

The Quotable Bolaño: A Miscellany

‘[Those who believe *The Savage Detectives* is the great contemporary Mexican novel] say it out of pity. They see that I’m down or fainting in public plazas and they can think of nothing better to say than a merciful lie, which, by the way, is the most appropriate thing in these cases, and it’s not even a venial sin.’

‘I would give him the advice we young Infrarealists in Mexico gave ourselves. When we were twenty, twenty-one years old, we had a poetry group, and we were young, uneducated and brave. We told ourselves: live lots, read lots and fuck lots.’

‘Posthumous: It sounds like the name of a Roman gladiator, an unconquered gladiator. At least that’s what poor Posthumous would like to believe. It gives him courage.’

‘I am sure, dear Maristain, that I will not win [the Nobel Prize], as I am sure that some lazy person from my generation will win it and not even in passing mention me during his or her Stockholm speech.’

‘I should like to have been a homicide detective much better than being a writer. I am absolutely sure of that. A string of homicides. I’d have been someone who could come back to the scene of the crime alone, by night, and not be afraid of ghosts. Perhaps then I might really have become crazy. But being a detective, that could easily be resolved with a bullet to the mouth.’

The Last Interview and Other Conversations

‘I am a person full of defects and they are all deplorable.’
 ‘“Fuck” and “pussy”.’
 – when asked ‘What words or phrases do you use most?’

Diario La Tercera (Chile)

‘Now that I’m forty-four years old, I’m going to offer some advice on the art of writing short stories.

(1) Never approach short stories one at a time. If one approaches short stories one at a time, one can quite honestly be writing the same short story until the day one dies. (2) It is best to write short stories three or five at a time. If one has the energy, write them nine or fifteen at a time. (3) Be careful: the temptation to write short stories two at a time is just as dangerous as attempting to write them one at a time, and, what’s more, it’s essentially like the interplay of lovers’ mirrors, creating a double image that produces melancholy.’

‘Listen: I don’t have anything against autobiographies, so long as the writer has a penis that’s twelve inches long when erect. So long as the writer is a woman who was once a whore and is moderately wealthy in her old age.’

Between Parentheses

‘Books are finite, sexual encounters are finite, but the desire to read and to fuck is infinite; it surpasses our own deaths, our fears, our hopes for peace.’

‘The writer is gravely ill’

‘We never stop reading, although every book comes to an end, just as we never stop living, although death is certain’

Last Evenings on Earth

‘Only poetry isn’t shit.’

2666

‘Philip K. Dick died/and now we only need/what is strictly necessary’

The Romantic Dogs

‘Every hundred feet the world changes.’

‘The truth is we never stop being children, terrible children covered in sores and knotty veins and tumors and age spots, but ultimately children, in other words we never stop clinging to life because we are life.’

‘Reading is pleasure and happiness to be alive or sadness to be alive and above all it’s knowledge and questions.’

2666

‘Reading is more important than writing.’

The Last Interview and Other Conversations

‘I never take the opposite view of things.’

The Last Interview and Other Conversations

‘In reality the five books [that have marked my life] are more like 5,000. I’ll mention these only as the tip of the spear: *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, *Moby Dick* by Melville. The complete work of Borges, *Hopscotch* by Cortázar, *A Confederacy of Dunces* by Toole.’

The Last Interview and Other Conversations

‘Among other things, my own experience has led me to believe that American naiveté can sometimes be more than it seems; it can hide something we Europeans can’t or don’t want to understand.’

The Return

‘Artaud said that writing was a filthy thing, that all writers were pigs, today’s more than any. I subscribe to his view. Still, despite everything, I continue to admire young writers. In the same way that I admire young boxers.’

‘We all have to die a bit every now and then and usually it’s so gradual that we end up more alive than ever. Infinitely old and infinitely alive.’

The Skating Rink

‘Exile is courage. True exile is the true measure of each writer.’

‘Exiles’

‘The truth is, I don’t believe all that much in writing. Starting with my own. Being a writer is pleasant—no, pleasant isn’t the word—it’s an activity that has its share of amusing moments, but I know of other things that are even more amusing, amusing in the same way that literature is for me. Holding up banks, for example. Or directing movies. Or being a gigolo. Or being a child again and playing on a more or less apocalyptic soccer team. Unfortunately, the child grows up, the bank robber is killed, the director runs out of money, the gigolo gets sick and then there’s no other choice but to write. For me, the word writing is the exact opposite of the word waiting. Instead of waiting, there is writing’

‘Is my work autobiographical? In a sense, how could it not be? Every work, including the epic, is in some way autobiographical. In the *Iliad* we consider the destiny of two alliances, of a city, of two armies, but we also consider the destiny of Achilles and Priam and Hector, and all these characters, these individual voices, reflect the voice, the solitude, of the author.’

Interview in *Bomb*, Winter 2002