

How the authors of  
the red room' and the  
farthing house' create  
tension in their ...



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I think that a good ghost story should have a lot of action in it but also have a philosophical approach to the existence of ghosts and what, if they exist, they are doing here. They should be realistic so the reader, when in similar surroundings to the ones in the book will remember the story and start to feel nervous at the prospect of the thing in the book happening to them.

Human nature should also be a part of ghost stories because it is a good way to show how easily humans can be frightened by something, to an person looking in on them, is insignificant and stupid almost. H. G Wells and Susan Hill both contribute to the tension of the story by putting the narrators in situations that drastically change the attitudes of both narrators.

The narrator of 'The Farthing House' is a fairly old woman known only as Mrs. Flower. She is the niece of Aunt Addy, the person that she goes to visit in the story. She begins the story in a manner that already creates tension for the reader by starting off, 'I have never told you any of this before - I have never told anyone. This opening sentence sets the tone for the rest of the story because from reading that the reader will realize this is a secret she has kept for a long time and is still very nervous about telling.

The first major change in her attitude and personality comes when she first becomes aware of the atmosphere in the house; 'I had sensed something sinister, that I was shrouded at once in the atmosphere of a haunted house. This is when she thinks about ghost and the possibility of them existing for probably, the first time in her life and questions the beliefs that had been installed into her at an early age and it is quite an unnerving experience for her. The next change in how she acts is when she sees the ghost for the first time. She becomes terrified and hysterical, 'I was soaked in sweat, shaking,

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terrified. I did not sleep again that night but sat up in the chair wrapped in the eiderdown with the lamp on.

' This creates tension because it shows how frightening the experience was for her to not go to sleep again that night due to fear. The final change she goes through is the night after her visit to the graveyard and when she realizes that the ghost is not there to harm her, 'I slept well that night. I saw nothing, heard nothing although in the morning I knew somehow that she had been there again. ' I believe Susan Hill chose an old middle to upper class woman as her narrator because she wanted to show that anybody can see ghosts and to prove that regardless of your upbringing human nature is basically the same in everyone.

That creates tension because everybody who reads the story will feel nervous about the fact if it could happen to her it could happen to anybody. The narrator of 'The Red Room' is an arrogant and bold young man who claims he has an open mind about the existence of ghosts but proves his own claim wrong when he says, 'I can assure you said I, that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me. ' He has come to Lorraine Castle because he has heard about the Red Room, a room that is supposedly haunted. The opening paragraph of the story in Red Room creates tension like 'The Farthing House' does by saying, 'And I stood up before the fire with my glass.

' This gives you the feeling he is proud of himself and acts superior to other people and you know something bad will happen to him. The first change in attitude is as he is walking down the corridor to the Red Room and he

suddenly becomes very nervous, this shows when he stops and feels scared to move, 'I stood rigid for half minute perhaps. Then with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver, I advanced. ' When he finally does get to the room his nervous attitude has evolved even more and he checks every inch of the room to try and calm himself down, then creates a place where he can stay with some kind of defence, 'I had pulled up a chintz covered armchair, and a table, to form a kind of barricade before me. His attitude becomes slightly more upbeat when he collects the candles to light up the room, which is demonstrated when he says, 'There was something very cheery and reassuring in these little streaming flames. However, he quickly loses this sense of well being after midnight when all the candles start to go out, 'My hands trembled so much that twice I missed the rough paper of the matchbox.

' He reaches his most different change in attitude when the darkness has completely blanketed the room and he becomes terrified, 'I was now almost frantic with the horror of the coming darkness. After he has woken up from his unconsciousness his way of thinking has completely changed and he now is not sceptical of people who claimed they have seen ghosts as he himself has had a supernatural experience that he cannot deny. He seems to agree what the presence is with the old caretakers when he doesn't say anything when one of the old men says, 'There is fear in that room of hers - black fear, and there will be - so long as this house of sin endures. ' I believe H. G Wells chose this man for pretty much the same reason as Susan Hill, because he wanted to show that anyone can believe in ghosts and anyone

can have that experience. The narrators of 'The Red Room' and 'The Farthing House' are very different from each other.

The narrator of 'The Red Room' is an arrogant, overly confident and unafraid of ghosts as he believes if you can't measure them or can't see them whenever then they are not real, and while the narrator of 'The Farthing House' is not exactly a believer of ghosts she doesn't go around claiming not to be frightened by ghosts. When both narrators leave their respective locations Mrs Flower is enlightened whereas the young man is just scared at the prospect of ghosts and ever meeting them again in his life. The motives of the two are also the opposite of each other, Mrs Flower is there to visit her aunt without the thought of a ghost in her head, compared to the young man who is there for one thing and one thing only, a ghost hunt. I prefer the way the narrator of 'The Red Room' is portrayed because he is set up from the beginning to be disliked by the readers because of his arrogance.

He adds a bit more tension this way because you know something is going to happen and you are just waiting for it to happen and wondering when it will happen which keeps you on the edge of your seat. The places that the two stories are set in are purposefully isolated and both have a history of misery and suffering. This helps the tension the reader will feel because the reader will know they are alone and if something bad happen no one is going to come to their rescue. 'The Farthing House' is set in a 'very quiet, very out of the way' part of the countryside in an old house that one hundred years ago, was used to house mothers with their illegitimate babies and after the war was a military convalescent home and now overlooks a graveyard with a lot of young babies and young mothers.

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The small village that resides near the house sounds just like an old English village from long ago where you could have `an old fashioned muffin and fruitcake tea after the cathedral service. ' All this creates to the tension by leaving you thinking that even if the people in this village realised something was going on they are unlikely to be able to do anything about this as, from the way the village is described the villagers are probably quite old people. Another aspect of tension creeping in is the way the room is described as `far too big for one person. And `as though someone else ought to be there.

' This gives you the feeling that as it is described as enough room for another person then another person probably was there and you think back to the illegitimate babies and how many of them, and their mothers must have died because of the primitive medical knowledge available in those days. The Red Room' is set in a castle called Lorraine Castle nearly a hundred years before `The Farthing House' is written. The castle is taken care of by `grotesque custodians' in the thoughts of the young man. Three old people, two men and a woman make up the trio of caretakers hired to keep the castle clean but they do not do a good job of it because one of the main passages is `chilly and dusty.

' There is little description of the outside of the castle, all we get to know about it is that moonlight can get through the windows and is the main source of light at night. The Red Room itself is a large room containing some furniture, a bed, a chimney and two mirrors. The room is also dark and his candle `was a little tongue of light in its vastness that failed to pierce the opposite end of the room. This all creates tension by the reader knowing

something will happen to the man because of his cockiness and the isolated  
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surroundings inside the castle just increase that tension, especially seems how the caretakers had refused to take him there because they were too scared. I think that 'The Farthing House' author made the better setting for a ghost story as the feeling of isolation is stronger and next to a graveyard of dead children gives you a haunted feeling about the place and you also wonder if there are any hidden secrets that may have been forgotten over the years it has been there.

The structure of the story is very important in relation to the tension in the stories because the authors made deliberate decisions about how long to make sentences, where the climax should be and how to craft the ending in a way that will wrap up any loose ends that might be there after the climax.

The sentence length in 'The Red Room' is important because a lot of short sentences would not create the same kind of tension as the longer, complex and sophisticated sentences that H. G Wells uses most of the time, for example, 'I put down my empty glass on the table and I looked across the room, and caught a glimpse of myself, abbreviated and broadened to an impossible sturdiness, in the queer old mirror at the end of the room.'

Although he goes such a long time without using a full stop he uses many commas to break up the sentence and in others uses hyphens. This creates more tension than shorter sentences because shorter sentences just break up the story too much and you can get distracted earlier whereas with longer sentences you can keep the readers attention for longer periods of time.

Susan Wells also uses long sentences but they lack the complexity of 'The Red Room', the words however are sophisticated and you can tell that Mrs Flower is more upper class than lower class because of this.

The authors of both 'The Red Room' and 'The Farthing House' describes the narrator and the things around the narrator in such detail because if you feel you know everything there is to be known about the person and the place then you create an attachment with the place and the narrator and when they go through something you feel and understand that it is that they are feeling. You also form a relationship with the narrators because you know them so well, in the case of the young man in 'The Red Room' you probably have a love-hate relationship with him, wanting him to fail because of his arrogance. With Mrs Flower you feel somewhat sympathetic for her when she first experiences seeing the ghost and happy for her when she discovers the truth about it because there is nothing really to hate about her. The climax of 'The Red Room' is when the young man is rushing around the room trying to get away from the darkness, ' I have a vague memory of battering myself thus, to and fro in the darkness, of a cramped struggle, and of my own wild crying as I darted to and fro. ' This is an exciting sentence and is made that long so you don't have to pause in the middle of it. The author put the climax before the end of the book purposefully, so he could put in an explanation as to what happened after the young man knocked himself out and provide what the characters in the story thought about it.

In 'The Farthing House' the climax is even further away from the ending than 'The Red Room,' it is when Mrs Flower sees the ghost for the first time, 'I was wide awake, I am quite sure of that, I could hear my own heart pounding, see the bedside table, and the lamp and the blue binding of Sense and Sensibility in the moonlight. ' The climax was put here because it wouldn't have made any sense at the end because there would have been



no explanation as to what happened after that and as it wasn't a dramatic climax people will want to know. Overall, I preferred the structure of 'The Red Room' because I think the way it was set out was a lot better and I prefer a dramatic climax because it gives you a shock at what happened. I do think it is good to have an explanation type scene though, so if you are unsure of something that happened it is cleared up. Both authors use sophisticated language and interesting adjectives, verbs and adverbs to create tension in their stories.

This creates tension because the more creative the words the more it is probably going to be a good, interesting story. In the stories, the tension is contributed to by the use of adjectives. By helping to build up a vision of the surroundings, they are helping you be more of a part of the story. H. G Wells often strings adjectives together to describe in detail what the narrator is seeing, hearing or feeling.

He does this when he describes the corridor the narrator has to walk down to get to the Red Room, he describes it as, 'The long draughty, subterranean passage was chilly and dusty.' This creates tension by giving you the feeling that you are there by telling you, where it is, what it looks like and the features of the passage. Susan Wells, to a lesser extent also uses adjective strings for example, 'She was young with a flowing, embroidered nightgown, high necked and long-sleeved.' This makes you feel like you know the ghost, and if you ever saw her that you would recognise her. The verbs used in 'The Red Room' create tension because it gives you a better description of what is actually happening, 'I darted to and fro' is a lot better than just saying I

moved to and fro because darted gives you the sense he was desperate to get away.

That adds tension because if he is desperate to get away then there must be something he has to get away from. Whereas 'The Red Room' uses verbs to create a sense of urgency 'The Farthing House uses verbs to create a feeling of contentment in the beginning, 'On which a fat cat slept beside a fire.' That just makes you feel that nothing bad could happen there because a cat sleeping by the fire is a feeling of relaxation. But that also can lull you into a false sense of security, prepared for later on in the story when there will be a scare and because you were in a lower state of tension you are scared a bit more. I think that the author of 'The Red Room' used better language than Susan Hills because even though it was written over a hundred years ago and tastes have changed 'The Red Room' still creates a bigger sense of urgency and danger in the story.

'The Farthing House' is more relaxed and philosophical which I feel reduces the tension in the story because there is too much discussion about what ghosts are, where they come from, why some are peaceful while others seem intent on destroying random peoples lives and why society has stopped believing in them. The cultural context of the stories also provides a place to create tension in the story. When 'The Red Room' was written there was a conflict between science and religion about who should be 'leading' the masses, this creates tension because peoples feelings will have been running high and the reader would want to see which side the author was on. When 'The Farthing House' was written the conflict was over and science had undoubtedly won. We know this because the middle and upper classes

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believed in science and what they did others would generally follow. This creates tension because people would be interested about what the author thought about this.

The man in 'The Red Room' represented science during that period of time, bold, arrogant and convinced it was right. The old people represented what religion was looking like to more and more people, old tired and on its last legs. A good example of the caretaker's religious side is when she talks about superstition. After the young man has said he is going to the room, the old woman says, 'This night of all nights! This proves she has superstitions because if she didn't it wouldn't matter what night he went to the room on. Throughout the story the young man becomes increasingly afraid of the ghosts that have been said to be there and starts to believe the old caretaker's stories.

The church says you have to have faith to believe in God and miracles and as he begins to have faith that the caretakers are telling the truth the presence reveals itself. I think shows H. G Wells was on the side of religion as it showed a scientist turn into a man who believes that ghosts exist even though they cannot always be seen or measured. When 'The Farthing House' was written, nearly one hundred years after 'The Red Room' the age of witches and ghosts have long gone and the age of sceptics that demand hard proof before believing anything are here.

But although the age of religion is over it has been replaced by spirituality, not one particular faith but living life like you think you should and this is becoming more and more popular. That is one of the reasons Mrs Flower

didn't reveal her secret to anybody, for fear of rejection from the society she was in. She still hadn't talked to anybody against it as she had only wrote a letter which proves she is still unsure of whether she should tell anybody about her experience. I don't think the author was on any side in specific but I think she leaned a bit more to spirituality rather than science or religion because although she didn't mention faith or it can't be true otherwise someone would have documented it already she did believe in ghosts after her experience without seeming religious. I believe that the best story overall was `The Red Room.

' I think this because it is quite a bit more exciting, dangerous, edge of your seat tuff. I preferred the narrator because of his attitude, I'm right, your wrong rather than an old woman who has grown up not thinking for herself and just being spoon fed everything she believes. The structure in `The Red Room' is also better as it has just the right sentence lengths for not too long and not too short, also the climax I think is in the right place. About a page from the end with a page long ending which discussed the aspects of the story that they had theories on. So all in all although `The Farthing House' was a good story `The Red Room' had an edge over it that meant I found it more enjoyable to read.