

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 Vilem 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 amoebae and this enigmatic figure takes us back to the transvestite whore Vicky Vaporú (Vicky Vapour-rub) 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

Errant

MATT

Jor

MALET
450pp. Barcel
978

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 perdudes* (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 offspring, scatterings of late-twentieth-century history and a gambling debt.

The story begins quietly enough: local police inform a young Barcelonan, Cristòfol, 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, Cristòfol 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

spin-offs have a... they are there, in p... nant tone – which... This is evident in t... who is oblivious... in Paris in May of... demonstrator (Chri... a wardrobe he and... unloading at the ti... accident in which... killed; and in the... Cristòfol's Catala... seizes the opport... "Gauche Divine",... socialist set which... rage in the 1960s... converge on prese... the mystery of Gab... reasons behind... accounted for, in a... light-hearted and a... The novel is un... theme, never over... abandonment. Gab... with whom he ente... grow up in the sam

Wargames

OLLIE BROCK

Roberto Bolaño

EL TERCER REICH
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Hanna return to Germany, while Udo stays on in the resort – allegedly to wait for the body, though we know from his acerbic commentary that he had little but contempt for Charly.

Although much of the narrative is given to these expressions of contempt – mostly directed at the other characters – there is still a frustrating lack of depth in the character of

to outlining possibl... ments of armoured... premiss of the game... about regaining c... always plays the p... two-dimensional... Second World W... resounding victory... writing itself, howe... an excess of distilla... Brashly confident... champion for nothin... less adept socially... of our impulse to t... he is shown as dis... worthless or stupid... anxious when faced