

Characters in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Learning Intentions

- Understand each **main character** in depth:
 - Their **traits** (e.g., brave, manipulative).
 - Their **development** throughout the text (character arc).
 - Their **relationships** with others in the story.
 - Their **role** in conveying themes.
- Be able to discuss **minor characters** if they play a critical role.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* features a cast of complex characters who navigate themes of morality, gender roles, and societal judgment. The main characters' traits, development, and relationships contribute significantly to the novel's impact.

Main Characters

Helen Graham (Mrs. Huntingdon)

- **Traits:**
 - Helen is strong-willed, morally upright, and fiercely independent. She is devoted to her son and determined to protect him from the corrupting influence of her husband.
 - Her artistic talents and piety further emphasise her resilience and complexity.
 - **Development:**
 - Helen evolves from a young, hopeful bride who marries for love to a determined and self-reliant woman who escapes an abusive marriage.
 - Her return to Wildfell Hall after Arthur's death signifies her complete independence and newfound ability to shape her own future.
 - **Relationships:**
 - *Arthur Huntingdon*: Her tumultuous marriage with him highlights her moral fortitude and societal constraints placed on women.
 - *Gilbert Markham*: Helen's growing trust in Gilbert demonstrates her ability to find love again, despite her past trauma.
 - *Arthur (her son)*: Her maternal love drives much of the plot, as she prioritises his well-being over societal expectations.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Helen embodies themes of resilience, moral integrity, and the subversion of traditional gender roles. Her actions challenge societal norms, making her a groundbreaking character for her time.
-

Gilbert Markham

- **Traits:**
 - Gilbert is earnest, passionate, and sometimes impulsive. His initial immaturity gives way to greater understanding and empathy as the story progresses.

- **Development:**
 - Gilbert grows from a jealous and judgmental suitor to a supportive and understanding partner. His journey reflects the importance of patience and trust in relationships.
 - **Relationships:**
 - *Helen Graham*: Initially fascinated by her mystery, Gilbert's love for Helen deepens as he learns about her past and gains her trust.
 - *Eliza Millward*: His fleeting interest in Eliza at the beginning contrasts with his enduring devotion to Helen, highlighting his maturation.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Gilbert serves as a counterpoint to the toxic masculinity displayed by Arthur Huntingdon, illustrating the possibility of respectful and equal partnerships.
-

Arthur Huntingdon

- **Traits:**
 - Arthur is charming, manipulative, and morally bankrupt. He represents the worst aspects of patriarchal privilege, using his charm to exploit and abuse.
 - **Development:**
 - Arthur does not change significantly throughout the novel, remaining selfish and hedonistic until his death. His character arc serves as a cautionary tale.
 - **Relationships:**
 - *Helen Graham*: His abusive behaviour towards Helen and neglect of their son drive her to leave him, serving as the catalyst for the novel's central conflict.
 - *His Friends*: His relationships with his debauched circle reflect his moral corruption and influence over others.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Arthur embodies the dangers of unchecked privilege and the consequences of moral decay. His character highlights the societal structures that allow men to exploit women.
-

Minor Characters

Arthur (Helen's Son)

- **Traits:**
 - Innocent and impressionable, young Arthur symbolises hope and the potential for moral redemption.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Arthur's well-being is central to Helen's decisions, highlighting themes of maternal responsibility and the influence of upbringing.
-

Frederick Lawrence

- **Traits:**
 - Frederick is Helen's supportive brother, who helps her escape her marriage. He is calm, rational, and loyal.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Frederick represents the possibility of positive male figures in a world dominated by toxic masculinity. His assistance contrasts with the neglect and abuse of Arthur Huntingdon.
-

Eliza Millward

- **Traits:**
 - Eliza is flirtatious, self-centred, and gossipy, embodying the small-mindedness of the local community.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Eliza highlights the destructive power of gossip and societal judgment, themes that are central to Helen's struggles.
-

Annabella Wilmot

- **Traits:**
 - Annabella is vain and superficial, pursuing wealth and status through marriage.
 - **Role in Themes:**
 - Her unhappy marriage mirrors Helen's, serving as a critique of societal pressures on women to marry for material gain rather than love or compatibility.
-

Conclusion

The characters in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are instrumental in exploring its themes of morality, gender dynamics, and societal constraints. Helen's resilience, Gilbert's growth, and Arthur Huntingdon's moral decay provide a compelling examination of human behaviour and the oppressive structures of Victorian society. Minor characters further enrich the narrative, offering contrasting perspectives and deepening the novel's critique of societal norms.