

## Doña Bárbara by Rómulo Gallegos – Character Sketches

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

**Doña Bárbara.** She roamed the plains at the turn of the century. We encounter her in Chapter III of Part I as a girl about fifteen years old, and by the end of the story, in Chapter XV of Part III, she is getting on into her forties. As a beautiful young woman she is about to be sold to a Turkish or Syrian “sultan” who is well-established as a pirate chief in his territory in the Orinoco. Asdrúbal defends her until his death and at that point young Barbara is no more. She becomes the “devourer” of men. She is filled with avarice and seeks revenge. Her mystical powers have been increased by many times by her training with a native conjurer. She settles in her ranch, El Miedo, where she is renowned as the most complex, corrupt, and diabolical woman in all the river valley of the Arauca. We have to point out that it was not she herself who brought about her transformation into this kind of woman. Her embittered character was shaped by the human scum from whom she had to free herself in her youth. She was a beautiful, hardworking, and good ship’s cook for six sailor/pirates and her guardian. Unable to defend herself, the pirates:

*La brutalizaban con idénticas caricias: rudas manotadas, y besos que sabían a aguardiente y a chimó.*

During this time, a young fellow, Asdrúbal, came aboard the pirate pirogue as a traveler/cook, and he identified with her as the spark of love crept into their hearts. In the course of things, the pirate crew died, along with Asdrúbal, who had tried to save her from her misery. The result was the character, Doña Barbara, whom we encounter years later meting out evil and terrible hatred towards all men, leading inevitably to the decay of her humanity and to her love of witchcraft. She has a daughter from a sleazy love affair with Lorenzo Barquero, which increases her hatred toward men still more, and which by the last chapter leads her to take her own life or to flee from her hate-filled existence – the reader must decide what happens...

**Santos Luzardo.** He witnessed the death of his older brother and uncle at the hands of his father, who was rigid in his opinions and judgments. The father himself succumbed a few days later in the face his foolish actions, departing from this world in deep remorse and with an anguish he brought on himself. Doña Asuncion, Santos's mother, took the fourteen year old Santos from the father’s cursed estate, Altamira, to Caracas where he attended the university law school and made himself into an upstanding man of integrity. After ten years, Santos decided to sell Altamira, and he traveled back to the land and to the house where his brother and father had died. His memories and nostalgia made him put off selling the estate and he instead returned to being a “llanero”. With his goodness he was always the antithesis of Doña Barbara. By the force of his intellectual powers and integrity he sought to end the evil that dominated the plains, brought about by the malevolence of that woman. It was a classic battle of goodness and reason against evil and corruption. In the end his victory resulted in ridding the plains of murders and in sowing peace across Altamira.

**Marisela.** There is no need to use fancy words to describe the wild spirit with which she lived the first years of her existence, that is, until Luzardo arrived with his gentle hand and sound reason. That finally freed her instinct for living and brought her in contact with the civilized life at Altamira which she had never known. She detested the barbarity of her mother, Doña Barbara, and tried to instill understanding and love in all beings she came in contact with.

**Lorenzo Barquero.** The harshest images of this man come from having acquiesced to Doña Barbara’s love. The first time he found himself before her he was attracted to the woman. He discerned none of her evil ways at first, and he fell head over heels for her to the extent that he gave her everything that belonged to his family and he had a daughter, Marisela, with her. When he half-way understood that he

had been a puppet in her hands, he fled and locked himself in his ranch, the "Palmar de la Chusmita", accompanied by his daughter, and given over to alcohol which destroyed his life. All of his culture and the university education he acquired in Caracas were put in ruin. He becomes a shell of a man. He is always ready for a drinking binge and becomes the poster-child of self-destruction through the victory of alcohol.

**Melquíades.** He does not have very much of a role in this story. He appears a few times and is always committed to the wishes of Doña Barbara. He is a child of witchcraft and personifies it in all its forms, including whenever this evil woman desires that the actions of her goblins and, prophecies be carried out. Even though he is not always around, he is addicted to wickedness and, for this reason, becomes the right hand man for carrying out the evil designed by Doña Barbara. He is her executioner, which is why he is nicknamed "El Brujeador".

**Asdrúbal.** He is the personification of love. He represents the love Barbarita longed for in her teens, but he is killed before it can be realized. In one interpretation among several, at the ambiguous end of the story Doña Barbara dies in his arms and, as though in an ethereal dream, their troubled souls travel the Venezuelan rivers, uncertain if it be a matter of good or evil.

**Antonio Sandoval.** He is the embodiment of good in the plains. He bears no bad thoughts and no misrepresentation of truth and sincerity. He was taught to believe in his master and he would go to his own death for him. He is fully committed, consistent, and believes in goodness and good deeds above all things. He is a product of the wisdom of the plains and always wants truth to prevail.

**Pajarote.** If anyone in the novel Doña Bárbara represents a pure "llanero", it has to be Pajarote. Everything he does is for altruistic ends, always for the good of the people living in the plains. For him there can be no other meaning to life. He is rough, but noble. He is uneducated, but astute and pragmatic by his own nature. He is, in short, a fine example of the ideal model Romulo Gallegos has of a true "llanero".

**Balbino Paiba.** He is the complete opposite of Pajarote. He is a classic example of a man who believes himself to be sharp-witted but who is, in fact, dumber than a doornail. He is a flatterer and cowardly. He is evil-minded and at times ridiculous. He is the most inveterate villain in the novel. He is a shameless murderer. As a measure of his character, it is said that he is a low-life nobody wants as a friend.

**Ño Pernalete.** He is the quintessential example of a dictatorial and corrupt politician. One always suspects that for this man power is the key, whether or not he holds it, and that if there are doubts, he adapts to those who best suit his scheming and way of doing business. He is repulsive as a man and in the position he holds.

**Mujiquita.** Secretary to Ño Pernalete and a man who, in order to survive, has neither friends nor guiding principles. It is his curse to have to lay on the flattery in order to stay in good stead. He is pitiful, the classic functionary for whom the boss is always right, even though he knows that the boss never is. But he always agrees with his boss. He has no friends. He only has as his reality the false image of his superior.

**Juan Primito.** We are dealing here with a person sometimes called a "village idiot." He is silly. He is a product of nature but without the ability to distinguish good and evil. He is the "gofer" for Doña Barbara, although sometimes instead of complying with her instructions, he changes them if the object of the mission is someone he likes. He doesn't want to destroy things, as his master does, but he does help promote external discord to support her evil intents. He is discreet and conscientious. He uses what mental powers he has to do his works, as if this helps him see into the future in a way that supports his way of living. But we must not forget that underneath it all, he is a simpleton.