

DOÑA BÁRBARA, LEGEND OF THE LLANO*

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SOUTH from Caracas 270 miles one comes upon the sleepy metropolis of the *llano*, San Fernando de Apure.¹ Slumbering on the far bank of the Orinoco's largest tributary, the city lies some six hundred miles inland from the sea in the heart of one of the largest areas of plains country in the Americas. Of this vast pampa terrain of approximately 250,000 square miles, the *llano* country par excellence is that of the Guárico and of the Alto and Bajo Apure.² And South from San Fernando some forty miles over a sandy trail one comes upon the pride of the Apure, the *hato* of La Candelaria.³ Gathering unto itself 100,000 head of horses and countless thousands of wild cattle, this famed ranch sweeps on to the Arauca, and

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¹ The marker at the airport, which is on the very banks of the Apure, affords the following data on the city: founded in 1789 by Fray Buenaventura Benaocaz; elevation 67 m. (220 ft.); mean temperature 32.78°C. (91°F); population, according to the 1936 census, 7972; 432 kms. (270 ms.) due south of Caracas; and 427 kms. (267 ms.) from Santa Rosa del Sarare, the most distant community in the state of Apure, of which San Fernando is the capital. The city may be reached from Caracas by air (Taca or Aeropostal) almost daily throughout the year with possible interruptions during June, July, and August because of heavy rains and floods. Roads are impassable during the winter or rainy season which usually begins in April and reaches flood stage in August. There is no commercial air service between San Fernando and Ciudad Bolívar, and river traffic has declined greatly in recent years. Cargo, and the occasional traveler, must wait for whatever craft may chance to work its way up from the lower Orinoco. Today San Fernando buys directly from Caracas; it is no longer dependent on the slow, circuitous water-route. Several hundred head of cattle are now flown in daily from the surrounding *llano* to the city's *matadero*, and from there to all parts of the country, a matter of only several hours today from the center of the cattle industry to the most distant consumer-centers. Cattle-raising has been much neglected of late, a fact reflected in beef-shortages and high prices and in the unsuccessful attempt to import fresh beef from Nicaragua. San Fernando, natives will tell you, is no longer as active as in years gone by; salesmen recall the day when thirty or more used to descend upon the city at the same time.

² See Daniel Mendoza, *El llanero (Estudio de sociología venezolana)*, Caracas, Tip. "Cultura Venezolana," 1922, 1-8, for a good description of the *llano*, especially of the Alto and Bajo Apure, based largely on Codazzi and Humboldt.

³ For intimate colorful notes on La Candelaria, as well as on San Fernando, see Erna Fergusson, *Venezuela*, New York, Knopf, 1939, 216-237.

beyond, to embrace over 275 square miles of *llanura venezolana*. La Candelaria was already a ranch of some size⁴ during the years when Páez, Bolívar, Boves, and Morillo made history on those very plains. At the turn of the century it fell into the grasping hands of Juan Vicente Gómez, and of Cipriano Castro before him, swelling to its present proportions as numerous neighboring lands and communal holdings were added to it. Lands formerly cultivated or under supervised grazing became the favored domain of the untamed horse and wild cattle, of the "onza, tigre y león," of fowl, and of the deer. And in the days of Gómez, before the winter rains set in, many parties were wont to visit this hunter's paradise of La Candelaria.

Rómulo Gallegos was a member of one of these parties during the Easter holidays of 1927. It was his first trip into the *llano*. *La Trepadora* (1925) had been well received⁵ and he was now hard at work on another novel. But before he could complete it, he needed authentic material on the *llano*, just enough so that the account of his leading character's short visit to San Fernando would ring true. But this character never returned to the pages of the unfinished manuscript, nor was the story ever told. Gallegos abandoned the theme for one that had appealed to him ever since his writing of "Los aventureros"⁶ a quarter of a century before, in which he had represented barbarism and civilization as "las dos fuerzas contrarias que mueven el cuerpo social venezolano."⁷ There in La Candelaria and in San Fernando he first heard the story of the now almost mythical *hombruna* who seemed best to symbolize the devastating forces of regression and of barbarism.

The idea developed rapidly. The young man from Caracas, who was but to spend a few days in the *llano* and then return to the capital, would stay on in the valley of the Apure and the Arauca "para contribuir a la destrucción de las fuerzas retardatarias de la prosperidad del Llano."⁸ Don Rómulo worked feverishly for the short eight days he was there. There

⁴ Mendoza (1823-1867), *op. cit.*, 15: "Los descendientes de éste (Pedro Beroes) fundaron *La Candelaria*, que desde hace veinticinco o treinta años es también una finca rural considerable." *El llanero* was written around 1845.

⁵ For an early exhaustive critique of the novel, see Julio Planchart, *Reflexiones sobre novelas venezolanas con motivo de La Trepadora*, Caracas, Lito-Tip. Mercantil, 1927, 21-36 (reprint from *Cultura Venezolana*, 77, Diciembre, 1926): "... disquisiciones . . . escritas con motivo de las alabanzas y aceptación que ha merecido *La Trepadora*. . ."

⁶ *El Cojo Ilustrado*, XXI, 1912, 81-85.

⁷ Anonymous favorable review of *Los aventureros* (Caracas, 1913) in *El Cojo Ilustrado* (clipping, probably 1913), 146.

⁸ The goal sought by Santos Luzardo in *Doña Bárbara* (Barcelona, Araluce, 7th ed.) 29. Further references will be to this edition. Dillwyn F. Ratcliff, *Venezuelan Prose Fiction*, New York, Instituto de las Españas, 1933, 259, comments on the fact that "the character Santos Luzardo is entirely in the tradition of the Venezuelan novel."

were willing guides to acquaint him with the varied phases of ranch life, the *rodeo*, the branding, the *doma*, the *recolecta*, the river-crossings, and many eager tongues to reel off tales of exploits, of feuds, of *llanero* superstitions and customs in racy idiom and in *coplas* that he would later transcribe so faithfully to the written page that as one critic put it: "Nunca se habían contado en Venezuela estas cosas del llano con tanta exactitud, con tanta lealtad, con tanto fervor. . ."⁹

Within one month after returning to Caracas the first galleys of a new novel were coming off the press. But Don Rómulo was not satisfied with what he read, nor was he pleased with the title of *La Coronela*. The initial spontaneous outburst of inspiration and enthusiasm seemed to have carried him to no satisfying end. He was not of a mood or of a mind to labor painfully over a story that would not spin itself out as he hammered away at the keys. The plot had hit him of a sudden; he had thought it out on his way back to Caracas, had developed it on long solitary walks, and then without outline or written notes he had sat down to type-off chapter after chapter until the first proofs began coming in from the printer. This was his technique. A plot must take its final shape almost subconsciously, spontaneously, as he writes. And once a chapter is finished, it must remain as it is because Don Rómulo does not like to rework a single line; if he is still sufficiently stirred, he prefers to write the page or chapter all over again as it comes to him afresh. *La Coronela* was disappointing as he read those first printed pages, the title had none of the pull or symbolism of his earlier novels, he suddenly cooled to the entire task and called the printing to a halt. *La Coronela* too was left unborn.

Shortly after, Don Rómulo took Sra. de Gallegos to Bologna for an operation. It was there in Italy, during his wife's convalescence, that he returned to the abandoned manuscript of *La Coronela*, revising and re-writing entire chapters and finally hitting upon a title that would place the novel among those other felicitously-named masterpieces of his American confrères: *Los de abajo*, *La vorágine*, *Don Segundo Sombra*. In early 1929, after three months of inspired writing, *Doña Bárbara* was ready for the Barcelona publishers, and for world acclaim.¹⁰

⁹ An anonymous reviewer in *Cultura Venezolana* (94, 1929, 149). Quoted by Ratcliff, *op. cit.*, 253.

¹⁰ *Doña Bárbara* (Novela), Barcelona, Araluce, 1929 (15 de febrero), 350 pp. The Library of Congress has two copies. This first edition did not carry a glossary; and the entire text underwent a drastic revision before the second edition appeared in Barcelona in January, 1930. A glance at the chapter headings of the first edition, and the order in which they appear, will in some measure reveal the extent of changes made; Part One, I. ¿ Con quién vamos? II. El descendiente del Cunavichero. III. Un(o) solo y mil caminos distintos. IV. La lanza en el muro. V. El familiar. VI. Una pregunta intempestiva. VII. El recuerdo de Asdrubal. VIII. La doma. IX. La esfinge de la

Only eight days in the *llano* and yet Gallegos had written a novel that elicited statements such as these from critics who were not acquainted with his background or past: "Don Rómulo Gallegos ha vivido, sin duda, la vida amplia y libre del inmenso llano y sabe reflejarla en sus múltiples aspectos con una sobriedad y un verismo bien poco tropicales, por cierto."¹¹ Only in one instance¹² does the author, or for that matter anyone else, suggest or imply that *Doña Bárbara* was born of contacts, legend, and facts picked up on that short trip to Apure in 1927. Invariably, critics will extol Don Rómulo as "el que forjara la ficción de la hombruna Doña Bárbara,"¹³ one even going so far as to insist on this fictional feature of the heroine as a point of departure by way of substantiating charges of plagiarism and of lack of originality.¹⁴ Several reputable critics, both Colombian and Venezuelan, have already seen fit to refute accusations to the effect that *Doña Bárbara* "era un plagio de *La vorágine* porque allí también hay bongos. . . ."¹⁵ What denial of such ill-founded charges could prove more

sabana. X. El espectro de la Barquereña. XI. La bella durmiente. XII. Algún día será verdad. XIII. (Los derechos de) Mister Peligro. Part Two, I. Los amansadores. II. Miel de Aricas. III. Candelas y retoños. IV. El rodeo V. Las veladas de la vaquería. VI. La pasión sin nombre. VII. Soluciones imaginarias. VIII. Coplas y paisajes. IX. La dañera y sus obras. X. El espanto de la sabana. Part Three, I. Las tolvaneras. II. Ño Pernalet y otras calamidades más. III. Opuestos rumbos buscaban. IV. La hora del hombre. V. El inefable hallazgo. VII. El inexcrutable designio. VII. Los retoños de Mister Danger. VIII. La gloria roja. IX. Planes y visiones de Doña Bárbara. X. La luz en la caverna. XI. Los puntos sobre las haches. XII. La hija de los ríos. XIII. La estrella en la mira. Epílogo. It will be observed, for example, that the compelling and strategically-placed chapter III of Part One, "La devoradora de hombres," does not appear in the first edition at all, that the "Epílogo" of the first becomes chapter XV of the later editions under the significant and appealing title "Toda horizontes, toda caminos," and finally, that chapters I, III, and V of Part Two and chapters I and X of Part Three of the later editions do not appear as such in the first. Many pages of the first edition were eliminated altogether in the second, innumerable changes and corrections were made, and approximately forty pages of new text were introduced, including the glossary. A tremendous improvement in style, descriptive power, and dramatic appeal resulted therefrom. It would appear, then, that the text as we now have it was reworked and revised at least three times. For one of the best of the early reviews, see Ricardo Baeza in *El Sol* (Madrid), January 14, 1930.

¹¹ Manuel Pedro González, "Del momento hispanoamericano—A propósito de *Doña Bárbara*," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, VII, 27, July, 1930, 167.

¹² See Luis Enrique Osorio's write-up of an interview with the author published in *Acción Liberal* of Bogotá for November, 1936. To the question "¿Cómo nació *Doña Bárbara*?" Gallegos replied: "Nació en un hato de Juan Vicente Gómez: el hato de La Candelaria."

¹³ Loreley, "Rómulo Gallegos: El escritor y el hombre," *Repertorio Americano*, XVIII, 805, June 5, 1937, 329 ff.

¹⁴ Jorge Añez, *De La vorágine a Doña Bárbara*, Bogotá, Imp. del Departamento, 1944, 213 pp.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127. Actually, this was reported by Rafael Heliodoro Valle after an interview with Gallegos, and published in *El Dictamen* of Vera Cruz, Mexico, December 13, 1942.

effective than an account of how Gallegos actually came by his story and his characters?

Don Rómulo was in a talkative mood that late June afternoon of 1947. He had been assisting in the construction of a small building in the rear of his home "Marisela" that lies at the foot of El Ávila on the outskirts of Caracas. "Marisela," too, he had helped build with his own hands and with returns from *Doña Bárbara*. This was his means of relaxation now in crowded days at the headquarters of the Acción Democrática, whose party president he was, and again their presidential candidate—"El candidato del pueblo"—just as back in 1941 when Apure championed him as their man "que no tiene otra cosa que un libro bajo el brazo."¹⁶ In speaking of that book and of the loyal support of his *llanero* friends, Don Rómulo recalled his days at La Candelaria. Antonio Torrealba, he said, was the one who knew more about the *llano* and the *llanero* than anyone else in San Fernando. It was Antonio who had served as his guide and constant companion in 1927, who had introduced him to his *compadres* at the ranch, and who had provided him with large collections of *coplas* and other popular verse-forms that were to find their way into *Doña Bárbara* and later into *Cantaclaro*.

Antonio José Torrealba Osto is easily recognizable in the *peón* Antonio Sandoval who welcomes Santos Luzardo to Altamira. Like the real Antonio, the Antonio of the novel is always at hand when Santos needs the considered counsel of one old in the ways of the *llano* and its people. Antonio Torrealba now lives in San Fernando, whence he came from La Candelaria some seventeen years ago. There is no mistaking his "cara redonda, de color aceitunado." Time has undoubtedly added to the weight as it has to the years of this "araucano buen mozo," who is now in his late forties. His medium height and maimed left foot seem to accentuate his two hundred fifty pounds, and to belie that he was the cicerone and counselor Antonio of days gone by. Today Antonio works at a jeweler's, where he cleans and polishes when he is not regaling those who would listen with tales of *llano* life or filling ledgers with *coplas* from oral tradition or of his own composition. One of his ledgers is packed with observations on folkways and customs that he will tell you are rapidly changing, if not disappearing altogether.

Antonio was born of an Indian mother and a descendant of the early Spanish settlers on his father's *hato* Santa Rita, South of San Fernando.

¹⁶ Andrés Eloy Blanco, in an extemporaneous campaign speech delivered in Caracas, April 5, 1941, that in the words of the typist drew "una clamorosa ovación." In this same speech Eloy Blanco makes several apt references to Apure's backing of Gallegos—"cuya candidatura ha sido alzada sobre los lomos de los caballos llaneros." See *Programa político y discursos del candidato popular Rómulo Gallegos*, Caracas, Edit. Elite, 1941, 39-47.

He grew up in the *monte* and on the *sabana*. By the time Gallegos and his friends visited La Candelaria in 1927, Antonio had worked himself up to a position of responsibility as assistant administrator of the ranch. It is now his joy and pride, swelling generously with the years, to recall his every moment with Don Rómulo, to identify place-names and characters in *Doña Bárbara*, and to elaborate on any scene or event that Gallegos touches upon in the novel.

Melquíades Gamarra, the "brujeador," he will tell you, was Juan Ignacio Fuenmayor, "muy hábil y muy respetado pero tan vil como en la novela." Balbino Paiva, Doña Bárbara's choice of *mayordomo* for Altamira, was Eladio Paiva of the Alto Apure. Encarnación Matute was one Encarnación Contreras. The Mondragones were three *vaqueros* of that name who were actually dubbed "Onza, Tigre y León." And Ño Pernaleta was Diego Pernaleta of Tinaco, "auténtico y autoritario,"¹⁷ under the rule of the despot Pérez Soto. Those whom Antonio identifies with real warmth were his old cronies of La Candelaria days; they are the ones, of course, who move about him as Antonio in the novel, the *luzarderos* of Altamira. Carmelito López—"de los nuevos; pero luzardero, también, hasta los tuétanos"¹⁸—was none other than Antonio José Zapata. Old Melesio, the father of Antonio Sandoval, "anciano de piel cuarteada, pero con la cabeza todavía negra,"¹⁹ was Brígido Reyes, patriarch too of a large family. The *cabrestero* María Nieves, "llanero marrajo, hasta en el nombre, que parece de mujer,"²⁰ was Rafael Anselmo Luna, who had come to La Candelaria after a period of service in the army. And finally, there was Juan Palacios, born Pablo Mirabal, the "zambo contento, canilludo y desgachado,"²¹ who was nicknamed "Pajarote" by Antonio and his boys, and who too could say with his counterpart in the novel: "Las palabras son para decirlas."

But Antonio becomes even more talkative when the conversation turns to the songs of the *llano* and to the *compadres* of "Cantaclaro." Ramón Nolasco, "el mejor arpista de todo el cajón de Arauca,"²² was the popular harpist and singer Pedro Tovar, who is still alive at a ripe old age. Ramón Páez, son of General José Antonio, testifies to the existence of "muchos improvisadores famosos" among the *llaneros*, citing such famous names of that day as "el negro Quintana, viejo sargento de la Guardia," and one

¹⁷ "Pernaleta" has become synonymous with unscrupulous, despotic government officials. For the *llanero* the "Pernaletes" are his "perseguidores del lado del Gobierno." See Fernando Calzadilla Valdés, *Por los llanos de Apure*, Santiago de Chile, Imp. Universitaria, 1940, 169.

¹⁸ *Doña Bárbara*, 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²² *Ibid.*, 237.

Sarmiento, "Caporal del Hato de San Pablo."²³ Even a hurried trip to the *llano* will afford anyone an opportunity to verify this unusual gift of every *llanero*, whether he be of San Fernando and happen to drop in at the jeweler's to exchange a round of *coplas* with Antonio, or whether he be one of such a group of *vaqueros* as Gallegos describes in his colorful chapter "Las veladas de la vaquería": "Al atardecer llegaban los vaqueros en grupos bulliciosos, empezaban a decirse algo entre sí y terminaban cantándolo en coplas, pues para cada cosa que se necesite decir, hay en el Llano una copla que ya lo tiene dicho y lo expresa mejor. . . ."²⁴

Most beloved of all Venezuelan singers was Florentino, the semi-legendary bard of Arauca, who, as in the legend of Santos Vega, "todo lo dijo en coplas y a quien ni el mismo Diablo pudo ganarle la apuesta de a cual improvisara más. . . ."²⁵ In *Doña Bárbara*, and again in *Cantaclaro*, Gallegos observes that should a singer lag in improvisation, "para salir del apuro se echaba mano de Florentino."²⁶ And Antonio will add that in the *llano* any good *copla* is always attributed to the Araucan bard.

Antonio's ledger is full of *coplas*, *galerones*, *joropos*, *septillas*, *corridos*, and "*diálogos*" or "*contiendas*," many of his own composition, some good, others, he is forced to admit, "malas," or rather "escandalosas." In it too may be found a lengthy version of the popular "El Zamuro," several strophes of which Gallegos includes in his excellent description of the dance.²⁷ It is the song of the legendary bout between Florentino and the devil, sung at almost every gathering. "La Chipola,"²⁸ which Antonio calls "el joropo nacional del Llano," is also there in his ledger. These *coplas* are not to be found in any of the available collections of Venezuelan folk-songs. Gallegos made his selection from the large collection furnished by Antonio. And from Antonio also came the *coplas* sung at milking-time.²⁹

²³ *Escenas rústicas en Sur América o La vida en los llanos de Venezuela*, Caracas, Edit. Sur-América, 1929, 95, 123. (Translation by Francisco Izquierdo of the second English edition, 1868, originally published in New York by Scribner's in 1862 under the title *Wild Scenes in South America, or Life in the Llanos of Venezuela*.) See also Mendoza, *op. cit.*, 16-28, for a good description of the singers, songs, and dances of the *llano*. Mendoza claims that in his day there were more than four thousand *coplas* "consagradas y guardadas cuidadosamente por la tradición en su arcón oloroso a eternidad."

²⁴ *Doña Bárbara*, 232.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

²⁹ Among the many bouts in Antonio's ledger there is one that contains *adivanzas* for over a hundred popular names given to milk-cows in the *llano*, such as Azucena, Noche Clara, Manso Río, Zapatico, Píña Dulce, Noche Oscura, Claridad, Nube de Agua, Viuda Triste, Carpintero, and many others. Other *coplas* of this type may be found in Calzadilla Valdés, *op. cit.*, 75-81. Readers will recall Teresa de la Parra's inimitable description of a milking scene, replete with *coplas*, in her *Las memorias de Mamá Blanca* (Paris, 1929). Ramón Páez, *op. cit.*, 33, also testifies to this age-old *llanero* custom.

Florentino, Sarmiento, Pedro Tovar, "el tuerto Ambrosio," Torrealba, "el negro Quintana," names of bards of the *llano*. All men. But Antonio also has compositions by a female troubadour named Marisela Hortelano, one of three notorious "strong" women of the *llano*, where this tradition of *hombrunas* seems deeply rooted. Her companions were Chipola and Carupa. In a composition entitled "Guacharaca jorajo," Marisela sings of her verbal duel with the bard Agamenón, who defeated her. She had sworn never to marry any man except the one who could "sing her down." But Agamenón was in love with another. Marisela, like Doña Bárbara, withdrew her suit and even abetted their marriage. Her song begins thus:

Soy Marisela del Carmen
Hortelano es mi apellido.
Nombre tan raro como éste
En el Llano no lo ha havido. . . .

Antonio claims that Gallegos knew nothing about this Marisela, suggesting that he probably took the name, which obviously is a favorite with the author,³⁰ from that of a calf at La Candelaria! Be that as it may, Gallegos confided that his Marisela is purely fictional, that she has no counterpart in the Arauca as have most of the forty-two odd characters—and all of the leading ones with the additional exceptions of Santos Luzardo, "el Coronel Apolinar," and Míster Danger.³¹

One important identification overlooked by Antonio was that of the Barquero family. One of his compositions, however, does refer to an *hacendado* of Apure by that name. Gallegos claims that he had in mind none other than Mier y Terán, the proprietor and founder of the historical *hato* "La Rubiera,"³² who like Lorenzo Barquero lost title to his lands when he gave himself over to excessive drink. The feud between the Luzardos

³⁰ The name would appear to be popular in Venezuela. This popularity may be due in part to association with the exhilarating dance "La Maricela." See Ramón Páez, *op. cit.*, 96, for a description of the dance.

³¹ Even though fictional, Míster Danger is evidently introduced as a symbol of certain unwelcome British and American interests in the *llano*, principally in the cattle industry. More specifically, the character may be identified with those Americans who began the wholesale exploitation of alligator skins in the Apure country around 1894-1895. Cf. Calzadilla Valdés, *op. cit.*, 349-351.

³² Although popularly known as "La Rubiera," the official name is La Cruz. The ranch lies some forty miles northeast of San Fernando. For a description of it as it was a century ago, see Ramón Páez, *op. cit.*, 442 ff. Mendoza, *op. cit.*, 14, claims that the owners were forced to mortgage "La Rubiera" as a result of heavy donations and expenses incurred in the construction of the cathedral of Calabozo, which they financed jointly with the proprietors of *hato* San Diego. Mendoza states that at the time of writing "la enajenación del *hato* La Cruz lleva doce años pasando de padres a hijos y a nietos el documento de *empeño*."

and the Barqueros was suggested to Gallegos by the notorious struggle between the Manuí and the Belisarios of Guárico.

Of place-names really little need be said. Of the approximately fifty bayous, streams, rivers, ranches, towns, cities, and states mentioned, twenty-five or more are easily identifiable on even the least adequate of maps, and over half of the remainder can be definitely associated with existing sites. Altamira is, of course, La Candelaria; El Paso del Algarrobo is the Paso Arauca, on the far side of which lie the main ranch buildings; La Chusmita is El Garcero on Candelaria lands; and the Boquerón de La Carama is the Boquerón or Ventana del Vaenado near Los Cañitos, Antonio claims that Los Cañitos is El Miedo, Doña Bárbara's ranch; but Gallegos says that there is actually a ranch by that name. It is not, however, the name of the ranch of Doña Bárbara's counterpart in real life, nor is it located, as in the novel, hard by La Candelaria. And so even the names of the ranches are familiar ones to any *llanero* of those parts. Many of them may be located on the map or be encountered in any book on the *llano*. José Antonio Páez³³ and his centaurs dashed from one to another in their inspired campaigns against the *godo*. And Ramón Páez later, as well as Mendoza and others, will also mention them.

It was only natural too that Gallegos should refer to historic sites enshrined in the heart of every *llanero*. Mucuritas and Queseras del Medio³⁴ come immediately to mind when he seeks for historical exemplifications of the mad daring of these men of the *llano*: "El Llano enloquece y la locura del hombre de la tierra ancha y libre es ser llanero siempre. En la guerra buena, esa locura fué la carga irresistible del pajonal incendiado, en Mucuritas, y el retozo heroico de Queseras del Medio. . . ."³⁵ Gallegos quickly sensed the intense local pride of the *llanero* and the significance of Machado's reflection on this point: ". . . por natural compenetración entre el individuo y el medio, el sujeto y el objeto, en nuestro romance resultan más dignas de la trompa épica Las Queseras que Carabobo, y de mayor importancia las cargas de Mucuritas que la campaña portentosa que llevó nuestras tropas por los riesgos de los Andes al triunfo de Boyacá."³⁶

³³ See his *Autobiografía del General José Antonio Páez*, 2 vols., Caracas, Edición del Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1946.

³⁴ Mucuritas and Queseras del Medio, both in Apure, were the scenes of famed Páez victories on January 28, 1817, and April 2, 1819, respectively. These victories, together with others at Mata de la Miel (February 16, 1816), El Yagual (October 8, 1816), and Paso del Diamante (February 6, 1818), are all inscribed on the monument to Páez, "Prócer de la Independencia," in the main plaza of San Fernando.

³⁵ *Doña Bárbara*, 83.

³⁶ José E. Machado, *Cancionero popular venezolano*, Caracas, Emp. El Cojo, 1919, XX-XXI.

Small wonder, then, that the men of Apure should have thrown their full support behind Gallegos—"the candidate with a book under his arm." In that book they found a faithful mirroring of themselves, of their way of life, of their problems, and of their needs. In its pages they discovered characters and types easily recognizable in colleagues and semi-legendary heroes—and places, too, cherished in their memory and sacred to their superstitious beliefs. Here was a man who could appreciate their nostalgia for an heroic past as voiced in the anonymous ballad "Las Queseras del Medio":³⁷

I suspiro entristecido
pues me parece escuchar
el grito de: Vuelvan Caras
en el aire resonar.

Here was a man who could stir the deep-rooted individualism and pride of the humblest descendant of those heroic forbears by reminding them that "el llanero no es peón sino en el trabajo."³⁸ Here was a man from Caracas who would define their homeland as "toda horizontes, toda caminos—llanura venezolana, propicia para el esfuerzo como lo fué para la hazaña, tierra de horizontes abiertos donde una raza buena, ama, sufre y espera!"³⁹

Small wonder, therefore, that these men of the plains should want to claim Gallegos for their very own, that they should refuse to admit that he is anything but a *llanero*. Gallegos tells the story of a certain theosophist encountered in his travels who when once again master of himself after the crushing discovery that the author of *Doña Bárbara* was but a *caraqueño* after all, launched forth undauntedly with the assertion that if not in this life, then most assuredly in another incarnation Don Rómulo must have been a full-blooded *llanero*! And jestingly he will add that he is fearful of returning to San Fernando where he knows that they have in eternal readiness none other than Cabos Negros himself for him to mount and tame, as did Santos, to their enthusiastic cries of "Denle el llano!" Gallegos too is well on his way toward becoming a legend in the *llano*!

But it is around the character of Doña Bárbara that fact and fiction are weaving a legend in the best tradition of the *llanura venezolana*. The undisputed facts are few. In the early decades of this century on extensive holdings along the Arauca some 150 miles west by southwest of San Fernando there lived a woman by the name of Francisca Vázquez who became famed as the *hombruna* or *marimacho* of *hato* Mata El Totumo.⁴⁰

³⁷ José E. Machado, *Centón lírico*, Caracas, Tip. Americana, 1920, 49.

³⁸ *Doña Bárbara*, 340.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁴⁰ Readers will recall that there is a ranch by this name in *Doña Bárbara*, 294.

She must have been skilled in the ways of the *llano* and capable of holding her own with any man. By the time Gallegos reached the *llano* in 1927, Doña Pancha had already become something of a legend. She was still alive at the time. Common report places her death in the very late nineteen twenties. Gallegos did not get to meet her, nor did he visit her ranch. Antonio Torrealba, however, had seen her many times, and one can only begin to imagine what stories he must have told Gallegos of her prowess, her cunning, her greed, and her mastery of men!

All seem to agree that Doña Pancha never married. Antonio will claim, however, that she had two offspring: one, a daughter, who is said to be still alive on her mother's lands that have long since become the property of the Hernández Vázquez; the other, a son, who was killed by a "toro bravo." But Mariano Pardo of the "toddy" parlor on Plaza Páez in San Fernando will deny that Doña Pancha left any children. In his younger days Don Mariano had spent more than ten years on horseback over every foot of the Apure country. He had known Doña Pancha at home on Mata El Totumo. In later years he remembered her visits to San Fernando. He claims that she was short and stocky and even "fea," that she dressed in a slovenly manner and like a man while on the range but always appeared neat and respectably dressed at San Fernando. Both men do agree to the stories about numerous lawsuits over boundary disputes. Don Mariano contends, however, that Doña Pancha was not as crafty and cunning as Antonio depicts her; these trials, he believes, were brought on largely because of her ignorance and mismanagement. He also believes that as a result Doña Pancha often lost more land than she won. Both men recall the most sensational of these trials, which took place in San Fernando around 1922. This time it was Doña Pancha versus Don Pablo Castillo.⁴¹ The defense was in the able hands of lawyer Pensión Hernández; the prosecution was magnificently conducted by no less a figure, so they say, than today's distinguished poet and statesman, Andrés Eloy Blanco.⁴² The trial proved to be the crowning event of many a day. People would crowd the court from early morning on, thrilled by the eloquence of the "dos bonitos abogados."

One soon begins to suspect that Antonio and others have long since confused the original Doña Pancha of Mata El Totumo with the character as later developed in the fertile imagination and under the extraordinary assimilative powers of the creator of Doña Bárbara. It is apparent too that the motion-picture "Doña Bárbara," which has been shown on three or

⁴¹ The owner of *hato* Menoreño in the Alto Apure. For a good verbal portrait see Calzadilla Valdés, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

⁴² See note 16, above.

four runs of several nights each in San Fernando during the last few years, has contributed not a little to the conflicting stories and to the blurred memories now held of the flesh-and-blood *hombruna* of twenty years ago. Today it is Doña Bárbara who has become a symbol and a by-word—even among the girls and habitués of the bars of San Fernando. Doña Pancha has disappeared; but Doña Bárbara has returned to replace her as the notorious *cacica* and “devoradora de hombres” of Apure.

In the light of information herein presented, Doña Bárbara’s visit to San Fernando, so appropriately and poetically described in the chapter “La hija de los ríos,” now carries added meaning and significance. Is not Gallegos trying to tell us of the legend that had sprung up about the character of Doña Pancha, inviting us at the same time to identify his heroine with the *hombruna* of Mata El Totumo? For men of the *llano*, at least, the association must have been immediate. And is he not also attempting to convey to us his conviction that Doña Bárbara too would soon become as much a part of the legend of the *llano* as had her counterpart in life? How else could one interpret these lines?

Ya, al saberse que estaba en la población, habían comenzado a rebullir los comentarios de siempre y a ser contadas, una vez más, las mil historias de sus amores y crímenes, muchas de ellas pura invención de la fantasía popular, a través de cuyas ponderaciones la mujerona adquiría caracteres de heroína, sombría, pero al mismo tiempo fascinadora, como si la fiera bajo la cual se la representaban, más que odio y repulsa, tradujera una íntima devoción de sus paisanos. Habitante de una región lejana y perdida en el fondo de vastas soledades y sólo dejándose ver de tiempo en tiempo y para ejercicio del mal, era casi un personaje de leyenda que excitaba la imaginación de la ciudad.⁴³

Gallegos himself will admit that he is no longer certain just how much of the story of Doña Bárbara is the story of Doña Pancha as he gathered it from the “imaginación de la ciudad.” But does it really matter? Let it suffice that today in the *llano* the *marimacho* of Mata El Totumo and the *hombruna* of El Miedo have become as one for “espíritus impresionables y propensos a las sugerencias de lo extraordinario, como lo son los de la imaginativa gente llanera.”⁴⁴ And so too today in San Fernando, for the equally imaginative stranger, it is “los pasos de Doña Bárbara, sombra errante y silenciosa,” that reecho in his fancy throughout “la noche soñolienta de brumas . . . y leyenda.”

⁴³ *Doña Bárbara*, 373-374.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

“Language! The blood of the soul, sir, into which our thoughts run, and out of which they grow.”—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES