

**Unit III: Gabriel García Márquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"**

Gabriel García Márquez was a Colombian writer and journalist, widely regarded as one of the most important authors of the 20th century. His works often blend the fantastical with the ordinary, creating rich, imaginative worlds that reflect the complexities of life in Latin America. In 1982, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his unique ability to merge the magical and the real, capturing the essence of a continent's life and struggles. His most famous works include *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981).

García Márquez also explored themes of solitude, the passage of time, and the intricacies of human emotion. Through his stories, he revealed the deep interconnection between reality and fantasy, and his works have become a staple in world literature, translated into numerous languages.

Gabriel García Márquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is a powerful story that intertwines magical realism with the themes of human nature, exploitation, and the ambiguity of authority. Written in 1968 and first published in the journal *Casa de las Américas*, the story presents a curious scenario where an elderly man with large wings appears in a small town after a few days of rain. Initially mistaken for an angel, the old man becomes the object of the villagers' fascination, but his treatment by the people reveals a lot about human behaviour and society.

The story begins with Pelayo and Elisenda, who live in a house plagued by crabs and a sick baby. When Pelayo finds a strange, old man with wings in his courtyard, he is initially startled but soon believes the man is a castaway from a shipwreck. A neighbour, however, informs them that the man is an angel. The news spreads rapidly throughout the town, and people begin to flock to Pelayo and Elisenda's house to see the "angel," treating him like a circus attraction. The angel is chained up and kept in a chicken coop, where he endures constant mistreatment. Despite being thought of as a divine figure, his appearance is not as angelic as one might expect: his wings are dirty, damaged, and filled with parasites, and he seems entirely human, lacking the dignity associated with celestial beings.

Father Gonzaga, a priest, arrives to investigate the claims of the villagers. He tries to communicate with the man, speaking Latin to test if he truly is an angel. However, the old man does not respond to Latin, leading Father Gonzaga to dismiss the idea that the man is divine. Nevertheless, the villagers continue to believe the old man is an angel, and as more people come to see him, Pelayo and Elisenda make a fortune by charging admission. They grow indifferent to the man, who becomes just another source of profit.

Later, a new carnival arrives in the town with a woman who has transformed into a spider. The townspeople quickly lose interest in the old man, and Pelayo and Elisenda use the money they have earned to build a mansion. Over time, the old man becomes more ill, but he survives through the winter. Eventually, he begins to regain strength and attempts to fly. After several failed attempts, he finally takes

flight, leaving the town behind. Elisenda, watching him disappear, feels a sense of relief, no longer burdened by his presence.

The story touches on several important themes. One key theme is the human tendency to exploit the extraordinary. The villagers, who initially view the old man with awe, soon treat him as a commodity, much like a circus animal. This exploitation highlights the selfishness and lack of compassion in human nature. Additionally, the idea of authority is explored through the contrasting views of Father Gonzaga, who represents institutional authority, and the villagers, who interpret the angel's presence in their own way. The story also questions the notion of divinity, as the angel's human qualities make him seem less otherworldly and more earthly. This challenges the readers' perception of what makes something divine.

Moreover, the symbolism of the wings is important in the story. While the wings should be a sign of the angel's celestial nature, they instead mark him as different and separate from the rest of the community. The wings, which are described as damaged and unremarkable, suggest the idea of a "logic of supplement," where the extraordinary becomes an obstacle to true understanding or compassion. The treatment of the old man also mirrors the treatment of the spider woman, who attracts pity rather than admiration, highlighting how society often commodifies suffering.

The story is also an example of magical realism, a genre that García Márquez is known for. In magical realism, the extraordinary is treated as part of the ordinary world. In this story, the arrival of the old man with wings is treated with casual curiosity rather than fear or reverence. This reflects the genre's characteristic blending of the magical and the mundane, making the reader question the boundaries between reality and fantasy.

“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” is an interesting story that explores themes of human nature, exploitation, and the ambiguity of authority. Through its magical realist elements, the story challenges readers to reconsider how we treat the extraordinary and the unknown, urging us to reflect on how society can be both compassionate and cruel. The old man, despite his angelic appearance, is ultimately a victim of human indifference, serving as a mirror to the flaws in our treatment of those who are different or misunderstood.