Short Story Review

Cliodhna Ni Mheadhra

The Landlady – Roald Dahl

Being honest, I don’t read as much as I should. Not nearly as much as I’d like to. I tend to claim it’s because I don’t have the time, so reading a short story had immediate appeal for me. Written by Roald Dahl, a king of children’s literature, and only five pages long, The Landlady seemed like a lovely, potentially quaint story that I would probably enjoy.

(As well as being a great way to pass some time in after school study instead of doing maths homework…)

While I was right about enjoying The Landlady – it was a fantastically written, intriguing piece – I could not have been further from the truth with my assumption that it would be a sweet tale about a harmless old lady in the English countryside.

The story begins with an ordinary description of an ordinary businessman on his way to an ordinary business meeting. He is looking for somewhere to stay and, just as one might expect, is directed to a pub, The Bell and Dragon. So far, nothing out of the ordinary.

However, an air of mystery arises when Billy, the main character, is seemingly drawn towards a quiet B&B, by a force outside his control. We immediately start to feel uncomfortable, as though something bad is about to happen, but we’re not quite sure what it could be. This feeling of unease and uncertainty lingers throughout the story, and is the reason why I enjoyed The Landlady so much. The landlady herself appears first as a “terribly nice”, welcoming lady, but we become increasingly wary of her and her intentions as the story continues until we are left with the feeling that there is undoubtedly something creepy about her and her empty house.

As the phrase coined by American entertainer P.T. Barnum goes, “always leave them wanting more”. With The Landlady’s intrigue, continuous sense of foreboding and somewhat abrupt, unexplained ending, Roald Dahl has achieved just that. I have never before found myself so irritated after reading a story. I wanted so much to find out what had happened to the landlady’s two previous guests, to the point of trying to look them up on Google in an attempt to find old newspaper articles explaining the mystery, only to remember that they are fictional characters.

If The Landlady had been a film, I would have been on the edge of my seat throughout, and I’m sure there would have been a moment of uncomfortable silence from the audience after the unresolved ending. After reading the last page, and then re-reading it in the hope of finding a sentence I might have missed that would explain Billy’s fate, I thought about the story for the rest of the evening, recommending it to anyone I spoke to. I had been absorbed by Roald Dahl’s incredible storytelling, and I don’t think The Landlady is a story I will forget in the near future.

The feelings evoked in the reader by The Landlady make it one of the best short stories I have ever read, if not the best. Roald Dahl has managed, in just a few pages, to achieve what many writers could not in a few hundred pages. He has captured the imagination of his audience and has undoubtedly “left them wanting more”. I would recommend The Landlady to anyone over the age of twelve, as I think it would not be fully appreciated by younger children, and anybody who assumes they are too old for a story by Roald Dahl is wrong. I have already forced it upon my family and friends because I think everyone should read it – I cannot stress enough how brilliant I think it is. It has reignited my love of reading, which to me, is the sign of an excellent short story.

Short Story Review

“The Landlady”

AUTHOR: Roald Dahl

BY: Lisa Murphy 1A

RATING: 3/5 stars

“The Landlady” is an exciting and mysterious tale about the very strange places, and even stranger people encountered by one young man in the quiet and unfamiliar town of Bath. All is not as it seems and things take a strange turn when he finds himself staying in a bed and breakfast which may be hiding more fantastic secrets than the stuffed animals and dotty old landlady would have him believe…

“The Landlady” is a story about Billy Weaver, a young man who moves to bath to start a new career as a businessman. Inexplicably drawn to stay in a cosy looking bed and breakfast, Billy soon finds that all is not as it seems, and that the mysterious landlady may be hiding an unimaginable secret.

This story contains interesting characters, such as the unusual and slightly batty old landlady, who seems kind and generous at first yet soon turns weird and evasive. Why does she talk about her only two other guests as if they were prized possessions of hers? And when she starts to asses Billy as if recruiting him for something, can he trust her?

This story will have the reader guessing right to the end what crazy new discoveries will be revealed next and is full of suspense and mystery.

I thought that “The Landlady” was an enjoyable read. The plot was simple yet interesting and left the reader wanting more.

Unfortunately, the ending was a disappointment. Throughout the story the reader develops a sense that something strange is going on, yet this mystery is not developed and the ending leaves a huge question mark lingering.

However Dahl’s simple yet clever writing style and the light-hearted and engaging plot make this story a great read for younger readers.