

# Comparison of the red room and farthing house ghost stories



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Ghost stories have been around for decades, they have been passed down from generation to generation to the present day. Several people believe they are real and others believe they are nothing but nonsense, there to scare us. However, authentic or not ghost stories have been the central theme for many a book. When a ghost story is written it follows some typical conventions. Within these conventions lie three main parts, the characters, plot and setting. The plot of a traditional ghost story usually involves the death of a person.

This person has usually died prematurely or violently leaving unfinished business. The spirit is then caught in a sort of limbo. The first character is a believer and sees the ghost frequently. They are usually old and not used to the modern world which is dominated by scientific fact. There is a non believer this person is usually young, foolish and very arrogant and doesn't mind disagreeing with people. The setting is usually in the dark where not everything is distinguishable and it is easy to play tricks on the eye.

They consist of certain props like antiques, fireplaces, open pianos and the house is usually isolated. The Red Room was written by HG Wells and is set in the Victorian era. It is about a haunted room. The narrator is a disbeliever of ghosts he prefers to attempt to explain events away by applying scientific knowledge. HG Wells was himself very keen on scientific developments and wrote Science Fiction stories, like the time machine. The narrator is almost dared by the other characters to spend a night in the haunted room.

Because he is so sceptical of ghosts he accepts the challenge without any hesitation. However towards the end of the story he changes his mind. While

enduring events that take place in the room he attempts to reason logically about the events but eventually is overcome. He realises that logic cannot explain away the events and is resigned to the fact that maybe other forces are actually at work. But even then he doesn't admit this to the other characters. Farthing House is written in a later period probably mid Twentieth Century.

It is scripted in the form of a narration as a letter written by the main character to her children probably to be opened after her death. The author felt compelled to clear her conscience regarding events that had taken place years previously. She felt guilty about sending her aunt to a home to be looked after rather than being able to look after her herself. She used all the usual excuses to avoid it and her social conscience was pricking at her. The story shows that even at the time it was written there was still a bit of stigma attached to unmarried women having babies.

The Vicar said that things had improved for illegitimate children since the time the house had been built though. Susan Hill had herself endured many miscarriages during her life and may have been preoccupied with people having babies at the time of writing this story. She was able to empathise with the character who had longingly wanted to find her child. These stories commence in their own way, the Red Room has a more conventional beginning, whereas Farthing House is written in letter form. The stories begin very differently and grow further apart in the way they are written.

The structure language and plot are all quite different. The red room got underway by means of a strong line from the narrator, who we perceive to

be male, " It will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. " Right from this switch on line we can make out that the narrator is cocky, over confident and a none-believer who bases beliefs in science. This line is then counteracted by the three old people who are quick to dismiss the facts of the young man, since they believe in the ghost that lies within the Red Room.

This early clash of conflicts inside the characters assist the rise in tension and climax to enable the structure of the play to drive the reader onwards, keeping the reader's engaged. In the opening lines you get the sense that the narrator is setting himself up for fall as he denies everything. The next climax and approaches when the narrator, makes his way to the red room. The narrator has to make his way down a dark corridor, one of the trademarks of a good ghost story, where he battles with reality, explaining away any anomalies which may occur with science. This causes the climaxes to swing up and down like a bungee.

The young man eventually reaches the Red Room feeling a bit nervous he decides to conduct a search of the room. Especially the dark shadowy corners. The anticlimax is achieved by the lighting of candles. The story continues along the next few pages with little happening and then the next climax begins to take effect. The story starts to build up the language becomes short and sharp it is at this point that the author introduces more tension by making the candles blow out one by one and the character is unable to explain away the abnormality using scientific theory.

The climax peaks at the time that the fire is extinguished. At this point the character has become very scared and in his panic manages to knock

himself out. From this point onwards the story drops slowly and tails off with no conclusion arrived at. Farthing House starts on a high with the character beginning a sentimental journey back in time triggered by sights and smells she had experienced that day and which had drawn her back into the past. The next pitch at a climax is when she is shown to the Cedar room.

She gets an uneasy feeling about the room and that same evening when settled for sleep she dreamed almost instantly about a baby and a crib she was being drawn into the past and she was awoken with the sound of a baby crying. She was temporarily dazed and could not be sure where she was. This is one of the key climaxes in the story and clues the reader into the fact that the dream may in fact be a prelude to ghostly goings on. The language is calm there does not seem to be any hint of fear or of feeling startled.

All through the next day she contemplates on what happened the night before. The story then starts to build up to the next climax which takes place the next night where she has a sighting of the ghost. Again her dreams become almost real to her and she is awoken by a young woman in her room. But rather than let fear build up in her the author describes a feeling of melancholy and hopelessness at the inability to help this woman which she feels compelled to do. Unlike the Red Room this story is more controlled there is no sense of panic, dread or terror.

However there is a final twist in the story and this comes in the last few lines where a newspaper article described woman who had tried to steal a baby and had given her address as ' Farthing House Close, Little Dornford'. The similarities and differences between the two stories are that the Farthing

House is written in the form of a letter and therefore involves the author recounting things that happened to her in the past. The stories are also set in different periods the language used is different because the authors wrote the stories in different centuries and in dissimilar moods.

The Farthing House story shows the ghost as someone to be sorry for rather than to be feared by. The characters were also different the character in Farthing House did believe that ghosts could exist quite the opposite of the character in the Red Room. The similarities come in the form of settings both houses are old, isolated and decorated in an antique style. Both ghosts are confined to a particular room within the house. The ghosts in both stories are introduced midway though the stories, but what's different about the Red Room, is you don't see the ghost, the narrator assumes he feels it, but never sees it.

The ghost inside the Red Room is introduced gradually by the use of shadows which aids the build up of tension in the early stages since the narrator fears them. The narrator then tries to get around these circumstances by illumination, he lights a number of candles which he places in the corners of the room and lights the laid fire, so as to fight back the shadows. But it backfires " the fire was no sort of comfort to me," this is when we expose the initial hint of a ghost. The ghost is actually portrayed as being invisible but is able to get round the room unseen and put candles out.

There is no draft in the room to explain why the candles should go out. Even when the character begins to convince himself that it is nonsense the fire is suddenly extinguished. The ghost must be able to feel that the character is

disbelieving him and is saying explain this act then. Almost as if the ghost is playing with him. Language is used to describe tension and feelings rather than the ghost. To me the impression of the ghost I get in this story is one of someone playing with the man and enjoying watching the fear building up in him.

I think HG Wells is trying to put the point across that not everything in the world can be explained away by science. The ghost in Farthing House is shown to us in a sadder atmosphere the reader can't help but feel sorry for the ghost. She appears because of the tragic circumstances surrounded by the loss of her child. I feel that she is reminding people of her tragedy as if to say look what happened to me don't you feel sorry for me knowing that nothing can be done for her. She is not intending to frighten. She introduced to the ghost by the sound of a crying baby permeating her dream.

The writer is trying to write a story which explains that not all ghosts are to be considered evil or scary some of them just cannot rest because of the way they were treated while alive they feel as though their business is still unfinished. Both stories have their pros and cons but my favourite has to be The Red Room. This story contains more action and is more gripping and more of my idea of a traditional ghost story. Ghost stories sit well with the Victorian era because there was no electric light and London always seemed to be foggy. I would have liked a better ending with a more sustained climax. I found the ending to be a bit flat.