

## The Grey Woman (1861)

The Grey woman begins in the vein of a travel journey in Heidelberg which Gaskell visited in 1841, 1858 and 1860.

Maureen Reddy states: "The Grey Woman" is far more innovative and complex than a conventional reading of it would suggest, and its method of narration and its structure are not only artistically sound, but actually sophisticated, choices, given Gaskell's intentions...Read from a feminist point of view, this story is a terrifying fable about female sexuality, marriage, and society. The submerged meanings in "The Grey Woman" are all connected to central female experiences, and may only be apprehended by readers consciously approaching the story from a female perspective, the one from which it certainly was written. The structure of this story and Gaskell's method of narration are integral parts of the meaning of "The Grey Woman."

1 What are your views?

2 Unlike 'The Old Nurse's Story' Gaskell is specific about dates here (184- and 1778), thus we must think carefully about their significance. What is their significance?

3 What is the significance of the title 'The Grey Woman'? How does it alert us to the underlying meanings in this story?

4 In *The Contested Castle* Kate Fergusson Ellis states that Gothic writing 'speak[s] of what in the polite world of middle-class culture cannot be spoken' (p. 7). In how does Gaskell's story fulfil this function?

5 Consider the passage where Anna is trapped with a corpse. How is this gothic and how does Gaskell heighten the sensation of fear/terror in this passage?

6 Before the end of Part 1 in 'The Grey Woman' Anna explains 'I was only now waking up to a full sense of what marriage was'. What is Gaskell saying about marriage and the female position in this story? How does Gaskell bring out her feelings on marriage?

7 In what way might 'The Grey Woman' be read as a fairy tale or as the re-writing of a fairy tale- Bluebeard for instance?

8 What about the castle itself? What might Gaskell be trying to achieve through her positioning and description of the castle?

9 How does Gaskell treat the concept of home and family in this story?

10 If this can be read as a Gothic tale of entrapment, who is trapped and how are they trapped?

11 Gaskell often revisits ideas in her writings. What themes can you pick out in this story that can also be found in other works by Gaskell? How does she deal with these themes?

12 In what ways do Gaskell's descriptions of M. de la Tourelle and Amante challenge reader's perceptions of gender? How might we, as modern readers, see this portrayal of gender and gender

13 How successful is the ending?