

## **A Fugitive from Memory.**

Mauricio Redolés.

### **Abstract**

*In the context of the 50-year anniversary, the poet Mauricio Redolés, who lived in exile in London until 1985, took up the invitation of this special edition of 'Displaced Voices' to unearth from his rich body of work a reflection on the urgent need for [refreshed] memory. This is an extract originally printed in Revista El Canelo (1993) and Reproduced in English with the author's permission. – TH & GM*

### **A Fugitive from Memory**

There is a Chinese text from a few years ago, which I read on bus heading to Las Condes<sup>26</sup> while going to work, that had a huge impact on me given its relevance today.

The story goes like this: a man is gradually beginning to lose his memory. His family notices and takes him to the doctor. The doctor is unable to cure him and the man gradually deteriorates. Finally, someone appears who says he can treat him. The healer asks the family to leave him alone with the man for a day. At the end of this one day, the patient is already beginning to improve.

The last thing he remembers in this memory healing process is that he had lost his memory and that a miraculous healer had helped him regain it. Then, incandescent with rage, he goes into the house to fetch a machete and goes in search of the healer.

This story is highly relevant today because we often try to forget that we have forgotten. When we remember that we have forgotten, when someone stands us in front of that faithful mirror that is memory, we pale at the reflection. Memory is dangerous. Not very convenient in times of change, in times when you flee from remembering. A Colombian writer (Gabriel García Márquez) masterfully recounts the loss of collective memory in one of his novels.<sup>27</sup> José Arcadio Segundo Buendía flees from the train that is carrying him and thousands of people killed in a massacre following a banana strike towards the sea. He is a survivor on the run. He walks towards a town: Macondo. After hours of walking he reaches the first houses just as dawn is breaking. Attracted by the smell of coffee, he enters a kitchen in which there is a woman with a baby. The woman gives him a coffee.

José Arcadio Segundo Buendía does not speak until he has finished the coffee.

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<sup>26</sup> Las Condes is a commune of Chile located in Santiago Province, Santiago Metropolitan Region.

<sup>27</sup> [\[ii\]](#) Gabriel Garcia Marquéz, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa. (Picador, 1978).

‘There must have been around three thousand of them,’ he murmured.

‘What?’

‘The dead,’ he clarified. ‘It must have been all the people who were at the station.’

The woman measured him up with a pitying look. ‘There haven’t been any deaths here,’ she said. ‘Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo.’ In three kitchens where José Arcadio Segundo stopped before arriving home, they all told him the same thing: ‘There have been no deaths.’<sup>28</sup>

On a visit to his brother, ‘he also did not believe his version of the massacre, or the nightmare of the nightmare trip of the corpses traveling to the sea either. The night before, an extraordinary proclamation to the nation which said that the workers had left the station and had returned home in peaceful groups.’<sup>29</sup>

Memory loss sometimes seems to be an act of memory concealment. It can only be a clandestine operation in pursuit of a higher objective, as in the case of Richard Kimble, protagonist of *The Fugitive* (an excellent American series, masterfully acted by David Janssen, broadcast between 1963 and 1966.).

The story is of Dr. Richard Kimble, who is wrongly accused of murdering his wife. He sees a one-armed man fleeing the scene of the crime but the jury believes this to be a false alibi and sentences him to death by electric chair. Condemned to death, Kimble is transferred by train to his place of execution but the train derails and he flees. This is where the series begins. Like José Arcadio Segundo Buendía, Dr. Kimble flees from a train but, unlike the former, he does not want to reveal the past. Instead, while dedicating his existence to finding the one-armed man, he takes on different identities, walking from state to state and working in the most diverse of trades. On one occasion he travels to Alaska under the name of Larry Talman. The ship’s captain calls him to his cabin and tells him that there is no Talman family in the whole of Pennsylvania, nor is there a Cecil Avenue, the address which Kimble (as Talman) had given. The fugitive replies that the lack of a past does not constitute a crime. ‘You’re right,’ replies the captain, ‘but a man without a past is hiding something.’ Masterly. A lesson for Chileans.

It is true that insisting on the issue of human rights violations is annoying for some political engineers. It is true that we have to find the “one-armed man” responsible for the disappeared and the murdered. But let us not change our name, let us not hide the past, let us not take up knives in anger against those who refresh our memory. Let us not deny the existence of that train without lights, loaded with dead, traveling towards the sea.

No matter how much the driver and the entrepreneurs of the progress that began on 11 September 1973 tell us that we can derail.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 251

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 251-2.