

Compare the signalman by charles dickens and lamb to the slaughter by roald dahl

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



During my essay I will be looking at two short stories from the 20th and 19th centuries. I will examine the similarities and differences of Lamb to the Slaughter and The Signalman in content style and language. I will also show how the writer's background influenced them to write these stories.

In some ways these stories are fairly similar but in other ways they differ, firstly the openings of each of the stories have different atmospheres. In Lamb to the Slaughter the atmosphere tends to be calm and quite blissful. The evidence we have for this in the text is the type of words the writer uses for example, " The room was warm and clean" and " this was a blissful time of day. " However contrasting to this the opening of The Signalman appears to have a spooky, ominous atmosphere again we can see this from the words used in the story. " Stood on top of the steep cutting," and " the glow of an angry sunset.

" These words give a strange feel about the place whereas in Lamb to the Slaughter the words give a relaxing, calm vibe. This effects the reader's expectations of the stories. From reading the opening of Lamb to the Slaughter we expect that the story is going to be quite amiable this is ironic because as you read on you come to see how it is the exact opposite. However from reading the opening of The Signalman we expect that the story is going to be quite eerie and mysterious.

We also get this idea from the description of the setting, for example in The Signalman it describes the setting as " the glow of an angry sunset. " In Lamb to the Slaughter the setting is presented as warm and homely " the room was warm and clean. " The settings appear very different. Both of the

authors create suspense in each of the stories. In Lamb to the Slaughter, Dahl builds up tension near the beginning.

We get the idea that Patrick has something on his mind because of his attitude towards Mary. He keeps giving her one word answers to her questions and ends up losing his temper with her " Sit down just for one minute sit down. " This makes the reader wonder what is going through his mind. He then confesses to Mary that he has something to tell her but then Dahl begins to describe Patrick's actions " He had now become absolutely motionless.

.. this keeps the reader in suspense wondering what this important thing is he's about to tell her. Dahl leads his way up to this thing Patrick has to tell Mary but the reader never gets to hear what is actually said so we are kept wondering what he could have told her throughout the whole of the story. Also after Mary kills her husband she begins to behave very peculiarly, as if nothing has happened " she put on her brightest smile," Dahl builds up tension here for the reader because her behaviour is constantly changing so we don't know what she is capable of doing next. We are also kept wondering whether she will be suspected of killing her husband especially when the police go to the scene of the crime " There was a great deal of whispering.

.. " Dahl creates suspense right up until the end because we are hesitant whether the police are convinced by her story so the reader is curious

whether she gets away with the murder. Suspense is also evident in The Signalman.

Similarly to Dahl, Dickens keeps the reader wondering throughout the story how it is going to conclude. However Dickens' story is longer and more descriptive. The opening of the story is ambiguous. It is quite confusing for the reader to clarify what is happening, " when he heard a voice thus calling to him..

. " It is not obvious what the narrator is talking about although this is effective because it keeps the reader interested to see what is going to happen next. The narrator describes the signalman as " a dark sallow man" from this description we get the idea that he is an unusual character it also leads us to think that there is something about this man we don't already know. Some of the language used portrays him as a mysterious character " his post was in a solitary and dismal place...

" Dickens keeps the reader wondering what this man has to conceal. Throughout the story spectres and supernatural feelings are often mentioned. The signal man questions the narrator about why he called out to him " what made you cry... " and the narrator tells him it was no doubt because he seen him, only the signalman then asks him " You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in a supernatural way? This is quite a bizarre question to ask somebody, which confirms that there must be something extraordinary about him.

Also because he mentions the word “supernatural” it makes you think that something supernatural is going to happen sometime during the story so the reader is kept in anticipation. The ending of the story is quite sudden. We discover that the signalman is dead and that the train driver called out to him “Below there! Look out...” which were the exact words that were haunting him.

This leaves the reader wondering the actual meaning of the story. The ending is ambiguous just like the beginning of the story. Both stories are written from different points of views. Lamb to the Slaughter is written in third person and The Signal Man is written in first person. This affects the way you read the stories.

For example in Lamb to the Slaughter it is written from Mary’s point of view which makes you feel sympathy for her “did they kill both mother and child?” However if it was written from her husband’s point of view we might think she is spiteful for killing him. Likewise in The Signal Man the way the story is written affects the way we perceive the characters. For example if the story was written in the signalman’s point of view we may not find him as unusual. Both of the stories contain lots of description but the way the authors use description differs. Dickens tends to write in a much more detailed form including words which the reader may not have come across before “with the utmost passion and vehemence,” this makes it more challenging for the reader because they may have to look up some of the meanings.

On the other hand Dahl tends to stick to fairly simple adjectives which the reader will understand “ Wonderful translucent quality,” this may make the reader prefer Dahl’s story because it is easy to follow and understand, they may get bored of The Signal Man because it is too confusing. Again we can compare the descriptive style of both of the authors if we look at how Dickens describes the signal man and the place he works with Dahl’s description of the Maloney’s living room. “ Excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation,” we can see that Dickens builds up a detailed image with descriptive words. The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn.

.. ” Dahl also builds up an image but keeps it very simple. I think that the way Dickens uses descriptive language may affect the readers understanding of the story because he goes into complex description which is hard to comprehend. Alternatively Dahl does go into detail when using description but he keeps it easy for the reader to follow. Each author wrote their story for a certain audience.

The Signal Man was written in the 19th century. If we consider the historical background of Dickens story railways were about thirty or forty years old and must have seemed new and exciting for readers. Readers, incidentally had no radio, TV, video, computers or access to the internet and so would have looked forward to a ghost story that thrilled and frightened them. They could not have seen a video version of the story.

The written words were all they had. Dickens wrote his story for this audience. Also in England 1866 there was an industrial revolution when factories and mines were growing at a phenomenal rate changing the landscape and people's attitudes forever. Dickens did not support the new technology of which railways were an example.

In his story we can see how he is expressing his doubts about how this new technology could be dangerous. We can see this because his story ends in tragedy "Signal man killed this morning." He also shows he's against it by describing the atmosphere as dismal "barbarous, depressing and forbidding air" if he was all for the new technology I'm positive he would have presented it in a less negative view. Dahl writes for a different audience. Dahl is a modern writer who produced many scripts designed to be shown on TV and his written style is more economical than Dickens.

He does not describe everything but allows the reader to fill in the missing bits. He would assume that his readers were familiar with a typical suburban home because they have access to TV and video as well as cinema and would have seen examples of typical homes dozens of times. It is this background to his story that helps to explain some of the differences between his and Dickens. Dahl wrote his story in a way he knew would appeal to his audience in 1979 just as Dickens did with his audience in 1866. After reading these two stories I can conclude by saying they have a lot of differences.

The Signal Man is a psychological drama and is supernatural it also has quite a serious purpose. However Lamb to the Slaughter is not supernatural it is quite humorous “ and in the other room Mary began to giggle. ” Although the stories did contain some things similar such as they both involved violent deaths and had a twist at the end of the story. Both authors also built up suspense right towards the end of the story keeping the reader intrigued throughout.