



▲ English writer Susan Hill

GENERAL VOCABULARY

Booker Prize prestigious British award given for outstanding literary works in English

London's West End an area of London where a number of good quality professional theatres are located

'WHISTLE AND I'LL COME TO YOU' (FROM *THE WOMAN IN BLACK*) SUSAN HILL

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Susan Hill is an English writer of literary novels, ghost stories, children's books, detective novels and memoirs. She has won the Whitbread, Somerset Maugham and John Llewellyn Rhys awards and has been shortlisted for the **Booker Prize**. She is known for writing in the Gothic style with its distinctive creation of suspense through a description of background and atmosphere.

The Woman in Black is probably the most well-known of her ghost stories written in this tradition and its stage production is the second longest running play in **London's West End**.

The novel is the story of Arthur Kipps and is narrated in the first person. It recounts his experiences in the town of Crythin Gifford when he was a young junior solicitor. The story centres around Eel Marsh House, where unexplained noises are heard and the ghostly figure of the Woman in Black is sighted. Kipps later learns that this is the ghost of Jennet Humfrye, a woman whose son died in an accident on the marshes, and that her appearance foretells the death of a child. Kipps's involvement in events at Eel Marsh House ultimately lead to the deaths of his wife and child.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Read about the Gothic novel and find out about some of its more famous examples, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.
- 2 There are several movie adaptations of *The Woman in Black*. Try to watch one as a class, paying particular attention to the way in which the story's background is shown and how an atmosphere of eeriness and suspense is created.
- 3 Do you believe in ghosts and the supernatural? Talk about some of the ghost stories you know from the folklore of your country and culture. What are their common features? Are they similar or different to the typical stories of the Gothic tradition?

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During the night the wind rose. As I had lain reading I had become aware of the stronger gusts that blew every so often against the **casements**. But when I awoke abruptly in the early hours it had increased greatly in force. The house felt like a ship at sea, battered by the gale that came roaring across the

casements Windows that are set on hinges and open like doors.