

Looking Back

Dickens and the Victorian novel in Year 7, Fear and Fascination: the study of the Gothic in Year 8.

Literary Context

The novel follows a literary tradition of gothic novels that typically include isolated houses or castles, hauntings, and induce fear in the reader. Susan Hill set out to write a ghost story, inspired by Henry James's novel, The Turn of the Screw. She read a range of ghost stories to inspire her and made a list of elements that a ghost story should contain. One of the key features of these stories, as well as the ghost itself, is a 'most unimaginative and straightforward' person who 'most certainly did not believe in such things as ghosts'. We see this character clearly in the rational Arthur Kipps.



Year 9- Term 1: The Woman in Black

Historical Context

Historical Context: (Edwardian setting (1901-1910) but written in the early 1980s – a historical novel)

Isolation is a key generic convention of Gothic horror (the protagonist is often an orphan or without family, and rural, isolated settings/old mansions are common). Hill is 'playing' with ideas of Gothic horror but changes the protagonist to male rather than female (gender reversal).

Women were often socially isolated in Edwardian society if not fitting the traditional stereotype of 'angel in the house', e.g., Jennet is excluded while pregnant/Alice Drablow dismissed as a "rum'un" by Mr Bentley.

Hill suffered emotional isolation with the death of her first fiancé and the death of her middle daughter.

Hill used real-life settings of marshes around Suffolk coast in the 1970s to inspire the desolate atmosphere, the dry rustling of reed beds, and the moaning wind.

Narrative and structure

Kipps emotionally isolated at the **start of the novel**. Christmas Eve: family telling ghost stories.
Rising action: Kipps more isolated and tension rises ('conspiracy of silence' in the village, physical isolation of Eel Marsh House, literally cut-off by the tide).
Narrative climax in 'Whistle and I'll Come to You' (ch.10)
Falling action in ch.11 on seeing a robin again after 12 days – "Now, I appreciated the bird's presence simply watching".
Resolution: isolated again – bleak ending.

Setting

Eel Marsh House ("gloomy old house") – isolated/cut off by **Nine Lives Causeway**. Tide comes in and there is no escape (Gothic horror convention). Eel Marsh sounds slippery/unpleasant (drowning).
Crythin Gifford – rural village, isolated from towns and cities. Kipps travels by train through **Gapemouth Tunnel** then car (Samuel Daily) to reach Gifford Arms. Sense of being trapped in the past/another time (clash of old and new). Samuel Daily tells Kipps of "drowned churchyard" and "swallowed-up village" (foreboding). Physical isolation of settings adds to gloomy feeling and foreshadows horror events.
November: month of the dead (and echoes 'Frankenstein')

Themes

Family
 Secrets and the Past
 Appearance/reality
 Social class
 Gender
 Tradition v. modernity
 Gothic Horror

Key vocabulary

Pastiche	Desolation
Foreshadowing	Alienation
Pathetic Fallacy	Patriarchal
Isolation	Paranormal
Desolation	Supernatural
Solitude	Mystery
Fascination	Terror

Looking Forward

Next unit - Romeo and Juliet

Links to GCSE include Language Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing – reading skills, analysing writers' choices. Links to the Gothic in GCSE text Jekyll and Hyde

Week six – assessment

Week one – introduction to unit

Week two – character and setting

Week three – Writer's methods

Week four – writing about structure

Context and gender