

Freedom in isolation



In *The Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the authors use the motif of solitude and isolation to symbolize freedom. These qualities free Gregor Samsa and the town of Macondo, respectively, from external troubles. In *The Metamorphosis*, the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, wakes up one morning transformed into an insect. Gregor must now deal with this transformation, as it will forever change his life. Though Gregor does not realize it at first, he has actually been enslaved by his family for some time. He has an unconditional sense of obligation for his family, as he works hard to pay off the family debt “with great earnestness”, and dreams of sending his sister, Grete, to learn to play the violin professionally. His devotion to his family reveals how thoughtful and compassionate he is. However, his family generally does not view him as a family member, but rather a source of income. Upon his transformation, the family is concerned with how it would affect their finances, rather than his well being. This is exemplified on the morning of Gregor’s transformation. It is the first day he has missed work in five years, and his family’s immediate concern is for his job. As Gregor is freed from this obligation, he realizes the true nature of his family. The more they isolate themselves from him, the more he realizes that they have been oppressing him all along. Gregor eventually learns to accept the irreversibility of his metamorphosis, and realizes that there is nothing he could do except to adjust his attitude and accept the change that has taken place. There is a strong imbalance of freedom and duty throughout the novel. Though it is evident that Gregor hates his job, he essentially is confined to it by his duty to his family: “it was [...] a requirement of family duty to suppress one’s aversion and to endure—nothing else, just endure”

(Kafka 50). He wants to fulfill his duty and dreams of the day where he can finally pay off the family debt. Gregor is pressured and confined to work in a stressful environment for the benefit of his family: "The stresses of trade are much greater than the work going on at head office, and, in addition to that, I have to deal with the problems of traveling, the worries about train connections, irregular bad food, temporary and constantly changing human relationships which never come from the heart." (Kafka 4) Freedom is obtained in his transformation, but is cut short by his family, who continues a sense of imprisonment. Instead of comforting Gregor, they lock him inside a room, which they begin to fill with garbage. This room can be a metaphor, symbolizing Gregor's life in confinement. The garbage that they put in the room may represent a false sense of love that they have given him. While it is true that his transformation has literally dehumanized him, it is also important to note the psychological dehumanizing effects that it has on his family. Gregor fails to obtain freedom, for when he is not imprisoned by his job, he is imprisoned by his family. As it turns out, the only path for Gregor to follow to achieve freedom is in death, where he is finally isolated from all of his troubles. Similarly, the town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are also confined through interactions and the changes that it brings. Though the novel itself attributes many Biblical allusions, the characters in the novel are generally not very religious. It is implied that the town of Macondo was a better place when it was isolated from organized religion. Religion is treated with much skepticism throughout the novel, and this is illustrated in Jose Arcadio Buendia's mocking of the local priest. Also, Aureliano Segundo laughs at the idea of his son wanting to become pope. The novel suggests that life in Macondo is best lived with enthusiasm and with few restraints.

This is exemplified by the fact that most of the characters in the novel are uninhibited by religious, moral, and sexual values. Therefore, it is implied that isolation from religion grants people more freedom. Other forms of isolation such as political isolation and geographical isolation can also be attributed to freedom. For a long period of time, the town of Macondo has been cursed with violence between warring Liberals and Conservatives. The fact that characters such as Colonel Aureliano Buendia constantly and consistently seek war and reject peace, resulting in bloodshed for the town, reveals that war confines the town to chaos, as opposed to isolation granting the town political freedom. Upon the construction of the railroad, the town of Macondo has now become connected to the world. No longer isolated, it is now vulnerable to the evils of capitalist foreigners. These foreigners oppress the people of Macondo with violence and corrupt the town with materialism. The foreigners create a police force that imposes strict rules for the people, thereby stripping away the town of its freedom. Though isolation essentially drives both the town of Macondo and Gregor to their eventual destruction, it has indefinitely granted both entities freedoms in various forms. In *The Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the motif of solitude and isolation is used to symbolize freedom, in contrast to interaction and the theme of dehumanization and confinement. Gregor Samsa and the town of Macondo essentially achieve freedom in their demise, isolating themselves from all of their problems and troubles. In an existentialist point of view, it should be noted that perhaps true freedom cannot be fully achieved until death. Therefore, everyone and everything may actually somehow always be confined to something. Works Cited

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