Benjamin Ha

English 1 Honor

February 29, 2015

Book Review

Lamb to Doubt

The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the name Roald Dahl is *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*. These are popular stories for children, so when I read *Lamb to Slaughter*, I was surprised at Dahl’s ability to create a mystery with suburban murder. Dahl drew me in as a coconspirator with his cleaver and thrilling development in the mystery. Dahl presents a unique way of concealing the murder weapon by simultaneously presenting it to the police. Unpredictable behavior leads to an unexpected end where the prey becomes the predator.

In *Lamb to Slaughter,* Mrs. Maloney is a six month pregnant housewife who lives in a peaceful and tranquil house. The bucolic facade begins to fade away early as Dahl beings to lead to murderous mischief. Upon learning of her husband’s plan, Mrs. Maloney responds in a shocking manor. She keeps composure despite the tragedy. One of the key points of Mary Maloney is her tendency to crack composure where she fades from adult to giggling child. This weakness is what makes Mary Maloney believable.

At first glance, Mrs. Maloney “began to cry her heart out. . . No acting was necessary” (Dahl). Dahl leaves it to the reader to determine her sincerity. I am confident she is sincerely wacky as later on she begins to giggle instead. Her dual personality of adult to child-like behavior hints a multi-personality disorder, her conversation with the grocer and her desire to feed information to the officers further prove her insanity. Mrs. Maloney is as tantalizing as the plot itself. At points, I am distracted by her erratic behavior but the intense plot keeps it on track. Her unique character gives life to the story as a whole. When I first read *Lamb to Slaughter*, I over looked Mr. Maloney as the victim. On further analysis, he is the victimizer. Not only is he ungrateful for his wife after all the work she does for him, he loses faith and ditches her for another women. This provides a major plot twist as it justifies Mary Malone’s action. This dramatic shift entices my taste for drama. Perhaps this plot twist is what makes Mr. Maloney my favorite character. Dahl’s character development comes from his attention to the detail and insight he applies in his writing.

Dahl’s masterful skill at writing is similar to Van Gough to painting a portrait. Dahl describes a clear and accurate portrait the perfect room and seemingly tranquil house. Even though Dahl lacks tremendous amounts of figurative language, the few he does have bring in all the senses and offers a fully immersive experience for the reader. For example, when Mrs. Maloney waits for her husband to come home, “Almost as a sunbather feels the sun . . . that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together” (Dahl), her intense emotions are felt strongly. While this narrative is directed to adults, he writes in a sophisticated yet easily understandable voice that keeps interest the whole time.

With numerous years of experience writing children novels, Dahl composes a book that appeals to mature children and adults alike.