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influence of gothic
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In this essay I aim to compare and discuss the influence of gothic elements in 'The Red Room' by H. G. Wells, 'Jane Eyre' by Charlotte Bronte and 'I'm the King of the Castle' by Susan Hill.

Gothic fiction is a type of fiction that predominated in English literature in the last third of the 18th century and the first two decades of the 19th, the setting for which was usually a ruined gothic castle or abbey. The gothic novel emphasised mystery and horror and was filled with ghost haunted rooms, underground passages and secret stairways. The term Gothic is used to designate narrative prose or poetry of which the principal elements are violence, horror, and the supernatural. Jane Eyre, written in 1846, isn't a typical gothic novel, it is more subtle, which attracts the reader to Jane, she is mystifying, with deep feelings and emotions. Jane Eyre became the inspiration to many authors, including H. G.

Wells and Susan Hill. After a difficult childhood as a 'precocious' and rebellious orphan, forced to accept and cope with the ill treatment and disgust of her aunt and cousins, Jane becomes an assertive, independent woman, who pursues her passions and finds her true love, Mr Rochester. As a child, she was eager to learn and explore the world, but her intelligence was frowned upon by her relatives in Gateshead Hall and she was locked away in the 'Red Room' as if she were a prisoner in her own house. Mrs Reed and Jane's cousins saw her as an intruder, she did not belong at Gateshead, she was not worthy, she was only a poor and plain orphan child who they disliked and bullied.

Jane's situation and depression was often reflected in the narration, she talked of books she engaged in, they reflected her mood in the house. ' desolate coast', ' cold and ghastly moon', ' haunted and quite solitary churchyard' all echo the atmosphere of Gateshead hall. The Red Room is a key theme to the gothic fiction used in all three texts, in Jane Eyre it allows the reader to understand Jane's thoughts and true identity, she is a superstitious and passionate child with ordinary fears like any normal child and her entrapment in the Red Room allowed Brontë to show this. The Red Room is a frightening and mysterious place, it's associated with death, Mr Reed died in the self same chamber, this haunted her in the dark, chilling and silent atmosphere of the ' seldom slept chamber'. The room was filled with mahogany and ' crimson cloth', the shades ' glared white' with a pale throne, she felt trapped surrounded by death, doom and gloom.

The dark reds brought depression and darkness to her stay in the room, she was terrified. In the first few chapters of Jane Eyre, the Red Room is practically the only element of gothic, it adds another dimension to her tale, Brontë has realised the importance of gothic elements in previous classics and modernised it to relate to Jane's powerful and moving tale. She was influenced by the likes of Mary Shelley and Horace Walpole and this is evident in her descriptions of the ghostly aspects throughout Jane Eyre. Charlotte Brontë's gothic elements inspired the eerie atmosphere of Warrington and Wells's Red Room. The Red Room, written in, followed closely to Brontë's descriptive terror.

Wells immediately enticed the reader with description of the ' spiritual terrors' of the ' haunted room' with words like ' decaying', ' withered', '
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grotesque', 'monstrous' and 'ghostly'. In this ghostly tale, Wells uses fear to entice the reader, the unknown and unexplored is always exciting and thrilling, 'the old people' had only heard of the Red Room, it was mysterious and daunting. Nobody knew what it was really like, and of all times to discover the true Red Room, Wells chose night time, like Brontë?. This adds horror, the 'absolute silence' of the 'darkness overhead' and the 'shadows' and 'echoes' adds impact with the unknowing of what the room holds in the dark, like blindness, it is indefinite what lies beneath and this to the reader is fear-provoking. Wells also had seen the impact of such horrifying novels as Frankenstein, and used such terror to illustrate the supposed dangers of the Red Room. The most daunting aspect of it was nobody knew what would happen, it was unfamiliar territory to the man, and the reader became a part of him, experiencing the room for the first time with him.

Brontë? and Wells play on the gothic elements with typical haunting themes like ghosts, darkness and silence. Jane Eyre frequently recounts stories of local folklore and fairytales full of ghosts and sprites but Hill's gothic elements are more subtle. *I'm the King of the Castle*, written in 1970, is probably Hill's best known book, it won praise for its piercing fable of the brutality latent in childhood innocence. This is closely linked to Jane's discrimination by her cousins as a child, John treated her with such brutality and hatred it was almost unbelievable a child's innocence could be so lacking. Hill had obviously studied children's behaviour and recognised the hidden potential of such evil conduct, like Brontë? *I'm the King of the Castle* uses the contrast of the natural environment of fields, woods and the

weather with the artificial presence of Warings to provide atmosphere and mystery.

The setting affects and reflects the characters. The gloom of Warings acts as a physical parallel for the lives of the Hoopers, the yew trees, with their suggestion of death deepen the morbid atmosphere in Warings. The Red Room with dark wooden panelling and staircases, the attic full of dead and rotting things are all aspects of the setting which have such a disastrous affect on Kingshaw. The extensive use of the natural environment in the hang wood episode, provides a chance for Hill to reveal new aspects of both boys, create tension and add uncertainty to the plot. Like Brontë and Wells, one of Hills main cause for fear comes from the setting, Warings is a isolated and desolate ‘ ugly’ house, a ‘ rather tall and badly angled’ house ‘ built of dark red brick’ separated from the village of Derne.

The Red Room, like in Jane Eyre, has associations with death, this time of the dead and decaying moths in glass cabinets kept by Hooper’s grandfather who is now also dead. Hooper was forbidden to enter by his father, which tempted him further and made the reader think what was so terrible about only a room. Again the author used the unknown to scare the reader, like Wells. Death is a major theme in I’m the King of the Castle as well as fear, hatred, evil, failure and disappointment.

Hooper is very reminiscent of John in Jane Eyre, Brontë was a major influence to Hill and Wells, both took aspects of Jane Eyre and used them in different ways to achieves different affects very successfully. Both took the dark, haunted, terrifying room as the core for all gothic themes, Hill noticed the

effectiveness of isolation and used it to separate Kingshaw from his peers and the adults, he was different and the reader sympathised with him. Wells recognised the use of vivid description and applied it to maximum advantage almost manipulating the reader into a sense of insecurity in the 'chilly, echoing passage'. Isolation, as I have already mentioned is a very important theme, in the three texts but mainly Jane Eyre and I'm the King of the Castle. Death and isolation appear in two or three of the texts and are the stems of most fears within the characters and the reader.

Jane Eyre is frightened due to loneliness in a dark and creepy room, accentuated by her superstition and anger towards her maltreatment as a child. Her surroundings simply amplify her feelings and represent her depression with the boring, tedious and dreary four walls day in day out, not only in the Red Room but in the nursery where she is still confined, forbidden to leave and see her relatives. She is not able to communicate with children of her own age and is restricted to expressing her opinion only in her mind, she has nobody to listen to her, except from the doctor whose visits were occasional and fleeting. Kingshaw is a sensitive boy, he hates the deathly atmosphere in the Red Room, and he was terrified when Hooper locked him in.

He was isolated, he couldn't escape, he was trapped in an environment he hated. When the crow attacked him, there was nobody to help, he was again alone to defend himself, as he had been throughout his childhood, without a father to look up to. Having been brought up by only a mother, it is visible that he lacks slightly in masculinity, he becomes emotionally overwhelmed by his nightmares and dead animals, like the crow and the moths. He has <https://assignbuster.com/consider-the-influence-of-gothic-fiction-upon-pre-20th-century-and-20th-century-texts/>

many experiences with isolation, he feels trapped in Warings, with nobody to relate to or look up to, he resents Mr Hooper as a father figure. Many a time he is locked up by Hooper, in the shed, in the Red Room and he is forced to keep his company in Hang wood, much to his irritation.

He feels claustrophobic, he can't be himself and he fears Hooper. Isolation doesn't only affect Kingshaw however, Hooper has a critical and negative nature, he knows nothing of warmth and affection, the loss of his mother is one reason for his coldness. Despite mocking Kingshaw for being a ' baby-boy' over attached to his mother and claiming that fathers are better than mothers, his delirious outburst, ' Mummy! Mummy! ' reveals his inner insecurity created by her absence. He is emotionally deprived, isolated, and he compensates by hitting out at those around him. He resents his fathers frequent absence and he becomes lonely in Warings, isolated from the outside world in a huge, unfamiliar, ominous house in the middle of nowhere without a mother or any true friends. In conclusion, Gothic fiction, past and present has influenced many authors including those I have studied, the more modern authors like Susan Hill, interpreted the gothic elements in her own way and has made them more relevant to the modern world.

She has focused her story on the tale of two children, their upbringing and how events affect them and how they deal with mistreatment and isolation from their parents. Jane Eyre includes, in the first few chapters, a potent tale of the appalling nurture for a child and how she deals with it throughout her life. Both these authors simply use gothic elements to support their story and give interest and mystery to the reader. It is extremely effective, Susan Hill shocks the reader with Kingshaws death and gives food for thought, and <https://assignbuster.com/consider-the-influence-of-gothic-fiction-upon-pre-20th-century-and-20th-century-texts/>

enlightenment to how some people are forced to live. Brontë also shocks the reader with the abuse Jane receives as a child, which also is intolerable and moving. Wells is different however, *The Red Room* is a short story meant as a simple tale of the fright of one man, and Wells for a brief reading, allows the reader to follow his venture into the red room with the famous gothic elements which are so widely recognised.

It isn't moving, it is effective but with no real poignancy, unlike *Jane Eyre* and *I'm the King of the Castle*.