

"Lamb to the Slaughter"

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**B.A(Prog.)IIInd Year
"Lamb to the Slaughter"
Unit 16: Reading Between the Lines**

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A Note on the Language and Narrative Style used in "Lamb to the Slaughter"

A Note on the Language and Narrative Style used in "Lamb to the Slaughter"

Roald Dahl's story "Lamb to the Slaughter" is written in a very simple language with a very easy vocabulary. It does not have any complicated imagery, symbolism or any abstract or reflective ideas. The story is a mystery story in which the writer shares the truth of the mystery with the reader. The writer and the reader share the secret of the main character while the other characters in the story do not know the reality of the situation.

Now, how does the writer achieve this?

- He uses a simple narrative technique. The story keeps the female protagonist, Mary Maloney, in the centre of the narration. Slowly the reader gets to align with her perspective and becomes a witness to all the action in the story through her perspective.
- The narrative builds up a tension between the husband and wife till Mr. Maloney reveals his distraction to her. The dramatic tension adds to the readability of the story. This also raises curiosity in the reader for what may follow. No wonder, many films have been made based on this story.
- The use of irony is best suited to creating double meanings ...One meaning appears on the surface and the other is the hidden meaning to be "read between the lines" of the story. For example, let's see what Mary Maloney means when she tells herself "Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all." In fact, isn't she an extremely good actor when she "acts" natural? The story abounds in double meanings and hidden meanings.

HOW TO READ THE STORY

- Read the Story at one go first
- Notice how easy it is to read the story because of its style and language.
- During the second reading, be attentive to the use of irony in the story.
- Be on the look out for what you can read between the lines!
- And also note instances of the-not-so-funny humour in the story.

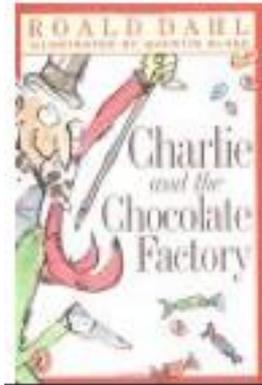
Dahl uses puns and word coinages more often in the children's stories, whereas in his adult fiction the emphasis is on imaginative plots. In addition to his children's books, Dahl also aroused much controversy with his politically incorrect opinions - he was accused of anti-Semitism and antifeminism and when a prowler managed to get into Queen Elizabeth's bedroom, Dahl was wrongly suspected of having given to the unwanted guest the whole idea in one of his books, *The BFG* (1982).

Roald Dahl on Chocolate !See



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7senu6OzVA> :

(Viewed on 15 July 2009 at 04:35 pm)



http://www.mrcpl.org/PZ/images/Charlie_and_the_Chocolate_Factory.jpg

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What does "Reading Between the Lines" mean?

1. What does "Reading Between the Lines" mean?

BETWEEN THE LINES



<http://www.martinstranka.com/photos/conceptual/Between%20The%20Lines.jpg>

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“Reading Between the Lines”
is to realize and understand

what the lines may mean and what is *implied* but not expressed on the surface.

In other words it means to understand the hidden meaning in writing or in speech.

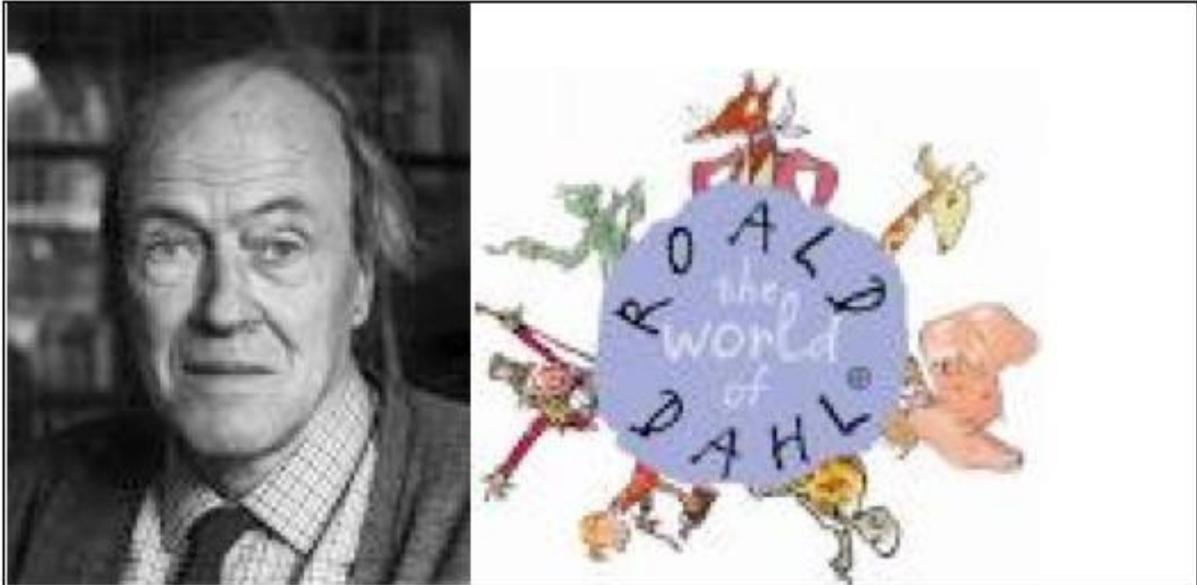
Example One : People often say (or write) one thing but mean another. Let's pretend that we have just gone to see the performance of a play together. As we are coming out of the theatre you ask me: 'What did you think of the play?' and I reply: 'The costumes were very impressive'.

Although you know that I thought highly of the costumes you also know that I probably did not think much of the theatrical experience overall. We need to understand how such extra (inferred) meaning comes about, and how understanding this kind of process can be used to interpret dramatic texts in particular, but also other texts and talk.

Reading "Between the Lines" leads one to the Sub-text
in projecting what the text may mean

1: by implication : in an indirect way

2: by way of inference : to infer a meaning that is not stated explicitly



http://blogs.fayobserver.com/faytoz/files/2008/08/roald_dahl.jpg

<http://www.turnerusd202.org/uploaded/faculty/spaitsc/roalddahl.jpg>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR of

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER :

ROALD DAHL (1916-1990)

Acknowledgement: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/rdahl.htm>

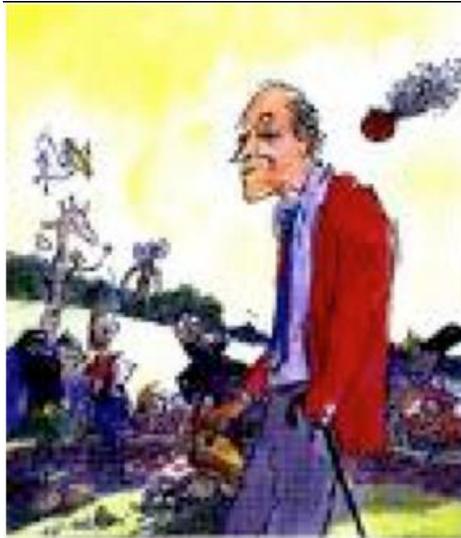
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British writer, famous for his ingenious short stories and macabre children's books. Dahl's taste for cruelty, rudeness to adults, and the comic grotesque fascinated young readers, but upset many adult critics. Several of Dahl's stories have been made into films, including *Matilda*, directed by Danny DeVito (1996).

Roald Dahl has a fantastic, interactive official website dedicated to him

and his works, biography, interview with him. See: <http://www.roalddahl.com>

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<http://friend.ly.net/users/jorban/biographies/dahlroald/dahl.jpg>

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The following life story of Roald Dahl helps one to understand the writer's choice of themes for his stories and his specific style of writing:

Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff, Wales, of Norwegian parents. His father, Harald Dahl, was the joint owner of a successful ship-broking business, "Aadnesen & Dahl". Before emigrating to Wales, Harald had been a farmer near Oslo. He married a young French girl named Marie in Paris; she died after giving birth to their second child. In 1911 he married Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg. Harald died when Dahl was four years old, and three weeks later his elder sister, Astri, died from appendicitis.

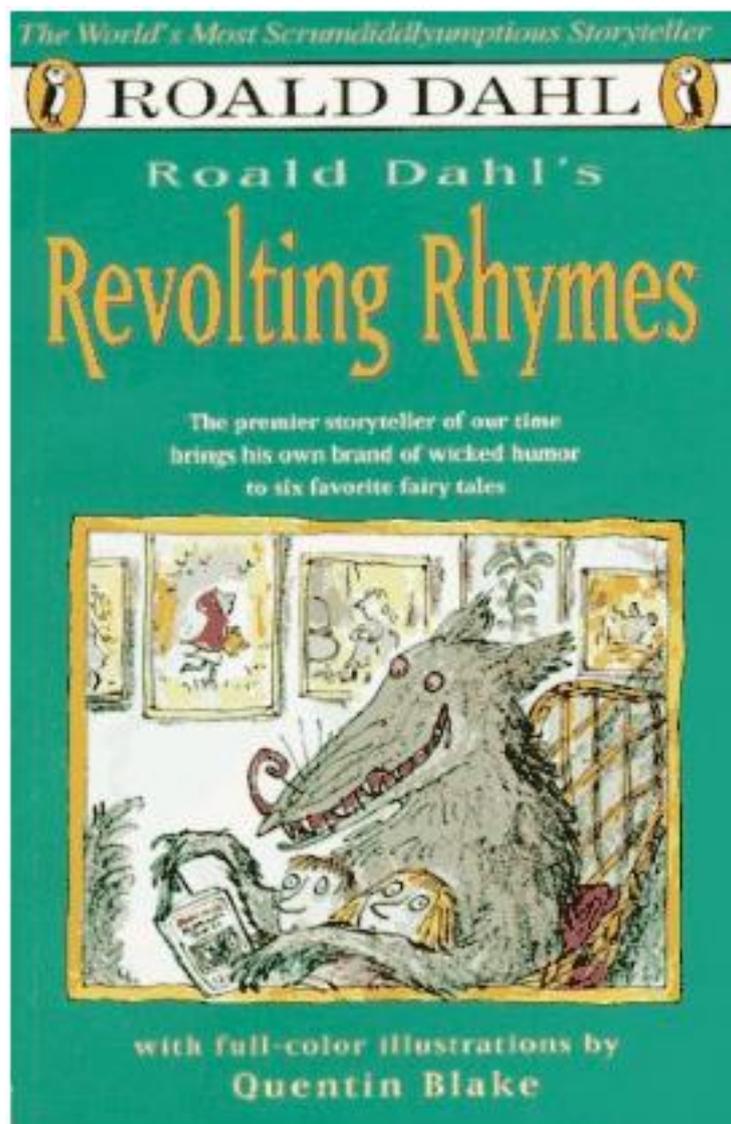


<http://www.sheilaomalley.com/Dahlneal.jpg>

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The family had to sell their jewellery to pay for Dahl's upkeep at a private school in Derbyshire. When Dahl was 13 he went to a public school named Repton.

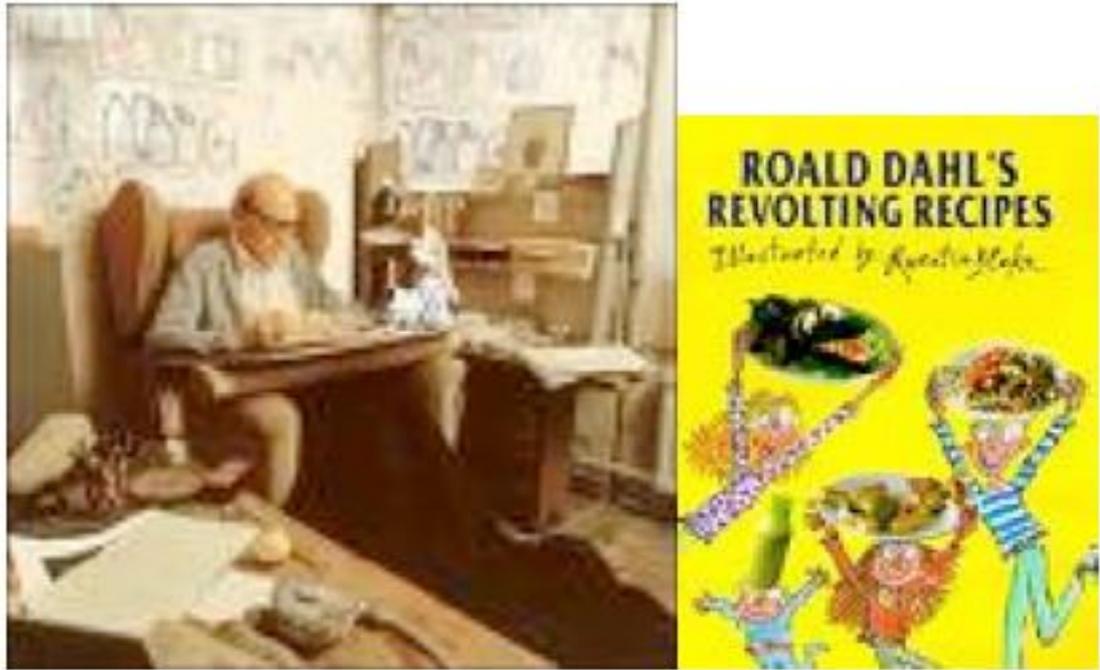
About his years at public schools in Wales and England, Dahl later described without nostalgia: "I was appalled by the fact that masters and senior boys were allowed literally to wound other boys, and sometimes quite severely. I couldn't get over it. I never got over it..." (from *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, 1984) Dahl especially hated the matron who ruled the school dormitories. These experiences later inspired him to write stories in which children fight against cruel adults and authorities.



<http://carbogs.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/roald-dahl-poems-revolting->

[rhymes-books.jpg](#)

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http://amuse.laurakress.com/wp-includes/images/wlw/RoaldDahl_E458/roalddahl1.jpg

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"I have never met anybody who so persistently writes words meaning the exact opposite of what is intended," one of Dahl's English teachers commented. Such an art of using language must have been of great use to Dahl later as a writer.

"Parents and schoolteachers are the enemy," Dahl once said. "The adult is the enemy of the child because of the awful process of civilizing this thing that when it is born is an animal with no manners, no moral sense at all." In *WITCHES* (1973) behind the mask of a beautiful woman is an ugly witch, and in *MATILDA* (1988) Miss Turnbull throws children out of windows. Both parents are eaten in *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* (1961), but the real enemies of the hero of the story, a little boy, are two

aunts.

At eighteen, instead of entering university, Dahl joined an expedition to Newfoundland. Returning to England he took a job with Shell, working in London (1933-37) and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1937-39). During World War II he served in the Royal Air Force in Libya, Greece, and Syria. He was shot at in Libya, wounded in Syria, and then posted to Washington as an assistant air attaché to British Security (1942-43). In 1943 he was a wing commander and worked until 1945 for British Security Co-ordination in North America.

In the crash Dahl had fractured his skull, and said later: "You do get bits of magic from enormous bumps on the head." While he was recovering from his wounds, Dahl had strange dreams, which inspired his first short stories. Encouraged by C.S. Forester, Dahl wrote about his most exciting RAF adventures. Dahl's first children's book, *THE GREMLINS* (1943), about mischievous little creatures, who eventually join the Allied forces in the Battle of Britain, caught Walt Disney's attention. Later it inspired a popular movie. Dahl's collection of short stories, *SOMEONE LIKE YOU* (1954), gained world success, as did its sequel, *KISS KISS* (1959). The two books were serialized for television in America. A number of the stories had appeared in the *New Yorker*. Dahl's stories were seen in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-61) and in the *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979) series.



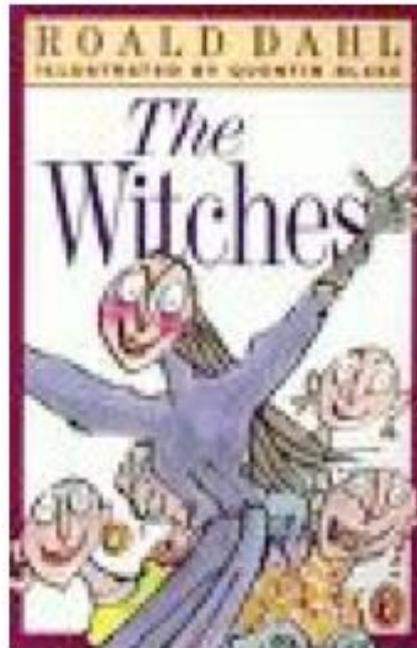
<http://www.joelstewart.co.uk/main/images/mimages/centipede01.jpg>

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In 1953 Dahl married the successful and wealthy actress Patricia Neal; they had one son and four daughters - the eldest daughter Olivia died of measles when she was eight. Dahl's wife suffered a series of brain hemorrhages at the age of 38; while pregnant with their fifth child she had a stroke. She described her recovery and her husband's solicitous help in the autobiography *As I Am* (1988). The marriage ended in 1983 after other family tragedies, and Dahl married Felicity Ann Crossland.

The only stageplay Dahl ever wrote, *THE HONEYS*, failed in New York in 1955. After showing little inclination towards children's literature, Dahl

published *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* (1961). Later *THE WITCHES* (1983) won the Whitbread Children's Book Award in 1983.



<http://www.joelstewart.co.uk/main/images/mimages/centipede01.jpg>

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The judges described the book as "deliciously disgusting". Later Felicity Dahl collected her husband's culinary "delights", such as "Bird Pie", "Hot Frogs", and "Lickable Wallpaper" in *Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes* (1994).

MY UNCLE OSWALD (1979) was Dahl's first full-length novel, a bizarre story of a scheme for procuring and selling the sperm of the world's most powerful and brilliant men. Dahl received three Edgar Allan Poe Awards (1954, 1959, 1980). In 1982 he won his first literary prize with *THE BFG*, a story about Big Friendly Giant, who kidnaps and takes a little girl to Giantland, where giants eat children. In 1983 he received World Fantasy Convention Lifetime Achievement award. Dahl died of an infection on November 23, 1990, in Oxford.

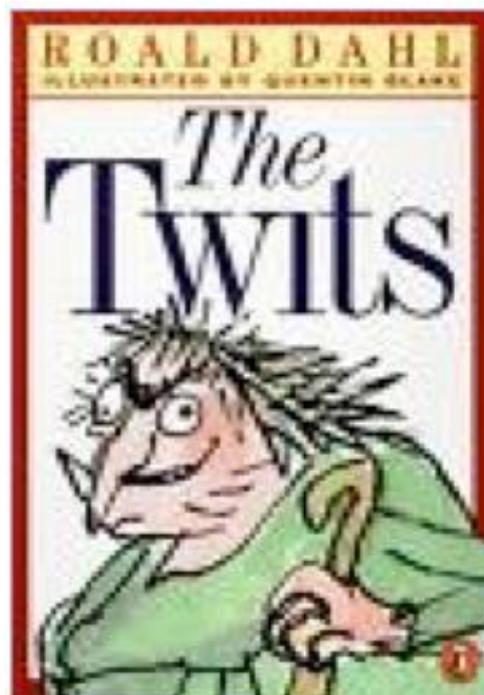
Dahl's autobiographical books, *BOY: TALES OF CHILDHOOD* and *GOING SOLO*, appeared in 1984 and 1986 respectively. The success of his books resulted in the foundation of the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery in Aylesbury, not far from where he lived.

"Good ghost stories, like good children's books, are damnably difficult to write. I am a short story writer myself, and although I have been doing it for forty-five years and have always longed to

write just one decent ghost story, I have never succeeded in bringing it off. Heaven knows, I have tried. Once I thought I had done it. It was with a story that is now called 'The Landlady'. But when it was finished and I examined it carefully, I knew it wasn't good enough. I hadn't brought it off. I simply hadn't got the secret. So finally I altered the ending and made it into a non-ghost story." (from *Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories*, 1983)

Dahl's stories have unexpected endings and strange, menacing atmospheres. The principle of "fair play" works in unconventional but unavoidable ways.

Uncle Oswald, a seducer from 'The Visitor', gets seduced. In 'Parson's Pleasure' an antique dealer tastes his own medicine and the Twits from *THE TWITS* (1980) use glue to catch birds and meet their own gluey ends.

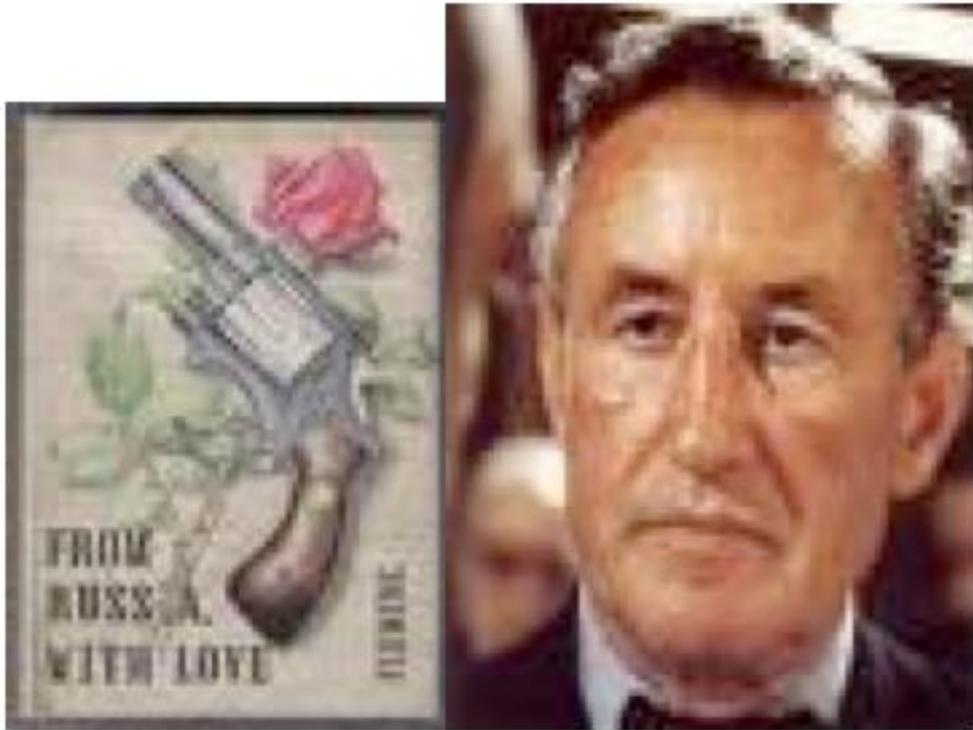


<http://cockingasnook.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/book-cover-roald-dalh-the-twits.jpg>

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The Source of Inspiration for the story 'Lamb to the Slaughter'

In 'Lamb to the Slaughter' the evidence of a murder, a frozen leg of lamb, is eaten by officers who in vain search for the murder weapon. The story was inspired by a meeting with the writer Ian Fleming at a dinner party.



http://www.klast.net/bond/images/flem_col.jpg

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So said **Roald Dahl**: My friend, the late Ian Fleming, the James Bond man, is really responsible for the story you're going to see now. We were staying the week-end at the house in Vermont. And at dinner the roast leg of lamb was so dry and tough that Ian looked across the room and whispered, "This ruddy thing must have been in deep freeze for ten years, you ought to be shot". "No, I said, I..I..I think there must be a more interesting punishment than that". That's how the idea for this story began.

Dahl makes clever use of "black humour" in his stories. He does not hesitate in using violence, even murder, to construct an engaging story with incidences that can be funny and at the same time unsavoury.

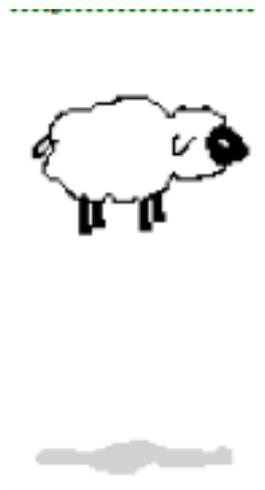
Black Humour

Black humour is humour that may amuse one but it does not leave one essentially in good cheer. It uses the grotesque or the absurd for comic purposes. It is, in other words, fun but rather morbid. Black humor became widespread in popular culture, especially in literature and film, beginning in the 1950s; it remained popular till the end of the twentieth century. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* (1961) is one of the best-known examples in American fiction. The short stories of James Thurber and the stories and novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. also offer examples of black humour.

The image of the cheerful housewife, Mrs. Maloney in Roald Dahl's story "Lamb to the Slaughter" suddenly smashing her husband's skull with the frozen joint of meat intended for his dinner is itself an instance of black humour for its unexpectedness and the grotesque incongruity of the murder weapon. There is a morbid but funny double meaning, too, in Mary's response to her grocer's question about meat: "I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer." She did indeed get a leg of lamb from the freezer.

The story, told in an apparently simple style, carries a number of meanings within itself. It ends with the giggling of Mary Maloney who is a murderer now! Indeed the situation is funny but it is also simultaneously sad and strange.

Read the Story



Lamb to the Slaughter

By Roald Dahl

The title of this story is an allusion to the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah in Isaiah 53 - "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb..."

See: : Opera based on this story:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS6pUVH7hWE>

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The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight—hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whisky. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her and about everything she did. The drop of the head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin – for this was her sixth month with child – had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger,

darker than before.

When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tyres on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in

'Hullo, darling,' she said.

'Hullo,' he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both his hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel – almost as a sunbather feels the sun that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whisky had taken some of it away.

'Tired, darling?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I'm tired.' And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was half of it, at least half of it, left. She wasn't really watching him but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

'I'll get it!' she cried, jumping up.

'Sit down,' he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whisky in it.

'Darling, shall I get your slippers?'

'No.'

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

'I think it's a shame,' she said, 'that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about his feet all day long.'

He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

'Darling,' she said. 'Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday.'

'No,' he said.

'If you are too tired to eat out,' she went on, 'it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.'

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

'Anyway,' she went on, 'I'll get you some cheese and crackers first.'

'I don't want it,' he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. 'but you must have supper. I can easily see to it here. I'd like to do it. We can have lamp chops. Or pork. Anything you want. Everything's in the freezer.'

'Forget it,' he said.

'But darling, you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.'

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

'Sit down', he said. 'Sit down.'

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the

time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass frowning.

'Listen,' he said, 'I've got something to tell you.'

'What is it, darling? What is the matter?'

He had become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

'This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid,' he said. 'But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is to tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much.'

And he told her. It didn't take too long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

'So there it is,' he added. 'And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you are looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job.'

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

'I'll get the supper,' she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all – except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now – down the stairs to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

'For God's sake,' he said, hearing her, but not turning around. 'Don't make supper for me. I'm going out'.

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself, So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both – mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month. What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

'Hullo Sam,' she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

'I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.'

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

'Hullo Sam,' she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

'Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're *you*?'

'I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.'

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

'Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight', she told him. 'We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house.'

'Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?'

'No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb, from the freezer.'

'Oh.'

'I don't much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?'

'Personally,' the grocer said, "I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?'

'Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those.'

'Anything else?' The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. 'How about afterwards? What are you going to give him for afterwards?'

'Well – what would you suggest, Sam?'

'The man glanced around his shop. 'How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that.'

'Perfect,' she said. 'He loves it.'

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid she put on her brightest smile and said, 'Thank you, Sam. Good night.'

'Good night, Mrs. Maloney. And thank *you*.'

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she

happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables on Thursdays evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

'Patrick!' she called. 'How are you darling?'

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living-room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, 'Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!'

'Who's speaking?'

'Mrs. Maloney, Mrs. Patrick Maloney.'

'You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?'

'I think so,' she sobbed. 'He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead.'

'Be right over,' the man said.

The car came over quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policemen walked in. she knew them both – she knew nearly all the men at that precinct – and she fell right into Jack Noonan's arms, weeping hysterically. He put her gently into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

'Is he dead?' she cried.

'I'm afraid he is. What happened?'

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the

phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of them she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he didn't want to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven – 'it's there now, cooking' – and how she'd slipped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

'Which grocer?' one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases – '...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper...peas...cheesecake...impossible that she...'

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just where she was until she felt better? She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said, she'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke to her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may've thrown it away or

hidden it somewhere on the premises.

'It's the old story', he said. 'Get the weapon, and you've got the man.'

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing – a very big spanner for example, or a very heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

'Or a big spanner?'

She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw the flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantel. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

'Jack,' she said, the next time big spanner for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

'Or a big spanner?'

She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw the flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantel. The Sergeant Noonan went by. 'Would you mind giving me a drink?'

'Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whisky?'

'Yes, please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.' He handed her the glass.

'Why don't you have one yourself,' she said. 'You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me.'

'Well,' he answered. 'It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.'

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a nip of whisky. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, came out quickly and said, 'Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.'

'Oh *dear* me!' she cried. 'So it is!'

'I better turn it off for you, hadn't I?'

'Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much.'

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes. 'Jack Noonan,' she said.

'Yes?'

'Would you do me a small favour – you and these others?'

'We can try, Mrs. Maloney.'

'Well,' she said. 'Here you are, and all good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it's long past your supper time, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven? It'll be cooked just right by now.'

'Wouldn't dream of it,' Sergeant Noonan said.

'Please,' she begged. 'Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favour to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.'

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were dearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

'Have some more, Charlie?'

'No. Better not finish it.'

'She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.'

'Okay then. Give me some more.'

'That's the hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick,' one of them was saying. 'The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge hammer.'

'That's why it ought to be easy to find.'

'Exactly, what I say.'

'Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.'

One of them belched.

'Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.'

'Probably right under our noses. What do you think, Jack?'

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

Vocabulary

Let us see if we understand the meanings of some difficult words in the story. Here's an exercise:

Vocabulary

Find the following words in the story and match the meanings. Join them to the definitions on the right. The first

Word	S.No	Match	Meaning	Letter
anxiety	1	F	confused, understanding	not A
tranquil	2		a heavy stick with a knob at one end, for hitting someone	B
punctually	3		extremely happy	C
blissful	4		a very strong feeling which guides someone	D
amber	5		Having a glowing	E

			appearance	
bewildered	6		feeling worried	F
instinct	7		comforting someone who is sad, cheering them up	G
club	8		annoyed, irritated	H
peculiar	9		turned from liquid to solid	I
frantic	10		being kind to visitors	J
grief	11		on time, not late	K
congealed	12		mad, wild	L
translucent	13		calm, peaceful	M
exasperated	14		extreme sadness after someone dies or goes away	N
consoling	15		strange, unusual	O
hospitality	16		an orange-yellow colour	P
corpse	17		slightly	Q
luxuriate	18		a metal tool, a wrench	R
nausea	19		something planned	S
intent	20		punishment	T
gravel	21		sensation of vomitting	U
spanner	22		a dead body	V
trifle	23		small stones used to make roads	W
penalty	24		to enjoy self-indulgently	X

“Lamb to the Slaughter” falls into the genre of ‘Mystery Stories’. The exercise below is focused on the vocabulary generally appropriate for such stories.

Mystery Vocabulary

http://pagesperso-orange.fr/absolutenglish-972/notes/mysteries/vocabulary_matchexo2.htm

(Viewed on 15 July 2009 at 03:03 pm)

Matching exercise

Match the words given below with the definitions provided after the list.

- Alibi
 - Clue
 - deduction
 - evidence
 - red herring
 - sleuth
 - suspects
 - witness
-
- Something that appears to give information toward solving the crime.
 - Person who has personal knowledge about the crime
 - People who appear to have a motive to have committed the crime.
 - Collecting the facts and drawing a possible conclusion.
 - Someone or something that proves who committed the crime.
 - A false lead that throws the investigator off track.
 - An investigator or detective.
 - A plea offered by an accused person of not having been at the scene of crime.

For a Crossword on Crime, click on:

<http://www.ac-nantes.fr:8080/peda/disc/lv/anglais/hotpotex/lapierre/Crime/crime01.htm>

(Viewed on 15 july 2009 at 03:04 pm)



For a Game on Words for Criminals, Visit:

<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/words/activities/crimes01.html>

The story "Lamb to the Slaughter" compels one to

ask the following question:

IS MARY MALONEY GUILTY?

Since this is a very popular story world-wide, the responses below show how different students have different answers to the above question.

Responses from students of different countries

RESPONSES FROM STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/absolutenglish-972/notes/mysteries/page1.htm>

(Viewed on 15 Jul 2009 at 03:17 pm)

Yes, I think that Mary Malony is guilty... but she's not alone. We can say that she's responsible for this crime. But it's a crime of passion. This is not a reason to say that she's not guilty, but it gives her extenuating circumstances. We know that she's expecting a baby, and her husband announced her that he's going to leave her. It's not a respectable attitude and, even if she's a criminal, she mustn't get a big jail sentence.

Manou (LAT, Blois)

I don't think that Mary Maloney is guilty. She has killed her husband but this is because he wanted to leave her. First she doesn't have all her faculties and second if she has all her head, this is a usual reaction. Because when a wife leaves her husband, the husband can hit his wife, this is a usual reaction. She loved her husband, she is just guilty of her emotion. She doesn't really want to kill her husband. When she comes back home and pretends she doesn't know that her husband is dead, this is a real shock for her. This is not a game, she is herself.

Emma (LAT, Blois)

First her husband wanted to break with her and second she was pregnant.

She had a true reason for murdering her husband. But she had no right to murder him. It is forbidden by the law. If all the women murdered their husband because he wants to leave her, it would be a chaos. She is guilty because she has no right to murder a man.

Tiphaine (LAT, Blois)

Oct 12, 2004

Yes and no. Yes because she obviously did commit the crime, but no because she didn't do it out of spite. It was in pure shock, in protection of her unborn child and of pure and utter heart break. When you love someone the way Mary loved Patrick, all you want is to be loved back, for them to be happy but for you to be there to share it with them. She was devastated that he would do this to her and so acted in a trance. So in that sense she is not guilty. Had he not done that, then I am sure murdering him would never have crossed her mind. So you could say she acted because she was provoked.

Kathy L. (Ayr, Scotland)

May 31, 2005:

As far as we are concerned, we think Mary is not guilty because she was a caring wife, she was waiting for her husband every night, sewing in her house, on her own. And all he found to do was to leave her although she was expecting a baby !

She spent all of her time loving him and his reaction shows us he didn't deserve Mary.

We can imagine that if he leaves her, she will lose everything. That's why we cannot help siding with Mary : we would have done the same thing !

Milay, Lucie (Laon, France)

In our view, Mary is not guilty. In fact, her husband was unfaithful and she was right to kill him. He was a horrible man because he wanted to abandon her although she was six month-pregnant. He was really heartless with his caring wife. Moreover, we can't help feeling sympathy

for Mary who has turned into a radical feminist. At the beginning of the story, she was a submissive housewife and she became a free woman. To our minds, the metamorphosis is very positive.

Sophie and Gaëlle (Laon, France)

On the one hand, Mary is guilty because she wittingly killed her husband and it's forbidden by the law; she showed herself pitiless, cruel and irresponsible.

On the other hand we cannot help siding with Mary, since she was devoted to her husband and to thank her, he found nothing else than being unfaithful; he deceived her with another woman! Patrick was really merciless, because he had broken Mary's heart while she was pregnant! She should have tortured him!

Gwennaël (Parfondeval, France)

March 16, 2006

When Patrick announced that he is about to leave her naturally Mary must be very upset with that. But she doesn't do that act. Instead she goes down calmly and collects the leg of the lamb. So she immediately gets a cold-blooded instinct to kill Patrick. She comes with that intention to him, and when she gets a chance she kills him. So she follows a plan (in going down, getting the weapon, and hitting him from behind). It's not an immediate reaction from the woman. Since it was a plan she is guilty and must be punished.

Suresh (Bangalore, India)

April 6, 2006

I think Mrs Maloney is guilty in some way because she was pregnant and her husband came from work and told her that he was going to leave her. I think that was the reason that provoked Mrs Maloney to kill her husband, and I also think she was a little crazy.

Carolina (Argentina)

Read between the lines" uttered by Mary Maloney

Examine the following extract from the story and comment on what you can “read between the lines” uttered by Mary Maloney

‘Would you do me a small favour – you and these others?’

‘We can try, Mrs. Maloney.’

‘Well,’ she said. ‘Here you are, and all good friends of dear Patrick’s too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it’s long past your supper time, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don’t you eat up that lamb that’s in the oven? It’ll be cooked just right by now.’

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Sergeant Noonan said.

‘Please,’ she begged. ‘Please eat it. Personally I couldn’t touch a thing, certainly not what’s been in the house when he was here. But it’s all right for you. It’d be a favour to me if you’d eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.’

How do you think will the Sergeant and his men be doing “a favour” to Mary Maloney by eating away the lamb?

Look at the ending of the story, specially the lines in red and show how what you can read “between the lines” is what actually makes the story so interesting

‘She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.’

‘Okay then. Give me some more.’

‘That’s the hell of a big club the guy must’ve used to hit poor Patrick,’ one of them was saying. ‘The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge hammer.’

‘That’s why it ought to be easy to find.’

‘Exactly, what I say.’

‘Whoever done it, they’re not going to be carrying a thing like that

around with them longer than they need.'

One of them belched.

'Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.'

'Probably right under our noses. What do you think, Jack?'

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

Why does Mary Maloney begin to giggle?

Is the story funny?

What kind of humour do you see in the story?

Is the ending effective? What makes it so?

Work out an alternative ending of the story.

Some More Questions

- Do you think that the author displays any sense of justice or fair play in the story? If so, how?
- Mary Maloney is an intelligent as well as a sensitive person who demonstrates tremendous composure of mind in the story. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer.
- Comment on the title of the story. Is the "lamb" in the title a metaphor? How do you understand the word "slaughter" in the context of the story.
- How will you describe the story? Is it tragic or comic? A black comedy? Give reasons for your answer.
- Is this story a mystery story, a crime story or a detective story? Or would you see it as a "revenge fantasy"? Why?
- How does Dahl use irony to bring humor to the plot?
- Is the murder in the story an instance of domestic abuse? How?
- Does the unpremeditated nature of Mary's crime make it seem less horrible than if it had been planned?
- Name some writers/stories you are reminded of as you read this story.
- Write a personality profile of Mary Maloney.
- It is said that Dahl started the "twist ending" movement in the writing of the short story !
- What is the "twist" in the story "Lamb to the Slaughter" at the end?
- "Lamb to the Slaughter" was originally rejected by *The New Yorker*

in 1951.

- Dahl's taste for cruelty, rudeness to adults, and the comic grotesque fascinated young readers, but upset many adult critics. Several of Dahl's stories have been made into films, including *Matilda*, dir. by Danny DeVito (1996).
- **'Aunt Glosspan,' the boy said, ' what do ordinary people eat that we don't?'**
- **'Animals,' she answered, tossing her head in disgust.**
- **'You mean live animals?'**
- **'No,' she said. 'Dead ones.'** (from 'Pig' in *Kiss, Kiss*, 1959)

The 'YouTube' has many versions and remakes of films based on the story "Lamb to the Slaughter". The following URLs present the closest representation of the story:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIIEO9I9krA>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkiX580QbVA>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BucLRD5VPEc>
- <http://www.leechvideo.com/video/view2531379.html> :film of the story
- <http://video.aol.com/video-detail/lamb-to-the-slaughter/2398629809> : Film
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewfzH1hl0xA> : Film Hitchcock style
- <http://daazo.com/film/ac76a69e-7cf0-102a-baba-000e2e531ae0/> : Film (Viewed on 15 July 2009 at 03:20 pm)

References

Reference:

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-lambslaughter>

(Viewed on 15 July 2009 at 03:22 pm)

In his short story "Lamb to the Slaughter" Roald Dahl offers his readers a tale so grotesque, so darkly comic, so hilarious in some of its incidental details (the fourth line from the end features a belch), that one can easily fail to take it seriously. "Lamb to the Slaughter" seems a kind of literary joke, a morbid toss-off, which the author luckily convinced some editor to buy. Yet part of Dahl's cleverness in this slick tale of domestic comfort disrupted, of marriage betrayed, and of a life taken, is that he tricks his readers into complicity with a murder, just as the murderer tricks the investigators into complicity by getting them to consume the evidence.

Bertonneau, UCLA

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On irony behind the title of Dahl's "Lamb to the Slaughter."

"Lamb to the Slaughter" is representative of Dahl's economical style and dry, dark sense of humor. Like all of his short fiction, the narrative in this story is driven by plot, not by character or mood. Readers find themselves dropped into the middle of the action with no knowledge of the background or history of the characters to establish tone or motive. Starting with the double meaning of its title, however, "Lamb to the Slaughter" offers readers a number of opportunities to explore the complexities and possibilities beneath the taut and matter-of-fact surface of the story. Alert and curious readers will find themselves opening narrative trap doors and rummaging through Mary's psyche in search of reasons why an ordinary evening ended in murder.

Piedmont-Marton, University of Texas at Austin

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In his essay, Warren gives some background on Dahl's life and analyzes Dahl's position as a writer of horror stories. He likens Dahl's style to that of James Thurber and Saki, other notable twentieth-century humorists who possessed a satiric and sometimes morbid bent of mind.

Roald Dahl is a short story writer of highly unusual gifts. He is one horror writer who rarely spills blood. His short stories have earned him great

distinction not only in the field of horror, but among the great short story writers of the twentieth century, an assemblage that includes James Joyce, Frank O'Connor, John Collier, Saki, Katherine Mansfield, John Cheever, and Ernest Hemingway (who was a personal friend of Dahl's and whose advice on storytelling and the value of economy Dahl took to heart).

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In the following review, Kelly examines the use of suspense in the short story collection Someone Like You, in which "Lamb to the Slaughter" appeared.

...the four notable talents: an antic imagination, an eye for the anecdotal predicament with a twist at the end, a savage sense of humor suitable for stabbing or cutting, and an economical, precise writing style. No worshipper of Chekhov, he. You'll find him marching with solid plotters like Saki and O. Henry, Maupassant and Maugham. He doesn't really like people, but he is interested in them (to paraphrase the author of "Cakes and Ale"); the reader looking for sweetness, light and subtle characterization will have to try another address. Tension is his business; give him a surprise denouement and he'll give you a story leading up to it.

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For further reading: *Roald Dahl* by Chris Dowling (1983); *Roald Dahl* by Alan Warren (1988); *Roald Dahl: A Biography* by Jeremy Treglown (1994); *St James Guide to Young Adult Writers*, ed. by Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast (1999); *Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter: Portraits of children's writers* by Julia Eccleshare (2002)

A Critic's Reading of Symbolism in the Story

Mary - Mother of Jesus. Jesus = lamb of God, on the cross "slaughtered" for our sins. Sacrifice - to create atonement for sins, her husband was "sacrificed" for his "sin". Leg of Lamb literal "lamb of god" reference