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English 305, Version 2

26 November 2018

García Márquez's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" : A Representation of Jung's

### Archetypes

It is not uncommon for an individual to put more meaning on an object or person than is perhaps necessary. This is the case in Gabriel García Márquez's short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World." A man washes up on the shores of a small village and is unrecognizable as one of their own. The villagers then proceed to claim the man as their own, giving him the name Esteban and creating a backstory for him. The village then welcomes this deceased stranger. Why would they adopt a stranger as one of their own? Is this drowned man just a drowned man or does he represent something more? Perhaps he fulfills something in the villagers' unconscious that they did not even realize needed fulfilling. According to Jung, archetypal ideas are "primordial images which were never reflections of physical events but are spontaneous products of the psychic factor" (Jung 56). Archetypal ideas are images that are formed from the unconscious. These archetypal forms can then be used to show why the village reacted to the arrival of Esteban. The handsomest drowned man did not belong to any one, yet the village took him in as one of their own, creating a life story for the man, projecting archetypes of their own wants and desires on Esteban through the backstory they created for him and through elements of magical realism. What are the townspeople looking to gain from the appearance of this man? Whether it be the women looking to explore their masculine traits

through the animus or the men of the village searching for their more feminine side through the anima, all of the villagers are in search of something more through the drowned man and his arrival into their village and their lives.

The women of the village project themselves onto the unidentified drowned man by focusing on his masculine qualities that they lack as women and creating a backstory for him. Esteban did not belong to any of the surrounding villages, so he was unknown in life. Only when the women “finished cleaning him off did they become aware of the kind of man he was and it left them breathless. Not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination” (García Márquez 290). There was no room for Esteban in the imaginations of the women of the village because he was not housed in their conscious imaginations, rather he was present in their unconscious. The women are searching for their animus in order to feel whole and complete themselves. This is why the women project their desires for their own archetypes on Esteban by creating a backstory and giving him a name. The women were in search of their masculine qualities, focusing on the larger than life existence of Esteban. These actions brought their unconscious desires into their consciousness. As far as the women of the village were concerned, Esteban was the perfect man. He was not only handsome, but also easily embarrassed by his largeness and considerate of not making others accommodate to it. The aforementioned represents a perfect man, something the women were searching for in their unconscious to make them whole and fulfil the unfulfilled animus archetype because he showed the attributes of an ideal man.

The elements of magical realism within the story connect Esteban as a symbol of the various archetypes throughout the story such as his large size representing masculinity or his assumed embarrassment representing femininity. Esteban is described as being rather large as “the tallest men’s holiday pants would not fit him, nor the fattest ones’ Sunday shirts, nor the shoes of the one with the biggest feet” (García Márquez 290). Esteban is projected as being larger than life so that he could house all of the desires from all the village people. Esteban is therefore a symbol within the community. Symbols can be objects that are projected upon and “are alive and connect social consciousness to the deep strata of the collective unconscious” (Kiehl 205). While Esteban is not physically alive, as a symbol he is very much living. He is the connection between the villagers and their own unconsciousness. The women make some pretty ill-fitting clothes for Esteban, representing how their backstory was also unfitting for the man. The way in which Esteban’s emotions were portrayed on his deceased face and how the men of the village interpreted them differently than the women is also an aspect of magical realism at work in the story. Esteban is dead, so the expressions on his face are supposedly unmoving. How is it then, that villagers can interpret different emotions from the man’s face? This is so because each individual villager is looking for something different in Esteban’s arrival in order to make themselves whole.

The men of the village also project their unconscious desires onto Esteban. The men project their anima, in this case their desire to be more emotional on Esteban. “They only had to take the handkerchief off his face to see that he was ashamed” (García Márquez 292). In society, men are expected to be stoic and not show the world affecting them. Esteban, however, is described as being ashamed. Archetypal figures “share qualities that are common to the human

experience in this striving toward wholeness” (Kaminker 96). Esteban shares the missing qualities that the men in the village wish to have to be whole, but are unable to because of the box that society places gender into. In order to be whole and fully experience what it is that makes an individual human, the men are searching for validation in Esteban’s ashamedness and ability to show emotion, even in death. Humans often focus on an “ultimate concern” which is something that concerns all of one’s life (Kaminker 96). The ultimate concern is the goal, what will make the individual whole. In the case of the men of the village, the ultimate concern is the desire to show emotions, which they project on Esteban who shows so many different emotions. A real man does not show that he is ashamed as that would show weakness, and weakness is an attribute that is more often associated with women. By realizing the emotions shown in Esteban, the men of the village are projecting their unshared emotions.

The handsomest drowned man in the world washed ashore and challenged the villagers to confront some of their desires hidden deep in their unconscious. He was a symbol of their unconscious and something to project their unspoken wants upon. Esteban symbolized a variety of desires, both conscious and unconscious, for all of the villagers, regardless of gender. He represents the anima and the animus, depending on who is looking for something more within him. Jung’s ideas surrounding archetypes are heavily prevalent in the projections of all of the villagers and help bring forward some of their deepest and most suppressed desires in their search for wholeness within the human experience.

## Works Cited

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