

# Which is the most successful gothic horror short story

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Gothic horror (Gothic Fiction) is a genre of literature that combines elements of both horror and romance. As a genre, it is generally believed to have been invented by the English author Horace Walpole, with his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*. The effect of Gothic fiction feeds on a pleasing sort of terror, to thrill and scare the reader. *The Red Room*, by H. G Wells and *The Monkey's Paw* by W. W Jacobs are both good examples of Gothic Horror. Both stories deal with the theme of the supernatural - the 'ghost' and the wish granting paw.

Another, less obvious theme is the nature of humans, the main character in *The Red Room* is very confident in the face of the wisdom of the elderly residents of the castle. Even in the opening sentence the man seems to simultaneously acknowledge and dispel the fear of the paranormal in the Castle by saying "it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me." He is showing off his confidence, which will slowly diminish on his journey to the red room, his actual stay in it and as the tension builds. This is confidence and arrogance is ironic as he will end up defeated by this so called 'ghost'.

In *The Monkey's Paw*, the family, particularly Herbert is also very cocky - "might drop on his head from the sky" yet again this is also ironic as the in order to get the money Herbert gets mutilated and dies. The setting of each story is a very important way of adding to the tension. If the story was set in a nice, happy cottage, in the middle of a suburb, on a warm summer's day there is nothing scary about it. If it is set in an old rotting house in the middle of nowhere, which is engulfed in darkness, there is an aspect of fright and scariness.

In both *The Red Room* and *The Monkey's Paw* there is this aspect of darkness, isolation with the stories setting - the isolated, dark and cold Lorraine castle and the dark, isolated house. The darkness and isolation, for the readers, increases the risk of something bad happening. The rain and storm outside the isolated house in *The Monkey's Paw* also adds to the risk of danger. We know this house is isolated, as the wife says "the worst of living so far out" The time of both stories is also important. Both stories involve the night - in *The Monkey's paw*, we meet the Sergeant Major at night and the knocking also start at night.

This is also the case in *The Red Room*. The story is set at night. This adds to the tension through fear. People are naturally scared of the night as it takes away our vision. This would allow someone to creep up on us. Particularly in *The Red Room* this is the case as the darkness itself creeps up on the man, and we think there might be something behind that blanket of darkness. Both authors use a lot of in depth descriptive text, such as to describe the three custodians, or but I find Wells does a lot better job than Jacobs.

Wells creates an amazing, tangible feel and sense to the story, despite the massive contrast between modern life and that of that era. 'The glow vanished, the reflections rushed together and vanished, and as I thrust the candle between the bars darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye, wrapped around in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestige of reason from my brain'. The detail and quality of this quote is very powerful and is very good at describing the scene, which is integral for the story and shows off the writer's actual skill.

Jacobs isn't quite as skillful as Wells, but he isn't bad either and while his descriptive text isn't quite as good, it's still quite effective. This might have been a decision on his part, but I personally prefer Wells' method. However, in my opinion the most important technique in both stories is the author's use of characters. Yet again, Wells is better in a more obvious way than Jacobs. Wells is very good at describing and turning the custodians into horrible, non-human creatures. The idea of using old, crippled people is very smart and ties in with the theme and even the setting very well.

It's almost like their part of the castle with their age and grotesqueness. The description used, could almost make a horror story. Instead of making each monster a similar monster, he makes them all unique and gives them all their own 'quirk'. One man has a withered and wrinkled arm, the other red eyes that could pierce the night sky, yet the lady seems not to have as much of a quirk as the others, she only seems to repeat one thing over and over again. Each has its own weird personality, one saying nothing apart from, "tonight of all nights" and another, constantly warning him.

Yet the third character is very interesting and says practically nothing, but his presence is strange and unexplained. This makes us very curious of his purpose. Some of Jacobs's characters are quite interesting, like the soldier, but the idea of having characters as part of the horror story doesn't seem to be important. The personality of the Whites seems to be non-existent, even the name is very plain and not interesting but it's obvious when everything goes wrong – Mrs White goes hysterical in grief and becomes very desperate

and maybe even loses the plot a bit. This lack of personality provides a nice contrast to the hysterical side.

However, Mr White seems to keep it together a bit more. In *The Red Room* the main character seems to get more and more desperate. At the start he was very matter of fact and by the red room he is frightened by a statue of Ganymede and Eagle. Ganymede is a character from Greek mythology. He was supposedly the most beautiful of all mortals, and so the king of the gods took the form of an eagle and stole him from earth to become the god's cupbearer. This relates to the story, as in both the story and the myth, the main character finds himself powerless in the face of a greater power.

He reaches the room, which appears normal, and then suspense is built again, as the candles are extinguished due to an unknown cause. This is similar in *The Monkey's Paw*. The characters are very relaxed at the beginning and confident of the lack of power by the paw, only Mr. White's and the soldiers fear gives us warning of possible problems. Then once Herbert dies they start panicking and the wife even goes slightly mad. *The Monkey's Paw's* ending, in my opinion, is much better as it is a better story plot and it keeps the tension and suspension right up to the very end.

As the race between the husband and wife unfolds we are desperately wishing that the mutilated thing doesn't come in, this keeps the reader involved and absorbed until the very end. In *The Red Rooms* ending was a let down and quite dull - an anti-climax. The tension finished before the ending and this made the ending quite boring, and though the concept of the fear of fear is very interesting it's not very exciting. I personally prefer *The*

<https://assignbuster.com/which-is-the-most-successful-gothic-horror-short-story/>

Monkey's Paw despite the better style of writing by Wells. For me, The Red Rooms ending completely ruined it and the story line was not as interesting or as gripping as Jacobs story.