

Memories of My Melancholy Whores

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, at 78, still unpredictable

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Years, even decades pass and yet Marquez's works remain anchored high in the sky of international literature like a distant galaxy, beyond the time. Marquez, who turned 78, stunned the millions of his readers all over the world with his latest novelette unsurprisingly carrying a very notorious title: *Memorias de Mis Putas Tristes (Memories of My Melancholy Whores)*.

His first fiction in 10 years, the 110 page short novel might puzzle even the highest-flying writers. The giant intellectual takes us through mixed, interconnected and sometimes overlapping concepts of biological age, physical desire, death, solitude, love, spiritual corruption and wickedness. The story is told by the "I" pronoun, a narrator inside the action, and written in a fiery style that we do not sometimes find in the works of much younger writers. The style itself probably provides much of the needed answers to the tormenting questions which the novel engraves in the mind of the reader. So what does Marquez talk about in his short novel?

The story speaks about a 90 year old man who lives alone, the reader will not know much about the old man's life even after finishing reading the last page of the book. But at the time of narration, we know that the old man is a failed journalist who had never practiced any other career except journalism. From gathering small pieces of papers from news agencies, he becomes a weekly writer of a *boring* column in a local newspaper. We also get to know that he is incredibly addicted to brothels, not only because he is unattractive, but also because he finds a strange comfort and soothe in sleeping with whores...a comfort that he never tried to explain even to himself. The old man never knew the meaning of love. The word "love" is not contained in his personal glossary, even though he is a writer full of words and vocabularies. The women he knew through his entire life were mostly prostitutes; he bought their bodies with money as he plainly admits: *I have never slept with a woman without paying her, even those rare women, who were not prostitutes; I have always convinced or forced them to take money even if they had to throw it later in the rubbish.*

It is logical then, for our sad, dire old man, who appears more miserable than his whores, to think of celebrating his 90th birthday in a stylish way; he asks Rosa Cabarcas, a professional pimp, to get him a young virgin girl so that he can "offer" himself to her and rest his tired bones. Rosa hawks a 14 year old virgin poor girl and when he enters the room which is supposed to embrace his nineties' tumultuous breathings, in stead; he looks at the completely nude teen-ager who was under the influence of sleeping drugs, given to her by Rosa Cabarcas in disbelief and then he lies satisfied next to the her, listening to his weak heart beats, content simply to watch her sleeping naked, without touching her, before he finally runs away.

Miracle! In stead of having sex, our old man finds love. The 90 years old man deeply embedded in failure and shame, finally finds love. From a thirsty, clandestine pleasure seeker, he turns into a fragile-hearted lover who discovers love for the first time in his life. At the age of 90, few steps away from grave, Marquez's old man finally understands the meaning of "love", the word which he deleted from his dictionaries as he wrote later: *I used to think that dying through love is a poetic metaphor; I have wasted more than fifteen years trying to translate Leopardi's Canti and only that night I understood the meaning of Leopardi's poetic verses: "Ah, if this is love, how it torments me!"*

It seems that when Marquez wrote this text, he must have been influenced by Yasunari Kawabata, the Japanese Nobel Prize winner in literature; In his 1926 novel, *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, Kawabata describes an old man being entranced by the beauty of a young girl, and who was also happy just to look at her sleeping, while he recalls the importance of love and passion for him throughout his life.

The reader might also recall a significant Balzac's phrase in *Letters of Two Brides*: "*you have no other choice in life; you either die of love or die of boredom*", and instead of dying of boredom, our old man whose sickness and loneliness are increased by age, chooses to march slowly towards his death escorted with love.

This very late love is unattainable of course; if we to assume that desire is a continuous blazing fire and soul is a never-ending water fall, how could we ignore that body is a machine that obeys the logic of time, it rusts and gets weird, and this is the main dilemma which dwells in *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, despite the writer's attempt to invoke the power of love to defy age and time. No wonder then that the old man becomes entrenched in an obscure, unclear hallucination-like status, something between reality and imagination, awakening and sleep.

The novelette, with its impossible love story, looks different from Marquez's previous works, but we can still smell in it the same sad and legendary smell which we usually find in Marquez's giant novels like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* to *Love in the Time of Cholera*; the same narrow roads inhabited by poverty and misery, the dark brothels, the tropical humid climate, the smells of sweat, corruption and rumours, add to all of this the "Marquezian" touch which fills the reader with a mysterious longing for a lost paradise and leaves him sinking happily in a strange delicious sadness.

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