



Blurb

Susan Hill – Born 1942 in Scarborough. She had a happy childhood. She moved to Coventry with her parents at seventeen & also lived in Leamington Spa & Stratford, Places she chose for their charm & atmosphere. She would often escape to Dorset for peace to write, either the countryside or small seaside town in Suffolk. Susan wrote the novel between 1968-1974 while in a remote Dorset Cottage. She wrote six novels, two collections of short stories & several radio plays.

Context

Set in the summer of 1969, isolated setting makes the exact period irrelevant. Story of misery in childhood which could happen at any time, but isn't a pessimistic view of children's experiences set amongst the English upper classes in 1960's. Both boys Hooper & Kingshaw have had a privileged start to life. Both attend fee private boarding schools. In keeping with upper class tradition, they refer to each other by their surname. Mr Hooper often travels to London & absent for long periods.

Symbolism

Though only a brief appearance, the key to the Red Room plays an important part in symbolism. Keys are used as a symbol of the ability to gain access to something & unlock what is hidden within. Mr Hooper is seen as a jailor entrapping freedom & all virtuous qualities as a key is meant to power & authority.

Inside the Red Room contains Edmund's Grandfather's Moths collection. The moths symbolise death & destruction. Edmund secretly visits the Red Room & finds the largest moth. 'Death's Head Hawk Moth' as soon as he touches it, it collapses into a soft formless heap of dark dust. This image foreshadows the novel's tragic end. Moths are driven to light & according to the theories they navigate by lunar light. This links to how Edmund is fascinated by the "enormous moon" outside the window. Suggesting that not only that he has a morbid attraction towards moths, he also embodies them as he is attracted to the moon. When he touches the moth it disintegrates, this implies that it is a warning to Edmund because it means that no matter how powerful you think you are, you can still be defeated. Edmund Hooper's grandfather is on his death bed. "The boys looked toward the bed. His skin is already dead, he thought, it is old & dry" (11). His grandfather having comparisons to his moths, family unhappy to look, his grandfather pinned in his bed.

At Fielding's Farm it is significant that Charles & Edmund walk together across a bridge that has a stream below. By crossing the stream Charles leaves behind a sad existence that is slowly killing him to one that offers life. Water is traditionally a symbol of life. After the thunderstorm while in Hang Wood they find a stream & Edmund insists that they follow it in hope that it leads them out of the wood. The stream runs into a pool. Edmund immediately decides to swim but Charles is initially reluctant remembering his fear of swimming pool when younger. Deciding the natural pool is different he jumps in finding the experience exhilarating, & for a time his hatred for Edmund is forgotten.

Weather

Susan Hill has used *pathetic fallacy* to foreshadow the events in the novel numerous times. In Chapter 7 it is revealed that the cruel heartless Edmund Hooper's greatest fear is thunderstorms. Edmund experiences a lot of trauma as a thunderstorm is quickly approaching. We notice this when he "whimpered" & "rocked himself a little backwards & forwards". By using words that connote with madness & panic. Susan Hill clearly shows the distress Edmund is going through which is interesting as we have never seen Edmund in such a vulnerable state. This shows that although Edmund dominates Charles Kingshaw for most of the novel he is still weak compared to the vast outdoors. The quote "great crash of thunder almost overhead & a tearing noise, as though the sky had been ripped open" represents Edmund's hostility & violence towards Charles. Violent diction such as "crash", "tearing", "ripped open" depict their relationship & how Charles Kingshaw's mental state is being torn apart by Edmund.

Themes

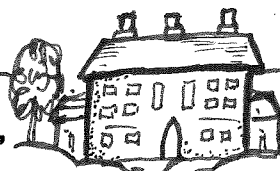
Isolation, bullying, unhappy childhood, cruelty, power of evil, lack of love, relationships.

The issues & themes are timeless; isolation, bullying & suicidal children still exist today. **Childhood experiences** form an individual's character & have a lasting influence in later life. The novel challenges adult's beliefs that children are resilient & happy. This is done by drawing clear parallels between Hooper & Kingshaw. Both are only children with single parent, of similar age & social background. Isolation features in family relationships. Edward Hooper, Mr Hooper, Charles Kingshaw & Mrs Kingshaw are remarkable for the lack of love in their lives. None of them loves another person or the effects of being loved in spite of being forced into close proximity. As only children with widowed parents, they are isolated unable to relate to others even in their families. Mr Hooper didn't love his wife, he was cold & reserved & had an authoritative rule to Edmund, With Mr Hooper contemplating marriage to Mrs Kingshaw, and it is more for sexual gratification rather than a mutual affection or esteem.

The effect of **lack of love** on characters is the important point. Susan Hill sees love as an empowering emotion. People flourish in loving relationships which foster confidence & create a deep source of happiness. Fielding – comes from a loving family, shares his confidence & happiness with those he meets. The absence of love has the most disturbing effect on Hooper. An emotional vacuum he has nothing to counter the evil that possesses him. Most isolated of them all is Kingshaw. The adults maintain an indifference to his suffering throughout the story.

I'm the King of the Castle

Warings



Setting & Place

Warings is a large house built by the first Joseph Hooper who was a successful businessman. Although present at the time Mr Hooper made a contribution to it, & knows himself to be weak & unsuccessful. He believes the house will provide him with the status which he claims as a right. Warings represents the Hooper family pride. It's collection of Moths suggests their preoccupation with dead & useless things at the expense of family relationships. Hooper's close identification with the house makes it all the more hostile to Kingshaw & its gloomy atmosphere makes him afraid. "Warings it was ugly, it was entirely graceless" (15). "Yew trees had stood here before the house, Warings built around them". Yew trees are thirsty trees & take water from those plants around them. They are generally linked to churchyards, death gloom, draining surroundings of water & life. Joseph Hooper had spent his childhood holidays at Warings & didn't like it. The gloom & darkness of rooms surrounded by woods & fields can be seen as a kind of Garden of Eden. It is never made clear exactly why Edmund Hooper feels that "nobody should come" to Warings.

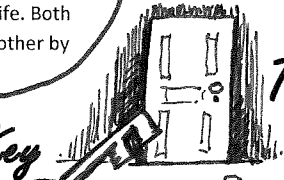
Charles Kingshaw first attempt to break free of Warings was when "he went through the Yew trees", "coming out into one corner of the field" (39). Charles Kingshaw's journey within this scene represents his actual journey at Warings & his relationship between the characters. At the beginning of his walk, "great black shadows laid across the entrance" of the Copse (39). This foretells the start of Charles Kingshaw's hardship at Warings. This hardship is further showcased through the fields that "sloped upwards". Representing an uphill and in the end a losing battle. Along his walk he kept "stumbling" in the "ruts that had dried hard". A sense of desolation & negligence is shown through the words 'dried' & 'hard' denoting Charles Kingshaw's future distance relationships with his mother.

The Warings Escape

The Red Room

Introduced in Chapter 1, it is a room kept locked because it contains the valuable collection of moths & butterflies belonging to Mr Hooper's father, Edmund's grandfather. Mr Hooper is reluctant to let Edmund into the room, but Edmund notes where his father keeps the key & steals it one night to explore the room examining the museum-like collection of moths & butterflies in display cases. Fascinated by the specimens he opens a case to look more closely at the @Death's Head Hawk' moth, but when he tries to pick it up it disintegrates into dust. On seeing his grandfather for the first time in the sick room Edmund refers to him "All he looks like is one of his dead old moths" (11). Mr Hooper as a child was led around the room & lectured afternoon after afternoon during his summer & hated it violently. Here Charles is tormented later in the novel. The room is painted entirely red, the colour linked to blood, death, bitterness, anger. "On show was stuffed bodies of Weasel, Stoat, & fox, glass eyed & posed in stilted attitudes". (19) The word 'stilted' suggests something unnatural, forced pose, creating a distorted image. "There was a dead smell" links to stagnation of death.

The Key



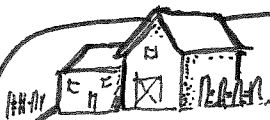
Moths



Fielding's Farm

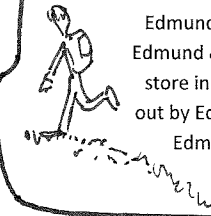
Another place Charles finds temporary happiness. A key point is that the boys play outside in the stream. The balance of power shifts between Charles & Edmund. When Edmund realises they are lost he reacts hysterically. Charles congratulates himself on his own presence of mind. Edmund refuses to relinquish his hold over Charles by reminding him moths come out at night. Charles leaves Edmund to find a way out. On return Edmund is face down in the water & Charles manages to revive him, lighting a fire & giving him his own clothing. The reader sees a range of Charles Kingshaw's emotions from the fear that Edmund had died to elation at his own ability to cope with the crisis.

Stream



The Crow

The Crow is symbolic of danger & fear, the crow a predator. The fact that the crow was "the largest crow" that Kingshaw had ever seen makes the crow resemble Hooper. The superlative "largest" implies the crow's dominating, thus intimidating features. The "shining black" crow also suggests Hooper's consuming nature, as the colour "black" usually represents death and emptiness. Furthermore, "scarlet" suggests the crow's bloodthirsty characteristic, since the colour scarlet, or red generally connote blood and death. Also, the colour can be a symbol of shame (e.g. scarlet woman), which implies the shame that Kingshaw is feeling from being attacked by "a rotten bird". Beyond some fields Charles Kingshaw is attacked by a crow after escaping from Warings. Attacked by the swooping crow, he runs away terrified with the crow chasing him. Charles Kingshaw trips & the crow lands on his back. After a few moments it flies away after being frightened by Charles' screams. Edmund sees the whole incident from a window & taunts Charles about fearing the crow & reluctance to go into the Copse. Edmund dares Charles to go into the Copse & the larger Hang Wood & is resigned to accept. The crow represents Edmund & his violent relationship with Charles. Charles thought that the crow might be some kind of crow's food store in which he was seen as an invader". This signifies how Charles feels unwanted at Warings & being driven out by Edmund. The diction 'Invader' shows Charles' insignificance to something he's superior to, similar to how Edmund perceives hi. Since Edmund chooses a room high up in the house & the crow was "circling overhead" Kingshaw, they are watching over Kingshaw, 'trapping him 'as if catching a prey.



Leydell Castle

After going on a 'family trip', Charles decides to explore the castle alone & climbs up the high walls leaving Edmund down below. Charles invites Edmund to join him but he is scared. Once away from Warings, Charles yet again feels confident. Eventually Edmund follows Charles but gets stuck & frightened to move & wets himself. Charles feels an intense hatred of Edmund & knows that if wanted to he could make Edmund fall though chooses not to because he knows once he returns to Warings he will become the victim again. Not strong enough to fight Edmunds off. Charles tries to help Edmund but he falls. After Hang Wood, we can be certain that Edmund will blame Charles for this accident too. Although we know Charles Kingshaw's dominance won't last, we feel as pleased as Charles is when he stands tall on the castle & proudly exclaims...

"I'm the King of the Castle".



Thinking

Complete the following questions to give you a good understanding of the novel

1. How does the author Susan Hill create an atmosphere in Chapter 1?
2. How is conflict created between Hooper and Kingshaw?
3. How are symbols used to emphasise Kingshaw's fears in Chapter 3?
4. How do the views of the parents and the children compare?
5. Investigate how the author uses description to create intense feelings
6. How does the author use language to demonstrate Kingshaw's anxiety?
7. Investigate the writer's purpose for creating feelings of isolation
8. How does Hooper's treatment of Kingshaw increase the tension between them?
9. What was the author's purpose for shifting the power in the novel?

How does Hill show the tensions between Hooper and Kingshaw?

Look at taking five quotes from different sections of the novel.

1. Chapter 2: When the boys first meet.
- 2/3. Chapter 7: (2 quotes) Hooper's reaction to the thunderstorm & how the boys behave in the pool.
- 4/5. Chapter 17: (2 quotes) 'Kingshaw had waited' & 'Something will happen to you'.

The theme of **isolation** is enforced through the description of the setting & natural environment. Warings stands alone, isolated from the village of Derne. With Kingshaw's venture into the surrounding countryside the author uses hostile images to emphasise his loneliness & vulnerability (E.g. The crow). There is also a deserted landscape on his way to Hang Wood.

An underlying vein of **cruelty** runs through the novel – with a presence of danger & sinister influences. At its strongest it is represented by Hooper's treatment of Kingshaw, but it is present in other subtle ways such as the collection of moths in the Red Room. Frequently associated with animals such as the predatory crow, the thrush banging open a snail's shell, the killing of turkeys at Fielding's Farm & the humiliation of elephants at the circus. The widespread cruelty of childhood is shown through Kingshaw's reactions on his encounters with other boys. Cruelty is not unusual in children in the struggle to survive as part of a group. The weakest are often oppressed but society seeks to correct this & preserve the safety of the weakest. Cruel behaviour in children is corrected & the values of love & comparison are taught. It is disturbing at the end of the novel to confront their belief in the innocence of childhood & question the source of his evil power. This power remains a mystery but the evidence of its existence is clear, in Hooper's sense of triumph of Kingshaw's death.