

# Comparison between murder mystery stories – lamb to the slaughter and speckled ba...

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



In this essay I am going to explain the main differences between 'Lamb to the slaughter' and 'Speckled Band'.

Roald Dahl wrote 'Lamb to the slaughter' in 1954 where as 'Speckled Band' Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote in 1892, so already here there is a contrast, the stories were written in different time periods. 'Speckled Band' which was written in Victorian times has a much more traditional storyline where as the much more modern 'Lamb to the Slaughter' has a different type of murder and an unpredictable ending. A traditional classic murder story would be one in which the writer almost makes us be on the side of the detective and the murderer is caught by a series of clues in which the detective has found. As I stated before 'Speckled Band' follows this type of storyline as from the start we are lead to like the detective - Sherlock Holmes.

During the story we begin to be led to not like the villain as many clues, which are found in the investigation, lead up to Dr Roylott being the murderer. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it' - this quote shows one of several clues in which Sherlock Holmes found in the investigation. Where as in 'Lamb to the Slaughter', which I see as being a different kind of murder story, from the start we are following the villain and are led to like her. 'Did they kill them both - mother and child?' - here we see Mary Maloney worrying about the consequences which came when committing a murder but cleverly the writer shows the reader the worry and concern to almost make the reader feel sorry for her and therefore wanting her to get away with the crime.

This feeling for the reader continues throughout the story as we follow Mary's thoughts and feelings and not the detectives. This therefore makes this story untraditional, as we want the murderer to get away with the crime. Another way of showing the contrast in these stories is the murder weapon. A traditional murder weapon would be complex which needs a number of clues to find out.

So in 'Speckled Band' where a snake was the weapon, this was not a foregone conclusion, clues had to be found in order for Sherlock to realize what the weapon was. In contrast to this, 'Lamb to the Slaughter' uses an unordinary weapon but a different method of killing. No clues were needed to find out Patrick Maloney had been killed by being struck on the head. I suppose you could argue that they did not know what the weapon actually was but no clues had to be found which does not follow the traditional storyline. Another way to argue that the story 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is not very traditional is the way in which the murder actually happened. This is because we follow the all the thoughts of Mary and are almost a witness to the murder.

' swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought in down as hard as she could on the back of his head' - here we get a vivid description of the murder and can see that the writer really wants us to have a clear picture of this crime in are heads. Phrases like ' high in the air' and ' as hard' really add emphasis to this murder and we see little evidence of language technique here except for plain literal imagery, which helps give us a clearer picture of the murder. In this next section of my essay I am going to analyse

the story openings of the two murder mysteries. In 'Lamb to the Slaughter' the mood at the start of the story is very peaceful and calm. Mary Maloney is basically waiting for her husband to come home in her very quiet house.

It would seem she was completely in love and devoted to this man - 'merely to please herself with the thought that's each minute gone by made it nearer to the time that he would come', the writer here is introducing Mary's devotion to Patrick as this is the first time he mentions her thinking about him. We can see from this sentence that she loves him dearly from the word 'please', just from this one word we see that she cannot wait for him to get home. This love and devotion does not stop throughout the rest of the opening of this story, if anything it turns into more of an obsession, when he comes home she takes his coat off for him, which he is perfectly capable of doing himself. As I have already said the mood is very calm and quiet at the start of this story and when Patrick Maloney enters the house this atmosphere does not change but I do feel that the room gets much more tense as he almost brings a dull feeling to the house.

I think this is because he is very unpleasant and says very little to Mary, which we have already learnt, would do almost anything for him. This is very clever by Roald Dahl because when introducing the character of Patrick Maloney he only says 'hullo' to Mary and this therefore this makes us feel sorry for Mary because she is totally in love with him and he almost ignores her. This mood at the start of the story does not prepare the reader at all for what is to follow. From this atmosphere and her almost total obsession with Patrick no one would really predict that she about to become a devious

murderer. We now that 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is not going to be a traditional murder story and we can see that it is set up for some sort of surprise or an exciting event. A different type of story opening would be that of 'Speckled Band' where a more traditional approach is taken.

The mood at the start of this story is much more lively and interesting than 'Lamb to the Slaughter'. It starts with a flashback, which keeps the reader interested right from the start. 'It was early in April, in the year '83,' here we can see that a story is going to be told and although not much relevant information has been said we still want to hear the rest of this story because Watson had said previously that he had not come across a case like this. The opening of this story also involves speech, which I consider to be more informative and more appealing to a reader. For example when Watson recalls himself saying 'My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything.

We can see that an exciting investigation is to take place as he says he would not miss it for anything. There is also little description in the start of this story, which was not the case in 'Lamb to the Slaughter'. Although description sets the scene very well, the object being described has to be exciting and interesting where as in 'Lamb to the Slaughter' there is a very plain and boring description of the settings and atmosphere. Instead of description, the story of 'Speckled Band' uses a different approach to capture the mood and atmosphere and this is speech. 'prove to be an interesting case' is a quote which shows that speech keeps the reader interested. We have already witnessed Dr Watson say that this was one of

the most unusual cases Sherlock Holmes has investigated and this adds to the fact that he says that it will prove to be an interesting case.

We know hope that this story is going to be exciting and hope that what follows lives up to Dr Watson's opinion. I will now compare and contrast the murderers from each story. Mary Maloney was an unexpected murderer as the start of the story clearly shows that she is practically obsessed with Patrick Maloney. The writer portrays Mary to be such a frail, gentle character who is almost bullied into a boring life that her husband makes her believe she likes. ' She took his coat and hung it in the closet', this is such a generous thing to do and again show's Mary's obsession to please this man. On the other hand, Dr Roylott is portrayed as a big bulky and aggressive man and a perfect match for a murderer.

We know he is big and aggressive when Mrs Stoner says ' immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger. ' , We know that Dr Roylott is now capable of a murder due to the proof in which Mrs Stoner gives us. The word ' uncontrollable' shows us that his anger is even out of his own hands and obviously struggles to calm himself down or for someone to calm him down. In ' Lamb to the Slaughter' the writer is clever in portraying Mary as a ' soft touch' because when she does actually commit the murder it makes the story much more exciting to see how she copes in covering it up. Readers begin to like Mary the moment she hits him with the leg of lamb.

The reason for this is that they are glad Mary has finally ' come out of her shell'. I am not suggesting that what Mary did was right but I am suggesting

that the readers will like her for doing it. For once in her life she stood up to Patrick and this is what makes this murder so good because no one expects such a timid almost frightened woman to come up with the shock surprise of killing this man. Dr Roylett however, is a very much different murderer. Mary and Dr Roylott are not similar in any way except for the fact that they both managed to commit serious crimes. Dr Roylott is a big boisterous man who has no courtesy for Sherlock Holmes - 'I know you, you scoundrel'.

Calling Sherlock Holmes a scoundrel is very impolite and rude, showing no respect. In having no courtesy or respect for Sherlock Holmes, this straight away makes him a suspect for the murder, which Mrs Stoner described. This shows that Dr Roylott is not as clever as Mary because she realizes that she has to show she is upset and heartbroken about Patrick's death and shows much respect to the detectives on the case where as Dr Roylott immediately forces Holmes not to like him and makes himself a prime suspect for the murder. We know that Dr Roylott is a greedy, selfish man for the motive for which he killed Mrs Stoner's sister.

This was purely for money; in contrast to this Mary's motive was not for Patrick's money, it was out of spite and sudden hatred for this man she loved, she wanted to feel justified for what he had done to her. Some people might say that Mary was a better and more devious murderer than Dr Roylott but I think that one of the main reasons why Dr Roylott got caught and Mary Maloney didn't is the difference in the detectives, one was skilled and the other was not. The two detectives, Sherlock Holmes and Jack Noonan had very different styles of going about their business. For example Jack

Noonan does not look at all the possibilities of Patrick's murder thoroughly, where as Sherlock Holmes looks at the murder from every prospective like from the gypsies outside to the murderer himself. Sherlock Holmes is a cool, calm, well-mannered detective with a clear way of thinking. Throughout the story decorum is shown through Holmes' use of language.

' I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case... in this quote we can see that Holmes shows decorum in several ways, by using the word ' madam' we see that Holmes is showing respect, and in the little phrase ' happy to devote' we can see more use of decorum because Holmes is being polite and helpful. Holmes is a good detective because his mind is focused on the job ahead. He does not talk much as he does not like to predict the wrong solution.

' I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room' here we can see that Holmes did not want to suggest his conclusions in case he was wrong. This shows Holmes is a very precise and accurate character and would not like to be proven wrong. Holmes is a typical detective and he solves the crime by being two steps ahead! He knows about the snake as soon as he sees the milk and dog lead but he does not let on that he knows because he would not like to be wrong. The author wants the reader to admire the detective because of his quick thinking and clever planning. I think that because the reader follows Holmes from the start so it automatically makes us want him to solve the crime. Jack is a different type of detective because he is more careless and he isn't as quick thinker as Sherlock.

He is obviously fooled by Mary's story so therefore unsuccessful in solving the crime. He is also fairly unprofessional considering he drinks and hugs Mary. Knowing she is a suspect in the investigation Jack should not be gently placing Mary into a chair. The reason why Jack Noonan does not solve the crime is because he is not professional enough about solving the case.

For example 'fell right into Jack Noonan's arms' - considering Mary is a suspect in this case, hugging is probably not the most professional thing to do. I believe he is too soft where as Homes is focused on the crime. The main differences in these two detectives are that although Holmes is polite and friendly and happy to talk to the suspect he does not let business mix with pleasure, where as Noonan is too polite and friendly to Mary and doesn't really ever consider Mary of being the murderer. Noonan is also fairly clueless about most things in the investigation where as Sherlock is two steps ahead at all times. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took' here we can see Sherlock knows his victim before catching him, but Noonan does not even know what the murder weapon was or have the slightest ideas of who the murderer could have been.

So we can conclude that Noonan is not professional enough about the way he goes about his work and that he does not get close to solving the crime, but Sherlock is very professional, polite and clever and this is the reason why he solves the crime and Noonan doesn't. In the ending of 'Lamb to the Slaughter' Noonan is no closer to solving the crime and Mary is feeling slightly more relieved, she giggles to herself at the end of the story which shows yet another side to Mary's personality. In the ending of 'Speckled

Band' Sherlock Holmes makes a plan to catch Dr Roylott and in doing so we see the death of Dr Roylott. We then hear Holmes give a conclusion of how he thought of the plan and how he knew all along Dr Roylott was the murderer.

At the end of 'Lamb to the Slaughter' we are told that Mary giggles to herself - 'Mary Maloney began to giggle. This giggling could be another twist in Mary's personality, at first she was all obsessive with her husband and then she kills him in a moment of madness but it would seem she was sorry for what she has done because of how upset she was and now we see that she giggles to herself which could mean she is not sorry at all and just really glad she has the skills to fool police detectives. Although this is not a vital moment in the story it is still something to think about at the end of this story. What is meant by this giggle? I think that this giggle is more a sigh of relief than a devious, sly giggle. At the end of the 'Speckled Band' there is not so much a twist in the tale but a much waited for conclusion.

Sherlock sets this plan up and none of the readers actually know what he has in mind to catch Dr Roylott. So when it is revealed the snake has killed Dr Roylott it could be said that this is a twist in the story. The key line at the end of 'Speckled Band' is - 'I cannot say it is likely to weigh heavily upon my conscience.' here Sherlock is talking about the death of Dr Roylott. Basically the fact that Sherlock is responsible for Dr Roylotts death does not really bother him, as the world is a better place without people like him.

When comparing this comment with Mary's sly little giggle the reader is left thinking about two different things. Firstly Sherlock's comment is a good last line for the story of the 'Speckled Band' and after this line the case is closed and the reader does not want to know anything more about this story. Whereas in 'Lamb to the Slaughter', the reader is left thinking about Mary and her giggle. Why did she giggle and what did it mean? These are the two questions left on the readers mind at the end of this story.

This giggle is almost a cliffhanger. 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is quite an intriguing title as it has the word 'slaughter' in it. This word is to do with death and so therefore leaves the reader wondering what the word 'lamb' has to do with it all. The meaning of this title is revealed half way through the story when Mary commits the murder.

This however is not the case in 'Speckled Band' because the title of this story is not revealed until the very end when Sherlock Holmes explains his findings and how the murder was solved. Although this title is less intriguing than 'Lamb to the Slaughter' I think that it had a better meaning behind it. The effect of having a less intriguing title is that it keeps the reader guessing, in contrast to this 'Lamb to the Slaughter' gives the reader something to think about such as 'lambs' or the word 'slaughter'. I am now at the end of my essay and have concluded that the main differences in these two stories are that when reading the openings of each story, 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is very calm and quiet whereas 'Speckled Band' is lively and full of speech. The main difference in the two murderers is that Mary

was clever enough and devious enough to fool the detectives but Dr Roylott was too obvious not to be the murderer.

I also concluded that the detectives were very much different because Sherlock Holmes was very professional and did not mix business with pleasure, but Jack Noonan was too soft with Mary and this is the reason why he could not solve the case. The last contrast I found was in the endings where in 'Lamb to the Slaughter' we are left with something to think about, but in 'Speckled Band' the story is ended by Sherlock's speech leaving no more queries for the reader to think about. I hope I have covered all points necessary to prove that 'Speckled Band' and 'Lamb to the Slaughter' are different types of murder stories.