

The red room by h g
wells and the
signalman by charles
dickens



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In my essay, I will explain two short stories, and will illustrate the similarities and differences between them. The two stories are from the pre 1900 prose, and are called 'The Red Room' by H. G. Wells and 'The signalman' by Charles Dickens.

The Red Room is about the narrator's experience when he visited a castle and he tells it as it happened. The owner of the room was called Lorraine Castle. His visit was due to the fact he wanted to visit a room in the castle named 'the red room'. In the beginning of the story, it is not known why the room was given the name.

My thoughts were due to the fact that either the room itself was red, or the room was given that name due to something which happened in it which wasn't good. As when you think of red, blood comes to mind. He met with the owners of the castle, as the story begins, and the characters were as he describes; "Something inhuman in senility, something crouching and atavistic; the human qualities seem to drop from old people insensibly day by day." They were three elderly people, all strange in different ways.

There were two old men, one with a withered arm, another with a bad throat, and an old woman. He felt uncomfortable in their presence; "The three of them made me feel uncomfortable, with their gaunt silences, their bent carriages, their evident unfriendliness, to me and to one another," The narrator in whose name was not given, asked permission to visit the room and stay there the night. The three tried to convince him not to, but willingly, the narrator urged, as his curiosity was much, and he wanted to know why everyone feared the room, and to face it himself. " 'I can assure you,' said I,

‘ that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. ’ “ They didn’t stop him, but only warned him.

The narrator says at eight and twenty years, he’s never seen a ghost, but the old woman says, “ And eight-and-twenty years you have lived and never seen the likes of this house, I reckon. There’s a many things to see, when one’s still but eight-and-twenty,” “ A many things to see and sorrow for. ”

The author creates a gothic feeling when he illustrates the sound of one of the old men as he enters the front room to join them. The sounds are his footsteps as he walks with his walking stick, along the flags in the corridor.

The old woman also mentions; “ This night of all nights. ” Which makes it sound like something disastrous happened before on the night. “ It’s your own choosing. ” Which makes it sound like they were not going to be responsible for anything that may happen to him in the room. In front of the elderly people, he showed me no sign of fear, but only confidence and bravery. But when he was on his route to the red room, his feelings start to change and signs of fear show.

Also, he mentions and gives us a clue why he was there to visit the red room; Here it was, thought I, that my predecessor was found, and the memory of that story gave me a sudden twinge of apprehension. ” He does not fully explain what he meant when he said this, so it leaves the reader in thought and mystery as to what his visit was about. When entering the room, he locked the door behind him straight away, to make sure no one could enter the room at any time at all. The room belonged to Lorraine Castle, in which the young duke had begun to die, and finally died when he fell head

long down the steps. He was very careful with making sure the room was secure and inaccessible.

He lit all the candles in the room and made a barricade with a table. He also had a revolver with him, which shows he did not feel secure at all in the room, taking all precautions. More signs of fear show. “ By this time I was in a state of considerable nervous tension, although to my reason there was no adequate cause for the condition. ” “ The somber reds and blacks of the room troubled me; even with seven candles the place was merely dim. ” After midnight, the first candle went out, followed by others, and this shocked him as he began to talk out aloud to himself.

‘ What’s up? ’ I cried, with a queer high note getting into my voice somehow. ” As he rushes round the room trying to light the candles, he gets more panicky and his fear overcomes the bravery he had at the start of the story. “ My hand trembled so much that twice I missed the rough paper of the matchbox. ” Then he tells about this fear as if it was what he was fighting against. “ It was like a ragged stormcloud sweeping out all the stars. ” “ I was frantic with the horror of the coming darkness, and my self- possession deserted me.

“ He then acts very frantic and in the darkness, he runs to the door, but he strikes the corner of the bed and staggers hitting other bulky furniture, soon enough that he knocked himself out. He says he remembered no more. He wakes up the next morning with a vague memory. The old people are around and question him about what had happened the previous night.

“ It was very slowly I recovered my memory of my experience. ‘ You believe me now,’ says the old man, ‘ the room is haunted. ‘ ” The narrator concludes that yes, the room was haunted. The elderly argue with whom they think who haunts the room. He concludes and ends their theories.

” ‘ The worst of all the things that haunt a poor moral man’, said I, ‘ and that is, in all its nakedness- Fear! Fear that will not have light her sound, that will bear reason, the deafens and darkness and overwhelms. It followed me through the corridor, it fought me in the room-. ‘ ” There was a moment of silence and he concludes it saying; “ There is fear in the room of hers- black Fear, and will be- so long as this house of sin endures. ” The author finishes the story with this quote, and I think it was a clever way of ending it.

The author builds tension and mystery throughout the story, without anyone knowing what really haunted the room. The narrator brought us with him through the story, showing his feelings and emotions of fear and bravery; anxiety and trepidation. As if we knew how he felt. When the narrator was knocked out, we never quite know had happened to him. How exactly he was knocked out.

If he knocked himself, or if someone did; a spirit or person. But he finalizes this story showing that all that haunted the room was the fear that built up in himself, and the negative vibe that the room gave out with all its past history and stories. This helped grow fear inside of him. The signalman is about the narrators experience of a strange, creepy happening, when he visits a signalman at his post underground and hears of weird goings on. His visit was due to the fact that the signalman wanted to know why this was all

happening, and the narrator was there to understand these incidents, as a doctor.

The story begins as the narrator calls upon the signalman from looking down the line and calling to him, “Halloa! Below there.” After a few pauses, the signalman directs the narrator to a path, which leads him underground. Upon meeting the Signalman, he is described as a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. The atmosphere is set to be an eerie and depressing one. “entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthly, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as I had left the natural world.

” Doubt comes into his mind about the man, whether or not he was a spirit or man. 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. But this doubt disappears when he takes a step back, and because of this action, he detects in his eyes some latent fear of him. The first clue we get about what the story is about comes across in their conversation, where the narrator asks why the man seems as if he feared him. The man replied that it was because he was doubtful, whether or not he has seen him before.

He points towards the red light and said that is where. They then descended towards the post (box) where the man stays, as his job was a signalman for the underground trains that passed. You know that the narrator knew something of this man’s past. He talks of how the man studied philosophy,

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and had attended lectures; but he had run wild and misused his opportunities, as he was left with the rundown job as a signalman.

He describes this as; “ He made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another. “ The signalman whilst in conversation, went about his job as usual, and at two points, is described to of fallen with colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut, and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. Then to end their first meeting, they set another time and date to meet at the same place. But there were many cautions and instructions the signalman gave.

He noted not to call out at any time. He then asks what made the narrator call out, “ Halloa! Bellow there! ” He replies he doesn’t know what made him do so. The signalman replies, “ Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words.

I know them well. ” This gives out the idea that the signalman had heard them words before, and probably play an important part of the story, or the problem in which the signalman has. They wished each other goodnight and left it at that. At this point of the story, everything is mysterious, and very little about the signalman’s problem is shared.

No clues into what his problem was given, until their second meeting. This meeting is different as he actually tells the narrator what problem he has been having and what has been troubling him. Almost straightaway upon their second appointment, the signalman tells of how the previous day, the

person he had mistaken the narrator for, was whom troubled him. Finding out whom this person was, was what the narrator was eager to do.

But the signalman doesn't know the answer to his question; " I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved, violently waved. " Also shouting it with utmost passion and vehemence; " For God's sake, clear the way! " He describes his first sighting of this strange person or spirit. He says someone shouted those familiar words.

" Halloo! Bellow there! " standing by the red light near the tunnel. These phrases obviously play an important part in finding out the problem that he has. You know that the signalman has not come into contact with this person, as he says that he had not seen his face. But is familiar with what the figure says, as he shouts the phrases, which are repeated so often. He ran towards the figure asking what was wrong, but approaching the figure with arms stretched out to remove the figure's left arm across his face, it disappeared. The signalman says how he returns to his box and sends telegraphs both ways that there had been no problem.

The narrator who's part in the story comes clear, and tries to ignore the presence he felt. " Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger down my spine. " It comes clear that his part in the story is as a doctor, as he tells the signalman that it must be a deception of his sense of sight, originating in disease of the delicate nerves in his eyes. They sat in silence then the signalman speaks, that six hours after the sighting, a memorable accident

happened on the line, and ten hours later, the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel to the spot where the figure had stood.

Being a doctor, the narrator tried his best to disagree. A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. " He tried to look at it as a coincidence, but the same coincidence had occurred continually. Months later, the signalman described that the same happened, but the figure was silent. That day, trouble came to a woman whom was in great pain, and instantly died, and lay between the two of the men talking there on the floor.

Many times it reassured, and the figure rings his little bell when calling out the words he was most familiar with, " For God's sake, clear the way! " The narrator asks if it rang the first time they met, and the signalman says twice. This is where the narrator says how it must be his mind misleading him, as he did not hear it ring at all. This now shows that it is the signalman whom only sees the figure and hears it. So it's up to the reader to either think of it as a mind misinterpretation or a supernatural incident. The signalman had been troubled by this figure, and the question he asks the doctor is; " What does the spectre mean? What is its warning against? What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen.

It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of me. What can I do? " This quote above is a very important one as it is almost like the signalman is fortelling his own death or as he is the only one who sees and hears the figure, that it is haunting him

and something bad is to happen to him. With this he panicked. The narrator pities the signalman, seeing him in such a state.

The narrator thinks; “ It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life. ” The signalman then talks more of why the figure chose him, and shows much frantic distress. And then says why him, a poor signalman, why not someone of higher authority whom people would believe. The narrator as a doctor, concludes his decision that a man of the signalman’s state, is a threat to the public’s safety, and he represents to signalman, that he should have to be discharged, and tell his superiors about these sightings he’s having. After a while, the signalman clamed down.

They departed they departed once again that night. The narrator then tried to conclude this case as a doctor for his patient, the signalman. Many thoughts ran through his head; But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? ” The next night and last night they were to meet was a night fall of mystery, great thought and weirdness. The doctor had to accompany the signalman to tell his superiors of the strange happenings, and with this, he knew a discharge of his job was to follow.

As he approaches the brink the next evening, and sees an appearance of what he thought was the figure with his left arm across his eyes. The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I

saw the appearance of a man was a man indeed,” This is probably one of the few, rare times in the story that the narrator has a slight reoccurrence of how the signalman actually felt and believed. But it was only a mistaken identity, and wiped all thoughts and doubts in his mind. There was also small group of men.

He sensed something wrong indeed, and felt to blame himself if anything bad had happened to the signalman. He felt it would be his responsibility, as he was the one whom was there to help and listen to the signalman. With an irresistible sense that something was wrong- with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there,” Then news, which was told to the narrator from the group of men, shocked him. It was that the signalman had died that morning, being cut down by an engine. They described to the narrator what had happened, and to his horror, the signalman all those times had been right.

He had actually foreseen his upcoming death, and sensed danger near him. The signalman had been at the mouth of the tunnel, whilst the man called out to him from the train, those horrific familiar words, “ Below there! Look out! Look out! For God’s sake clear the way! ” But it was too late, the signalman was cut off by the engine. And that’s how the story ends, with the narrator’s note. ” Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the engine-driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate signalman had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself – not he- had attached, and that only in my

mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated. “ This note was written as a perspective from a doctor, as a coincidence.

As a man whom works with science, supernatural happenings, is no truth for him and his beliefs. As we could see, he looks at it all with medical explanations and coincidences. The two stories’ similarities are how the scenes of the stories are set. Both in Pre 1900 prose, the scenes are eerie, mysterious, and have tense moments between characters with no real understanding of each other. They are both in dim, dull surroundings. Both stories hold mystery and anxiety till the end of the story, where all meaning is set out clear and told.

Both stories end with the narrator’s thought, which both actually conclude with no supernatural thought. Differences in the stories are where scenes are set. One is based inside and another outside. ‘ The signalman’, has its character die. In ‘ The Red Room’, the narrator brings us through the story with his shared emotion, feelings, thoughts and all.

Openly showing were he was brave and in fear. The narrator in the signalman is a doctor, whom works in the world of medicine so does not believe in the natural world. He treated the signalman as his patient and showed very little to none fear at all, only very few times of doubt.