

Amelia Johnson

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Paper 1 Final

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

After reading Angela Carter's retelling of "Little Red Riding Hood," our first assignment involved retelling a fairytale or fable, incorporating some change to the original story. We were then required to analyze these changes, and how they impacted the meaning of the tale.

The Three Bears

"The bear is a beast known to all in today's world. It is a creature whose lust for blood is unmistakable. It is hard to believe that, in a different time, we once lived in harmony with these barbarous creatures.

Everyone remembers the Human-Bear War: their many rebellions on our good cities and people, the years of fighting and destruction against the guiltless humans. The innocent lives they stole would not be in vain, however. We decimated their forces, leaving no fighting bear without a suitable punishment.

On account of our merciful nature, we allowed the remaining bears to live out the rest of their lives as exiles. Now, fifty years after the pandemonium, they live scattered in the forests just outside the border, although, there have been a number of sightings recently beyond city limits.

Their predisposition to uncivilized and inhuman nature prevents them from showing any sort of compassion or clemency. Though their numbers are fewer, bears still pose a very imminent threat to humans. Never leave your child or loved one in the forest unattended. If you

find yourself in this situation, be aware of the warning signs. Bears often leave tracks while meandering or hunting; they are commonly known to walk on two legs. Should you find multiple carcasses or an abundance of crows, be alert. They retire in grassy plains, fields, or other defoliated areas. Always carry bear spray while traveling through the forest. Beware of these most devious, callous beings.”

It was late autumn, and winter was just slipping around the corner. The swallows had all fled from the silent, persistent pines. Tucked away in these woods were scarce cabins and houses for those yearning to escape the city life, well aware of the apparent risks that awaited them. In one sat a jovial girl with dirty-blond hair, unmistakable ringlets brushing her shoulders. Bright and perspicacious, she spent most of her days reading books that her parents had collected from their travels. Today, she opened A Forest-Dweller’s Guide to Living to the “Dangers” section, as her mother suggested she do. She attended a humble school down a canopy of lively greenery, and she greatly enjoyed learning. Her parents so often considered moving her to a city school, but for their own reasons, decided to remain in the sticks for a little while longer. She quite enjoyed living in this thick forest. She felt at peace trekking to and from school each day, surrounded by the ever-changing wildlife. Nevertheless, she so often dreamed of escaping this monotonous routine. Her imagination would take her to unspeakable places, far beyond what the forest could bring her. For now, however, lacking resolve and any practical means of leaving, she remained. And the dangers that consumed everyone else’s mind didn’t seem to bother her, partly due to her naiveté. “Don’t leave without your bear spray, my sweet Goldilocks. The bears wouldn’t think twice about gobbling you up.” Her mother’s sweet, watchful voice called out, as she left for school, dressed in the pale blue checkered dress her mother had bought her.

Pushing her mother's repetitive warning to the back of her mind, she set off and followed the same trail that had always taken her where she needed to go. Today, however, she noticed a new path straying from the original. It was almost as if it had opened up for her, right then and there. It was so tempting and so novel. The breeze behind her coerced her to wander forward. Surely, she couldn't get too lost. In a few moments, she became adrift in her thoughts: How did bears live in these woods, anyway? Did they sleep in trees? Did they eat berries or hunt their prey, like so many other carnivores? How did they communicate with each other?

And so, Goldilocks senselessly drifted farther and farther, until the tender forest she knew and that had protected her was hidden from sight, blanketed with unfamiliarity. Suddenly, she became aware of the foreign trees and brush and her heart began to race. Her mother's anxieties began to eat away at her composed disposition. Darkness began to creep behind her, in the long, sharp blades of grass. An icy breeze brushed against her bare legs, and was that a bear's murderous growl she just heard? Her hand instinctively reached for the can of bear spray, unused.

She was overwhelmingly relieved when she finally came upon a quaint cabin so similar to hers that she mistakenly thought it was for a brief moment. As she hurriedly approached, she noticed an unfamiliar rusted roof. She soon realized it wasn't her own, and her hopes were quickly doused. However, she assumed it was one of her classmates' since her neck of the woods was very small, or perhaps this was her wishful thinking. She would soon come to realize this was not, in fact, her neck of the woods at all. She rushed to the door and knocked politely, but there was no answer. Hesitantly, she inched the amber door open to an empty home. It was rustic, but cozy and instilled in her a sense of comfort. A dying fire was burning in the stone mantel that ran up the wall. Across from it, a burgundy leather couch and two matching chairs at

its side, wool blankets laid across them. Many lamps, still on, filled the room with a warm, yellow light against the unwelcoming darkness spilling through the glass windows. Around the corner was a small kitchen and wooden table, where three bowls of porridge sat. Upon seeing this, she suddenly became aware of her overwhelming hunger. Thinking that whoever she knew in the neighborhood would be sympathetic to her situation, she decided to snack on a bowl of porridge.

First, she sat in the closest and largest wooden chair with a cobalt blue cushion. It was hard and uncomfortable to sit in. As she quickly shoved a spoonful into her mouth, it scalded her taste buds and gums. She scooted to the next seat, an orange, cushioned loveseat. With her tongue still numb, she cautiously blew on the porridge before taking a spoonful. This time, cold mush slid down her throat and her stomach turned. Nonetheless, she was still hungry and moved on to the last chair, a yellow wooden one. It suited her very nicely. Warily, she scooped a tiny amount of porridge, and to her surprise, it was just perfectly right. She scarfed down the rest of the bowl in record time, and right as she finished, the chair made a strange creaking sound. Before she knew it, its legs gave out beneath her.

In a state of slight panic, she attempted to put the chair back together, but in doing so she received a large splinter in her finger. Grimacing, she pulled it out, and a stream of red began to flow from her finger. Having wandered all day, body and mind, and her stomach full, she noticed her eyes beginning to droop. She wiped the blood on the trim of her dress as she ascended the staircase, leaving a dark streak across one checkered blue tile. In a large bedroom, three beds leaned against the wooden wall. As she did before, she made her way over to the first bed with a modest sapphire blue duvet cover. As soon as she laid down, she noticed how firm the mattress was, and how small she was in comparison to the enormous bed. Uncomfortable, she moved on

to the next: a queen-size bed. The comforter had orange primroses spanning across it and a folded tangerine blanket hung over the edges. As she sat down, she sunk too far into the soft, feathery mattress. Eagerly, she made her way over to the last bed. It was just her size. As she sunk into the covers, spotted with yellow bumblebees that matched the color of her hair, she let her weariness overwhelm her. Falling back on a false sense of security, she drifted off into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Soon after, two loving parents and their little Georgie were returning from their evening stroll through the woods as part of their daily routine. The lush leaves hanging from the drooping branches of trees basked in the last gold of the retiring sun. George, excited to read one of his new books, began to run when he spotted their humble abode, dotting his mustard overalls with mud. However, he was greeted with an eerie air in what was supposed to be their safe haven. The soft, brown fur on his back tingled as he stood up on his back paws, raised his small, round ears, and inspected.

At this moment, his cautious father, following closely behind, announced, "Someone has been eating my porridge." His mother, picking up her painted bowl, whispered, "Someone has been eating *my* porridge." Finally, George, in his pure voice, pronounced "Someone gobbled up all my porridge and broke the chair I made." Wary of a vicious hunter, they went to inspect their bedroom. His mother motioned for him to stay put, but the curious child trailed them. "Someone has been sleeping in my bed." The father reached his paws behind his head. "Someone has been sleeping in *my* bed," the mother murmured almost simultaneously, as she fiddled with the thick, knitted blanket atop her bed with her long, trimmed claws. "Someone is sleeping in my bed!" George exclaimed, and both his parents sprung to his side. Though, their sudden shock was soon washed away upon seeing the intruder. A young girl whose once perfectly curled hair was now

frizzy, and whose once clean dress was wrinkled and dirtied lay sound asleep in Georgie's bed. They almost didn't want to wake her. They all fell silent for a few moments, before the father cleared his throat and mumbled "Poor thing..." He lingered, in thought, and rubbed the length of his snout.

"George, fetch another blanket for her."

Quite urgently, George picked up his most treasured blanket, hand-woven and golden in color, and laid it on her peaceful body. Abruptly, Goldilocks awoke from her slumber and saw what she wished she had never seen, something straight out of her nightmares: three ferocious bears surrounding her. They had found her alone and hunted her down, stalking her while she rested. Their eyes narrowed at her, claws out and sharpened, teeth blood-stained and bared, prepared to attack at any moment. She screamed like she had never screamed before, because she had never needed to.

George then kindly approached her, laying his paw gingerly on her leg, and attempted to comfort the frightened human, though he had never even seen one before. In a state of true shock, she instantaneously scrambled for the can of bear spray in her front pocket and sprayed, wincing her eyes shut. Though she missed his face, George, skin burning, stumbled back into his mother's arms. Tears fell from his eyes, and his mother hushed his cries, while his father laid a disheartened gaze on their guest. Releasing her heated clench on the cold, metal can, the cries of young George rang in her head. It reminded her of her own sobs, when she was injured. Then, a chocolatey voice that sounded like her mother's cooed, "Hushhhhh, my little Georgie." She peaked open one lid to the chaos she had created. The innocent child cuddled into the chest of his mother, her long lashes hung down as she rocked him. It was all so familiar. She then looked down at the thoughtful blanket wrapped around her. She didn't know bears were capable of such

emotion. They were a family, just like her own. Now that she was thinking about it, perhaps she didn't know as much about bears as she had thought.

Tears began to stream from Goldilocks' round, apple cheeks. Burying her dishonorable face in her legs, she cried "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry." A phrase that had not been uttered from human to bear in years.

She willingly awaited her punishment.

"It's okay." The words hung in the air.

"I understand." George suddenly stood up on his four paws, his deep brown eyes looking directly at her and his mouth curling into a smile. It was because of this kindness that Goldilocks fell deeper into her guilt. How could she look past the face of an innocent youth, regardless that he was a bear?

George then helped her out of bed, and they conversed like nothing had ever happened. He showed her his toys and books; she didn't know bears could read. He invited her downstairs and offered more porridge, which she didn't think she deserved. She apologized for breaking his chair, and the two worked together to fix it. The mother cleaned her dress, and wrapped a bandage around the cut on her finger. The cool, forgiving father offered her a place to stay for the remainder of the night. Their soft paws tucked her into bed, just as her parents did.

When the nurturing sun rose again, and covered the darkness and fear with its warmth, Goldilocks knew it was time to leave. George and his parents gave her a basket full of freshly picked berries and fruit, and guided her back to the human village. Goldilocks did not ever find the bears again, though she tried, but kept their compassion and benevolence in her heart as she spread words of them to her people. Soon enough, everyone knew the tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

In the original tale, Goldilocks stumbles upon a cabin in the woods, and begins to meddle with, eat, and break personal items in the home of strangers. She falls asleep in a bed that is not hers, and awakes to discover three bears at her side. She proceeds to run away from the fearsome bears and her mistakes, and thus the story ends. I suppose the moral is something like “don’t mess with other’s belongings,” but this is a little difficult to understand since Goldilocks shows no remorse for her actions. She has no motivation and no background, so it is hard to sympathize with her, though she is widely considered the protagonist.

To begin my edition, I added a brief prelude to the relations between human and bear, which sets up why Goldilocks and the simple-minded villagers are so afraid of the bears. This, in turn, makes the story a little more realistic and applicable to “real life.” I also tried to give Goldilocks more of a character than the original, having intellect and skills to face her mistakes, rather than run from them, like so many damsels in distress and the original Goldilocks have done. In part, knowing this and her background makes it easier to pity her for her mistakes and possibly mimic her actions. In many fairytales, there is often a clear distinction between what could be plausible and what could not. With the more mature tone, my intent was to blur this line and also open the age range of the audience. While this is a children’s story, the changed morals can be pragmatic in anyone’s life, regardless of age.

Finally, I altered the ending, so that the bears are not as terrifying as Goldilocks initially thinks. Instead of scaring her away and living up to their stereotype, they actually welcome her with open arms; they are very humanized. The subtle details in the furniture of their home even convince Goldilocks that they are human. This later makes Goldilocks reconsider what makes

bears so different from humans in the first place, which alters the moral in a continuation of the original along with another, “don’t make judgements about people you don’t know.” I think this moral, more than the original, is a little more relevant in modern society with the presumptions people make about others based on external features or visible labels. Now especially, it is very common for people to differentiate and value themselves based on categories like race, sexuality, and religion, and what is considered normal. Goldilocks, her villagers, and humans represent the norm, and the bears, in a sense, represent “the others.” They embody one of the more unfortunate scenarios as we succumb to these superficial preconceptions and separate ourselves accordingly. The reason why I stress that this moral can be learned by people of all ages, is that many times children do not have prejudices by nature; they are taught. While children can benefit from this moral, perhaps it is more helpful for adults now. Though Goldilocks is blissfully unaware of the humanity of bears because of what others have forced upon her, she opens her mind and accepts their similarities, a lesson I think many can bear to learn.