

Bang bang who's  
dead by jane gardam  
and the signalman by  
charles dickens



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These two short stories belong to the mystery genre and use some of the typical elements of the mystery and ghost story genre periodically. The four aspects of these ghost stories I am going to investigate and compare between the two stories respectively are; Plot, Setting, Style and character. "Bang Bangs who's dead?" is a short story about a little girl called Fran who goes to an old house in Kent where an apparition is rumoured to play in the garden and wear the same clothes in winter and summer.

a little ghost girl plays in the garden. She wears the same clothes winter and summer-long black stockings, a white dress with a pinafore, and her hair flying about without a hat, but she never seems either hot or cold." This statement in the first paragraph straight away reveals the plot, that the story is about a little ghost girl, and straight away makes most of us think that there is going to be an encounter with this ghost girl in some form as the story progresses. This has started to be a typical element in most recent ghost stories and films to straight away jump into the general plot or main part of the story in the first few opening lines, but this does dispel some mystery and throws out all the excuses some people can come up with to explain strange things in some circumstances in the story.

But is also quite effective as straight away gives as an almost perfect picture in our minds of what type of setting it is. As the story progresses and more is revealed about the ghost and the house we see another rumour that only children can see the apparition, this adds more mystery and more twists and turns in the plot as most children do make up things and say they see "things" but most people just ignore them. "Where've you been? They asked when they got back to the house. Playing with the girl in the garden.

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What girl? There's no girl here. This house has no children in it. Yes it has. There's a girl in the garden.

She cant half run". This shows that the rumour that children can only see the sceptre may be true after, but only justifies that the rumour exist and provides support and evidence for it, but doesn't justify that there is an actual ghost girl that plays in the garden and is only visible by children. This is also one of the typical elements, and is used in both modern and older stories. As most stories and films do use these twists and ideal circumstances for a perfectly good explanation and reason not to believe the people involved when they say they have seen something unusual. Such as the other short story I am studying called The Signalman by Charles Dickens.

The narrator didn't believe the signalman's statements that he would encounter a sceptre driving a train whenever he heard a bell (that no one else could hear), and he had a good reason not to as the man was isolated seemed never to leave the control centre so, maybe he did see illusions but illusions of the mind, but later we find that is not true. As the story progresses and the plot starts to develop we see that Fran seems very interested in meeting the girl, when her mother tells her that there is one, which is quite unusual for a mother to be this open on such a topic, but her father is quick to try and do the opposite and make her think there isn't.

Which is quite normal for a parent to try to withhold this type of information this adds a little more mystery and twists in the plot as now the adults have started to dispute over it, or does the father believe in the ghost and is just trying to protect his daughter and not frighten her? Then we get our first

description of the house where the girl is rumoured to play in the garden. We <https://assignbuster.com/bang-bang-whos-dead-by-jane-gardam-and-the-signalman-by-charles-dickens/>

see that it is a very old house passed down by 3 generations, and we see that the owners proclaim that no children have ever been in the house. " I think it's because there have never been any children in the house that it's in such beautiful condition, said the woman. Nobody has ever been unkind to it.

" This is clearly untrue as Fran's mother told her before that " They barred the windows long ago, said Fran's mother, to stop the children from falling out. The children lived upstairs. Every evening they were allowed to come downstairs and see their parents for half an hour and then they went back up there to bed. " This also adds a possible explanation that a child could have fallen out of the window, been killed due to the fall and became the sceptre that all the children proclaim to have seen, and the owners bared the windows to prevent this happening again. Also because a lot of time has passed they may now think they can say that no children have ever lived here in order to dispel the rumours of the ghost girl in order to attract more visitors and potential buyers of the house. But Fran's father is quick to change the subject when Fran asks " Did the ghost girl do that? " this adds some more twist in the plot and makes us think whether the father knows something after all due to his abrupt sharpness in his tone when he replies " Shut up and come and lets look around the house" but this can once again be explained by saying that he is being the overprotective father .

This type of frequent counter-attacks to try to come up with explanations to some of the strange happenings in stories is very typical and frequent in both modern and older stories. Further on into the story Fran is asked by the owner to play in the garden, Fran doesn't seem reluctant at all almost <https://assignbuster.com/bang-bang-whos-dead-by-jane-gardam-and-the-signalman-by-charles-dickens/>

pleased, which is very strange for a girl her age after being told by someone she trusts and has known for her whole life that there is a ghost in the garden. This is not a typical element as it takes away some of the mystery and prevents more disputes and tension growing in the story, as the mother seems very calm and relaxed about it. Where as in other ghosts stories the parents get very stressed and afraid, and panic and try to protect their children in any way they can and try to keep them as far away as possible from the " potential danger or disturbance". As Fran is playing in the garden there is a moment where everything is silent, but its seems very unusual for everything to just stop and stay still. Even though there seems to be a perfectly good excuse for it " Silence had fallen.

The house behind her was still, the garden in front of her stiller. It was the moment in an English early summer afternoon when there is pause for sleep. This type of pause is used a lot in typical ghost stories as it creates a lot of tension and suspense but the setting plays a part to, as in Fran's case it was where the apparition was rumoured to roam free. Then Fran starts to feel a little strange like she knows what's upstairs, like she belongs to the house.

" It was strange. She felt she knew what the house looked like upstairs. Had she been upstairs yet or was she still thinking of going? Going. Going to sleep. Silly" The style in which those sentences are written is very out of context and unusual. And also gives an unusual feel that something unordinary may be occurring due to the way she is speaking.

Maybe talking to someone inside her? or is just talking to herself?. Also the fact that she felt tired this early in the afternoon after speaking like this also

feels a bit strange and out of context. But this can also be explained by looking back to when Fran said that it was that time in an English summer where there was pause for sleep. Now the plot is starting to develop more and we start to see Fran's character revealing more as the sort of person who isn't afraid, and likes to explore. She also is the person who isn't easily surprised or surprised she seems to be 'laid back' and comfortable in many situations. Where 'normal' people would be very uncomfortable and maybe 'scared'.

Then suddenly something even more unusual happens as Fran jumps up and shouts "You can't catch me. Bang, bang - you're dead." This style is quite extraordinary and creates a lot of questions in our mind as to, who is she talking to? , is she talking to the ghost? , who is dead? Or is it just a silly little child's game? But nevertheless very unusual. But then we see that "She didn't know what she meant by it so she said it again out loud. Bang, bang.

Your dead." This also seems strange like she says something that she doesn't want to or was forced to, or maybe she is speaking to someone or maybe she's it's a game after all? Then Fran starts to run around the garden and play like the ghost girl is rumoured to, and we get a more detailed description of the garden and the setting. Then Fran leaves the garden and tell her friends that she didn't see a living soul. In my opinion ghosts are not living souls , living souls are humans , and then she says "I didn't see any ghost. Never even thought of one". This is untrue as it is obvious she has thought about ghosts I am sure she even believed that there was one there after her mother told her about it, and she was very excited about meeting <https://assignbuster.com/bang-bang-whos-dead-by-jane-gardam-and-the-signalman-by-charles-dickens/>

the ghost the way she lied is like she was hiding something like she had seen something but thinks she hasn't.

Then Fran notices an oil painting and thinks she sees for a split second a little girl standing there staring at her wearing a t-shirt, and then she goes cold down the back of her neck. This is another strange circumstance as the figure she has just seen could have well have been the sceptre that is rumoured to frolic in the gardens, but the strange thing is that the ghost wasn't wearing long black stockings and a pinafore that it is rumoured to but the same clothes as Fran, a white tee-shirt. Fran thinks it's her own reflection but we later find out (if we didn't already) that the oil paintings as they are not covered in glass. This cliff-hanger is utilized a lot in modern and traditional stories to have one extremely strange/tense/disturbing encounter with the wraith/presence. This may have not been the encounter but was the ideal time, setting for it as Fran was on her own and in the place where the ghost girl is rumoured to haunt. Then she tells her friends that it was her reflection, which shows that she still doesn't think she has seen the ghost.

Which also shows that her character isn't easily fooled or may try to avoid the truth. Later on Fran meets the girl who she thought was her reflection, the girl seems very strange and is also dressed like Fran, we also see a strong reference in the text that she may have indeed actually been the girl Fran had seen in the oil painting. This time she didn't vanish. " This shows that the girl was the actual figure that Fran had seen or looked distinctly like her. When Fran tells her that she thought she was the reflection and the girl replies " when you've been here as long I have let's hope you'll know a bit more. Oil paintings don't give off reflections.

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" Creates more tension to mount and this girl that Fran seems even more stranger. The way in which the girl says " When you've been here as long as I have" makes you think whether Fran is actually going to live in the new house and take this strange girls place.