Uncertainty Creates Fear In The Story 'House Taken Over'

As the sun started to set, the day got colder and colder. I stepped into the dark water of the ocean as it slapped my sandy legs. The water started to pull me further without me being aware of it. By this time, I was now fully in the water. I felt something brush against the bottom of my feet. Then it happened again and again. I looked down at my feet and saw a figure of black circling me now and I did not know what to do. How does this make the reader feel? Uncertainty is a state where something is unknown. This feeling of uncertainty creates fear for the reader and the character in the story. Authors trigger this fear by portraying anxiety, using figurative language, and incorporating mystery.

One way that uncertainty creates fear is in the story “House Taken Over,” by Julio Cortazar, when he uses anxiety in the characters to make the reader fearful. The author creates suspense when there were unknown sounds coming from the other side of the characters’ spacious house, “The sound came through muted and indistinct, a chair being knocked over onto the carpet or the muffled buzzing of a conversation. At the same time or a second later, I heard it at the end of the passage which led from those two rooms toward the door” (Cortazar 39). Not knowing what these sounds came from makes the character anxious and worried about what it could be. The reader, in this situation, does not know what is going on. The authors make it vague making these situations obscure and difficult to distinguish. This feeling of uncertainty allows the reader to create their own imagination and paint a picture of any bad situation.“They’ve taken over our section” (Cortazar 41). The author never explains who they are or what is in the story making the reader feel scared because of not knowing what is attacking the characters. Also, the author makes these sounds continuous and repetitive as if something big will happen later. The vagueness of what is going on in the story makes us worry because it could be anything that comes to mind. Moreover, when the characters hear the sounds, they act normal as if nothing ever happened and they go back to their activities, making the reader confused about what will happen. The author of this story uses anxiety to make the reader feel unsettled.

On the other hand, Edgar Allen Poe creates fear in “The Fall of The House of Usher” by his figurative language and literary devices. He puts the story in a dark and isolated setting. “A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master” (Poe 16). As one reads this, they might feel unsettled at the fact that something could be lurking in the dark but they could never know because of the intricate details. Poe puts an immense amount of dramatic language to make the reader feel scared about the plot. These literary devices make the reader feel how he wants them to feel which is fearful. “...with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium --the bitter lapse into everyday life --the hideous dropping off of the veil” (Poe 14). Poe puts an emphasis on the house being isolated and different from the normal world. Because the setting is different, this might cause the feeling of uncertainty in the reader, making one fearful about what is to come in the plot. The representation of the house is terrifying making the audience uneasy but at the same time intrigued about what is there because they do not know yet. In addition to that, the descriptive details that are used created the disturbed and gloomy mood also produce that fear of the unknown. Edgar Allen Poe portrays the sense of uncertainty for the reader in

“The Fall of The House of Usher” by using literary devices such as imagery and foreshadowing to create fear.

Lastly, the story “Where is Here?” by Joyce Carol Oates creates fear by the use of mystery. In this story, a stranger comes to the house to look around but he does not say who he was and why he came. When the dad opened the door to the stranger, the mom was anxious about him, “She went on worriedly, ‘He could be anyone, after all. Any kind of thief, or mentally disturbed person, or even murderer. Ringing our doorbell like that with no warning and you don’t even know what he looks like!’”(Oates 70). The author develops a character, the mom, who is always worried and anxious because she doesn't know what is going on. The visit of the stranger is also sudden and out of the blue because he just comes to the quiet neighborhood to see the house. The mom, not knowing anything about the stranger, starts to assume the worst possible scenario about him because she is suspicious. The characters in the story experience uncertainty, which causes the reader to have a sense of mystery about what will happen in the future. After that, the stranger started asking strange questions and the parents didn’t know how to react, “The father and mother were perplexed by these strange words and hardly knew how to respond. The mother said uncertainly, ‘Our daughter used to like to sit there too, when she was younger. It is a lovely place.’”(Oates 73). The father and mother see the stranger as peculiar and different from normal because of his actions. Seeing the stranger’s actions makes them confused so they become uncertain about his purpose of being there and what he might do in the future. A reader might also see the stranger as unpredictable as he gets stranger by the second. As an audience, one might imagine the worst possible scenario making them feel scared of what is untold by the author. Furthermore, the title of the story poses a question that makes you think about the mysteries of the house and worry about what will happen later. The mysterious events of this story makes the reader feel suspenseful and uncertain about the plot, creating fear.

In conclusion, the feeling of fear can be stimulated in different ways based on the story. The story “House Taken Over” creates fear by the use of anxiety in the plot and the characters. However, in “The Fall of The House of Usher,” Poe uses literary devices to make the reader feel a certain way. Similarly to “House Taken Over,” “Where is Here?” incorporates mystery and suspense to trigger the feeling of the unknown in the reader. Overall, this type of literature makes the reader feel uncertain and unsettled, creating a feeling of fear in many ways.