

# A very old man with enormous wings by gabriel marquez

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Gabriel Marquez is famed with producing a large collection of fine literature. *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* guides readers into the depths of deep moral and spiritual truths—all done through the vision of a children's tale; yet, it's far from a simple short story for elementary students to digest. It's Gabriel Marquez's method and style that reaches out to the cultured individual as we look at point of view, character construction, and symbolism. Marquez, in fact, is very deliberate in his tone and thematic language which creates the power behind his tale.

I will assess this short fiction piece and offer critical evidence to aid in dissecting how and what is the author's true message: He blended magical realism with satirical undercurrents against the Columbian government. Marquez complicated his meaning by incorporating religion with government upheaval into Columbia, a country based in Catholicism. This steadfast government preferred to control its people instead of creating unity. The characters, too, hide their motive as Gabriel Marquez provides vivid descriptions of why the human mind has become so tainted by its own grip on material vices and following a strict higher order.

Materialism and the Columbian government have put up walls, according to Marquez, between the spiritual world and the individual. In fact, an entire village in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* is so blinded of the true essence of human spirit that they cannot tap into it—even when a village cages an angel in town. Yet, could this 1968 publication, an early creation by Marquez instead be a satirical stab at an artist who hopes to fool a small

village of simple-minded folks? This idea generates great conflict as readers attempt unravel this complicated piece.

Marquez's story stirred up religion, the Latin American government, and social disharmony. Symbolism surrounding the ideal of his vision of the Latin American government was a tricky undertaking for Marquez. The main reason that this was a risk for Marquez is that if someone were to chastise or publicly mock the Columbian government, the repercussions most often led to the arrest of an individual. The government didn't allow free-press or speaking out against the government. Since Columbia, by-and-large, is a catholic country Marquez's angel can be viewed as a symbol of the constant praying done by their lower-class society.

They prayed for their freedom, safety, and peaceful survival. It's very ironic how a poor community is forced to save every peso they work so hard to earn. The limited funds netted by individuals and households winds up being just enough for survival. The government, in turn, looks the other way as it pilfers every peso they can from individuals and families. It's almost a dictatorial monarchy that could be likened to the story of Robin Hood and the problems he faced when trying to share the wealth with the less fortunate.

In Marquez's story, he showed readers that the people of this simple Columbian village prayed often and deeply to God, praying for an angel to save them from this constant torment. Many times, their prayers were focused solely on having a just government to represent them. They, however, never knew what a just, fair legal system was. This small Columbian

village and its political practices remained hidden from many neighboring countries. In dissecting this short story, I must look further into symbolism. Marquez also painted a picture of the poor woman in the story.

The poor woman is actually the symbol of the poor Columbian people. The poor people prayed; yet, nothing seemed to be going their way—whether they held rosary beads or not. Marquez, in his compassionate, writerly ways used his poetic license when he brought an angel to this community that was in dire need of reconciliation. The angel, however, does not fit the stereotypical white-winged halo of beauty, grace, and heavenly wisdom. Here, the angel arrives on the scene in its crumpled state of near-paralysis. Even the angel's wings are covered in stench.

This stench on these heavy, infected wings is symbolic of a suffering community. Marquez wrote the following to initiate this winged-angel into the story, which created a tone of what was to come from our angel: his huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. This description helps to create the theme of a troubled Latin American society. Every time a new election brings about a different government official or president, there seemed to be a need for spiritual aid for the Columbian nation.

They always feel back on spiritual healing, but the healing never came to them. So, to display this, Marquez created the new government official, or president, as an angel coming to save Columbia in hopes of solving their massive problems. It so fitting, and ironic, that Marquez depicts the

president as an angel. The president and government were anything but angelic toward its people. So to bring the message home, Marquez described a withered up, decrepit angel that is caged by the community—partly because they didn't know what to make of this bird-creature.

Marquez added in the short story, a poor woman who since childhood had been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; the Portuguese Man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him...and many others with less serious ailments. Marquez further conveys meaning by creating characters that seem to have something missing. The angel, although it is a fantastic sight with its huge wings, appears to be very human, even ordinary. At best, it's a disappointed angel that was forced into a standstill by the seeing eye of the people who yearned for a better system of government.

We sense upheaval and emotions from the characters, yet he does not create concrete characters that the reader can relate to. There is a purpose to his magic, though. Our angel is described as a helpless angel, one that is caged by the people. Even though he appears to be so weak and unable to even walk, they cage him. This, in effect, symbolizes how the government has instilled decades of fear into the people, blinding them and weakening them. They cannot speak for themselves for fear of being imprisoned by the government.

More irony can be seen here because the people are fearful of being imprisoned by the government rule when they are already caged by this

oppressive government. The character of our angel creates the style of the story. It is, both fascinating and distressing. Readers discover an underlying source of tension by how ill-mannered they treat this angel-like creation. In reality, we know that people don't sprout wings. So this is either some kind of monster, a cruel trick, or completely imagined. When the doctor examines this caged winged-man, he feels that the wings are perfect for this creature.

He is left to wonder—since he believes the wings are a perfect fit—why God did not grace us with wings as well. They are a natural addition to the old man's frame. When we look at the logic of the situation, we either feel it has supernatural intentions or its wings were meant to fit him. The author even has Pelayo and Elisenda overcome their own shock and dismay when they, too, feel he is a familiar creature. As readers, we are steered in the same direction and simple acceptance of this winged angel.

In fact, none of the people that come to view the winged-man ever question its existence. At the end, we are left to wonder whether he was or was not an actual angel. In any event, he is, at the very least, an old man with wings.

The caged angel is placed on a families' property. The family living on the property are representations of the cabinet of the government figure.

Marquez created a poor family for the angel to land on. Once the angel arrives, the family accepts it and discovers a means of generating some income.

They use the angel as if the angel were a sideshow freak at a carnival attraction. The people in the village, as displayed by Marquez's talented

ability to create plot, are tainted by conventional wisdom, superstition, and ignorance. This ignorance is something that has been instilled by a government that refused to allow its people to grow and expand their individual knowledge base. Even though the angel is treated distastefully—and the angel appears pensive and even in pain—it is in no way, a bad angel or a representation of the angel of death.

He is just a vulnerable creation who is plagued by the heavy burden of his wings. Again, these dysfunctional, stench-ridden wings represent the cabinet of the government that has plagued the community into submission. The following phrase written by Marquez helps signify the fact that these villagers are a people easily swayed by the voice of confidence. First, out of all the people they might call on to help decipher who, what, and where this apparent winged creature came from, the villagers called upon a fortune teller of sorts.

Marquez wrote, They called in a neighbor woman who knew everything about life and death to see him, and all she needed was one look to show them their mistake. Marquez, then, related how quickly this apparent all-knowing woman comes to a conclusion about this winged man without more than a bat of her eye at the winged individual. “ He’s an angel,” she told them. “ He must have been coming for the child, but the poor fellow is so old that the rain knocked him down. Here, Marquez uses clever wit to state this woman as either a gifted clairvoyant or another peasant who has found a crafty way to make some money by offering counsel to people in need of aid. In closing, it’s important to remember that several techniques aided in

developing the old man's existence. Marquez used detailed sensory imagery that were visual (his wings, fading hairline, and parasites) and ocular (we could smell this angel and feel his wings brush up against us as it pressed against the cage. Furthermore, Marquez does not depict the angel as some glorified dove or eagle with thick plumage.

Instead, we are given the image of the withering, stench-filled feathers of a buzzard. This, in essence, is the picture we are to visualize when we think of the Columbian government and how it treated its people. Marquez purposely goes against the stereotypical angel and makes his point in poetic fashion. Marquez presents us with a new slant on angels: What if they were real and were nothing like we expected them to be? He develops stress and apprehension between this old man's dying magical qualities with his equally unclean human characteristics.

Thus, we cannot clearly place our character in one mental state. For one, he doesn't appear omnipotent or heavenly. He does appear to be lost and in the wrong place, unable—or unwilling—to communicate with the people of Columbian. Once again, this symbolically drives home Marquez's point: The Columbian people are living in a harsh reality of an unjust governing body. In the end, the old man is a stubborn, dying man of flightless wings who has lost his wings of life by sucking the life out of its people.