

# Gabriel's magic realism and beyond... The greatest Colombian of all time

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

GABRIEL García Márquez once said, “A person doesn’t die when he should but when he can.” Had he truly meant it, he would have chosen to die much later.

However, death comes when it comes. Marquez is dead. True, but who will carry the legacy of Marquez’s brand of magic realism in the coming days? With Marquez leaving for eternity there sure will be a vacuum in the world of magical realism writing. But, wait! He also taught us one important lesson about the genre of magical realism and that is: develop your own style and technique based on all that has happened in your life rather than imitate.



The three common elements, found across many of his works are the theme of solitude, setting of a village called ‘Macondo’ and ‘La violencia’ (refers to a brutal civil war between conservatives and liberals that lasted till the 1960s). No wonder these elements helped him to create stories that would eventually chronicle a nation’s life, culture and history. By the time García Márquez and his fellow members of “el boom” in Latin-American fiction came to maturity, the re-emergence of the fantastic heritage in fiction appeared no less revolutionary than the region’s politics. In a number of his works he experimented with a less traditional approach to reality. As a result, an unusual event has been described rather too ordinarily.

In his writings there are the ingredients of pure realism too.

But for which one would you compliment him? Realism or magic realism? Of course we compliment him for his thoughts, patterns and techniques, for his type of magical realism. And the fascinating bit is that Marquez’s magical realism in many places sprang out of bizarre incidents unfolding in ordinary circumstances. Added to that is his deliberate use of folk tales, myth and history to entertain his readers by giving them the feel of realism which seems more of Marquez realism than magical. The most talked about example in this regard (especially among students) is the physical and spiritual ascension to heaven of a character while she is hanging the laundry out to dry in ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude.’

Well, there could be endless hours of debate regarding the characteristics of Marquez’s magic reality writings. But I actually found his quotes to be equally realistic as magical. For instance, regarding marriage in his ‘Love in the Time of Cholera’ he writes: “The problem with marriage is that it ends every night after making love, and it must be rebuilt every morning before breakfast.”

Look through the words and you’ll find clear elements of humour, satire and magical elements in it. In another place of the same book he says, “Wisdom comes to us when it can no longer do any good”. In most cases, wisdom comes at such a time when there is little or no use for it. Probably the funniest among all is about fiction, of which he says, “Fiction was invented the day Jonah arrived home and told his wife that he was three days late because he had been swallowed by a whale”; and the cleverest one is perhaps: “One can be in love with several people at the same time, feel the sorrow with each, and not betray any of them.”

The most important Spanish-language author since Miguel de Cervantes, García Márquez’s powerful impact on the literary world will never be forgotten for another reason: style. If you go through the books then you’re to notice that he is one of those who never stuck to a particular style when it comes to writing. The magic of this is that one way or another he was capable of creating a huge readership.

There is even an important commentary by him that’s worth mentioning: One doesn’t choose the style. You can investigate and try to discover what the best style would be for a theme. But the style is determined by the subject, by the mood of the times. If you try to use something that is not suitable, it just won’t work.

Since they understand how to seduce their readers, maybe that’s why writers like him become masters. Take, for instance, the work, ‘No One Writes to the Colonel’ where the main characters of the novel are not named, adding to the feeling of insignificance in an individual living in Colombia. And the ‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’ is a queer combination of journalism, realism and a detective story.

In the end Marquez may be remembered for his rare talent in and contribution to the literature world but that too is very eerily similar to a saying of his on death: “Nothing resembles a person as much as the way he dies.”

Well, García died in fame.

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JUNAIDUL HAQUE

THE above words were used by the President of Colombia to describe Gabo, one of the world’s most popular writers. He died on April 17, 2014 in Mexico City. Born on March 06, 1927 he was eighty seven. President Barack Obama said, ‘The world has lost one of its great visionary writers.’ The French President called him ‘a literary giant’ who was ‘one of the most influential South American intellectuals of our time.’ Salman Rushdie wrote after his death, ‘He was the greatest of us all’. Gabo’s death received ‘extraordinary worldwide attention’ and readers everywhere ‘felt genuine sorrow at his passing’.

Who is Gabo, by the way? The world’s most loved writer was formally called Gabriel García Marquez. His greatest work, ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’, has sold thirty million copies since its publication in 1967. He received the Nobel Prize in 1982. Known as the best exponent of magic realism, he was the world’s most influential writer of fiction. His influence the world over can be compared to the influence of Charles Baudelaire and T.S. Eliot as poets before him. ‘Should be required reading for the entire human race’, wrote The New York Times on his best book. The Sunday Telegraph called him ‘An exquisite writer, wise, compassionate and extremely funny.’ Critics found ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’ the most magical book and claimed that he has influenced the world.

The Caribbean cricketers were the world’s best from 1960 to 1990. No wonder the twentieth century’s most influential writer was born in Aracataca, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. If the Russians have dominated world fiction before, the twentieth century belonged to Latin America. Several powerful world class writers practised magic realism and some of them were awarded the Nobel Prize. Magic realism is a literary style which uses magical elements and events in otherwise ordinary and realistic situations.

As a small child Marquez lived with his maternal grandparents near a banana finca called Macondo. He studied law, first at the National University of Colombia in Bogota, where he wrote his first story, and then in Cartagena, where he also worked for a newspaper. In 1950 he moved to Barranquilla, where his new circle of friends exposed him to world literature. He admired Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. He gave up his law studies and wrote ‘Leaf Storm’, but Losada, the publishing house, advised him to go for ‘another line of work’. For the next few years he worked for a few newspapers and a press agency in Latin America, Europe (Rome, Paris and Barcelona) and New York City. ‘No One Writes to the Colonel’ was written during this period. In 1961 he went to Mexico to work on film scripts, one of which was written with Carlos Fuentes. The idea for his great novel ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’ came to him on a car trip from Mexico City to Acapulco in 1965. He shut himself up for eighteen months and wrote it. His wife managed her family with borrowed money. After its publication in

1967 from Buenos Aires, it became an instant bestseller and won literary prizes the world over. Thus he created his fictional world of Macondo with interesting characters and ‘magical reality’. Some of his works are set in this fictional village inspired by his birthplace Aracataca. Most of them explore the theme of solitude. Even his Nobel Prize speech was titled ‘The Solitude of Latin America’. Life here is as dramatic and as full of variety as the history of Colombia and Latin America. Characters here survive civil wars, banana barons and natural calamities. Personal, family and historic: all events are made eternal by Marquez in his more than a dozen books of fiction, the names of which are famous in countries from Argentina to Japan and from Canada to Australia.



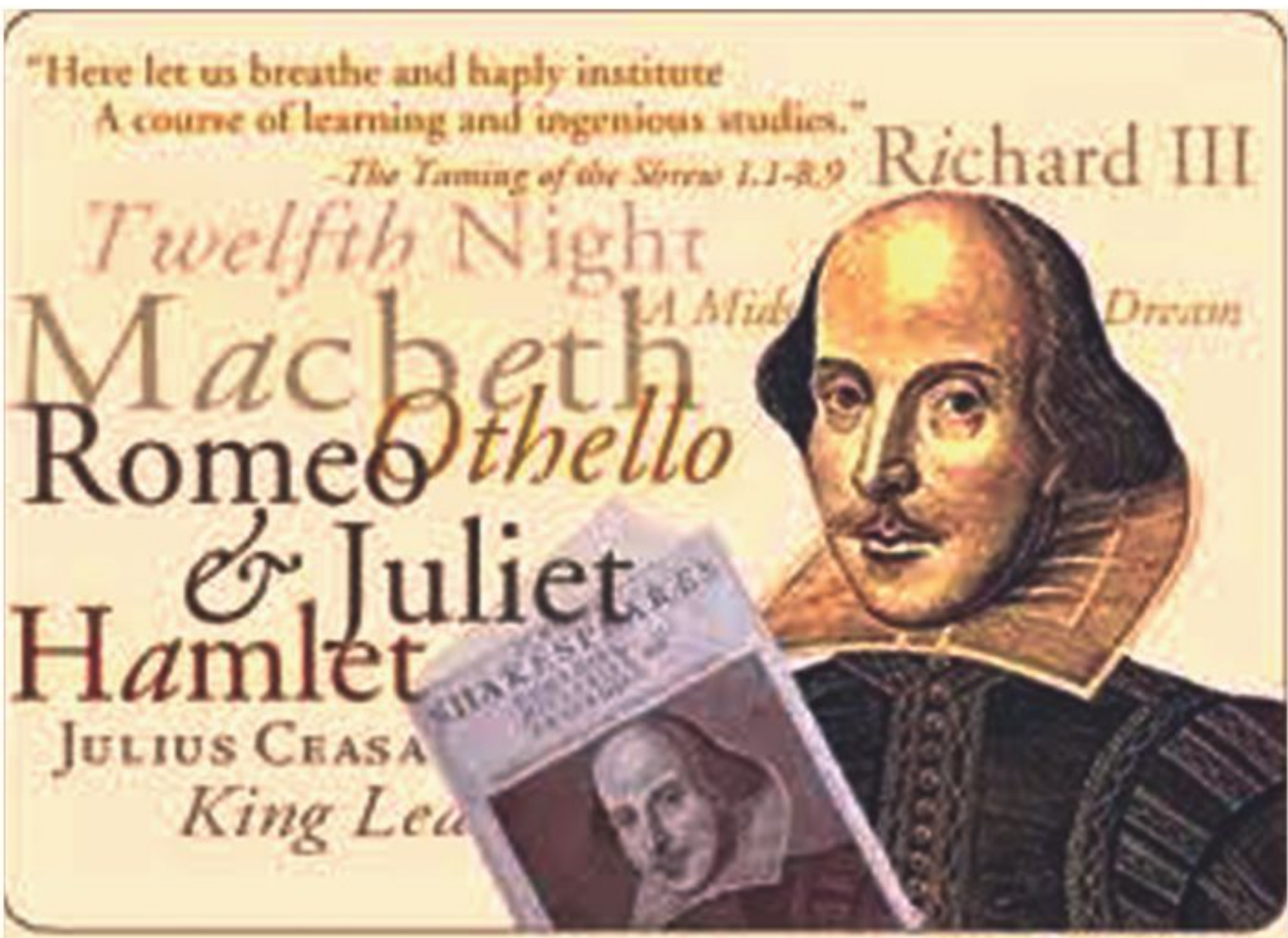
His grandfather’s stories shaped García Marquez’s political and ideological views. His literary technique was influenced by the Colonel too. His writing career ‘initially took shape in conscious opposition to the Colombian literary status quo.’ Marquez’s anti-imperialist and socialist views are in ‘direct opposition to the global status quo dominated by the United States’. His grandmother played an equally important role in his upbringing. He was inspired by her story-telling, ‘treating the extraordinary as something perfectly natural.’ Her deadpan style influenced her grandson’s best novel some thirty years later.

García Marquez befriended Fidel Castro and found him a very cultured and learned man. They met on several occasions and talked literature passionately, President Bill Clinton also admired him personally, declared ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’ as his favourite novel and talked literature with him for hours together.

Gabriel García Marquez will be remembered for hundreds of years in the future. Classics like ‘The Autumn of The Patriarch’ (1975), ‘Innocent Erendira and Other Stories’ (1972), ‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’ (1981), ‘Love in the Time of Cholera’ (1985), ‘The General in His Labyrinth’ (1989), ‘Of Love and Other Demons’ (1994), along with the books mentioned above, will ensure that. Jhumpa Lahiri informs her readers that she has read his ‘Collected Stories’ so many times that her copy no longer has a cover.

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## Shakespeare . . . and the eye of God



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

(Four and a half centuries ago, on 23 April 1564, it is said that William Shakespeare opened his eyes to life. He was baptized three days later. In the fifty two years that spanned his life, he left English literature transformed and the world's imagination soaring into aesthetic space never before imagined. He died on 23 April 1616).

THERE are reasons why you cannot ignore William Shakespeare. In a larger dimension, you cannot stay away from literature, the pursuit of it. For literature speaks of life, more pertinently of what life ought to be or could be. In Shakespeare, you come by all these images, perspectives if you will, which speak of existence. He delves into the soul in all its manifestations. Think here of arrogance, that common human frailty.

*Danger knows full well that Caesar is more dangerous than he / We are two lions litter'd in one day / And I the elder and more terrible.*

There is that timeless, unmistakable hint of politics here. The malady Caesar suffers from is an affliction which has regularly destroyed the lives of authoritarian, self-obsessed men. Recall more from *Julius Caesar*. The most powerful man in Rome reminds the one who had earlier warned him of the Ides of March. The Ides of March are come, says Caesar, with a grin. Ay, Caesar, says the other, but not gone. Minutes later, Caesar is a bloodied corpse.

Shakespeare’s universality springs from this deep-rooted ability in him to present individuals in all their corporeal and intellectual manifestations. That good, thinking men are often incapable of decisive action or

eventually act when the effort is doomed to failure comes through in the Prince of Denmark. In Hamlet lurks a philosopher, a fastidious lover. Forty thousand brothers, he screams at Laertes, cannot equal his love for Ophelia. And yet that morbidity of a thought --- ‘To be, or not to be . . .’ --- pushes him toward an ugly end. And when he goes down, he carries a whole body of people with him. In Hamlet, therefore, you come by the image of the perennial scholar rendered immobile through inordinately long moments of rumination. He fears the consequences of his probable acts and stays

his hand. Those consequences happen anyway.

There is something of the impartial about Shakespeare, the dispassionate in him if you will. He tells us what men have long known, before and after him. *The evil that men do lives after them/the good is oft interred with their bones . . .* That is Antony. In Shakespeare’s deft use of language, this mundane truth takes on the form of a philosophical statement. And you stumble into similar philosophical peregrinations even in Shylock, much though you may dislike the nerves in the man who badly needs his pound of flesh:

*Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a few hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions . . . If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? . . . The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction.*

The evil in the man peeps through that well-formulated statement. Shylock is the symbol of a man under siege, at least in his view. And besieged men are prone to explosive behaviour, even incendiary acts. That said, how do you assess the plain villainy in Lady Macbeth, in whom not a drop of the milk of human kindness can be spotted? Macbeth succeeds Duncan on the throne; and yet somewhere concealed behind the crown he wears is the disturbing figure of a henpecked husband. Power, then, becomes a matter of opinion. If Lady Macbeth rides her husband, in that all-encompassing sense of the meaning, the fiery-and-gradually-submissive Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* is in the end a considerably shrunken woman. Petruchio will have none of the nonsense she hurls at him. Note:

*Petruchio: Come, come, you wasp: I’faith, you are too angry.*

*Katherine: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.*

*Petruchio: My remedy is then, to pluck it out.*

Unhappy, ambitious individuals people the world of

Shakespeare. And men initially happy at the rise of their siblings to the summit are soon made grumpy by an excess of hate and a plenitude of expectations. You find some of that in *Richard the Third*. Richard, not yet king, seemingly celebrates the emergence of his brother as monarch thus:

*Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer by this son of York / And all the clouds that low’r’d upon our house/In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.*

The hunchbacked Richard will soon emerge, in all his depth of vanity and villainy, to wreak havoc on the world around him. Consider, through the prism of history, the march of such hunchbacks, figuratively speaking, to the heights of glory at the expense of the good and the pious. They destroyed a world.

Shakespeare is all about life, about the nature of men and women. He makes us laugh, even in the midst of deepening gloom. Think here of Puck, of Nick Bottom, of Caliban. The folly into which Lear lands himself once he surrenders the pomp of royalty to Goneril and Regan swiftly pushes him down a spiral staircase of gathering insignificance. And yet the proud king, not in the best of moods, dismisses his Fool as a plain, silly being. The Fool comes back with a vengeance:

*...now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing.*

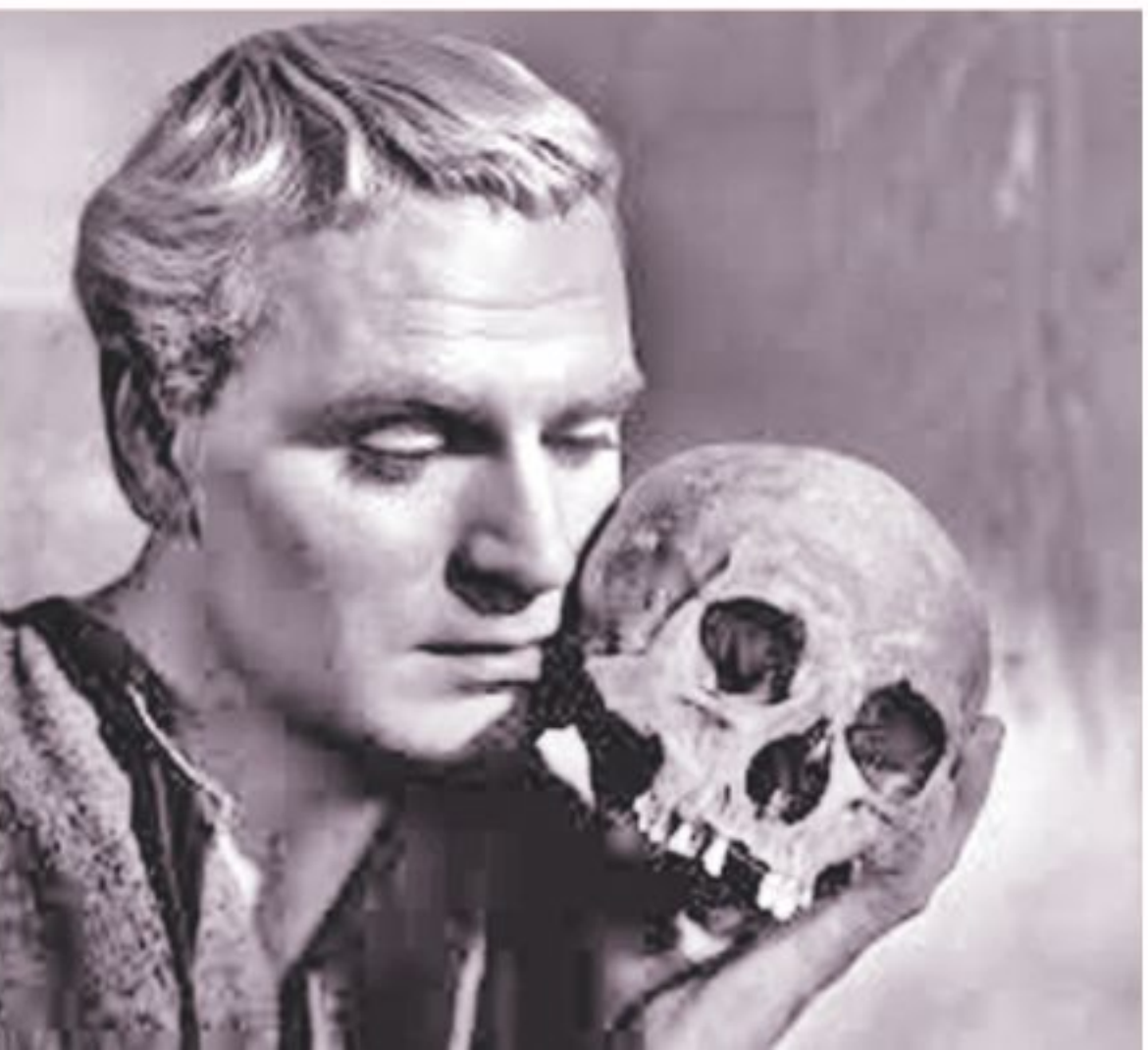
Yes, you laugh at the wit in the Fool. And yet there is pathos which comes with that laughter, for Lear has fallen to the depths. Remember his tears, the howl that appears to rend the heavens asunder as he cradles a dead Cordelia in his arms?

*Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life/And thou no breath at all?*

Lear’s tears become yours. Somewhere in you a father, a foolish one to be precise, rises. And you understand those bootless cries flung at the heavens.

Shakespeare, then, is part of you --- beyond frontiers, beyond cultures, beyond circumscribed time. Ben Jonson puts it aptly: ‘He was not of an age, but for all time.’ And Laurence Olivier was not far behind: ‘Shakespeare --- the nearest thing in incarnation to the eye of God.’

SYED BADRUL AHSAN IS WITH THE DAILY STAR



### POETRY

## In the depth of your love

NAHID KHAN	All you have is each other to hold Deep down you know she is there, She hasn't gone away, not far away. For others it might fade away Only you two can identify The one star in a million in the sky. That is as bright as a star can be Will shine away to illumine your way You will find the lost one In the depth of your love. Streams let go the beloved To embrace the ocean, May you let go of your love To make it eternal, and Always find the loved one In the depth of your love.
She is still there for you, It is hard to bear She is there so much. No one can share Or look after your offspring When you need a break Or space a bit quieter. That way she is only yours and just yours No one can touch her, nor can hurt She is as safe as with you and only you As if protected by guardian angels. Your pain is not understood No one knows, no one ever could One of those things, just belongs to you. Feel that love within you as you would	

## Lost Fairy

MD. RAKIBUL ISLAM	sitting beside me. Her body was like the ocean foam, eyes were crystal clear, face was like glittering diamond. She looked like a new born babe, killing me with her enchanting gaze. I asked her, "I am a wanton boy, will you come with me?" She said, "I am a lost fairy, I am here for a moment , how can I go with you?" I cried saying, "please stay" She replied, "I am beyond your reach".
I was walking on a lone and dark path knew not exactly the destination. Piercing darkness brooding over me like an all devouring monster. It seemed like an eternal journey! I was tired of walking, with no one to accompany.	She ascended waving her hands in the seventh sky, leaving me in lone and dark world, in intolerable torment, with the thought that some passions can never be fulfilled.
Suddenly, I saw a beacon of light coming from the western sky, looming large as it came nearer. Eyes got dazzled by the flash of light, senses became numb by the resonance. I was like a dumb statue and got faint..	
Returning in consciousness, I saw a white robed girl	