

The portrayal of fear
in the signalman by
charles dickens and
night fears by I p ...



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In “ The Signalman” and “ Night Fears” both the men experience some kind of fear. The reader has to distinguish whether the fear is supernatural or psychological. In both stories the signalman and night watchman work alone making them vulnerable and susceptible to the psychological fear. The central characters are isolated by their jobs this creates suspense and tension. “ The Signalman and “ Night Fears” were written seventy years apart yet the stories use very similar elements in them for example the isolation of central characters, darkness and a twist at the end.

The signalman was written in the 1850’s when trains were starting to be used regularly yet people were scared of trains this could be linked back to how the train plays apart in the signalman’s death. “ Violent pulsation” Night Fears was written in the 1920’s just after the First World War. The night watchman’s wife mends a pair of black-out blinds used from the war. “ Old blue-paper blinds used once for the airaids” This links to fears connected with war. In “ The Signalman” and “ Night Fears” both the stories are set in isolated places.

The signalman is set in the middle of two bankings. Which has a zigzag decent that leads you to the signal box. The language used to describe the setting is very negative and depressing. “ Solitary and dismal” These words show how isolated the signalman is. The setting is very eerie. “ There was a barbarous and depressing, forbidding air” In “ Night Fears” the night watchman looks after an unused warehouse, which is fenced off. There is a sign which reads “ no thoroughfare” the night watchman reads this over and over again this shows his boredom.

There is less setting described as L. P Hartley goes into more detail about the night watchman state of mind? In the two stories the fears are different in "Night Fear" the fear is continuous and the action takes place over the night, where as the signalman's fears build up over a few days. Every time the visitor goes back to see the signalman he is even more terrified than the time before. " But I am troubled, sir, I am troubled. " In the story " The Signalman" the signalman is visited by a spectre, which comes to warn him of the forthcoming events, the spectre waves his right arm and has his left arm across his face.

He shouts: " Halloa below their look out. " These words are the representation of the supernatural fear. The bell in the signalman's box rings when there is not a train, the bell and the spectre are linked together as they both predict death. In the story " Night Fear" a stranger who appears out of nowhere visits the night watchman. The night watchman never sees his face he has his back turned towards the fire. " Thank you but I would prefer to warm my back. " After he has contradicted all the positive thoughts of the night watchman and taunts him about his death: It will be cold, but colder before morning. "

He then walks of with irregular footsteps. The word " irregular" in this context is very eerie, as you cannot walk irregular this is linked to the stranger being supernatural. In " The Signalman" and " Night Fears" both the signalman and the night watchman have lonely jobs where they may not see anybody for hours. The reader has to decide whether this has something to do with them being visited, is it their minds playing tricks on them, or is someone really there.

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In "the Signalman" the spectre stands at the mouth of the tunnel violently waving its arms when the signalman goes out to investigate this strange sighting it disappears. The signalman could be tired and seeing things this may have something to do with the loneliness and monotony of his job. Both these stories are ambiguous. The reader is unclear whether the fear is supernatural or psychological. Though in "Night Fear" the reader is more towards the idea of the fear being psychological whereas in "The Signalman" the reader thinks more about the fear being supernatural.

In "The Signalman" the suspense and tension is built up by now the author writes in short sentences this shows a dramatic scene of fear. "What's wrong" "Where" There is suspense at the beginning of the story, as the signalman does not answer the visitor's question the first time it is asked he just glares at him. "He regarded me with fixed attention" The signalman did it because those were the words that the signalman would meet his death with. In "Night Fear" the suspense and tension is built up by the way the stranger just appears and how he would not look at the night watchman.

The reader sees the tension building up as the stranger destroys all the positive thoughts the night watchman has about his friends and family e. g. earlier the night watchman thinks of his family it is positive, it is what cheers him up at work but after he has spoken to the stranger he starts to think if his family really do love him. Both Hartley and Dickens portray fear by leaving the men alone at night, in monotonous jobs. Although Hartley makes the action take place over one night, Dickens makes it take place over a couple of days. The conclusion of the stories are the same, by the end both men are dead.

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