

How tension is built
up in both the
darkness out there
and the signalman



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The stories are set in slightly different eras – ‘the signalman’ is set in the Victorian era, written by Charles Dickens, whilst ‘the Darkness out there’ is set a more recent 20th century, and written by Penelope Lively. Although both stories are set in different times, both of the script writers build up tension using different techniques. The Victorian era was a very gothic and supernatural time, with the invention of the steam train. It was huge, nobody had ever seen anything like it, the loud roar of the engine, like a massive black beast, cutting its way through the countryside.

The technology involved was so vast that no-body really knew what it was, or how it worked. The 20th century story is based around the period just after the Second World War, so emotions are high, and it is a very psychological. People are craving for their loved ones to come home, as many had no news of their whereabouts, but also there was a lot of hate in people’s hearts, they had turned cold blooded and became very evil and racist.

The physical settings between the two stories are also different, the darkness out there is set in a countryside area where there was a plane crash in World War Two, which is rumoured to be haunted by its German occupants, but the Signalman is in a lonely railway cutting, where an apparently haunted signalman watches the line. The signalman’s story, has such a horrific plot that we become drawn in. When the author continuously interrupts it, we become more anxious and become desperate to hear the rest of the story.

Dickens use of painful personification, like ‘angry sunset’ and ‘violent pulsation’ contribute greatly to the stories’ impact. Short sentences and

repetition also make us feel tense The characters from both stories are not so dissimilar from the outside. The old lady from ' the darkness out there' is very much like a cottage loaf, widowed she stays in her cottage, not going outside much but always seeming to be active. The signalman is very similar by the fact that he is lonely, sat in his little control tower deep within the cutting.

Spending his days reading the books he keeps on his shelves and teaching himself maths and other new skills he had never thought of. Though they both have something in common, they both believed they'd seen ghosts. The old lady, Mrs Rutter, spoke to some kids telling them stories about a World War 2 plane which crash landed in a wood behind her house, and that there where German men in it who she saw struggling to survive in the bitterly cold winter whilst she stayed in the comfort of her home, watching them suffer and die, claiming to have seen ghostly images of them.

The signal man spent his days just sitting in his control tower, until a man stood at the top of the ridge and hailed ' Hello? Below there! '. The signalman stood stunned, whilst the man found his way down the side of the cutting to the bottom where the rail track ran. The man and the signalman spoke, during this talk the signalman explained to the man how he had repeatedly seen a ghostly figure/spectre before a horrific incident involving the railway, and that this was not a one-off, that it was a recurring event, and every time the figure showed it was in the same place hailing the same words ' Hello? Below there! '.

Mrs Rutter's attitude within today's society would be deemed unthinkable, but you have to remember she lived through the war, and the attitude she had was completely acceptable due to the amount of the pain and suffering she would have gone through in those tragic times, it can be argued that her attitude is not acceptable, but she has been through a lot of pain and if she had helped the Germans and the English authorities found out, then without doubt she would more than likely have been executed, so you could say, that she was protecting herself but the Germans had to suffer, to ensure she would live, though she may have died anyway, from an explosion, or the Germans may have seized the English authorities, and thus, have power over England.

The signalman's story seems crazy, unrealistic and very unbelievable. , the super natural that can not be explained, it was what people thought in the era. The one time the signalman chooses to ignore the voice was the one time he should have. The calm scientific reasoning of the author was wrong whilst the hysterical ramblings of the signalman was surprisingly correct. However, still the unexplained ending leaves us in a very tense and unsettled state.