

Wuthering Heights

Emily Brontë

FICTION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Professor John Mullan



GRESHAM
COLLEGE

The doors are opened into the lower room. It is a stony, vaulted and spacious chamber. The fireplace is empty and swept clean. The walls here are twelve feet thick, and light falls from windows set high above the head. There is a figure sitting at the table. Silently he asks, ‘Is it you?’ Thomas More rises from his place, crosses the room and melts into the wall.

Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror and the Light* (2020), Part Six, I ‘Mirror’

About eleven o'clock, I see a flickering on the staircase. The air is still; then it moves. I raise my head. The air is still again. I know it is my stepfather's ghost coming down. Or, to put it in a way acceptable to most people, I 'know' it is my stepfather's ghost.

I am not perturbed. I am used to 'seeing' things that aren't there. Or - to put it in a way more acceptable to me - I am used to seeing things that 'aren't there'. It was in this house that I last saw my stepfather, Jack, in the early months of 1995: alive, in his garments of human flesh. Many times since then I have acknowledged him on the stairs.

Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost. A Memoir* (2003), Part One

The wavering great letters were familiar by now, fly-track thin: GO NOT TO THE KITCHIN TODAY.

Evelyn's heart sank. Like this, they prolonged her existence. They could take her at any time, kill her (broken neck at the foot of the stairs), or leave her a shell without faculties. But they preferred to watch her fear, her pathetic ruses, her flickering hopes which they would dash within the hour; that was the only explanation. Disconsolate, she entered the front parlour. There, placed precisely in the centre of the circular table, lay a tin-opener.

Hilary Mantel, *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (1985), Chapter 1

Wm Cole 1765.

THE
CASTLE of OTRANTO,
A
S T O R Y.

Translated by

WILLIAM MARSHAL, Gent.

From the Original ITALIAN of

ONUPHRIO MURALTO,

CANON of the Church of St. NICHOLAS
at OTRANTO.

wrote by the hon^{ble} Horace Walpole Esq.

L O N D O N :

Printed for THO. LOWNDS in Fleet-Street.
MDCCLXV.

“Blessed Mary!” said Bianca, starting, “there it is again! Dear Madam, do you hear nothing? this castle is certainly haunted!”

“Peace!” said Matilda, “and listen! I did think I heard a voice—but it must be fancy: your terrors, I suppose, have infected me.”

“Indeed! indeed! Madam,” said Bianca, half-weeping with agony, “I am sure I heard a voice.”

“Does anybody lie in the chamber beneath?” said the Princess.

“Nobody has dared to lie there,” answered Bianca, “since the great astrologer, that was your brother’s tutor, drowned himself.

Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ch. II





They were engaged in interesting discourse, when madame, who was then speaking, was interrupted by a low hollow sound, which arose from beneath the apartment, and seemed like the closing of a door. Chilled into a silence, they listened and distinctly heard it repeated. Deadly ideas crowded upon their imaginations, and inspired a terror which scarcely allowed them to breathe. The noise lasted only for a moment, and a profound silence soon ensued.

Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), Ch. IV

... she almost fancied she saw shapes flit past her curtains and glide into the remote obscurity of her chamber.—The castle clock struck one before she closed her eyes to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

I think it is the weakness of mine eyes,
That shapes this monstrous apparition.
It comes upon me!

JULIUS CAESAR

Daylight dispelled from Emily's mind the glooms of superstition, but not those of apprehension ...

Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), II vi



IV

It was not that I didn't wait, on this occasion, for more, for I was rooted as deeply as I was shaken. Was there a "secret" at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement? I can't say how long I turned it over, or how long, in a confusion of curiosity and dread, I remained where I had had my collision; I only recall that when I re-entered the house darkness had quite closed in.

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

The legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, imprisoning deep beneath that ground, on whose surface grass grew and flowers bloomed, the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive for some sin against her vow. Her shadow it was that tremblers had feared, through long generations after her poor frame was dust; her black robe and white veil that, for timid eyes, moonlight and shade had mocked, as they fluctuated in the night-wind through the garden-thicket.

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (1853), Ch. XII, 'The Casket'

Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long—but as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black and white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.

Say what you will, reader—tell me I was nervous or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed; this I vow—I saw there—in that room—on that night—an image like—a NUN.

I cried out; I sickened.

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Ch. XXII, ‘The Letter’

“Do you begin to comprehend by this time that M. le Comte de Hamal was the nun of the attic, and that he came to see your humble servant? I will tell you how he managed it. ... Nearly a year ago I chanced to tell him our legend of the nun; that suggested his romantic idea of the spectral disguise, which I think you must allow he has very cleverly carried out.

But for the nun’s black gown and white veil, he would have been caught again and again both by you and that tiger-Jesuit, M. Paul. He thinks you both capital ghost-seers, and very brave.”

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Ch. XL, ‘The Happy Pair’

... my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, ‘Let me in—let me in!’ ‘Who are you?’ I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. ‘Catherine Linton,’ it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of Linton? I had read Earnshaw twenty times for Linton)—‘I’m come home: I’d lost my way on the moor!’ As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, ‘Let me in!’ and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear.

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), I iii

‘I have a strong faith in ghosts; I have a conviction that they can, and do, exist among us!’

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. II, Ch. XV

‘What is the matter, my little man?’ I asked.

‘There’s Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t’ nab,’ he blubbered, ‘un’ I darnut pass ’em.’

I saw nothing; but neither the sheep nor he would go on so I bid him take the road lower down. He probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat. Yet, still, I don’t like being out in the dark now; and I don’t like being left by myself in this grim house: I cannot help it; I shall be glad when they leave it, and shift to the Grange.

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. II, Ch. XX

What he liked to talk about was the latest new piece at the theatres, the latest exciting trial or police case, the latest social craze or social swindle, and especially the latest murder and the newest thing in ghosts.

George Augustus Sala, *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* (1894)

I was passing quickly on, and in a few moments should have passed the lighted window, when my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk, that it was I who was to bring calamity upon the stately house and that my warning feet were haunting it even then. Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself and everything, retraced the way by which I had come, and never paused until I had gained the lodge-gate, and the park lay sullen and black behind me.

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852-3), Ch. XXXVI, 'Chesney Wold'



‘My Lady, I came away last night from Chesney Wold to find my son in my old age, and the step upon the Ghost’s Walk was so constant and so solemn that I never heard the like in all these years. Night after night, as it has fallen dark, the sound has echoed through your rooms, but last night it was awfulest. And as it fell dark last night, my Lady, I got this letter.’

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Ch. LV, ‘Flight’



FRONTISPICE.

BLEAK HOUSE

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.



LONDON:

BRADBURY & EVANS, BOUVERIE STREET

1853

If Morris were earthside, she had once said to Al, and you and he were married, you could get rid of him easily enough; you could divorce him. Then if he bothered you, you could see a solicitor, take out an injunction. You could stipulate that he doesn't come within a five-mile radius, for example. Al sighed and said, in Spirit World it's not that simple. You can't just kick out your guide. You can try and persuade him to move on. You can hope he gets called away, or that he forgets to come home. But you can't leave him; he has to leave you. You can try and kick him out. You might succeed, for a while. But he gets back at you. Years may go by. He gets back at you when you're least expecting it.

So, Colette had said, you're worse off than if you were married.

Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (2005), Ch. Two

I've never attempted to remind Seeley of his other, odder theory: that Hundreds was consumed by some dark germ, some ravenous shadow-creature, some 'little stranger' spawned from the troubled unconscious of someone connected with the house itself. But on my solitary visits, I find myself growing watchful. Every so often I will sense a presence, or catch a movement at the corner of my eye, and my heart will give a jolt of fear and expectation: I'll imagine that the secret is about to be revealed to me at last; that I will see what Caroline saw, and recognize it, as she did.

If Hundred Hall is haunted, however, its ghost doesn't show itself to me.

Sarah Waters, *The Little Stranger* (2009), Ch. 15