

Short-Answer Questions and Answers

1. **What is the setting of the story when Pelayo first encounters the old man?**
Answer: The story begins in a coastal village during a rainy, stormy period. The light is weak, even at noon, and the old man is found in the muddy rear of Pelayo's courtyard.
2. **Why did Pelayo and Elisenda initially think the old man was a castaway?**
Answer: They thought he was a castaway because he spoke in an incomprehensible dialect with a sailor's voice, suggesting he was a survivor from a shipwrecked foreign ship.
3. **What was the neighbor woman's reaction to the old man, and what did she conclude?**
Answer: The neighbor woman examined the old man and concluded he was an angel, likely sent for the sick child but knocked down by the rain due to his old age.
4. **How did the couple's attitude toward the old man change after their child recovered?**
Answer: After their child recovered, Pelayo and Elisenda felt magnanimous and decided to set the old man free on a raft with provisions, showing a brief moment of kindness.
5. **Why did the crowd treat the old man like a circus animal?**
Answer: The crowd treated him like a circus animal because they were curious about his unusual appearance and wings, tossing food through the coop as if he were an exhibit.
6. **What was the old man's reaction to the crowd's mistreatment?**
Answer: The old man displayed remarkable patience, enduring the hens pecking at him, people pulling his feathers, and stones thrown at him without retaliation.
7. **Why did the crowd's interest shift to the spider-woman?**
Answer: The crowd flocked to the spider-woman because her admission fee was lower, and they could interact with her by asking questions, making her a more engaging spectacle.
8. **What physical changes did the old man undergo toward the end of the story?**
Answer: The old man grew large, stiff feathers on his wings, resembling those of a scarecrow, and he eventually regained enough strength to attempt flight.
9. **How did Elisenda feel when the old man finally flew away?**
Answer: Elisenda felt relief for herself and the old man as he flew away, no longer seeing him as an annoyance but as a distant dot on the horizon.
10. **What is one element of magical realism in the story?**
Answer: The presence of a very old man with enormous wings, blending a fantastical element with the realistic setting of a coastal village, is an example of magical realism.

Essay Questions and Answers

1. **Discuss the theme of compassion and its absence in "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." How does the treatment of the old man reflect human nature?**
Answer:
Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" explores the theme of compassion, or the lack thereof, through the treatment of the old man with wings, who symbolizes the weak and vulnerable. The story critiques human nature's tendency to exploit

and marginalize those who are different, revealing a profound absence of empathy in society.

Pelayo and Elisenda, the central characters, initially react to the old man with fear and suspicion, locking him in a chicken coop without considering his comfort or dignity. Their decision to charge admission to see him reflects their prioritization of financial gain over compassion, turning a potentially divine being into a spectacle. The crowd's behavior is even more callous, treating the old man like a circus animal by tossing food and throwing stones to provoke a reaction. This dehumanization underscores society's fascination with the extraordinary, coupled with a failure to extend kindness to those who do not fit conventional norms.

The neighbor woman's assertion that the old man is an angel shows a fleeting moment of awe, but even this is tainted by her assumption that he is there to serve a purpose (to take the sick child), not as a being deserving of respect. The doctor, however, displays a rare curiosity and respect, marveling at the "logic" of the old man's wings, which suggests a more empathetic perspective, though it remains intellectual rather than compassionate.

The story's climax, where the old man flies away, and Elisenda feels relief, highlights the ultimate failure of compassion. Her relief is not for the old man's freedom but for the removal of an inconvenience from her life. Marquez uses this narrative to critique society's tendency to isolate and exploit the vulnerable, urging readers to reflect on the need for kindness and empathy. The old man's patience and endurance in the face of mistreatment serve as a poignant reminder that compassion is essential to affirm the dignity of all beings, regardless of their appearance or perceived value.

2. Analyze the role of magical realism in shaping the narrative of "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." How does it contribute to the story's themes?

Answer:

Magical realism, a hallmark of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's writing, is central to the narrative of "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," blending fantastical elements with a mundane reality to explore themes of human nature, compassion, and societal values. The story's magical realist elements, such as the old man with wings and the spider-woman, create a surreal yet believable world that challenges readers to question their perceptions of the extraordinary and the ordinary.

The old man with enormous wings is the primary magical element, introduced in a realistic setting—a stormy coastal village where Pelayo and Elisenda live ordinary lives. His wings, described as "huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked," are fantastical, yet his frail, human-like condition grounds him in reality. This juxtaposition forces characters and readers to confront the ambiguity of his identity—is he an angel, a castaway, or something else? The lack of a definitive answer reflects the story's theme of human skepticism and failure to embrace the unknown with empathy.

The spider-woman, another magical realist element, further highlights society's superficial fascination with the extraordinary. Her transformation into a spider due to a lightning strike is accepted as a curious spectacle, yet her story is more accessible to the crowd because it fits a narrative of punishment and morality. This contrast between the old man and the spider-woman underscores the theme of societal judgment, where people prefer clear explanations over ambiguous wonders.

Magical realism also amplifies the story's critique of exploitation and lack of compassion. The old man's supernatural presence does not inspire reverence but rather greed and cruelty, as seen when Pelayo and Elisenda profit from his captivity. The fantastical elements thus serve as a lens to examine real-world issues, such as the marginalization of the vulnerable and the commodification of the extraordinary. By blending the magical with the mundane, Marquez creates a narrative that challenges readers to reflect on their own attitudes toward difference and the need for kindness in a world that often prioritizes profit over humanity.

3. **Write a character sketch of the old man, Pelayo, and Elisenda, highlighting their roles and significance in the story.**

Answer:

The Old Man: The old man with enormous wings is a mysterious, frail figure who serves as the story's central symbol of the weak and vulnerable. Physically, he is described as old, with a bald skull, few teeth, and tattered, muddy wings, resembling a "drenched great-grandfather." His pitiful condition contrasts with the grandeur one might expect from an angelic being, emphasizing his humanity. His personality is marked by patience and resilience, as he endures mistreatment—hens pecking, feathers pulled, stones thrown—with stoic silence. His role in the story is to challenge societal norms and expose the lack of compassion in those around him. His eventual flight symbolizes liberation from exploitation, leaving a lasting impression of endurance and the need for empathy toward those who are different.

Pelayo: Pelayo is a practical and responsible everyman, representing ordinary people confronted with the extraordinary. Physically, he is not described in detail, but his actions—such as arming himself with a bailiff's club and locking the old man in the coop—suggest a cautious, pragmatic nature. His initial fear and suspicion give way to opportunism as he profits from the old man's presence, reflecting a practical but self-serving mindset. Pelayo's significance lies in his role as a typical societal figure who fails to fully empathize with the vulnerable, prioritizing financial gain and convenience over compassion. His eventual indifference to the old man's departure underscores his limited emotional growth.

Elisenda: Elisenda, Pelayo's wife, is a loving mother with a shrewd and practical streak, embodying maternal instincts alongside opportunism. Physically, she is not described, but her actions, such as caring for her sick child and later buying luxurious items with the money earned, highlight her dual nature. She is instrumental in turning the old man into a spectacle by charging admission, revealing her cleverness but also her lack of empathy. Her relief at the old man's departure reflects her view of him as a burden rather than a being deserving of care. Elisenda's significance lies in her representation of societal tendencies to exploit the unusual for personal gain, highlighting the need for greater compassion.