What Would You Do?

Jennifer Trujillo

Many of us have been in a situation where we are being told one side of a story and have no other perspective to take into account. When we hear the other side of things, we usually come to a clearer conclusion and have a firmer understanding of intentions and actions. In the short story "Hungry, Like a Wolf," we are given the other perspective to the classic "Little Red Riding Hood" fairytale from the eyes of the villain, the wolf. The short story "Hungry, Like a Wolf" by Amina Gautier is told from the perspective of the wolf, which helps the reader develop empathy towards him and highlight how some villains, real or fake, can be misunderstood.

In the wolf's retelling in "Hungry, Like a Wolf," a grandmother that lives in the forest invites him into her home. She requests that he eats her before her illness consumes her first. Following the odd request, the wolf contemplates for several days whether or not to consume the grandmother. He discusses it with his mate, and he eventually comes to the conclusion that he will give into his hunger and consume the grandmother (Gautier). He is trying to feed his insatiable hunger he has had since his childhood that comes with the inherent nature of "being a wolf" which "meant he would always hunger" (Gautier). This differs from the classic "Little Red Riding Hood" fairytale where the wolf barges into the grandmother's home and horrifically eats her and then her granddaughter. The wolf's retelling shows that he was invited and not an intruder, which paints a different picture to the reader.

Learning about the wolf's past can cause the reader to develop empathy for this perceived villain. The wolf becomes relatable and almost like he's one of us. This is because "reading fiction provides excellent training for […]understanding[…]how other people feel and think" (McKearney and Mears). The article "Lost For Words" discusses the effects that reading fiction has on young readers, building empathy for real and fictional people. In this case, the reader is developing empathy for the wolf by reading his narrative, as well as other people who may make bad decisions. The wolf elaborates on his upbringing and discusses that since he was pup he struggled with hunger. It caused him to always "[think] of the next kill" (Gautier), which led him to succumbing to the grandmother's proposal and eating her. As the reader comes to understand his backstory, they empathize with the longing he has. It's understandable that his hunger would carry on into his adulthood when throughout his life he felt deprived of food. In a real world scenario, the reader may also feel empathetic to criminals or "villians" who steal or those who even commit a murder.

What makes the reader empathize even stronger is that they know that the wolf is an animal at the end of the day. That is why when the wolf gives into his primal instincts, the reader can't say he is bad. The reader can acknowledge that the wolf, like many other characters in literature, may "[do] terrible things…" but "...the story should help [the reader] understand a character's motivation" (McKearny and Mears). They know the wolf is a wild animal and he is acting in accordance with his DNA. Unlike humans, wolves don't experience guilt. They are oblivious to how their actions affect others and therefore they cannot express remorse. With this understanding, the wolf is inherently innocent because he has no deeper comprehension of his actions, which leads the reader to

empathize. An innocent person doing something bad doesn't register as a bad person. The wolf is innocent and appears so to the reader.

Although the wolf questions the grandmother's proposal and states he needs "some time to think it over…" (Gautier), he can't truly give it the same consideration a human would. That is why when the reader stops viewing the story from the perspective of a human, but rather, from the perspective of a wild animal, the reader can realize that the wolf didn't know any better. The wolf is simply an animal that cannot reason through decisions with the consideration of others in mind, which leads to the consumption of the grandmother.

The reading experience for a person is altered by them having to put themselves in the position of a villain. They have to consider what they would do if they were placed in the same circumstances as the wolf. This can cause a dilemma in the reader because their morals come into question. Would they still denounce killing someone, or would they come to see how an animal like the wolf could eat the grandmother? With the shift in perspective, most readers will come to the conclusion that the wolf is an animal, and he just acted as such. This actively goes against the classic fairytale "Little Red Riding Hood" and no longer paints the wolf as a predator preying on the innocent. Most readers would likely eat the grandmother if they were a starving wolf, which stops villainizing his character in the classic tale.

Reading a story from a different perspective truly impacts the development of empathy in the reader. The reader of the short story "Hungry, Like a Wolf" by Amina Gautier becomes more empathetic to this perceived villain's decision to eat the grandmother. Knowledge of the wolf's hunger as a pup and inherent inability to critically think like a human all contributed to the reader feeling compassionate and understanding. The reader comes to the conclusion that if they were a wolf, they would likely act the same. That positively builds empathy in the reader as they learn to understand real and fake people who think differently from them.

Works Cited

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