

# **I Don't Want to Win a Nobel Prize!**

**By**

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***Freeditorial*** 

Zoilo and I were enjoying a quiet chat. It had been hot all day long, but now, after dinner, we were stretched out luxuriously on the terrace of his attic, looking out over the multitude of city lights.

Our relaxed conversation had turned to the topic of writers. Or more accurately, Zoilo was talking about writers while I listened—or pretended to listen, because it was a long lecture and I was having a hard time concentrating on so many words. But suddenly, one sentence woke up my neuron and put it in a state of alert.

“You writers,” I heard him say, “don’t always manage to express...”

I didn’t hear a thing after that. What came next was all the same to me, because echoing in my brain all I could hear was the phrase: “You writers!” Was he talking about me?

Yes, believe it or not, it would seem that Zoilo had called me a writer. This phrase brought so many doubts into my mind that I looked around to see whether someone else had come in... But no, there was nobody there. He had to be referring to me. Me, a writer? And according to Zoilo?

My first reaction was one of bewilderment, followed quickly by further doubts. Had Zoilo made a mistake? Had I heard him wrong?

There was nothing else for it but to question him on it, even at the risk of knocking myself off the pedestal on which my self-esteem had suddenly placed me.

“When you just said ‘you writers’,” I interrupted him after clearing my throat, “were you by any chance referring to me?”

He looked at me languidly, and without the slightest hint of irony replied:

“Well, of course. You write and publish your work, don’t you?”

“Yes...” I stammered as I tried to qualify the claim: “But they’re just short stories about little events and issues of everyday life. That’s not...”

“Then you’re a writer,” he interjected. “To be called a writer, what you have to do is write and publish your work, which you do. The classification has nothing to do with a book’s size or genre.” And he added: “So obviously you’re a writer.”

“Well, if you put it that way...” I was forced to admit. “I guess...”

“Yes,” he said, again cutting short the sentence I was attempting to put together. “So I was referring to you writers when I said that you don’t always...”

Again I stopped hearing him. I was trying to assimilate and internalize this new facet of myself that had never even occurred to me before: Me, a writer? Me, a writer!!

My mind, as usual, began churning out one thought after another. *If I'm a writer, then I'm an intellectual. If I'm an intellectual, I can start coming up with meaty phrases and seek societal recognition. If I get societal recognition, I'll become famous. If I become famous, I'll get the best tables at restaurants and sign autographs...*

I was forced to slam the brakes on my musings, because I became suddenly aware that they weren't exactly worthy of a brilliant intellectual. *Is the best thing about this new facet of my identity really that I could get good tables at restaurants and sign autographs?* I chided myself. *Don't I already eat in good restaurants? And anyway, what's so great about scribbling on a piece of paper or on some stranger's t-shirt?*

Clearly, my brain had gone off track with this line of thinking. Of course, I had been so surprised by the whole idea that my confusion was understandable. Me, a writer! Who would have thought such a thing only a few minutes ago?

My mind wandered further through the maze of my recently acquired situation, while Zoilo went on talking about something. But I have to admit that once again, I wasn't listening, although I was taking the precaution of nodding now and then to denote agreement, even while my neuron continued its digressions, assuming that this way I was giving the impression that I was hanging on his every word. But very soon my strategy caught me out.

"You really would like that?" I heard him ask me suddenly.

I didn't know how to conceal the fact that I had no idea what he was referring to, as it was clear that I had just given my approval to something that was not, it seemed, altogether agreeable.

"I'm sorry," I said at last. "Perhaps I've misunderstood your question. What did you mean exactly?"

"I asked if you would like, as a writer, to enter literary competitions."

*Ah, that's all it was, I thought. What a relief!*

Once I'd calmed down, I mulled over my answer for a moment, before finally replying thoughtfully:

"It depends."

"On what?"

Apparently, he had no desire to give up his quarry. So I was left with no

alternative but to come up with another answer. At last, I found one.

“I wouldn’t mind entering one of those literary competitions that aren’t decided beforehand.”

“And which ones are those?”

“Well, I don’t know,” I replied cautiously. “There must be some...”

“If a publisher organizes one,” he replied, “before it even begins they will have agreed who is going to win based on their sales forecasts; everyone else who takes part is just there to justify the whole charade. If a literary prize has a political institution behind it, they’ll give it to the entry that falls most in line with the institution’s ideological position.”

“Well, that’s just great,” I retorted, unable to avoid a certain sense of disillusionment.

A short silence ensued, and then suddenly, although I think I intended it as a joke, I blurted out:

“So then, all that leaves me is to hope for a Nobel Prize.”

Zoilo gazed at me steadily for a few seconds, and at first I noticed a hint of a smile break out on his face, followed by a genuine effort to repress open laughter.

To be honest, it annoyed me. I will never be Shakespeare, I admit. But I write things and some people read them. I acknowledge that I’m probably not worthy of a Nobel, but there was certainly no need for my friend to drive the point home by chuckling at me.

“Sorry,” said Zoilo, perceiving my hurt feelings. “I’m not laughing at you. Not at all. I’m laughing because the Nobel is in fact the most manipulated of all the prizes in all the world. In fact, it’s worse than any publisher prizes, and probably worse than the worst political ones.”

I stared at him blankly. What on earth was he talking about? The worldwide prestige of the Nobel is irrefutable. How could Zoilo dare to question it?

“Allow me to disabuse you. You can draw your own conclusions once you hear my explanation.”

I got comfortable in my chair, ready to listen carefully, because this was Zoilo I was dealing with. If it were anyone else who had come out with such an outlandish assertion, I wouldn’t have given them the time of day. But Zoilo went on:

“First of all, it’s worth remembering who Nobel was. He was a Swede who

invented dynamite, an invention that has killed more people than any other weapon made by man, including the nuclear variety. This hardly makes him a candidate for establishing prizes. If anything, he should be consigned to oblivion, and his invention with him.”

I made to say something, but then thought better of it and shut my mouth.

“Secondly,” Zoilo continued, “I doubt you want to win a prize whose previous nominees include Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini. Or to form part of a club of prizewinners that includes, for example, Woodrow Wilson, the US president who got his country into the First World War, General Marshall, who directed the US army during the Second, or Henry Kissinger, America’s oddball Secretary of State under Nixon and Ford. Arafat, the terrorist behind Black September; Rabin and Shimon Peres, presidents of an Israel that crushed one of its neighbors without a second thought; Carter, the poor sap who as US president helped ensure the success of Islamic radicalism with his ignorance; García Márquez, who opened up routes for the distribution and sale of cocaine, in collaboration with the murderous madman Pablo Escobar; Neruda, who wrote odes in praise of a mass murderer like Stalin. A very different case, but just as inexplicable, was the Nobel that was awarded to Obama when he had only just become president; in other words, before he’d even had the chance to do anything at all to earn it. I suppose they gave it to him because of how exotic and progressive the idea of the first black American president was; although, if you think about it, the prize should probably have been awarded to the American citizens, most of whom are white, for electing a man of color.” He paused for a moment, and then added: “The antithesis of this case is the case of Borges, the brilliant Argentine writer who deserved it more than anyone, but who never won it despite being a Nobel literature candidate for thirty years. The Swedish socialists wanted to punish him for giving a lecture in a Chilean university in the days of the dictator Pinochet, but they had no qualms about granting it to writers who chummed up to communist tyrants.”

After such compelling arguments I felt chilled to the bone, and it had nothing to do with the weather because it was a mild evening. As they had come from Zoilo’s mouth, I knew that every one of these claims had to be true.

Yet after hearing them, I couldn’t help but feel slightly befuddled. My ecstasy at having been declared a writer was evaporating quickly.

“In that case,” I felt I had to ask, “why do they have so much prestige?”

“Because of a group of self-interested manipulations, and effective propaganda.”

I was speechless. I really didn't know what to think. Then Zoilo interrupted my reverie of despondency with these words:

“Because we are gregarious animals, we humans are easily manipulated.”

“But why does anyone want to manipulate us?” I asked. “What does the manipulator get out of it?”

“Power.”

This plain and simple answer set my thoughts racing. But Zoilo interrupted again.

“Would you like to hear a few examples of some obvious manipulations?”

I said yes merely by nodding, as I felt barely able to speak.

“Well, listen carefully then. Just by way of example, I'm going to offer you some undeniable cases of manipulation, past and present.”

I settled into my seat and tried to concentrate on his words, because the truth is I like it when Zoilo tells stories.

“There is one very notable case of manipulation going on today. I'm referring to 'global warming', as a product of human activity due to CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. It's totally false. A widespread scam. This gas represents only 0.05 percent of the gases that make up the atmosphere, and volcanoes, forests and the sea emit 95% of the CO<sup>2</sup> in that atmosphere. The contribution of mankind is insignificant, and has no capacity whatsoever to influence the climate.”

“Then why do we all think that we're the ones to blame for climate change or global warming?”

“Because there's a lot of people with their own agendas make us believe it. The first thing worth noting is that the creators of this 'truth' used to call it 'global warming', but when the evidence that the planet wasn't really getting warmer became irrefutable, they replaced it with the more general term 'climate change'. The objective of this massive manipulation is power in the form of financial benefits, because some of its biggest promoters are developing nations looking to get money out of more developed countries. Other groups with an obviously huge interest in promoting this message are the industries developing solar, nuclear and wind power. And it's also being peddled vigorously by automotive manufacturers, who hope to force people all over the world to change their cars in the space of a few years. Actively participating in all this are a multitude of corrupt journalists on the take from the industries and governments interested in disseminating this idea, along with a lot of misinformed dupes. And finally, there are the anti-Establishment groups who see the possibility of destroying Western capitalism with this idea,

by pushing up the price of the power consumed by its factories when they're forced to use renewable energies, which are still very costly and inefficient; and with this hypothetical destruction of the West they see a chance to avenge the collapse of communism." He paused again, and then went on. "As you can see, the promoters of this 'truth' are a bunch of different groups who, for very different reasons, have a common interest in promoting and imposing this fallacy; and in fact, they've just about done it. In any case, we know very well today that the climate is always changing, but that it isn't due to human action."

"Then what makes it change?"

"We don't know for sure, but the latest serious studies appear to link it to sunspots."

A brief silence ensued, allowing me to assimilate everything I'd just heard. But Zoilo was on a roll and he soon continued:

"I'm going to tell you another story of manipulation, in this case to keep from tarnishing the good name of a family, and thus prevent it from losing its public image and power. Did you know that the Kennedy family asked the US government to drop its investigation into the president's assassination?"

"I had no idea," I replied in shock. "Why?"

"Because they didn't want the truth exposed about the Kennedy family's connections to the mafia in Chicago, which had been extremely useful in helping JFK win the presidential election. But when he won, the Kennedys, believing they were untouchable, forgot the promises they'd made to the mob in exchange for the help they'd received, and the mafia took him out."

I thought about this for a moment, and then asked:

"Do a lot of people know about this?"

"Not really, no. The US government and the FBI do. It's all classified as a State secret to protect the prestige of the presidential institution and of the Kennedy family itself. But there are plenty of solid clues that confirm the fact, a fact that has been further supported by thousands of secret documents on the topic that were recently declassified."

I couldn't help but express a thought that nagged at me:

"So how can we know what is true and what isn't? How can we escape the manipulators?"

"It isn't easy," replied Zoilo. "The only way to do it is by applying the basic principle of the Enlightenment. 'Don't accept the truth you are offered; find it for yourself.' But the manipulators are less lazy about creating 'truth'

than most other people are about seeking it. They know that by controlling the education and information of the people through schools and the media, they can direct their thoughts and thus their actions. They know that it is always a minority of people who are curious enough to seek the truth. And that allows them to win nearly every time.”

He paused.

“A good example of this,” he went on, “can be seen in the Spanish region of Catalonia, where for thirty years kids in school have been told a lie about their own history, which has been manipulated in such a way as to make many Catalans believe that they’ve been bullied by the rest of the country. And another tool that has been successfully exploited by the manipulators has been culture, which they’ve turned into a weapon of disunity rather than integration. Consequently, now that these indoctrinated younger generations are reaching voting age, they vote exactly the way the manipulators had planned, so that they can satisfy their ambitions.”

“It’s true,” I had to admit. “But that’s something that is limited to one small region...”

“All right, I’ll give you another example of global manipulation that has been going on for more than seventeen hundred years: Christianity.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

I reacted swiftly and decisively. I could accept that everything else was just as Zoilo claimed; even so, they were such important issues that I’d be looking it all up in Google for confirmation, following the principles of the Enlightenment. But this idea of Christianity and manipulation... Come on! That’s just crazy!

“I’m not questioning Jesus,” he clarified. “Not at all. What I’m trying to say, if you’re capable of setting aside the manipulated part of your brain and opening up to the facts, is that the founder of Christianity wasn’t Jesus, but the Roman Emperor Constantine, three hundred years after Jesus’ death. And he did it for political reasons, turning an empire that had always been secular into a religious State. It was because of that decision that we are a Christian civilization.”

“And why did he do it?”

“Because Roman society, after so many centuries of peace, had become utterly hedonistic. So he thought it would be a good idea for his citizens to follow the example of the hardworking Christians, which people thought of as a Jewish sect barely distinguishable from many others. In fact, it was Constantine who called the first Christian council in history to found the



religion as we know it today, in Nicaea. It was at that council that they put all the different contradictory Christian movements that had emerged by that time into order, and also where they decided that Jesus was the Son of God, and that Mary was a virgin, and where they came up with the idea of the Holy Spirit. All of this was later combined with various rites taken from other religions of the era and subjected to the kind of administrative organization that typified the Roman Empire, and this gave rise to what we know today as Christianity. From that time on, this newly founded church took to inventing the history of its origins, with its martyrs, saints and persecutions, in a quest for legitimacy and prestige, and managed to consolidate immense power over the centuries, much of which it still holds to this day. Actually, it ended up becoming the direct heir to the authority of the Roman Empire when that Empire disappeared politically. In fact, the two were so closely related that, just like the Empire, the Church split into two: the Catholics in the West with their capital in Rome, and the Orthodox in the East where their capital in Byzantium.”

I was speechless. And after a long silence the only thing that occurred to me to say to myself was: “*Holy cow!*”

“The truth is,” muttered Zoilo, with a more serious expression than I had ever seen him wear before, “that most of our convictions and values are derived from lies concocted to manipulate our thoughts, and as a result to control our actions. Let me give you one more example. Think of Simón Bolívar, who is so much in fashion right now with certain South American regimes. If he were alive today he would be charged as a war criminal; instead, in Venezuelan and Colombian schools they still present him as a hero of independence. In reality he was a guy who killed old and sick compatriots by pulling them out of hospitals and smashing their heads in with rocks to save bullets, who killed anyone who surrendered without any kind of trial, and who even offered South America as a gift to England in exchange for its help to defeat Spain, which he had a grudge against because he and his father had been denied the noble titles they thought they were entitled to. A man that subsequent legend has dressed up as a hero of South American independence, when what really happened there was a cruel civil war, because one group of natives who wanted to remain part of the Spanish empire disagreed with another who wanted independence. Peninsular Spain by that time had been invaded by Napoleon and was in no condition to intervene anywhere.”

We stopped for a few minutes to take a breath there on the tranquil terrace, looking out at the lights of the night, each one immersed in his own thoughts. After a little while, Zoilo, I suppose upon noticing my perplexed expression, began speaking again in a gentle voice:

“Manipulation is the instrument that governments use to drag people into

wars by stirring them up with theoretical values like patriotism, glory and heroism. It is what religions use to drive someone to martyrdom by promising them heaven and virgins. And it is what scientists use to convince us of the indisputable reliability of science, or engineers to convince us of the absolute safety of nuclear power. In short, manipulation has been and continues to be the basic tool used to ensure that most of us act against our own interests, for the benefit of a small number of people who are hungry for power.

I have to admit that discovering just how easily we are manipulated was not at all pleasant for me. Sometimes I think I'd rather not know the truth about things if I can't change them. Perhaps it would be better to go on believing in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy...

And suddenly, I don't quite know why, I thought about the relationship of all this to the Nobel Prize. Zoilo once told me that the Greeks had given us philosophy, the Romans had given us law, and the Americans had given us the spectacle. So I guess that the Nobel Prize, coming as it does in the American era, is more of a spectacle than anything else.

Still, after thinking it all over, I had to acknowledge that the whole thing was awfully complicated. This Nobel guy was the one who invented dynamite, which had killed millions of people—this was his glorious contribution to humankind—and yet he saw himself fit to found a peace prize. I guess what he had in mind was the peace of the graveyard; after all, Gandhi, for example, the pacifist par excellence, never won a Nobel.

The intelligent Marx—I mean Groucho, not Karl, who was nothing more than a German crackpot responsible for a lot of disproven socioeconomic theories—once stated that he would never belong to a club that would have him as a member. Based on this principle, I would never want to belong to a club—the Nobel club in this case—that has the members it has, and that was founded by a guy who invented the most efficient way for us to kill each other.

Think about it for a moment and I'm sure you'll agree. It's as if the Boston Strangler had established an award for the "Most Elegantly Made Rope". Or if the Milwaukee Cannibal offered a diploma for the "Sharpest Knife". As if Hitler had established a prize for Jew of the Year, or Stalin for Democrat of the Century. As if Dracula had created the Best Blood Transfusion Award, or Nero the prize for Fire Fighter of the Decade, or Henry VIII for Wife of the Month. Wouldn't any of these prizes be downright crazy? Well, that's exactly why I've decided that I don't want to win a Nobel Prize.

**EM Ariza**

***Free***editorial 