arrives in the district capital, he meets Mujiquita in his favorite watering spot. They greet each other and Mujiquita asks, “What brings you to these parts?” Santos quickly begins to lose hope because he now understands that the judge – his friend is no longer secretary, but rather a judge – has to confess to him that nothing else matters in that place except that which Ño Pernalete decrees. Having received a notice from the Office of the President in which he is ordered to do everything necessary to ensure that no more murders happen in the region, the general sent back a response saying that in his district there had only been deaths from natural causes, including the demise of Carmelito. Luzardo’s annoyance boiled over and Mujiquita tells him he will let him speak directly with the general. When he returns, Santos tells him that he has decided to stay calm, that the general said he would enforce justice, and that within a few days he would tell him what happened in the death, or better said in the two deaths — those of Carmelito and his brother, Rafael — and in the disappearance of twenty thousand pesos worth of feathers they were carrying.

Mujiquita and Ño Pernalete were in agreement that it was going to be difficult to resolve this matter, since doña Bárbara controls everything from El Miedo. After all, she has been a friend of the President and he owes her many favors. On the other hand, Santos Luzardo, “el doctorcillo” as the colonel calls him, always threatened to go over Ño Pernalete’s head and that was something that he could not abide:

— *¿Hasta cuándo será usted pendejo, Mujiquita? ¿No se le ocurre que si nos ponemos a jurungar, nos vamos a encontrar con la mano de doña Bárbara?*

Commentary

There is no doubt at all that doña Bárbara has had a crucial part in the two deaths of the Altamira workers and in the disappearance of the heron feathers. Vengeance is this hateful woman’s fundamental end. Her daughter’s contempt for her and Santos Luzardo’s behavior toward her provide a prime motivation in those two deaths.

The objective of her trickery is to get even sweeter vengeance by provoking her adversaries – using death as the way to insult them. It is a penalty that not even the poor Devil would have dared to use. But for doña Bárbara and her entourage of yes-men, who are addicted to her

more out of terror and money than out of commitment to her, it plays a big role in this matter of Carmelito and his brother Rafael.

Chapter IV. Opuestos rumbos buscaban

Synopsis

At El Miedo, they are aware of recent events. Doña Bárbara confirmed the deaths of Carmelito and his brother from one of the officers who brought the news to Santos — afterwards, at the express order of Ño Pernaleté, they took it to “la Bruja”.

After some days without seeing each other, the owner of El Miedo met with her administrator and lover, Balbino Paiba. Following a long talk about matters, the two came to rather different conclusions – he thought he would be the head man once again, and she figured she could make him take the rap as the killer of the two brothers. Doña Bárbara was thinking, “Ya éste no verá el hoyo donde va a caer», while Balbino Paiba was reflecting boastfully:

...Yo hice muy bien las cosas: de Rafaelito no quedó ni rastro, porque lo que no le gustó al caimán le gustó a la caribera del Chenchenal, y ahora él es quien va a cargar con la muerte del hermano y con el robo de las plumas. Mientras tanto, ahí bajo la tierra están seguras...

A few days after this confidential meeting, doña Bárbara and Balbino went riding on the savanna where she caught sight of Luzardo in the distance. She gave Balbino an order to wait for her and went to meet Luzardo. She talked to him about the two dead hands, saying how sorry she was, and that she was going to go to the judicial offices to lodge a complaint. Santos responded contemptuously that the judicial officials in these parts are worthless and that he was going to take another approach:

...Y espoleando el caballo prosiguió su marcha, dejándola plantada en medio de la sabana.

Commentary

By reading these few chapters, we are getting to know a lot about the events taking place. We already know who the assassin was. We also know who is planning to benefit from the killings. The noose is tightening over Balbino. We can't believe that he will come to benefit from the sale of the heron feathers that he has hidden underground – or from the two killings, the weight of which is falling on his shoulders.

Chapter V. La hora del hombre

Synopsis

A dramatic change has come to Altamira that could be fatal or a victory for the destiny of the plains and the people who inhabit them:

En el Llano, el hombre debe saber hacer todo lo que hace el hombre.

That is exactly the way Santos Luzardo understood things after his conversation with Mujiquita and Ño Pernaleté. There is no justice other than that which one enforces himself.

After his acrimonious encounter with doña Bárbara, he headed to Macanillal. There he caught the two surviving Mondragon brothers off guard, wounded one in the thigh. He took them hostage back to Altamira – but not before setting fire to their shack.

Out of bravado, the one with the bullet in his leg would not let anyone treat his wound. Pajarote and María Nieves took them, tied elbow to elbow, to meet the punishment that the authorities in

neighboring Barinas would see fit to impose on them – and which they would have evaded if they had been allowed to flee or were turned over to Ño Pernaleta.

Santos was told about the flight of Marisela and her father, which Antonio had not been able to prevent, and he responded:

— *Es lo mejor que ha podido ocurrírsele — dijo Santos —. Ahora estamos en otro camino.*

He gave orders that at sunrise the next day, they would begin construction of the fencing at Corozalito, which mister Danger had tried to stop. Santos was putting in play the very ruse that Ño Pernaleta had advised him to use.

There was disagreement among the ranch hands about the decision to take justice into his own hands. Some were afraid of what might happen as a consequence, and the rest thought it was about time to take action:

Era el comienzo del buen cacicazgo. La hora del hombre bien aprovechada.

Commentary

The thirst for vengeance and the plan of action, whether it was to impose true justice or just what Santos Luzardo considered to be his justice, had begun with dividing up the prairies. Already the candles that illuminate the ranch houses by night were beginning to flicker without even any breezes or winds. The tumultuous shadows split apart. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. As we have said, the stage has been set clearly, and the tragic events will come, one piled upon the other, on the wings of the birds and the backs of the cattle in the plains.

As someone said, “The war has begun”. What nobody knows is how many battles it will take to settle it. As always, one knows when things start, but never can foresee in what form and in what way they will end up.

Chapter VI. El inefable hallazgo

Synopsis

Everything in this chapter takes place in Marisela’s old shack. First the fool, Primito, shows up. She watches him spy on her, then makes him approach and gives him orders to go see doña Bárbara and tell her that she needs money in order to leave this godforsaken place for good. He carries out the task and returns with 15 pieces of gold that Bárbara gave him to get her daughter out of her life and to rid herself of a rival for the affections of Santos Luzardo.

He leaves the coins on the table just as mister Danger returns. When Danger sees that her father is falling down drunk, he makes him sign a paper. Because he can’t do it on his own, Danger helps guide his hand and both ended up finishing the signature. He reads the document out loud:

— *Por el presente declaro que he vendido al señor Guillermo Danger a mi hija Marisela por cinco botellas de brandy.*

Marisela is exasperated upon hearing the paper read and lunges at the insufferable foreign bully, hitting him over and over again. None of the blows did anything but make the devil laugh. As she exhausted herself, she stopped to rest, at which point he took advantage of the pause to jostle her about. The father, stone-cold drunk, knows in his foggy mind that something is going on with his daughter because of her screams, and he throws a large machete at mister Danger, who catches it with his hand. Danger gives Marisela a tremendous blow with his hand and

leaves her on the floor. After insulting both of them, he charges off, all the while reminding them that the ranch and the girl are now his property.

In a little while, Antonio Sandoval appears while the girl is collecting herself from the frightening events. She greets him happily and, since her father has fallen asleep, she proposes that they go outside so they won't awaken him.

They talk about how much the people of Altamira miss her presence. He proposes that she return home, not only for the sake of the household, but also because he thinks Santos Luzardo is turning into a common thug, now handling problems with beatings and killings if need be. He suggests that if she had been there, he would not have dared to install the fence in front of Danger's lands. Every day things seems to be getting worse. He says he is sure that all this is because she is not present at Santos' ranch.

She answers that she cannot return to Altamira because she wants to take her father to San Fernando, to see if there are doctors there who can cure him. Antonio asks her if she wants him to try to get money from Santos to help her and she tells him that she has already asked for money from the person who should give it to her.

Antonio promises to bring her horses and everything necessary for the trip, but doubts that don Lorenzo can stand such a long trip through the savanna. He suggests that they travel in a pirogue that is due to arrive shortly and that he can make all the arrangements:

— *...deje eso de mi cuenta. (...) Creo que viene en lastre y en él pueden irse hasta San Fernando.*

Commentary

Marisela recovers quickly, beset by the problems that are arising because of her stubbornness. All are serious situations for her – as much because of her mother as because of her father. Santos is going to try to pick her up, much as she had secretly hoped would happen. Nor can she forget the problems mister Danger is creating for her at every turn.

She always seems to have friends who protect her – as is the case with Antonio Sandoval. He is a straightforward man who is not interested in economic gain or in sticking his nose into things outside of his work, which he carries out loyally and to the end.

At this moment though, Marisela only sees her path to freedom either in the general store that Primito has offered to buy her with the gold coins Bárbara gave her, or in a trip to abandon these plains so ill-omened for her once and for all.

Chapter VII. El inescrutable designio

Synopsis

A new evil stratagem has crossed doña Bárbara's mind. After giving Balbino the brush-off, she sends Juan Primito with a message for Santos Luzardo:

— *Que esa noche, a la salida de la luna, estará esperándolo en Rincón Hondo una persona que tiene que decirle algo a propósito del crimen de El Totumo. Que si usted se atreve vaya solo a oír lo que le dirá.*

Primito returns, saying that Santos has agreed to attend the night meeting. Doña Bárbara calls Melquíades immediately, reminding him of his boastful line: "traígamelo, vivo o muerto". He did remember and accepted the assignment to go to the meeting at Rincón Hondo.

Commentary

What does doña Bárbara have in mind? What is the purpose of this meeting? Perhaps to make one last attempt at a reconciliation with Santos, or more likely to deliver her vengeance for his affronts in a form Melquíades has prepared to send him on his last journey?

The wagging tongues of literary critics are wont to say that one should always wait for an author to resolve the problems he himself created and not to jump to conclusions about things to come. In that tradition, we will wait for Rómulo Gallegos to tell us, by his own hand, the resolution.

Chapter VIII. La gloria roja

Synopsis

...Y avanzó solo con el trágico arrebiate. Solo y convertido en otro hombre.

This is how this chapter ends, and for that reason we will begin with the ending – to reassure the reader that Santos Luzardo hasn't died in this new trick to get rid of him. Melquíades is the one who has passed on to a better life.

As he arrives at the meeting place — Rincón Hondo — with a certain premonition of what is to come, Santos meets up with Pajarote. Santos reprimands him for being there, but Pajarote tells him that in these circumstances he is not his ranch hand, but the man who believes he has to protect his master against his own folly – that of showing up alone in spite of all the dangers a meeting with this villain can bring.

Santos finally accepts his company, and they situate themselves in an advantageous spot chosen by Pajarote to avoid surprises. A short time later, el Brujeador arrives. Santos confronts him and just as he sees Melquíades make his move to shoot him, he raises his gun and with a single shot unseats him from his horse, on his way to the great beyond. El Brujeador's shot did not hit home, at least where he had intended it to.

Pajarote and Santos together decide to carry Melquíades' body on his own horse and take it to doña Bárbara. They set out on their journey, taking a shortcut Pajarote had found. Meanwhile, for Santos, the fact that he has started a chain of events with a death by his own hand fills him with uneasiness:

¿...sus sueños de existencia civilizada se habían esfumado, y se había convertido en el caudillo de la llanura para reprimir el bárbaro señorío de los caciques, y no era con el brazo armada y la gloria roja de la hazaña sangrienta como tenía que luchar con ellos para exterminarlos? (...) Ahora no podía revolverse...

Commentary

We can add little to this passage, given the blood and death in the action. Santos Luzardo knows in his heart that from the very moment he decided to remain at his ranch and, in so doing, to defend and give support to his people, this moment would come. All his intellectual skills could not foretell any other outcome.

One can't dream about establishing civilized behavior where there is none – just as one can't keep those who live there from defending their principles with black arts, dishonesty, and barbarism. Selfishness outweighs all other human virtues and sins.

To confront such adversaries, who easily resort to corruption and dissension to carry out their stratagems, there is only one way – and that is to beat them at their own game. If not that, then the best thing for Santos Luzardo to do would be to stay in Caracas and practice his profession.

In the end, he could not stay at Altamira and maintain his principles and keep himself pure. The task was simply impossible to carry out in that way. So, on this moonlit night he has killed for the first time in his life.

Chapter IX. Los retozos de míster Danger

Synopsis

Balbino goes to visit míster Danger, not exactly out of courtesy. He sees that things are getting complicated and he would like to disappear from Venezuela and move to the border area of Colombia with the profits he thinks he will make from selling the heron feathers. He feels he can save his hide in this way and avoid the danger he senses is closing in.

They greet each other, have a drink, and joke around until Balbino begins to ask him if he is interested in buying the 40 head of cattle that he has, so he can leave. Danger observes some unusual movements by his dogs and he goes to check on what is happening. He finds Juan Primito behind a tree and figures he was sent to spy on Balbino.

Míster Danger doesn't say anything to Juan Primito and he continues in his spying lookout. Míster Danger returns to the interrupted conversation with the administrator, saying that he wouldn't buy any yearlings that are not properly branded. Paiba, who has no pangs of conscience about misleading other people, assures him that his cattle are without exception good and legal.

Turning around, Danger shows him a pouch of snuff that he says he found in a field of brush at El Totumo, the place where the killings of Carmelito and his brother, Rafael, took place. Balbino is startled because in truth that pouch did belong to Carmelito.

But Guillermo Danger adds another point, "no se asuste hombre, que no fue en El Totumo donde lo encontré ni tampoco al pie del paraguatán de La Matica", alluding as well that he knows where Balbino buried the feathers he stole from Carmelito.

He says all of that so el Primito would hear it and run with the story as fast as he can to doña Bárbara. To wrap up the bothersome visit, he says, "mira Balbino nada de usted me interesa, yo no quiero complicaciones con nadie, por lo tanto ya puede irse por donde ha venido". He dismisses him with a curt "hasta siempre". Once Balbino is outside:

... le echó la pierna al caballo y cogió el camino del sitio de La Matica, diciéndose mentalmente:

— Ahora sí que no hay tiempo que perder. Ya voy a estar desenterrando mis plumas, y jojos que te vieron, paloma turca! Viajando de noche y escondiéndome de día en las matas, antes de que puedan ponérseme sobre las huellas, ya habré pasado la raya de Colombia.

Commentary

Balbino may aspire to be a great administrator, but before all else he is a bumbling idiot. One can see that by both the depravity of his ideas and his harebrained ways of explaining situations. In addition, Rómulo Gallegos chooses the most picturesque ways to carry the events of the story forward and, on this occasion, he wants to lay out the full plan the hapless administrator has undertaken. He must flee without delay and we will see in the next chapters if he has enough time...

Chapter X. Entregando las obras

Synopsis

Doña Bárbara is worried because she heard the shots that were fired in Rincón Hondo just as she left her veranda to head for the savanna to wait for el Brujeador to return. Primito arrives out of breath from running as fast as he could to bring the news about Paiba and gasps out:

— *En La Matica, al pie del paraguatán, están enterradas las plumas.*

At the same time, they hear the hoof beats of several horses. Bárbara calls to Melquíades but hears that it is Santos Luzardo who responds instead. She approaches the horses to be able to confirm that her accomplice is dead. She reacts quickly as if surprised, and says to Luzardo:

— *Ya sabía que usted vendría a traerlo*

Santos finally comes to understand her plan – this vindictive woman has made him become a killer in order to bring him under her will. He leaves the horse with the body slung across the saddle and goes his way without saying even a single word to her.

Santos Luzardo knows he has become a member of the fraternity of assassins – that the cunning woman has staged the event at Rincón Hondo so that he would become an instrument of death. She has made Santos into the laughing stock of the plains and her tool. Practically and morally he now belongs to the gang of killers working for the despot of the Arauca.

His horse heads for the stables at Altamira without any guidance, while Juan Primito, who has witnessed everything, gets a categorical and unmistakable order from doña Bárbara:

— *Tú no has visto nada. ¿Sabes? Vete de aquí inmediatamente y cuidado como se te ocurra hablar de lo que has visto.*

With the unusual noises in the night, all the ranch hands at El Miedo wake up and go to see what is happening. Each makes his own comment, and finally doña Bárbara asks where Balbino is. They look around for him with their eyes, knowing that he has not been among them, but they nevertheless ask:

— *¿Habrá sido Balbino?*

Her own people resolve things for doña Bárbara and, with her customary authoritativeness, she directs that nobody should waver in carrying out her orders:

— *En La Matica, al pie del paraguatán, están enterradas las plumas de garza del doctor Luzardo. Allí debe estar Balbino, desenterrándolas. Anden de allá, ligero. Lévense dos winchesters y ... tráiganme las plumas. ¿Comprenden?*

Soon, one hears the sound of shots from the Winchesters and from a pistol – but the last ones heard are from the rifles. The treacherous Balbino Paiba has fallen.

Commentary

We realize from the action in this one night which characters are still afoot and which have died – but what are the consequences? Well, one by one individual pretexts come to an end, and with each departure there remain fewer and fewer characters with which to weave the final outcome that is approaching. We only have five chapters left and, in the words of the tailor, there is still much fabric to be cut.

For the moment, the author has put Santos in a tight spot where all he can think about is his despair, and doña Bárbara. Using all the spiteful designs in the world, she has contrived that blame for the death of Melquíades will fall on Balbino, whom she has also had killed, at least based on the shots that were heard from the Winchesters.

Only one witness to the truth remains, the slow-witted Juan Primito.

Chapter XI. Luz en la caverna

Synopsis

Two horses are galloping over the nighttime savanna when Pajarote, one of the horsemen, says to the other, Santos:

— *¿Luz a estas horas en casa de don Lorenzo? Algo debe de estar pasando allá.*

Santos, who was engrossed in thinking about what had happened at El Miedo, had not taken notice that the lights were on in the palm grove of La Chusmita.

They headed their horses toward the spot and as Santos entered, he came upon Marisela caressing Lorenzo's hair. She told him that her father had just died. She threw herself in Santos' arms and cried without stop. He held her close. She said over and over again that the quicksand bog had swallowed him. At that point, Luzardo whispered in her ear, "a mí también":

...Esta noche he dado muerte a un hombre.

She responded that it couldn't be, but Santos continued to confirm it. She asked how it came to pass and Luzardo explained it to her. While he was still recounting the events, Marisela tells him in no uncertain terms:

— *¿No ves como no era posible? Si la cosa sucedió como la cuentas, fue Pajarote quien lo mató al Brujeador. ¿No dices que el Brujeador te quedaba a la derecha, cara a cara contigo y que la herida fue en la sien izquierda? Pues por ese lado no podía herirlo sino Pajarote...*

And at last, Santos:

Aceptó el don de paz y dio, en cambio, una palabra de amor.

Y aquella noche, también para Marisela bajó la luz al fondo de la caverna.

Commentary

At last, and in the midst of thoughts of death, the light of love shines through. For both Santos and Marisela, the thoughts and plans that had been forgotten in their determined pursuit of "la Dañera" remain unsullied. Note that it is only in commenting that we bring up the inveterate villain, Bárbara. The author takes great care in this 11th chapter that she not make any kind of appearance – not even with the death of Lorenzo, the father who made all his defects apparent with the help of alcohol, nor in the face of the death that Santos had taken responsibility for. The insight Marisela pointed out made him understand that, in fact, it was not he who was responsible.

For the moment in this tale, love finds its place in Santos' heart and the darkness of his earlier ruminations about Marisela remain buried in its depths.

Chapter XII. Los puntos sobre las haches

Synopsis

Puzzling is the best way to describe the following facts. They became known in only a few minutes on the arrival at Altamira of the bald-headed Encarnación, who came from San Fernando to rest and, at the same time, to give doctor Santos a letter that he had been given by Judge Mujiquita:

«Ayer se presentó por aquí doña Bárbara con las dos arrobas de plumas de garza que te fueron robadas en El Totumo y declaró lo siguiente: que habiendo caído en sospechas de que el autor del crimen fuera un tal Balbino Paiba, mayordomo de Altamira, al cual despediste a tu llegada a ésta, ordenó a varios de sus peones que lo vigilaran; que dos de éstos, cumpliendo aquella orden, lo siguieron hasta el sitio denominado de La Matica y allí lo sorprendieron infraganti desenterrando un cajón que resultó contener las plumas de referencia; que lo intimaron se diera preso, y como hiciera armas contra ellos, dispararon sobre él y le dieron muerte, en seguida de lo cual, ella se puso en camino para ésta, con el cuerpo del delito y a dar cuenta a la autoridad de lo sucedido, así como también de la muerte de Melquíades Gamarra (a) el Brujeador, asesinado por el mencionado Paiba, pocos momentos antes del suceso de La Matica y a causa de la misma vigilancia a que más arriba hago mención.»

He also wrote that doña Bárbara delivered the feathers to a merchant in San Fernando, who would sell them and, when she returned to El Miedo, she would send the proceeds from the sale.

Thus, the “h’s have been dotted,” as Ño Pernaleté had said, and he took the opportunity to add a few notes of his own to Judge Mujiquita’s letter.

Santos couldn’t believe what he had just read. El Pajarote, who had not moved from his side, told him that in life everything always has a solution, especially in the prairies.

Santos couldn’t agree and said he would go to see the judge, with whom he had studied, and get him to rectify that string of untruths. They both explained their points of view and after Santos’ arguments, Pajarote had his turn. At last he persuaded Santos that all has been God’s work, the only one who knows how to resolve hard problems:

A pesar de la gravedad del asunto, Santos no pudo menos que sonreír: Al dios de Pajarote, como al amigo del cuento de Ño Pernaleté, no le producían escrúpulos los puntos sobre las haches.

Commentary

Throughout this work, Rómulo Gallegos is a great friend of wise sayings. We can add still another, “no hay mal que por bien no venga,” which on this occasion suits things to a T.

In spite of all the crazy things that happen, you can’t help but smile at each event. The irony that the author uses, on the lips and in the actions of the characters, is surely an example of things being well said and better written.

Only three chapters remain and we still cannot see clearly how this will end. We expect the author to delight us once again with his extraordinary talents and that he will find a way to vanquish despotism through one of the characters that remain.

Chapter XIII. La hija de los ríos

Synopsis

We find doña Bárbara in San Fernando. It appears that the shyster lawyers are rubbing their hands together in anticipation that some kind of work, like the villain of El Miedo usually pursues, will come to their offices. Very soon though it becomes clear that these expectations are groundless – there will be no new law suits.

Doña Bárbara is resting on the terrace of the hotel in a rocking chair taking in the breezes from the river, which flows only 100 meters from where she is settled. Ignoring the comments passersby are making about her presence and reputation, her mind meanders from river to river

over which she navigated in her youth: el Orinoco, el Atabapo, and el Guainía — the first yellow, the second red, and the last black.

As she daydreams, the image of Asdrúbal appears in her imagination – the true and transcendent love of her life that was taken from her in its bloom by the jealousy of men. Then and there many years ago she had given up her dreams and changed into the “devoradora de hombres”.

Commentary

These long, dream-like and almost poetic paragraphs, filled with words that are not the least bit bitter, explain clearly for the first time in the work what we were uncertain about – how the feelings of this woman underwent such a profound metamorphosis. Perhaps we are still in for a surprise, but for the moment everything seems headed along the pathways of romanticism.

Chapter XIV. La estrella en la mira

Synopsis

Doña Bárbara returns to El Miedo with her mind made up. In a letter she wrote in San Fernando, she plans to hand over a quitclaim transfer of all she has stolen back to Santos Luzardo, and to try to see if love might renew itself between them. There are no differences in age or wealth that should stand in their way, she wants a respite that is long overdue, and as the daughter of the rivers, she wants to dedicate herself completely to the lost love which left such a deep mark on her.

She finds El Miedo completely empty though – she is alone without ranch hands and workers. With Primito present she asks him what has happened and he answers:

— *«Se escabulleron todos», respondió el bobo, sin atreverse a acercársele, temeroso del arrebató de cólera que sus palabras iban a provocar. «Dijeron que no querían servirle más a usted, porque ya usted y que no es la misma de antes, y el día menos pensado los iba a ir entregando, atados codo con codo»...*

Doña Bárbara's eyes flash furiously at the news, and to avoid worse reactions, the half-witted Primito asks if she knows that Lorenzo Barquero has died. The unfeeling woman replies that it's about time. She asks about her daughter and Primito tells her:

— *¿La niña Marisela? Otra vuelta en Altamira. Se la llevó el doctor para su casa, y según he oído decir, se va a casar con ella en estos mismos días.*

Up to this moment, doña Bárbara felt a bit happy because of the recent events, although not without doubts. Now she feels deeply offended in the midst of her dreams and, in a clear fit of jealousy, she remounts her horse and heads for Altamira.

Juan Primito stands petrified and breathless as he watches his mistress galloping off. While she gallops along, her inner voice delivers the pronouncement:

— *¿Quiere decir que he perdido el tiempo al entregar mis obras? Pues las recojo otra vez, y con ellas, ¡hasta la tumba! Pero veremos quién triunfa. Todavía no ha nacido quien pueda arrebatarme lo que ya he dicho que me pertenecerá. ¡Primero muerta que derrotada!*

Focused on her internal monologue, she covers ground at full speed until she gets to Santos' house. The darkness of night is on her side and, without dismounting, she approaches the house in silence, watching everything to the far ends of the building. Through the door of the front dining room, she sees how Luzardo and Marisela are seated, very close together at the

table, looking at each other with love. Bárbara, as if wearing an awe-struck mask, is filled with emotion to deepest recesses of her heart.

When she is within shooting range, she takes her weapon from the sheath of her saddle holster and draws a bead on her daughter's breast – a perfect target:

— *De pura luz de estrellas era la chispa que brillaba en la mira.*

But then she lowers the weapon without having dared to fire. A starlight-borne sprite stood between the two lovers and the trigger of her revolver.

For a considerable while, she contemplates the happiness of the two young people, feeling for the very first time a heartfelt maternal love springing from the core of her being:

— *Es tuyo. Que te haga feliz.*

Commentary

For the first time in her life, doña Bárbara feels herself as much a mother as a lover. Her mind is filled with thoughts of the emotions she had felt under her Asdrúbal's loving gaze:

¡Por fin el amor de Asdrúbal, pura sombra errante a través del alma tenebrosa, se reposaba en un sentimiento noble!

Chapter XV. Toda horizontes, toda caminos

Synopsis

Bárbara settles accounts generously with her ranch hands in case they have trouble finding work. She stops visiting with her "Socio", with whom she had had many long conversations concerning her acts of sorcery. And she recommends that Juan Primito, her spy to the very end, take up residence at Altamira if they will have him. She also gives him a letter to carry to Santos Luzardo.

Some hours later, mister Danger sees her pass by his place – bad omen for him. He waves to her but she is so absorbed in her thoughts that she doesn't even turn to return his farewell.

She gazes at everything along the way and bids farewell with her look, even though it doesn't register with her. She watches for the last time a battle in the quicksand bog between a cow and a snake in the muddy waters. Ultimately the serpent drags the beast to the bottom of the pond. It is another victory for the bog.

The misfortunes are carried from mouth to mouth. It sounds like the terrified birds that fly over the bog crying and flapping their wings without stop delivered the news:

...ha desaparecido la cacica de Arauca.

The letter she had left with Primito for Luzardo touches his heart when he reads it:

— *«No tengo más heredera sino mi hija Marisela, y así la reconozco por ésta, ante Dios y los hombres. Encárguese usted de arreglarle todos los asuntos de la herencia.»*

This sounds like she is thinking of suicide – and it is possible that she headed for the quicksand bog to join the cow and the snake at the bottom of the pond. In any case, the truth is that doña Bárbara had disappeared:

— *Pero como era cosa sabida que tenía mucho oro enterrado, y de esto nada decía la carta, y, además, en el cuarto de las brujerías se encontraron señales de desenterramientos, a la presunción de suicidio se opuso la de simple desaparición, y se*

habló mucho de aquel bongo que, navegando de noche, ya eran varias las personas que lo habían sentido pasar, Arauca abajo...

Another possibility, that some prefer, is that she might have gone off with Asdrúbal and they are still sailing together on the rivers in the region.

Even the crass míster Danger leaves, with his rifle slung over his shoulder and his horse at a quick trot. As he passes the men working on the fence, he shouts:

— *No gasten tanto alambre en cercar los lambederitos. Díganle al doctor Luzardo que míster Danger se va también.*

And Rómulo Gallegos ends his *Doña Bárbara* with a line filled with respect for the plainsmen:

¡Llanura venezolana! ¡Propicia para el esfuerzo como lo fuera para la hazaña, tierra de horizontes abiertos donde una raza buena ama, sufre y espera!...

Final Commentary

A heart-wrenching cry of victory and peace resounds across the length and breadth of the savannas. The now dormant and feared name “El Miedo” disappears and the ranch land returns to being a single entity, Altamira.

All this is the fruit of the triumph of love, justice, and integrity. With only these guiding principles, sooner or later there will be but one vision of a future, without the fear, terror, and suffering brought about by sorcery and its indistinct visions. It is in honor of the virtue of integrity and its consequences that the story’s events came to win out over untruth and senseless violence.

Much evil fell on Altamira and its inhabitants. The founding Barqueros and the Luzardos almost destroyed their faith in life and building for the future. But their descendants, Santos Luzardo and Marisela Barquero, overcame these missteps and revitalized the region, based on the principled path they had followed during many years. It sufficed for them to experience the consequences of perfidy and betrayal for a short time to emerge to renounce the evil that serves for many people. And doña Bárbara, who was traumatized in her youth, knew in the end that she had to vindicate her earliest love.

¡Doña Bárbara! Thank you for having saved Altamira and all of its fond memories.

Written 85 years ago (as of 2013), we still read this magnificent novel with delight as it reveals the power of our many emotions, our friends, our alliances, our unity, and above all, our love.