

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall Study Guide

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
The Letter and Chapters 1-5.....	6
Chapters 6-9.....	8
Chapters 10-15.....	10
Chapters 16-21.....	12
Chapters 22-28.....	14
Chapters 29-33.....	16
Chapters 34-39.....	18
Chapters 40-45.....	20
Chapters 46-48.....	22
Chapters 49-53.....	24
Characters.....	26
Objects/Places.....	31
Themes.....	33
Style.....	36
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	40

Plot Summary

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the second novel by Anne Bronte. In this novel, Anne Bronte tells the story of Mrs. Huntingdon, the wife of an alcoholic from whom she feels it necessary to protect her son. Mrs. Huntingdon runs away from her husband, taking her son and living in her ancestry home under the name of Mrs. Graham, a widow living on what she can make selling paintings. During this time, Mrs. Graham meets and falls in love with a local farmer, Mr. Gilbert Markham, whose love she cannot return until the death of her husband or dissolution of her marriage. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was highly controversial when it was originally published and continues to be a novel characterized by its unique insight into the psychology of marriage.

Mr. Gilbert Markham is writing a letter to his brother-in-law in which he is telling a highly personal story in return for one his brother-in-law told him. This story begins in the fall of 1827 when Mr. Markham became aware of the arrival of a tenant in the abandoned Wildfell Hall. Just as curious as the rest of his neighbors, Mr. Markham finds this widow, Mrs. Graham, to be highly opinionated, independent, and excitingly beautiful. Mr. Markham sets out to befriend this woman, but is rebuffed in nearly every attempt. However, Mr. Markham invites himself along each time his sister goes to visit Mrs. Graham and manages to talk Mrs. Graham into going to the shore with him and his friends. During this time, Mr. Markham befriends Mrs. Graham's five-year-old son and soon finds this to be a doorway into Mrs. Graham's affections.

In time, Mr. Markham finds himself falling in love with Mrs. Graham, despite rumors that begin to circulate regarding her virtues. Finally Mrs. Graham tells him that while the rumors are false, there are things about her that he does not know. Mrs. Graham promises to tell him these secrets on their next meeting. However, before that meeting can take place, Mr. Markham overhears Mrs. Graham talking to Mr. Lawrence, her landlord, in such a way that he begins to believe the rumors may be true. Mr. Markham begins to avoid Mrs. Graham. At the same time, Mr. Markham meets with Mr. Lawrence on the road and hits him with his riding crop, sending him flying to the ground from the back of his horse.

Finally Mrs. Graham convinces Mr. Markham to come speak to her. When Mrs. Graham learns what Mr. Markham overheard between herself and Mr. Lawrence, she gives him her diary to read, promising it will explain everything. The diary begins six years before Mr. Markham met Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Graham begins by describing her first season in London in search of a husband. Mrs. Graham, or Helen as she was called at the time, is not pleased with any of these men because they are all old. There is one man, however, a Mr. Huntingdon, that she finds dashing. Despite her aunt's warnings against marrying a man without virtue, Helen falls deeply in love with Mr. Huntingdon.

Mr. Huntingdon comes to Staningley, the home of Helen's uncle, in order to hunt. During this time, Mr. Huntingdon learns of Helen's affections for him and begins spending his time with Annabella Hargrave instead. Soon Helen learns he has done this to make her jealous and that he really loves her. Soon they are engaged to be married, despite the



reservations of Helen's family and friends. Marriage proves to be bliss at first, despite some odd behaviors on Mr. Huntingdon's part. However, things begin to sour when Mr. Huntingdon takes a trip to London and refuses to return until fall.

Mr. Huntingdon invites his friends to visit Grassdale for hunting in the fall. Annabella Hargrave, now Lady Lowborough, accompanies her husband. Lady Lowborough begins a flirtation with Mr. Huntingdon that highlights her contempt for her husband. Mrs. Huntingdon is offended by this behavior, but feels as though there is nothing she can do about it. Mrs. Huntingdon is relieved with their guests go home. A month or so later, Mrs. Huntingdon gives birth to a son. Mr. Huntingdon is not impressed with his new child and resents the attention his wife pays to the child.

Mrs. Huntingdon struggles between caring for her child and making her husband happy. Mr. Huntingdon goes to London again in the spring and fails to return until the fall. The following year, he again invites his friends to Grassdale to hunt. The men drink to excess for a while, but then Mr. Huntingdon appears to be losing interest in the drink. Mrs. Huntingdon hears her husband's friends assign his new attitude to the woman he loves and guesses they are talking about herself. However, Mrs. Huntingdon later learns that her husband is carrying on an affair with Lady Lowborough. Mrs. Huntingdon begs to be allowed to take her child and leave the marriage, but Mr. Huntingdon refuses to allow. Instead, Mrs. Huntingdon makes it clear that their marriage is now one in name only.

Mrs. Huntingdon grows increasingly concerned for her son as his father teaches him to drink and act in vulgar ways. Mrs. Huntingdon begins to plan an escape, a way to get her son and go to the continent, away from her husband. However, her husband learns of her plans and puts an end to them. Mrs. Huntingdon begins to search for other ways of escape, finally turning to her brother, Frederick Lawrence. Frederick agrees to help his sister by providing sanctuary in their childhood home, Wildfell Hall, but only if she will promise to give the marriage one last try. Mrs. Huntingdon agrees, but knows she must take her son away when Mr. Huntingdon moves his mistress into the house under the guise of being the governess.

Mr. Markham finishes reading this diary and returns to Mrs. Huntingdon, vowing his undying love. However, Mrs. Huntingdon tells him they cannot be together because she is still married in the eyes of God. Mrs. Huntingdon makes Mr. Markham promise to go away and not contact her for six months. Mr. Markham does, but keeps track of Mrs. Huntingdon's movements through her brother and his good friend, Mr. Lawrence. Unfortunately, Mr. Lawrence will not speak of his sister, but will only share the letters she writes. In these, Mr. Markham learns that Mrs. Huntingdon has returned to her husband to nurse him after a fall from his horse and of his subsequent death.

Mr. Markham waits the six months, but soon learns that Mrs. Huntingdon is no longer living at Grassdale, but has moved back to Staningley to be with her now widowed aunt. Mr. Markham continues to wait, even past the six month mark, for some word that Mrs. Huntingdon still loves him. When Mr. Markham hears of a marriage between Mrs. Huntingdon and Mr. Hargrave, he rushes to stop the wedding, only to learn it is the



marriage of Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Hargrave's little sister, Esther. Mr. Markham then goes to Staningley to declare his undying love to Mrs. Huntingdon, but learns she has inherited a great deal of property from her uncle and that he is no longer suitable to be her husband.

Mrs. Huntingdon discovers Mr. Markham at her gate and invites him inside. They talk, and Mrs. Huntingdon convinces him that his lack of property should not stand between them and true love. Mr. Markham and Mrs. Huntingdon marry the following August and live together in happiness for more than twenty years.

The Letter and Chapters 1-5

The Letter and Chapters 1-5 Summary

The novel is set in the 1820s, a time in which society expectations were extremely important to the way a person was expected to conduct their personal business. This novel is about a woman who has left her husband. During this time period, it was scandalous for a woman to leave her husband and almost unheard of for a woman to take her child with her since the child was considered to belong to the husband.

In the letter, Mr. Gilbert Markham writes a letter to his friend telling him that he knows he is upset that Mr. Markham refused to tell a personal story in return for his friend telling one, so he plans to tell his story in several chapters in several letters. In chapter one, Mr. Markham begins his story by talking about his inheritance of his father's farm and his responsibility to his mother and two younger siblings. After work in the fields one afternoon in late 1827, Mr. Markham came home to tea and learns that a widow has moved into the abandoned Wildfell Hall. Rose, Mr. Markham's sister, tells him that several other families in the area have gone to meet this widow, Mrs. Graham, but she has yet to return those visits. That Sunday, Mr. Markham sees Mrs. Graham for himself and he is fascinated by her beauty.

In chapter two, Mr. Markham happens to walk past Wildfell Hall while out walking with his dog. A little boy comes out to meet Mr. Markham, drawn to him because of his dog, Sancho. Afterward, Mr. Markham goes to the home of the vicar, Mr. Millward, to visit his beloved, Eliza. In chapter three, Mrs. Graham comes to the Markham home to return Rose's visit. Mrs. Graham explains that she goes nowhere without her child and her child cannot walk the distance required to go visit the other families who have come to see her. Mrs. Graham asks Mrs. Markham to express her regret to these other families. During the visit, Mrs. Markham serves wine, but both Mrs. Graham and her son, Arthur, refuse. A discussion ensues over whether or not a mother should dissuade her child from partaking in vices. Mrs. Markham has the opinion that a mother should not participate too much in the discipline of a male child because it might adversely affect his behaviors in adulthood. Mrs. Graham, however, disagrees and participates in a lively discussion about the theory with Mr. Markham. When Mrs. Graham leaves, however, they have become friends.

In chapter four, the Markhams host a small party for the neighboring families. Mr. Markham spends a great deal of his time in the company of Miss Eliza Millward. Afterward, Mrs. Markham asks her son not to marry Miss Millward because she knows her type and she will not care for her husband as a woman should. In chapter five, Mr. Markham accompanies Rose on a visit to Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Graham entertains her guests in her art studio because there is no fire in her parlor. When Mrs. Graham leaves the room for a moment to speak to another guest, Mr. Markham begins looking through her paintings. Mr. Markham finds a portrait of a fair-haired man and one of Mrs.

Graham's child at a younger age. Both these paintings face the wall and Mrs. Graham returns them to their place when she finds Mr. Markham looking at them.

The Letter and Chapters 1-5 Analysis

This novel is written in the first person point of view, in a format that suggests the main character is writing a letter to a dear friend. The reader does not know the nature of this relationship or what story the friend told to make Mr. Markham tell his story, but knows that Mr. Markham is telling this story in order to appease his friend's hurt feelings after he refused to reciprocate in telling a personal story. This format tells the reader that the story included in this novel is one that is highly personal to Mr. Markham and one in which Mr. Markham plays a major role.

As the story begins to unfold, Mr. Markham reveals some of his character to the reader. Mr. Markham is a hard working, honest man who is in love with the young daughter of the neighborhood vicar. Mr. Markham lives with his mother and two younger siblings, taking responsibility for their care by running the family farm even though he does not enjoy this work. As a gentleman, Mr. Markham is drawn into the social expectations that cause him to visit with a new neighbor, widow Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Graham is living alone in a few rooms of a neighboring manor, Wildfell Hall. This fact causes a great deal of gossip, in part because she is a woman living alone that no one knows much about and in part because she seems secretive and unwilling to visit with her neighbors. Mr. Markham finds her opinionated and beautiful, drawing him slowly into the curiosity that surrounds her.

Two important points on Mrs. Graham are touched on in these chapters as well. Mrs. Graham is opposed to her son drinking alcoholic beverages, suggesting to the reader that Mrs. Graham has had a bad experience with alcohol, especially since it has been suggested by the local vicar that drinking in moderation is not only acceptable, but expected. Second, Mr. Markham finds several paintings in Mrs. Graham's studio that are clearly being hidden, suggesting that Mrs. Graham has something to hide. Mr. Markham also notices that Mrs. Graham signs her paintings with a false name, suggesting again that she is hiding or has something to hide.

Chapters 6-9

Chapters 6-9 Summary

In chapter six, for four months gossip continues to spread about Mrs. Graham, and Mr. Markham often finds himself running into her during his daily walks. One afternoon in March, after some time in which it appeared that Mrs. Graham has been avoiding him, Mr. Markham comes across her by a spring. Mrs. Graham is drawing in her sketch book and becomes annoyed when Mr. Markham attempts to watch. On the way home, Mr. Markham runs into Mr. Lawrence, the landlord of Wildfell Hall. They are friends, so Mr. Markham stops to talk. Mr. Lawrence is curious about Mr. Markham's interest in Mrs. Graham and appears quite concerned about their relationship, even though the whole county knows that Mr. Lawrence is courting Miss Wilson. That night at dinner, Mrs. Markham again warns Mr. Markham not to marry a woman who will not make his happiness her prime occupation.

In chapter seven, Mr. Markham runs into his siblings and Miss Millward walking to Wildfell Hall. Mr. Markham joins them on their visit, during which Fergus, Mr. Markham's younger brother, rudely asks Mrs. Graham many personal questions, such as why she only lives in a few rooms of the large manor. During this visit, it is suggested that a party of friends take Mrs. Graham to the shore where she would like to make a few sketches for future paintings. A few weeks later they all gather for this trip and Mr. Markham finds himself walking with Mrs. Graham the whole time, fascinated with her conversation. Once they reach their destination, they have a nice picnic, and then Mrs. Graham leaves her child with Miss Mary Millward to go make her sketches. Mr. Markham follows her, speaking with the reluctant companion while she works her sketch. On the way home, Mr. Markham finds himself walking with Miss Eliza Millward, a companion he finds wanting in comparison to Mrs. Graham.

In chapter eight, six weeks have passed. Mr. Markham and Mrs. Graham have become friends. They have gotten into the habit of sharing books, so when Mrs. Graham expresses the wish to have a specific book, Mr. Markham orders it as a present. However, when Mr. Markham gives it to Mrs. Graham, she refuses to accept it as a gift and instead demands to pay for it. Mr. Markham is offended. Finally Mr. Markham talks Mrs. Graham into accepting the gift without feeling as though she owes Mr. Markham anything more than friendship.

In chapter nine, Mr. Markham pays a visit to the Millward home where Miss Eliza Millward suggests that she has heard gossip about Mrs. Graham, but she refuses to say what. A few days later at a party, Miss Wilson refuses to sit near Mrs. Graham because she has heard that Mrs. Graham is not a widow, but Mr. Lawrence's mistress. In fact, the rumor says that Mr. Lawrence is the father of Mrs. Graham's child. Mr. Markham refuses to believe these lies, lies that change his opinion of both Miss Eliza Millward and Miss Wilson. Later, Mr. Markham goes out to the garden to be alone with his emotions and Mrs. Graham stumbles on him. They talk for a minute, until they are discovered by

Mr. Lawrence and Miss Wilson. It is clear Miss Wilson is saying something unpleasant about Mrs. Graham to Mr. Lawrence, causing Mrs. Graham some embarrassment. Mrs. Graham returns to the party. When the party is over, Mr. Markham offers to take Mrs. Graham home, but she refuses. When Mr. Lawrence comments on this, Mr. Markham is rude.

Chapters 6-9 Analysis

As Mr. Markham gets to know Mrs. Graham better, she continues to be aloof and evasive, suggesting again to the reader that she has something to hide. However, it is apparent that Mr. Markham is falling in love with her and that he now prefers her company to that of Miss Eliza Millward, the object of his affections before Mrs. Graham's arrival. This apparently does not sit well with Miss Eliza Millward, as evidenced by her delight in spreading gossip about Mrs. Graham. At the same time, Mr. Lawrence begins showing interest in Mr. Markham's relationship with Mrs. Graham. Mr. Lawrence is courting Miss Jane Wilson, so Mr. Markham is confused by why he might be jealous of his relationship with Mrs. Graham.

Gossip about Mrs. Graham suggests that she is the mistress of Mr. Lawrence and that he is the father of her child, rather than the mysterious dead husband. Mr. Markham, who perhaps knows Mrs. Graham better than anyone else in the neighborhood, does not believe this gossip. However, Mr. Lawrence's continued interest in Mrs. Graham begins to make Mr. Markham wonder why he is so interested. This causes Mr. Markham to become rude toward Mr. Lawrence, treating him with less respect than required by a friendship.

Chapters 10-15

Chapters 10-15 Summary

In chapter ten, Mr. Markham continues to defend Mrs. Graham's character, this time to his mother and sister. Mr. Markham then goes to see Mrs. Graham, where he finds her determined to keep their relationship on a friendship basis only. On the way home, Mr. Markham runs into Mr. Lawrence on the way to Wildfell Hall, but he will not tell Mr. Markham why. Mr. Markham also runs into Mr. Millward, who seems to believe the rumors about Mrs. Graham. In chapter eleven, Mr. Millward comes to visit the Markhams. Mr. Markham learns that Mr. Millward has told Mrs. Graham about the rumors about her in an attempt to set her on the path of virtue. Upon hearing this news, Mr. Markham immediately rushes to visit Mrs. Graham.

In chapter twelve, Mr. Markham finds Mrs. Graham upset by the gossip. Mr. Markham tells her that he loves her and that he wants to protect her, but she insists that he cannot help her. Mrs. Graham tells Mr. Markham there is a lot about her he does not understand, but that she is a virtuous woman despite what everyone thinks. Mrs. Graham agrees to meet Mr. Markham the following day and tell him the truth, but for now he must go. Mr. Markham begins to leave, but returns because he wants one more look at Mrs. Graham. Unfortunately, Mr. Markham overhears a conversation between Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence that suggests the rumors are all true. In chapter thirteen, Mr. Markham begins to bury himself in work even as he falls into a deep depression. Mr. Markham reluctantly goes to visit Mr. Wilson and is outraged to find Miss Wilson and Miss Eliza Millward there, still talking about Mrs. Graham.

In chapter fourteen, Mr. Markham is on his way to town when he runs into Mr. Lawrence on the road. When Mr. Lawrence begins to speak to him, Mr. Markham hits him on the head with a riding crop hard enough to knock him off his horse. Mr. Markham turns to leave, but decides he should help Mr. Lawrence remount his horse. However, Mr. Markham refuses to accept Mr. Markham's help, preferring to remain sitting on the road. Upon returning home, Mr. Markham learns that Mr. Lawrence has taken ill. In chapter fifteen, Mrs. Graham seeks Mr. Markham out and asks him why he has been avoiding her. Mr. Markham resists her desire to talk at first, but finally agrees to meet with her. Mrs. Graham learns of what Mr. Markham overheard between her and Mr. Lawrence. Mrs. Graham appears relieved. Mrs. Graham gives Mr. Markham the bulk of her diary, removing some of the last pages, and asks him to read them to understand her relationship with Mr. Lawrence. Mr. Markham does, reading the entire diary in one night.

Chapters 10-15 Analysis

Mr. Markham confesses his love for Mrs. Graham and learns that she has a secret she feels he should know. However, Mrs. Graham continues to deny Mr. Markham the right to court her, but not explaining why they must only be friends. The reader hopes that

Mrs. Graham's confession will explain her behavior. Unfortunately, before Mr. Markham and the reader can learn what these secrets are, it appears that Mr. Markham has stumbled on the truth on his own, learning that the rumors about Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence are true. Much to Mr. Markham's credit, and the respectability of his character, Mr. Markham does not tell anyone what he has learned. Mr. Markham suffers in silence, depressed by the revelation of his beloved's true character.

Mr. Markham and Mr. Lawrence are good friends when the novel begins, but Mr. Markham has quickly changed his opinion of this friend as his affections for Mrs. Graham grow. This, coupled with the conversation he overheard, leads Mr. Markham to do something impassioned and inappropriate—knocking Mr. Lawrence from his horse. Mr. Lawrence has no idea why Mr. Markham is angry with him, but he is unwilling to forgive without apology. This suggests to the reader that the tensions between these two characters will only grow as the plot continues to develop. However, a conversation with Mrs. Graham suggests there is a good explanation for the conversation between Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence that Mr. Markham overheard. All the answers to Mrs. Graham's secrets appear to be in the diary she gave to Mr. Markham, and the reader greatly anticipates the following chapters in which Mr. Markham has promised his correspondent he will share the entire contents of this diary.

Chapters 16-21

Chapters 16-21 Summary

Chapter sixteen begins six years prior to the beginning of Mr. Markham's story. Helen, as Mrs. Graham was known at this point, has returned early from the season in London. Helen's aunt warns her that she should not marry a man only interested in her for her looks or wealth. Helen insists that she does not plan to marry anyone but the man who loves her. Helen has already set her sights on Mr. Arthur Huntingdon, a young friend of her uncle's. Helen's aunt does not approve. Helen's aunt believes this man has bad habits that will make him a bad husband. Helen's aunt wants Helen to marry Mr. Boarham, a man who has proposed, but whom Helen finds boring. Helen turns down his proposal. In chapter seventeen, Helen relates a dinner party she and her aunt and uncle attended at the home of another of her suitors, Mr. Wilmot. Also in attendance are Mr. Huntingdon as well as Mr. Wilmot's niece, Annabella, and her cousin, Miss Milicent Hargrave. Mr. Huntingdon flirts with Helen, drawing her aside and asking how she feels about him. Helen's aunt finds them and is outraged at her improper conduct, again warning her that Mr. Huntingdon is not an appropriate match for her.

In chapter eighteen, Helen and her guardians return home early because of her uncle's illness. However, that fall her uncle has invited several men to come to Staningley to hunt. Among these men is Mr. Huntingdon. Helen is excited to meet Mr. Huntingdon again, but is horrified when, during an examination of her drawings, Mr. Huntingdon finds a small portrait of him she has made and forgotten to erase on the back of a drawing. Mr. Huntingdon keeps the picture, causing Helen great embarrassment. The following day, Mr. Huntingdon finds Helen in the library. Again he takes her sketches and searches them for other miniatures. When he finds another, Mr. Huntingdon moves to keep it, but returns it when Helen becomes upset. In return, Helen tears it up and throws it in the fire. Mr. Huntingdon is upset by this move and spends the next few days flirting openly with Annabella.

In chapter nineteen, Helen begins to cry as Annabella sings a song she finds touching. Mr. Huntingdon believes Helen has done this because of him and he corners her, forcing her to admit her feelings. Mr. Huntingdon proposes, but Helen refuses to accept until he has her uncle's permission. In chapter twenty, Helen works to convince her aunt that she wants to marry Mr. Huntingdon. Helen uses several biblical references to plead her case, finally convincing her aunt. Helen also receives permission from her uncle, who suggests a wedding date around Christmas. In chapter twenty-one, Helen tells her friends about her upcoming nuptials and finds them less than happy for her. Helen refuses to allow this to get her down, however, and she continues to plan the wedding. Mr. Huntingdon also receives letters from his friends, who disapprove as well. One claims he must marry the first girl he sees to set things right.

Chapters 16-21 Analysis

Although the story is told in something of a linear fashion, these chapters are part of the pages contained in Mrs. Graham's diary, therefore taking the reader back in time. Helen, Mrs. Graham, is a young woman in these pages, just old enough to begin searching for a husband, suggesting her age to be between seventeen and nineteen. Helen is living with her aunt and uncle due to the death of her mother and the unwillingness of her father to raise a female child. Helen is clearly much loved by her aunt and uncle, especially the aunt who finds herself fighting to keep Helen from making a mistake in choosing the man she will marry. Helen's aunt warns her frequently not to marry Mr. Huntingdon, a man who has a reputation for heavy drinking and improper behavior, but Helen is young and believes herself to be in love. The reader sees these warnings, and while they appear to just be the caution of a loving aunt, they also seem to foreshadow the future of Helen's marriage.

Mr. Huntingdon is a good-looking man who is often impetuous and behaves in ways that suggests a lack of maturity on his part. Helen is offended by some of these behaviors, but fails to believe that these behaviors suggest a man who is not ready to be married. The reactions of Helen and Mr. Huntingdon's friends also tell the reader that the match will be a difficult one, but again Helen is deeply in love and it appears that Mr. Huntingdon is also in love. The reader wonders, though, if there is so much love here, why Mrs. Graham, or as she will soon be known to the reader, Mrs. Huntingdon, would find herself living alone in Wildfell Hall.

Chapters 22-28

Chapters 22-28 Summary

In chapter twenty-two, Helen and Mr. Huntingdon are out riding with Lord Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot. Mr. Huntingdon tells Helen that Annabella is not in love with Lord Lowborough but is only marrying him for his title. Helen asks if Lord Lowborough is not marrying Annabella just for her fortune. Mr. Huntingdon tells Helen how Lord Lowborough lost his fortune by gambling and how he vowed never to gamble again, but then began drinking to excess. Lord Lowborough then realized he must stop drinking, but Mr. Huntingdon and his friends continually tempted him to return to drinking. Helen is outraged at Mr. Huntingdon's behavior and suggests that he tell Lord Lowborough what Annabella has told him, but he refuses. This causes Helen some doubt about her fiancé's character, but not enough to keep her from going through with the marriage.

In chapter twenty-three, Helen and Mr. Huntingdon are married. Helen is disappointed that Mr. Huntingdon did not allow them more time on their wedding vacation, but is pleased that he appears so excited to be alone with her at his home at Grassdale. One afternoon, as they walk home from church, Mr. Huntingdon tells Helen she is too religious and asks her to tone it down. Helen refuses. In chapter twenty-four, Mr. Huntingdon is growing bored at Grassdale. During this time, Mr. Huntingdon begins telling his wife stories of his past romances, including a woman who was married during their relationship. Helen is so outraged that she refuses to hear anymore. Helen refuses to talk to her husband for several days, prompting him to plan a trip to London. Finally they make up and Mr. Huntingdon agrees to take Helen to London with him. In chapter twenty-five, Helen spends a month in London with her husband, where he takes pride in showing her off. However, Mr. Huntingdon forces his wife to return to Grassdale alone so that he can attend to business. Mr. Huntingdon remains gone the entire summer, leaving his wife alone. Upon his return, Mr. Huntingdon plans to invite his friend for a hunting party.

In chapter twenty-six, Mr. Huntingdon's guests arrive, including the newly married Lord and Lady Lowborough. Mr. Huntingdon spends most evenings flirting shamelessly with Lady Lowborough, causing Helen a great deal of embarrassment. However, Helen continues to behave as the proper hostess. In chapter twenty-seven, Helen sees Mr. Huntingdon kiss Lady Lowborough's hand after she has finished playing a song on the piano. Mr. Huntingdon is properly ashamed of his actions and begins paying less attention to Lady Lowborough. In chapter twenty-eight, Helen gives birth to a son, Arthur. Mr. Huntingdon is not impressed with his new son and is jealous of the attention Helen pays to him, causing her to be forced to find a way to divide her time between the two.

Chapters 22-28 Analysis

Helen begins her marriage to Mr. Huntingdon, but it begins on a sour note as Mr. Huntingdon shows a reluctance to share his wife with the public and does not allow her to enjoy their honeymoon. Then Mr. Huntingdon becomes bored, complaining of Helen's religious beliefs and torturing her with stories of his past conquests, which include affairs with married women. To the reader, this suggests a certain enjoyment in the adventure of extramarital affairs, suggesting that Mr. Huntingdon's morals do not extend to fidelity. This foreshadows trouble for Helen. This trouble is further suggested when Mr. Huntingdon leaves his wife alone for the entire summer while he supposedly attends to business in London, and then he invites his friends and spends a great deal of time flirting with Lady Lowborough, his previous flirtation partner.

The reader is worried that Mr. Huntingdon is not mature enough to handle marriage, let alone to be a faithful woman to someone as virtuous as Helen. When their child is born and Mr. Huntingdon is less than supportive and is in fact jealous of the infant, it sets up a situation in which a wedge is sure to be driven between Helen and her husband as she is forced to choose between her infant and her love for her husband.

Chapters 29-33

Chapters 29-33 Summary

In chapter twenty-nine, a year has passed and again Mr. Huntingdon goes to London alone. Helen fills her time caring for the new baby. The neighbor, Milicent's mother, sister, and brother, come to visit often. Although Helen does not approve of Mrs. Hargrave's insistence that her children marry well, she does befriend Esther, Milicent's teenage sister. Mr. Walter Hargrave, Milicent's brother, tries to win her affections, often speaking to her of her husband's stupidity in leaving her alone, but Helen ignores his overtures even when he can prove that her husband has been lying to her about his intentions. In chapter thirty, Mr. Huntingdon returns home. Helen wants to tell him how she feels about his behavior, but puts it off because he is ill when he returns home. They argue when Helen admits her feelings, but Mr. Huntingdon refuses to listen or offer any apology. Mr. Huntingdon then begins to drink more while at home, except when Mr. Hargrave comes around. Mr. Huntingdon goes hunting with friends that fall and Helen visits her aunt, but hides from her the truth of her marriage.

In chapter thirty-one, Mr. Huntingdon sneaks off to London alone while Helen is visiting her ailing father and brother, Frederick. That fall, Mr. Huntingdon again invites his friends to hunt. Lady Lowborough is among them. Helen is annoyed when Lady Lowborough berates her husband for not drinking to excess like his friends. From that time on, Lord Lowborough begins spending his nights walking or in the library rather than drinking or sitting with the ladies. That same night, the men come into the room with the ladies and behave inappropriately. In fact, Mr. Hattersley, Milicent's husband, hits Mr. Hargrave for attempting to interfere in an argument they are having. In chapter thirty-two, Milicent asks Helen to encourage her sister, Esther, to be choosy when picking a husband. While refusing to say anything against her own husband, Milicent feels as though she was pushed into marriage and she is unhappy with her husband's habit of drinking to excess. Later, Mr. Hattersley comes into the room and upsets his wife by discussing Annabella's better assets. When Milicent runs from the room, Helen tells Mr. Hattersley that despite his wife's apparent acceptance of his behavior, she really is unhappy.

In chapter thirty-three, Helen overhears two of her husband's friends discuss how he has stopped drinking in excess because of the woman he loves. Helen believes they are speaking of her, and she is very excited. Later, when Rachel dresses her, she tells Helen that her husband is behaving in an inappropriate way, but before she can explain, Milicent comes in. After dinner, Mr. Hargrave tries to tell Helen something, but she refuses to listen. The following evening, Helen plays chess with Mr. Hargrave. When it is over, Mr. Hargrave tells her that her husband is having a clandestine meeting with Lady Lowborough. Helen goes out to catch them and is shocked to learn it is true. Helen asks her husband for permission to take her child and leave him, but he refuses. Helen then tells her husband that they will be married in name only from that time on.

Chapters 29-33 Analysis

In these chapters, the reader becomes aware of Mr. Hargrave's growing affections for Helen even as her marriage begins to fall apart. Helen refuses to acknowledge these overtures at affection, insisting that she must be true to her husband because of the vows she took before God. This opens the reader to the interpretation of Helen's religious beliefs, touching on the theme of religious faith, and to see how seriously she takes these beliefs. It also opens the door on infidelity, a theme that will be expanded upon when Helen learns that her husband is openly having an affair with Lady Lowborough under her own roof. Helen is scandalized by this and wants to leave her husband, but he refuses to allow her to take her child. During the time in which this novel is set, the husband has the only rights to the children from their marriage and a woman cannot take her child without the husband's permission. This leaves Helen stuck in a marriage that only makes her miserable.

At the same time Helen struggles with her marriage, her friend Milicent is having similar troubles. Milicent's husband, Ralph Hattersley, is a drinker like Mr. Huntingdon. Mr. Hattersley wishes his wife did not approve and that she often argued with him the same way that Helen argues with her husband, but Milicent is too kindhearted and meek to argue with her husband. Helen assures Mr. Hattersley that Milicent is unhappy with his behavior, but he does not believe her. This opens the door to a marriage that can either fall apart like Helen's, or for a man to find his way back to the road of virtue and stop taking his wife for granted, presenting a contrast to Helen's own situation.

Chapters 34-39

Chapters 34-39 Summary

In chapter thirty-four, Helen is uncomfortable being around Lady Lowborough, but she is polite. In the afternoon, Lady Lowborough asks to speak to Helen. Helen announces what she knows and suggests that Lady Lowborough stop trying to be polite to her. Helen also promises not to tell Lord Lowborough about the affair as long as Lady Lowborough promises to keep her behavior within the proper parameters. In chapter thirty-five, Helen goes down to breakfast on the last day her guests will be at Grassdale and finds Lady Lowborough awaiting her lover. Helen is outraged when Mr. Huntingdon appears and speaks intimately to Lady Lowborough, despite her presence. Then Lady Lowborough has the audacity to ask Helen to watch after Mr. Huntingdon and to keep him off the alcohol while they are apart.

In chapter thirty-six, Helen and Mr. Huntingdon live in unhappy solitude. Helen continues to allow Mr. Huntingdon to live as he pleases, no longer attempting to convince him to take better care of his personal health. When Helen does relent a little and show concern, Mr. Huntingdon is rude and mean to her. At the same time, Mr. Huntingdon is beginning to use little Arthur to get at his wife, teaching him rude behavior and to disregard his mother's teachings. In chapter thirty-seven, another year has passed. During this time Mr. Hargrave has become a friend that Helen has almost begun to trust. However, one afternoon he comes to her alone and tries to convince her that now that her husband is having an affair with Lady Lowborough and Helen has decided to remove her affections from him, that perhaps they two, Helen and Mr. Hargrave, might have an affair of their own. Helen is outraged and tells Mr. Hargrave that although her marriage is essentially over, she is still legally married and therefore not free to indulge in such an affair.

In chapter thirty-eight, it is five years since Helen married Mr. Huntingdon and two years since he began his affair with Lady Lowborough. Mr. Huntingdon's friends have come to hunt again, including Lord and Lady Lowborough. Helen speaks to Lady Lowborough and warns her that if she sees any inappropriate behavior, she will tell his husband of her affair with Mr. Huntingdon. Lady Lowborough acts on her best behavior, but somehow Lord Lowborough finds out anyway. Helen attempts to console the injured man, but he is too angry at having been in the dark so long that he cannot be consoled. One of the friends suggests a duel between the two men, but Lord Lowborough refuses. The next morning Lord and Lady Lowborough leave Grassdale.

In chapter thirty-nine, Helen begins to notice a worsening in the behavior of her son, whom her husband now takes delight in getting drunk and teaching to act in inappropriate ways. Helen tries to keep him from his father, but Mr. Huntingdon is the man of the house and has the right to keep his son at his side if he so wishes. Helen decides she must get her child away from his father and begins to paint again, hoping she can make enough money from her art and her jewelry to buy passage for herself,



Arthur, and Rachel to the continent. When Mr. Hargrave stumbles upon her plans, he offers to take her under his protection, but again Helen refuses. As they argue, Mr. Huntingdon comes into the room and begins to curse Helen for cheating on him. However, Helen is able to prove her purity by forcing Mr. Hargrave to admit she turned down his overtures to an affair. Through this episode, Helen finds a friend in Mr. Hattersley.

Chapters 34-39 Analysis

These chapters show the reader how deeply Helen's religious faith really runs, illustrating a theme of the novel. Helen is living with a man she knows no longer loves her and whom she no longer respects or loves. Helen wants out of the marriage, but when her husband refuses to be made a fool of in such a way, she refuses to be his wife in anything but name. This means that Helen must live under Mr. Huntingdon's roof and care for his home, but she no longer cares about what he does or with whom. This leaves Helen miserable because it goes against her nature to not care for a person, even the man who has broken her trust, another theme of the novel.

Helen puts up with the mistress of her husband not once, but twice in a two-year span, again showing the reader how respectable and kind she is. Helen's only action in this situation is to threaten to tell the woman's husband of her infidelity if she were to cause Helen any embarrassment in her own home. It turns out Helen does not have to confide the truth to the wronged husband; he finds out on his own in a way the reader is not allowed to see. The man is devastated. It appears this man loved his wife despite the warnings he might have seen early in his marriage. The man takes his wife home and away from her lover, ending the affair but unable to save his own reputation. It is a difficult situation, but at least this man has the option of kicking his wife out of his home. Helen has no options and must live in a loveless marriage to an abusive alcoholic.

Helen's husband begins to use her child to hurt her. Helen is forced to stand by and watch as her husband teaches the boy to drink and to act in vile ways. The boy is slowly being taught to disrespect his own mother. Helen begins to think the only way of saving her child from becoming like his father is to take him away, despite her husband's reluctance to allow them to leave. It is a desperate act for a desperate woman and once again shows the reader the depth of her personality.

Chapters 40-45

Chapters 40-45 Summary

In chapter forty, Mr. Huntingdon sees what his wife is writing and takes away her diary, reading all about her plans to run away. Mr. Huntingdon takes away the money she has saved and all her jewels, allowing her only a few pieces of silver from that point on so that she cannot take his son and run away. In chapter forty-one, Mr. Huntingdon once again makes his yearly pilgrimage to London. Helen uses this time to teach her son to dislike alcoholic beverages by putting a tartar-emetic in them to make him sick whenever he drinks them. During this same spring, Frederick, Helen's brother, comes to visit. Helen tells him of her situation and asks if it would be possible for her to stay in their abandoned childhood home, Wildfell Hall, for a time until she can make the money she needs to go to the continent. Frederick agrees, but asks his sister to try to make her marriage work first. Helen agrees to give it a try.

In chapter forty-two, Mr. Huntingdon begins spending so much time away from Grassdale that Helen begins to think she will be able to remain in the marriage. Mr. Hattersley brings his wife and children to visit his mother-in-law. During a visit to Grassdale to see Helen, Mr. Hattersley begins to talk with Helen about changing his ways, of not spending so much time with his friends. However, Mr. Hattersley is afraid his wife would not want him to change. Helen shows him some letters that show Millicent's true feelings about her husband's wild behavior. Mr. Hattersley promises Millicent he will change his ways and be a better husband. In chapter forty-three, Mr. Huntingdon returns and immediately announces that he has hired a governess for their five-year-old son. Helen protests, but he refuses to change his mind. When the governess arrives, it is quickly evident to Helen that she is not a governess, but her husband's mistress. Outraged and concerned for her son's moral fiber, Helen again begins to plot her escape, writing to her brother to prepare Wildfell Hall.

In chapter forty-four, Helen, Rachel, and Arthur sneak out of Grassdale in the middle of the night and take a coach to Wildfell Hall. They are greeted at the house by a woman Frederick hired to care for the house until their arrival. There is little furniture, but the house is clean and safe. Helen learns that Mr. Huntingdon has searched for her at Staningley with stories filled with lies, but that her aunt refuses to believe him. Then Helen begins to speak of her new neighbors, but here the diary abruptly ends, leaving Mr. Markham shocked and filled with remorse for his own actions.

In chapter forty-five, Mr. Markham goes to see Mrs. Huntingdon, as he now knows her to be called. Mr. Markham apologizes for believing she was having an affair with Mr. Lawrence, or Frederick, her brother. Mr. Markham also vows his undying love for Mrs. Huntingdon. Mrs. Huntingdon, however, pushes Mr. Markham away, telling him they must never see one another again because she cannot break her marriage vows no matter how cruel her husband was to her. Mrs. Huntingdon also insists she must move, that the gossip here will cause those she love too much trouble if she does not. They

finally agree to wait six months and then they will begin a correspondence until such a time as Mr. Markham and Mrs. Huntingdon might be together. After leaving Mrs. Huntingdon, Mr. Markham goes to Mr. Lawrence and apologizes for his actions. Mr. Markham explains what he had overheard and what he has since learned from his sister. Mr. Lawrence accepts the apology and they once again become good friends.

Chapters 40-45 Analysis

Mr. Huntingdon learns of his wife's desire to leave him with their child and he takes away her means of doing so. The reader wonders at this point why Mr. Huntingdon is so set against his wife leaving. It is true that he would be embarrassed for a time by the gossip, but since the whole neighborhood knows of his drinking and infidelity, it seems he already has a poor reputation in the neighborhood. The reader also considers that his reluctance to let his wife go is his son, a love for the child that is shown through vulgar behavior, but even this can be questioned by his choice to leave that child so frequently. It seems to the reader that Mr. Huntingdon might still love his wife despite his behavior, he is simply too immature to show it. At the same time, an argument can be made that he loves his son, he simply is too immature to realize that by teaching the boy to drink he is damaging the boy's morality, touching on the theme of corrupting a child's morality.

Helen puts up with a great deal. Helen finds herself forced to go behind her husband's back and to take huge measures to teach her son not to drink. Helen cares deeply for the child and cannot stand the idea of him growing up to be like his father. However, once Helen cures the child of his taste for alcohol, she believes he is safe in his father's company. This unfortunately is not true when his father brings his mistress into the house. Now Helen cannot put up with that attack on her moral fiber and cannot allow her son to be around such moral corruption. Finally Helen runs away, and this brings the narration back to Mr. Gilbert Markham. Now Mr. Markham understands the lies and the secrets that surround Mrs. Graham and her landlord, Mr. Lawrence. Mr. Lawrence is Mrs. Graham's brother. Mr. Markham can give in to his love for Mrs. Graham, or Mrs. Huntingdon as he now knows her as. Unfortunately, this does not change the fact that Mrs. Huntingdon is still legally married and she cannot go against the vows she took in front of God, not for herself and not for the man she loves. This leaves the lovers in a difficult position in which they must wait for Mr. Huntingdon to die.

Chapters 46-48

Chapters 46-48 Summary

In chapter forty-six, Mr. Markham begins visiting Mr. Lawrence frequently to learn how Mrs. Huntingdon is doing. Mr. Lawrence is loath to speak of his sister; therefore, Mr. Markham can only learn little things. When Mr. Lawrence begins to recover from his illness sustained after Mr. Markham knocked him from his horse, he goes to visit the Wilsons. Upon learning this, Mr. Markham warns Mr. Lawrence that Miss Jane Wilson is not the kindhearted woman he believed her to be, but a cruel gossip who was behind the rumors about Mrs. Graham. Mr. Lawrence does not appear to take this information to heart, but Mr. Markham soon notices that he no longer visits the Wilson home.

In chapter forty-seven, Mr. Markham is present when the Millwards visit his home. Miss Eliza Millward makes a great show of telling everyone that Mrs. Graham is not a widow, but that she left her husband and that they have recently reunited. Mr. Markham does not believe this until he arrives at Mr. Lawrence's home and learns it is true. Mr. Lawrence shows Mr. Markham a letter he has received from his sister explaining that Mr. Huntingdon had a fall from his horse and had no one to care for him. Mrs. Huntingdon feels it is her duty to attend to him until he becomes well again. In the letter, Mrs. Huntingdon says that she forced her husband to sign a paper agreeing to allow her to take the child away again any time she sees fit without his interference before she would let him see the child. Mr. Markham asks Mr. Lawrence to ask his sister's permission to tell his family about her real story in order to clear her name. Mr. Lawrence reluctantly agrees.

In chapter forty-eight, Mr. Markham learns that Mrs. Huntingdon has agreed to allow him to tell people about her story. Mrs. Huntingdon continues with more information about her husband, telling what a difficult patient he is and how afraid of death he is, despite the fact that the doctor believes he will recover. Mrs. Huntingdon also talks of her dear friend, Esther Hargrave, and expresses a desire that she will find a man to love and marry. At this point, Mr. Markham tells his friend to whom he is writing this story that Miss Mary Millward married Richard Wilson and he became the vicar upon her father's death. Miss Eliza Millward married a wealthy tradesman, and Miss Jane Wilson remained single and moved to the city to escape her brother.

Chapters 46-48 Analysis

In these chapters, Mr. Markham becomes friendly with Mr. Lawrence once again in an attempt to be close to someone who is close to his beloved Helen Huntingdon. However, Mr. Lawrence is shy and dislikes talking about the women closest to him; therefore, he often fails to give Mr. Markham the answers about Mrs. Huntingdon he desires. This foreshadows a time in which a misunderstanding will take place that will

leave Mr. Markham labor under the opinion that Mr. Lawrence does not want him to marry his sister.

Mr. Markham learns through the gossip that Mrs. Huntingdon had returned to her husband. Mr. Markham is sure this is untrue based on what he has learned from Helen's diary, but soon learns it is true. Once again Mrs. Huntingdon shows the depth of her character and the depth of her religious faith by returning to her husband to nurse him through an illness. Mrs. Huntingdon cannot leave her husband to suffer alone, which it turns out he is because all the servants and his friends have abandoned Mr. Huntingdon in his time of need. Mrs. Huntingdon is a strong woman with a deep faith and it is this faith that has kept her married and faithful to her abusive husband, despite her desire to be with another man. Mr. Markham finds himself now hoping that Mr. Huntingdon will die so that he and his beloved might finally be together, despite the un-Christian like direction of these thoughts.

Mr. Markham also tells the reader that Esther Hargrave is still looking for a husband even though her mother and brother have made her miserable by calling her a burden. This foreshadows a relationship that is yet to begin, but one the reader can see coming. At the same time, Mr. Markham tells the reader of the lives of his neighbors, who they married and what became of them. It seems the two women who so maliciously spread rumors about Mrs. Graham are the two who ended up the least happy.

Chapters 49-53

Chapters 49-53 Summary

In chapter forty-nine, Mr. Markham continues to ask about Mrs. Huntingdon from Mr. Lawrence, but Mr. Lawrence continues to be vague. This leads to Mr. Lawrence simply handing over his sister's letters whenever Mr. Markham asks about her. In these letters, Mr. Markham learns that Mr. Huntingdon began to drink again and this caused his illness to worsen. Mr. Huntingdon soon began to speak of death and asks his wife questions about it and begs her to help him redeem himself in fear of not going to heaven. Mr. Huntingdon stops just short of asking for redemption himself, however. Mr. Hattersley has come to help Mrs. Huntingdon care for her husband, but he refuses to allow his wife to leave his side. Mrs. Huntingdon begins to suffer from exhaustion because she is forced to sit at her husband's side day and night without rest. Finally Mr. Huntingdon dies.

In chapter fifty, Mr. Lawrence immediately goes to his sister's home to help her through the funeral. Mr. Markham is saddened to hear on his return that Mrs. Huntingdon is suffering from exhaustion. Mr. Markham is anxious to see or speak to Mrs. Huntingdon, but he knows he must wait until their six month deadline is up. When it is, however, Mr. Markham learns that Mrs. Huntingdon's uncle has died and that she has begun spending the majority of her time at Staningley. Mr. Markham must wait to write to her when she returns to Grassdale. However, instead of returning, she goes to the shore with her aunt, Arthur, and Mr. Lawrence. At this point, Mr. Markham tells his friend that Lady Lowborough separated from her husband and ran away to the Americas. Once she was gone, Lord Lowborough got a divorce and remarried an older woman. Lord Lowborough has custody of his two children with Lady Lowborough, even though the youngest, a girl, is clearly Mr. Huntingdon's child. He has been a good father to both. Mr. Hattersley has become a good father and Christian just as he promised Milicent and they are enjoying a good life together.

In chapter fifty-one, Mr. Markham is walking home from the vicarage with Miss Eliza Millward. Miss Eliza tells him that she has learned that Mrs. Huntingdon is about to marry Mr. Hargrave. Mr. Markham immediately rushes home and takes the first coach to Grassdale. When Mr. Markham arrives after a long, slow night of travel, he discovers that it is not Mrs. Huntingdon who is getting married, but her brother, Mr. Lawrence, to Miss Esther Hargrave. In chapter fifty-two, Mr. Markham takes another coach to Staningley where he has learned Mrs. Huntingdon spends most of her time now. On the way, Mr. Markham doubts that Mr. Lawrence wants him to marry his sister, but he is not bothered by that. He is bothered, however, by the information that Mrs. Huntingdon has inherited all of her uncle's lands and money, making her part of a social class above his own. Mr. Markham gets out of the coach at the gates of Staningley, but decides not to see Mrs. Huntingdon.



In chapter fifty-three, Mrs. Huntingdon and her son, Arthur, find Mr. Markham on the road and invite him into the house. In a moment alone, Mr. Markham confesses his doubts to Mrs. Huntingdon, but admits he still loves her. Mrs. Huntingdon says she loves him too and that they should be married despite society's ideals. They agree to marry the following summer.

Mrs. Huntingdon's aunt is happy that her niece has found happiness, but asks that they live at Staningley to keep Mrs. Huntingdon from the pain of her memories of Grassdale. Mr. Markham gives his family farm to his brother. Arthur grows up to be a fine young man and marries Milicent's eldest daughter, Helen. Rose has married and it is to this man that Mr. Markham is writing his story. Mr. Markham and Mrs. Huntingdon have been happily married for nearly twenty years.

Chapters 49-53 Analysis

Mr. Huntingdon dies, afraid of what will happen to his soul in the afterworld. Mrs. Huntingdon remains at his side until the very end and continues to worry for the safety of his soul as well, often praying for him despite everything he did to her. Mr. Markham is thrilled with Mr. Huntingdon's death because it means he can no longer hurt Helen and that he and Helen might be together again. However, Mr. Markham's only connection to Mrs. Huntingdon is Mr. Lawrence, and he fails to tell Mr. Markham how often Mrs. Huntingdon asks after her beloved. Mr. Markham comes to believe Mr. Lawrence does not want the two to be married because of Mr. Markham's position in society. However, it later turns out Mr. Lawrence is simply shy about personal information, something the reader has suspected all along.

Mr. Markham proves the depth of his love for Mrs. Huntingdon when he hears she is to be married and he rushes to stop the wedding. Mrs. Huntingdon is thrilled Mr. Markham has finally admitted his love for her and come to her rescue. They are quickly married and settle into a blissful life together. At the same time, Milicent has found happiness in her life, despite her husband's early wildness, proving that Mrs. Huntingdon's heart was in the right place when she thought she could save her husband from his vices with her love. It simply was that Mr. Huntingdon was too immature to outgrow his excesses. Happiness has come to all the good people in the novel, however, and unhappiness to those who deserve it, giving this book a well rounded ending and a satisfying ending.

Characters

Mrs. Graham/Mrs. Helen Huntingdon

Mrs. Helen Graham is a widowed woman who has come to live in a few rooms in Wildfell Hall, the abandoned home of the Lawrence family. Mrs. Graham is believed to be a tenant of Mr. Lawrence, the sole surviving heir of the Lawrence family and a good friend to Mr. Gilbert Markham. Mrs. Graham's arrival causes quite a stir in the neighborhood because it is a small farming community in which nothing new ever seems to happen. Several families go to visit Mrs. Graham upon her arrival, causing her great distress because she would rather be left alone. However, society forces Mrs. Graham to be respectful and to make a few visits of her own. Mrs. Graham finds herself in the home of Mr. Gilbert Markham, his mother, and two younger siblings. Mrs. Graham quickly finds herself on the defensive, forced to defend her desire to keep her son from drinking wine.

Mrs. Graham makes such an impression on Mr. Markham that he begins to visit her often, even though she works to discourage these meetings. Mr. Markham becomes infatuated with Mrs. Graham. When Mr. Markham hears terrible rumors about Mrs. Graham and her landlord, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Markham immediately jumps to her defense. However, an accidental discovery makes Mr. Markham begin to believe the stories. Mrs. Graham gives Mr. Markham her diary in an attempt to convince him that she is not the evil person everyone would have him think she is. In this diary, it is revealed that Mrs. Graham is actually Mrs. Huntingdon, a young bride who found herself forced to live with the alcoholic vices of her husband, including his decision to carry on an affair with a married acquaintance despite his wife's knowledge of the situation. To make matters worse, Mr. Huntingdon begins corrupting the morals of his young son and brings a woman into the house as a governess who is in actuality his mistress. It is for these reasons that Mrs. Huntingdon chose to leave her husband and take up the persona of Mrs. Graham in her family home at Wildfell Hall.

Mr. Markham vows to love Mrs. Huntingdon, but she pushes him away, insisting they can never fulfill their desire for one another as long as her husband is alive. Mrs. Huntingdon is a highly religious woman who clings to her faith even in the face of everything her husband has done. In fact, Mrs. Huntingdon returns to her husband and nurses him through an injury that will eventually bring on his death. Eventually Mrs. Huntingdon and Mr. Markham are reunited, but the latter is afraid that his lady love's newly inherited estates place her in a position that will not welcome a marriage between herself and himself. However, Mrs. Huntingdon proves that love is more important than societal expectation.

Mr. Gilbert Markham

Mr. Gilbert Markham is a young farmer who lives near Wildfell Hall. Mr. Markham is in love with the young daughter of the local vicar until a mysterious young widow comes to take up residence in abandoned Wildfell Hall. Mr. Markham finds himself enchanted with the young widow, surprised by her strong opinions and her devotion to her young son. Mr. Markham begins seeking Mrs. Graham out, often scheduling his walks to coincide with hers even though it seems clear that she does not want his companionship. Mr. Markham persists, even ignoring the gossip that begins to circulate around Mrs. Graham and her young landlord, Mr. Lawrence. Eventually, however, Mr. Markham becomes aware of some evidence that appears to make the rumors true. Mr. Markham falls into a dark depression, refusing to see anyone. However, a meeting with Mrs. Graham convinces Mr. Markham to read her diary and learn that truth about her situation.

When Mr. Markham reads this diary and learns that Mrs. Graham, who is really Mrs. Huntingdon, is the wife of a morally corrupt alcoholic, he allows himself to fall in love with her again. However, Mrs. Huntingdon's deep religious beliefs keep them apart. When Mr. Markham learns that Mrs. Huntingdon has gone back to her husband in order to nurse him through an illness, he cannot help but pray for Mr. Huntingdon's quick death. When Mr. Huntingdon does, indeed, die, Mr. Markham begins to hope that he and Mrs. Huntingdon will soon be together. Unfortunately, Mrs. Huntingdon does not attempt to contact Mr. Markham and he finds himself consumed with the idea that she no longer loves him. When Mr. Markham hears a rumor that Mrs. Huntingdon is to be married, he rushes to stop the wedding, only to learn she was nowhere in the area and the wedding is that of her brother and a good friend. Finally Mr. Markham finds Mrs. Huntingdon and confesses his love, agreeing to marry her the following fall.

Mr. Frederick Lawrence

Mr. Frederick Lawrence is the good friend of Mr. Markham and the owner of Wildfell Hall. Mr. Lawrence claims to know little about his tenant, Mrs. Graham, but rumors soon begin that he is the father of Mrs. Graham's young son, Arthur. Mr. Markham refuses to believe these rumors, until one night he overhears Mr. Lawrence attempting to talk Mrs. Graham out of moving far away from him. When Mr. Markham next meets Mr. Lawrence on the road, he hits him with his riding crop, causing him to fall from his horse and suffer a terrible cut on his head and a cold. When Mr. Markham later learns that Mr. Lawrence is Mrs. Graham's brother and that he has only been trying to help her, he is contrite and attempts to apologize.

Mr. Lawrence becomes Mr. Markham's only source of information on Mrs. Huntingdon once she returns to Grassdale to be with her ailing husband. Mr. Lawrence is shy, reluctant to speak of his sister; therefore, he often gives Mr. Markham her letters. Mr. Markham is saddened to see that Mrs. Huntingdon never mentions him in her letters and begins to doubt her continuing love for him. Mr. Lawrence, at the same time,

continues to keep quiet about his sister's frequent requests for information regarding Mr. Markham. Had Mr. Markham left it up to Mr. Lawrence, he might never have learned the truth of Mrs. Huntingdon's feelings for him.

Mr. Arthur Huntingdon

Mr. Arthur Huntingdon is Mrs. Huntingdon's husband. Mr. Arthur Huntingdon is a wild young man who often hangs out in his London club with his friends, where they often drink heavily and act in ways contrary to social propriety. When Mr. Huntingdon meets Helen Lawrence, he falls madly in love with her. Unfortunately, Helen's aunt does not approve of him and often warns Helen that he is in love with her only to get access to her inheritance from her father. Helen disregards her aunt's warnings and continues to allow Mr. Huntingdon to court her. Soon they are engaged. During their engagement, Helen learns of a few things about Mr. Huntingdon's drinking days that concern her, but she believes that her faith and her love will convince him to become a better man.

In the early months of their marriage, Mr. Huntingdon likes to share with his new wife stories of his past romances. These stories often involved deceit and indecency, causing Mrs. Huntingdon great amounts of distress. Soon after, Mr. Huntingdon goes to London for an extended visit, leaving his wife alone in their home in the country. This becomes a habit and Mr. Huntingdon will disappear every spring and through the summer. Shortly before their third wedding anniversary, Mr. Huntingdon begins carrying on an affair with the wife of one of his friends, in his own home. Mrs. Huntingdon finds out and begs to be allowed to leave the marriage. When this is not allowed, Mrs. Huntingdon makes it clear that she will never again be more than a housekeeper and hostess to her husband.

Mr. Huntingdon's bad behavior continues. Mr. Huntingdon begins drinking more and more. During these drinking binges, Mr. Huntingdon will often take his small child and get him drunk, encouraging him to act in amoral ways. Finally, Mr. Huntingdon brings his mistress into the house, calling her governess to his five-year-old son. Mrs. Huntingdon has enough and leaves, causing her husband a great deal of embarrassment in the neighborhood. When Mr. Huntingdon falls from a horse and is injured, his wife returns to nurse him back to health. Unfortunately, his affection for alcohol complicates Mr. Huntingdon's recovery and he dies, his wife at his side.

Young Mr. Arthur Huntingdon

Young Mr. Arthur Huntingdon is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Huntingdon. Arthur is a beautiful young man who is blond and blue-eyed like his father. Also like his father, Arthur likes to drink when he is a small boy and begins picking up some of his father's vulgar behaviors. Mrs. Huntingdon becomes frightened by this and takes advantage of her husband's long absence to frighten her son away from these behaviors. Mrs. Huntingdon adds anti-turmeric to her son's drinks in order to cause him mild illness and

to associate this illness with alcoholic drinks. Mrs. Huntingdon also teaches her son morality and encourages him to use sound judgment.

Arthur is the reason Mrs. Huntingdon leaves her husband. If not for him, Mrs. Huntingdon would have remained at her husband's side due to her vows to him taken in church. However, Mr. Huntingdon's corruption of her son's morals is unacceptable and she can no longer expose him to such vulgar behavior. Arthur is also the reason Mrs. Huntingdon becomes friends with Mr. Markham. If not for Arthur's affections for Mr. Markham, Mrs. Huntingdon would have been more successful in discouraging his overtures at friendship.

Mrs. Milicent Hattersley

Milicent Hargrave is the cousin of Annabella Hargrave, the niece of one of Helen Lawrence's many suitors. Milicent is a quiet, kindhearted woman whom Helen befriends almost immediately. Although Milicent does not agree with Helen's choice of husbands, she stands by her and is very happy to participate in the celebrations. Later, Milicent marries one of the friends of Helen's husband, Mr. Huntingdon. This man, Ralph Hattersley, is a hard drinker who wants a wife who will not criticize or complain about his drinking. Mr. Hattersley gets exactly that in Milicent, but soon finds he is not happy in her compliance. Mr. Hattersley worries that his wife is complacent because she does not love him. Later, with Helen's help, however, he learns this is not true. Helen and Milicent will remain good friends throughout their lives.

Mr. Walter Hargrave

Mr. Walter Hargrave is Mrs. Milicent Hattersley's brother. Mr. Hargrave is a friend of Mr. Huntingdon and often drinks in excess with him. However, Mr. Hargrave finds himself falling in love with Mrs. Huntingdon, and as such, he begins to refrain from heavy drinking. Mr. Hargrave seeks Mrs. Huntingdon out as often as he can, often telling her of his feelings and expressing his opinion that Mr. Huntingdon is an idiot for not seeing how lucky he is to have such a wife and such a child. When Mrs. Huntingdon cuts herself off from her husband, Mr. Hargrave begins to suggest there is nothing standing between them and an affair. However, Mrs. Huntingdon continues to resist his advances, finally proving herself in front of her husband and his friend, much to the humiliation and heartbreak of Mr. Hargrave.

Miss Eliza Millward and Miss Jane Wilson

Miss Eliza Millward is the daughter of the local vicar and the object of Mr. Gilbert Markham's affections at the beginning of the novel. However, when Eliza becomes jealous of the attention Mr. Markham pays to Mrs. Graham, she begins a rumor that Mrs. Graham is Mr. Lawrence's lover. This opens Mr. Markham's eyes to the kind of woman she is and he decides he would rather not have anything further to do with her.



Miss Jane Wilson is a local girl who wants to marry Mr. Lawrence. When Mrs. Graham comes to Wildfell Hall and Mr. Lawrence begins spending time with her, Miss Wilson joins in on the rumor regarding Mrs. Graham. Eventually Mr. Lawrence learns of this from Mr. Markham and realizes what kind of woman Miss Wilson is. Mr. Lawrence ends his courtship of Miss Wilson.

Lord and Lady Lowborough

Lord Lowborough is a friend of Mr. Huntingdon's who lost his fortune in gambling. Lord Lowborough then sought to soak his unhappiness in alcohol, but soon came to realize it would take him to the same place his gambling did. Lord Lowborough vowed to never drink again, a decision that causes his friends to call him a coward. However, Lord Lowborough sticks to his convictions. Soon Lord Lowborough falls in love with a rich young woman, solving both his desire to replace his fortune and his need to be loved.

Lady Annabella Lowborough is a friend of Helen Huntingdon's and the niece of one of her suitors. Lady Lowborough is in love with, and often flirts with, Mr. Huntingdon in the weeks before his engagement to Helen Lawrence. However, Lady Lowborough is more interested in gaining a title to go with her substantial fortune. Lady Lowborough marries Lord Lowborough not for love, but for a title. Later, Lady Lowborough will engage in a torrid, two-year affair with Mr. Huntingdon that will end his marriage and cause the separation of her own. During this time as well, Lady Lowborough will give birth to a daughter who is not her husband's child. However, Lord Lowborough will raise the child as his own after he secures a divorce from his wife.

Rachel

Rachel is a loyal servant who has been Helen Lawrence's nurse since her birth. When Helen moves to live with her aunt and uncle, Rachel accompanies her. When Helen becomes Mrs. Huntingdon, Rachel accompanies her. When Mrs. Huntingdon gives birth to Arthur, Rachel becomes his nurse. When Mrs. Huntingdon decides she must run away and can no longer provide Rachel with a salary, Rachel insists on going along with her. Rachel insists she could never work for another mistress and that if Mrs. Huntingdon does not want her, she will be forced to find a home of her own somewhere. Mrs. Huntingdon agrees to take her along and Rachel continues to be Mrs. Huntingdon's companion and confidant until her marriage to Mr. Markham.

Objects/Places

Mrs. Huntingdon's Diary

Mrs. Graham gives a diary to Mr. Gilbert Markham to explain her past to him, her relationship to Mr. Lawrence, and to explain why she cannot enter into a relationship with him. This diary turns out to belong to Mrs. Huntingdon, the wife of an alcoholic from whom she has escaped in order to protect her son from his abusive ways. Mrs. Huntingdon adopted the name Mrs. Graham to protect herself and her son.

Paintings

Mr. Markham notices several paintings in Mrs. Graham's studio that face the wall, including one of a young gentleman who turns out to be Mrs. Huntingdon's husband, and one of a young child, clearly young Mr. Arthur Huntingdon.

Mrs. Huntingdon Letters

Mr. Markham learns about Mr. Huntingdon's illness and subsequent death through letters Mrs. Huntingdon writes to her brother.

Dogs

Mr. Markham owns a dog that young Mr. Arthur Huntingdon has taken a fancy to. Mr. Markham gives Arthur a pup from his own dog's union that Arthur enjoys greatly.

Riding Crop

Mr. Markham knocks Mr. Lawrence from his horse by hitting him on the head with his riding crop. Mr. Markham attacks Mr. Lawrence in this way because he wrongly believes Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Graham to be lovers.

Rose

Mrs. Huntingdon gives Mr. Markham a winter rose as a symbol of her heart and all it has suffered and endured to free her to be with him. Mr. Markham appears to misunderstand the importance of this gesture, but later convinces Mrs. Huntingdon not only of his understanding, but his love for her.



Keys

Upon reading of her desire to escape his home, Mr. Huntingdon takes his wife's keys and uses them to steal all her money and all other means of escape.

Wine

Mr. Huntingdon likes to drink and often becomes very drunk on wine after dinner, especially when his friends have come to visit him at Grassdale or when he is in London with them.

Wildfell Hall

Wildfell Hall was once the home of the Lawrence family, but was abandoned after the death of the elder Mr. Lawrence's wife. Several rooms of the hall are made inhabitable for the use of Mrs. Helen Graham, a widow who makes her living selling her paintings. However, it later turns out that Helen Graham is Helen Lawrence Huntingdon, the wife of an alcoholic who is living in her childhood home to escape her husband.

Grassdale

Grassdale is the manor in which Mr. Arthur Huntingdon resides and to which he brings his bride after their marriage. Mrs. Helen Huntingdon runs away from this residence when it becomes clear that her husband intends to corrupt their young son. Mrs. Huntingdon later returns when her husband becomes ill after a fall from his horse. When Mr. Huntingdon dies, the manor is left to his young son, Arthur Huntingdon.

Staningley

Staningley is the home in which Mrs. Huntingdon was raised by her aunt and uncle after her mother's death. After the death of her uncle, Mrs. Huntingdon inherits Staningley and resides there with her aunt. After her marriage to Mr. Markham, they choose to make Staningley their permanent home.

London

Mr. Huntingdon often travels a hundred miles or so to London every spring and remains in that city with his friends throughout the spring and summer, before returning sick and exhausted to his neglected wife.

Themes

The Moral Corruption of One's Child

Mr. Huntingdon is an alcoholic who finds it entertaining to become very drunk and indulge in improper behavior. Before his marriage, Mr. Huntingdon would often spend his evenings in a club with his friends, drinking and gambling, often spending every night joking with one another and telling vulgar stories. Upon his marriage, however, Mr. Huntingdon swore to remain at his country home, Grassdale, and be a proper husband to his new wife. Unfortunately, finding himself with too much time on his hands, Mr. Huntingdon soon began making trips into London to once again party with his friends. This leads to other behaviors that only serve to embarrass Mr. Huntingdon's wife and to impeach her character among those who frequent London society. Despite this, Mrs. Huntingdon continues to love and care for her husband, even bearing him a son in the first year of their marriage.

As time goes on, the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Huntingdon continues to deteriorate as Mr. Huntingdon continues to drink heavily with his mostly single friends. When, after two years of marriage, Mrs. Huntingdon realizes that her husband has been carrying on an affair with one of his friend's wife, Mrs. Huntingdon can no longer abide her husband's behaviors. Mrs. Huntingdon tells her husband that they will be man and wife in name only. However, Mrs. Huntingdon can do nothing about her husband's behavior or his influence over their growing son. When Arthur Huntingdon is only three and four, his father begins introducing him to alcohol, finding it amusing to get the child drunk and to teach him vulgar words and actions.

Mrs. Huntingdon believes it is her role, as a mother and a Christian woman, to protect the moral virtues of her young son. In her husband's absence, Mrs. Huntingdon poisons her son's alcoholic beverages to force him to associate illness with the drinking of these liquids. Mrs. Huntingdon also teaches her son to be kind and considerate, and to love his mother over all others. However, Mr. Huntingdon does not find this amusing and does his best to teach his son to disregard his mother's teachings. As a result, young Arthur becomes confused about the morality of both his parents and the path he should follow.

The author of this book has had experiences with children whose parents refused to teach them to live a virtuous life. As a result, her book includes the theme of the moral corruption of one's child not only to give Mrs. Huntingdon a reason to take her child and run away from her husband's home, but also to show the reader the depth of Mr. Huntingdon's own moral corruption and refusal to live his life with any degree of virtue. This theme is central to the motivations of the main character, Mrs. Huntingdon, making it an important theme to the overall plot of the novel.

Religious Faith

Mrs. Huntingdon has strong faith in religion. Mrs. Huntingdon believes that a woman should be a servant to her husband and that she should remain loyal to the vows she made before God to her husband no matter what trials that marriage should place before her. In this belief, Mrs. Huntingdon finds herself committed to a man who is known for his love of improper behaviors and indulgence in alcohol, but she believes that her love and faith will change him. Unfortunately, Mrs. Huntingdon does not see the warning signs and misses the fact that her husband has no interest in ever changing his behavior.

Mrs. Huntingdon learns that her husband is having an affair with the selfish wife of one of his good friends. Mrs. Huntingdon cannot leave her husband because he will not allow her to take their child, but she cannot live with him as his wife any longer. Mrs. Huntingdon cuts herself off from her husband's affections and enters into a marriage that is in name only, causing a great deal of hurt and tension between her and her husband. Mrs. Huntingdon only becomes more miserable with each passing year as she watches her husband attempt to corrupt their son's moral basis and turn him into the same sort of person she now knows her husband has always been.

At the same time that Mrs. Huntingdon finds herself fighting to find a way to protect her son from his father's influence, she also finds herself fighting off the advances of an amorous neighbor. Mr. Hargrave is the beloved brother of Mrs. Huntingdon's good friend, but his morality is something on the same level as her husband's. Mr. Hargrave wants to have an affair with Mrs. Huntingdon, but her moral basis does not allow her to enter into a relationship that goes against everything her religion has taught her is wrong. Even when the man whose affections showered upon her is one she loves as well, Mrs. Huntingdon will not give in. It is her religious upbringing and her faith in God that keep her from these temptations. It is also this religious basis that helps Mrs. Huntingdon suffer the despair of her marriage and fight for the moral conscious of her young son. For this reason, religious faith is a theme of the novel.

Destruction of Trust

Trust is an important basis of any marriage. Mrs. Huntingdon entered her marriage with the belief that her love for her husband would be enough to help him see the error of his ways and would keep them both happy. However, Mrs. Huntingdon's love was not enough to cure her husband of his affection for alcohol or to keep him from breaking his marriage vows by having an affair with a married woman, a woman who was once Mrs. Huntingdon's friend and confidant. Mrs. Huntingdon finds her trust in her husband completely destroyed and is left to her own devices in finding a way to protect her son.

At the same time, Gilbert Markham thought he could trust in the virtue and loyalty of his friends and family. However, shortly after the arrival of Mrs. Graham to the neighborhood, Mr. Markham learns that the girl he once fancied himself in love with is nothing but a neighborhood gossip. Eliza Millward and her good friend, Jane Wilson,



begin spreading rumors about Mrs. Graham, which makes her appear to be a woman without virtue. Mr. Markham is deeply troubled by these rumors and he quickly changes his opinion of these young women he once thought highly of. About that time, Mr. Markham also learns that his good friend, Mr. Lawrence, might in fact be Mrs. Graham's lover. Mr. Markham feels that his trust in these people has been misplaced and he becomes miserable with this knowledge. It is for these reasons that destruction of trust is an important theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The first and last parts of the book are in the point of view of Mr. Gilbert Markham. Mr. Markham is writing a letter to a friend with whom he has had something of a falling out because Mr. Markham refused to tell him a personal story in response to the friend relating a personal story of his own. Mr. Markham has decided to remedy this mistake by telling his friend a story through letters written in chapters. Mr. Markham tells his story, beginning some twenty years before, through a first person narration. In the middle of his story, Mr. Markham has come across a diary written by a woman he knows and, because this woman's story is intertwined with his own, relates the diary passages in full. By doing this, Mr. Markham hands the narration over to his lady friend, Mrs. Helen Huntingdon. Mrs. Huntingdon tells her story in a first person narration through her personal entries in her diary.

The first person point of view of this novel is a highly intimate narration that allows the reader to grow close to the narrating character and therefore care what happens to that character. To add to this intimate narration, the novel is written as though from one friend to another in a series of letters. This adds to the intimacy of the novel, giving the narrator, Mr. Markham, the ability to express his desires as he relates his story and to make comments about the narration that might not be possible if the novel had been written in any other format. When Mr. Markham relates the contents of his lady love's diary, this only increases the sense of intimacy as the reader imagines what it must have been like for this love sick man to read the most intimate thoughts of the woman he loves, especially when these thoughts are often about the man she married. It is an intimate insight into the characters that would not be possible with another point of view, making this plot all the more filled with suspense and excitement.

Setting

The novel begins in a small, country setting on the coast of England. The narrator is a young man who has recently, and reluctantly, taken over his father's farm in order to provide for his mother and two younger siblings. The narrator learns of a woman living nearby in an abandoned property that has only been partially restored for her use. Mr. Markham becomes friends with her, soon falling in love with the aloof widow. When the narrator overhears a conversation between his lady love and a man he takes to be her lover, the narration changes. The narrator then begins to relate entries in his lady love's diary, switching the setting to her marital home of Grassdale. This is in a similarly country setting, some hundred miles from London. The house is large and dark, almost forbidding. This setting reflects the characters who live inside this home, a selfish alcoholic and his much suffering wife. Finally, the novel's setting changes to Staningley, the home of Mrs. Huntingdon, the lady love's aunt. This home is open and airy, a



friendly place that seems well suited to raising a family. It is here that Mrs. Huntington was raised and where she and Mr. Markham will raise their own family.

The setting of the novel is well written and well suited to the characters and plot. The setting of Wildfell Hall is one of darkness, surrounded by a forbidding garden that was once glorious but now suffers from neglect. This description fits the mistress of this place well, a young woman who has run away from her alcoholic husband and is hiding in fear that he might one day steal their child back to his poor influence. Mrs. Huntingdon was once a rare beauty, a woman who possessed a caring soul and loving heart, but who has been abused and neglected, left to wither in her own misery. The setting of her ill-fated marriage is also appropriate. Grassdale is described as a large, stone house that is as cold in appearance as the husband who lives within its walls. The house is unwelcoming, an unhappy place where Mrs. Huntingdon is forced to face the realities of marrying a man with less virtue than herself. It is a sad place, the perfect setting to a bad marriage. Finally there is Staningley, the seashore home of Mrs. Huntingdon's aunt and uncle. This place is filled with light and happiness. It is the setting of Mrs. Huntingdon's fondest memories of her childhood and the perfect place for her to finally proclaim her love for Mr. Markham.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel tends to be formal, filled with grammar and words that are not used in everyday language in the modern world. This novel was written in the 1840s; therefore, some modern readers might find its formal language stiff and forbidding. However, the language of the novel is appropriate to the time period in which it is set and to the characters that populate its pages. The dialogue that fills the novel was regarded as some of the most insightful and intelligent dialogues of its time, allowing the characters to not only express their emotions for one another, but to discuss behaviors that were not widely discussed during the time in which the novel is set. Some of the scenes, as well, describe events that were highly scandalous at the time, especially for female readers, leaving the novel to often be criticized for its usually honest themes. The modern reader will find the reading of this novel to be slow for its attention to the language that is of a higher regard than modern bestsellers, but will find it easy to comprehend and refreshingly honest.

The language of this novel fits with the time period in which it is set and the characters that populate the plot. The language is common to the type of language used in the period in which the novel was written. The language tends to be stiff and more formal than modern readers might be accustomed to reading, but it is a rich language that is used in such a way as to celebrate the written word and the poetry of dialogue and inner monologues. The language is often filled with words that are either unfamiliar or no longer used in modern usage, but they are words the reader will easily be able to understand when taken in context. The novel is well written, filled with intense themes that were unusual at the time, and a celebration of language rarely seen in modern attempts.

Structure

The novel was originally written in three volumes. However, though the reader is made aware of when each volume might have ended, the current edition is not divided into parts or volumes. The novel begins with a preface by the author in which she addresses the strong themes of the novel and her desire to present these themes in an attempt to help young women realize that real life is not a romance novel. The novel then begins with a letter written by the narrator, Mr. Gilbert Markham, to his friend, Mr. J. Halford. The reader does not know who Halford is or what his relationship is to Mr. Markham at first, but will later come to learn he is Mr. Markham's brother-in-law. Then the novel begins with the first of fifty-three chapters, each named for a theme or event to be described within the chapter.

The novel has one main plot. The plot follows Mr. Markham's budding friendship with a mysterious widow who turns out to be the unhappy, estranged wife of a morally corrupt alcoholic. The narration not only follows as Mr. Markham gets to know this young woman, but also her diary, given to Mr. Markham to explain her relationship to a mutual friend, Mr. Lawrence, and the reason why she cannot submit to her feelings for Mr. Markham. After reading this diary, Mr. Markham must continue to wait to learn of his beloved's feelings for him, eventually finding himself drawn to her residence, where he intended to declare his love for her but realized her position in society was so far above his as to prohibit a relationship. This causes Mr. Markham to nearly make the biggest mistake of his life by walking away. However, the novel's climax leads to a more than satisfying ending that will have both Mr. Markham and Mrs. Huntingdon finding happiness once again.

Quotes

"You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827." Chap. 1: A Discovery, p. 9

"I perceive, with joy, my most valued friend, that the cloud of your displeasure has past away; the light of your countenance blesses me once more, and you desire the continuation of my story: therefore, without more ado, you shall have it." Chap. 2: An Interview, p. 19

"I went home very happy, with a heart brimful of complacency for myself, and overflowing with love for Eliza." Chap. 2: An Interview, p. 24

"Moderation in all things remember. That's the plan—"Let your moderation be known unto all men!" Chap. 4: The Party, p. 40

"You see there is a sad dearth of subjects," observed the fair artist." Chap. 5: The Studio, p. 43

"There goes the dinner bell—and here comes my aunt to scold me for sitting here at my desk all day, instead of staying with the company—I wish the company were—gone." Chap. 18: The Miniature, p. 154

"My cup of sweets is not unmingled: it is dashed with a bitterness that I cannot hide from myself, disguise it as I will." Chap. 22: Traits of Friendship, p. 175

"Arthur is getting tired—not of me I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads—and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement;" Chap. 24: First Quarrel, p. 197

"But Esther is a child as yet—a little merry romp of fourteen: as honest-hearted, and as guileless and simple as her sister, but with a fearless spirit of her own, that I fancy, her mother will find some difficulty in bending to her purposes." Chap. 26: The Guests, p. 220

"Yet let me remember it is not I that am guilty: I have no cause to fear; and if they scorn me as the victim of their guilt, I can pity their folly and despise their scorn." Chap. 33: Two Evenings, p. 296

"I posted the letter on my way home, most manfully resisting the temptation of dropping in a word from myself at the same time." Chap. 45: Reconciliation, p. 395

"As for myself, I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived and love together, and how blessed we still are in each other's society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us." Chap. 53: Conclusion, p. 471

Topics for Discussion

Who is Gilbert Markham? Why does he become interested in Mrs. Graham? What is it about Mrs. Graham that first draws him to her? Why does Mr. Markham continue to pursue a relationship with Mrs. Graham even when she attempts to push him away? Why does Mr. Markham not believe the rumors about Mrs. Graham? What finally makes Mr. Markham believe these rumors? Are they true? What does Mrs. Graham do to persuade Mr. Markham of her innocence in these rumors?

Who is Mrs. Graham? Where has she come from? Why does she become the center of gossip? Why does Mrs. Graham attempt to keep to herself, despite the frequent visits of her neighbors? Is this impolite by social standards of the time? Why or why not? Why is Mrs. Graham determined her son should not drink wine? Why does Mrs. Markham believe this is an improper attitude for a mother to take? How might Mrs. Markham's opinion change if she knew the truth about Mrs. Graham's husband?

Who is Mr. Lawrence? Are he and Mr. Markham friends before the novel begins? What happens to change this? Why? Why does Mr. Markham assault Mr. Lawrence on the road? What did he think he was attempting to defend? Why does Mr. Markham go back to help Mr. Lawrence? Why does Mr. Markham later apologize to Mr. Lawrence? Why is Mr. Lawrence willing to accept this apology?

Who is Mr. Arthur Huntingdon? How does Helen meet Mr. Huntingdon? What does Helen find alluring about Mr. Huntingdon? Does Helen believe her love can change Mr. Huntingdon? Does Helen ever doubt this conviction? Explain. When Mr. Huntingdon marries Helen, why does he not allow her to remain in Europe to see the sights? Why is Mr. Huntingdon in a hurry to get Helen home? Why do they go to London? Why does Mr. Huntingdon send his wife home early? What is Mr. Huntingdon doing while in London alone?

Who is Lady Lowborough? What does she do that causes a scandal among the members of Grassdale's servants and inhabitants? How does Mrs. Huntingdon learn about this scandal? What does she do about it? How long does this scandalous affair continue? Was there any warning to Mrs. Huntingdon that this might one day occur? Explain. What happens to Lady Lowborough when her husband learns the truth of her behavior? What about her children? What is Lady Lowborough's reaction to all this?

Discuss infidelity. What is infidelity? What was the attitude toward infidelity in this time period? Who was blamed? Who was ruined in society? Why? What would have happened to Mrs. Huntingdon had she cheated on her husband? Why did she resist cheating on her husband even though their marriage was basically over? Why did Mrs. Huntingdon send Mr. Markham away and ask him to forget about her? Would their relationship have been consider infidelity? Explain.

Discuss gossip. What is gossip? How does gossip come into the plot? Who starts these stories in the beginning of the novel? What are their motives? How do the people

around them react to these stories? Does it have the desired effect on Mr. Markham? On Mr. Lawrence? Why or why not? How does gossip affect Mrs. Huntingdon as her husband begins an affair with Lady Lowborough? How does Mrs. Huntingdon suffer this gossip? How does this gossip affect those involved?