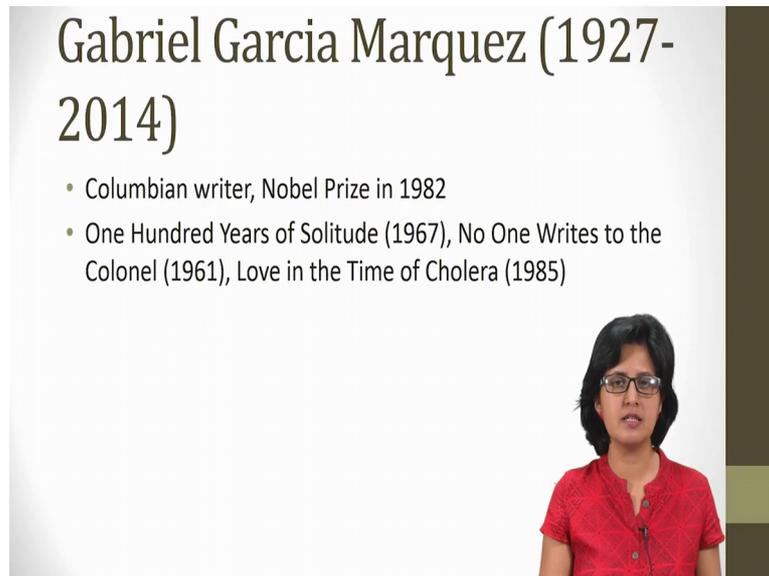


Introduction to World Literature
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Balthazar's Marvellous Afternoon - II

Hello and welcome to today's session, today we continue to take a look at this short story, "Balthazar's marvellous afternoon". Having taken a closer look in the previous session, today we will focus on some of the important elements to be discussed, a quick recap before that.

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Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014)

- Columbian writer, Nobel Prize in 1982
- One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), No One Writes to the Colonel (1961), Love in the Time of Cholera (1985)

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Balthazar's marvellous afternoon is a short story written by the Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez who lived from 1927 to 2014. He won Nobel Prize in literature in 1982, some of his other important works includes One Hundred years of solitude, No one writes to the Colonel and Love in the time of Cholera. He is considered as one of the best storytellers of his times and he perfected this genre the sub genre rather now come to be known as the magic realist form.

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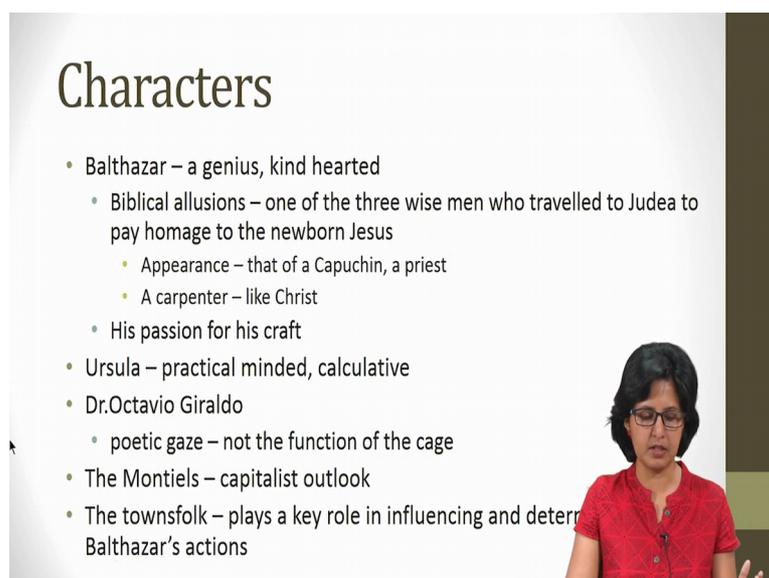
Balthazar's Marvellous Afternoon

- Originally written in Spanish
- A simple plot – the story of a poor carpenter
- To be read as a parable?

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Balthazar's marvellous afternoon is a short story which was originally written in Spanish, we currently access the translation. As you have noted, it has a simple plot it is a story of a poor carpenter. Parable is very simple and there is hardly any complexity within the story, but some critics are also (1:17) that there is a need to be read as parable across Marquez meant this to be read as a story which has some inherent moral or rather Marquez is trying to convey some value system that he also apparently believed it.

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Characters

- Balthazar – a genius, kind hearted
 - Biblical allusions – one of the three wise men who travelled to Judea to pay homage to the newborn Jesus
 - Appearance – that of a Capuchin, a priest
 - A carpenter – like Christ
 - His passion for his craft
- Ursula – practical minded, calculative
- Dr. Octavio Giraldo
 - poetic gaze – not the function of the cage
- The Montiel – capitalist outlook
- The townsfolk – plays a key role in influencing and determining Balthazar's actions

The slide features a woman with short black hair and glasses, wearing a red patterned shirt, speaking from a video inset in the bottom right corner. The background is a light gray gradient with a dark vertical bar on the right side.

The characters in the story include Balthazar, Ursula, Dr Octavio Giraldo, the Montiel and the townsfolk. Balthazar comes across as a genius, he makes the most beautiful cage that the townsfolk had ever seen and there is a lot of demand for the cage that he makes, but

Balthazar himself oblivious to the kind of genius the kind of craft that he possesses and he initially treats the cage as an ordinary thing and only when he begins to garner this kind of appreciation from the townsfolk, he begins to realise the worth this piece of work this piece of art has. He also comes across, he is a very kind hearted person and we get insights about his character throughout his interactions with his wife, with the doctor, with the Montiel family and so on.

It is hardly to notice that the biblical allusion in this character right from the name itself. But other is the name of one of the 3 wise men who travel to Judaea to pay homage to the newborn Jesus. And in between Ursula noting his shabby appearance because he had been working on this cage for the last 2 weeks and he has not even shred. And Ursula says that now he has a look of a capuchin that is reference to a priest and the occupation that Balthazar pursues in this story, being a carpenter some have pointed out there is a direct allusion, biblical enthusiastically allusion where the reference is also to Christ who was a carpenter.

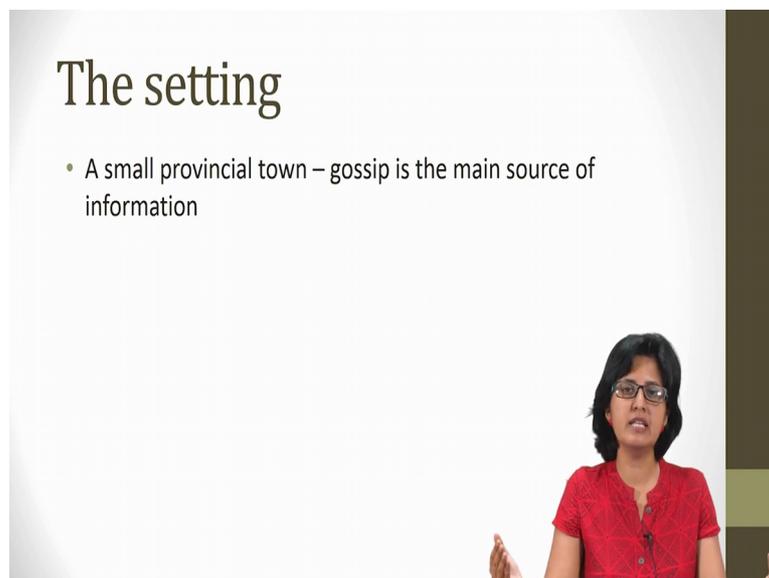
Balthazar comes across someone who has immense passion for his craft whether it is in the way that he works or in the work that he displays, we find that being very prominent throughout this short story. Ursula the woman with whom Balthazar is living, she is a practical minded woman, she comes across she is calculated, this is not to say that she is bad sort of a person, but she comes across as the practical figure in that family where she failed to see the beauty, the aspect of beauty which is in the cage. On the other hand, she notices the size of it and the price and the money that this cage could fetch them. She is the one who triggers, who instigates this desire about Balthazar in the 1st place to go and ask for 50 or even 60 pesos for the cage.

Doctor Octavio Giraldo is the one who perhaps gives the best description of the cage in the short story. He notices not the function of the cage but describes it as a flight of imagination, and he even goes to the extent of saying that the cage can sing by itself even if there is no bird in it and this poetic gaze gives the much-needed political element to this short story by Doctor Octavio Giraldo pointing out repeatedly that this is perhaps the best artefact that he has ever come across so much so that he desires it to be gifted to his ailing wife. The Montiel; Jose Montiel, his wife and the 12 year old son for whom the cage is being made, they perhaps represent the very facet of the capitalist outlook and ironically much as we dislike the way in which the Montiel's behaviour Balthazar, especially Montiel and his wife much as we dislike the kind of behaviour.

We also need to acknowledge that the artwork that Balthazar created, it assumes value, it assumes a word only when it is in the possession of the Montiels. And this is perhaps the interesting turning point that Marquez also brings in Marquez also weaves into this short story. The townsfolk, it is a nameless crowd, we are not being introduced to anyone any of the individuals in the crowd, but we realise that from the beginning of the story till the end they play a key role in influencing and determining Balthazar's actions. The readers are also made to realise the worth of this piece of work this cage and also the crowd pulling effect of it only when we are told that there is a crowd outside Balthazar's house to see the cage.

And even when Balthazar goes to the Montiels to sell the cage rather he ends up gifting it, even at that time we find this same crowd waiting outside to see the outcome. And this townsfolk, this nameless crowd it plays a significant role in taking the action forward and also in showing how people can behave in different ways even out of their nature when they are asked to perform under immense society pressure. We find Balthazar being overtaken by an anxiety of performance and fact when he goes to the Montiel, not because he really cares for it as an individual but mostly because there is a crowd waiting outside and it is also important for Balthazar to assume some dignity and some position some important position as an artist especially before the townsfolk.

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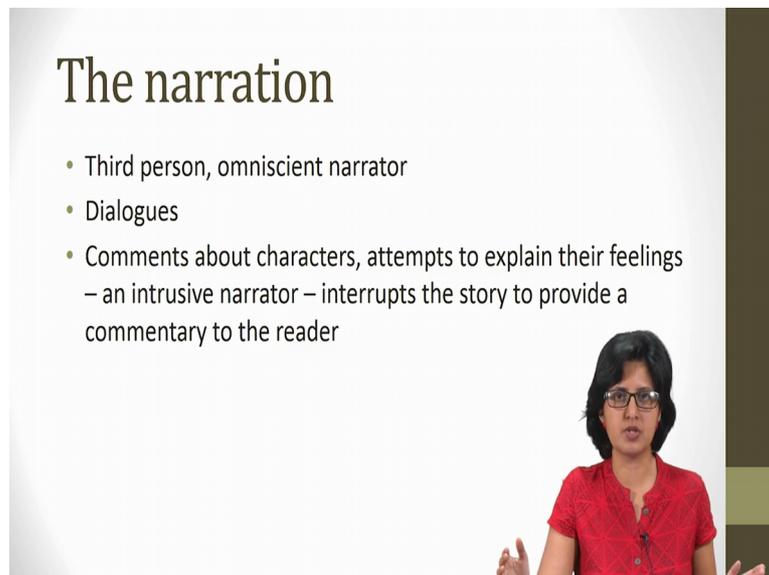


We have already noticed with the setting of this short story, there is no particular name given to the town in which this is set but we get to know that it is a small provincial town where almost everyone seemed to know each other and gossip is the main source of information. It is not as if Balthazar has sent the word out about this new cage which he has finished building,

on the other hand we find a crowd gathering outside and through them we find the news of the cage reaching far and wide. The physician Doctor Octavio Giraldo, he apparently reaches Balthazar's house to buy the cage after having heard about it. He himself says, the cage looks better than its reputation, it also tells us about the pressure under which Balthazar is placed just like the news about the cage has spread far and wide.

Balthazar also knows that and by extension the reader also knows that. The news of Balthazar having sold this cage to the Montiels that will also reach far and wide that reputation perhaps may taken a long way in terms as an artist as a carpenter and more people may approach him because this kind of information they travel fast, they are realise in that small provincial town by way of gossip.

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The narration

- Third person, omniscient narrator
- Dialogues
- Comments about characters, attempts to explain their feelings – an intrusive narrator – interrupts the story to provide a commentary to the reader

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Marquez is a master story teller, there is no doubt about that, and in Balthazar's marvellous afternoon we find Marquez emerging as a different kind of a storyteller. He makes use of the simple plot and he makes use of very interesting narrative technique to convey what he has to say. The narration is apparently in the surface level, it is very conventional, it is a 3rd person omniscient narrator, we get to know about the actions and the thoughts of that character mostly through dialogue but there are also comments about characters. We also find the narrator trying to explain the characters feeling and even certain things which are not so obvious to the reader.

So here we find that this omniscient narrator is also an intrusive narrator, and intrusive narrator is one who interrupts a story to provide a commentary to the reader, we find this

happening in various steps in the short story. If you go back and take a closer look at it again, you will realise that about almost every character that is insider information that the omniscient narrator the intrusive narrator tries to give us. And this also takes the story to a different level altogether and we begin to wonder whether it is the author Marquez, he himself trying to manipulate the way in which this story needs to be read.

And given that he is indeed a master storyteller, given that he is someone who can experiment with his craft, it is quite possible that Marquez intended this story to be read in a particular way and he also wanted to play the characters within the moulds that he himself had created so that the reader will not be at a loss to figure out how to evaluate the characters or how to categorise the characters, it comes across as a very conventional simple plot. But beneath this we can find the (())(11:14) of narration, maybe they are known philosophical truth or profound things that Marquez instance to explore but the beauty of the story lies primarily in this narration where we are also able to visualise the pressure that Balthazar feels throughout the story. And the kind of helplessness and a partial sort of a victory that he gains towards the end.

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Themes

- Greed versus generosity
- The value of art
 - Money vs. artistic value
 - A beautiful piece of art – gifted, not sold
 - Commercialization – alienation of the product from the producer
- Society and hypocrisy
 - The rich and the poor
- Class conflict
 - Balthazar's social status – linked with his poverty, deabilities

Some of the important themes of this short story needs to be taken a look at, we find this obvious theme of greed being positioned vis-a-vis generosity, and both these virtues are placed side-by-side as contrasting elements and we also find the characters who are associate editor with these different qualities. We find Ursula, personifying greed at the beginning but we also find that in some way or the other Balthazar also does the same line a little later in the story, especially in that instance where he imagines, when he begins to fantasise about

making perhaps a million cages and then selling them out to different prospective customers, where he is fantasising about this mass production that he eventually will be able to do.

We find him also being almost greedy, so Marquez is not trying to prevent this in black and white, there are also these different shades of grey that we would come across. And we find Balthazar embodying generosity more than anyone else. And we also find a generous character and amicable character in the physician Ocotvio Giraldo where he is not resentful of the fact that Balthazar did not sell the cage to him. On the other hand he immediately forgets that matter and then he goes on with his life. And towards the end of the story, the idea of greed and generosity, they almost come into conflict with each other well we are being given an exaggerated in the count of Montiel's greed, Montiel's stinginess, Montiel's difficulty to part with his money even if that means owning a piece of art.

And on the other hand we have Balthazar who is generously gifting this piece of art, this cage to Pepe Montiel, the 12-year-old boy because he has already promised himself. And this act of generosity there is a flip side, this act of generosity, this act of benevolence is also an act of revenge at the same time. So Marquez has successfully brought together different elements, different conflicting emotions within the same character and in some cases within the same episode. The story also asks questions about the value of art, about whether it is about money or artistic value, and it also ends with this irony about this beautiful piece of art for which people are willing to pay anything, it is gifted it is not sold.

He ends up gifting it partly to please the child, partly to impress the crowd that is waiting outside and partly as revenge, as an act of revenge on this rich man Montiel. The story also tells us a little early that Balthazar always had (())(15:07) for rich people. So this moment of gifting this piece of art as the important questions not just about the value of art, but it also showcases certain elements within Balthazar's character. It also tells us about the ways in which the product is alienated from the producer and it draws attention to the commercialisation of art perhaps that also an important point that Marquez wanted to convey through this short story.

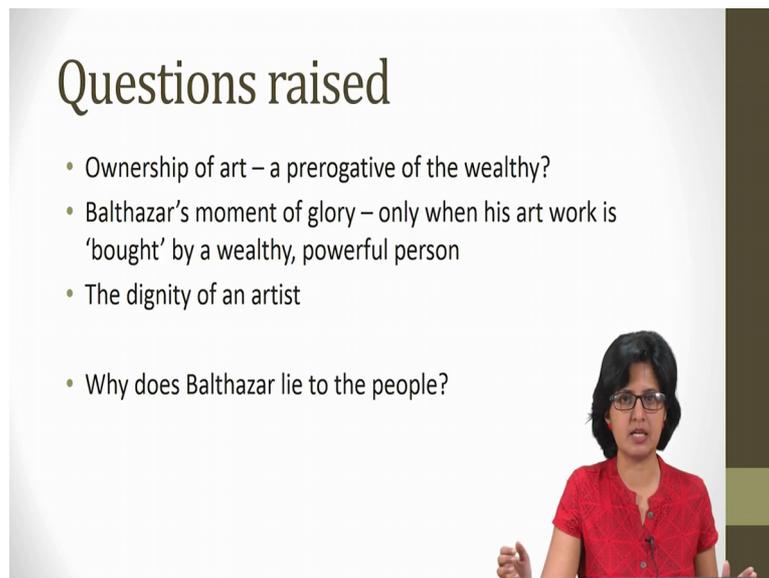
The story also raises the issue of society, the society pressure and hypocrisy which is inherent in it then hypocrisy of the townsfolk or even the hypocrisy of Balthazar himself who is forced to act and performance particular way due to the society pressure. It also brings in the divide between the rich and the poor where there are certain expectations and aspirations, and on the other hand the rich also come across as someone who is living within another kind of

hypocritical setup where they fail to live up to the expectations of the poor not do they have the capacity to satisfy themselves. We are also introduced to this immense irony where the rich man and the town say Montiel, he is unable to fulfil the desire of his 12-year-old son, on the other hand, it is this poor carpenter this penniless carpenter Balthazar who manages to satisfy his desire.

This immense irony also shows the different ways in which Marquez want us to look at different the rich and the poor, the haves and have not that it is not always about the wealth that you possess but it is also about certain other qualities. Class conflict is perhaps an important theme in this short story; it is hard to miss the social status of Balthazar or the different characters who are presented to us. His social status Balthazar's social status is linked with this poverty, and this is despite this artistic ability while people acknowledge that he is a gifted artist that this is the best cage in the world, this is the most beautiful cage in the world that he is a gifted artist, it does not do anything to alleviate the poor conditions in which Balthazar is living.

In order to make this piece of art he had spent 2 weeks as his partner Ursula points out, which also meant that they did not have any other income in past 2 weeks when he was focusing not on his routine carpentry job, but on making this cage which eventually he could not even sell, he had to gift it. So it is drawing our attention to the class conflict which is inherent here where the poor man the poor carpenter cannot really afford to be an artist unless the piece of art is acknowledged and even bought at least seemingly by a rich man. The acknowledgement of his work as an artist, the acknowledgement of the value the inherent value of this piece of art it also lies the power to judge and the power to evaluate is also vested where the rich.

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Questions raised

- Ownership of art – a prerogative of the wealthy?
- Balthazar's moment of glory – only when his art work is 'bought' by a wealthy, powerful person
- The dignity of an artist
- Why does Balthazar lie to the people?

Let us begin to wrap up this discussion, let us also look at some of the questions that this story begins to ask. It forces us to wonder whether the ownership of art is prerogative of the wealthy which is what the story also begins to unravel in different ways. And Balthazar's moment of glory, the moment he walks out after gifting this cage to the 12 year old boy and the moment when he also decides to lie to the people waiting outside that he managed to sell it for 60 pesos as they all had expected, this is his moment of glory. And this is a moment for celebration and since we also know more details because of this omniscient narrator, we also find that it is a bit sad because Balthazar is able to celebrate his moment of glory only when his artwork is bought by a wealthy powerful person.

But Balthazar, the narrator and the readers know that it was not actually sold, it was only gifted. We also realise that after 2 weeks of hard work, after 2 weeks of neglecting his ordinary his routine carpentry work, Balthazar is now forced to be penniless. In fact, the worst condition that he was bare for. When the story ends, we know that he is drunk his watch is left as pond in the liquor shop and he is lying on the street. And the story also tells us that Balthazar has never done this before and some commentators point out that whole house on that side of the world or people getting drunk at the end of the day those are ordinary sites.

And for Balthazar to abstain from these kinds of things and for the story to tell us that this is the 1st time that Balthazar ever did such things, it is of immense significance because Balthazar's moment of glory is also another low for him, a low for him financially and low for him as far as his own value systems and his own personal ethics are concerned. The story

also raises questions about the dignity of an artist, and Balthazar who comes across as a dignified soul. From the beginning of the story we find that he is not able to sustain that position when he walks into the Montiel's house.

At the Montiel's, he has being humiliated, he is being yelled at and we also realised that his dignity is at stake. ((21:34) to gift this cage to the 12 year old boy and it is an act of defiance as an Balthazar is concerned and that is one moment through which he claims his dignity and through which he perhaps tries to tell the rich that there are things which they cannot dictate just with the power of money, just with the power of wealth. And when Balthazar walks out, we also realise that his dignity can be maintained or can be elevated when he chooses to lie and Balthazar does precisely that. The story finally leaves this important question about Balthazar lying to the people, about the way in which Balthazar as an artist is forced to lie about what he did with his own artwork.

And this lie, we do not know how the story proceeds, maybe this lie cemented his reputation further and he got more orders for his cage one would never know. Or maybe this lie cemented his reputation as an artist and he continued to live as poor as before, but nevertheless the important turning point in the story is that moment, the moment of glory which Balthazar sees by choosing to lie the crowd which is waiting outside. And as pointed out in the beginning, though the townsfolk, the crowd which gathered in front of Balthazar's house or the crowd which is waiting outside Montiel's house and the crowd which got drunk with Balthazar's money, we find that they emerge as equally powerful, not just Montiel but this townsfolk this crowd also emerges as a powerful determinant in assessing the value of this piece of art.

I leave you with this short phrase from Plato's work Eon where Eon remarks it, we are only interpreters of interpreters. Quoting this one of the commentators of Balthazar's marvellous afternoon, he also remarks that. At the end of the short story we realise that there are no final answers, there are no final solutions because as a reader as a reader of Marquez we are also really interpreters of an interpreter. With this we wrap up this discussion on the short story Balthazar's marvellous afternoon, thank you for listening and I look forward to see you in the next session.