

## Norberto José Olivar Pecha Kucha

**00:27** – OK. I've had this idea for a few days and I've been

**00:30** - bothering a bunch of people with this. Now it's your turn, so pretend to be interested and I'll pretend I believe you. So now, this idea is more of a question: What is the novel that defines us as Venezuelans? What we were and what we will be? Only one title appears in my mind: *Doña Bárbara* by maestro Gallegos. And so here I am with this literary angst, when I read with great astonishment about the supposed

**01:00** - desecration of Gallegos' tomb. Coincidence? Uneasy, I felt the unseen hand of literature gesturing to me. And the first thing I thought was this: our daily lives, our language, our memory, all are the blood that invigorates the life of this most Venezuelan fiction. And even if we don't like it, this fiction sustains us culturally with its ineffable social assimilation. What if maestro Gallegos is telling us

**01:30** - that the time has come to kill his Doña? The paradigmatic character who not only has traced us and seen through us with her soul, in her soul, but has substantiated a style of political behavior and coexistence that is insufferable for this nation. Let me explain this social assimilation. It isn't necessary to have read *Doña Bárbara*: she has been internalized. She lives

**02:00** - inside every Venezuelan. She's been there for who knows how long; we see this in our historic propensity to go against what's civilized, in the despotism that struts over the law and that many still applaud with enthusiasm. And the humiliating submission, in exchange for accounting-free income and easy access. This has been more than enough to make us feel less than comfortable in the territories of

**02:30** - fear, except in Altamira, where the work will surely be difficult. And as Uslar Pietri would have reminded us, "If we ask the average Venezuelan if he has read this work, probably the answer is no; but he knows it well, because for him and for many she's a María Félix, a Marina Baura, or more locally, Edith González in her most popular adaptations."

**03:00** - I don't know whether this is the least of it, but we have only assimilated the paradigm of La Doña, not her foil, Santos Luzardo; and that is in great measure what is so worrisome, as La Doña produces in us an abundance of admiration. That would be the legacy of Gallegos, to show us how we are via a fictional handling. It is no coincidence that his novels are the utmost expression of Venezuelan *criollismo*.

**03:32** – And, well, how do we get out of this typically Gallegos-esque calamity? We've already received the answer from the great beyond: killing Doña Bárbara...but this homicide is only possible to execute in its own dimension, that of fiction. After Gallegos, a

great part of our literature magnifies experimentation and applauds even more for political photograms, with the exceptions that

**04:00** - we could all call to mind right now, but they don't reach the level of social assimilation of this Doña, who's no longer strictly fictional. I'm not speaking of compromised literature: for Gallegos, literature seeks liberty, and I know that each of you in your own right seeks something similar. If we are free, then and only then are we citizens. There is no submissive citizen, nor is there submissive literature.

**04:30** – Our vocation makes us into bad people in the eyes of the helm of the State, intent on the annihilation of free will. But I insist, in my vocation, at least, citizenship begins with a fictional murder. What that means is a series of desecrations of our heroes, not in order to read the future in their bones, but to change the past. How?

**05:00** - By rewriting it. The past is no more than language, and memory doesn't go any farther than a mere selection of episodes. Knowing this, a different past is possible and thus we won't be any longer what we were, nor will we be what they say we are or will be. And believe me, history is no more than a lie that changes according to the desires of the petitioner. I'm working on this facing

**05:30** - 2020—I'm writing a novel in which a glorious *caudillo* of our own is an indisputable, soulless brute. Now, his condition as hero does not contradict his brutishness, but it does disqualify him as a paradigm or saint: a hero transfigured into a simple citizen who kills off the despotism cultivated by other works of fiction, but this is only possible if he is socially assimilated.

**06:00** - Perhaps my aspirations are too high—but it's not for nothing they always wind up burning books. Aira says that reading novels one learns nothing. I believe the opposite: I believe that reading good novels, and writing them, you learn everything, or almost everything. Novels prepare us for the incomprehensible, they make us more discerning, and this discernment is nothing more than the critical condition of our gaze. With my 2020 project

**06:30** - I'm in anguish over the gazes of young people with regard to this militaristic society that degrades them for the benefit of a holy host of *caciques* who sit above them like a ceiling. Books do not make us good people, but they can make us very uncomfortable citizens. That is why it's necessary to quickly and definitively bury Gallegos' Doña. Not long ago, one of our young filmmakers, Jonathan Jakubowicz,

**07:00** - assured us that “we almost always worship our criminals” and we do this, I'd add, without consciousness. That is what is truly terrifying. Thank you.