

The representation of
the supernatural in hg
wells red room and
susan hills farth...



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In this essay I am going to examine the representation of the supernatural in H. G Wells Red Room and Susan Hills Farthing House.

The Red Room was written in the 19th Century and is a good example of the Victorians interpretation of the genre of ghost story writing because it has stereotypical elements such as it being set in a castle on cold winters night.

Conversely Farthing house is a contemporary story written in 1992 and therefore represents the relevance of ghost stories to modern times because the account takes place in a period that we can relate to.

The supernatural is defined as something that cannot be explained according to natural laws, characteristics of something caused as if by a go, involving or ascribed to occult beings, exceeding the ordinary (abnormal) and supernatural forces occurrences and beings collectively of their realm.

The cultural contexts of the two stories are obviously very different due to the times in which they were written and the differences in the way of life between the late 1800's and the late 1900's, however both share similarities in the representation of the supernatural and setting for example both stories contain parts which occur at night.

The definition of the supernatural seems to me to be quite narrow. My understanding of the supernatural also includes noises and presences which can't be explained, and it is this wider definition that I wish to include in the two stories.

The plot or storyline of *The Red Room*, is that a confident young man is dared by someone to stay in an allegedly haunted room, known as the Red Room. He is cynical and wishes to prove that ghosts don't exist.

There are certain techniques employed by Wells to add to the suspense in the story for example lack of information about the characters such as their names and the setting adds to the atmosphere of the story.

The setting (geographical and time related) of the story conforms to our notions of a stereotypical ghost story, for example Wells uses an isolated and the bulk of the story occurs at night because this adds to the sense that the story is typical of a ghost story. The castle is described as having shadowy alcoves and 'sombre reds and blacks'. This all adds to the atmosphere.

The language of the story is typical of the late 1800's. There are many words that are not used today and this creates a sense that the language is archaic. For example instead of saying posture the word carriage is used.

This word is typically used in the late 1800's and this seems strange to the reader. The language is also typical of H. G Wells and reflects his style. Much of the language is also poetic. Wells uses poetic prose because it is typical of his style of writing and it suits the story he is writing. For example 'the moonlight coming in by the great window'. This sentence has poetic overtones and is a clear image. These images add to the atmosphere.

The characters consist of a young man (the main character) and some old people. The young man is challenging the old people's ideas about the supernatural and is not heeding their warnings. For example 'It will not take a very tangible ghost to frighten me'. This shows how confident he is. It gives <https://assignbuster.com/the-representation-of-the-supernatural-in-hg-wells-red-room-and-susan-hills-farthing-house-essay-sample/>

the impression of young versus old. The people are described as ill and decaying representing death and ghosts themselves. This contributes to the morbid atmosphere.

The images in the Red Room are seen through a first person view that makes the story seem more believable and personal. This all makes the imagery clear and easy to visualize.

Red Rooms structure is made up of tension levels. Its steadily rises from the beginning of the story till the point where the young man bangs his head after which it then drops as the story is resolved.

Farthing House on the other hand has a different plot. It starts with a young woman recounting an experience she has. She tells a story of what happened to her a few years before when she went to stay with her aunt in an old peoples home. Farthing House is a recount of a tale of something strange.

Farthing house is also set in an isolated area. Therefore the setting of this modern story has many similarities with the Red Room. For example both supernatural encounters occur at night. Both places are geographically isolated. This is because both try to show a typical setting for ghost stories.

The language in Farthing house is very different to that of the Red Room. It is a lot more modern than the Red Room (a result of it being written so much later) and it is written as an epistolary.

The effect if this is that it makes you feel more involved in the story and makes it more personal. For example ' I have never told you any of this
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before'. By using 'you' Susan Hill immediately makes the reader feel more involved and compelled to read on. This line is effective as the first line of the story.

The images in Farthing House are not created from poetic techniques like in the Red Room but by detailed descriptions. For example 'she was young with a flowing embroidered night gown'. The effect of this is that creates clear images that make the reader feel like is seeing for himself what is being described.

The similarities between the Red Room and Farthing House are pronounced. This is because both include periods of high tension and other things that are typically found in ghost stories for example the setting.

The differences however are also pronounced. They are the language, the style and the end morals of both stories. The effect of these differences are that they contribute to each stories unique style as both stories get different messages across to the reader by the end of the story.

Wells viewpoint in The Red Room is from a first person perspective. He is trying to tell us a seemingly typical ghost story with a twist at the end and his moral or lesson is that there was nothing to fear but fear itself. My interpretation of this is that the young man was subconsciously scared by the rumours and reputation of the room even though he was critical and rationalized them. This resulted in him working himself into a frenzy and banging his head. The Red Room is a story about human nature and how easily the mind can play tricks on itself.

On the other hand Hills viewpoint in Farthing house is more personal as a suggestive epistolary. She is trying to tell us a modern day ghost story and how it can affect us. Her moral is how strange things are possible and how events from the past can be resolved today.

The supernatural is represented in the two stories by ghosts however they are very differently represented. For example in The Red Room the 'ghost' doesn't have a physical form, its just a force whereas in Farthing house the ghost takes the form of a young woman. This is because whether a ghost actually exists in The Red Room is always in question unlike Farthing House in which the ghost is of a woman who died there a long time before but has lingered in the house as a sad presence.

I think the representation of the supernatural in The Red Room is more successful than in Farthing house because the fact that you cant see the entity makes the reader create his/her own spirit/ghost. This makes it seem more sinister and as a result more successful as a ghost story. I do not believe that the ghost in Farthing House would have lingered just to give people a sense of sadness.

I preferred The Red Room more than Farthing House because I like the dramatic style of H. G Wells as opposed to Susan Hills modern day suggestive style. Farthing house is written to make the reader think about the stories ending and what the moral actually is it can be interpreted in a number of ways. I do not feel this is an effective way of putting a message across and telling a story.

I feel ghost stories are still relevant to a twentieth century audience because they can teach us lessons on life and how to be careful with it. People also liked to be frightened. Ghost stories will always be liked because readers are comforted by the suggestion that there isn't just a void after death and that there is something afterwards. Readers also like to be horrified by what they can not explain as it excites them.