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No One Writes to the Colonel

A short summary

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was a Columbian novelist, screenwriter, journalist and short story writer. He was considered as one of the notable writers of the twentieth century. He has won Nobel prize for literature in 1982

No One Writes to the Colonel is a simple story that exposes a corrupt town and its institutions. It is written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez which was published in 1958.

It is a novella about an impoverished retired colonel, a war veteran who still hopes to receive the pension he was promised some 15 years ago. He lives in a small village along with his asthmatic wife. The story opens with the colonel preparing to go to the funeral of a town musician. This particular death is significant because he was the first to die from natural causes in many years. The novel is set during the years of “La Violencia” in Columbia. It was the time when martial law and censorship prevailed.

The major characters of the novel are not named. This technique adds to the feeling of non-identity of an individual living in Columbia. The couple’s son was killed due to political repression. They lived in poverty and financial instability. Gabriel Garcia Marquez explores the corruption of the local and national officials throughout the novel. The colonel desperately wants to sell their inheritance from their only son who is now dead. The only reminder of his son’s existence is a rooster that the colonel trains to take part in a cock fight.

The novel contains several intertwined plots. There is the plot that deals with colonel son Agustin, the second plot deals with the political tensions of the town and the third one is about the colonel’s life which dominates the whole narrative.

The colonel visits the post office near the harbor every Friday waiting to get a piece of mail about his pension. He has been doing this for 15 years and the postmaster sarcastically declares, ‘nothing for the colonel. No One Writes to the Colonel’

Gabriel Garcia Marquez explained that the novel was inspired by his grandfather who was also a colonel and who never received the pension he was promised. It is also said Garcia Marquez took inspiration from his own experience of unemployment in 1956 after the newspaper he had been working for closed down. The daily lives he witnessed and experienced during this time are said to be one of his inspirations for this novel.