

Edmund Hooper

Thin, strange, sharp neck bones, something in his eyes. He is unloved & unlovable, scheming malevolent. Cold & inscrutable he is an only child, isolated & wholly without conscience. Has an obsession with war. Is he naturally an evil boy, or shocking product of his family circumstances?

His father thinks that Edmund has always been strange & finds him disturbing, a difficult child to love. In his father's eyes he is hard & inscrutable. However Mr Hooper's own unhappy childhood, failed marriage & general inadequacies must have been important influences in shaping Edmund's character. His mother died six years ago & although she had the knack of dealing with Edmund there is no impression of a loving relationship. In fact Edmund barely remembers her. An only child his hobbies are solitary & devoid of human involvement. (Preparation of battle plans). He has no friends. Hooper relates to other boys only by trying to control them. One reason perhaps, for his inability to relate normally to people lies in his watchful approach to others. He is smaller than Kingshaw but he seems older, more aware & calculating. He is detached & unresponsive towards his father, who is disturbed by Edmund's knowing looks & uncomfortable questions. His instinctive detection & understanding of fear is his starting point in relationships with other boys, he weighs up their characters to see if he can gain control. Fielding baffles him by his easy confidence, but Hooper soon realises that Kingshaw is an easy victim. Hooper's own strong fears of things like the storm & being lost in the wood are quickly put behind him unlike Kingshaw who is vulnerable carrying his fears with him. Hooper appears to bully Kingshaw as an experiment to satisfy his curiosity about Kingshaw's behaviour when afraid, but soon displays a malevolent enjoyment of his power to control. He approaches the persecution with cold deliberation, delighting in his plans & showing no scruples about the suffering he inflicts. An important characteristic of Edmund is his lack of conscience. He is contemptuous of his father's feeble attempt to guide his behaviour towards Kingshaw, his father failing to develop Edmund's sense of morality & compassion. Mr Hooper's family pride is the example & foundation for Edmund's snobbishness & superiority towards impoverished Kingshaws. At the end of the novel as Kingshaw leaves the house, Hooper enjoys untroubled sleep, his mind "blank" in spite of all the damage he has done. Strongest suggestion of evil nature is his lack of remorse at the end, when he feels only triumph at his victim's death. The depiction of him is made more disturbing by reminders that he is only ten years old e.g. sticking his tongue out when colouring etc. When Kingshaw arrives he feels resentment & anger followed by delight in the exercise of power. These are normal feelings, but in Edmund they are the starting point for the abnormally cruel behaviour resulting in Kingshaw's death. Susan Hill deliberately does not define Hooper's motives. His unrestrained remorseless behaviour is made more evil because we as the reader cannot understand their source. The character of Edmund is a warning that such evil can exist & his family background an example of the circumstances in which it can thrive.



Charles Kingshaw

Fearful, sensitive, forced himself into independence, isolated from other people, unremarkable boy in appearance & achievement with a low self-esteem. He is introduced in the novel as "a misfit".

If Edmund represents the power of evil, Charles might be seen as his good & innocent victim. By exploring his feelings & relating much of the action through his eyes. Susan Hill makes the reader sympathise with him & feel the horror of Edmund's persecution. Knowing Charles well we understand why he is vulnerable & believe in his suicide as inevitable conclusion of his suffering. Resigned to be disappointed & to things working out sadly. He has an expectation that others are stronger & more successful. It's debatable whether his preoccupation with his own inadequacies is the result or cause of his problems in relating to other boys. He does have friends & joins naturally with Fielding his anxiety about coping with other boys reflects his confusing & unhappy experiences which Susan Hill shows through the flashback technique. E.g. Turville's dares at the pool; Charles displays certain qualities & practical skills (making helter-skelter), resourcefulness (Hang Wood) & sometimes allows himself to feel proud of his achievements (although short lived). The main cause of Charles' insecurity is his unhappy family background. He keeps a photo of his father who died but there are no affectionate associations with him, only pride that he was a pilot in the 'Battle of Britain'. Charles doesn't miss him & can't recall exactly when he passed & his life has since been difficult, living in numerous places & private hotels. Charles relationship with his mother is uncomfortable, embarrassed by her efforts to keep up appearances & show affection. In Chapter 3, Charles regards school as a haven or security, away from home & his mother. When at school he firmly puts his mother behind him, he cannot tell her & she makes no effort to understand him. By Chapter 10 his disappointment in her misunderstandings of him forces him into even greater isolation. In spite of his remoteness from his other (chapter 16) he is troubled by her having more to do with the Hooper family & own affairs than himself. This shows a natural desire for affection. Charles isn't cold like Edmund; his emotional isolation is the result of his protective mechanism- not letting himself mind or need others his need for affection suppressed because it has never been fulfilled. In Chapter 13 we are given a pitiful impression of his self-sufficiency through the description of how he coped with his nightmares, & feelings of some finding comfort in Mr Hooper's arms. Charles envies the natural relationship between the Fielding's, recognising the contrast with the strained behaviour in his own home.. Compassion is at the root of his moral sense, most evident when he turns down the temptation to have his revenge on Edmund when he is at his mercy. He knows from personal unhappy experiences that it is wrong to make others suffer, or to even wish suffering upon others. Charles has a superstitious fear of God's retribution. This contrast between Charles & Edmund is shown repeatedly to emphasise Charles Kingshaw's innocence in the face of Edmund Hooper's evil behaviour. Charles has many fears, perhaps the result of his insecurity & year of coping with unhappiness.

Mr Joseph Hooper

Weak, complacent, lonely, and unable to feel or show affection, tall, thin & dark echoes the gloom of Warings & stirs Charles Kingshaw's memories of the crow.



When Mr Joseph Hooper regards himself in the cheval mirror in Chapter 2, his anxiety & self-doubt are shown. He contemplates his unimpressive appearance & tries to build up his self-confidence. Most of the information we are given about Mr Hooper relates to his emotional inadequacy. As a child he suffered silently, not strong enough to complain when he was made to watch his father working on his Moth collection in the Red Room. The contempt that his father felt towards him contributes to his lack of confidence & drove him away. His marriage to a cold & distant woman was also unhappy. Failures in his relationships with his father & wife, echoed in his own relationship with his own son, Edmund. He appears to have no friends & feels resentful when Mrs Kingshaw speaks to a friend of hers on the phone. This resentment shows that he is possessive in relationship with others – a characteristic that is shared by Edmund. A lonely man, he cannot face being alone at Warings with its unhappy memories of childhood. His isolation & inadequacy are reflected in his sexual feeling s of strong desire & frustration. He is attracted to Mrs Kingshaw largely by the prospect of satisfying his desires. Mrs Kingshaw's ingratiating behaviour gives Mr Hooper the confidence he seeks, although he holds no apparent affection or regard for her in return. Mr Hooper knows he has failed & a disappointment to his domineering father. He is aware he isn't respected by those around him m & he hopes that Warings will give him that dignity & prestige that he lacks & tries to impress Edmund with his new status in Chapter 1. Though recognising his weaknesses Mr Hooper is complacent. He blames other people for his problems & resigned to his difficulties with Edmund. Mr Hooper shirks responsibility to guide & control his son & blind to Kingshaw's suffering in his care. Mr Hooper must therefore share the blame of Charles Kingshaw's death, though doubtful he has the capacity to understand or admit his part in it.



Anthony Fielding

Confident, & well-balanced, Fielding is a happy & independent child with a secure & natural family background.

Anthony Fielding appears in only three of the chapters but makes a strong impression on Kingshaw. Our first impression is f his confidence when he challenges Kingshaw about being on the altar of the church. Fielding makes friends easily with the assurance that people will accept him. A well balance boy he listens sympathetically to Kingshaw's account of Hooper's bullying but is unable to understand the behaviour as he personally would never suffer such an experience. He tries to protect Kingshaw when he comes for tea but is unable to overcome Hooper's influence though not overly sentimental he tells Kingshaw in a matter-of fact way about the fate of the animals on Fielding Farm. Fielding provides a striking contrast with Kingshaw & Hooper which increases our awareness of their problems. Giving us as the reader the reassurance that childhood is not always an unhappy experience, representing the 'normal' world beyond Warings where a child can be loved & secure. This world is purposely distance from the vents at Warings to emphasise the isolation of the main characters & obliviousness of the world to suffering. To Kingshaw he is a lifeline through their friendship, separate of Warings, Kingshaw gains confidence & hope. However Kingshaw feels his own inadequacies when he observes Fielding's personality & behaviour. When his mother brings Fielding to Warings Kingshaw feels it has spoilt the friendship making Kingshaw's isolation complete, leaving no-one he can have confidence with. Fielding's character also shows the disturbing fact that simple goodwill & friendship are no match for Edmund Hooper's evil power.



Mrs Helena Kingshaw

Shallow, insensitive, anxious to please, shows little understanding, A widow with a ten year old son, struggling to manage since her husband's death, superficial showing an attention to her appearance, with nice clothes, earrings & bracelets.

To Mrs Helena Kingshaw, her son is a burden & threat to her future happiness. She scolds him (Charles) for wickedness when really it's just childish naughtiness. Mrs Kingshaw is deliberately undeveloped because this novel is concerned with children & childhood. Her role is to provide a background which explains some of her son's insecurity & unhappiness. Her son's isolation & suffering is emphasised by Mrs Kingshaw being unaware of Edmund Hooper's treatment of Charles Kingshaw in spite of living closely with him. She has no home of her own & no financial security after years of moving from place to place. Living in private hotels it is understandable that she is attracted by the possibility of a secure future with Mr Joseph Hooper. She would like to be a good mother but is too anxious about her ability to do & say the right things. Her self-conscious efforts to relate to Charles Kingshaw are reduced in the artificial style of speech, & contrasts sharply with Mrs Fielding's relayed confidence with her son. Mrs Kingshaw tries to occasionally show affection to Charles (which embarrasses him) E.g. every night going to kiss him & sometimes trying to talk to him. Unfortunately Mrs Kingshaw never really 'listens' to what Charles tells her, instead dismissing his feelings & fears, simplifying them & hearing only what she wants to hear. She does recognise her failings in their relationship & decides to think more about herself in Chapter 5. Towards the end she trivialises her son's feelings, maybe recognising in them a threat to the future 'she' seeks at Warings. In the end we see that her real fault is complete insensitivity. The neglect of her son's emotional needs is emphasised by her focus on her own affairs & the false way she speaks to him. The remoteness from Charles is emphasised by the irony of her showering Edmund Hooper with attention when he is injured, & comforting him when they find her son dead.

Words

Dynastic sense – A sense of the importance of family, a subtle example of irony, given the failure of the Hooper family.

Archeroptia Atropos – The Latin name for the 'Death's Head Hawk Moth' 'aptly chosen for its symbolic quality.

Catacombs – Underground burial places, again an aptly chosen comparison

Crinolines - Kingshaw's enjoyment of these toys gives some indication of his character & it's more gentle & feminine.

Hated – This is an important word, revealing at this early stage (chapter4) the intensity of feeling in Kingshaw.

Scourge of the Marsh Monster – Edmund may be influenced by reading lurid & violent stories.

Leek, Broughton-Smith – The names reveal something of the social class of Charles Kingshaw's classmates.

Come on, Hooper its ok – The use of slang is important indicating perhaps some loss of control.

Drummonds – The name of a minor Prep school or Boarding school.

Founders Day – A day in the school calendar to celebrate the person who founded (started) the school.

Quad – Schoolboy slang for quadrangle, an enclosed patch of ground in a school or college.

San – Schoolboy slang again for school sick room or clinic.

Memorial Hospital – Small hospital in memory of those who died in the First & Second World Wars.

Literary Terms

Colloquial – A style of writing or speech which contains the kind of language & grammar associated with every day speech.

Dialogue – Conversations between the two boys, Edmund & Charles.

Episodic – A narrative which written in the simple form of a series of episodes or incidents, rather than a complicated & involved plot.

Image/imagery – In its narrowest sense an 'image' is a word picture, a description of some visible scene or object.

Irony – A manner of speaking or writing which consists of saying one thing while you mean another.

