

"The Angel as Commodity: A Critical Examination of Consumer Culture in Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with* Enormous Wings"

Saqib Mehmood¹, Savera Waseem², Warisha Fazal³

¹ Department of Humanities: COMSATS University Islamabad, Islamabad. Email: saqibmehmood325@gmail.com

² Department of Humanities: COMSATS University Islamabad, Islamabad. Email: saverawaseem6@gmail.com

³ Department of Humanities: COMSATS University Islamabad, Islamabad. Email: varishafazal@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study employs a theoretical framework combining Zygmunt Bauman's theory of consumer culture and Alan McKee's textual analysis methodology to examine Gabriel García Márquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." The narrative is analyzed through the lens of Bauman's concepts of commodification, disposability, and liquid modernity, highlighting how consumer culture shapes human relationships, experiences, and identities. The study reveals how the old man is commodified, disposed of, and represented as a spectacle, reflecting the dehumanizing tendencies of consumer culture. By combining Bauman's theory and McKee's textual analysis framework, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the intersections between consumer culture, literature, and society.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 Oct. 2024
Revised 05 Dec. 2024
Accepted 10 Dec. 2024

KEYWORDS

Consumer Culture,
Commodification,
Dehumanizing
Tendencies, Society

Introduction

Consumer culture has become a dominant force in shaping human behavior, influencing how individuals and societies perceive and assign value to objects, people, and experiences. Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* provides a profound critique of this culture by portraying the commodification of an extraordinary event: the arrival of a winged old man assumed to be an angel. Instead of reverence or compassion, the townspeople view the angel as an opportunity for profit and spectacle, exploiting him to fulfill their economic and social aspirations. Through the lens of consumer culture, the story critiques how society reduces the sacred and extraordinary into opportunities for profit and entertainment. This research aims to explore how Márquez critiques consumer culture through his narrative. By examining the commodification of the angel and the townspeople's moral compromises, this study seeks to shed light on the broader implications of consumerism's dominance in society.

The story encapsulates the essence of consumer culture, as described by theorists like Jean Baudrillard (1998), who argued that consumerism is less about utility and more about creating symbolic meaning and spectacle. Márquez's narrative aligns with this idea, showing how the miraculous is stripped of its spiritual value and reduced to an item of public fascination. The people in the story charge admission to see the angel, care little for his suffering, and ultimately discard him when he no longer satisfies their desire for novelty. This behavior mirrors the dehumanizing tendencies of consumer culture, where even the sacred can be commodified and disposed of once its profitability or entertainment value diminishes.

Background of Study

Consumer culture refers to a system where economic and cultural practices prioritize the acquisition and consumption of goods and services, often at the expense of intrinsic or spiritual values (Bauman, 2007). The rise of consumerism has increasingly blurred the lines between the sacred and the profane, reducing even extraordinary phenomena into commodities for entertainment or profit. Gabriel García Márquez, a master of magical realism, embeds this critique in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. The story illustrates how a miraculous figure—an old man with wings—is commodified by the townspeople, turning him into a source of income and spectacle. The townspeople's response to the angel reflects the commodification inherent in consumer culture. Instead of recognizing the angel as a sacred or miraculous figure, they transform him into a sideshow attraction, charging admission fees and exploiting his existence for financial gain. The angel's

CONTACT Saqib Mehmood  saqibmehmood325@gmail.com  Pakistan

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by ICSDR Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.



suffering becomes secondary to the townspeople's profits, revealing how consumer culture can strip the extraordinary of its spiritual or moral significance.

The narrative also highlights the ephemeral nature of consumer interest. The angel's popularity wanes when a more sensational attraction a woman transformed into a spider arrives in town. This shift demonstrates the disposability of commodities in consumer culture, where novelty drives value. The angel, once a source of fascination and profit, becomes an afterthought, further emphasizing the dehumanizing effects of commodification.

The townspeople's behavior aligns with Featherstone's (2007) observation that consumerism thrives on the ephemeral nature of novelty and spectacle. Instead of seeing the angel as a spiritual being, the townspeople use him to generate wealth and attention. This background situates the story within the larger discourse on consumer culture and its dehumanizing effects, providing a rich ground for analysis.

Statement of Purpose

Consumer culture, as defined by Bauman (2007), often assigns value based on utility, profitability, or novelty rather than intrinsic worth. This commodification of the sacred and extraordinary can lead to moral and ethical dilemmas. In *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, Márquez critiques these tendencies by depicting how the angel a figure of miraculous and otherworldly significance is objectified, exploited, and eventually discarded by the townspeople. By charging admission to see the angel and reducing his existence to a spectacle, the narrative highlights the moral compromises inherent in consumer culture. This research seeks to address how the story reflects the dehumanization and commodification characteristics of what often considered unconsumable i.e, sacred and worthy of reverence.

Research Objectives

To analyze the commodification of the angel in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* the light of Zygmunt Bauman's theory of consumer culture.

Research Questions

How does the angel in "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" reflect the commodification of what often considered unconsumable?

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the understanding of consumer culture's impact on society, particularly its ability to transform the sacred into a commodity. By examining Márquez's story *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* through the lens of consumerism, the research provides insights into how literature critiques modern economic and cultural practices. The findings will be valuable for literary scholars, sociologists, and cultural theorists seeking to understand the intersections of consumerism, morality, and art. Furthermore, this study highlights the ethical dilemmas posed by commodification, offering a framework for critically examining consumerist tendencies in both literature and contemporary society.

Literature Review

The intersection of the human and the divine has long been a subject of fascination and exploration in literature. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is a seminal work that has captivated readers and scholars alike since its publication in 1955. This enigmatic tale of an angel who falls to earth and is cared for by a poor couple has been interpreted in countless ways, with scholars exploring its themes of faith, morality, and the human condition. The intersection of consumer culture and literary narrative has become an increasingly important area of study in recent years. As consumer culture continues to shape and influence our daily lives, it is essential to examine how literary narratives reflect, critique, and challenge the dominant ideologies of consumer culture. This literature review will aim to explore how consumer culture is represented and critiqued in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings". Through the lens of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), this review will examine how Marquez's narrative reflects and challenges the dominant ideologies of consumer culture, including materialism, commodification, and the construction of identity through consumption. By applying CCT to Marquez's narrative, this review will aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between consumer culture, literature, and identity.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" has been the subject of extensive literary analysis and critique. This narrative, characteristic of Marquez's distinctive style, has been interpreted through various lenses, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, and social ecology. The story's employment of magical realism, parody, and multiplicity has led scholars to explore its subversion of grand narratives and dominant power structures. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on Marquez's narrative, examining how it challenges master narratives and dominant ideologies.

The 20th century was marked by significant global events, including World War I, World War II, and the Cold War, which led to a shift in the socio-economic and political world order. This, in turn, influenced the literary landscape, with writers seeking to experiment with new themes, styles, and techniques. One such literary movement that emerged during this period was magical realism, a narrative technique that combines realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical and supernatural elements.

The term "magical realism" was first coined by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925, who used it to describe a way of exploring the hidden mysteries of daily life (Zamora, 1995; Bower, 2004). The concept was later introduced to Latin American writers and critics in 1949. Arnould and Thompson's (2005) seminal paper introduced the term "Consumer Culture Theory" and provided a framework for understanding the cultural aspects of consumption. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a disciplinary brand that encompasses a diverse body of research focused on the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Since then, numerous studies have built upon this foundation, exploring various aspects of consumer culture, including the symbolic meanings of consumer goods (Bradshaw & Brown, 2008), the impact of consumer culture on society and culture (Kravets et al., 2018), and the role of consumer culture in shaping identity and community (Arnould & Thompson, 2018b). This literature review draws on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) to analyze Marquez's narrative. CCT is a theoretical framework that examines how consumer culture shapes and is shaped by societal values and norms (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

This literature review has examined the key concepts and themes in the existing research on magical realism, with a particular focus on Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings". While the existing literature has provided valuable insights into the use of magical realism as a literary device, there remains a significant gap in the research about the application of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) to the analysis of text. Therefore, this literature review suggests that there is a need for further research that explores the Consumer Culture Theory in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story An Old Man with Enormous Wings.

Formulation of Bauman's Model of Consumer Culture

This paper seeks to establish Zygmunt Bauman's theory of consumer culture within the purview of his wider conception of liquid modernity. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Consuming Life* (2007), for example, Bauman uses the notion of liquid to characterize contemporary social relationships in contrast to the solid modernity of the past. In liquid modernity, there are no solid human relationships, identities, or social institutions, only transience, instability, and commodification. This consumer culture is commodification, disposability, and the liquid nature of modern life, all of which are key features of Bauman's Consumerism. These ideas will be essential in examining how the villagers in Márquez's story interact with the old man with the wings†, stripping him of his miraculous, god-like qualities and transforming him into just a mere good to be enjoyed and profited from.

Here Bauman's critique of commodification in consumer culture is particularly relevant. In modern consumer societies everything, even people, is seen as commodities, he argues. Human beings are merely resources or commodities to be exchanged and acquired. Bauman (2007) refers to potential commodification and observes in *Consumable Life* the way personal relationships and experiences have become objects of consumption often mediated by the market. The villagers' treatment of the old man parallels this process in the story. He materializes as a kind of odd and beautiful miracle, only to be quickly reduced to a source of profit the moment the villagers realize they can make money off his existence. This is also evident in Bauman's theory of disposability: once the old man becomes uninteresting that is, if he is just consumed, he is laid aside without further consideration for his human dignity comparable to how consumer culture discards people and products when they are no longer valuable/interesting.

The other fundamental component of Bauman's theory is modernity itself, which is seen as liquid. In this framework, everything from objects to people to values becomes inconstant and continuously moving. We will see how the perception of the old man changes from an object of divine respect to nothing more than

a spectacle. Bauman's theory will emphasize the transient nature of the villager's relationship with the old man, as well as the way consumer culture commodifies all experiences into a transient experience.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a theoretical framework combining Zygmunt Bauman's theory of consumer culture and Alan McKee's textual analysis methodology. Bauman's theory (2000, 2007) highlights the concepts of commodification, disposability, and the liquid nature of modern life. McKee's textual analysis framework (2003) guides the examination of discourse, language, and representation in the narrative.

Bauman's Theory of Consumer Culture

Bauman's theory of consumer culture posits that modern society is characterized by a pervasive consumerist ethos. In this context, human relationships, experiences, and identities are increasingly commodified, becoming marketable goods to be bought and sold. Bauman argues that this process of commodification leads to the disposability of people, relationships, and experiences, as they are constantly replaced by new, more desirable commodities.

The Liquid Nature of Modern Life

Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000) describes a social context in which relationships, identities, and institutions are increasingly fluid and ephemeral. In this liquid world, individuals are free to create and recreate themselves, but they are also subject to the constant pressure of consumerist expectations. Bauman argues that this liquid modernity leads to a sense of disorientation and disconnection, as individuals struggle to find meaning and stability in a constantly changing world.

McKee's Textual Analysis Methodology

McKee's textual analysis framework (2003) provides a systematic approach to analyzing the language, discourse, and representation in a text. McKee argues that texts are not simply reflections of reality but are instead actively involved in shaping our understanding of the world. By examining the language, discourse, and representation in a text, researchers can gain insight into the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that shape the narrative.

Application to "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"

This study applies Bauman's theory of consumer culture and McKee's textual analysis methodology to Gabriel García Márquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." The narrative is examined through the lens of Bauman's concepts of commodification, disposability, and the liquid nature of modern life. McKee's textual analysis framework guides the examination of the language, discourse, and representation in the narrative, highlighting how the old man is commodified, disposed of, and represented as a spectacle.

By combining Bauman's theory of consumer culture and McKee's textual analysis methodology, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the ways in which consumer culture shapes our understanding of human relationships, experiences, and identities.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, integrating Bauman's theory of consumer culture and McKee's textual analysis framework to explore the critique of consumer culture in Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. The methodology is designed to systematically analyze the narrative elements of the text, focusing on how commodification and disposability manifest in the story and reflect broader cultural critiques.

Research Design

The research adopts a textual analysis approach, which is well-suited for examining literary narratives. Textual analysis allows for a detailed examination of the language, discourse, and representation in Márquez's story, enabling the researcher to uncover the underlying ideologies and social critiques embedded in the text. This approach aligns with McKee's (2003) framework, which emphasizes the active role of texts in shaping cultural understanding.

Data Collection

The primary data source for this research is Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. Secondary sources include critical essays, theoretical works on consumer culture, and scholarly interpretations of Márquez's writing. These sources provide context and support for interpreting the narrative through the chosen theoretical lens.

Analytical Procedure

Textual Segmentation: The story is segmented into key narrative events, such as the arrival of the angel, the townspeople's reactions, and the eventual decline of interest in the angel. These segments are analyzed for their thematic and symbolic significance.

2. Application of Bauman's Concepts: Each segment is examined to identify instances of commodification, disposability, and fluidity in human relationships and societal values.

3. Language and Representation Analysis: Using McKee's framework, the language, imagery, and discourse surrounding the angel and the townspeople are analyzed to uncover underlying ideologies and critiques of consumer culture.

4. Integration of Findings: Insights from the textual analysis are synthesized to draw connections between the narrative elements and broader cultural critiques, highlighting how Márquez critiques consumerism through his story.

Discussion and Analysis

Thematic Articulations: Commodification, Disposability and Spectacle

The initial phase of this analysis is centered around finding the main motifs that correlate with Bauman's concept of consumerism. Commodification, disposability, and spectacle are all aspects of a world of which the old man is a part, and which drives how the villagers treat the old man in turn. In liquid modernity, as Bauman puts it, all things are commodified, including people and relationships, with their limited shelf-life indicating when it is time to move on. This is evident in Márquez's story, in which the old man is first venerated, then exploited and finally thrown away.

The Old Man as a Commodity. Commodification is key to the way the story treats the old man. At first, they see him as a remarkable, even godlike, creature.

"When Pelayo and Elisenda saw the old man for the first time, they were struck by his wings. He was 'a very old man with enormous wings lying face up in the mud.' His wings, initially a symbol of divinity, were later reduced to a spectacle."

But Pelayo and Elisenda view the old man through a different lens once they understand that he is profitable. The couple elects to make money by charging people to see him. This is the start of the old man's commodification. Once he is glimpsed as a wonder rather than a wonder-worker, the divine is stripped of him, and he is rendered a commodity, to be consumed.

"They decided to charge admission to see him. And they made a profit by parading him before the public." Bauman's idea of commodification describes a process by which human experiences and human beings are transformed into and evaluated by their market value. Here, the villagers, who at first act with awe and reverence toward the old man, begin to see him as a commodity. The old man was a circus animal, or they made people pay to see him some phrases illustrate the shift from veneration to exploitation. The old man who was once seen as divine is now a mere commodity, proving Bauman's argument on consumer society, where everything from a human to a simple object is bought, used for some time, and then thrown away.

And it is this transformation that comes to life in McKee's method of analyzing discourse and representation. In this way, that language change also serves as evidence of how Pelayo and Elisenda shift in their understanding of the old man:

"He was treated like a circus animal in a chicken coop, where he was both a curiosity and a commodity." Pelayo and Elisenda go from perceiving the old man with awe and wonder to viewing him as an object to consume. The villagers no longer call him a miracle but "the old man with wings" a frame that secularizes him in a way that sets him free of divine or spiritual associations and is open to audience interpretation as a sideshow.

Disposability of the Old Man. When the novelty of the old guy fades, he is expendable. To cite Bauman, disposability in consumer society means that people and things are valued only on their usefulness if the usefulness lasts, and in a moment of becoming useless, they are thrown away.

"When the novelty of the old man faded, Elisenda was able to stop taking care of him. She ignored him completely as he had become a burden. She was glad when he flew away."

The old man's final disposal is indicated by his leaving the story at its end. Crushed under the hand of a man like that until he is no longer interesting enough to sell and thrown away as a result. Pelayo and Elisenda become increasingly inattentive to him, and their indifference signifies his disposability.

Another key moment in the analysis is when the old man flies away, representing how temporary his life is. The villagers' response is not one of loss but instead a relief that the onus of looking after him has been taken away. This is indicative of the consumer culture that Bauman critiques, in which the ephemerality of things and experiences becomes normalized. The old man, the former center of the scene, becomes disposable the moment he stops giving any profit or adrenaline.

The Spectacle as a Form of Consumption. He becomes a kind of curiosity for the villagers, the old man. His remarkable appearance attracts attention, and soon he is exhibited as a public attraction.

"The villagers paid to see him, and some came from miles away. The old man, once a divine figure, was now nothing more than a spectacle for people to consume."

Such transformation is the crux of Bauman's criticism of consumer culture, where spectacle is commercialized and made available for consumption. The old man draws; no one is there for a true spiritual experience; they are there because it's new and entertaining. This notion corresponds with McKee's approach to analyzing the representation of how the old man is represented not as a human being with intrinsic value but as a product to be consumed.

"They made money from his miraculous presence, and people lined up to see him, treating his wings not as a symbol of grace but as a form of entertainment."

The way the villagers treat the old man illustrates the fact that, in liquid modernity, even extraordinary or miraculous occurrences are commodified. The old man who can be read as divine or othered but who in the end has wings like a butterfly becomes an object of entertainment. McKee's analysis would note that the language describing the old man's transformation from a venerated figure to an exploited object reflects the mutability with which consumer society regards people and experiences.

Analysis of Discourse and Language

Discourse, in Alan McKee's textual analysis method, is everything language reflects social relationships, ideologies, and power dynamics in a text. Discourse analysis works by analyzing how language makes meaning, how individuals are constructed, and how social realities are created by what is said or not said. In this instance, we care about Márquez's use of language to convey the old man's commodification and disposability, the way he passes from a divine being to a public spectacle for the villagers' consumption.

Transformation of the Old Man from Divine Figure to Commodity. The old man with enormous wings is cast as miraculous from the start, implying both divinity and something supernatural. These words primed the transformation of discourse about him. At first, the old man's physical state (his wings and how he is discovered by Pelayo and Elisenda) is portrayed with an aura of wonder and mystery:

"A very old man with enormous wings lying face up in the mud."

This first description gives it a character of otherness, a supernatural quality that creates a distance between its existence and the world around it. We can use Bauman's idea of the "other" here: the old man, despite being strange and foreign, is first treated as a spectacular figure of something divine. His wings are indicative of his union with something trans-human, which is in the domain of the spiritual or the divine other.

But the shift in language begins with the arrival of the villagers, who behave not like worshippers but like exploiters. The transition from sacred being to commodity is echoed in the language used to describe the old man's new status:

"They put him in a chicken coop."

"The elderly man was treated like a circus animal."

"People paid to see him."

These tweaks in language are key and they signal a seismic shift in thinking. The old man's wings, which once represented divine grace, are reduced to the status of a mere exotic specimen." Referring to him as a "circus animal" is even more objectifying the emphasis is no longer on his miraculousness but on his entertainment value.

McKee's analysis of discourse highlights the way this commodification is embedded in the language. The words this old man was described by are no longer rooted in awe and wonder but rather exploitative. The moment when "chicken coop" (laden with associations of enclosure and commodification) and "circus animal" pop up are like flips of a switch from awe to exploitation, encoding the old man's divinity into a commodification shunted toward entertainment spectacle.

Exploitation and Language of Profit. When the villagers start to feast on the old man, the language of consumption is revealed more plainly:

"The charge admission to see him."

“And they made a profit by parading him before the public.”

Now the discourse resorts to the language of transaction and capitalism, and the old man becomes a literal commodity in the capitalist market. By “charge money,” it is signaling the transition from the old man as spiritual to the old man as a commodity. The way the villagers act (and decide to profit off him) is reflected in the language they’re no longer dealing with him as an otherworldly being but a commodity to monetize.

Bauman’s analysis of consumerist society focuses on this tendency of not just commodifying products but experiences social relations, and people themselves. Liquid modernity causes people and experiences to be objectified and commodified they lose their authentic and intrinsic value. The way they offer the Reformed to the world shows how, as Bauman notes, economic utility now often prevails in contemporary societies over meaning or intrinsic value.

Narrator’s Discourse

The narrator’s speech is also important to how the story builds its critique of consumerism. The narration is often detached and seems almost clinical in its treatment of events. The cool detachment of the narrator produces an alienation that parallels the treatment of human beings by consumer culture as things to be used, observed, and disposed of. The cool narration builds on the story’s criticism of the commodification of the extraordinary.

The old man is a “curiosity”, a term that separates him from the divine, which would be more appropriate to him, and emphasizes his otherness and marketability. That distant tone of the narrator is a direct reflection of how society, like the villagers, starts to exploit that old man when his difference is no longer revered but commodified for entertainment.

Character Actions and Social Context. The third step of the analysis: is character actions and social context. Through examining the behavior of Pelayo and Elisenda, as well as the villagers’ response, the analysis will account for how the story articulates a commentary on consumer culture, one defined by an emphasis on exploitation and disposability.

The Old Man as Exploited by Pelayo and Elisenda

Pelayo and Elisenda’s behavior in the story gives a clear image of “Bauman’s concept of commodification”. They start being curious about him, but the moment they realize that they can get money out of him, their treatment of him changes. McKee’s approach to textual analysis succeeds in exposing the transactional relationship that Sonia and Natasha have with the old man. Their lack of compassion for him or desire to see him recover is abhorrent to me, and they only see him as a stepping stone to their plot. Charging people to see him is the moment of his commodification.

Their behaviors reflect the fluidity of contemporary relationships; friendships are seldom motivated by anything other than self-interest and financial gain. Once the old man’s efficacy as a phenomenon wears off, Pelayo and Elisenda form no emotional bond with him to speak of, illustrating how, in consumerist societies, people are valued entirely in terms of serving their market utility.

Social Context and Capitalist Ideology

The story takes place in a small, impoverished village, and Pelayo and Elisenda’s economic struggles heavily influence their decision to exploit the old man. The social context of the couple’s poverty and desperation could be read as an illustration of the capitalist pressures Bauman laments. The village’s economic predicament leads Pelayo and Elisenda not to see the old man as a divine entity but as a potential resource to exploit. This is emblematic of a major capitalist logic that undergirds much of liquid modernity: people as products, worth determined solely by how much profit they can extract.

Representation and Ideology

According to McKee representation is “The way characters, events, and objects are portrayed in the text (which will usually represent that text’s underlying ideology). In “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” the representation of the old man shifts from that of a miraculous being to a commodity and then to a disposable object. This evolution resonates with Bauman’s concerns about consumerism and the transient status of value in liquid modernity.

Representation of the Old Man as the "Other"

At first, the old man is seen in other terms he is described as mysterious and even supernatural. No ordinary man possesses wings, and the description of his wings alone implies he is from another world. This otherness is underscored by the villagers' reactions to him. He is horrifying and they worship him as a god at first.

But as it dawns on the villagers that they can profit from the old man, his representation transforms. He is not a great one anymore but a spectacle. The old man's spectacle, like Bauman's notions of commodified experiences, is something for the villagers to consume for entertainment, not something they cherish for its spiritual worth. And this transformation symbolizes the fluidity of identity in liquid modernity, where the worth of an individual is not a fact, but a variable of market forces and social demand.

Thematic Interpretation: The Critique of Consumerism

It critiques capitalist ideology through representation. What's true is that in capitalist societies, people and things are often defined in terms of their utility in terms of what they can provide in profit or market value. If the old man can't entertain (and thus make money), he has no value. And once he fails to, he is disposed of, highlighting Bauman's notion that every object or human being is disposable in liquid modernity once it ceases to carry meaning.

This story shows the ideological ground of consumerism through the changing representation of the old man: from a God-like figure to an object of the system. His disposability, that moment when one is abandoned after an end of market value demonstrates how in liquid modernity even the most extraordinary experiences and most special people become disposable.

The Theory of Profit and Exploitation

The old man's final depiction: in which he no longer serves any economic purpose, illuminates how consumer society forces the capitalist exploitation of everyone to be commodified and to be disposed of once its economic utility has vaporized. Bauman's critique of liquid modernity shows that, once something, or someone, stops being profitable or marketable, they are made invisible and abandoned. The old man, a degrading spectacle, represents this ephemeral commodity with no value past this moment. His exodus is not treated with reverence or lament but with indifference and relief.

Conclusion

Gabriel García Márquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* offers a scathing critique of consumer culture and its effects on human behavior. Through the commodification of the angel, Márquez highlights how consumer culture reduces the sacred and extraordinary to mere commodities, stripping them of their spiritual value and meaning. This narrative serves as a powerful warning about the dehumanizing tendencies of consumer culture, where people and objects are exploited for profit and entertainment, and discarded when they no longer satisfy our desires.

This study demonstrates that Márquez's narrative aligns with critical theories of consumer culture, particularly Jean Baudrillard's concept of consumerism as a system that creates symbolic meaning and spectacle. The story underscores the need for critical examination of the cultural and social implications of consumerism and encourages readers to reflect on the values and principles that guide their consumption practices. Ultimately, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* challenges readers to reconsider the consequences of living in a society driven by consumerist values and to seek alternative ways of assigning value and meaning to the world around us.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868-882.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society: Myths and structures* (C. Turner, Trans.). London: Sage Publication.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Consuming life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bower, K. (2004). The rediscovery of magical realism in the 1980s. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 40(1), 42-53.
- Bradshaw, A., & Brown, S. (2008). The fetishization of brands. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(2), 139-147.
- Faris, W. B. (2004). *Ordinary enchantments: Magical realism and the remystification of narrative*. Vanderbilt University Press
- Featherstone, M. (2007). *Consumer culture and postmodernism* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Hassoun, A., Cropotova, J., Trif, M., Rusu, A. V., Bobiş, O., Nayik, G. A., ... & Regenstein, J. M. (2022). Consumer acceptance of new food trends resulting from the fourth industrial revolution technologies: A narrative review of literature and future perspectives. *Frontiers in nutrition*, 9, 972154
- Kravets, O., et al. (2018). *Consumer culture theory: A handbook*. Routledge.
- Marquez, G. G. (1955). A very old man with enormous wings. In G. G. Marquez, *Leaf Storm and other stories* (pp. 1-8). Harper & Row.
- Márquez, G. G. (1995). *A very old man with enormous wings: A tale for children*. In *Collected Stories* (G. Rabassa, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Prediger, S., & Neugebauer, P. (2023). Can students with different language backgrounds profit equally from a language-responsive instructional approach for percentages? Differential effectiveness in a field trial. *Mathematical Thinking and Learning*, 25(1), 2-22
- Rokka, J. (2021). Consumer Culture Theory's future in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 29(1), 114-124
- Shah, T., Ahmad, A., Ali, M. S., & Razaq, A. (2024). WINGS OF OPPRESSION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POWER RELATIONS IN GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S 'A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS'. *Policy Research Journal*, 2(4), 1682-1691
- Velez Valencia, C. (2021). Craft and Storytelling: Romance and Reality in Joseph Conrad and Gabriel García Márquez.
- Zamora, L. P. (1995). *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*. Duke University Press.