

LITERARY SECTION

OUR WILLFUL NAIVETÉ SHALL SET US FREE: AN ONGOING CONVERSATION WITH MIGUEL SYJUCO

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Abstract

First eleven thousand words of an ongoing Canada-Cubao correspondence. Two young writers talk about writing: albeit both are provisionally despondent, incredibly, no one waxes nostalgic. Topics discussed: writing about home from a distance of an ocean and a continent, toughing it out journeyman-style, *bayanihan* vs. *crab mentality*, literature vs. everything else, the Great Pinoy Novel, and other pretentious, quite possibly neocolonial things.

About the interviewee

Miguel Syjuco received the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize and the Philippines' highest literary honor, the Palanca Award, for the unpublished manuscript of *Ilustrado*. Born and raised in Manila, he currently lives in Montreal.

About the interviewer

Adam David is a bookmaker.

Miguel Syjuco and I first corresponded in April 2009. Two months before that initial exchange, I wrote what Miguel felt was a scathing review of *Ilustrado* for the *Philippines Free Press* (the title of which is "Pity Not the Elite, But Do Not Condemn Them All: Social Irrelevance and the Pinoy Postmodern "New" in Miguel Syjuco's *Ilustrado*"), based on what later turned out to be the novel's first major draft. Through oblique channels, I learned that he found the review insulting and bewildering—*Where/How did he get a copy of my book, a book that's yet to be published anywhere?*—and my reaction to his reaction—*What's he complaining about? It doesn't matter where I got it; I read it and I wrote about it, and that's that.*—was more or less the same.

Our first email exchanges were efforts to clear the air, which naturally, effortlessly, happily, warily, pretentiously, and naively turned into a conversation about the current state of Philippine letters, a conversation that at first was personal and private, but as it went on covering topics ranging from the jobs one takes to finance one's art to the postcolonial demands of literary internationality to the merits of Roberto Bolaño's posthumous novels, I naturally, effortlessly, happily, warily, pretentiously, and naively

thought it was erudite enough to be of value for other people even if only as a lofty attempt to contribute to the tradition not of literary interviews or authors' profiles but of that variant off-the-cuff form of literary criticism, "literary conversations," an important creative and critical tradition that is sadly lacking in the Philippines, a curious absence in a scene where gab is gold, where the need and want and interest for talk is exercised in various drink-ups by way of gossip, or more precisely, *intriga*, or rather, what passes as local contemporary literary criticism. I asked Miguel if it was okay if we were to make public our private correspondence in the virtual pages of an online literary critical journal, not to mention one that is published by his alma mater, and he naturally, effortlessly, happily, warily, pretentiously, and naively said *yes*.

While preparing the manuscript for publication, I read the entire thing in one go for the first time in its current form, and what came across to me was that Miguel and I were basically people looking for other people to talk to, and having found each other, proceeded to have a conversation—a conversation still in progress between jobs and calamities and international book exchanges—and amidst all that, I think we're both *still looking* for other people to talk to, if not looking for other people to just plain *talk*. I think this is what the publication of this conversation is for, and I am naturally, effortlessly, happily, warily, pretentiously, and naively dedicating it to that.

This part of the conversation went on for a year, on and off. It began in April 2009, as Miguel worked on the final publication draft of *Ilustrado*, and ended the week before it was officially released here in the Philippines, April 2010, and late 2010, we're both still *talking*. In many ways, my review of the book was the first part of the conversation. This is part two. Bask in our natural effortless, happy, wary, and pretentious naiveté; enjoy it, and be warned—there will be more.

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MIGUEL SYJUCO: A lot of pressure has come from the prize and the coming publication. Writing is painful, lonely, and intimidating, but it's infinitely harder to now have all these people watching closely, or wanting the book to be something it's not. It's my first book, for crying out loud, and I'm young yet, and I never set out to try to write the Great Filipino Novel. I write to try to make sense of the world around me, and my work is me trying to explain this chaos to myself, and I try to write things that are new to me (that teach me new skills or techniques) so that I can discover, not copy, not approximate (in fact, it's funny that you mentioned my work takes from those writers you

mentioned [David's review names Auster, Borges, Danielewski, and Foer as writers whose postmodern tropes, techniques, and experiments can be found in *Ilustrado* -ed.], when the only one among them I've read is Borges, and not even a lot. I take that as heartening that I've stumbled and bumbled into all that on my own, because maybe, just maybe, one day later in my career I'll discover, on my own, something truly new). So it's kind of saddening to hear you mention that some people back home have put *Ilustrado* on a pedestal, or have high or unfulfilled expectations, or don't know how to react to it. All I want is for people to read the damn thing, to laugh when they want to, to enjoy some parts they find enjoyable, to hate or sympathize with the characters, and see the work as a single step in a long process of creative discovery, rather than see it as a product, or a prize-winner, or a hope, or a representative, or whatever.

My theme song since winning the prize has been Public Enemy's "Don't Believe the Hype." Because after three years of thinking the work sucks, of having to work several jobs to fund a project I never thought would ever be published, of knowing all too well my skills' shortcomings and immaturities—after all that, to hear sudden praise, and to see forward movement, even though I still know and can see the book's flaws, well, that's discombobulating. There's no way I can believe the hype myself—not when I have to go back to revising the work and still can't for the life of me make the plot move better, or make Crispin's and Miguel's voices more distinct, or imbibe the work with more than the little it contains right now. So it really, honestly fucking sucks that there are those who are giving in to or frothing up the hype. It's just a damn book, and a first one, and one from someone who has his own small slice of the Philippine experience.

I am saddened and surprised that, despite everyone's excitement about the book supposedly contributing some sort of benefit to Filipino literature on the global stage, not a single Pinoy has helped me edit, revise, or shape the book. Many Pinoys, especially among the literati, have clamored to see the book, promising help with revising. I had shared with a few of them a copy, or a couple of chapters, only to have them—once their curiosity had been sated—simply forget their promises. In many ways, I've been adrift with trying to write as good and true a first novel as I currently can. The funny thing is that I've many friends from the US and Australia who have gone over the book, draft by draft, line by line, word by word, helping me shape it and make it live (perhaps their influence was all too clear to you). I can't understand why these foreigners have been so willing to help me, when not a single one of my compatriots has not, despite their initial enthusiastic promises. The only feedback, if one can call encouraging words feedback, came from Tony Hidalgo,

who was the judge of the Palanca prize for the novel—and while I’m very grateful to him for his support, both you and I know that he was being very generous to the book.

Our literary tradition has so many challenges, but I’ve always believed that we’re all in it together. My work owes much to the writing of those Filipino writers whom I’ve read, or who taught me, or who encouraged me. Whatever shortcomings I have as a first-time novelist are, of course, my own—but sometimes I fear I’m being naive when I think we Pinoy writers can and should work together to help each other realize ourselves as writers, both at home in the Philippines and on the world stage. Naive? Maybe. But I’d rather live with that naiveté than accept the unpalatable possibility that we Filipino writers are prone to that tired cliché of possessing crab mentality.

ADAM DAVID: I believe in what you’re saying, your naiveté as you put it, and I try my best to help people realise that, that we actually need to work together, even in our various solitudes, despite our differences in opinion and poetics. We should always be out there trying to change people’s minds, if not detonate their brains into tiny little pieces. I read Marianne Robinson saying that civilisation is planting a tree we will never sit under, and I substitute “literature” for “civilisation” and found myself agreeing with that wholeheartedly. We should never do these things for our own gain. We should all accept the fact that we will never be able to eat the cake we’ve baked. I mean, it’s good if that happens, but we shouldn’t work on these with that in mind.

MIGUEL SYJUCO: I like that Marianne Robinson quote; thanks for sharing that with me. I’ve got a writer friend who once told me an adage engineers use: With a limited understanding of something, we can come up with a complex explanation; but it’s a full understanding of something that allows us to make a simple explanation. I think that idea is related to Robinson’s, in a way.

I consider writing/literature to be a conversation, and any writer who can’t listen to responses to his work is just like that fat drunk uncle at family dinners who monopolizes all discourse. And I’m just a lost young hack trying his best to learn how to be a better writer and human being with each passing day, and *Ilustrado* is my first attempt at writing a novel, so I’m pleased to have received an honest and constructive review.

Sometimes it seems there are more critics than there are actual writers in the Philippines, and yet most critics prefer not to properly criticize and instead would rather back-bite, fence-sit, or double-speak. We Pinoy literatis need to grow up. It’s so incestuous sometimes, and therefore internecine. And there’s always some sort of fatalistic inertia

about the whole thing. When I lived in Manila, the only workshop feedback I ever received had to do with either my background (which is incidental, given that the text should stand on its own) or with spelling/grammar/word choice. In the workshops I did in Manila and Dumaguete, it was all either just encouragement (which, I know, is probably a big part of why I chose to continue along the perilous path) or petty anti-burgis knee-jerk reactions. It was, sadly, only when I left the country to study abroad did I learn how to workshop properly, how to revise properly, how to not take the work/criticisms/difficulties so personally. But it seems things are changing. It's up to us to make those changes.

It is sad that that old vision of the bayanihan as a great example of Pinoyness doesn't seem to apply much these days, especially in the writing community. It's funny how things work: a lot of people were just happy to write me off as some coño kid (coño as a pejorative term used for someone who is part of the upper class or aspires to belong to it—ed.) who used to write but went abroad and fell off the face of the earth. Now suddenly there are those claiming me who once marginalized me because of the random provenance of my birth. That really sucks. I'd love to be able to help my kababayans (countrymen) and fellow writers with the connections I've been lucky enough to make, but I hope all this kalokohan (expression that refers to negative peculiar practices ed.) doesn't make me so bitter that I lose that so-called naivete.

Do you think it's our cultural (or should I say sub-cultural, as it's only us wee literary types who see it this way) view that the writer is an instrument of the divine, and that we're "artists" given to inspiration from visiting duwendes—rather than how we should really view ourselves: as journeymen trying to hone a craft? That maybe we should all stop thinking in terms of masterpieces that define whatever, and instead we should think of our books as baby steps forward toward maybe one day, hopefully, writing something actually good and true and not "suckful?"

ADAM DAVID: I caught on pretty early in my writing career about how workshops work here, and how it *ought* to really work. I was a Malikhaing Pagsulat (Creative Writing in the Filipino language—ed.) undergrad in UP but dropped out pretty quickly after I realised that that set up wasn't for me. But I shouldn't be too cruel to the MP program as it gave me a more down-to-earth perspective of literature, as opposed to the more flighty-artist perspective that most Creative Writing (meaning, English-language) writers have. I should also add that things have been changing for CW these last few years, so this isn't as true today as it was during my time, but back then, it was as clear-cut as this: in the MP program, we're brought up thinking that we're merely vehicles for the messages that our

works ought to ideally contain (and mainly nationalist messages, at that) and that we owe it to society to perfect our art so that we can pass the message on more clearly so that the largest number of people possible can understand and know what we're talking about.

It's a very utilitarian (read: Marxist) way of seeing how art works, and I subscribe to it wholly, only I'm not as determined about it as much as some people as I still see art as *art*, as something that should look/sound/read/taste/feel beautiful, only I'm not as flighty-"aestheticky" about it as most people are, as it *still* has to tell you something, it still has to educate. I'm very much interested in looking for a common ground between the two extremes, both in the stuff I read and in the stuff I write, and you know, there really is a common ground. Things still tend towards one side than the other, but the common ground exists.

I suppose this is my roundabout way of answering your question about writers being either instruments of the divine or being "merely" journeymen. I absolutely love the journeyman concept, as that's how I see more of us should approach writing, more or less how other artists approach their craft, i.e., it's really about "craft," but as I alluded to in the above paragraph, I also subscribe to the notion that writers are "instruments of the divine," only the "divine" here is synonymous with "arts and culture" as much as it is that little loaded word "society." I think we should see our production with an eye to that elusive obra maestra of equal measures of art and commentary, but that doesn't mean that we be grim grimacing grimaces about it. All those trashy popular paperbacks of slapstickhood have as much potential to be transgressive and transformative as, say, *Ilustrado*. Only we have to *bother* to imbue them with the said transgressive and transformative stuff so the potential has the potential to turn into kinetic.

I think it really can't be helped, seeing *Ilustrado* being the Next Great Pinoy Novel, mostly with the title being what it is. And it will certainly be on a pedestal as it won this big-ass award and it'll be published by Hamish Hamilton and Penguin and FS-fucking-G! I'm afraid it's all out of your hands, now, really, and I think its value in Pinoy Lit is how it won all of these things. It showed us here that it's actually possible. That's why I was particularly violent on how it portrayed most of the Filipino things in it, as it's pretty much the first really major contemporary book we have off-country, and we of course would want us to be represented as properly (maybe even as truthfully) as possible, which I know is really quite impossible as you'll always end up marginalising someone somewhere, we can only merely work on making it fair for everyone concerned (without falling into the traps of exoticism and expatriatism, which most people, including me, criticise Hagedorn's

books as being guilty of), but first and foremost, we really *do* have to strive towards making it fair for everyone concerned. This is the pressure the book is under. I don't envy you that.

I think *Ilustrado* will have legs long enough to outstride all the brouhaha attached to it right now, especially how its main audience by default will be people outside of the Philippines. It will be read and remembered here for the most part for the awards, but it'll all blow over soon after the book becomes available. I for one will read it and write about it on its own terms, which is how everything should be read, when you get down to it.

Bayanihan still exists here, only it's been perverted into an empire-building scheme by all these little kings and queens of Pinoy Lit. A lot of local publishers are guilty of this, publishing books that aren't really worth for shit but as the writers have padrinos and matronas and such in the reading committee, the books get published.

And yeah, being written off as such because of your surname sucks. When I read your book, I had no idea who you were, had no idea about your family, only heard of your name from those Localvibe.com things you used to write ten years ago, which I only vaguely read. Maybe you're talking about an older generation of writers? At any rate, like with the awards, I think your book will surpass all this talk once it's out, all the more pressure to polish it to a gleaming example of contemporary Pinoy writing in the global context!

You're now in the quite enviable position to help Pinoy Lit in the global context. The things I would do if given the chance to anthologise Pinoy writing of the last ten years for, say, Penguin or FSG ... that I envy.

MIGUEL SYJUCO: Your points about the MP program are interesting. I've always wished I had gone to UP (that might surprise you), though that wasn't an option given that all my relatives had gone to Ateneo, and at 16, fresh-off-the-boat from Cebu (where I did my high school), I had no idea about these things, and like an obedient son and Catholic, I went where I was told (Something I've spent the rest of my life defying). The UP Creative Writing Center did, however, do a lot for me, and I owe a lot of the teachers there for their encouragement (Ateneo, at the time, didn't have a Creative Writing program; besides, I think the literary academics are basically comrades, wherever they may teach).

Fascinating, too, about the philosophy that lit should be a vehicle for messages. I agree, some. But fear that it's also a bit dangerous—some impressionable students might therefore tilt precariously toward propaganda (or, at the very least, polemic), without realizing that writing as an art must be and do many things—both entertain and inform, question and teach, explore and proclaim, kill and give birth, get lost and find itself.

Literature might necessarily be a vehicle for nationalistic or moral messages, but if it doesn't prove interesting to a reader, then what's the point, because it'll only be read by the writer's circle and the rest of the converted. On the flip side, it might be an interesting story that readers love, but if it doesn't try to present some sort of message, then it's empty (art for art's sake, as you say).

I think I've discovered my own significant lessons, having lived and written abroad for almost as long as I've lived and written in Manila. After leaving the Philippines, I was filled with nationalism—thinking I had to be a representative of Filipinos, in my own way; and disgusted at how small-minded/domestic/self-indulgent some of the short stories by my American classmates were. And so I tried all sorts of methods: I wrote about the Philippines as a post-colonial victim; tried to use the exotic to make my stories interesting to Western readers; refused to write about protagonists who weren't Pinoy; infused my work with political messages (yes, believe it or not, I lean more towards Marxism than most would believe). And my stories just didn't work—they were polemics, or even propaganda. They did not graduate into being stories people wanted to read—they were seen as merely vehicles for whatever message I felt was important. Maybe it was because I wasn't a skilled enough or sufficiently powerful writer in order to pull it off. Maybe I just couldn't reach that common ground you mentioned.

Sometimes I wonder why we Filipinos are not published more in the world. Is it because the writers who write well are too busy, or too proud, to go through what I've gone through, querying agents, sending stories to countless contests, querying publishing houses, getting rejected scores or times for years on end? Or is it that we've allowed ourselves to pander, by writing stuff that exoticizes ourselves, ticks all the boxes of postcolonial/tropical/third world writing (stuff like Arlene Chai's *Last Time I Saw Mother*, for me, exemplifies that)? Or is it that we've shot ourselves in the feet by jumping onto the Magical Realism/Asian-American/etc. bandwagon (which, I think, turns readers off, because they can sense gaya-gaya [imitation –ed.]). Or is it that sometimes a lot of the gritty, real, authentic writing (in English and otherwise) comes off as too message-infused?

I really want to figure out why, for example, hasn't Butch (Dalisay)'s solid novel been picked up elsewhere other than in the Philippines and Italy? Why hasn't Krip tried to get *The Music Child* published now that it received some international attention? And why have all the Pinoy works published abroad suffered from being limited in their own ways? Why haven't the Pinoy works from the local writers made it abroad?

I don't know. I wish someone could tell me that. *Ilustrado* was my attempt at figuring some of that out—I tried to walk the tightrope between message-vehicle and art-for-art's-

sake. By exploring my ideas about the church vs. atheism, politics vs. social responsibility, morality vs. callous disinterest. I tried to let the rich hang themselves (the Gucci-gang-esque young with their drugs and parties, the Forbes Park old with their mistresses, cars, businesses, self-interested politics, etc.). I tried to make a point about the Pinoy expats who give up on their country and countrymen (Crispin, after all, failed because he forgot where he came from, and allowed bitterness to hijack his work). I tried to point out some of hypocrisies that come from the rich and poor alike. Heck, I even tried to shed light on some of the problems of Philippine lit itself. And I let the Miguel protagonist crucify himself (he's a selfish, drug-abusing, coño with no sense of duty, though he does know he's done something wrong with his life). Plus, I eschewed the whole trope of trying to write from the POV of a beggar/urchin/revolutionary/jEEPney-driver/maid/prosti/thief/whatever, because I knew that would always be inauthentic, coming from someone of my background. But all that I tried to do, I had to couch in an interesting form, in something that would make people laugh, in something that would make people angry, in something that would satisfy their aching heartstrings longing to be tugged. And, since I spent four years on the bugger, then I had to write it in a form that interests me, and I admit that what people like to call post-modern meta-narratives does interest me. I don't know if my work alighted on that "common ground" you spoke about, but I tried to. I'd like to think that it succeeded in some measure, if only because it will be published quite widely. But I do hope I didn't go over too much into the entertaining/exploitative/exoticizing/pandering spectrum and alienate readers at home. I wanted to write a work that—like my life, and especially like the Philippine experience—is both local and international. Maybe by trying to be both it is doomed to be neither.

I have to tell you, though, that I am wary of nationalism-for-nationalism's-sake and that I believe literature can and should also transcend national boundaries—that world literature Goethe talked about. For, at the heart of things, we're human beings first and Filipinos second, and that literature needs to reach broader humanity. That's not to say it must forget where it came from, but it should explain things to readers both at home and abroad.

I do think we agree, though, on the writer being an "instrument of divine," though we have different ways of saying it. I think what we both believe in (and correct me if I'm wrong) is that writers have responsibilities. I do believe though we all have a role to play. Maybe mine (for now) happens to be abroad, seeing as I'm currently abroad; and yours (for now) happens to be at home, since you are currently at home. I don't want to be like Ishiguro, or Jose Garcia Villa, or even Roberto Bolaño—who ended up rejecting their home

countries. But just as I was marginalized and pigeonholed as a coño writer when I lived in Manila, I can see that when *Ilustrado* comes out it will take all my patience and fortitude to not become embittered and just say fuck-it-I'm-staying-abroad-to-write-as-an-expat when *Ilustrado* gets eviscerated by the pens sharpened by overly-effusive nationalism.

I used to work at *The Paris Review* and *The New Yorker*, reading and screening unsolicited manuscripts. Once in a while, a work from a kababayan would come in, and I'd of course put it forward to the editors, with a report on why I thought the work should be published; by and large, the editors always complained about it either being too didactic, or over-written, and despite my protestations, such works were never, ever published. It seems that what the international publishers have consistently said about my work, compared to the other Philippine writing they've said they've seen, is that it is surprisingly restrained. Their comments shocked me, as I didn't consider my work restrained. But I guess I've learned to choose where to let it hang loose? It's really tough to figure all this shit out. Maybe this is another hint at why Philippine writing in English doesn't fare better abroad? I don't know. I'd really be interested to see how works such as Norman Wilwayco's would do translated into English. But that, of course, really only matters if we're published abroad or not.

I think (from what I've read about even the international press criticizing the Man Asian Prize for awarding the prize first to an already-famous, already-published Chinese author, and then to a foreign-schooled, writing-in-English writer from the Philippines) the world is really clamoring for an authentic novel from the Philippines. Besides, for you to really be effective as a critic and teacher (at home, especially, where every teacher is proudly a critic and every critic thinks him/herself a teacher), there's no better critic and teacher than one who engages precisely in the very thing he/she is criticizing and teaching. Besides, there are few challenges and joys like writing a full-length novel. It's the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's been supremely fulfilling.

ADAM DAVID: I agree with your fear about the danger of seeing writing as a vehicle for messages, as people here (although I bet it's how it is all over) already teeter more towards propaganda when writing under that mode, as we always equate "message" with "nationalist messages" when it can very well be something like "art feeds culture feeds art" which is, admittedly, more flighty than "GMA tuta ng kano imperyalista ibagsak" (translated as "Down with Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, pet puppy of Americans" –ed.) but no less important, and actually arguably more immortal than any political polemic propaganda.

I really think that more writers should make claims, political or literary or whatever. More writers should see their place in society as shamans, social psychologists, as educators. Most writing here is just that, *writing*; it has been for the majority of its history, and nothing much after that, so wary/afraid to make claims, to say things that might whisk a few wigs off. I know I don't sound particularly humble about this, but we really can't afford to be humble about this. Or rather, the moment we *choose* to be "writers," we're already proud unhumble creeps. What we can only really do is work on being worth our hype. It's basically the first rule in writing, the first lesson: "Assume the right to make others think." It's true. You have to have a certain amount of conceitedness (or should it be "conceit?") to pull off being a proper writer.

My theory on why Pinoys aren't that prominent in the global context is that I think we've been too busy being "American" in our writing, more preoccupied with perfecting the use of English in the American sense and not really tackling with it on the level of, say, the Igbo back when they had a very lively English-language literature. They took English as taught to them by the English and just really ran away with it while most English-language writing here is more concerned with grammar and mimicking Hemingway or Salinger or Carver (nothing wrong with them, of course, but still) than with really establishing a Pinoy English, which is something we actually already have, something we've yet to really tap. Doing it like how the Americans do it isn't exactly a very new thing, not exactly a very honest thing to do with an art—or a tradition/history of art—that is at the very least only partially American.

I've been fantasizing about reading a Penguin anthology of contemporary Pinoy writing. If I had the chance to do it, I'd prioritize translations of Pinoy-language stuff, and also try to showcase Pinoy traditional forms like the *dagli* and the *tanaga*. Less of the blatantly American-influenced writing, more with the distinct cultivated voices we have right now. More concerned with showing how we've grown from the initial Americanisms of Carlos Bulosan and Bienvenido Santos and the brother Leon (from Manuel Arguilla) paradigm. A status report, so to speak, more than half of which would probably be stuff in translation. How would you do it?

This is actually the perfect time for an anthology like that, as I think Pinoy Lit has never been as diverse as how it is right now (not even ten years ago). Things really are starting to change for all of us here, and you're a big part of it, even if only in the pedagogical sense.

All this talk about writers being messengers reminds me of this: a prominent local bookstore enjoying national market presence only managed to sell 500 pieces of poetry

books last 2008, with 150+ (around 180, if I remember correctly) of them being the “literary” poetry books, the rest being those cheap and trashy newsprint compilations of proverbs and such. That’s 500 actual pieces of books, for the whole year, from all 100+ branches all over the country. Apparently, not only do we have nothing to say, we also have no one to say nothing to.

MIGUEL SYJUCO: That is sad trivia about poetry sales. I know we’re supposed to be a poetic, epic, myth-oriented culture, but I do wonder at poetry’s potential for relevance sometimes. I used to write poetry (very badly, I now concede), but I gave it up to focus on fiction (albeit I try sometimes for poetry in my prose) because I felt fiction stands the best chance of actually, as you say, being relevant. What do you think of that assumption? Sometimes I wonder if I’m wrong, but perhaps that’s just me hoping that I’m indeed wrong. It would really suck if poetry—which to me is the highest distillation of the written form—has become impotent and superceded by the prosaic.

I agree with you that the choice to become writers does imply some sort of arrogance, madness, idiocy, or some such condition that makes us choose the unreasonable path when we could much more easily have become notary publics or stock brokers. But I posit that the writing itself keeps us humble, because it’s damn hard. I never knew how hard it would be until I tried to write a novel. Poems, stories, they reward us with a sense of completion, and we’re able to enjoy them and not hate them because we can let them go after weeks, or a few months; not so with a novel! I’m sure you’ll find that novel writing is the most humbling process of all!

I’m necessarily a neo-Luddite, used to be crippled by cell-ulitis and weighed down by the electronic gadgets attached to my belt and stuffed into my pockets. E-mail remains my big addiction (because of the solitude of writing in a foreign country, and the single-minded effort to make my career take off, I don’t have any colleagues to hang out with after work nor many friends here who understand where I’m coming from), and my laptop and word processor are my main tool for writing. I couldn’t have written *Ilustrado* without MS Word and its cut-and-paste and find functions. And I wonder if something has been lost with such ease of writing, deleting, shifting around. It seems to me that writers who write in longhand and on typewriters would, logically, take more care with choosing words and arranging them in sentences, paragraphs, chapters, a novel. Yet on the other hand, maybe there’s something to be said about the word processor’s ability to really keep up with our stream-of-consciousness (provided the writer is later his own brutal editor). What do you think?

I tend to agree, too, with your theory about why we Filipino writers aren't more prominent on the world stage. I also wonder why the Indian writers have been such successes writing in the language imposed on them. I think you're right in your analysis, but I also do suspect it might be that the limited literary culture (in terms of such incentives as finances and fame) in the Philippines means a limited competitive environment, which means limited motivation to revise work into what it could be. It's a lot easier to get published in Manila, even if it's just in annual anthologies. When I lived and wrote in Manila, my work would be workshopped ever so superficially (for grammar, mostly, or to be dismissed as irrevocably *burgis*), then published, then stuck into a *Likhaan* anthology (an annual anthology published by the UP Institute of Creative Writing and UP Press –ed.). When I lived abroad, it was infinitely more difficult—I spent years and a lot of anguish trying to get published in lit journals (I have yet to!) and spent years and a small fortune on stamps trying to get agents to consider my work (not to mention having to read all the “how to get published” and “how to get an agent” books and websites). I'm not saying that we don't have a rich literary tradition in the Philippines, I just don't know if we have enough local incentives to really stick with works enough to make them tough bastards they need to be. Or am I just being dazzled and warped by the hardships I had to go through abroad?

I agree that the Great (so-called authentic) Filipino Novel must come from a writer writing in a language indigenous to us, because then it will be without the didacticism, the self-consciousness, etc. But I do wonder if the eventual act of translation will compromise that anyway; writing in English about the Philippines necessitates our being simultaneous interpreters—and while something is always lost in translation, as Filipinos who have been colonized and neo-colonized for centuries, I do wonder if the act of translating ourselves is actually part and parcel of that authentic Filipino experience. (I'm not trying to justify my work; I know that my limited slice of the Philippine experience disqualifies me in many running's—though that doesn't mean I'll not keep reaching towards what's authentic to me.)

Could it be that we write for certain audiences because we simply don't have a natural audience at home (yet), and therefore must try to find people who'll actually read us? I confess, I've always suspected (to my dismay) that to really make it as a writer who will be read at great lengths at home, we have to make it big abroad. It's a sad notion, but it seems to be a problem a lot of countries have. Bolaño faced the same thing with his native Chile—only when he was huge in the great Spanish-speaking world did he get the respect he deserved at home.

An anthology of Pinoy writing would be fantastic—and long overdue. Your method sounds spot-on. I am ashamed to admit that I have no idea how to do it. I haven't read much of the country's contemporary writers, both because my Tagalog is weak, and because when I go home I end up having to choose from among the Filipiniana section the history/social-commentary/political books—both because I'm unaware which fiction is worthwhile, and because I need the reference/history books for research for my work. I was recently asked to contribute to a US publication that has short essays on “overlooked and underappreciated” books; of course, I wanted to use the chance to plug Pinoy Lit, but I had to revert to old favorites (I chose Bulosan, because he would interest Americans for his forgotten success there, and because he was so influential to me long ago)—and I wish I had been better equipped to have written something about someone more contemporary. So not only am I trying to be a better writer, I also need to be a better reader.

Are there works in Filipino and regional languages being translated into English? Sometimes I wonder if a role, given that I'm blessed with mild success/connections, might be to help advocate translation of some Filipino/regional language works into English for submission to prizes like the Man Asian or to publishers abroad. Because my Filipino-language skills are not strong, I just wouldn't know where to start. Who do you think stands a good international chance if translated into English?

I've also been thinking a lot about what you said about some people who are wishing that our first internationally recognized contemporary book would be something more Pinoy. I've been trying to figure that out, which means I battle both my own knee-jerk justifications of my work as how it is placed now, and my own discovery that I share the same sentiments as these people do. I'm wondering if the conundrum is a chicken-and-an-egg situation: maybe the, so to speak, “international” tendencies of *Ilustrado* have earned it that international attention, and that its compromises/concessions to foreign readers have allowed it to get where it's gotten? Maybe we should all get together then to translate and push our local best-hopes-and-chances—whatever they may be—to put work out there that doesn't have to compromise/concede? (Then there's the question of why can't a book be big and deep enough to offer something for both local and international readers?) If those writers who wish our big pedestal-placed novel were one “truer” than *Ilustrado*, why didn't they write it? (And I'm not going to accept the bullshit about not having the time nor the resources that I had—I've had far less than most people assume, and because of my background I've had to fight harder to be a writer than most; plus living abroad, working several jobs, dayshift and nightshift, are in many ways harder than teaching and writing as an academic at UP/Ateneo/UST/etc.). I don't know. I really don't know.

ADAM DAVID: As long as there's an assumption that poetry is more given to flights of fancy than prose (which is assumed to be more down to earth), poetry will never be "relevant" in the sense that it could be a vehicle for transformation/transgression. Maybe because we don't really have a poetry version of *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*? I don't buy into that, but I do think that that's what people are thinking about poetry. Not to say that that's what people consciously think about it, but I feel that that belief is there. There are also more poets than prose people as I think poetry's tendency to be shorter than the average prose piece lends itself to the idea that it's actually easier to write, less time-consuming, easier to play around with (which lends itself towards the idea that you can be more experimental with poetry than prose under the not entirely inaccurate notion that poetry demands less commitment from the reader and the writer—it's fairly easy to be formalistically flighty within an already flighty form).

And yeah, the writing itself is the humbling act, and the reception of whatever thing we've written is the most humbling of all. There's no really greater feeling than the satisfaction of confirmation that all those tears and ink poured on to whatever tanaga you've written actually works when read to/by an audience, and there's nothing as life-crushing as a mass scoffing of your latest obra.

It's been my long-standing critique of PC word processors that it really has turned a lot of us into lazy-eyed writers thanks to the absolute ease of auto-spellchecking and just the paperless aspect of it all—you can really afford to digress as you don't have to worry about running out of paper. It has more good than bad, of course, as it gives way to more people experimenting with form, playing around with typography, and it's just really much more economical (in space and in cash) to have our things in neat little icons that we simply have to click to stow away in little virtual folder cabinets.

I absolutely agree about what you said about us being relatively big fish in a small pond. It's funny how *important* awards and publications here mean when even at a casual glance you can see how insignificant these things are in relation to the quality of the average poem and story that get great mileage, and funny how dismissive most people are when you try to go outside of that process and do things your way (i.e., self-publishing). It's really very very easy to be a good writer here nowadays.

With the Indians, though, I think that, thanks to the British, it's because there are more people who are interested with India than with the Philippines. Among the Asian nations, India has always been in the international limelight, together with China and Japan, more so than the Philippines. I think that it's more that than anything inherent to our country.

I wish we had more people who see writing as a journeyman effort. People who see it less as an awards- and diploma-earning thing and more really as an art you have to work on to be good.

“Could it be that we write for certain audiences because we simply don’t have a natural audience at home (yet), and therefore must try to find people who’ll actually read us?” This made me think that it’s what I tapped into subconsciously when I started telling people that our preoccupation shouldn’t be in pandering to the international or literati or masa audience; instead we should be focused on cultivating an audience that will be open to our many things that are either-or/neither-nor/in-between, and that we should start producing the initial works that will help cement this notion right now.

About Filipino works being translated here, yeah, actually, like I said, thanks to *Illustrado* winning Man Asia, things are happening: I know of two novels being translated right now for the Man Asian, Edgar Samar’s *Walong Diwata ng Pagkahulog* and Norman Wilwayco’s *Gerilya*. They’re both being translated by Mikael Co, an Atenean poet. If I remember correctly, UP tried doing a few translations of “classic” Pinoy stuff, like Jun Cruz Reyes’s masterpiece *Etsa-Puwera* being translated by Baryon Posadas, but I think the project ran out of money and nothing really happened with all the work they put in. I think if there’s one contemporary Pinoy novel worth translating, it’s *Etsa-Puwera*. It’s a century-long drama along the lines of *Noli* and *El Fili*, its focus starting from the Spanish Occupation and crawling towards Post-Ninoy Philippines, concentrating on the people living along the margins of society, i.e., the babaylans, the huks, the pulubis, et al, thus the title, a Filipino word that strangely does/can not translate to English quite directly or with any of the seriousness mixed with unseriousness that the Filipino word has, which comes off as a very good metaphor about my wondering if the Great Filipino Novel here can be a Great Novel Novel outside of here. I mean, *Etsa-Puwera* is truly a good book, but it is also an indelibly Filipino book, a trait that a translation may not be able to truly respectfully mirror. But should we even problematise such things? Meaning, should we even really bother with translations? Why not just try to write a Great Novel Novel?

And you’re right, it really is a chicken-egg conundrum: we can’t really have the one without the other. We can only really strive towards earnestness.

MIGUEL SYJUCO: Going back to the big-fish-small-pond syndrome: not only do they have to allow themselves to be challenged, but they also need to see themselves as small fish in the bigger pond of humanity, because that’s the only way one can aspire to be bigger, better, stronger than one currently is. It’s not so much a question of having colonial mentality as

it is of avoiding the small-minded parochialism of an efflorescing post-colonial society. (Kundera calls it the “provincialism of small nations,” which prevents the nation from seeing itself in the larger context of the rest of the world.) Seriously, if some of our big local writers had to try harder to compete in the global stage, I think their work would be stronger. Instead, they sit on their local laurels and scratch their heads and say, “Tangina kaputol, ba’t hindi tayo mas sikat sa mundo?” (translated as “Whoreson, why aren’t we more internationally famous?” -ed.) Maybe it’s a good thing my background made it so I never felt really accepted at home amongst my colleagues, as it forced me to strike out into the world beyond our shores. It’s important indeed for us Filipino writers to want to first be read by our countrymen, but we must always remember that we’re all countrymen/women in the same nation called Earth. Again, there’s the naivete. But it’s true. We have to think of writing in the most expansive way. Culture should be defining, not limiting.

I don’t know if we’ll have to agree to disagree about the India ideas. I mean, sure, the Indians had the Brits, but we had the Americans, albeit briefly and not as deeply. But it’s up to writers to define a nation to itself and the rest of the world, and if India has proved fascinating and in the limelight, it must be (at least partly) because it’s been written as fascinating and worthy of the limelight. I think we Pinoy writers have often been stuck between the extremes of self-exoticizing ourselves (as if our work were tourist pamphlets) and harping on the gritty cruelties and uglinesses (as if we’re fist-raising social realists or martyrs or horror genre writers). Two extremes that are both boringly two-dimensional and counterproductive. I admit, it’s hard not to fall into such traps (I myself often do, after all). But I think the way to avoid that is to write about the people, the characters, and their situations, and try to downplay the local color of setting. If we can’t do that, we become defined as, in the world’s view, more a place and less a people.

Could it be that such an idea connects to your idea of cultivating a readership that is “either-or/neither-nor/in-between?” I wonder how we would cement such notions as early as now if we can’t get them to read the work, to pass it on, to discuss it, to teach it in school, etc. Sure, from little things big things come. I used to think that compromise is when nobody is happy, and that we should always stand our ground banging on that closed door until either our fists are bloody pulps or the door finally opens. But the flip side is that compromise can be when everybody (or maybe not everybody, but a good majority) is happy. Is that a utopian idea? Maybe. Sure. But we must have utopian ideas. How do we cultivate the either-or/neither-nor/in-between? The route I’ve taken is to try to play on their post-colonial tendencies and woo them by a roundabout way. Whatever compromises *Ilustrado* and I have had to make, there’s now no question, fortunately, that it will be read—

and now that I have the readership, maybe the next book can be less compromising, and the book after that even less so. I don't know if that will work, but we'll see. Or maybe I have to take a hit at home in order to be able to put myself in a global position to help those who will undoubtedly come soon, so that they don't have to compromise as much? I don't know.

As for the Great Filipino Novel being a Great Novel abroad, I couldn't agree with you more. But I caution us: we're talking definitions here, something that as critics/readers and writers we must of course always attempt (isn't writing, in a sense, attempting definitions, and isn't reading, after all, searching for definitions?). But something we must also try to be wary of. Words are just words, and are only components of the message, right? I think we should just try to write good novels (shit, I think we Pinoys should just try writing novels. Period.), and eventually the Great Filipino Novel will come from it. I think it's like certain movies that come out and we can see "Made for Academy Award Nomination" written all over it (or, a better example: "Made for Palanca Win"). Such things have an emptiness to them, a sense of artifice rather than trueness. They may be great in their reach, but are they great in their pithiness?

As for our discussion on poetry—a character in Bolaño's *2666* was remembering how a certain Latin-American author (I forget who) said that the best poetry reads like prose, and how Harold Bloom said the best prose reads like poetry. I really like that idea, because in many ways it rings true.

Could it be that for us to really become journeymen, we have to accept that it is very much the process rather than just the product? Which brings me to the word processor as a tool—I'm thinking that it could indeed be a very good tool because it allows for a lot more to be done—I know I could never have attempted *Ilustrado* if I had to use a typewriter for it (which underscores John Dos Passos's genius). Besides, in this day and age of fragmentation, and short attention spans, perhaps it's the word processor that will allow us to keep up with the changes while staying rooted in the disciplines and lessons of the more archaic past? Sure, there's the danger of the Kerouacian spewing up of "literature." But I'm fascinated in the process I'm working through now—I've summarized each and every fragment of *Ilustrado* into two lines and listed them on MS Word, then printed them out, then cut them out into strips and put them on 10 sticky boards (one board each), so that I can arrange and rearrange them to figure out how best to make the book move, how to make the pacing better, how to sustain the reader, etc. It's fascinating. Sure, I could have done that with a typewriter and scissors. But the point is, I wouldn't have even gotten to the point of the jumble the book is in without having the tool of MS Word's cut-and-paste.

If we maintain discipline, and we use the tool to stretch the limit of the form, then maybe it can't be anything but good, or, at the very least, interesting.

ADAM DAVID: I agree with you completely about searching for a compromise in what we're doing that isn't necessarily detrimental for everyone concerned, and yes, there is definitely no doubt that your necessary compromise paid out in a really big way, so we know that it's actually possible.

I'm currently reading Gina Apostol's *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, and it's treading on virtually the same thematic territory as *Ilustrado* and I'm wondering about our maybe-subconscious interest on the Post-Hispanic Philippine Condition AND (although in a more sober manner) on the Post-American, too, and I'm tempted to call it "postcolonial" but the interest is more *after* the Spanish reign, and then it skips the Philippine-American war and just goes straight to Post-America, and then Martial Law, and then EDSA (I'm talking about narratives in general, not only with *Ilustrado* and *Mata*), so it's not strictly Postcolonial (but now I fear I'm merely splitting hairs here). I'm wondering why we more or less dwell on these specific events and topics and by implication ignore the other ones, like the Japanese Occupation, or the Spanish-American and eventually Filipino-American wars. For sure, we have texts that deal with those issues, but not as substantial as our Post-Spanish and Post-American texts. It seems these events have bigger monopolies in our consciousness than the others. Why do you think so? Is it a matter of digesting these things chronologically? Is it a Rizal thing? Is it because of the gaps in our history? Is it white-washing?

About Bolaño, I keep wondering why we (Filipino writers and readers) seem to lack writers who can spin a yarn that long and complex/complicated and rich. My girlfriend proposed that maybe it's the economics of the thing, our economic condition as a nation, as a nation not having too much interest on the written word (especially compared to a place like Japan or India), and especially when the writers who can do such things are all very busy trying to make money (like Butch Dalisay, or even the younger ones like Vlad Gonzales). Even Gina Apostol had to call in the family cavalry to take care of her daughter so she could finish *Mata's* final stretch of writing. I'm wondering if you have a different take on this issue. I mean, from all accounts, Bolaño did all his writing under the threat of absolute no holds barred poverty, but still, he managed to write quite a lot of things before he died. I'm wondering why we don't seem to have something akin to that.

MIGUEL SYJUCO: I read *The Savage Detectives* right after I had finished madly taking apart *Ilustrado* and putting it back together in the crazy way that was/is its incarnation for the Palanca and Man Asian; discovering Bolaño sort of consoled me, reassuring me that I wasn't being idiotic, and that I needn't give up experimenting, playing, daring. Yeah, I felt: where has this guy been? I also felt: this is the man who holds the hints for how Philippine writing can move forward. I thought: there are some writers going on about Magical Realism and how it is essentially a Philippine invention, when here is this Bolaño who is repudiating, destroying, and leaving Magical Realism so far behind its *less di na uso* ("no longer fashionable") than it is absolutely *laspag* ("worn-out"). There's daring to Bolaño's writing, and maybe it was because he knew he didn't have long to live and therefore wasn't worrying too much about his career, his tenure, what others would think. There's also audacity to his writing, and I think that's because he wanted to satirize what he felt was wrong with the world but at the same time his big-hearted compassion couldn't help but come through as wit and wonder. The most amazing thing is that Bolaño turned to fiction to make money, because he knew that poetry would never pay; he started writing fiction to enter short story and novel competitions, and eventually, knowing his life was limited, he wrote his big novels (*2666*, *The Savage Detectives*) in order to leave some sort of royalties to his family after he died.

Why don't we Filipinos have a Bolaño? I honestly think it has less to do with the practical (and reasonable) considerations you outlined, and a lot more to do with our preoccupation with authenticity and causality and nationalism. Bolaño was rejected early on by the Chilean establishment, and so he gave up trying to be part of his home culture and became part of Spanish writing in general. He didn't try to be more Chilean, he didn't try to appeal to the masses through his work, he didn't try to prove he was nationalistic or whatever. He just wrote, and because he was a compassionate thinker, a humanist, and a fucking angel with prose, he was able to combine many of the things that matter in life and put it into his work. I think he stuck to something that we in the Philippines haven't been able to do properly yet—story; story as the most important thing; story as a window into humanity, rather than the window into Filipino-ness masquerading as story. There's no postcolonialism in his work, no Marxism, and certainly no feminism, and yet, because he's a man of deep mind and heart, he answers and repudiates those issues—his work is post-postcolonial (it is international, it is local, it is a mix of influences without bemoaning what was supposedly lost), his work is inclusive in the way that Marxism could never be (it's about people from all walks of life, and how they interact and try to find a place in the world they can somehow share), and his work is more than feminist (it is *sympatico* with

the women but it is honest to the men, and it shuns political correctness but never at the expense of diminishing women).

I think that's why he's great, and that's also why we've not yet produced a Bolaño. Really, he could be Pinoy, no? As in uber-Pinoy. His wit, his prose, his ideas, his swagger—talagang (“really”) Pinoy. I guess the difference between us and Bolaño is that Bolaño shunned excuses, knowing that even a good excuse was still an excuse when it comes to getting in the way of writing what he wanted to write.

But maybe I'm just mythologizing. You should read 2666. That'll blow your mind.

You know what's always confused me about Philippine writing? We have such great writers in Filipino, such great writers in English, such great writers in the dialects, and many of these writers are multilingual. And yet, there seems to be this constant debate about language. Why can't we just get over it and have the English writers translate the Filipino and dialects so that the work can be available to the rest of the world, and why can't those good in Tagalog and the regional languages translate the works in English so that they can be available to the broader Philippine readership? Sure, market is a big issue—but the world is a market, and if everyone can stop being so fucking prissy and petty about it, then the writers in English can help each other revise and edit and sell the work to the rest of the world, and do the same for works in translation. And vice versa? We're so prized for our bilingual maids and call centre personnel, and yet our literature is an either/or issue, and therefore, both at home and abroad, it's been mostly neither/nor in terms of readership and acclaim. After all, the pure Filipino is a myth—unless we feel that Bagobo or Tausug writing is what we should all be doing. But for centuries we've been Malay, Chinese, Spanish, Muslim, Christian, American, etc., and so our literature should reflect that. But it doesn't. It's either more Anglophone than Anglophone (but with nationalistic sentiment, as if overcompensating for it not being written in Tagalog), or it's militantly in the vernacular, as if that instantly makes it more valuable than anything else. I mean, sure, the language and authenticity debate has merit, but when it seems to surround work that hardly anyone in our own country reads, which has a hard time getting published abroad, maybe it's time to start rethinking our priorities, because for a literature to exist properly, it needs to be read.

I guess that's my answer, however oblique. Yes, practical considerations of making rent and buying groceries are valid, but it's the same thing here in North America, and was in Australia, just as I'd bet it's the same in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Every writer is poor when he/she is starting out (god knows I had to scrape for a living for years after I left my family by insisting on being a writer), and so they work many odd jobs, or write at

night or only on weekends, or get lucky and get a scholarship or fellowship (but even those are limited, and short). The writer's life is sacrifice, and that's why I haven't married my girlfriend of six years (for so damn long I couldn't even afford to bring her to a nice dinner, much less buy a ring and pop the question), that's why I don't think I'll raise a family, and that's why I don't have much of a life outside of my work—because I want this writing thing so damn badly I'll do anything to get it. I think of some of the long- and short-listed writers for the Man Asian award and the traction their novels got—agents were approaching them, their names were in the international press, etc. Did they run with it? Did they finish the work properly and refine it? Did they leverage the attention they got to get their work out to the international agents and publishers? No. I saw one of the shortlistees last year and asked him about the book and he said, “Eh, ang dami ko'ng gagawin” (“I have so much stuff to do.”). Sure, that's valid. All of us have too much to do. But what's the priority? Everything else, or literature? I think we've got it better than most countries—better pa than the West even. We have a tight family to act as support, we can stay at home and live with our parents while we write (most Westerners get kicked out when they reach adulthood, right?), we have a closely knit community, we have a rich culture (Westerners would kill to have the wealth of stories we have just outside our jeepney windows), we have a deftness with English and a natural grace with our vernaculars, heck, most people, even among the middle class, somehow have a domestic helper to help out around the house (let me tell you, there's nothing more frustrating than having to cook all your own meals, clean all the house, pay all your taxes, go to whatever odd jobs one can find to make ends meet, live through five months of winter darkness and cold, grind out time to exercise, and find time to make friends in a foreign country, when all one wants to do is write and write and write). Honestly, I think great writing is there for the taking for us, we just need to get our acts together, prioritize, stop sabotaging ourselves, maybe even help each other, and, like Nike, just do it.

But what about having no reading public at home, you say? Sure, that's an issue. But there are many ways for us to write for the world (the Philippines and elsewhere) without pandering, compromising our cultural integrity, or being so-called inauthentic (You mean to tell me the OFW who lives 20 years in the Middle East isn't Pinoy? Then what about the banker who lives in Daly City for 20 years? Is he any less Pinoy? What about the mail order bride who lives 20 years with her white husband in Australia and refuses to speak Tagalog ever again—is she not a part of the Filipino experience, even in her rejection of it?). I think we put so much stock in creating a masterpiece, in making the Great Filipino Novel that is meant to capture all of Philippine experience, when that's an impossibility in any country.

Every literature is made up a cacophony of voices from all walks of life, many of them in opposition; and yet we Filipino writers seem to keep trying for such a narrow target with our writing, rather than celebrating all as a singular part of the common experience. I really don't think it's economics, because economics is an issue everywhere. I think it's just getting out and spending the time and patience necessary to make the work work. It took me four years of juggling jobs, hustling scholarships, selling personal effects, eating cereal for all meals a day while unemployed, sequestering myself in my oubliette, etc., to write *Ilustrado*—I'm by no means saying I'm better or I have the answer compared to anyone else at home, but I'm really curious about when the last time a writer in the Philippines spent four years on one project. I think if anyone in the Philippines sucked it up and put in the time, they'd be winning the prizes and getting far more than what I could ever achieve. But maybe they just don't want it badly enough, or are too sane to bet all their chips because they know they may never get them back.

I think Bolaño put in his all in his books, because if he couldn't have a long life at least he could have literature.