

Assistance

Alexandra Allen

Death is concept that most people ignore until the grim reality of it makes itself known. A concept that most adults shy away from despite when it becomes a necessary topic to discuss. This notion is something that leaves children befuddled and grasping at straws to figure out the meaning of a goodbye that lasts. Conversations about such a bleak concept are needed in order to properly prepare others for the future during these difficult events. To put it simply, death is inevitable and can be prolonged thanks to advancements in technology and peoples' understanding of human physiology. However, is it fair to continue to assist those awaiting the end when they're ready to leave despite the opposition of others, such as family, friends, or even professionals? By changing the perspective of the classic tale, "Little Red Riding Hood," Amina Gautier allows the reader to gain an understanding and even empathy of the notion "assisted suicide" that many willfully ignore in her short story "Hungry, Like the Wolf."

Almost everyone at one point or another has heard of the tale of a little girl in the red hood who ran into a wolf on her journey to her grandmother's house. As such, it is commonly known that the story is mainly focused on the little girl and her interactions with the wolf. In "Hungry, Like the Wolf" by Amina Gautier the perspective is still third person limited, but the narrative follows the wolf and his interactions with the grandmother. In this version, the wolf is invited into the grandmother's home where she then requests his assistance. The older woman reveals her failing health and the lackluster relationship she has with her family, consisting of her daughter and granddaughter. So, while the grandmother still has her wits and some life to her, she offers herself to the wolf as a meal. While the creature was hesitant at first, ultimately, comes around and fulfills the dying elderly woman's request. Amina Gautier does not only modernize the classic fairytale but alters the perspective allowing the reader to empathize with the grandmother and see the "villain" in a different light.

"She beckoned like someone who had been waiting. 'Come in,' she said" (Gautier); by having this simply interaction in the beginning of the short story the author is clearly stating that this version of the tale is taking an unusual route. This sentiment is only reinforced by the grandmother's request: "She said, 'Soon I'll die here and I don't want to rot.' She lived with an image of dying in her bed with no one to see or know" (Gautier). By having this discussion between the characters it establishes that the wolf is not simply a conniving beast preying upon his next victim, an unsuspecting grandmother. This creature is something that the grandmother appears to trust or, at the very least, values their skills for this complicated issue. The problem being that the older woman does not want to wait for her symptoms to become worse and worse until her eventually death. Given the relationship that was established between her and the rest of her family, who knows how long until someone stumbles upon the woman's corpse.

Although the wolf seems interested in the deal, he is understandably hesitant about such matters considering his position; despite how neatly everything appears to be laid out according to

the grandmother. The beast then announces that he will need some time to think over her request and states that the woman find out his answer from him in three days (Gautier). While the situation itself is strange, it is not too far off from real world scenario of a relative or loved one wanting to avoid unnecessary pain for an inevitable event. As shown in certain studies, "The empathy we feel for characters wires our brains to have the same sensitivity towards real people" (McKearney and Mears). This narrative allows the reader to gain insight on an unpleasant concept of an all too real problem that many have to face.

The wolf after conversing with his mate and considering the potential impact it could have on the pack comes back to the elderly woman with an answer. At this point, the reader can see the excitement upon the grandmother's face and the never-ending hunger the wolf is feeling makes itself known. While the beast impatiently states she wouldn't understand his hunger, but the woman exclaims:

I think I do. I hunger to escape this world. I want to go on my own terms. I'm starving for freedom; I want to shake this sickness loose. (Gautier)

At the end of the story, the reader is able to investigate a complicated moral issue and gain an understanding of both characters' viewpoints (McKearney and Mears). While the viewer would normally be put off by the wolf's desire, thanks to the grandmother's explanation the reader was given valuable insight into the character's state of mind. The wolf and the grandmother are adhering to the laws of nature.

Amina Gautier's "Hungry, Like the Wolf" not only modernizes but changes the perspective of the classic tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" that so many have heard of and allows the reader to gain an understanding of a grim reality, death. This short story is unique, because the story focuses on the wolf and his interaction with the grandmother instead of a little girl's journey through the woods. The reader is given valuable insight into a difficult topic through the eyes of the wolf and the grandmother's own thoughts of her impending end.

Works Cited

- Gautier, Amina. "Hungry, Like a Wolf." *Blackbird: A Journal of Literature and the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1, Spring 2019. <https://blackbird.vcu.edu/v18n1/fiction/gautier-a/hungry-page.shtml>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2024.
- McKearney, Miranda, and Sarah Mears. "Lost for Words? How Reading Can Teach Children Empathy; Stories Have the Power to Bring Emotions to Life, and Help Children Understand Their Own Feelings and Those of Others." *The Guardian*, 13 May 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2015/may/13/reading-teach-children-empathy#:~:text=A%20Cambridge%20University%20study%20by,Neuroscience%20backs%20this%20up>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2024.