COURSE DESCRIPTION
For the most part, the novels of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Brontë are no longer viewed as islands of disguised autobiography, eruptions of wildly personal “poetry,” or eccentric genre-grafts planted and nurtured in the distant northern moors of The Imagination. Increasingly critics have acknowledged that these works take on the political, religious, and social controversies of their time: the equivocal status of the governess in relation to women’s “proper work”; poverty and industry; class transgression and social mobility; custody and incarceration; emigration, exile, and foreign exploitation; the ethics of inheritance; regional and sexual difference; biblical interpretation and “aesthetic morality.” While this seminar will not focus upon one or even a certain set of these topics, we will read works of the Brontës alongside selected criticism in an attempt to understand a few of the interpretive strategies used to budge narrative from the private sphere to the public realm. In the process, we will also explore what the terms private and public might reasonably mean in a critical endeavor that seeks to reestablish form and idea within some non-aesthetic, often political, context.

While it’s technically possible to cover all seven Brontë novels in a semester’s time, I have made the very hard decision to exclude Charlotte’s Shirley in favor of gaining appropriate time for the remaining six novels. We shall study them by author, in order of publication: first Charlotte’s Professor, Jane Eyre, and Villette; next Anne’s Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall; and last Emily’s Wuthering Heights.

For ease of reference, you must have the required texts in the editions listed below and in print form. Electronic or online versions are not allowed in this course, and all electronic devices must be turned off and stowed for the duration of each seminar session.

Our first session will introduce the seminar, and I’ll briefly review the Brontës’ juvenilia. For our second session, on Thursday, January 21st, please have read the first eleven chapters of The Professor (pp. 39–125).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Careful reading of all assignments, regular attendance, and active participation in discussions; four criticism responses (2–3 pp. each / 750 words — 20% of final grade); one archival paper (5–7 pp. / 1500 words — 30% of final grade), including proposal; and one research paper (15–20 pp. / 5000 words — 50% of final grade), including initial and updated proposals with annotated bibliographies and a draft.

REQUIRED TEXTS