



Astrid Velasco*

Vindictas An Interview with Socorro Venegas**

Astrid Velasco: Tell us about *Vindictas*.

Socorro Venegas: *Vindictas* is a UNAM publishing project born out of a concern. It evolved and began to turn into indignation, and then a need and solidarity. I associate many emotions with it, as well as intellectual curiosity.

A young writer, Ave Barrera, told me that it had been difficult to find a novel by Luisa Josefina Hernández, and I became curious about why this woman, born in the 1980s, was interested in a work by a woman author from the last century who is better known as a playwright and that I didn't even know had written novels. I asked her about the book and asked to borrow it, and she generously loaned it to me. Starting with that reading, the *Vindictas* project began to take shape.

What a wonderful novel; how sad that it's out of print and can only be found with great difficulty. So, I thought of publishing it at the UNAM, and we began researching the copyrights. I also thought that it was a good idea for Ave Barrera to write a prologue to introduce this writer from the last century to new readers. And that outlined the entire publishing project.

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A little while ago, I remembered that the idea for the collection came to me after a chat with Ave. I said that this book wasn't an isolated case, that there are many women writers out there that we should read again, or, even more, there are young readers who have never even heard of or imagined that María Luisa Oval, Marvel Moreno, or Dulce María Loynaz existed, the latter a very famous novelist, but better known as a poet. I told Ave that we should create a collection of novels by not only Mexican women writers, but by women writers from other Latin American countries. This project should expand and it should always be a young woman writer who introduces her literary predecessor. With that, we would be creating a kind of genealogy or establishing a bloodline, so to speak, seeking out those sentinel voices and the works that paved a road for those of us who write and publish today. So, that's a struggle that should be recognized.

These writers fought the fight and opened up horizons for other women who came later. That's how the project was born. Then I asked Ave to come to work with me and join the team of publications as the editorial coordinator, and we work together on the projects. It's an endeavor that really involves many points of view. What I did at the beginning was to ask one woman writer, and then another, and also women researchers, to search their memories about which women writers they would like to read, which

ones we should recover from that atrocious marginalization that they have suffered and vindicate and publish them.

I also thought that the collection design should honor the works themselves. I've wanted them to be carefully published, with love, so that the books are beautiful but at the same time inexpensive, so that members of the university community can buy them and have access to them. I think that's fundamental: weaving with those other viewpoints, with those voices, with women authors from Argentina, Colombia, Chile.

We've also organized seminars and training activities for readers who accompany these new discoverers of the writers to feed their curiosity and offer more information about the context, about the works and the authors. That's why the five we published in 2019 and that we launched at the Guadalajara International Book Fair were reprinted two months later: they sold out. We love that because it means people have been receptive to a project like this from the UNAM. It was important that these works were accompanied by activities like seminars and conferences that bring in the reflections of academia, that communicate and socialize other reading experiences and the knowledge of new readers.

AV: Did you have particular criteria for creating the catalogue?

sv: At the beginning of the project, the first criterion was to create a collection that recovered twentieth-century authors. Later, it was to cover Latin America and that a young woman author would always write the prologue, something fundamental for this collection to have a very precise aura, that is, something that would be out there surrounding these voices. I am very moved when I read a *Vindictas* novel by seeing the reasons that book was demonized or rejected. For example, *La única* (The Only Woman) by Lupe Marín, was rejected because she made spelling mistakes, as did Lezama Lima. But there was a creative capability, a literary vision, a gaze, an aesthetic venture that had gone unnoticed. *La única* is also a book of a very brave, daring denunciation that could have offended the cultural milieu of its time. Imagine a woman, a character in this novel, who stands in the middle of a market and shouts out a speech against the sexism of doctors, talking about her terrible experiences.

It's an extraordinary novel whose first edition unfortunately was not edited, and so it was up to us to fix a few

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things: we left some of the important marks of the first edition to underline how they could publish it. I couldn't say they were defects, but marks of their time and of the conditions in which the book came about. We did work on punctuation and typographical syntax.

There are other novels, like the one by María Luisa Mendoza, whose main character is an empowered woman who inherits a fortune from her father and doesn't have to worry about marrying or about what society might think. She owns her own body, her sexuality, and her destiny, and, of course, is an anomalous character. This is why I think about an aura that surrounds the novels, and there it is, the same as the thinking in the prejudiced readings that might exist.

There's also Tita Valencia's novel *Minotauromaquia* (Minotauromachy), which won the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize in 1976, one of the most important awards a writer can receive in this country, which is why it was very good to be able to republish it.

We could never use as a criterion that we publish these authors because they're women, but because of these works' literary value. We have an editorial team that has read and adjudicated them but external collaborators have also participated in the process. We try to have representatives from other countries and ensure that the authors of the prologues can also be of other nationalities in order to enrich and join in this Latin American or Hispanic-American discourse. Soon, *Vindictas* will publish a book by a Spanish novelist since the authors didn't experience this misogyny and marginalization exclusively in Latin America. We're talking about something quite generalized.

Jorge Volpi made our project transversal for the entire Coordinating Office of Cultural Dissemination, and that's why there have been programs of *Vindictas* reflection, music, visual arts, theater, etc.

AV: Who thought of the collection's name?

sv: I worked very closely with Clarisa Moura on the design, proposing what we wanted. She's the designer. We wanted beautiful books, worthy of the authors and the

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works, because in many cases, the intent when you publish them and re-publish them is to dignify the works. And when we were looking for a name for the collection, Ave Barrera, together with Lola Horner, who wrote the prologue for Marcela del Río's novel, part of the first *Vindictas* series, proposed the name in singular. And I loved that because the first meaning of *vindicta* or *vindictas* is "vengeance," and we didn't want to avoid that meaning. It didn't seem to us that there was anything wrong with it or that we were doing something inappropriate if we consider how much violence has been perpetrated against the women authors, a violence materialized in pushing their works to the margins or justifying why they weren't being published or why they're not read. For example, to avoid publishing a work, they argue that it's very academic, that it's incomprehensible, and then it's not published. That's what I mean when I talk about violence. But *vindicta* also has the other meaning that involves keeping, protecting, and I like this very much because that's what we're doing, and we're going further by leaving in the hands of the readers the possibility of familiarizing themselves with the gazes of the other half of the authors on this planet.

The project's aim is to vindicate, to reclaim, and therefore we decided that its name should be in the plural, *Vindictas*. From the beginning, it has had a lot of impact; it's easy to remember and that's been very good for the collection. For that reason, when Volpi proposed to Juan Casamayor from the Páginas de Espuma publishing house to go ahead, but that time with short stories, that selection of short story writers should keep the name of the publishing house, the name *Vindictas* had to be kept, because it was not only the name of a collection, but a way of looking, and I say that in all seriousness: in the Publications Department, this has become a way of looking with which we evaluate entire collections.

Now that we have recovered *El ala del tigre* (The Tiger's Wing), the poetry collection, an important analysis that we carried out beforehand was to review the proportion

of both male and female published authors, and there was a clear imbalance. So, when we redesigned the collection, of course, we're not going to stop publishing male authors, but we will seek more balance, in this and all the collections. At first it was an interesting experience, and as an editor, you'll understand perfectly. I ask the editors I collaborate with or the ones who propose projects to us, when we look at their tables of contents, I ask them if there were no women specialists, since, in that list of ten authors we could well incorporate some female writers' viewpoints. And the first response can be very defensive, like, "I'm not a macho and I'm not excluding women authors."

And we've never said that they were, but that "what if" has led us to enrich various projects, and I have thanked these editor colleagues who have taken me at my word and have researched, and we have found—and therefore published—real gems in all our collections. That is to say, this point of view doesn't exist only at *Vindictas*.

AV: How many titles does the *Vindictas* collection currently have?

SV: There are ten, and I've slowed down a bit due to the pandemic, but, for example, we've included works by Yolanda Oreamuno from Costa Rica and Vlady Kociancich from Argentina; soon we'll have Dulce María Loynaz's work, from Cuba; and we're continuing to explore this entire silenced half of the region: fifteen novels plus this selection of Latin American short story writers, which includes twenty authors representing the geography of Spanish. We have a short story writer for each Spanish-speaking country. It's also fundamental to point out that we don't see this book as an anthology: the criterion was that each author had published at least one book of stories, though, for example, Susy Delgado from Paraguay, has only published one, and all the rest of her work is poetry. But this book of stories is exceptional, and, she also writes in Guaraní and Spanish. And that's something we also want to show: these rich underground rivers that are the original languages of Latin America, which was also a criterion for including it in *Vindictas*. So, it's not an anthology, but, rather, a horizon for reading, an invitation to ask ourselves whether we have already read the best narrative in Latin America if we haven't read these women.

AV: What do you think has changed in the cultural and publishing world so more women can be in print today?


sv: There's this idea out there that there's a boom, and that's something we have to work against, because if you accept that, we'd be saying that before, women weren't writing or that women writers hadn't existed. And that's not true; precisely, these projects show that. It may be a matter of the existence of a special sensibility, a conviction on the part of publishers that we need to make a fundamental change and that this isn't something temporary because now we're talking more about demands or feminisms, because now the theses exist in Chile or the green wave exists in Argentina. That is, this isn't a fad: it's a movement that had to happen and that humanity—not just half of it—had to take on board. I think it's important to value this era and what it brings us, and if there's any permanent job for those of us who work with books, for all of academia, bookstore owners, librarians, editors, I always say, we all have to maintain this world where—we know it, we're now aware and we have evidence, and these books are that evidence—women write and they do not lack

the quality to be published, their work is not less than that of a man, they don't talk only about "women's things," and that's where we have to start looking for their point of view without prejudices or labels. Diamela Eltit said it a while ago in her lecture "De-biologizing Literature": a horizon is necessary where we don't have to make women authors visible or defend them. A project like *Vindictas* has to be absolutely unnecessary in the coming century, because right now, our endeavor has been like an authentic archaeological dig, where we recover everything we lost, and it was tragic to have to do it. I think about my years of training, when I wanted to be a writer, at sixteen or seventeen, and how I would have loved to have read Elena Garro then, and all the authors I've published now, and those who, even if they had published something, I never was able to read. That was terrible because we lost something essential in that era, but let's also think about those who are being educated now, and that they shouldn't have to think of literature as an exclusively male activity. **MM**

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