

The dream woman

Literature



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Wilkie Collins who wrote *The Dream Woman* rebelled against his strict father and his religious background in which he grew up. He was determined to be a writer and live a less restricted life. This lifestyle would have affected his writing. His short story *The Dream Woman* has a theme of dreams and premonitions. This story is about a man who sees a dream of a woman trying to kill him and later in life he marries that woman, however he does not realise Rebecca Murdoch is trying to kill him but his mother does.

Charles Dickens family background had a profound effect on his writing. When his father was sent to a debtor's prison, Charles had to leave school and had to earn money by labelling bottles, which was a really monotonous and depressing job. In this short story the signalman is a person who is isolated from civilisation. This was because of his job. He works in a small hut by the tunnel of the railway cutting. He is the only one who can see the ghosts, which warn him about danger.

The final story is *The Red Room*, which is about whether ghosts are haunting a room in this castle. Herbert George Wells who as a young lad developed love for literature and secretly studied books in the library wrote this story. There is a haunted room in the castle. The owners believe there is an unnatural presence in the castle, which has caused the death of previous occupants. The narrator, on the other hand, is anxious to contradict this theory.

The typical ghost story changed during the Victorian period because of the scientific discoveries made in the 19th century. As scientists began to discover more about science, superstitions became less popular. People

began to question superstition beliefs and even questioned religion. This affected the writers because people were questioning supernatural occurrences like ghostly hauntings. All the stories we have studied are therefore not traditional ghost stories. As an alternative authors play with the ideas of premonitions, time slips and the effects of fear.

In the Signalman a sense of mystery is created with a strange and unusual setting. At the beginning of the story when the Signalman is called by the narrator, the Signalman is at the bottom of the hill near the line and the narrator is at top of the hill. Strangely the Signalman looks in the other direction, which makes the reader wonder why the Signalman is acting in a rather strange way.

The story starts where the narrator says 'halloa, below there.'

In response to this the Signalman looks down the line. With the narrator saying 'that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came.'

This entices the reader to read on because the reader wants to know why he is looking down the line. In addition this creates a sense of mystery.

Furthermore the atmosphere is further heightened by the description of the gloomy, unpleasant setting of the cutting.

In the opening of the Dream Woman there is little action. The narrator, who plays the doctor, meets the main character here but finds that the main character Isaac Scathard is a bit strange because he is sleeping during the day.

This raises a question 'do your ostlers sleep during the day?'

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The doctor becomes very interested in the story of Isaac. The mystery is that the main character is depressed and has a terrible past, which haunts him constantly.

The Red Room starts with the dialogue 'I can assure you' which suggests that this is in the middle of the conversation. The old people who live in the castle try to warn the narrator, but the 28 year old man is arrogant and tries to prove them wrong. This sets up tension, which adds to the excitement and lures the reader in to the story.

Narrators are used in different ways in the stories. In the Signalman the narrator plays a character in the story that listens and tries to work out what is troubling the Signalman. The narrator meets the Signalman unexpectedly and finds out about his supernatural experience. For most of the story the narrator acts like the voice of reasons to the Signalman. The narrator also leads the reader to doubt the sanity of the signalman

In the Dream Woman there are two narrators. At first it is the doctor. The doctor meets the second narrator who is the landlord. The landlord is the main narrator in the story because he tells the story whereas the doctor just writes it down. The doctor also gives opinions about Isaac's fears, his bad luck and his lack of judgement in marrying the Dream Woman.

In the Red Room the narrator is the main character. We read everything through the narrator and we experience what he is experiencing. The effect is that the tension is made more immediate.

In The Signalman the signalman is the main character. The Signalman tells the narrator about the weird and strange happening in the story. The narrator thinks he is very strange and the narrator has doubts about his sanity. He finds out the signalman messed up his career.

'... He is a student of natural philosophy and had attended lectures, but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down and never risen again.'

This tells us why the Signalman ended up in a dead end job. In the story we do not know much about the other main characters name or any other information. The focus is kept on the signalman

The main character in the Dream Woman, Isaac Scathard, is an ostler and has a lot of bad luck. Isaac travels around looking for a job. The main character is Isaac's mother. She tries to make Isaac realize that the dream women he saw, was his wife trying to

kill him. The only person who believes Isaac saw this premonition was Isaac's mother, who takes it very seriously

The Signalman and Isaac are both similar because both of them have had trouble with their occupations. Another way both of them are similar is that both of them have had a supernatural experience and do not know what to do about it. Furthermore both of them are having help to sort their problem out.

Isaac and the Signalman also have some differences. One of the differences is that Isaac is a bit slow and can't get a job, but the Signalman is quite clever because he had gone on to further education but had lost it all. A

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supplementary difference is that nobody knows whether the Signalman is seeing a ghost or not, and the Signalman does not realise that the ghost is warning him and nobody finds out about the ghost until it's too late. In the Dream Woman Isaac's mother finds out before Isaac about the meaning of the dream. She works out that the dream was warning him about Rebecca.

There are constant problems in these types of stories. This help to generate tension. Both the Signalman and Isaac have problems they cannot extricate themselves from. The Signalman's problem is that he is the only one who can see the ghost and premonitions. He is very alert and whenever he sees a ghost there's an accident but he cannot do anything about it. When the Signalman tells the narrator about the premonition, the narrator thinks the signalman is strange and is probably reacting to the long and lonely hour of his job. He fears that the signalman is not paying attention to his job and is putting other people's lives in danger.

In the Dream Woman, nobody believes Isaac about the Dream Woman apart from his mother. In this dream or premonition the Dream Woman is trying to kill him. Another problem is that although Isaac does not know, the woman he marries is the woman who is trying to kill him in the dream. His life is ruined because he lives in perpetual fear of Rebecca murdering him.

There is a sense of doom and fatalism in both stories as though neither character can escape the problems they are facing.

In the Red Room the main character comes to a castle and tries to prove the owners wrong. The owners think the room is haunted. And believe that there is a ghostly spectre in the room, which comes on a particular night to haunt

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it. The past stories of the room make it even worse because people have apparently died in that room.

The problems in the Red Room are different to the other two stories because the main character is very stubborn and arrogant and does not take any notice of the warnings of the owners of the castle. The old man at the beginning of the story tries to warn the young man but at the same time he leaves the 'decision' to him. It is as if the three old people are ridding themselves of their responsibility of the young man. It is their duty, like guardians, to warn the man of what they believe is to be his death.

In the other two stories both of the main characters take the warnings seriously and ask people for help but the main character in the Red Room does not take any notice of their warnings. Tension is built up in this way. When there is a problem the tension, suspense and excitement increases. This is because the problems are strange. In the Signalman the opening creates a sense of mystery. The Signalman looks the opposite way when he is called. Which makes us wonder why he is doing this. The setting is also very gloomy and creates mystery. When the Signalman explains the problem to the narrator this creates more tension, as this is very strange. Furthermore more tension is heightened when the Signalman hears the calling of the ghost an accident transpires. This makes us wonder what the ghost is and why is it warning him, but tension arises because the signalman does not know how to solve the problem he has been given.

In The Dream Woman when Isaac dreams about the woman trying to kill him it is one of the climaxes of the story. This makes us want to know who is

trying to kill him. The tension later arises when Isaac's mother recognises Rebecca as the dream woman. Isaac had not recognised any of the clues.

'The dream woman! Isaac the dream woman'

Isaac take no notice of his mothers warnings and marries Rebecca.

Everything changes when Rebecca starts to settle down to married life.

'She grew sullen and contemptuous. She formed acquaintances of the most dangerous kind'

Tension also arises because everyone including the reader seems to know Isaac has made a serious mistake and is in danger but Isaac himself seems totally oblivious.

Tension increases when Rebecca brings a knife and his mother recognises the knife as the one in the dream woman uses in Isaac's dream.

Tension is then increased when Isaac goes to get the knife from Rebecca but she refuses to hand it over. When Isaacs's mother dies later on in the story but she carried on drinking and even went to Isaac's mother's funeral drunk. For this Isaac slaps her. The excitement and drama is further heightened here because there is a strong sense that Rebecca will hold it against Isaac forever. Isaac takes up a job as an ostler and Rebecca disappears after threatening Isaac which causes tension and creates a cliff hanger.

The tension in the Red Room builds up at first when the man agrees to stay in the red room. The tension increases when the candles in the room start going out. The author here uses short sentences fro more excitement and

drama. When more candles start going out the man runs around the room relighting them but they keep going out. This creates more tension and makes the reader think there is something in the room. Tension is further increased when the candles start going out all over the room. He thinks it is just the wind but they continue to go out and fear overcomes him. The tension is at his peak when all the candles had gone out and the only light left was coming from the fire

'The flames were still dancing between the glowing coals.'

When the fire goes out we are led to think there is something supernatural in the room and the narrator will die.

Then there is a gap in time, tension starts to unwind slowly. He wakes up the next morning after being rescued at dawn by the old people. He tells the old people it is fear which is in the room. The ending in the Red Room is very effective and dramatic but we are not convinced by the narrators explanation of what is in the room.

The ending of the Signalman is very tense and surprising. The narrator does not suspect something terrible has happened to the signalman, instead he assumes the signalman's problems have been deciphered. The ending is a shock. The narrator realises when he finds out about the signalman's death, that he had not helped the signalman and that he was not going mad but had foreseen his own death. At this, this story is about premonitions.

The ending of the Dream Woman Isaac is asleep and Rebecca attempts to kill him but Isaac stops her. Isaac leaves and gets a job as an ostler, this

leads us back to the beginning of the story. Isaac sleeps during the day because of his fear of Rebecca coming back to kill him, this makes him scared to go to sleep at night. This leaves the story at a cliff hanger. We will never know whether Rebecca kills Isaac or not. This leaves the reader asking the question what will happen to Isaac.

Conclusion

I think the Red Room is the most ghostly, unusual and atmospheric story. Language plays an important part and changes with characters. The old people have an old English vocabulary whereas the young man is given a upper class and stylish vocabulary.

When the narrator is going to the Red room the writer writes about the shadows following him. When the narrator is in the room he feels calm enough to stay. As he becomes more aware of the shadows in the room the tension rises again.

'The shadow in the alcove at the end in particular had that undefinable quality of a presence, that odd suggestion of a lurking, living thing that comes so easily in silence and solitude.'

This shows us darkness is far more frightening than being able to see and know what is there. The tension is built through the young man expressing his feelings.

As soon as the candles start going out in the room, the tension in the story is boosted because there is an uncertainty about why the candle went out.

Although the narrator does not feel a draft he claims that it was a draft that
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blew it out. The tension is also increased her. He tries to reassure himself by lying to himself. When the candles continue to go out fear overcomes him. The narrator runs around the room lighting the candles.

'I was almost frantic with horror'

Finally when the fire goes out the tension is at his highest. He uses long sentences that contain descriptions about how he feels.

H. G. Wells uses tension to make the story interesting and keep the readers attention. Throughout the story the tension slowly increases and decreases this is what makes the story interesting and why I think is the best unusual and atmospheric story.