

The detective genre

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When many people think of a novel from the detective genre, they think of a dark and stormy night, a large sinister house, gunfire heard by everyone however seen by no one, and the expression "you're probably wondering why I called you all here", "The butler did it", and the phrase associated with Sherlock Holmes "elementary, my dear Watson". In the end, the intellectual and ever vigilant detective solves the case, and justice, occasionally through the magistrates is served.

Both "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" and "Lamb to the Slaughter" has factors that are frequently used in detective genre, for example, they both include a killer who is cold and cunning, and perhaps a little angry. On the other hand, they are shown to us extremely differently, showing one story which is very distinctive of its genre and the other which is very untypical of the detective genre. That is why I have chosen these two contrasting stories as the basis for my essay.

In this paper I have decided to examine the comparisons of the setting, characters, weapons, victims and plot from the 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' by the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and 'Lamb to the Slaughter' by the renowned child author Roald Dahl. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' is based upon the famous fictional Detective 'Sherlock Holmes' and his investigation into the murder of Julia Stoner of Stoke Moran.

In fear of her step father, Julia's sister 'Helen Stoner' seeks out the notorious Detective Sherlock Holmes, in the hope that he could produce evidence to prove how her stepfather, Dr Grimesby Roylott had murdered her sister.

Helen believed that Roylott had murdered her sister because she intended to marry, and this would mean he would be obligated to pay for this, with the money left to him by the sister's deceased mother.

Renovations to Helens bedroom, meant that she had conveniently been moved in to her sister room which was opportunely next to her stepfathers. Without the knowledge of Dr Roylott, Holmes and Dr Watson investigated Julia's room, in wait of the murderer's next hit. Whilst examining the room, Holmes found various clues; a ventilator which was attached to the wrong wall directly over the sister's bed and a bell pull with no function as it was not connected, but it was also directly beside ventilator and hanging alongside the bed, suggesting it was a method of passage.

During their wait Holmes spots a creature coming out from the ventilator, he startles it causing it to escape back the way it came and also attacking its master, causing Dr Roylott a painful death from the venom of his own pet snake. Roald Dahl's short story 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is an untypical detective novel about a loving housewife and how after some upsetting news from her alcoholic husband, beats him to death using a leg of lamb which she was going to cook for his tea. Mary Maloney was a happy and content housewife who was pregnant with her husband, Patrick Maloney's child.

One evening after returning from his work as a police officer, Patrick comes home to his attentive wife and begins drinking heavily. He seems stressed and finally sits her down and tells her some upsetting news, which we assume is he is leaving her. A deluded Mary continues preparing her husband's tea, ignoring his pleas. She returns with a frozen leg of lamb, still

ignoring what he had said, he keeps his back to her and continues to justify his actions. Mary becomes emotional and swings the leg at his head causing him to fall to the floor, dead. She slowly begins to come back to her senses.

Immediately she realizes the ramifications of what she has done. Not wanting her unborn child to suffer as a result of her crime, she begins planning her alibi. Placing the leg of lamb in the oven, she made her way to grocers to formulate an alibi for herself, upon returning home she phoned the police. When they arrived the police believed her alibi, as they could not find any form of a weapon which they believed could have cause her husbands death. While the police are searching unsuccessfully into the night for the murder weapon, Mary offers them some lamb that she had prepared for dinner.

They are happy to oblige. While they relaxed in the kitchen and converse over the case (their mouths "sloppy" with meat), Mary Maloney sits in the living room and giggles quietly to herself. Both Conan-Doyle and Dahl use a variety of techniques to make their stories more appealing; for example, in Dahl's "Lamb to the Slaughter" the story involves the character of Mrs Mary Maloney, affectionate housewife and psychopathic murderer. While many other stories focus on the investigator or sometimes the victim, this story centres on the nature of the murderer.

This perspective assists with the telling of the murder, making it more unanticipated. The story comprises of two main plot twists; the first being the murder itself, made it unpredicted by what we have perceived of Mary Maloney's character, the setting, and the form the murder weapon. The

second plot twist is as the story concludes, where the officers devour the murder weapon. Conan-Doyle uses a method in writing "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" as well. His story centres on the character of the detective, Sherlock Holmes, which is a favoured method of murder mystery authors, possibly because it leaves a place for development.

This story, though centred on Holmes, is told as seen through the perspective of his colleague, Dr Watson, providing an excellent example of writing in the first person scenario. Unlike Dahl's story, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is a classic 'whodunit', and so, like many 'whodunits' there is always an element of suspense. The weapons used in both these stories are rather unique to the genre. Roylott's snake was used to poison his victims with its venomous bite; this was its purpose when its master sent it through the ventilator to kill his step-children.

This cunning plan was constructed in an attempt to avoid losing his money over his stepdaughter's marriage. In the end this weapon had the opposite effect, 'And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt in directly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death'. A more Melee approach was used in 'Lamb to the Slaughter'.

An emotional woman hits her husband over the head using a frozen leg of lamb in a fit of anger, after he reveals some upsetting news to her, which we assume is that he is leaving her. The weapon is an important factor in this story, because of its form is also the reason the police could not find any

evidence to connect Mrs Maloney with her husband's murder. It is also ironic that the officers that were investigating the scene, ate the very weapon that had caused the murder. Believing the weapon was " Probably right under our very noses". The sympathy does not lie with both victims in this case.

In 'Lamb to the Slaughter' Dahl wished for his reader to sympathise with Mary Maloney because although she murdered her husband he gives her a reason for her outrage, by telling a obviously devoted wife and rather emotional woman (in her pregnant state) that he was leaving her and their child. In 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' there's a more typical approach as we feel sympathetic for Julia Stoner as she has been painfully murdered by a person she felt was apart of her family, as well stealing any chance she had of a happily married life, all because of her stepfathers greed.

The way we perceive these murderers are very different. In 'Lamb to the Slaughter' Mary is a pregnant woman whose husband gives her the upsetting news that he had decided to leave her during her pregnancy. Mary is a devoted housewife, who obviously does not deal well with this rejection and subconsciously tries to ignore it, until she is eventually pushed to far, 'Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head'.

In 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' Dr Grimesby Roylott represents a classic money hungry villain. His character is too greedy to allow his stepdaughters marriage to take any of the fortune left to him by his

deceased wife, so he plans a strategy involving his venomous pet snake to poison his step daughter as she slept. Holmes calculated reasoning proved, 'He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed'.

The setting for 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' is very typical of detective genre. A large sinister manor, isolated from the general public with a clever plot unfolding from the clues surrounding the characters and setting. This story is set in 19th Century during the Victorian era, so standards and morals differ greatly to our modern day. Harsh punishments were placed upon convicted murders in Victorians times, including there own deaths. The 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is set in the 1970's in a more realistic setting.

Patrick Maloney was murdered in his own home, after a tense discussion with his wife, which resulted in his murder. This story is much closer to reality, and relates with situations and emotions revolving round divorce and betrayal. In conclusion, I have learnt that the setting and time period constitute to the outcome of the story, and its characters morals and methods. Standards have changed, and means of punishment have altered greatly between the settings of each story.

Also the process of investigation has changed through the 19th Century, having a more orderly and functional procedure, which is shown in 'Lamb to the Slaughter', instead of the mysterious conduct of unravelling clues during

the plot of 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band'. Over time the audiences who read these novels has changed there principles and level of expectance, so the crime performed by Mary Maloney would be seen as a 'crime of passion' executed through the unstable emotions of a pregnant women who's grasp on reality had been shattered through her husbands cruel words.

When 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' was written during Victorian times, mystery and murder was a popular aspect in books. The Victorians were renowned for there love of literature because it was a method of escape from gruelling life in the Victorian age, this was because a reader could become completely emerged in a different reality, indulging in fantasy and anticipation.