

**The Victorian Gothic Short Story**  
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**Lecture – 19**

**H.G. Wells "The Red Room" - Close reading and its ideological implications**

Hello and welcome to this week's lecture on H.G. Wells's The Red Room. In this lecture, we will look at the third and final section of this Gothic short story. I will be doing further close reading of these final parts of the story and discuss its ideological implications in terms of the Gothic mode.

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Sombre reds and greys



*Suggests the past trapped up*  
*colour symbolism*  
*scared mind*

□ The sombre reds and greys of the room troubled me; ...Casting about for a remedy, I recalled the wax candles I had seen in the corridor, ... I walked out into the moonlight, and presently returned with as many as ten. These I put in the various knick-knacks of china with which the room was sparsely adorned, and lit and placed them where the shadows had lain deepest, some on the floor, some in the window recesses, ...my seventeen candles were so placed that not an inch of the room but had the direct light of at least one of them.

*Support to the narrator's attempt to conquer the room*  
*colour symbolism*  
*scared mind*



Now, if you remember the story, we have the narrator in the red room and he is doing his best not to lose his confidence. So, he tries to examine the room very thoroughly, he has a scientific bent of mind and that implies a thorough examination of the facts. So, the facts in this room are the furniture, the curtains, the valances of the bed. So, what he does is he tries to open the curtain, stack up the valances of the bed and he checks out the corners of the room to see if there is anything lurking there. And he tries to light up the room in the best possible manner.

Now, in this particular paragraph we further see the method that the narrator, the young narrator who's trying to conduct a vigil in this room and check if this room is haunted, this young man tries something more to make the place secure. Let us see what he does.

‘The sombre reds and grays of the room troubled me. Casting about for a remedy, I recalled the wax candles I had seen in the corridor. I walked in out into the moonlight, and presently returned with as many as ten. These I put in the various knick-knacks of china with which the room was sparsely adorned and lit and placed them where the shadows had lain deepest. Some on the floor, some in the window recesses, my seventeen candles were so placed that not an inch of the room, but had the direct light of at least one of them.’

So, you can see how a frightened mind works. So, he is very scared even though he claims that he is kind of brave enough to face this room at night, he is very scared. And what does a scared mind do? It tries to figure out all the possibilities that would bring his level of fear down. So, he recalls, he recalled the wax candles he had seen in the room. So, the wax candles, where are they? The wax candles are in the corridor, the moonlit corridor which he had walked through to get into this particular room.

I want you to think about the contrast between the colors here. We have reds and grays, the sombre reds and grays. Sombre, almost sad, melancholic. Why is it melancholic? That is a question. Why is it somber? That is a question that we can ask. And such a question would also tell us that this is part of the Gothic motif where the writer is suggestive of certain sadness or tragedies which had happened in this room and in this castle years ago possibly.

So, it’s suggestive of tragedies, past tragedies; past tragedies. And of course, we did have the deaths of the young Duke who tried to conduct a vigil and then dies unfortunately, and then we have the death of the young countess as well who was frightened to death by her husband as a joke. I mean he tried to frighten her to tease her and then she really takes fright and dies. So, these sombre reds and grays perhaps indicate that the room is kind of reflecting the past tragedies, the sadness, the deaths of its previous inhabitants. So, that is one aspect.

The other I want you to think about is the contrast between the colors. So, we have the moonlight here outside in the corridor and we have the sombre color of red and gray here in this room. So, there is a contrast of colors in this story and the color has a symbolism. If you remember the previous lectures about the story, I did talk about the possible significations of this color red, what does it signify, does it signify blood, tragedy,

murder, passion and so forth. So, gray again the bleak side of life, the pessimistic, the negative and anything that is not very positive. So, that set of ideas is contrasted with the moonlight which has some kind of hope perhaps.

So, the young man, the narrator goes out into the corridor and brings back all the wax candles that he had previously seen when he was walking through it. And what does he do? He puts it on the various knick-knacks of China, the all these Chinese stuff that is there in the room are used for the purposes of placing a candle and he lights it. And he kind of places it, places all the candles in strategic locations especially where the shadows had lain deepest.


So, deep shadows, the depth is like the depth of a sea, an ocean perhaps. So, look at the amount of darkness and shadows that are there in this particular room. So, he places some on the floor, some in the window recesses and at the end of his attempt he tells us that there are seventeen candles and all of them placed in every part of the room, so that no place is dark. So, he has been successful in lighting up the place.

What is also interesting is the fact that he counts the candles. There are seventeen candles. That is where interesting. So, if you counted in this fashion it also tells us that he does have an experimental attitude, there is a scientific bent of mind which kind of counts everything, observes everything, even a particle of dust that he noticed previously which made him look up the chimney, where there are further darknesses.

So, the other interesting thing is whatever data that he collects, information that he collects about the room is also kind of leading him to the discovery of further darkness and that is very sad and negative in some sense because he is trying to kind of gather this information and analyze it and come to a truth or the domain of reason which will comfort him, but in this story all the gathering of data and information leads him into further darkness. But in this particular paragraph, there is a momentary happiness. Happiness in the sense that there is direct light in the room, in every part of the room from the candles that he has lit up.


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The Red Room



□ It occurred to me that when the ghost came I could warn him not to trip over them. The room was now quite brightly illuminated. There was something very cheering and reassuring in these little silent streaming flames, and to notice their steady diminution of length offered me an occupation and gave me a reassuring sense of the passage of time.

*Handwritten notes:*  
Count the present  
light → hope & cheer  
darkness = despair & negativity  
short-lived → foreshadowing



And once he has done this, once he has kind of achieved light in the room it occurred to him that ‘when the ghost came, I would warn him not to trip over them’. So, he is trying to joke about it because there is so much light in the room, so many candles, seventeen candles in the room, so he is trying to joke and say that if the ghost did come, I would warn the ghost not to trip over the candles.

‘The room was now quite brightly illuminated. There was something very cheering and reassuring in these little silent streaming flames and to notice their steady diminution of length offered me an occupation and gave me a reassuring sense of the passage of time.’

So, there are two things that are kind of useful in terms of these candles. One is the room is well lit, illuminated, brightly lit and number two, it is very reassuring to him to see so much light and he is cheering himself up. So, light is full of hope, hope and cheer for the narrator. Darkness- full of despair and negativity for the narrator. So, the color contrast of light and darkness is also one of the contrasts that this story sets up continuously and I would also suggest that this is connected to the apparent conflict between the past and the present. So, the present comes to signify light perhaps and the past comes to signify darkness.

So, this particular moment in the story is significant, I would think, because it is one of the few moments or the moment in the story where we find the narrator happy and cheerful and confident, and that kind of positive demeanor is offered to him by light. So,

light is what gives him hope and cheer and confidence. That is something we need to keep in mind. So, the ancient; the ancient period, the ancient people, the ancient ideas are associated with darkness and despair and tragedy and suffering. So, that is something we need to keep in mind.

Now, the light in the room offered by the candle has another function for the narrator it occupies him in another way too, what is that? He kind of looks at the way the candles reduce in size as they are burning up. So, 'the steady diminution of length offered me an occupation'. So, it gives him some kind of job to kind of observe the way the candle is being burnt out. And again it's very ironic even though it gives him a kind of a purpose, he does not perhaps realize that the candle is slowly kind of wearing away, it is reducing, it is getting diminutive in size and suddenly there will be darkness again. So, there is that element which he does not realize at this particular moment. So, the reassurance is perhaps short lived and it's extremely short lived as you would know when you read the next set of paragraphs. So, it is a foreshadowing of things to come.

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## The Red Room <sup>climax</sup>

□ Then something happened in the alcove. I did not see the candle go out, I simply turned and saw that the darkness was there, as one might start and see the unexpected presence of a stranger. The black shadow had sprung back to its place. "By Jove," said I aloud, recovering from my surprise, "that draft's a strong one;" and taking the matchbox from the table, I walked across the room in a leisurely manner to relight the corner again. My first match would not strike, and as I succeeded with the second, something seemed to blink on the wall before me. I turned my head involuntarily and saw that the two candles on the little table by the fireplace were extinguished. I rose at once to my feet.



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first match would not strike and as I succeeded with the second, something seemed to blink on the wall before me. I turned my head involuntarily and saw that the two candles on the little table by the fireplace were extinguished. I rose at once to my feet.' So, this is the climactic part of the story.

What happens? The candles go out one by one. So, the candles are not going out because they have completely extinguished themselves, it is just getting extinguished for some reason which we are not told about. So, and he does not see it go out, he just notices it and then there is darkness there, where there was a candle flame previously. So, he simply turned and saw the darkness was there. And suddenly he feels as if he is unexpectedly seeing a stranger where that stranger was not present a moment ago. So, the presence, the sudden presence of a darkness where a candle was lit is like the unexpected presence of a stranger.

And look at the way the narrator is kind of imagining that space, he feels as if the black shadow had sprung back to its place. It is as if the shadow is kind of personified into a black human figure. So, it is springing back into place, it is kind of taking over that space, taking control of that space and the *it* is the shadow. By Jove he says and the draft is a strong one. So, the draft is referring to the wind. And what he does is of course, he tries to light up the candle again, he picks up a matchbox from the table and he walks to the place to that alcove where that candle was and he kind of lights it up.

So, look at the way he walks. He walked across the room in a leisurely manner. He is trying not to be scared, he is trying not to be frightened by this sudden darkness that has come to that particular area. So, he relights that candle. And but he is frightened is indicated by the fact that he is not able to strike the first match, he is not able to light it. With the second, he succeeds and what happened, something seemed to blink on the wall.

Look at the effect; look at the effect that the writer creates by using such images. So, he is trying to say light the second match and he succeeds and on the wall before this young narrator he sees something blink which means the candle's shadow, the shadow of the flames is what is kind of blinking there and he turns his head involuntarily and saw that the candles on the little table had gone out.

If you remember there is a fireplace, there is a table that he draws before the fireplace and on that table, he had some candles and that is gone out now and he tries to get them relit as well. So, one by one all the candles keep getting blown out mysteriously that is what happens from this point on with this story. And the narrator, this young man is hard pressed to keep lighting the candles as they go out one by one and he becomes very exhausted at one point.

Let us see how that happens. So, what I want you to understand is that even though the narrator is physically and consciously trying not to be frightened, his actions tell us that he is indeed very fearful and that is indicated here by the fact that he cannot light up the match very quickly.

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### The Horror of the Coming Darkness

□ I dropped matches on the iron-bound deedbox in the corner, and caught up the bedroom candlestick. With this I avoided the delay of striking matches, but for all that the steady process of extinction went on, and the shadows I feared and fought against returned, and crept in upon me, first a step gained on this side of me, then on that. I was now almost frantic with the horror of the coming darkness, and my self-possession deserted me. I leaped panting from candle to candle in a vain struggle against that remorseless advance.

*darkness - symbolic → loss of control of reason → going in to the power of darkness extinction of the narrator's confidence*



So, what he does is he drops the matches on the iron bound deed box in the corner and caught up the bedroom candlestick. So, he thinks that this would be a better idea instead of lighting the match one by one; the candlestick will be easier, so that he can easily light up all the candles. 'With this I avoided the delay of striking matches, but for all that the steady process of extinction went on and the shadows I feared and fought against returned, and crept in upon me. First a step gained on this side of me, then on that. I was now almost frantic with the horror of the coming darkness and my self possession deserted me. I leaped panting from candle to candle in a vain struggle against that remorseless advance'.

So, this is a paragraph which fantastically tells us that he is losing control over his confidence, his courage is kind of deserting him right now. So, what he does is, as I said, he drops the matches and he thinks that the candlestick would be easier to light all the other candles in the room, but despite the fact that he is using the candlestick to light all the candles, the steady process of extinction- extinction of the candle flames goes on. I would also think that this word is used symbolically because the extinction is also the extinction of the narrator's courage or confidence.

And there is a kind of symbolic battle going on against the shadows on the part of the narrator and look at the way he says the 'shadows I feared and fought against'. I have been fighting against this set of shadows and they are returning again, they are getting more powerful and they are creeping in upon him. That is what he feels, as if he is being overpowered by the darkness around him. Again, that darkness is very symbolic.

It is symbolic because I would argue that the narrator is losing control of his reason and he is kind of giving in to the power of darkness. 'I was almost frantic', he says, he is kind of desperate because he is horrified by the coming darkness and he accepts, he acknowledges that the self-possession deserted him, it is letting go of him, it has betrayed him, his self-possession betrays him and he is kind of moving very quickly. He is leaping from candle to candle in order to avoid the remorseless- the pitiless, remorseless means pitiless- advance of the shadows. So, the shadows are all personified here, they seem to be like figures, specters that are attacking him symbolically.



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This is the image of a deed box, an antique deed box. It is very beautiful. I have shown you this image because there is a reference to the deed box in the earlier paragraph. The ironbound deed box and this one is wooden, but this is iron bound deed box. And what is the meaning of a deed box? A deed box means a kind of a safe where you keep all the most important documents, probably documents related to property.

So, this is a very interesting object that has been specified in this particular paragraph. If you remember there are knick-knacks of China, China that has been mentioned which again points out the fact that the owner or the heirs or the inhabitants of this castle have been wealthy enough to kind of buy and display exotic goods, luxury goods.

And this particular deed box is an indication to property aspects perhaps of this particular castle, so it makes us want to think about who is the next heir, who will get the property, who actually is the owner of this Lorraine castle. So, the deed box is a very interesting object that we might want to think about in terms of lineage, hereditary transfer of power and other related issues.

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## The Ladyship

I must confess that the address of these three old pensioners in whose charge her ladyship had left the castle, and the deep-toned, old-fashioned furniture of the housekeeper's room, in which they foregathered, had affected me curiously in spite of my effort to keep myself at a matter-of-fact phase.

Young narrator  
Symbolic  
Absence of owner  
Is she alive/dead?  
Symbolically  
the castle & ideas contained in the housekeeper's room



I am trying to pick out the connection to the owner of this castle by reminding you of this particular statement which comes up early on in the story. So, who is the actual owner? There is a reference to a ladyship. So, let us see who that is by reading this particular statement from the story. 'I must confess', this refers to the narrator of course. 'I must confess that the address of these three old pensioners in whose charge her ladyship had left the castle and the deep-toned, old-fashioned furniture of the housekeeper's room in which they foregathered had affected me curiously in spite of my effort to keep myself at a matter-of-fact phase.'


So, this particular reference to the ladyship tells us that there is an owner, an absent owner. The question is she alive or dead. We do not know, but she is not present, perhaps she is in town, we do not know, but the house or the mansion or the castle has been given to these three old pensioners to look after in her absence, in the absence of the owner. And look at the way the narrator jumps from a reference to the ladyship to the furniture that is there in the housekeeper's room because that is where he is at the moment and the housekeeper's room and the thoughts that are swirling in the housekeeper's room is what is dominating or challenging or throwing the narrator off balance.

So, the castle and its ideas are somehow contained, I would call it symbolically contained, figuratively contained, in the housekeeper's room. So, it is the housekeeper's room or the thoughts of the three old pensioners that is throwing him off balance, that is


kind of destroying his matter of fact phase. So, and the furniture in the housekeeper's room is also indicative of the furniture that he is going to find in the red room- the deep-toned, old-fashioned furniture. Think about the sombre reds and grays, sombre reds and grays of the red room. So, what is very interesting is when you read this particular passage very closely you will understand that the housekeeper's room and the old people somehow construct a particular kind of perspective in the narrator's mind even before he goes to the red room.

So, they prepare him mentally. And that preparation is done as I am pointing out not only through the way the interiors of the housekeeper's room are set up, but through the words and thoughts of these old people as well. So, the castle is somehow being brought down at this point in the story which is the beginning of the story to this particular space, a small space. So, this space prepares him as to how to approach the space of the red room.

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I turned to where the flames were still dancing between the glowing coals and splashing red reflections upon the furniture; made two steps toward the grate, and *incontinently* the flames dwindled and vanished, the glow vanished, the reflections rushed together and disappeared, and as I thrust the candle between the bars *darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye, wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestiges of self-possession from my brain.* And it was not only palpable darkness, but intolerable terror. The candle fell from my hands. I flung out my arms in a vain effort to thrust that *ponderous* *heavy* blackness away from me, and lifting up my voice, screamed with all my might, once, twice, thrice. Then I think I must have *staggered* to my feet. I know I thought suddenly of the *moonlit corridor*, and with my head bowed and my arms over my face, made a stumbling run for the door.



Now, let us go back to the red room where this young man is being buffeted symbolically by the power of the shadows and the darkness. So, what is the impact of this particular ambience of the room is what we are going to see now. So, this is again a very important climactic point in the story.

He turns to where the flames were still dancing, he says 'I turned to where the flames were still dancing between the glowing coals and splashing red reflections upon the

furniture.' Can you remember where the coals are glowing? It is in the fireplace. So, what he does is even in this moment of trauma and anxiety and in a state, a tortured state of mind, he thinks about the fireplace, he turns to that fireplace and he sees the splashing red reflections upon the furniture.

So, the fire is throwing all these red reflections on the furniture, the tables and chairs that are there; 'made two steps towards the grate, and incontinently the flames dwindled and vanished. The glow vanished, the reflections rushed together and disappeared and as I thrust the candle between the bars, darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye, wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestiges of self-possession from my brain'. So, he looks at the fireplace, he thinks that would be a very good place where he could light up the candlestick.

So, what he does is he goes to that grate, you know the iron bars are the grate, iron bars that are kind of set up before the fire is the grate and he kind of thrusts the candle stick between the iron bars so that he can light up the candlestick and suddenly what happens, the fire goes out, incontinently. Look at the word incontinently. The flames dwindled and vanished incontinently, unreasonably. We use this word to describe a human being, not a fire, an inanimate thing.

So, what the narrator does is he imagines all these inanimate things as a being possessed of some kind of mind and action and thought. He is imagining them as human as something which has human qualities. The flames vanish and everything just kind of disappears, everything disappears, the glow disappears, the reflections everything disappears and he feels the darkness close upon him, come and kind of crush him.

Look at the way he describes it. He feels as if the darkness is upon him like the shutting of an eye, the way you will sense darkness when you close the eyelids is what he is sensing right now and he also feels that the darkness is stifling him, suffocating him, it is a suffocating embrace, not a pleasant one. So, suffocating embrace it kind of seals his vision as if he is being sealed literally in some kind of cellar, he feels as if he is being shut up in darkness and it crushes the last remaining vestiges of self-possession, the last iota of confidence, the last bit of confidence and courage is gone from his brain because of this sudden vanishing of the fire in the fireplace.

And it was not only palpable darkness, but intolerable terror. So, adding to that palpable darkness very tangible darkness, darkness that he can touch and feel, there is this terror that is building up because of this darkness on his mind. 'The candle fell from my hands'. He just drops it, that is the way he describes it- the candle fell or he drops the candle from his hands involuntarily. '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'.

So, what he does is once he dropped the candle he is trying to thrust, physically thrust, push away the darkness, the heavy darkness. Look at the word darkness, ponderous, ponderous means heavy, heavy darkness, deep darkness. Look at the way the manifold ways in which darkness is described in this particular story, it is a heavy darkness, it has depth, it has scale, it has size and it is monstrous and that is the image that the narrator creates in the readers through his description. So, he is trying to thrust the darkness away from him, blackness away from him and he screams 3 times- once, twice, thrice.

'Then I think I must have staggered to my feet'. He gets back on his feet with an effort, stagger is something that you do with a lot of effort, awkwardly. 'I thought suddenly of the moonlit corridor and with my head bowed and my arms over my face, made a stumbling run for the door'.

So, in this moment of great stress he is reminded of the moonlit corridor and this is a repetitive pattern. If you think back to the earlier paragraph, when he is in the room he thinks that he can further light up this place by bringing all the wax candles from the moonlit corridor. So, that moonlit corridor is always on his mind subconsciously I would think. So, he wants to get out into the corridor. Why, because it's lit up, it's naturally lit up by the moon. There is light there.

So, what he does is he kind of bows his head, he is not willing to face the darkness, the ponderous darkness, he kind of bends himself, slightly bows his head, puts his arm protectively over his face. He is afraid that the darkness will kind of hit him, rain blows on him and he kind of rushes towards the door. He makes a run, he makes a run for the door, that is it.

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## Commonplace

□ I opened my eyes in daylight. My head was roughly bandaged, and the man with the withered hand was watching my face. ...I rolled my eyes into the corner and saw the old woman, no longer abstracted, no longer terrible, pouring out some drops of medicine from a little blue phial into a glass.

contrast  
daylight? => reason?



And what happens? I did not put the succeeding paragraph there, but what happens after this is that he just stumbles against the furniture. He hits himself against all the objects in the room and he is frantic. He wants to get out, but he does not know where the door is and eventually he finds the door, he falls out of the door and then he is found by the 3 people in the morning and they bring him back to the housekeeper's room and that is where the narrator opens his eyes.

He says 'I opened my eyes in daylight'. So, he wanted to get back into the moonlight and he comes to himself, he regains consciousness in daylight. 'My head was roughly bandaged and the man with the withered hand was watching my face. I rolled my eyes into the corner and saw the old woman no longer abstracted, no longer terrible, pouring out some drops of medicine from a little blue phial into a glass'. So, he is back. He is alive, he is being tended by the 3 people and the old woman whom we met at the beginning of the story is trying to give him some medicine, she is getting some medicine from a blue phial.

So, what is interesting here is this idea that the old woman is no longer abstracted as she was at the beginning. So, this is a contrast. The contrast from the beginning of the story. So, what does that imply, is she not abstracted, distracted in daylight? So, does daylight offer some reason to these people? So, that is a question. Is daylight associated with

reason and enlightenment? So, that is something we need to keep in mind. Daylight is significant, light is significant in the story.

And she is also no longer terrible. I mean if you look at the beginning of the story the old woman is almost a spectral presence. She is somehow supernaturally described or supernaturally perceived by the narrator, but now she is no longer terrible. She looks ordinary, she looks less threatening, in fact, she is nursing this injured narrator. So, light makes things appear in a different way and that is what the narrator acknowledges himself.


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Commonplace

- The three of them in the daylight seemed commonplace old folk enough. The man with the green shade had his head bent as one who sleeps.
- "Where am I?" I said. "I seem to remember you, and yet I can not remember who you are."

ordinary

↳ the uncanny familiar & unfamiliar



'The three of them in the daylight seemed commonplace old folk enough'. They looked ordinary; commonplace means ordinary. Nothing threatening, extraordinary about them. Normal, mundane. 'The man with the green shade had his head bent as one who sleeps'. So, this man with the shade over his eye who looked really threatening and disturbing at the beginning of the story now looks as if he is kind of just sleeping off, nodding off. He is no longer terrible.

So, light again puts a different spin on things. The narrator asks 'Where am I? I said, I seem to remember you and yet I cannot remember who you are'. It is a very interesting statement in the context of this Gothic story. I remember you and yet not remember you is a kind of Freudian concept of the uncanny where things are both familiar and

unfamiliar. The old people, they are kind of really threatening and disturbing at the beginning of the story and now they look very familiar as well.

So, contrary ideas are embedded in the figure of these old people. The known and the unknown- they are familiar yet unfamiliar, they are known yet unknown and since the narrator has been hurt he is not able to recall the last night's event, and they tell him. 'They told me then and I heard of the haunted red room as one who hears a tale'.

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A Tale

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□ They told me then, and I heard of the haunted Red Room as one who hears a tale. "We found you at dawn," said he, "and there was blood on your forehead and lips."

*narrativized*

*tangible injury = Red Room*

*violence*

*Power*



So, his experience itself becomes narrativized. So, he becomes part of the story of the haunted red room. Perhaps he would also go into the legends about the red room. So, he would succeed the old earl, the countess, the young Duke and he would also join that crowd of people who were affected by the haunted room. And they say, 'We found you at dawn, said he, and there was blood on your forehead and lips'. You were injured, you were bleeding.

So, there is tangible violence. There is tangible injury brought about by the red room. That is undeniable. So, the red room does inflict violence. As it has inflicted violence on the other inhabitants. So, the room does have a power. We will come to see what the power is shortly.



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### Haunted or Not?

- "Yes," said I, "the room is haunted."
  - "And you have seen it. And we who have been here all our lives have never set eyes upon it. Because we have never dared. Tell us, is it truly the old earl who—"
  - "No," said I, "it is not."
  - "I told you so," said the old lady, with the glass in her hand. "It is his poor young countess who was frightened—"
  - "It is not," I said. "There is neither ghost of earl nor ghost of countess in that room; there is no ghost there at all, but worse, far worse, something impalpable—"
- indescribable*



So, they ask him, this very pointed question. Do you think the room is haunted? It is a very direct straight question. They think that he has been there, he has been affected by it, so he would be in a good position to respond to that question very clearly. And they ask him, do you think the room is haunted? And he says, 'Yes, said I, the room is haunted' and 'You have seen it. And we who have been here all our lives have never set eyes upon it because we have never dared. Tell us is it truly the old earl who—'

So, what is interesting about this particular idea is that the old people have never experienced any of the hauntings. It is all hearsay for them, it is all narrative for them, it is all their interpretation. So, that is what they point out here. We have not been here all our lives in this castle, but we have never experienced such hauntings because we have never dared, we did not have the courage to go and stay in the room. And they ask, tell us, is it truly the old earl. Is it the old earl who is haunting that red room? And then narrator says, no, it is not him. 'I told you, said the old lady with the glass in her hand, it is his poor young countess who was frightened'.

So, perhaps it is that young wife who died because she was frightened. And then the narrator refuses and says, disagrees and says, 'It is not, I said. There is neither ghost of earl nor ghost of countess in that room'. It's neither of these people's ghosts. 'There is no ghost there at all'. That is what is very significant here. Hse said, there is neither, there is no ghost there at all, but worse. What is far worse, far worse than a ghost- something

impalpable. Something that you cannot really touch, something that is not concrete. And there, he is being cut off. He is not allowed to complete his statement. And 'fear' he says, 'fear that will not have light'.


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Fear

- 'Fear! Fear that will not have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason, that deafens and darkens and overwhelms. It followed me through the corridor, it fought against me in the room—'
- I stopped abruptly. There was an interval of silence. My hand went up to my bandages. "The candles went out one after another, and I fled—"

*theory*  
*↳ fear*

*details =>*



So, he says there is nothing, there is no ghost there, there is something far worse, something that is really terrible and that is intangible, impalpable, you cannot touch it, you cannot really see it, intangible. And he describes what that is. He says that it is fear. 'Fear that will not have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason, that deafens and darkens and overwhelms'. So, what is in that room is fear itself, fear that is unreasonable, fear that will not bear reason, that deafens and darkens and overwhelms the mind of the human being and it drives away reason. 'And it followed me through the corridor'. He says that fear followed me through the corridor, 'it fought against me in the room'.

So, he says that he was not fighting against shadows. He is not fighting against shadows, what he is doing is that he is fighting against his own fear and that is what he acknowledges. 'I stopped abruptly, there was an interval of silence, my hand went up to my bandages' and he starts to narrate. 'The candles went out one after the other and I fled', and he is cut off there. It is at this point he is cut off by one of the old people. And so, what the narrator is trying to do he is trying to kind of theorize what has happened there and he comes to the details in order to prove that theory.

So, the details are here, the detail the candles have gone out one after the other. The detailed theory is that there is no ghost, it is just fear.

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### Power of Darkness

□ "That is it," said he. "I knew that was it. A Power of Darkness. To put such a curse upon a home! It lurks there always. You can feel it even in the daytime, even of a bright summer's day, in the hangings, in the curtains, keeping behind you however you face about. In the dusk it creeps in the corridor and follows you, so that you dare not turn. It is even as you say. Fear itself is in that room. Black Fear... And there it will be... so long as this house of sin endures."

*Loss of Candles? Fear ⇒ Power of Darkness = Ghostly Spectre.*



And when he is about to describe the details he is stopped there by an old man in that group, and he says that, "That is it," said he. "I knew that was it. A power of darkness. To put such a curse upon a home. It lurks there always, you can feel it even in the daytime, even of a bright summer's day, in the hangings, in the curtains, keeping behind you, however you face about. In the dusk it creeps in the corridor and follows you, so that you dare not turn. It is even as you say. Fear itself is in that room. Black fear, and there it will be, so long as this house of sin endures."

So, what is very interesting is that when the narrator says that it is fear, the old man here transforms it into a power of darkness. And that power of darkness itself, darkness itself becomes a ghostly presence. He is turning that into a ghost itself a specter, the specter that haunts this house.

And look at the way he kind of describes it, he says that it is kind of there always, it follows you, it lurks there, it is hiding there in the darkness to spring on you, you can feel it in the daytime, even at daytime it will be there, even on a bright summer's day, even during summer not just in winter, even during summer you can feel it. You can feel it in the hangings, in the curtains and that power of darkness is always behind you when you

walk and when you turn to face about it, it will not be there. It will be creeping after you in the darkness, it will follow you and you would not dare to turn and look at this fear.

So, fear becomes the ghost and they believe in that ghost and they believe that this fear is a curse- a black fear- and this black fear or curse or ghost will be there forever as long as this house of sin endures. What is this house of sin? Lorraine castle. Why is it a castle of sin, a house of sin, is a question that is not answered in the story. So, we can imagine that things, bad things, evil things, tragedies have happened in this house and that is why the old people believe that or everybody who kind of associates themselves with this house believes that this is haunted. So, it is a curse, a family curse perhaps that is kind of there in this particular castle.


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Themes and Style

- Timeless nature of fear
- Modern, but atavistic in tone:

There is, to my mind, something inhuman in senility, something crouching and atavistic; the human qualities seem to drop from old people insensibly day by day.

Handwritten notes on the slide include: "Fear" in a box with an arrow pointing to "Unreason", "Darkness of mind", and "primitive" written below the quote.



Now, if you look at the themes of the story, H.G. Wells tackles this timeless nature of fear. Fear is something that has been around since time immemorial, from the primitive ages to the contemporary. Fear is always around, fear of darkness, fear of death, fear of tragedies and so on and so forth, that timeless nature of fear is explored in this particular Gothic story.

And he does it in a fantastic way and we realize that the young narrator looks at it in a modern manner at the end of this story where he associates it with unreason, fear that will not have light or sound, that will not hear any kind of explanation, that is what fear

is according to the narrator. So, this is unenlightenment. So, fear is associated with darkness of mind.

So, this story even though it is set in the modern, quote unquote, days of the late 19th century, is atavistic in tone. If you look at the details of the story there are references in the story which kind of indicate to the reader that it is perhaps set in the medieval times, in the ancient times. The word atavistic is something that is related to things very primitive, not modern and the word itself is used in the story and this is the statement where it is used.

“There is, to my mind, something inhuman in senility, something crouching and atavistic”-- something primeval, primitive—“The human qualities seem to drop from old people insensibly day by day.” So, the word atavistic is used in connection with the 3 old people, the caretakers or the pensioners of the house. And this is the narrator’s description of them at the beginning of the story when he meets them in darkness, not in daylight. In daylight they look commonplace and ordinary and less threatening, but in darkness they look senile. There is something almost insane, not very normal, not very reasonable, something crouching and atavistic, almost animalistic, in their manner and demeanor. So, they do not seem like civilized human beings at night. So the uncivilized barbaric, supernatural, domains are contrasted with the modern, rationality, science and experiment and experiential data. So, that contrast is always there as I pointed out.

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### Gothic Motifs

- Lorraine Castle ✓ — *desolate, dark, almost uninhabited*
- Haunted room → *Red Room*
- Ghosts? → *Spectres, fear the old earl*
- Superstition → *legends ✓ the Countess*
- Previous death → *Young Duke*
- Curses. → *Lorraine Castle is cursed*



So, look at the Gothic motifs that I have listed out there on the slide. So, what are the key Gothic motifs? The castle itself, the really desolate, dark, almost uninhabited, is a very striking Gothic motif. And then we have the haunted room, a perfect Gothic cue there, the red room is a Gothic motif and there are suggestions of ghosts, black strangers lurking in the room that is what the narrator believes closer to the end of the story where he feels that he is being assaulted by all these specters. So, we have symbolic specters.

And fear itself becomes a ghost according to the old man with the shade at the end of the story who says that black fear is what is kind of haunting this room. Superstitions, we do have legends, we have legends in the story. The legends that the old earl is perhaps haunting the red room or the countess. Then we do have previous deaths, ranging from these two figures- the countess, the young Duke who dies of apoplexy.

So, we do have deaths. We have curses, so Lorraine castle is cursed according to the old man with the shade. So, the typical Gothic cues are present in this particular story. And H.G. Wells kind of exploits all these Gothic cues and ideas to attack the basic principles and suggest that there is no ghost, but there is just fear, an unreason, an unenlightenment in the mind of human beings.

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Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.