that his despair over literature comes after he has seemingly read and taken in the whole of the Western canon (he is as omnivorous in his reading as Jorge Luis Borges, another of his masters), and this makes his verdict on the impossibility of creating anything new at least plausible.

At the same time, Vila-Matas invites the reader to join in the game, inviting us to pursue all his references, while at the same time we remain alert to the fact that he can just as easily slip in authors he has invented, such as the mysterious Vilen Vok, the Central European writer *par excellence*, whose absurd maxims are quoted here: "life is short but the day is long". Everything is carefully chosen and placed in these narratives, which split, divide and multiply like amoeba and this enigmatic figure takes us back to the transvestite whore Vicky Vapour (Vicky Vapour-rob) of *Paris no se acaba nunca*.

This kind of intertextuality underlines the message that author and reader are playing this dangerous game together. Vila-Matas insists that there is a "moral contract" between writer and reader, and that the reader should be active, showing a "capacity for intelligent emotion, a wish to understand the other person, and to get closer to a language that is different from that of our daily tyrannies". He goes further, declaring that: "the same skills needed to write are also needed to read. Writers can fail readers, but the reverse is also true, and readers fail writers when all they look for in them is a confirmation that the world is exactly how they see it". In spite of all the playfulness therefore, the game of literature is the most serious and urgent there is.

As Roberto Bolaño’s health began to fail, he knew he must make the most of the time he had left. It seems that in the rush, the immense novel 2666 was prioritized, and that El Tercer Reich (The Third Reich) was one of several projects which fell by the wayside. It was only partly typed up from an older handwritten manuscript when the author died in 2003. The manuscript, however, dates from 1989, and so the novel should be placed among his early works despite its late appearance.

*El Tercer Reich* has a naturalistic feel that may disappoint devotees of Bolaño’s better-known novels. It does not form part of what Siddhartha Deb called, in the TLS, an "archive of the Latin American literary Left". It has none of the wild ambition, complex narration and obsessive cataloguing of 2666 and *The Savage Detectives*; none of the fragmentary, surreal disorientation of *Antwerp*. There is a mood of the exotic and the uncanny in spin-offs have a certain charm, and they are there, in particular, in the last two passages, which contain a faintly nostalgic tone — which is another way of saying that they are present, as in *Lost Luggage*, which makes few concessions to popular genre fiction, consisting as it does of a long and unorthodox narrative – much of it told in the first person plural – involving a truck driver, his international offsprings, scatterings of late-twentieth-century history and a gambling debt.

The story begins quietly enough: local police inform a young Barcelonan, Cristófol, that they have found an abandoned flat, previously inhabited by his father, Gabriel (a removal man whom he hasn’t seen for many years). In the flat he finds a handwritten list which includes his own first name, plus three others: Christopher, Christophe and Christof. These foreign namesakes, Cristófol discovers, are his half-brothers, born in London, Paris and Frankfurt, respectively. Once the four have made contact, they start to investigate their father’s past by quizzing their mothers and those of his known associates they can trace. The information gleaned is recounted by them in a series of episodes describing the adventures of Gabriel and his workmates, which span three decades and twice as many countries.

Despite their seeming lack of relevance to the main storyline, these separate narrative

**The author of two critically acclaimed collections of short stories which appeared in 1998 and 2002, Jordi Puntí has now published his first novel. *Maletes perdidas* (Lost Luggage), which is already a bestseller in Spain, makes few concessions to popular genre fiction, consisting as it does of a long and unorthodox narrative – much of it told in the first person plural – involving a truck driver, his international offsprings, scatterings of late-twentieth-century history and a gambling debt.

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