

## THE CHALLENGE OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Gottlieb GUNTERN

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**García Márquez:** You cannot imagine how difficult it is to be a myth and to be sitting here. Of all that Gottlieb has said about myths, there is one important condition which he forgot - or was too discreet - to mention: being invisible. The quality of being invisible helps a myth to grow, strengthening and sustaining it at the same time. It is a snare into which I have fallen. I am practically invisible, not because I am a myth, but basically because I am shy.

This is the first time in my life I find myself before an audience. I have never given a conference, I have never taken part in a writers' congress. I have great respect for writers and for their congresses, but I have always thought, albeit I may be wrong, that we writers are made only to write. Life is the substance, the raw material and the product of the profession of writer. A writer who does not live is dead from the beginning.

When I am not writing, I am usually in the company of a small group of old friends. I discover that through some inexplicable mystery, I am in several places all at the same time. I remember being in my home in Mexico, reading the newspaper at eight in the morning, and there were all the details of a conference, absolutely untrue. However, I have honestly had to admit that if I had really given that conference, I would have said exactly what was stated in the newspaper, for it corresponded exactly to my way of thinking, and even to my own words.

I am very hesitant to give press interviews or television interviews. First of all, it takes a great effort on my part to overcome my initial reluctance, and secondly I have the impression that it is always the same interview. I am always asked the same questions and I always have the same answers ready. Despite my reticence, there are many interviews of me, some good, some bad. The best one was in a Montevideo newspaper. It was an absolute fake, but it is the best interview that has ever been published, a synthesis of my way of thinking that I had never succeeded in conveying in an interview. I found it so interesting, I wrote the newspaper to find out who the author was, and that created a terrible state of confusion. You see, the person who had signed the interview did not exist; it had been mailed in spontaneously, and as it was so good, it was published. The greatest confusion is that the newspaper people, who were so delighted with the interview, were very disappointed in my curiosity **about** the author, because they thought it was a self-interview which I had signed with a pseudonym so as to be able to express my true thoughts at long last!



CREANDO

It is very funny to see how I inaugurate writers' congresses, give speeches, make statements, visit presidents and personalities all over the world, when in fact I am quietly at home, waking up at five in the morning to work until eight on the mass of papers left over from the night before. I suppose I could get up at five, but it is such a lonely hour! I have the impression that the whole world is asleep and only I am awake, and that fills me with a terrible sensation of loneliness. So I prefer to work in bed until eight ; I write from eight in the morning till two in the afternoon. In the afternoon I always have a lot of appointments for a host of things - although not as many as Gottlieb said. There are some, and the others are taken care of by all the García Márquezes out there, whom I don't even know. There is the one who studied law, the one who goes around with presidents, the one who proselytizes, and even the one who sings. I know of a tape that people say I recorded singing at a party. I do sing at parties, but at this one, I neither sang nor was present. Besides, I wouldn't like the tape to be mine, because I sing better than that anyway.

Now, why am I here? I am here first and foremost because after forty-five years of writing every day, of having sustained my own myth, I asked myself: Why do you write? Why does one dedicate one's entire life to inventing stories? What does that creative vocation, to which one sacrifices everything, consist of? Why does one practically immolate oneself for it, doing something which, in my opinion, is very honestly no good for anything? In other words, there came a time when I began thinking seriously about the mystery of artistic creation, and in my case, of literary creation. Why does it happen, and above all, what is the process through which one can make it happen? Even more difficult, what is the process through which one can make it happen well, to such an extent that one succeeds in deceiving mankind, making everyone believe that it is a very important thing? As I asked myself these questions, I decided to open a workshop for scriptwriters, trying to set a trap for the mystery, to see if I could capture it. Every year for three weeks I get together with a group of ten young men and women from Latin America. (There are more women than men, so it must interest them more than the men.) The ten of us sit around a table with a tape recorder, the door closed, for four hours every day, inventing stories. The principle is always the same: who has an idea? One of the ten expresses an idea, and from there, all together, we explore the possibilities of the story and see it through to the end. We have never failed. Every idea winds up being a story. Of course you need a moderator, someone with experience - which is where I come in. At one point I take command of the idea and see it through. The wonderful thing is that we prove to ourselves that you can make a story out of anything. We know that what we are inventing has been happening to a lot of people for a long time. We're merely putting it together differently to come up with a new ending. The last time we held our workshop, we decided to think of half-hour subjects for television. In the three weeks it lasted, we came up with forty-three valid subjects, and the last one, we did in three minutes. I looked at my watch and said, "We've got five minutes until the end of this year's workshop, let's do a story." We did it in three. One person got up and said: "A young social worker goes to visit a young prisoner and they fall madly in love. What happens?" Someone else



said: "She helps him escape so they can be happy." Fine. How does it end? Someone else said: "They're terribly unhappy, so he decides to turn himself back in so she can continue visiting him in prison and they can be happy forever." Three minutes! Of course, then we developed the story, who he was, who she was, how he managed to escape, but that was the easy part.

**Guntern:** You have shown very clearly and used many examples to illustrate how you build the crystals of the iceberg underwater with unbelievable care. If the creative process is never to run out in art, science, or any other field, chaos and order must dance a tango together and each lead in turn. They have to go from slides and glissades to sudden stops, abrupt breaks and many crazy things. There are creative people who work better if they follow a strict order of things - da Vinci, for example, used to say, "Lavorando ostinato rigore." Hemingway, whom you mentioned, once said that a writer had to polish each sentence until it became as sharp as the *estoque*, the sword used by the matador to kill the bull. Flaubert went even further when he stated, "I would rather die like a dog, even if only to gain one second, than to leave a sentence before it was perfect." These are two men of literature. Picasso, a master of pictures, was more inclined to chaos and felt that, "Quand c'est fini, c'est foutu." (When it's finished, it's done for.) Sometimes he would have wanted his work to remain imperfect. Now you are a man of letters and a man of pictures. How do you get round this tango of chaos and order?

**García Márquez:** Quite simply. I work in a chaos, but a strictly rigorous one, otherwise I could not manage. I wish I could remember the brilliant arguments of St.-John Perse, who dedicated his Nobel Prize speech to the theme "The Relation of Methods in Poetry and Science." Unfortunately I don't, but it would be interesting for you to keep his speech in mind for the next crazy writer you may get here.

I could never be an academic because I believe in the chaos of life. If I did not, I do not think my books would be read. I intend for them to resemble life. That is why I do not want *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to appear on the screen. (Note that I do work in the film industry and have a great respect for it, although the only thing I have studied academically is the cinema. I attended the Center for the Experimentation in Cinematography in Rome because at that time I thought that the cinema was probably the best way to express myself much more deeply. Later I found out it was another story when you took into account all the technical and economic conditions that go with the cinema and which you do not find in novels. The work of a novelist is the loneliest in the world. In other fields, one can ask scientists and technicians for help and find out about everything, but the moment you have to make a decision at your typewriter, you are absolutely alone; and the moment what you are doing starts looking good is absolute bliss. I could not see it any other way. I cannot imagine a greater sensation of happiness than when you feel that what you are writing is being



dictated by someone within you, and you are simply taking it down. But I think I have gone off the subject, and I cannot remember what I was going to say.

**García Márquez:** Thank you very much. Let me just take a phrase he mentioned regarding Kafka and normality to express something I wanted to say somewhere along the line. When I read Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, I was in a students' boarding house in Bogotá. My roommate lent me the book, I settled down with it and read the sentence: "That morning Gregory Sansa woke up turned into a gigantic insect." Until then I had only read rhyming poetry. When I read that sentence, I thought to myself, "Ah, if this is allowed, I can probably do something in literature. If saying this is possible without it being taken as an absurdity but accepted as something real, then I can probably become a writer." This was a long time before I went with my mother into town. My discovery consisted in how naturally Kafka could make extraordinary assertions. There is another one that goes: "I have a small animal, half cat, half lamb," and he affirms this in a most natural way. You can feel that he believes it; and if he believes it, there is a ninety-nine per cent chance that the reader is going to believe it too. He says, "There was a vulture pecking at my feet. It had already done with my socks, and now it went on pecking at my feet." He has such a natural way of relating things that would seem terribly abnormal but which wind up being perfectly normal in the story. I did not want to omit that experience because I also think it was fundamental for what I did afterwards. So I am very grateful you brought it up.

**Kohler:** I have a question concerning the images which are solidly anchored in reality and which you bring into your literature with such tremendous evocative force. Do they relate to the transmission of images in a film, if there are different degrees in images? I am thinking specifically of the screen adaptations of *Eréndira* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

**García Márquez:** That is a good question in the sense that I have been thinking a lot these days about the relationship between literature and the cinema. As I said this morning, I always used to think one could go much further in the cinema than in literature. But from what I have seen of the economical and technical drawbacks in films, literature is freer, more independent. I took the decision of going ahead with literature, but I have not been able to abolish the temptation to go into films. So for the time being I am doing both, and I have reached the conclusion that I have to keep literature and the cinema completely separated. This is precisely what I had intended to say at the end of the morning when I lost my line of thought.

I have decided that my novels not be made into films, particularly *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, because the screen image imposes faces on the characters, which cannot be eluded. Things have to be the way the director decides through the actor and not otherwise. In a novel



there is a margin of possibilities for the reader to finish it as he sees fit and in a way come up with his own novel. As far as I have seen in conversing with some of my readers, one thinks Ursula Iguarán looks like his grandmother, another thinks the in *No One Writes to the Colonel* looks a lot like his uncle, that they're cousins, and they end up identifying the characters with members of their families. This is possible thanks to the extent of participation the reader has when he reads a novel. In films, and I am saying this in favor of the film industry, the image is so imposing, it is that way only and there is no imagining it any other way. So I have decided to continue working on my literature as literature and on films as films. They are two completely different, not interchangeable things, and many years of experience have taught me that there have been many good films made from bad novels, but very few good novels have resulted in good films - or at least in better films. The example is not very good, because I find it unjust that every time someone comes out of the cinema having just seen a film based on a novel, you hear, "The book was better" or vice versa. They are rather crude comparisons, but since they do exist, we have to deal with them. I feel that a writer of novels should go on writing novels, and if he has an idea for a film, he should participate in writing the screenplay. What happens with a **scriptwriter** is that he requires a great deal more humility than a writer of novels, who is the sole and supreme owner of his work. In the cinema, he has a subordinate position, for it is the director with all his staff who are going to wind up being the true authors. The **scriptwriter** is their humble servant and I think that is the way it should be. So the writer who wants to work in the cinema has to have humility, just as the director has to have full authority. I think that is very good for the cinema and good for the novel as well.

I very much like the example of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, which is actually the result of a happy weakness of mine. The book was made into a film. Francesco Rosi and I are very old and very good friends. For many years we had been talking about working together, and we had been thinking precisely of doing something on the life of Porto Ricans in New York. Francisco was very interested in the subject. So we came to an agreement which would really have been worthwhile if done by both of us. But the producers in the United States told him - and this is an example of how creation can be obstructed - that because people in the United States were particularly sensitive to the problems of Porto Ricans in New York, they could produce any theme except that one. That was that. Francesco and I went on with the idea that we had to make a picture together. When I was in Paris, Francesco called me from Rome and told me that he was going to come, so we had a long lunch together. We talked about everything and the next day, Tonino Guerra, Francesco's leading scriptwriter, phoned me and said, "You guys are imbeciles. You've had lunch together, you've been talking all day, and you haven't said a word about the cinema. Francesco went to Paris to propose doing *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. But you are so negative about novels being made into films, that he didn't dare say anything." So I felt a bit guilty and phoned him up and said, "Francesco, do you want to do *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*?" and he said yes. So he made the film and I think he did a good job, even if it has little to do with the book. It is an excellent film, and if it has not been



more successful, it is because it has not been accepted in Latin America. The reason is they feel there is a cultural barrier which Francesco didn't succeed in overcoming. It's not his fault. It's the fault of the impenetrability of national cultures which is something one has to respect very much. Then I remembered having proposed that he make the same drama, but located in Sicily, because culturally and morally speaking, it is a drama which could be Sicilian or Andalusian. For production reasons, Francesco preferred making it in Spain. I think if he had made it in Sicily, which is his country, which is where he had worked, where he had the experience of other great films like *El Giuliano*, I think he would have done better. So this experience gave me an extra argument for not letting my books be made into films, but I am fully disposed to find arguments **in favor of** the cinema and I am constantly working at it.

In short films and novels, there are two completely different worlds sharing a lot of common factors. Doctors do not do engineering, nor do they aspire to build bridges. That is the way it should be, although the comparison may seem a bit strange. At any rate it explains very well what I am trying to say.

**T. Compernelle:** I have appreciated every second of what you have said. I am Theo Compernelle, a child psychiatrist, and due to a series of coincidences, I work in Belgium and Holland not only with extremely disturbed children, but also with intelligent and sometimes very creative ones. This is to better situate my question. Last year, in searching for sources of creativity, I was impressed by the fact that with people like Botta, Sbarro, Maya Angelou, their creativity and their choice of expression - writing, inventing, building - was influenced by a childhood dream. Maya Angelou, as a very young child, was captivated by literature. Sbarro wanted to invent a water bicycle. These very creative people strike me as making a childhood dream come true, or even better, the child within them seemed to be extremely alive, active, stimulating the creative process. You just said that your life as a writer began when you were a young man; that you stopped your law studies to become a journalist, and that you were finally convinced by the encounter of your mother and her friend. I wonder, however, if you too are not fulfilling a childhood dream, if somewhere inside you, there is also a child's experience which pushed you to become a creative writer instead of a creative sculptor, a creative painter, a creative journalist or a creative businessman.

**García Márquez:** By "dream" do you mean an illusion or do you mean the experience one has when one sleeps? Is it an image I had while I was sleeping or is it something to which I aspire, an ideal?

**Compernelle:** The latter.

**García Márquez:** The only dream - ideal - I have had in my life is to be a writer. I have never thought of being anything else nor have I ever wanted to. I have had to do lots of jobs during my lifetime.



When I began as a journalist at the same time I began as a writer, I was told: "Be careful, journalism kills the writer." I went on with journalism, I went on with my novels, and when I had to do some publicity, I was told: "Be careful, publicity kills the writer." Later on, when I started working with television and cinema, they told me: "Be careful, television and cinema kill the writer." The experience I have today shows that the only thing that kills the writer is death. Nothing else can kill a true writer for the simple reason that a writer writes because if he does not, he dies. Rilke said something that I will never forget: "If you think that you can live without writing, then don't write." And I always thought the only thing a writer could say is: "I know the day I have to stop writing will be my death day." There is no doubt about that, and I think the only thing that has ever kept me from writing a single day is health. I have an idea that may be very Hemingwayish: if you want to be a professional writer and always produce the same quality of work, then you have to live like a boxer. That is, you have to be in excellent health every day. I like having a drink or two with my friends, but I am always careful, because a hangover is terribly dangerous for a writer. Generally you begin a job in a given frame of mind, and the next day, if you do not continue the job in the same frame of mind, there is likely to be a change in the quality of your work. I take care to read the newspapers after work, and I never listen to the news on the radio or on television until I have finished working for the day, because they impress me. I have to keep the same frame of mind as the day before, and I take very good care of my health.

There was just one time I had to write when I was in very bad health, and that was during *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I had very painful boils in the armpits - which kept recurring; they would heal then come out again. At one point I felt really terrible, but I had to keep on writing, and it was very painful. So much so, that I quite understood why the boils are called "golondrinos" in Spanish: because you have to go around with your arms up, like a swallow. The pain was tremendous while I was developing the character of Colonel Aureliano Buendía. As he kept winning his wars, I realized I had to give him a great handicap so things would stop going so well for him in life, so I decided on the armpit boils. I know the illness better than anyone, having gone through it for three or four months. I gave Buendía golondrinos that were even worse than mine. The reason I am telling you all this is that when I finished giving him the armpit swelling, mine disappeared for good, and that was twenty-five years ago. This leads to another mystery that I leave to you. Perhaps I am contradicting myself and it is better, after all, to write in bad health to live through an experience such as this one.

**Compernelle:** I liked your answer, but again, you begin your life as a writer the moment you become a journalist, as though there had been nothing before that, and my question concerned what came before that. Did you really become a writer the moment you decided to become a journalist, or was there something before that, in your youth, your childhood, was there some encounter with literature, with books, with a writer, a neighbor? I find it so extraordinary to become a writer one day as a





young man of about twenty-three. All of a sudden, there you are, a writer, as though there had been nothing before!

**García Márquez:** I think I was a writer from the day I was born. Moreover, I think that every writer is a writer from the day he is born. I think that the fact of being a creator is a biological way of being. Some detect it, others detect it and develop it, others do not heed the divine call and do not go on. I detected it from the beginning. I can remember perfectly well when I did not know how to read. But I know the first thing I read were the pages of a book which was falling apart and came out of a drawer in the house in Aracataca. So without knowing what I was reading, I began to read these loose pages and for me, it was a marvelous revelation. Only as an adult did I find out that they were *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. But to me flying carpets and genies and magic lamps were not surprising because this was the sort of thing I would hear about all day every day in the house. My grandmothers talked about ghosts and the dead walking around the streets and they would tell absolutely fantastic stories, so I thought this book I was reading and the stories told by my grandmothers were all the same. I lived within a legendary world from the beginning, and then, at a very early age, I discovered poetry. Actually I started off with a poetic formation. I began with the short poems of elementary school, and as soon as I was able to read "adult" poetry, which was at around the age of twelve, I started doing so. There came a time during my end of schooling exams where I could recite by heart the most important poems of the Golden Century of Spain. Those are things you learn at a certain age and never forget. So I was giving myself an education in poetry, which is undoubtedly the literary base of everything I have written. On top of that, life kept setting traps for me so that there was no way I could escape from literature. Colombia at that time was a very centralized country. I lived in a town. There was a child born in our house every year; I am the eldest of sixteen children. The time came when I realized that the house - once my grandparents had died - was a sinking ship and the first rat to get away was me. "I have to get out of here or we're all going to drown. I'm going to escape!" Now escaping from that situation in Colombia at the beginning of the forties was no easy task. I had to take a boat up the Magdalena River to Bogotá and take an exam with other students my age from all over the country to get a scholarship. If I lost the scholarship, I would have to go back home. The trip alone cost my parents a lot of money. But I made it, and it was risky, because I had to make it eight times during the exam period. The entire book *Love in the Times of Cholera* is based on my experiences during those trips and that last book, *The General in His Labyrinth*, is the trip up that river. I would never have known that river the way I know it today if it had not been for those trips. I suppose we could say it the other way around: that I thought up the stories because I already knew the river. In the case of Bolívar, his life and his character would have interested me, but without that river, I would not have been able to write about him. The point I want to make is that I obtained a scholarship for Sipaquira, which is a town near Bogotá. It was a laic boarding school, but the building was an old 17th century convent. They would get us out of bed at 5.30 am, and since there were no showers, they would take us out on the





patio to be **hosed down**. But at that hour, at an altitude of 2,600 meters, it was just as cold on the patio as it is outdoors here now. Every day after our bath, they would inspect us to see if our fingernails were clean, our hair was combed, our shoes were shined. It was a hard life, very disciplined; ( I do not believe in writers with no discipline). Inspiration and talent have to be accompanied by one's own strict regime and nobody else's.

I have never been able to write in pajamas and slippers. I wake up at 5.30 am, correct whatever was left from the night before, and at seven or eight I always have a cold shower. I get dressed - not with a tie, mind you - but clean and presentable like to go to the office. All this is part of a discipline which has been very useful to me in life. As there was nothing to do on Saturdays and Sundays in school, I would go to the library and read. I read all the books in the library in the six years I was in the school, in the order in which they were arranged. There was a bit of everything; books left by teachers; books left by people who were just passing through. Now that I think of it, there were three enormous volumes which I know now were written by Freud. I can just see myself at the age of 13 or 14 reading Freud page by page and with as much fascination as I had had for the *Thousand and One Nights*. And now I know why: they were clinical stories. They were personal dramas which he transcribed directly as the patients related them. I was as interested in Freud as I was in Quixote and Lazarillo de Tormes, and everything I read afterwards. I left school with a poetic education which I think was quite good, thanks to all this chaotic but rigorous reading. I acquired a theory and technique of my own in literature, for nobody ever taught me how to read or write. I went about constructing my life with what I found, which was life itself. From that moment on, I never read systematically; I would just read the books as they came and as far as I enjoyed them. I am a thoroughly self-taught man who, as all self-taught men, lives his life by filling up holes. I was greatly comforted when I saw Hemingway's library in La Havana. It was exactly like the library in my school, but obviously built up by himself for his own purposes. I have a great number of dictionaries - angel dictionaries, botanical dictionaries, witchcraft dictionaries - because dictionaries have the advantage of creating exactly the knowledge you need at a given moment, and then you can forget it forever. So whenever I am writing and some theme crops up, let's say cholera, I study everything I can find on the subject, and once I have finished my book, I forget about it and never have to remember it. That is how it was in Hemingway's library. You could tell he would send for books that he needed as he needed them and then would put them aside, and it ended up being like in my school. So when I talked this morning about rigorous chaos, I can demonstrate it at any moment as I have just done so now.

**García Márquez:** For me the time we have spent here is a great experience because I feel I have learned a lot. I did not come to teach, but to learn. Now this is often said hypocritically. In my case it is very sincere because I am interested in going deeper into the process of literary creation and



more concretely my own literary creation, which is the only thing I can answer for. I am interested in this because, as I was saying this morning, for a long time I have been asking myself why I do this. The memoirs I am in the process of writing will be more interesting if I can go even further in exploring my own literary processes. I should like to leave my readers a sort of big joke and tell them, "OK, I've created a world for you, you believed in it, and now I'm going to tell you how many lies and fabulation and untruths there were in that world I invented." But as I write, I realize that that very fact is creating another world behind the one I created; and consequently my memoirs may be the most fantastic of my novels. I am seeing this here with every passing minute, because I am very much aware of your reactions. I know exactly where you were more interested and where less and that is very important for one reason, namely that I write to be read. I have even gone as far as to say, more obscenely, "I write to be loved," so that my friends would love me more. I try to do my best each time so as to be loved more each time, because the need to be loved is an absolute, infinite sentiment, there is no end to it: voracity without cure. I am very interested in how to continue along these lines and I hope I can go on for the rest of my life. You can be sure I shall continue writing until my last breath, because I shall continue needing to be loved more and more until the end. What is more, I have been discovering lately with the book I am writing that there is a lot of drunkenness in narrating; it's a drug. So I shall continue narrating and searching and exploring and perhaps in the end I shall contradict everything I have said this morning, which is quite useless. Maybe it serves to make one loved, which is a lot in itself.

**Guntern:** Some 2,500 years ago, Greek philosophers, Leukippos, Demokrit, maintained that the entire universe was made up of atoms. They imagined them as tiny, indivisible parts, eternally the same, which could combine to form lamps, stones, vases, human beings. This theory was forgotten until it was dug up again in England at the end of the last century by a person who believed in the existence of atoms, whereas most people considered them fictitious. As the majority were non-believers, they declared the believers fools and even more foolish the attempt to look into these mysterious things. Some people, such as Niels Bohr, nevertheless, went on to investigate. He discovered that an electron, when jumping from one energy level to another radiates color, like a rainbow. And he had the vision that these so-called spectral colors were a window through which one could look into the mystery of the atom. This afternoon Gabriel García Márquez has opened such a window. He has displayed marvelous spectral colors and given us food for thought; but a sort of thick fog has disguised the mystery and will probably always do so. What touched me most - among many other things - is the seriousness, the tremendous discipline, the respect with which his genius has reached out to meet us.

**García Márquez:** Thank you very much.

