

# The red room, the monkey's paw and the speckled band essay sample

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



With Close references to the texts you have been studying, explore how the authors of The Red Room, The Monkey's Paw and The Speckled Band establish and develop gothic setting and atmosphere.

The Monkey's Paw, The Red Room and the Speckled Band were short stories written in 1892 - 1902 that adopted a style of Gothic Literature. During the late 19th century and early 20th century this style of literature grew to become very popular. This was due to the change in lifestyle during the Victorian period and was supported by many historical aspects. Additionally, the 1870s the School Act was introduced which introduced more literate people into society therefore increasing the demand for books. The Speckled Band was the first, of the three books, to be written in 1892 by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Not only does it include gothic elements but another main theme that runs through the short story is mystery. The Red Room was the second to be written in 1896 by H. G. Wells and it included mystery, gothic elements in addition to a ghost story.

The setting of The Red Room helps to express different themes because an ancient castle is used. The use of a castle is a common setting used in gothic novels because it dated back from the medieval ages when gothic architecture was popular. The Monkey's Paw by W. W. Jacobs was the last short story written out of the three that were studied. This was written as a crime investigation in 1902 but the short story included different gothic aspects, for example, the use of exoticness causing unease. The Monkey's Paw was brought from India which was ruled under the British Empire during the era; Indian items were often thought to be exotic and strange. In the

three stories the authors have made effective use of irony and gothic devices which include contrast and pathetic fallacy.

During the Victorian era there were many things that were thought to be gothic; these were often things that were ancient, unfamiliar and the unknown. In a classic gothic story the setting strongly influences the necessary horror that is created. All three stories use different aspects of the gothic era to create their setting. In the Red Room, the position of the room inside the house is very unusual and it is therefore hidden from most people.

' There were candles in the sockets on sconces, and whatever dust had gathered ... evenly it was invisible to moonlight.' This section shows us that the passage to the Red Room was made so no-one dared to enter and its aim was a success as the paragraph shows everything appeared to be untouched in years because there is a sense of isolation. The description of content of the Red Room such as ' scones' evidently depict that decorations were unusually outdated for the protagonist. Moreover, gas light had already become part of average people's homes so this was an unusual sight. The use of setting is very powerful as it makes the protagonist feel very uncomfortable as he is surrounded by the un-known. Although, in The Red Room there is a simple plot, the use of many literature devices makes it an effective gothic story.

The Monkey's Paw is set in 20th century London. The home of the Whites is in the suburban area of London where a lot of industrialisation was taking place. The conditions of the living area are shown when Mr White exclaims, '

The path is a bog, and the road's a torrent'. The use of the suburbs on London is essential for the story as it demonstrates the era and place the Whites were living in. This also demonstrates that the street was incomplete and that made the area look filthy. Although The Whites lived in an incomplete street they lived in a Laburnum Villa which was considered to be a brand new home. Using an ordinary setting related more with the reader. However, as Laburnum Villas were modern buildings the setting was not traditional for a gothic story.

Later on in the story, Herbert (the son of Mr and Mrs White) has a tragic death; this leads to the insanity of the mother. Consequently when the door bell rings, the mother answers the door hoping for Herbert but no-one appears. There is confusion to the reasons why this could happen include: the Monkey's paw granting the wish or someone playing on the street. But because of the terrible state of the setting it is not possible for the person to hide. This leaves an element of mystery within the cause of wishes coming true. In the 20th century most people did not believe in ghosts.

When these three short stories were written it was important for the reader to be terrified by them. M. R. James was a very famous author of ghost stories who lived from 1862-1936 and he came up with five main points that helped make a ghost/gothic story effective. One of his points was to include no explanation of the machinery. This point has been considered in The Monkey's Paw because of the mysterious ending. Once the reader has finished the story they have to find a solution to the absurd ending on their own therefore making it more personal and more terrifying. The over

crowding of cities in the 20th century made it very claustrophobic but on the edge of town the Whites are isolated. Thus, after Herbert's death, the parents felt lonely and unsafe.

The main setting in 'The Speckled Band' is an old ancestral House of Stoke Moran described in the story as 'building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion and two curved wings, like claws of a crab, thrown out on each side'. A manor in ruins was a very typical setting for gothic stories as it helped tell the background of the character that lived inside and the history behind each imperfection. The comparison of the manor to the claws of the crab gives an ominous ideology of being trapped: Helen Stoner is trapped by her sinister father because she fears her death. There is a sense of foreboding caused by the detailed description of the gothic architecture; the manor is located in the countryside of England thus creating a feeling of isolation. The manor reflects Dr. Roylott's personality: he was a miser who would not have enough money to replace the shattered glass; this helps show how much money is urgently needed.

To create a good piece of gothic literature you must use powerful techniques to help create an eerie atmosphere. The aim of a gothic story is to create terror in the reader's mind. The most effective way to do that is by creating a convincing atmosphere. In the Red Room the atmosphere is created at the beginning with the title. The use of 'red' gives the reader an idea of a claustrophobic atmosphere. The use of the colour in the 'red' room; it is used to help understand the danger of the room as well as being associated with death and blood. In the story there is a lot of atmosphere by

the uses of detailed description of peculiar surroundings. For example, ' that large sombre room with its shadowy window bays, its recesses and alcoves.' this extract helps the reader to imagine what the room would be like and how there is an enforced feeling that something dangerous would happen.

At the beginning of The Red Room the protagonist is with the three elderly people who appear to be very queer and give a sense of preternatural. Their strange behaviour at the beginning of the story gives the reader a sense of unease and expectancy for the unknown. This is shown by the protagonist when he comments on them as being ' grotesque custodians' which shows us that he thought they were bizarre people who were guardians of the property. The elderly people are trying to convince the protagonist into thinking that there are supernatural things happening in the castle. But the protagonist thinks in a modern way and is a superficial observer. This shows great contrast between the old people and the young protagonist. The protagonist also stays un-named throughout the story which adds to the element of mystery.

Once the protagonist has reached the Red Room, all that is contained within the room remind him about death. This is shown when the protagonist describes the room, ' The shadow in the alcove at the end of the in particular, had that indefinable quality of a presence, that odd suggestion of a lurking, living thing,' There is a use of darkness which is what haunts the protagonist's mind and leads him into believing in the supernatural and eventually losing his sanity.

There is a lot of history in the castle associated with. Including, a death of a young duke who fell ' headlong down the steps I had just ascended' and includes a death about a timid wife who had a tragic death due to her husband's jest of frightening her. The use of death adds to the atmosphere because death is something we fear. The Red Room is a psychological story because the cause for the lights going out is a mystery but the protagonist does come to a conclusion which is ' The worst of all things that haunt poor mortal man...and is in all its nakedness-Fear that will not have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason'. The ' fear' is psychological which means it's all in the mind and this makes this short story especially gothic because there is there is not solid answer to what happened in the red room.

In The Monkey's Paw the atmosphere is affected greatly by the mystery around an exotic object from a distant country: the Monkey's Paw. The mysterious tonality is created straight from the title because it sounds unusual and intrigues the reader, plus the mysterious paw sets the timbre. There is use of dramatic irony when Herbert was very sceptical and had great levity about the situation but during the story he is the one who dies. He expresses his rationality when he jokingly says ' I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed'. After the death of Herbert there is a lot of silence between the two parents which builds up tension. This tension helps to create a very gothic atmosphere because there has already been a death and the reader wants to know whether the Monkey's Paw actually is, really, supernatural. The section when there is

knocking on the door, it gets is very tense because of the darkness and the old people's struggle.

This tension has an anti-climax when the mother opens the door to find nothing. Throughout the story there is a theme about fate. When the Whites' wish on the monkey's paw they're instantly playing with fate: because they make a wish which is against their fate. During the sergeant major's visit he makes himself clear about the situation by saying ' It had a spell put on it by an old fakir ... a very holy man He wanted to show that fate rules people's lives, and those who interfered with it did so in their own sorrow.'

Throughout the whole story there is a fight with fate as the Whites: wish for a son, wish for their son alive and finally a wish for their son dead! During this era the British Empire was thriving and the other countries were kept under control with the armies. This meant that many people would visit India on a daily basis. An example of this is in the Monkey's Paw; the Sergeant Major was from India. He tells stories about India which were: ' spoke of wild scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues and strange peoples.' Indian items were often seemed to be strange, exotic and new.

The Speckled Band is narrated in first-person through the eyes of Dr Watson, who is Sherlock Holmes' assistant. The advantage is that the reader can understand plot and storyline with greater understanding and relate to the story more personally because Dr Watson is an average man. He is often left in the dark and doesn't understand the cause of the mysterious actions. This helps to build up the atmosphere because the reader is left in suspense till



the very end of the story. Another reason the reader can relate to the story is because it is authentic. It uses real location, realistic cases and has no supernatural but instead uses strangeness and exoticness.

This is against M. R. James rule for the perfect ghost story because it explains the machinery. On the other hand, this story is not a ghost story but has a greater theme of a detective fiction. Other things add to the exoticness in the atmosphere including things Dr Roylott keep on his grounds near his manor house. Dr Roylott has gypsies which were considered to be dangerous and were outcast. There is a large contrast between the ' vagabonds' and the Englishness of the setting. He brought many things from the outside which include the Indian animals. The baboon and the cheetah added a sense of danger and un-safeness.

The cheetah and gypsies were also used as red-herrings because the cheetah had black speckles all over him and the gypsies wore spotted handkerchiefs round their neck. The exotic animals were used to kill Dr Roylott in the end. This added to strange ending instead of the common mysterious endings most authors used. ' Out of a clump of bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child'; in this extract the baboon runs by Dr Watson and Holmes. What is makes it all the more frightening is the way Conan-Doyle has described the baboon as a hideous and distorted child. These are powerful adverbs add to the variety of gothic.

Literature is always affecting and is affected by the society that it is written in. Due to the society of Victorian times gothic literature became very

popular. All three short stories reflect the society of the late 19th century and early 20th century. One thing that is clear is that Victorians were obsessed with death. Reasons for this was because they were always surround by death. Overcrowding meant there were many diseases about which lead many people to death also due to the fact that there was poor hygiene on streets which also lead to an epidemic of cholera in 1849. Death became a common part of people's lives, especially in the working-class. This is shown in the Monkey's Paw when Herbert's parents have a funeral in a town nearby where there was space to make more graveyards due to popular demand. Death was seen as a taboo subject but it became more embraced than feared. This meant Victorian people had aristocratic funeral processes and had significant graves to remember the death by. During this era religion was always challenged by the new growth in science.

Evolution was one main aspect that had been discovered in the 19th century; this new concept challenged the Christian concept of Adam & Eve. Due to the weakening in traditional religious beliefs many people became agnostic and atheist. H. G. Wells was an atheist, this reflects in his work and when he wrote The Red Room because it hints about spiritualism. New beliefs started emerging because of science development which lead to the growth in spiritualism. Spiritualism is the belief that the soul of the dead can communicate with the living. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became interested in spiritualism for the first time in 1881. He wrote The Speckled Band in 1892, his story was very radical and all the clues were found due to facts, not beliefs which shows that Conan Doyle was not sure if to believe in God.

Spiritualist believed that there was life after death but they also thought that it was possible to communicate with dead. All three short stories are affected by the historical content of when the era. When the stories were written the writers were affected by what was happening around them.

The Industrial revolution took place during the 18th and 19th century. During this period there was a huge growth manufacturing, mining and factory work in general. . Due to this there was a lot of urbanisation growth because people wanted to live near their places of work. There is reference to the Industrial Revolution in the Monkeys Paw: ' Caught in the Machinery'. It was very common for young children to get caught in machinery because there were no uses of safety guards; this often happened in textile industries. There was a huge crime wave in the 19th century which introduced society to a new system called metropolitan police.

However in order to catch a crime the policeman would have to have been in the right place at the right time. This made police easy to escape from. This eventually led the police under a lot of controversy. This is demonstrated in the Speckled Band. The short story is effective as a mystery story because Sherlock Holmes was a private detective and not a policeman. The story would not have been effective if Holmes was a policeman because they were not considered to be efficient in helping solve a crime whereas a private detective is. This is demonstrated when Holmes says, ' Fancy having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force!' This shows the low regard for the police.

To create a very good atmosphere and setting for a gothic story you need to use literary devices to develop terror in the readers mind. Different literature devices help to makes particular parts of the stories more effective. Gothic stories are about contrast. In the Red Room there is a lot of contrast between the light and dark. This may seem to come across to the reader in many different ways. The most obvious way is reason and superstition. In the Red Room the protagonist is in the darkness which allows his mind to start believing in the supernatural and the morning when he is woken up by the elderly people he can think rationally again because there is light. In the Monkey's paw there is a contrast between the parents and Herbert because the parents believe the Monkey's Paw has powers where as Herbert is very sceptical and believes that the Monkey's paw granting 3 wishes is a myth.

There is use of dramatic irony in the Monkey's Paw when the messenger to the mother from Herbert's factory says "' Badly Hurt," he said quietly," But he is not in any pain." " Oh, thank God!" said the old woman'. This is dramatic irony because by now the reader knows that Herbert is dead but the mother has yet to find out. Dramatic irony is used because shows the limited nature of human understanding and causes the reader to pause or reflect on that certain moment. The characterisation plays an important role in the Speckled Band because Dr Roylott has important motivation and malevolent intentions which leads him to having a desire to murder both his daughters. Another example of importance of character's personality is in The Red Room.

The protagonist come is a self-confident, modern and is a rational person; ' I come to the business with an open mind'. An open mind is the mark of a good scientist but the narrator is no actually open-minded because he is set out to dispel the myth in the haunted red room. Characterisation is used by the author because she shows the person's view and reflects their personality which affects the whole story plot. The three short stories use different ways to narrate their stories. In the Red Room the narrator remains un-named and tells the story through a first person perspective. This is useful because the inner emotions of the character can be explored and shows the increase in the belief of the supernatural in the narrators mind. In The Monkey's Paw the narration is in third-person.

This is a useful way to narrate a story because the reader often knows more than the character so can predict what the consequences of some actions can be. There is great use of similes in stories contains some very effective similes which include: ' put out his hands like a sightless man' from the Monkey's Paw. The Red Room has many examples of personification which include ' darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye'. There are many uses of literature techniques in the Red Room which include metaphors: ' left an ocean of mystery and suggestion beyond its island of light'. Use of similes, metaphors and personification helps to make descriptions vivid by comparing their subjects with known events or things. Effective methods help readers visualize what is being described making it a more gothic description.

In conclusion the writers of The Speckled Band, The Monkey's Paw and The Red Room establish and develop gothic setting and atmosphere by using a variety of features. The Speckled Band has been kept gothic elements with aspects of mystery within the story. To make it an effective short story Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has employed a sophisticated narrative technique to keep the reader in suspense till the very end of the story. Conan Doyle has also kept the story very authentic to make the plot more realistic by using real locations and popular opinions including the belief the police were incompetent. The Monkey's Paw is about a battle against fate with the mystery of the Monkey's Paw.

It is very effective as a short story because it adopts a lot of ironic features including the third wish being for death of their son which was predicted from the sergeant major. W. W. Jacobs keeps the reader interested by including many social and historical aspects to this story. For example there is large reference to the Industrial revolution and the British Empire.

The Red Room has a very simple plot but has been cleverly written to create an unnerving atmosphere. H. G. Wells has done this by describing the setting in tremendous detail and by using a first person narrative. The first person narrative helps to understand the process going through the protagonist's mind and understanding why the darkness led him into a state of insanity; there is limited view which leaves a mystery into the reason of what happened on the frightening night. All three stories embraced gothic literature in different ways but have done so successfully. Overall, I think these short stories were

very effective and were superbly written for their generation. They are appreciation in this generation and will be acknowledged in years to come.