



THE USE OF ANALEPSIS TO DECIPHER THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILD CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF SUSAN HILL

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ASBTRACT

This article analyzes Susan Hill's masterful use of analepsis (flashbacks) in "I am the King of the Castle" and other short stories. The narrative technique reveals characters' psychological development, particularly in child protagonists, by illuminating formative experiences, trauma, and school memories. Hill employs flashbacks to explore themes of power dynamics, bullying, and loss of innocence.

Keywords: Analepsis, Flashbacks, Psychological development, Trauma, Power dynamics, Bullying, Childhood

INTRODUCTION

Literary narratives often rely on temporal shifts to create depth and psychological complexity in their storytelling. In Susan Hill's works, particularly "I am the King of the Castle" and her short stories, the use of analepsis (flashbacks) serves as a powerful narrative device that illuminates the psychological landscapes of her characters. This article examines how Hill strategically employs flashbacks to reveal the formative experiences, traumas, and social dynamics that shape her characters' present behaviors and emotional responses. Through careful analysis of various examples from her works, we explore how these temporal shifts contribute to the portrayal of childhood development, power dynamics, and the loss of innocence.

MAIN PART

Susan Hill masterfully employs analepsis, or flashbacks, throughout "I am the King of the Castle" to provide crucial insights into the characters' past experiences and psychological development. This narrative technique allows Hill to weave a rich tapestry of memories and formative events that shape the characters' present-day actions and emotions. As Genette (1980, p. 40) notes, "Analepsis serves to fill in narrative gaps and provide backstory, enriching the reader's understanding of character motivation and development."¹ Hill uses flashbacks to reveal traumatic experiences that have shaped Kingshaw's fears and insecurities. For instance, the memory of the swimming pool incident vividly illustrates the roots of Kingshaw's water phobia: "When he was about 5, he had gone with his father to an open-air swimming pool... Turville had seen that he

¹ Genette, G. (1980). Narrative discourse: An essay in method. Cornell University Press.

was afraid of the water, not just because he could not swim, but for other reasons, quite inexplicable."² This flashback not only explains Kingshaw's fear but also highlights the insensitivity of the adults in his life, contributing to his sense of vulnerability and isolation. Hill also uses analepsis to contrast Kingshaw's current experiences with his school life, providing context for his behaviors and attitudes. The recollection of school adventures and punishments serves to illustrate Kingshaw's understanding of risk and consequence: "He was afraid. He had known how it would be. There was no question of it being an adventure. That is what Mr Hooper would have said. Perhaps other people might do because of that, for a lark, like Perevell and Blakey when they went up the mountain, last winter term, wanting to cause a stir."³ These school-related flashbacks, as Rimmon-Kenan (2002, p. 47) suggests, "provide a comparative framework for the character's current situation, highlighting changes or consistencies in their behavior and thought patterns."⁴ Hill's use of analepsis also serves to reveal Kingshaw's self-perception and his place within the social hierarchy. The memory of his mediocrity at school and the comparison to other students illuminate his struggles with self-esteem:

"He had never been much good at anything. Not bad. Not so unfailingly, hopelessly bad that everybody held him up as an example, like they did with Leek."⁵

These flashbacks to school experiences are particularly significant in the context of child psychology. As Nikolajeva (2014, p. 133) argues, "School-related memories in children's literature often serve as microcosms of larger social structures, revealing how children navigate power dynamics and form their identities."⁶ Hill also uses analepsis to explore the theme of innocence lost and the harsh realities of growing up. The contrast between Kingshaw's experiences with rabbits at school and his encounter with a wild rabbit highlights this transition: "They had rabbits at school, in cages, fat and white, with pink, vacant eyes. But this was different, it quivered and twitched with life."⁷ Furthermore, the flashbacks to restricted access to newspapers and the subsequent nightmares illustrate the psychological impact of exposure to adult realities: "Sometimes, they were not allowed to see the newspapers, at school, because of things like murder trial reports... If you began to read something, your eyes went on and on, you couldn't stop them until you knew every terrible thing about it and then you had thoughts and nightmares, you could never return to the time of not-knowing."⁸ This particular use of analepsis aligns with what Trites (2000, p. 85) describes as the "narrative of maturation," where exposure to adult knowledge marks a significant shift in the child character's worldview.⁹ Hill's use of flashbacks also serves to highlight Kingshaw's attempts to assert himself and find his place in the world. The memory of his climbing

² Hill S. *I'm the king of the castle*. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.25

³ Hill S. *I'm the king of the castle*. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.49

⁴ Rimmon-Kenan, S. (2002). *Narrative fiction: Contemporary poetics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

⁵ Hill S. *I'm the king of the castle*. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.54

⁶ Nikolajeva, M. (2014). *Reading for learning: Cognitive approaches to children's literature*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

⁷ Hill S. *I'm the king of the castle*. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.57

⁸ Hill S. *I'm the king of the castle*. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.121

⁹ Trites, R. S. (2000). *Disturbing the universe: Power and repression in adolescent literature*. University of Iowa Press.

feat at school reveals his desire for recognition and distinction: "At school, he had climbed on to the music block roof, at night, and along the ivy between one dormitory floor and another, he could get to the crow's nest at the top of the elm tree by South Gate. Nobody had ever done that before. It was the only distinction he had ever been able to secure for himself."¹⁰ This flashback reveals Kingshaw's desperate need for recognition and his willingness to take risks to achieve it. As Nikolajeva (2010, p. 185) notes, "Such memories of daring feats often serve as a counterpoint to the character's current feelings of powerlessness, highlighting the psychological journey of the protagonist."¹¹ Hill also uses analepsis to explore the theme of bullying and its lasting impact on a child's psyche. The brief flashback to Kingshaw's sole experience of being beaten up provides insight into his current vulnerability:

"Once, once only in his whole life, he was beaten up. Crawford had done it, he beat up everybody."¹² This memory serves to contextualize Kingshaw's reactions to Hooper's bullying, illustrating how past traumas can shape present behaviors and fears. The use of analepsis in "I am the King of the Castle" is particularly effective in portraying the psychological complexity of child characters. As Bal (2017, p. 79) argues, "Flashbacks in narratives focusing on child characters often serve to illustrate the formative experiences that shape their worldview and emotional responses."¹³ Hill's skillful employment of this technique allows readers to understand the deep-seated fears, insecurities, and motivations that drive Kingshaw's actions in the present narrative. Moreover, the frequent use of school-related flashbacks underscores the significance of educational institutions in shaping a child's psyche. As Nodelman (2008, p. 216) points out, "School memories in children's literature often function as a microcosm of society, revealing the character's place within social hierarchies and their strategies for navigating complex social dynamics"¹⁴.

Susan Hill's stories, such as "The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read," "Punishment," "Sand," "Elizabeth," and "The Brooch," often employ flashbacks (analepsis) to explore complex themes related to childhood psychology. This narrative technique allows Hill to delve into the formative experiences of her characters, highlighting how past events shape their present identities and emotional landscapes. In "The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read," the young boy's interactions with the beekeeper are interwoven with reflections on his own past, including his mother's death. The boy's questions and curiosity reflect a search for connection and understanding in a world altered by loss. These flashbacks emphasize how children process grief and seek stability through new relationships. Similarly, in "Punishment," Mick's memories of his brother Charlie's suffering and death are pivotal. Flashbacks to Charlie's punishment and subsequent death reveal the deep psychological scars left on Mick. The story illustrates how childhood trauma can manifest as unresolved anger and guilt, influencing Mick's actions and his quest for vengeance. In "Elizabeth," the titular character experiences

¹⁰ Hill S. I'm the king of the castle. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.131

¹¹ Nikolajeva, M. (2010). Power, voice and subjectivity in literature for young readers. Routledge.

¹² Hill S. I'm the king of the castle. -UK.: Penguin Random House, 2019. -P.165

¹³ Bal, M. (2017). Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative (4th ed.). University of Toronto Press.

¹⁴ Nodelman, P. (2008). The hidden adult: Defining children's literature. Johns Hopkins University Press.

flashes of insight into her family's struggles and her mother's sacrifices. These moments of reflection connect Elizabeth's childhood experiences of poverty and familial duty to her development and understanding of the world. Her internal monologue reveals a psychological struggle with expectations and the desire for a different life. The story "Sand" uses flashbacks to reveal the sisters' childhood experiences with their mother, who was often discontented and unyielding. These memories highlight the lasting impact of parental attitudes on children's emotional development. The tension between hope and disappointment, as experienced on the beach, underscores the sisters' lifelong feelings of guilt and resentment. Lastly, "The Brooch" explores the relationship between a child and her blind uncle, incorporating flashbacks that reveal the uncle's pride and the structured routines of their life together. These memories illustrate the child's evolving understanding of her uncle's limitations and the tender bond that develops despite them. Overall, Hill's use of flashbacks not only enriches the narrative but also offers profound insights into the psychological development of children. These reflections on past events highlight how early experiences, especially those involving family dynamics and trauma, leave indelible marks on the psyche, influencing characters' behaviors and emotions well into adulthood.

CONCLUSION

Susan Hill's masterful deployment of analepsis demonstrates the profound impact of past experiences on character development, particularly in the context of childhood psychology. Through carefully crafted flashbacks, Hill creates a rich tapestry of memories that reveals how early experiences, trauma, and social interactions shape her characters' present realities. The technique proves especially effective in exploring the complex themes of power, vulnerability, and growing up. As demonstrated through multiple works, including "I am the King of the Castle" and her short stories, Hill's use of analepsis not only enriches her narrative structure but also provides deeper insights into the psychological complexity of childhood experiences and their lasting effects on individual development. This sophisticated narrative approach ultimately allows readers to understand the intricate connections between past experiences and present behaviors, highlighting the enduring influence of childhood memories on character formation.

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