



A WELL-READ ONLINE COMMUNITY

Weird Sisters (Brown)

[Summary](#) | [Author Bio](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Discussion Questions](#) | [Full Version](#) | [Print](#)

The Weird Sisters

Eleanor Brown, 2011

Penguin Group USA

336 pp.

ISBN-13:

Summary

There is no problem that a library card can't solve. The Andreas family is one of readers. Their father, a renowned Shakespeare professor who speaks almost entirely in verse, has named his three daughters after famous Shakespearean women.

When the sisters return to their childhood home, ostensibly to care for their ailing mother, but really to lick their wounds and bury their secrets, they are horrified to find the others there. *See, we love each other. We just don't happen to like each other very much.* But the sisters soon discover that everything they've been running from—one another, their small hometown, and themselves—might offer more than they ever expected. *(From the publisher.)*

Author Bio

Eleanor Brown's writing has been published in anthologies, magazines, and journals. She holds an M.A. in literature and lives in the Denver area. *(From the publisher.)*

Book Reviews

A family drama, gracefully costumed in academic garb and lit with warm comedy, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished...if you know a Stratfordian who's always quoting the Bard, get thee to a bookstore...Brown is such a clever writer, and she's written such an endearing story about sisterly affection and the possibilities of redemption, that it's easy to recommend *The Weird Sisters*.

Ron Charles - Washington Post

You don't have to have a sister or be a fan of the Bard to love Brown's bright, literate debut, but it wouldn't hurt. Sisters Rose (Rosalind; *As You Like It*), Bean (Bianca; *The Taming of the Shrew*), and Cordy (Cordelia; *King Lear*)—the book-loving, Shakespeare-quoting, and wonderfully screwed-up spawn of Bard scholar Dr. James Andreas—end up under one roof again in Barnwell, Ohio, the college town where they were raised, to help their breast cancer stricken mom. The real reasons they've trudged home, however, are far less straightforward: vagabond and youngest sib Cordy is pregnant with nowhere to go; man-eater Bean ran into big trouble in New York for embezzlement, and eldest sister Rose can't venture beyond

the "mental circle with Barnwell at the center of it." For these pains-in-the-soul, the sisters have to learn to trust love--of themselves, of each other--to find their way home again. The supporting cast--removed, erudite dad; ailing mom; a crew of locals; Rose's long-suffering fiancé--is a punchy delight, but the stage clearly belongs to the sisters; Macbeth's witches would be proud of the toil and trouble they stir up.

Publishers Weekly

This lovely debut novel is a tale of three sisters: Rosalind, Bianca, and Cordelia. Named by their father, a famous Shakespeare professor who communicates primarily in Shakespearean verse, they grew up surrounded by books near the campus of a small Midwestern college. Rose, the oldest, stays close to home and follows her father into academia. Bean, the middle child, leaves home for an exciting life in New York City. Cordy, the youngest, drifts aimlessly across the country. Life isn't turning out to be what the sisters expected, so each decides separately to return home to care for their sick mother. The sisters are less than thrilled when they learn all three have run home. Unfortunately, the key to starting the next chapters of their lives isn't hiding between the pages of one of their beloved books. *Verdict:* This novel should appeal to Shakespeare lovers, bibliophiles, fans of novels in academic settings, and stories of sisterhood. The narration is a creative and original blending of the three "Weird Sisters" as one. —Shaunna Hunter, *Hampden-Sydney Coll., VA*

Library Journal

There are no false steps in this debut novel: the humor, lyricism, and realism characterizing this lovely book will appeal to fans of good modern fiction as well as stories of family and of the Midwest. —Ellen Loughran

Booklist

In a debut about growing up, secrets and failures are predictably resolved when a family crisis reunites three bright but unhappy siblings. As the daughters of a Shakespeare scholar, the Andreas girls are no strangers to the Bard. Oldest Rosalind (known as Rose) is named after the heroine of *As You Like It*, Bianca (Bean) has the name of the tamed shrew's sister and daddy's girl Cordelia (Cordy) bears the name of *King Lear's* devoted youngest. Their "weird"ness refers to *Macbeth*, although the three are far from witch-like, just averagely bookish women grappling with their unusual upbringing and some dubious adult choices. Drawn home to Barnwell, Ohio, because of their mother's breast cancer, the sisters reassemble uneasily in their parents' house—footloose Cordy, now pregnant; self-hating, morally dubious Bean, sacked after embezzling from her New York employers; and overly dutiful Rose. Quirky and perky, Brown's narrative uses light comedy to balance the serious life issues. The family's habit of quoting Shakespeare at every turn is less amusing, and there's also the curious plural narrative voice—"our sister," "our parents,"—seemingly the collective point of view of all three daughters. The story itself is a lengthy account of the women facing their demons, assisted by saintly parents, friends and

neighbors who offer jobs, reassurance and romance. All's well that ends well.
Readable, upmarket, non-mold-breaking escapism.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

- 1.The Andreas family is dedicated to books, particularly Shakespeare. Would the family be different if their father were an expert on a different writer? Edgar Allan Poe, let's say, or Mark Twain? What if they were a family of musicians or athletes, rather than readers? How might that change their dynamic? Is there an interest that unites your family in the same way that reading unites the Andreas family?
- 2.The narration is omniscient first person plural ("we" rather than "I"). Why do you think the author chose to write the novel in this way? Did you like it?
- 3.Which sister is your favorite? Why? Which sister do you most identify with? Are they the same character?
- 4.Do you have any siblings? If so, in what way is your relationship with them similar to the relationship among the Andreas sisters? In what way is it different?
- 5.Each of the sisters has a feeling of failure about where she is in her life and an uncertainty about her position as a grown-up. Are there certain markers that make you an adult, and if so, what are they?
- 6.In what ways are the sisters' problems of their own making? Does this make them more or less sympathetic?
- 7.The narrator says that God was always there if the family needed him, "kind of like an extra tube of toothpaste under the sink." Is that true, or does the family's religion have a larger effect on the sisters than they claim? How does your own family's faith, or lack thereof, influence you?
- 8.In many ways, the Andreas sisters' personalities align with proposed birth-order roles: Rose, the driven caregiver; Bean, the rebellious pragmatist; and Cordy, the free-spirited performer. How important do you think birth order is? Do you see those traits in your own family or in people you know?
- 9.Father Aidan tells Bean, "Your story, Bean, is the story of your sisters. And it is past time, I think, for you to stop telling that particular story, and tell the story of yourself. Stop defining yourself in terms of them. You don't just have to exist in the empty spaces they leave." Do you agree with Father Aidan? Is it possible to identify one's self not in relationship to one's siblings or family?
- 10.Is it irresponsible of Cordy to keep her baby?
- 11.How does the Andreas family deal with the mother's illness? How would your family have coped differently?
- 12.The sisters say that "We have always wondered why there is not more research done on the children of happy marriages." How does their parents' love story affect the sisters? How did your own parents' relationship affect you?

13. What do you think of the sisters' father, James? Is he a good parent? What about their mother?



14. Why do you think the mother is never given a name?

15. The narrators' mother admits that she ended up with the girls' father because she was scared to venture out into the world. Yet she doesn't seem to have any regrets. Do you think there are people who are just not meant to leave home or their comfort zone?

16. Bean and Cordy initially want to leave Barnwell behind, yet they remain, while Rose is the one off living in Europe. Do you think people sometimes become constrained by childhood perceptions of themselves and how their lives will be? How is your own life different from the way you thought it would turn out?

17. When you first saw the title, *The Weird Sisters*, what did you think the book would be about? What do you think the title really means?

top of page

 ADD THIS 

Site by **BOOM** (<http://www.boomsuper.com>)  (<http://www.boomsuper.com>)

LitLovers © 201



About the Author

Full text biography:

Eleanor Brown (American novelist)

Birth Date : 1973

Place of Birth : United States, District of Columbia, Washington

Nationality: American

Occupation : Novelist

Table of Contents:

Personal Information

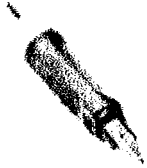
Career

Writings

Media Adaptions

Sidelights

Related Information



about this author

Personal Information:

Born 1973; companion of J.C. Hutchins (a writer). **Education:** Holds an M.A. **Addresses:** Home: Denver, CO. Agent: Elizabeth Winick Rubinstein, McIntosh & Otis, Inc., 353 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016. **E-mail:** eleanor@eleanor-brown.com.

Career Information:

Writer. Former middle-school teacher.

Writings:

- *The Weird Sisters* (novel), Amy Einhorn Books/G.P. Putnam (New York, NY), 2011.

Work represented in anthologies. Contributor of short fiction to magazines, newspapers, and journals.

Media Adaptions:

The Weird Sisters has been adapted as an audiobook.

Sidelights:

Eleanor Brown's first novel, *The Weird Sisters*, chronicles a turning point in the lives of three sisters in a Shakespeare-loving family. They are the young-adult daughters of James Andreas, a Shakespeare scholar and professor at a small college in an Ohio village. They are all named for Shakespeare characters: the oldest for Rosalind, from *As You Like It*, and she goes by Rose; the middle sister for Bianca, from *The Taming of the Shrew*, and she is nicknamed Bean; and the youngest for Cordelia, from *King Lear*, and she is known as Cordy. They also frequently use the Bard's words to communicate. The book's title is a reference to the three witches in *Macbeth*, who were considered weird in an early sense of the word, originally spelled "wyrd" and meaning "fate," as the witches represented the three fates of mythology.

The novel's plot deals with the sisters' fate. Their father summons them to their childhood home because their mother (whose name is never disclosed) has been diagnosed with cancer, most likely terminal. The sisters, meanwhile, are having crises of their own. Rose has stayed close to home and become, like their father, a college professor, but her fiancé, a fellow academic, is eager to take a position he has been offered in England, and she is loath to relocate. Bean has just lost her job as the human resources director in a New York City law office because she has been stealing from the firm. Cordy, who has led a [peripatetic] life, following rock bands around the country and never staying long in one

peripatetic = walking or traveling about; itinerant

location, job, or relationship, has just learned she is pregnant--and she is not married, nor is she even in touch with the father. Now, by confronting their mother's illness and their own problems, they must belatedly grow up.

Some reviewers found *The Weird Sisters* a quirky, charming story. "This smart, hopeful novel by Washington-born author Eleanor Brown will be the winter's tale for any book lover who likes her entertainment laced with a touch of Shakespeare," observed Ron Charles in the *Washington Post*. He described it as "a family drama, gracefully costumed in academic garb and lit with warm comedy." He noted that Brown tells much of the story in the first person plural, "a rarely used perspective that works marvelously here." A critic at the Web log *She Is Too Fond of Books* also commented on the narration, calling it "the amazing collective voice of the three Andreas sisters," and adding: "Brown shares their individual stories, but in the omniscient voice of the whole; and it's a personal whole, blatantly honest, baring emotions."

Brown's liberal use of Shakespeare references received both praise and criticism. While *New York Times* contributor Janet Maslin termed the device "a bit much," she continued: "But Ms. Brown appears well equipped to handle this gimmick. And she makes it her book's main attraction." Janet Okoben, writing in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, thought the Shakespeare quotes "grow tiring," and Charles remarked that the characters "seem oblivious to the heart of these great works, reducing Shakespeare's words to clever slogans." However, the contributor on the *She Is Too Fond of Books* Web log commented: "The quotes are naturally appropriate to the plot and serve only to enhance the characters."

As to the book's other merits, Maslin reported that the plot "overlaps with many other books about family troubles and reconciliations," but predicted that readers will "appreciate the good sense and good humor that keep her story buoyant." Tom De Haven, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, deemed the novel "likable but sometimes careless." The story, he wrote, "seldom rises above the predictable and the romantic," and he objected to the fact that "historical time is fudged, generalized, while quotidian details, those small things that lend nuance, are kept vague." He acknowledged that *The Weird Sisters* "can be entertaining, and Eleanor Brown's neurotic, floundering characters have the potential to be spirited company. But their world is one you can never entirely believe in."

Charles related that despite his quibbles, "it's easy to recommend" the novel because "Brown is such a clever writer, and she's written such an endearing story about sisterly affection and the possibilities of redemption." *Library Journal* reviewer Shaunna Hunter described the work as a "lovely debut novel," while a *Publishers Weekly* critic dubbed it "bright" and "literate." *Booklist* contributor Ellen Loughran observed that the Brown makes "no false steps" in a story distinguished by "humor, lyricism, and realism." A blogger at *Write Meg!* concluded: "Lovers of literary fiction, family dynamics and novels about sisters shouldn't miss this one--a worthy and very readable story about love, connection and forging new identities."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, October 15, 2010, Ellen Loughran, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. 35.
- *Chatelaine*, February 1, 2011, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. 110.
- *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 25, 2011, Janet Okoben, "Eleanor Brown Plops 'The Weird Sisters' in Fictional Barnwell, Ohio."
- *Denver Post*, February 27, 2011, Robin Vidimos, review of *The Weird Sisters*.
- *Library Journal*, October 1, 2010, Shaunna Hunter, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. 65; May 1, 2011, Joyce Kessel, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. 48.
- *New York Times*, January 17, 2011, Janet Maslin, "A Family Speaks in Someone Else's Words, but At Least It Chooses the Best," p. C7.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 24, 2011, Tom De Haven, "Triple Witching," p. 7.
- *Publishers Weekly*, November 15, 2010, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. 39 November 15, 2010, "PW Talks with Eleanor Brown: No Eye of Newt Here," p. 37.
- *USA Today*, January 20, 2011, Carol Memmott, profile of Eleanor Brown, p. D5.
- *Washington Post*, February 16, 2011, Ron Charles, review of *The Weird Sisters*, p. C1.

ONLINE

- *At Home with Books*, <http://athomewithbooks.blogspot.com/> (February 3, 2011), review of *The Weird Sisters*.
- *BookReporter.com*, <http://www.bookreporter.com/> (February 4, 2011), interview with Eleanor Brown.
- *Eleanor Brown Home Page*, <http://www.eleanor-brown.com> (June 19, 2011).
- *First Things Web site*, <http://firstthings.com/> (March 8, 2011), Gayle Trotter, "Eleanor Brown Chats with Gayle about *The Weird Sisters*, Sin Radar, and Shakespeare."
- *NewWest.net*, <http://www.newwest.net/> (February 14, 2011), Jenny Shank, interview with Eleanor Brown.
- *Psychology Today*, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/> (January 4, 2011), Jennifer Haupt, "*The Weird Sisters*: A Debut Novel with Staying Power."
- *Rundpinne*, <http://www.rundpinne.com/> (February 1, 2011), review of *The Weird Sisters*.
- *Seattlest*, <http://seattlest.com/> (March 18, 2011), Kimberly Banti, "Interview: Author Eleanor Brown Talks 'Sisters' and Shakespeare."
- *She Is Too Fond of Books*, <http://www.sheistoofondofbooks.com/> (February 21, 2011), review of *The Weird Sisters*.
- *Write Meg!*, <http://writemeg.com/> (February 16, 2011), review of *The Weird Sisters*.

OTHER

- *Weekend Edition Sunday* (broadcast transcript), February 6, 2011, Liane Hansen, "'Weird Sisters' Quote Shakespeare to Communicate."*

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2012

Gale Database: Contemporary Authors Online

Gale Document Number: GALE|H21822338

Source Citation: "Eleanor Brown (American novelist)." 2012. Books & Authors. Gale. Gale Internal User 2 Oct 2014 <<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/start.do?p=BNA&u=gale>>

©2008 Cengage Learning