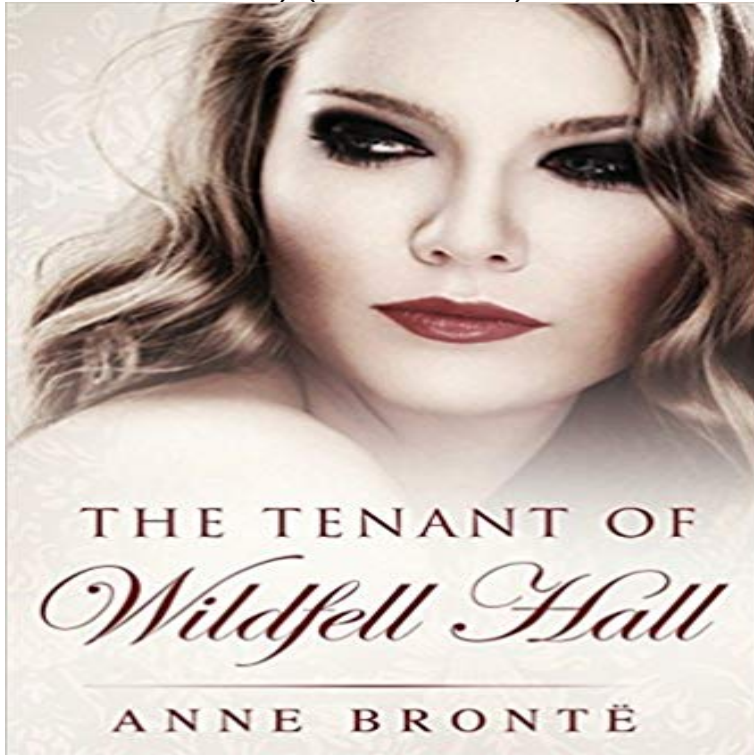


Tenant of Wildfell Hall: (Starbooks Classics Editions) (Collection of Bronte sisters) (Volume 5)



The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the second and final novel by English author Anne Brontë, published in 1848 under the pseudonym Acton Bell. Probably the most shocking of the Brontës novels, this novel had an instant phenomenal success but after Annes death, her sister Charlotte prevented its re-publication. The novel is framed as a letter from Gilbert Markham to his friend and brother-in-law about the events leading to his meeting his wife. A mysterious young widow arrives at Wildfell Hall, an Elizabethan mansion which has been empty for many years, with her young son and servant. She lives there in strict seclusion under the assumed name Helen Graham and very soon finds herself the victim of local slander. Refusing to believe anything scandalous about her, Gilbert Markham, a young farmer, discovers her dark secrets. In her diary, Helen writes about her husbands physical and moral decline through alcohol, and the world of debauchery and cruelty from which she has fled. This novel of marital betrayal is set within a moral framework tempered by Annes optimistic belief in universal salvation. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is mainly considered to be one of the first sustained feminist novels. May Sinclair, in 1913, said that the slamming of Helens bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England. In escaping her husband, Helen violates not only social conventions, but also English law. Reception The Tenant of Wildfell Hall had an instant phenomenal success and rapidly outsold Emilys Wuthering Heights. Within six weeks, the novel was sold out. In America, the novel achieved even greater sales than it did in England. In response, Anne wrote her now famous preface to the second edition in which she defended her object in writing the novel, saying that she did not write with the intent of amusing the reader or gratifying her own taste, but because she wished to tell the

truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it. She added that she was at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man. In September, the Rambler published another hostile review, opining that Acton and Currer Bell were probably one Yorkshire woman, and while allowing that the writer was clever and vigorous, it denounced the truly offensive and sensual spirit in the novel, saying that it contained disgusting scenes of debauchery and was neither edifying, nor true to life, nor full of warning. Around the same time, Sharpes Magazine warned ladies against reading The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, saying that it was not a fit subject matter for the pages of a work ... to be obtruded by every circulating library-keeper upon the notice of our sisters, wives, and daughters. However, there were a few positive reviews to balance this. The Athenaeum called it the most interesting novel which we have read for a month past.

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