

The signalman and the foghorn essay



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The Comparisons between ' The Signalman' and ' The Foghorn' begin before you even start to read the actual stories. ' The Signalman' taken from Charles Dickens' ' Mugby Junction' was written 1866 whereas ' The Foghorn' was written almost a century later. Charles Dickens is also a person whose name is known throughout the English speaking world, unlike Ray Bradbury an American 20th century writer who is not so well known. ' The Signalman' is set around the same time it was written, in the Great Railway Era, ' The Foghorn' though is not set in any specific time in history. Both of these stories are set in what would be classified as isolated locations, ' Out there in the cold water, far from land', already in the first sentence of ' The Foghorn' there is an indication of the loneliness of the lighthouse and also, ' there wasn't a town for a hundred miles down the coast', which reinforces the loneliness of the situation.

In ' The Signalman', ' the steep cutting', evokes a sheltered place away from the view of passers-by because of the steepness of the cutting. This post was a very solitary and dismal a place I ever saw,' This portrays a very gloomy and very depressing place because of the loneliness. ' a dripping wet wall of jagged stone,' gives the reader a sense of coldness but makes it sound very harsh and unwelcoming place. Bradbury also uses stone, ' the stone tower' to create a cold atmosphere suitable for the time of year when ' The Foghorn' is set during, ' a cold November evening' Stone is a repeated idea throughout both stories to emphasise the cold and dismal settings.

Dickens, creates a mysterious and eerie atmosphere by using a spectre, associated with supernatural beings, I standing at the door looked towards the red light and saw the spectre again' Bradbury creates the same

atmosphere by using a sea monster, ' From the surface o the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-coloured, with immense eyes... ' Both mythical creatures also bring tension into the atmosphere. ' The ensuing minute of silence was so tense we could hear our hearts pounding' ' The Red light' and ' the light touching red, then white, then red again', This repetitive idea of the red light that appears in both stories symbolises danger. The use of sound in both stories is very important, the bell adds irony to ' The Signalman' because although it is one of the signalman's jobs to look after the bell, it is the bell that subsequently leads to his death.

The same idea appears in ' The Foghorn', as it is the noise of the foghorn, which leads to its downfall. ' The tower rocked, trembled and started to give. The Foghorn and the monster roared' The location is one of the contrasts between the two stories; ' The Foghorn' is set ' far from land' and ' The Signalman' is set in a ' deep trench' both are extremely different, but yet have the same effect upon the reader. The lighthouse is far out from land and susceptible to all the elements whereas the signal box is very enclosed and sheltered. Season is also a contrast between the two texts; Dickens gives very few seasonal details and concentrates more on the weather, to help build the setting for example, ' an angry sunset' Whereas Bradbury uses the season winter, to create the atmosphere. Nature also plays a key part in both stories in helping establish the mood.

Another similarity is the time of day that both stories are set, both Dickens and Bradbury have chosen night as it adds mystery and contributes to the eerie atmosphere. Both writers have used similar language devices but in certain ways to create different effects. Dickens uses personification to help

the reader envisage the setting, ' an angry sunset' Whereas Bradbury uses it to help the reader create a picture of the lighthouse ' The great eye of the light' Alliteration is used throughout ' The Foghorn' in different contexts, to accent the height or depth of something, ' The head rose a full forty feet above the water' Charles Dickens does not use it so freely and there are only a few examples of his use, the slow touch of a frozen finger' and ' a vague vibration'. Similes are also another word device, which can be frequently found in ' The Foghorn'; Bradbury uses them to help create the atmosphere and setting.

For example, ' They were like a big peacock's tail, moving out there till midnight. ' Referring to the shoals of fish gathered in the bay creates a sense of mystery and conveys an eerie atmosphere to the reader. Bradbury uses metaphors in a similar way to add to the already mysterious mood of the story, ' the ocean's the biggest damned snowflake ever' his quote refers to the fact that the sea is forever changing and that no part however large or small ever stays the same. Dickens uses similes and metaphors a lot less than Bradbury, preferring to use adjectives to establish a picture of the setting, ' the deep trench' and ' clammy stone that became oozy and wetter as I went down.

' These two descriptions both evoke a dreary and miserable place that is both unwelcoming and unpleasant. Bradbury also uses onomatopoeia occasionally during the story to help the reader imagine the setting, not just visually but aurally too. ' the Fog Horn bumbling in the high throat of the tower' But the most used language device throughout both stories is the use of adjectives, without these the two stories would not create the same effect

upon the reader. ' from the surface of the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-coloured, with immense eyes' without this sort of description the reader would not get a very clear picture of the mythical creature and such a mysterious atmosphere would not have been created, or if adjectives had not been used in ' The Signalman' for example, His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. ' The reader would not have known what a desolate and depressing place the signalman worked in. I think that both writers have portrayed the setting effectively and have sustained it throughout the stories, I find ' The Foghorn' a lot easier to read and study because of the use of modern language as opposed to ' The Signalman' because the use of archaic language for example ' he had to stand without the door', ' up yonder' and ' Halloa! Below there! ' , these words which I have never heard or do not use in the same context as Dickens mean that the story is harder to understand.

I thought that both stories were good and kept the readers interest well with the build up of tension throughout both, along with serving their purpose to entertain.