

Starving Destitution

by Alyssa Betz

No one's life is the same. People are rich, poor, happy, depressed, loved, and alone. Also, no one's eyes view life all the same. Without the power to see the world through someone else's eyes, one cannot begin to comprehend what their world looks like, nor the confines of their struggle. The short story of "Geraldine Moore the Poet" walks through many avenues of this concept, specifically looking at poverty and loneliness and how they affect one's life.

One theme that is prevalent throughout "Geraldine Moore the Poet" is poverty, and how it affects seemingly all aspects of Geraldine's life. As Geraldine walks to school in the introduction of the story, "she passed the hot-dog man on the corner and waved. He shrugged as if to say business was very bad. Must be . . . three guys before you had to pack up and forget it. Nobody's got hot-dog money around here." This scene illustrates how not only Geraldine, but millions of people, are poor in America. It can feel like no matter what one does, they shall never escape.

Geraldine cannot escape the confines of poverty on her way to school, nor does school offer liberation. In school, her teachers do not understand her daily struggle. To Geraldine, their teachings do not help her find the answers she seeks into understanding how to cope with the day-to-day struggle of deprivation and poverty. In her geometry class, her "teacher, started drawing cubes and cylinders on the board. . . . Geraldine started to raise her hand to ask what all these squares and angles had to do with solving real problems, like the ones she had. Better not, she warned herself . . . your big mouth got you in trouble last term." In her classes, as many students do, Geraldine slips into daydreams of the future. However, children suffocating in the silence of poverty do not daydream about recess or lunchtime. Children like Geraldine daydream about living a better life.

Geraldine's daydreams do not make a better life appear out of thin air, nor can they make her home-life a place of comfort. While walking home from school one day, Geraldine saw that "right outside her building was a pile of furniture and boxes. That wasn't anything new. She had seen people get put out in the street before, but this time the ironing board looked familiar . . . and the big ugly sofa standing on its arm." That afternoon Geraldine joined many other people in the heartbreaking devastation of having no place to call home. This last heartbreak reiterates the theme of how devastating the effects of poverty can be on one's every-day life.

Another theme examined in “Geraldine Moore the Poet” is how loneliness affects one’s outlook on life. Loneliness and depression often leave the world dark and desolate through saddened eyes. This desolation is foretold within many aspects of Geraldine’s life. For example, “when Geraldine’s mother first took sick and went away, Geraldine had been on her own except when Miss Gladys next door come in on Thursdays.” And, although Geraldine’s sister Anita moved back home, Geraldine still feels alone. For some, having another individual to live with can be a great comfort. However, for others, it can feel like there is a vast universe separating them from one another.

Although Geraldine at least has Anita present, her parents are nowhere to be found. It is not told how many actual miles separate Geraldine from her mother, and it has been a long time since she has seen her dad. Both Geraldine’s parents have been ripped from her life, her mother by sickness and her father by choice. Like many children in the world, Geraldine is an orphan. Even though her parents are not deceased, they are living in a parallel universe Geraldine never sees.

Having a split family system is not the only example of a parallel universe in Geraldine’s story. Geraldine’s teacher, Mrs. Scott, tried to teach her students another example in English class: poetry. Poetry is a way to express and escape one’s reality without having to alter it. Like many students who do not like their homework assignments, Geraldine had not written a poem for class that day. When Mrs. Scott asked Geraldine why, Geraldine replied, “Nothing lovely’s been happening in my life. I haven’t seen a flower since Mother’s Day, and the sun don’t even shine on my side of the street. No robins come sing on my window sill. Just the rain comes, and the bills come, and the men to move out our furniture. I’m sorry, but I can’t write no pretty poem.” The raw beauty and honesty of Geraldine’s poetic words rendered Mrs. Scott speechless for several moments. Like Geraldine, many high school students express their thoughts of loneliness in works of poetry. Geraldine’s words of honesty, of beauty, and of heartache are a harsh reiteration of just how much the coldness of loneliness can effect a teenager’s life.

In essence, the short story, “Geraldine Moore the Poet,” proves without a doubt that often one does not know what is truly going on in someone else’s life. Geraldine’s teacher, Mrs. Scott, had no comprehension of the trials constricting her student’s everyday life until the saddened words of Geraldine’s poem opened her eyes. Mrs. Scott laid eyes on a teenager gripped by poverty and destitution, loneliness and despair. Millions of teenagers worldwide live their lives restricted by these four words. Many children are starving, isolated, alone, and destitute. For these children and Geraldine, poverty and loneliness effect every aspect of their lives.

Work Cited

Bambara, Toni Cade. "Geraldine Moore the Poet." *Class Attack!* n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.