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My Summer Reading: Dancer Carlos Acosta

The images and romances of Hispanic novelists grip the superstar

by [Ismene Brown](#) | Friday, 3 September 2010

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Carlos Acosta: Superstar, dancer, writer and avid reader

Johan Persson

Carlos Acosta is not just a superstar dancer with the Royal Ballet and around the world, he is an avid reader - and indeed writer. After writing his autobiography *No Way Home*, he has also scripted dance shows and is now writing a novel.

Unsurprisingly, his thoughts and memories turn to his native Latin America - to the Chilean Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) and the Spaniard Carlos Ruiz Zafon (born 1964) - when he chooses what next to read, a marked contrast with the heroes of European ballet dramas such as *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* and the Chekov-inspired *Winter Dreams* that he dances this autumn at Covent Garden. Now 37, Acosta is widening his view of life and increasingly focusing on what he can do in his homeland, Cuba, a powerhouse of world dance that - dominated by the nonagenarian Alicia Alonso - **increasingly looks as if it needs new leaders.**

1. What are you reading at the moment?

I'm reading Roberto Bolaño's *2666* at the moment. To be honest I've been reading

rating

☆☆☆☆☆

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'We are bowled over!' Thank you for your messages of love and support

Much-appreciated words of commendation from readers and the cultural community



Rebirth: London City Ballet review - pocket-sized company fulfilling its big ambitions

Christopher Marney's revitalised company gains momentum with each appearance



R:Evolution, English National Ballet, Sadler's Wells review - a vibrant survey of ballet in four acts

ENB set the bar high with this mixed bill, but they meet its challenges thrillingly



Like Water for Chocolate, Royal Ballet review - splendid dancing and sets, but there's too much plot

Christopher Wheeldon's version looks great but is too muddling to connect with fully

it for some time - it's very long and the depth of the characters and the nature of the narrative mean that you need to pay the book a lot of attention. It's a great journey through different periods of time and different locations mostly in Latin America. Bolaño had been recommended to me by a friend and I am so pleased to have had the introduction.

[Extract: **2666** by Roberto Bolaño (Picador 2009)]

In the morning Espinoza gave the clerks and the guards and the waiters at the hotel some of the rugs and serapes he'd been accumulating. He also gave rugs to the two women who cleaned his room. The last serape - a very pretty one, with a red, green and lavender geometric motif - he put in a bag and told the clerk to have it sent up to Pelletier.

"An anonymous gift," he said.

The clerk winked at him and said he would take care of it.

When Espinoza got to the crafts market she was sitting on a wooden bench reading a pop magazine full of colour photos, with articles on Mexican singers, their weddings, divorces, tours, their gold and platinum albums, their stints in prison, their deaths in poverty. He sat down next to her, on the curb, and wondered whether to greet her with a kiss or not. Across the way was a new stall that sold little clay figurines. From where he was Espinoza could make out some tiny gallows and he smiled sadly. He asked the girl where her brother was, and she said he'd gone to school, like every morning.

A woman with very wrinkled skin, dressed in white as if she were about to get married, stopped to talk to Rebeca, so he picked up the magazine, which the girl had left under the table on a lunch box, and leafed through it until Rebeca's friend was gone. A few times he tried to say something, but he couldn't. Her silence wasn't unpleasant, nor did it imply resentment or sadness. It was transparent, not dense. It took up almost no space. A person could even get used to silence like this, thought Espinoza, and be happy. But he would never get used to it, he knew that too.

When he got tired of sitting he went to a bar and asked for a beer at the counter. Around him there were only men and no one was alone. Espinoza swept the bar with a terrible gaze and immediately he saw that the men were drinking but eating too. He muttered the word fuck and spat on the floor, less than an inch from his own shoes. Then he had another beer and went back to the stall with the half-empty bottle. Rebeca looked at him and smiled. Espinoza sat on the sidewalk next to her and told her he was going home. The girl didn't say anything.

"I'll be coming back to Santa Teresa," he said, "in less than a year, I swear."

"Don't swear," said the girl, smiling in a pleased way.

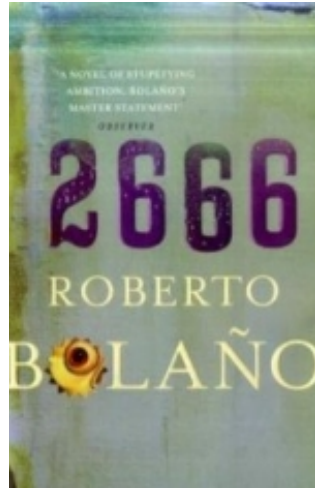
"I'll come back to you," said Espinoza, swallowing the last of his beer. "And maybe we'll get married and you'll come to Madrid with me."

It sounded as if the girl said that would be nice, but Espinoza couldn't hear her.

"What? What?" he asked.

Rebeca was silent.

- [Find 2666 on Amazon](#)



2. What was an ideal summer read that you remember from the past?

One of the best was Carlos Ruiz Zafon's *The Shadow of the Wind* which I read a few summers ago. The book is set in Barcelona around the middle of the last century and has a great sense of place, it's gripping and educational with a fantastic use of suspense. It's a completely absorbing holiday read.



[From *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon, translated by Lucia Graves (Phoenix, New Ed 2005)]

I still remember the day my father took me to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books for the first time. It was the early summer of 1945, and we walked through the streets of a Barcelona trapped beneath



iD-Reloaded, Cirque Éloize, Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury review - attitude, energy and invention

A riotous blend of urban dance music, hip hop and contemporary circus



How to be a Dancer in 72,000 Easy Lessons, Teac Damsa review - a riveting account of a life in dance

Michael Keegan-Dolan's unique hybrid of physical theatre and comic monologue

A Single Man, Linbury Theatre review - an anatomy of melancholy, with breaks in the clouds

Ed Watson and Jonathan Goddard are extraordinary in Jonathan Watkins' dance theatre adaptation of Isherwood's novel

Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby, Rambert, Sadler's Wells review - exciting dancing, if you can see it

Six TV series reduced to 100 minutes' dance time doesn't quite compute

Giselle, National Ballet of Japan review - return of a classic, refreshed and impeccably danced

First visit by Miyako Yoshida's company leaves you wanting more

Quadrophonia, Sadler's Wells review - missed opportunity to give new stage life to a Who classic

The brilliant cast need a tighter score and a stronger narrative

The Midnight Bell, Sadler's Wells review - a first reprise for one of Matthew Bourne's most compelling shows to date

The after-hours lives of the sad and lonely are drawn with compassion, originality and skill

Ballet to Broadway: Wheeldon Works, Royal Ballet review - the impressive range and reach of Christopher Wheeldon's craft

The title says it: as dance-maker, as creative magnet, the man clearly works his socks off

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