

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE, SHIRLEY JACKSON

ABOUT HOST ERIC BOYD

Eric loves to geek out over writing craft, story ideas, and the last book he read. A lawyer and dad to two teenagers, he writes middle grade and adult horror. Eric has led events and workshops for SCBWI, Shut Up & Write, and the Ubergroup. Connect with Eric: [@ericboydauthor.bsky.social](#) on Bluesky and also [@ericboydauthor](#) on X.

OPENING PARAGRAPH & PROSE STYLE

Resources discussing the famous first paragraph:

- [Shirley Jackson's Sublime First Paragraph in 'Hill House.' Annotated | Medium](#)
- [The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson: Day 1](#)
- [16.30: First Page Fundamentals—THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE | Writing Excuses](#)
- [Favorite Openings: The Haunting of Hill House - by DongWon](#)

ESTABLISHING CHARACTERS

Eric Edson's The Story Solution: [How We Feel A Story](#)

Key traits in an opening:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Courage (not optional) | • Funny | • Loved by Friends & Family |
| • Unfair Injury | • Just Plain Nice | • Hard Working |
| • Skill | • In Danger | • Obsess |

INTERIORITY

Rebecca Makkai levels of interiority: [Go Deep! - by Rebecca Makkai - SubMakk](#)

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Reportage | • Internal monologue in reaction to events in scene |
| • Sensory input, without commentary | • Memory / projection into the future / association / tangent |
| • Internal physical reaction, without commentary | • Self-reflection, or narrative reflection, on psychology or emotion |
| • Reportage or sensory input with commentary and/or interpretation | • Subconscious |

And pitfalls - [Interior\(ity\) Design Fails - by Rebecca Makkai - SubMakk](#)

- Empty head characters
- Not enough interiority during crucial scenes
- Too much interiority during moments when nothing much is happening
- Relying on heart and breathing instead of proper interiority

- Tagging thought and filter words

MOTIFS

[How to Use Motifs in Your Story | NY Book Editors](#)

[Motifs in Writing: Definition, Examples, Usage](#)

Now you do it:

- Decide on Your Theme
- Create Your Motif
- Repeat It, But Not Too Much
- Remember to Be Consistent

BUILDING TENSION

[Tension In Writing: How To Grip Your Readers – Jericho Writers](#)

[Writing Nail-Biters: How to Write Suspense in Horror](#)

[Amp up the Scare Factor: How to Create and Build Tension in Horror Stories - Uncharted](#)

[Creating Tension in Scenes: the Horror Music of Fiction](#)

- Zooming In
- Pay attention to the setting and imagery
- Set a Ticking Clock
- Change your Writing Cadence
- Limit point of view and withhold info
- Take advantage of dramatic irony
- Build in escalating steps
- Think of it like a puzzle... sort of
- Clearly establish the stakes
- Use foreshadowing
- Leave things to the imagination
- Don't break your own build-up

OTHER QUESTIONS

Queer Subtext

- [The Real Horror At The Heart Of "Haunting Of Hill House" Isn't What The Netflix Show Thinks It Is](#)
- [The Yassification of Shirley Jackson: A Queer Reading of The Haunting of Hill House – OutWrite](#)

Resource that delves into parallels between the story and Midsummer Night's Dream

- [Shades of Shakespeare in the Queering of Hill House](#)

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