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Compassion and Cruelty of Mankind

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, an author who gave pride to Latin Americans, is best known for his writing style which incorporates elements of magical realism. The work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, with translation to over 36 languages, has miraculously been studied and read worldwide. Marquez was born in 1927 and passed away in 2014. Despite his passing, the Nobel Prize winner for literature, will be remembered for generations, as his stories transcend time. Both “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” share a theme of transformation. As the readers, we notice that both protagonists transform the communities view of faith, both internally and externally. The protagonist, be it the “dead body”, or the “angel” has a large impact on two different communities. They react in different ways, yet demonstrate the both the humanistic cruel side of humanity towards the unknown and the mysterious.

In “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World”, the story begins, and takes place in a small fishing village. Young villagers find a large object floating towards them only to realize it is a human male corpus. The villagers take the mysterious corpus around adjacent villages to identify where he came from. After cleaning his body, they came to realize that he is no ordinary man, but a gorgeous, muscular, large being. The woman of the village, fell madly in love with the man and called him Esteban, while the men dreamt of being him as he was so remarkable.

“Not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination” (Marquez, *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*, 2). In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's work we see that Magical Realism represents the connection between dream and reality. We find as the reader that the women and all the villagers dream of Esteban and fantasize of his presents, even though in reality Esteban is just a corpse. After coming to terms with the reality of Esteban, the village decides to honor his death by giving him their local funeral. Although the villagers came to terms with the reality of Esteban, they vowed to change their village in his name. They cleaned the village, made their homes bigger and planted flowers so that others will know that this was Esteban's village. But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors ...” (Marquez, *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*, 7-8). It is very clear that the theme of transformation occurred in a positive, internal manner in “*The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*”. As a village, they completely change their customs and principles in order to praise a ‘divine’ man that was never living in their presence. This in turn, changed their outlook on life, as Esteban's presence, while dead, still inspires in them a sense of empowerment and internal faith in themselves. It shows how humans behave with the unknown and can in fact create traditions and new norms that would change the village forever.

In “*A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*” we are introduced to a local couple, Pelayo and Elisenda, that live in a simple village. They come to discover a sick, old, and homeless man that has large wings attached to his back. Surprised by his presents and strange anatomical figure, they conclude he is an angel. They believe that this old angel has come to take their sick dying child to heaven. The old man is kept in the couple's chicken coop and begins to attract a

crowd of locals. Even the local priest comes to examine the so-called angel and concludes he cannot be an angel, as he does not speak Latin. The people of the town want to be healed by the angel and ask him for miracles. “a poor woman who since childhood has been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers” (Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, 1). The crowd augments rapidly, convincing Pelayo and Elisenda to start charging for admission. The crowd begins to grow impatient of the old man with wings and treats him with disrespect, by throwing stones and even searing him with hot iron. The villagers are then distracted by a bizarre spider woman that arrives to the village and lose interest in the angel. The angel continues living in the family’s home and after several years recovers and flies away. Marquez, in many ways shows the natural feelings humans get when they are introduced to something they have never seen or can’t explain. The unfamiliar unfortunately transformed into violent and inconsiderate acts towards the angel. “The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers” (Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, 1). Marquez expresses that the unknown - the divine - has a stronger transformation on humans than the known. Marquez demonstrates how the divine is forgiving of human kind and shows them compassion – although they, at times, are cruel both to him and to one another. This can be expressed by the way the villagers treated the angel, in addition to, Pelayo and Elisenda monetizing the angel for their own benefit, however he remains continuedly patient.

While the two stories portray the impact of a mysterious protagonist on villagers and on human kind, the reactions they express towards the unknown are quite different. Both towns responded in a unique manner to the events that occurred, demonstrating such peoples character. In both stories, the villagers portray changes in their habits as an effect of the protagonist. In “*A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*” we find that, after his appearance, the villagers seek

answers and miracles for problems they fear in life (much as people turn to religion for similar aims). Before the angel arrived to the town, the villagers, would perhaps seek those miracles from the church. This proves how humans can switch beliefs and values subconsciously, which is supported by their drastic change of attention to the spider woman that suddenly appeared. Marquez in a way, demonstrates that humans lead on other to solve problems and rely on faith to do so. This same theme appears in “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World”. The effect one deceased man has on an entire village was truly transformational. Estaban, although not living, inspired the villagers to better their lives and selves through a transformation of internal empowerment and internal belief. By rebuilding their homes, planting flowers and creating a beautiful village, they express honor and love to Estaban – and to themselves.

All in all, through the writing of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the theme of transformation shares a common ground in both stories “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”. The two stories demonstrate acts of compassion and cruelty of mankind and their attitudes towards faith. While both stories portray transformation from within and are expressed in a unique manner, the reader is left with an undoubtable feeling of change caused by the mysterious protagonist.

Work Sited

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