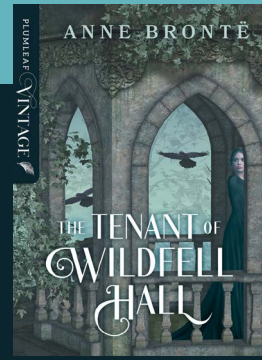


THE TENANT OF
WILDFELL
HALL



BY
ANNE
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1. In her introduction to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Finola Austin describes the author, Anne Brontë, as entering territory that was “shocking to contemporary audiences and remains controversial today.” Why would the novel be considered controversial today?
2. Anne Brontë’s portrayal of Helen Graham is remarkable for the depiction of the character’s obvious sexuality, which was uncommon for the time. How is Helen’s sexual desire, first for Arthur Huntingdon and later for Gilbert Markham, apparent? Why is it important in the novel?
3. Why does Helen return to care for her husband, from whom she is estranged, when he is dying? Is this behaviour in character? Does it show strength or weakness?
4. Helen Graham is a complex character. Does her marriage to Gilbert Markham undermine her portrayal as a strong woman? Is this marriage more than a giving in to the mores of the time? What evidence is there that this marriage may not be a typical Victorian marriage?
5. Much had been made of the proverbial slamming of the bedroom door when Helen tells her husband that they are “husband and wife only in the name.” At that point, Helen feels she has little recourse but to stay with him, despite his behaviour and excesses, since a married woman had no legal rights of her own, and she would have likely lost custody of her child. Is staying with her husband the best decision she could have made? Does she have any other choices? How different are similar situations today? Do women have better options?
6. How do Helen’s actions show the importance of motherhood and the role of mothers? Why is Helen willing to suffer in her marriage but plans an escape when she feels her son is threatened by her husband’s corrupt behaviour? Why is the fact that she is a single mother cause for gossip once she does leave her husband?
7. Are any of the male characters admirable? Do any have redeeming qualities? Is the reader intended to be sympathetic toward any of the male characters? Why might the author have portrayed the male characters as she did?
8. Who is the protagonist of this book: Helen or Gilbert? How can an argument be made for choosing either one as the protagonist?
9. Do the many subplots add to or detract from the impact of the book? Why might the author have deemed them necessary?
10. Does the complex narrative structure needlessly complicate the novel? What benefits are there to the narrative shifting between different points of view and male and female perspectives? What drawbacks are there? What impact does the narrative structure have on the reader?
11. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is often considered to be the most overtly feminist of the Brontë novels. It discussed very risqué topics for its time and was even published originally under a pseudonym. Can *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* be viewed as a feminist novel? How would the novel change if it were published today? Is the novel timeless or was it simply timely?