

How do the authors
of the red room and
the signalman create
suspension and
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The Red Room by HG Wells and The Signalman by Charles Dickens are two gothic stories which have made good use of description to give their readers a tense atmosphere which leads to suspense throughout the story. By creating ideal gothic settings, dark tunnels, haunted rooms and haunted tunnels with ad, both stories leave readers hooked as we worry for various characters since they are in such sinister environments. Techniques used by the authors, common to both stories with characterization and vivid descriptions of detestable settings, suspense is truly created by HG wells and Charles Dickens.

In The Red Room, HG Wells thoroughly creates a very unpleasant, spooky and disturbing setting which leads to fear of the “ghosts”. Even as the story begins, the presence of three “droning” old people with disfigured appearances suggests unpleasant happenings to come. Such an impression is well founded, especially with their disturbing descriptions. The phrase, “the man with the withered arm” implies infirmity, and age, the word withered being a very repulsive word which suggests the arm could be bent or shrunken also with an unpleasant pronunciation.

The other man’s descriptions are no better, being referred to as “the man with the shade in his eyes” which gives the man an evil feel, introducing shadows and darkness into the story. Sickness is also displayed in these people as they “cough and splutter”, the word splutter having been skillfully used as it disgusts us and repels us from this place where these old men are. Also worth attention is the way this man is compared with the first, “more bent, more wrinkled, more aged than the first”. This is good use of language,

having used triple repetition to emphasize the disfiguration of the second man.

It concludes the ugliness of the aged people which casts an unpleasant air of age, sickness and death on the castle which they are in and therefore builds up an air of tension as we try to apprehend what will happen later in this detestable place. In addition to unpleasant pensioners, darkness and shadows are used well to give the story a truly gothic feel. Even before he enters the passage-way below, the narrator sees the first shadow, one of the man with the shaded eyes as he pours the cup of wine, “ a monstrous shadow” , that “ mocked his action as he poured and drank”.

Here, it is described as if the shadow is different to the old man, an independent creature which chooses to ridicule the man, to cause mischief and evil, giving us fear as we are given the impression the shadows have a mind of their own and a force of evil. Darkness is a key feature of the red room and emphasis is placed on it as the narrator enters it, who describes it as the “ germinating darkness”. Fitting with the earlier description of the shadow, the darkness is personified here, the word “ germinating” giving life to the shadows, talking of it as if it were a seed, ready to grow and expand, and to take light from the room.

This feeling of the darkness invading all areas is emphasized when he says that his candle was a “ little tongue of light in its [the darkness’s] vastness”.

The light which is shown to be the narrator’s hope in this story is already overcome by the darkness. This setting is further built upon when the

narrator fails to keep up with the self extinguishing candles and describes
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the darkness as on a “ remorseless advance”. The setting full of darkness, shadows and the unknown gives us tension and fear as it makes us fear what is to come.

The implications of different colours are also used to good effect in the story where the colours red and black are mentioned often to remind us of dark things. For example, the colour black, like where it says, “ the legends which have sprouted in its black corners”. Black is linked with the darkness, the unknown and the source of the narrators fears. This is implied when he lights his candles, which he describes as his only weapon against the “ remorseless advance” of the darkness.

The colour red, the name of the room, is often linked with blood and danger, and in this story is also used to stimulate our imagination, being used to remind us of the story of the room, where a woman came to a “ tragic end” and where a young duke had “ begun his dying”. Therefore, the name of the room has been well chosen since it brings up the dying which has taken place here, and constantly reminds us of the danger which the narrator is facing as he enters. The signalman, also a gothic tale, is set in a railway cutting, in an equally unnerving place, where setting also plays an important role in creating suspense.

A fearful setting is established near the beginning of the “ Signalman” when the cutting is said to have a “ force to draw me [the narrator] down”. Such a feeling at the beginning of a novel could be interpreted as a hint of malicious presence at the bottom of the cutting, as if something lurks in the cutting,

seeking to suck the narrator down so it can work its evil upon him. This <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-the-authors-of-the-red-room-and-the-signalman-create-suspension-and-tension-with-characterization-and-setting-essay-sample/>

feeling would probably have been inspired by Dickens natural fear towards trains after he nearly got killed in a railway accident, which greatly helps to build up tension as we wait to find out the nature of the evil which lies at the cutting.

A foreboding scene at the bottom of the cutting adds to the fear and tension. Like any gothic tale, the cutting is a small space with a “ barbarous depressing air”. Dickens has made good use of repetition here, making the place seem cruel and ideal for the bad happenings which now seem likely. But it is not only his visual surroundings which Dickens vividly describes. The cutting is said to have “ an earthy deadly smell”. Together the words “ cutting” and “ deadly” remind us of graves, which are linked to deaths, perfect for a gothic setting.

The setting of the story also appeals to the sense of touch: the channel to the cutting is described as a “ clammy stone. ” The use of such a word suggests the stone had a sweaty feel, bringing unpleasant textures to mind. As the narrator goes down towards the tunnel, it gets “ oozy”, so it gets worse as you go down, suggesting there is something terrible at the end: in the cutting. There is onomatopoeia in the word, and the rocks are made to feel alive, as they seem to be giving off a sticky liquid, as if they had a life of its own. Overall, the unpleasant images given in these phrases makes us dread to think what will happen in this place.

As in the red room, colours are used to remind the reader of terrible images. For example, the “ gloomy red light” reminds us of the danger of the line. As

if to conclude this, we are later told that it is by this light that the ghost
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always appears. Unpleasant textures and imagery are also used to make the place seem nasty. The “dripping-wet wall” and the “jagged stone” further helps us to imagine the unpleasantness of this space. The words “dripping wet walls” suggest the place could be empty and deserted, since he can hear the tip-tap of the water meeting the ground.

The wet walls would also mean it was unpleasant to touch, turning the place into a typical gothic setting. The word “jagged” was a good choice as it implies the walls have many sharp points which can cut and cause injury to people. This is similar to the use of the word “cutting” to describe the trench which the train passes through: a cut on a person draws blood. The pronunciation of the words “cutting” and “jagged” also shows how Dickens has chosen words well. The harsh sounds of the g’s and the t’s in “cutting” and “jagged” are a clever means by which the author makes the setting seem unfriendly and unwelcoming.

Overall the use of the words “cutting” and “jagged” helps make the reader think that blood and injury surrounds this place and makes us wonder what terrible accident might happen in this location which adds to the tension and suspense. Another way in which tension and suspense is built up is with the characterization of the main characters in these two stories. In The Red Room, the characterization of the narrator adds to the tension through his ignorance and stupidity. The story opens with, “it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me”, and shows the arrogance of this narrator on the first line.

His ignorance is further emphasized when he says, “ eight-and-twenty years... I have lived and never a ghost have I seen as yet”. We should all realize his ignorance as he says these words, since he is young and would have seen little of the world in 28 years in comparison to these old people so it would seem he is blinded by confidence and he seems foolish to ignore the advice of these old people who have many more days than him. It is then that we find ourselves believing the old people who speak of ghosts and that we realize the aged gathering was right about the ghost in the room which adds to the fear and tension as we wait to find out.

This is similar in *The Signalman*, where Dickens constantly hints that the ghost is real and adds to the suspense and tension by making the signalman, who claims there to be a ghost, seem more trustworthy than our unbelieving narrator. The little details we are fed like the fact that he does his job well because he always keeps his flag “ furred around its short pole” which hints he is an organised man, does his job well and is therefore likely to be reliable in what he says.

As is in conclusion to his capability as a signalman, the narrator admits, “ I should have set this man down as one of the safest men to be employed in this capacity [as a signalman]”. He is also shown to be an intelligent man who “ has taught himself a language” and one who has worked at different forms of mathematics, and “ even a little algebra”. Due to the intelligence of this man, we are made to believe this man has credibility which leads us to trust him over the narrator whom we know so little about.

Since he has been a “ student of natural philosophy” who was good enough to go to university, we can tell he is scientifically minded individual who would be doubtful about seeing a ghost himself. As a result of this, we are made not to doubt when he claims to have seen one. The comparative reliability of the narrator with the signalman makes us think the signalman is right about the existence of the ghost, so creates tension and suspense because the ghost can only mean bad things to come. The main narrator’s attempts at rationality also to adds tension to the story.

One such example is when the narrator makes an attempt at rationality, saying that the voice of the spectre was only the “ wild harp [the wind] makes of the telegraph wires”. Such an attempt at rationalising the ghost only makes its existence surer, for how can our reliable signalman mistake a voice for the wind? In this way, Dickens cleverly destroys all possibility that there is not a ghost. In conclusion, both stories are seen to have created suspense and tension in innovative ways but it is probably the endings of these two stories which are the most interesting.

For the signalman, the story is almost clear that there was a ghost since even the rational narrator admits it in the end, but there is some doubt with the red room. Some people may think that the ghost never existed and that everything is the crazy narrator’s imagination but some other people may think that there was one, only it was invisible. But I think that there is obviously no ghost as HG Wells was a scientific man though there was a presence in the room since the candles went out in an unnatural way. A ghost story without a ghost, it could be said.