Márquez’s candid conversation with María Elvira Samper in 1989 had him speak thus of Colombia: “Colombia is a country where there’s a fragmentation of power and each one wields their share according to their interests. The problem is, the civilian government is the one that has the smallest share” (“The General in His Labyrinth Is a “Vengeful” Book”169).

“In a country of de facto powers”, as Palacios says, where “the police, the judiciary, and the electoral system are facades” (264); the common man in Colombia has always been the worst sufferer. Years of oppression, political unrest, social injustices, corruption, censorships, curfews, underdevelopment and a constant sense of insecurity have become the staple ingredient of the common man’s life — despite this, Colombians respond to life with zeal which is “an affirmation of life in the face of a tragedy” (Palacios 238) that no adversity could defeat.

*No One Writes to the Colonel* (*No One*) and *In Evil Hour* are two of the earliest novels by Márquez, which document not just the injustices suffered by the people or the limitless atrocities by those in power; but also compose a paean of human will and resistance against hopelessness, mindless suffering and corrupt power.

“For nearly sixty years — since the end of the last civil war — the colonel had done nothing else but wait” (García Márquez, No One 3). What Robin Fiddian calls a “preposterous amount of time” (47), these sixty years of waiting for a letter confirming the old colonel’s pension indicates “the absurdity of his situation” (47) as well as exposes the rotten system wherein one has to wait for decades for a letter which could have become the means of sustenance for the old colonel and his
asthmatic wife; and as Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat reflects: “Every aspect of the protagonist’s private and public life is affected by this official default” (25).

The novel opens with the image of the colonel scraping the bottom of the coffee can with only one spoonful left which immediately establishes the acute poverty of the old couple. Yet, he waits for the coffee to boil “with an attitude of confident and innocent expectation” (García Márquez, No One 3). Márquez’s early depiction of the colonel is significant in the sense that throughout the entire novel, his “confident attitude” and “innocent expectation” would be pitted against false hopes, unabated social injustices and thwarted expectations.

Márquez subtly introduces the grim political situation of the place, as the colonel prepares to attend a funeral which is a “special event” for him because ironically, it was the “first death from natural causes” (García Márquez, No One 6) that they have had in many years. The memories of their dead son Agustín returns with the sound of the funeral bells and Márquez wastes no time in presenting an oppressive atmosphere, when the funeral march is stopped by the Mayor:

“Well nothing,” the colonel replied. “The burial may not pass in front of the police barracks”.

“I had forgotten,” exclaimed Sabas. “I always forget that we are under martial law.”

“But this isn’t a rebellion,” the colonel said. “It’s a poor dead musician”. (García Márquez, No One 9)

With their young son dead and without the war pension; the old couple are left with only their son’s memories and his rooster — a fighting cock. This fighting cock
becomes a symbol of resistance against their hopeless situation. The colonel fights poverty and every adversity to keep the rooster alive and nurture it for the upcoming cock fights. The rooster was not just a ‘legacy’ from their son, rather it was a reminder of the unjust murder of their son (who was ‘shot’ down for distributing clandestine papers during a cockfight); and the colonel’s determination to keep the rooster alive and fit for fighting, symbolically reflects his determination to resist against all odds. The title of the book arises from the regular hopelessness that the colonel endures when every Friday he waits for the letter (which would confirm his pension) which never arrives and he is resigned to say: “No one writes to me” (García Márquez, No One 13).

The colonel’s eternally delayed mail is however substituted by the newspapers that the doctor gives him to read and their conversation obliquely hints at the repressive atmosphere of the town:

“What’s in the news?” the colonel asked.

The doctor gave him a few newspapers.

“No one knows,” he said. “It’s hard to read between the lines which the censor lets them print.” (García Márquez, No One 13)

Márquez exposes the blatant act of corruption that renders their lives miserable. The pathos can be deeply felt when the colonel tells the lawyer: “All my comrades died waiting for the mail” (García Márquez, No One 24). The lawyer’s utter disinterest in the colonel’s matter and his official explanation of the delay presents a frustrating picture of sheer government red tapism. The importance of the Civil War or of their service had no value anymore. The colonel’s worries about his documents are unashamedly dismissed by the lawyer, as those documents must
have passed through thousands and thousands of hands, in thousands and thousands of offices, before they reached God knows which department in the War Ministry... the officials have changed many times in the last fifteen years, the lawyer pointed out. “Just think about it; there have been seven Presidents, and each President changed his Cabinet at least ten times, and each Minister changed his staff at least a hundred times.” (García Márquez, No One 26)

In the labyrinth of countless transfers of power and files, the sacrifices made by the colonel and his comrades are long forgotten. The heroes were dead and already forgotten. The past or their remnants did not matter at all now.

As conditions deteriorate, the colonel is forced to rethink his decision of keeping the rooster. The rooster was the hope of not only the colonel but also of Agustín’s friends. The young boys keep their dead friend’s memories alive by circulating the clandestine papers in his name. “Agustín wrote” — this coded message honoured Agustín’s sacrifice and death. Despite political persecution, there were still some people like the doctor, Agustín’s friends and the colonel himself who resisted. Agustín’s fighting cock had become the symbol of hope against the absurd brutal life of the people languishing under a martial law. Hence, when he unwillingly mentions the thought of giving away the rooster, Hernán’s insistence takes on a symbolic meaning: “‘Realize how things are, Colonel,’ he insisted. ‘The main thing is for you to be the one who puts Agustín’s rooster into the ring.’” (García Márquez, No One 34). The “main thing” here is that despite the loss of his young son, by putting the rooster into the fighting ring the colonel would be carrying on the fight.
Corruption at the official level horribly affects lives at the personal level. The colonel’s stoic determination to keep the rooster clashes with his wife’s insistence on selling it to make ends meet. The conflict between reason and emotions, need and compromise, giving up and resistance becomes severe:

“I’m tired,” the woman said. “Men don’t understand problems of the household. Several times I’ve had to put stones on to boil so the neighbours wouldn’t know that we often go for many days without putting on the pot.”

The colonel felt offended.

“That’s really a humiliation,” he said...

“I’m ready to give up affectation and pretense in this house,” she said. Her voice began to darken with rage.

“I’m fed up with resignation and dignity.”

The colonel didn’t move a muscle.

“Twenty years of waiting for the little colored birds which they promised you after every election, and all we’ve got out of it is a dead son,” she went on. “Nothing but a dead son.”

The colonel was used to that sort of recrimination.

“We did our duty”.

“And they did theirs by making a thousand pesos a month in the Senate for twenty years,” the woman answered.

“There’s my friend Sabas with a two-story house that isn’t big enough to keep all his money in, a man who came to this town selling medicines with a snake curled around his neck.”

“But he’s dying of diabetes,” the colonel said.
“And you’re dying of hunger,” the woman said. “You should realize that you can’t eat dignity.” (García Márquez, No One 41-42)

This altercation exposes not just their desolation but also the utter corruption and filthy affairs of the state. The dignified colonel had begun to lose the battle to poverty and social injustice. Ironically, while his friend and comrade Don Sabas with his ill-gotten gains was ‘dying of diabetes’, he himself with his uncompromising attitude and moral values was ‘dying of hunger’.

Agustín was shot dead for his activities (circulating clandestine papers) which were considered inimical to the regime. Yet his death did not stop the activities, since clandestine sheets were still being circulated and as they circulated they said: “It’s from Agustín” (García Márquez, No One 51). People kept on taking risks. And his son’s death does not stop the colonel from taking risks as well as surviving them:

. . . The colonel felt the dry snap, articulate and cold, of a rifle being cocked behind his back. He realized that he had been caught fatally in a police raid with the clandestine paper in his pocket. He turned halfway around without raising his hands. And then he saw, close up, for the first time in his life, the man who had shot his son . . . The colonel gritted his teeth and gently pushed the rifle barrel away with the tips of his fingers. (García Márquez, No One 51)

The situation becomes almost like a fighting pit where he is forced to face a strong opponent. But he does come out unscathed. And so does his rooster, when some of the young boys put it in the fighting pit on the trial day. The colonel
saw his rooster in the middle of the pit, alone, defenseless, his spurs wrapped in rags, with something like fear visible in the trembling of his feet. His adversary was a sad ashen rooster . . . He rebuffed every attack, and landed again in exactly the same spot. But now his feet weren’t trembling. (García Márquez, No One 54-55)

The whole atmosphere in the pit was heated up and as the cock was picked up and shown to the crowd, there “was a frenetic explosion of applause and shouting” (55).

After the trial fight, the colonel makes a decision once and for all: “The rooster’s not for sale” (57) — an immensely difficult decision considering the fact that he and his wife would have to go without food and any means for days. Caught in the tussle between the need to survive and the need to keep alive his morals, he decides to fight against all odds but keep the rooster. And in utter desperation when his wife questions him:

“And meanwhile what do we eat?” she asked, and seized the colonel by the collar of his flannel night shirt. She shook him hard.

It had taken the colonel seventy-five years — the seventy-five years of his life, minute by minute — to reach this moment when he replied:

“Shit”. (García Márquez, No One 62)

The novel ends brilliantly with this scatological word — something (that is, swearing) which the colonel had despised throughout his life.
In fact, an earlier episode with Alfonso holds significance now as we realize that the colonel who was ‘startled’ by someone’s swearing would one day end up swearing himself:

“Goddamn it, Colonel”.

He was startled. “No need to swear,” he said. Alfonso adjusted his eyeglasses on his nose to examine the colonel’s shoes.

“It’s because of your shoes,” he said. “You’ve got on some goddamn new shoes.”

“But you can say that without swearing,” the colonel said, and showed the soles of his patent-leather shoes. “These monstrosities are forty years old, and it’s the first time they’ve ever heard anyone swear”.

(García Márquez, No One 33)

This is the same man who puts an end to his wife’s desperate query with ‘shit’.

Of course, it took him years — seventy-five long years of suffering political injustice, government apathy and moral decadence to have arrived at this point. It was a moment when the colonel released himself from all kinds of oppressiveness and asserted himself — a moment when he decided to continue fighting the long fought battle against injustice and corrupt practices. It was a moment of resistance against power and tyranny.

The colonel’s battle is fought at both the personal and public level. At the domestic level, his wife constantly reminds him of their acute poverty, his
impracticality and his obstinacy (in keeping the rooster instead of selling it and putting an end to their financial miseries); however, his “determined quixotic resistance to the crushing pressure of poverty, uncertainty and political injustice” (Bell 22) defeats every attempt of the old woman. Although his ultimate rebuff to his wife’s admonishments (the ‘shit’ that he utters) happens at the personal level, however, this final expletive is actually his reply to the outer pressures and prejudices which had grossly affected his personal life. We must remember that their poverty and misery was caused mainly due to political injustice. This war veteran had been deprived of his pension for decades and the corruption was so deep-rooted that there was no hope either that he would ever get it. And with their only son killed by authorities, they were even more handicapped. Hence, the colonel’s final swear was aimed at not only his wife but at the whole repressive and corrupt system.

Although political violence is not very explicit in the novel, yet authoritarian power pervades everywhere. The musician’s death is the first natural death after a long time — suggestive of the deaths that had taken place in the town which must have been violent; including their son Agustín’s death. However, people keep alive Agustín’s spirits. His death does not deter them from resisting the oppressive regime and they carry on circulating clandestine news (the very reason why Agustín was killed). These clandestine papers are circulated through a code: “Agustín wrote” (García Márquez, No One 32), which “fittingly honours the memory of their dead comrade, whose example it paradoxically keeps alive” (Fiddian 49). The colonel’s much awaited letter is substituted by these clandestine news and “in a symbolic sense, the colonel’s dead son Agustín writes from beyond the suffocating limits of the town, with news and encouragement for those who oppose the repressive regime” (50), and
his rooster embodies “their spirit of resistance and hunger for justice” (Fiddian 48). The euphoria among the public during the trial fight and the adulation and ovation shown to both the rooster and its owner, suggests that the “cock turns into a communal symbol of resistance to the government’s repression; his apotheosized victory in a training session is an anticipation of definite victory in the regional fights” (Mouat 26).

The colonel, his wife and the townsfolk had long suffered political tyranny. Agustín’s death, censorship, night curfews, police raids, clandestine activities — all these suggest an atmosphere of repression as well as that of resistance. This becomes a tale — not just of power and injustice but also of protest and resistance. The narrative is suggestive of the slow but gradual and strong resistance shown by the colonel and the people. Although Márquez does not directly present violence in the novel, and in fact, not a single bullet is shot, yet the whole novel is pervaded by the effects of power. Death, suffering, repression — these are constant preoccupations in the novel. It opens on a funeral day and ironically, it was the first death due to natural causes. The colonel’s copartisans were either killed or exiled. His own son was shot dead and he himself faced an almost similar situation when there was a surprise police raid and he was face-to-face with the man who shot his son. Due to abject poverty, the dignified colonel and his wife were forced to sell their belongings. There was no hope for elections. The newspapers told only what the authorities allowed. Corruption showed itself at every level.

Yet, people did resist. Clandestine activities carried on despite dangers, in the hope that someday things would change for the better. This hope is reflected in the
enthusiasm and spirit of the crowd when the rooster counters every attack of its opponent on the trial day. The whole episode of the trial fight becomes symbolic. When the rooster was put into the fighting pit there was “something like fear visible in the trembling of his feet” (García Márquez, *No One* 54). Yet, the cock “rebuffed every attack . . . now his feet weren’t trembling” (55). The colonel, too, trembled. He hesitated when he went to Don Sabas to sell the rooster. He was about to lose his battle against corruptive power and stark poverty. Yet at the end, he rebuffed every attempt (by the tough situation as well as his wife) that threatened to defeat his dignity and hope. The colonel’s final decision is also suggestive of “the urgency of evolving beyond the submissiveness which lies at the base of all social injustice, abetted by the men who wait rather than act” (Prieto 40).

The novel has obvious references to that period in Colombia which is now called *la violencia*. Those were the times when political factionalism was at its height. Violence and mayhem were the order of the day. Despite an obvious political content, *No One* does not remain simply a tale of war — it reaches beyond that. Instead of depicting violent incidents, gory murders, Márquez draws an honourable story about an honourable man who has to fight the battle for survival without giving in to power or corruption. Although set in the context of *la violencia*; the text encompasses universal human themes of courage, honour, and justice, as well as a subtle treatment on the nature of power.

Although seemingly portrayed as an old, poverty-stricken powerless man, the colonel emerges as a real hero by the end of the novel. He is an experienced yet innocent and almost naïve person who clings on to the hope of receiving the letter
which would confirm his war pension. Every consecutive Friday his hopes of receiving the letter are dashed, yet that did not stop him from waiting: “And he really believed it, certain that he would be alive at the moment the letter arrived” (García Márquez, No One 29). Márquez creates an exemplary figure of a common man with sheer human will and courage. He is pitted against the wily Don Sabas who was once his comrade and the only one who escaped political persecution. Sabas’s immorality and dishonesty stands in contrast to the colonel’s moral dignity and courage. For Sabas, the rooster was valued in a few pesos while for the colonel as well as for the community, it had more of a moral, emotional and political value as it was the living legacy of the dead Agustín — the legacy of the will and resistance that Agustín stood for.

Márquez leaves the reader hanging between hope and despair. The rooster’s win in the trial fight does give a sense of hope, yet the stark reality can also not be ignored. The colonel’s emotions after the trial fight are significant because that not only brings back his past memories but also subtly compares itself with the gloomy present:

He had no regrets. For a long time the town had lain in a sort of stupor, ravaged by ten years of history. That afternoon — another Friday without a letter — the people had awakened. The colonel remembered another era. He saw himself with his wife and his son watching under an umbrella a show which was not interrupted despite the rain. He remembered the party’s leaders, scrupulously groomed, fanning themselves to the beat of the music in the patio of his house. He almost relived the painful resonance of the bass drum in his intestines.
He walked along the street parallel to the harbor and there, too, found the tumultuous Election Sunday crowd of long ago. They were watching the circus unloading. From inside a tent, a woman shouted something about the rooster. He continued home, self-absorbed, still hearing scattered voices, as if the remnants of the ovation in the pit were pursuing him. (García Márquez, No One 56)

Every line reflects a beautiful past as well as a tormenting present. It speaks of a glimmering hope from behind the shadowy clouds of political and personal mess. The colonel remembers his own past merged with the collective past of the town. It was not only the town which was “ravaged by ten years of history” but his personal life was also inestimably ‘ravaged’. The pessimism of the present reflected in “another Friday without a letter” is contrasted with a happier past when the colonel and his wife and son had enjoyed a dignified and happy life. The “scrupulously groomed” party leaders are in contrast to the unshaven, pajama-clad Mayor who stopped the funeral procession. Yet, he had no regrets; because on that ‘Friday without a letter’ the people had awakened. The prospect of Agustín’s rooster winning the cockfight was a matter of jubilation and a reason for reassertion of their hopes. The arrival of the circus after ten years, itself suggests change. Although elections were long suspended and there was no hope either of having elections, yet on that day the crowd seemed like the ‘tumultuous Election Sunday crowd of long ago’. And as “the remnants of the ovation in the pit were pursuing him” — is it that the remnants of the beautiful past was actually pursuing him or is it that the echoes of the ‘ovation’ still resounding in his ears is an anticipation of a better future? Márquez craftily leaves the ending for the readers to resolve.
No One does not end either in victory or defeat. Márquez never resolves this but it sure does end with a sense of hope. All the forces of power work upon the condition of the old colonel and his wife. Living in an oppressive state where a martial law does not even allow a funeral procession to proceed properly and where any kind of resistance is brutally suppressed, the colonel’s final expletive is his reply to the pressures of a difficult life. In Bell-Villada’s words:

The figure of the colonel is among García Márquez’s most memorable and touching exemplars of human innocence: an ex-soldier yet gentle, timid, wide-eyed, dreamy; unable to counter the wiles of the trickster Don Sabas yet himself blessed with reservoirs of self-irony and belief that are all but wondrous; peaceable, yet ultimately stubborn enough to say “no” to the sale of the rooster, and then end up pronouncing the most unforgettable final line in all prose fiction. (García Márquez 130)

This novel was written when Márquez was in Paris — himself fighting with poverty and hopelessness. El Espectador — the newspaper in Bogotá where he was working was closed down by the military regime of Rojas Pinilla and his entry into Colombia had become dangerous because of his journalistic activities. He being a political victim as well as a witness to a lot of violence, this novel bears a subtle personal touch. His grandfather himself had suffered due to government apathy. Years later when he was himself facing stark poverty, all these impressions combined into the formation of No One.

Although it is not a tale of war, this “tale of a retired colonel who waits away his life, dying of hunger for a pension which never comes, could well be just what it
seems and nothing more: a brilliantly terse indictment of social injustice in Latin America” (Prieto 33); and “the colonel’s dignity as a conscious individual being is the standard by which political evil is to be judged. To that extent, it is in itself a form of political resistance” (Bell 23).

Márquez’s old, dignified colonel was inspired not just by his grandfather, rather the colonel and the story is a result of varied impressions and experiences which he creatively gave shape to. The impressions of his childhood remained with Márquez. And they were not simply impressions, but facets of reality — reality as understood by him and as suffered by his grandfather. His grandfather introduced him to the outer world, “and on most days he would walk around the town with him. One of their favourite walks was on a Thursday to the post office to see if there was any news about the Colonel’s pension from the war twenty-five years earlier. There never was, a fact which made a big impression on the child” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 48). His grandfather Colonel Nícolas Márquez never received the war pension — an example of corruption and dishonesty of government officers and authorities. His grandfather was the stoic figure of a veteran who fought for ideals. However, it was too late for him to realize that the governments that came into power promising change and prosperity had no respect for ideals; just as it took the colonel “nearly half a century to realize that he hadn’t had a moment’s peace since the surrender at Neerlandia” (García Márquez, No One 43).

In one of his trips to Valledupar, Márquez met a man who created a strong impression in him and in his own words he says:
... I met Colonel Clemente Escalona, Rafael’s father, who impressed me from the first with his dignity and old-fashioned patriarch’s bearing. He was as slim and straight as a reed, with weather-beaten skin, prominent bones, and perfect dignity. From the time I was very young I had been pursued by the subject of the anguish and decorum with which my grandparents waited until the end of their long lives for the veteran’s pension. But four years later, when at last I was writing the book in an old hotel in Paris, the image I always had in mind was not my grandfather but Don Clemente Escalona as the physical replica of the colonel who had nobody to write to him. (Living 410)

Márquez’s own experiences as well as those of the people whom he met and also the situations are subtly reflected in No One, where the colonel is hopeful of a pension which never arrives. It was a situation of hope against hope. The stoic figure of the colonel walking everyday up to the docks in hope of the non-existent pension is at once — a dismaying picture of untold sufferings, a dirty picture of corrupt politics and policies depriving common people of their basic needs; and yet an inspiring story of the indomitable spirit of a common man to resist and fight the perversities (of politics) and the odds of life.

In Evil Hour shares the geographical and social milieu with No One. While in No One, the text focuses on one particular individual and is limited to a few events which nevertheless speak volumes about the precarious situation of the man and his society as a whole; in In Evil Hour the focus is broadened as Márquez sets out “to explore the phenomenon of violence from a perspective that would consider the
perpetrators as well as the victims of repression and barbarism” (Fiddian 52). The characters of Father Angel, the Mayor and Don Sabas in No One are developed further here along with a number of other characters who people the unnamed town. When the novel begins, the town is already infested by lampoons and the first death already takes place because of it.

Although the novel opens in an atmosphere of relative peacefulness, the subversive and controversial lampoons were already bringing back the restlessness and insecurities of the community. It is through the means of the lampoons that Márquez begins to expose the hidden rottenness and repressed brutalities. The lampoons cause the death of a young man Pastor and this incident indirectly becomes the expository event that would unearth buried terrors.

Márquez is extremely sarcastic at every attempt by the Mayor who pretends to do justice to the fateful incident. As the Mayor requests the doctor (Octavio Giraldo) to conduct an autopsy, the latter’s sneering remark directly attacks the Mayor: ‘‘So we’re doing autopsies now,’ he said, and added: ‘That’s great progress, obviously.’’” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 13). Filled with deep irony and sarcasm, this dialogue surely reflects the façade of lawfulness that the Mayor has been trying to put up.

The role of Father Angel serves only to further expose the uselessness of his religious prohibitions and sanctions. Here, the distinction between morality and immorality, political correctness and otherwise are definitively blurred. The priest’s religious severity is ironically undermined by the actual moral depravity of the
people. A man who gives more importance to the moral classification of movies than the moral implications of the lampoons — the priest becomes an ineffectual caricature of moral policing whose moral injunctions seem futile and baseless in a place where laws and morals change according to the political situation. As he prohibits the showing of a movie due to the death of Pastor, the manager’s complaint proves the vacuity of such sanctions, since: “Last year the police themselves killed a man inside the movies and as soon as they took the body out the show went on . . .” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 18).

In a town where political and personal immorality merges, the lampoons become just a media of exposing what almost everyone knows but can never make them public. The moral and sexual debauchery is just a part of the whole picture as the narrative gradually unfolds more serious issues of blatant misuse of power such as the forceful accumulation of land and property. The barber’s comment on Don Chepe Montiel’s immense property raises serious questions about business and ethics:

“A fine business: my party gets in power, the police threaten my political opponents with death, and I buy up their land and livestock at a price I set myself.”

Mr. Carmichael lowered his head. The barber applied himself to cutting his hair again. “When the elections are over,” he concluded, “I own three towns, I’ve got no competition, and along the way I’ve managed to get the upper hand even if the government changes. All I can say is: It’s the best business there is; even better than counterfeiting.” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 43)
Such misappropriations can be traced to the times of *la violencia* when:

> Quite simply, “land-grabbing” of a nonideological sort became a common practice during *la Violencia*. Anyone who had the guns and the power could and would steal away other people’s property. The big land-owners’ armed bands on retainer helped them swell their lands yet further, and in areas where the state still had authority, the police and military frequently connived in the takeovers. (Bell-Villada, *García Márquez* 27)

The Mayor’s misuse of his powers is also an extension of the excesses that arise out of such political chaos and violence. As the floods render many people homeless, the poor people are offered rehabilitation by the Mayor, whose act of generosity turns out to be a sly way of fleecing tax out of them. Law and legalities become mere ineffectual terms in such repressive states. The Mayor’s negotiation with César Montero (the man who killed Pastor) satirises the entire rotten legal system. He unashamedly sets a price for Montero’s legal issues and ultimately his freedom: “‘... between courts and lawyers, they’ll get at least twenty thousand pesos out of you... between twists and paper work, they’ll nail you for two years if all goes well for you.’” (García Márquez, *In Evil Hour* 74).

Hence, the ‘best deal’ for Montero would be for him to pay the Mayor and be rid of the hassles:

> “César Montero sighed.” He puts his hands into his pockets, and, with a resolute air, but without haste, he summed up his thoughts in two words:

> “How much?”
As the stench of a dead cow (which comes floating across the flooded river) invades the room where Montero and the Mayor are discussing, Márquez’s vivid but obnoxious imagery of the dead cow and its stench shows the putrefaction of morals in men and in the society as a whole. The lampoon which causes Pastor’s death is one such example of the decay that permeates through the so-called respectable families. The moral and spiritual decadence is just a part of the overall social and political decadence of the town and just as “the stench of rottenness hung over the wharf for a moment, mingling with the morning breeze, and even penetrated deep inside the houses” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 77); so also the stench of moral, social, and political rottenness had penetrated deep inside the families of the town.

Amidst such lawlessness and corruption, there are however some people like the barber and the dentist who show their resentment towards such regimes. Especially the dentist lives in open confrontation with the Mayor. Like the Colonel who was left alone in No One — whose co-partisans were either killed or exiled; the dentist here “had been the only one sentenced to death who hadn’t abandoned his house. They’d perforated the walls with shots, had given him twenty-four hours to leave town, but hadn’t succeeded in breaking him” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 108). And he not only resists but also carries on with the subversive act of circulating clandestine papers. As the lampoons have been slowly and steadily unearthing the dark secrets of the respectable families of the town and gradually destabilizing the so-called peace that was being established for a while; in a more symbolic and stronger
way these clandestine papers would steadily be exposing the atrocities of a ruthless, autocratic government which has been trying hard to put up a show that peace prevailed, law was maintained, and that justice was delivered. Moreover, the poor people of the town do not keep their rancour hidden and despite the Mayor’s pretense of help and rehabilitation during the flood; the Mayor’s earlier atrocities are never forgotten. The conversation between the woman and the Mayor is a reminder that death, oppression and injustice could not be forgotten or forgiven:

“‘How long are you people going to go on like this?’ the Mayor asked.
The woman spoke without changing her apathetic expression.
‘Until you people bring the dead you killed back to life.’” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 67).

The apparent peace and stability of the present nevertheless could not efface the evil times of the past. Mr. Carmichael (the caretaker of Montiel’s property) too resists the pressures put on him by the Mayor. Despite severe physical torture, Carmichael remains rigid in his determination not to allow the Mayor to capture the Montiel estate: “... after two days of hunger and exposure to the elements, his reply revealed the same inflexibility” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 170). Carmichael’s honesty stands against the Mayor’s greed and despite the situation that he is in, his courage and dignity shines in his resistance:

He didn’t lift his head until he heard the Mayor walking from one end of the office to the other. Then he gave a sigh and said: “You still have another way out, Lieutenant.” Before continuing, he looked at him with soft gentleness:

“Shoot me”. (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 171)
Finally, the unsolvable issue of the lampoons forces the Mayor to declare a curfew as per the rules of which: “No one could go out onto the streets after eight o’clock and until five in the morning without a pass signed and stamped by the mayor. The police had orders to call Halt three times at anyone they found on the street and if they were not obeyed, they had orders to shoot” (García Márquez, *In Evil Hour* 117).

Márquez heightens the tension that arises during such times, and by the end of the novel the utter duplicity and ruthlessness of a brutal and repressive regime is fully exposed. When a boy named Pepe Amador is caught circulating clandestine papers; the actual, brutal face of the regime comes to the front. He is tortured and killed in jail without being given any chance to pray for justice and as it happens in most repressive regimes, such murders are never accounted for, as the Mayor declares: “This boy never died” (García Márquez, *In Evil* 178).

*In Evil Hour*, thus, ends with a return of violence and lawlessness in the town. In the grip of moral decay and political violence — the town had only one optimistic news, and that was the resistant groups “were organizing guerrilla groups against the government in the interior again” (García Márquez, *In Evil Hour* 149).

In *In Evil Hour*, Márquez incorporates some of the events that he had himself witnessed in Sucre. It was that of the pasquines. As he recounted the experience:

Terror lived in the houses of the great families, who waited for the next morning, as if it were a fateful lottery. Where least expected a punitive sheet of paper would appear, which was a relief for what it did not say about you, and at times a secret fiesta for what it did say about others . . . Several families began an exodus for fear the pasquines were a
prelude to the political violence that was devastating entire towns in the interior of the country in order to intimidate the opposition.

Tension was transformed into another kind of daily bread. (Living 229)

In In Evil Hour, these pasquines or lampoons create the disturbance in the unnamed town. The lampoons serve as a reminder or a reflection of the moral decay which threatened to expose the so-called respectability of the well-to-do families. The events in Sucre inspired the then young Márquez and he recalled that: “Then I knew that one day I was going to write a novel about them, not because of what they said, which almost always were fantasies in the public domain, and with little wit, but because of the unbearable tension they managed to create inside the houses” (Living 230).

Combining personal memories and political experiences, this early novel draws a telling picture of the grim lives of common people compelled to live (if they survived political onslaught) under a repressive government. Those were the times when law was used and abused by the powerful, and when justice was reduced to a farce; as Mr. Benjamín tells Pepe Amador’s mother (who had approached him to write a petition demanding justice): “Justice doesn’t depend on writs; it depends on bullets” (García Márquez, In Evil Hour 173).

Justice was not yet delivered in No One, yet the Colonel waited patiently for it. In In Evil Hour, we never learn whether there ever will be an answer to the various injustices that the people had to suffer. In No One, the fighting cock becomes the symbol of hope — the hope of a better future. In In Evil Hour, the news of guerrilla
groups being formed to resist the onslaught of mass political extermination and injustice brings the only ray of hope. Power was yielded by the powerful. But that did not stop people from protesting. These two early novels by Márquez which take place in small, unnamed towns are befitting narratives of resilience shown by common people against the vices of absolute power.

Although Márquez writes about oppression, grave political injustice and deaths — amidst the bleak reality lies a possibility of hope brought about by resilience of the common man, be it the Colonel or Carmichael. It is this very human will and courage of the common man that sustains hope against indescribable loss and suffering — the poignant yet courageous tale of the old Colonel as well as the determination of Carmichael to resist the Mayor’s pressures; and this forms a basic belief in Márquez’s works, a belief which is well-documented in his Nobel Prize winning speech of 1982: “In spite of this, to oppression, plundering, and abandonment, we respond with life. Neither floods nor plagues, famines nor cataclysms, nor even the eternal wars of century upon century have been able to subdue the persistent advantage of life over death” (“The Solitude” 90).