

The signalman, the man with the twisted lip and the red room essay sample



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This essay will compare and contrast the settings which the writers have chosen for their stories in 'The Signalman', 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' and 'The Red Room'. In 'The Signalman', the narrator as he descends into a railway track, becomes involved in a complex and confounding situation. The reader is gripped in suspense following the plot which involves the signalman being haunted by a ghost, and with each time the ghost appeared, death follows. The story concludes with the death of the signalman himself, indicating that the appearance of the ghost was an omen of his approaching demise.

The Man With the Twisted Lip' sees Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson absorbed in a perplexing and singular case involving a woman and her missing husband. It began as she walked down a street looked up at a window and saw her husband who shrieked and went immediately out of sight. When she and the police went up to the room where he was last seen, they could not find him. Instead they encountered a scary, distrustful beggar with a horribly distorted face. The reader feels the tension building as the detectives try to solve this unnerving case and there is a sigh of relief when the case is solved.

The solution is however an unusual one, and to some extent, quite amusing. Conan Doyle has done this to release the uneasiness and tension built up in the reader. Whilst the narrator in 'The Red Room', presuming himself unafraid of any type of ghost or the supernatural, becomes overwhelmed by fear in the sinister and menacing atmosphere of the Red Room, a fear which disturbs the reader. His experience in the room keeps the reader in suspense

as the numerous candles which he had lighted goes out one by one. All three stories are written during the reign of Queen Victoria.

It was during the reign of Queen Victoria that a time of invention, transformation and progress emerged. Dickens' 'The Signalman' was inspired by the creation of the railway, which marked the advance of technology. Dickens used this as his setting to give a synchronous effect. The location of his setting was a remote, obscure signalbox which was part of the railway network during that period, imparting a sense of historical context. As well as this, the signalman in question was oddly well educated. Such a person working in a lower class profession is unusual as it contradicts the strict social divisions of the time.

It is significant how Dickens chooses to create his setting which combines the mysterious upernatural with a contemporary railway setting. This has given the story an extraordinary and startling effect. 'The Signalman' was written in 1866. The year before Dickens was involved in a railway accident whilst he had been travelling to London. It had derailed at high speed and the result was the death of ten people and many more were injured. This has obviously provided the inspiration to his story. 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' was one of the Sherlock Holmes adventures, written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1891.

The series itself started in 1887 and oddly enough, Jack the Ripper committed his horrendous and infamous murders the following year. He was the first serial killer Britain had known and the place where he committed his murders, Whitechapel, had greatly influenced Conan Doyle's settings. The

main thoroughfares of Whitechapel were connected by a network of narrow, dark and crooked lanes where everyone apparently containing some headquarters of infamy. It is not surprising then that Jack the Ripper was able to escape and the crime rate was overly high.

The police were criticised heavily by the public for their inefficiency and incompetence in not capturing the Ripper. With this in mind, Conan Doyle created an amateur detective with excellent deduction methods who solved complicated cases for the incompetent police. The East End of London during that period was an hostile environment, densely polluted by smoke from factory chimneys and full of slum housings where workers lived. Diseases spread quickly and because medicines were not so advanced, doctors prescribed opium-based laudanum only to those who could afford it. This is why addicts in The Bar of Gold were upper class gentlemen.

And so, Conan Doyle created his setting atmosphere to contemplate the social events of the time. 'The Red Room' written by H. G. Wells in 1894 centres on Gothic themes: the supernatural and the quintessence of fear. Its purpose was to terrify the reader and to put emphasis on mystery and horror. Gothic literature spanned the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and its main features were witchcraft, curses, hidden rooms especially in derelict and eerie castles or abbeys, and the ones Wells used particularly were grotesque characters, Lorraine Castle, haunted rooms, ghosts, superstition, previous deaths and curses.

The story was also the most recent of all three stories however Wells had chosen not to reflect in the setting the time it was written in. He had done

this in order to explore the ageless nature of fear and convey in his contents a timeless quality. The description of his setting was one that was old-fashioned and ancient. The tale is atavistic similar to other Gothic literature (Wells had actually used the word 'atavistic' in the story) as it made very little references to the period of the 1890's.

Therefore, because of the heavy influence of Gothic literary traditions, Wells in 'The Red Room', had purposely been elusive about its precise time and location. There are many features in 'The Signalman' which Dickens used to make his railway setting menacing and ominous. It begins with the narrator calling out to the signalman: "Halloa! Below there!". Although the importance of this calling is unclear at first, later on in the story it has a supernatural significance. The ghost who haunted the signalman is known to call out "Halloa! Below there!". This element of supernatural happenings conveys an unsettling and discomfoting ambience.

Dickens used many other techniques to create the same effect, such as the contrast of light and darkness. At the beginning of the story the narrator is 'steeped in the glow of an angry sunset'. It distinguishes a distinction between the red sunset at the top of the cutting and the darkness in the trench below. The sunset is personified as 'angry' and this introduces a sense of foreboding and apprehension to the story as it is not a calm and peaceful sunset. Suddenly, there is 'a vague vibration in the earth and air' then 'a violent pulsation' and an 'oncoming rush' and 'vapour'.

This is the effects of the train and it suggest that it is like an earth-shaking monster. The 'vapour' is the train's steam and 'violent' hints of a hostile

creature, creating a frightening air. Dickens then applied an element of peril when the narrator looks down upon ' a rough descending path', in order to emphasise on the steepness of his decent, leaving the natural world far above. Next the narrator described the ' cutting was extremely deep and unusually precipitous' and as he descends ' through clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I went down'.

Dickens put in the element of descent into the significant place and also enhanced the menacing atmosphere by using sensory descriptions. As well as this it is written in first person narrative so that the reader could relate to the narrator's experience. Once the narrator has descended, he describes the railway ' as solitary and dismal a place as I ever saw' revealing a remote and despondent surrounding. Dickens further applied sensory descriptions to evoke a disturbing milieu when the narrator sees ' a dripping wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all but a strip of sky' on one side of the railway.

Dampness, cold and unpleasantness are conveyed in ' dripping' and ' wet', whereas ' jagged stone' implies the danger in the area as the stone is sharp. In this perspective there is a ' crooked prolongation of this great dungeon' and this adds to the powerful sense of imprisonment and mystery. The emphasis on light and dark is shown in the other direction of the railway where there is ' a gloomy red light and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel'. Dickens used an oxymoron in ' gloomy red light' - ' red' and ' light' are usually bright and vibrant colours and to be described as ' gloomy' creates an ominous and depressing mood.

This is built up in 'the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel'. Oppressive imagery is introduced in 'a barbarous, epressing and forbidding air'. The fact that the air was being personified in this way is so that Dickens could make a more realistic impact on the reader and that the atmosphere is more frightening and menacing. There is also 'so little sunlight' that 'it had an earthly, deadly smell'. This is further usage of light/darkness and senses. Dickens use the words 'earthly' and 'deadly' because it is linked with death and decay, giving a repugnant atmosphere.

The narrator then feels the 'cold wind rushed through, that it struck chill to me'. Again, because it is in first person narrative, it is as if we ould also feel the cold wind rushed through and that it has also struck a chill to us.

Because of the spookyness of the railway, the narrator felt 'as if I had left the natural world', the similie used here helps to convey that supernatural forces have power over the setting. The signalbox was described as 'a lonesome post' giving a full extent of how isolated the place was.

The Man With the Twisted Lip', unlike 'The Signalman' has a clear and identifiable geography of where the place is. Conan Doyle had choosen his setting in 'Upper Swandam Lane', which is described as 'a vile alley lurking behind the high harves'. Already a negative and repugnant atmosphere is conveyed and there is something of a sinister nature in the way the alley is 'lurking behind'. There is 'a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave' which introduces an element of descent to a significant place.

In many ways the description is similar to Dickens's as the descent is also 'steep' to emphasize the contrast between the world above and the sinister place in which the narrator is about to go down. There is also the colour 'black', associated with mystery and evil, and also 'mouth of a cave' seemed to liken the gap as a mouth of a huge monster. Conan Doyle uses this to establish fear in the reader and to give an ominous feel as to what would happen next. As the narrator, Dr. Watson, passed down, he gives details on the steps which were 'worn hollow' by the 'ceaseless tread of drunken feet'.

It is written in first person narrative, just as in 'The Signalman', so the reader could relate to Watson's experience. It is as if we too are observing the steps as he descends. It is unlike 'The Signalman' however because the descent was wet and precipitous. Here it is 'worn hollow' which implies that this is a run-down place and the fact that feet were personified as 'drunken' gives the idea that the people who dwell there are manic and disturbed. The narrator continues to make his way 'by the light of a flickering oil lamp'.

The light therefore is not constant and so there is a sense of eeriness in the atmosphere. When he has made his way into the main location, the air was 'thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke'. Dickens had also used oppressive imagery to make the reader feel weighed down upon. However here it is with 'brown opium smoke' so the air he is breathing in is unnatural and discomfiting. The narrator sees 'through the gloom ... dimly ... a glimpse of bodies lying in strange, fantastic poses'. Like Dickens, Conan Doyle had used the word 'gloom' to build a depressing atmosphere.

However, unlike Dickens, he has put people in his setting, ones with ' bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back and chins pointing upwards'.

There is something deranged and disturbing in their pose that the reader becomes frightened by. It is as if they are possessed. They also have ' dark, lack-lustre eyes', which gives the impression that they are not normal and in a rather strange state. Conan Doyle continues to use light and darkness to maintain a unsettling atmosphere. The narrator describes ' out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light' which gives images of hell.

This is similar to Dickens's way of describing his settings, they both used ' red' and ' light' as it signifies danger. The people in the opium den spoke in ' a strange, low, monotonous voice'. It gives a sense of moodiness in the atmosphere and oddness as they are not speaking in a normal way - ' their conversation coming in gushes ... then suddenly tailing off into silence'. The effects of the opium has obviously affected the way they are and their minds are elsewhere. The narrator had to hold his breath ' to keep out the vile stupefying fumes of the drug', the senses of smell help to create a realistic setting.

When Dr. Watson had left the opium den with his friend Sherlock Holmes, they rode on a carriage ' through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets'. Even when they are out of the opium den, the mood is still depressing. They rode past a bridge ' with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us'. The river here is ' murky' shows the unpleasantness of the area and ' sluggish' suggest that it is slimy and ickening. Throughout the story, there is no element of the supernatural, as there is in ' The Signalman'. H. G. <https://assignbuster.com/the-signalman-the-man-with-the-twisted-lip-and-the-red-room-essay-sample/>

Wells's 'The Red Room', like the other two stories, is written in the first person narrative.

This again helps the reader to understand what the narrator is going through. It is similar to 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' as it includes characters who are deformed or deranged in some way. The narrator at the beginning of the story is talking with an old man with a 'withered arm', and an old woman with 'pale eyes wide open', this put emphasis on their odd and weird appearances. Then here is the sense of sound: 'the door creaked on its hinges'. The use of onomatopoeia makes the sound more realistic to the reader.

A second old man entered and he was described as 'more bent, more wrinkled, more aged even than the first' and his lower lip was 'half averted, hung pale and pink from his decaying yellow teeth', again there is another deformed character. The room which they are gathered had 'deep toned, old fashioned furniture' and 'sombre reds and blacks', which ensures a gloomy atmosphere with a touch of Gothic imagery. The colours 'red' and 'black' were also used in the other two stories. 'The conveniences of the room... were ghostly' enhances the spiritual terrors of the atmosphere.

When the narrator bids his strange companions goodnight and makes his way into the haunted room, he goes through a 'chilly, echoing passage'. Although unlike 'The Signalman' and 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' there is no element of descent, it is similar to both stories in the sense that there is an unsettling atmosphere when the narrator makes his way into the main location. There is a similarity in the fact that all the significant places in all

three stories are located in the nderground or trench, the narrator here is walking in a ' subterranean passage'.

All three writers had done this as they were influenced by the idea that hell exists under the ground. There is, comparable to Conan Doyle's story, the flickering of candles and shadows: ' my candle flared and made the shadows cower and quiver'. There is something frightening in the way the shadows move so which creates an eerie ambience. From the window the moonlight ' picked out everything in vivid black shadow or silvery illumination'. Moon comes from the latin word ' lunar', which is associated with the word ' lunatic'. The words ' vivid black shadow' is an oxymoron and ' silvery illumination' gives a ghostly effect.

It is similar to ' The Signalman' because it use of supernatural elements, but its way of portraying so are different. In ' The Signalman', a real ghost actually appears but here there are no ghosts. Unlike ' The Man With the Twisted Lip' and ' The Signalman', there is no use of sensory descriptions in ' The Red Room'. The sinister atmosphere is potrayed in the location through the way the numerous candles went out and the shadows room. As the narrator looks about ' the large sombre room', he comments on ' its shadowy window bays, its recesses and lcoves'. These contribute to the Gothic atmosphere.

Then we here ' the shadow in the alcove' had an ' undefinable quality of a presence'. We get the impression that it is alive and so its ' presence' is frightening. Later when the narrator had lit more candles in the room, after a while they began to go out on its own accord ' and the black shadow sprang

back to its place there' in the alcove. The use of light and shadow is similar to Conan Doyle's setting, and the word 'sprang' gives the shadow something of a menacing nature. The narrator turns and sees the darkness as he saw 'the unexpected presence of a stranger'.

Again 'presence' is used and this is linked with ghost and spirits. It also enhances the eeriness of the room. The shadow seems to have a will of its own, it took 'another step towards me', it is as if it is about to overtake him. The candles continue to go out like 'a volley', which emphasizes the quickness it has done so without his control. The narrator turns to the fire, where it was 'splashing red reflections upon the furniture' giving the impression of blood stains. In a way the darkness is oppressing him - 'ponderous blackness' which is weighing him down.

However in the other two stories, oppressive imagery is used through describing the air. As we have analyzed above there are comparables and contrasts in the settings which the writers have chosen in 'The Signalman', 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' and 'the Red Room'. They have, undeniably, all used many techniques to ensure that the settings are unearthly, disconcerting and disturbing to the reader. Because all three stories were written in the Victorian times, there were either some references to the social events of the time or influences from Gothic literature which spanned the century before.

In 'The Signalman', Charles Dickens made use mostly of the elements of the supernatural to establish a spooky and ominous atmosphere. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' made most use of oppressive

imagery shadows/ flickering candles. Whereas in 'The Red Room' by H. G. Wells, the negative atmosphere is conveyed mostly through description of light and shadows in the room. All three writers has successfully developed tension within the reader. This is done through the instilment of fear - 'the worst of all things that haunt poor mortal man'.