

Social Criticism in *Jane Eyre*: A Marxist Approach

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Abstract—Social criticism is an analytical approach used to examine social structures, institutions, and power relations in order to reveal inequalities and injustices within a society. This study investigates the forms of social criticism presented in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* using a Marxist theoretical framework developed by Karl Marx. The data were collected from the novel through a qualitative descriptive method focusing on narrative events, character interactions, and social settings. The analysis reveals the rigid class hierarchy of Victorian English society, in which the bourgeoisie controlled economic resources and social power, while the proletariat experienced dependency, exploitation, and alienation. The findings show that the novel portrays various forms of social inequality through the experiences of *Jane Eyre* as an impoverished orphan and governess navigating a stratified social structure. Furthermore, the social criticism expressed in the novel remains relevant to contemporary societal issues, including gender oppression, power imbalances in the workplace, and struggles for individual autonomy. Therefore, *Jane Eyre* can be understood as a significant literary work that not only reflects social realities of its time but also encourages readers to critically examine injustice and inequality in modern society.

Index Terms—social critique, Victorian literature, Marxist

I. INTRODUCTION

Published in 1847 during the Victorian era, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is widely regarded as one of the canonical works of English literature, recognised for its compelling narrative, complex character development, and profound engagement with social issues of the nineteenth century. Literature, in its broadest sense, refers to a collection of written or spoken works that reflect human experiences through language (Sunyoto et al., 2022). Beyond functioning as artistic expression, literature also serves as a reflection of societal realities and a medium through which ideological struggles, identity formation, and social consciousness are negotiated (Mutmainnah et al., 2022). In this regard, literary works may function as records of human experiences across different historical periods, representing social realities from past eras

to the present (Arafah et al., 2024a; Yudith et al., 2024). Such representations are often shaped by the author's interpretation of social life and are expressed through narrative structures that convey emotions, ideas, motivations, and personal perspectives (Arafah et al., 2024b; Lestari et al., 2025). The interaction between social realities and authors' imaginative creativity contributes to the diversity and uniqueness of literary narratives (Mare et al., 2025), as it allows authors to reinterpret and reimagine their experiences and observations, leading to a rich tapestry of storytelling that reflects both personal and collective histories. While modes of circulation and public engagement with texts have changed across time, literary works continue to invite critical reflection on social realities in different discursive contexts (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b).

The development of modern technology has further expanded access to literary works, enabling readers to engage with texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Literary works today are available in multiple languages and can be accessed through digital platforms and online media (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a; Hasjim et al., 2026; Idhan et al., 2026). As English has become a global language, it plays an important role in facilitating the translation and dissemination of literary works from different cultural backgrounds (Kaharuddin et al., 2023; Karamoy et al., 2024). Consequently, English literature encompasses a wide variety of texts—including short stories, poetry, novels, plays, and songs—produced by writers from diverse cultural contexts (Arafah, 2018). This diversity highlights literature's role as a global medium for expressing human experiences and communicating social values across societies.

In academic contexts, literary works are frequently examined as part of scholarly discourse and educational practice. Through appropriate analytical approaches and pedagogical methods, literature offers aesthetic enjoyment and encourages critical awareness of social realities, including issues related to nature, culture, and society (Abbas et al., 2024; Jaelani et al., 2024). Recent studies have also emphasised the importance of integrating literature into learning materials and digital learning environments to enhance students' critical and interpretative skills (Arafah et al., 2023c; Arafah et al., 2025b). In language education, the development of effective pedagogical approaches and technological integration has also been widely discussed, particularly in relation to improving students' writing skills and learning outcomes (Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Teaching strategies such as brainstorming, free writing, and explicit or implicit instructional methods have been shown to influence students' language development and learning engagement (Arafah et al., 2024c; Kuswanti et al., 2023; Suparti et al., 2025). These studies show that literature, language education, and digital learning environments are becoming more and more connected. They also show how important it is to critically engage with literary texts as part of a larger set of educational practices.

Culture is an integral aspect of social life, as it molds collective practices and affects daily interactions within communities (Arafah et al., 2023b; Takwa et al., 2024). Many literary authors seek to represent cultural traditions and social values within their narratives, thereby illustrating aspects of local identity and community life (Arafah et al., 2025a; Arafah et al., 2025c; Taqdir, 2025). Such representations often aim to communicate moral values and social lessons that can guide individual behaviour within society (Takwa et al., 2025). Furthermore, portraying local cultural practises in literary works may contribute to raising readers' awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Arifin et al., 2022; Takwa et al., 2024b; Yudith et al., 2023). Previous studies have also shown that traditional practises, belief systems, and social norms often persist within communities despite social change, indicating that local knowledge continues to function as an important cultural resource (Effendy et al., 2025; Takwa et al., 2026a).

At a broader level, literary works frequently portray social realities that emerge from different historical periods and societies around the world (Arifuddin et al., 2024). Because these works circulate globally, translation plays an essential role in enabling readers from different linguistic backgrounds to access them. However, cultural differences may present challenges in interpreting translated texts, as readers must navigate unfamiliar cultural references and social contexts (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023), which can lead to misinterpretations or a lack of appreciation for the original work's nuances. These dynamics highlight the importance of critical literary analysis in understanding how texts represent social realities and cultural meanings.

Literature therefore occupies a significant position in both academic and social discourse, particularly because of its capacity to shape collective understandings of human experiences (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). Classical literary works often convey themes that remain relevant across generations, illustrating how ideas from earlier historical contexts continue to resonate with contemporary readers. Language serves as the primary medium for communicating literary meanings, and authors frequently use figurative language and stylistic devices to express aesthetic and ideological ideas (Baa et al., 2023). As noted by Arafah et al. (2021b), literary texts may be understood as cultural mirrors that reflect the conditions, beliefs, values, and tensions present within a particular historical period. This dual function—as both reflection and critique—is particularly evident in *Jane Eyre*, where Brontë's portrayal of nineteenth-century English society reveals underlying social tensions and inequalities.

As a cultural product that encompasses political, economic, and social themes, literature can function as a window into historical contexts as well as a medium for questioning dominant social norms (Irmawati et al., 2020). Language plays a crucial role in conveying both the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of literary works, allowing authors to articulate social critiques through narrative and symbolic expression (Manugeran et al., 2023). Literature from different cultural traditions frequently addresses universal issues such as justice, identity, and human dignity, thereby facilitating cross-cultural understanding and social reflection (Arafah, 2018). In this sense, language operates as a cultural mediator that shapes how social values and identities are constructed and interpreted through discourse (Taqdir et al., 2026).

The Victorian period (1837–1901) was characterised by rapid industrialisation and significant socio-economic transformation in British society. These developments contributed to the emergence of a rigid class hierarchy in which wealth and power were concentrated among the bourgeoisie, while the working class experienced economic dependency and limited social mobility (Suhadi et al., 2022). Such conditions produced disparities in access to education, employment, and political influence, particularly affecting marginalised groups within society. Women, in particular, often occupied subordinate positions within the social hierarchy due to prevailing patriarchal norms (Asri et al., 2023). Women from working-class backgrounds faced multiple forms of oppression resulting from the intersection of class inequality and gender discrimination (Poovey, 1984). Victorian ideology frequently confined women to domestic roles while promoting ideals of feminine virtue that reinforced existing social structures and class boundaries. These social dynamics were often reflected in literary works of the period, where authors used narrative forms to expose contradictions between dominant social ideologies and everyday realities (Arafah et al., 2021a).

Marxist theory, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, offers a critical framework for examining how economic structures shape social relations and ideological systems (Marx & Engels, 1970). Central concepts within Marxist theory—including class struggle, alienation, dominant ideology, and bourgeois exploitation—are particularly relevant when analyzing literary texts that portray social inequality. In *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist *Jane Eyre* is depicted as an impoverished orphan and governess who must navigate a social system structured by class hierarchy and economic power. Marx and Engels (1970, p. 64) argue that the economic base of society determines the superstructure of ideas, values, and institutions that sustain social order. This theoretical perspective can be observed in the novel through institutions such as Lowood School, which exemplify how social institutions may function as ideological mechanisms that reinforce class and gender hierarchies. Religious doctrines and disciplinary practises within such institutions often serve to legitimise inequality and maintain existing power structures (Abrams, 1971; Taqdir et al., 2025). Literary narratives frequently expose these mechanisms of domination by illustrating how apparently neutral social institutions contribute to the reproduction of social inequality (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Arafah et al., 2023d).

Jane Eyre's pursuit of economic independence and personal autonomy represents a form of resistance against oppressive social systems. Her struggle reflects broader tensions within Victorian society, where individuals from marginalised backgrounds sought recognition, dignity, and social mobility. Insights from critical social theory further illuminate how marginalised individuals strive for self-representation and rational communication within structures that attempt to suppress their voices (Hasanah et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of these efforts in challenging and transforming societal norms. Brontë's own experience as a woman writing within a male-dominated literary tradition may also have influenced her portrayal of Jane's quest for self-determination.

Literature therefore functions not only as a reflection of social conditions but also as a medium for articulating social criticism (Rano et al., 2026). Linguistic expressions within literary texts operate as semiotic systems that encode cultural values, social hierarchies, and collective worldviews within particular historical contexts (Takwa et al., 2026b). Through narrative representation, literature can address social problems that may be overlooked within mainstream discourse (Novitasari, 2021). In this regard, literary works such as *Jane Eyre* encourage readers to critically reconsider established social structures and ideological assumptions (Arafah et al., 2021a). Brontë constructs a narrative that challenges both class-based and gender-based inequalities within Victorian society by portraying Jane's refusal to accept the social position imposed upon her and her determination to assert her dignity as an individual.

Although *Jane Eyre* has been widely examined using various literary approaches—including feminist criticism, psychological analysis, and cultural studies—studies that systematically apply Marxist theory to analyse the novel's representation of class relations, ideological domination, and socio-economic inequality remain relatively limited. Many previous discussions focus primarily on gender issues or character development, leaving the broader economic and ideological structures of Victorian society less thoroughly explored. Consequently, a comprehensive Marxist analysis is needed to reveal how the novel depicts class stratification, labor relations, and institutional power as mechanisms that shape social inequality. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the forms of social criticism represented in *Jane Eyre* through a Marxist analytical framework. By examining how the novel reflects and critiques the hegemonic social and cultural structures of nineteenth-century Britain, this research contributes to a more profound understanding of *Jane Eyre* as a literary work that exposes the interconnected dynamics of class, ideology, and social power. In doing so, the study also highlights the continuing relevance of Marxist literary criticism in interpreting classical texts and understanding persistent issues of inequality in contemporary society.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marxist literary criticism provides an important framework for examining how literary texts represent class relations, ideology, and social inequality. Developed from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, this perspective views literature not as an autonomous aesthetic object, but as a cultural product shaped by material conditions and socioeconomic structures (Marx, 1977). A central principle of Marxist thought is that social existence determines consciousness; thus, values, morality, and ideology, including those represented in literary works, are influenced by relations of production and class-based social arrangements. Eagleton (1976) emphasises that Marxist criticism is concerned not only with literary form, but also with how texts reflect, reproduce, or challenge the ideologies that sustain unequal social systems.

Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony further develops this perspective by explaining how dominant groups maintain power not only through force, but also through consent internalised through institutions such as family, education, religion, and literature. Related Marxist concepts such as class division, ideology, and alienation are therefore central to literary analysis. In this framework, the bourgeoisie controls material resources and social power, while subordinate groups experience dependency, exclusion, and limited agency (Marx & Engels, 1978). Ideology functions to naturalise inequality and conceal exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1970), while alienation describes the condition in which human beings are estranged from dignity, self-determination, and meaningful social relations under oppressive structures (Marx, 1977).

Within literary studies, this framework is particularly relevant for examining novels that portray social hierarchy and institutional domination. Marx's notion of the relationship between base and superstructure is useful in understanding literature as both a reflection of historical conditions and a medium through which those conditions may be questioned. In a broader sense, critique may also be understood as an effort to expose domination and inequality within social life (Habermas, 1987). Although studies such as Arafah (2020) and Arafah et al. (2023a) discuss ideological contestation in contemporary discourse, these works are not used here as the primary framework of analysis; rather, they only illustrate that ideology remains a relevant concern across different historical and discursive settings.

Previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of Marxist criticism in revealing inequality and class tension in literary texts, including *Mockingjay* (Nailah, 2016; Wijaya, 2020) and *Les Misérables* (Fauzan, 2021). In contrast, studies on *Jane Eyre* have more often applied psychological (Permana, 2010), feminist (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2023), and postcolonial (Karim, 2025) approaches. Therefore, a more focused Marxist reading is needed to examine how Charlotte Brontë's novel represents class hierarchy, ideological domination, alienation, and the struggle for dignity within Victorian society.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research examines social criticism in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through a qualitative analytical framework, adopted because the analysis is grounded in detailed descriptive data drawn directly from the novel's textual elements and passages. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences as integrated wholes rather than isolated variables (Moleong, 2010), emphasising contextual correlation and prioritising holistic interpretations over statistical generalisations (Ratna, 2004). This method aligns with analysing how *Jane Eyre* reflects 19th-century English social conditions and complies with academic standards for literary research.

Data collection involved primary analysis of the fourth edition of *Jane Eyre* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, June 2024; 608 pages), read iteratively to identify relevant passages, characters, and themes on class relations, economic inequality, and social criticism, then extracted and categorised. Secondary data included scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, and historical documents retrieved from academic libraries and databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR), with sources assessed for credibility and relevance, including research on Jürgen Habermas's critical social theory.

Data analysis was conducted in three phases: reduction to focus on Marxist concepts, Habermas's theory, historical conditions, and contemporary relevance; display structured into thematic categories covering poverty, power dynamics, and current issues; and conclusion development through correlating evidence with frameworks, followed by cross-verification for validity.

The theoretical approach integrates Marxist literary criticism, positing that works reflect material conditions, with social existence shaping consciousness, complemented by Habermas's theory focusing on the public sphere, rational communication, and the relevance of historical criticism to present contexts. Analytical concepts include class relations, hegemony, false consciousness, and alienation (Marxist); alongside the public sphere, communicative action, and bridging historical and contemporary challenges (Habermas, 1989).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *How Jane Eyre Reflects Social Class, Dominant Ideology, and Forms of Alienation in Victorian English*

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* depicts Victorian England's rigid social hierarchy through a Marxist lens. The novel contrasts the bourgeoisie, who control resources and social authority, with the proletariat and other marginalised groups whose lives are shaped by dependence and exclusion. Through *Jane Eyre*—a poor orphan who later becomes a governess—Brontë shows how class determines dignity, rights, and social recognition, while also revealing the emergence of resistance within an unequal system.

1. Social Class

Class stratification is evident in Jane's treatment by the bourgeois Reed family, where she is positioned as a dependent rather than a legitimate family member. When John Reed finds her reading, he asserts economic and social superiority through humiliation:

You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. (Brontë, 2024, p. 12)

John's language functions as class discipline: by labeling Jane "a dependent," he denies her entitlement to resources and reinforces the ideology that worth is determined by wealth and lineage. From a Marxist perspective, the scene illustrates how bourgeois power is maintained through control of material resources and everyday intimidation, naturalizing inequality as "proper" social order. Jane's marginal position in the household therefore becomes an early site of social critique, exposing how class privilege legitimises exclusion and dehumanisation.

2. Alienation

Jane experiences social alienation as a direct consequence of her class position, acknowledging her exclusion from the Reed household:

"I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her vassalage" (Brontë, 2024, p. 19).

The term "discord" signifies more than personal discomfort; it reflects Jane's structural exclusion from an upper-class environment governed by wealth, privilege, and social conformity. From a Marxist perspective, this alienation emerges from a social order that organises relationships around class hierarchy and material distinction, marginalising individuals who do not conform to its dominant values. Jane's confinement in the red room after resisting John's abuse further reinforces her exclusion, transforming social marginalisation into psychological and emotional isolation. This alienation persists beyond childhood, as Jane later reflects:

"I know what it is to live entirely alone; friendless, without brother or sister, uncle or aunt, not a soul that feels naturally the affinity to myself" (Brontë, 2024, p. 100).

Her reflection illustrates a form of structural alienation in which individuals lacking economic and social capital are denied access to meaningful communal bonds. Rather than arising from personal failure, Jane's loneliness is produced by a class-based system that prioritises status and material wealth over solidarity and human connection. In this way, *Jane Eyre* exposes alienation as a systemic condition of Victorian society, revealing how social structures actively generate isolation among those positioned outside dominant class hierarchies.

3. Dominant Ideologies

Marxist theory highlights how dominant ideologies—such as religion and social norms—function to preserve bourgeois power by legitimising inequality. Lacking economic and social power, Jane initially turns to religion as a source of moral justice:

"God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums" (Brontë, 2024, p. 23).

While faith offers Jane consolation, it is also manipulated by figures of authority such as Mrs Reed, illustrating how religion operates as part of the ideological superstructure that justifies domination. From a Marxist perspective, religion thus serves a dual function: it provides hope for the oppressed while simultaneously reinforcing social order that benefits the ruling class.

Victorian social ideology also linked human worth to class and physical appearance, as evident in Mrs Reed's description of Jane to Mr Brocklehurst:

"If she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlorn condition; but as it is, one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (Brontë, 2024, p. 33).

The derogatory label "little toad" reflects an ideology that devalues individuals who lack beauty, wealth, and elite lineage. Such constructions function to naturalise class inequality by portraying the marginalised as inherently inferior, thereby normalising their mistreatment. Jane's response demonstrates critical awareness of these imposed judgements:

"I am poor! obscure! plain, and little!" (Brontë, 2024, p. 278).

Rather than accepting these labels as measures of her worth, Jane exposes them as social constructs designed to sustain hierarchical distinctions. Her recognition marks a rejection of dominant evaluative norms and advances a counter-narrative in which human value is grounded in moral integrity and inner dignity rather than external markers of class and appearance.

B. How Marxist Theory Reveals Social Critique in Jane Eyre

Through a Marxist lens, *Jane Eyre* exposes social criticism embedded in Victorian English society by revealing mechanisms of class exploitation, ideological control, and resistance to inequality. The novel critiques how capitalist structures and social institutions perpetuate dependence, devalue the working class, and normalise injustice.

1. Critique of Capitalist Economic Systems

The novel critiques a capitalist system that conditions survival on compulsory labour for the poor. During Jane's admission interview at Lowood, Mr Brocklehurst asks:

"What would you do if you lived alone and had to work for your bread?" (Brontë, 2024, p. 44).

This question reflects a social order in which labour is presented as the sole means of existence for the lower classes. Institutions such as Lowood function to discipline impoverished children into compliant workers, ensuring their integration into capitalist production without access to alternative forms of security or autonomy. From a Marxist perspective, this reveals how the working class is compelled to sell its labour power while being denied ownership of the means of production, reducing human dignity to economic utility.

2. Resistance to Class-Based Worth

The novel also challenges the ideology that equates social class with human value. Miss Temple asserts the inherent dignity of marginalised children:

I must not forget that these coarsely clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of piety and virtue are placed in their minds as surely as in those of the more favored. (Brontë, 1847, p. 64)

Her statement counters dominant Victorian beliefs that justified exploitation by portraying the poor as morally or intellectually inferior. Education, in this context, becomes a potential site of resistance by affirming equality and disrupting class-based stereotypes. Jane later articulates this resistance explicitly:

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will" (Brontë, 2024, p. 278).

This declaration signifies a rejection of both class and gender oppression. From a Marxist perspective, Jane's assertion represents the emergence of class consciousness, as she refuses roles imposed by a system that reduces individuals—particularly working-class women—to controllable and expendable objects. Her insistence on autonomy challenges the ideological foundations that sustain class hierarchy and social domination.

3. Critique of Educational Inequality

The novel highlights how unequal access to education perpetuates class-based prejudice:

"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones" (Brontë, 2024, p. 58).

This metaphor underscores the role of education in shaping critical awareness and resisting inherited social biases. From a Marxist perspective, restricted access to education functions as a mechanism of social reproduction, enabling dominant groups to maintain hierarchy by limiting critical consciousness among the working class. In *Jane Eyre*, education emerges not merely as skill acquisition but as a means of challenging prejudices that sustain class inequality, suggesting its potential to disrupt ideological conformity and foster social awareness.

4. Rejection of Class-Based Relationships

Jane's marriage to Mr Rochester represents a rejection of Victorian norms that governed relationships through class hierarchy:

"Reader, I married him" (Brontë, 2024, p. 473).

This declaration gains significance because the union occurs only after Jane attains financial independence and Rochester's economic power is diminished, creating conditions of material parity. From a Marxist perspective, this narrative choice affirms that economic autonomy is essential to equitable human relations, preventing dependency and exploitation within intimate bonds. Rochester later acknowledges this equality:

"My bride is here," he said, "because my equal is here, and my likeness" (Brontë, 2024, p. 472).

His recognition reflects a shift in social consciousness shaped by altered material conditions, reinforcing the novel's critique of class-based valuation. The relationship thus rejects marriage as a transactional institution rooted in wealth and status, proposing instead a model grounded in mutual recognition and shared humanity.

C. How Social Critique in *Jane Eyre* Relates to Contemporary Social Realities

Literary works often transcend their historical contexts by addressing social issues that persist across time. The social critique articulated in *Jane Eyre* remains relevant to contemporary realities, particularly in relation to power imbalance, exploitation, restricted freedom, and struggles for autonomy. Through a Marxist perspective, the novel illuminates how structural inequalities continue to shape social relations and constrain individual agency beyond the Victorian era.

1. Persistent Power Hierarchies

The social restrictions Jane experiences reflect enduring limitations on individual freedom:

The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother, or father, or master, to say your soul is your own. (Brontë, 2024, p. 139)

This passage reveals how power operates through everyday discipline, shaping behaviour and suppressing self-expression among subordinate groups. From a Marxist perspective, such constraints are products of hierarchical social structures that normalise domination by those with economic and social authority. Although rooted in Victorian society, these dynamics persist in contemporary contexts, where gender norms and organisational hierarchies often discourage marginalised individuals from questioning authority or asserting autonomy.

The novel thus anticipates modern patterns of inequality, demonstrating how power relations embedded in social institutions continue to reproduce unequal access to voice, recognition, and agency. By foregrounding Jane's awareness of these constraints, *Jane Eyre* underscores the ongoing relevance of literary critique in exposing and challenging persistent forms of social domination.

2. Rejection of Materialism

Jane's preference for freedom over wealth articulates a critique of materialism that remains relevant beyond its Victorian context:

"I believe he is of mine, I am sure he is, who would not rather be a free and happy vagabond, than a slave in a golden chain?" (Brontë, 2024, p. 270).

This statement captures the tension between material accumulation and personal autonomy. From a Marxist perspective, Jane's rejection of the "golden chain" reflects resistance to capitalist logic that equates human worth with economic productivity and material success. Material comfort is portrayed as a form of constraint when it requires the sacrifice of

freedom, agency, and self-determination, while the “free and happy vagabond” symbolizes liberation from systems that prioritize profit over human fulfillment.

The critique resonates with contemporary social realities in which individuals increasingly question success defined solely by wealth and status. By foregrounding freedom and meaningful existence over material gain, *Jane Eyre* exposes the alienating effects of capitalist values and affirms the enduring relevance of literary critique in challenging materialist definitions of happiness and social worth.

3. Solidarity and Resistance to Injustice

Jane’s realisation that many others face oppression reflects modern movements for equality:

“*Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot*” (Brontë, 2024, p. 116).

Jane Eyre’s recognition establishes a direct conceptual link between 19th-century narratives of oppression and contemporary global movements for equality. The assertion underscores that systemic hardship encompassing poverty, inequality, and structural marginalisation is not an individual experience but a widespread condition, with resistance manifesting both overtly and in quiet, collective acts of defiance. Modern examples include textile workers organizing boycotts against enterprises employing child labor, and communities mobilizing to demand access to decent housing actions that mirror the “silent revolt” described in the text.

From a Marxist analytical framework, such collective resistance signals the emergent class consciousness of subordinate groups as they recognise their exploitation within capitalist structures. Concurrently, from a social criticism perspective, these movements denote the evolution of a more inclusive democratic public sphere, where historically marginalised voices are increasingly visible and their demands for justice are gaining traction. Together, these perspectives illuminate how the recognition of shared oppression can translate into organised action, bridging historical and contemporary struggles to challenge inequitable systems and advance more equitable social arrangements. In a social criticism perspective, it signals the development of a more democratic public sphere where oppressed voices are heard.

4. Relationships Based on Equality

Jane’s commitment to an equal partnership with Mr Rochester reflects a rejection of relationships structured by hierarchy and dependence:

“*I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion*” (Brontë, 2024, p. 462).

Rather than positioning herself as a subordinate, Jane defines the relationship in terms of mutual support, dignity, and companionship. From a Marxist perspective, this stance represents a refusal of class-based power relations that traditionally govern intimate bonds through material status and dependency. Equality, in this context, becomes possible only when neither partner exercises economic or social dominance over the other.

This vision is further articulated in the novel’s emphasis on balanced freedom within partnership:

“*Being together for us means being as free as when alone, and as happy as when with others*” (Bronte, 2024, p. 476).

The relationship thus rejects marriage as a site of control or constraint and reimagines it as a space where individual autonomy is preserved through mutual recognition. By grounding intimacy in equality rather than status, *Jane Eyre* affirms that just social relations—both private and public—depend on the dismantling of hierarchical structures that privilege wealth, class, and power.

V. CONCLUSION

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë is not merely a romantic narrative but a significant work of social critique relevant to both Victorian England and contemporary society. Analysis using Marxist theory reveals how the novel depicts a rigid class hierarchy, with the bourgeoisie controlling wealth and power while the proletariat, exemplified by Jane, experiences dependency, exploitation, and alienation. Dominant ideologies equating status with human worth are challenged through Jane’s resistance to oppression, as she asserts universal equality and advocates for relationships built on mutual respect. The narrative’s themes resonate with modern challenges, including gender-based marginalisation, workplace inequities, and tensions between law and morality. Ultimately, *Jane Eyre* stands as a timeless work encouraging examination of unjust structures and progress toward a more equitable society.

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