

Literary Icons: The Brontë Sisters [C1]

Come Emily, le sorelle Charlotte e Anne si spinsero fino ai confini della psicologia umana, con personaggi femminili complessi. Nei loro scritti risaltano la passione e gli sforzi per superare le restrizioni dell'ambiente sociale.



The year 1847-48 was a [momentous](#) one for the Brontë family. Parents Patrick and Maria Brontë had lost two young daughters (Maria and Elizabeth) to diseases more than twenty years previously but their three surviving daughters — Charlotte, Emily, and Anne — each published a novel within the same twelve months. All three novels — Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and The [Tenant](#) of Wildfell Hall — would go on to become much-loved classics of English literature. What the books' readers didn't know at the time was that the authors were female. The Brontë sisters had already published a collection of poetry together in 1846 using the male pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. And, to make the publication process easier, all three chose to use these pseudonyms again for the first editions of their novels.

EARLY VOCATION

Although 1847-48 was their annus mirabilis, the Brontës had been writing creatively for years. From early childhood, the girls, along with their brother Branwell, had invented stories about fantasy worlds they called Gondal and Angria. They wrote down their stories in miniature handmade books, which are now on display at the Parsonage Museum in the Yorkshire village of Haworth. In the same museum, which has been put together in the house where the Brontë family used to live, you can see the room where the sisters used to sit together, writing their literary masterpieces.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte, the eldest sister, who was born in 1816, published the romantic novel *Jane Eyre* first and it was widely [praised](#) by the critics. Writing in the first person, Charlotte tells the story of an orphan girl called Jane Eyre. Jane suffers cruelty at [boarding school](#), then becomes a [governess](#), and finally ends up marrying her handsome employer Mr. Rochester. Charlotte's own childhood experience at [boarding school](#), where her two older sisters Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis, seems to have inspired the fictional Lowood School of the novel. And, like Jane Eyre, Charlotte had personal experience of working as a [governess](#). Charlotte wrote later that this experience was "frequently [bitter](#)" but the results, in terms of financial independence, "[precious](#)." Charlotte also spent two years in Brussels teaching at a [boarding school](#), and Emily [joined](#) her there for one year. This experience would provide material for Charlotte's third novel *Villette* (1853) about a poor young woman who goes to teach in Belgium. As well as poetry and the many stories she wrote during childhood and adolescence, Charlotte wrote two other complete novels, *Shirley* (1848), set in Yorkshire, and *The Professor* (published posthumously in 1857). In 1854 Charlotte finally got married, after first saying no, and the next year died while pregnant, aged thirty-eight.

ANNE

In 1848, the youngest Brontë sister Anne, who was born in 1820, published her second and more famous novel, *The [Tenant](#)* of Wildfell Hall. Through a series of letters, Anne tells the story of a young woman, Helen Graham, who runs away from her alcoholic and abusive husband to start a new life living alone with her son. At a time when divorce was not an option, Helen must make a risky escape and hide her identity in order to survive. It's likely that the characters of the husband Arthur Huntingdon and his drunken and degenerate friends were based on the Brontës' brother Branwell, who was addicted to alcohol, opium and laudanum. Anne's first novel *Agnes Grey*, about a [governess](#) and her experiences working for wealthy families, was published in 1847. In it, Anne [drew on](#) her own experiences working as a [governess to highlight](#) the precarious situation faced by young women who had to do this type of work [to earn a living](#). Although some critics praise the book, it never had the success of *The [Tenant](#)* of Wildfell Hall. Anne died of tuberculosis in 1849 aged twenty-nine.

Glossary

- **momentous** = cruciale
- **Tenant** = inquilino
- **praised** = elogiare
- **governess** = istitutrice
- **bitter** = amara
- **precious** = preziosa
- **joined** = raggiungere
- **drew on** = attingere a
- **to highlight** = mettere in risalto
- **to earn a living** = guadagnarsi da vivere
- **boarding school** = convitto, internato