

# [The manifestation of helen graham, who moved to](https://assignbuster.com/the-manifestation-of-helen-graham-who-moved-to/)

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The circumstances forced upon both protagonistsmirrored the reality of 19th century Britain’s “ period of seismicpolitical and social turbulence” Invalid source specified., a time whichradically reduced the female protagonists’ possibility of broader horizons, byenforcing them to a life of domesticity. CharlotteBronte’s 19th-century fiction ‘ JaneEyre’, published in 1847, “ dazzled and shocked readers with itspassionate depiction of a woman’s search for equality and freedom” (STEVIE DAVIES 1996). Composed of three volumes, the first-person narrative provides a reflectiveretrospective of the tempestuous journey of an eponymous heroine intoadulthood. Residing primarily in the bildungsroman genre, the protagonist isfaced with individuals who hold the capability to jeopardise her independence. Herunconventional relationship with her sardonic employer forces her into asubordinated position, whilst threatening her freedom.

In order to stabilizeher independence and achieve unrestricted horizons, the protagonist must adaptboth her circumstances and environment. A year after the publication of ‘ JaneEyre’, Anne Bronte published ‘ The Tenant of Wildfell Hall’ in 1848. Labelled asfeminist testament, the novel critiqued “ the domestic ideology thatsubordinated women”( (Diedrerich, 2003)The epistolary novel begins with the omniscient narrator of Gilbert Markham, who becomes increasing captivated with the manifestation of Helen Graham, whomoved to derelict Wildfell Hall with her young son.

As the plot progresses, thereader gains Helen’s viewpoint through her diary, which consists the detailedaccount of both martial and artistic oppression. In both novels, theprotagonist under threat of patriarchal domination, exploring themes ofclassism, proto-feminism and gender roles. Both protagonists mustpartake in psychological and moral pilgrimage in order to gain a true sense ofself-worth and autonomy. In this essay, I will firstly look at externalfactors, such as 19th-centurysociolect, which contributed to the protagonists’ subordinated position insociety and their feelings of oppression inside the domestic sphere. Followingwhich, I will examine how the setting furthered the protagonists’ reducedhorizons, using the extreme case of Bertha Mason to resent the completeoppression of autonomy and the protagonists’ potential outcome. Secondly, Iwill examine the heroines’ defiance to conform to these gender roles and thevaried effectiveness of their inevitable escape from patriarchy.

Lastly, I willexplore how Anne and Charlotte Brontë aswriters explore the possibility of broader horizons for women.  It could be arguedthat both Jane Eyre and The Tenant of WildFell Hall explore therestricted horizons for women, due to the use of oppressive nineteenth-century social attitudes, whichenforce upon the protagonist’sunrealistic gender roles. In her illuminating exploration of 19th-century gender roles, KathrynHughes notes, that due to the Victorian sociolect, “ women were consideredphysically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were bestsuited to the domestic sphere” (Hughes, 2014). The Victorian ideology of separatesphere contributed to oppressive ideals, whicharguably reduced their horizons to a life of domesticity.

Either maritalcommitments or a career path often consolidated women’s seclusion to thedomesticity: such as Helen’s marriage to MrHuntingdon, or Jane’s role as a governess at Thornfield. In their pertinent feminist reading of JaneEye, Gilbert and Gubar note that in male-authored books, women arecharacterised as either an ‘ angel’ or a ‘ monster’. The unrealisticideal of The Angel in the House originated from Coventry Patmore’s1854 poem, which manifested “ a modelof the domestic goddess, who apparently retained her chastity even as wife andmother.” (Furneaux, 2014). The virginal idea that a wife must remaincompletely pure in marriage, even after children, reinforced the unattainablemarriage standard, whilst reinforcing unrealistic gender roles, set upon womenin the nineteenth century. This is best exemplified, by MrHuntingdon’s sociolect and treatment of Helen reinforces her place within thedomestic sphere, believing that the “ idea of a wife is a thing to love onedevotedly and to stay at home – to wait upon her husband and amuse him, andminister to his comfort in every possible way.”(Towfh) Mr Huntingdon’s lexis reinforces oppressive genderroles, often referring to his wife as an” Angel monitress” (169), or his “ patron saint” (175). The irony of hisdiction creates an ironic parallel to the reality of Helen’s situation.

The noun ‘ monitress’, originated from the18th century, to describe a “ femaleschool pupil assigned disciplinary or other special responsibilities,”(Dictionaries, 2017), the combination of the personal pronoun, assertsHuntingdon’s ownership over his wife, whilst confining her purpose in theirmarriage; Her ‘ special’ domestic ‘ responsibilities’, reinforces her adaptationto these common 19th century marriage ideals. In addition, the noun ‘ angel’ refers to a massager of god or a” person of exemplary conduct of virtue.”(Dictionaries, 2017), whilst alluding to unrealistic gender role of the Angel in the House. If women dared to venture outside their domestic sphere, such asHelen’s aspirations to become an artist, they were placed under oppressivesocial criticism.

Mr Huntingdon’s idealof the perfect wife, it suggests the impact of social attitudes, which affected the minds ofVictorian society, which in turn reduced the horizons for women.  Similarly, the social prejudices of the Victorianera, also reduced the horizons of the female protagonist in ‘ Jane Eyre’, by enforcingclassism which oppressed her sexuality. In her judicious reading of JaneEyre, Esther Godfrey notes that the governess creates a “ hole in the invisible wallbetween working-class and middle-class gender identities.” Invalid source specified..

Unable to associate herself with theresidence of the house, due to her station, and ostracized from the servants byher intellectual ability: Jane was viewed as contempt by all levels ofsocial hierarchy. Bronte’s characterization as Jane as a governess highlights the social limbo, which made itincreasingly difficult for a woman ofsuch a position to meet suitable men, whilst contributing to the suppressedsexual desires of governesses and women as a whole. In addition, itcould be argued that Mrs Fairfax representsthe social voice of Thornfield House, reinforcing the Victorian sociolect ofclassism.

At first sightingof any relationship between Jane and her employer, Mrs Fairfax commented how “ Gentlemen in his station are notaccustomed to marry their governess”(9p306 JE). Although Jane rejects the theology of the Angel of the House, stating, “ I am not anangel,’ I asserted; ‘ and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself.”(JE), her relationship with her sardonic employer, creates the possibility of Jane becoming a Fallenwoman. The oppressive social ideal of a Fallen Women describes a woman, who “ has “ losther innocence”, and fallen from the grace of God. In 19th-century Britainespecially, the meaning came to be closely associated with the loss orsurrender of a woman’s chastity.” (Dictionary, 2017).  Despite Rochester’s marriage proposition, due to the presence of malevolentwife, in the views of society and in turn law, Jane’s relationship andengagement become void. In addition toJane’s subordinated position as a governess, Rochester’s legal unavailabilityas a suiter forces Jane to unknowinglyassume the position of a mistress.

The figure of a mistress in Victorian Britain was a woman whoembodied sexual promiscuity, and the idealof the fallen women. In its archaic dialect, a mistress is defined as a “- a woman (other than the man’s wife) having a sexual relationship with amarried man.” (Dictionary, 2017). Ideals such as The Angel of The Houseand The fallen women helped enshrine a sexual double standard, which in turnreduced the horizons of women. Rochester states the social view of a mistress, which in Victorian Society, was ‘ the nextworst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always byposition, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading'”(328-329). Despite this Jane states, “ I am my own mistress”, although this couldbe interpreted as Jane’s ownership over her position, the abuity of the definition of ‘ mistress’could provide an alternative understanding. Despite the noun’s negative archaicconnotations, a mistress can also be defined as “ a woman in a position of authority or control” (Dictionary, 2017).

The addition of thepersonal pronoun, suggests the protagonist’s belief of the more contempory meaning of the word. Thus statingherself as her own mistress embodies the protagonist, and in turn the author, activily rejects the oppressive ideals. In turn, It could be arguedthat Charlotte Brontë uses Jane’s relationship with Rochester as a critique against Victorian 19th century oppressive social hierarchy. Brontë, therefore, uses the relationship between employer and governess to address the fragilityof gender roles and classism.  In addition, both Jane Eyre and The Tenant of WildFell, the male protagonists use oppressive idiolect, to mentallyoppress women, by obscuring them as to be seen as fragile creatures, bettersuited to the reduced horizon of the domestic sphere. In an ignorant interpretation of awomen’s place within the domestic sphere, the Duke of Wellington commented how “ women arelike swans, graceful in the water, but when they presume to leave their naturalelement, the home, they have an ‘ unseemly waddle’ which entitles everyone ‘ tolaugh till their sides split at the spectacle'”.

(Wellington, 1830). In the light of this oppressive statement froma highly regarded public figure, the patronizing diction used by the Duke of Wellington normalises the oppression of women, whilst displayingthe enormity of the problem. Both MrHuntingdon and Rochester uses constant zoomorphism, to personify the femaleprotagonists as fragile winged creatures, which need to be restrained to their cage (the domestic sphere), in order to keep them safe.