

VINTAGE CLASSICS



ROBERTO BOLAÑO
**MONSIEUR
PAIN**

'A gripping noir conspiracy thriller'
Observer

EX LIBRIS

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

ROBERTO BOLAÑO

Roberto Bolaño was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1953. He grew up in Chile and Mexico City, where he was a founder of the Infrarealism poetry movement. Described by the *New York Times* as ‘the most significant Latin American literary voice of his generation’, he was the author of over twenty works, including *The Savage Detectives*, which received the Herralde Prize and the Rómulo Gallegos Prize when it appeared in 1998, and *2666*, which posthumously won the 2008 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. Bolaño died in Blanes, Spain, at the age of fifty, just as his writing found global recognition.

PRAISE FOR ROBERTO BOLAÑO

‘Bolaño’s oeuvre is among the great, blistering literary achievements of the twentieth century’

Lauren Groff

‘Bolaño was a game changer: his field was politics, poetry and melancholia . . . and his writing was always unparalleled’

Mariana Enriquez

‘One of the greatest and most distinctive voices in modern fiction’

The Times

‘The most influential and admired novelist of his generation in the Spanish-speaking world’

Susan Sontag

‘Roberto was one of a kind, a writer who worked without a net, who went all out, with no brakes, and in doing so created a new way to be a great Latin American writer’

New York Times

‘The triumphant posthumous entrance of Roberto Bolaño into the English-language literary firmament has been one of the sensations of the decade’

Sunday Times

‘We savour all he has written as every offering is a portal into the elaborate terrain of his genius’

Patti Smith

‘A supernova of creativity whose light is still arriving at our shores’

New Yorker

‘His fiction was hallucinatory, haunting and experimental’

Times Literary Supplement

‘Bolaño: that *poète maudit*, irreverent and brilliant, who wrote many of the best stories and novels of his generation’

Samanta Schweblin

‘Bolaño mastered the alchemy of turning the trivial into the sublime, the everyday into adventure. Bolaño is among the best at this diabolical skill’

Georgi Gospodinov

‘Bolaño offers a unique, multilayered and quirky perspective on contemporary life’

Daily Mail

‘One of the most respected and influential writers of his generation . . . At once funny and vaguely, pervasively, frightening’

John Banville

‘Bolaño’s work is a sprawling labyrinth of surprise, bold invention and images that will live with you forever’

Chris Power

‘An acid-tongued, truth-telling, peripatetic genius, who lived all too briefly, wrote in a fever and did not go gentle into

that good night’

Copyrighted Material
Washington Post

‘For stunning wit, brutal honesty, loving humanity and a
heart that bleeds into the simplest of words,
no other writer ever came close’

Marlon James

‘Bolaño’s books are volcanic, perilous, charged with infectious
erotic energy and demonic lucidity’

Benjamín Labatut

‘An exemplary literary rebel’

New York Review of Books

‘Bolaño is the writer who opened a new vein for twenty-first-
century literature . . . Vivacious and weird and madly alive again’

Kevin Barry

‘Bolaño’s uncontrollable storytelling pulsion, his savage way of
using adjectives, his melancholic, almost tormented urban
realism, changed the tone of a whole tradition’

Álvaro Enrigue

‘When I read Bolaño, I think: everything is possible again’

Nicole Krauss

‘Bolaño made each book more ambitious so that it will take us
many years to come to terms with his vast achievement’

Colm Tóibín

‘Bolaño continues to cast a spell, thanks to the wild metaphorical
reach of his tumbling sentences, his implausibly encyclopaedic
grasp of global affairs and the seductive sense that
twentieth-century history is a nightmarish riddle to
which only literature is the solution’

Guardian

‘Latin American letters (wherever it may reside) has never had a
greater, more disturbing avenging angel than Bolaño’

Junot Díaz

‘Bolaño was a flat-out genius, one of the greatest

writers of our time’

Paul Auster

Copyrighted Material

ALSO BY ROBERTO BOLAÑO

NOVELS

The Savage Detectives

2666

Nazi Literature in the Americas

The Skating Rink

The Third Reich

Woes of the True Policeman

The Spirit of Science Fiction

NOVELLAS

By Night in Chile

Distant Star

Amulet

Antwerp

A Little Lumpen Novelita

Cowboy Graves

STORIES

Last Evenings on Earth

The Insufferable Gaucho

The Return

POETRY

The Romantic Dogs

Copyrighted Material

The Unknown University

ROBERTO BOLAÑO
MONSIEUR PAIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY
Chris Andrews

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Copyrighted Material

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Vintage Classics is part of the Penguin Random House
group of companies whose addresses can be found
at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin
Random House
UK

This edition published in Vintage Classics in 2024
First published in Spain by Editorial Anagrama in 1999
First published in the United States of America by New Directions Books in 2010

Copyright © Roberto Bolaño 1999
Translation copyright © Chris Andrews 2010

Roberto Bolaño has asserted his right to be identified as the author of
this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

penguin.co.uk/vintage-classics

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781784879464

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future
for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made
from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.



Copyrighted Material

for Carolina López

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

- P. Does the idea of death afflict you?
- V. (Very quickly.) No–no!
- P. Are you pleased with the prospect?
- V. If I were awake I should like to die, but now it is no matter. The mesmeric condition is so near death as to content me.
- P. I wish you would explain yourself, Mr Vankirk.
- V. I am willing to do so, but it requires more effort than I feel able to make. You do not question me properly.
- P. What then shall I ask?
- V. You must begin at the beginning.
- P. The beginning! But where is the beginning?

“Mesmeric Revelation”
Edgar Allan Poe

Copyrighted Material

PRELIMINARY NOTE

Many years ago, in 1981 or 1982, I wrote *Monsieur Pain*. Its fate has been haphazard and erratic. Under the title *The Elephant Path* it won the Felix Urubayen prize for a short novel, awarded by the Toledo City Council. Not long before, it had been short-listed in another provincial competition, under a different title. I won three hundred thousand pesetas in Toledo. And around a hundred and twenty thousand in the other city, as I seem to recall. The Toledo City Council published the book and made me a judge for the following year. In the other provincial capital they forgot about me even sooner than I forgot about them, and I never found out whether or not the novel had been published there. All this is recounted in a story in *Last Evenings on Earth*. Time, that consummate joker, has subsequently sent a number of major prizes my way. But none of them has meant as much to me as those awards scattered over the map of Spain: buffalo prizes I had to go hunting like a redskin whose life is on the line. Never have I felt as proud or as wretched to be a writer. There's not a lot more I can say about *Monsieur Pain*. Almost all the events related actually occurred: Vallejo's hiccups, the carriage — a horse-drawn carriage — that ran over Curie, his last experiment, or one of his last, which touched on certain aspects of mesmerism, the doctors who were so negligent in their treatment of Vallejo. Even Pain is real. Georgette mentions him on a page of her passionate, bitter, helpless memoirs.

Copyrighted Material

PARIS, 1938

On Wednesday the sixth of April, at dusk, as I was preparing to leave my lodgings, I received a telegram from my young friend Madame Reynaud, requesting, with a certain urgency, my presence that evening at the Café Bordeaux, on Rue de Rivoli, relatively close to where I live, which meant that if I hurried, I could still arrive punctually at the specified time.

The first indication that I had just been drawn into a singular episode presented itself immediately: as I was going down the stairs I came across two men climbing up to the third floor. They were speaking Spanish, a language I do not understand, and wearing dark trench-coats and broad-brimmed hats, which, since they were below me on the stairs, obscured their faces. Because of the semi-darkness that generally prevails in the stairwell, but also because of my quiet way of moving, they failed to notice my presence until I was right in front of them, a mere three steps away, at which point they stopped talking, and instead of stepping aside and allowing me to continue on my way down (the stairs are wide enough for two but not three people abreast), they looked at each other for a few moments that seemed to be fixed in a simulacrum of eternity (I should stress that I was a few steps above them), and then, slowly, very slowly, they trained their gazes on me. Policemen, I thought, only policemen have preserved that