

Compare and  
contrast the ways in  
which the writers of  
the the red room and  
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The Red Room is a story by HG wells and is about a man who goes to an ancient castle to ghosthunt. This proves to be successful after a near fatal encounter with candles during his vigil. The Signalman by Dickens is about a man who is being haunted by ghostly figures that precede death. This soon leads to his own death.

These two stories are both written in the Victorian period, The Red room in 1894 and the signal man in 1866. Because of this, and the nature of these stories, they belong to the gothic genre of writing. This is odd because the Victorian era are known for their huge advancements in technology and science. This doesn't account for their fascination with the supernatural and superstition. These stories were popular because of their suspense and twist in their tales involving ghosts, supernatural beings and the unexplainable.

This paper will focus on how the two stories compare against each other and how the two successfully capture the fear and imagination of their readers and keep it. The setting described in ' The Red Room' is dark and ancient; an example of this is the idea of the labyrinthine corridors and passageways the narrator must walk through in order to get to ' the Red Room'. You go along the passage for a bit, until you come to a door and through that is a spiral staircase and halfway up... Go through that and down the long corridor to end and the red room is on your left up the steps.

' This shows that it is an endless and long journey to get to the final destination. It is also impossible for him to make a quick escape if something goes wrong and he has to return. If he does try to return he could easily get himself lost and get him into more danger than he was before. The recurring

theme of darkness versus light in this story also has an effect in the corridors. The only thing that gives a direction in the dark is a solitary candle, which he keeps with him.

He is not able to see around corners and alcoves that he may come to pass along his journey and because of this, everything seems more threatening and dangerous. An example of this could be when he is about to find the red room and is confronted by a statue of a 'Ganymede and Eagle' this startles him and stands for what he describes as thirty seconds with his hand on a gun before he relaxes. This is because he is unable to see its true nature in the darkness and assumes the worst possible scenario '...

impression of someone crouching to waylay me... ' The setting in 'The Signalman' is similar to that of 'The Red Room' but unusually for gothic horror stories it takes place in the day and is set in a modern place which makes it all the more intriguing and thought provoking for the reader. It is set on a railway line signal box in the middle of a cutting. This has been referred to as 'The unnatural valley' to show its roughness and enforces the point of modern technology ploughing through natural beauty and destroying it.

The cutting itself was dark and dank. It was uninhabitable and had a certain untouchable quality about it 'clammy stone it became oozy and wetter as I went down...' The setting also includes an ominous looking tunnel in which two of the three fatalities occur. The tunnel is described as 'barbarous' this suggests that it feels deadly and uncouth and has a certain barbaric power about it.

The tunnel has also been personified to have some sort of animal like qualities that make it all the more threatening and disturbing. This allows us to feel like the tunnel is an unwelcome guest in this story and this is also where most of the tragedies occur. Another reason the scene seems to the reader to be more uncomfortable because it is set in a modern era; it plays on the readers emotions by using an area which is new and unknown and therefore makes the reader feel uneasy because it is like being in the dark. The most of characters in the ' The Red Room' comply with the setting. They all seem to blend in together and be part of the setting of the old castle. They are mostly old and haggard and have a grotesque and bizarre nature about them.

The narrator makes an observation of this. ' I must confess that the odds of these three old pensioners in whose charge her ladyship had left the castle, and the deep toned, old fashioned furniture of the housekeeper's room in which they had forgathered affected me...

They seemed to belong to another age, and older age an age when things spiritual were different from ours, less certain; an age when omens and witches are credible.... This shows that the mere presence of these three grotesque old people had ensured the existence of ghosts in the room and the protests about it made it something to be fearful of adding to the tension and apprehension of the room that they seemed so frightful. It is also noted that the narrator doesn't have a name in this story and this possibly because it allows the readers to become the person they're reading about and gives them room to attach themselves emotionally to the story and get drawn in further.

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The narrator is also often a sceptic in these types of stories. This is possibly to ensure that the reader thinks that all rational explanations have been disproved and all that is left is the spectral and irrational explanations. An example of the narrator being a sceptic is when he first arrives at the castle; 'eight and twenty years,' said I 'I have lived and never ghost as I have seen yet' 'this shows his arrogance in believing that because he has never experienced the supernatural it doesn't exist. This is a common way of thinking for a sceptical narrator in gothic ghost stories.

This a good way of heightening tension because we know of his age (28) that he is naive and inexperienced which makes him a reasonable target for the supernatural and irrational explanations that become of him. An example of this is when he first enters the room and checks all possible entrances and exits to see if there is room for trickery or something that is not ghostly. The three housekeepers in the story are old and extremely ugly. This is told to us by the descriptions given to them by the writer HG Wells.

There are two men one with a withered arm and one with a sliding lip revealing decaying teeth and gums. And a woman who has pale vacant eyes that seem to stare. These disfigurements are often product of age and this places emphasis on castle and the housekeeper's belonging to the castle because of their seemingly ancient age and their grotesque nature. Another character or aspect of the story is the way that fear has become personified in the story.

The descriptions of fear in the story and conclusion show that it has been described like a human being in its mannerisms and movements. '... as I

stood undecided and invisible hand seemed to sweep out the two candles on the table' or ' and the shadows I feared and fought against returned, and crept in upon me..

. This allows us to see the narrator use his scientific explanations and watch as they all fail. Also like ' The Red Room', ' The Signalman's' narrator is also nameless. This is probably again to allow the readers to be drawn in and imagine themselves as the character seeing and feeling what the character is feeling.

He is young man, we assume because unlike the other story there is no mention of the narrator's age. And we believe him to be an educated man or a man of high regard because the signalman and the train driver Tom always refer to him or answer him as ' sir'. The signalman was unusually intelligent for his post. It makes the reader wonder why he had such a lowly job? His appearance is also very striking and which coincided with the idea of him being visited by the unknown. He is described in a lot of detail compared to the other characters in the story. ' He was a dark and sallow man, with a dark beard and heavy eyebrows' this shows that his features are quite dark and have a resemblance to the dark which in this genre of stories is usually associated with the unknown and the supernatural.

Other characters in the story are the spectres themselves. They rarely speak but have a huge presence in the story and lead to the main character's death among others. They're a bad omen because they only appear when death is approaching and always seem to cover their faces to show an emotion or a gesture. It is possible that they are the last possible things that

the signalman sees. To tell the signalman that they are in they release a strange vibration in the signal bell that alerts the signalman. ' I have never confused the spectre's bell with the man's.

The ghost ring is a strange vibration in bell that derives from nothing else... ' this shows that he alone can hear the bell because at the time the narrator is the signal box with him.

The spectres appear in the same place, by the danger light. This is probably to draw attention to the word danger. The final character that has a very small but integral part in the story is that of Tom the train driver, the last person to see the signalman alive and who acted out the familiar cries and gestures of the spectre. He also enforces that fact the signalman is an extremely contentious and is a reliable man; also reinforcing that he was telling the truth about seeing the spectres. The imagery used in The Red Room is common in many ghost stories.

It uses the image of light and dark and uses the senses. Ghost stories use the senses to frighten the reader and to also keep them reading are because people can read and sympathises instantly with the way people in the stories feel. An example from The Red Room could be as follows, ' ..

. I turned and saw that the darkness was there, as one might see an unexpected presence of as stranger. ' This uses the sense of sight that is prominent in this story and that use of the sense of sight allows you to imagine the situation, as it is possible it has happened to you before. You can sympathise with the character thus, further drawing you into the story and keeping you reading. The principal of imagery is used in The Signalman <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-the-ways-in-which-the-writers-of-the-the-red-room-and-the-signalman-essay/>

in the same style as *The Red Room* but it is used to a greater effect because it uses more than one type sense. Sight is used by the way of the danger light and the visitation of the spectres themselves and the fact that a specific threatening colour has been used, Red in this case similarly to *The Red Room*.

*The Signalman* also uses the idea of darkness in the form of a tunnel and its un-welcoming and barbaric presence. ' ...

A gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to the tunnel in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous depressing and foreboding air' expresses this perfectly. The idea of hearing as a personified idea includes disturbing analogies to emphasise the dark and devilish sounds that can be heard. One particular quote ' the wind and wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail. ' Suggests the dark and murky world of the supernatural where they hear everything and the stories being uttered in confidence are being whisked along the telegraph wire as if sending the message of warning to the higher powers.

Touch and sensation is used predominately in this story. The idea of fear being personified is also toyed within this story with the line ' ... the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine.

' This gives the idea that he is being marked out in this particular by fear. An another use of sensation is the idea of the warmth of the fireplace in the signal box masks dank weather of the cutting, which is dark and miserable. It is always somewhere where the signalman feel safest when he has been approached by the spectres and a majority of the conversations about the <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-the-ways-in-which-the-writers-of-the-the-red-room-and-the-signalman-essay/>



spectres takes place inside around the fire. The reason the authors involve the senses when writing their stories is because it draws the reader in because it uses a major part of our being to feel exactly what the other characters are feeling and how this affects them and us. The structure of *The Red Room* is typical of the other stories of its genre and uses the same main principals: The rule of three, Withheld information climaxes and twists in the tales. This is also the same for *The Signalman* *The Red Room*'s structure uses of rule of three noticed in the three old grotesque house keepers and the narrator three screams ' Lifting my voice screamed once twice, thrice' the thrice in this quote is reminiscent of a spell or incantation and this is an unnerving thought.

And one that would capture the imagination of any reader and keep them gripped. The signalman also has a predominant use of the rule of three by the unfortunate occurrence of three accidents of that stretch of line, the signalman touches the narrators arm three times to emphasis his point about the story and the three visits to the signalman's box by the narrator. The rule of three is used in the actual event in the story also- there are three events that lead to a fatal. In a gothic ghost story it is commonplace to have unanswered questions in the beginning to intrigue and entice the reader into reading more. *The Red Room* however bucks the trend by leaving more unanswered questions than answered ones.

This technique is used to allow you to keep thinking about the story even after you have stopped reading it. There are questions like, ' why is the old mans arm withered? How did they ' discover' it was haunted? And why is this day so important? '. These questions continue to go on unanswered; this is a <https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-the-ways-in-which-the-writers-of-the-the-red-room-and-the-signalman-essay/>

clever way of making you finish the story yourself jumping to your own conclusions; thus trying to cause nightmares while you continue to think about the story. This is done less so in *The Signalman*. There are fewer questions but all of them bar one, are answered. The only question not answered is why was the signalman on the track at the time and did not seem to hear the train or the driver at the time of death? The climaxes in *The Red Room* seem to be a complete turn around when considering the build up in tension and use of the senses.

The stories mini climaxes seem to carry more weight to them and keep the reader hooked throughout the entire story. But the idea of fear incarnate inhabiting the room doesn't strike enough fear into the readers or they aren't enough unanswered questions in it to start making terrifying assumptions. *The Signalman* however has a good climax because it involves a huge twist in the tale. The signalman who sees the premonitions of others deaths and ends up seeing his own. This is a good conclusion and climax because it thrusts your way of thinking in another direction.

For instance many probably thought for the first section that the person who would end up dying was going would be the narrator. The short story that captured and held my attention was *The Signalman*. This is because it had used practically all senses to entice me into the story. This allowed me to become involved and want to carry on reading the story. The climaxes also helped me to find out about the characters and the climax shocked me and I still kept asking questions after I had finished reading. The reason I did not chose *The Red Room* because it didn't allow me to ask questions after it had finished and it did not hold my imagination for long enough.

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Sensory stimulation in a ghost story is crucial especially in a gothic ghost story. This is because the information on paper needs to be transferred successfully into your mind to terrify you. This can only be done if the senses are a major part and not an integral but side-tracked aspect of the story. The senses cause us to lose our reason if they are all stimulated at once this makes a good ghost story all the more frightening.

This why in my opinion I feel that ' The signalman' captures and sustains its audiences' imagination. In the best possible way, through the senses.