

How is a sense of fear created in the reader in gothic short stories? essay sampl...



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A sense of fright and panic is created in the reader in gothic short stories through

HG Wells uses various techniques and a wide range of vocabulary to create tension and fear in the reader in the story 'The Red Room'. Wells deliberately selects an arrogant and over-confident narrator who helps build up a sense of tension:

"I can assure you," said I, "that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me."

This quote, right at the start of the story makes the reader think that the narrator is very pompous and confident and that does not believe in ghosts. The use of the word 'tangible' also makes the reader think that the protagonist is almost brave. Furthermore the narrator says: "Eight and twenty years I have lived, and never a ghost have I seen yet" Here the narrator carries on his pompous tone and tries to sound confident while he is only putting up a façade.

'Well,' said I, 'if I see anything tonight, I shall be so much the wiser. For I come to the business with an open mind.' Here the protagonist tries to convince himself that he is confident and nothing supernatural is happening or will happen to him during his stay in the Red Room.

The other characters in the short story include three old people who live, and take care of the house. One of them is a woman, and the other two characters are men. One of the men has a withered arm while the other man is described by the following quote:

“ A second old man entered..... He supported himself by a single crutch, his eyes were covered by a shade, and his lower lip, half averted, hung pale and pink from his decaying yellow teeth.”

This character, the second old man, is so disfigured he is beyond imagination that Wells intends him to be a parody of the gothic genre. He represents many, if not all, of the gothic elements, which means he is overly exaggerated and beyond belief. He is almost dead and he represents death and decay. This is reinforced here: “ He made straight for an armchair on the opposite side of the table, sat down clumsily, and began to cough”. This character builds up panic since we think that things can only get worse. We wonder why the old people are there, and whether they are going to do something to the protagonist.

Another technique used to create fear in the reader is repetition. The old man with the withered arm keeps repeating the words ‘ It’s your own choosing’. This makes the reader feel unsettled and make the old man seem insane and very unpredictable. This also shows the fact that the author is holding back information from the reader and so we lose trust in the narrator and it makes everything a lot less predictable.

The narrator experiences fear in many different ways throughout the story. The first time the narrator admits to being uncomfortable is just after the third old man enters the room. “ The three of them made me feel uncomfortable.” The next example is the when the narrator starts his journey to the Red Room. He is very paranoid and gets alarmed by any sound or noise. He is also very afraid of every shadow he sees “ A shadow

came sweeping up after me” and “ made the shadows cower and quiver.”

Another example of when the narrator experiences fear is when he sees a shadow of a statue:

“ Its shadow fell with marvellous distinction upon the white panelling and gave me the impression of someone crouching to waylay me. I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps.”

Here the narrator shows that he is paranoid. He sees the shadow as something that is alive and out to get him. He also thinks that whatever being was out to get him was tangible: “ Then, with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver, I advanced.” This again shows that the narrator does not believe in ghosts and believes that whatever may attack, he will be able to kill with a gun.

Shortly after this the narrator arrives at the red room. As soon as he enters, he locks the door. This is an attempt for him to cling on to tangible thoughts. Next he decides to look around the room, and he tucks up the valances in the bed. This shows that he is slowly becoming scared. This builds fear in us because we feel many of the same emotions as the narrator. In addition, when the narrator gathers up more candles and lights them it shows he is slowly being engulfed by the darkness and fear in his mind. It also shows that he is clinging on to the candles to keep him from being completely overwhelmed by the darkness. The candles are also another way for the narrator to stay sane and cling on to sanity.

Straight after lighting the candles, the narrator sets up a barricade. This shows that he is succumbing to his fear. When the narrator begins talking to <https://assignbuster.com/how-is-a-sense-of-fear-created-in-the-reader-in-gothic-short-stories-essay-sample/>

himself, and making up rhymes, it is obvious that he has almost completely given up to the fear, but he still isn't accepting it. When the narrator starts making excuses and jokes, he has completely been taken over by the fear and but he still does not accept it. The narrator finally gives up when he says "What's up?" He finally accepts his fear here, and gives up completely to the overwhelming darkness.

There are many examples of gothic imagery in the story, the main examples being the three old and decaying people, the shadows, the candles and the house the room is situated in. The house is an example of typical gothic architecture. The house is a large mansion, with a spiral staircase, and great windows. All of these features link back to gothic buildings and architecture. The shadows are also a typical gothic feature. They represent things such as death, horror, and darkness. The shadows are personified, and are made to seem as if they are alive and have a mind of their own:

'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.'

Here the narrator shows his paranoia, and gives the shadows lifelike features. This makes the reader feel scared about the ghosts, and make them think the narrator is fallible and not thinking normally. Conversely the candles represent good, light, and tangible things. Without the light, the narrator will fall into darkness, and give up his fight to his fear:

'The candle fell from my hand. I flung out my arms in a vain effort to thrust that ponderous blackness away from me, and, lifting up my voice, screamed with all my might - once, twice, thrice'

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Here the narrator loses his fight to the darkness; this is because he has lost the candle. This shows that without the light the narrator loses all tangible thoughts, and that he relies on the light. Also the title of the story itself is typically gothic. Also the word 'red' in the rooms name can represent death, fear, terror and danger.

Another technique used by HG Wells to create fear is holding back information. This makes everything much more unpredictable and leaves the reader 'on the edge'. It makes the reader worry about the narrator at all times, and makes them think anything can happen. It also makes them think that they are not getting the full story and this makes tension build up in them:

"Are you really going?...This night of all nights? said the old woman"

Here we know that the author and the narrator are holding back information from them. This makes the reader very nervous, and it makes us think a lot about what could have happened on this certain night and if something very bad will happen because to the protagonist because it is this certain night. Moreover, the old woman seems very scared of the room, she does not seem to believe the protagonist in that he is going to the room and this makes us feel anxious.

This technique also makes us always feel 'on the edge' and we have no idea what is going to happen to the protagonist and what is coming up next. This technique also makes the reader think about what is special in about the Red Room and what will happen there, or what has happened there. We also

wonder why the narrator has come to see the room, and if anything supernatural is actually there.

Also when the story starts, the narrator holds back information by putting up a façade. We are unaware of his real feelings, but sometimes he shows his feelings although not deliberately. His viewpoint also changes many times throughout the course of the story. This makes him very unpredictable, and the reader feels that he or she cannot trust him. The narrator himself causes fear due to his fallibility. This scares the reader from the start of the story, and helps build up fear up to the point where the narrator loses his battle to his fear.

The narrator tries to cope with his apprehension in many different ways. He fails in most of these attempts, and simply puts by hiding and concealing his real feelings. He also attempts to lie to himself. He acts pompous and arrogant, and makes himself think that he will not see anything supernatural in his stay at the Red Room: "Eight-and-twenty years," said I, "I have lived, and never a ghost have I seen as yet." Here the narrator tries to hide his fear by pretending to be brave, while he is actually very scared. However, when he enters the Red Room he changes completely. He shows his fear, will try to hide it, but he does accept his fear closer to the end of the story. In the room, he lights as many candles to overcome his fear. The darkness worries him, and he feels eliminating it using light will get the fear away from his mind:

“ My candle was a little tongue of flame in its vastness, that failed to pierce the opposite end of the room, and left an ocean of mystery and suggestion beyond its island of light.”

He tries to get rid of any suspicion of a something being inside the room, and thinks that will keep his fear at bay. After the candles start going out, without any reason the narrator starts giving in to his said the old woman. He tries to use tangible reasons for why the candles went out to keep his fear from overwhelming him: “ Odd!” I said. “ Did I do that myself in a flash of absent-mindedness?”

Furthermore the narrator begins talking to himself: “ This won’t do!” said I, and first one and then another candle on the mantelshelf followed. “ What’s up?” I cried.” Once again the narrator tries to keep his tangible thoughts by simply speaking and hearing his voice, but it does not help him. This is his last attempt to keep his fear at bay until he gets completely overwhelmed by his own fear.

In the end the narrator is completely defeated by the fear when he loses all the light. The light represents all his tangible thoughts and keeps him confident. Without the light, the narrator loses all tangible thoughts and goes insane.

After being knocked out, the protagonist finds himself back with the ‘ old custodians’. He begins by saying that the room is haunted: “ Yes, the room is haunted”, but he quickly contradicts himself by saying “” No, it is not there is no ghost there at all.” This shows that he still has not accepted the

supernatural and shows that he has almost lost his sanity when he says:  
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“ The worst of all the things that haunt poor mortal man,” said I; “ and that is, in all its nakedness - Fear!”

This reinforces the fact that the narrator is fallible, and that he cannot be trusted.

Similarly to Wells, Dickens too adopts a typically Gothic setting that is very unsettling and a location that has many gothic features:

“ His post was in as solitary and dismal place as I ever saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon...the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel.”

Here, there are many uses of gothic imagery. The signalman's post seems to be awful, and dull. This depresses the reader. The word 'dungeon' makes it seem as if the signalman is trapped in his post and cannot escape, and must stay there till his death. It makes it seem as if the narrator is trapped from the normal and tangible world, and has no contact with the real world. Also the black tunnel makes the reader worry, because some supernatural and intangible thing can be lurking there.

Right from the start of the story, the tone is depressing and dull:

“ There was a barbarous, depressing and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had a deadly smell...it struck to chill me, as if I had left the natural world”

Similarly to the Red Room, the signalman's post is very dark and there is hardly any light. This is a typical piece of gothic imagery, the fight between light and darkness, which can also be conveyed by the fight between good and evil. Also the smell makes the atmosphere seem more terrible, and forbidding. Moreover the narrator feels he has left the natural world and travelled into a supernatural world, which makes us think that something may happen to the narrator at any time.

The start of the story is also very vicarious:

" There came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down"

Here the description of the train going passed makes us imagine as if we were actually there. This makes the reader feel stronger feelings for things which happen to the narrator since the reader feels that they are actually there. This causes more fear and suspense to be built up.

The signalman's post is solitary and very dull and dark; " His post was in as solitary and dismal place as I ever saw" The signalman's post is very similar to the room in ' The Red Room'. In the Red Room the narrator is trapped in the room just like the signalman is somewhat stuck in his solitary post. Also the dark and gloomy atmosphere in both stories builds up fear in the reader:

" The shorter perspective in the other direction terminating the gloomy red light"

The ' gloomy' red light makes the atmosphere dull and makes the reader feel sad and unhappy. Also the red light symbolises some gothic features. These include death, danger, blood, and terror. The light is also another piece of gothic imagery. There are many other uses of gothic imagery in the story:

“ The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitous. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozy and wetter as I went down”

The path towards the signalman's post is very dangerous and is typically gothic. This is similar to the journey the narrator in ' The Red Room' makes when he is heading to the room. It is as if the narrator is descending down to hell and there is no coming back. This description is also vicarious and makes us feel we are actually there with the narrator. This causes tension in the reader since the reader feels insecure and worries for the narrator's safety and well being and feels the same things as the narrator. Another instance of hell is the angry sunset: “ so steeped in the glow of the angry sunset.” This reminds the reader of hell, and fire in hell and can represent the end of the world because it was believed that the sun would mean the eventual destruction of the earth.

When the narrator begins to start thinking of supernatural things it scares the reader:

“ The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man”

This builds fear up in the reader because the reader feels and thinks the same as the narrator. As soon as he starts thinking these intangible things, the reader thinks that they will probably be true. This makes us worry for the narrator. Also when the narrator says “ His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me” he once again shows that he is starting to believe in the supernatural. This makes us feel insecure and feel nervous for the narrator.

Later on, the signalman describes a ‘ spectre’:

“ The arm left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved – violently waved”

This ghost makes us feel frightened and nervous because we think that it can harm the narrator. Also the use of the word ‘ violently’ makes everything seem more sinister.

We soon find out that the narrator is getting nervous – “ Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine.” This makes the reader feel nervous as well as sorry for the narrator as he has been caught up in the signalman’s problems. It builds up fear because we know something is going to happen to the narrator or the signalman.

We then learn that the narrator is trying his best to ignore the supernatural:

“ A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it”

Here the narrator tries to ignore the supernatural goings on but fails. It makes the reader feel scared as another supernatural thing has happened.