

Place and setting in the Gothic  
and in *Wuthering Heights*

# A brief starter activity:

Consider these settings. Which seem to you to have gothic potential, and for what reasons?

- An abbey
- A ruined castle
- A railway station
- A crypt
- A forest
- A country house
- A graveyard
- A spaceship
- An office block
- A theatre
- A factory
- A dungeon
- An island
- A school or college

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# Gothic place and setting

- Your previous studies will have taught you the significance of place within narrative. Gothic fiction has a characteristic topography, and place and setting operate within the gothic narrative in particular ways.
- Gothic architecture, such as cathedrals and abbeys, was characterised by pointed arches and flying buttresses, stained-glass windows, and rib vaults. The effect on the spectator was often frightening and vertiginous. Also associated with gothic architecture were gargoyles, which are grotesque carvings of men and animals protruding from roofs and walls

- Gothic literary landscapes are equally wild and exotic, a wilderness in which extreme actions and passions seem oddly appropriate to the setting. From the perspective of 18<sup>th</sup>-century neo-classicism, Gothic was synonymous with what was crude and barbaric.
- The settings often play a significant part in the unfolding of the narrative: their features may directly influence the action; they may also symbolise some aspects of the personalities of the protagonists.

# Place and setting in *Wuthering Heights*



- What different settings are there in Wuthering Heights that might be considered to be Gothic?



# The Moors

- The constant emphasis on landscape within the text of *Wuthering Heights* endows the setting with symbolic importance. This landscape is comprised primarily of moors: wide, wild expanses, high but somewhat soggy, and thus infertile. Moorland cannot be cultivated, and its uniformity makes navigation difficult. It features particularly waterlogged patches in which people could potentially drown. (This possibility is mentioned several times in *Wuthering Heights*.)
- Thus, the moors serve very well as symbols of the wild threat posed by nature. As the setting for the beginnings of Catherine and Heathcliff's bond (the two play on the moors during childhood), the moorland transfers its symbolic associations onto the love affair.



## **Spring on the Moors, Chapter 13- the first Catherine longs to return to the moors as she lies dying**

The first time she left her chamber was at the commencement of the following March. Mr. Linton had put on her pillow, in the morning, a handful of golden crocuses; her eye, long stranger to any gleam of pleasure, caught them in waking, and shone delighted as she gathered them eagerly together.

‘These are the earliest flowers at the Heights,’ she exclaimed. ‘They remind me of soft thaw winds, and warm sunshine, and nearly melted snow. Edgar, is there not a south wind, and is not the snow almost gone?’

‘The snow is quite gone down here, darling,’ replied her husband; ‘and I only see two white spots on the whole range of moors: the sky is blue, and the larks are singing, and the becks and brooks are all brim full. Catherine, last spring at this time, I was longing to have you under this roof; now, I wish you were a mile or two up those hills: the air blows so sweetly, I feel that it would cure you.’

‘I shall never be there but once more when I die,’ said the invalid; ‘and I shall remain there for ever.’

## Chapter 22- Young Catherine- remembers happy childhoods swinging in her favourite tree

On an afternoon in October, or the beginning of November—a fresh watery afternoon, when the turf and paths were rustling with moist, withered leaves, and the cold blue sky was half hidden by clouds—dark grey streamers, rapidly mounting from the west, and boding abundant rain—I requested my young lady to forego her ramble, because I was certain of showers. She refused; and I unwillingly donned a cloak, and took my umbrella to accompany her on a stroll to the bottom of the park.

On one side of the road rose a high, rough bank, where hazels and stunted oaks, with their roots half exposed, held uncertain tenure: the soil was too loose for the latter; and strong winds had blown some nearly horizontal. In summer Miss Catherine delighted to climb along these trunks, and sit in the branches, swinging twenty feet above the ground; and I, pleased with her agility and her light, childish heart, still considered it proper to scold every time I caught her at such an elevation, but so that she knew there was no necessity for descending. From dinner to tea she would lie in her breeze-rocked cradle, doing nothing except singing old songs—my nursery lore—to herself, or watching the birds, joint tenants, feed and entice their young ones to fly: or nestling with closed lids, half thinking, half dreaming, happier than words can express.

## **Chapter 24- Catherine and young Linton Heathcliff quarrel about their favourite ways of spending an afternoon on the moors**

‘One time, however, we were near quarrelling. He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up overhead, and the blue sky and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly. That was his most perfect idea of heaven’s happiness: mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk: I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine, and began to grow very snappish. At last, we agreed to try both, as soon as the right weather came; and then we kissed each other and were friends.

# Penistone Crag

- The one place where characters are free to be themselves is out on the moors- Penistone Crag. This location is predominantly associated with Catherine and Heathcliff; young Cathy also shows her affinity with her mother through her yearning to escape the confinement of the Grange and run free on the moors. The imagery of these wild, rolling moors runs throughout the novel, finding perhaps its most famous expression in Catherine's metaphorical description of her love:

*My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff.*

- Penistone Crag is a desolate landscape of rocks. In the spring flowers bloom among the rocks and beauty appears. It is the place that Cathy and Heathcliff go to escape Hindley. They are both free spirited as children. The place signifies their innocence and raw needs. It also represents the beautiful side of their love.













## A delirious Cathy talks about Penistone Crag where she and Heathcliff played as children Chapter 12-

‘And here is a moor-cock’s; and this—I should know it among a thousand—it’s a lapwing’s. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot: we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dared not come. I made him promise he’d never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn’t. Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly?’

‘Give over with that baby-work!’ I interrupted, dragging the pillow away.

‘I see in you, Nelly,’ she continued dreamily, ‘an aged woman: you have grey hair and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Penistone crags, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our calves; pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool. That’s what you’ll come to fifty years hence: I know you are not so now. I’m not wandering: you’re mistaken, or else I should think I *was* under Penistone Crag; and I’m conscious it’s night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet.’

‘The black press? where is that?’ I asked. ‘You are talking in your sleep!’

‘It’s against the wall, as it always is,’ she replied. ‘It *does* appear odd—I see a face in it! Who is it? Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I’m afraid of being alone!’

# Chapter 18- Young Catherine longs to go to Penistone Crag

She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house: a real beauty in face, with the Earnshaws' handsome dark eyes, but the Lintons' fair skin and small features, and yellow curling hair.

Till she reached the age of thirteen she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself. Sometimes, indeed, while surveying the country from her nursery window, she would observe—

‘Ellen, how long will it be before I can walk to the top of those hills? I wonder what lies on the other side—is it the sea?’

‘No, Miss Cathy,’ I would answer; ‘it is hills again, just like these.’

‘And what are those golden rocks like when you stand under them?’ she once asked.

The abrupt descent of Penistone Crag particularly attracted her notice; especially when the setting sun shone on it and the topmost heights, and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow. I explained that they were bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree.

‘And why are they bright so long after it is evening here?’ she pursued.

‘Because they are a great deal higher up than we are,’ replied I; ‘you could not climb them, they are too high and steep. In winter the frost is always there before it comes to us; and deep into summer I have found snow under that black hollow on the north-east side!’

‘Oh, you have been on them!’ she cried gleefully. ‘Then I can go, too, when I am a woman. Has papa been, Ellen?’

One of the maids mentioning the Fairy Cave, quite turned her head with a desire to fulfil this project: she teased Mr. Linton about it; and he promised she should have the journey when she got older. But Miss Catherine measured her age by months, and, ‘Now, am I old enough to go to Penistone Crag?’ was the constant question in her mouth constantly the answer, ‘Not yet, love: not yet.’

## The last chapter- Heathcliff is buried- but his and Catherine's ghost continues to be seen on Penistone Crag

We buried him. Earnshaw and I, the sexton, and six men to carry the coffin, comprehended the whole attendance. The six men departed when they had let it down into the grave: we stayed to see it covered.

But the country folks, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible that he *walks*: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em looking out of his chamber window on every rainy night since his death:—and an odd thing happened to me about a month ago. I was going to the Grange one evening—a dark evening, threatening thunder—and, just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him; he was crying terribly; and I supposed the lambs were skittish, and would not be guided.

'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.

# The Weather Forecast

Weather is often mentioned in *Wuthering Heights*. It is a recurring motif used:

- to reflect and echo the moods of characters
- as a metaphor for characters' emotions
- to mark a dramatic change of some sort, as the altering seasons reflect the uncertainty in the plot itself. For example, a storm might be used to prophesy problems ahead, while steady sunshine may be used to direct the sympathies of the reader. This use of the weather to reflect characters' lives is often known as the 'pathetic fallacy'.

# ‘What Happened Next?’

- Were there any connections that surprised you?
- Why do you think that Brontë chose to illustrate the event using that particular kind of weather?
- How does Brontë’s use of weather affect our understanding of the events?

# ‘What Happened Next?’

- On that bleak hill top the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb. (*p51/p9*)
- **What happens next?**
- – Heathcliff dies
- – Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights, experiences hostility and dreams of Catherine [1]
- – Catherine [1] mourns for the absent Heathcliff



# ‘What Happened Next?’

- A high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy, yet it was not cold, ... I went, through wind and rain, and brought ... the doctor, back with me ... (*pp83-84/pp43-44*)
- **What happens next?**
- – Catherine [1] dies
- – Mr Earnshaw dies
- – Heathcliff hangs Isabella's dog

# ‘What Happened Next?’

- There was a violent wind, as well as thunder, and either one or the other split a tree off at the corner of the building; a huge bough fell across the roof, and knocked down a portion of the chimney-stack, sending a clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen fire .... I felt some sentiment that it must be a judgement on us (*p125/p85*)
- **What happens next?**
  - – The characters realise that Heathcliff has gone
  - – Heathcliff re-emerges into the characters’ lives
  - – Lockwood arrives at Wuthering Heights

- It was about the period that my narrative has reached – a bright frosty afternoon; the ground bare, and the road hard and dry ... The sun shone yellow on [the stone's] grey head, reminding me of summer; (*p147/p108*)
- **What happens next?**
- – Catherine [2] meets Heathcliff for the first time
- – Nelly is reconciled with young Hareton
- – Isabella marries Heathclif

- Next morning – bright and cheerful out of doors – stole softened in through the blinds of the silent room, and suffused the couch and its occupant with a mellow, tender glow.  
*(p201/p166)*
- **What happens next?**
  - – Catherine [1] lies dead
  - – Heathcliff lies dead
  - – Linton lies dead

- The abrupt descent of Penistone Crag particularly attracted her notice, especially when the setting sun shone on it, and the topmost Heights; and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow. (*p225/p190*)
- **What happens next?**
- – Nelly discovers Catherine's [2] deception
- – Catherine [2] ventures beyond the boundaries of Thrushcross Grange
- – Heathcliff overhears Catherine's [1] decision to marry Edgar

- Summer drew to an end, and early Autumn – it was past Michaelmas, but the harvest was late that year ... a fresh watery afternoon ... and the cold, blue sky was half hidden by clouds, dark grey streamers, rapidly mounting from the west, and boding abundant rain. (*p262/p229*)
- **What happens next?**
- – Catherine [2] meets Heathcliff for the first time
- – Nelly is imprisoned by Heathcliff
- – Hindley dies

- We were in April then, the weather was sweet and warm, the grass as green as showers and sun could make it, and the two dwarf apple trees, near the southern wall, in full bloom.  
(p356/p326)
- **What happens next?**
  - – Heathcliff dies
  - – The puppies are killed
  - – Linton courts Catherine [2]

# The Graveyard



# Cathy dies, Chapter 16

‘She’s dead!’ he said;

‘Yes, she’s dead!’ I answered. ‘She drew a sigh, and stretched herself, like a child reviving, and sinking again to sleep; and five minutes after I felt one little pulse at her heart, and nothing more!’

‘And—did she ever mention me?’ he asked.

‘Her senses never returned: she recognised nobody from the time you left her,’ I said. ‘She lies with a sweet smile on her face; and her latest ideas wandered back to pleasant early days. Her life closed in a gentle dream—may she wake as kindly in the other world!’

‘May she wake in torment! Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!’

[...]

The place of Catherine’s interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry-plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat-mould almost buries it.

## Chapter 29- In the graveyard after her burial Heathcliff senses Cathy's presence in the graveyard

It began oddly. You know I was wild after she died; and eternally, from dawn to dawn, praying her to return to me her spirit! I have a strong faith in ghosts: I have a conviction that they can, and do, exist among us! The day she was buried, there came a fall of snow. In the evening I went to the churchyard. It blew bleak as winter—all round was solitary. . Being alone, and conscious two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself—"I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills *me*; and if she be motionless, it is sleep." I got a spade from the tool-house, and began to delve with all my might—it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws; I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down. "If I can only get this off," I muttered, "I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!" and I wrenched at it more desperately still. There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by; but, as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there: not under me, but on the earth. A sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labour of agony, and turned consoled at once: unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me: it remained while I re-filled the grave, and led me home.

—I felt her by me—I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me! It was a strange way of killing: not by inches, but by fractions of hairbreadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope through eighteen years!

## **The very ending of the novel- the three graves at peace on a summer's evening**

My walk home was lengthened by a diversion in the direction of the church. When beneath its walls, I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months: many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates jutted off here and there, beyond the right line of the roof, to be gradually worked off in coming autumn storms.

I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the moor: on middle one grey, and half buried in the heath; Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf and moss creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare.

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

# Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange

- In many of the essays and critical books on *Wuthering Heights* we are told that the contrast between the two main settings of the novel is fundamental to its structure. We read that the soft-sounding Thrushcross Grange represents luxury, comfort and order, while Wuthering Heights is all about unwelcoming wildness.
- Is this necessarily the case?

# Description of Wuthering Heights from Chapter 1

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. One may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones...

One step brought us into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby, or passage: they call it here 'the house' pre-eminently. It includes kitchen and parlour, generally, but I believe at Wuthering Heights the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter, at least I distinguished a chatter of tongues, and a clatter of culinary utensils, deep within; and I observed no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking, about the huge fire-place; nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls. One end, indeed, reflected splendidly both light and heat from ranks of immense pewter dishes, interspersed with silver jugs and tankards, towering row after row, in a vast oak dresser, to the very roof. The latter had never been underdrawn; its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye, except where a frame of wood laden with oatcakes, and clusters of legs of beef, mutton and ham, concealed it. Above the chimney were sundry villainous old guns, and a couple of horse-pistols, and, by way of ornament, three gaudily painted canisters disposed along its ledge. The floor was of smooth, white stone: the chairs, high-backed, primitive structures, painted green: one or two heavy black ones lurking in the shade. In an arch, under the dresser, reposed a huge, liver- coloured bitch pointer surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies, and other dogs haunted other recesses.

## Chapter 2

On that bleak hill-top the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb. Being unable to remove the chain, I jumped over, and, running up the flagged causeway bordered with straggling gooseberry-bushes, knocked vainly for admittance, till my knuckles tingled and the dogs howled.

## **Chapter 32- Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights in the summer after his first visit and finds it trasformed**

I rambled leisurely along, with the glow of a sinking sun behind, and the mild glory of a rising moon in front—one fading, and the other brightening—as I climbed the stony by-road branching off to Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. Before I arrived in sight of it, all that remained of day was a beamless amber light along the west: but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon. I had neither to climb the gate nor to knock—it yielded to my hand. That is an improvement, I thought. And I noticed another, by the aid of my nostrils; a fragrance of stocks and wallflowers wafted on the air from amongst the homely fruit-trees.

Both doors and lattices were open; and yet, as is usually the case in a coal-district, a fine red fire illumined the chimney: I could both see the young people and hear them talk before I entered, and looked and listened in consequence; being moved thereto by a mingled sense of curiosity and envy, that grew as I lingered.

# Thrushcross Grange

We crept through a broken hedge, groped our way up the path, and planted ourselves on a flower-plot under the drawing-room window. The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed. Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw – ah! it was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. Old Mr and Mrs Linton were not there. Edgar and his sister had it entirely to themselves; shouldn't they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven! And now, guess what your good children were doing? Isabella – I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy – lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping, which, from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them.