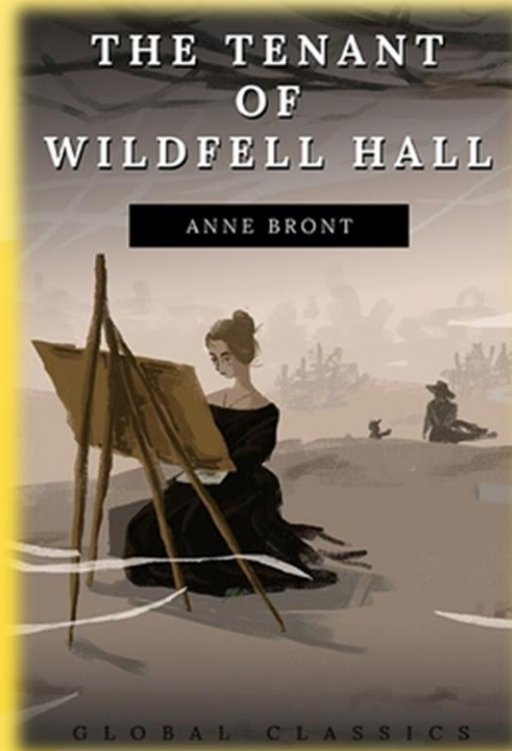


# The Tenant of Wildfell Hall



*"The slamming of [Helen's] bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England." May Sinclair.*



- **Anne Bronte** used pseudonym **Acton Bell**
- Attended The Clergy Daughter's school
- Worked as a governess
- Her brother Branwell was a severe alcoholic
- Wrote in a realistic style rather a romantic one
- *The Tenant* (1848) was wildly popular, but disturbing



Anne( left) 1820 - 1849



# Helen Graham

- **Mysterious** young widow, who arrives at Wildfell Hall, an Elizabethan mansion, to live with her son Arthur and a servant.
- She makes her income by **selling pictures**.
- Despises connection with the neighbourhood
- Helen is slowly drawn into the social circles of the village.
- Gilbert Markham is attracted to Helen
- There are rumors about Helen and a mysterious **man who often visits** the mansion: a Mr Lawrence.
- Gilbert confronts violently Mr Lawrence, who is actually her brother.
- Helen gives Gilbert her diaries.





# A Scandalous Woman



- Drawing pictures / working makes her quite scandalous and **Bohemian**

Refused the rules  
of society

- She lives **secluded** and this gives rise to gossip in the neighbouring village

## HENCE

She is an **outcast**. Eventually she must accept the company of her neighbours to avoid small talk

- The character of Helen Graham was probably inspired by Anna Isabella Milbanke, the wife of George Byron



# Arthur Huntingdon

- Helen marries for love.
- Arthur is handsome, witty but also spoilt and selfish.
- He is jealous of their child and claims Helen's attentions.
- He starts to be often away.
- Helen hopes to reform him
- Arthur has an affair with the wife of one of his dissolute friends: Lady Lowborough.
- Arthur derides and humbles her, refusing to grant her a divorce.
- Only when Arthur starts to encourage his son to drink and swear, Helen leaves him with the help of her brother.
- Arthur was inspired by Anne's brother Branwell



# A Man's Upbringing

- Arthur Huntington is the result of his upbringing as **the first son** of a wealthy family:

**MOTHERS** → PANDERED → WHIMS

**FATHERS** → TAUGHT → TO 'BE A MAN'



- He has no inner resources, can barely write, and is easily bored
- He demands constant entertainment and instant gratification
- At home, he is restless and drawn to the pleasures of London( wine, women, gambling)

**HENCE**

- Arthur's upbringing and behaviour were typical for a male member of the social elite

Those who had outstanding  
roles in society





# Despite All

- Helen learns that her husband is ill and goes back to Grassdale.
- She nurses him till he dies.
- There is no repentance and Arthur rejects any responsibility of his actions.
- Now wealthy and independent, she is free to marry Gilbert, **who is far below her station**



# Gilbert Markham

- Gilbert Markham is **the principal narrator** in the novel.
- He often displays jealousy, moodiness and anger

**BUT**

differently from Arthur, he grows morally and proves to be worthy of Helen.





# Symbols

## DIARY:

Very popular genre as:  
intimate, real

- a) the answer behind the mysterious Helen Grantham
- b) trust, when Helen gives it to Gilbert.

## PAINTINGS:

- a) Helen's liberation



MARRIAGE



# The Artist



- Before marriage Helen defined herself as an artist.
- After her marriage to Arthur, Helen, accepting the role of wife, rarely refers to herself as an artist.
- Helen's artworks legally belonged to her husband and the law allowed Arthur to destroy them.
- Posing as a widow, Helen makes her role as an artist who sells her works to support a child more socially acceptable.

... which he did, when he discovered her plans to earn money by selling paintings



# Themes

- Domestic violence
- Gender roles
- Marriage
- Alcoholism





# Gender Roles

In such case as **cheating**:

Women: expected to **stay**

Men: could **divorce**



In such case as **divorce**:

Women: were **banned** from society

Men: **remarried** with no criticism



# Married Women's property Act 1870



allowed married women to be legal owner of the money they earned and to inherit property.

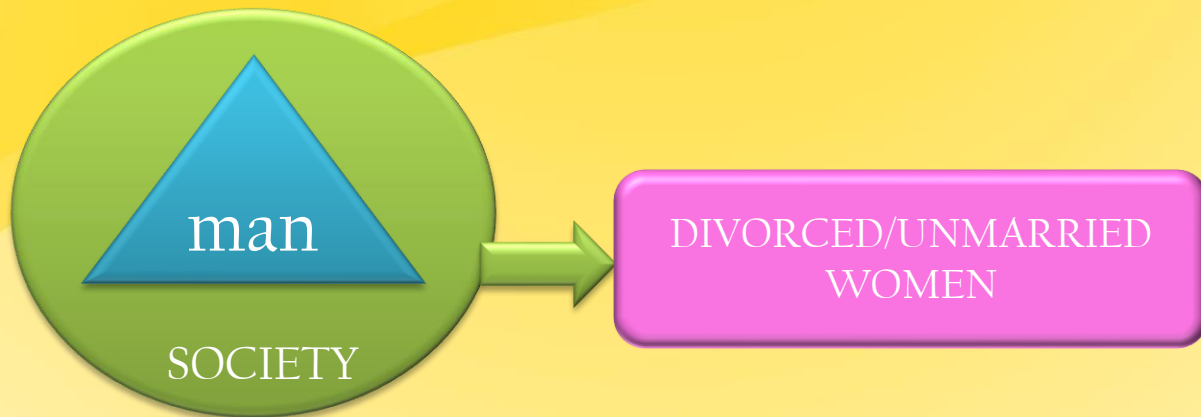
Before 1870, once married:

- Any money made by a woman became the property of the husband with the exception of the dowry.
- She had no legal custody of her children.
- Women were not recognized to be a separate legal being.
- A woman had no longer the right to do anything with her property even if it was still legally hers.
- She could not sue or divorce.



# Being a Tenant

- A tenant is a person who **occupies** land or property rented from a landlord. 
- Helen is the tenant, not an owner-occupier, of Wildfell Hall, the place of her birth, which has been bequeathed to her brother 
- Hence once left the marital home, being a tenant, defines new status: she is **displaced**.





'Curious enough is  
to read *Wuthering  
Heights* and *The  
Tenant of Wildfell  
Hall*.....

...and remember  
that the writers  
were two  
retiring, solitary,  
consumptive  
girls!



G.H.LEWIS

