

Critical Insights: The Brontë Sisters

Text Reviews

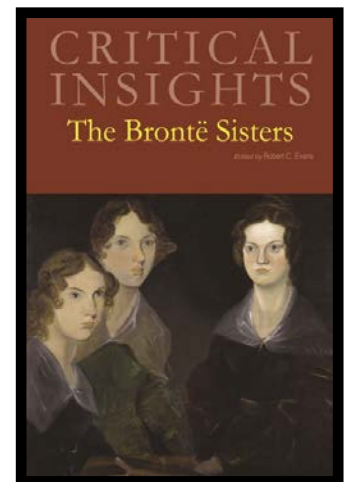
Critical Insights: The Brontë Sisters is part of Salem Press's Critical Insights series, that provides background and critical analysis on major works of literature and important writers. The Brontë Sisters focuses on all three of the Brontë women: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, and their contributions to literary history. As subjects, the Brontës are intriguing, mainly because they seem to have lived such normal, albeit extremely short

(Emily and Anne were often ill and both died early) lives. Nevertheless, from their first publications, mystery swirled around them. Perhaps it was their pen names, or perhaps because their writing can be seen as such a departure from literature, and specifically literature by and about women, of the time.

This Critical Insights volume is divided into several sections — an introduction by a scholar, a brief biographical essay on the Brontë family, four “Critical Contexts” essays, and finally, numerous “Critical Readings.” The “Critical Contexts” essays focus on scholars’ historical approaches to the Brontës and their writing, a survey of past literary criticism, and some specific critical lenses — for example, one essay examines Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* in the context of class and the travel writing genre. In the first “Critical Readings” section, scholars engage with specific works to explore the shifts in popularity of certain Brontës. Most notably Anne Brontë, whose fame has risen considerably since her death, and Branwell Brontë, the sisters’ brother, who was slated to be an artistic star but instead fell to alcoholism, with his three sisters gaining far more posthumous popularity than he ever would. The second “Critical Readings” section includes surveys of editorial introductions to scholarly editions of Brontë novels, and the third “Critical Readings” section compares various film and television adaptations of Brontë works.”

- **AGAINST THE GRAIN**

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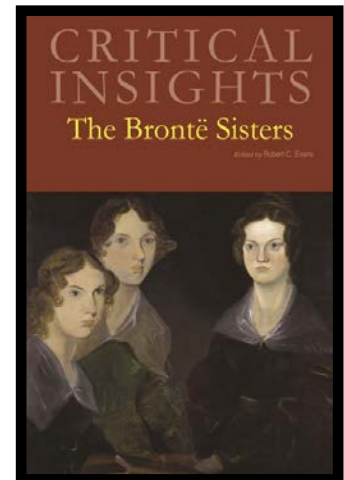
Text Reviews

“Editor Robert C. Evans was a respected Professor of English at Auburn University until his retirement in 2021 and has contributed to and edited a variety of Critical Insights publications including *The Brontë Sisters*. Other contributors include English professors, independent researchers, and other academics with interests ranging from 19th-century literature to stop-motion films to the U.S. public education system. **This plurality of research and expertise imbues in this Critical Insights volume a diversity of thought — although the core focus is the Brontë sisters and their legacies, the volume and the writers within make clear that one doesn’t need to confine oneself to a study of 19th century literature in order to find inspiration in the Brontës’ works.**

Critical Insights: The Brontë Sisters is an excellent introduction to the lives and literature of the Brontës and an equally excellent scholarly companion for reading Brontë novels. Particularly of interest are the second and third “Critical Readings” sections which analyze editorial introductions to the novels as well as film and tv adaptations. Both of the sections would be helpful for use in instruction settings, allowing teachers to select the best scholarly edition of *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights* or to build viewing programs of adaptations that can support instruction. These sections are also immensely helpful to researchers who can use this single volume to narrow down the editions most useful to their research.”

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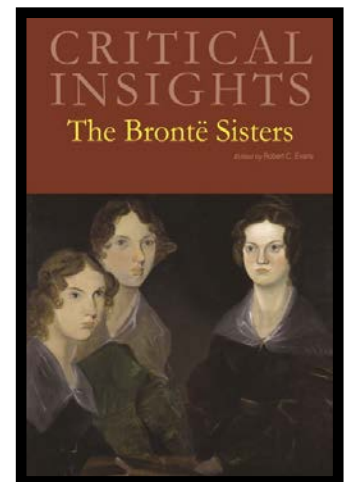
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“There were three Brontë sisters—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne—and all became famous novelists to varying degrees. **Released in the "Critical Insights" series, this volume begins with a brief collective biography before turning to the novels.** Evans (Auburn Univ.) presents many examples of how one might approach the study of these women, first dealing with past criticism and then looking at contemporary points of view.

The major novels discussed are Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Less-known works (Charlotte's *The Professor*, Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) are briefly analyzed. Written between 1847 and 1849, the sisters' works are said to have changed novel writing forever. Though the sisters focused on domestic life, their writing—with its transformative psychological thrills—revolutionized what a woman's perspective could be. Especially interesting is the idea that not becoming a wife and mother might drive a woman's growth, which could be fostered through travel and work. Most of the book's introductions to the Brontës' novels offer convenient, standardized overviews of critical responses... **But the volume's notes and sources provide nonspecialists with an invaluable summary of critical responses to the Brontës.** Also enlightening are the three summaries of films made of the Brontë novels.”

- **CHOICE**



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