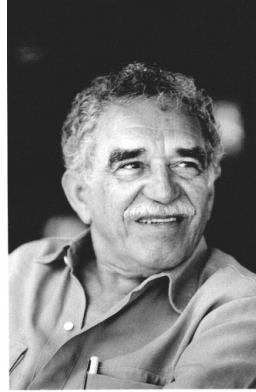


"Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Final Farewell"



During the summer of 1999 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature and author of such classics as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, was treated for lymphatic cancer. In the wake of that, there were persistent rumors about his failing health.

On May 29, 2000 these rumors appeared to be confirmed when a poem that was signed with his name appeared in the Peruvian daily *La Republica*. The poem was titled "La Marioneta" or "The Puppet," and it was reportedly a farewell poem that Garcia Marquez had written and sent out to his closest friends on account of his worsening condition.

The text of the poem, as well as the news of Garcia Marquez's worsening condition, quickly spread to other newspapers. On May 30 Mexico City dailies reproduced it. *La Cronica* ran a headline that read "Gabriel Garcia Marquez sings a song to life," and published the poem superimposed on a photo of the novelist on its front page. The poem was also read on many radio stations and spread quickly throughout the world via the internet.

The poem itself was highly sentimental and full of cliches that one would not have normally expected from the great writer. For instance, the poem declared at one point the author's desire to "live in love with love." (the entire text of the poem, translated into English, is reproduced to the right).

Nevertheless, many who read it were deeply moved by what they took to be the dying author's final message. For instance, one friend of Garcia Marquez, the Indian filmmaker Mrinal Sen, told the *Hindustan Times* that upon reading the poem he was flooded with memories from his 20 years of acquaintance with the author.

However, it soon became clear that Garcia Marquez's condition had not worsened recently, and he had not written the poem credited to him.

The poem turned out to be the work of an obscure Mexican ventriloquist

named Johnny Welch. Welch had written the poem for his puppet sidekick "Mofles," but somehow his name had been replaced by the name of the Nobel Prize winning author.

Welch admitted that he was not a great writer, but told Mexico's InfoRed radio station that he was nevertheless "feeling the disappointment of someone who has written something and is not getting credit."

Garcia Marquez did not comment publicly on the poem. However, the week that the poem was published, a legitimate piece by him did appear in print. It was an essay on the Cuban castaway Elian Gonzales titled "Shipwreck on Dry Land."

"The Puppet"

If for a moment God would forget that I am a rag doll and give me a scrap of life, possibly I would not say everything that I think, but I would definitely think everything that I say.

I would value things not for how much they are worth but rather for what they mean.

I would sleep little, dream more. I know that for each minute that we close our eyes we lose sixty seconds of light.

I would walk when the others loiter; I would awaken when the others sleep.

I would listen when the others speak, and how I would enjoy a good chocolate ice cream.

If God would bestow on me a scrap of life, I would dress simply, I would throw myself flat under the sun, exposing not only my body but also my soul.

My God, if I had a heart, I would write my hatred on ice and wait for the sun to come out. With a dream of Van Gogh I would paint on the stars a poem by Benedetti, and a song by Serrat would be my serenade to the moon.

With my tears I would water the roses, to feel the pain of their thorns and the incarnated kiss of their petals...My God, if I only had a scrap of life...

I wouldn't let a single day go by without saying to people I love, that I love them.

I would convince each woman or man that they are my favourites and I would live in love with love.

I would prove to the men how mistaken they are in thinking that they no longer fall in love when they grow old--not knowing that they grow old when they stop falling in love. To a child I would give wings, but I would let him learn how to fly by himself. To the old I would teach that death comes not with old age but with forgetting. I have learned so much from you men....

I have learned that everybody wants to live at the top of the mountain without realizing that true happiness lies in the way we climb the slope.

I have learned that when a newborn first squeezes his father's finger in his tiny fist, he has caught him forever.

I have learned that a man only has the right to look down on another man when it is to help him to stand up. I have learned so many things from you, but in the end most of it will be no use because when they put me inside that suitcase, unfortunately I will be dying.

translated by Matthew Taylor and Rosa Arelis Taylo

"A Farewell Letter"

If for an instant God were to forget that I am rag doll and gifted me with a piece of life,
possibly I wouldn't say all that I think,
but rather I would think of all that I say.
I would value things,
not for their worth but for what they mean.
I would sleep little, dream more,
understanding that for each minute we close our eyes we lose sixty seconds of light.

I would walk when others hold back.
I would wake when others sleep.
I would listen when others talk,
and how I would enjoy a good chocolate ice cream!
If God were to give me a piece of life,
I would dress simply,
throw myself face first into the sun,
baring not only my body but also my soul.
My God, if I had a heart, I would write my hate on ice,
and wait for the sun to show.

Over the stars I would paint with a Van Gogh dream a Benedetti poem,
and a Serrat song would be the serenade I'd offer to the moon.
With my tears I would water roses,
to feel the pain of their thorns,
and the red kiss of their petals.

My God, if I had a piece of life...
I wouldn't let a single day pass without telling the people I love that I love them.
I would convince each woman and each man that they are my favorites,
and I would live in love with love.
I would show men how very wrong they are to think that they cease to be in
love when they grow old,
not knowing that they grow old when they cease to love!
To a child I shall give wings,
but I shall let him learn to fly on his own.
I would teach the old that death does not come with old age,
but with forgetting.
So much have I learned from you, oh men...

I have learned that everyone wants to live on the peak of the mountain,
without knowing that real happiness is in how it is scaled.
I have learned that when a newborn child squeezes for the first time with his
tiny fist his father's finger,
he has him trapped forever.
I have learned that a man has the right to look down on another only when he
has to help the other get to his feet.
From you I have learned so many things,
but in truth they won't be of much use,
for when I keep them within this suitcase,
unhappily shall I be dying.

~GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ~