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ENGL 580: Haunted Spaces

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ENGL 580 Final Project; *Haunting With The Brontës*: Lesson Plan, Rationale and Syllabus

Course Description: The Brontë sisters left an undeniable mark on English literature that continues to live on in our modern culture with countless adaptations of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. What about their younger sister, Anne, who was also a novelist and a poet? This class explores the works of the three sisters with the common theme of haunting in mind. We will look at *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and a selection of poems by Emily Brontë. This class will also look at these texts through the application of spatial, psychological, and feminist theories as well as examine multiple biographies to explore the lives of one of Victorian England's most prolific families.

Theoretical Applications Rationale:

In presenting this 300 level coursework to junior and senior undergraduate English majors at a state university, I want to give them an introduction into the lives and works of the Brontë sisters. I will achieve this by using the author's own works and various literary theories to allow my students to get a deeper meaning from these sister's novels and a selection of Emily Brontë's poems. There is so much thematically that can be done with the novels *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. I want my students to explore these sister's works using not only the lenses of biography, but a few other literary theories to help them start feeling comfortable using literary theory when discussing literature. If they are juniors, this might be one of the first times they seriously tackle literary theory in an academic setting. The undergraduate students need some experience with a variety of literary theories before they graduate. Many of them may be considering coming back to graduate school and knowing how to use literary theory is a skill that would help them in more advanced English studies.

Chronologically, the Brontë sisters published their poetry collection in 1846, before any of their novels; which I'm planning on teaching in the order they were published; *Jane Eyre* (October 1847), *Wuthering Heights* (December 1847), and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (June 1848). In most undergraduate classes I attended, the professors tended to only have time to review their syllabus and have a class introduction during their first class. Because of this, for the second class, I knew that I wanted to find an article on how to read poetry to help some of my students who might feel that poetry is difficult for them. I will this reading pair with the first selection of Emily's poems in the beginning of the semester. I'm deciding to assign an excerpt from Michael Hurely's *Poetic Form: An Introduction* to help the students learn about how to read poetry. I wanted to give the students some time in class to break down some of Emily's poems using some of Hurely's methods. This would be done over the first two classes following the course introduction. I want to work with most of the poems assigned for reading so they can get a lot of practice with reading and drawing more meaning from poems. Some days on the syllabus, I assign both a reading from one of the Brontë's works and a supplementary source. For this reason, many of the articles and biography chapters I chose are mainly quick reads since I don't want to overwhelm the students.

For accessibility purposes, the first theory I was going to introduce was reading biography in the fiction works of the Brontë's. I was going to use Donald M. Murray's article "All Writing is Autobiography" about how all fiction writing is a form of autobiography for the author. Even though Murray primarily uses examples from poetry, this can obviously apply to other works of fiction as well. It might prove a solid way of helping undergraduate students see new ways of looking at complex texts like the Brontë sister's novels. Because of Murray's use of poetry in examples, this article would probably pair well with the poems. I put this reading on the first class so that we can begin to discuss it if there's time after the introduction. It's a pretty brief piece which will connect to the first theme of an

author's writing reflecting their biographies. This is a trend in the Brontë sister's writing which has been noted by several biographers.

For biographical material, I'm using a shortened version of Elizabeth Gaskell's *A Life of Charlotte Brontë* because she was a contemporary of Charlotte's and it's available readily in the public domain, making it easier for my students to access. I'm also using three chapters from Samantha Ellis' *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life* to illustrate pieces from the lesser known Brontë sister's life. Ellis speaks in detail about how pieces of the Brontë's lives, not just Anne's, made their way into the novels of these prolific sisters. Her writing style would be rather accessible for the students. I also included Morse's short article "Those Wild Yorkshire Girls" on the three Brontë sisters being influenced by their surroundings, growing up in the Yorkshire moors. It would be good to balance a much older source with a more recently published biographies. From reading the biographies, I want my students to understand how the lives of The Brontës helped shape their writing. Studying the biography of the writer helps unveil some context that might be hidden otherwise, since every author cannot help but affect their work with their own personal touches. Murray mentions this in his short article, and I agree with him that this is an unavoidable part of writing though it would be a mistake to think that fiction works simply mirror their author's lives.

With this class, I don't want to simply use biography to examine the Brontë's writing. I also want to use some of the haunting theories that we used in ENGL 580. The two I'd like to use in this undergraduate class would be Foucault's spatial theory on heterotopias and Freud's psychological theory on the uncanny. All three of the novels of the Brontë sisters and quite a bit of Emily's poetry is concerned with varying types of haunting; ghosts, death, longing, regret, fear, revenge.

Foucault's theory of heterotopia can be applied to *Jane Eyre* using Thornfield Hall itself as well as the Red Room at Mrs. Reed's house. *Jane Eyre* is littered with examples of heterotopias; Mr. Rochester's garden and the mirror in which Bertha appears later to terrorize Jane are two more

examples. Similarly, in *Wuthering Heights*, the window that Cathy's ghost appears at acts as a distorted mirror, which could be argued as another heterotopia. The moors in *Wuthering Heights* act undoubtedly as a heterotopia because Cathy's ghost haunts them and recalls Heathcliff to the time of his childhood, which is impossible for him to return to. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen's diary acts a heterotopia bringing Gilbert into the world that Helen was desperate to escape; Huntingdon, the abusive husband she fled but feels guilty for abandoning. Helen had kept everyone at a distance out of fear of having her identity discovered. She finally lets Gilbert close enough to her to read her diary so he knows her story. The half-destroyed ruin of Wildfell Hall acts as a heterotopia of crisis for Helen as well, for it provides her and her young son shelter while hiding away from Huntingdon.

The uncanny also appears in the sister's novels. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane faces several instances of uncanny doubling in her story. The uncanny coincidence of her dead uncle matching the dead uncle of St. John and his sisters is ignored at first, but then reveals the fact that they are related to Jane. The first family she lives with, her cousins, the Reeds are the evil version of the Rivers family, who also turn out to be her cousins. Prior to that, the uncanny appears when Bertha wears Jane's wedding veil the night before she is supposed to marry Rochester the first time (Charlotte Brontë, 306). Bertha's terrifying image in the heterotopia of Jane's mirror, is Charlotte Brontë purposely using the uncanny to scare not only Jane but her readers. Bertha is Jane's uncanny double, since they are both Rochester's wives, this scene makes this clear (Gilbert). There is also a heavy usage of the uncanny in *Wuthering Heights* where the first generation of characters is in some ways doubled in the second generation. Cathy's daughter is also named Cathy. Heathcliff's son is named Linton which is Isabella's family name. Hindley's son is named "Hareton", following in the naming pattern where the male characters living at Wuthering Heights have names that begin with H. Cathy is her mother's daughter and she shares her name so that she can tie up the messy story that her mother's generation left behind. Linton, the would be usurper,

dies and Cathy marries Hareton instead which restores order to Wuthering Heights since the two legitimate heirs now live at their family home again.

Feminism was a main context for my class as well. There is a wealth of feminist scholarship on the Brontë sisters which I think would be beneficial for my students to interact with. Because the Brontës wrote at a time still not entirely friendly to women writers, they are often claimed by feminists as early feminist writers. I plan on using three articles that seem to examine the Brontë's writing from different feminist perspectives; one focusing on each sister. I'm using the *Madwoman in the Attic* chapter on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Gilbert) and the articles "Is Emily Brontë a Woman? Femininity, Feminism, and the Paranoid Critical Subject" (Francis) and "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (Carnell). Writing from the point of a feminist theorist is beneficial for students to be able to read, understand, and then write themselves, since it is a popular set of theories to write from in current academia.

In her *Madwoman in The Attic* chapter, Gilbert reviews Jane's progress through Charlotte Brontë's novel as a pilgrimage to womanhood from girlhood, documenting the perils many Victorian girls in Jane's place would have faced simply because they were women. Gilbert uses Bessie's song to show how Jane grows up and escapes the predestined loneliness for a "poor orphan child" (342). Another main point of Gilbert's article was to show why many Victorian critics were offended by *Jane Eyre*; not because it was more openly sexual than previous books had been but because Jane dares to be angry at her mistreatment (338). Gilbert's article provides many insights into *Jane Eyre* which would be beneficial for students. It's also one of the easier to read articles that I found. I think comprehension and accessibility is important for undergraduate students, especially if they aren't terribly familiar with academic theoretical writings.

Emma Francis sparks a controversial question when she asks with her article "Is Emily Brontë a woman?" Similar to Berg's difficulty with labeling Clara Reeve as Female or Male Gothic, Francis finds it

difficult to lump Emily Brontë in with the other 19th century female poets. The themes of beauty that female 19th century poets stressed and were often confined to, especially if they wanted to make a living off their writing, were not present in Emily Brontë's poems which tend to lean towards the masculine use of the Sublime (31). Francis instead likens Brontë's work to being an 'heir of Byron' and the other male Romantic poets (31). Francis breaks down two of Emily Brontë's poems- "The Prisoner" and "The Philosopher" with close reading to examine the gendered language within. Emily Brontë's poetic voice, being difficult to place as a traditionally female one is a case for feminist theory, like Clara Reeve's placement in the Gothic cannon. They both deserve to be recognized within their own genres as female writers even if they do not conform to the typical mode of female writing for their eras.

Rachel Carnell's article on Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deals with how Helen is an "exemplary literary woman" in the fashion of the female authors of the eighteenth century (10). Helen's place as a female painter allows her to show she is educated and gives her the leverage to stand up for her beliefs in a lot of ways that all the other women in the novel do not (12). Carnell challenges this old image of the "exemplary literary woman" because it seems that only a privileged few women can actually be her (13). Anne Brontë clearly shows that once Helen marries Gilbert Markham, she disappears from the public sphere where she would debate education and morality, to use her humanizing morals to teach Gilbert and their children how to be better people. In doing this, Brontë does not challenge the idea as women being primarily mothers and wives, but champions it, by removing Helen from the focal point by the end of the novel.

The varying forms of Feminist theory are one of the more important themes I hope that the students learn from this class. Reading from a feminist perspective in any text is beneficial since it could help the students develop not only discussion topics in class but potential paper topics for this class and beyond. I put two papers on my syllabus since I've planned this to be more of a reading-heavy class. These papers will be connected to the literary theories and texts we discuss in class. Before the first

paper is due, around mid-terms, we will have one class in the library to help students practice some research skills and begin working on their papers. To practice their presentation skills, the students will also have an in-class presentation on their final paper topics to share with the class about their findings. I will also do short reading quizzes as part of the participation grade to encourage engagement with the texts, since I was aware that as an undergraduate, not every student always did the class readings as assigned.

Since *Haunting with the Brontës* is supposed to be a junior and senior level undergraduate class, I do want to challenge the students a little bit, to show them what some graduate work is like. I feel that the application of a small selection of literary theories to the Brontë texts would be good practice for the more demanding, deeper analysis that is required in graduate school reading and writing. I have heard professors and teachers of all grade levels complaining that their students aren't ready for the next level of work, having been so ill-prepared by their previous experiences. If I were a professor, I'd attempt to alleviate this issue by trying to pre-prepare my students for their potential next level, which for most senior-level undergraduates in an English program would potentially be their master's degree.

Lesson Plan for Presentation:

The lesson I'm going to present to our ENGL 580 class will be from the review day at the end of the semester where I want to work with the students in tying everything we learned together. This is so I can show the theories of heterotopias and the uncanny at work in all three of the Brontë sister's novels- *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. I wanted to do work with more than just *Jane Eyre* so there will short reviews on *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* for my ENGL 580 classmates since I don't know if they've read the books before or not. There will also be work with the biographies since that's one of the main lenses I'm using for this course and some of the feminist articles since that's my next most used theoretical lenses in this class following biography and the

theories of haunting (psychological and spatial). Basically, I want my presentation to be sampling of the best findings and ideas I had while researching for this lesson plan/rationale.

From this lesson, I would want my students to have a good idea what the theories of heterotopias and the uncanny are so they can use them in future literature classes. Similarly, after this class, I want them to be able to use the application of the author's biography when writing literary criticism and papers for their future academic careers. This also goes for the usage of feminist theory when reading literary texts. I want students to complete my class with a basic idea of what literary theory is, having worked with a few different theories during the semester while reading the excellent writing of the Brontë siblings.

Lesson plans, not previously presented to our ENGL 580 classes:

1. The second lesson I'd want to present for consideration would be one working with Emily Brontë's poetry. I have heard complaints from school teachers and professors alike that their students don't know how to read poetry. I wanted to work with some of Emily's poetry for that reason. I devoted the second and third class to working with a few of her poems.

For the first reading (class 2), I would pair a how to read poetry guide aimed at college students with four of Emily's poems. We would spend the class applying the terminology and breaking down the selected poems for meaning. Realistically, we might only get to two or three of the poems, but I want the students to have enough material to work with.

For the second reading (class 3), I paired Francis' article with Francis' article on the gendering of Emily Brontë's poetry will provide historical context for analyzing Emily's work and framing a type of argument in feminist theory. Emily Bronte's poetry has been contended as to where in the 19th century poetry cannon it belongs. She writes more like a male Romantic poet, having been influenced by Byron. There

has been some historic difficulty placing her in relation to her contemporaries. I want to start the literary impacts that Emily's poems had and how her work relates to her contemporaries. We will also further use the skills learned in class 2.

2. The day that I blocked off for in-library research is meant to help the undergraduates learn how to find good sources for their papers and give them some extra time to start research. I wanted to give them some in-class time to do this with the first paper. The first paper comes mid-way while reading *Wuthering Heights*. The class can choose to do topics on Emily's poetry or Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* using any of the theories of haunting, biography as writing, or feminism that we cover up to this point in the class. The second paper will allow any subject covered in class, as long as it is different from the first paper. I want the first paper to have guidance which can be applied to the later second paper.

Sample Syllabus:

ENGL 365- *Haunting with the Brontës: Victorian England's Literary Sisters Tackle Serious Ghosts*

Primary Materials:

- Emily Brontë's poems
- *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë)
- *Wuthering Heights* (Emily Brontë)
- *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Anne Brontë)

Secondary Materials:

- "All Writing is Autobiography" (Murray)
- "Is Emily Brontë a Woman? Femininity, Feminism, and the Paranoid Critical Subject" (Francis)
- *Poetic Form: an Introduction* (Hurley) excerpt
- *A Life of Charlotte Brontë* Abridged *Best of World Literature* edition (Gaskell)
- *Madwomen in The Attic* chapter 10 on Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (10)
- "The Uncanny" (Freud)
- "Heterotopias" (Foucault)
- *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and The Art of Life* chapters 4, 5 and 8 (Ellis)
- "Those Wild Yorkshire girls" (Morse)
- "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's the Tennant of Wildfell Hall" (Carnell)

Semester Homework outlines for a class that meets twice weekly either Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday at the same period.

Week 1

Class 1: Introduction, Syllabus Review, Murray "All Writing is Autobiography"

Class 2: Poems (3), *Poetic Form: an Introduction* (Hurley) Excerpt

Week 2

Class 3: Poems (3), "Is Emily Brontë a woman?" (Francis)

Class 4: First 10 chapters of *Jane Eyre*, short Gaskell Biography

Week 3

Class 5: *Jane Eyre* chapters 11-18

Class 6: *Jane Eyre* chapters 19-22, Freud's "Uncanny" excerpt

Week 4

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Class 7: *Jane Eyre* chapters 23-26, Foucault's "Heterotopias"

Class 8: *Jane Eyre* chapter 27-33

Week 5

Class 9: *Jane Eyre* 34-End, *Madwoman in the Attic* (Chapter 10)

Class 10: *Wuthering Heights*

Week 6

Class 11: *Wuthering Heights*, *Take Courage* Chapter 4 "Emily"

Class 12: *Wuthering Heights*, *Paper 1* topics due

Week 7

HAVE A FUN, SAFE SPRING BREAK!

Week 8

Class 13: In class research/paper prep

Class 14: *Wuthering Heights*

Week 9

Class 15: *Wuthering Heights*, "Those Wild Yorkshire Girls"

Class 16: *Wuthering Heights*, *Paper 1* due

Week 10

Class 17: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Take Courage* chapter 5 "Charlotte"

Class 18: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Week 11

Class 19: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Take Courage* chapter 8 "Branwell"

Class 20: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Week 12

Class 21: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Paper 2* Topics due

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Class 22: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, "Feminism and the Public Sphere"

Week 13

Class 23: Themes in review, relating all the texts together

Class 24: Final Project Presentations session 1

Week 14

Class 25: Final Project Presentations session 2

Class 26: No class but Paper 2 due by normal class time

Sources:

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Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Book. 1847. Bantam classics. 2003.

Brontë, Emily. *Collected Poems*. Book.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Book. 1847. Oxford World's Classics. 2009.

Carnell, Rachel K. "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 53, no. 1, Jun. 1998, pp. 1-24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2902968>

Ellis, Samantha. *Take Courage: Anne Brontë and the Art of Life*. Book, chapters 4, 5, 8. 2017.

Francis, Emma. "Is Emily Brontë a woman? Femininity, Feminism, and the Paranoid Critical Subject." *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day*, 1991, pp. 28-40.

Freud, Sigmund. David McClintock, translator. *The Uncanny*. Penguin Books. Book chapter. "The Uncanny". 1919; German, 2003; English, pp. 121-162.

Foucault, Michel. Miskowiec, Jay; translator. "Of other spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias". *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*. Journal. 1967; French, 1984; English, pp. 1-9.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. "A Life of Charlotte Brontë", abridged. *World's Greatest Books*. Volume 9: Lives and Letters. Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. March 2006. Pp. 130-137.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "A dialogue of self and soul: *Jane Eyre*" *The Madwoman in The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Chapter 10, Pp.336-371.

Hurley, Michael. *Poetic Form: An Introduction*. Cambridge Introductions to Literature, Book, 2012.

Morse, Deborah Denenholz. "Those Wild Yorkshire girls: Body, Place, and History in the Brontë's Lives and Art." *Victorian Review*, volume 42, number 2, Fall 2016, pp. 243-250.

Murray, Donald M. "All Writing is Autobiography". *College of Composition and Communication*, Vol. 42, No 1. Feb. 1991, pp. 66-74.