

The napoleon and the spectre essay



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All of the stories written during the Victorian era make use of the genre of mystery. By analysing each of them, mystery questions philosophical, religious and even social concerns. Furthermore, by contrasting all the narratives whether in first or third person, similarities and differences can be concluded about the setting, role of the author and language used.

‘ The Red Room’ and to an extent ‘ The Signalman’ portray pompous and flippant narrators explaining mysterious situations with reference to fact and psychology. The narrator in the ‘ Signalman’ is a man of rationality who scientifically analyses the railroad employee like a doctor would a patient. He scrutinises the Signalman in a cold analytical way, which shows how he tries to dismiss these inexplicable stories with logical reasons. “ Originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction,” supports this. The debate between science and the unexplained is reminiscent of the relationship between the narrator and the Signalman.

Those who have encountered the supernatural either fear its power or have little belief based on their experience as opposed to formal learning.

Although at first the narrator rejects any possible idea of strange events occurring, he soon becomes doubtful, due to how powerful and convincing religion is. The contrast in The Signalman between the rational, technological world is expressed through trains, education, references to medical practises and the verbose, over articulate narrator. Evidence of this over exaggerate language is, “ I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face.

The Signalman is also mentioned as 'educated,' which means he cannot be dismissed as a 'half wit.' These strange events now have more resonance. Similarly in 'The Red Room,' the narrator is extremely complacent. He reveals the old generation as not competent, which mirrors their thoughts.

"A second old man entered, more bent, more wrinkled, more aged even than the first," is confirmation of this. The technique of discrepancy is used in order to emphasize their abilities. Furthermore, this mocking continues as the narrator sarcastically repeats what the old people say e. . it's your own choosing – It's my own choosing. However once again the narrator gradually begins to doubt his first judgement.

The darkness, which is part of the landscape, starts to play on his human fears. Another parallel between the Red Room and Signalman is the fanciful suggestions utilised that emulate the pretentious language. Christianity was an essential part of the fabric of Victorian society however as the nineteenth Century progressed, the status of Christianity was seriously challenged. Darwin argued that a process called 'natural selection' favoured those changes that were most profitable to the organism concerned.

Many Christians found the theory of evolution incompatible with the idea. H. G. Wells story presents an account of this religion-science debate where the impulsive narrator represents a Darwinist, stipulating facts and evidence on his journey to insanity, while unwisely declining the guardian's basic faith. 'The Monkey's Paw' and 'Napoleon and the Spectre' use the mystery genre to criticise aspects of society with a sense of the paranormal realm punishing certain mortals.

The title, “ The Monkey’s Paw,” could symbolise a desire for revenge on the part of an Asian continent subdued by the British Empire as well as a metaphor of the destruction of India; it was torn into separate parts. A ‘ monkey’ is an exotic, potent, foreign figure and in this case is from the mysterious location of India. The ‘ paw’ could signify violence and disembodiment, as this is a part of the animal. The fakir who put a spell on the cultural item is punishing the human desire to interfere with fate or take more than is his due. The eventual punishment results in the death of their son.

However only oriental religions believed in destiny, whereas the majority of Britain who were followers of Christianity did not. Correspondingly in Napoleon and the Spectre, Napoleon comes into contact with a strange supernatural creature that entices him and compels the gallant soldier to confront political crimes through the streets of Paris. This ‘ ghost’ shared a related name to a French General Napoleon supposedly murdered, General Pichegru. Napoleon allowed himself to be taken on this tour partly due to his courageousness but also the fact that the ghost exerts authority over him, encouraging him on with alluring remarks such as, ‘ follow me Napoleon and though shall seek more. ‘ In this situation Napoleon has been chastised due to the offenses he has committed.

Contrastingly, there is no sense of cause and effect in Napoleon and the Spectre compared to the Monkey’s Paw, which is much more palpable. In each of the four stories, the narrator plays a different role and to an extent is ‘ untrustworthy. The Red Room and The Signalman are written from a first person narrative whereas The Monkey’s Paw and Napoleon and the Spectre

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are written from a third person account. There is a dramatic difference between the two different types of description.

By writing in the first person, the narrator is much more directly involved with the story and more emotion is involved e. g. fear of supernatural, whereas by writing in third person, the story becomes a bit more simplistic and less sentimental. However exaggerated language is used throughout all of the novellas. The narrators in ' The Signalman' and ' The Red Room' travel from scepticism to fearful belief.

Although the narrator in ' The Signalman' did scientifically question the Signalman, the narrator in ' The Red Room' takes part in these eccentric incidents. The Narrator of the Signalman does not engage in these activities and is therefore less directly involved compared to the narrator of The Red Room. In The Signalman, the narrator has been raised not to believe in such ridiculous events and his arguments against the mysterious have more timbre than those in The Red Room as the events have been experienced. Consequently H. G.

Wells is untrustworthy and his viewpoint, flawed. Evidence of this is when the narrator is lost for words, which shows how he does not have all the answers. The narrator in ' The Signalman' is not seen to be accurate as these events have occurred but he has more validity. Charlotte Bronte and W.

W. Jacobs are not untrustworthy nor are their ideas flawed, as they do not question the concept of the supernatural. Instead, they narrate stories of how people have been cursed by its supremacy. Very little reflection takes place within these novella's compared to The Signalman and The Red Room

where a struggle takes place; here its is very much superficial. The landscapes of these mystery stories generally add to the emotion of the scene and the variety of techniques used by the author.

Charles Dickens' description of the railway cutting contributes to the unnerving tone as well as the air of supernaturalism. As the narrator has difficulty climbing down from the cutting, this adds to the tension and it seizes a sense of certainty. "The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozier and wetter as I went down," is evidence of this. The words, 'oozier' and 'clammy stone,' are unpleasant adjectives that emphasize how intolerable the isolated location is. The use of adverbs such as 'unusually precipitate' highlights size of the setting.

In addition it informs us that is it a place of significance. Furthermore, Charles Dickens uses the repetition of the infinitive of the verb in order to stress the dullness and mundaneness of the Signalman's life e. g. to change..

. to trim...

to turn. In the Red Room once again the landscape of the gothic is described with shadowy adjectives. "The long, draughty subterranean passage was chilly and dusty," is an example of how the darkness within the stories begins to play on our human fears. The dimness of the site symbolises the unknowable; H. G. Wells is using the technique of personification in this case.

Verbs such as "thrust" testify the power of the supernatural that is engulfing him; there is an element of desperation. Furthermore the use of numbers, "

once, twice, thrice,” shows the battle between the rational and the supernatural. In *The Monkey’s Paw* and *Napoleon and the Spectre*, both narrators deliberately withhold information in order to intensify the mood of speculation and intrigue. In *Napoleon and the Spectre*, the landscape of mystery has its own different set of rules i. e. walls cannot dissolve in the ordinary world.

Charlotte Bronte includes little bits of French sprinkled here and there to make the story sound authentic. The opening of *The Monkey’s Paw* is very much different compared to the other stories as it is set in a jovial, domestic environment rather than a haunted house. However the weather, ‘ cold and wet,’ plus how isolated the place is soon bring a sinister side to the story making it fairly uncomfortable. Later, apprehension is created, as the General doesn’t reveal the wishes he was granted.

In this instance the General was wise and knowledgeable about the ‘ monkeys paw’ and he counsels them about its power. By using this technique W. W. Jacobs is able to establish pathos; the father is reluctant to carry out wishes as he is content with his life but disregards these thoughts. “ The first man had his three wishes.

... I don’t know what the first two were, but the third was for death.

This quote is an ominous foreshadowing of events, which is the death of their son. The word grouping of, ‘ resignation, apathy, weeping’ show the parents torment. The language used by the company representative who revealed the death of their son is very formal, cold and non-emotional e. g. “ The firm

wish me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss. ” Soon after, there is a change of roles between the two parents.

The once flippant mother now wishes to bring her beloved son back to life. Encounters with something beyond the realm of the explicable can lead to injury and mutilation. This primarily takes place in the story of ‘ The Red Room. ‘ The author soon becomes emotionally vulnerable and there is almost a sense of humiliation from the supernatural. The use of hubris is thus employed; pride before mortification.

“ I was almost frantic with the horror of the coming darkness, and my self-possession deserted me,” shows how the narrator has lost his dignity. “ I bruised myself on the thigh against the table,” is evidence of how his encounters with darkness have physically bruised him, which is a possible metaphor to his mental injuries. By falling on the floor, it shows how humbled the author is by the experience as he is very dismissive about the elderly's simple faith of the supernatural. The narrator has almost become aged; his character is retrospective of theirs. In conclusion the genre of mystery brings up a diversity of themes in relation to normal every day life.

The Monkey's Paw questions people's belief in fate, The Red Room and the Signalman interrogates rationality and Napoleon and the Spectre criticises the appalling aspects of society where one of the Ten Commandments is broken, ‘ one shall not commit murder. ‘