

The atmosphere in jane eyre and wuthering heights

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



How do the writers of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights use setting and atmosphere in the development of their novels?

Setting and atmosphere are dominant features of Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre. Through them the authors are able to reveal plot through characters and underlying themes. They colour our interpretation of the novel and allow us to assess situations for ourselves. This is summed up in the writer Lori Handland's assessment of a novel when she says that "setting can influence your entire novel and the reader's response".

The title Wuthering Heights refers to the dwelling place situated on the heights. "Wuthering" is defined as an "atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather", and has the effect of stunting growth around it. This description permeates the lives of the characters in Wuthering Heights causing them to be crippled, emotionally and mentally. Charlotte Brontë also draws a parallel between the surrounding and inhabitants in Jane Eyre.

Jane's childhood to her maturity is chartered through five locations with internal and external obstacles in her path. Mike Edwards describes this "as a journey towards liberation from the psychological and physical prison". We can thus conclude that the setting and atmosphere is paramount to the novel's development.

Victorian society dictated that households were run on a rigid yet wholesome manner. It was expected that parents controlled their children, gave them "sound English education" which included the basic norms of society. Children were not expected to run wild and bring themselves up like the inhabitants

of Wuthering Heights. Girls were regarded as lesser beings, so the pressure on them to be educated was less intrusive.

If by some misfortune, they were orphaned, they were expected to be able to finance their own lives by perhaps becoming a governess. Both Charlotte and Emily Bronte's novels reflect these expectations of society. Emily and Charlotte Bronte's novels display rebellious undercurrents of their feelings against these expectations, making their stories atypical. Their experience of being governesses and living in a parsonage next to a graveyard on the Yorkshire Moors resonates in their novels and is related to the complexities of human relationships within the parameters of the Victorian Era.

Emily Bronte inventively creates the setting for Wuthering Heights within a malevolent atmosphere which radiates throughout the novel. The outsider Lockwood arrives on a tempestuous night with the intention of renting Thrushcross Grange. The Heights impresses Lockwood as being an archetypal, gloomy house, embedded into the "bleak hill top", defended by "large jutting stones" and "gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun". The area is hostile; the thorns have the potential to inflict sharp wounds to the tender flesh. This description reveals the incapability of these plants to grow normally as they appear to be half starved, similar to the antagonistic inhabitants of the house which are later revealed. The house has a character of its own awaits his departure.

This idea is reinforced by the savage dogs who greet him with "white teeth watering for a snatch". Their resentment is similar to Heathcliff's "closed teeth" and whose manner was "exaggeratedly reserved than [himself]". The

weather, " a sorrowful sight" captures the attitudes of the occupants to Lockwood which moved like " one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow". The interior of the house features high back chairs of a " primitive structure", " villainous guns" and " clusters of meat beef and ham" strengthening Mr Lockwood's observation of Wuthering Heights being the ideal location for a " misanthropist's heaven". These noxious, controlling attributes of the setting appear to be containing the inhabitants. As these features overwhelm the atmosphere, our awareness of these austere conditions develops.

The narrative is filtered through Lockwood and Nelly Deen's bias. This story of layered images and generations is described by Ceil as " a murky tangle lit by inexplicable flashes, [still] it falls into a coherent order". C. P Sanger has labelled this a " Chinese box structure". This atmosphere as the narrative unfolds is frantic yet persistent. The two major protagonists, Cathy and Heathcliff's unorthodox nature are unconventional like the structure of the novel. They develop contrary to society, as their " chief amusements to run the moors" occupied their days. It is curiosity which impels Cathy and Heathcliff to wander through the barren hills to their neighbour, Thrushcross Grange. The Grange is set " buried in trees", surrounded by flowers in a valley giving the atmosphere that it is sheltered from the dangerous influences of the Heights.

The Grange reflects a gentler and more amiable lifestyle as portrayed by its vegetation. However we realise later that this is a façade and it is not as exuberant as it seems. A Marxist interpretation would be that the difference between the Thrushcross Grange, a cultivated bourgeoisie house and

Wuthering Heights, an agricultural house infers conflict between the two. Brontë magnifies the setting and atmosphere of the two houses making them the universal focus of the novel. This restrains the plot to developing within the borders as John T Mathew observes "Wuthering heights is a novel occupied with boundaries". These are both literal and figurative. The houses themselves are the catalyst for the events and attempt to tear Cathy and Heathcliff apart.

Prior to the children's separation, Brontë allows them to familiarise themselves with the Grange from outside. They notice how "splendid" and ostentatious the Linton's household is. The Linton's household is a "splendid place carpeted with crimson", and roofed by a "pure white ceiling bordered by gold, [and] a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre". These colours are reminiscent of royalty and power. In contrast, Wuthering Heights is coated with graver colours, while inside colours of the rural marshes dominate the furniture which is of "wood", "painted green" "heavy black ones" "liver-coloured" giving savage and Gothic markings. The Linton's family being together creates a homely and wholesome setting, an unfamiliar atmosphere to the spectators.

This causes a childish response to the foreign/strange environment, so "[they] laughed outright at the petted things". This colours later events of the novel as Cathy never really adapts to this setting even when the physical barrier is removed for Nelly Deans comments that "She never has the power to conceal her passion" for the wild. Mrs Linton exclaims that Cathy's desires to commune in the wilderness of the untamed moors had her grown up in "

absolute heathism”, reflecting societies norms. Heathcliff’s rejection from Thrushcross Grange provided the catalyst for his future actions and envelops the novel with the vengeful atmosphere and gloom. Both Cathy and Heathcliff act like children of nature, controlled by its wild attributes as if it runs in their blood. This makes them respond spontaneously without being restrained by social etiquette. Cecil generalises them as “fiery, untamed, children of the storm”

Jane Eyre, the heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s novel had difficulty in merging with society and feeling accepted, due to her social position and the effects of her childhood. When we first meet Jane she is confined under Gateshead’s “hostile roof with a desperate embittered heart” which inevitably shapes her existence and development into her adulthood. The house treated her cruelly and pierced disappointment into herself and the world as she perceives it around her. In the red room her “habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of [her] decaying ire”.

Even when viewing Thornfield a “manner house... [of] a picturesque look”. She decides she “must not exult too soon”. The first descriptive lines of the novel encapsulate what is symbolic of the events in Jane’s life. The “leafless shrubbery” is a metaphor for her lack of storge (family) love and growth. The pathetic fallacy of “The cold wind had brought with it clouds so sombre and rain so penetrating”, mirrors the lonely and vulnerable character’s, Jane’s future encounter with the harsh predestined events which shall follow. The dismal weather reflects Jane’s attitude to life her situation which creates a melancholic mood so early in the novel.

Jane's childhood memories surface as she claims her "more sociable childlike disposition" finds little favour. Our sympathy as modern readers is anchored when Jane questions the authenticity of the punishment. Mrs Reed's response of "there is something truly foreboding about a child taking up her elders in that manner" resembles a Victorian cliché that "children should be seen and not heard". The atmosphere becomes overwrought with Jane and Mrs Reed, both wanting justice. As a result Jane leaves the room and slips into a "small breakfast room adjoined into a drawing room". This room is neither one nor the other, thus as a setting it expresses her emotional limbo in her adult life. Jane has to "slip" inconspicuously to avoid her movements giving rise to annoyance.

Due to Jane being tiny she "mounts" herself onto the chair raising herself physically but also mentally above her situation. Brontë's texts impose the idea of Jane being vulnerable to the greater and more omnipotent events ranging from her cousin's brutality to the later incidences. She sits where "folds of scarlet drapery shut in [her] view", while on the right, "panes of glass, protecting but not separating [her] from the drear November day." The literal setting has figurative over in her life. Jane abandons herself into her own imagination and isolates herself by reading a book. Nonetheless, the glass cannot guard her against the effects of the dreary day, they merely magnify it. The "ceaseless rain outside sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast" prophesizes her next experience, the dreaded red room.

This incarceration in the “red room” is to make her learn from her wrongs. Ironically, she is told to “repent” and if not “something may be permitted to come down the chimney”. The idea that suffering occurs only due to wrongs emerges as a pervading theme throughout the novel reminiscent of the book of Job. This suspicion is injected into Jane’s perception of her surroundings, “all looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality”. The atmosphere is feeding on the expectancy of superstitious activity to occur making Jane Eyre fit the requirements of the gothic genre. The apprehensiveness on Jane’s behalf directs the way the reader perceives the events through the novel and thus her subjective views influences the readers’ reception of the atmosphere

Only when eponymous character is placed in the “seldom chamber” do we learn its mystery releasing the gothic terrors as the reader could not anticipate successfully. By protesting Mr Reed’s death to have taken place there, Jane claims that “a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion”. Words like “dreary” contribute to the atmosphere encouraging it to linger on in a menacing fashion. This line evokes a powerful image of the paranormal, existence submitting itself to the cause of guarding a dead man’s room heightening the readers’ awareness for something sinister to occur.

There is no concrete evidence for these guards, and therefore is an assumption of the child’s, Jane. This viewpoint leads us to question her interpretation, as the majority of children like Jane possess a vivid imagination which has the potential of perceiving an event inaccurately. As

Jane internalises the horror sympathy from the readers is evoked. Brontë's pulsates the room allowing it to act freely. " Out of the surroundings shades rose high and glared white". This aggressive nature seems to intimidate Jane as the room becomes oppressive. Jane concentrates on a " certain secret drawer in the wardrobe", which contains a miniature of Mr Reed.

By her imagination feeding on loneliness of the macabre settings, her brain swims in " tumult". This miniature makes Jane wonder whether he will return to punish Jane for the burden she has caused upon his wife. The " secret of the room" according to Jane is " the spell which has kept it so lonely despite of its grandeur". This notion of the world controlled by supernatural forces on specific places is echoed in Wuthering Heights and can be used as an explanation as to why such heightened controversy takes place there. The tone of Jane is fearful as she believes the opposition, a " revolted slave" is still " bracing [her] with its bitter vigour". The red room staples itself in Jane's life and is used as a comparison for later events that cause distress.

Technical devices and style are features of both writers which help to create setting and atmosphere. Both writers liberally use commas liberally, " I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by someone across the lawn; but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald was someone coming vision from another world." This approach from Jane Eyre allows the reader to digest each aspect individually till they reach saturation point and in this case,

display the bewildered thoughts of the character, developing atmospheric tension.

This leaves the reader eager to carry on reading to satisfy their hungry curiosity. In *Wuthering Heights* tension climaxes when Heathcliff hurls a knife at Isabella, "The charge exploded, and the knife, in springing back, closed into its owner's wrist. Heathcliff pulled it away by main force, slitting up the flesh as it passed on, and thrust it dripping into his pocket". In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë's application of contrasting colours, red and white in phrases such as, "carpet red", "crimson cloth", "snowy Marseilles", trigger off images of death, bloodshed and hell. The use of colours, encourage the process of the psychological term "associationism", to conjecture in the reader's mind as they associate the images physically while their senses are being heightened of something indirectly connected.

In the same way heat is juxtaposed with cold, and this contrast anticipates a deeper level of horror and excites an atmosphere oppressively malevolent. Another sense of Jane's is awoken as she notices her "blood was still warm", before encountering a manifestation of Mr Reed. Again the setting becomes animate, "daylight began to forsake the room", as if in sympathy with the receding of Jane's warmth. The wind howls and mysterious clamour echoes from the stairs due to the beating rain. Jane grows by "degrees cold as a stone". This simile gives the impression that the room has the potential to turn her lifeless and soulless. Jane then screams begging to leave but her only form of escape was that "the unconscious could close her from the scene."

Nature and landscape are used to portray timelessness or ephemeral nature of relationships, thus setting love in eternity. According to Scorchner, Emily Bronte shows “ human activities are like the activities of the landscape” in the characters. Catherine Linton “ was struck during a tempest of passion”. Characteristics from are vividly etched on their faces “ her face was just like a landscape-shadows and sunshine flitting over in it in rapid succession”, “ his forehead...shaded over with a heavy cloud”. The natural setting in Wuthering Heights is also used as a means of expressing ones thoughts. Emily Bronte permits Cathy to use nature as a medium for comparing her love for Heathcliff and her feelings for Edgar Linton. “ My love for Edgar Linton is like the foliage in the woods.

Time will change it”. This simile illustrates the inevitable change of weather and the effects it has on nature, just as it will have on her love. The imagery produced by the term “ foliage” is of many leaves elegantly falling from trees on to the ground gently. However, her love is seasonal and ultimately will wither, leaving the trees vulnerable and bare. On the other hand, she claims her love for Heathcliff “ resembles the eternal rocks beneath-a source of little visible delight, but necessary”. Cathy acknowledges the lack of beauty behind rocks but labels it “ necessary” and a “ source of little visible delight”. It is as if this love evolved when time began through the natural movements in the natural cosmic order of creation. The word “ eternal” displays the rock to be containing attributes which can endure whatever hardship faces them and therefore takes a greater force to destroy them.

The effects of pathetic fallacy are exploited in both Brontë's style of writing. David Lodge comments that "the romantic imagery of landscape, seascape, sun, moon and the elements" enables the development of "theme". It is a Midsummer's Day where Jane feels obliged to walk in Thornfield Orchard in order to embrace the picturesque scenery. It reminds her of a robust "band of Italian days", ideal for courtship scenes. The sun is portrayed as a "red jewel" inflicting passion on what's below, the sky is a "solemn purple", and the moon "beneath the horizon" symbolises femininity. R. B. Martin claims Brontë achieved many of her "finest effects by lurid contrasts of illumination and shade by the relentless light of rational day set against the menacing shadows against the dead of night".

The imagery of Brontë's lexis is evocative and highly sensual. Passionate flourishing shades of rose and jasmine help create a tranquil atmosphere. Repeating her behaviour as a child before entering the ghastly red room, Jane retreats between a "very high wall" and a "beech avenue screened from the lawn". Trapping herself once more she feels she could "haunt such a shade forever". However words like "stole" and the oxymoron "warning fragrance" alerts the reader to the uninvited intrusion of Mr Rochester through the potent smell of a cigar. This highly charged atmosphere is then further ignited by Mr Rochester's proposal of marriage.

The reader feels uneasy as a sense of foreboding emerges due to this cloying situation. Significantly after Jane accepts the marriage proposal, a "waft of winds came sweeping down", bringing with it a darkness which spreads over the "Eden-like" landscape. Brontë infuses this scene with

literary techniques such as alliteration of “rain rushed”, which floods the more positive setting. The short yet abrupt rhyming words, “grave” “amazed” emphasize the powerful atmospheric conditions as they lend a sense of foreboding to the scene.

The chestnut tree “writhed and groaned” and the wind “roared”, both these elements of nature are personified using strong verbs to reveal feelings of dread regarding this marriage. The tree trunk splits into half symbolising the later destruction to come. Warning signs litter the setting and reverberated through like a “lamentable blast”. We experience “the thunder crashing “fierce and frequent [and] the lightning gleamed”. Bronte’s use of onomatopoeia “crash” powerfully propels us into an atmosphere wrought with tension. All these atmospheric words charge the setting negatively which anticipates.

Jane’s discovery of Bertha on her wedding day fulfils this prediction and forces her into a new environment of Ferndean. Both settings resemble the condition of Mr Rochester at the time he owned them. Thornfield Hall was a Previously Jane had made an analogy between Thornfield’s environment and Mr Rochester, “knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansions designation”. However the fire left him with a “seared vision... [And] cripple strength” and a burnt house.

His next home, Ferndean, is “deep buried in a wood” and shadowed under the “characteristics of sad sky, cold gale, and continued small penetrating rain”. Ferndean has “no flowers, no garden-beds” and the building is decaying. Mr Rochester uses a metaphor to articulate how he thinks of

himself, “ no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard”. The tree that was once magnificent was torn hastily. Despite Mr Rochester’s new condition, Jane sees him as “ green and vigorous” and believes plants will “ grow out of [his] roots” instead, installing a hopeful atmosphere. The setting and nature act as the extension of character’s moods and feelings of both novels.

In Wuthering Heights, an atmosphere of harmony is achieved when young Catherine and Hareton attempt to cultivate the Heights, “ She had persuaded him to clear a large space of ground from currants and gooseberry bushes”. The removal of thorn bushes and the addition of plants imported from the Grange appear to generate an optimistic view. The scents of the flowers invade the kitchen instead of the usual dominating smell of raw livestock. The friendship bond between Catherine and Hareton reminds us of Cathy and Heathcliffs as well as the similarity within their personalities. Heathcliff exclaims to Nelly that “ Hareton seemed a personification of my youth”.

Ironically, the structure of the story is symmetrical starting with Hareton and ending with Hareton. Heathcliff latter abandons his room, under the thwarting rush of rain and kills himself in order to be reunited with his soul mate, Cathy. In both books the houses characterise their Byronic heroes. The changes of Wuthering Heights do not reflect Heathcliff and therefore the reader anticipates his departure. David Daiches believes that “ the most tenacious of forces that reside in human nature have no relation with the

artificial world of civilisation, but...have a relation to elemental forces at work in the natural world".

However it could be argued that the artificial world created is the product of inner feelings and of their hermeneutics. Hareton and Cathy display this, by moving to Thrushcross Grange and altering their surroundings, leaving the spirits of Catherine and Heathcliff to roam the stark area of Wuthering Heights in peace. As Heathcliff said " people familiar with these moors often miss the road". Arguably the setting in the novel is more important than the characters, as characters leave or enter but the location never changes.

The settings in both novels are used to depict the emotions of the characters, enable the reader to comprehend the novel and prefigure what will occur. The gothic features of the novel emerge through the landscape assisted by the exude bodies, and the harsh weather conjuring a tense atmosphere. In contrast, love and passion are also depicted through landscape and expressed through metaphors referring to nature. This talent of both writers is displayed through their ability to convey two major contesting themes, love and hatred, in their full light. Emily Bronte adopts a sophisticated style of writing as the novel is projected from the past encompassing chthonic elements.

Jane in Jane Eyre interplays between her internal mediation and the occurrences outside bringing the reader to an equilibrium/understanding of both. It is through her acuity and subjective connotations of words that setting and atmosphere is developed. In the beginning of Wuthering Heights, Lockwood arrives at the conclusion that it is our experiences which makes us

assimilate events, via the settings and atmosphere in the ways we do, “ it is strange how custom can mould our tastes and ideas: many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the rest of the world”.

Both, Charlotte and Emily Bronte’s manipulation of the language , and the narrative lenses provided within the frames of the novels influences the reader to perceive these novels in a manner that shows it in all it’s context of setting and therefore it’s marvel. The Bronte’s artistically use the vital ingredient of setting which creates atmosphere to enhance their characters makeup, create themes and develop a sustainable plot, being one of the reasons to the success of their novels. The complicated ideals/frames behind their novels has lead these texts to be of the most enigmatic and controversial texts in English literature, with the aid of setting and atmosphere providing a backbone for these achievements.

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BIOGRAPHY

<http://www.geocities.com/jenkez2/>

<http://www.eclectics.com/articles/setting.html>