# THE WOLF’S POSTSCRIPT TO ‘LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD’

# *by Agha Shahid Ali*

*First, grant me my sense of history:*

*I did it for posterity,*

*for kindergarten teachers*

*and a clear moral:*

*Little girls shouldn't wander off*

*in search of strange flowers,*

*and they mustn't speak to strangers.*

*And then grant me my generous sense of plot:*

*Couldn't I have gobbled her up*

*right there in the jungle?*

*Why did I ask her where her grandma lived?*

*As if I, a forest-dweller,*

*didn't know of the cottage*

*under the three oak trees*

*and the old woman lived there*

*all alone?*

*As if I couldn't have swallowed her years before?*

*And you may call me the Big Bad Wolf,*

*now my only reputation.*

*But I was no child-molester*

*though you'll agree she was pretty.*

*And the huntsman:*

*Was I sleeping while he snipped*

*my thick black fur*

*and filled me with garbage and stones?*

*I ran with that weight and fell down,*

*simply so children could laugh*

*at the noise of the stones cutting through my belly,*

*at the garbage spilling out*

*with a perfect sense of timing,*

*just when the tale*

*should have come to an end.*

**About the Text:**

In ‘The Wolf's Postscript to "Little Red Riding Hood"' Agha Shahid Ali inverts the classic European fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood - the young girl (named after the red-coloured hood that she wears) who meets a big' bad wolf in the forest when she is on her way to visit her ill grandmother. In the story, the wolf rushes to the grandmother’s house, eats her up, dresses like her and waits for Red Riding Hood to arrive, finally devouring her too. In some versions, the cries of the girl alert a passing woodcutter who then kills the wolf, not before ripping open the wolf’s belly to retrieve the grandmother and filing it with stones and pebbles instead.

Shahid's poem is written from the point of view of the wolf - the 'other' of the original tale who has been labeled as the bad, villainous character in the story as well in popular culture. The poem begins with the wolf’s justification of his entire role in the story - he did it for 'posterity' so that teachers could provide 'a story with a moral' to generations of young readers particularly little girls who should not speak to strangers. In a mischievous twist to the original, the wolf explains he could have easily gobbled her up right then in the jungle, but deliberately delayed the entire process in the interests of a good, exciting plot. The original fairy tale earned him the reputation of 'the Big Bad Wolf' which has become his only reputation - hinting at the way stereotypes are propagated through stories. He does however wickedly admit that she was rather pretty though he was no child molester. He deliberately let the huntsman snip him open and fill his belly with stones only in order to make countless children enjoy a good laugh.



**Analysis of the poem:**

* **Stanza I :** The wolf claims to have performed his role as an antagonist in “Little Red Riding Hood” for the good of future generation, his actions present teachers and young readers with ‘a clear moral’ warning children about the dangers of being overly curious, wandering and naively trusting strangers. Posterity implies that the wolf would have anticipated similar circumstances befalling future generations hadn’t he acted like as he did in “Little Red Riding Hood”, suggesting a desire for observers to see his valor in savagery.“Posterity” also implies that the wolf is aware of society’s moral code and he is not merely an ignorant and devious beast.
* **Stanza II:** The wolf tries to flaunt off his generosity by claiming that he could have eaten Little Red Riding Hood during their first encounter if he wanted to. He also explains that as a “forest-dweller” he knew where her grandmother lived so he did not need to ask that and if he wanted to eat Red’s grandmother he could have done so years before. One implication of the wolf claiming that he could have eaten Red on their first encounter is his way of trying to justify his action and clear his conscience. He is trying to convince himself as well the reader that what he did was justified. “Couldn’t I have” implies that the wolf is seeking validation of his actions.
* **Stanza III:** The wolf proves readers wrong for portraying him the stereotype “Big Bad Wolf” by saying that he wasn’t a child molester in spite of the fact that Red was pretty and the perfect victim in the given surroundings and circumstances.
* **Stanza IV:**  The wolf tries to show off his level of intelligence by saying that he deliberately did let the huntsman cut open and fill his belly with stones only to make countless children ridicule him and enjoy a good laugh forever. Although his reasoning may not be universally accepted, the wolf looks desperate that the readers consider his perspective—he endured the equivalent of an internal stoning and decades of childish ridicule to teach future generations a valuable lesson in caution.