

# The red room and the landlady



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Short stories have been written for hundreds of years, although it was not until the nineteenth century that the short story became a popular genre in its own right. Many authors began their careers writing short stories in magazines and journals.

(In fact literacy rates were better than ever before and were constantly improving; printing technology was also improving which meant that cheap magazines were widely available). The short story was the ideal form for writers who wanted to earn some immediate money and still reach a wide audience. Subject matter, form, and general characteristics came under close consideration and critics of the time discussed the short story in a way that made the public think of it as more than just a cut-down novel. By the end of the nineteenth century the short story was well rounded and very popular in Europe and North America. The short story's popularity is still growing to this day, probably due to our hectic lifestyle where time is a rare luxury. It's much easier to get involved in the plot of a short story than a lengthy novel.

They are also much quicker to read, so it's possible to read the whole story while on a train journey home, whereas one may not bother to continue, or even start reading a novel. The gothic short story has always been very popular, and can be easily identified by its unique style and content. Often set in the ruins of a medieval building such as a castle or monastery, the gothic short story has a unique setting. Hidden rooms and secret passageways can form a central part of the plot, and dark corridors or stormy weather are used to create atmosphere.

They are frequently based around the unexplained, and sometimes will not give an explanation for this at all. The gothic short story is often melodramatic and elaborate descriptions of landscapes and buildings are used throughout. This helps set the scene, and also adds to the overall atmosphere of the story. Vivid accounts of characters' emotions are also used to create a sense of suspense, and in some cases uncertainty. The Red Room by H. G.

Wells (1896) is a classic pre-nineteenth century gothic short story. The setting contributes a great deal towards suspense in the story and it is actually set in a medieval castle, with many connections to the past. H. G. Wells chose to set the story there, and he has obviously done it for a reason.

“ The door to the red room and the steps up to it were in a shadowy corner,” this implies that the room has a sinister background, and may make the young man apprehensive or even fearful, it will also have the same effect on the reader. It is typical of its time, and the language demonstrates this. “ There's many things to see, when one's still but eight and twenty”, this was said by the old woman in the second paragraph, and it's an excellent example of Victorian language. The sentence structure and vocabulary is adversely different to that of the present day.

This affects way the author writes a great deal, as society and culture at the time influence him and his writing a great deal. Like many other gothic short stories, the plot is centered on the unexplained and the story often questions the reader about this. The fact that the cause of the night's happenings is never wholly revealed, even at the end, makes the story even more

powerful. It leaves the reader on a knife-edge, wondering whether it was merely the young man's imagination, or a real ghost trapped within.

The Landlady by Roald Dahl (1960) is a post-nineteenth century short story. It is very different in setting and language. This is because it has been set and written in a very different time period; society and culture have indirectly influenced the way Roald Dahl has written the story." Each word was like a large black eye staring at him through the glass, holding him, compelling him, forcing him to stay where he was and not walk away from that house, and the next thing he knew, he was actually moving across from the window to the front door of the house, climbing the stairs and reaching for the bell". Billy Weaver said this, and it implies that there is a paranormal force drawing him to that particular house.

It also gives the reader a sense of uncertainty and the supernatural, and it questions the reader about the cause of this event. This helps the reader become involved in the story, and makes them respond to what they have read. A trademark of the gothic short story is detailed descriptions of the characters. This particular story also makes good use of this, and the author often uses it to build up the atmosphere, and give the reader a feeling of uncertainty and misgivings.

" He noticed that she had small, white, quickly moving hands, and red fingernails." Again Billy Weaver said this, and it may make the reader feel oppressed or suspicious of the landlady. Writers will always be influenced by the society and culture of their particular era. This changes dramatically over time and therefore it effects writers in very different ways. This may be in

the language or even the style the author uses. Both these stories are well written, although both are in slightly different styles.

Personally I prefer that of Roald Dahl in the Landlady because the writer builds up suspense more effectively, and with less effort. The language is also more suited to the modern reader, compared to the Victorian language of the Red Room which some people may find difficult to understand. There is no doubt that the pre-nineteenth century gothic short story is still popular, as many are still read to this day. Although it's post-nineteenth century counterpart seems to me, to be the better choice for today's readers.