

What makes a good mystery essay



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Short fictional mystery stories were very popular in the 19th century, especially in the Victorian era. They often appeared on the back of newspapers or in magazines because they were so cheap. Although not read as much now, one does receive pleasure in reading these fascinating mystery stories. Nowadays we have television, radios, films and many other modern media technologies. As the world advanced, science was beginning to explain the unexplainable and answer unanswerable questions. There were huge scientific breakthroughs and discoveries, that it seemed as if it could solve anything.

These stories were original, unique and unexplainable, which is why the Victorians liked them, because it was a break from science proving everything. The mystery story genre developed by characteristics in the way these stories were created. Most of these stories were quite typical, for example setting the scene with pathetic fallacy. The writer uses pathetic fallacy, to help create the mysterious mood of the scenes, as this device was used to assimilate the weather to show how a character was feeling.

We can see this in ‘The Red Room’, as it helps make the character feel uneasy, and, as he pursues down the corridor, his mind begins to play tricks on him, as if there is somebody round the corner, “I was about to advance... Hiding from me by the corner of the wall, its shadow with... Gave me the impression of someone crouching to waylay me.... I then held my revolver...” In “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” the narrator speaks as if he leaves the real world, and goes down into the dark, gloomy, eerie and unnatural world, “... is a vile alley lurking behind. This creates a sense of a vile and unnatural world lurking behind the true city.

This creation of a new world is vital for a good mystery story. 'The Twitch' begins with a description of the setting, and then goes on to describe the guests that come in. The man and his daughter are described as almost cold among a warm atmosphere. This suggests a contrast to ordinary happenings, and it is this effect that makes the central characters in this story seem peculiar. The first sense of mystery and dread enters when the man's hair is described to be "White, too white... This creates a sense of eeriness and something from out of this world, and also begins to introduce questions in the mind of the reader as to why this man is so different.

The man is described in such a way, that he stands out from the rest of the dinner guests. The word "grave" is also used to describe him, which, after reading the story until the end, makes sense, and is, in effect, ironic. It also gives an impression of something from the dead. The girl is described as having: "the pale beauty of a ghost," which immediately gives us the idea that these two people are something out of the ordinary.

She is also described as being having "terrible slowness as if she was virtually unable to move her arms." This gives us a pretty obvious impression that she is something from the supernatural, and is like a zombie, or the living dead. The father has a "most peculiar nervous twitch... his hand described a snake's tongue." Snakes are venomous and can kill, and the fact that his hand moves in the motion of a snake's tongue, a "crazy zig-zag," suggests some type of evilness, as snakes are evil (looking at the example of the Garden of Eden, where the snake sweet-talked Adam and Eve to eat the apple).

This embroils the reader into the tension created by the writer. This shape could also imply that he is making motions like that of a lightning bolt, as lightning bolts are the same shape, and, in most horror stories, zombies jolt to life after a spell of lightning. Finally, the woman is noted as always wearing “ one glove on her left hand. ” This creates a sense of mystery, leading on from her earlier description, and make it seem as if she is something from the supernatural.

This helps the reader build an image of the people and from this the reader may start to feel a little scared because often people relate pale people to be similar to the “ living dead. ” They also help us make a fair assumption as to what is going to happen in the story. It is with this technique that mystery stories differ from normal stories, as mystery stories are designed so that prediction is also indulged into the story, and therefore, the reader can slowly predict what is going to happen.

‘ The Twitch ’ is set in a health spa and a hotel restaurant, which is almost described as gloomy, “ the gloominess of the health spa. The author uses the sense of sight to build a picture in the readers’ mind, which adds to the effect of the story. When the two people approach the narrator, they are walking at a “ slow pace, ” which makes the readers feel scared and uneasy about what they will do to the man. The man then begins his story as to why he has a nervous twitch and why his daughter wears a glove. As he begins to tell the story, the narrator switches from the original narrator to the man with the twitch. This now turns into a story within a story, or a frame tale/narrative.

Because of this, the audience is made clear of his feelings and emotions at different points during the story. This affects the way we read the story and the way we feel towards the characters, as the reader tends to feel closer to the man and therefore, makes an effort to understand him. After the girl is buried alive, the man, who is now the new narrator, describes the atmosphere of that night as particularly frightening. He uses descriptive words, such as: " It was cold... and the wind, a winter wind, a frozen wind, a great wind full of ice, knocked the windows with a sinister repetitive sound.

This sets the scene for something scary to happen, as the atmosphere is now very cold and scary indeed. The repetitive description of the wind emphasises how cold it actually was, and it makes the reader more engrossed into the story, and much more on edge. The man then " started so suddenly that the seat cracked. " This shows that he is so tense that even his seat has cracked. This also increases the readers tension too. As the daughter enters the house, the man describes her as a " phantom" and a " ghost. " This choice of wording makes the reader feel uneasy and nervous and also tense as to what the " phantom" will do.

After the story ends, the writer, once again, introduces pathetic fallacy. The narrator has now switched back to the original narrator and the setting is a " lonely, sad little valley," which is similar to the lives of the father and daughter - they are sad and lonely, following that story. This is an example of pathetic fallacy, which makes the setting and the characters more vivid, and helps make a good mystery story. In third-person objective, we have no entry to anyone's thoughts or feelings. The author simply describes, without emotion or editorialising, what the characters say and do.

The author's persona here is almost non-existent. Readers may be unsure whose fate they should care about, but it can be very powerful precisely because it invites the reader to supply the emotion that the persona does not. Almost all of them are in first person narrator, which draws us into the story. These stories were well written with escapist literature, when there is relief from reality and a different approach, which is what attracts us as well. The narrator is the person who is describing the story to you.

This makes you feel as if someone is talking to you physically and individually, creating the feel and setting the scenes in the story as you read it. This gives it a more personal mood to it. We can also understand their thoughts, emotions and feelings as they describe them and we can get right inside the narrator's head. Other stories might not have these inner sensations; therefore, this point is vital in making a good mystery story. All the stories are in first person singular, and this implies to us that they have had the experience.

They are sharing the event with us and have survived their fascinating encounter. It makes it a lot more believable too, and also creates a 'mise en scene'. This also makes it easier to read and comprehend. It is easier to relate to the character in understanding what's going on. This is why they are written in first person singular, and is certainly what draws us into the stories. This also makes it stand out as an excellent mystery story. A good mystery story needs a scary setting like a Castle, Monastery, graveyard or somewhere that is spooky and is quite old, with a scary history.

This is because it adds emphasis to the frightening atmosphere that the author is trying to create, and helps build tension. Also, a good mystery story has to make the reader feel like they are present and it needs to have suspense to make the reader want to keep reading. Furthermore, a good ghost story has to make you feel like you are there and know what the characters are feeling. It also needs to build up the tension and suspension in the story. In a good gothic novel you might find a ghost, curse, witches, and superstitions deaths. The story 'The Red Room' is written in first person.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator tells of a duke's death. This adds suspense to the story, and makes the reader think that something is going to happen to the narrator – which is what happens. In 'The Red Room', we notice that the character thinks like an ordinary typical person using sarcasm and someone who is definitely not frightened of any petty ghost. He is confident and a secure person, which brings the story realistically to life, as we can associate to it.

We can tell that he does not believe in the supernatural or ghosts, because he says at the beginning of the story, "I can assure you.... hat it would take a very tangible ghost to frighten me." In "The Red Room" there is a verbal motif that is repeated throughout the whole story, which is the choice of nights: "'This night of all nights' said the old woman." This makes us more interested in reading further, as there seems to be something eerie about this night that the character has chosen, and also adds suspense. The 'Red Room' is set in a gothic style castle, which is described, as dark and gloomy. The ornaments set in the room and also the conveniences relate to the previous deaths that had taken place within the castle.

The passage within the castle is described as a long, draughty subterranean passage. The word "subterranean" means "underground or secret" (from www.dictionary.com), which makes the reader know that this is not something normal, and has some relation to the dead. This helps the reader build an image of the setting and from this the reader may start to feel a little scared because often people relate darkness to be a scary place. This may also create a mysterious atmosphere, the setting seems to be spooky and creepy because a lot of the narrators feelings are expressed by the use of his words related with the subject, i. . quivers, rustling.

Colour is also used throughout the story as we, the reader, as a whole, seem to relate certain colours to different things, for example, "this haunted room of yours..." is 'The Red Room'. The supernatural associations with the colour red because it symbolises evil, danger and blood. Because of this, readers may be left wondering what is ahead in the story and if anything dangerous may happen. This tension makes a good mystery story. "Fashions born in dead brains", "Violent pulsation" and "Oozing walls.

This adds implicit criticism which over turns the natural world, from this we get the feeling of the distortedness that 'The Red Room' brings and therefore the readers might fear what the room brings as the story progresses. "Descends into darkness." When we hear this, we immediately link it with imagery of hell. There is a continuous use of pathetic fallacy. In "The Red Room" H. G Wells expresses how unpleasant, grotesque and intimidating the old people are as he uses several horrible images which scare the reader and make them question what actually happened to them.

The old people reassure the narrator about “ The Red Room” by saying how safe it is at the beginning. “ I have lived, and never a ghost have I seen yet. ” However, because of their distorted physical appearance, this hints that something will happen, as the readers will sense something is not quite right and odd. The author has chosen to make the old people anonymous, which builds on the tension as the readers would constantly question who are they? At the start of the book, the reader would think that they are related to the dead in some way; maybe they are ghosts or zombies. A second old man entered, more bent, more wrinkled, more aged even than the first. He supported himself by a single crutch, his eyes were covered by a shade, and his lower lip half averted, hung pale and pink from his decaying yellow teeth. ” This gives a vivid description of the man, and it seems that this man is from the dead, as he is “ decaying. ” The old characters used here are very clever, as they are typical characters in a ghost story and so, make it seem more realistic.

The title, ‘ The Red Room’ is instantly linked with the idea of danger and warning as red signifies blood, anger and evilness. This brings the room alive and gives it more intimidation and more purpose; it also gives the idea that a strange and unwelcome being possesses the room. The colours used in this story all help to make evil more imaginable, and therefore, make the terror more realistic. Red and black are constantly used throughout the story, which underpin the mystery and is symbolic using the effects of light fading into darkness.

Glance of his red eyes”, “ Red light” and “ The sombre reds and blacks of the room troubled me; even with seven candles the place was merely dim” show

that even light, which could symbolise holiness and the idea of God's light helping to exercise the evilness but we get the sense that the room is greatly troubled and cannot be saved. The colour black is linked with the idea of death, the plague and darkness this gives us an unearthly feeling combined with warning and evilness that the colour red brings which gives off how disturbed it is.

As well as the idea of colours being used, there is a strong use of shadows in 'The Red Room' which shows unease and a forbidding figure. This helps to make the ghost seem more alive and living as the shadows are seen sweeping which is a form of movement. "The echoes rang up and down the spiral staircase, and a shadow came sweeping up after me, and one fled before me into the darkness overhead." Shadows, "cower and quiver" and "Listening to a rustling that I fancied I heard" but there is "absolute silence" these quotes are a good use of personification, which make the story more expressive and to give the objects in the story character.

Wells borrowed from the literary tradition of gothic literature when he wrote 'The Red Room', purposely being elusive about its precise time or location. Fear is the basis of the story as we find out at the end. The start of the story is sets a gothic scene by having very strange people by a warm fire, "The man with the withered arm," "The old woman" and "The man covered by a shade." These characters all help to create a sense of uneasiness and frightfulness about them.

One character is known all the way through as "The man with the shade." This adds mystery, fear and confusion to the reader, and therefore, makes it

a very good mystery story as questions go through the reader's mind all the time. We do not know the names of any of the characters so that there are questions unanswered from the start. This creates confusion and builds up the mysterious atmosphere. Tension and anxiety develops from uncertainties. Darkness is a main factor in this short story. Wells uses darkness because it creates fear. That fear of the unknown leaves the narrator vulnerable. The three characters are old which indicates that they have experienced a lot in life.

Repetition is used to give the narrator warning. The old woman says " It's your own choosing" and " This night of all nights? " as if she is trying to say that there is something in that room that will harm you. This haunts the narrator as well as the reader. It brings a sense of alarm to the narrator and the reader knows that the narrator, although warned not to go will go. It is human nature to be scared and adventurous. The journey to the Red Room is long and dark with a series of obstacles that are shown to slow down the process of the narrators pace.

The narrator mentions the " echoes. This shows that the corridors and the staircase are going on forever. It may even show that the house is trying to warn him not to go into the Red Room. " The spiral staircase" may also tell him to try and go back because it makes the reader think that it goes on forever. The narrator takes candles with him so he is prepared to see danger. He also takes his " Revolver" which suggests that he is beginning to feel scared and he needs its protection because he may feel that he will encounter something that he may want to. This adds to the tension, and

therefore, tension is a vital element in a good mystery story, as portrayed by Wells.

As the narrator enters the room he begins to feel a strange presence, and starts to check the room “ systematically. ” He examines everything in order so that he does not miss anything out. This shows that he has a lot of anxiety yet approaches that anxiety with a logical mind. The “ recesses” and “ alcoves” are used to create tension because they may have secrets hidden within them, which adds the mystery to the surrounding of the Red Room. The “ candles” are mentioned as the “ light” and the “ ocean of mystery” as “ dark. ” Wells talks about the candle as being so small that it is not able to “ pierce the opposite end of the room.

This shows that he is curious to see what is in that area and likes to be in control of the situation. That fact that he is not in control scares him a lot, making his mind run wild with mysterious thoughts. The narrator is alert, but not calm. The word “ pierce” creates tension because it feels like something is stopping the light from getting to the end of the room. It also creates a sense of unwelcoming. The author shows that the narrator is thinking a lot about the ghosts and paranormal activity because he has a conversation with himself.

This also shows that he is going a bit crazy, and it also shows that he is trying to calm himself down by trying not to believe what the old people think is the truth. “ Steady on! I said. These candles are wanted! ” The pace increases here as Wells uses compresses the sentences to build up the description of the candles going out. Each time they are re-lit; but they fail

again “ two candles in the remoter end of the window were eclipsed” The narrator’s panic is palpable building to a climax where he hits his head and falls to the ground.

He wakes up finding himself in bed with bandages on his head, he tells the old people about fear and how it effected his mind. The narrator explains to the old people that it was fear that paralysed him with fright. The author writes “ Fear” with a capital F; this is so it is personified and seems to take on a personality in itself suggesting it can work against you and have power over you. This is shown by the way in which the narrator reacts to the circumstances in the red room. Wells is effective in creating tension, as we have to wait and find out what really frightened people about the red room.

This tension and suspense helps make a good mystery story, as it makes us feel on edge, and makes us like the narrator - scared. As we establish the fact that there was nothing haunting the room we wonder what happened to the old people and was it the room that had an effect on them. I think that Wells had deliberately made the people old as he knew it was easier to make old people look grotesque as the elderly are fragile and wrinkly looking, therefore he took the chance to make them have distorted features to fuel the suspense and tension of the story.

This plays on a fear of old age, as it is something never encountered or experienced by the reader. Wells has done a good job by maintaining the emotions of all stereotypical ghost/gothic stories. He has used archaic language, an example of which is the maintenance of emotions, which would

have been appropriate for the Victorian society and because of the excellent visual images which help readers to picture the terror quicker.

Readers would enjoy being scared and might be relieved towards the end because the ending twists everything by revealing there was clearly nothing. 'The Man With The Twisted Lip' is one of many Sherlock Holmes stories that were extremely popular with the 1890's audience. Just like the other stories above, 'The Man With The Twisted Lip' has a lot of mystery and strange happenings in it. This story is set in the East End of London, which was highly polluted, full of smoke belching factories around which the workers lived in slum housing.

With disease on the high and medicines being expensive many doctors prescribed opium-based laudanum to the moneyed classes who could afford it. This is shown in the story when Dr. Watson enters the opium den. Instead of being filled up of working class people it is in fact crammed full of the upper class. In 'Twisted lip', a character (although not a very substantial one) is introduced as the first word in the story, with a short background on his dead brother and how he died of an opium addiction.

This being quite pointless at first is quite a cunning trick the writer has introduced here, as for the next few paragraphs the reader thinks that this 'Isa Whitney' is what the story is based on, the trick being the writer has made the story out to be something it is not, which is intentionally ironic as the story is based on a man trying to conceal the truth. Examining the construction of 'Twisted Lip,' it is evident that there are a few references to class, like "dregs of the docks" and "a vile alley", these let the reader understand

Dr. Watson's train of thought and how he considers himself to be, within the very thick walls separating class at this time.

When Watson reaches the opium den he refers to it like it was a tomb, " a glimpse of bodies lying" and using words like " lacklustre", the writer sets a very dark, dreary place and referring to the smoke as " gloom. " Soon after Isa makes his way to the cab Sherlock Holmes inevitably makes an appearance, after a brief introduction Isa and his troubles have left the picture and Watson and Holmes take the limelight of the story.

This point is quite a major difference as it shows the authors different style of writing compared to ' Red Room', as ' Red Room' has quite a few characters and even less are properly introduced with past family history, whereas ' Twisted Lip' and ' The Twitch' portray a much larger world to the reader and even though Isa Whitney is key to the irony and depth of ' Twisted Lip' the reader won't realise that until approaching the end of the story. It does this to ensure suspense and that a mood is created, which is vital in a good mystery story.

Going down into the opium den it is extremely dark which symbolises death and gloominess. " Holmes's shrill whistle", " the clink of horses' hoofs", " silence' broken by occasional policeman's footfall or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers". In this quote, Doyle uses lots of details that relates to all the five senses: smell, sight, touch, taste and sound, which makes the whole story jump out and be more realistic. Therefore, these effects are required to make a good mystery story.

A flickering oil lamp” is not too bright and causes shadows which may scare the reader, the atmosphere will be on edge and very tense. Because the atmosphere is tense it seems that anything could make the reader jump. During this story, ‘ The Man With The Twisted Lip’, Conan Doyle chose to reflect the periods contemporary events, social conditions and problems. Overall I feel that I enjoyed ‘ The Man With The Twisted Lip’ the most because this story kept me interested all the way throughout. There was so much going on, that it made me think about all the different scenarios and possibilities that may arise.

All the way through this story there was a lot of tension. Is it a wonder that Sherlock Homes and Dr. Watson’s stories are so popular when they create so much interest and gentle confusion for the reader? There are quite a lot of things in common with these stories. Firstly, they all contain pathetic fallacy at some point throughout the text. This helps it become more vivid and stand out. Suspiciousness and mystical powers were common in mostly all of the stories at some time, although the dates were years apart.

The build up to the ending of the story is very effective, as it is written through the eyes of an almost ‘ secondary’ character, meaning Watson isn’t the one solving the clues in fact he doesn’t help much at all. He is also a quiet character. This does not sound like the regular profile of a main character, but looking at the story at this perspective is very successful and is also more realistic. Holmes solves the mystery like he usually does, by deduction and sleuthing to the best of his ability.

In 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' the mood is changed from dark, gloom and the unknown to brightness, cheeriness and removes the need for fear by the use of the thermal image "bright morning sunshine". This phrase automatically implies warmth and light, giving the reader an indication that things will be alright and the mystery will be solved. The only short story to use warmth is 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' this is because as a mystery it is different to the two horror stories.

At the end of the mystery story, everything is solved and makes sense, there is no mystery and no more need for suspense and tension, and this is why warmth is created through the use of thermal images. 'The man with the twisted lip' uses both light and dark. Darkness is used at the beginning of the story, to portray fear and the mystery of the man's disappearance, and then once the mystery has been solved, light is brought into the story to show that everything is alright now. Every story that I have studied have all ended with a supernatural climax.

The stories generally begin with a normal relaxed, sceptical person with a cynical approach towards any supernatural or extreme activity. The story then continues with that person who pursues the supernatural event and finish with an experience that changes their lives; whether it's a premonition or a haunting, they always turn out fascinated, proved wrong and they admit that there is some existing supernatural force. Like in 'The Red Room', the title does even hint a sound of a little gloomy and distinct, and the word "red" is associated with danger and blood, which suggest a sense of eeriness.

The first words are, ' I can assure you.... that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. ' This gives us an impression that he is like us. At the very end, his last few words are that there is fear in there as well a ghost. ' Yes, the room is haunted. ' And, ' the worst of all.... Is fear. ' I believe all of these stories are successful mystery stories, because they contains all the ingredients for a good mystery story; Excitement, suspense, mystery and also leaves the reader in wonder over the events that take place.

The three stories all build up atmosphere during their stories, using similar techniques to each other. The foundations used for building up the atmosphere are the dark; darkness is used to represent evil and scariness, creating a spooky atmosphere from the start. Descriptions are also widely used to build up the atmosphere. Things such as sudden noises are scary, making the reader jump, implementing a scare factor into the stories.

Also smells and other sounds are mainly used to create atmosphere, the smell of death will imply evil and increase the atmosphere of the story. I think that the use of the darkness in the short stories is the most effective, as everyone instantly recognises fear and evil with the dark. The stories are all just as applicable now as when they were written, as they all use the same basic techniques that would still be used today to create atmosphere and enforce fear onto the reader. Also the element of age does not affect them, if anything it just creates more atmosphere.