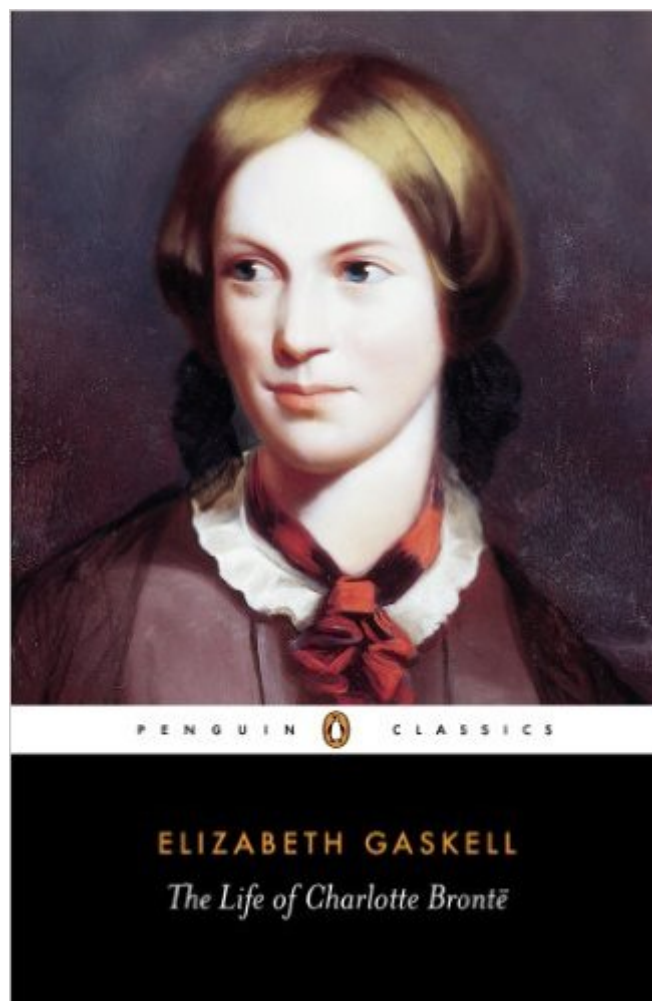


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The Life Of Charlotte Bronte (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of her close friend Charlotte Brontë was published in 1857 to immediate popular acclaim, and remains the most significant study of the enigmatic author who gave Jane Eyre the subtitle *An Autobiography*. It recounts Charlotte Brontë's life from her isolated childhood, through her years as a writer who had 'foreseen the single life' for herself, to her marriage at thirty-eight and death less than a year later. The resulting work - the first full-length biography of a woman novelist by a woman novelist - explored the nature of Charlotte's genius and almost single-handedly created the Brontë myth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most people associate the name Elizabeth Gaskell with the novel *North and South*. The fact that Mrs Gaskell was an excellent novelist is indisputable, however, this work proves she was also talented biographer. *Vanity Fair's* Thackeray wrote of Gaskell's biography "In the whole of English literature there is no book that can compare in wide-spread interest with *'Life of Charlotte Bronte'* by Mrs Gaskell." The book is certainly worthy of the praise, however, it is not without flaws. Gaskell's biography was the first biography to be written on Bronte with the consent of her father, Patrick Bronte. Although Mr Bronte consented to the biography due to the fact that Mrs Gaskell was a close friend of his daughter. Mr Bronte and Charlotte's husband decided it would be better for the public to read about Charlotte from someone who held Charlotte in such high esteem. However, the book

was not without controversy. Gaskell somewhat embellished Mr Bronte's stern character and his treatment of his daughters and wife. Letters unpublished in this book prove Charlotte and her sisters loved their father dearly. Mr Bronte was quite astonished to read his cold demeanor towards his children. The strongest controversy came from other people, such as Lady Scott who threatened legal action due to Gaskell's mention of her affair with Charlotte's brother, Branwell. (The affair proved to be a total fabrication by the Bronte sisters.) William Carus, who founded the Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge also expressed displeasure with the details of the school. Regardless of the controversy, the biography gives an excellent portrait of Charlotte the woman. If you are looking for information on the Heger affair in Brussels, look elsewhere. Mr Heger's name is nonexistent in this book.

While the definitive overall Brontes biography is Juliet Barker's 'The Brontes', and the various Bronte-related works of Edward Chitham are invaluable in their own right, this still stands as an important contribution to understanding the Brontes, and Charlotte above all. Despite its flaws, and I agree with other reviewers, that this is a rather dark picture of events, Elizabeth wrote a detailed and very sympathetic account of Charlotte's life and her relationship to her family. Her inclusion of letter content, especially in relation to Ellen Nussey, was somewhat self-edited, and the lack of references to the romantic friendship that so clearly existed between the two women, was probably Elizabeth's attempt to protect them. For anyone who is interested in the truth of their passionate relationship, I highly recommend Elaine Miller's detailed essay 'Through All Changes and Through All Chances' from the book Not A Passing Phase, compiled by the Lesbian History Group. The letter excerpts that Elaine includes clearly indicate that Charlotte and Ellen not only loved each other, but that they jointly expressed a long-term desire to live together 'until Death'. When Ellen Nussey wanted to publish her own 'The Story of the Brontes' which would have included many excerpts from the hundreds of letters that Charlotte had sent her, Arthur Nicholls blocked permission, as he owned copyright to the contents of the letters, even though Ellen owned the letters themselves. Nicholls - Charlotte's husband of only nine months - also destroyed all of the literally hundreds of letters from Ellen to Charlotte, and even tried to insist that Ellen destroy all of Charlotte's letters to her, during Charlotte's lifetime.

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