



UNIVERSITI  
PENDIDIKAN  
SULTAN IDRIS  
اونيورسيتي فنديديقن سلطان ادريس

---

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

**BIS 3203**

**WORLD LITERATURE**

**ASSIGNMENT 2**

**INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT**

**'THE LANDLADY' by Roald Dahl**

**NAME** : SITI NUR FAQIHAN BT IMRAN  
**MATRIC ID** : D20151070660  
**GROUP** : A  
**LECTURER'S NAME** : PROF. MADYA DR. ABD GHANI BIN ABU  
**SUBMISSION DATE** : WEDNESDAY 8 MAY 2019

## **1.0 ABOUT THE CHOSEN SHORT STORY**

“The Landlady” is a short horror story by Roald Dahl. It initially appeared in The New Yorker and originally published on November 28, 1959. This is one of Dahl’s most famous stories and it has been dramatized on television several times. It is known for the simple, subtle and scary ending.

There are several reasons why I chose this short story. First, it is written by Roald Dahl. I enjoy most of his works such as Matilda, The BFG, and Charlie and Chocolate Factory. Known for dark humour and unexpected endings, Roald Dahl was widely praised for creating works that captivated both children and adults attention. Hence, his works are still mentioned and praised until these days. Second, I am drawn with his style of writing which is humorous and creative – lots of onomatopoeia, interesting adjectives and his ability to make characters alive on every page.

Third, it amazes me on how both adult and children can read to his books for enjoyment for years. He puts a twist on his words and arranges the sentence structure to a point of wackiness and witty at times. He also uses various literary devices to create vivid images and sounds for his characters and readers. This unique trait of Dahl in writing makes me choose one of his mind-boggling yet subtle horror stories, “The Landlady” for this assignment.

## 2.0 SYNOPSIS

“The Landlady” is one of Roald Dahl’s best-known stories and contains a mixture of mystery and horror as a theme. Billy Weaver, a man just arrives in Bath and needs a place to rest overnight. It is his first time in town due to his new job there soon. He has been told to go to “The Bell and Dragon” which a pub he could spend the night. However, on the way through, a bed and breakfast place caught his attention as it is a charming house. On an impulse, he decides to check it out and rings the bell. A small old lady answered it immediately and invites him over while tells him the room rate.

Not even a minute later, Billy decides to stay. He looks around the house but finds nothing. Soon, he stumbles upon a house with a fire-lit living room to sign the guest-book. However, he notices that the last guests were there a while back in the entire book. The names seem familiar but he shrugs it off as perhaps a distant memory of someone he went to school with hence the reason behind why the names seem familiar.

The woman, owner of bed and breakfast place offers Billy a cup of tea and biscuits. He does not accept it first, saying he would like to go straight to bed. He eventually accepts the tea and sits down with the woman. He notices her parrot sitting quietly in the cage and a dachshund sitting on the floor right in front of the fireplace. He also starts to notice a curious bitter almond taste in his tea and the odd odour from the woman.

Together, they have a conversation about the guests that were there before and Billy asks if they left recently, which she replies that both of them are still in the house on the fourth floor. Billy is confused and worried more as he found out that the parrot and dachshund were just stuffed. The landlady reveals that she herself stuffed the animals and she is a taxidermist actually.

The story ends abruptly with Billy asking the landlady if there have been any other guests coming to her place in the last three years. She says no, only him. The ending leaves a chill terror with a subtle hint of horror to the readers.

### 3.0 ANALYSIS

In the short story, “The Landlady”, Roald Dahl creates a masterful short story which is filled with suspense and foreshadowing. At every turn, Dahl includes clues which lead the reader further on the path of his twisted tale to the conclusion that the landlady has an ulterior motive towards Billy. His expert descriptions of Billy’s character and setting, his use of language and well-structured plots bring the reader to an unsettling conclusion.

Some readers might think that this story is merely a metaphor. Billy represents youth, innocence, naïve, optimism, love and carelessness. He is full of ambitions as he cannot wait to start his new job in Bath. This young man believes that he may change the world and becomes a successful businessman, just like what he has seen from others. Meanwhile, the landlady symbolizes maturity, steadiness but with strong psychopath motives behind the character that she carries. According to Roald Dahl, he has always wanted to write a ghost story with no ghost’s element in it. In his opinion, he nailed it with the landlady character. It is agreeable this story has no ghosts, however, the rest of the obligatory elements that are always present in scary horror stories are present.

I believe his story has two themes that are worth to be talked about. The main theme of this short story is an exploitation theme. As Dahl opens the story with the description of the young, naïve Billy, traveling to Bath for work. He makes the readers believe that Billy is considering staying in a congenial pub or a boarding house because he loves interacting with people. However, naïve Billy ignores his intuition and check out the boarding house which drawn him with a cosy, warm bed with inviting fireplace from the outside. Likewise, Dahl gives clues to the reader about the landlady character as he describes her as “slightly dotty” and states that she springs to open the door when the bell has rung like a “jack-in-the-box” as if she was expecting Billy. Her descriptions are as she is ready to pounce on her victim as an eager cat pounces on a helpless small mouse.

The exploitation theme comes in from both the oblivious Billy and the deceitful landlady. An example of Billy’s apathy towards the ulterior motives of the landlady is when he considering staying at the bed and breakfast place. “The old girl is slightly dotty, Billy told himself. But at five and sixpence a night, who gives a damn about that? – “I should've thought you'd be simply swamped with applicants,’ he said politely.” With those thoughts in mind, Billy actually disregards the landlady’s state of mind which eventually cost him his life. The devious landlady taking advantage on Billy’s major flaw and decides to kill him –

although Billy was putting the puzzle pieces together after looking at the guest names in the guest books and his questions about the stuffed animals at that time.

“*‘Temple,’ Billy said. ‘Gregory Temple. Excuse my asking, but haven’t there been any other guests here except them in the last two or three years?’* Holding her teacup high in one hand, inclining her head slightly to the left, the landlady looked up at him out of the corners of her eyes and gave him another gentle kind smile saying, “*No, my dear. Only you.*” *she said.* The provided shreds of evidence portray how the landlady lures Billy’s innocence to take his life, just to satisfy her perverse passion. She entices him into a false sense of comfort, and strikes just prior to his uncovering of the truth, showing her exploitation of his naïveté youthful soul.

Another theme that Roald Dahl portrays in this short story brilliantly with his languages is appearances versus reality. This theme is supported with a naïvety motive from Billy and it is manipulated by the landlady. The underlying message under this theme is the short story may also be read as a cautionary tale that advises one to be careful when trusting strangers in public place as it is very rare for a person who does not you to be preoccupied with your well-being. The whole concept is about being cautious with strangers around you. This theme of deception is illustrated mainly by the landlady and it starts with her bed and breakfast place that she runs. She knew that her bed and breakfast place can be very deceiving with the cosy warm place with little fireplace in the living area and a piano to bring out the liveliness of the home. Well, this definitely hooks Billy’s attention to stay there especially after hearing the price and the comfortableness that he may receive.

The landlady also deceives Billy with her looks. Dahl pictures her as about forty-five or fifty years old woman with a warm welcoming smile. He also adds several more qualities that make readers and Billy believes she is a nice woman with an odd and mysterious aura. The landlady is described as *has “around pink face and very gentle blue eyes”* and “*small, white, quickly moving hands and red-finger-nails*” – these depictions make it difficult for Billy to take her as a dangerous woman. In fact, the landlady acts pleasant and friendly to Billy that he begins to picture her as a motherly figure.

The image of the landlady is one of the most intriguing aspects of the story. This lovely woman with kind eyes and gentle smiles can easily make readers’ blood run cold in their veins without fail as she is illustrated as a perfect psychopath by Roald Dahl. That mask of friendliness and motherly care hides lunacy, absolute cruelty, and malice. The most

disturbing fact about her is that – according to the landlady – she doesn't do anything wrong. It is simply about her passion as being a skilful taxidermist. The woman looks at Billy, not as a person but a perfect addition and latest exhibit to her ridiculous collection. His white teeth, nice skin, and youth make him the best candidate, in the landlady's opinion. Although, this means the landlady has achieved her purpose – deceiving Billy with her words and actions until he trusts her. Billy thought that the landlady is just “dotty”, but the reality proves to be more dreadful.

Then, the landlady appears to be thoughtful and inattentive with Billy's comfort – she prepares the warm bed sheets and invites him for a cup of warm tea and biscuits in front of the fireplace. Although Billy's attention is still on the missing guests, stuffed animals in front of him and the bitter almonds taste from his tea, he is still oblivious to the whole situation. However, the reality is different. Throughout all the deceptions from the appearances that the landlady portrays, she is actually preparing Billy to be the next victim of her collection by poisoning the tea with potassium cyanide to kill him. Later, she will add Billy in her room as a sort of museum-ready with the other two missing guests since years ago.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

It is a successful horror and mysterious short story written by Roald Dahl. He excellently writes a perfect scary story without ghosts, werewolves, aliens or any other monsters. Powerfully crafting this story, Dahl through his intentional use of description, dark humour, interesting and witty language, and wicked plot twist development at every turn, compel the readers to interact with this story on an emotional level. This will heighten the reader's experience in reading this intense short story and creates tension in the readers' mind.

This story, despite being beautifully written leaves a rather strange yet mindboggling aftertaste as the author leaves the readers with no answer. We, the readers don't know whether Billy will be able to escape an awful fate or no. It is as if he let the readers decide what fate we would want for Billy. I must say that the odd smell of the tea prepared by the landlady is Dahl's final gift to the readers. It is a smart, witty move as a simple warm cup of tea can seal your fate forever.