

In 'the red room', how
does hg wells explore
the nature of fear



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Wells was born in the year 'The Signalman' was written. Like Dickens, he was of poor parents.

He went to night school to better himself to be trained as a teacher. He was lectured by T. H Huxley, the famous Darwinist (The belief in the theory of evolution) and developed a life long interest in science. He was drawn to socialism and believed that the only hope for society to improve was to build it on rational principles. He is well known for novels such as 'The Invisible Man', 'The First Men in the Moon', 'The Island of Dr Moreau' & 'The War of the Worlds' (although the modern day film version is, unfortunately, not as good! H. G Wells begins the story with an array of cliches.

It is not that he is a bad writer, but rather he is mocking the other horror stories that were out at his time (and there were many of them). H. G Wells was sceptical of ghosts, and so he made the narrator the same with the aim to prove the non-existence of ghosts. Although he is mocking other stories with cliches, we see that even cliches can be scary; old people being one of these cliches. They have all been given abnormalities.

(The man with the withered arm, the lady who sways her head from side to side and the man with major face deformities). These things give us an impression of eeriness and mystery since something must have happened to them in the past. Since they have a 'haunted room' in their house, it is easy for the reader to jump to conclusions. Also, the entrance of the old man with the walking stick is quite dramatic.

We hear him before we see him it seems he makes a lot of noise coming in which suggests that it takes a lot of effort from him. When we actually see <https://assignbuster.com/in-the-red-room-how-does-hg-wells-explore-the-nature-of-fear/>

him, it is evident that the narrator is slightly unnerved by this. He describes all there of the old people as 'Grotesque custodians'. The old man notably repeats the words 'it's your own choosing!' This, itself is a cliché as the old man is not accepting any responsibility for whatever might happen to the narrator. This is a cliché as this means that the narrator will be alone in his experiment.

He even says 'If you go to the red room tonight, you go alone'. Continuing with the abnormality of the old people, the aged woman, who sways her head from side to side, repeatedly yells 'Tonight of all nights!' as if to say that the supernatural threat is worse on that particular night than any other night. Again, Wells does not explain why and piles on the suspense. The actual setting of 'The Red Room' is in a huge mansion - again another cliché. The mansion is often a symbol of horror as mansions are typically found in the countryside and therefore away from the civilisation of cities and towns.

The gothic mansion is the setting for many horror films and stories. The old man gives a long set of instructions to the red room. This suggests that the old people have positioned themselves as far away from the red room as possible. It also means that when the narrator reaches the red room, he won't be able to reach help. On the way to the red room, Wells uses many things to purposely scare the reader.

He builds on the gothic horror trend. The narrator himself admits to being slightly unnerved or 'affected' even though he is trying to keep things as 'matter as fact' as possible. The mansion is old as it is described as belonging

to 'an older age'. It is almost as if the whole mansion is one big cliché. The shadows that the narrator sees are personified as someone 'cowering and quivering' and a 'bronze group' stood on the landing.

These are the typical red herrings of a typical horror. They unsettle the narrator as he reaches into his 'pocket that had' his 'revolver'. This is to reassure himself even though his revolver would be useless against something supernatural. The last thing is that he recalls his 'predecessor' i.e.

the person who attempted the same thing before him. It states that the last person fell 'head long' down the stairs that the narrator is currently standing on. He seemed to be on the same 'mission'. This makes us and could make him think that he may be going the same way.

Of course, his predecessor could have fallen accidentally and something supernatural may not have been involved. The narrator enters the room with a rationalist view; the view that H. G Wells shares. But slowly, his rational and factual mind is taken over by his imagination and fear.

This is not a quick process, but happens gradually which could be traced back to when he reaches for his revolver in the corridor. However, questions must be raised on why he has a revolver for this experiment in the first place. He obviously must have decided to bring it but for what? The actual room is made so that, us being the reader, we can empathize with him. Or rather, we can start to understand where he starts to lose himself in imagination. All the things that have happened before are seeds in his mind.

They may be coming to 'bloom' now, as he may start to have doubts, as we would.

He describes the room as being a 'sombre', depressing room. The sinister parts are explained when he describes the 'shadowy window bays', the 'recesses and alcoves' and the fact that his one candle does not enable him to see to the end of the room. He describes the darkness as being a 'germinating darkness' which suggests that the darkness is growing. He admits himself that there is mystery surrounding the room.

'One could well understand the legends that had sprouted...'). He compares his situation to one of being on an island of light surrounded by an ocean of darkness with the metaphor.

The narrator resolves to make a 'systematic examination' of the room. This shows his scientific, rational mind but also, the fact that he had to resolve to do this, shows us that he may be slightly fearful. H. G Wells writes a paragraph on the systematic check. This gives me the impression that the narrator is checking every corner to re-assure him.

It seems that he is not looking for anything supernatural but someone hiding. This, again, builds on the theory that he is slightly unnerved. The narrator starts to light candles and then the fire to 'Keep down any disposition to shiver'. It seems that, being a rational man, he know the power of his mind. He does not want himself to shiver because of the cold.

If he shivers because of the cold, he'll think that he is shivering because of fear. Also, he might not want to appear fearful to anything that might be

watching him in the room. After he does that, he protects himself, by pulling a table up in front of him ' To form a kind of barricade before him'. He also lays his gun down on the table. Of course, again he is reassuring himself that he has a method of protecting himself even though these methods won't work against something supernatural.

He is sort of helping himself as in doing these he is protecting himself from things that are tangible and real and therefore, he might not think that ghosts exist. However, being a rational and scientific man I do not believe that he would have bothered with these measures. I think the barricade and his gun are offering him some psychological protection. His scientific qualities again are shown when he describes the rooms ' perfect stillness too stimulating for the imagination'. He depicts that the alcove at the end of the room is particularly eerie.

He checks the alcove again. As he says himself, he is in considerable nervous tension. He believes that he is okay, as he says ' My mind ..

. was perfectly clear'. We know this is not true as he explains that he began to ' string some rhymes together' but ' the echoes were not pleasant'. This suggests that the echoes could make him think that another being could be in the room.

He then remembers the old people from earlier. I believe this recall prompts him to realise that the room is quite dim so he remembers the candles in the passageway. It is at the point when he puts the candles in the room and starts lighting them when I think he starts to lose his mind as he is trusting

his sanity to the candles. He makes sure that the room is well lit and that he

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can see everything in the room. He also tries to maintain himself by making a sarcastic comment about warning the ghost about tripping on the candles. Soon after, the candle in the alcove that gave him particular trouble before goes out.

He personifies the darkness that 'jumps into its place'. This is where his sanity starts going downhill rapidly. He exclaims 'By Jove! That draughts a strong one!' Since he exclaims this, I can imagine that he is in some hurry to relight the candle. I imagine he walks briskly to the candle to relight it.

As he does this, another two candles go out. This could be because the narrator created wind by walking briskly and put the other 2 candles out. He makes a mistake of personifying the darkness ('the shadow seemed to take a step towards me'). He seems to think that he is at 'war' with the shadow and wants to win otherwise something really bad will happen. His frequent exclamations, such as 'Odd!' and 'This won't do!' shows us that he is becoming more and more fixated on 'keeping the shadows at bay'.

'What's up' becomes infected with a 'queer high note' which mean that he is trying to keep his voice calm but it is not working. The next thing he says, 'Steady on! These candles are wanted!' is said with a half-hysterical facetiousness. This means that he is trying to be funny but the hysterical notes in his voice tell us his true emotions. In effect, this is an oxymoron. We defiantly know that he is frightened when he says that his hands trembled so much 'that twice I missed the rough paper of the match box'. He thinks that because he is lighting the candles quickly, he is 'gaining on the extinctions'.

He is becoming extremely paranoid and his war like battle with darkness is becoming more evident. However, H. G Wells seems to cheat in his next sentence when all 4 lights in different corners of the room go out. Up till that point, everything that happened could be reasoned with a rational explanation but in a large room, 4 candles going out in 4 different corners is highly unlikely. A definite turning point is the narrator's cry of terror.

This is where his fear has overwhelmed him, so, he is no longer trying to keep himself calm, but he is letting out emotions. He thinks that he gains on the darkness by using a new method of relighting the candles. He takes one candle and uses it to relight the others. He ' avoids the delay of striking matches' but he completely loses it. His dependency on the candles is evident with his urgency to relight them. He even admits to completely losing it when he says ' my self-possession deserted me'.

He is now running around like a madman! We know this because he uses verbs of panic such as ' bruised', ' stumbled', ' whisked' and ' snatched'. He then remembers about the fire. He is obviously delighted that he has the fire still because he describes it as ' flames dancing between glowing coals and splashing red...

' . However, his fire vanishes. It could be because of a draught or a whole variety of other reasons. When it vanishes so does any hope in the narrator. He repeats the words ' vanished' in a set of 3 so he is obviously gutted that this has happened. He describes the fire going out as something that had ' crushed the last vestiges of reason from my brain'.

He describes it as if it were an attack. He literally wants out and makes a break for the corridor from which he came. He runs into the corner of the bed and hit another few items before finally getting knocked out. It is appropriate for him to get knocked out ever since it was a war with his mind and it seems as if his mind has been defeated.

In the end, the narrator wakes up to find that the old people from before have found him and bandaged him up. As he talks to them, they seemed to have changed. ' He spoke to me no longer as one who greets an intruder. But one who grieves for a broken friend'.

They probably feel sorry for him and what he has been through. In the beginning, they seemed sceptical and disapproving of what about to do. This could have been because the narrators fear had started earlier, since he chose to bring the gun, and it could have been nerves affecting him a lot earlier than we thought and therefore, his opinion on the old people may have been slightly biased. When asked about the room, the narrator replies that ' the room is haunted'. We take this in a literal sense and think that indeed, ghosts reside in the room. However, when he elaborates, we find out that he is not talking about anything supernatural, but fear.

He describes it as being both ' Deafening and darkening'/ I note the'd' sound which was probably used to emphasize the overwhelming power of the mind. The old man seems to agree but what we must realise is that although they seem to be talking about the same thing, they are not. The old man personifies fear and it is shown by using a capital ' F'. He still thinks that there is something supernatural. I think it is fair to say that H.

G Wells is making the general point about people wanting to cling to their primitive beliefs and not look at things rationally. He shows us that people are generally hard to change and that is the whole point to the story.