

## Setting

### What do you learn about Martyn's life from Brooks use of settings?

From the start of the novel it is very clear that Martyn does not have a normal life. After the introduction, he describes his home. His father, <sup>William</sup> Billy Pig, presides in it, making Martyn clear and tidy up after him. Pig by name, pig by nature: his father's slovenliness is extreme, and he offloads his responsibilities onto Martyn. Although no words are spoken, his father stands 'leaning in the doorway, smoking a cigarette, watching me through bloodshot eyes'. This shows that his father dominates him, and abuses his role. The setting, which depicts neglect, is a metaphor for state of their lives together. It is symbolic of his neglect of Martyn too.

William uses the house as his drinking <sup>zone</sup> one, and has no interest in leading a normal or decent life, 'he was a drunk with child benefit'. Other <sup>rooms</sup> area in the house are equally as bad: the attic is a storage area for empties, but his fear of losing Martyn and the income that he brings, forces him to try and conceal his habits from Auntie Jean, 'Up and down the ladder, arms full of clinking bottles,' swearing all the time. Auntie Jean attempts to get <sup>William</sup> Billy to rally, and clean once in a while, but both Martyn and William see this as invasive, <sup>She</sup> She criticises, but does not help, 'swishing around the house running her fingers through the dust' .....Brook's description points to the whole house being badly cared for and neglected. It creates a sympathetic background for Martyn's life.

In the first chapter 'Wednesday', it is clear that Martyn does not live in an affluent area, and the description of the people in town reveals that Martyn feels distrustful of others, everything seems 'token', and insincere, 'I watched the skinny Santa for a while.....thirty seconds and a lucky bag per kid'. Even the Christmas decorations in the centre seem shoddy and poor, with the choice of adjectives, 'plywood sleigh' and 'plastic holly'.

When shopping for a Christmas gift for Alex, he can only afford to go to 'The Bargain Bin, which he describes as 'a cheap shop which sells all kinds of rubbishy stuff'. He details the stock in a list, beginning with 'cups, towels, bean bags', and ending with 'weedy footballs and plastic machine guns', all things which are clearly poor value for money, substandard goods. This clearly indicates that he is poor: he sees none of the child benefit money, and receives no pocket money. Dad is busy drinking it all away. He later adds that he hated it when his father did give him any, 'He'd only ask me for it back the next day'. His unhappiness in his life shows in his reaction to others. The noise distracts him, and he sees parents treating their children unkindly 'whacking them on the arm'. This brings his own abuse to mind and he has to leave. He uses extreme verbs to describe the atmosphere. 'boiling. Paralysing. A great swirling mess of sound'.

The neglect of the whole area surrounds him. On the way home, he sadly mentions 'the depressingly familiar' interior of the bus shelter, and Brooks includes the visual representation of the graffiti, which does not make sense.: 'Duffy is nob'. The home area where Martyn lives has a negative impact upon him, it is clearly a miserable place to live. He describes the alleyway as he returns home, alone, in the rain with the Christmas shopping. It is a mess of 'dog turds and squashed cans'. The street itself is



miserable, in the chapter 'Saturday', Brooks uses colour to describe it in short, lifeless sentences, 'Grey, brown. Brown, grey. Black. Dead green'. The council puts no effort into maintaining it, and there is a lack of civic pride: people do not bother to paint their houses, or repair anything. The word 'dead' in the description depicts a strand of society that has given up trying. It is a street where the mindless, like Slobman, live, and where dealers, like Don, sell drugs. Martyn strives to get away from this. His daydreams include Alex, and he imagines the life they could lead, with her strolling on the beach in a bikini, and how they could be private detectives, in America. Martyn uses his imagination to escape the horrible existence he has, and even experiments with ideas and experiences, such as his experiments with the colours in his eyes, on 'Sunday. Whilst he is thinking out how to outwit Dean, he presses his eyes hard. It hurts, but it is worth the 'dazzling checkerboards of dayglo red and electric blue' The strange patterns and colours make a sympathetic background for the brilliance of his ideas, and colour represents a thinking mind, compared to the drab world of all the people who have given up thinking, or caring.

Brooks uses settings to reflect personality too. Dad's bedroom is like him, disgusting 'smelly, dirty...chilling and macabre' are the adjectives used, along with all the details of food remnants, and the sleazy way that William used his room. By contrast, Martyn's room is described in the next paragraph, in the chapter 'Friday', as 'clean and white, and odourless', Martyn uses a simile. 'like a palace' to point out the difference between them. This order and hygiene reflects Martyn's need to have a clear space in which to think. Clutter upsets him. The way he organises the house is a sympathetic background for his ordered thinking and 'tidy' mind. He describes his room as bare and empty. But that is how he wants it. 'functional': it is clearly a place to think and problem solve. It also represents a change in the power struggle. Once dad's body is removed from the house Martyn is in charge, free just to make and eat the food he wants at breakfast. He no longer struggles to survive, and says it is 'clean, and a pleasure to keep clean'.

The quarry is a significant setting which brings about the change Martyn needs. There is an intense paragraph of description, using adjectival phrases to create atmosphere, 'great mounds of dead earth, hacked-out trenches.....crumbling cliffs'. It is in this dramatic landscape, which resembles a war zone that Martyn takes action to dispose of his father's body. With black humour, Martyn appreciates what they must look like in the simile. 'Like something out of an old horror film'. But it is with satisfaction, and a sense of pride in himself that he realises he is 'actually doing something'. It feels like standing up for himself, as he tips the body amongst the rubbish. Again, Brooks shows the value Martyn places upon William Pig, as, most fittingly, Martyn visualises Billy 'in slow motion.....sinking down.....finally coming to rest among the rocks and silt and supermarket trolleys and rusted bike frames at the bottom of the pit'. He reverses the phrase 'Not dead just sleeping', for it to read, more happily for Martyn, 'Not sleeping, just dead'. The relief he feels at the relief from the influence of his father has led him, right from the moment of not phoning for help, to this, the disposal of the body. He feels justified in putting dad's body where it belongs- amongst the rubbish. It seems like poetic justice.

Final settings include the police station, where Martyn notices every detail. Unlike the stress that most people feel in this environment, Brooks shows how Martyn enjoys the environment. Having watched and dreamed of detective stories for so long, to him, it

is like being in one himself. He enjoyed being driven in the large police car, describing it as 'a nice one', and also details 'a proper bed, a carpet.....very nice'. He thinks it is like a cheap hotel, and imagines what it would have been like to be behind bars ..... 'interesting'. He enjoys the whole scene, and acts his part with great confidence during interview.

Ironically, Martyn ends up at Auntie Jean's 'semi-detached' house, which he admits is 'quite nice'. It is here that both he and Breece realise how close they both came, but Martyn is free. This is ironic. He thought he would have been a prisoner at his aunt's but it is here that he receives a letter from Alex, and his possible future opens up.

Brooks uses a varied and unusual range of settings to bring this work to life. They fit with the theme of detective stories, which this becomes, in a way. The strongest use of settings is to depict mood, and characters lives, as the details reveal how, and who they live with, as well as their hopes, fears and aspirations. As Martyn puts it in 'Monday', 'Anywhere would do. Anywhere but here.'