

The Life of Charlotte Bronte



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ELIZABETH GASKELL

The Life of Charlotte Brontë

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In 1855 Charlotte Brontë, pregnant and married less than a year, fell ill and died of tuberculosis—the same disease that had killed her sisters and brother. Two years after Charlotte’s death, her friend Elizabeth Gaskell, herself a well-known novelist, completed work on *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a biography that was met with immediate acclaim by readers curious to discover more about the enigmatic author of *Jane Eyre*.

Both a work of art and a well-documented interpretation of its subject, Gaskell’s biography is an extraordinarily vivid and sensitive account of Brontë’s outer and inner lives: her shyness and strangeness; her intense appreciation of the Bible, poetry, music, and the theater; her love of her family; and her fears of loneliness. Meant to be a defense and vindication of “a noble, true, and tender woman,” the book paints Brontë as an unforgettable figure careening between depression and exaltation. It also portrays her suffering. In her personal life, Brontë knew deprivation and loss, while in her artistic life, despite her fame, she had been taunted as coarse and had none of the advantages that a man might take for granted.

A powerful tribute from one writer to another, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* remains one of the most evocative and perceptive biographies ever written.

Anne Taranto was educated at Columbia and Oxford Universities and at Yale University, where she earned a Ph.D. She has taught courses on the novel and on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature at Georgetown University and is currently at work on a study of Charlotte Brontë’s relationship to the literary marketplace.

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