

Faithlessness in a
very old man with
enormous wings



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The sudden appearance of an angel to test the faith of a town of religious people lead towards an unexpected reaction from the Christian environment in Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. An old man falls out of the sky into Pelayo and Elisenda's courtyard that has come to heal their sick child from a fever as an angel but is not really displayed as an angel. García Márquez's style of this short story is grounded in magical realism as it usually is in all of his work.

The magical element displayed in this story is an old man as an angel because angels are not physically seen by humans. The setting plays a major role in this story with García Márquez having it set in Colombia, where he is from and where all his work is usually set in. Colombia is unquestionably a Catholic country. García Márquez disdains the villagers' loss of faith in the angel by highlighting the faithlessness of the angel's prisoners, alongside their willingness to believe his miracles.

García Márquez uses imagery to show mistreatment of the angel to display that the villagers indeed do not believe this old man is an angel. For example, once there is rumor that there may be an old man that is depicted as an angel, everyone wants to see him. Elisenda takes advantage of this opportunity of people in her courtyard by charging everyone five cents to view him like a locked-up animal in a zoo. Also, the imagery of mistreatment towards the angel relates to the mistreatment of Jesus in the Bible. Jesus and the old man are recognized as powerless individuals, so they are abused. Just like Jesus was nailed to the cross, the very old man was physically harmed: The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless

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for so many hours that they thought he was dead (García Márquez 147). The old man has an iron pressed to his side, meanwhile, Jesus suffers with a woven crown of thorns and nails in both his hands and feet. García Márquez paints a picture of these harsh conditions the old man is put through: He spent his time trying to get comfortable in his borrowed nest, befuddled by the hellish heat of the oil lamps and sacramental candles that had been placed along the wire (García Márquez 146). The villagers may not understand if the old man is an angel, but God's word explains that no one should be mistreated because it is not known if they are an angel or not. Hebrews 13: 2 says, Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (The Bible). The villagers' mistreatment of the angel demonstrates their loss of faithfulness because of their disobedience to God's word, even as they come to him for relief, this demonstrates a basic belief in miracles.

The villagers in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* are not appreciative nor respectful to the remarkable work that is done by the old man. The villagers come in search of the old man for restoration of health: a poor woman who since childhood had been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him (García Márquez 146). However, the small miracles that the old man perform are not what the villagers expect, so they give up on him as an angel: Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn't recover his sight but grew three new teeth, or the paralytic who didn't get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers (García Márquez

148). The villagers fail to realize God works in mysterious ways and the blessing they received could have been the blessing God wanted the angel to give them right now only because he was giving them a little taste of how marvelous their next blessing they receive is going to be. The villagers are unwillingly and unable to understand the angel's miracle which shows their loss of faith because a faithful Christian would be thankful for any blessing they receive.

The villagers have a difficult time finding how the old man play a role in their lives because he does not fit their expectation of an angel, so they lose faith in him being an angel. García Márquez makes it harder to believe the old man is an angel by the way he describes his appearance: He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud (García Márquez 144). The villagers are unable to look past the appearance of the old man to realize his holiness, but James 2: 1-13 summarizes for those who put their faith in God not to respect people based on their appearances and circumstances (The Bible). Father Gonzaga, a priest decides to determine if the man is an angel by speaking Latin to him. The priest is quick to send out letters for different opinions asking for the solution to the situation once he gets the memo that an old man is depicted as an angel because he believes the man is sent by the devil, instead, of God. It is evident the Priest thinks he is not an angel: Then he noticed that seen close up he was much too human: he had an unbearable smell of the outdoors, the back side of his wings was strewn with parasites and his main feathers had been mistreated by terrestrial winds,

and nothing about him measured up to the proud dignity of angels (García Márquez 145). God always rewards his people for their patience and so he did for the angel. After the long winter, God gives the angel a new beginning of life with wings to fly. In the story, it's ironic for Elisenda to be joyful that the angel is finally gone because he supplied her with a two-story mansion from earnings and healed her child. This definitely shows her lack of faith because God used the angel to bless her doubly. The villagers claim to believe in God, but they do not based on their doubt of the angel, reflecting their faithlessness.

Gabriel García Márquez emphasizes the loss of faith of the villagers by the imprisonment of the angel and the miracles in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. The villagers express their misapprehension by constantly pointing out the reasons why the old man could not be an angel. The villagers' attitudes show their lack of faith by disregarding the proof they have in front of them that this old man is an angel. There are several times God blesses people with something, but they do not see the full beauty of it because they try to make something different out of it that God did not send for them.