

The differences and similarities between 'the red room' and 'farthing house'



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' The Red Room' by H G Wells (1896) and ' Farthing House' by Susan Hill (1992) are two short ghost stories written in different centuries and in different styles.

Both stories have similarities and differences in different areas such as language, atmosphere and setting. I will look at these similarities and differences and analyse them, deciding why they are present and what effect this has on the story and the reader. I will analyse them separately and I will also compare them and decide which one I think is the most effective and why. The openings of both stories are very different from each other and use contrasting styles.

' Farthing House' takes some time to build up, and there is more of an introduction to it and the narrator begins by talking a bit about the situation, " Now it has all come back to me, I do not want to let it go again, I must set it down. " This tells the reader that she is remembering the event and writing down from her memory, whereas in ' The Red Room' the reader is plunged straight into the action with no build up or introduction given, " And I stood up before the fire with my glass in my hand". This is the second line and puts us straight into the action and on the set. Another major difference in the respective openings of the stories is that ' Farthing House' is presented as a flashback, told by the narrator, and ' The Red Room' is told as though it's actually happening, "...

.. Something that had been drifting on the edges of my consciousness blurred and insubstantial, came into focus, and in a rush I remembered..

.... This tells the reader that ' Farthing House' is told as a flashback, and this in my opinion takes some of the excitement away from the story, as if a story is told like in ' The Red Room' (on the scene) the reader cannot assume that everything will be alright and this leaves the reader in the dark and adds excitement to the story.

Both narrators start the story by telling the reader of themselves, " I can assure you" said I, " that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. This is the opening line of ' The Red Room' and immediately gives the reader an impression that the narrator is boastful and arrogant. " I have never told you any of this before – I have never told anyone. " This is the opening line from ' Farthing House' and instantly gives the reader the impression that the narrator is in a somewhat tense or nervous state of mind, as she repeats the same line twice. The setting of a ghost story is very crucial to its effect.

Both stories are set in old places, ' Farthing House' has lots of descriptions that tell the reader that it's a very original setting to say the least, but I believe that the description of the farthing house setting is like the opening to a romance or a fairy-tale, "

the countryside around it, on that late November afternoon, saw the red sun setting behind the beech copse.... ", and ".

....

beyond the rising, brown fields saw the bonfire the gardener had left to smoulder on gently by itself.....

“. This tells the reader that setting is pleasant and serene and not somewhere a setting typically associated with ghost stories. Words such as gentle, red sun and smoulder all suggest a kind of calm, peaceful and tranquil atmosphere, not altogether expected or wanted in a ghost story, although I also believe that this abnormal description interests the reader and entices them to continue reading. In comparison ‘The Red Room’ has more of a typical ghost story setting, “..

.. the great red room of Lorraine Castle. This suggest to the reader that the story is set in a castle, typical of a ghost story because of its usual isolation and traditional spookiness. There are several other lines that suggest a more typical spooky setting, “..

.. and I stood up before the fire. ” suggests night time, “ I half expected the old people were trying to enhance the spiritual terrors of their house by their droning insistence”, “...

.. the queer old mirror at the end of the room” and “ the door creaked on its hinges” all add to the creepy, old atmosphere in the setting. Words and phrases such as spiritual terrors, queer old mirrors and creaked are all adjectives which can paint a mental picture in the reader’s mind of a dark and creepy place. There are also differences in the setting of the actual room, where the respective events take place. In ‘Farthing House’ the room is described as “ one of the two largest in the house”, “ overlooking the garden”, “ high ceilings” and with “ ample furniture” all suggesting a quiet and peaceful room, that although slightly daunting is still comfy.

In comparison the red room is said to be in “ a shadowy corner” suggesting a sort of dark, boxed in feeling to the setting. Lots of lines crop up in the next passage of description such as “...

... with its shadowy window bays”, “...

that large sombre room”, “ in its black corners” and “....

its germinating darkness” all illustrating a depressingly deep and dark room, with the narrator also using a metaphor to emphasise this, “ My candle was a little tongue of light in its vastness. This suggests a huge room, with the good of light not being able to overcome the vastness of the evil dark.

Another thing in ‘ The Red Room’ is that the mention of “ The sombre reds and blacks of the room troubled me” as this is almost suggesting that the colours of the room in some way symbolise the history of the room as the colours red and black often are meant to symbolise things like death, evil, blood and danger, and in a way the narrator sees this as a bad omen and subconsciously troubled by this (often more powerful than the conscious mind). A similarity between the two stories is that the respective rooms in each story both have a past that seems to add to the suspense and tension of the stories. In ‘ Farthing House’ it’s said that “.

... its previous occupant having recently died” of Cedar room, and in ‘ The Red Room’ it’s said that “.

... the great red room of Lorraine Castle, in which the young duke had had died”. Both descriptions therefore suggesting that both rooms had previous tragedies occurring in the past and this can often play with the imagination

and make a person (narrator) nervous as is highlighted in 'Farthing House',
“.

.... I was in a slightly nervous and unsettled frame of mind.

” Which tells the reader that, although the narrator would prefer not to admit to feeling like this, she is because of the history that creates tension. The way in which each narrator sees the ghost is totally different. In 'Farthing House' the narrator is not expecting to see the ghost, so when she does, she is at first absolutely paralysed as she has had hardly any prior emotions such as fear, anxiety or suspense to get rid of some of the fear that she experiences when she encounters the ghost. As she sees the ghost by accident, at first she does not believe that it's a real ghost, “...

. what on earth were they thinking of to put her and her bed in my room while I was asleep” suggesting that the narrator believes that it's not a ghost at all but a woman. Although she is frightened she still reacts calmly to the ghost and even feels sorry for it, “ I felt that she needed me in some way” and “ I felt inconsolably hopeless and sad” both suggesting that the narrator is still uncertain of whether the figure is a human being or a ghostly apparition. I'm sure the narrator would have had not quite such strong feelings for the figure and probably would have panicked a bit more or would have at least been more frightened.

The narrator even manages to muster up the courage (spurred on mainly due to her overwhelming melancholy feelings towards the ghost. In contrast the narrator in 'The Red Room' is on a vigil to find the famous ghost of the red room at Lorraine Castle and is very aware of its history and therefore this
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creates tension and suspense even before he sees the ghost, “...urveying the scene of my vigil” tells the reader that the narrator is out on a mission to prove whether or not the famous ‘Red Room Ghost’ actually exists.

When the narrator actually sees what he believes to be the ghost he becomes hysterical, as he knows about the ghost’s and the room’s past, and this has created massive amounts of tension in the narrators mind, and this influences his thoughts, which in turn lead to him acting in the way he did, rushing around, becoming hysterical and not thinking rationally, “An invisible hand seemed to sweep out the two candles on the table. With a cry of terror I dashed at the alcove” indicates that just because a candle went out, the narrator’s imagination came up with the idea of something or someone putting it out, thus he becomes hysterical and runs to the alcove. The ghosts in both stories are described in different ways, primarily in my opinion because I believe that no ghost ever cropped up in ‘The Red Room’ but was in fact created in another way. In ‘Farthing House’ the ghost is only seen for a short period of time, and is described by the narrator in a human form, “She was young, with a flowing embroidered night-gown, high necked and long sleeved” and “Her hair was long too...

..” This illustrates the physical form of the ghost and most certainly suggests a human being rather than a ghost. What should also be noted is the fact that the ghost had long hair and her clothes were typical olden day clothes and both of these facts suggest a woman not from this generation but in an older generation. There is also an interesting link between the ghost and the vicar that the narrator encounters at the graveyard.

The vicar tells the narrator that “ Farthing House was s home for young women and their illegitimate babies at the turn of the century. ” And the narrator also passes a grave stone depicting a mother (19) and her baby who died at Farthing House at the turn of the century. These three things put together could point to the fact that the ghost may have once been one of these poor unfortunate mothers who were sent to Farthing House because of their illegitimate babies. In comparison to this, in the ‘ The Red Room’ the ghost is not described as a solid form but as several things such as the shadows or as an invisible apparition that is extinguishing the candles, “ The flame vanished, as if the wicks had been suddenly nipped between finger and thumb. This tells the reader that the narrator thinks that something is in the room with him and is snuffing out his only defence against it; the light.

As more candles begin to go out, what is left of the narrators rational thinking disappears entirely, “... and the shadows I feared and fought against returned” suggesting that the narrator is personifying the shadows and turning them in to what he believes to be the ghost. The narrator then begins to use a couple of similes to describe the ghost’s movements such as “ It was like a ragged storm-cloud sweeping out the stars” and “.

... darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye.

” I believe that these quotes suggest that the narrator hasn’t actually seen the ghost, but because of the stimulation of his imagination and the absence of rational thought he begins to come up with these similes to describe something that the narrator thinks is there but he can’t actually see it. The ghost in ‘ The Red Room’ I believe is created entirely by the narrator’s

knowledge of the ghost and the room (history), the stimulation of his mind by the overawing atmosphere of the room and the continuing expectancy, which comes with time, of a ghost appearing, all combining together to create fear and tension in the narrator's mind that destroys his rational thinking and sends his imagination into overdrive, therefore creating the ghost by himself. Up to seeing the ghost the narrator in 'The Red Room' is fairly confident and we know this as his actions while he is in the room suggests that he believes that there is no real ghost, but instead he may be suspecting a human being, " I pulled up the blinds and examined the fastenings of the several windows...

. " and "....

. tapped the dark oak panelling for any secret opening. This suggests to the reader that the narrator is making sure that there is no way that any human being can get into the room, which also reassures him as he believes that the real ghost does not exist. There are some signs which suggest that the narrator is slightly nervous before seeing the ghost, "..

... peering round each article of furniture" and " to form a kind of barricade before me.

These actions would usually be considered to be a product of rational thought and a systematic approach, but I believe these are the first signs of the narrator getting nervous and apprehensive. The narrator also mentions things such as "...

.. remoter darkness of the place and its perfect stillness, too stimulating for the imagination” and “ The sombre reds and blacks of the room troubled me” suggesting things beginning to bother him such as the room colours and this is because of his nervous state of mind. He also speaks aloud and reassures himself by joking, “ When the ghost came, I could warn him not to trip over them” and “ By Jove.

” Illustrating the fact that the narrator is trying to reassure himself because he is nervous. In comparison, the narrator in ‘ Farthing House’ is also uneasy and nervous, but she doesn’t know why, “ It made me too uneasy” and “ It was the cry of a new born baby.... I hesitated, stopped.

” This tells the reader that these particular events have made the narrator nervous and uneasy because she also mentions in the same passage that she is “ composed and cheerful” which are conflicting emotions, and this may be one of the causes of her initially bad reaction to the ghost. After the experience, the narrator in ‘ Farthing House’ feels sorry and is sympathetic towards the ghost, because they both have something in common; they are (or were) both mothers, “ I was not afraid any more....

oor pale, distraught young thing, she could do no harm” is suggesting that the narrator has thought about the events and has perhaps even made the link between the ghost and the graveyard and can sympathise with the ghost’s plight, and this makes the narrator more at ease with herself and she even mentions that “ I slept well that night. ” In comparison the narrator in ‘ The Red Room’ changes drastically after the experience, and he loses his arrogance and I believe that he was cut down to size by his own

inexperience and the haunting event that took place. The narrator is still very frightened and is very shaken the experience, “ Fear, it followed me through the corridor, it fought against me in the room” suggests that he now knows that he imagined the ghost all himself and is now not so confident and has had some of his premature arrogance and self-confidence that he had at the start drained from him by the experiences and he even communicates with the people that at the start he described as “ undignified custodians” and has gained respect for them and the powerful forces of fear. Both stories are in the 1st person and so allows the reader to connect more with the storyteller and get a first hand view of what the different experiences must have been like for the narrators. In ‘ Farthing House’ there are lots of small sub-plots and references to other details such as the background of the narrator’s child, the link between the start and the end of the story and the curious graves in the Farthing House graveyard that suggest the story is just scratching away at the surface of a much deeper story and background, that could involve the narrator telling the reader that there is more to her than meets the eye (mysterious). The atmosphere throughout both stories changes dramatically, altering things like tension and suspense along with it.

At the start of ‘ The Red Room’ there is a hostile atmosphere between the narrator and the old people, “... their evident unfriendliness to me and one another” suggests an atmosphere that does not appear so often in ghost stories (hostile).

In comparison the atmosphere at the start of ‘ Farthing House’ is nice and comfy, “ Warm and comfortable.....

ood home-cooked dinners..... rooms were spacious.

..... other residents pleasant.

” This tells the reader that an even more obscure atmosphere for a ghost story is evident here; one of a comforting and welcoming atmosphere with no suspense or tension, although there is a mention of “ the atmosphere of a haunted house”, but the narrator is not sure why this is, so she discards this idea with no second thought to it. As the story continues in ‘ The Red Room’ a different atmosphere begins to take shape, “ 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. ” This suggests a traditional creepy, dark, dull, chilly, scary, spooky sort of atmosphere and this also creates tension in the story and in the narrators mind as he gets more and more nervous. The atmosphere in ‘ Farthing House’ remains the same apart from the narrator’s strange sensation that someone had been in her room, “... .. hat someone else had been in my room... .. only that sensation, that atmosphere was still there” suggests that she felt something unexplainable in the atmosphere that caused her to believe that someone had been in her room. In ‘ The Red Room’ there is huge tension created and this turns into the atmosphere as the reader and the narrator are expecting something to happen and this also creates suspense, “ and snuffing them gave me an occupation” tells the reader that the narrator is nervously awaiting for something to happen and this creates tension and a tense atmosphere.

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Than as the narrator begins to panic, he himself creates an atmosphere of panic and fear, “ wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision and crushing the last vestiges of reason from my brain” illustrates that the narrator is introducing longer words into his sentences giving the impression of his fear and panic as he begins to speak faster, which only serves to add tension to the atmosphere, as the suspense and tension coupled with the atmosphere begins to make your spine tingle. Then all of these things get to an unbearable climax as the narrator describes “ a horrible sensation of falling” as his last action, which coincidentally ties in with the same fate as the poor old duke had come to. In ‘ Farthing House’ as the narrator experiences the ghost sighting, there is an atmosphere of creepiness and a cold and dark scene, “ I heard nothing, no footstep, no creak of the floorboard. I was too frightened to go further” suggests a quite creepy, eerie atmosphere, that is sort of an aftermath of the tension and suspense that was created by the narrator telling the reader that she was paralysed and couldn’t move, creating tension and providing an atmosphere of fear at the same time, “ The room felt horribly cold..

.... I could not speak to her, my throat felt paralysed” illustrates that the reader was right there with the narrator, almost feeling her emotions, and living the experience with her, that not only creates an atmosphere, tension and suspense but also makes the story seem real to the reader with hard fear and the reality of the situation.

As I have already said, tension is created in ‘ The Red Room’ because the reader keeps expecting to see a ghost and in ‘ Farthing House’ the tension is created because of the prior omens like the unexplained sensations and also <https://assignbuster.com/the-differences-and-similarities-between-the-red-room-and-farthing-house/>

the fact that the narrator was not expecting to encounter a ghost. In 'Farthing House' the story ends with another separate story of "A young woman stole a baby, from its pram...."

.. Her address was given as Farthing House Close, Little Dunford" which sort of ties back into the beginning of the story as it tells of a mother wanting a baby just like the ghost and also I believe the narrator. This creates a sort of closed ending, whereas in 'The Red Room' there is a slight anti-climax because of the fact that the narrator confirmed the reader's doubt over the credibility of the ghost, "The worst of all things that hunt mortal man - fear" suggesting that it was the narrator's own fear that created the ghost and caused him to act in the manner in which he did. The story also leaves on a note of despair and reflection, "There is fear in that room of hers - black fear, and there will be so long as this house of sin endures" suggesting a depressing point to leave on because this leaves an impression on the reader and also makes the story more believable and spooky.

A short and sweet end would not be appropriate for the end of a ghost story. I think that the most successful story, and also the one I prefer is 'The Red Room' as it builds up more tension and suspense, and also has all the typical elements of a ghost story such as a good setting (isolated) and a typically spooky atmosphere which works well with the very original and interesting idea of a ghost created by fear, knowledge and the stimulation of the imagination.