

As If By Magic: The Power of Masculine Discourse in Doña Bárbara

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Doña Bárbara is generally read in an allegorical way. In some versions, the resulting allegory qualifies as manichean since it depends on clearcut rather mechanical binaries.¹ Other readings go beyond the manichean view to find some nuance between the binaries, though still working with the same terms. In his study of Spanish American rural novels, Carlos Alonso questions this reading practice and argues that these novels' allegorical structure anticipates critical readings with an awareness of the gap between signifier and signified. This, he suggests, is preemptive of critical efforts to re-allegorize, to attach the signifier to the signified, as it were, seamlessly:

If at a superficial, ideological level Doña Bárbara attempts to reduce its interpretation to a single meaning, in its unceasing allegorical transformation it anticipates every effort to read and interpret it, given that every interpretation can be construed as an attempt to produce another narrative, another story that will stand for the text it confronts. (Alonso 134)

Further, critics' attempts to achieve a mastering discourse are disarmed, he claims, by the allegorical structure:

Criticism on the novela de la tierra has customarily derived the authority of its commentary from its appropriation of a sustained critical discourse already present in the works themselves, a discourse that seeks to legitimize their ruling presuppositions... But... it would seem that the more [critics'] externality and authority are confirmed, the more their discourse is limited to repeating the text, to remaining inside it, as it were. (Alonso 71)

In this sort of structure the critic seems destined to do no more than repeat.

Alonso's argument is largely convincing, and devastating for much of the extant criticism of Doña Bárbara. But his argument does not render otiose all criticism, for it is one thing to anticipate the critical enterprise, but another for all critical reading to be pre-empted.² Crucial here are the scope and grounding of critical awareness in Doña Bárbara. The basic postulate of this essay is that no text can fully know itself. Thus the critical discourse within Doña Bárbara can only be elaborated in the context of its particular contents: the context of the critical awareness creates constraints, it is positioned and therefore not absolute. By extension, my argument about Doña Bárbara is not a global dismantling or demystification. I shall argue that part of the underpinning of its allegorical conflict is a certain concept of gender, which is not questioned in the novel's discourse, and that the structure of the allegory is dependent on not seeing the gender presuppositions. Consequently, I shall stress discourse in the novel so as to avoid the sort of positivistic view which has commonly been employed to discuss the characters

[†] An original version of this article can be found at <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/27/0/millington1.txt> in plain-text form and is best viewed with Western ISO-8859-1 encoding (Last accessed on 3/28/2009).

as if they were real people.³ What is most striking about the majority of the criticism of Doña Bárbara is its blindness to gender: even when reference is made to it, it is often brief and only intermittently critical. In allegorizing the novel into well-worn binaries, most criticism actually reconfirms its gender dispositions.⁴ By stressing discourse in the novel I want to limit the allegorizing process, to see how a structure of meaning is created rather than trying to elaborate yet another narrative around the material. Underlying this is a simple question: why is the role played by doña Bárbara assigned to a female character? In actantial terms,⁵ this is not inevitable, and so it is important to ask what is at stake in this decision. The point is to find something of the discursive unconscious.⁶ In other words, this essay will approach the novel by trying to resist its textual logic. This does not mean that I can avoid allegory altogether, since allegorizing is a fundamental step in critical practice: destabilizing the discourse will run certain risks, and the lure of a pseudo-mastery is one of them.

Another risk is that of producing a reading more sophisticated than is appropriate to the novel itself, for Doña Bárbara is not the subtlest of texts. The question is whether destabilizing the discourse of gender is straying into a sort of critical excess. I shall certainly be risking that excess, even as I also succumb to the lure of mastery through re-allegorizing, but there is potential here for shuttling back and forth between critique and mystification, and that process will show up reading's provisionality. It is also worth underlining that I shall be dealing with gender in broad terms, that is I shall not be looking just at the problems of female characters, which is what has often seemed to do duty as "gender analysis". What follows will be an analysis of masculinity and femininity as projected by the masculine discourse of the novel. Hence I shall start by looking at the implicit gender system, before moving on to destabilize it by identifying its contradictions and shortcomings.

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Underlying Doña Bárbara there is a positive model of masculine behaviour, for which the narrator and some of the characters express (often implicit) approval. This model or norm might well be called a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 183-86).⁷ It is a traditional form of behaviour, whose valued features are physical endurance, display of strength, quick-witted practicality, decisiveness, loyalty to other men and lack of intellectual complexity. Its polar opposite is presented as urban sophistication or cultivated manners. Physical danger is relished by the plainsmen, as is the chance to display their skills in their work. Imposing the self on other men or on animals (by breaking a horse or castrating a bull) are the maximum expression of this hegemonic masculinity.

This model is alluded to in the quite commonly used term *hombria* (manliness). The narrator praises the plain as a place which creates the conditions for *hombria* to express itself, as opposed to the city which does not. The plain is wild but can bring out qualities in men (9). This is part of the traditional lore of the location: the potential male inheritance is to succeed to "aquella raza de hombres sin miedo que había dado más de un centauro a la epopeya..." (9) 'that race of fearless men who had given more than one centaur to epic'. The reference to the "centauro" is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the link between the animal and the human in the form of the centaur naturalizes the idea of men in a seamless relationship to the physical forces of the plain. Secondly, this reference to a mythic animal inadvertently draws out the idealizing nature of this form of masculinity, as if it were not grounded in social practices as all gender formations are. The atavistic aspect of the ideal is also significant, since it seems to root the hegemonic masculinity on a timeless plane/plain, as if this were the way that plainsmen had always been, and perhaps always will be.

On his return from the city, Santos Luzardo is attracted by the attributes of this hegemonic masculinity. He finds its features easy to identify with, something which the discourse wants to

suggest is "in his blood". Hence it is important that even in undertaking his project to tame the plain, to teach it new ways, he sees it in terms of a fight, calling it "la lucha contra el mal imperante" (26) 'the struggle against the reigning evil'. The rhetorical borrowing from hegemonic masculinity is clear, as is its underpinning in a sort of headstrong machismo:

en aquella decisión [to impose a new order on the family estate] hubo también mucho del impulsivo escapado de la disciplina del razonador, al contacto con el medio propicio: la llanura semibárbara, "tierra de los hombres machos", como solía decir su padre... (26)

in that decision there was also a lot of the impulsive man freed from the discipline of the reasoner, in contact with a propitious environment: the semi-barbarous plain, "land of virile men", as his father used to say...

Even in carrying out the new, Santos is reaffirming the values of the old: the relishing of a fight, the desire to pursue a risky enterprise, pride in his own strength. A logical extension of this articulation of the novel's hegemonic masculinity comes later when Santos loses his restraint. At that point he comes to share the plainsman's view without complications: "el hombre debe saber hacer todo lo que hace el hombre" (143) 'a man should know how to do everything that a man does', with the result that "el hombre se impondrá" (144) 'a man will impose himself'. Here the hegemonic masculinity is identified with the strong expression of will. By contrast, the lack of all these qualities is evident in Lorenzo Barquero: for a man not to have or to have lost these features is to render him beneath contempt.

An important feature of this masculinity is display. The occasion on which Santos first breaks a horse (40-41) is of significance partly for what it seems to reveal to Santos himself, but mostly for the visual message that it communicates to those around him: those who witness his feat draw fundamental conclusions about Santos as a man. Most crucially, the sceptical Carmelito gives Santos the ultimate approval: "Carmelito murmuró, emocionado: – Me equivoqué con el hombre" (41) 'Carmelito murmured, moved: "I was wrong about the man"'. A recognition that seems highly charged. In this context it is normal practice for the plainsmen to cultivate their image, and to brag about their skills and exploits, as if having to prove and reprove their masculinity for the observant gaze of their peers. The natural world and women are the ground on which they do this.

There is then a celebratory current in Doña Bárbara built on the more or less unrestrained activity of a hegemonic masculinity. The novel deploys an imaginary notion of the self-sufficiency of the individual man in the demanding semi-frontier environment. This is particularly articulated in relation to the uncertainties with the returning Santos. His doubts help to define some of the limits of the hegemonic masculinity. His long absence in the city has changed him, it has interrupted his development (9); not only does Antonio say that he has changed (19), but Carmelito thinks that Santos hardly measures up to the standards of masculinity at all:

Pero del concepto que tenía Carmelito de la hombría estaba excluido todo lo que descubrió en Santos Luzardo... : la gallardía, que le pareció petulancia; la tesura del rostro, la delicadeza del cutis ya sollamado por el resol de unos días de viaje, rasurado el bigote, que es atributo de machos; los modales afables, que le parecieron amanerados; el desusado traje de montar, aquel saco tan entallado, aquellos calzones tan holgados arriba y en las rodillas tan ceñidos, puños estrechos en vez de polainas, y corbata, que era demasiado trapo para llevar encima por aquellas soledades, donde con los de taparse basta y sobra trapo. (19-20)

But from the idea that Carmelito had of manliness was excluded everything that he discovered in Santos...: his elegance, which seemed to him like vanity; the tautness of his face, the delicacy of his skin already scorched by the glaring sun of a few days travel,

his moustache (the attribute of true men) shaven; his affable manner, which seemed to him affected; his antiquated riding suit, that sharply cut jacket, those breeches so loose at the top and so tight at the knee, with narrow trouser cuffs instead of leggings, and a tie, which was an excess of cloth to wear in those empty spaces, where simply covering oneself is enough and more than enough.

Santos is clearly taken to be effeminate, though the novel balks at spelling it out so directly. However, the novel mystifies Santos' gender identity by insisting on his innate *hombria* which the environment of the plains can simply reactivate after years in which city dwelling has allowed it to lie dormant. The "natural" world of the plains and its people work a rapid rebirth: Santos is projected as returning to his roots (24), as in a process of growth. Hence he can emerge (almost overnight) as a "complete" man.

Interaction with the plain and Santos' recuperation of his interrupted progress towards hegemonic masculinity are epitomized by his breaking of the horse. This is an advanced test for the plainsman: "¡La doma! La prueba máxima de llanería la demostración de valor y de destreza que aquellos hombres esperaban para acatarlo" (40) 'The horse breaking! The greatest test of plainsmanship, the demonstration of courage and skill which those men were waiting for to be able to respect him'. Not unexpectedly Santos breaks the horse without any problem and without any practice at all: he clearly just "knows" how to do this, and so an "innate" masculinity is insinuated. This spectacle of breaking the horse completes the first phase of the novel: it reconnects Santos with the plain and it repositions him within the novel's hegemonic masculinity. And that positioning is something which even the broken horse is forced to concede: "... [el caballo] relincha engreída porque si ya no es libre, a lo menos trae un hombre encima" (41) '... [the horse] neighs conceitedly because if it is no longer free, at least it has a man on its back'. It is not surprising that Santos later finds himself exhilarated by the cattle round-up, which turns into a romance of physical exertion and power over the animals (86).

As far as the novel's positive projection of masculinity goes there is one further point to make, and that concerns the bonds that link the plainsmen together. This is something which Santos comes to rely on, particularly with Antonio. Again reactivating the past, they build on their boyhood friendship, and Antonio becomes Santos' foreman, guiding and protecting him thanks to his knowledge of the plain. Antonio plays the loyal plainsman. He has not changed since boyhood (19) and so has not ceased to work for the good of the Luzardo estate even during its decline. The loyalty of Antonio helps to bring Santos back from the edge of disaster when he seems to be risking everything with his wild behaviour (143). Pajarote shows the same selfless loyalty in risking his life to go with Santos to face El Brujeador. And, as he articulates it, his behaviour expresses an absolute – the solidarity of man to man regardless of social hierarchy:

'Peón es peón y le toca obedecer cuando el amo manda; pero, permítame que se lo recuerde: el llanero no es peón sino en el trabajo. Aquí en la hora y punto en que estamos, no tenemos un amo y un peón, sino un hombre, que es usted, y otro hombre que quiere demostrarle que está dispuesto a dar su vida por la suya, y que por eso no ha buscado compañeros para venir a tirar la parada con usted. Ese hombre soy yo, y de aquí no me muevo.' (151-52)

'A farmhand is a farmhand and he has to obey when the master commands; but let me remind you: the plainsman is only a farmhand at work. Here, at this particular moment, we aren't a master and a farmhand, but a man, which is you, and another man who wants to show you that he is ready to give his life for you, and because of that he hasn't sought companions to come and bear this burden with you. That man is me, and I'm not moving from here.'

There is also one negative aspect of the novel's hegemonic masculinity, which it does itself see. The question is where the dividing line between the supposedly positive and the negative is to be drawn. The negative aspect is a sort of excess of *hombria*. It is identified when Lorenzo Barquero expresses the ultimate logic of all the behaviour I have described: "En esta tierra no se respeta sino a quien ha matado" (100) 'On this land only someone who has killed is respected'. That extreme is also made visible through Santos when he opts for the violent shortcut to achieving his objective. That particular phase is described as "La hora del hombre" (141) 'The time of the man' and it is approved of by the peones (143). This murderous violence is a refusal to negotiate with the other, a choice to impose the self come what may. This is something that Santos himself articulates in thought: "Después de todo – se decía – la barbarie tiene sus encantos, es algo hermoso que vale la pena vivirlo, es la plenitud del hombre rebelde a toda limitación" (116) 'After all, he said to himself, barbarism has its charms, it's a beautiful thing that is worth experiencing, it's the fullness of the man refusing all limits'. Hence, at a later stage, Santos comes to act with "el temerario alarde de *hombria*" (153) 'the rash display of manliness', something which is clearly only a step beyond the castrating of the bull.

More significant than this first negative aspect is another which Doña Bárbara hardly confronts, for violence is carried over into behaviour towards women characters. So even before the rape of doña Bárbara as a young woman, she is brutalized by predatory men (11). There is an attempt to excuse this in the novel's insistence on her beauty, described as "la perturbadora belleza de la guaricha" (13) 'the disturbing beauty of the young woman', as if making it understandable for men to behave towards her as they do. But the collective rape of her is violent and pitiless, and followed by a contemptuous dismissal (14).

The discourse does not question the male characters' treatment of doña Bárbara, but it is aware that in general there is a danger in the violence of masculine behaviour. Implicit in the discourse there is a sense that a new form of masculinity is needed to replace the traditional form. The alternative model takes shape in Santos, although there is some uncertainty about his position: control of the most violent aspects of hegemonic masculinity is something which breaks down in him near the end without being satisfactorily resolved. In addition, one might argue that the sort of control in question is actually reminiscent of certain traits of the hegemonic masculinity itself, with its emotional reticence and anxiously drawn ego boundaries.⁸ In this context, Santos' commitment to fencing and the strict control of cattle might be seen (allegorically) as a symptom of familiar masculine behaviour. This question of how new his behaviour is will need to be examined in more detail later.

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In the definition of masculine identity, women characters are very important. Within the novel's discourse, women characters are one of the chief grounds against which masculine subjectivity can attempt to project itself. Hence much of doña Bárbara's characterization depends on the deployment of the stereotypes of the whore and the witch that make her appear a monster:⁹ she is variously a "mujerona" 'virago', a "cacica" (10) 'female boss' and a "devoradora de hombres" (11) 'devourer of men'. The coarseness of this sort of characterization should not mask the double play involved: as the women characters are made use of and categorized, their otherness is crucially required to define the limits of masculinity. As if providing a rational causality, doña Bárbara's history is presented, or at least the key moment that "explains" her present state. But the treatment of her past is questionable and the emphases that it chooses manipulative. Doña Bárbara is apparently the child of rape, although the exact circumstances of the rape are not mentioned, being surrounded with mystification: "su origen se perdía en el drámatico misterio de las tierras vírgenes" (11) 'her origins were lost in the dramatic mystery of virgin lands'. Moreover, her parents are reduced to the stereotypical: a white adventurer has his violent way with an Indian woman. The predatory masculine behaviour is romanticized (the

adventurer) and the mother's "sombria sensualidad" (11) 'dark sensuality' seems to "explain away" how it happened.

As a young woman doña Bárbara finds herself in the same position as her mother – a beauty besieged by brutal men. And the same mitigation is employed, since she unwittingly stimulates the men but feels ambivalent about their reaction to her: she feels "miedo y gusto a la vez" (13) 'fear and pleasure at the same time', as if indicating her half complicity. When the rape occurs, the novel locates her clearly as victim, but that soon begins to be superseded. Firstly, a quasi-naturalizing metaphor is introduced, relating what has happened to her to the catching of a bird on the wing, which at best seems to evade the issue of men's brutality to another human (14). Her resentment is then rapidly passed over so that her desire for destructive revenge on all men can be conjured up. Her range of feelings is curtailed in a highly deterministic way, and the reason is clear – the novel wishes to produce a device threatening men: "Ya sólo rencores podía abrigar en su pecho y nada le complacía tanto como el espectáculo del varón debatiéndose entre las garras de las fuerzas destructoras" (14) 'From that moment she could only harbour bitterness in her breast and nothing pleased her as much as the spectacle of a man struggling in the claws of destructive forces'. Hence in half a page she rapidly passes from being the victim Barbarita (14) to being the calculating "mestiza" (15) 'mixed blood woman' devoted to witchcraft. As this perspective develops, so the rape becomes in retrospect simply a trigger: the event itself no longer seems to count. So her beauty becomes a malign and dangerous weapon, a threat to order and peace (15), and when combined with her hostility to men she becomes a potent destructive force. Rather later in story-time she begins to produce her own (male) victims, but in text-time she moves from helpless victim to victimizer in one page. The manipulation of the character by the masculine imaginary is evident, and could be allegorized as a fear of women and of loss of control. However, the transformation of doña Bárbara into a monster is only completed when her power starts to produce results. Her first victim is Lorenzo Barquero (15), and in producing his downfall she begins to acquire land. On her way to power she corrupts the local officers of the law (17), and she also rejects maternal behaviour because of the acquiescence to male will it implies (15-16). Rather than consider all this in the light of the rape, or even consider the presence of poetic justice, the novel excludes real explanation with vociferous disapproval of the results of her behaviour. It is the "destruction" that she represents that is really valuable to the novel's purposes.

The "history" of doña Bárbara is the novel's attempt to rationalize her position when Santos arrives: though far from convincing, it is symptomatic of its gender anxieties. This analysis starts to answer the question of the gender assignment of the main actantial roles in the novel: Santos' opponent can be stigmatized and rendered unnatural (in the end, a "natural" loser) since in the novel's gender system doña Bárbara can be depicted as a threat to "common sense". Hence her "threatening" loss of femininity is actually expressed via the acquisition of masculine features, in fact some of the very features that the novel's hegemonic masculinity relies upon.

Paradoxically, doña Bárbara's access to landowning is made possible by male violence and by men's inability to negotiate. The feuding between the Luzardo and Barquero families weakens male solidarity and control over the land, and that allows doña Bárbara to take an initiative, though (not surprisingly) the novel does not dwell on this connection. When Santos arrives, she is expanding her estate and acting just like many another (male) landowner. She dresses, rides and works like a man:

Durante las jornadas se entregaba a una actividad febril, a horcadas sobre el caballo, amazona repugnante de pantalones hombrunos hasta los tobillos bajo la falda recogida al arzón, lazo en mano detrás del ganado altamireño que paciese por sus sabanas,

insultando a los peones por el menor descuido y destrozándole los ijares a la bestia con las espuelas... (79)

During the daytime she gave herself up to feverish activity, astride her horse, a repugnant Amazon with mannish trousers down to her ankles under her dress which was tucked up on the saddle, lasso in hand in pursuit of any Altamira cattle that might be grazing on her savannahs, insulting the farmhands for the least carelessness and destroying the flanks of the beast with her spurs...

On more than one occasion her hands or voice are described as manly or androgynous (eg 85), and, together with her lack of maternal feelings (93), this is a sign of her upsetting of gender relations.

In fact, and yet more paradoxical, doña Bárbara actually seems very successful as a landowner and in the basic chores of ranching: she exploits the existing system on the plain very well and manipulates authority by using her beauty against men. This is most apparent with Lorenzo Barquero, whom she simply unmans: he becomes her victim and is left a pathetic, empty wreck. With his masculinity he loses his property rights – a vital combination later underlined by doña Bárbara's simultaneous feminization and loss of property. So important is this unmaning of Lorenzo that he is described on numerous occasions as "el ex-hombre" (eg 17, 46, 50) 'the ex-man', and in fleeing from doña Bárbara, he takes refuge in a sort of "no man's land" between her property and Santos'. In wreaking this effect on Lorenzo she is "monsterized" as the whore and castrating female: sex is a device used to achieve power. The position of most men becomes that of hapless victim of her potent blend of witchcraft and sex:

Inhibida la sensualidad por la pasión de la codicia y atrofiadas hasta las últimas fibras femeniles de su ser por los hábitos del marimacho... si alguna razón de pura conveniencia... la movía a prodigar caricias, más era hombruno tomar que femenino entregarse. (18)

With her sensuality stifled by the passion of her covetousness and the last feminine fibres of her being atrophied by the habits of the mannish woman... if she was moved by some reason of pure convenience to offer carresses, it was more a mannish grasping than a feminine surrender.

The last phrase is highly revealing of the (just) underlying gender ideology in play: men initiate, women submit themselves, a replay of the familiar active/passive dichotomy. For the novel, the clear conclusion to be drawn from her success is that she is unnaturally endangering gender, and engendering danger, hence she is compared to "las monstruosidades de la naturaleza" (85) 'the monstrosities of nature'. The precondition for her success, of course, is that she has no difficulty finding men lacking in the basic strength of the hegemonic masculinity to deal with her – but Doña Bárbara is not interested in exploring this multiple deviation from its basic norm.

On this foundation is constructed a character who changes as the novel progresses. For doña Bárbara ceases to be a masculinized, menacing and devious figure and becomes much more conventionally feminine, and powerless. In other words, one of the dynamics of the novel is the fulfilment of the masculine fantasy. Far from the novel merely trying to control her as monster/whore/witch, she is brought into even greater control as simply feminine. The revealing thing (revealing of the strength of masculine anxiety and desire) is that the taming of the "monster" is very easy. The course back to femininity is not absolutely smooth (frustration does spark off momentary relapses), but there is never any real doubt about the final position she will occupy, not that this reversion receives any coherent explanation.

The trigger to dramatic change in her is again a man: Santos' arrival produces an almost immediate modification in her. The novel itself admits that the change takes place "overnight":

"La primera impresión desagradable fue el cambio que, de la noche a la mañana, se había operado en el aspecto de la mujerona" (43) 'The first unpleasant impression was the change which had occurred overnight in the virago's appearance'. Not that this change in her is innocent for it seems that she is aiming for Santos' seduction. But there are ample signs of a gender transition, so that very soon her dress is almost entirely feminine with only odd incongruous masculine details (eg 83).

Underlying her reversion to femininity is her inability to cope with Santos. His arrival throws her into a state of great emotional confusion: his first legal ultimatum shocks and disorients her, despite her long history of hard-headed control over men. The novel is replete with attempts to explain this. In fact, the plethora of explanations for her ceding ground (both literally and metaphorically) is somewhat confused. She finds that she respects him (73), that she likes his authoritativeness (91), and that she fears him (83). She feels "subyugada" (92) 'subjugated' and she acknowledges his power by obeying his orders without question (122). These reactions are presented as statements of her feelings – there is no rationalizing of them. She feels intimidated by his virility – "la subyugaba aquel insólito aspecto varonil" (83) 'she was subjugated by that unexpected manly appearance' – and she is impressed by his skills on the plain, even though she can herself do the selfsame things rather better (83). Other "explanations" of her behaviour are that she has reached "la crisis de los cuarenta" (89) 'the crisis of her forties', and that Santos sparks off the "hidden truth of her soul" (92). Another reason is that she experiences an emotional tide beyond explanations (the reason is that there is no reason) (89). This "reason" again has strong gender bias, framing woman as the one to act emotionally and inexplicably, thus satisfying the masculine fantasy. In this vein is also the explanation that she surrenders because Santos makes her feel like a woman (89). Extending this gender explanation, doña Bárbara does later seem to be surrendering because of her desire to experience love and to explore an undiscovered part of herself. But that is contradicted by other elements suggesting that she is devious in apparently ceding ground to Santos in order to trap and seduce him (44, 65-66, 82, 92). This is representative of the confusion in the character (alluded to on 122-23), but in the context of all the other "explanations" it compounds the lack of clarity. Not only is the mass of explanations unconvincing, but none of the individual "explanations" is sufficiently grounded to suggest more than that the sudden change in doña Bárbara is something the novel has to produce, as if by magic. Hence, "explanations" (however numerous) are beside the point: Santos simply will produce a radical change in doña Bárbara. The best explanation may be one deriving from a fatalistic idea that she herself intuits: "Las cosas vuelven al lugar de donde salieron" (122) 'Things return whence they came'. In gender terms this "truism" is clearly indicated by doña Bárbara's jettisoning of self-determination and reverting to a passive femininity subordinate to masculinity. But this leaves Doña Bárbara in a contradictory position: it produces a mystified ending where things have somehow been conjured back into their "original" places, but at the same time it castigates doña Bárbara herself for superstitious commitments. Transparently at the end, the discourse of masculinity has worked a reversal of doña Bárbara's position, but only by relying on her (derided) penchant for fatalism and on her wholly inconsistent readiness to readopt her position as victim.

However, for all her manifest changes, the novel also wants doña Bárbara to remain the same. And this is because she is still needed to perform a gender function. The novel stresses the change in her by making it something which she explicitly proposes to herself: "Seré otra mujer... Ya estoy cansada de mí misma y quiero ser otra y conocer otra vida. Todavía me siento joven y puedo volver a empezar" (140) 'I'll be another woman... I'm tired of myself and I want to be different and to lead another life. I still feel young and I can start again'. At the same time, a deterministic strand insists that there is only one doña Bárbara. Hence change is desired, but her truth is immutable: "la verdad íntima y profunda de su ser se sobrepuso al ansia naciente de renovación" (90) 'the profound, intimate truth of her being imposed itself on the

growing desire for renewal'. In this sense her past precludes any modification of her behaviour (unlike Santos after his return from the city). Change is denied her for two reasons. Firstly, her threatening side is still required by the novel because this enables her to be excluded at the end – without her exit there would be potential for confusion with Marisela, as the domesticated feminine figure. And secondly, her exclusion is required in order to establish the gender boundary clearly: there is no place for ambivalent figures (even reformed ones) in the restored gender order. So the ending leaves doña Bárbara as a figure who, on the one hand, does not, cannot and will not change, and who, on the other, does manifestly change in giving up her self-determination, her control and her struggle. Doña Bárbara falls victim to the desire for a certain sort of ending, and in that sense, she does continue the same: she is still the defining ground for Santos. Their inverse trajectories are completed, his initial arrival exactly counterbalanced by her departure at the end. But she is not therefore "surplus to requirements", since it could be argued that her exclusion is as much a defining and controlling gesture as any attempt to assimilate Marisela. So doña Bárbara is not lost in gender terms. She, as much as Marisela, is still a ground for male subjectivity: "... the exclusion of woman and the denigration of the feminine... point to the underlying theme in the intertextual and historical continuity of masculine self-legitimation and ideal self-projection" (Braidotti 235). This again underlines why the actantial roles are apportioned along the gender lines that they are: the absolute vindication of Santos has an added "inevitability" in this discourse if his principal opponent is a woman.

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Marisela is a counterbalance to doña Bárbara within the logic of the masculine discourse and its bid for exclusive power. She begins the novel in "no man's land" with her father Lorenzo, and where he has been emasculated, she is not yet feminized: she is virgin territory that Santos will map. That process starts in a paradigmatic scene heavily freighted with gender implications. The visual plays a major role here, since Marisela is seen and created by the masculine gaze. In part I chapter xi, Santos first sees and appraises her, and what he finds is an unformed being outside the parameters for women that he knows. The process of her assimilation is begun by Santos, and the vehicle for her "education" is his flirtation. In "educating", he will reveal the beauty beneath the wild exterior: " – Sí, te enseñaré... Pero tienes que pagarme por adelantado las lecciones, mostrándome esa cara que tanto te empeñas en ocultar" (51) 'Yes, I'll teach you... But you must pay me in advance for the lessons, by showing me that face that you're trying so hard to hide'. Her neglect, the past failure to feminize her, cannot mask the "truth" from the knowing masculine eye: "Pero bastó el breve instante para que los ojos de Santos apresaran la revelación de belleza" (52) 'But the brief moment was enough for Santos' eyes to grasp the revelation of beauty'. Here the skill of the eye is as important as the beauty, and progressing from his perception Santos "unveils" the face by washing it, a process which, together with his speech, awakens her "soul": "Las manos le lavaron el rostro y las palabras le despertaron el alma dormida. Advierte que las cosas han cambiado de repente. Que ella misma es otra persona" (53) 'His hands washed her face and his words woke her dormant soul. She notices that suddenly things have changed. That she herself is another person'. Marisela begins to be assimilated to the model that Santos knows, and she acquiesces enthusiastically. Suddenly she discovers an interest in her own appearance, as if trying to find out what it is that the masculine gaze has discovered: she aligns herself immediately with that constituting viewpoint (53). The key to this is her sudden desire to be beautiful, but this is clearly a desire formed on the desire of the masculine other. The novel presents the whole scene as an innocent epiphany, whereas what the discourse is operating is an assimilation to gender type.

The assumption of the external image is accompanied by the "birth" of her emotions, a new range of awareness:

La frescura del agua en las mejillas, que ahora le están produciendo sensaciones desconocidas. ¡Sí se siente la belleza! Estas sensaciones nuevas y tiernas no pueden tener otra causa. Así debe de sentir el árbol, en la corteza endurecida y rugosa, la ternura de los retoños que de pronto le reventaron... (53)

The coolness of the water on her cheeks, which are now giving her unknown feelings. Yes beauty is felt! These new and tender feelings can have no other cause. This is how a tree must feel on its hardened and rough bark the tenderness of the shoots which suddenly split it open...

Marisela is transformed from a wild, blank space into a potential recruit for femininity, all naturalized by the references to the world of the plain. After the utterance of a few words – "¡Es preciosa esta criatura!" (52) 'This child is beautiful!' – Marisela is made, as if by magic, into another/an-other person. In effect, what Santos does is to en-gender Marisela in the form of a virginal and idealized young woman, who supposedly stands as the opposite pole to the witch/whore that her mother is. This scene is a first step in a process of domestication. When she is taken to Altamira, her "education" progresses as her language is normalized to suit Santos' preferences and she is assigned the domestic chores (95-96). Her role as apprentice to femininity and domestic servant allows Santos to play the part of paternal authority, with a touch of condescending gallantry, which the discourse projects as his avoidance of the crude ways of the plain (75).

His paternalism opens up the key ambiguity in regard to Marisela, for Santos does indeed see himself in the role of her father (or alternatively brother) (96). He does not perceive the sexual aspect of the relationship, and retains a strict emotional boundary, not untypically of hegemonic masculinities.¹⁰ Santos' obtuseness means that he fails to recognize his own feelings, and hence, in a move which inverts the power structure of their relationship, she has to take the initiative and declare herself to him. That sparks a debate in him as to how dangerous the "education" of Marisela is: he feels threatened, and his response is to toy with the idea of sending her away. This, as the novel itself ironically makes clear, is a way of protecting himself from an emotion he cannot cope with. It would also be a way of restoring his power: it allows the man to make the decisions and it reduces Marisela again to the position of one who is moved around at his behest. In the end, he does nothing, but his uneasiness about emotion is registered.

The efficacy of Santos as an "educator" is clear when Marisela "returns to the wild". For she becomes preoccupied for the first time by her relationship with her mother. Her fear is that she will inherit her mother's repulsive nature (129) and that therefore she is not worthy to be loved. Her self-hatred is a sign of the assimilation of Santos' perspective on doña Bárbara as a monster. Her "return to the wild" is an expression of fear that there is no escape from this inheritance. In effect, what happens is that Marisela discovers that she faces a decision about her future (though the choices available are created by the masculine discourse): she can be located either outside with doña Bárbara, or inside in domestication with Santos. Crucially, this masculine polarization puts the mother-daughter relationship in the balance. From the start, there has been no relation between them because of doña Bárbara's rejection of her daughter, but now the mother emerges as a sort of genetic threat (despite her situation having been produced by the historical circumstance of her rape). The novel shows that she can escape the "threat", but without taking account of the complete loss of relation with the mother. There appears to be no room in this discourse for a female solidarity to match the male solidarity of the plainmen. But Marisela's desire to be rescued by Santos is not sufficient on its own. She can be recovered not when, as if by magic, she suddenly discovers love for her dying father (149), but when Santos sees her display of love to her father: again it is his gaze which triggers a new phase in her life.

If Santos creates Marisela – and this is abundantly clear when she is called "su verdadera obra" (163) 'his true work' –, she is also the mirror which Santos needs in order to reflect back a narcissistic self-image. In the first place, it is Marisela who reassures Santos that he is not guilty of the murder of El Brujeador (163): the mirror reflects what he wants to know. In the second place, that reciprocal relation is clear when doña Bárbara sees Santos and Marisela together in the final vignette in which Santos talks while Marisela listens: "Ya habían concluido de comer; él hablaba y ella escuchaba, mirándolo embelesada..." (171) 'They had already finished eating; he was speaking and she was listening, looking at him entranced'. Marisela is taken back because she will listen to and absorb the masculine discourse that Santos articulates; her admiring gaze poses no question to him, it simply confirms him in power. But despite this attempt at "resolution" in inequality, the question of emotional reciprocity is not well handled. The evolution of Santos' emotions from obtuseness about love to apparent acceptance of it is hardly explicitly addressed: the novel simply brings Santos and Marisela together in a quasi-idyllic match, and hopes for resolution.

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Santos' position must be seen in relation both to the hegemonic masculinity and to the women characters. From the point of view of masculinity he represents a possible adjustment, yet one which the novel does not fully work out. He is located within a family history, and specifically in relation to its disruption, which is largely responsible for the plot's impetus. Santos is represented as the force that will repair the problem. The remote patriarchal peace of the family was disrupted by feuding between the male members (7-8), sometimes over remarkably trivial issues such as a stray cow. The inflexibility of macho pride ended in Santos' father killing his eldest son. This created a major break, for Santos was taken away from the dangerous environment by his mother. At a stroke, the main influences on his life changed: the city replaced the plain, and his mother became the sole parental presence (his father dying of remorse). The discourse frames these events as Santos' loss of a masculine environment and a stunting of his growth:

La brusca trasplatación del medio llanero, rudo, pero lleno de intensas emociones endurecedoras del carácter, al blando y soporoso ambiente ciudadano... prodújole un singular adormecimiento de las facultades. El muchacho animoso, de inteligencia despierta y corazón ardiente... se volvió obtuso y abúlico... (9)

The abrupt transplantation from the environment of the plain, which was rough but full of intense emotions that build character, to the soft and soporific surroundings of the city... produced in him a singular numbing of the faculties. The lively boy, with a sharp intelligence and passionate heart... became dull and spineless...

The environment for Santos to develop into a man was lost.

His return to Altamira is intended to enable a complete break with it – to sell it in order to go abroad. Revealingly, as Santos loses his regional feelings and link with masculinity so he also loses his national outlook: "La tierra natal ya no lo atraía, ni aquel pedazo de ella, ni toda entera, porque al perder los sentimientos regionales había perdido también todo sentimiento de patria" (10) 'His native land no longer appealed to him, neither that piece of it, nor the whole of it, because on losing his regional feelings he had also lost all patriotic feeling'.¹¹ So he nurtures the desire to "expatriarse" (10) 'leave his native country'. As he returns to sell Altamira it is evident that his gender identity is open to doubt: he does not measure up as a man, and he is no leader. In short, he appears the effete city-dweller. From this position of apparently total lack, he responds by revealing that he does relish a fight, does like the plain and does have all the requisite skills for ranching. The episode of the breaking of the horse (39-41), as I have already indicated, is a spectacle affirming his entitlement to respect by the hegemonic masculinity. But

the novel really looks to locate and en-gender him differently. He may be attracted by the life of the plain, but he is also repulsed and sees it as endangering all that the city has cultivated in him (26). The key balancing for Santos becomes how to behave sufficiently as a man without succumbing to the mindless forces of hegemonic masculinity. The complexity in gender terms that Doña Bárbara tries to elaborate is how to maintain Santos' commitment to the energy and display of the plainsmen's masculinity and how to control and, at times, repress it with the law, which is to risk being emasculated. Hence, the relative gender complexity of Santos is not a simple binary between the city and the plain, or between effeminacy and hegemonic masculinity, but an effort at weaving them into reconciliation. This does not prove to be easy. On the one hand, he does try to deal with others through legal channels, but, on the other, he is also deeply attracted to the way of life on the plain (eg 119). Confirmation of the value of this combination comes from doña Bárbara who seems impressed (on one occasion) by this new combination of virility, dignity and delicacy: "La subyugaba aquel insólito aspecto varonil, aquella mezcla de dignidad y de delicadeza que nunca había encontrado en los hombres que la trataran..." (83) 'She was subjugated by that unexpectedly virile appearance, that mixture of dignity and delicacy that she had never encountered in the men who had dealings with her...'.

Some of the novel's most interesting uncertainty is related to balancing the aspects of Santos. There is no question of conventional *hombría* being entirely denigrated, as Lorenzo proves during his brief rehabilitation. His recovery is projected quite plainly in gender terms:

Era la brusca rebelión del hombre, el rencor de largos años sepultado dentro del alma envilecida, algo viril, por fin, brutal, pero con todo, menos innoble, menos abyecto que aquella relajación de la dignidad que lo había hecho entregarse al alcohol para olvidarse de su miseria. Ya esta saludable reacción había comenzado desde los primeros días de su estadía en Altamira... (99)

It was the sudden rebellion of the man, the bitterness of long years buried within the debased soul, something virile, in short, brutal, but for all that, less ignoble, less abject than that loosening of his dignity which had made him give himself up to alcohol in order to forget his degradation. This healthy reaction had already begun from the first days of his stay at Altamira...

While the novel approves of this "healthy" development, it does not cope well with non-violent emotion. Santos may be a "new man" (as far as the plain is concerned), but the early experience with Marisela does not teach him how to recognize emotion. When he senses the loss of control of emotions, he is inept, and tries to fend them off (112-13). Nor is Santos' problem resolved effectively at the end. In his sudden conversion to violent action and his relishing of man to man combat with El Brujeador, he seems to experience the "return of the repressed" he so much feared (153). After the murder of El Brujeador, the balance of forces in him has apparently been disastrously upset. The discovery that Pajarote and not Santos actually shot El Brujeador hardly removes from him the responsibility for the violent acts before the shooting nor for his intention to shoot him. In addition and contradictorily, the ending relies on the shooting of El Brujeador to resolve the plot.¹² Despite all this, the novel is content to exonerate Santos, and the lost balance of forces in him seems to be restored. Indeed, the balance is apparently enhanced since Santos and Marisela can return to their relationship in a rather idealized scene witnessed by doña Bárbara (171). In bringing them back together the novel avoids examining the emotional implications of the reunion: it simply happens. Indeed, if there is any change it seems to be in Marisela, not in Santos, for she has learnt tenderness and filial duty towards her father (162), and is therefore worthy of Santos. His problem with not recognizing emotion does not receive any attention. So the interplay of *hombría* and control is (implicitly) reasserted in the "new man" at the end, but on a rather unelaborated foundation.

Paradoxically, underlying the attempted balancing of forces in the "new man" and destabilizing much of what the novel is trying to do is the fundamental similarity (at least conceptually) of Santos and doña Bárbara. Their mixing of features is crucial here, and is visible in many details. Witness the literal/metaphorical assigning of bodily hair, which reverses expectations: Santos has no moustache (19-20), but doña Bárbara's vigour and authority elicit the praise from Carmelito that "esa mujer es de pelo en pecho" (35) 'that woman has hairs on her chest'. The initial feminine features in Santos are matched in doña Bárbara by masculine ones, and their structural similarities in terms of gender blurring are only disguised by the coarser, disparaging terms employed with her. For much of the book they share a positioning at variance with the norms of the gender divide operating on the plain. Moreover, they are both in transition throughout: doña Bárbara back to a position of femininity, and Santos towards a sort of masculinity (which, though "new" in theory, looks in practice rather similar to much of the hegemonic masculinity). So part of the underlying process of the novel relies on the interactive processes of "defeminizing" Santos and "demasculinizing" doña Bárbara.

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My essay works from the ground that Doña Bárbara sets up its allegory with certain gender presuppositions. Inevitably it is necessary to assume something of the allegorical structure in order to work against it and destabilize it: this is the compromise of reading. But gender is not (or not simply) a content of the allegory, but part of its mechanics. Another way of resisting the gender logic of the novel would be to insist that there is another narrative concealed in it, which it cannot foreground. To expose this narrative is to reformulate the novel's allegory vigorously and to indicate its bias: to re-allegorize against the grain. The other narrative is not a romance of rebuilding life on the plain, but the tragedy of a woman's oppression by and attempt to overcome men and their gender system. It would start with doña Bárbara's rape and effort to recover from it, showing her apparently successful attempt to achieve independence by exploiting masculine behaviour more effectively than men. Her strategy is sustained by playing on men's weaknesses (a reversing of the relation in her rape): hence she uses sex and magic in highly effective ways against them. Her use of magic might therefore be seen as a destabilizing tactic which is anathema to and largely beyond the scope of the rationalist and legalist discourse of Santos. It is a tactic that almost gives her complete triumph over her erstwhile attackers, but it cannot save her from final defeat.

By extension and continuing the destabilizing process, it is important to grasp that the novel itself relies on magic in two ways. In the first place, it is the negative ground for its own preferred rationalist discourse – doña Bárbara's magic enables the discourse to set itself and Santos over her. In the second place, the novel irrationally and "magically" produces doña Bárbara as disconcerted by Santos, so strong is its need for her not to outmatch him. Hence the novel castigates her witchcraft but relies on its own léger de main to contrive its preferred outcome. A symptom of this is the use of omens. In an early scene, the peones of Altamira discuss the reappearance of the hacienda's good spirit as a sign that Santos will win the battle with doña Bárbara (32-34). At first, Pajarote pretends that he has seen the spirit in order to create confidence in the others that Santos is a good man, as the narrator clearly points out in demystifying the story Pajarote tells (33). But Pajarote bases his story on another that María Nieves has previously told him which is related to the peones after Pajarote's fraudulent version. This original version and other strange events of good omen are not demystified (33-34). This superstitious and wishful thinking by the peones is in fact an accurate anticipation of the novel's ending, and that accuracy and the failure to demystify the original story are indicative of the novel's own desire. There are numerous other signs of the novel's conjuring up of Santos' victory: for example, doña Bárbara's "inability" to cast a spell on Santos (85); her idea of spooking Santos away but inexplicably desisting (90); her wanting to kill Santos but finding that someone

(the implied author, perhaps?) stops her (93); and the advice of doña Bárbara's "socio" 'accomplice' to try to achieve her ends by giving up all that she has gained: " – Si quieres que él venga a ti, entrega tus obras" (123) 'If you want him to come to you, surrender your works', a rather convenient tactic from Santos' point of view! So far from doña Bárbara's magic being outlawed, it looks like a fundamental ingredient of the novel's plot dynamic. In that sense, the novel destabilizes itself from within, and reveals its foundation in masculine fantasy.

Notes

1. Abdul JanMohamed offers an analysis of the operation of manichean allegories in his *Manichean Allegories. The Poetics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. His introduction sets up a useful theoretical base for a critique of the subject.
2. See Alonso (134) where he is apparently open to this possibility.
3. This sort of practice is quite common; see, for example, Schärer-Nussberger and Shaw.
4. A notable exception to this is Sharon Magnarelli. She takes a critical view of the representation of women in *Doña Bárbara* and makes some helpful observations. But i) she is still making this critique within the parameters of the allegorical binaries of nationalism; and ii) she limits herself to a consideration of women characters, without encompassing the whole gender field.
5. See Greimas. Applying his theory of actants, doña Bárbara is Santos' "opponent" in his quest to gain his object: control over Altamira.
6. Using this term is fraught with danger. Though I will use some psychoanalytical concepts in what follows, I will do so sparingly because of psychoanalysis' capacity to appropriate the objects of its analysis into its own master narrative.
7. In his book Connell is describing the hegemonic masculinity of the contemporary western world, but the basic concept does not appear to be tied to one particular context.
8. For a general discussion of ego boundaries and of men's general tendency to want them sharply defined, see Sherrod and Chodorow.
9. For a detailed discussion of these stereotypes, see Gilbert and Gubar.
10. For a social scientific study of this general phenomenon in contemporary USA see Balswick.
11. For a discussion of the nationalist dimension of *Doña Bárbara*, see Sommer.
12. One might note that for all Santos' rapid acquisition of the skills of the plain, he does not improve very much in his handling of a gun: he is notably inaccurate in shooting the crocodile at the start (5), and still misses his target at the end!

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