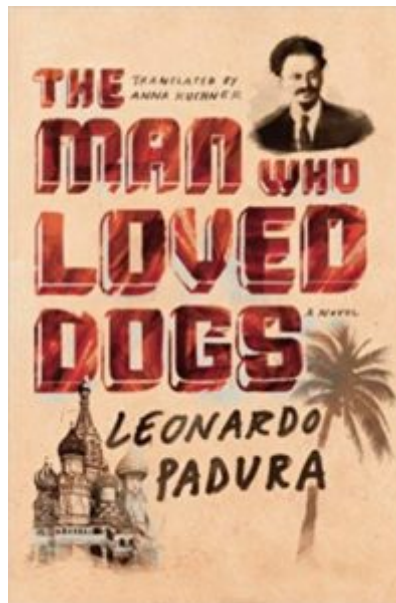


Kluwer Mediation Blog

The Man Who Loved Dogs

Rick Weiler (Weiler ADR Inc.) · Sunday, January 6th, 2019



On August 20, 1940, in Mexico City, Ramon Mercader drove an ice-axe into the skull of Leon Trotsky, ending the life of one of the most ruthless revolutionaries of the twentieth century. Mercader, it was discovered much later, acted on the orders of Joseph Stalin another of the century's most ruthless leaders. The path that led Trotsky and Mercader to their rendezvous in Mexico City is wonderfully relayed in the novel, **The Man Who Loved Dogs** by the Cuban novelist [Leonardo Padura](#). The novel continually shifts between the perspectives of Trotsky, Mercader and that of the fictional Cuban novelist, Iván Cárdenas Maturell, who, in the novel, happens to meet Mercader many years later on a Havana beach.

I read the novel while myself on a Cuban beach over New Year and recommend it highly for mediators.

Why? Because I found the novel offers keen insights on some of the key issues I face in mediation every day; specifically epistemology, fear and compassion.

Epistemology

As the fictional novelist Iván proceeds from his first chance meeting with Mercader and delves further and further into the assassin's back story as well as Trotsky's I am reminded of my struggle as mediator to comprehend and reconcile the battling narratives presented in the discursive war I

face in each mediation. What is to be believed?

Like Iván, I believe that most commercial mediators find themselves forging a Manichaen perspective (good vs. evil, truth vs. lies, justice vs. injustice, etc.) for a more complex, nuanced moral relativism. That philosophical position authenticates the dignity and respect that mediators liberally apply to lubricate the path to resolution. But what if some of our parties aren't deserving of that dignity and respect? What if none of them are? What is to be believed?

Fear

The Man Who Loved Dogs features a fiesta of fear: Trotsky's fear of sinking into irrelevance following his exile from the Soviet Union, Mercader's fear of failing to adequately serve his mother and the revolution and Iván's fear as a once promising novelist in Castro's repressive Cuba. All of it, of course, set against the backdrop of the fear wielded by Stalin as the primary instrument of controlling millions in the USSR as symbolized by that most-feared of all structures in Moscow: [Lubyanka](#).



Mediators know that fear is the most motivating human emotion. Some might argue for love but mediators' experience together with modern cognitive psychology indicate otherwise. And we use this knowledge as we "work our magic". We make sure parties and counsel understand and fear all the ruinous consequences of an unsuccessful trial, the costs, the time, the anxiety and, perhaps most importantly, the humiliation. We encourage them, subtly and not-so-subtly, that the way out of fear is to make a good decision, all things considered: to settle!

Compassion

Perhaps most instructive for mediators is the novel's treatment of compassion; that feeling that arises when one is confronted with another's suffering and feels motivated to relieve that suffering. Iván, the novelist, as he learns more and more about the paths trod by each of Mercader and Trotsky, finds himself being overtaken with a "bothersome and enigmatic mixture of disdain and compassion" for both of them.

This too resonates with me. Beyond the search for right and wrong, truth and lies, justice and injustice I find myself, as a mediator, motivated by a not-so-simple human compassion borne of an awareness that, at bottom, we are all just life-forms on this planet, trying to make our way and in so-doing making mistakes, hurting others and ourselves, but doing what we think is best at a given point in time. A well-worth-reading discussion of compassion by California mediator Douglas

Noll, can be found [here](#).

And speaking of what we have in common, what was the quality uniting Trotsky, Mercader and Iván? Of course, each was a man who loved dogs! Here too I could identify, since leaving the tropical climes of Cayo Guillermo for minus 25 degrees centigrade in Ottawa meant reuniting with our much-loved Sparky (see below).



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