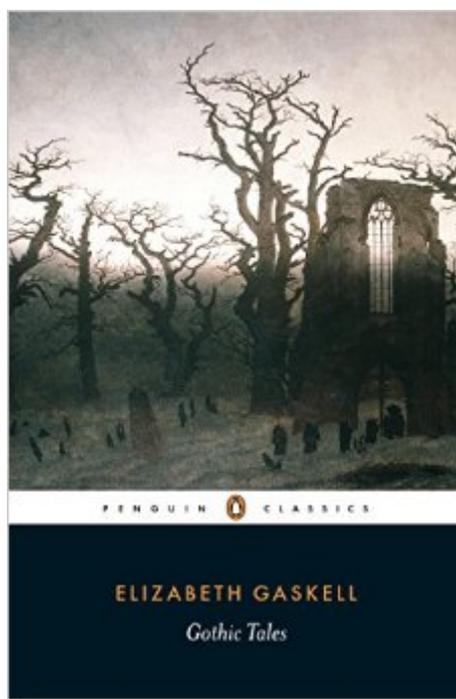


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Gothic Tales (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Elizabeth Gaskell's chilling Gothic tales blend the real and the supernatural to eerie, compelling effect. 'Disappearances', inspired by local legends of mysterious vanishings, mixes gossip and fact; 'Lois the Witch', a novella based on an account of the Salem witch hunts, shows how sexual desire and jealousy lead to hysteria; while in 'The Old Nurse's Story' a mysterious child roams the freezing Northumberland moors. Whether darkly surreal, such as 'The Poor Clare', where an evil doppelgänger is formed by a woman's bitter curse, or mischievous like 'Curious, if True', a playful reworking of fairy tales, all the stories in this volume form a stark contrast to the social realism of Gaskell's novels, revealing a darker and more unsettling style of writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

North and South is one of my favorite classics. The dark, tragic and romantic tale of a young clergyman's daughter's sudden move to the industrial parts of Northern England captivated me from beginning to end, especially after watching BBC's 2004 four-part series adaptation. Wives and Daughters is another favorite. It is lighter than North and South, yet it is nevertheless heartbreaking and tragic in certain areas, a cannot-put-down dramedy that contains various storylines and social topics. Imagine my surprise and delight to discover that Elizabeth Gaskell had written a collection of gothic short stories. I've become an avid reader of the genre, and it can always be appreciated when you get to read one from a classic author. "Disappearances" sets the perfect tone. Gothic is all over the rather morbid storyline. "Curious, If True" is also a perfect gothic, especially because it

deals with characters from fairy tales. "The Old Nurse's Story" is the proverbial ghost story, as is "The Poor Clare." "The Doom of the Griffiths" centers on an ancient family curse that now haunts the new generation. But my two favorite stories are "Lois the Witch" and "The Grey Woman." "Lois the Witch" takes place in Salem. Lois Barclay travels from England after she loses her parents. She wants to find her New England relatives, the Hicksons, a Puritanical family, with tragic results. It takes place during the Salem Witch Trials, so you can imagine the rest. "The Grey Woman" takes place in eighteenth century Germany. A young miller's daughter marries an aristocratic man. She thinks she has made a perfect match, but little does she know that her husband is not what he seems. These two are rather unique gothic stories.

Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-65) was a great novelist. She wrote among other classic novels: "North and South"; "Wives and Daughters"; "Cranford" (recently serialized on Masterpiece Theatre); "Mary Barton" and "Sylvia's Lover." Less known is her work in the short story genre. She wrote many pieces for the periodical Household Words edited by Charles Dickens, the Cornhill magazine and other Victorian periodicals. She was also the wife of the Rev. William Gaskell a Unitarian clergyman in Manchester; a mother; traveler and one of the earliest and best biographers of Charlotte Bronte who was her dear friend. Gothic Tales is a collection of eerie tales compiled in a new Penguin Revised edition. Nine stories are included in the collection which are: Disappearances—a short article on unusual disappearances no one has been able to explain. The Old Nurse's Story—The tale of a young girl who is pursued by a ghost who looks like her. The Squire's Story—The story of Mr Hearn a highwayman. The Poor Clare—The tale of Bridget and her daughter Mary. Mary disappears and Bridget seeks to find her but not before putting a curse on Mr Gisbourne who had shot her dog. Bridget's curse results in her grandchild Lucy's shadowing by a fearsome "Other." In her later years Bridget becomes a religious nun in the Clare order. Lois the Witch is the longest and best of the stories in the collection. It recounts the tale of an English girl who is hanged as a witch during the Salem Witch Trials. This nearly 100 page novella reminds us of the same type of tale spun by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is the only piece in the collection which is set in America. The Crooked Branch is the story of a quaint old couple who have a son who becomes a criminal.

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