

Compare how tension is conveyed in "the red room" and "farthing house"



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This essay is written to compare the tension between these two stories, "The Red Room" by H G Wells and the "Farthing House" by Susan Hill. To do this differences and similarities between the stories must be compared, by looking at certain aspects of the story that effects the tension in the stories. These aspects include settings and atmosphere, characters, language, pace, tension and finally say what tension the end brings. In the Red Room, there were few characters as the story mostly focused an isolated character.

It looks at the kinds of encounters with this mythical and legendary ghost that still may or may not be in xistence. The backgrounds of the characters: one was an old man, referred to as the man with the withered arm; the old lady and the man with the shade were the other characters. The old people in the story add tension because they look very old and scary themselves and they keep repeating phrases like "it's of your own choosing" and "tonight of all nights", which is said by the old man with the withered arm. The narrator is a man unlike the other characters in that he is young, skeptical and overconfident. On page three the young man makes it known, that he doesn't believe in such things as haunted rooms and hosts as he boldly states "eight-and-twenty years I have lived, and never a ghost I have ever seen as yet". This suggests that in all his life he has never seen a ghost and that he doesn't believe in such supernatural beings, and has no intention of thinking otherwise or changing his opinion.

However, the narrator then takes a different route in his emotions and his confidence soon changes and this makes him a little insecure. Not only do the elderly people imply that there is a ghost or something lurking around in the Red Room, but they constantly repeat the word ghost throughout the

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story. "Farthing House" also revolves around only a few characters. These characters are Aunt Addy, Mrs. Pearson and the narrator, who has a name of Mrs.

Flower, though it is not often used. Aunt Addy is the person that is currently staying at the Farthing House and the main character is the woman who is going there to see her. Mrs. Pearson was one of the old people that knew about the ghost.

The narrator was calm, sensitive and emotional; we know that she is emotional from such phrases as "overshadowing of sadness". An atmosphere of anxiety and suspense are introduced early in the story of the "Red Room" when a young man visiting an old castle meets with the other characters and they speak about the ghost. In the Farthing House the tension begins early and leaves you wondering what it is the narrator wishes to reveal to the reader. However, the story continues and we are not let into the disclosure until later on. The setting for the "Red Room" was very in keeping with traditional ghost stories. It was set in an old castle deserted by a Countess.

The image of the ghost is set in medieval times where people were dying from the plague and there was a great deal of poverty. It gives the reader an impression of a dark and empty place somewhere where there could be not help for hours. An example of this type of imagery is given by the author, in various parts of the story of the "Red Room" when he mentions objects and places within the house that are not used today and might not have been used for hundreds of years. For example on page six of the "Red Room" it

says " The long, draughts subterranean passage was chilly and dusty; and my candle flared and made the shadows cower and quiver. " The settings add tension and an element of mystery and darkness in a subterranean passage.

It creates the feeling of secrecy and shows that it is isolated from the rest of the castle. Similarly, the reader can see that they still use candles, which are often personified throughout the story as a ghost. It builds up the tension because it gives the idea of another presence in the room that is ghostly. There is also a spiral staircase in the castle that is found in a lot of horror books and films. These are the films where people encounter beasts of the dead and the night, like ghosts, goblins, night stalkers or even the classic vampire.

It was said that on the spiral staircase someone had once fallen into the eternal peaceful rest of death. The narrator feels a little uneasy with this fact; because now he feels that the same thing could possibly happen to him. This now brings the element of fear to mind. There are also very long corridors in the story where one could walk for a very long distance alone. This will no doubt scare someone if it is dark and all that can be seen is what the candle allows them to.

It is a bit like the subterranean passage all dark and isolated from the rest. The other danger involved is that if it is a subterranean passage, then there are no windows and no one around could hear you if you needed help and you cannot escape with much ease. This means that the character is vulnerable. This then means that he will get frightened and his brains will begin to jump

to assumptions, and become delusional and paranoid. Everything in that castle was old, dark and oversized.

There were dark rooms, long corridors, and big, old furniture. There are a few facts about the castle that seem to be suspicious. For example, two elderly people are looking after the castle since the countess has left. It's a little weird that she left it to two elderly people that don't mind working here in the castle even though they know that there is supposedly a ghost there. The author has done this to make the reader wonder why? The author Susan Hill, author of the "Farthing House" has chosen to take a different approach in the choice of settings and atmosphere in her ghost story .

In fact, it is almost the opposite effect for some of the story. First, in the house, there are already people in the house as in the castle of the "Red Room". However, instead of the elderly people having, dark, scary large rooms, the "Farthing House" have pleasant fresh flowers and friendly people, which is a totally different approach to the straight off spooky, scary conventional horror story. However, it is an old house that smells and that does not leave it with such a happy and pleasant feeling. The story takes off near the beginning on page 18 where it says; " it had been a beautiful day for the drive too.

I had stopped twice, once in a village, and once in a small market town and explored churches and little shops, and eaten lunch and had a pot of tea and taken a walk along the banks of a river in the late sunshine, and the berries, I remember had been thick and heavy, clustered on the boughs. I'd seen a ay and two dear and once, like magic, a kingfisher flashing blue as blue across a

hump-backed bridge". Here you can see that there is no tension and is not scary or spooky in any way. The author chooses to start with no tension and would rather build the tension up from nothing.

Then the narrator says " But as I turned right and the road narrowed to a single track, between trees, I began to feel nervous, anxious, I prayed that it really would be all right, that Aunt Addy had been telling the truth". This shows that already the narrator is not feeling like she knows exactly what's to come and is showing the signs of nervousness; this changes the mood. The story still has a good, cheerful atmosphere at this moment. The tension arises on page 19 where a new setting is introduced into the story.

It says in the text " The church was just ahead, the car lights swept along a yew hedge, a lynch gate, caught the shoulder of a gravestone". Immediately, the change is clear; from talking about flowers and polite people the author has chosen words like gravestone, nervous, anxious, which brings imagery of being scared and death to mind. The atmosphere also changes along with the setting, instead of it being happy, warm and good spirited, it has a side element of doom from the thought of death. This cemetery was mostly filled with the dead bodies of mothers and children. Evidence of the atmosphere being changed is when the narrator then goes to say " I am being very careful now, it would be too easy to claim that I had sensed something sinister, that I was shrouded at once in the atmosphere of a haunted house".

From this quote it is clear that the narrator has claimed that she was being very careful now because, she cannot just get scared over something that she only thought she had sensed. Although in the last line of the quote she

does say, " I was shrouded at me in the atmosphere of a haunted house".

This shows that the atmosphere is now a ghostly one, and no longer the bittersweet atmosphere it once was before. In the " Farthing House" there was also a staircase, however instead of it being a spiral staircase; it was a handsome staircase. Inside, a character called Mrs Pearson took the narrator's luggage and placed it in the Ceda room.

It is clear that another difference is present. In the " Red Room" the elderly people gave a bad and eerie atmosphere, whereas in the " Farthing House" they are pleasant and even say " and ts such a lovely room, I'm sure you'll like it". On the next line however, it changes again when the narrator says, " How could I have failed? " That line is always said in ghost stories that right before something awful and atrocious happens which creates tension. The Ceda room was now sharing something in common with the spiral staircase in the " Red Room" and this was that someone had previously passed away and died there. This makes her uneasy to know that one has died in the very room she is standing in. It creates an atmosphere of darkness and mystery.

She says on page twenty-two " I was in this arge, high-ceiling room because it was free, its previous occupants having recently died". Then she says on the same page " I must set it down because I feel I have to tell the whole truth and parts of that truth is that I was an unsettled, slightly nervous frame of mind as I got ready for bed, because of what I knew, and because I could not help wondering whether whoever had occupied the Ceda room had died in it, perhaps even in this bed. I was as you might say, almost expecting to have bad dreams or to see a ghost" it is shown here that she tries not to

frighten herself but she is frightened never the less. She is n a room where  
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someone died and she feels unsettled and believes that there is a chance that she might encounter a ghost. Both the authors have used much contemplation in choice, diction and use of direct language in order to create the tense twists and turns that occur throughout each story. First of all the "Red Room" is written in a direct manner.

In the "Red Room" the language was very well thought throughout. At the start of the story on page three, it has the first reference to the ghost where it says; "it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me". This shows that the image of the ghost is present. The old man with the withered arm then responds by saying, "it is of your own choosing".

By saying this, the man with the withered arm is saying that he is alone with his decision. He has warned the narrator, now it's up to him to decide whether he should listen or venture alone. The old man with the withered arm then repeats it near the bottom of page three and this shows that he again is warning the narrator. He even repeats it again on the next page.

On page five the old man with the withered arm is skeptical and paranoid arm alerts the young man by saying "But if you go to the red room tonight" then the old woman finished the sentence and then said "this night of all nights. Then the man said, "You go alone". The elderly people make it clear that they suspect something is going to happen that night of all nights. They make it seem like something happens in that room every year on that night, especially, which makes the narrator and reader alert and waiting to see what will happen next. Also if noticed the reader can see that only old people



are giving the warnings, and in a way the old people can relate to the ghost because looking at old people in a ghost story often represents death. .

Many key words were said in the stories. There were words such as: " old age", " ghosts", " omens", " witches", " existence" and " spectral". This shows a very good choice of words because the author's choices of words were excellent for giving the impression of death. In the " Red Room" the author chose not to use adjectives often because in some sections you get paragraphs with only one adjective. An example of this is on page seven, and it says " I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps. Then with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver, I advanced, only to discover a Ganymede and eagle glistening in the moonlight".

The author only put one adjective in that whole sentence and that was the word glistening. It is clear that Wells likes to create gaps in that he likes to build up tension in some areas not in others. He has a good choice of vocabulary and knows where to place his words to create tension. In addition, he uses a very powerful type of description called personification. This is when he takes an inanimate object and brings it to life with the choice of words. He uses language with tools such as adjectives to bring object such as candles to life giving it a humane structure.

In the " Farthing House" the story is written in a letterform. On age six-teen, the narrator says, " you will be prey enough anxieties and fancies with out my adding ghost to them". In this sentence, the author wrote the word prey to distinguish the feeling of fear from a predator. On page twenty, he says, " I am being very careful now it would be too easy to claim that I have sensed

something sinister. That I was shrouded at once in the atmosphere of a haunted house".

It can be seen that it is more subjective and in first person perspective and the whole page is about questions that was once asked retrospectively, it is more vivid. On page twenty, the narrator also said, " the only hing I noticed was the faintest smell of hospital antiseptic". Now the word hospital represents a place where people die and the word antiseptic gives the image of people bleeding to death that are in agony. She too uses good choice of expressions Authors that write stories such as these and want to include tension must think about a certain aspect that will control it. To control it, a pace determines how fast the tension moves and builds throughout a story.

In the " Red Room" the pace of tension within the story was rapid and smooth throughout the story. It begins with a feeling of tension but hen when the ghost is first mentioned the pace speeds up and accelerates because of the distorted and old characters. It stays at a steady fast pace until the end of the story where it then slowly decreases in speed. Then as the pace slows down the tension diminishes. The pace for the " Farthing House" was different.

It began slowly and speeded up, but then slowed down and then speeds up again when she finds out about the death of the person in her room. The pace continues in a pattern like this throughout the story; a zigzag pattern. When the tension is slow it's because it is calm, and when he has great relationships with the other characters within the story. When the story is fast paced then the tension increases due to something relating to the ghost.

This gives the feeling that maybe the person that died could possibly be the ghost. At the end of each story, a certain feeling is given to the story. In the "Red Room", on page fifteen, the narrator says, "fear in that room of hers-black Fear, and there will be-so long as this house of sin endures". The word fear was written as a pronoun, and is clear that the narrator is still scared and that he is definitely sure that there is something in that room for sure.

He is certain of this although he knows that it is just fear in his mind. The tension is still there and always will be because it was not proved that there was not a ghost and the mystery about the ghost is still there. There is a bit of relief since it is clear that there is no ghost in that room, and that it was just fear of one created. In the "Farthing House" at the end on page thirty-three, the narrator says, "I think of it constantly, see the young, pale, distraught woman, her arms outstretched, searching hear her sobbing, and the crying of her baby.

But imagine that she has gone, now that she has had what she was looking for". In that ending there is a link between the narrator and the distraught woman, she can relate to her because she too has a burden lifted off her shoulders. Now that she knows why the ghost was there and that she has unraveled the mystery and that there is nothing to fear now, she has nothing to worry about. This is the part of the story where the narrator can relax a bit because now there is relief. In conclusion both stories use elements of tension and suspense.

The pace of each story differs in their timing of suspense. One begins almost immediately and the other builds up the tension gradually. Both use the first

person perspective. There are twists and surprise in both stories. I think the "Red Room" was more successful as a ghost story as it was more psychological.

It really gripped me and it was the sort of book you did not want to put down. I felt excited and thrilled at most of this book. I was eager to read more and wanted to know what was going to happen next. The "Farthing House" had much more description in it and this was not as gripping or exciting as the "Red Room." Although this was an excellent story it did not fill me with as much suspense and tension as the "Red Room."