

How does roal dahl
create unease and
tension in the
landlady



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In this essay I am going to discuss how Dahl uses language, characters, and objects to create tension and unease in the story "The Landlady". The story begins by describing a long train journey taken by Billy Weaver. When he arrived "it was about nine o'clock in the evening and the moon was coming up out of a clear starry sky".

The fact that it is night and the moon is up over a starry night, gives the town an eerie sense to it, as if it's a special night, and a night where something is going to happen. Also the fact that it is night-time suggests that there are going to be few people on the streets. The air was deadly cold and the wind was like a flat blade of ice on his cheeks". This sentence adds deeper atmosphere to the town, as it wasn't just cold, but "deadly" cold.

The blade of ice, suggests something harmful, dangerous might happen to him. "He had never been to Bath before". "Billy was seventeen" He is unfamiliar of the area, a foreigner, and therefore might be prone to be misled or misguided. The fact that he is relatively young and inexperienced might add to the chance of being misled. Because he is so young, he seems quite an innocent figure in the story.

"a line of tall houses on each side, all of them identical". the handsome facades were cracked and blotchy". This town seems unnatural to have a line of houses, each identical to one another, even in their states of ruin. Also the tallness of the houses can seem like stretched houses, when someone looks at a whole line of them.

This could signify a certain distortion in the town; a twisted town which shouldn't be trusted. The fact that all of them are in a ruined, neglected

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-roal-dahl-create-unease-and-tension-in-the-landlady/>

state could mean that no one lives in those houses any more. If this is true, then the isolation of Billy in a sort of a "Dead area" of the town is frightening. " Suddenly in a window that was brilliantly illuminated ..

. The brightly-lit window, out of a dark street, that catches his eye immediately, seems very strange. Especially the fact that it draws him towards it, as if he were magnetised to the window. The tremendous warmth originating from this window pulls him towards it. As he looks in notices the " velvety green curtains", " a bright fire burning", " a pretty little dachshund curled up by the fire", " a baby-grand piano", " pleasant furniture", and " a large parrot in a cage".

This all seems very surreal, as if it is too good to be true. A bright warm fire, a little dog curled up and napping by it, a nice cosy feel to it, is all too surreal. Therefore instead of giving us the impression of a nice room, we feel there is something sinister underneath the warm exterior, but we can't place our fingers onto what exactly it is. He contemplates with himself the other alternatives of accommodation, and clearly talks himself into going to the Bell and Dragon, as " he was a tiny bit frightened" of boarding houses.

This notice seems to be ' alive'. It is as if the sign is hypnotising him, in making him not leave. It is drawing him back to the house. This is very strange, how a notice can all of a sudden seem so powerful. This is very sinister indeed. " He pressed the bell.

Far away in a back room he heard it ringing. And then at once the door swung door open and a woman was standing there. " This is weird, because of the fact that he heard the ring in back room, yet the woman was already

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-roald-dahl-create-unease-and-tension-in-the-landlady/>

there, waiting for him. It is as if she were standing behind the door and expecting him to ring.

How she predicted this, must have some connection, with the "evil eyes" notice board. This is very extraordinary and the reader feels that there is something not right here with this woman. "Please come in," "She stepped aside holding the door wide open". This reminds me of the Dracula stories, and how Dracula's victims, must enter his house, at their own free will. "I saw the notice in the window" he said holding himself back "Yes, I know." "I was wondering about a room.

"It's all ready for you, my dear," she said. The Landlady seems to know an awful lot about Billy, she's prepared everything for him, as if she knew his intentions before he came. The use of language by the landlady is also prepared. It is as if she knows the reply to all his questions in advanced. Throughout the story Dahl has put this quality in the landlady's character as a barrier of understanding and learning more about the landlady. Dahl has given her this sweet innocent voice of knowledge, and a facial mask of a sweet old lady, to allow her to say what she wants, without revealing a lot.

"It was fantastically cheap. It was less than half of what he was willing to pay. This fact adds to the surreal sense of the Bed and Breakfast. The landlady even takes it a stage further by offering to reduce the price even further. A weird thing about the B; B is that even at this low price there was absolutely nobody else there, as the landlady tells Billy "We have it all to ourselves".

" I am inclined to be just a teeny weeny bit choosy and particular", " I see someone standing there who is just exactly right". This suggests that she has in the past waited for other people and chosen them to participate in something. " The old girl is slightly dotty, Billy told himself", " Mr Perkins. It is Mr Perkins isn't it? " The reader first assumes that the landlady is just getting strange in the mind in her old age. However, as the story develops you feel that the landlady is pretending this, in order to hold back something from Billy. This adds to the unease of the story.

" He noticed that the bedspread had been taken off the bed, and that the bedclothes had been neatly turned back on one side. All ready for someone to jump in. " The reader starts to feel that everything is too perfect and the fact everything seems pre-prepared makes it seem unnatural and unusual to the reader. We don't want to go breaking any laws at this stage" she said. This suggests that laws will be broken at some time of Billy's stay.

It seems that the landlady is almost performing a ritual, with different stages. She has performed this ritual before, and wants to get it exactly correct. " The fact that his landlady appeared to be slightly off her rocker, didn't worry Billy in the least. After all, she was not only harmless - there was no question about that -" The fact that Billy has no doubts about his landlady, means that he is off guard and vulnerable. This line is also very ironic as the reader finds out later in the story. " The fire was glowing in the hearth, and the little dachshund was still sleeping in front of it.

" The reader starts to feel that there is something wrong with this scene but you can't put your finger on it. Log Entries: " Christopher Mulholland 23

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-roald-dahl-create-unease-and-tension-in-the-landlady/>

Cathedral Road, Cardiff Gregory W. Temple 27 Sycamore Drive, Bristol” “

That’s funny, he thought suddenly. Christopher Mulholland. It rings a bell. ” “

As a matter of fact, now he came to think of it, he wasn’t sure that the second name didn’t have almost as much of a familiar ring about it as the first.

The fact that he somehow remembers the first name on the log entry is somewhat unusual, but the fact that he remembers the second name as well is extremely extraordinary. The reader is thinking that this is much more than just a coincidence, and that in some way this is connected to the landlady and all the unusual things that have so far occurred. “ I’m positive I’ve heard those names before somewhere. ” The reader feels that if Billy can remember where he has heard those names before, it will be a big discovery, and shed some light on the landlady. Unfortunately no matter how hard he is trying, Billy can’t remember the exact details, just vague memories.

“ This last entry is over two years old. And Christopher Mulholland ‘ s is nearly a year before that. ” The fact that the entries are so old, and that no one else has stayed here adds to the mystery. “ He noticed she had small, white, quickly moving hands, and red finger-nails. ” It is unusual for a woman of her age, to have red fingernails.

There seems to be something deceptive about her hands. Billy notices these facts about her hands, when she is preparing him a cup of tea. This could signify that she is doing something to the tea. As Billy gets closer to remembering where he heard those names before, the landlady seems

intent on changing the subject and shrugs off any attempts from Billy of finding more about those men. " Wait just a minute.

Mulholland ... Christopher Mulholland ..

. wasn't that the name of the Eton schoolboy who was on a walking-tour through the West Country, and then all of a sudden...

" " Milk? " she said. " And sugar? " " Yes please. And then all of a sudden..

. " As Billy is about to finish his sentence, the landlady repeatedly interrupts him and changes the subject. The reader is no doubt inclined to believe that the other boys went missing. The reader's suspicious view of the landlady is confirmed.

Unfortunately Billy hasn't noticed the connection and doesn't follow up the Mr. Mulholland story. He succumbs to the persuasion of the landlady to drop the story. " Your tea's all ready for you".

" She placed his teacup on the table in front of him. " To Billy the landlady seems like generous and kind old lady offering him a cup of tea. To the reader, however, it seems like she is extremely intent on making him drink the tea. There is something sinister about this.

Now and again he got this peculiar smell that seemed to be emanate directly from her person". " Pickled Walnuts? New Leather? Or was it the corridors of a hospital? " The author suggests that the smell emanating from the landlady, could be some kind of chemical such as cyanide, by referring to its smell as " corridors of a hospital". The reader can see that there is

something wrong with tea, but feels saddened for Billy's inability to recognise the danger. It is Billy's inability throughout the story to spot something peculiar, which makes the reader sympathise with Billy.

His innocence and his submission to the landlady's cosy appearance makes the story even more frightening. " But my dear boy, he never left. He's still here. Mr. Temple is also here.

They're on the third floor, both of them together. " This is very evil, as the reader can imagine both men upstairs on the third floor sitting on their armchairs, dead. This explains the supposed disappearance of the two men. Once again, however, Billy doesn't suspect a thing, as he views his old but innocent landlady.

" Seventeen! " " Oh it's a perfect age! " The landlady once again expresses her ritualised view, that everything has to be just right. She chooses her victims very carefully, and they have to be perfect. " But I think he was a trifle shorter, in fact I'm sure he was. " " There wasn't a blemish on his body. " This remark is even more sinister. Even though Dahl doesn't make the landlady directly say it, there is really only one explanation of how the landlady is sure that Mulholland was a trifle shorter, and that there wasn't a blemish on Temple's body.

" That Parrot. " " I could've sworn it was alive. " All along the cute little parrot in the corner, was a stuffed one. This seems a bit deceptive in a way, because the perfect, cosy scene, doesn't seem so good now. However, it doesn't shock the reader that much, as many people are known to keep stuffed birds.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-roald-dahl-create-unease-and-tension-in-the-landlady/>

However, the next discovery is slightly more frightening and sinister. " And suddenly he realised that this animal had all the time been just a silent and motionless as the parrot. " The cute curled up little dachshund was also a stuffed animal " perfectly preserved". To the reader this is quite disgusting, and we finally find out what was wrong with the ' too good to be true, cosy picture' encountered at the beginning of the story. The reader is quite shocked by this discovery, however Billy thinks it's " absolutely fascinating". He still doesn't suspect anything sinister about the landlady, even after her hinting little comment: " I stuff all my little pets myself when they pass away. " " You did sign the book, didn't you? " " That's good. Because later on, if I happen to forget what you were called, then I can always come down here and look it up. " The reader feels that what the landlady is really trying to say, is that when I've stuffed you and put you upstairs, then I can come down and remember your name. Towards the end of the story, the reader feels angry that Billy hasn't realised what danger he is in, and the reader feels like shouting at him for being so ignorant. This adds to the extreme tension of the story.

" Haven't there been any other guests here except them for the last two or three years? " " No, my dear," she said. " Only you. " The story concludes with just as much tension as before. The landlady finishes off with a sinister line, and the reader, is inclined to imagine and predict the fate of Billy, now in the dreaded hands of the landlady.