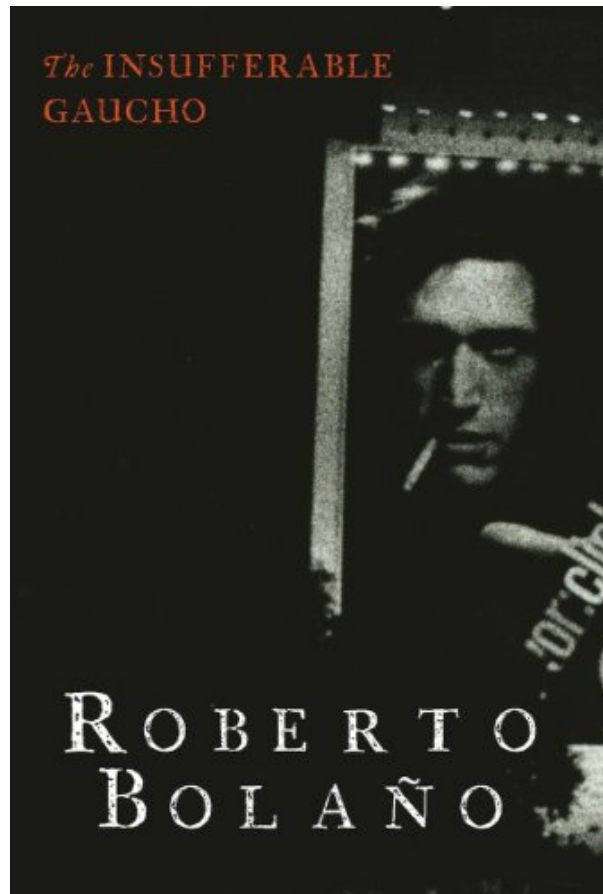
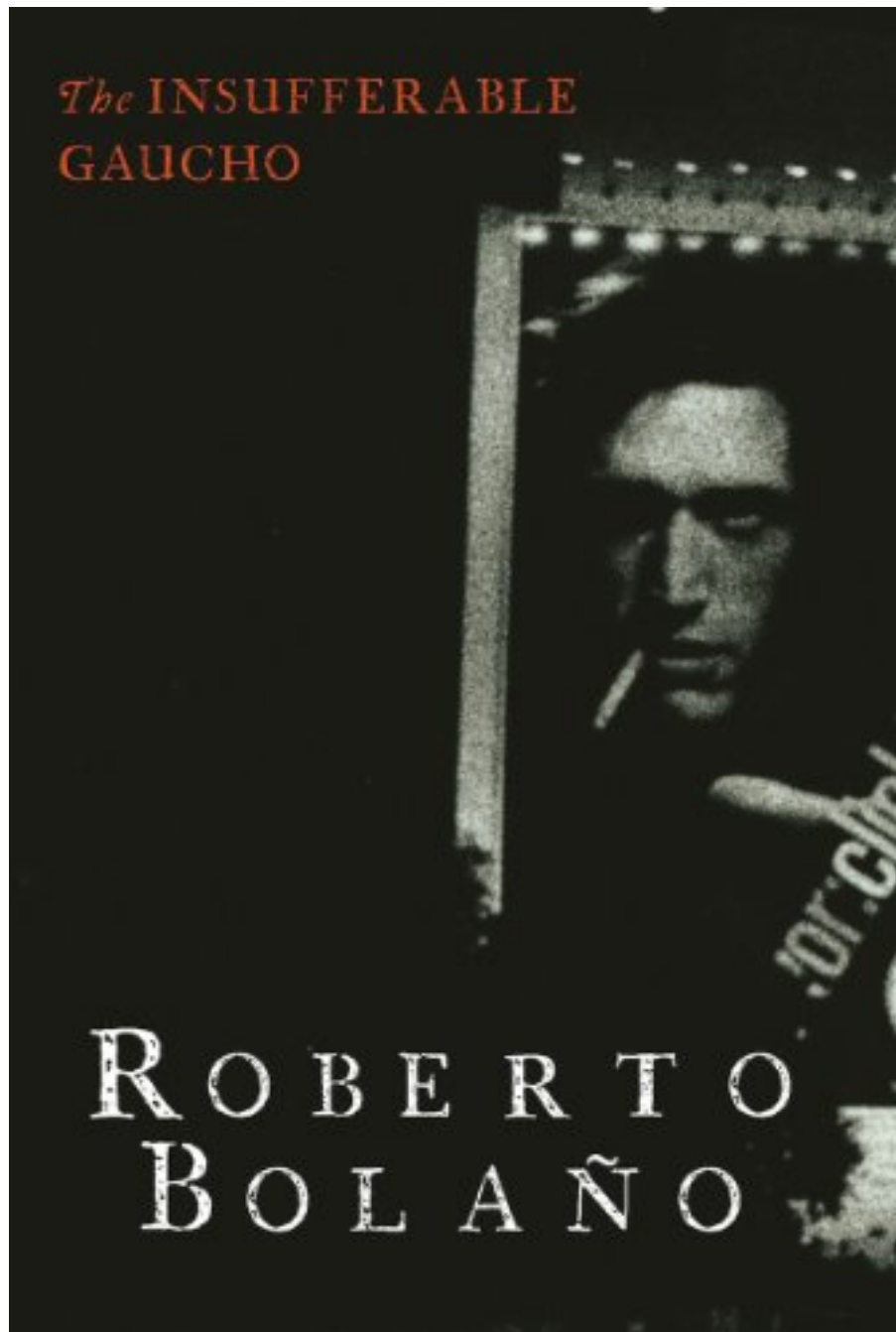


THE INSUFFERABLE GAUCHO BY ROBERTO BOLAÑO



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From Publishers Weekly

Seven tales by the amazingly prolific-in-death Bolaño (2666) explore themes of self-exile and illness. The two best stories concern conflicted Argentinean protagonists; in the title story, Hector Pereda, "an irreproachable lawyer with a record of honesty," leaves Buenos Aires after the death of his wife and the collapse of the country's economy to make a go as a gaucho on the pampas. Inhabiting a ruined ranch, with only the languid locals and predatory rabbits as company, Hector finds a welcome, near-poetic restoration of a society where self-reliance and egalitarianism reign. In "Alvaro Rousselot's Journey," an acclaimed Argentinean novelist sets out for Paris to confront a filmmaker who has blatantly plagiarized his books, though what really eats at the novelist is that the filmmaker has ignored the writer's recent works, leaving him with the sense that "he had lost his best reader." "Rat Police" reflects Bolaño's interest in fantasy and noirish crime fiction, while "Literature + Illness = Illness" is essentially an essay about terminal illness. Andrews is an excellent translator, and even if these are somewhat lesser works in the Bolaño pantheon, completists will snap this up.

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These five astonishing stories, along with two compelling essays, show Bolano as a magician, pulling bloodthirsty rabbits out of his hat.

The stories in *The Insufferable Gaucho* ? unpredictable and daring, highly controlled yet somehow haywire ? might concern a stalwart rat police detective investigating terrible rodent crimes, or an elusive plagiarist, or an elderly Argentine lawyer giving up city life for an improbable return to the family state on the Pampas, now gone to wrack and ruin. These five astonishing stories, along with two compelling essays, show Bolano as a magician, pulling bloodthirsty rabbits out of his hat.

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More gems from Bolaño

By T Bowden

Another beautiful collection by Bolaño, this one including two essays, one, dedicated to his hepatologist, on (terminal) illness, the other on Spanish literature. The title story is an allegory about Argentinean politics, and the book as a whole--typical for Bolaño--are studies, meditations, and anecdotes on sex, death, politics, violence, terror, and joy. Told with Bolaño's floating style that seems simultaneously to be about everything and nothing. Chris Andrews's translation is impeccable, as it is with Bolaño's other novels translated for New Directions.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

"I'm a poet now, searching for the extraordinary, trying to express it in ordinary, everyday words."

By Mary Whipple

When the speaker's friend makes this statement in "Jim," the first story in this small but unforgettable collection of five stories and two essays by Chilean author Roberto Bolaño, the reader cannot help but feel that Jim is in many ways the author's alterego. Bolaño also began his writing life as a poet, something that is obvious in his recognition of the tiny, seemingly insignificant moment or detail which becomes extraordinary within its context. Such "extraordinary" moments or details are worthy of notice, and even wonder, but as the author shows, they are not necessarily "wonderful." Extraordinary moments are temporal, and, though meaningful, they can also be shocking or sad.

Throughout these stories, the reader becomes hypnotized by the succession of Bolaño's images, by the lives he depicts (including his own in the two essays), and by the metaphysical suggestions and possible symbols of his stories, despite the fact that Bolaño does not make grand pronouncements or create a formal, organized, and ultimately hopeful view of life. There is no coherence to our lives, he seems to say: chaos rules. Although artists of all kinds try to make some sense of life, Bolaño suggests that their visions may not be accurate since they have no way of knowing or conveying the whole story, the big picture, the inner secrets of life. Vibrant and imaginative, Bolaño's stories seduce the reader into and coming back to them again and again looking for answers or explanations that often remain tantalizingly out of reach.

"Jim," which takes place in Mexico, one of the many places the peripatetic Bolaño lived, tells of a sad, often desperate man who considers himself a poet, someone the speaker once saw staring rapt, bewitched by a fire-eater, who was performing just for him. The symbolism is clear, but the story's conclusion is less so. In "The Insufferable Gaucho," set in Argentina, where Bolaño also lived, an honest lawyer in Buenos Aires is

affected by the passage of time and the distancing of his children as they grow up and leave home. Believing that Buenos Aires is "sinking" under its crime, violence, and failed economy, he returns to his dilapidated family ranch on the pampas and tries to restore it and himself. "Police Rat," the grimmest of the stories, features Pepe the Cop, a rat who describes life in the sewers, even taking time to comment on the non-role of the arts in the lives of rats. In "Two Catholic Tales," Bolano creates parallel stories, telling of a seventeen-year-old boy who is trying to see if he has a vocation for the priesthood, and of a long-time patient at an insane asylum, who describes his terrible experience with priests.

Two essays at the end are particularly poignant. "Literature + Illness = Illness" explores the relationship between writing and the illness which will claim Bolano's life at age fifty, soon after writing this. In "the Myths of Cthulhu," a wonderful companion essay, he comments on the "perfect novelist," one whose work is famous for its "readability," someone who is popular, and successful as a result. Bolano eventually concludes that "We [writers] are the middle class generation...We think our brain is a marble mausoleum, when in fact it's a house made of cardboard boxes, a shack stranded between an empty field and an endless dusk." Mary Whipple

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

An uneven collection. However the story 'Rat Police' is an absolute gem, maybe the finest thing he ever wrote. Worth picking up.

By jafrank

This is kind of a hodgepodge collection, five short stories and two essays. The title piece and longest story doesn't feel like anything else Bolano ever wrote: its got a weirdly pastoral, homey quality to it as we watch an Argentine judge return to the village of his youth following an economic collapse. It's not bad, but it's not really a style that plays to Bolano's strengths. The stories here mostly feel redundant, like weaker variations of things he's done better in his other work.

BUT. The story 'Police Rat' (about a gritty rat cop trying to solve a series of serial killings in an underground rat civilization). Is not simply the strongest thing here, but very possibly the strongest fiction Bolano ever created, period. Maybe even better than 2666, Distant Star, and By Night in Chile.

Never has the ominous sense of dread he evokes, of some impossible evil lying just around the corner, been presented more powerfully. And the set-up of the whole thing, of someone trying to solve a forgotten mystery in a hopelessly marginal, doomed civilization, feels like the most direct distillation of his interests I've ever come across. If you can't be bothered to read 2666, read this instead. It's the seed that book comes out of, and for my money the best short story I've read in quite some time.

The two essays at the end are discursive, free-wheeling and angry. Bolano confronts the illness that would eventually kill him, and what he felt was the middle-class mediocrity of Spanish language literature towards the end of his life. They offer interesting, erudite perspectives, but are nowhere near as dazzling as his fictions. It's a mixed bag, but 'Police Rat' on its own makes the entire thing worth reading

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