

To what extent do the  
short stories you  
have read reveal a  
19th century  
preoccupa...



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' Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by Faith and Hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and reimpresed by external ordinances by stated calls to worship, and the salutary influence of example,' (Samuel Johnson). During the 19th Century, there was an apparent preoccupation with the Supernatural, and this was conveyed through the extremely popular ' Short Stories'. New scientific revelations such as ' The Origin of Species' questioned the reality of the traditional beliefs of an omniscient, benevolent, omnipotent God.

With the industrial revolution, received wisdoms were discovered, enabling the masses to question their own beliefs. People had begun to develop a preoccupation with the unknown. Popularity of the genre rose when the serialisation of literature through magazines made the succinct style of writing accessible to the general public. Both short stories contain underlying revelations concerning the 19th Century preoccupation with the supernatural.

The Red Room focuses upon embracing the unknown, and a journey from scepticism to reverence for the unknown, whilst the Judge's House focuses upon an individual's role in society, a debate between cynicism and science versus the supernatural. This preoccupation with the supernatural is conveyed through the short stories in numerous ways, ranging from the atmosphere and setting of the story, to the underlying moral. Both the Judge's House and the Red Room are instances of this, within their examinations of the collective themes of mystery and the supernatural in each story.

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The Red Room is about a cynical, anonymous narrator who chooses to ignore the caveats and stigma of the local townsfolk, spends a night in a foreboding house, and encounters his own fear. Essentially, this is a story about cynicism versus embracing the unknown, mirroring the events of the time, in which the theory of evolution had questioned the general beliefs about an omniscient, omnipresent, benevolent God. This theme relates to the preoccupation with the supernatural, as it advises for society in general to be aware of the supernatural, and not to dismiss the unknown in favour of science and knowledge.

The Judge's House is about a man of science named Malcolm Malcolmsen who is too sceptical to believe in the paranormal stigma surrounding the Judge's house, and rejects society in search of isolation, and chooses to stay in an abandoned house, formerly inhabited by a merciful judge, who embodied in a rat, constantly watches and harasses Malcolmsen with his baleful eyes. The Judge eventually hangs the protagonist, who is too sceptical to return to society, this mirroring the theme of an individual in society, and also mirroring the theme of science versus religion.

The several themes all reveal a preoccupation with the supernatural. Many of these themes act as an admonition to the reader not to be too sceptical. A way that these stories convey this preoccupation is with the protagonist of the story. The protagonist in the Judge's House is used in the story to set an example to any sceptic in society. There are many key points in the status of the protagonist, Malcolmsen, which reflect the theme of an individual in society, and also the debate between cynicism and embracing the unknown.

Firstly, Malcolmsen is a dedicated student of mathematics.

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This subject is considered to be very pure, thus his logical mind leads to a mental dismissal of the mystery that shrouds the judge's house. The fact he studies mathematics relates to the theme of science versus religion, and therefore suggests to the reader that a scientific mind is rather a vice than a virtue. The second factor is that Malcolmsen imposes a voluntary isolation from society, and often rejects the aid of society. He chooses to reject society in search for isolation to dedicate his time to science. This relates to the preoccupation with an individual's role in society.

If the individual chooses to reject society, then the result is inevitable... death. That is the message that is being conveyed in the Judge's House. That fact that he is a man of science is reflective of that fact that his mind is too logical to search for an explanation that is illogical. This is shown by the way that the protagonist does not comprehend that his antagonist, the Judge, does not fear science, yet fears the bible, and religion. This is linked to the preoccupation with the supernatural, as it conveys that evil does not fear science, nor facts, but religion.

The usage of a protagonist of this nature just reveals a preoccupation with the supernatural in the 19th century. However, the protagonist in the Red Room is portrayed in a different way, and to a slightly different effect. The biggest difference between the two protagonists is that whilst the protagonist in the Judge's House has a determined character and identity, the protagonist in the Red Room remains anonymous throughout the story. The intention of the author is that the protagonist's anonymity has the effect that it shows that what happens to the narrator could happen to anybody.

The anonymity also acts as an admonition to the reader not to be too sceptical. It makes the story much more immediate, and much more engaging. His first statement is a challenge, the tone ironic; ' I assure you, it would take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. ' This is ironic as in the final analysis it is an intangible ghost that frightens him. Another difference between the two protagonists is that whilst in the Judge's House Malcolmson has a motive for staying in the house, the protagonist of the Red Room does not reveal his motive for visiting.

This ambiguity surrounding his motivation increases mystery. The protagonist is young and sceptical, and also has an air of confidence and slight arrogance: ' I assure you, it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. ' The relevance of the protagonist being young and sceptical is that after spending a night in the red room, he realises his fear of the unknown, and he moves from absolute cynicism to appreciation and reverence of the supernatural. This is one of the underlying themes of the Red Room.

Also, the significance of the protagonist being young and sceptical is that he undergoes a rite of passage when staying in the red room, as is mirrored through a journey to the red room in which his apprehension is conveyed by jitters and fears: ' Then, with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver, I advanced, only to discover a Ganymede and Eagle glistening in the moonlight. ' There is also a long psychological journey to the red room, which reveals to the reader that the scepticism is not as strong as he believes it is. Before the Red Room protagonist even reaches the red room, he's already in a state of nervous tension.

This has the effect to the reader that scepticism is never as strong as you believe, and is fleeting. The protagonist in the Red Room is used as a moral to the masses, to deliver the message that one must have appreciation for the unknown. Also, the anonymity of the protagonist reminds the readers what could happen if they become too apprehensive of the supernatural. The circumstances, statuses, and actions of both protagonists reveal a preoccupation with the supernatural. However, with every protagonist, there must be an antagonist.

The antagonist of Malcolmsen in the Judge's House is a complex character, as it is not a singular character, but rather a metaphor. Initially, the antagonist is in the form of a rat. However, the rat is the embodiment of the Judge, who in turn personifies the devil, which is the anthropomorphosis of evil. However, Malcolmsen's logical and methodical mind does not allow him to think laterally, to find a relationship between the rat and the judge. However, Bram Stoker, the author of the Judge's House makes the narrator continually describe the rat with ' baleful eyes'.

This has two effects. Firstly, it associates the rat with evil, dirtiness, and shows that the narrator is actually more fearful than he lets on. More importantly, it has the effect that baleful eyes is a human quality, and this continual personification of the rat foreshadows the fact that the rat is the judge. The narrator unwittingly gives the rat human qualities: ' There on the great high-backed carved oak chair by the right side of the fireplace sat an enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes.

The fact that the rat was glaring, the fact that the rat was sitting on the chair, and the fact it is a big rat all foreshadows that the rat is the judge. When Malcolmsen looks upon the picture of the Judge, he again unwittingly compares him to something else, this time he gives the Judge bestial imagery, comparing him to the bird of prey; ' His face was strong and merciless, evil, crafty and vindictive, with a sensual mouth, hooked nose of ruddy colour, and shaped like the beak of a bird of prey. '

Not only does Malcolmsen unwittingly infer using such loaded vocabulary that the Judge is a bird of prey, but he also unwittingly infers that he shall soon be the Judge's prey. A link that can be made is the way that in the picture the Judge sits in the giant chair beside the rope. This again is a release of clues, as the rat also sits on the chair. Once again, it is being foreshadowed that the rat is the judge. Of course, it is eventually revealed that the Rat is the Judge, as is shown when they are both likened with identical qualities: '... th his baleful eyes glaring vindictively. '

The way that the Judge moves towards the conclusion of the story reveals a lot about the antagonist. He moves in a slow, menacing way, without any uncertainty and with no hurry. This likens the Judge to the devil, and has the effect that the reader yautomatically associates him with the devil, and then in turn, evil; ' Slowly and deliberately/his eyes fairly glowed like hot coals and he stamped his foot with a sound that seemed to make the house shake. ' Immediately the Judge is given this behemoth, powerful, crushing imagery.

This makes the reader aware of the strength of the unknown. As with the protagonist, the antagonist of the Red Room is portrayed in a different

manor, and thus creates a different effect. Unlike in the Judge's House in which the antagonist has been personified in some form or another, in the Red Room the antagonist is fear itself. The fact that fear is the antagonist is conveyed through numerous ways. Firstly, it is conveyed by the loss of sight, and the way that sensory perception is deprived; ' I was now almost frantic with the horror of the coming darkness, and my self-possession deserted me.

This has the effect of showing that the protagonist's confidence and arrogance isn't as strong as he believes it to be. The fear is the darkness, and the darkness engulfs him. This tells the reader that if you do not appreciate the unknown, then it will engulf and destroy you. As with the Judge's House the protagonist unwittingly personifies inanimate objects in his fear. This is shown in the Red Room when he gives the candles human characteristics; ' I saw the candle in the right sconce of one of the mirrors wink and go right out...

The fact that the candles are winking shows that the protagonist has given them human attributes. The fact that the antagonist is fear is also conveyed through the number of candles that are lit by the protagonist. The numbers 7 and 10 were considered by numerologists at the time to be very pure, complete numbers. Therefore, the number 17, formed when the two numbers are combined, was considered to be the number representative of universal chaos and disorder. This number was particularly ominous in the 19th Century, and the fact that this number of candles is used foreshadows ominous events.



The language that the protagonist uses to describe fear is very loaded; '... that deafens and darkens and overwhelms.' This language is used as a mild form of intimidation, with the intent that the reader will become slightly fearful of being sceptical of the unknown. This relates to the theme of a metaphorical journey from cynicism to embracing the unknown. The irony with the Red Room is that after the protagonist stated that 'it would take an extremely tangible ghost to frighten me' it turned out that the thing he feared most was untouchable, intangible, and thus reflective of the fear of the unknown.

However, it is not only the protagonists and antagonists that reveal a 19th century preoccupation with the supernatural, but peripheral characters are also used to reveal this. A similarity between both the Red Room and the Judge's House is that both the protagonists reject the advice and help that the peripheral characters offer them. The peripheral characters in the Red Room are treated with a lot of contempt from the sceptic protagonist. They are immediately dismissed by the protagonist, and he chooses not to regard any of the foreboding messages told by them.

The three peripheral characters contribute to the ambience of the play. The atmosphere is suggested by structure and action, and especially by the author's usage of language. The contempt felt by the protagonist is displayed by the way he describes them; '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 description of them causes the reader to be repulsed by them, but as the story progresses, the

readers realise that even though they have been dismissed by the cynic protagonist, they were really speaking the truth.

This links to the theme of cynicism versus appreciating the unknown, and conveys to the reader that one should always have regard for what they do not know. The three peripheral characters behave in unique ways, all three adding to the effect of the story. The old woman acts as fate, revealing the events that are about to unfold by her repetition of the phrase ' This night of all nights,' , and thus revealing the fate of the protagonist.

The old man with the withered arm acts as if he is aware of the fact the protagonist has dismissed their help, but acting anti-social towards him, such as speaking in blunt one liners; ' I said - it's your own choosing. ' This behaviour conveys to the reader that people who do not have respect for the supernatural will be treated with condescension from society. The second old gentleman acts as the most friendly of the triad, offering help to the protagonist. However, he too is dismissed by the protagonist. The way that the triad are described by the protagonist is reflected of his views.

The underlying message lying in his descriptions is that old people really irritate him, and their archaic advice is pure fiction. Of course, this is contradicted by the fact that they were in fact correct about the room. He describes them to make them look repulsive, giving them grotesque deformities, and vile habits such as the hacking cough of the man with the withered arm. The fact that the truth lies with the dismissed, grotesque triad links to the theme of science versus religion, and the preoccupation with the supernatural.

The peripheral characters in the Judge's House are used to achieve a similar effect, yet Bram Stoker uses different methods to achieve this. There are three peripheral characters in the tale of the Judge's House and they are the Doctor, Mrs Whitam, and Mrs Dempster. Both the Doctor and Mrs Whitam perform the same function in the Judge's House and their function is closely linked to the theme of an individual in society. They both act as society, offering Malcolmson aid and refuge. Yet Malcolmson chooses to impose a voluntary isolation upon himself, and in effect rejects society in search of seclusion.

He is then killed... the moral of the story is never to reject society, and this is conveyed to the reader. The third peripheral character, Mrs Dempster acts as a form of a red herring. On the surface, Mrs Dempster appears to be just as cynical as Malcolmson; 'Rats is bogies and bogies is rats,' thus proclaiming that the entire stigma surrounding the house is caused by the rats. However, when asked to stay at the house with Malcolmson, she fobs him off with an implausible excuse. This shows that even though Mrs Dempster states she is a non-believer, deep down she is.

However, it is not only the peripheral characters that add to the ambience of the short stories. Such factors of setting and weather also add to this. Setting is typical of Gothic and Victorian ghost stories. Dilapidated and derelict buildings were often inhabited by people who neglected their own welfare and were regarded as morally corrupt. Victorians prized order and appearances as important indicators of character. Gloominess is suggested by the cold and dark, contributing to the atmosphere of oppression and neglect. The Judge's House and the Red Room are no exception.

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Both of the stories focus around a house with some form of unease and mystery shrouding them. In the Red Room the preoccupation with the supernatural is suggested in numerous ways. Firstly, we can reveal the preoccupation from the way that the room is described. Before the protagonist even visits the room, the reader has been given an impression of what the room will be like. The way that the old triad react when told of the protagonist's intentions; ' This night of all nights/... and eight-and-twenty years you have lived and never seen the likes of this house. ' These examples provide the reader with a preconception of what to accept.

The fact that the protagonist passes through a subterranean passage suggests to the reader imagery of darkness and enclosure, quite similar to that of a tomb. The fact that the subterranean passage suggests darkness is closely linked to the underlying theme of darkness and light, good occurring in light, and bad being synonymous with darkness. The Judge's House also follows the characteristics of a typical Gothic mystery, with an old, derelict house. Unlike in the Red Room, in the Judge's House the focal point of the essay is upon the house in general, and not of a room in particular.

Similarly, by the time the protagonist reaches the house, the reader is already in a state of nervous tension, as a preconception of the house has been formed. This time, the preconception is suggested by the estate agents attitude towards the house; '... that some kind of absurd prejudice has grown up about it,' and also from the reactions of Mrs Whitam when informed of his intentions; '... you wouldn't sleep there a night, not if I had to go there myself and pull the big alarm bell that's on the roof. ' The fact that the

setting has such a stigma has the effect that the audience already have a presumption of what will happen.

As you can see, it is possible to ascertain that setting was often used to add to the atmosphere of the story, as well as acting as a release of clues.

However, the weather also adds to the ambience of the story. In both the Red Room and the Judge's House, there are many instances in which the weather or other inanimate objects are reflective of the psychological mood of the story. In the Judge's House there is a gradual narrative crescendo, and this is also shown through the gradual increase in force of the storm.

Towards the end of the story, as the plot reaches its final peak, the storm is at its strongest; '... could hear the roar and howl of the tempest, and through it, swept on the storm. '

This Pathetic Fallacy adds toward the atmosphere of the story, making the story much more harrowing yet exciting. All of the points made previously all add towards one thing... the ambience of the story. In stories of a ' Gothic Mystery' genre, there are numerous ways in which ambience is suggested. Atmosphere is suggested both by structure and action, but especially by the author's use of language. Both stories contain numerous examples of the authors using selective vocabulary and imagery to suggest and convey opinions to the reader.

The authors also use other methods such as dramatic foreshadowing, pathetic fallacy, and a gradual release of clues to add to the ambience.

Firstly, one should look at the way atmosphere is suggested in the Red Room. From the offset the story is structured to create and sustain suspense.

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The very first assertion from the protagonist creates a slightly uncomfortable atmosphere, yet it also engages interest from the reader, as they automatically want to see what happens. The mention of the house also engages interest -and the narrator's confidence introduces conflict into the text.

His arrogance and complacency makes the story inevitably ironic, as the reader can automatically assume what will happen to the narrator. The journey to the room creates a certain ambience to the story. The author uses passages such as a subterranean corridor and a spiral staircase to invoke metaphors of darkness and imageries of a tomb. This creates an atmosphere of tension for the reader, and causes them to read on. By the time the protagonist reaches the room both he and the reader are in a state of nervous tension. The author of the Red Room also uses dramatic foreshadowing to add to the ambience of the story.

An example of this would be the actual journey to the red room, in which his arrogant and confident facade shown earlier is undermined by the jitters and fears that is shown as he travels to the red room. The previous irony of the phrase 'it would take a very [in]tangible ghost to frighten me,' foreshadows that this assertion will inevitably come true in one form or another. The protagonist, in his fear, unwittingly gives inanimate objects human characteristics.

An example of this would be when he suggests that the candles were winking; '... I saw the candle in the right sconce of one of the mirrors wink and go right out... The fact that the lights constantly go out foreshadows the

fact that the lights will inevitably go out. He also personifies things such as darkness and fear; '... closed upon me like the shutting of an eye,' this shows the anxiety experience by the protagonist, as he unwittingly gives darkness such characteristics. Through the whole story, the narrative gradually crescendos, and this is mirrored by the increasingly tempestuous weather. The author uses pathetic fallacy to mirror the psychological mood of the story, and this adds to the ambience of the play.

The author portrays the protagonist as an example to society, and the reader will be astutely aware of the message that is delivered... do not disrespect the supernatural and unknown. Atmosphere is suggested also by the description of the peripheral characters. They are described with incredibly grotesque vocabulary; 'withered arm/pale eyes/monstrous shadow,' thus creating quite a frightening atmosphere, and also building up the texture of the plot. They also act as a red herring to the protagonist.

When described in such context, the reader would assume they are the antagonists of the story... t ironically in the end they provide the aid to the protagonist. The atmosphere is also suggested by the continual repetition of the phrase 'this night of all nights,' which creates suspense as the reader anticipates what is so special about that exact date. There are repeated references to the old people's fear, darkness, and shadows, which adds to the anxiety of the reader. As the story progresses, the pace of the narrative increases. As in the beginning, the protagonist's sentences were long and slightly contemptuous, as the pace of the narrative increased, his sentences became shorter and more abrupt.

This is reflective of his psychological mood, and makes those passages much more immediate. Unlike the Judge's House in which there is a series of peaks and narrative crescendos, in the Red Room there is a continuous increase in pace of narrative. It starts off slowly, in which he engages in conversation with the old triad, gradually speeds up as he makes his journey to the red room, and ultimately peaks when the lights of the room go out. This makes the story much faster paced, and makes the ambience more anxious.

To conclude, it is possible to ascertain that the ambience and atmosphere of the Red Room is maintained by the author via many aspects of structure, actions, and choice of language. As with the Red Room, the atmosphere and ambience of the Judge's House is constantly increased throughout the text. However, whilst the Red Room consists of one constant narrative crescendo, the Judge's Room consists of numerous peaks and declines. This has a profound effect on the reader, as they are never sure when the story has reached its final peak. The first climax occurs during his first confrontation with the rat/judge.

As this is the first climax, it isn't as fast-paced as the latter peaks, but the confrontation creates an atmosphere of uncertainty among the readers, as they are confused as to what will happen after. During the day, the narrative diminishes, just to rise again as the night falls. This time it crescendos much more, during the second confrontation, in which the growingly audacious rat does not flinch when threatened by science books, yet flees from the bible. However, once again the speed of the narrative decreases. However, the narrative reaches its final peak during the final confrontation, in which the Judge appears.

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During this confrontation, the narrative is at its fastest, with fast moving narration and highly rapid verbs: '... with a quick movement... the lamp seemed to have blazed up... he drew close to the victim. ' This series of crescendos and diminishments creates an atmosphere of excitement and uncertainty and makes the story exciting, with an edge of suspense. A technique used in a story called The Speckled Band is that the audience are given a red herring to throw both the audience and the protagonist. This causes less predictability in the story, and slightly misleads the audience.

Another factor which is much more prominent in the Judge's House rather than the Red Room is that there are constant releases of clues. There are many instances in which the protagonist unwittingly foreshadows events that inevitably occur; ' You could hang a man with it... ' referring to the rope which eventually hangs Malcolmson. By putting in these releases of clues, the reader can automatically infer what will happen, and thus sustain the built up exciting atmosphere. Another instance of dramatic foreshadowing is the human characteristics Malcolmson uses to describe the rat; '... t the enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes. '

These human characteristics reveal to the reader what the protagonist does not do, and thus makes the plot much more exciting. Bram Stoker intentionally repeats the phrase; ' baleful eyes,' which suggests that the rat is in fact the Judge, yet Stoker also develops the character with such a logical mind that he cannot search for an answer that could be illogical. As the story progresses, and the pace of the narrative speeds up, the usage of language by the protagonist becomes slightly more erratic. He begins to chatter to himself, and on occasions, arguing with himself; '...

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If I go on like this I shall become a crazy fool. This must stop! ' Unlike the Red Room in which as the story progresses, the sentence structures become shorter, in the Judge's House the protagonist appears to ramble more incessantly. This suggests Malcolmson's anxiety and sustains the atmosphere. The final technique in which the atmosphere is sustained is via the usage of pathetic fallacy. As the narrative crescendos, as does the mood of the tempestuous storm, until both the storm and the plot reach a peak together, to suggest the atmosphere is as climatic as it shall get.

So, as you can see, the atmosphere and ambience of the Judge's House is sustained in similar ways to the Red Room and also differs in ways. However, it is obvious from both stories that there is an underlying preoccupation with the supernatural. After reading through both the Red Room and the Judge's House it is possible to ascertain a 19th Century preoccupation with the supernatural. This is mainly due to the underlying themes of both stories. Both short stories deliver a message to the reading audience, via clever symbolisms to blunt propaganda.

The fact that the underlying themes, including science versus faith, an individual in society, psychological journeys from cynicism to respect for the unknown, are so blatant reveals that the new found beliefs in Darwinism questioned the beliefs in an omnipresent, benevolent God, and that people had begun to move away from the general consensus of the time. The fact that these stories are based around the schism of beliefs strongly ascertain the preoccupation with the supernatural. Therefore, to conclude, the short stories that we have read do in fact reveal a 19th century preoccupation with the supernatural, to a great extent.

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