

A Psychological Study of No One Writes to the Colonel by Gabriel García Márquez: A Psychoanalytic Approach Based on Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung

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Abstract

Gabriel García Márquez's 1961 novella *No One Writes to the Colonel* depicts the silent tenacity of a destitute war veteran who waits every Friday for a pension letter that never comes. The Colonel's inner existence and the psychological depth of his waiting are examined in this novella using the psychoanalytic frameworks of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. The study examines the Colonel's internal conflict between hopelessness and the enduring delusion of hope using Freud's ideas of repression, sublimation, and the death drive. He continued to wait while being denied material possessions, which is a covert attempt to transform irritation into moral defiance.

Furthermore, Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and archetypes, particularly the "Wise Old Man," help us comprehend the Colonel as a symbol of wisdom, tenacity, and spiritual integrity in the face of societal decline. Thus, the novella is both a psychological study of endurance and a subtle socio-political indictment of post-war Latin American disillusionment. The Colonel's waiting turns into a symbolic act of self-assertion and resistance against meaninglessness rather than just a passive expectancy. Ultimately, Márquez dramatizes the underlying desire for wholeness, hope, and dignity in an uncaring world by turning the concept of waiting into a meditation on human resiliency.

Keywords: repression, archetype, death drive, collective unconscious, symbolic resistance, marginalization

Introduction:

No One Writes to the Colonel, written by Gabriel García Márquez in 1961, is a brief yet profound tale about survival, hope, and dignity. It narrates the tale of an elderly war veteran known only as "the Colonel," who has been waiting for his government pension for a long time but has never received it. He visits the post office every Friday in hopes of receiving a letter that will transform his life, but each week he comes home dejected. The Colonel never gives up hope despite hunger, poverty, and illness. This straightforward tale is a striking examination of human perseverance because of his peaceful patience and unwavering confidence in justice.

This study examines the Colonel's inner world using the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, two well-known psychoanalysts. Freud's theories enable us to comprehend the

Colonel's feelings and unconscious conflicts, such as how he suppresses his suffering and turns to hope to deal with grief and hopelessness. Jung's theories regarding the collective unconscious and archetypes help to understand how the Colonel comes to represent moral fortitude and wisdom for both him and all of humanity. This paper examines how waiting becomes a sign of faith and silent resistance rather than merely an act of patience by relating these psychological concepts to Márquez's narrative.

The subject is important because Márquez's novella captures the emotional and social climate of post-war Latin America, where many people experienced corruption, disappointment, and broken promises. "For nearly sixty years—since the end of the last civil war—the Colonel had done nothing else but wait" (Márquez, *No One Writes to the Colonel* 7). However, the narrative also speaks broadly about the human condition—that is, how people maintain their beliefs despite all the evidence to the contrary. We can see how hope and sorrow can coexist in the same heart when we comprehend the Colonel's psychology. The Colonel's self-destructive persistence is embodied in his monotonous waiting without any material gain. This relates to Freud's theory of Thanatos, or the death drive. Ironically, though, this "death drive" becomes Eros, or the life instinct—his will to live on through hope. According to Freud, "what we call happiness... arises from the satisfaction (preferably sudden) of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 68).

The Colonel's waiting becomes a suppressed survival tactic. Dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious," according to Freud (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 134). The rooster and the pension letter are two recurrent motifs in the novella that represent the Colonel's dream. The rooster, which he and his spouse raise despite their hunger, represents suppressed energy and societal ambition. The rooster is the only creature that remembers him, according to Márquez (*No One Writes to the Colonel* 43). Psychologically, this object of care becomes an externalization of the Colonel's libido, his natural life force, which transforms it into a symbol of hope and resistance.

According to the critic Rubén Pelayo, "The rooster is not merely a sign of optimism; it is the Colonel's unconscious resistance to annihilation, the Freudian substitute for lost faith in institutions" (Gabriel García Márquez: *A Critical Companion* 88). The bird's survival gives meaning to his own.

Carl Jung studied archetypes, which are universal patterns of the mind, whereas Freud concentrated on individual repression. According to Jung, "the archetype is an inherited pattern of thought or symbolic image that derives from the collective unconscious and is universal in all humans" (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 4).

As critic Raymond L. Williams observes, "The Colonel's silence is not ignorance but archetypal wisdom; he speaks the language of the unconscious—waiting" (Gabriel García Márquez 54). Jung may contend that this waiting is a spiritual path toward individuation—the unification of unconscious faith and conscious despair.

Once more, the rooster plays a paradigmatic role. It represents the hero archetype as well as the prospect of rebirth. According to Jung, "the bird symbol often stands for the spirit that rises above the earthbound condition" (Man and His Symbol 111). By caring for the rooster, the Colonel projects his unconscious desire to rise above pain and develops his own spirit.

This paper's primary goal is to examine how Márquez used the Colonel's unending waiting to symbolize social criticism and psychological turmoil. It will begin by providing a brief synopsis of the novella's themes. The Colonel's inner behavior will then be explained using Freud's theories of repression, sublimation, and the death drive. Jung's notion of archetypes, particularly the "Wise Old Man," will be examined to demonstrate how the Colonel develops into a timeless representation of fortitude and spiritual fortitude. The paper will finish by demonstrating that Márquez's story is about the human desire for hope, dignity, and significance in a quiet, unfair world, rather than just waiting for a letter.

Literature Review

Many critics have examined and appreciated Gabriel García Márquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961) for its themes of political negligence, loneliness, optimism, and dignity. An impoverished retired army veteran who has been waiting years for his pension—which never arrives—is the subject of the novella. Despite having a brief and straightforward premise, the story has profound emotional, social, and psychological significance. The Colonel is frequently portrayed by critics as a representation of silent perseverance—a guy who maintains his faith in the face of starvation, destitution, and despair. Márquez uses this persona to illustrate both the quiet courage of individuals who dare to hope and the suffering of forgotten people living under unfair administrations.

Literary scholar Raymond L. Williams claims that Márquez's literature combines inner feeling with social truth. His characters reflect the challenges of common people who encounter exceptional adversity rather than being heroic in the conventional sense. In the Colonel's case, waiting for his pension turns into a political and personal symbol. On the one hand, it symbolizes his hope that justice would eventually be served; on the other, it is a critique of the government's disregard for its own people. Additionally, critics note that waiting in this novel becomes a metaphor for the human condition rather than merely a plot device. The never-ending waiting conveys both the tenacity of optimism and the hopelessness that results from being disregarded by society. As Nasrullah Mambrol observes in the article "Analysis of Márquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel*", "the feeling of having to wait, as if everything were suspended or trapped in a freeze-frame, pervades the entire plot of the story."

The novella was interpreted by many academics as a mirror of post-war Latin American life, which was marked by political corruption, bureaucracy, and broken promises. Márquez uses long pauses and sparse sentences to portray the emotional weight of disappointment.

The Colonel's loneliness and poverty reflect the plight of many individuals in Latin America at the time. "The only thing that comes for sure is death, Colonel" (No One Writes to the Colonel 24). Despite all of this, the story maintains a tone of quiet resistance and spiritual resilience.

From a psychological standpoint, the narrative can be comprehended through the concepts of two of the most significant figures in psychoanalytic thought, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Freud's theories enable us to comprehend the Colonel's suppressed feelings and internal struggles. Through his unwavering optimism and his bond with the rooster, he subtly displays his suppressed wrath and despair. According to SuperSummary's article "No One Writes to the Colonel – Symbols and Motifs," the couple "had spent that money penny by penny, parceling it out between their needs and the rooster's." The Colonel transforms his inner suffering into patience and dignity, which is explained by Freud's theories of repression, sublimation, and the death drive. He finds purpose in waiting rather than giving up, which turns into a means of emotional survival.

Carl Jung's theory, on the other hand, emphasizes archetypes—symbols and patterns that are present in every human mind—and the collective unconscious. The Colonel's personality is an excellent fit for Jung's "Wise Old Man" archetype. The Colonel stands for moral rectitude, perseverance, and knowledge. He is poor and powerless in the physical world, yet he is spiritually strong. The story's rooster also has a Jungian significance; for the Colonel and the entire village, it represents hope and bravery.

When taken as a whole, these psychological interpretations show us that Márquez's novella is more than just the tale of an elderly man awaiting his pension. It is also a profound examination of the human psyche, demonstrating how individuals maintain their dignity and faith despite pain and silence. Márquez transforms the act of waiting into a social message about faith, perseverance, and the resilience of the human spirit, as well as a sort of psychological resistance.

Methodology

To comprehend the Colonel's personality and feelings, this paper employs psychoanalytic literary criticism. This study is guided by two main frameworks:

The Colonel's internal struggle—how he suppresses his sorrow (repression), transforms it into patience (sublimation), and confronts the quiet pull of death (the death drive)—is explained by Freud's theory. Symbols and archetypes that stand for hope, dignity, and moral wisdom, such the rooster, the letter, and the Colonel himself, are interpreted using Jung's theory. Quotations from both the original text and secondary academic sources are used to support the analysis, which is based on a close reading of the text with an emphasis on significant scenes and dialogues.

Results / Analysis

a) The Colonel's Suppressed Feelings (Freud's Theory)

The Colonel's calm patience hides his anger and disappointment. His frequent Friday trips to the post office reveal his suppressed optimism. His statement, "There is no mail for the Colonel"

(Márquez, No One Writes to the Colonel 9), illustrates how his hopes are consistently dashed but he is unable to give up. His poverty and hunger also demonstrate sublimation—he transforms bodily pain into moral fortitude. The Colonel's persistence in waiting despite despair can be explained by Freud's concept of the "death drive," which combines a yearning for tranquility with a refusal to give up on life's challenges. Freud proposed that human behavior is governed by unconscious desires, repressed emotions, and internal conflict among the id, ego, and superego (Freud, The Ego and the Id 25).

b) The Colonel as Archetype of the Wise Old Man (Jung's Theory)

The Colonel is a wonderful fit for Jung's "Wise Old Man" archetype. He stands for perseverance, moral clarity, and suffering-based insight. Another significant Jungian symbol in the narrative is the rooster, which represents courage and group optimism. The Colonel becomes the voice of a whole community when he declares, "The rooster is not just a rooster; it's the people's hope" (Márquez, No One Writes to the Colonel 43). Their mutual sorrow has value because of his perseverance.

c) Waiting as Resistance

The Colonel's waiting is an act of resistance rather than passivity. He silently rejects the notion of giving up hope when he declines to sell the rooster even though he and his wife are famished. "Shit" (Márquez, No One Writes to the Colonel 67), his last word, conveys defiance and dignity. At last, he takes charge of his own destiny at this point.

4. Discussion

Márquez's tale demonstrates how the human mind may endure even in the direst circumstances. We witness how people hold onto hope when there is no reason to do so through the Colonel. The theories of Freud and Jung enable us to comprehend that waiting is both a psychological necessity and a social reality. The Colonel uses patience to safeguard his identity and beliefs. His optimism turns into a way for him to spiritually oppose a corrupt society.

The novella also discusses society, showing how the state deserts forgotten heroes while they continue to be powerful in silence. Readers are reminded by Márquez's depiction of the Colonel that hope, despite its impossibility, gives life purpose. His patience turns into a lesson about moral bravery, tenacity, and human dignity in an unfair world.

Conclusion

No One Writes to the Colonel by Gabriel García Márquez is a brief but profoundly poignant tale about patience, hope, and human dignity. Márquez illustrates how individuals maintain optimism in the face of injustice and despair through the Colonel's never-ending wait for a pension notice. We can see that the Colonel's waiting is both an external act and a mirror of his inner emotional world thanks to the psychoanalytic approach employed in this study. As observed by reviewer Stella T. Clark, "The Colonel's patient endurance is both tragic and noble, a Freudian defense

against total despair” (Clark, *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* 72). His refusal to accept defeat, despite evidence of futility, reveals a deeply repressed anxiety—a tension between his superego’s dignity and his id’s desire for satisfaction.

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