

Comparison of black veil and the darkness out there



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"The Black Veil" was written early in Dickens' work, circa 1840's so it is a pre-twentieth century story. "The Darkness out There" is a more modern story written by Penelope Lively at around 1985.

"The Black Veil" belongs to a horror, suspense genre, a classic thriller where the solution is provided at the end. It has a macabre element to it, showing people in extreme emotional states. The genre for "The Darkness out There" is less easy to recognize as it focuses mainly on a girl's development. Both stories involve a person who is naive at the beginning of the story, Sandra's fears in "The Darkness out There" are different at the beginning then they are at the end. She started off as having childish fears about "Packer's End," such as "enormous blokes" and "the woods," but she learns in the end that her real fears was "the darkness people" hide in themselves. Her cliched ideas proved not to be true; if they were, then the world would be a very comfortable place where "flowers sparkle and birds sing.

"Her future, which she thought was suffused with happiness, is now "unreliable" and unpredictable. Similarly, the surgeon in "The Black Veil" was also lead through a climatic experience in his life. Through what seemed like a perfectly safe act, he realizes in the end that he has to be careful about who he helps." "The Black Veil" concerns a young surgeon waiting for his first patient. There is an immediate atmosphere of suspense as "The night was" described as "wet and cold.

"He is then visited by a woman where Dickens describes her clothing with lots of references to dark colours, such as her "black shawl" and "black veil." He creates a mysterious, sinister atmosphere, conveying a sense of

ominous excitement to the audience. The description of “Walworth” is a “miserable” one, it is a slum area so a middle-class man going in to a “poverty” stricken area was undoubtedly putting himself at the risk of robbery. This was particularly true in the 1840’s as there was a more extreme social division due to the difference in clothing.” Packer’s End” in “The Darkness Out There” is also a “nasty” place in which Sandra is reluctant to “go by herself,” unlike the surgeon who has to go to “Walworth” given that “the woman” is his first patient. The fact that Dickens says that “The mysterious figure” had shoes “saturated with mud,” which is a clue for the reader that she had been outside, emphasises how Dickens uses various techniques to tease out information, since this is a story designed to keep the audience on the edge of their seat.

Throughout the story, the woman is referred to as “the stranger” to add a sense of mystery. Most doctors should not emotionally exhaust themselves so we can see that the surgeon has not had much experience as he talks “compassionately” to “the mysterious figure.” The audience’s interest is maintained by contradiction in parts of the text, “The stranger” seeks “medical advice” but deems it as “useless.” The readers are just as confused as the doctor, who tries desperately to be rational. The surgeon is made to visit a “house” which was “detached from others,” the cottage in “The Darkness Out There” was also isolated. The streets were “imperfectly lighted,” emphasising their gloominess.

“Detecting desperate characters” proves to be impossible, the police are reluctant to patrol this area underlining the threatening atmosphere because criminals can do as they please. When he arrives, the surgeon is told that he

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is "too soon" by a man looking like a corpse, which I found rather puzzling as doctors are usually told the opposite, again it adds to the suspense Dickens is trying to create. The simile, "slug-like tracks" fits in with the atmosphere of the house. Gender differences are mentioned in both stories, the surgeon considered it "absurd" for "a woman" to not "expose" their grief by "sobs." Kerry in "The Darkness out There" didn't care about "a bit of dirt" whereas the smallest amount "of grime" made Sandra "shudder.

"The Darkness out There" involves a niece, young girl joining a voluntary group, she meets, what is superficially "a cottage-loaf woman" telling a story about soldiers. Mrs Rutter seemed affable and undisturbed because "the walls were cluttered with old calendars and ornaments." Just like a stereotypical, cosy cottage. But her "sly eyes" suggested something ominous, possibly threatening about her. It emerges that the grandmother was involved in a callous act, watching someone being "hurt bad" just because "it was bucketing down.

"It is interesting to note that Lively's attempt is to empathise with Sandra whereas Dickens' intention is to provide an entertaining, macabre story. The characters from both stories seem to reflect each other. The surgeon is inexperienced as he has just started out as a surgeon. Sandra is at the threshold of adulthood and is apprehensive, frightened of what she doesn't know. She refuses to go near "Packer's End.

"The surgeon is confident and willing and goes to "Walworth." The fact that this is the case is understandable seeing that Sandra is a young girl and the surgeon is a young man: both characters start off naive and are victims of

circumstances. Sandra is reluctant to see the darker side of Mrs Rutter; instead, it is Kerry who realizes the significance of the story. The surgeon is not perceptive about what approaches him, and is left very much “ in the dark” when he meets the stranger. In “ The Black Veil,” Dickens controls everything and the audience is not given enough information to make their own judgement.

In “ The Darkness out There,” we often see Sandra’s innocence and naivete, enabling us to question her judgements. The reader is therefore, able to see through what the character judges and make sensible deductions. Most people in the city don’t have naïve ideas like Sandra, we are able to recognize that people can have a “ dark” side to them and the “ world” is “ unreliable. Dickens ends the exposition quite late into the story.

This is due to the fact that it was written in the 1840’s where people had a lot more time to read as a replacement for other entertainments, which weren’t available. The complication starts at the middle of the story, when “ the woman” tells a story, she is constantly contradicting herself, she wants help but the person is beyond help. Both the reader and surgeon are confused, during his journey through “ Walworth,” he is on threatening territory. Part of the complication begins when the surgeon is “ left” in “ a little cold room,” he is unaware of what is happening and neither does the reader who is placed in exactly the same position as the surgeon.

Right at the end, the climax comes when the “ dead man” is discovered and it is revealed that the corpse is the woman’s “ son.” There is no resolution since Dickens leaves the reader where a moment of revelation is made. The

reader is left with a mysterious, shocked feeling as they begin to make sense of her nonsense, yet we are left by ourselves to decide upon the reaction of the characters after the climax. Again, this is another example of how Dickens doesn't let out too much information: this time, it is up to the reader to decide what happens next. In "The Darkness Out There," the resolution underlines the theme.

The reader is revealed that Sandra "realised with alarm" the truth about appearance and reality. Superficially, nature is beautiful "in which flowers sparkle," but underneath it all, is the dark, malicious side of it. The "darkness" is often inside people, therefore the story provides a unexpected, perhaps disturbing reversal of expectations in which "The Darkness" is "not out there" as one would expect from the connotations of the title. Both stories are written in third person narrative but it is almost like a first person narrative as a large percentage of the story is seen through one character's eyes.

They are also both structurally similar, revealing information piece by piece, like a jigsaw waiting to be solved." "The Black Veil" conveys an air of suspense immediately. The "black shawled" woman remains nameless to give an idea to the reader that she is mysterious and the fact that she appears with a "black veil" in a storm, at "night" highlights even more that she is obviously a disturbing person surrounded by mystery. Mrs Rutter's, character, however was shown progressively, things were "concealed" more seeing that the story surrounds the idea of how appearance can be deceptive. She is not presented to us as troubled, at the beginning she

seemed nothing more than a woman with a “ creamy, smiley face.” “ Her eyes” were used to alert the reader that she is a strange, worrying figure.

On the surface, she appears to be one thing, but the darker side of her is gradually revealed. This story is less omniscient compared to “ The Black Veil” where things are made more apparent. The “ black veiled” woman has “ a low deep voice” and she admits she is “ mentally ill.” Her mental state is made clear to the reader, nothing is left ambiguous. Although her contradictory responses puzzles the reader, as well as “ the surgeon.

” She “ beseeches his aid” yet his “ medical advice” would prove to be “ useless.” The things she says therefore reinforces her disturbed “ mental” state, we can only presume that she is a mad woman seeing that Dickens teases out information little by little, using several clauses to build up the point he is trying to make. The bizaare, macabre caressing of the corpse reinforces the reader’s thoughts on her, particularly for a twentieth century reader, where “ chafting” a “ forehead” of a “ senseless form” may be viewed as repulsive. Deaths now are sanitised, the body is not on display, and “ mourning” is discreetly done. Whereas in the nineteenth century, people didn’t shy away from death due to the high mortality rates and so, this was seen as the natural way of grieving, and wouldn’t think of this as macabre.

“ The woman” is presented as consistent, we can tell from the beginning that the woman is strange. Mrs Rutter, on the other hand, appeared to be a stereotypical granny figure, a “ round woman” with, what initially, seems to be, a cliched, granny’s “ cottage” because of “ the fireplace” and “ big-eared

rabbits." She seems friendly, warm and hospitable as she offers " chockies" to the " visitors." Mrs Rutter seemed chatty but the audience gradually realizes that she was involved in a callous act. The story of her hostility and vile behaviour is revealed progressively where she turns out to be " scary" and " trouble." As she changes, the language she uses becomes foul; " bastard" is not a word associated with old woman.

Here the writer is intending to make us think of the old women as a " bitch." The response Dickens tries to create towards the end of the story, is a sympathetic one, a contrast to what we may of thought of her at the beginning due to her " deep voice" and " absurd" behaviour. By making her " collapse," he is trying to express a sense of emotional distress and vulnerability. The sympathy in " The Darkness Out There" goes towards Sandra where she is forced to grow up quickly and rather brutally.

The writer intends to make the reader have a " wary" approach to Mrs Rutter as the story develops: by " licking her lips," it is clear that she was proud of her cruel act, strengthening the vicious, mean streak in her. Kerry's shock and disgust is supposed to reflect the reader's response. Sandra in " The Darkness Out There" is younger than the surgeon therefore her thoughts are going to be less complex and expressions are going to be simpler as it is also directed mainly to those in their late teens. The target audience in " The Black Veil" is of an older group, thoughts are more complex.

One of the problems is the archaic vocabulary; for instance, we would normally say " I need your help," rather than " I beseech your aid." " Fain" is an obsolete word, now we use " willingly" and we use " duvet covers" in

place of “ counterpane. The vocabulary in “ The Darkness out There” is generally more accessible with no great complexity or obscure use of words. “ Nasty” and “ creepy” are examples of childish language; “ she wouldn’t go in there for a thousand pounds” is a colloquial expression.

Although the language here is of less complexity, the idea is more complex than “ The Black Veil” where the subtext is less serious and everything is made is quite superficial.” The Black Veil” was probably written by Dickens as a way to earn money, instead of it intending to be a learning purpose.” The Darkness out There” deals with a girl’s awareness of the complexity of the adult world. Sandra’s stereotypical ideas of “ falling in love” and “ getting a good job” are stripped away which charts her psychological change. Her security has been shattered as the world has “ grown unreliable and it “ is not as it appears.” The change from being naïve to a mature girl was forced upon her as she realizes that her real fears in her life were not “ tree shadows” but the “ darkness “ inside” people as Mrs Rutter turned out to be a heartless “ bitch.

” Her judgement of Kerry also changed, and it is this change which has left her with “ nothing to say.” Initially, all she saw in him was a “ greasy, spotty” boy but “ she realised” that he “ had” moral sensitivity and knew things about life that she failed to recognise. Both stories involve the present then go back to the past as the narrator is telling a story that happened several decades ago. The styles, however differ greatly, “ The Black Veil” has a longer sentence structure as people in the Victorian times spent more time reading and had a longer attention span. Our attention span tends to be shorter as we are a visual culture and expect stories to move more quickly

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generally. "It will be readily believed" is an example of longer, more leisurely pacing of writing.

"After plodding through the mud" and "the young man at length arrived" are longer, more multi-claused sentences. Because of these extended sentence structures, one would expect that a nineteenth century reader to persevere with this book, and other nineteenth century books." The "Darkness Out There" is a modern literature piece, the exposition is shorter, due to the fact that we have less reading patience now compared to people from the Victorian times. The general language is more direct and simple, paragraphs are less developed in terms of shorter detail and faster pacing, unlike the description of "Walworth," which was much more formal.

Dickens referred to himself as "we," a slightly reserved way of addressing himself, perhaps to gain extra authority. "Packer's End" was described simply as "nasty" and "creepy," as in any modern story, the sentence structure is straightforward without many clauses in it.