

Comparing and contrasting three fear stories



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Fear stories are tales that many people enjoy reading. The thrill and excitement and the pure exuberance involves them in the twisted storylines. People all over the world from all aspects of society enjoy them. We enjoy being 'scared' in the comfort of our own homes or in the cinema. It gives us an ultimate adrenalin rush or 'thrill'. But a fear story from a book creates a different atmosphere to that on the movie screen, which is why the sale of fear books is so popular and more than that of many other genres.

We have been studying three fear stories over the past few weeks, one by W. W. Jacobs, one by Edgar Allen Poe and the last by Roald Dahl. All three stories carry the typical fear trait - to build up suspense and create an atmosphere in which the reader will be spooked. They also carry the typical villain and victim though they are not the usual stereotypical characters usually portrayed. All stories spark the interest of the reader, which add that sense of enigma and fright. The first story is 'The Landlady' which is written by Roald Dahl.

The story is set in the 1950's, and although it is dated to that of fear stories now, the cliffhanger suggests it is a modern story. The language and the vocabulary are very much in time with the setting of the story as there are many references to that time, 'trilby hat', 'five and sixpence'. Although old-fashioned language is used some modern context comes through, 'swanky residences', 'slightly dotty' (the use of slang). The second story is 'The Monkey's Paw' written by W. W. Jacobs.

This is set in 1863 and this reflects in the language and settings used and show the historical context, 'hark at the wind', 'caught in the machinery'

(Herbert the young boy worked in the factories). It is the industrial age, when young children worked in factories and it is also the age of superstition.

Unlike the other two stories Jacobs mixes the age of reason, 'a coincidence' with the superstitious world of supernatural, 'just a bit of what you might call magic'. But in this case Dahl and Poe take away a part of the tension by not introducing the supernatural.

The last story is 'The Tell-Tale Heart' written by Edgar Allen Poe. This is set in the mid 19th century; the historical context of this is accentuated by the use of lanterns, as there is no electricity. The heavy wooden doors have latches and shutters that shield the windows. The language again is very old-fashioned and mellow, 'I bade the gentlemen welcome'. 'The Landlady' is a mysterious tale of a young boy Billy, who, stays in a bed and breakfast whilst staying in Bath, owned by an old woman.

When he meets the old woman he finds her 'slightly dotty' but still stays there because she seemed 'harmless' and she only charged 'five and sixpence' as he didn't have much money. He starts to realise there is something wrong when he signs the guest book and there haven't been any guests for more than three years and Billy also recognises the names of the guests as people he had read about in the papers. But took it to be his mistake until he realised that her animals he had assumed to be real were stuffed and he could always smell a distinctive smell of formaldehyde.

The story ends in a cliffhanger and so leaves the reader guessing as to what happens. 'The Monkey's Paw' is a very dark and fearsome tale as it incurs twists of the supernatural and its mystical happenings of what can occur

when being greedy and messing with the unknown. The first strange happenings come when a man arrives, Sergeant-Major Morris with a talisman, the monkey's paw, and tell the family of the queer stories encountered with the paw. He tells them that the paw grants three wishes, however they should be careful. The family ignore the warnings and dreadful things start to happen.

This story also ends in a cliffhanger with the reader unexpectedly made aware that the boy that died could be one of many things knocking at the door. 'The Tell-Tale Heart' is a very formidable and curious story that is about a man who is obsessed with an old man's eye. However strange it may be this man watches the old man at night waiting for the right moment to make his move and get rid of the eye. Yet at the end the young man feels the police know everything and starts to hear things, 'ringing in my ears', and finally admits to the deed.

The settings in the stories are very similar it was, 'evening' (The Landlady), 'night was cold and wet' (The Monkey's Paw), 'every night, about midnight'. They are all set at night and when it is dark and cold and the weather is usually bad or stormy. In the 'The Landlady' the 'air is deadly cold' which is ironic because death is one of the main storylines. The instant use of the weather introduces the reader to the fear factor of the story straight away as it grabs the attention and makes the reader more aware of the frightening parts of the story still to come.

The use of similes are used 'wind was like a flat blade of ice', this gives the reader a chance to feel more involved with the story as the reader can feel

like they can relate. The isolated and run-down house of the old woman is in a secluded part of town. Nearby residences had once been 'swanky' and 'paint was peeling from the woodwork', 'the handsome white facades were cracked and blotchy from neglect'. This is obviously a place, which is not looked after. However the appearance is deceptive to that of the inside of the house. Inside it is cosy, warm and welcoming. This makes the old woman seem nice and harmless.

But the stuffed animals still hint that it is sinister. Billy the victim thought that 'it would be a pretty decent place' to stay in after seeing the inside. The setting for 'The Monkey's Paw' is more of the conventional setting for a fear story. The story begins at night where it is 'cold and wet'. The house of the characters is again isolated like in 'The Landlady', because it is in the countryside, away from any human contact. Again the inside cosy atmosphere contrasts with the bleak and dingy exterior. There is a cosy warm fire and has comfortable furniture like in 'The Landlady', which contrasts with the outside weather.

This makes the weather seem more violent and frightening because of the stark contrast. The cosy atmospheric surroundings make it hard to convince the reader that a great fear could upon the family household, but the references to the weather and supernatural goings-on reflect that it is a fear story. 'The Tell-Tale Heart' like in the other stories, takes place at night 'every night, about midnight', but unlike the other two they are not isolated as they have neighbours and thus making the reader wonder that not much can happen if people are nearby.

Therefore, keeping the reader intrigued as to what could happen through the story. The house is described to be 'old', 'dark' and 'creaky'. The house is lived in by an old man and isn't very well looked after, 'it is only a mouse crossing the floor'. The references to the time of the day, in this instance at night, keep the reader interested because they know that something is sure to happen as the plot thickens. Whenever something would happen it would occur at night when it is dark, accentuating the mystery and building up the feelings of fear and tension.

The presentation of the characters is one of the most important elements to the fear of these stories. The villain in 'The Landlady' is not your stereotypical, 'a man dressed in black and his face hidden' villain. But what appears to be 'quite obviously a kind and generous soul'. She is an old lady with a 'warm welcoming smile', 'about forty or fifty years old' and she has a 'round pink face and very gentle blue eyes'.

The old woman is not the conventional villain and so makes it surprising to the reader, thus asking themselves questions as to how could something happen when a kind old lady is involved and wondering whether she is a villain or not and thinking that Billy is the villain and the lady the victim. She appears jolly and gentle perhaps a touch senile but harmless. Billy however, makes excuses for her as to why she is 'dotty', like saying she is like this because perhaps she 'lost a son in the war' and had 'never got over it'. This relates very much to 'The Monkey's Paw' as it also has an unconventional villain.

The villain is the traveller, Sergeant-Major Morris that brings the talisman. He comes with an air of mystery and intrigue. He wins the family trust by telling

deep and meaningful stories. He appears to have a strong and powerful hold over the family, ' his three listeners leaned forward eagerly', ' his manner was impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat'. He uses reverse psychology to tempt the family with the paw with subtle hints, ' I had three wishes from it', but still tries to put them off it, ' it has caused enough mischief already'.

We are not given much physical detail about the man, thus leading to the mystery of him. The interest and suspense is built up more because the powers of the monkey's paw are hinted at but the reader is not told explicitly about the consequences, which makes it more sinister. However the villain for ' The Tell-Tale Heart' is more of the stereotypical villain. The villain is the young man who has the obsession with the eye. He also is not described physically in much detail creating more mystery about the character.

The characters state of mind is what makes him a notorious psychopathic villain. He is insane and very mad, he also hears things, ' I heard all things in the heaven and earth'. The writer chose to use the villain as the narrator, which is a good idea as it helps the reader to understand the story and what the villain is planning to do. He gives his state of mind away by the way he tells the story and the manner in which he acts towards the old man, the language he uses and what he says and does.

This villain contrasts with the other two stories in which their villains are so similarly matched. The victims are similar and not the stereotypical helpless female. Billy is the victim in ' The Landlady'. He is naive, young and inexperienced. At the age of only seventeen he tries to act grown-up but

therefore makes him very vulnerable. He is too trusting of the old lady and makes excuses for her. The setting is also against him as it is a new environment for him and he has never been on his own before in a boarding house so puts him in an isolated situation.

The fact that he has no experience with staying on his own in hotels is that the price of staying there is far too cheap. He also doesn't realise and understand the true meanings of the lady's actions. This compares very well to the victim in 'The Monkey's Paw'. The victim is Herbert, he is not described fully as a main character like Billy, who we are given a physical description. His family are also victims as they also suffer. He is also naive but cynical. He is sceptical about the paws powers and isn't superstitious so he doesn't fully understand, like Billy.

He is over-confident and refuses to believe. His phrase, 'and I bet I never shall' after wishing for money is ironic as he never will see the money because he dies, but his family receive the money because he does die! The old man is the victim in 'The Tell-Tale Heart'. The writer makes the reader feel sorry for the old man because he is vulnerable like the other victims and he is on his own. He doesn't know much but the villain is still threatened by him. He is not described much in detail so we have to use imagery to imagine what he looks like.

He has an eye, which is depicted by the villain as 'evil'. He doesn't know he is being watched and so this also makes him an easy target. 'The Landlady' is written in the third person. This helps the reader to get a better overview and insight of Billy's thoughts and feelings as the story unfolds. This makes

the reader become in the same situation as Billy but because the reader can read into depth a bit more and see the old woman for what she is, the reader picks up on the clues a lot better and faster than Billy. 'The Monkey's Paw' is also written in the 3rd person like 'The Landlady'.

It uses old-fashioned detailed language, 'hark,' which reflect the time it was written. The writer uses long descriptive sentences to enhance his point and heighten the fear. This is similar to 'The Tell-Tale Heart' which is old-fashioned around pre twentieth. It is written in the first person. This gives the reader a better idea of what the villain is feeling and how to react to him and the different perceptions he puts across. This story also uses long descriptive sentences for the same reasons as 'The Monkey's Paw'.

The suspense is the main part to a good fear story and all of the three stories build up suspense well. In 'The Landlady' the setting, weather, use of similes and questions building up in the readers minds. The use of all these different ways of creating suspense result in the reader feeling like they cannot stop reading and want to find out what happens at the end. Questions like will Billy finally realise about the old lady before it's too late? And what will happen to him if he doesn't? Result in the tension building up more because the reader becomes more involved.

The most obvious of clues that Billy cannot recognise, like the taste of arsenic in his tea and the smell of formaldehyde everywhere, eventually all build up to the cliffhanger at the end. However the cliffhanger is used to create suspense in the 'The Monkey's Paw' differently and uses different techniques to that of 'The Landlady'. First it uses the mystery visitor from

the foreign country and the fact that he won't sell the talisman. Its descriptive language helps the anti-climax build up and puts it into perspective. It makes the reader question their own beliefs or if it may be a coincidence.

This is part of the fear genre where the reader is left with questions. The description of the paw is grotesque and not pleasant but the reader's curiosity makes them want to read on anyway. The reader is then left in suspense about the last wish, which resulted in death. The quote, ' Morris said the things happened so naturally that you might if you wished attribute it to coincidence', once again the story is testing the reader's integrity to believe them and say it is all coincidence or it is to do with the supernatural.

The news of Herbert's death when the man says he is badly hurt but he is really dead is that the reader anticipates this outcome. And finally at the end as to whether Mr. White will be able to stop Herbert coming back from the dead. The villain is the main build-up used for creating tension in this story, as it is him the story focuses mainly on and is the character the reader has got to know. The use of the setting also builds it up and the vulnerable old man. Will he realise? Why is the villain doing this?

The use of similes, ' black as pitch with the thick darkness', the use of personification, ' because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim'. The uses of these techniques all build up the suspense the writer wants to create to make the reader feel shaken and uneasy. ' Will he get away with the murder? ' is the cliffhanger, which leaves the reader hanging in suspense. The speed of the

story in 'The Landlady' is much slower to that of 'The Monkey's Paw' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart'. All the stories set the scene well and build up to the climax.

'The Landlady' is the only story which doesn't pick up its pace towards the end and build into shorter pacer sentences. After reading all three stories, I decided I liked 'The Landlady'. This story I felt was easier to read and understand. The storyline was easier to pick up and follow and the language and structure of the sentencing was easier to understand. I found 'The Landlady' grabbed your attention and kept it for longer because of the drawn out storyline as to whether Billy would be okay or not. I would say younger people would find it easier to follow as well. This story appealed to me more.