

# Lamb to the slaughter by roald dahl and the signalman by charles dickens essay

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



In this essay I will compare and contrast the writers use of tension and suspense in the two short stories "Lamb to the slaughter" By Roald Dahl and "The Signalman" by Charles Dickens. Tension is a state of mental strain or excitement, where as suspense is a state of anxious uncertainty or expectation, when information is kept back for a certain purpose. Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and lived through the industrial revolution and wrote mainly about social and living conditions among the working class. Charles Dickens was strongly against child labour as he had worked as a child himself and had therefore experienced the brutality that this society possesses. In "the signalman" we can tell that the story is pre-twentieth century by the way that the story portrays no women whatsoever and the signalman can stand on the railway lines. Supernatural element reflects Victorian fascination with the paranormal as a reaction against the rapid advances in science and technology during the nineteenth century, which seemed to deny the existence of a spiritual dimension to life. The story is written in first person, which makes us feel as if we are there.

The dark, descriptive words, which build up the sense of suspense and tension bring the story to life, also because the narrator has first hand experience the story becomes a reality. Roald Dahl was born in 1916 and lived through the first and Second World War. He wrote a large number of short stories based on his wartime experiences, but he is remembered for his children's books. It is quite easy to tell that this story is based in the twentieth century, as the women is the main character, and the fact that the death penalty was still present tells us that it could be set in America. This

story is written in third person, which creates a sense of impersonality, which means that the reader can make up his or her own minds about the outcome of the story. The descriptive language and light and dark contrast makes us inconspicuous to what is going to happen.

The sentence structure builds up the tension and suspense as the short sentences move the reader on and keeps the reader interested unlike the elongated sentence structure of "The Signalman". Although the writer's styles are different, their purpose of text is somewhat the same. In both stories the writers want to entertain us, as Dahl wants to make us laugh, the story is what we call a black humour, it is filled with ironic humour, as Dahl makes a murder seem light hearted and funny, whereas Dickens makes us feel Dark and sinister. Dickens entertains us by wanting the reader to think that there is something out there that the human mind can't understand, so although he wants to entertain us his story has a serious purpose in scaring us and making us wary of the unknown. His story follows in the gothic tradition of the mists on moors and creaking staircases etc. Techniques he uses in order to create tension and suspense are his dedication to detail for example, at the beginning of the story the reader is confronted with images of a wet environment that is both dangerous and dark.

He uses descriptive language to create a weird or even scary image for the readers in the nineteenth century because the only entertainment that they had was reading and when somebody in a safe environment is confronted with something like that, it can be very scary and sensational. In this story "Lamb to the slaughter" Roald Dahl misleads us into thinking that Mary

Maloney and Patrick are happy. He convinces us that Mary is a sweet, kind even angelic character by the way that he describes her as “ glowing” and content. He disguises the fact that something bad will happen (as in “ The signalman” the whole story is about foreshadowing) so when it does happen the reader is confronted with a confused and shocking situation. In the two stories the settings and characters are very different.

In “ lamb to the slaughter” the story is possibly set in a suburban house in America. This is because the police station is called a “ precinct” and they call a shop a “ grocery store”. Also because the story is set in the twentieth century, the presence of the death penalty suggests that they are in America. The scene is set inside the house in a warm and homely lounge or living room.

Where as in “ The signalman” the story is set outside in the nineteenth century, during the industrial revolution. The scene is set outside the signalmans box at a railway line. The main character in Roald Dahls story is Mary Maloney; a normal housewife devoted to her husband, Patrick Maloney. Mary is described as an angel, being six months pregnant.

Patrick Maloney (her husband) is a police detective and is seen as a cruel man for hurting and not appreciating his wife who obviously loves him very much. Now in “ The signalman” the main character is the signalman, a very educated man who is described as a very dark, sallow man that at first the visitor believes is unnatural and inhuman, but is believed to be trustworthy as he is very well educated, this helps the reader to believe that this story is

true. The narrator is the visitor in the story and because we know little about him, we have to rely on what we have seen. In my opinion the narrator is a very superstitious man as he assumes that the signalman is a ghost. He is also a very rational man as he stays calm during the signalman's speech. The other main character is the ghost or spectre that the signalman keeps seeing; this builds up the suspense and tension as the spectre is mentioned before we are told about the signalman's visions.

By the use of descriptive language in " the signalman" it was quite easy to tell that it was a story of a horrifying nature and not a happy one, as the dark, negative words create a sense of tension and suspense and he uses the senses to describe things which engage the reader, " clammy stone that became oozy and wetter.... or " there by dint of looking about me.

.. " However in " lamb to the slaughter" Dahl again uses descriptive words but doesn't use senses, instead he uses a light and dark contrast. " When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor...

" The structure and form of the first story is simple! The dialogue is short and uses quick sentences which move the story on to keep the reader interested, where as in the second the dialogue is made up of reported speech and long sentences which are very descriptive but make the story a bit boring. The sense of tension and suspense in Roald Dahls story is built up, the story begins happily, a pregnant wife waiting for her husband, the story is kept alive when we see into her mind. In Dickens story the tension and suspense is just there, it is there from the beginning when the narrator suggests the

presence of ghost before we hear the signalman's story. In conclusion, the tension and suspense in the two stories are built up in different ways resulting in a fascinated, scared and satisfied reader.