

The Brontës in Brussels: a Victorian drama

Charlotte Brontë's Secret Love

JOLIEN JANZING

In 1842 Charlotte Brontë goes to Brussels with her younger sister Emily to learn and teach, in the hope of starting her own private school. The Catholicism and sophistication of Brussels gives them a cultural shock. In Madame Heger's boarding school, among rich and spoiled young ladies, Charlotte and Emily try to stay true to themselves. The introverted Emily cannot settle in and grasps the first opportunity of returning to England for good. Charlotte is more worldly and stays longer in Brussels. The main reason is that she has fallen in love with Constantin Heger, the headmistress's husband.

A captivating encounter with the remarkable Brontës

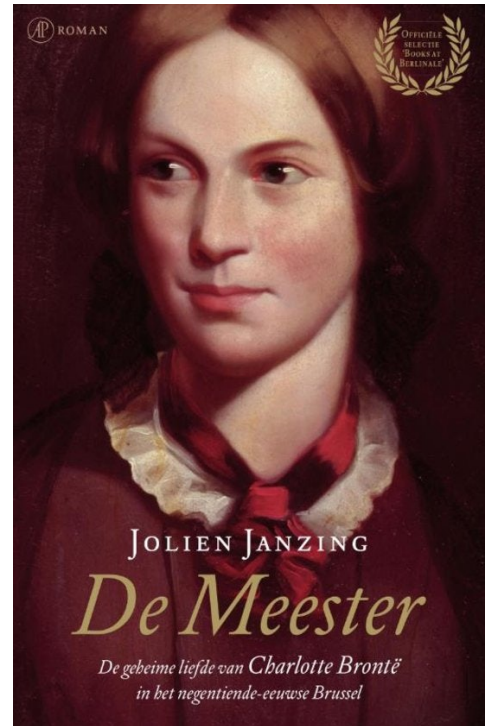
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What exactly happened in Charlotte's time in Brussels has never become completely clear, although letters have been preserved that show her feelings for the married teacher must have been very intense. On her return to England it inspired her to write 'The Professor' and the experience of heartbreak and unrequited love is seen as having shaped her subsequent writing.

'Charlotte Brontë's Secret Love' is a Victorian flavoured book, with an omniscient narrator, which exudes a nineteenth-century, Brontë-esque atmosphere.

A definite must-read for Brontë fans

NRC HANDELSBLAD



AUTHOR



Jolien Janzing (b. 1964) is a Dutch-Belgian author and journalist. She has had two nonfiction books published and made her debut as a fiction author in 2009. At the beginning of 2017, her book 'Audrey & Anne' came out, a novel about Audrey Hepburn and Anne Frank. *Photo © Alessandra Ruyten*

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TRANSLATION GRANTS Marieke Roels - marieke@flandersliterature.be, Elise Vanoosthuysse - elise@flandersliterature.be, Yannick Geens - yannick@flandersliterature.be