

Lucy Burgess  
The Influence of Beauty  
3/2018

Power is often associated with positions of strength and influence. Beauty for example can command even the strongest of minds whether it is physical or merely an idea around a certain object or person. No matter the form the beauty has taken, the influence that this beauty has on a group of people is a considerable power. This concept, that beauty can command, is explored in many of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short stories through the use of magical realism. Magical realism, when used in literature, can provide a realistic view of the world while incorporating magical elements into writing. Gabriel Garcia Marquez uses magical realism in his short stories *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* and *The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World* to explore the powerful influence of masculinity and beauty.

In the short story *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings*, a small seaside town is captivated by the arrival of a strange man with wings thought to be an angel sent to cure the sick. The angel, an old man with wings, stood out as an important figure throughout the story because of his holy significance and believed part in a 'spiritual conspiracy.' Upon his arrival, Pelayo and Elisenda, the owners of the chicken coop the angel was imprisoned in had considered to 'beat him to death' out of the dramatic intrusion and strangeness of his arrival. However, upon getting to know the stranger, the land owners discovered they lacked the cruelty to put him to death. The angel drew further attention from the townspeople including the sickly and cursed who were in search of health and a miracle. Word spread that this stranger was a 'holy' creature among humans and had cured his captor's child of fever. Crowds of townspeople visited the angel, worshiping him in ways that made him of more value alive than kept hidden, as he had previously been kept by Pelayo and his wife.

The angel's "beauty", his holy presence and unexpected value, played an important role in *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* as a result of the modern social and societal issues represented throughout the text. The angel was an outlandish and mythical creature yet was worshiped as a holy figure and healer capturing the attention of desperate crowds seeking revival. Drawing contrast from the holy stranger, a traveling circus passing through the same town as the angel presented a woman that had been changed into a spider as a punishment. Although her physical state was as strange and outlandish as the angel, the lady spider received none of the attention the angel received. The spider was ridiculed for her punished state, and the admission to see the female spider was significantly cheaper than what it cost to visit the

angel. The contrast between the value of the strange male versus the strange female displayed the differences between a male's influence and a female's influence. The male angel received more attention and had higher admission. Meanwhile, the female spider was ridiculed for her unfortunate state and was considered to be valued less than the male angel. The fantastical rivalry, or lack thereof, was made in comparison to the financial differences seen in the real world by women, who are statistically paid significantly less than men in similar job positions.

In the short story *The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World*, a very large man washes ashore on a beach of a seaside village. The size and weight of the man startled the people of the town, but his beauty struck the town's women. The man arrived at the town with an unsightly appearance, having been drowned and tattered by dirt, seaweed and grass. Yet despite the man's lack of life and unattractive appearance, the women in the town believed the man was 'the tallest, strongest, most virile and best-equipped man they had ever seen.' The man's unexpected beauty sparked a craze in the town as the man was put to rest following his death. However, the more time the women spent with the man, preparing him for his burial, the more the women grew an attachment to him. The women attempted to give life to the lifeless body by personifying the man and fantasizing what he would be like if he were alive. Women and children wept over his dead body proclaiming his life and body was theirs as if to claim the foreign man whom they had just met belonged to them. Following the man's burial, townspeople pledged to bring beautiful change to their town to keep the drowned man's memory alive. The man was a gift the townspeople had not anticipated to receive, but to their eyes the man had changed not only their town but their lives with his enviable and breathtaking beauty.

Similar to the angel's role in *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings*, the drowned man in *The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World* was worshiped for his beauty. In each story, when the women laid their eyes on the man, his beauty became an object of obsession. They were captured by his mysterious and outlandish beauty. Arguably, there is an understated focus on the social roles between males and females in the story. The dominant male in the passage is described as a fit and attractive man who, despite being water logged and dead, displays dominance over any who looks at him including the town's men. The women in the passage are perceived as delicate and emotional in the face of death and beauty compared to the strong and handsome main male character in each story.

The two short stories *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* and *The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World* display major themes of male versus female roles as well as the power and downfall of a

man's beauty. Both short stories have male main characters that attract large amounts of attention because of their outlandish beauty. With their beauty, the male characters possess a dominance over the female characters, alluding that the strong male character has more worth than a female. However strong these male characters were or how much attention they commanded, their influence comes with a price. The male characters, the angel and the drowned man, are only seen for their beauty and not for who they really are beneath their looks.

The influence of beauty and male roles in society may be a comparative between the two Marquez stories, but the storylines both characters exist in have defined differences. The way the male characters were taken in by the townspeople displays how different the characters would be treated physically. The angel was dragged through the mud to the chicken coop where he would be held captive for his holy significance. When the handsome drowned man was discovered, he was welcomed by the townspeople and was immediately taken care of by the townswomen. The angel, however, was almost beaten to death had he not supposedly cured Pelayo's child. In terms of beauty, the angel's beauty was attributed to the belief that he was a holy creature, and the drowned man's beauty was physical. Despite the male character's similarities with being worshiped over their beauty, the fate of each character is different.

For centuries, the influence and dominance of men in society has overpowered that of a woman's roles in history. Many believe that the influence and power men have is indebted to their strength, masculine beauty and ability to succeed. Both set in seaside towns, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's stories include the arrival of a strange male character that captures the attention of the townspeople by their strange yet beautiful nature. Though the characters are treated differently, they share the influence they gain from their beauty. Through the use of adding magical elements to his writing, Gabriel Garcia Marquez establishes the roles and influences that beauty can have in any society.