



**Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude***  
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Brown compares Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Both are novels which concentrate thematically on the relations of power between humans, and the violence of authoritarian control

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The Master and Margarita

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Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* are both novels which concentrate thematically on the relations of power between humans, and the violence of authoritarian control. Both contain characters in the midst of, and at the mercy of 'great history', and both portray the dehumanising effects of ideological struggle.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez portrays the beginnings of the political struggle for power. Macondo at first exists in splendid isolation from the rest of the country, bounded by swamps and sea, and its people live simple lives, without the intrusion of politics or ideology. Its inhabitants found Macondo after leaving Riohacha after Jose Arcadio Buendia commits murder. It is a metaphorical 'fall from Eden', and Jose Arcadio's crime is 'original sin'. In this way, Macondo can be seen as early society, a place where politics and the struggle for power has not yet begun. However, after this arcadian period, the political struggles of the rest of the country soon begin to affect Macondo too, and its inhabitants must take part in the workings of history. Political power comes to Macondo in the shape of Don Apolinar Moscote, a government official, who claims he has been named Magistrate of the town. He is confronted by Jose Arcadio, the founder of the town, who, up till then, has been the unofficial figure of authority in Macondo;

*"In this town we do not give orders with pieces of paper," he said without losing his calm. "And so that you know it once and for all, we don't need any judges here because there's nothing that needs judging." (Pg 57)*

Jose Arcadio appears to have won the right for Macondo to be self-governing, however Don Apolinar immediately returns with soldiers, emblems of government power. Later, the country dissolves into civil war, a war fought mainly between the Conservatives and the Liberals, who fight for control of the country. Aureliano becomes a leader in the rebellion of the Liberals, devoting his life to the ideological struggle. Garcia Marquez does not glorify this struggle, however, and Aureliano is not portrayed as a hero but simply as being misguided. Even he, in the end, realises that he fights not for his people, but out of pride. Not only this, but the difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals is negligible. They both fight for the same thing; power and control. Marquez is not anti-political, but only criticises the power that politics gains over peoples' lives, and the significance it is endowed with;

*It is true that all experience, and therefore all fiction, is political. It does not follow, however, that politics provides the ultimate horizon of significance for all human life and actions.*

*(Michael Bell, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, pg 65)*

While the beginning of political struggle is portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* portrays the result of ideological struggle. The struggle for power has been won; Bulgakov depicts the corrupting influence of such power and the oppression of people who live under complete control. Biblical Jerusalem and 1930's Moscow are shown to have much in common. Both are under dictatorial control; Jerusalem under Caesar, and Moscow under Stalin. Both cities are permeated by a constant atmosphere of fear. In Jerusalem, the smallest crime is punishable with death. The people must 'love' Caesar, and the expression of any other opinion, even ambivalence, is considered treason. In such an atmosphere, the gentle humanism of Yeshua cannot be tolerated, and he is executed for his anti-authoritarian beliefs. Yeshua voices what could be said to be the opinion of Bulgakov, and perhaps even Garcia Marquez, on the matter of power;

*...all power if a form of violence exercised over people and that the time will come when there will be no rule by Caesar nor any other form of rule. Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice where no sort of power will be needed. (Pg 39)*

It is ironic that Yeshua's prediction of a time without any sort of authoritarian power sounds suspiciously like Marxism, which has become unrecognisably distorted in Stalin's Moscow. Politics dominates every area of life. Everyone must learn about Marxism, whether they are a lawyer, teacher, hairdresser or butcher. Everyone must be, above everything else, a Marxist, defined by their political identity, and above every other ambition in life, everyone must constantly strive towards the fulfilment of Marxism, despite the fact that it is unlikely Stalin had any intention of following it. Even ordinary human discourse became politicised, and the concept of 'doublethink' was born. Everyone was a potential informer, and Stalin's spies were everywhere. Therefore, in ordinary conversation, people would lie constantly and consistently, without thinking about it, and yet would know that it was not the truth. In artistic areas, the concept of 'Socialist Realism' was introduced. This meant that all artistic expression must take into account the party's line on any given subject, must always express the ideas of Marxism and the progression towards its fulfilment, and must always be made for the majority of people. Art had to be functional like everything else and became used, not for expression, but for propaganda. The result was de-humanisation. In this way, political power came to dominate every area of life and human freedom was reduced to minimum.

In both novels, the supernatural or magical is used to portray the individual's power against the workings of politics or history. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez uses a narrative technique which has come to be known as 'magical realism' in which elements of the fantastical are fused with the ordinary. Critics such as Michael Bell have suggested that, in accordance with the 'fall from Eden' theme, the narrative technique represents the cultural fall into dualism; self versus world or mind versus body, shown by the splitting of the unconscious and conscious selves of the characters. It is suggested that after the insomnia plague, the characters lose the ability to regain their dream selves and so they live in a kind of 'waking dream' in which psychological structures are acted out.

*...in truth they have now lost their capacity properly to inhabit both worlds so that the dream world of their suppressed obsessions henceforth imposes itself on their daytime lives.*

*(Michael Bell, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, pg 46)*

Marquez' technique has also been described as a kind of narrative 'hyperbole' which seeks to expand the sensibility with which we perceive the world we live in. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez's characters are often endowed with a kind of supernatural power. Aureliano can see the future. Remedios The Beauty is taken up into the clouds as a divine being. Melquiades survives death, and stays on earth as a ghost. Ursula chooses not to die and lives for over a hundred years. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, if the resolution is strong enough, nothing can overpower it. It is perfectly possible for people to have power over even death. The characters struggle to create and define their own worlds, their fight is against time, history and fate. It could be said that Marquez' endowment of his characters with special power is an illustration of our powerlessness against forces which remain outside our control. By crossing the border of normal possibility, Marquez reminds us of the limitations of our own 'real' lives, but also of the possibility of viewing the world in an entirely different way. Marquez's characters struggle to control, and to create their own world. It is through this act of creation that we can truly escape the forces in life over which we have no control. Marquez suggests that literature is the means by which we can gain understanding of a world-view different from our own, and therefore an understanding of our common humanity. While politics

and ideology have the power to de-humanise, literature has the power to remind us of our humanity. Through imagination, and art, we can be elevated from the restrictions we face in day to day life, and we can also be enlightened as to the true potential of our lives, and our own individual power to create and shape our own destinies.

In *The Master and Margarita*, carnival mayhem is produced when the devil and his entourage come to 30's Moscow. Bulgakov's style is similar to Marquez's 'magical realism' in that the unreal becomes perfectly possible. The devil, in the guise of Professor Woland, exposes the materialism and greed of the people of Moscow, mocks those in positions of power, and brings retribution on those who are guilty of crimes against their fellow men. The establishment is brought low before the powers of the supernatural. Woland's powers, as illusionist and magician, are comparable to the powers of the artist, and Woland is, like the Master, an archetypal artist figure.

*His noble bearing and romantic grandeur makes him a natural embodiment of creative energy which can never be totally stifled by the reasonings of the weak and tame minds of officialdom.*

*(Craig Brandist, Carnival Culture, pg 201)*

Woland's power is mainly to reveal the hypocrisy and greed of those in power and the unjustness of the political system. As Woland exposes this, so does Bulgakov in his writing of *The Master and Margarita*. In this way, the individual power of the artist is shown to be greater than that of those in power.

*While the moral imperative to oppose the new cultural hierarchy is clear, the forces to do this are transformed into an abstract, otherworldly presence accessible only through the imagination of the writer.*

*(Craig Brandist, Carnival Culture, pg 219)*

As in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the act of creation is shown to be the route to human freedom. Yeshua, too, is an archetypal artist figure.

*The Master and Yeshua (Jesus), as bearers of the word, are paired in terms of suffering official persecution for their beliefs and their insight into the multileveled nature of reality.*

*(Craig Brandist, Carnival Culture, pg 200)*

He alone stands up against the establishment, a figure of courage and rebellion. He is executed, but his 'word' has been heard, and from this one of the world's largest religions is founded. The words of this one man, considered a beggar and a lunatic, are shown to have more power than that of the machinations of politics. Caesar's empire falls, but Yeshua's words are still heard.

*Yeshua has, in his holy innocence, demolished officialdom. What Bulgakov has presented is a historically and psychologically plausible Man with a capital M, Man who turns those around him into human beings first and foremost.*

*(Lesley Milne, Mikhail Bulgakov, pg 231)*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* are both novels which take for their subject the relations of power between humans. The characters of both novels appear powerless against the workings

of politics and 'great history' but, in both novels, art is shown as the means by which the individual can gain elevation from their limited understanding. The only way to defend our humanity against the dehumanising influence of politics and power is through art. In both novels, imagination is the key to the escape from oppression.

## **Sources**

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