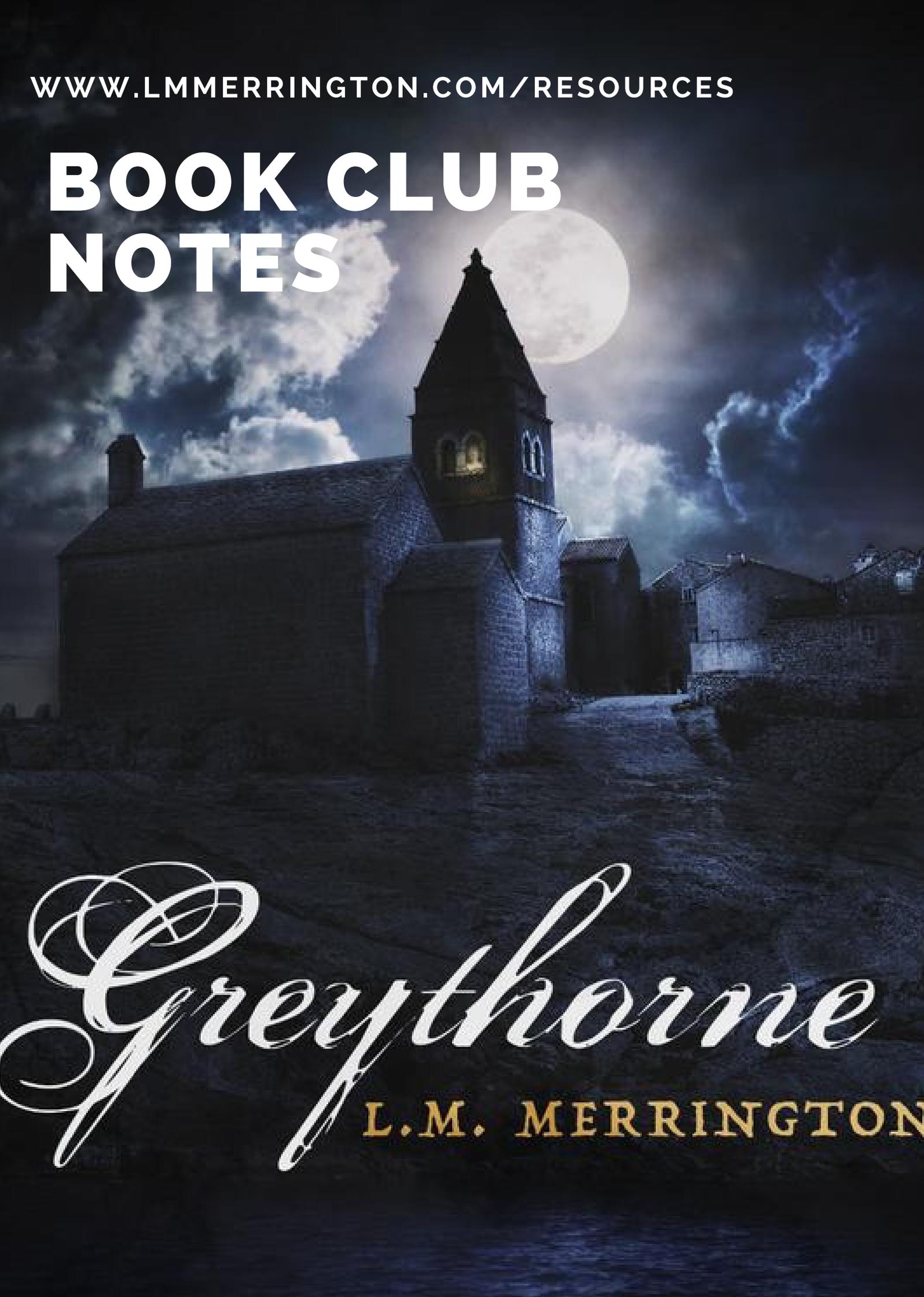


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# BOOK CLUB NOTES



*Greythorne*  
L.M. MERRINGTON

## BOOK CLUB NOTES

**Greythorne**

By L.M. Merrington

**About the Author**

Louise Merrington is an author and editor with over 20 years of publishing experience. Under the name L.M. Merrington, she is the author of two Gothic mystery novels, *Greythorne* and *The Iron Line*, and a collection of interconnected Victorian-inspired fantasy short stories, *The Light at the Edge of the World and Other Stories*.

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**Blurb**

How did Lucy Greythorne die?

From the moment Nell Featherstone arrives at Greythorne Manor as a governess to eight-year-old Sophie, she finds herself haunted by the fate of the mistress of the house, and entranced by the child's father, the enigmatic Professor Nathaniel Greythorne.

When a violent storm reveals Lucy's body is not in her grave, Nell becomes suspicious about the Professor's research. But what she discovers in his laboratory will turn all her ideas about life and death, morality and creation on their head.

Enthralled by a man walking a fine line between passion and madness, Nell must make an impossible choice between life, death, and life after death, where any mistake could be her last.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Greythorne* is a Gothic-inspired novel. Gothic novels became popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and are characterised by a mixture of horror and romanticism. What aspects of *Greythorne*, such as setting or plot, can be characterised as distinctly Gothic? Why?
2. How are religious symbolism and themes incorporated into the text? How do Nell's religious beliefs influence her moral choices? How do they bring her into conflict with events in the story?
3. In the epilogue, Nell is forced to make a choice between her abstract moral position and an action that will save Sophie (p217). Do you think she makes the right choice? Why/why not? Do you think this action will change her as a person (perhaps making her more like the Professor?), or is the action itself rendered less repulsive because her motives are good?
4. In the second-last sentence of the epilogue, Nell says, "And in that moment I decide" (p217). Why did Merrington choose not to explicitly detail Nell's decision or its aftermath, and instead leave it up to the reader to imagine?
5. What is the effect of confining the action in *Greythorne* to a single main setting? How does this restricted setting affect the plot?
6. *Greythorne* contains two major twists: one at the climax of the novel (where the Professor's research is revealed) and one in the epilogue (where Nell makes a choice). How does Merrington set up the reader to have a certain expectation of events, and how does she then circumvent these expectations with the twist?
7. *Greythorne* is told through the eyes of Nell Featherstone, an 18-year-old orphan who has been engaged as a governess at Greythorne Manor. How does this first-person narrative colour our reading of events and our perception of other characters?
8. There is very little physical description of Nell in the book. She describes herself as "no beauty" but "passable" and "respectable" (p46). Why do you think Merrington has chosen not to focus on her physical characteristics? What does Nell's description of herself indicate about her self-image and her values?
9. What are some of Nell's qualities? What are some of her deficiencies? How do these affect the choices she makes in the story?
10. Nell says of the Professor, "I had expected a notable eccentric, not this charming and, truth be told, rather handsome specimen" (p47). How do other characters in the book, such as Elsie Drabble and Frances Greenslade, refer to the Professor, and how does this shape your (and Nell's) mental image of him before he appears?

11. Although the Professor is the book's antagonist, he also exhibits some positive character traits. What are some of these and what effect do they have on developing him as a character?
12. The Professor calls his work "arguably the greatest scientific discovery since Galileo" (p171). What is his motivation for choosing the path that he has? Why is it important that characters have a clear motivation?
13. How does the relationship between Nell and Sophie change as the book progresses? How are these changes reflected in Nell's descriptions of Sophie?
14. Is Sophie a likeable character? Why/why not? Do your impressions of her change once it's revealed what has been done to her?
15. Lucy Greythorne is never physically present in the book, having died five years before the events of the novel, and her voice is only heard briefly through her letters (pp150-154). Why do you think she is referred to only in letters or through the memories of other characters, rather than through a flashback to her life?
16. The Professor tells Nell that "in many ways you remind me of her [Lucy]" (p90). What are some of the similarities between Nell and Lucy? What are some differences?
17. What is the nature of Jonas's relationship with Lucy? How does this influence the events of the story, and his choices?
18. Jonas's death (pp184-187) is a particularly poignant moment in the story. How does this scene change your opinion of him? How does his death fit in with the greater theme of redemption?
19. What were some of the major social issues of the Victorian era (1837–1901) and how are these reflected in the story?
20. There are indications in the text that women have certain expectations placed upon them in terms of what they can and cannot do. What does the text indicate about women's roles and aspirations in the Victorian era?
21. How are Victorian ideals of motherhood portrayed in the relationships between Lucy, Sophie and Nell?
22. In what ways does Sophie epitomise a spirit of female rebellion?
23. Do you believe any aspects of Victorian womanhood are still pervasive in society today? If so, what?

24. The governess is a popular figure in Victorian and Gothic literature. In Victorian times, being a governess was virtually the only respectable job for a middle-class woman without family support. However, governesses occupied an in-between space in society, being neither servants nor part of the family, and were often treated with contempt by both groups. In what ways does Nell show she's conscious of the precariousness of her social position?
25. How does Nell's role as governess influence her relationships with Sophie, the Professor and Jonas?
26. How does her job influence the choices that she is forced to make?
27. Why do you think Merrington chose to make the main character both an orphan and a governess?
28. In the nineteenth century, before the development of many aspects of modern medicine, including antibiotics and vaccines, death rates were high. Industrial centres in particular often suffered from appalling living conditions, overcrowding, unclean drinking water and poor sanitation. Children often succumbed to childhood diseases that have now been almost eradicated in the developed world, and many women and babies died in childbirth. It was not uncommon for people to have big families but have only a small number of children survive to adulthood. In this context, scientists were naturally pushing to find new ways of combating death and disease. Merrington offers Professor Greythorne's solution as being simply a natural extension of these impulses. Although Professor Greythorne's reanimation of the dead is an extreme, fictional example, the debate in medicine and science about whether things *should* be done just because they *can* be is very real. Can you think of some examples in modern medicine where this debate is occurring?

## **FURTHER READING**

Abrams, Lyn, *Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain*, BBC History:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian\\_britain/women\\_home/ideals\\_womanhood\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women_home/ideals_womanhood_01.shtml)

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Hughes, Kathryn, *The figure of the governess*, British Library (part of the 'Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians' resource): <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-figure-of-the-governess>

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