

THE END OF A LOVE

When Ğorg Mallia's 'fairy-tale' relationship came to a sudden and brutal end, he did something men rarely do: he talked about it, publicly. In five poignant blog posts, he laid bare his tortured soul as he started the long road to healing, a cathartic process that not only helped him, but also touched a nerve with many of his readers. Here, he shares excerpts of his original posts, edited by **ADRIANA BISHOP**.



Prof. Ğorg Mallia, or simply Ğorg, as he is known to many of his students and friends, is famous for his smile – a warm, infectious smile that permeates even a computer screen in his regular posts on social media and lingers in the memory of those who are fortunate to know him even if they haven't met him in years.

An acclaimed author, poet, cartoonist and artist, Ğorg regularly regales us with his insightful sketches and cartoons on social media, and in recent years, he had shared his happiness at finding love again in later life. We rejoiced with him as we vicariously lived the joys and highs of a long relationship that, by his own admission, had “borrowed a lot more from fairy tales than reality”.

But then, out of the blue came the shocking news and that famous smile was obliterated. In an achingly brief and terse Facebook post, Ğorg announced to all those who had been following this happy romance that the fairy tale was over. As Ğorg's world collapsed around him, we were left as stunned and speechless as he was.

In this age of online sharing, it is easy to believe that we are communicating more. Yes, we certainly are, but it does not necessarily follow that we are communicating better. And when something as devastating as a relationship break-up happens, it would be understandable if we chose to retreat into the darkness of our sorrow and cry alone.

However, Ğorg bravely [my word, not his] opted to continue sharing after the happiness turned to utter despair, following the wholly unexpected end to his relationship. As he started putting pen to paper, or rather fingers to keyboard, and the first of his musings on the darkest hours of his life was published, the response was unanimous, if surprising to the author.

His posts hit a raw nerve with everyone who read them. People related to them perhaps from their own experiences. The fact that we have all loved and lost at some point in our life does not diminish the pain that consumes and threatens to break us apart.

But what was most extraordinary was the fact that rather than suffer alone, Ğorg

used his talent as a writer to express his feelings. "It helps," he admits. "Temporarily. But not permanently. Knowing that others are being touched and helped by my publishing these 'intimate' blogs is positive. I have received a lot of personal messages to that effect [from] people who are grateful because of my honesty. Heartbreak destroys us all."

It is well documented that the deep emotional impact, the pain, of heartbreak, in itself a form of grief, could trigger or lead to the circumstances that may provoke mental illness. It can be so easy to hide behind a smile when inside your heart is aching and your world is dark. Though not everyone agreed with Ğorg's decision to bare all, he was grateful for the positive response and encouragement he received from so many others.

"The break-up wrecked my soul, my life and my future. It was sudden and completely out of the blue. I am still far from OK. As bad, I would say, but I am also getting professional help, which I had to accept for the first time in my life," Ğorg reveals.

In the month of Mental Health Awareness, marked in several countries around the world, and with World Mental Health Day on October 10, Ğorg has agreed to share an edited version of his original blog posts, reproduced here in the order they were first published.

THE SOUL-DEVOURING DARKNESS

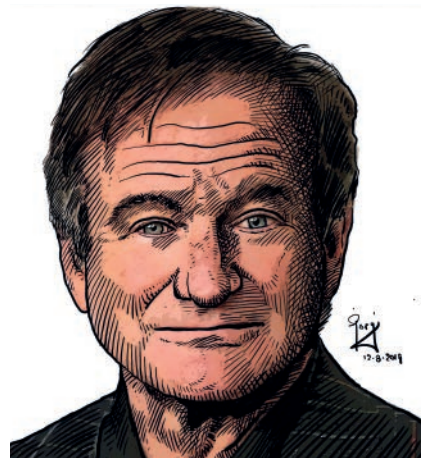
The last couple of days, I have thought a lot about Robin Williams, who died by his own hand five years ago. As is my wont these days, whenever I feel really close to someone who has died or that person has in any way affected me and my life, I draw him ... trying to pull out of the likeness that predominant element that I see thrusting itself into my soul.

In Robin William's case, it had to be the eyes and the mouth. I increased the girth of the lips to the right to turn the smile into a sardonic one, and I put 'water' in the eyes, making them liquid, inward looking, giving the lie to the character he played in public. The jovial clown there to raise a laugh, while fighting with demons inside.

And I empathise. Can't not. I often fight with demons. I might not be a

certified clinical depressive, but there are many of the symptoms that dog me; that run through my very being like soiled water, fouling my life and often ruining it.

I am known as the guy with the smile. A recent, soul-destroying, devastating break-up led me to draw myself without the smile [couldn't put it on anymore] and the reaction was massive. "This is not the Ğorg we know"; "Go put the smile back on"; and the usual platitudes one tells someone going through a bad patch



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that often do more harm than good. But the smile couldn't be there that time, because the demons had eaten it.

I'm a very moody person. I come across as an extrovert, a good communicator, a man of words. Which I suppose I also am. But I am also an artist. A poet. A writer. And those creative traits do really demand an introverted conceptualisation of life. In fact, when the inward eye darkens, when something triggers thoughts that become darker and darker and procreate like lice in a schoolgirl's hair, I fold into myself, struggling with the inner me, letting no one in till I push away the darkness, forcing it into as narrow a space in my psyche as possible, in order for lightness to once again allow itself into my being.

But when I'm in my dark place, the darkness devours my soul, and throttles my stomach, tramples on it like a herd of demented buffaloes and kills all dreams, all hopes, all happiness.

Even those really close to me have found this difficult to take. And if there are enough of these incidences, then the effect on some people is that they see the silence and the wall built around me at

that moment, and take the rebuff as a rebuke and stop trying to understand the cause and just take the [horrid] result as the outcome. This can be disruptive of even the most intimate relationships, with the accumulative effect of too many soul-devouring moments making people give up on me. And the irony is that, in so doing, they confirm that the darkness was right after all, and that it is the natural way of being, rather than the occasional blip in happiness.

So, I empathise with the Robin Williamses of the world. I don't think his final solution was the right one, but living with darkness as a delightful smile entertains the masses is a hell in all but flames and devils. Though, in actual fact, →

the flames are there too; flames of angst and hopelessness, of helpless turmoil and a shroud of gloom, demolishing dreams and killing futures, as the laughter in the street joins the feast band, and lights blaze.

Everywhere but inside me.

HAPPINESS [AND THE LACK OF IT]

As I walked in Malmö city centre a few months ago, I noted a young girl, no more than 20, walking on the pavement and crying. I was uncertain what to do. Surely it was not my place to go ask her if she was all right? She obviously was not, so that would have been trite and out of place. In the end, I decided that it was not something I could affect, and she turned the corner and was gone.

But my mind stayed with her. And I could not, for the life of me, conceptualise anything so hellish that would make that girl blubber in that way for all to see as she walked in the middle of a busy city. I mean, what could have been so impossibly bad after all?

Now, months later, I know exactly what could have been hell for her. Not what in itself, but the concepts that underlie misery and happiness.

You see, I could not conceptualise such horrors at the time because I was fundamentally happy. I was in a stable, long-term, happy relationship that had borrowed a lot more from fairy tales than reality, but held together very nicely, thank you. I was doing well in my profession; a serious health problem had been all but solved; I was working on a new children's book that had enormous promise. My life was happy. Happiness was the overarching emotion that then coloured all other emotions.

And then the main source of my happiness, my relationship, the very lynchpin of my existence, was brought crashing down overnight, and it died very fast after that, efficiently, intransigently, in spite of all my efforts to the opposite. And the overarching veneer of joy, which had coloured the world bright and found it difficult to understand the fundamental reasons for sadness, disappeared. My frequent smile went with it. My approach to life darkened.

I stopped quipping, joking about everything, I stopped looking at sunsets and feeling their warmth on my face and letting their colours turn my soul to gold.

I died inside, and everything darkened.

OK... let me try to explain this as best I can. Think of an old painting that had warm, beautiful colours when first created by the master. Think of grime accumulating over centuries, in which the colours dull, the bright hues become pastel... the content remains the same and recognisable, but the verve and oomph... the pomp and circumstance, if you like... are no longer there. In my case, it just took one day... less, actually, a few minutes, to do that, but the effect was undoubtedly the same.

And suddenly, the other day, I remembered the crying girl in Malmö, and my heart immediately went out to her, and oh! how I recognised her despair at whatever had instigated that bout of intense misery.

Now it was difficult for me to recognise the reason for laughter and joking in much the same way that I had not understood what could have motivated the sadness... Because the happiness was a coating that I did and felt. That is exactly what the sadness is now, and it's darkened the taste of good food and darkened the light streaming through cracks in the curtains early in the morning; darkened the intensity of an exciting movie; darkened the air I breathe, making it thicker and less filling [stopping in my chest, more often than not]; darkened the silence and the smile on people's lips. Darkened my whole perception of reality.

I have no clue when my next bout of happiness will come around. It's going to need to be a doozy to clear out the misery that is weighing down my soul.

In fact, right now, it's telling me that it is never going to happen. And no matter how I struggle, I find it hard to contradict it.

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THE THOUGHT-ENHANCING SILENCE

The silence in the middle of the small town of Köyceğiz, in Southwestern Turkey, is beyond anything I've ever experienced.

Walking by the huge lake here, also called Köyceğiz, you can't even hear the lapping of the waters, as they are becalmed a lot of the time, almost as if there is no organic beating heart within that huge expanse of water.

The place is absolutely gorgeous. The lake itself, of course, is idyllic and the mountains that border its horizon rise and fall, having different levels and different shades, almost as if they were

downtime as I try to work; they fight back against my life-giving creativity; they punch me in the stomach and my heart and my mind; they engulf my very soul. Because my world has been turned upside down by a sudden, intransigent decision I was helpless to overturn, but which, in turn, overturned me and all that I am and can be and will be. Demolishing the past, destroying the present, and annihilating the future.

I am, of course, working hard to get back on track, since this way lies total destruction of my mind and soul. It looks anything but hopeful as I write this, but I need to believe it is, because giving up leads to places I do not want to go.

So, in a sense, thank you Köyceğiz for your thought-amplifying silence. I cannot not hurt right now. It's like existing with half of every organ amputated, and needing to understand how to make do with half a heart, and half a liver and, much worse, half a soul, but the pain writ large helps me put it in some sort of order. Still painful, but a tiny bit more acceptable.

If only there was just the beauty to be enjoyed in this wondrous place... shared with the only one who mattered to me to share beauty with! But therein lies the insanity in the excruciation that underlies the mess I'm in. So, I will also need to learn how to appreciate the beauty alone, till sharing Köyceğiz with someone who can regrow the amputated half of my soul becomes again an option I can live with.

TO SLEEP OR NOT TO SLEEP

In the past couple of months, I have been having problems with sleep. It is a well-known fact that satisfactory sleep is tied firmly to a feeling of security.

I have always slept lightly, and because of a number of health issues, have had interrupted nights forever. But my mental and emotional conditions right now have aggravated that to the extreme. I hardly ever go to bed before midnight... but, like clockwork, my mental 4am alarm chimes and I am fully awake, with very tiny chances of drifting off again.

Because that is when the mind is smothered by uncontrollable thoughts. They are an avalanche, indomitable and catastrophic. They lull at first, making sure there is no defence possible, calmly sliding into position at the edges of consciousness... slinking in like silent snakes, noiselessly skirting the edges of my thoughts. And then the thoughts attack... full on, with trumpets blaring and horses in full gallop, with guns blazing and a kettledrum bang-banging for rhythmic marching in overwhelming, totally dominating invasion, defeating all resistance, sweeping away defiance with the sudden destructiveness of a gigantic tsunami.

I try all the tricks. For example, I repeat the phrase "blank it out" to the point of nausea, trying to push back →



shot by a Disney Multiplane Camera. And it's almost as if I'm alone in this world so beautiful. It was gifted to me by well-wishing friends, who, knowing how darkness has engulfed my world right now, cared enough about my well-being to do something about it, trying to push a bit of light to dilute, even if very, very briefly, the density of the black.

The beauty is just amazing and unique, but it's the silence that predominates. It's a solid wall that wraps you round in abstract cast concrete. And of course, thoughts just reverberate in it. Loud and harsh and clanging, like the inside of a bell tower during the feast of the village patron saint. And thoughts aren't exactly lacking right now. They keep me awake at night; they share my

And Köyceğiz, that has given me so much by way of beauty, has also amplified the thoughts with its silence, though maybe, in so doing, has also helped me embrace them, and with them, the grief that is such an integral part of what has happened. Because only through embracing it will I eventually wear it out. I cannot get rid of it. I cannot ignore it. It will bore a hole in my heart and kill me. I need to hold it to me as it tortures me, grabs my stomach and twists, stops me breathing... like accepting the drill of the dentist during a root canal [but without anaesthetic!] knowing that, at some point in the future, potentially a very distant one, it will help ease the killer toothache. A psychologist friend of mine has actually told me I have to do this.



the dark, gigantic tanks of war that, however, just roll over all attempts at camouflage, sowing fire-breathing dragons and gristle-gnawing crocodiles into my thumping brain. And the tanks take the form of doubts, of unanswered questions, of regrets, of sorrow, of grief [intense, heart-stopping, stomach-crunching grief]... of terror of the present and horror of the future. And they all manage to crunch themselves into the hours of tossing and turning, with eyes shut [but really wide open].

I usually give up the ghost around 6am. The dark abyss slashed open by the annihilating thoughts remains very much inside me, with my stomach dropping into it often, with the jolt of a sky-rocketing lift. And then there is the effect on my health. This is when the really worrying thought came into my mind, although I wish it hadn't. This is when I realised that I was not worried. That death no longer mattered much to me. It was not preferable to life, no. But unlike before, when I aspired to prolong life in ways that were almost frantic, the reasons for living have almost entirely disappeared.

No, I am not suicidal. That's not the way I do things. But I suppose not really caring much if I live or die is a version of that. I'll make no particular effort to die before my time has come, but I very much doubt I'll make any massive effort to the opposite, either.

WHEN SWEETNESS LIGHTLY DILUTES THE NIGHT'S INTENSITY

Ok, you get it. I'm depressed. Not clinically, but I do not really see many differences in the symptoms. When a long relationship in which you had invested everything is murdered suddenly, there is no way to "just cherish the time [I] had with her, and let go" as [someone suggested to me]. Tell that to the core that has been shattered. Tell that to the thousands of pieces life has been broken into as I try to pick them up one by one and very, very slowly glue them back together again. Tell that to the annihilated heart and soul.

And it has nothing to do with self-pity and all to do with basic survival, because when your very soul has been ripped from your body and your mind has been devastated, looking even remotely at the time with her with any glee is beyond conceivable. That time in my life is a body with its head hacked off. And just as dead to me.

Friends and colleagues have been absolute troopers so far throughout this saga. Some with just a single, sympathetic line, others with long conversations, tears and hugs. And I was also incredibly touched by students, tentatively reaching out to their heartsick professor, with no agenda at all, but just because they can't stand me being so incredibly sad.

One former student wrote to me: "... It always makes me sad when deeply emphatic people have to pass through a

challenging period, because I know they feel things three times over ... Don't let hard times break your spirit or your soul, because people are external to you and you should always be your number one pride and joy ... I still believe the world is beautiful and I hope you find the strength within you to keep seeing the beauty in everyday things. I think the world has lost a sense of connectivity, but I hope you realise that even when you feel alone, you're not alone and you've made a difference in people's lives more than you realise, and people do care. Take care, Gorg, and keep being you please! Keep inspiring others with your art and writing and keep hold of the light within the darkness."

No, unfortunately, the beauty in everyday things has lost an enormous amount of its lustre to me right now, and I have not yet learnt to appreciate it alone because the best things in life are shared. And I had learned only to share and never to appreciate alone. So that is something new to me that I need to learn among the many pains and sorrows that overwhelm it.

But I will, hopefully not too far in the future, until, at some point in my life, someone will teach me how to share again. And, yes, I will try to "keep hold of the light" until that happens. ●

The full blog posts can be read at www.gorgmallia.com/blog.html

Prof. Gorg Mallia's latest book My Love Had Eyes of Blue and Dreams – Verses of Love and Pain, a selection of poems written between 1979 and 2019, has just been published. More details on gorgmallia.wordpress.com