

Sara Franklin: As someone who writes primarily non-fiction, I think a lot about the blurred lines these days between reporting and memoir and what narrative non-fiction is, these sort of boundaries. I'm curious to know if you ever set out write out something akin to a memoir—I know you call it a novel but, is that something you had any intention of doing or any *interest* in doing?

Francisco Goldman: Never any interest in doing. There are some many reasons. I think that, when I finished the book, I had no idea what to call it. I had written the book very consciously of forming something—I was obsessed with the form and shape of the book all the time—and it's up to other people, really, to say what that form and shape means. And yet, I knew that finding the right shape for that book, shaping that book stylistically, structurally, was really somehow the most important part, the most important thing. Because I knew that there was no mystery to me in discovering essentially, fundamentally, what I felt. Love and grief. But how to express it, and the key to that was finding its shape, and that's an intuitive process and a process that took years. Took three years to write the book. And it was never written the way I conceive of a memoir. I never wanted to be imprisoned in any notion of "this has to be factual, this is absolutely the truth". Why would I do that to myself? I wasn't writing on assignment for a newspaper. You know, I've done journalism, I know what that obligation is. And to me memoir means non-fiction, means you don't make anything up. Which means you don't move things around in time, which means you don't create composite characters... probably because I've done so much work in journalism I'm very strict about what I think non-fiction is. And what kind of obligations you take on when you say you're going to write non-fiction. How did this book begin? I'd been after six months of grief, I was in this sort of gassiest, almost primordial "the world has been destroyed" ... my planets had smashed. And I wasn't thinking "what should I call it?". And when I finished, it still had never occurred to me. I really wished I didn't have to call it anything. And I said to my editors, "why do we have to call it anything, why can't we just call it a book, or prose?". And of course, that's exactly why we call it a novel, because, as many other people like myself have said, those are the *roots* of the novel. The novel is essentially formless. This makes it authentically a novel, the fact that it's this crazy mongrel, has no idea what to call itself. There was a great definition of the novel in the David Shields book, talks about how the novel began, talks about what a hybrid mix of fact and fiction it was from the very start. So I never understood in this country why that was, for some people, controversial. To me, it was a basic sense of trust immediately established between the reader and the writer. Just reading the jacket copy, if the reader had any curiosity—and everything nowadays, there's no book that anybody reads that's somehow separated from the context of the information age, you know, so anyone could just type in my name and find out "yes this is all true". And I think the reader—I *think*—intuitively senses, why would I make up Aura? I think you instinctually, almost intuitively, can grasp where you might invent and where you wouldn't. So you know, to put it plainly, to put it kind of prosaically, the made up things aren't about Aura. Honestly, I had to use convention a lot in the book in different ways, when I'm writing about Aura's childhood—one thing the narrator's doing, which is what I was obsessively doing in my own life, is trying to tell her life

story. And what did I have to go on? All I had to go on were fragmentary stories of memories she told me. So I had those, and I had her diaries. So you see the writer trying to piece together what happened. For instance, the story of the day she met her stepfather. And I have this incredible fragment in her diaries where she just wrote, “my mom and this guy just came back and they’re wearing the same clothes they were wearing yesterday!” I mean, she was so sharp and perceptive. She was so, “ahhhh!” And you can just see her at her breakfast table, all worried and agitated about where her mom was. And out of that, I sort of had to make up a real scene. I don’t *know* if they played tag in the garden. I don’t even know if that’s the day she met her stepsister. So I made up a game, I can imagine. And so would somebody be comfortable calling that a memoir? I don’t know, but I’m not.

I think the whole memoir thing is part of the whole commercialization of prose writing. What is the strictness, who are these police who go around trying to catch people in lies, and somehow they’ve fabricated things in a memoir, and they try to disqualify the book. Another reason not to call it a memoir—okay, go ahead and catch me in something! And I guess, I know that my agent and everybody wanted me to call it a memoir because they’re more commercial, they’re more lucrative. I guess they come with the whole “Oprah earnestness” and “Oprah confession”. And I certainly didn’t want this book to be read as a confession. First of all because confession is one of the fictional tropes of the book, it’s one of the things that a lot of games are being played with in the writing of the book. What’s he confessing? He was accused of a crime? But in the end, his only crime really is that he’s himself. In the end, my only crime is that I’m myself. But yet the book is framed, and her crime was that she was herself. And those two things both led us to that wave. And I guess another thing is that (long answer), and this is really important, there’s no way to write that book just in my voice. From the start it always had to be a collaboration between Aura and myself. And when, even now, when I try to write about Aura only in my voice, I hate it because we were a couple, in a pretty profound sense. And I can’t, there’s no way to write about her, write about us without trying to bring her voice alive and imagine, as much as you can, her side of things. She’s not here anymore, and she wasn’t here while I was writing the book. So right away, I don’t understand how you could call that anything but fiction.

S: one of the things—there’s the piecing together of fragments of memory, that I was thinking about the first time I read the book, is it possible, do you think it’s possible, to write non-fiction or truth when you’re deep in grief? Is there even the clarity of mind to do that?

F: That is *such* a good question. I couldn’t agree more. You know it yourself—you’ve been shattered into a million pieces. You’ve been through it, I take it.

S: I read this as my father was dying, which was right on the heels of my mother dying, both in my early 20s. And it was—keep answering!

F: Yeah, you don't know who that "I" is anymore. I profoundly had no idea who that "I" was anymore. In a moment my whole life had been taken away. I'd been turned into this—there was no stable I to write from. And the whole process is so full of delusions and hallucinations and complete disorientation. You know, a lot of really profound disorientation. I guess superficially that would be something like, suddenly you're walking somewhere and you don't know where you are. Really terrifying. And I think that last time that happened to me was only a year ago. I imagine that kind of obviousness- something has happened to your brain, trauma, for example, and I became very fascinated when this was happening, trauma studies—and it's amazing how much we began to understand about the way traumatic grief works on the mind. Beginning in the 70s, when they began to work with Vietnam vets, and they began to see the way it really has actual neurological effects in the wiring of the brain. And that's what causes the hallucinations, the sense of dislocation. And so, it's easy to imagine that those obvious manifestations, the same thing would have been happening in a much more profound, deep levels. It's the trippiest thing I've ever been through.

S: Yeah, it is. Waving between, for me, this very muffled, dulled sense of things and this incredibly lucid high where everything is bright and vivid and overwhelming and your senses are just kind of popping at a level you can't control.

F: And plus a wall breaks down between your conscious and your subconscious.

S: Absolutely.

F: So when he's hallucinating in the scene—which is right out of my life—where I'm out with a girl where I grab that thing and say, "who left out the poison" and it's a carton of grapefruit juice. That really happened! What is that? And what that is is, literally, they have found that somehow, for one thing the sort of brain connections between that part of your brain that dreams, they get kind of scarred and severed. So they literally fire off imagines into the daytime when you're awake. And also, you sleep so badly. So you're sort of dreaming when you're awake. It was crazy! And I also felt incredibly obligated, I was dutiful about it, in the sense that I had to get a record of all of this when it was happening. I wanted just to be in the voice of the book. To show what it was like. And so the shrink was desperately trying to get me on meds, and I just refused. I said I didn't want to artificially lose on any of this, I feel like I have to go through this.

S: You were writing this as you were very much actively grieving your wife. How did that serve you? Or did it?

F: If I was being honest, I think it probably did more harm than good. Because it was really the opposite of letting go. It was immersing myself in the loss and in her life every day. Sort of attaching myself to her even more. Why would I do that? I felt I owed it to her. I knew that she was very very vivid still, honestly, in my daily life. And I knew that in a few years, even, those memories would be less vivid. And she

was, you know a big preoccupation in her own life was writing, something as simple as excavating her childhood, I kind of felt a kind of duty to do it for her. That's maybe crazy widower madness, but, NO! I felt that she has to be remembered! And only I can do it. And in that obsession is part of one of the themes of the book—how do you remember somebody? What does it mean to try to remember them? So at times it felt like a self-immolation, when all I wanted to do was run away and get out of New York and go somewhere I'd never been before and not tell anybody who I was or what I was going through, but I couldn't, I had to stay there and do this for her. And it probably complicated things for me. In some ways, this is my first year of—someone said to me, "Your grief is really going to start when you finish the book. Because that's really when you're going to have to let go." And in some ways, it's been that way. In some ways, that turned out to be true. And I don't regret it at all.

S: One of the things that I find unusual about the book, it seems to me in the kind of press and attention it's received, it sort of holds you and Aura and the reader in that place of grief rather than trying to figure it out circuitously or try to move beyond it or tell it backwards. Do you think that it is a distinctly American or Western instinct to— you were saying the writing of the book didn't allow you to let go, but that instinct not to stay in that place, to have a period of mourning, that sort of blocked off, official recognized period of grieving—it that something we perhaps need to excavate a little bit, or talk about more *because* we don't have a space for it culturally?

F: I don't know. It's been interesting to see this flurry of so called "grief" books. I always insist that my book's not a grief book, it's a love book. And I certainly, one thing I don't do in my book is offer advice or try to make grief manageable. Nobody would ever say to a griever, "read this book and do what he did". It could be, and I found when I was on tour, that there is this therapeutic value that people say, "I'm behaving so strangely," and then they read the book and they realize that people behave this way. I mean, that's what it can offer. But there's no "how to get better" prescriptions. And I think that it's clear that the U.S. is very uncomfortable with death in all forms, especially death when it's close to you. There was a family member of mine that said, "Don't you think it's time to move on?" three weeks after Aura died! You know, even my poor mom who's Guatemalan was like, "She's at peace on the side of the lord." I think this country just doesn't, everything had to get better quickly or there's something wrong with you. And I think that what I've learned is that every single grief is different. They really are, it's a remarkable journey for every person who undergoes it. And not a nice one, not one you'd wish on anybody. And not necessarily one that makes you stronger. They just simply are remarkably intense experiences. And it's true—when Iris Murdoch says, "The bereaved can only speak to the bereaved" in the sense that they've been through something other people don't understand. And I found, for instance, I think that my friends in Mexico has as much to do with saving my life as anybody else. And people don't understand this. They say, "Oh, Mexico's a death culture". I don't know what it was, but simply they were comfortable around me. That's all. We could talk about Aura. I can't put my finger specifically on anything the Mexicans did except to seem

to be always completely comfortable around me when it happened. And in those first weeks, though, it was just remarkable, even the first months, they had like a fire brigade organized to make sure I was never alone. Friends were always calling up and say, "Okay, it's your turn to go out and get drunk with him." Yeah... I had some very good friends here too, especially a couple of women. And they did come for me at the hospital that night after I got hit, and they were incredible. But those—I don't know if it has anything to do with it—but those are hard drinking women (laughs) who will always come and sit at a bar with me. And they both loved Aura. And some of Aura's friends who became very close to me, and still are. I think on the whole... that's another strange thing. In Mexico, most of my friends are men. And we're like the guys you'll see at a rowdy table in a cantina. There's a warmth... and in New York City, my friends are women. How strange is that?

S: I don't find it strange at all actually! Shifting gears a little bit... you know, you were still a writer in all of this. You were crafting a piece of writing. Did the actual act of writing feel different when you were working on this project than it had previously?

F: It was writing under a lot of pressure because I had to get it right. This sounds corny but it's true. It was like, "My love, I owe you the best book I can write". You know, I put a lot of pressure on myself to write the best sentences I've ever written in my life. It was a different kind of sentence. This was not that sort of baroque sentence of all my earlier books. This was a very different style for me which I worked hard at. It's a style that grows out of the forensic, clean style of *The Art of Political Murder* humanized. I was working for a voice that would be very transparent, a voice—although it's my voice—would never occlude or partially fog over Aura. She always had to be the one that came through in vivid technicolor. And that was someone very conscious who crafted that voice. I was constantly honing it back, honing it back, honing it back. I worked very very hard on my sentences. And so it was very consciously written in that sense sentence by sentence. Like I said, to find the right structure was a big challenge, to find the shape that seemed like the right shape, and follow what were essentially three narrative strands that all meet at that wave. And then the other thing I haven't mentioned—I recently came across, I was doing a search for something. And up popped the first email that I wrote in '07 in Berlin announcing that I was working on this book to my agent. And it never changed. I said, "I'm working on a book about Aura. So far, everything is pretty much true except about two thirds of the way through, it's going to turn totally into a novel." From the start, the day I began to write it, it was always this idea of trying to think of it as a collaboration between me and Aura. And I had this wacky idea and I wrote towards that. That, at a certain point, Aura's novel set in that French insane asylum was going to take over, and suddenly you were going to be in Aura's book, and I was going to be in Aura's book. And that is the DNA of the book, right. In that sense, too, no matter how much "true" or "untrue", it was always headed towards this strange thing where suddenly it was going to turn into this other novel. I mean, you know, it ends that way, it's just not the last third of the book, you know? And there's a moment now, a really key moment, as he's going up those stairs, he steps into her novel, and he becomes Marcel, and that's the moment. Before he has to

accept the autonomy of her imagination—how did he know what she was going to do? And she was smarter than me! She was a genius in her own way, who knows what she was going to do!

S: So you published the book in early 2011, and you were working on quite a few other projects at this point—do you feel like you’ve exhausted writing about Aura? Or are there threads you keep coming back to or shards here and there, or they show up in your other work?

F: There hasn’t been much other work (laughs). What happened was there were all these projects that got backed up. Felt like my career was totally interrupted by two books that I never expected to have to write that I wrote—*The Art of Political Murder*—why did I finally turn that into a book? Everyone was tearing their hair out, saying, “why don’t you go choose the least commercial thing you could possibly choose, you know, a book about political murder in Guatemala”. But I felt obligated to do it, I had no choice. Because so much was at stake there, and my friends so needed it, and I was so obsessed with it.

S: Yeah, I mean, it has that same element of sort of monomaniacal obsession.

F: Once I get obsessed with something, forget it. And so I was working on this novel that I set aside first for that, and then I started up again, the one that was going to be set in New Bedford. Aura and I went to New Bedford. So anyway, it’s been a long detour. Now I’m sitting there with like five projects. And I don’t know what I’m going to do next. I’m about to start—I have the feeling that as much as I try to pick up an old project, that compulsion to keep writing about what has happened is going to be too much. I’m just different now. And Aura’s death is something that still feels like it keeps happening every day. And I mean, I’m interested in different aspects. I’m interested in the possibility of reincorporating this into your life and finding a way to be happy again. I’m not saying that’s going to happen, but I’m interested in how that might happen. Because it’s going to be five years in July. So different ways to approach that keep popping into my head, and I think I’m going try try—until I’m clear about what I want to do—I might try to turn back to the New Bedford book, because she loved it, she really thought it was hilarious. And I would really love to do a short book. A hundred and eighty pages. I’ve never done anything like that, I’d be really proud of myself. I do want to do a book on the fifth year, all these sorts of things. A blend of autobiography, a lot of things...especially because I’ve reached this point in my life, there’s a lot of looking back, you know, “How did I get here?” My life has been pretty interesting. And thinking about how, obviously, if I do decide to write a book that goes very inward again, it’ll be even more fictionalized this time. I kind of feel drawn to that. I’m doing non-fiction again. I was just doing a big piece down in Argentina for *The New Yorker*. And it was their idea—a piece I knew nothing about. And I said sure. I had been on book tour, and it was a long book tour—this past summer in July—and it was so fabulous because I went down to Argentina to work on this piece and I had been where I was like this, I had, since April, only been talking about myself. For years I’d been writing about Aura, not a

word about anything else. And all of a sudden I had to write about Argentina, and I was this pesky journalist. And the case that everybody was ashamed of their role in, on all sides, so that nobody wanted to talk. And it was just fabulous to go from being the center of attention to being this utterly scorned reporter—finding ways not to talk to you, or treating with you a total lack of respect. And then sitting down to write this piece—little did I know that *The New Yorker*, with all the best intentions in the world, had assigned me the most complicated story—and once I get into something like that, I can only do it the way it has to be done. And ugh, it just ate up my fall. Finally, in October, I think, I handed in the first draft, it was like 100 pages long.

S: Oh, your editor must've just loved you!

F: And I said, "You know, I can cut this, but this is how it has to be told! This is the story!" And I thought they were just going to tell me to take a walk, and they would've been right. But I guess they like it—they've been working hard. So my editor has to cut it from over 25,000 words to about 12,000. And then, out of the blue, the *Times Magazine* calls me up and asks if I'd like to go to Chile to do a story on the student movement, and that was an amazing thing, what's going on down there. Everybody sees the student movement as a metaphor for what's wrong with society, and what's been wrong with the transition since Pinochet. I think the government's down to 20% approval. And again, whenever you begin to get a puffed up ego as an American writer, go take a journalism assignment. Because then nobody wants to talk to you. There I was chasing 23-year old student leaders around trying to get interviews with them, and having a hard time with it. I was so humiliated.

S: Could you see yourself doing another really long reported...?

F: No. I didn't even expect to do these pieces, I really just want to get back into writing a novel. But I just have these two pieces, really quickly, and a third piece would make a book. And then I just got offered an extraordinary piece down in Guatemala... ugh, I don't know what to do. So I'm one piece away from a book, three awesome stories that capture Latin America *right now*. Printed as a paperback, let it go right inexpensively into students' hands. It's not something I'm going to make a lot of money off of, it just seems like a neat thing to do.

S: Did you begin as a fiction writer?

F: Yeah. Always a fiction writer, the whole journalism thing has been so accidental.

S: Really? It's a hard thing to fall into. There are people clamoring for those pieces!

F: Yes! It's crazy. I think it's because it was a much more wide open time. If you, the nature of the war in Central America, it's amazing. I think when it started, people thought, old established reporters, Central America seemed like such a backwater,

nobody wanted to go there. So it opened up so many possibilities for young freelancers. So, to this day, when you look at the roster of *The New York Times*, some of the other big papers, it's amazing how many people started off as scruffy young freelancers in Central America. If they were good and worked hard, they could make journalism careers for themselves. I don't think that's true of Afghanistan, I think it's hard for someone to just say, "I'm going to Afghanistan" and pick up strings. I don't know, maybe. Maybe it's happening and I'm not aware of it. But it's more dangerous, and it's a long way to go. And in the same time how do you get immersed in the narco war without endangering yourself in a big way?

So anyway, I was out of college, I'd been living in New York a couple of years. And I was deciding I wanted to apply to MFA school, and I saved up enough money to go down to Guatemala—this was '79, '80—and holed up and tried to write my three short stories for my MFA applications. Because I moved to New York right before my senior year, but to get an MFA I was going to have to finish my BA. And I did the stories down there, and I sent them to Iowa and Columbia. But I'd also won a scholarship, because my teacher at U. Michigan recommended me to this bizarrely wonderful conference in Sarasota, Florida, a summer writer's conference, where the teachers were William Gass, Vance Bourjaily—who back then ran Iowa—Joy Williams, and then beside and Russ Taylor was the fiction editor at *Esquire*. And very strange thing happened one day. I was in William Gass's workshop, and I handed in a story in handwriting, and you're not going to believe what it was about—a squad of pee-wee cheerleaders from my Massachusetts hometown—and they liked it so much that they suspended all classes that day and did one massive workshop on me. It was bizarre, so bizarre. Just sat up there on the podium and just said nice things about me. Because of that Russ said submit something to *Esquire* when you're ready. A couple years went by, why would he even remember me? It had been one of those undergrad summers. And so I applied all these places, and I got in, got scholarship offers. And I also sent those stories to *Esquire*. And the fiction reader there—because it came in unsolicited—was this woman who is still a friend now named Marilyn Johnson, but she was then the slush pile reader. She was surprised to get an envelope with stamps from Guatemala. So it made her open it. And so, yeah, they bought a couple of the stories. So I figured, yeah, now I'm a published writer, I don't need to go to MFA school. Maybe that was a big mistake. And then they said, they invited me to write for the magazine. And this was the key turning point, for better or for worse (maybe for worse), I said, "Oh, I'm going to Central America, I'll write about what's going on there." I had been in my uncle's garden writing crazy New York City love stories, meanwhile going, "Oh my god, there's a war going on!" Typical suburban American innocence, understanding nothing. And so that was the beginning of my self-education as a journalist. It was clear to me, I'm an American kid, the American suburbs, with a Guatemalan family, essentially Central America and my country—I didn't see any way out of not writing about it, it was fascinating to me. It was a big subject, too big for me! I understood that the only way to really—I was still in my 20s—I could only imagine doing it on the scale of a Faulkner type of novel. I was constantly studying, and so I went down there and started doing freelance journalism, all the while what eventually came out

as *The Long Night of the White Chickens*. But it took me years! But if I went to Iowa, I would have stayed in my funny surreal New England cheerleaders, New York City love stories, somehow after this weird blend of Cheever and others... it was a big change.

S: I think that's the danger of MFA programs in general. You write in this bubble for a couple of years.

F: I encourage everyone go to. For Aura, going to the MFA program was the greatest gift of her life. I'm not even saying it was right for me, who knows what would have happened. I got into the Provincetown Fine Arts Workshop—I think I was too young for it, I couldn't take advantage for it. Eventually, I would have had to go into my family, I don't know what I would have done. In those early stories I was so confused about ethnic identity that I never would give characters last name, they were all kind of generic people. But then at Michigan, families like mine began to turn up in things that I wrote. Guatemalan, half-sister... this was percolating up anyway.

S: It always does. Comes back and hits you.

S: In an interview for the "Paris Review", you talked of love as leaving yourself and your yearning entirely and trying to enter the other person entirely. In *losing* that, does grief have an especially potent lesson in empathy for your writing? How has your writing style changed since losing Aura? Since writing *Say Her Name*?

F: There was, of course, with Aura, always that yearning, impossible to realize, of somehow knowing what it would be like to be her. In writing *Say Her Name*, I tried to get as close to her as possible. You know, I imagined that somehow, I was getting close to her. I was deep in grief, in crazed pain for much of the time I was writing that book, and writing was just my way of trying to keep her close. Writing about Aura, meditating on her, writing, meditating, dreaming, trying to catalogue and keep every memory as vivid as I could, etc. But that was far from being some equivalent of just automatic writing. I knew I needed a prose style that would help me get to that (however illusory) closeness. I looked at Vermeer, that intimacy, that limpidity in his painting, that brings his subjects seem so palpably close. Creating transparency, intimacy, out of paint. I tried to write a prose that kept myself out of the way as much as possible, except in those parts where I had to write directly about myself. A prose style that was pure gaze, or something like that. I had already begun to learn how to write that way, in certain respects, in *Art of Political Murder*, which for other reasons, in part because it was such a complex case, demanded that I write in a way that strived for clarity and that kept my own noisy self out of the way: a way to write that served the subject.

S: In looking back through some of your writing, grief-- for country, for culture, for loved ones left behind-- has been a major theme. Did you realize you were writing about grief so much before *Say Her Name*? Did those writings in any way prepare you to put words to your grief about Aura?

F: Nope. I knew nothing about grief until I lost Aura. Nothing. I may have thought I did, but I didn't.

S: What was the first piece of writing you ever published?

F: The Boyfriend's Duplicity, in Esquire, when I was, I think, 26. A short story.

S: You still spend a great deal of time in Latin America--- what keeps drawing you back? Why Mexico in particular?

F: I love Mexico City. I've been in love with it for almost 20 years. If I didn't have to earn a living up here, I would live there year round. I've written most of all my books there. Most of my friends are there. Much of my emotional life is lived there. Benedict Anderson wrote, reflecting on the origins of national feeling in New World colonialists I think, that the sense of really belonging to a place is born once you've buried your dead there, and I guess that's how I feel about Mexico City now. It's like something in the air there nourishes me, and I don't mean the pollution. All sorts of quotidian things that make me feel more alive: the freshness of the mornings, the way everyone says good morning, my neighborhood juice stand, the afternoon rains, the girl who works in the bookstore nearby, the suddenly falling velvety purple evenings. I haven't been there in a few months and I really miss it.

S: What themes or forms have emerged recently in Latin American literature? Who are the Latin American writers to watch right now?

F: There are so many interesting writers right now. I am not sure that any one thing, apart from the Spanish language, unites them – other than that, of course, none of them practice the sort of writing with which North Americans have been stereotyping Latin Americans since the sixties. But young Latin Americans stopped writing that way in the 70s. I greatly admire the work of my friends Horacio Castellanos Moya, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Martin Solares, Alvaro Enrigue, Alejandro Zambra, José Manuel Prieto, Mario Bellatín and Yuri Herrera, and also, of course, that of the late Daniel Sada. Valeria Luiselli is dazzling, the best very young writer – she's only 27 or so -- I've read. Also Guadalupe Nettle, Samantha Schweblin, Brenda Lozano and, well, others I could easily name here. Also watch for future books from other young writers such as Gabriela Jauregui and, of course, the first two winners of the Premio Aura Estrada, Susana Iglesias and Majo Ramirez. One thing you'll notice about that list – and I'm not sure what it means – is that as you descend from writers in their 50s and 40s to those in their 30s and 20s, or maybe I should say *ascend* from the 50s to the 20s, women begin to predominate.

S: In Henning Mankell's recent essay in the NYT on storytelling in Africa (Mozambique in particular), he wrote, "I'm old enough to remember when South American literature emerged in popular consciousness and changed forever our view of the human condition and what it means to be human. Now I think it's Africa's turn." Where, if anywhere, do you see truth in that statement? Is Latin

America, 'done'? Is Africa following an easier path because of Latin America, or is their story too different?

F: I don't agree with statements like that. I don't really know what that means, that South Americans changed our idea of being human. Maybe it's a very European way of dividing the world into "literatures" and fixing Rorschach-like political associations to them. Interesting writers and books – many of which deepen our idea of being human in all sorts of particular ways, for sure -- come from everywhere, all the time. Roberto Bolaño and Cesar Aira, to take just two recent Latin American examples, are certainly two of the most important, passionately read writers, internationally, of the last decade, so Latin America hasn't gone anywhere.

(Goldman's bestselling novel, *Say Her Name*, was re-released in paperback by Grove Press in April of 2012)