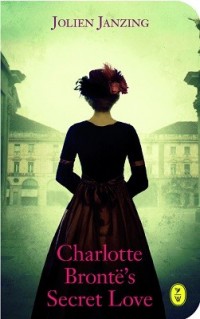
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# Charlotte Bronte's Secret Love

**Jade Craddock** 15 October 2015 - 5:05pm

Charlotte Bronte is among the iconic names of English literature and in this wonderful novel Jolien Janzing gives readers a fascinating fictionalised glimpse into the life of the woman behind Jane Eyre.  
Taking as her inspiration Charlotte and sister Emily’s time in Brussels, where they studied and eventually taught, Janzing weaves an evocative tale of Charlotte’s coming of age and emotional and romantic awakening. At the heart of it is Constantin Heger, Charlotte’s tutor and husband of the school’s headmistress Claire Heger, who Charlotte finds herself falling in love with despite the age gap and his marital status. And set against Charlotte’s story, Janzing introduces a compact parallel fictionalised account of Arcadie Claret, the teenage girl from Brussels with who King Leopold I of Belgium conducted a 20-year affair.  
  
Yet it is Charlotte Bronte and Janzing’s characterisation and portrayal of her internal struggle that captivates the reader. Admittedly the romance between her and Constantin remains quite veiled and although Charlotte’s feelings are evident, Constantin’s, while alluded to, are somewhat undefined, yet in a way this merely adds to the bittersweet nature of the whole situation.   
  
What Janzing does so beautifully is give a real sense of the experiences, emotions and motivations of Charlotte in Brussels that later feed into her own work. Similarly, Emily, who we are given telling glimpses of, comes across vividly as the woman who would go on to create Wuthering Heights. What we have are really portraits of the authors as young women; we see the personalities, character traits and life experiences that will define their literature, and in the case of Charlotte, some of the pivotal moments and relationships in her life that will shape and develop her very consciousness.

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