A very Old Man with Enormous Wings as a Strange Visitor

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I. INTRODUCTION

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings is an interesting story by a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, journalist and screenwriter Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He has a skill of weaving his story in such a way that the natural and supernatural elements are blended in an unexpected yet stimulating way. Through the story Marquez indirectly asks his readers that what would be your response if you will face and meet the supernatural element outside your door. How supernatural stranger is welcomed and interpreted by the villagers is the core concern of this short story.

II. THEME OF THE STORY

The present story deals with the theme of coexistence of cruelty and compassion. The present story is an example of the kind and cruel nature of the human being. It makes satire on the human’s reaction to those who are dependent, different and weak. When the Old Man is found on the rainy day, Pelayo cannot understand him whether he should be considered as the good or bad so he informs his neighbor who knows something about this kind of creature and she informs them that he has come to drive away Pelayo’s sick child so he must be clubbed to the death. Pelayo cannot gather the courage to kill him so he imprisoned the Old Man in a chicken coop. After few days of this incident, Pelayo and Elisenda’s child recover from the sickness so they decide to release that person put him to sea with enough provisions for three days. The news of this Old Man spread to the near towns and people come to see him. Thus, Pelayo gets an idea to earn money by showcasing this Old Man. However, eventually the Old Man has become the part and parcel of Elisenda and Pelayo’s household. By the time the Old Man eventually flies into the sunset, Elisenda regrets for him. The extreme patience of the Old Man with the villagers has finally transformed Elisenda and Pelayo’s lives. It can be interpreted that the Old Man’s arrival and his stay can be considered as an act of compassion to assist the poor couple. It may be the intention of Marquez to remind the preaching of the Bible 13:2 to his readers that:

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Bible 13:2).

III. THE OLD MAN AS A STRANGE VISITOR

On the third day of the rain Pelayo and his wife Elisenda find an Old Man with his broken wing and try to communicate with him but they cannot understand his language. As Marquez introduces an Old Man as:

His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar (Marquez: 1972, 2).

In the beginning of the story the short story writer has introduced a stranger and he is strangely welcomed and interpreted by the villagers. The readers cannot understand the intention of the writer that why an Old Man has come, what is his intention, from where has he come etc. All these questions remain unanswered till the end of the story. The stranger has come mysteriously and flies away mysteriously.

In the initial stage he is interpreted as an angel by the neighbour of Pelayo and Pelayo is advised to kill him but he has imprisoned him for the couple of days in the chicken coop where an Old Man is treated strangely where the strangers pelt him with stones, gaze at him and even injure him with a burning iron. When the father Gonzaga comes to know about the winged creature, he visits him, gazes at him and tries to communicate in Latin, the language of God but the Old Man doesn’t answer him in the same language. At that time, father raises a question that whether he is really an angel or anyone else. Through the character of father, Marquez criticizes the church. The father seems to be in no hurry to find out the fact about the unkempt so called angel. The villagers ask Gonzaga to study the Old Man’s incomprehensible language to see whether it has any relation to Aramaic, the language of Jesus. They all come to the final conclusion that the Old Man with wings may in fact be a stranded Norwegian sailor only makes the church sound absurdly literal-minded and out of touch with even the most basic elements of reality. After few days,
Pelayo’s child cures from the illness so the feelings and vision towards the Old Man has changed. Pelayo and Elisenda decide to release him with the three days provisions. As Marquez states:

“felt magnanimous” when they opted to set the angel afloat on a raft with enough food to last him a few days…. and leave him to his fate on the high seas (Marquez: 1972,3).

The Old Man is treated differently in the different occasions with the same persons at the same place. When the villagers and strangers crowded to see the Old Man, the couple gets an idea to make the money through this person and they charge five cents from each visitor whosoever wants to meet him. Thus, they earn much profit with the help of this person and they also purchase a new mansion. Now the Old Man has become the part of their household things. Many days they live with him and earn much profit through him.

Thus, through the wings of an Old Man, Marquez employs the symbolism in his present story. In this story majorly he shows two symbols of wing and the spider woman. Wings are the symbol of speed, power and limitless freedom of action and motion. The angles are often considered as a beautiful creature in the Christian tradition and through this symbol Marquez ironically employs the wings of the angle in the story to convey only a sense of age and disease. However, the wings of the Old Man is somewhat bedraggled, dirty and bare, still they are magical enough to catch the attraction of the crowds of sightseers and pilgrims. The spider woman is a symbol of fickleness with which many self-interested people approach their own faith. Due to her disobedience to her parents, she has changed into the spider woman from an ordinary woman.

Finally, at the end of the story, the Old Man’s patience is rewarded. His wings get new feathers with coming of the new season spring. The spring has come in the Nature and in the life of the Old Man too. The setting and the tone of the story meet with the action. Now the long and dreary winter has come to an end. All around the new life and vigour have been found. The Old Man looks at the sky and feels the breeze. He tries to fly slowly at first and then rising higher and higher and ultimately reaches over the sea, beyond the blue. All of sudden Elisenda comes to know about this incident and she observes him from the distance kitchen. As Marquez delineates:

She kept on watching until it was no longer possible for her to see him, because then he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea (Marquez: 1972,5).

When the couple comes to know that the Old Man has gone, they feel relief that the annoyance has gone and they feel relief from him. It proves that how much the human beings are greedy and selfish. Whatever the poor couple has earned, they have earned from this Old Man and when he flies away at the end of the story, no one feels grief for his absence, on the contrary they feel get rid of from that creature.

Thus, at the end of the story, the couple begins to live as normally as they used to live in the beginning of the story. No change is found in their lives whether the Old Man has come or gone. The human being is very selfish creature and they play ingratitude only to the natural and supernatural elements.

IV. Conclusion

To conclude we may say that, the present story is full of mystery and satire. With the help of symbols and characters, Marquez has criticized the self centered nature of human beings. Many questions are still remained unanswered such as; why did the Old Man come, what was his purpose, from where did he come and why has he gone and where has he gone? etc. All these questions trouble the readers and the readers have to get answers of all these questions by themselves only. The arrival and departure of the Old Man do not make any change in the lives of the characters of the story. They do not respond and react much with the departure of the Old Man.

REFERENCES

1. The Bible, preaching 13:2