

**Question:**

Describe the main aspects of the story 'A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings'.

**Answer:**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's literary reputation is inseparable from the term '*magic realism*', a phrase that literary critics coined to describe the distinctive blend of fantasy and realism, the ordinary with the extraordinary, where fantastical things are treated not just as possible but also as realistic. Magical-realist fiction consists mostly of true to life narrative punctuated by moments of whimsical, often symbolic fantasy described in matter-of-fact manner. "*A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*" is one of the most well known examples of magic realism as is included in his book "Leaf Storm". The story is a wonderful example of Marquez's talent in telling a fairy tale in a realistic manner while subtly weaving through it the magic of an angel.

The story begins with an odd allegorical reference to time: "*On the third day of rain*" and "*the world had been sad since Tuesday*" - seem to indicate the weather and human

emotion in a way that seems mythic and magical. On top of this the world behaves strangely supernaturally. Swarms of crabs infesting Pelayo's house, the darkness at noon, all these changes events seem to foreshadow the eerie arrival of the other worldly visitor, the angel.

Thus this rainstorm drives legions of crabs into Pelayo and Elisenda's house. After killing the crabs and dragging them back to sea, Pelayo returns to find a very old man in his courtyard, *"lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings"*.

Pelayo called Elisenda, who was attending to their feverish baby and they both attempted to speak to the old man, who replies in a dialect they do not understand. They are convinced that he is a ship-wrecked sailor.

Trying to explain his wings away, Pelayo calls in the neighbour woman who *"knows everything about life and death"*. She declares him as an angel coming for the child but foundered in the rain storm.

The neighbour woman advises them to club him to death, but Pelayo and Elisenda lacked

the heart to do so; instead, they locked him in the chicken coop.

Pelayo and Elisenda felt magnanimous when their child miraculously recovered. So they decided to “*put the angel on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas*”.

However this supernatural being does not affect the people greatly. He is a curiosity, but the ordinary, respond to him with less awe than confusion. The old man is an angel, but a decayed aged one. Here is a surreal coupling of the holy and the profane which continues throughout the story.

Father Gonzaga believes dogmatically that if the angel were a heavenly creature, he would speak the official language of the Catholic church - Latin. When he doesn't, the priest assumes that he must be an imposter. Human ignorance and spiritual blindness cover his perceptions as well as those of the other locals.

People respond to the angel with surreal indifference and treat him as a mere carnival freak. Crowds gather in the courtyard and troops with bayonets are called to control the crowd before they knock down Pelayo and

Elisenda's house, Elisenda gets the idea to charge an admission fee of five cents, thus revealing the mercenary, avaricious nature of man.

Countless people arrive, invalids come to be healed, but the angel seemed aloof from these events. He eats nothing but eggplant mush and exhibits supernatural patience when trouble makers pelt him with rocks and hens peck at his wings.

The angle draws a huge crowd, which attracts many travelling shows and circuses. There is also a 'spider-woman' - who is a giant, ram-sized tarantula with the head of a maiden. Her heart-rending tale, containing the moral of obeying one's parents, drew people to her. They became uninterested in the angel due to his supreme indifference. There have also been some miracles, but they seem to have misfired. For example, a blind man did not recover his sight, but grew three new teeth; a lame man almost won the lottery and a leper sprouted sunflowers from his sores. These "*consolation miracles*" ruined the angle's reputation and the spider-woman crushed him completely.

The angel was neglected for many months

and he was made to live in the filthy chicken coop, in rags. Despite being a heavenly creature, the angel came down with chicken pox at the same time when Pelayo and Elisenda's son did. The angel recovered and was set free to roam about in the house when the chicken coop collapsed. Elisenda complained about living in a "*hell full of angels*", as she chased the angel around everywhere with her broom and treated him like a nuisance, like the crabs.

During the angel's recovery, he grows his feathers back. He finally spreads his wings and leaves. Elisenda manages to feel nothing but relief, although the angel was responsible for lifting the family out from poverty's squalor and filth.