

Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

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Gothic Promises in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

- ⇒ By 1848 there was a nearly century-old tradition of Gothic fiction, often more violent in nature, language, and sentiment than anything in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Yet, when Anne Brontë used the conventions of the gothic as a structure for Helen's story...
- ⇒ Most Periodical Reviews criticized *Tenant* for including scenes "of the most disgusting and revolting species." [literary grotesque]
- ⇒ Sharp's London Magazine, 1848: women readers should not read the novel, because "so revolting are many of the scenes, so coarse and disgusting the language put into the mouths of some of the characters, that the reviewer to whom we entrusted it returned it to us, saying it was unfit to be noticed. . . ."
- ⇒ Why do gothic elements in *Tenant* offend rather than titillate?

Ethics: Agents, Acts, Consequences

- ⇒ Offers "a full and faithful account" (10, 128-129)
- ⇒ Moral Disease (25, 132-133)
 - (In)temperance (32-33, 42, 176)
 - Appearance v. reality (47, 131, 136, 148-150, 178)
- ⇒ Education (52, 69)
 - Male v. female (30-1, 56-57)
 - Nurture v. nature debates (42-3)
- ⇒ Inheritance (11, 49)
- ⇒ Speech and actions
 - Gossip (78, 79, 80-81, 84, 85)
 - Misreadings (87, 98, 104, 106-107, 126, 160, 174)
 - Attack on Lawrence (116-117, 118-119)
- ⇒ Rules for Love & Marriage (56, 95-96, 132-133, 138, 168)
 - Moral propriety (74-75, 131)

A Few Gothic Conventions

- ⊖ Ancient spaces and places: castles, etc. ["old world story" (10), Wild Fell Hall is "in ruins"]
- ⊖ Mystery and suspense. (frame letter to Halford, Mrs. Graham's history)
- ⊖ The vocabulary of the gothic (use of words indicating fear, mystery, etc.: apparition, devil, ghost, haunted, terror, fright)
 - ⊖ "ruins," "witch" (14)
- ⊖ Sex and Death: les femmes fatale / les hommes fatale
 - ⊖ Mrs. Graham (17)
 - ⊖ Arthur Huntingdon (130)
- ⊖ High emotion, sentimentalism, but also pronounced anger, surprise, and especially terror. [These build throughout the diary sections]
- ⊖ The metonymy (part for the whole) of gloom and horror.
 - ⊖ Wildfell Hall (22-23)

Oates: "Reflections on the Grotesque" (1994)

- ⊖ "...the grotesque always possesses a blunt physicality..."
 - ⊖ The Grotesque Body, according to Bakhtin, unashamedly "fecundates and is fecundated, ... gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying."
- ⊖ "This predilection for art that promises we will be frightened by it, shaken by it, at times repulsed by it seems to be ... deeply imprinted in the human psyche..."
- ⊖ "... it is both 'real' and 'unreal' simultaneously, as states of mind are real enough... though immeasurable."

Normative Ethics

- ⊖ For any act, there are three things that might be thought to be morally interesting:
 - ⊖ Virtue theory focuses on the agent, the person performing the act. We ought to possess certain character traits & these ought to be manifest in our actions.
 - ⊖ Deontological theory concentrates on the act itself. Certain types of acts are intrinsically good or bad.
 - ⊖ Consequentialism focuses on the consequences of the act. We ought to act in the way that brings about best consequences.
