When Murdo woke up after Hallowe’en and went out into the cold air to see whether anything was stirring in the world around him, he discovered that his door which had formerly been painted green was now painted red. He stared at it for a long time, scratching his head slowly as if at first he didn’t believe that it was his own door. In fact he went into the house again and had a look at his frugally prepared breakfast - porridge, scones and tea – and even studied the damp patch on the wall before he convinced himself that it was his own house.

Now Murdo was a bachelor who had never brought himself to propose marriage to anyone. He lived by himself, prepared his own food, darned his own socks, washed his own clothes and cultivated his own small piece of ground. He was liked by everybody since he didn’t offend anyone by gossiping and maintained a long silence unless he had something of importance to say.
The previous night children had knocked on his door and sung songs to him. He had given them apples, oranges, and nuts which he had bought specially from a shop. He had gazed in amazement at the mask of senility on one face, at the mask of a wildcat on another and at the mask of a spaceman on the face of a little boy whom he could swear he knew.

Having made sure that he was in his own house again he went out and studied the door for a second time. When he touched the red paint he found that it was quite dry. He had no feeling of anger at all, only puzzlement. After all, no one in his experience had had a red door in the village before. Green doors, yellow doors, and even blue doors, but never a red door. It certainly singled him out. The door was as red as the winter sun he saw in the sky.

- Hallowe’en masks introduce idea of hidden identity – symbolises Murdo’s efforts to keep his true nature hidden
- Emphasises the uniqueness of the door and Murdo too (he is ‘singled out’)
- Simile – beautiful image of nature: the door is positive
Murdo has two sides to his personality: the conformist side of village life, and a poetic side.

Nature has a meaning that approaches the supernatural: metaphors (the earth painted / the sea like a strange volume) suggest poetic meaning in everyday things.

Murdo questions the way he lives his life.
Murdo’s early life is full of bad luck

Image of the reaper juxtaposed (put next to) with a reference to death – Murdo sees his life slipping away
Murdo’s only love affair is slightly comical – obese lover with a religious mother feeds him indigestible food.

Mary is poetic like Murdo, dresses in red (like the door) and refuses to conform to the way of life of the village.
As he stared at the door he felt strange flutterings within him. First of all the door had been painted very lovingly so that it shone with a deep inward shine such as one might find in pictures. And indeed it looked like a picture against the rest of the house which wasn’t at all modern but on the contrary was old and intertwined with all sorts of rusty pipes like snakes.

He went back from the door and looked at it from a distance as people in art galleries have to do when studying an oil painting. The more he regarded it the more he liked it. It certainly stood out against the drab landscape as if it were a work of art. On the other hand the more he looked at it the more it seemed to express something in himself which had been deeply buried for years. After a while there was something boring about green and as for blue it wouldn’t have suited the door at all. Blue would have been too blatant in a cold way. And anyway the sky was already blue.

But mixed with his satisfaction he felt what could only be described as puzzlement, a slight deviation from the normal as if his head were spinning and he were going round in circles. What would the neighbours say about it, he wondered. Never in the history of the village had there been a red door before.

- The door sets off changes in Murdo
- Contrast (similes): the door is like art, the house threatening and dilapidated (needing repair)
- Simile: repetition of the idea that the door is like a picture
- Hyperbole emphasises the unusual nature of the door: theme of conformity
Irony – theme of conformity (linked to colours – blue = refusal to conform like red)

Cock = symbolic. Represents freedom and passion – colour red repeated (link to door)

Colourless clothes / wellingtons symbolise conformity. Contrast with colours which represent freedom and emotion

Contrast – red = courage white = conformity

Door personified – pleads for its own individuality

More personification: the door’s courage foreshadows Murdo’s courage (so see Mary)
Foreign drink – anything from outside the village is seen as positive. Associated with colour (red) and passion.

Rhetorical question followed by a series of short statements about how dissatisfied Murdo is with his life.

False appearance (like hallowe’en masks) Only ‘foreign’ people can be themselves.
thought others expected it to say. On the other hand, he didn’t like wellingtons and a fisherman’s jersey. He hated them in fact: they had no elegance.

Now Mary had elegance. Though she was a bit odd, she had elegance. It was true that the villagers didn’t understand her but that was because she read many books, her father having been a teacher. And on the other hand she made no concessions to anybody. She seemed to be saying, ‘You can take me or leave me.’ She never gossiped. She was proud and distant. She had a world of her own. She paid for everything on the nail. She was quite well off. But her world was her own, depending on none.

She was very fond of children and used to make up masks for them at Hallowe’en. As well as this she would walk by herself at night, which argued that she was romantic. And it was said that she had sudden bursts of rage which too might be the sign of a spirit without servility. One couldn’t marry a clod.
Murdo stared at the door and as he looked at it he seemed to be drawn inside it into its deep caves with all sorts of veins and passages. It was like a magic door out of the village but at the same time it pulsed with a deep red light which made it appear alive. It was all very odd and very puzzling, to think that a red door could make such a difference to house and moors and streams.

Solid and heavy he stood in front of it in his wellingtons, scratching his head. But the red door was not a mirror and he couldn’t see himself in it. Rather he was sucked into it as if it were a place of heat and colour and reality. But it was different and it was his.

It was true that the villagers when they woke would see it and perhaps make fun of it, and would advise him to repaint it. They might not even want him in the village if he insisted on having a red door. Still they could all have red doors if they wanted to. Or they could hunt him out of the village.

Hunt him out of the village? He paused for a moment, stunned by the thought. It had never occurred to him that he could leave the village, especially at his age, forty-six. But then other people had left the village and some had prospered though it was true that many had failed. As for himself, he

- The door has a meaning beyond its colour: it offers Murdo different choices in his life
- Theme of the supernatural
- Personification ‘alive’: the door speaks to Murdo and influences him
- Symbolic: represent his dull, predictable way of life
- The door compels (forces) Murdo to act
Simile: Murdo is not really like the villagers – he only pretended to be like them

Colours stand in for ideas: green/black are conformity, red is personal freedom

Red: associated here with the freedom / magic of childhood

The door sets Murdo on the path to a new romance as though he were still young (‘early’)

could work hard, he had always done so. And perhaps he had never really belonged to the village. Perhaps his belonging had been like the Hallowe’en mask. If he were a true villager would he like the door so much? Other villagers would have been angry if their door had been painted red in the night, their anger reflected in the red door, but he didn’t feel at all angry, in fact he felt admiration that someone should actually have thought of this, should actually have seen the possibility of a red door, in a green and black landscape.

He felt a certain childlikeness stirring within him as if he were on Christmas day stealing barefooted over the cold red linoleum to the stocking hanging at the chimney, to see if Santa Claus had come in the night while he slept.

Having studied the door for a while and having had a long look round the village which was rousing itself to a new day, repetitive as all the previous ones, he turned into the house. He ate his breakfast and thinking carefully and joyously and having washed the dishes he set off to see Mary though in fact it was still early.
His wellingtons creaked among the sparkling frost. Its virgin new diamonds glittered around him, millions of them. Before he knocked on her door he looked at his own door from a distance. It shone bravely against the frost and the drab patches without frost or snow. There was pride and spirit about it. It had emerged out of the old and the habitual, brightly and vulnerably. It said, ‘Please let me live my own life.’ He knocked on the door.

- Symbols of conformity: dull ‘wellingtons’ and cold, unemotional ‘frost’
- Red door now identified with Murdo: both resist the conformity of the village
- Personification: the door speaks for silent Murdo
- Ending: a short sentence that seems like the beginning of another story - optimistic and hopeful