

MUSINGS

Gabos Solitude

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

Love for stories, rather fairy tales, is a common thread. The stories of childhood travel by flights of fancy. As we grow up through, they appear to be feats of surreal fancy. The expanse of the imagination is indeed boundless. A dose of miracles heightens interest in history. Stories of miracles are transmitted from generation to generation. Gabriela Garcia Marquez ("Gabos" to his fellow Colombians) learned many such miraculous stories from his grandmother who lived in Aracataca — a northern coastal town of Colombia. Obviously, the expanse of imagining an inventor's dream was phenomenal. Later, he relived them in the solitude of exile in Mexico.

Thus it was that *Cien Anos de Soledad*, (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) in English) was born in 1967. Gabriel Garcia Marquez endowed it with a rural canvas, history, folk culture, politics, war and natural calamities, spreading over one hundred years and involving six generations. It is now regarded as the greatest Spanish literary work after Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615).

The journey involving hundred years in Marquez's novel begins in Macondo — a town founded by the patriarch Jose Arcadio Buendia and his band of twelve pioneers. They took the challenge of crossing a mountain, believing that it will lead them to the sea. Instead, they reached a river of clear water running over stones. It was then that the fictional Macondo was founded. Marquez's experience of time spent with his grandparents at Aracataca obviously proved to be handy here. The patriarch Jose Arcadio Buendia is a robust and massively built man with an unbribeable imagination that went beyond nature

and defied magic and miracle. He believed, and believed in, and an irresistible conviction, and stubborn tenacity. His imagination was sparked when he came in touch with a family of gypsies that visited his village every year in March.

He bought a magnet, then two magnetic notes, a telescope and then a magnifying glass. Melquiades, an old gypsy with spongy gums, flaccid cheeks and withered lips, came to his rescue when the whole village buzzed with the story of how Buendia had gone crazy. He gave him a gift of the laboratory of an alchemist along with few Portuguese maps and instruments of navigation. These would have a profound effect on the whole village.

Marquez's Buendia is indeed a mythical figure. Buendia did not confine himself to the laboratory though; rather, he became a voyager cruising through solitude and absorbed in the wonders of the world. His wife Ursula Iguaran was a small woman, but in a way like him, active and possessing strong nerves. She was everywhere, morning to night, moving around to the rustle of her starched petticoat. But she too had solitude as a companion and did not allow anything to ruffle her. Ursula lived a long life outliving her husband. Later, she would play a profound role in the lives of the next generations.

Marquez has sketched their younger son Col. Aureliano Buendia subtly too. In fact, he is the hero of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. He is a leftist ideologue, a warrior as well as a peacemaker, a man who shapes out to be a romantic revolutionary. Of course, the influence of leftist ideology on Marquez himself brought Aureliano into being. One may find Che Guevara in him too if

one wants to. However, Aureliano has a languorous air about him, and as Marquez puts it, clairvoyance as well.

There is certainly a romantic aura about Aureliano. He writes poetry, plays domino with Don Apolinar Moscote the city magistrate, and loves having his early morning coffee without sugar in the kitchen. All his life he would relax in solitude. His marital choice is uncanny — out of the six beautiful daughters of Don Moscote, Aureliano falls in love with the youngest one, Remedios, although she was still wetting her bed and set to reach puberty at that point. Nevertheless, she was a beauty about to bloom!

And she does come of age and Remedios and Aureliano are married one March day. Soon she plunges into household chores such as taking care of Senor Buendia. They aroused so much affection in both the families that when Remedios announced that she was going to have a baby it seemed that heaven itself was waiting for Remedios. One night though she woke up soaked in her bed and that exploded in her insides. She died within three days. The tragedy endears itself to readers though. Aureliano Buendia will be liked more for his love of Remedios and her tragic death.

In the end Garcia Marquez did not make Col. Aureliano a complete revolutionary hero. Indeed, we see the Colonolet opting for the Treaty of Neerandamia with the conservative government. For that he was awarded the Order of Merit but he refused it. The character of Col. Aureliano loses much of his sheen too because he had organized thirty-two armed uprisings but had lost them all. The halo of a hero, nevertheless, remains since he survived fourteen attempts

on his life, seventy-three ambushes, and a firing squad! The influence of the mixed race typical of Latino society is there in Aureliano. Prudigiously, he fathers seventeen male children by seventeen different women!

Marquez's Macondo develops in the course of the novel from a sleepy backwater town to become a prosperous plantation town rife with business developers, that is to say, 'gringos' from America. Electricity soon arrives, a railway network is laid, cinema houses start offering entertainment to the masses. But Marquez being left-leaning, he makes sure that labor unrest follows. Soldiers move in and three thousand workers are killed! Prior to these events, torrential rain overwhelms the town by creating a deluge. As if in a doomsday scenario, it rains for days... for months. It is all so apocalyptic! The Buendia house announces that there is a pool of standing water in the courtyard—termites, mustiness, scorpions and armies of red ants crawling everywhere. The door hinges, windows, floors, the ceiling and the bathtub all crack! The few who were in the building after the demise of the matriarch and the old spinster of the family, wait for the end.

But the rain stops and the sun came out. The end is surrealistic. The last illegitimate offspring of the family, another Aureliano fathers a male child, but too with a lady, and in keeping with the author's liberal philosophy, someone rejecting religion and relationships sanctioned by it!

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POETRY

ROCHELLE POTKAR

We hide our wet lace behind a trellis of plants, our voices honeyed from jaded soap operas. Our requiems are parties inside our heads, earphone to earphone. Tolerance in the diorama of this rented place. No door of solace or shame left open.

They will keep boyfriends. And. They will come with trouble. And. They will eat meat. And.

But sometimes we translate into vixens: late night-girls with eye masks, returning on the stairs — *shush!* the landlord is insomniac to silletoes and side slits of little black dresses, books, menstrual cups, and spandex.

Who will take responsibility for them? And.

Emerald nights pass into aged mornings, the sapphire of our head scarves and prayer mats from insular to secular near our 2 by 2 boxes. We curl each night against thoughts of saffron eyes, bloodshot.

If the nights fall over our skin, our bodies become bottles of wine, with a crack against it. Dripping... dripping... *They will get raped. And.*

Wooden cages with wooden birds flapping to horizons, we scrape air like parchment, peeling secrets from walls of adopted jailhouses. *They will grow wings. And.*

Serpentine winds belching histories of women who left when they heard the brick squeaking. *Shush! And not again! And please behave yourselves.*

But we play safe in dog-chewed chappals, our cycle tyres gripping the road's ruggedness as alleyways sugar-lip the broken sky of old whispering neighbors.

All this for only one proper peg to place the key of our russet city-freedom. *They will wear short skirts. And.*

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RADA LOOMS

SHAHID ALAM

Bret and I were marching resolutely towards our Hilly Hall, waiting for us only a couple of hundred meters or so away, though still out of sight. But that could be because both of us were in animated conversation. We had just got acquainted though and didn't know a single word of what was probably going to be a whole bunch of strangers in a huge and quite unfamiliar city. I had been to London before on a couple of brief stopovers on my to Boston, USA, but my hours there that were spent on the bus and the train, which were always present to while away one time and getting to know a place superficially, but not enough to know its warts and all, which could be far more interesting and satisfying than a quick tour.

Remember Bret? I had introduced him in my last piece, both of us having been members of the Boston-based theater group Harrison Project, who had found ourselves starting at each other across the street, where we were enrolled in the Summer School 1996 program—our Hilly Hall! RADA was located on Gower Street, but, before you stepped on to its black asphalt, you had to traverse the short distance of Chienies Street. Actually, unless you were taking a leisurely stroll down Chienies and taking in the surroundings, you might well have missed the concrete-and-glass premise of RADA, which houses the John Gielgud room. Gielgud, like many great actors, actresses, technical personnel, and directors, was a RADA alum, though now long dead; he is regarded by many theater literati as one of the all-time greats in acting Shakespeare, just about equal in stature to the incomparable Laurence Olivier.

RADA has not only contributed immensely to British culture, but through its alumni manifold works, in a variety of performing arts, and to each other. Gielgud, like many others that I, almost immediately following World War I, and even more aggressively and pervasively, with the end of World War II, American (or Hollywood) films, where British directors, actors, actresses, and technicians, including RADA alums, have had significant

input, being in the vanguard of spreading American culture, everlastingly throughout the world. It is not really much of a surprise that George Bernard Shaw bequeathed much of his literary works to that venerable institution. Indeed, RADA's basement houses the George Bernard Shaw theatre, used both for actor training and staged performances. And Bret and I were heading towards the original building of the Academy!

We didn't have to wait long before stopping, and looking to our right across the street. The Academy was staring right back at us. Or, rather, the two sculpted figures, looking grimy after decades of being out in the open, come rain, sun, or snow, perched solidly on two ledges at the entrance door of the venerable building and flanking the engraved

alumn, Richard Attenborough, more known for directing the Oscar Award-winning film *Gandhi* than for his numerous screen acting roles, was holding the position of Chair. RADA was founded by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1904 and, since then, it has provided comprehensive training to successive groups of actors and stage technicians. Among its notable alumni is the director Mike Leigh, whose film *Secrets and Lies*, won the Palme d'Or at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival. And just how many celebrated actors! A small and sampling: Glenda Jackson, Albert Finney, Anthony Hopkins, Julie Christie, Maggie Smith, Alan Bates, Peter O'Toole, Jonathan Pryce, Tom Courtenay, John Hunt, Kenneth Branagh, Ralph Fiennes, Susanah York, Charles Laughton (an idol of the English actor Sir Daniel Day

of its numerous heritage sites (and RADA is emphatically one of them), one can safely assume that any renovation would have been carried out around its core/central edifice. The two-year students are prepared for the professional world while they are undergoing training. Selected students and stage technician trainees work in productions directed by one of the RADA instructors, or invited directors. They are mostly staging in Vanbrugh over a period of several evenings. Spectators pay for watching the performances. They are usually top notch productions, and I had the great pleasure of watching one, *Ghost Train* (I had to pay for the ticket, although at a reduced rate, on account of having been a student). The Academy trains students in acting. And, yes, it lays a special emphasis on teaching Shakespearean acting. Each year it offers short-duration intensive courses that are devoted to performing in the Bard's plays. After all, he is universally admired, and the Japanese have an impressive theme park that is devoted exclusively to him. And each year they send a group of actors to train at RADA in short-duration workshops. Many do not understand English and rely on the course interpreter, but they eagerly take in the instructions in "classical" acting so that they can go back to their country to perform in the Bard's plays in Japanese translation. The Englishman's works have a particular appeal in that country of high culture, and Akira Kurosawa presented a first on celluloid in his own manner, the first as far back as in 1957, when he adapted *Macbeth* to create the outstanding *Throne of Blood*, and then in 1985, when he adapted *King Lear* to make *Ran*.

Bret and I were about to be introduced to the world of acting in a few weeks by his instructors. After having gone through the admission preliminaries in the crowded lobby we were directed to an appointed room. We entered, and were greeted by what appeared to be an ocean of faces. There were many of us there, men and women, crowding and sitting on the floor of a cavernous room. We were among the very last of the Summer 1996 session to have come in.

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stone announcing "ROYAL ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ART," stared down at us. Losing no time, and in a hurry in our eagerness, we crossed the street rapidly and walked through the open studded wooden entrance door of that hallowed institution. The first thing that struck me as I entered the vestibule was the very high ceiling I was under, and the massive oil paintings that adorned the walls. I can't recall now who the subjects of the portraits, but I think I can safely say that they represented luminaries of the artistic fraternity. Oil portraits of celebrated actors adorned the walls of several rooms inside the building. Gielgud had once been the RADA Council chair. When I was admitted to the Summer program, another

Lewis, winner of the maximum number of Oscars for best actor in a leading role—(three to date!) among others. The main theatre of the Academy, the Vanbrugh, which stages plays for a good part of each year, is usually and more conveniently reached from Malet Street, parallel to Gower; but is also accessible from within the new building. All the theatres are fully equipped and provide familiarity with the proscenium, open stage, and in-the-round productions. Obviously, with the twenty-plus years passage of time since I was there, RADA and its structural configurations might well have undergone changes, but, given the British peoples' admirable penchant for the preservation and exhibition



Metamorphosis

ARYAN SHAFAT

Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. A wandering shadow encompasses the metropolis. The full moon, at its apogee, slowly being tilted towards the horizon; the end. Cloaked by the ever-reaching darkness of night's grasp, the metropolis and its gaudy skyscrapers descend into an oceanic abyss: slumber. No rustle in the trees or flapping in the air; slumber's booming echoes spread throughout the city. Silence rules the metropolis, roaming through alleys, pervading the roofs and branches of trees, staining the transparent lakes. The deafening darkness blinding silence lingers.

Life was paused, at the unceasing abrasion between a torrent and slumber. Caused a thunderous roar, smashing the fragile glass of darkness, from above the clouds; the celestial beings wanted to play. Light's locomotive slowly rolled along, as darkness was swept out of the tiniest crevices of the metropolis.

Colours slowly tugged at each other as the translucent, ethereal dome turned into light-pink cotton candy, bringing forth a chilly rain, from afar, beyond time and its toys, an air from within our walls, a crisp air, bearing the fragrance of freshly harvested meadows. Colours tug at each other again, as the dome turns green and signals the cessation of silence's reign. familiar, eternal and golden rays return, again, to great glacial rivers, eternal encrusted trees and gaudy skyscrapers with euphoric warmth.

Toys are discarded, when the fiery celestial body, following the thunderous roar, scurries out of the horizon and levitates in mid-air, to watch and bestow the marble with divine showers of light. The gaudy automobiles have awakened, and ply the once-slumber and darkness-riddled roads, like ants on an ant-trail. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick.

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