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# ENGLISH LITERATURE GCSE

## The Woman in Black – Susan Hill

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REVISION GUIDE FOR STUDENTS





## English Literature:

### The Woman in Black

“I set out to write a ghost story in the classic 19th-century tradition, a full-length one. There have never been many, writers perhaps having felt the form would not stretch successfully.

By the time I began mine, in the 1980s, full-length ghost stories seemed to have died out altogether. I read and studied the Jameses, Henry and MR, and Dickens...” Susan Hill

<u>Christmas Eve</u>	Kipps is with his second wife and four step children who are telling ghost stories around the fire. This upsets Kipps, who then decides to write down his own experience.
<u>London Particular</u>	Mr Bentley tell Kipps about Mrs Drablow and sends him to sort the paper work of Eel Marsh House
<u>Journey North</u>	Kipps travels north, where it gets noticeably colder. He meets Samuel Daily
<u>Mrs Drablow's Funeral</u>	Kipps and Mr Jerome attend. Kipps sees a woman with a wasted face, small children lined up at the church fence. Mr jerome notices neither, and is afraid when Kipps speaks of them
<u>Across the Causeway</u>	Kipps travels to the house where he finds an old burial ground. He sees the woman in black for the second time, who disappears in front of him.
<u>The Sound of the Pony and Trap</u>	Kipps attempts to walk back to Crythin Gifford when a sea mist sweeps in, and he hears the ghostly sounds of the drowning pony and trap as well as the screams of a child.
<u>Mr Jerome is afraid</u>	Mr Jerome will not help Kipps with his work
<u>Spider</u>	Samuel Daily lends Kipps his dog to keep him company at the house. She is a good companion and good company for Kipps.
<u>In the Nursey</u>	Kipps wakes up and is alerted to danger by Spider. He hears a noise in the nursery but can't get in. When he does he finds a perfectly preserved children's bedroom.
<u>Whistle and I'll Come to You</u>	Spider shoots from the house and is nearly drowned. Kipps saves her. When he looks back at the house the woman in black is watching him from an upstairs window.
<u>A Packet of Letters</u>	Kipps discovers the truth about Jennet Humphrey being forced to give up her child for adoption to her sister Alice Drablow, and the boy dying in the pony and trap accident.

The Woman in  
Black

A few years later, Kipps is in a park with his wife and baby son.  
The woman in Black appears and causes the death of his small family. The baby dies instantly, his wife 10 months later.

## Betrayal

- Sure, we'll buy that Jennet was betrayed. Her sister forcibly took away her only child and then allowed—at least from Jennet's perspective—him to die in a horrible accident. Way to take care of your nephew, Alice. But *The Woman in Black* complicates the theme of betrayal. Did Alice really betray Jennet, or was she just trying to provide Nathaniel with a better life? If the accident was no one's fault, could it really be called a betrayal? And what kind of bonds of trust were broken when little Joseph died? Did Jennet betray Arthur— or was he simply betrayed by his sense that the world is a reasonable, fair, rational place?

“It was as though she was searching for something she wanted, needed—must have, more than life itself, and which had been taken from her.”

“In Scotland, a son was born to her and she wrote of him with a desperate, clinging affection”

“She was not welcome at her parents' house and the man—the child's father—had gone abroad for good.” “When they began again it was at first in passionate outrage and protest, later, in quiet, resigned bitterness. Pressure was being exerted upon her to give up the child for adoption...”

“But it seemed most likely that only a blood relation would have given, or rather, been forced to give her illegitimate child for adoption to another woman...”

“Her passionate love for her child and her isolation with it, her anger and the way she at first fought bitterly against and finally, gave despairingly in to the course proposed to her, filled me with sadness and sympathy”

“Alice Drablow would not let her see the boy at all”

## Isolation

- n • Since *The Woman in Black* is more or less set in the middle of nowhere among bogs and fogs, it makes sense that a lot of the book is basically a how-to guide on being scared and alone. In the book, Arthur finds himself literally separated from the rest of society when he arrives at Eel Marsh House, which is cut off from the mainland when the tide rises. And then when he finally gets back to London and a semblance of normal life, he finds himself alone even with his new family—since he can never share with them the horrors of his youth. Do you think he's starting to feel some more sympathy with Jennet?

“I realised that this must be the nine lives causeway – this and nothing more and saw how, when yje tide came in, it would quickly be quite submerged and untraceable”

“I saw the land on which it stood was raised up a little, surrounding it on each side for perhaps three or four hundred yards”

“But for today I had had enough. Enough of solitude and no sound save the water and the moaning wind and the melancholy calls of the birds, enough of monotonous

grayness, enough of this gloomy old house”

“I sat up paralyzed, frozen, in the bed, conscious only of the dog and of the prickling of my own skin and of what suddenly seemed a different kind of silence, ominous and dreadful.”

“I felt a second of pure despair, alone in the middle of the wide marsh, under the fast-moving, stormy sky, with only water all around me and that dreadful house the only solid thing for miles around”

## Revenge

- To Jennet, revenge is a dish best served cold... or hot, or on the side, or fried up in a tasty hash, or pretty much any way she can get it. What we're saying is that this chick likes revenge. Even though her son Nathaniel's death was no one's fault, she's super cheesed at the injustices that have been piled on her. But she's not content to stew in her own hatred. In death, she takes it out on other people's children—and in a final, heartbreaking twist, on Arthur as well. But will that be enough for her?

“She had been a poor, crazed, troubled woman, dead of grief and distress, filled with hatred and a desire for revenge”

“...whenever she has been seen...in the graveyard, on the marsh, in the streets of the town, however briefly...in some violent or dreadful circumstance, a child has died”

“I had seen the ghost of Jennet Humphrey and she had had her revenge”

“ Moreover, that the intensity of her grief and distress together with her pent-up hatred and desire for revenge permeated the air all around”

“Her bitterness was understandable, the wickedness that led her to take away other women's children because she had lost her own, understandable too but not forgivable”

“There was no expression on her face and yet I felt all over again the renewed power emanating from her, the malevolence and hatred and passionate bitterness. It pierced me through.”

## Fear

- Talk about Fright Nights. This is one haunted house that even thrill-seekers are going to want to avoid. *The Woman in Black* is interested in a lot of things—nature, the Sublime, revenge— but it's definitely interested in fear. What causes it? Who feels it? What does it prompt us to do? Is it just a fun emotion to evoke while we're sitting safely by the fire, or does it have a more primitive and profound purpose? And why doesn't Arthur obey his lizard brain and get himself out of Crythin Gifford before it's too late?

“Mr. Jerome looked frozen, pale, his throat moving as if he were unable to utter.”

“I stood absolutely helpless in the mist that clouded me and everything from my sight, almost weeping in an agony of fear and frustration, and I knew that I was hearing... appalling last noises of a pony and trap, carrying a child in it...”

“I had been as badly frightened as a man could be. I did not think that I would be the first to run from physical risks and dangers, although I had no reason to suppose myself markedly braver than the next person”

“My fear reached a new height, until for a minute I thought I would die of it, was dying, for I could not conceive of a man being able to endure such shocks and starts...”

“I was paralyzed, rooted to the spot on which I stood, and all the world went dark around me and the shouts and happy cries of all the children faded”



## The Supernatural

- What's more supernatural than ghosts and phantom noises and self-rocking chairs? *The Woman in Black* is chock-full of creepy, inexplicable details that point to one thing: the existence of ghosts. And it doesn't leave us any room for doubt. Unless—we're just going to throw this out there—unless the whole story is a way for Arthur to make sense of the otherwise senseless deaths of his wife and child. Could that be possible?

“I did not believe in ghosts. Or rather, until this day, I had not done so, and whatever stories I had heard of them I had, like most rational, sensible young men, dismissed as nothing more than stories indeed”

“It was a faint noise, and, strain my ears as I might, I could not make out exactly what it was. It was a sound like a regular yet intermittent bump or rumble. Nothing else happened.”

“But no one had been there. The room had been empty. Anyone who had just left it must have come out into the corridor and confronted me...”

“It was true that the ghostly sounds I had heard through the fog had greatly upset me, but far worse was what emanated from and surrounded these things and arose to unsteady me, an atmosphere, a force-I do not exactly know what to call it-of evil and of terror and suffering, of malevolence and bitter anger”

## Madness

- We can come up with a word or two for Jennet Humfrye, but "sane" isn't one of them. In *The Woman In Black*, her anger and despair actually make her go crazy—so crazy that she wants to destroy everyone. And confronting the reality of her ghost makes Arthur go a little crazy, too, or at least feel like he's going crazy. Wandering around a big haunted house will do that to a guy.

Her face, in its extreme pallor, her eyes, sunken but unnaturally bright, were burning with the concentration of passionate emotion which was within her and which streamed from her

But what was "real"? At that moment I began to doubt  
my own reality Mad with grief and mad with anger and a  
desire for revenge

Whether because of her loss and her madness or what, she also contracted a disease which caused her to begin to waste away.

She had been a poor, crazed, troubled woman, dead of grief and distress, filled with hatred and desire for revenge.

## Arthur Kipps

Arthur is the main character and the narrator. Hill's use of first person allows the reader to be sympathetic towards Arthur and share his fear. In the first and last chapters we see him as a man approaching old age. In the first chapter Kipp's is shaken by his step sons' ghost stories as they renew his 'close acquaintance ...with mortal dread and terror of spirit' (pg 9-10). In the final chapter Arthur is completely exhausted due his difficulty in telling his terrifying experiences at Eel Marsh House – emphasised with the last word of the novel 'Enough'. He intends that the whole world will know his 'past horrors' when his wife reads his tale after his death.

The youthful Arthur Kipps is a privileged, well-educated, ambitious, adventurous, impatient, arrogant, brave and foolhardy. Qualities that lead him to ignore Samuel Daily's advice and return to Eel Marsh House. He is arrogant as he confesses to having a 'Londoner's sense of superiority in those days' (pg 45).

The first time he sees the woman in black at Alice Drablow's funeral he feels sympathetic towards her and was concerned for her welfare 'skin stretched over her bones' (pg 56).

However, the second time at Eel Marsh house he is 'filled with fear, his flesh creeps and his knees tremble' (pg 75). Arthur Kipp's character is realistic and well-rounded; he reacts to the shocking events in a human way. Therefore allowing the reader to identify with the character. After the death of Stella and his baby he is a broken man. It takes him twelve years to recover the tragic events, when he buys Monk's piece and moves in with his second wife Esme.

Rational Protagonist. Does not believe in ghosts. Believes that people in the countryside are more likely to believe in such nonsense than well-educated city folk. He has a fiancé Stella when he sets off to Eel Marsh House. Events soon change his mind on the reality of the supernatural. However once he leaves the place he believes he is leaving the woman in black behind. He couldn't be more wrong. She makes a guest appearance at the end of the book killing Stella (now his wife) and his baby son.

## Samuel Daily

Samuel Daily is a big, beefy local business man in Crythin Gifford. He is successful and not embarrassed by his wealth; which annoys other local businessmen. Daily offers Arthur advice about his work at Eel Marsh House: '**you're a fool if you go on with it**' (pg 118).

Although Arthur warms to Samuel Daily, he comes up with several reasons he must go back; which is when Samuel gives Arthur Spider for protection. After Arthur's near death experience at Eel Marsh house, Mr and Mrs Daily look after him and he finished his work on Alice Drablow's papers in their home. After Arthur's return to London, Samuel Daily becomes his sons Godfather and visits often.

## Keckwick

Keckwick is a silent man. He is very blunt and matter of fact when he returns in the middle of the night to collect Arthur after his first terrifying experience at Eel Marsh House, including the pony and trap and the Nine Lives Causeway. He was Alice Drablow's link to the outside world; the only 'living soul' who saw her.

The reader may feel that some amnesty was reached between him and the ghost: he also suffered a great loss when his father died driving the pony and trap with the child on it. He is very unattractive 'his nose and much of the lower part of his face were covered in bumps and lumps and warts and...the skin was porridgy in texture and a dark livid red' (pg 94). This creates a disturbing and visual image appropriate for a ghost story.

## The Landlord

Nobody will talk about the woman in black. The landlord is not named and his role is to create an air of mystery. He is at the centre of the conspiracy of silence and his purpose in the story is to provide Kipps and the reader with background information and to add tension and suspense. The landlord is more significant for what he does not say rather than what he does say. **“She could hardly do otherwise, living there’ and he turned away abruptly”** (pg 44).

## Mr Jerome

Alice Drablow’s estate agent. ‘When Arthur meets Mr Jerome for the second time in his office seeking help with his task (Alice Drablow’s paper) it is clear that he is a ironically a broken man ‘...his hands...were working, rubbing, fidgeting, gripping and ungridding in agitation’ (pg106).

We find out in the penultimate chapter from Mr Daily that he was victim of the woman in black and had lost a child in a tragic accident.

## The Woman in Black

Approximately 60 years before Alice Drablow’s death, her unmarried 18 year old sister gave birth to a baby boy. The baby was taken against her will and given to Alice and her husband to adopt. The boy, Nathaniel, is killed with his nurse Rose Judd and Keckwick’s father. After suffering with a wasting disease, 12 years later Janet died of heart failure. She has been seeking revenge ever since; every time the ghost is seen a child dies in dreadful and violent circumstances. As a result the villagers live in fear and dread.

- Chapter 4: She had been a victim of starvation (pg 52) Very erect and still not holding a prayer book (pg 53)
- Chapter 5: I had felt indescribable repulsion and fear (pg 79) She directed the purest evil and hatred and loathing (pg 75)

Otherwise known as Jennet Humphrey, she is our traditional ghost. She has a purpose, and that purpose is revenge. She had a child out of wedlock (a sin in the Christian society at the time) and was therefore forced to give him up for adoption to her sister. When the boy died she couldn’t bear the pain, and soon died herself. Do you blame her for her actions?

## Alice Drablow

Alice Drablow was an old eccentric character of Mr Bentley’s father. Kipp is given the responsibility of handing the legal requirements due to her death. She has no friends or relatives. From the outset mystery surrounds her: Mr Bentley, Samuel Daily and the landlord’s reaction all help to create this mystery. It becomes clear that Alice was haunted by her dead sister who wanted revenge for the death of her son.

## Stella

Stella, Arthur’s fiancé, is always in the background. As not a fully developed character

she, Kipps only refers to his life with her and his expectation for them in the future. Stella and Arthur's son does in a tragic accident after a sighting of the woman in black. Note, all the female characters: Esme, Stella and Mrs Daily play small and underdeveloped roles. They are only required to support their husbands otherwise it would take away from the development of the ghost story.

## Esme and her Family

Esme and her family feature in the opening chapter: Christmas Eve. They provide a domestic context and background of normality in order to make the story seem real.

## Spider

Seems like a minor character, however without her we would not know when danger was coming our way, nor would we truly know if it was all just in Kipps imagination.

## Eel Marsh House

Thinking outside of the box, the house could nearly be a character in its own right. It seems to trap people and hold onto emotion the way a bitter person might. It stands alone, isolated and impervious to the weather that rattles around it.

## Key words/Ideas

<b><u>Pathetic Fallacy</u></b>	Weather reflects human emotions
<b><u>Rational Protagonist</u></b>	Logical main character
<b><u>Foreshadowing</u></b>	Hint at what will happen later on
<b><u>Conspiracy of Silence</u></b>	Characters will not tell Kipps the whole story

Past Exam Questions:

Write about how Susan Hill creates fear and tension at different points in the novel.

Write about Arthur Kipps and how he is presented at different points in the novel.

Write about some of the places and locations described in The Woman in Black. How are they important to the novel as a whole?

Arthur Kipps says, "I did not believe in ghosts". Write about some of the events in the novel which cause Arthur to change his mind and how they are presented.

Write about some of the ghostly experiences described in The Woman in Black and how they are important to the novel as a whole.