



Writer of  
FORTUNE

El Colonel Smiles

ever  
spired

looking for and developing poetic ideas

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## El Colonel Smiles

### *For Roberto Bolano*

*Yo, por bien tengo que cosas fan seneladas, y por nunca oidas ni vistas, vengan a noticia de muchos y no se entetierren en la sepultura del olvido.*

--Lazarillo de Tormes

El Colonel smiles. Pleasure birds fly in exotic jungles, among tableaux of hacked and burned nude bodies assuming famous paintings' poses. The aesthetic arousal stimulates his penchant for a "formal" fetishization of alliteration. Straining to suppress his laughter, he murmuringly intones: "Impeccably attired in immaculate form-fitting fatigues whose rigorously ironed creases crackle with each movement and gesture, he strides among his technicians, laconically ordering a different angle here, another take there, a still living victim to be placed over there. The crisp morning air is a sweet salience; the taste in the mouth is of clotting blood."

Licking his lips in anticipation, his eyes through aviator glasses gaze to the red flecked vulva of a dismembered young woman . . .

A brightly colored bird lands near the alluring meat, pecking its way towards the prized mound. El Colonel snaps a brisk order. The startled and obedient bird launches into flight. With deadly accuracy El Colonel brings it down. Blood from a small hole in its breast bubbles out among the girl's slashed thighs . . .

El Colonel smiles. Peeling a tangerine he looks to the misty hills of morning. Dew flecks the flesh of flowers at trembling verge of opening. His fingers play among the fruit's sections. Probing,--to elicit a secret.

El Colonel smiles. "Poetry is born of suffering. Poetry, born of torture—a more delicious beauty to be prompted and petted, O roseate Muse of pain." He fondles a razor-sharp letter opener. Licking his lips, he slits a new file. Classified forms and photos of "missing persons" come tumbling out . . .  
. . . Names—addresses---relatives' reportings . . . "last seen by—at—when"  
. . . El Colonel caresses the photos . . .

El Colonel smiles. Facing the cadets' young, soft faces . . . their expectant, obedient eyes—he writes with a felt tip marker on a vast white board, feral teeth gleaming in the brightly lit lecture room. Among headings and sub-headings he sketches a plan . . .  
"Memorize this closely, my children, it is not in any manual . . . remember it well, for it is the key to unlock the doors into the Temples of Art, the Theaters of Poetry, The Cinemas of Catharsis."

El Colonel smiles. The Americans have published a book of poems by detainees. The products of torture, censorship, controlled translations, the poems meet with poor reviews in terms of "poetry." Might not the productions of a poetry of torture be greatly enriched by bringing to them the benefits of his experience, his expertise, the generous gifts of a lifetime's aesthetic experimentations?

El Colonel smiles. Neatly refolding a fresh newspaper along its crisp pleats, he places it on top of a precisely aligned stack to his left. Turning slightly to his right, he lifts and efficiently opens another briskly crackling journal from the morning mail. Every few days, in one or another language, at varying lengths in differing fonts under tersely worded headers and with now more, now less details, there are appearing enigmatic reports of a series of American poets gone missing. From the library of a bucolic small college, from a hotel lobby in a great city, from the bathroom at a conference, from sidewalk cafes and sumptuous banquets, from illicit rendezvous' and quiet nights in offices, now here, now there, American poets "minor" and "major" are vanishing without a trace.

El Colonel smiles. He sips from a deep drink of sweetened and spiced irony. He, the trainee of American Special Forces, a graduate of the old School of the Americas, he is now the Master of Ceremonies, teaching the Americans far more than a thing or two in the Art and Poetry produced by torture. By Fear. By the spontaneous combustion of Disappearance, by absence erupting into the presence of a "day like any other." By rending the veilings and veneers of "artifice" and "opacity" and exposing a Black Hole into which all such shininess vanishes. By rendition spiriting away the shitting and trembling "purifiers of the language of the tribe" to be baptized in a font of filth, blood, come and tears.

El Colonel smiles. "Yea, verily, they shall feel the wrath of my Prod," he murmurs, his fingers caressing the instrument's metal dreamingly, as though playing the "backbone flute" of a famous Russian poet. Leafing through the files of the latest arrivals, he studies their photos, the bits and pieces of examples of their work culled from the internet, the various bits of biography, critic's comments, book blurbs, the sententious pronunciamentos that make up an American poet's CV. The Universities most are associated with interest him only in terms of the corporations and government contracts they are involved with.

El Colonel smiles. In the beginning was the Word and it dwelt with the original Author, the Non Plus Ultra Writer of Blockbuster Epics., the Master of the Page Turners, the Laureate of the door-stopping tome, the Bearded Bard of Radical Verse and Purple Prose, the eminence grise of the Academy, the Namer, the Shaman, the Seer, the Supreme Source of the Scribblers and copying Scribes. To return poetry to its origins, before the word, and then to shock it back to life, to force it to speak again from the primordial darkness, to make it speak again the craven and craving phrase, "Let there be light;" this is among my projects, El Colonel murmurs in a self-invented code.

Permitting himself a dry staccato laugh, El Colonel, speaking in the tongue of his devising, murmurs, "Yes, let there be light—but an electric light! For this is an advantage the Old Versifier did not have." Flicking his stainless steel "lighter," he "lights" a cigarette, smiling as he realizes what "shocking" thoughts he "occupies his time" with. His hands and eyes go back to the files, cigarette smoke drifting blue in the clear light of morning.





"EL COLONEL SMILES"  
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