

The manifestation of helen graham, who moved to

[Business](#), [Career](#)



The circumstances forced upon both protagonists mirrored the reality of 19th century Britain's "period of seismic political and social turbulence" Invalid source specified., a time which radically reduced the female protagonists' possibility of broader horizons, by enforcing them to a life of domesticity. Charlotte Brontë's 19th-century fiction 'Jane Eyre', published in 1847, "dazzled and shocked readers with its passionate depiction of a woman's search for equality and freedom" (STEVIE DAVIES 1996). Composed of three volumes, the first-person narrative provides a reflective retrospective of the tempestuous journey of an eponymous heroine into adulthood. Residing primarily in the bildungsroman genre, the protagonist is faced with individuals who hold the capability to jeopardise her independence. Her unconventional relationship with her sardonic employer forces her into a subordinated position, whilst threatening her freedom.

In order to stabilize her independence and achieve unrestricted horizons, the protagonist must adapt both her circumstances and environment. A year after the publication of 'Jane Eyre', Anne Brontë published 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' in 1848. Labelled as a feminist testament, the novel critiqued "the domestic ideology that subordinated women" (Diederich, 2003). The epistolary novel begins with the omniscient narrator of Gilbert Markham, who becomes increasingly captivated with the manifestation of Helen Graham, who moved to derelict Wildfell Hall with her young son.

As the plot progresses, the reader gains Helen's viewpoint through her diary, which consists of the detailed account of both marital and artistic oppression. In both novels, the protagonist under threat of patriarchal domination, exploring themes of classism, proto-feminism and gender roles. Both protagonists

<https://assignbuster.com/the-manifestation-of-helen-graham-who-moved-to/>

must partake in psychological and moral pilgrimage in order to gain a true sense of self-worth and autonomy. In this essay, I will firstly look at external factors, such as 19th-century sociolect, which contributed to the protagonists' subordinated position in society and their feelings of oppression inside the domestic sphere. Following which, I will examine how the setting furthered the protagonists' reduced horizons, using the extreme case of Bertha Mason to represent the complete oppression of autonomy and the protagonists' potential outcome. Secondly, I will examine the heroines' defiance to conform to these gender roles and the varied effectiveness of their inevitable escape from patriarchy.

Lastly, I will explore how Anne and Charlotte Brontë as writers explore the possibility of broader horizons for women. It could be argued that both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* explore the restricted horizons for women, due to the use of oppressive nineteenth-century social attitudes, which enforce upon the protagonist's unrealistic gender roles. In her illuminating exploration of 19th-century gender roles, Kathryn Hughes notes, that due to the Victorian sociolect, "women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere" (Hughes, 2014). The Victorian ideology of separate spheres contributed to oppressive ideals, which arguably reduced their horizons to a life of domesticity.

Either marital commitments or a career path often consolidated women's seclusion to the domesticity: such as Helen's marriage to Mr. Huntingdon, or Jane's role as a governess at Thornfield. In their pertinent feminist reading of

Jane Eyre, Gilbert and Gubar note that in male-authored books, women are characterised as either an 'angel' or a 'monster'. The unrealistic ideal of The Angel in the House originated from Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem, which manifested "a model of the domestic goddess, who apparently retained her chastity even as wife and mother." (Furieux, 2014). The virginal idea that a wife must remain completely pure in marriage, even after children, reinforced the unattainable marriage standard, whilst reinforcing unrealistic gender roles, set upon women in the nineteenth century. This is best exemplified, by Mr Huntingdon's sociolect and treatment of Helen reinforces her place within the domestic sphere, believing that the "idea of a wife is a thing to love on devotedly and to stay at home - to wait upon her husband and amuse him, and minister to his comfort in every possible way." (Towfh) Mr Huntingdon's lexis reinforces oppressive gender roles, often referring to his wife as an "Angel mistress" (169), or his "patron saint" (175). The irony of his diction creates an ironic parallel to the reality of Helen's situation.

The noun 'mistress', originated from the 18th century, to describe a "female school pupil assigned disciplinary or other special responsibilities," (Dictionaries, 2017), the combination of the personal pronoun, asserts Huntingdon's ownership over his wife, whilst confining her purpose in their marriage; Her 'special' domestic 'responsibilities', reinforces her adaptation to these common 19th century marriage ideals. In addition, the noun 'angel' refers to a messenger 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 as Helen's aspirations to become an artist, they were placed under oppressive social criticism.

Mr Huntingdon's ideal of the perfect wife, it suggests the impact of social attitudes, which affected the minds of Victorian society, which in turn reduced the horizons for women. Similarly, the social prejudices of the Victorian era, also reduced the horizons of the female protagonist in 'Jane Eyre', by enforcing classism which oppressed her sexuality. In her judicious reading of Jane Eyre, Esther Godfrey notes that the governess creates a "hole in the invisible wall between working-class and middle-class gender identities."

Invalid source specified..

Unable to associate herself with the residence of the house, due to her station, and ostracized from the servants by her intellectual ability: Jane was viewed as contempt by all levels of social hierarchy. Bronte's characterization as Jane as a governess highlights the social limbo, which made it increasingly difficult for a woman of such a position to meet suitable men, whilst contributing to the suppressed sexual desires of governesses and women as a whole. In addition, it could be argued that Mrs Fairfax represents the social voice of Thornfield House, reinforcing the Victorian social classism.

At first sighting of any relationship between Jane and her employer, Mrs Fairfax commented how "Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governess" (9p306 JE). Although Jane rejects the theology of the Angel of the House, stating, "I am not an angel," 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 Fallen woman. The

oppressive social ideal of a Fallen Women describes a woman, who “ has “ lost her innocence”, and fallen from the grace of God. In 19th-century Britain especially, the meaning came to be closely associated with the loss or surrender of a woman’s chastity.” (Dictionary, 2017). Despite Rochester’s marriage proposition, due to the presence of a malevolent wife, in the views of society and in turn law, Jane’s relationship and engagement become void. In addition to Jane’s subordinated position as a governess, Rochester’s legal unavailability as a suitor forces Jane to unknowingly assume the position of a mistress.

The figure of a mistress in Victorian Britain was a woman who embodied sexual promiscuity, and the ideal of 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 a married man.” (Dictionary, 2017). Ideals such as The Angel of the House and The fallen women helped enshrine a sexual double standard, which in turn reduced the horizons of women. Rochester states the social view of a mistress, which in Victorian Society, was ‘ the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading’” (328-329). Despite this Jane states, “ I am my own mistress”, although this could be interpreted as Jane’s ownership over her position, the ambiguity of the definition of ‘ mistress’ could provide an alternative understanding. Despite the noun’s negative archaic connotations, a mistress can also be defined as “ a woman in a position of authority or control” (Dictionary, 2017).

The addition of the personal pronoun, suggests the protagonist's belief of the more contemporary meaning of the word. Thus stating herself as her own mistress embodies the protagonist, and in turn the author, actively rejects the oppressive ideals. In turn, it could be argued that 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 fragility of gender roles and classism. In addition, both Jane Eyre and The Tenant of Wildfell, the male protagonists use oppressive idiolect, to mentally oppress women, by obscuring them as to be seen as fragile creatures, better suited to the reduced horizon of the domestic sphere. In an ignorant interpretation of a woman's place within the domestic sphere, the Duke of Wellington commented how "women are like swans, graceful in the water, but when they presume to leave their natural element, the home, they have an 'unseemly waddle' which entitles everyone 'to laugh till their sides split at the spectacle'".

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