

In 1847, when Charlotte Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre* in Haworth parsonage and secretly dreaming of her literary career, not even in her wildest dreams could she have imagined what a life and what a variety of meanings female critics would once give to her first novel, and that one day she would be even studied as one of the female writers who helped to spark the women's literary rebellion and her *Jane Eyre* would be celebrated as a feminist classic. After all, this is what the fascinating story of this unusual romance has turned out to be.

As my thesis has revealed, ever since its publication *Jane Eyre* has always drawn the attention of female critics. The first woman whose opinion about the novel was publicly heard was the Victorian reviewer Elisabeth Rigby. Interestingly, unlike female critics who came after her, she was not delighted by the appearance of this novel but on the contrary, she felt fully alarmed by it. She condemned it on both moral and religious grounds, disliking Jane's rebellion against the established order, as well as her sympathy towards the poor and the oppressed. Her opinion was nothing unusual concerning the fact that she was both a member of the upper class and a conservative. Yet, what was rather astounding was that as a woman allowed to write, she questioned the propriety of female writing and even proclaimed that only a woman of perverse qualities could write as immoral a book as *Jane Eyre* in her opinion was. Moreover, she also disputed whether it was proper for women to read, for *Jane Eyre* was popularly read and women constituted a considerable part of its readership.