

Gabriel garcia marquez and human nature



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Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a modern Colombian author, explores both the natural and the supernatural in his short story, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." Although the plot revolves around the character of a winged man who has fallen to earth, the story's true focus is not on the angel, but on the people surrounding him. Throughout the story, Garcia Marquez takes an essentially negative view of human nature. According to the author, people not only lack logic, they demonstrate ignorance. Such mindlessness is bad enough, but what is far worse is the human characters' cruelty. The townspeople mistreat the angel simply because he is different. Garcia Marquez's worst indictment of humanity, however, is reflected in their stubborn refusal to appreciate the miraculous. One way in which the author criticizes human nature is in his portrayal of mankind's intelligence. The story's characters, with the exception of the angel, lack the ability to think clearly. When Pelayo and Elisenda, his wife, first find the angel, they conclude that he must be a "castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm" (634). They base this conclusion on the fact that he does not speak their own language. In order to think him a mere sailor, however, they must overlook the obvious fact that he possesses wings. Even the neighbor woman who declares him an angel lacks logic; she immediately assumes that he has come "for the child" (634). In other words, she thinks that the angel is bringing death. Since there are many reasons why an angel might come to their town, and this woman has no proof that the angel intends to harm anyone, her assumption is illogical. The worst demonstration of mindlessness, however, comes from the priest, who decides that since the angel speaks no Latin, he must not really be an angel. Latin, after all, is a human language, and any priest worth the name would know that the Bible

was originally written in languages far more ancient. No educated person would claim that angels must speak Latin. Although Garcia Marquez presents a negative view of humanity by emphasizing mankind's lack of logic and knowledge, he cites a failure of compassion as an even worse flaw. The neighbor who recognizes the creature as an angel actually recommends clubbing him to death. Pelayo and Elisenda are scarcely better; they imprison the angel in the chicken coop. Their true intention is to set him adrift with "fresh water and provisions for three days" (635). Indeed, they view this course of action as "magnanimous" (635); the only thing that stops them from carrying it out is the fact that the "whole neighborhood" (635) has come out to see the angel. Neither are the townspeople compassionate: they make fun of the winged man as though he were a "circus animal" (635). Elisenda has no sympathy for the angel's plight; instead, she charges money to see him. Most cruel of all, Pelayo and Elisenda continue to keep the angel locked up for years. Because the angel is unlike them, they do not believe him worthy of care or concern, let alone kindness. As the story progresses, not a single person in the town objects to the way Pelayo and his wife keep the angel locked up in a filthy chicken coop. Garcia Marquez' characters represent a tendency to mistreat those who are different, but when those same characters fail to recognize the miraculous, it further demonstrates the author's negative opinion of humanity. Most people, when confronted with an angel, would have a profound religious awakening. Pelayo, Elisenda, and their neighbors, however, give no spiritual weight at all to the appearance of the divine among them. When they are not using the winged man's misfortune to their own advantage, they ignore him. This tendency to regard the supernatural

as completely commonplace is also seen in the townspeople's relationship with the woman who has been changed into a spider. They do not find her "outlandish shape" (637) startling; what impresses them is a perfectly ordinary story of how she once disobeyed her parents. Because her tale is "full of human truth" (637), it fascinates them far more than does "the haughty angel" (637) who lives among them. Even more surprisingly, not even actual miracles taking place in their city cause the townspeople to appreciate the supernatural. Instead of accepting such miracles as proof that the spiritual is at work in their lives, the townspeople dwell on the peculiar character of the angel's magic. They even call his acts "consolation miracles" (638), a term of contempt. Moreover, Elisenda's disdain for the miraculous is so strong that at the end of the story, she summarizes the angel in one word: as an "annoyance" (639)." A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" contains a brief yet elegant presentation of human nature as thoughtless, predatory, and unspiritual. Not only do the characters possess little logic or knowledge, they do not have the slightest compassion for the angel, or indeed, for anyone whom they perceive as different. Worst of all, in Garcia Marquez's view, is the characters' refusal to recognize or appreciate the miraculous in their very midst. This story, however, presents more than a negative view of humanity. It also reflects a profound challenge. By pointing out several flaws in human nature, Garcia Marquez suggests ways in which mankind should better itself. "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is an important story because, like all fine works of literature, it points out the need for a better world, one in which people are, at long last, intelligent, compassionate, and deeply spiritual. Works Cited Garcia Marquez, Gabriel. "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." World Literature: An <https://assignbuster.com/gabriel-garcia-marquez-and-human-nature/>

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