

Toni Morrison and Trump

Deafening silence follows death of giant



THE passing away of Toni Morrison shook up America, well as it should. Prolific, ferociously erudite and astonishingly widely read, it is fair to say that for many years she was the unofficial but undisputed queen of American letters. Her long, distinguished and productive career is strewn with pretty much every major award—the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Critics’ Circle Award, a presidential recognition (conferred by the previous occupant of the White House, obviously). As America continues to strive for greater racial fairness, most will concede that it is still a work in progress. But the passing of Toni Morrison is one of those moments when we can take some solace. The massive outpouring of grief and unreserved affection and respect accorded to this literary colossus transcended racial boundaries and made me hopeful about the essential inclusive humanity that animates most decent Americans. God knows it’s not easy to be hopeful in these troubled times. There was one glaring exception. That would be our tweeter-in-chief, the current resident in the White House, who loves to greet the crack of dawn with meanspirited 140-character spurts of pure venom in reaction to the latest perceived slight. President Donald J Trump was conspicuously, if unsurprisingly, silent.

Somehow the passing of arguably one of America’s greatest living writers was not worthy of his attention. There are two issues here: one broad, another more personal. The broader socio-cultural question is whether the demise of literary icons has lost some of its profound significance of yesteryear. The entire nation was in mourning when Charles Dickens died in 1870, and he was buried with demonstration of grief and homage did not follow Morrison’s death, her death was nonetheless extensively and reverently reported in the press. On a personal level, my strong hunch is even if his aides suggested a few words of condolence, Trump would have refused to have any truck with it. Toni Morrison had done something unforgivable in Trump’s eyes—she had been critical of him. It also may not be



Author Toni Morrison. national honours (albeit against his wishes) in Westminster Abbey. An estimated two million people joined the funeral procession in Paris after Victor Hugo passed away in 1885, and his remains were subsequently interred in the crypts of the Arc de Triomphe. While such massive public

entirely coincidental that she happened to be African American—a community the president has shown repeated signs of not being particularly fond of, to put it mildly. Now, there are instances of past Trump critics who have been rehabilitated—his former aide Steven Bannon and US Senator Ted Cruz come

to mind. But to get back into Trump’s good books you have to grovel, an option, alas, no longer available to Morrison. What a contrast with President George W Bush. Now Bush would hardly be confused with Santa Claus, particularly given his odious and illegal war with Iraq on false pretences. But he had his moments of humanity, and one of the noblest was when he conduced the death of the bitingly witty humourist and columnist Molly Ivins, who had mercilessly taunted him in her columns. She called him “Shrub”, arguing he wasn’t smart enough to be called “Bush”. It surely wasn’t much fun being the butt of Ivins’ jokes, but when she died, he had the enormous grace to put rancour aside. “I respected her convictions, her passionate belief in the power of words. She fought her illness with that same passion. Her quick wit and commitment will be missed,” Bush said in a statement. How times have changed. Trump’s silence brought back memories of the days following the death of Shamsur Rahman, the unofficial poet laureate of Bangladesh. The BNP was in power at that time, and erstwhile Prime Minister Khaleda Zia did not exactly cover herself with glory. She had followed Trump’s route. But Bangladeshis responded with a massive outpouring of grief—the number of people who turned up was possibly one of the greatest in living memory. What Trump and Khaleda fail to realise is that they are in no position to disrespect literary titans. Their conduct reminds me of a story of a visitor to a distinguished art museum which had a rare collection of past masters. He perused the art and shrugged. A curious guard asked him about his experience. He said he wasn’t terribly impressed with what he saw. In his view, the art didn’t amount to much. “Ah, sir, that’s where you are mistaken,” the custodian said. “I think you have got it backwards. Those works of art have stood the test of time and are universally recognised as great art. You don’t get to judge them. They judge you. It is you whose ability to appreciate art is judged depending on how you react.” Trump and Khaleda, too, are hardly in a position to assail the stature of Morrison and Rahman. Their conduct, however, speaks volumes about them. It’s hard to know if they even care. We live in particularly toxic political times when sheer political animus can rob people of the humanity and generosity of spirit so essential to harmonious civic life. It would appear that there’s no price to be paid for hatred in today’s polarised politics, and no particular gain to be made by being honourable and kind. I worry about another hero of mine, Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate economist, the quintessential gentleman whose commitment to reason, tempered thought and argument make him seem so charmingly old-world. Yet he has been treated horribly by the current Indian government, for the simple reason that he has refused to back off from telling harsh truths about the breakdown of civility and tolerance in his country. When he is gone, will we have to suffer through another egregious bout of studied silence from a head of state? I shudder to think about that day. Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for Silhouette, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

The invisible side of freelancing

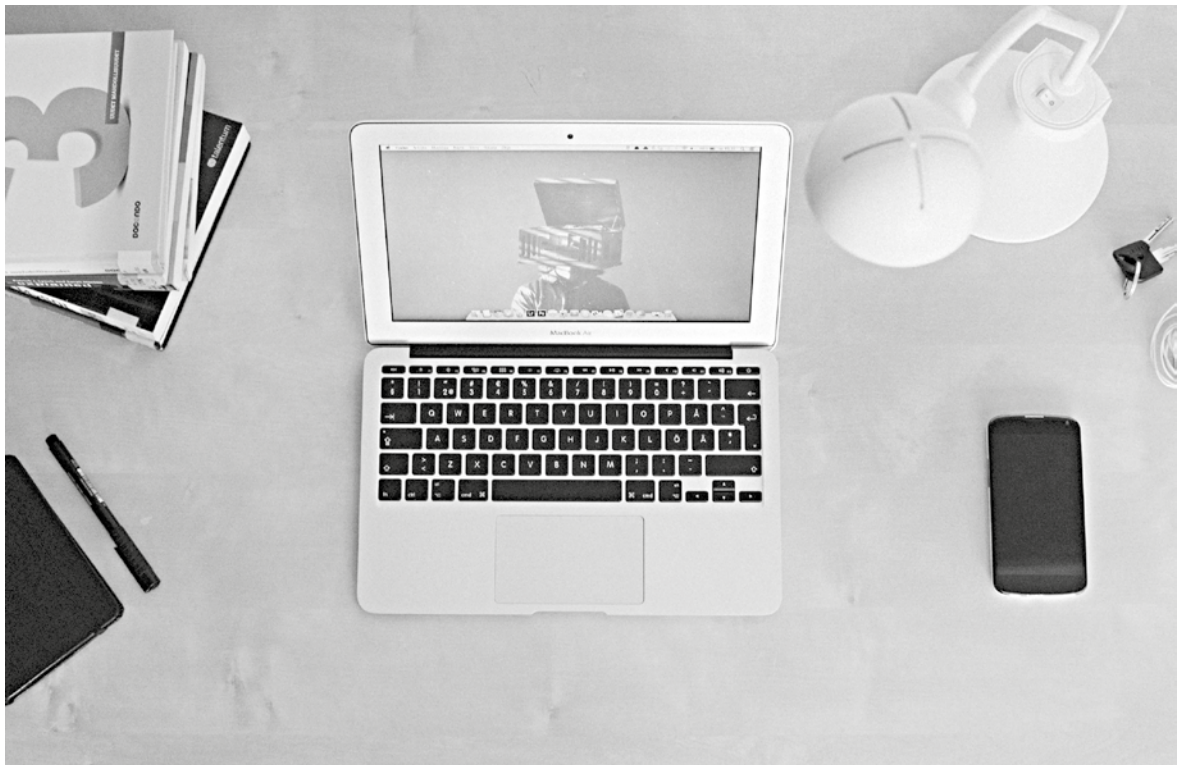
JINAT JAHAN KHAN

TO many of us, freelancing is the ideal income opportunity: with no boss to answer to and zero peer pressure, freelancing feels like just the right choice. One can work from the comfort of their home and focus on their business. But is it that simple? Perhaps not. If you think that having your own home as your workplace is an advantage, then you are wrong. For one, too many distractions in the workplace—the kinds we usually come across at home—will ultimately affect the pace of your work. While working from home, one might be prone to seeking more breaks: to watch a movie, listen to music, or have a chat with family or friends. As a result, a task that can be completed within an hour may take longer to finish, resulting in the decline of one’s productivity and efficiency. Many people choose freelancing as their main source of income so that they can spend quality time with their family or can have ample amount of time for themselves. However, the freedom that comes with freelancing may have negative impact on a person’s work. Let me explain: for a regular officegoer, there is a trade-off between income and leisure. It depends on one’s priority and what holds more importance in their life. However, this doesn’t mean that these two are mutually exclusive. One can enjoy both through proper work-life balance. But the problem arises when a person is reluctant or unable to find the right balance. People often procrastinate and this takes a toll on the quality of their free time. The extra burden or tension a person faces as a result of not doing their job on time

takes away from the joy, which they could have derived from leisure. In short, freelancing might render a person incapable of keeping their personal and work life separate. At this point, however, it should be added that not all freelancers face such existential dilemmas. Nonetheless, many experience this, even if for a short period of time. Without a supervisor or boss to oversee a person’s work, one can lose track of their work, due to a lack of feedback and monitoring. Sometimes emotional breakdown or monotonous feelings can take away from a person’s enthusiasm to work and even make them slow. In such situations, appreciation, casual suggestions or, at times, even criticism can boost an individual’s morale. However, freelancers don’t have colleagues or bosses around for such feedback. This can lead to loss of efficiency and thus income. In traditional employment formats, poor performance doesn’t immediately affect an employee’s income; an employee still receives remuneration with a word of caution from the employer. On the other hand, freelancers are always exposed to the possibility of financial loss due to their lack of efficiency. Thus, freelancers almost always live with financial insecurities. Not that such losses occur every day, but this always remains a possibility, since one’s income is dependent on the speed of their work and their efficiency. And even though a person might be efficient and committed to their work, at times luck runs out leading to unwarranted financial losses. One might question the logic of having to go to a workplace every morning, when one can simply

work from home, thanks to the technological advancements that have made our lives simpler. These days, an individual can work from wherever they want and whenever they want. So, what is the point of going to office? One answer is the importance of supervision and reinforcement which have already been discussed above. Healthy competition, financial rewards and promotions are some of the benefits of working in a professional environment. Networking and interpersonal interactions are also some of the positives of traditional employment. Always staying within the confines of one’s home can cause loneliness and depression. Humans are meant to coexist in a social setting and interact with each other, and a solitary life inside the house can have a negative impact as people have an emotional need to interact with other humans. Criticism and competition are not necessarily bad, especially if we can take them constructively and treat them as opportunities to improve our

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SOURCE: HACKERNOON.COM

performance and grow. The desire to excel, to exceed expectations, will help us explore our potentials and keep us busy, and leave no room in our lives for negative thoughts, loneliness and depression. Traditional employees use their vacations and weekends to spend quality time with their families and friends; freelancers, on the other hand, are often deprived of this since they do not always have the luxury of well-defined holidays or weekends. Freelancers also sometimes face problems establishing trust with their clients: often clients find it difficult to rely on unknown freelancers to get their job done. A freelancer needs to work hard in order to gain the confidence

of a client. This results in maximised output and positive outcomes for both parties. Freelancing, as discussed in this article, has its pros and cons. For one, it is an important source of income for our economy and it can greatly help in alleviating unemployment. However, people often tend to get drawn away by the prospect of working from home, and fail to reap the benefits of this non-traditional employment format. An individual must understand that they need to find the right work-life balance even while working as a freelancer; otherwise growth and sustainability will become difficult. Jinat Jahan Khan is a student at the Department of Economics at Dhaka University.

ON THIS DAY
IN HISTORY

AUGUST 17, 1903
JOSEPH PULITZER DONATES TWO MILLION DOLLARS TO COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY WHICH STARTS THE PULITZER PRIZES IN HIS NAME

The newspaper publisher gave money in his will to the university to launch a journalism school and establish the prize, an award given to those who excel in journalism, literature, and music

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

29 Fly, e.g.

32 Spots

33 Northern grazer

34 That lass

35 Batter’s goal

36 Capp and Capone

37 Dupe

38 Molecule’s makeup

40 Came to

42 Eel variety

43 Insertion sign

44 Concert site

45 Loses

DOWN

24 To be, to Balzac

25 Cannabis extract

27 Sugar source

1 Revolted

2 “Just the same...”

3 Is temporarily in

charge

4 One, for Juan

5 Sunday talks

6 Skilled

7 Jiffy

8 Is discriminating

9 Bakery treat

10 From which

17 Active spot

23 Chow down

24 Slalom section

26 Squids’ squirts

27 Grand -- (Atlantic island)

28 Paper worker

30 Failed in the clutch

31 Principles

33 Cake course

39 Chess piece

41 Baby’s wail

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YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

H	O	O	P	S		H	O	M	E	R
I	N	L	A	W		A	B	O	V	E
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BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott