

The way in which h g
wells has conveyed
the element of fear in
the red room



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the following essay, I will be examining the way in which H G Wells has conveyed the element of fear in The Red Room. In answering the question, I shall focus closely on certain points concerning fear and assess how successful the writer's methods in conveying this are. I will also, during the course of my essay, bid to include as many necessary quotations to help back up my points. The Red Room is a nineteenth century short story that examines the way that someone's life crosses with others' to dramatic effect.

It is taken from the anthology of short stories " Telling Tales," that combines terrifying and sometimes mysterious tales. As an alternative to outlining the setting of the story, the writer chooses to open with a dialogue, directly between the narrator and a man with a withered arm. He is accompanied by an old woman with her eyes fixed on a fire and the later appearance of a man covered by a shade, described also as more bent, wrinkled and aged than the first person. The tone for a formidable and gloomy encounter is set when the narrator (also the protagonist of the piece) implies that " it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me." Contradicting the narrators positive state of mind, the man with the withered arm emphatically remarks that it is his own choosing, suggesting that he is not responsible for the narrator's intentions of entering a haunted room.

This old fashioned phrase is repeated three times throughout the story for emphasis, clearly indicating that the old man is not pressuring the narrator into anything. Even at such an early stage, we become curious concerning the writer's artful style of writing, knowing little about the man with the withered arm and his possible involvement in the events yet to follow. The <https://assignbuster.com/the-way-in-which-h-g-wells-has-conveyed-the-element-of-fear-in-the-red-room/>

man with the withered arm is therefore, at this stage the subject of Wells's successful build up of dramatic suspense and fear. From the outset, the narrator is portrayed as someone rather composed and optimistic concerning the apparent adventure awaiting him, indicating, "I have come into the business with an open mind." The old characters, on the other hand, reflect the judgement that the place, in itself, is old and gruelling.

Some of the adjectives used by the writer, for instance, to reveal the narrator's uncomfortable and insecure state of mind, are words you would normally associate with a haunted room, i. e. gaunt, grotesque, and monstrous. The narrator's mood of insecurity makes him feel edgy, remaining intent however, on entering the haunted room. He initiates, "If, said I, you will show me this haunted room of yours, I will make myself comfortable there." I remain perplexed at this stage as to how a haunted room could possibly be comfortable for anyone and therefore sceptical concerning his over confidence.

The writer's build up of fear to the point when the narrator finally sets out on his journey is fascinating, succeeding in his attempts to grip and leave you in a state of apprehension. His interaction with the other characters has aroused the audience's fears due to their vagueness in behaviour and negative attitude towards the narrator's ambitions. The oddness of the man with the withered arm and the three pensioners in general also leaves the narrator feeling edgy. He reveals, on page 3, that in spite of his effort to keep himself at a matter of fact phase, he was affected. He is therefore powerless, at this point, to do little about easing his fears. This may suggest

that he is morally weak, leaving you fearful as to the events still to follow and how they will be dealt with.

He subsequently sets out on his journey, alone with the aid of his candle, down the echoing and chilly passage. The language from this point onwards becomes vividly effective when charting the narrator's thoughts and fears in his increasingly deranged state of mind. The importance of keeping sedate, however, is enlightened when Wells writes, " But with the effort I sent such thoughts to the right-about". He subsequently proceeds down a chilly and dusty subterranean passage, suggesting a gloomy atmosphere in contrast to the chatty, fire lit surroundings he was previously in.

The importance of keeping fear at bay is stressed here when the narrator stops at the landing, agitated by a rustling he thinks he has heard and only when completely satisfied with the silence, proceeds. This suggests that the narrator is in a precise and observant state of mind as he attempts to keep himself together. Fear here is built up through the surroundings, personified through Well's' experimenting of sight and sound symbolised through the subterranean passage and the noise the narrator believes he has heard. The narrator herein after stops again, " I was about to advance, and stopped abruptly," due to having the impression that someone was crouching to waylay him after distinguishing a shadow from what we are told is a bronze group. This confirms a message about the narrator's cautious and slightly confused state of mind. He attempts to consolidate the predicament by reaching for his revolver " Then, with my hand in my pocket that held my revolver, I advanced.

..” provided the shadow was something disagreeable, in which case the revolver would be his defence. His fears, ultimately, are relieved for the time being when a Ganymede and Eagle glistening in the moonlight enlighten him. Wells’ language remains direct, closely examining the narrator’s exasperating situation while successfully developing the story’s content. Before the audience gets to catch their breath, the narrator comes across a porcelain Chinaman that startles him.

The writer reminds us of the shadowy atmosphere as the narrator moves up the steps to the red room, again with the aid of the candles as his comfort. He proceeds by opening the door of the red room rather hastily, with his “ face half-turned to the pallid silence of the landing,” suggesting that his mind is only half employed with the prospect of the red room and that his fears are building the tension. When entering the room, the story’s tone changes completely as the narrator begins to impart some knowledge of past incidents that occurred, raising his own suspicions about the place and consequently alarming the audience as to what lies in store for him. His fears become increasingly critical when philosophising, “.

.. one could well understand the legends that had sprouted in its black corners, its germinating darkness.” Despite the candle remaining his biggest asset in consolidating his fears, however, not even that is powerful enough to help him see as far as the opposite side of the room as Wells points out on page four.

The narrator continues his quest by systematically examining the place, “ dispel the fanciful suggestions of its obscurity before they obtained a hold

upon me” suggesting that the uncertainties were gradually defeating him, regardless of his efforts. He tries to ease his fears by tucking up the valances of the bed, opening the curtains wide, pulling up the blinds to examine the fastenings of several windows. He discovers two big mirrors; each with a pair of sconces bearing candles, which he lights one after the other. This symbolises that the dark was acting as a burden in easing his fears and that the candles’ requirement was imminent, further clarified when he lights a fire to keep down any disposition to shiver. The narrator later admits that his examination of the room had done him good but he “ still found the remoter darkness of the place, and its perfect stillness too stimulating for the imagination.” This implies that his fears had been eased slightly despite his state of mind remaining in tatters.

He then detects an echoing of the stair and crackling of the fire, which he admits was no sort of comfort for him. This once more reminds us of his perceptive state of mind and sensual capacity. He again uses his candles to observe a shadow in the alcove, which his mind suggests, could be living thing. For the first in the story, the narrator communicates his emotions and state of mind to the audience “ By this time I was in a state of considerable nervous tension, although to my reason there was no adequate cause for the condition. My mind, however, was perfectly clear.

” This reassures us of his steady and alert approach in dealing with his fears, despite the uncertainty of its impact on him. In order to pass the time there, he begins to string some rhymes together, some, of which he speaks aloud, only to frighten himself. Subsequently, he continues the adventure by using his candles to consolidate his ever-emerging fears. He arranges seventeen of <https://assignbuster.com/the-way-in-which-h-g-wells-has-conveyed-the-element-of-fear-in-the-red-room/>

them to brightly illuminate the room and recites “ It occurred to me that when the ghost came, I could warn him not to trip over them.

” This relieves his fears slightly but also suggests that his state of mind is not ruling out the possibility of a ghost, after earlier discouraging the thought.

The writer skilfully keeps pace with the story by maintaining the tone’s uncertainty as the audience remains gripped by the next prospect awaiting the narrator. The candle in the alcove suddenly goes out after midnight, with the narrator oblivious as to how it happened. The writer’s carefully scheming methods raise the audience’s suspicions and further mount the tensions surrounding the narrator. At the same instinct, the narrator continues to speak aloud and walks across the room in a leisurely manner to relight the corner again. He observes, after turning his head involuntarily for the second time, that two candles were extinguished.

This provokes an immediate reaction, with the narrator rising to his feet, to his own uncertainty “ Odd! I said. Did I do that myself in a flash of absentmindedness?” He continues to inquire and examine the room, reflected through his speaking aloud as part of relaxing himself and consequently fighting off his fears. The writer’s language varies, at times with said I ending the narrators speech and at other times I said, while at the beginning of the story the writer chose to continue the narrators speech after indicating the speaker. I do not believe this has much of an effect on the story, although is interesting to note. The candles continue to go out and the narrator begins to tremble, so much so that he misses the rough paper of the matchbox, as he attempts to ease his fear of the dark. He begins to give up trying to keep fear at bay when he decides to drop the matches on the <https://assignbuster.com/the-way-in-which-h-g-wells-has-conveyed-the-element-of-fear-in-the-red-room/>

iron-bound deedbox, avoiding the delay of striking matches, in vain, as the shadows which he admits he feared and fought had returned.

The narrator is now almost frantic, as he admits, with the horror of the coming darkness. The narrator's deleterious state has left him physically wounded as he pants for breath and bruises himself against the table. His candle consequently rolls away from him but he realises that the fire is still there and attempts to relight it again. His candle, however, falls from the narrator's hand and must consequently flung out his arms in a vain effort to thrust the ponderous blackness away from him, before running for the door as a means of escape from his fears, which it seems have finally defeated him. The writer here ends the narrator's memorable conflict with his fears and welcomes back the other characters. The narrator opens his eyes in daylight, finding his head roughly bandaged as the man with the withered arm watching his face.

The narrator's memory has momentarily lapsed, as he cannot recall the event he had just experienced and the characters he had previously met before setting out on his adventure. He is enlightened by the man with the withered arm and slowly recovers his memory. He empathises with the narrator when asking, " You believe me now that the room is haunted?" The writer points out that he spoke as someone who grieves for a broken friend, while at the beginning of the story he was portrayed as a possessive intruder, doing little to encourage the narrator in his quest. Notice how the narrator is also changed at the end of the story, after earlier being portrayed differently. He has transformed from an optimistic and assured individual, eagerly anticipating the ambitious prospect of entering a supposedly

<https://assignbuster.com/the-way-in-which-h-g-wells-has-conveyed-the-element-of-fear-in-the-red-room/>

haunted room into someone both disillusioned and physically wounded from his nightmarish experience. The story closes as it began, in a chatty and reflective manner as both the narrator and the other characters try to make some sense of his experience.

He admits that the room was haunted despite any real evidence suggesting that it actually was. Ironic also to note because the effect the narrator's experience had on him was due to the build up of fear through the confusion of his surroundings. The entirety of his adventure was spent fighting off what his psychological state of mind suggested was a ghost or something disagreeable, despite it being fear all along causing him to react in the way he did. The narrator demands " There is neither ghost of earl nor ghost of countess in that room, there is no ghost there at all; but worse, far worse..

." He then philosophises that it fear, the worst of all things that haunt poor mortal man, that is, in all its nakedness. This theory horrifies the audience and gives us a better overview of the narrator's emotions, which portray fear as an ultimate evil. It was fear that followed him through the corridor, fought against him in the room, not a ghost, or any living creature. The last few sentences find the story at its most profound and shocking as the writer expresses his feelings to us once more.

" You can feel it even in the daytime, even of a bright summer's day, in the hangings, in the curtains, keeping behind you however you face it. In the dusk it creeps along the corridor and follows you, so you dare not turn." This clarifies the narrator's frustrations and improbability of his situation, as he is unable to defeat or do much about overturning the fate of his predicament.