

A very old man with
enormous wings – a
mirror of human
reactions essay
sample



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The title itself is intriguing, what would someone do if you find a very old man with enormous wings? As we have known that only angels or fairies will have such appendage, people will definitely have mixed emotions upon seeing an old man with huge wings lying in a puddle of mud. Some will feel threatened, afraid that the man will have a special power that could possibly hurt them. Some will feel in awe that an angel had dropped from heaven. Some will just be curious about the man. Lastly, some will definitely think of ways how could they make most out of the weird man - perhaps take him to the circus and make money by making his enormous wings an audience attraction. Thus, the enormous wings become the mirror of the people's reaction to it and it showed the negative aspects of human nature.

At the beginning of the story, the author wrote " He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings" (Marquez 387). The author created a dizzy image of the old man. Pelayo must move closer to object and focus on what actually it is, then to turn out a little bit clear to a very old man stuck in mud.

From the old man's face to the mud, than focus on the body, which could result a human being, however when the movement continued, which the old man with tremendous effort to get up, it showed up another image with a heavy object impeding the old man. The very big stuff finally turns out to be the wings. In this way, the author made a vivid picture that included a special meaning of big and heavy wings pressure on the old man's body. This is the appendage that people will draw upon their mixed reactions.

To Pelayo and his wife, Elisenda, the first townspeople to see the man (who is in their own backyard), he is just an old man who speaks in an incomprehensible dialect. Pelayo and his wife thought the wing was not important as it is, so they concluded the old man was a castaway foreigner. However, to their neighbor, he is “an angel” who is coming for Pelayo’s sick child but has been knocked down by the rain (388). Just as the angel becomes immobilized the child seems to recover, and so the neighbor woman’s words seem to confirm the supernatural: a visible angel really has come to protect the souls of dying children.

Elisenda and Pelayo are simple people. They live under very poor economic circumstances and their only child is sick. When Pelayo comes upon the winged old man he does not know what to think of him. Neither does his wife. Their frame of reference has no concept for such a reality. Their first response to it is awe, but after a short while they start to find the winged old man familiar, even human-like. Their neighbor, an elderly woman who supposedly understands all matters of life and death, calls the winged old man an angel. The townspeople, however, crowd into Elisenda and Pelayo’s house.

Their curiosity brings them to see this winged old man, whom they treat like a circus animal. Although the narrator never describes the winged old man as an angel, the characters do, and decide to put it to a test. Elisenda and Pelayo capitalize on the townspeople’s doubt and start to charge everyone who wants to see him. Indirectly, the angel does perform the miracles he is supposed to. The sick child of Elisenda and Pelayo gets well, and their poor

economic status changes. The angel, nonetheless, does not get any better treatment. He continues, until the end, to be treated as a circus animal.

Thus, Elisenda and Pelayo do not behave any differently than the rest of the townspeople. They, like the people who come from afar to see the winged old man, seem conditioned by their ignorance and superstition. They all want the old man to perform miracles as proof of his supernatural powers. In the end, the entire curiosities over the angel shifts to a newer attitude, their oppressive nature set in. The townspeople move on to think that the old man is an object of amusement, and the angel “concept” is left behind. Only then, when no one is paying attention, does the very old man with enormous wings fly away.

Marquez seemed to represent the old man as the mirror where people could draw upon their reactions on seeing an unusual person. This is evident in the story as the winged old man is viewed as an object, not a human being. He is isolated in a cage as if he were an animal. His isolation is total. He does not speak the same language, ignores the town’s social and cultural codes, and is the only one of his kind in the town. The town as character is portrayed as indifferent, not firm in its beliefs, frivolous, superstitious, and superficial. This is a town that moves back and forth, lacking firm convictions in seeing an old man with enormous wings.