

# *Jane Eyre* as Seen Throughout the Times

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A Critical Reception History of *Jane Eyre* in  
the 1850s and the 1960s and 70s

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## Abstract

The primary purpose of this study is to determine how the critical reception of *Jane Eyre* has changed from the date of publishing in 1847 and the early 1850s to the rise of feminist critical theory in the 1960s and 70s, by specifically looking at a reviewer's character analysis, scene selection, religious stance, writing techniques, and their reception of the author's sex. In the nineteenth century, critics' opinions were divided. Some dubbed *Jane Eyre* a masterpiece, others thought it was anti-Christian literature and anti-authority. All critics of this era were concerned with *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography. In the 1960s and 70s, critics were more like-minded in their opinions. The 1960s brought the arrival of feminist literary criticism in which the feminist perspective was analysed for the first time. The 1970s brought – due to an increase in analysing techniques – a textual analysis of the novel that focussed on women's inner experience in Victorian society, especially that of the psychological experience. All reviews, from both time periods, address the fact that Charlotte Brontë wrote in a certain way because she herself felt trapped in the constraints of nineteenth century Victorian society. Many of the nineteenth century reviews condemn the novel because of this, whilst most of the second-wave feminist reviews applaud the novel because of this.

Key Words: *Jane Eyre*, Reception Studies, Feminism, Charlotte Brontë, 1850s, 1960s, 1970s

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Table of Contents	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Chapter 1: The Critical Reception History of <i>Jane Eyre</i> in 1847 till the early 1850s	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Historical Context of the Nineteenth Century	11
2.3 Close Reading of Religious Aspects in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1850s	12
2.4 Close Reading of Character Analysis in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1850s	13
2.5 Close Reading of Writing Techniques in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1850s	14
2.6 Close Reading of Critics' Opinions Regarding the Author's Sex in the 1850s	15
2.7 Close Reading of Scene Selection in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1850s	16
2.8 Conclusion	17
3. Chapter 2: The Critical Reception History of <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1960s and 70s	19
3.1 Introduction	19
3.2 Historical Context of the 1960s and 70s	19
3.3 Close Reading of Religious Aspects in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1960s and 70s	20
3.4 Close Reading of Character Analysis in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1960s and 70s	21
3.5 Close Reading of Writing Techniques in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1960s and 70s	22
3.6 Close Reading of Critics' Opinions Regarding the Author's Sex in the 1960s and 70s	23
3.7 Close Reading of Scene Selection in <i>Jane Eyre</i> in the 1960s and 70s	24
3.8 Conclusion	25
4. Conclusion	28
4.1 Self-Evaluation	30
4.2 Recommendation for Further Research	31
5. Works Cited	32
5.1 Primary Works Cited	32
5.2 Secondary Works Cited	33

## 1. Introduction

No two people could agree in their opinion of it, so full was it of contradictions. Miss A. was delighted with it, Miss B. as much disgusted – Miss C. heard it so talked of, that she was most anxious to read it; but her married sister, Mrs. D. said, “No woman under thirty ought to open it. Then, it was such a strange book! Imagine a novel with a little swarthy governess for a heroine, and a middle-aged ruffian for a hero. (qtd. in Keen 78)

This was the verdict of *Sharpe's London Magazine* on Charlotte Brontë's, arguably, most famous novel *Jane Eyre*. It has indeed always been a novel of great controversy. Ever since it was first published in October 1847, the reading public and critics have been interested in the novel. The first two years, the story was especially subjected to a great amount of scrutiny and gossip because of the mystery of who the “Bell brothers” were (Allott *The Critical Heritage* 2). In 1850, after the death of Emily and Anne Brontë, Charlotte published a preface in *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in which she revealed that the “Bell brothers” were actually the Brontë sisters. This startled many of the audience and critics alike, because all three novels had often been called “coarse” and “violent” and it was even more shocking to find out they had been written by women, and unmarried young women at that. After Charlotte died five years later, readers and critics took the opportunity to examine the novels once more, and many more readers have continued to do so, even in contemporary days. But especially after the Brontë sisters' deaths, critics did reflect “on the disparity between the restrictedness of her [Charlotte's] own and her sisters' lives and the vitality of their creative imagination” (Allott *The Critical Heritage* 2).

As the review in *Sharpe's London Magazine* demonstrates, not one reader could agree in his or her opinion on *Jane Eyre*. But the critics' opinions were divided as well. Many early reviews praised the novel for being “original,” “new,” and “fresh,” and having a strong voice and message. It was, however, also condemned for being “vulgar,” “too bold,” and “coarse,” especially by those reviewers who thought that Currer Bell might be a woman (Alexander and Smith 134). With the rise of feminist critical theory in the 1960s and 1970s, critics began to focus on and re-examine the novel in a different light: there was now a need to investigate the history of criticism of the writing of women (Alexander and Smith 421). Ruth Gounelas' 1984

essay “Charlotte Brontë and the Critics: Attitudes to the Female Qualities in her Writing,” does exactly this. Gounelas divides her essay into three different time periods: “from 1847 to the early 1850s, when the author’s gender was a prominent and problematic factor in reviews by critics... [to] a long middle period, when, according to Gounelas, Charlotte’s gender didn’t seem to matter to critics... [to] ... another long period beginning in the 1960s when the fact that Brontë wrote so demonstrably as a woman began to attract positive critical interest in her work” (qtd. in Alexander and Smith 421).

This research project is influenced by the latter work and will follow the established time span which Gounelas has set up. My research will mainly investigate the early critical responses and thus the time period of the publishing date 1847 and the early 1850s, and responses of critics after the rise of feminist theory in the 1960s and 1970s. These time periods will be interesting to investigate because the results will most likely show that critics’ general opinions changed drastically over the years, but also a change in what they regard as being important in the novel, shown by, for instance, which scenes they analyse. The question therefore is, how has the critical reception history of *Jane Eyre* changed from the date of publication in 1847 and the early 1850s through the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, by specifically looking at character analysis, scene selection, religious aspects, the author’s sex, and writing techniques?

This research thesis is located in the field of reception studies or reception theory. A field which has already been well researched in the past. A few of the prominent, leading figures in this arena are Miriam Allott, Terry Eagleton, and Stuart Hall. Firstly, the eminent British literary theorist and critic Terry Eagleton, for instance, has contributed to the field of reception studies by having identified three general phases that occur in its history: the first phase, according to Eagleton, which took place in the nineteenth century and follows the rise of romanticism, is mainly interested in a preoccupation with the author. The second phase, dubbed “New Criticism,” is chiefly concerned with text analysis, and in contemporary years the focus has shifted from text analysis to the audience and their interpretations (Langland 388). Secondly, Stuart Hall was co-founder of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and he developed the encoding/decoding model of reception, which offers an explanation as to how media messages are interpreted by the audience, but also how they are produced and distributed (Pitout 244). And last but not least, Miriam Allott is the most prominent figure in Brontë criticism. Not only does her book *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, which was published in 1974, contain a collection of reviews and commentaries from around the publishing date of *Jane Eyre* till 1900, but she also provides commentary on the background

of the Brontës and how to approach reception studies. Alexander and Smith have remarked, “her indispensable book and intelligent editorial commentary have provided more than a starting point for the many more recent reception histories, which bring her account up to date...” (421).

Some of the more recent researchers in reception studies are, for example, Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, who are currently investigating what the value, function, and implied definition of labels associated with Modernism in contemporary literary culture are. Another example is Zoe Brennan who, following Allott’s book, in 2010, has published her book *Brontë’s Jane Eyre*. She does not only examine and analyse the novel as a whole, based on writing techniques, language, style and form, but also investigates the reception history of *Jane Eyre* and particularly how the rise of feminist critic theory has influenced critics’ views.

This study will examine reviews that are part of periodicals, casebooks, or scholarly books or articles, so that they all possess some elements of academic quality. At the time of *Jane Eyre*’s publication there was not an abundance of universities yet, and consequently the scholarly level was lower, therefore it was not comparable to that of the present. This means it is more sensible to be looking at “contemporary” casebooks and periodicals that have captured the reviews written in 1847, because if the reviews are mentioned in more contemporary academic works than the current critics and reviewers have probably built on those past works. This means that all reviews, even if written – or captured - at different times, still maintain a scholarly aspect and were not just written by people who were not as sophisticated in their technical knowledge about certain subjects – for instance feminist theory – yet. One such casebook which will be used, for instance, will be Miriam Allot’s *The Brontë’s: The Critical Heritage*, which was published in 1974.

In order to determine how the reception of *Jane Eyre* has changed over time, this thesis will examine 20 reviews from 2 different time periods. This means, a close analysis of 10 reviews that were published around 1847, and 10 reviews that were published in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, when close reading the reviews, two steps will be taken. The first one is to look at a reviewer’s general opinion of the novel. Does he or she favour or condemn it, do they recommend it, and why? The second is to look at a reviewer’s specific character analysis’, which scenes they choose to highlight in their reviews, what religious stance the author takes and how the critics interpret this, the technical aspects of the author’s writing (such as realism and tone), and the influence of the author’s sex on the critic’s verdict. Previous reception studies, such as Brennan and Allott, seem to suggest that the most common criteria when analysing a text will be the critics’ reception of the sex of the author,



religious aspects that are dealt with, and the technical aspects of writing. This thesis will therefore concur to those criteria. However, this project will add to the research field by also investigating if different scenes are highlighted by different critics in different time periods, and if the character analysis changes throughout times. It appears that the most differences, by looking at several reviews, lies in the scene selection and character analysis, and this is precisely why this thesis will look at those criteria in particular. By following these steps, the close reading of the reviews, regardless of the time period, will be done in the same way. Also, the research will only look at 10 reviews for each time period because the scope of the project does not allow for more reviews to be examined, especially because a close reading of 5 different aspects – character analysis, scene selection, the technical aspects of writing, the author’s take on religion and the critic’s reception to the author’s sex – has to be done.

Ergo, the method that will be applied to this Bachelor thesis is that of close reading. Close reading, in the words of Brummet, is reading to such a disciplined extent, that the object that is read, in this case the reviews that criticize *Jane Eyre*, will reveal layers of deeper meaning (3), and it is precisely this hidden and deeper understanding that this thesis will closely analyse. This thesis will look at different ways in which readers, but specifically critics, have looked at *Jane Eyre* over different time periods.

Also, it should be taken into consideration that different periodicals might review *Jane Eyre* differently based on their political, religious, and class allegiance motives. For instance *The Spectator* was a “staunchy-middle class journal ... [that did] not approve ... of the ... unorthodox novel” (Alexander and Smith 135). *The Examiner*, on the other hand, had a more politically radical view and thus favoured change and individualism (Alexander and Smith 135). Thus, different journals might affect the reception of *Jane Eyre*. This means this research will look at different types of reviews to see if this, and if so, to what extent this affects the critical reception history of Charlotte Brontë’s novel.

This inquiry will only look at British critics, or critics who write for a British periodical. The reason for this is because British critics will all have had, more or less, the same political, economic, religious, class, and so on and so forth developments as the others have had. If other, foreign, reviewers were added to the search than this would affect the research because they could have had different, for example, political situations than the British and thus approach *Jane Eyre* from a different angle. This is the case with French critic Eugene Forçade, who “reflects his concern with current political troubles in France, against which he measures Charlotte’s staunch individualism” (Allott *Charlotte Brontë* 66-7). His review is therefore already different from that of British critics, because they did not

experience the same troubles in France.

This thesis will have two chapters. The first chapter will deal with the sub question of what the critical reception of *Jane Eyre* in 1847 till the early 1850s looks like, following the aforementioned two steps. It will be divided into a brief introduction, a historical context on the nineteenth century, followed by the sub headings of the different aspects that this thesis will closely examine: character analysis, scene selection, writing technique, religious stance, and the author's sex. This chapter builds mostly on Miriam Allott's work. Particularly her case studies, *The Critical Heritage*, and her other work, *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Villette*. The second chapter will deal with exactly the same steps and have the same subheadings, except it will deal with the sub question of what the critical reception of *Jane Eyre* will look like during the rise of feminist critical theory in the 1960s and the 1970s. This chapter will refer specifically to Terry Eagleton's three phases of reception history. Finally in the conclusion everything will be mentioned again briefly and there will be an answer to the main research question of this project: How has the critical reception of *Jane Eyre* changed from the date of publication in 1847 and the early 1850s through the rise of feminist critical theory in the 1960s and the 1970s, by specifically looking at reviewer's character analysis, summary of plot, scene selection, religious stance, and their reception of the author's sex?

## 2. The Critical Reception of *Jane Eyre* in 1847 till the early 1850s

### 2.1 Introduction

According to Alexander and Smith, reception history is a reflective account of responses, mostly given by critics, to an object, in this case the literary text *Jane Eyre*, over a period of time (421). The reception of *Jane Eyre* began in 1847 when it was first published. Reviews, whether ones published in periodicals, or in (personal) letters that recommended or condemned the novel, flooded the country that was gripped with, according to novelist and newspaper editor Thomas Weymess Reid, “*Jane Eyre* fever” (qtd. in Brennan 98). This chapter will look at some of the most influential reviews published around the date in which *Jane Eyre* first came out and will analyse what the different opinions on it were, according to the aforementioned 5 aspects - reviewer’s character analysis, scene selection, religious stance, writing techniques, and reception of the author’s sex - and if something, and if so, what, influenced these different views.

### 2.2 Historical Context of the Nineteenth Century

It is important to note that the reading public grew enormously during the course of the nineteenth century. This was due to several factors. First of all economic factors contributed to the growth of an audience for novels: Concentrated markets developed due to the growth of cities; new binding and printing methods caused for a cheaper production of books which in turn led to lower book prices, cheaper libraries arose, and more advertising and promotion was done for new books (qtd. in O’Gorman 154). Secondly, due to the Education Act of 1870 a lower middle-class reading public materialized and thus even more people in society could now read (Donghaile 7). However, there was also a limitation to fiction, and what authors could write, in the beginning of the Victorian period. Reading could actually create a lot of tension: “At the centre of this anxiety about what constituted suitable reading material and ways of reading lay concerns about class, and concerns about gender” (Flint 18). The famous novelist George Eliot once wrote, “men and women are imitative beings. We cannot, at least those who ever read to any purpose at all... help being modified by the ideas that pass through

our minds” (qtd. in Flint 18) It was exactly this belief that led to the limitation of fiction, and even the banishment of fiction in some quarters of Victorian England. By mid-century though the censorship had been lifted, or, at least, was not so strict anymore and a lot of people started reading again. Anthony Trollope described that at his time of writing, in the late 1850s through to the year 1883, novels were “read right and left” and by various classes of society: from “young countesses and ... farmer’s daughters, ... [to] old lawyers and ... young students” (qtd. in Flint 19). Still, it was a development that could have influenced some reviews given on *Jane Eyre*. Especially because the novel went against certain regular conventions.

### 2.3 Close Reading of Religious Aspects in *Jane Eyre* in the 1850s

Charlotte Brontë in her novel “claims an unusual position from which she challenges both the pulpit and civilized society. The combination of a doctrine of self-determination with the recognition of equal worth lead... [some] critics ... to reject the novel as anti-authority and anti-Christian” (Keen 84). Especially because of Jane’s stubbornness, her independence, and the passionate scenes she and Mr. Rochester display. For instance, Lady Georgina Fullerton in *The Christian Remembrancer*, in a review published in April 1848, complains that Charlotte Brontë’s work “burns with moral Jacobinism,” and that “‘unjust, unjust,’ is the burden of every reflection upon the things and power that be” (58). And although the reviewer does not explicitly call the novel anti-Christian, she hints that it “wears a questionable aspect,” (60) especially considering Charlotte Brontë kills off Helen Burns in one of the earliest chapters and in “her ... the Christianity of *Jane Eyre* is concentrated, and with her it expires, leaving the moral world in a kind of Scandinavian gloom” (60).

In her assessment for the *Quarterly Review*, which appeared in December 1848, Elizabeth Rigby is even more disapproving of *Jane Eyre* in regards to being an anti-authority and anti-Christian text. She dubs the whole as “an anti-Christian composition”, and explains that Jane has “... [the] strength of a mere heathen mind...” and that “no Christian grace is perceptible upon her” (71). It is interesting to note that she describes, which are now seen as, Jane’s strongest personality traits, as being immoral and not intended by God: “It is by her own talents, virtues, and courage that she is made to attain the summit of human happiness, and, as far as *Jane Eyre*’s own statement is concerned, no one would think that she owed anything either to God above or to man below” (71).

#### 2.4 Close Reading of Character Analysis in *Jane Eyre* in the 1850s

During the Victorian times critics did not agree with each other. Whilst Elizabeth Rigby dislikes the character of Jane because her personality traits are in contrast with God's wishes, critic G.H. Lewes in *Fraser's Magazine* wrote that Jane is particularly well drawn by the author because,

We never lose sight of her plainness; no effort is made to throw romance about her – no extraordinary goodness or cleverness appeals to your admiration; but you admire, you love her, - love her for the strong will, honest mind, loving heart, and peculiar but fascinating personality. A creature of flesh and blood, with very fleshy infirmities and very mortal excellencies; a woman, not a pattern. (54)

An anonymous reviewer for *The Critic* wholeheartedly agrees with G.H. Lewes' portrayal of Jane, remarking that "the heroine is ... very well sustained: she is not faultless, but human – a woman and not an angel; on which account we feel all the more interested in her fortunes" (47). An anonymous reviewer for *The Spectator*, in stark contrast to Lewes' and *The Critic's* praise, writes on 6 November 1847, that the story "contains nothing beyond itself ... [and] is a very narrow representation of human life" (49). The fault he finds the biggest though is that both heroes of the story do not attract any sympathy at all (49).

James Lorimer, from an unsigned review in the *North British Review* disagrees entirely with Lewes and *The Critic* and supports the view of the anonymous reviewer for *The Spectator* that Jane and Rochester do not attract any sympathy. In fact, he finds her "hard, and angular, and indelicate as a woman." He continues, "Notwithstanding her love for Rochester, we feel that she is a creature more of the intellect than of the affections; and the matter-of-course way in which she, a girl of nineteen, who had seen nothing of the world, receives his revelations of his former life, is both revolting and improbable" (114). However, James Lorimer, in contrast to the reviewer from *The Spectator* does find Rochester an agreeable man, "proud, tyrannical, violent, and selfish though he was, he had the element of power, which, involuntarily and almost unconsciously, in a woman's eyes, supplies the deficiency of every other good quality... Mr. Rochester comes nearer to the man of genius than any other hero of romance we know" (114). What is thought-provoking here is that whilst Jane is berated for being a person of intellect, Rochester is praised as being powerful because of it

(among other qualities). It is precisely against this that Charlotte Brontë critiqued: that women should be constricted to show their intellectual abilities and even sexual appetites (Alexander and Smith 547).

Critic H.F. Chorley, writing a review for *The Athenaeum* in October 1847, in turn finds Mr. Rochester's protégé Adèle "with her hereditary taste for dress, coquetry, and pantomimic grace" true to life (45). The anonymous reviewer for *The Critic*, also agrees that the child of an opera-dancer Adèle is very lifelike, "There is exquisite delicacy in the drawing of this young creature: it is a perfect picture of a little girl, such as we do not know where to parallel in the whole range of literature – so rare it is to find childhood naturally depicted" (47).

It is interesting to note that most reviewers of the nineteenth century in their character analysis actually also talk about Charlotte Brontë's writing techniques, and specifically the realistic way in which she drew the characters – or the improbable way as *The Spectator* and the *North British Review* would claim. In any case, it appears that some criteria are intertwined in this time period. In this case the realism of writing technique cannot be detached from the character analysis. Also, that certain reviewers would criticise exactly that which Charlotte Brontë protests against: inequality for women and the constructions they face regarding, amongst other things, sexuality and intellectuality.

### 2.5 Close Reading of Writing Techniques in *Jane Eyre* in the 1850s

The aforementioned critic H.F. Chorley, whilst complimenting Charlotte Brontë's writing technique and especially the portrayal of Adèle as lifelike, is, however, also of the opinion that there are faults in the story line and some plot lines are even on the verge of being improbable. However he finds that there is so much power in the novel that those little eccentricities can be easily pardoned (44). As a matter of fact, all critics that are being examined in this research thesis, all 10 reviews, agree that *Jane Eyre* is a very remarkable and powerful novel. They all use words such as "though rude and uncultivated here and there," it is a "true, sound and original" story (Fonblanque 50). The author has "depth and breadth of thought... she has ... the gift of genius" (Fullerton 60). Or even that, "the book ... displays considerable skill in the plan, and great power, but rather shown in the writing than the matter" (*The Spectator* 49). An unsigned review from *People's Journal*, on November 1847 describes the writing style of Ms Brontë as "bold, lucid, pungent; the incidents are varied,

touching romantic; the characterisation is ample, original, diversified; the moral sentiments are pure and healthy; and the whole work is, in its high and headlong course, calculated to rivet attention, to provoke sympathy, to make the heart bound, and the brain pause” (80). He, or she, goes on to acknowledge the native power, and in turn narrative power this creates, that *Jane Eyre* possesses by showing “itself now in rapid headlong recital – now in stern, fierce, daring dashes at portraiture – anon in subtle, startling mental anatomy – here in a grand allusion, there in an original metaphor – again in a wild gush of genuine poetry”(81). Even the most critical reviewer, Elizabeth Rigby, remarks that “... this is a very remarkable book: “We are painfully alive to the moral, religious, and literary deficiencies of the picture, and such passages of beauty and power we have quoted cannot redeem it, but it is impossible not to be spellbound with the freedom of the touch” (72).

The reason why Charlotte Brontë grants her heroine such freedom of expression and speech which makes the novel powerful is because she herself is a victim of the trappings of gender constrictions in society. When she asked poet Robert Southey to appraise her poetry he warned:

The day dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and, in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. (qtd. in Michie 11)

## 2.6 Close Reading of Critics’ Opinions Regarding the Author’s Sex in the 1850s

The interesting thing is that even though all critics agree that Jane breaking free from conventional Victorian rules of society is, in part, what makes the novel powerful and original, most cannot resist the urge to judge the author based on gender.

For instance, Elizabeth Rigby, disapproving of the independence of Jane, and her so-called vulgar manner, writes that “if the author was female then she must have for some sufficient reason long forfeited the society of her own sex, and if male, then the writer was no artist...” (qtd. in Allott *Charlotte Brontë* 23). In contrast, G.H. Lewes is very receptive of *Jane Eyre* despite the fact that he has guessed that Currer Bell is indeed a woman. This does

not alter his opinion of it, “The writer is evidently a woman, and, unless we are deceived, new in the world of literature. But, man or woman, young or old, be that as it may, no such book has gladdened our eyes for a long while” (52). An unsigned review in the *Era*, published on 14 November 1847, even remarks that, “It is no woman’s writing. Although ladies have written histories, and travels, and warlike novels, to say nothing of books upon the different arts and sciences, no woman *could have* penned the ‘Autobiography of Jane Eyre’” (79). Now, the reason why some critics have trouble conceiving a successful women writer in the Victorian time period is because general thought was that a novel might cause women, women writers and readers alike, to become dissatisfied with their domestic house duties. This becomes evident when the *Christian Remembrancer* stewes over the possibility that the genre of writing could “for the women reader open out a picture of life free from all the perhaps irksome checks that confine their own existence” (qtd. in Flint 27).

### 2.7 Close Reading of Scene Selection in *Jane Eyre* in the 1850s

All 10 reviews that are analysed in this thesis only look at a few particular scenes: mainly those of Jane’s youth and her years at Lowood. All critics agree that depiction of Jane’s childhood and her time at Lowood is very lifelike and real. For instance, G.H. Lewes describes that “... the earlier parts – all those relating to Jane’s childhood and her residence at Lowood, with much of the strange love story – are written with remarkable beauty and truth” (47). Even the severe critic Elizabeth Rigby who finds almost nothing alluring about the novel, admits that Jane’s childhood is particularly well illustrated. She states that it is “brilliant retrospective sketching,” and continues to argue that because of this brilliance of writing technique the story is somewhat interesting. But she makes sure to emphasise that it “is the childhood and not the child that interest you” (69). The anonymous reviewer for *The Critic* finds the writing style of Jane’s earlier years superb, especially when she is sent to Lowood, “whose wretched fare, exacting tyranny, puritanical pretension, and systematic hypocrisy are painted with a vividness which shews them to be no fiction, but a copy from the life” (46). He also maintains that “the author has aimed a well-directed blow at actually existing charities in more than one county” (46). This is of course exactly what Charlotte Brontë intended. She in her youth also attended a charitable school and the portraits of suffering are her experiences, which she does not wish on anyone (Michie 5).

The reviewer for *The Critic* does, however, find that the mystery of Thornfield and all that follows – parts two and three of *Jane Eyre* – is too abruptly finished. He does note that



“there has been an evident effort to bring matters to a conclusion at a point prescribed by the printer rather than by the progress of the story” (47). Even though this reviewer blames the “absurd three-volumed system, which compels improper curtailment as well as needless expansion,” (47) many reviewers of the nineteenth century were not impressed with the latter parts of the novel. Many found it was too improbable and silly. Even reviewers who praise *Jane Eyre*, its characters and the writing style, such as G.H. Lewes must concede that, “there is, indeed, too much melodrama and improbability, which smack of the circulating library – we allude particularly to the mad wife and all that relates to her, and to the wanderings of Jane when she quits Thornfield”. He does state though, that even those parts are “powerfully executed” (54).

## 2.8 Conclusion

From the start of her career Charlotte Brontë pushed the boundaries and critiqued the society in which she lived. She protested against – albeit in a subtle way – the gender, religious and class restrictions that lay upon females of Victorian times. Not all critics could appreciate her viewpoints. Especially, Christian periodicals such as *The Christian Remembrancer* and *The Quarterly Review*, dubbed her novel anti-Christian and anti-authority. Critics’ opinions were very divided on the character analysis of Jane Eyre herself. Whilst G.H. Lewes and a reviewer for *The Critic* find Jane’s plainness refreshing and original, and praise the author for writing a character that clearly has faults, but is human, *The Spectator* and James Lorimer disagree and find Jane devoid of any sympathy. James Lorimer also adds that Jane is more of an intellectual creature than one of affection. He dubs this a bad characteristic. Strikingly enough though, James does find Mr. Rochester, despite his harsh characteristics, a genius man who attracts all ladies precisely because of this. This contrast in gender inequality, the man is praised for being intellectual and rude, the woman is not, is exactly what Charlotte Brontë protested against in her novel. All reviewers, however, review a character based on its realist aspects. Some, for instance *The Athenaeum*, find the characters portrayed in *Jane Eyre* extremely life like, whilst others, such as the *North British Review* find them devoid of human representation. It becomes clear that character analysis and the writing technique of the author are interlaced. Indeed, many critics praise Charlotte Brontë for her realistic approach and style. They also agree that the author has shown considerable skill in planning, and uses great power in her narrative. Elizabeth Rigby, who disliked *Jane Eyre* in general finds it a

remarkable book, especially because the author writes with such freedom. Again, the reason why Charlotte chooses for Jane to live her life as she pleases is because she – Charlotte – herself is trapped in the constructions of Victorian society. This is why she chooses to take the pseudonym Currer Bell. However, critics, have always been interested in what the actual sex of the author was and this does influence their opinion of the text. Elizabeth Rigby, for example, states that if the author was female than she must have forsaken her own sex, and if male than he was no artist. G.H. Lewes actually guessed that Currer Bell was a woman, but he wisely remarks that it is the text that is important, and the text is spectacular. A critic for the *Era* goes on to state that the text is written with such brilliancy that no woman could have ever written this. The reason why the sex of the author mattered is because people in Victorian society were afraid that women would forsake their domestic duties if they could have a legitimate career in writing. Lastly, it is intriguing to discover that all nineteenth-century critics generally dislike the latter parts of *Jane Eyre*. They only find beauty and lifelike writing in Jane's childhood years, and find the Thornfield part of the novel very improbable.

### 3. The Critical Reception History of *Jane Eyre* in the 1960s and 70s

#### 3.1 Introduction

It has been mentioned before in the introduction that Terry Eagleton, as one of the most prominent figures in reception studies has laid out three different phases of the reception history: firstly, in the nineteenth century, there was mainly a preoccupation with the author, secondly a new criticism phase in which there was a preoccupation with text analysis, and thirdly a phase in contemporary times in which there is a preoccupation with the audience and their interpretations. There was indeed a tendency up until the early 1960s to focus on “mainly biographical” concerns (Langland 394). Then in the 1970s, with the arrival of feminist criticism, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* was now reviewed in a new light: that of textual analysis, and specifically by focussing on gender aspects. But there were also scholars such as Terry Eagleton, who now examined the novel from a political and social perspective (Langland 394). This chapter will focus on the reviews of *Jane Eyre* of the most influential (feminist) scholars of the decades of the 1960s and 70s and will analyse what the different opinions, and views on it were, according to character analysis, scene selection, religious stance, writing techniques, and the reception of the author’s sex.

#### 3.2 Historical Context of the 1960s and 70s

Just as Terry Eagleton has mentioned in his three general phases of reception history, Herbert Rosengarten, in his *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research*, notes that “criticism of the novels often took second place to the theories of amateur psychologists, or to debates about such matters as ... authorship” (qtd. in Langland 394). It was not until the 1960s that critics began to focus their attention to analysing the works itself: the style, theme, and technique (Langland 394). In this first phase of second-wave feminist criticism a new phenomenon developed: that of analysing the novel through a feminist perspective (Alexander and Smith 187). Gender had always been an issue, but as Eagleton stated it was mostly through a biographical perspective. Now the text was analysed from a feminist point of view.

In the 1970s critics found that Charlotte Brontë had great writing technique, and they analysed precisely this technique in regards to gender, class, political and social implications. Also feminist criticism flourished even more because in the 70s there was a great deal of “formalist analytic techniques” that could be used to analyse the novel and thus there came a lot of works that focussed on, “women’s experience in patriarchy, [and] particularly the inner, psychological experience of the embattled feminine self” (Alexander and Smith 187). The latter kind of criticism was labelled high feminism.

Terry Eagleton in *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, reminds us that Haworth – the place where the Brontë family lived – was near the centre of West Riding woollen area. During the times that Charlotte was alive this area saw a lot of class-struggles, maybe even “some of the fiercest ... in English society,” and therefore it is no wonder that Charlotte put issues of “class relations, economic roles, and social status” at the centre of her novels (Hook 285).

### *3.3 Close Reading of Religious Aspects in Jane Eyre in the 1960s and 70s*

According to some critics in the 1850s, but specifically Elizabeth Rigby, *Jane Eyre* was a very anti-Christian text. The reason why she would be inclined to take this stance is because Charlotte Brontë did diverge from the traditional religious systems and opinions. Nancy Pell in her article “Resistance, Rebellion, and Marriage: The Economics of *Jane Eyre*,” written in 1977, expands on this issue. Whilst Charlotte Brontë uses quite some biblical phrases and echoes in her novel, she proposes an alternate religious system, namely one in which she “replaces the ‘mighty universal parent,’ the father God... with ‘the universal mother, Nature’” (402). For instance in the scenes where Jane wanders on the moors after Nature urges her to flee the seductions of Mr. Rochester, Jane finds that “man” offers her no help, but that it is Nature who “would lodge me without money and without price” (qtd. in Pell 402). This is a direct phrase from Isaiah 55.11, but the problem that nineteenth-century critics had with Brontë’s biblical references is that the focus had been taken from God and placed instead on Nature. According to Nancy Pell, as a representative of the 1960s and 1970s critics, this did not necessarily make the novel an anti-religious text, but instead it points to, “a matriarchal appropriation of traditionally patriarchal religious language” (402). Feminists approve of this change because it empowers females even more.

### 3.4 Close Reading of Character Analysis in *Jane Eyre* in the 1960s and 70s

Nancy Pell in her essay argues that the first scene between Mr. Brocklehurst and Jane Eyre sets the tone for the rest of the novel. In this scene Mr. Brocklehurst wants to show Jane that good children are rewarded and that bad children go to Hell. When asked how Jane should avoid going to Hell, she replies, “I must keep in good health, and not die” (qtd. in Pell 403). This indicates that Jane is very much interested in her own survival (403). In the eyes of some of the nineteenth-century reviewers this made Jane unsympathetic and selfish, such as the review for *The Spectator*, but feminist theory applauds it. A woman who stands up for her own rights is exactly what makes Jane likeable to them.

Adrienne Rich agrees entirely with Nancy Pell. She, however, already shook the entire community of critics back in 1973, with her work, “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman,” when she openly defied Virginia Woolf’s depiction of Jane as a “creature of self-delimiting passions” (Faurey n.p.). Rich, in contrast, precisely because Jane always had the courage to be herself found that the character was strong and true: “a person determined to live, and to choose her life with dignity, integrity, and pride” (qtd. in Faurey n.p.).

As Robert Martin, the author of *The Accents of Persuasion: Charlotte Brontë Novels*, published in 1966, asserts, Jane undergoes a transformation in the novel. The character grows from an inexperienced child into a mature and understanding adult. Throughout this process she learns the lessons of, “reconciliation of the head and the heart, [the] adjustment between reason and passions” (qtd. in Moser 302).

Passion was not necessarily considered to be a good trait by nineteenth-century critics, or even by later critics, such as Virginia Woolf. Elaine Showalter, in 1977, in her book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, sees in Bertha Mason an extreme character, realistically portrayed, but with a polar personality. She also believes that Bertha possesses an untamed passion and this is why she is perceived and portrayed as a madwoman in the novel (Lukić and Espinosa 111-2). Untamed passion will give way to madness.

But Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, find in Bertha’s madness a symbol of female rage. The same “rage that consumes Jane, Charlotte, and all women whose lives had been circumscribed and voices silenced. It is the self-same rage Virginia Woolf had seen as a defect and Adrienne Rich had countered with her delineation of the heroine’s constructive quest” (Lukić and Espinosa 113). The locked up Bertha now

becomes a central character, or rather metaphor, instead of remaining a side plot, and she represents the constraints that women experience during the nineteenth century (Lukić and Espinosa 113).

### 3.5 Close Reading of Writing Techniques in *Jane Eyre* in the 1960s and 70s

All critics this thesis has reviewed, even those who dislike certain elements of the novel, such as H.F. Chorley and Elizabeth Rigby, concede that *Jane Eyre* is a skilfully written masterpiece. Especially because Charlotte Brontë's writing technique oozes power and realism. Critics who analysed *Jane Eyre* during the arrival of second-wave feminist literary criticism concur. For instance, Inga-Stina Ewbank, originally a Swedish born academic, who later worked for institutions as The Shakespeare Institute of Birmingham, expressed her interest in women's literature in her research *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists* (1966). She remarks that Charlotte's work was, "reality recreated by the imagination" (qtd. in Knies 276). And indeed *Jane Eyre* was part autobiography – Charlotte's own experiences were incorporated into the novel – and part fiction – names, details, and events were added to novelize the text.

According to Q.D. Leavis earlier reviews – though admittedly none of the nineteenth-century reviews discussed in this thesis - have sometimes claimed that *Jane Eyre* was a whimsical composition (Brennan 103). She, however, insists that it is not, because it contains coherent use of imagery and symbolism, and even remarks that it is, "as deliberately composed as any novel in existence" (qtd. in Brennan 103). Similarly, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their influential work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, observe that Charlotte Brontë indeed uses imagery and symbolism. In their work, for instance, the attic room houses Rochester's wife, Bertha Mason, who is named a madwoman. This room is a symbolic space, that represents the closed boundaries for women in Victorian society. The madwoman in turn, is also a symbol for the trapped woman. In the words of Felski, "the madwoman in the attic was both an echo and a grotesque parody of the Victorian middle-class woman fettered by femininity..." (qtd. in 67). Gilbert and Gubar also reason that the female confinement was not bound solely to the fictional world. Women writers in the Victorian era were confined to a male defined (literary) world and culture. They could not "break free of male-defined literary conventions to imagine an autonomous female reality. But she is able nonetheless to fashion secret messages and surreptitiously subvert male truths" (Felski 68). Bertha Mason, as the

madwoman, is one such symbol that goes against the normal social conventions of the nineteenth century, and that offers a glimpse of what is hidden beneath the surface (Felski 68).

Margot Peters, in *Charlotte Brontë: Style in Novel* also elaborates that Charlotte Brontë used a lot of imagery in the novel, particularly images of hunger and starvation, and/or images and contrasts of cold and warm. Peters then explains that these images are a symbol for “Jane’s sexual and emotional deprivation” (Rigney 20). She warns though, that the images of fire that represents the passion in the novel – whether it is Jane’s or Rochester’s passion – is very temperamental in its intensity, and does not just warm, but it consumes, and thus Brontë perceives it as being ultimately dangerous (Rigney 20).

### 3.6 Close Reading of Critics’ Opinions Regarding the Author’s Sex in the 1960s and 70s

As Ellen Moers, in her *Literary Women*, published in 1976, says, “Before she gives Jane Eyre a name, or a class, or an age, Brontë makes her speaker both a person and a female in the quickest shorthand available to women writers: she has her say no” (qtd. in Lanser 183). As has been stated before, Charlotte herself felt suffocated in the constraints of Victorian society and this is why she choose to let her heroine be bold, independent, and free. According to Inga-Stina Ewbank, Charlotte Brontë, in her works, created her own proper spheres and “refused to limit themselves to what was ‘becoming’ of their sex... [thus] the reasons for critical disapproval of *Jane Eyre* ... [in earlier times] become clear” (Knies 275).

This critical disapproval quickly morphed into praise when the 1960s and 70s arrived. As Nancy Pell writes, “The conditions in which the adults in Jane’s world would have approved of her are drawn in terms of such extravagant prejudices or demands for subjection that the author leads us to give our sympathy and encouragement to the child who resists and defies them” (402).

It is intriguing to observe that whilst many critics of the 1960s and 70s write about how Charlotte used symbols and allegories to show the audience – in a subtle, and maybe even unconscious way – that women were trapped, and in this way also rebelled against their own confinement (Felski 66), none mention anything specifically about Charlotte being a female and the author of *Jane Eyre* and how this improves or diminishes the novel. In the nineteenth century obviously critics, such as Lady Fullerton, were very much concerned with the biographical details of *Jane Eyre* and they were convinced this influenced the quality of the novel. Second-wave feminist critics had no such quarrels. They praised women writers

and analysed their work accordingly, but did not look specifically at biographical details and it certainly did not improve or worsen the novel. As Terry Eagleton has stated previously, the new criticism focused mainly on textual analysis.

### 3.7 Close Reading of Scene Selection in *Jane Eyre* in the 1960s and 70s

As can be seen in chapter 2 of this thesis, all 10 reviews from the 1850s focus on the same scenes: those of Jane's childhood at Gateshead and her school years at Lowood. As said before this was because the critics of that time agreed that those scenes were brilliantly written and very lifelike, but the latter parts of the book, from the moment when Jane arrives at Thornfield – and especially the parts with Rochester's mad wife Bertha and Jane's wanderings on the moor – are described as improbable and silly. Author Robert Bernard Martin, in his book *The Accents of Persuasion: Charlotte Brontë Novels*, which was published in 1966, disagrees. He does admit that a reader's recollection of *Jane Eyre* is probably strongest when remembering Jane and her many struggles in the quest for happiness. This does include “the rebellion of Jane's lonely heart against the loveless tyranny of Gateshead, [and] the pangs of her physical and emotional hunger at Lowood” (n.p.) However, Martin, maintains that precisely because of these stark trials her happiness and joy shine all the more brighter, when Jane does experience moments of bliss. Martin, therefore, suggest that the most important scenes in *Jane Eyre* are not those of sorrow, but those of elation: “the lyrical garden scene when Rochester pours out his love against a counterpoint of the nightingale's song: the night when he swoops her into his saddle before him like a demon lover enveloping her in his cloak; the muted, autumnal delicacy of their reconciliation at Ferndean, poised between laughter and tears” (n.p.)

Most reviewers of *Jane Eyre* from the 1960s and 70s, whilst they mention Jane's childhood, focus mainly on the relationship between Rochester and Jane, or on Jane and how she grows as an individual. Terry Eagleton, in *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, first printed in 1975, explains that Jane's “ultimate relation to Rochester is a complex blend of independence, dominance, and submission” (qtd. in Wang 8). This can be seen in the scene in which Jane gives the servant John a five-pound note, and says, “Mr. Rochester told me to give you and Mary this” (qtd. in Wang 8). In this way the relationship between Rochester and Jane is based on mutual respect and affection, and Jane holds power in the household too: she can make her own decisions (Wang 8).



It is interesting to observe that whilst in the 1850s critics all agreed that the latter parts of the novel, and especially the part with Bertha Mason, were implausible, many critics of the second-wave feminist literary theory target specifically those scenes. Adrienne Rich, for instance, close reads all the scenes that contain Bertha because she wanted to focus on the two central debates that ruled the second-wave literary criticism: “passion and madness in women’s writing” (Lukić and Espinosa 112). She concludes that Bertha is Jane’s alter ego, a contrast between light and dark (Lukić and Espinosa 112). Of course, as mentioned in the chapter of character analysis, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also extensively analyse the scenes and character of Bertha. One such scene, for instance, is the ghostly scene where Jane sees Bertha crawling on all fours. Gilbert and Gubar write, “it was as if the very process of writing had itself liberated a madwoman, a crazy and angry woman, from silence in which neither she nor her author [could] continue to acquiesce” (qtd. in Felski 65).

### 3.8 Conclusion

From the conclusion of chapter one it could be derived that Charlotte Brontë protested – subtly - against gender, religious, and class restrictions. In this chapter it can be concluded that due to the rise of feminist critical theory in the 1960s and 70s, in combination with other fields of expertise, such as political and social investigations, reviewers began a specific textual analysis of *Jane Eyre* that mainly targeted the feminist perspective.

Nancy Pell found that one of the reasons why certain critics of the nineteenth century might have found *Jane Eyre* an anti-Christian text is because Charlotte Brontë changed the religious system. She replaced the figure of God, by that of Mother Nature. Jane Eyre in the novel experiences that man offers no help, but Nature will always lend a hand. This was not acceptable to critics from earlier times, but Nancy Pell simply sees it as setting aside traditionally patriarchal language and replacing it with a more maternal kind.

Nancy Pell also argues that the character of Jane stands up for herself and ensures, first and foremost, her own survival. This might have made Jane seem unsympathetic to earlier critics, but feminist theorists feel that this deserves praise. Adrienne Rich came to this conclusion even before Pell did. She believed that Jane was a strong character precisely because Jane Eyre was never afraid to be herself. Robert Bernard Martin argues that *Jane Eyre* is a novel of transformation: Jane grows from naïve child to experienced adult and throughout this maturing process the character learns the distinctions between reason and passions and how to divide them accordingly. Passion in a female character was not always

seen as a good character trait. As Showalter shows, Bertha, has an untamed passion that turns her into a madwoman. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, however, feel that Bertha is a symbol of repressed female rage. A rage that also lives within Charlotte, and other constrained women of the Victorian society. Feminist now fully explore the character of Bertha to see what women must have felt during their lives in the nineteenth century.

Just as nineteenth-century reviewers, researchers of the 1960s and 70s feel that *Jane Eyre* is a skilfully written masterpiece. Inga-Stina Ewbank remarks that Charlotte, in her work, mixed realism with fantasy elements.

Q.D. Leavis mentions that some of the earlier critical reviews of *Jane Eyre* have said that it had a whimsical composition. Leavis, however, disagrees entirely and points to the plentiful use of imagery and symbolism. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar confirm that Charlotte Brontë indeed uses these technical writing devices. They say that the attic room in which Mr. Rochester's wife, Bertha Mason, is locked up is a symbolic space. It represents the closed boundaries for women in the Victorian society, the same as Bertha Mason as the madwoman represents suffocating women. Women writers were especially confined to a male dominated (literary) world in which they could not break free from the social conventions. However, sometimes, they planted secrets messages. Bertha Mason is one such message. Margot Peters elaborates on the imagery of starvation and hunger and that of fire and coldness. These are all metaphors for Jane's sexual, emotional, and intellectual deprivation. She also remarks that Brontë found Rochester's and Jane's passion ultimately dangerous because it was so intense that it consumed everything.

Ellen Moers claims that Brontë made Jane a highly independent person because Charlotte herself felt trapped and powerless in the society in which she lived. This is exactly what caused condemnation from nineteenth-century critics because, according to Ewbank, Charlotte paid no attention to what was expected of her sex, but rather created her own proper sphere. In the 1960s and 70s this was complimented on, as Pell demonstrates by saying that the author leads the audience to give their sympathy to a child who resists and defies social conventions of the time.

Finally, while most critics from the nineteenth century focus solely on scenes of Jane's childhood, second-wave feminists do not. Martin admits that those horrible recollections are very powerful, but he finds that when Jane is joyful – all times include scenes with Mr. Rochester - this is such a stark contrast with the sorrow in the novel, that she simply radiates. Terry Eagleton finds that the novel offers a relationship of mutual affection and respect between Jane and Edward Rochester. This means that Jane is free to make her decisions when

she is with him. Many critics from the 1960s onwards focus on scenes that include Bertha “the madwoman” Mason. Adrienne Rich, for instance, wants to focus on two central debates of second-wave feminism: that of passion and madness in women’s writing. She concludes that Bertha is the alter ego of Jane. Gilbert and Gubar also analyse the scenes that contain Bertha extensively. They deduce that the process of writing itself had set free a madwoman.

#### 4. Conclusion

The reception history of *Jane Eyre* first started in 1847 when the novel was published. The reading public grew enormously during the nineteenth century, due to various economic reasons and the Education Act of 1870. However, there was also a great limitation to fiction because there was an apprehension about the influence literature could have on people, and especially on women. By mid-century the limitation had already been diminished, but this still influenced some reviews given on *Jane Eyre*. For instance, a reviewer from the *Christian Remembrancer* thinks that there is a possibility that the genre of writing could encourage women to stop doing their duties, and this worries her.

As a leading figure in reception studies, Terry Eagleton, suggests that there are three stages of reception history. The first, placed in the nineteenth century, is concerned with the biographical details of a text, the second, beginning around 1960, is concerned with textual analysis, and the third is concerned with the audience. As can be seen by focusing on the 5 chosen aspects, and which will be elaborated on below, that this thesis will particularly research - character analysis, scene selection, the technical aspects of writing, the author's take on religion and the critic's reception to the author's sex - this divide really does exist.

Among the nineteenth-century critics such as Elizabeth Rigby and Lady Fullerton *Jane Eyre* was described as an anti-Christian and anti-authority text. According to 1970s critic, Nancy Pell, this was mostly due to the fact that Charlotte Brontë replaced the conventional religious system. She replaced the figure of the father of God with that of Mother Nature. Feminist praised this change because it empowers females. Nineteenth-century critics, however, were appalled, and claimed that no Christian grace was perceptible upon the character of Jane. What is especially interesting is that, what are seen by the reviewers in the 1960s and 70s, as Jane's strongest personality traits, such as that Jane through her own strengths, virtues and talents tries to achieve happiness, are chided by Elizabeth Rigby.

Some Victorian reviewers, such as Lewes and an anonymous reviewer in *The Critic* find that the human representation in the novel is excellent. They praise Charlotte Brontë in her depiction of Jane as a real woman – not an angel, but a person with faults. H.F. Chorley is especially impressed with the character of Adèle, even remarking he has never seen such a perfect picture of a little girl in other literature. The anonymous reviewer for *The Spectator* is

not as easily impressed. He finds that Jane and Rochester are very disagreeable characters who do not attract any understanding and compassion from the audience. James Lorimer agrees that Jane is a very hard being, who is more intellectual than affectionate – this is not meant as a compliment. He, oddly enough, does find Rochester an agreeable man exactly because he has some disagreeable character traits. These traits make him more of a man. Lorimer, here, berates Jane for being intelligent, but compliments Rochester for it. This is exactly what Charlotte Brontë – in an ingenious way – protested against. She wanted equality for men and women on all fronts. New Criticism reviewers are more generous in their viewings of Jane. Nancy Pell and Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, praise Jane, and Charlotte alike, for being independent and wanting to ensure her own survival. Robert Martin finds that Jane undergoes a transformation in the text. As she matures, she learns to find the right balance between passions and reason. In the nineteenth century, passion in a woman was not a popular view. In fact, critics dubbed Jane as being unsympathetic because of it. Even the second-wave feminists did not all believe that passion was necessarily a good feat. Elaine Showalter, felt that Bertha had so much untamed passion that it turned her into a madwoman. Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, felt that Bertha's passion was a mere symbol for female rage. Rage, that both Jane and Charlotte also felt, against the constraints of Victorian society.

One of the things that all critics this thesis reviews agree on is that Charlotte Brontë excelled in her writing techniques. But whilst the reviewers of the 1850s, such as Chorley and even Elizabeth Rigby, merely compliment Charlotte on her lifelike quality and depth of thought, later critics from the 1960s and 70s closely analyse the text and discover that it is filled with symbolism, imagery and metaphors. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, argue that both the attic and the madwoman is symbol for the female (writers) repression. Again, Charlotte herself could testify to this, as can be seen in the letter she received from poet Robert Southey, who said she should not indulge in writing too much. The woman writer, specifically, could not break free of a literary world that was dominated by men, but she could hide secret messages in her texts. Charlotte Brontë did this in the figure of the mad wife of Rochester. Margot Peters, remarks that the images of starvation and hunger and fire and coldness represent the depraved emotions and sexuality of Jane. But also that the fire that burnt in Jane and Rochester could potentially be dangerous – just as Showalter said that the untamed passion in Bertha was unhealthy.

The 1850s reviewers analysed in this thesis admire the courage that Jane has in breaking free from social conventions of that time – though not all condone it, but most of them criticise the author based on his or her sex. Elizabeth Rigby exclaims that if the author

was female she must have forsaken her own sex a long time ago, and an unsigned review of the *Era* is absolutely positive that a woman could not have written *Jane Eyre*. G.H. Lewes is the only critic who guesses Charlotte's sex and is unconcerned with it. He wisely remarks that one should look at the writing of the text, and not at the sex. These reviews, clearly indicate that nineteenth-century critics were very much aware of the biographical aspects of a novel. Many reviewers of the 1960s and 70s observe, yet again, that Charlotte was restraint in her life and writing. Ewbank states that Charlotte refused to heed to the advice of what was expected of her sex, but instead created a sphere she wanted to have. It is worth mentioning that many of the later critics do not specifically mention Charlotte being a woman, partly because they already knew of course, but partly because they praised a work – and consequently the woman who wrote it – and not just the author. The author's sex did not affect an appraisal of the novel.

The 10 first reviews of this thesis all study the early scenes of the novel; those of Jane's childhood and years at Lowood. They wholeheartedly agree that those scenes are marked with beauty and brilliance retrospective writing. They also wholeheartedly agree, even the more generous critics, such as Lewes, that the parts with Mr. Rochester's wife, Bertha, and Jane's wanderings on the moor, are highly unlikely. Whilst 1960s and 70s reviewers can agree that Jane's childhood sorrowful scenes are very powerful, most analyse completely different scenes. Martin for instance evaluates the joyful scenes of Jane that she shares with Rochester, because he feels they are even more powerful, especially when contrasting them with the ambiguous scenes of her earlier life. Eagleton finds that Mr. Rochester's and Jane's relationship is built on mutual trust and respect. Also, many critics, Rich and Gilbert and Gubar are one example, analyse the figure of Bertha Mason. Whereas, she was seen as some silly side plot by the nineteenth-century critics, 1960s and 70s find her interesting, because she represents so much more than meets the eye.

Thus, as can be seen there are quite some fundamental differences in opinions due to the time periods in which the reviewers lived and the social, cultural, and religious conventions that rules at these times. Also the fact that Charlotte Brontë protested against these Victorian norms has influenced the reviewers greatly.

#### *4.1 Self-Evaluation*

The process of writing this thesis turned out to be rather difficult. Originally the subject was the reception of genre and subgenre of *Jane Eyre* in the nineteenth and twenty-first century as

labelled by critics. This had to be adjusted to the reception of critics in general, because due to the scope of the research, and texts available at the moment, the reception of genre and subgenre was too limited a subject. Once the subject had been altered the research process went a lot smoother. Still, there were some difficulties at times: the research question had to be fine-tuned, why were those particular criteria picked, who were the prominent figures in reception studies and how do they tie into this research thesis? All in all this research answers those questions and will contribute something new to the already existing research field; namely that of scene selection and character analysis.

#### *4.2 Recommendations for Further Research*

The investigation of the reception of genre and subgenre of *Jane Eyre* in the nineteenth and twenty-first century as labelled by critics is still very interesting. If the scope of the research is broader, and more texts can be collected, this is an intriguing project. How have critics labelled the genre and subgenres of *Jane Eyre* over the course of time, specifically in the nineteenth century (around the publishing date) and the twenty-first century and does this reception of genre change over the years? For instance, is it first dubbed as a domestic novel, and later on as a feminist novel?

Also, is the novel of Charlotte Brontë already so far canonised that *Jane Eyre* in contemporary times cannot be seen as anything else but a feminist text?

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