The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World, by Gabriel García Márquez

In A Nutshell
"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is a short story written by Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez in 1968. Originally written in Spanish, the story was translated into English in 1972, and was published with a collection of Márquez's short stories entitled Leaf Storm and Other Stories. By the time this touching story hit U.S. bookstores, Márquez was already famous for his stunning novel 100 Years of Solitude, published in 1967. 100 Years of Solitude catapulted Márquez to fame, had a huge impact on the world of Latin American writers, helped establish magical realism as a literary genre, and led to Márquez's Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

So where does "The Handsomest Drowned Man" fit in? It's tempting to think of this work as a slice of 100 Years of Solitude. It tells the tale of a small, coastal fishing village (presumably in Latin America) interrupted by the arrival of a dead body washed up by the waves. This drowned man has a huge impact on the village, which is changed forever by his arrival. Themes of community, myth, and the ideals of man are found in this piece and in many of Márquez's other works. The genre which so defined 100 Years of Solitude - magical realism - also features heavily in "The Handsomest Drowned Man." Lots more on that to come, we promise. Shmoop on!

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Big Picture Study Questions

1. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" spans just about 24 hours of narrative time. What events correspond to nightfall? To dawn?

2. We've argued that this story is about a man so great that he inspires other to be truly great as well. What sort of qualities does a person need to have to do this?

3. In this story, the drowned man takes on the roles of the society's greatest mythological figures; Esteban, Lautauro, even Quetzalcoatl. Imagine a similar story, but taking place in your time and place. What sort of "mythological figures" might be linked to a great man?

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