

# The monkey's paw, the clubfooted grocer and the red room



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The nineteenth century was an era of general belief in ghosts and spirituality. This is what made gothic stories even more appealing and successful during this era - the fact that they would be seen as being realistic. One major reason for the rise in spirituality during this era was the fact that many people had started to lose their Christian faith (mainly because the Church was unable to give an explanation as to why ghosts existed) and so they started to search for a new way of understanding and accepting death.

I think that the Victorians enjoyed reading horror stories because they offer a challenge - to see whether the reader can figure out who the "ghost" or spectre represents and what they are doing. By involving the reader, the writers were able to keep them interested throughout the story. During the Victorian era, the short story became a very popular genre and ghost stories were well-liked with the readers. It was therefore very important for the authors to build tension and suspense to keep their readers interested.

I will be studying: "The Monkey's Paw" by W. W. Jacobs, "The Clubfooted Grocer" by Sir Arthur Canon Doyle, "The Red Room" by H. G. Wells and "The Signalman" by Charles Dickens. In this essay, I will be exploring the ways in which the writers use the supernatural to create dramatic tension in the above stories. "The Monkey's Paw" is a short story by W. W. Jacobs, written in 1902. The title of a story is very important because it is the title which grabs the reader's attention and so, if it is not effective, people will not want to read the story.

The title of this story immediately grabs the reader's attention because it is mysterious and it makes us wonder what it is and what it can do. It also helps the reader to create a vivid image of an old and frail paw which looks as if it can bring bad luck to the owner. This story is written in the third person which makes it objective and much more realistic. It is realistic because we can be sure that the events took place and were not just part of the imagination or thought of one character.

It also allows for a more broad-based view of the on-goings as it does not follow one particular person throughout the story. The Monkey's Paw" is an ironic tale about the White family who live in a small Laburnum Villa. They are given an enchanted " Monkey's Paw", by Sergeant-Major Morris, which can grant them three wishes. Although they are warned of the dangerous consequences of making the wishes by the Sergeant, they decide to use it anyway.

The other two wishes are wasted in order to reverse the effects of the first wish. There are many ways in which Jacobs uses the supernatural to create dramatic tension throughout the story. His use of words such as: " fakir", " spell", " talisman", " mutilated" and " death" help to build up tension because these words are usually related to the supernatural and so the reader wants to read on and see what happens to the family. Also, they create tension because they add an air of uncertainty which is interesting as we wonder what will happen next in the story.

The fact that their house and location of residence is isolated and remote adds to the suspense and tension because it is the ideal place for something

mysterious and evil to happen. Horror stories are traditionally set in isolated places because if anything goes wrong, no one will be there to help. This is shown when Mr. White says, " Of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. " This adds to the tension created because from the outset of the story, it is evident that something will happen to the family, seeing as how they live in an " out-of-the-way" place.

These adjectives also help to keep the reader interested because by creating suspense, the reader will want to read on and see how things work out for this family and whether their suspicions were right from the outset. The Sergeant's reluctance to tell the family about the " Monkey's Paw" also adds to the dramatic tension because it makes the reader think about why he is so unwilling to tell them anything about it. He obviously knows that the " Monkey's Paw" is nothing but trouble, but the White family take no notice of his consecutive warnings.

This shows the reader that something evil will be happening, however, the family refuse to see it. It grabs the reader's attention and makes sure that the reader stays interested. One technique which Jacobs uses throughout the story, to great effect, is creating contrast between different elements in order to create a sense of fear and tension. For example, at the beginning of the story, he creates tension by showing the difference between the atmosphere outside and inside the house - " Without, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnum Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly.

This immediately sets the scene and is a very common effect which many writers use - bad weather usually signifies that something bad or evil is going to happen. When Jacobs says, " Outside, the wind was higher than ever," after the first wish is made shows that the weather has become considerably worse shows that nothing good can come from the wish or " The Monkey's Paw". Jacob's use of irony is also very effective because it helps to build up a sense of tension and suspense.

For example, there are a lot of references to fairy tales throughout the story and this creates anxiety for the reader because we know that this isn't a fairy tale, far from it actually. When the Sergeant says, " They think it's a fairy tale," whilst talking about what people thought about the " Monkey's Paw", it adds to the tension which is being built up because the reader knows that the truth is completely the opposite. There is also a lot of mention of the number " three" and this is symbolic because there is a famous saying that: " three's a charm" and " three is a magic number.

The number three is usually related to good things, good happenings and, in a sense, luck. This is ironic because the White family were not at all lucky and so by continuously using the number three Jacob's creates an atmosphere of fear and suspense. There are many other references to the number three throughout the story: the Sergeant says, " Three separate men could each have three wishes from it" and it is also the number of times which the Sergeant issues warnings to the family. There were three knocks on the door towards the end of the story and there are three members in the family at the beginning of the story.

These examples of the use of the number three all help to add dramatic tension, because fairy tales are associated with the supernatural and magical events which go on but the reader knows that this is definitely not a "happily-ever-after" story. Another instance in which irony is used is at the story is at the beginning, when Herbert says, "How can two hundred pounds can hurt you?" as well as "well I don't see the money, and I bet I never shall". This is ironic because it is the truth, however, Herbert doesn't get to see the money as it is because it is his death which gives the family this money.

The ending of the story is very effective because we don't know what the last two wishes are and we don't know who was at the door. There are many questions which are left unanswered and this allows the readers to make their own conclusions about the ending of the story. The only thing which we know for sure is that Herbert, their son, is dead and he is not coming back. Throughout the story, Jacobs builds up and drops the suspense, creating a wave-like rhythm. This is effective because as soon as one revelation is made, suspense is being built up in order to prepare the reader for the next revelation.

The reader is kept wondering about what will happen next after each revelation and this makes us want to keep on reading. "The Red Room", written by H. G. Wells, is a gothic, horror story written in the nineteenth century. The story is about a man who is sent to Lorraine Castle to investigate the unexplained deaths which have occurred in the castle and which are said to be due to ghosts. The title "The Red Room" immediately

attracts the reader's attention because we generally associate red with fear and danger because it is the colour of blood.

The story is written in the first person, which is effective because it shows all of the narrator's thoughts and views on the events which happen. Another reason why this technique is effective is because it shows the reader, first hand, whether the rumours surrounding the room are true or not. Wells begins the story by introducing the character of the narrator, who, similar to the other characters, remains unnamed. I believe that Wells does this to emphasize the physical appearance of the people, and to show how deformed the old people seem to be.

Wells, similar to Jacobs, uses contrast to create fear and tension throughout the story - the contrast between the narrator and the old people in the house is clearly evident. The narrator is a confident, defiant and strong minded person - this is shown when he says that, " I can assure you that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. " There is no such thing as a " tangible ghost" because ghosts are generally seen to be untouchable and so the narrator is basically pointing out the fact that he does not believe in ghosts and he only believes in what he sees.

The narrator describes the first old man as having a " withered arm" and the elderly woman is described as having, " pale yellow eyes. " During the Victorian era, any deformities, such as withered limbs or birth marks, were seen to be devil signs and this adds to the supernatural effect of the story. The second old man is described as being, " more bent, more wrinkled, more

aged even than the first. " It seems as though this man has the greatest effect on the narrator because his description of him is the longest.

He seems to be even more repulsive and deformed than the first two elderly people and this builds up tension because it makes the reader wonder how these people became like this. Is it due to the natural course of time, or is it due to something else? The second old man is said to have eyes which are " small and bright and inflamed. " These adjectives are ones which would generally be used to describe the eyes of the devil and supernatural creatures, not normal human beings. The detail which Wells uses to describe the characters immediately attracts the reader's attention as it sets the scene and makes us want to know what happens next.

The detail which is used to describe the old people adds to the sense of tension because their physical appearance doesn't sound very normal and natural, and even the narrator says, " There is to my mind, something inhuman in senility, something crouching and atavistic; the human qualities seem to drop from old people insensibly day by day. " Again, this creates suspense due to the use of words such as, " inhuman" and " senility" - they give the old people an almost supernatural effect which makes me compare them to ghosts and supernatural beings.

Whilst walking towards the red room, the narrator says, " an age when omens and witches were credible, and ghosts beyond denying. Their very existence was spectral;" and " The ornaments and conveniences of the room about them were ghostly - the thoughts of vanished men, which still haunted rather than participated in the world of today. " Here he compares the old



people to witches, saying that they “haunt” the world. Also, words such as, “omens”, “witches”, “ghosts”, “spectral” and “vanished” add to the supernatural effect, giving the old people an almost surreal appearance and nature.

Wells builds up an atmosphere of fear by having the old people repeat warnings to the narrator: “this night of all nights” and “it’s your own choosing”. There are repeated references to the presence of an evil spirit which could harm the narrator, however, he does not take heed to their warnings. This is similar to the technique which Jacobs uses in “The Monkey’s Paw” because he uses repetition in order to stress warnings and important information. This adds to the suspense of the story because once a warning has been issued, the reader knows that something evil or bad will happen eventually.

A great sense of fear is built-up as the narrator makes his way to the haunted room. He describes the corridor as having an “echoing passage” and being a “draughty subterranean passage.” The use of the word “subterranean” is important because it immediately suggests that it is an enclosed area, very similar to a tomb. He takes his revolver out and this shows that he believes that there is something which can harm him. Wells uses typical ghost story effects, such as creaking doors, “The door creaked on its hinges”.

This emphasizes the fact that the house is old and also, the fact that no body goes to this place that much. This makes the reader think about why no one goes into the room – is there really something in there? When the first candle

goes out unexpectedly, Wells personifies the shadows created as though they were about "to take another step towards" him. The shadows are described in this way to make them seem real and alive. He uses all reasoning available to find out why the candles were going out and reaches the conclusion that it's the draught.

As another two candles extinguished he says, "Odd! Did I do that myself? The aspect of fear starts building up in him as he realises that the wick of the extinguished candles weren't glowing nor were they giving off smoke. He says that the candles were going out as though an "invincible hand" had swept them out again with no trace of what actually put them out. The use of the word, "invincible" shows that the narrator must be starting to feel the tension. A lot of personification is used to describe the darkness, for example, "the shutting of any eye, wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestiges of reason from my brain" and "flames were still dancing".

These help us to visualize the darkness and the shadows which were created. He uses words to such as, "haunted", "chilly", "echoing", "shadow" and "darkness" to show the fear which is present in the narrator. Wells uses similes and metaphors to further emphasize the atmosphere of fear throughout the story. For example, he says, "ocean of mystery" and "like a ragged storm cloud sweeping out the stars." These expressions help to make the story more realistic because they enable the reader to visualise the darkness and the strangeness of the castle.

The ending to this story is very effective because the narrator, who was very defiant and proud at the beginning of the story, changes his views towards ghosts and the supernatural. There is no twist in the tale, however, the narrator describes the room and the events which took place while he was in there. Wells builds up suspense gradually throughout the story until he reaches a climax right at the end of the story. This is an effective technique because it keeps the reader interested in the story and it also helps to add to the tension and suspense built up throughout the story.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the author of the well-known stories, Sherlock Holmes. He also wrote many other stories and novels, one of which is entitled, "The Clubfooted Grocer". This is a short story in which Mr. Stephan Maple, who used to be a grocer, asks his nephew for help. He is not particularly liked by his family members, however, his nephew John agrees to go and visit him in the north of England and comes to face with dangers which he did not expect. The title immediately grabs the reader's attention because it makes one wonder why the grocer is "clubfooted" and so one wants to read on and learn more about the story.

The story is written in the first person narrative, creating a more personal feeling and giving us a more personal perspective into the different characters. The use of colloquial dialect helps to add a realistic effect to the story. Although there is not a lot of mention of the supernatural throughout this story, there are many ways in which Canon Doyle creates tension. The story starts off with the narrator explaining the life of Mr. Stephen Maple, the narrator's uncle. It gives us a very detailed account into the thoughts and feelings of the narrator about his uncle.

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The narrator tells us about the instance in which his uncle became “ clubfooted. ” He says, “ He was savagely assaulted by one of his customers and left for dead, with three smashed ribs and a broken leg, which mended so badly that it remained forever three inches shorter than the other. ” This makes the reader wonder why anyone would do this to a grocer and what had he done to provoke this incident. Canon Doyle leaves a lot of things unsaid, similar to “ The Red Room” and “ The Monkey's Paw”, and this helps to create tension and suspense for the reader.

Another similarity between these stories is the fact that they are all set in isolated areas - the narrator says that his uncle had “ settled in a lonely part of the north of England. ” The use of the word “ lonely” creates tension because things usually start to go wrong when people are alone, and not when there are many other people around. The isolated atmosphere is mentioned again whilst the narrator is on the train and going to see his uncle - “ For three hours I passed through desolate rolling plains”. This shows that the surroundings are very quiet and isolated adding to the mystery of the story.

Canon Doyle leaves a lot of things unsaid at the beginning of the story, and this creates suspense and tension as the reader will want to know more. Mr Maple's first letter to his nephew ends with, “ If you should fail me now you will live to regret it. ” This builds up tension because we don't know the reason as to why the uncle suddenly wants to see his nephew - it is obviously not a casual visit because he would not say that they would live to regret it at the end. Mr Maple seems to be in some sort of trouble, but doesn't want to say much, and again this helps to build up tension.

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The uncle then sends a telegram to the family, changing his mind and telling them that, " On no account let John get out at Congleton" - he seems to be scared and nervous about something happening to at the station and so he changes it. The fact that we do not know why he changes his mind adds to the strangeness of the whole situation. The telegram ends with, " Do not fail; only you to look to. " This is very mysterious because it makes us wonder how serious the situation is if this is his last hope and final resort.

Once John is ready to leave, another telegram is received, this time asking him to bring a gun. This adds to the suspense because it is a very strange request and it makes the reader wonder what is going to happen when the narrator reaches his uncle. Again, he repeats that he should get off at Stedding Bridge, not Congleton and this use of repetition is similar to that which is used in " The Monkey's Paw" and " The Red Room" - they act as a sort of warning, because it seems as though something dark will be awaiting him at Congleton Station.

Whilst on the train, the narrator realises that something must be wrong and he says that all the clues, " pointed to some vague but sinister meaning. " The use of the word " sinister" is very important because it is quite unsettling and makes us wonder what will happen next. Once he gets off the train, he gets onto the carriage which will take him to Farmer Prucell's house.

Here, he is given many warnings from the old woman, Mr. Prucell's wife. She says, " You've made your mind to go, then? ", " There's no hindering you from going back there. and " Oh, well, no one can stop you if you want to go

on. " Again, this use of repetition is common to both " The Monkey's Paw" and " The Red Room" because it adds to the suspense which is created as it makes us wonder what is going to happen to the narrator and why people keep giving him warnings. Also, there is similar dialogue in the other two stories, between the major characters and the minor ones. The narrator uses the words " mystery" and " peril" to describe the atmosphere which he felt he was in and these words confirm the reader's thoughts.

Canon Doyle's use of alliteration and onomatopoeia is effective because it adds emphasis to important words, for example, " clumsy scuffling of the creatures" and " made a curious clack-click, clack-click. " This also adds to the mysteriousness of the story because it makes the reader wonder why the narrator has used the word " creature" instead of human because he was talking about people. Canon Doyle uses long sentences to create a sense of struggle when the sailors came inside the house and tied their hands up.

This is a very effective technique in my opinion because the reader has to read the line quickly and so, in a sense, they can actually " feel" what is going on and it is as though they themselves are involved in the struggle. When John arrives at Mr. Maple's house, his arrival creates an air of uncertainty and fear as many bolts are unlocked in order to let him in. This makes the reader feel as though Mr. Maple is about to get attacked and this is the reason for all of the locks and bolts - for protection from an intruder which could harm him. To confirm this suspicion, Mr.

Maple says, " Come in, come in, man, quick, and don't leave the door open. " This adds to the mystery and strangeness surrounding the whole story.

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Conan Doyle uses a similar technique to Wells to introduce new characters that are important in the story. He describes them in a lot of detail and uses a lot of nouns and adjectives to describe their physical appearance and this helps the reader to visualise images of the people in their heads. It gives a clearer understanding of the characters and this helps to create a more realistic effect for the reader, because they will be able to “ see” the characters which are being talked about.

One example of this is when the narrator is describing his uncle when he meets him for the first time. He says, “ He was a small, thick man, with a great rounded, bald head and one thin border of gingery curls. It was a fine head, the head of a thinker, but his large white face was heavy and commonplace. ” By going into this much depth about each character, the reader is enabled to remember all of the different characters because they each have different characteristics and qualities.