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Beyond Romance: A Feminist Reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Requirements for Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization*

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DEDICATIONS

To our dearest parents, loved ones, friends, and inspiring teachers, this dissertation is a testament to the collective love and support that has fueled our journey. Your unwavering encouragements, belief in us, and patient understanding have been invaluable throughout this process. You celebrated our victories, offered a comforting shoulder during setbacks, and ignited our passion for knowledge. This achievement is a reflection of your collective influence and the profound impact you have all made on our lives.

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ABSTRACT

Jane Austen (1775-1817), a towering figure in English literature, transcended the confines of the Regency era (1811-1820) by weaving social commentary and wit into timeless narratives. Her novels serve as meticulously detailed portraits of the landed gentry, their customs, manners, and rigid social hierarchies meticulously laid bare. With a keen eye for human nature, Austen exposes the hypocrisy and vanity that often lurked beneath the surface of polite society, offering a scathing yet humorous critique of the social order. Marriage, a central theme in her works, explores the complex web of social and economic pressures, particularly for women. Confined by societal expectations, Austen's heroines navigate a world where marriage is often seen as a necessity for financial security and social advancement. However, Austen, a champion of female agency even within the limitations of her time, celebrates the possibility of marrying for love and personal fulfillment. Her heroines, far from mere passive bystanders, are strong, intelligent, and independent women who challenge societal norms. Characters like Elizabeth Bennet, with her sharp wit and unwavering convictions, and Emma Woodhouse, with her intelligence and desire for self-determination, defy expectations and fight for their own happiness. Austen's legacy extends far beyond her era. Her novels continue to be adapted and reinterpreted, captivating audiences with their timeless themes, sharp wit, and insightful social commentary. Her exploration of universal human experiences, coupled with her masterful storytelling, ensures her place as a literary titan whose characters, particularly her strong and independent women, continue to inspire readers and writers alike.

Keywords: Social Commentary, Women and Agency, Legacy, Social Observation.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Within the domain of English literature, few names shine as brightly as that of Jane Austen, one of the most famous English authors. Jane Austen, renowned for her captivating novels that transport readers to the intricate world of Regency-era England, has long been a subject of admiration and analysis. Her works, particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, have often been heralded as early feminist literature, celebrated for their strong-willed heroines and their commentary on societal norms. However, this dissertation comes to challenge this prevailing notion. Our research, rooted in the historical context presented in Chapter One and the literary analysis conducted in Chapter Two, seeks to demonstrate that labeling Jane Austen as a feminist is a misinterpretation of her complex narrative thus raising intriguing questions:

1. Can Jane Austen, predating organized feminism, be considered a feminist writer?
2. Does Jane Austen's portrayal of intelligent and witty female character(s) in *Pride and Prejudice* who ultimately achieve happiness through societal conformity truly represent feminist ideals?

Based on the above questions, the study presupposes that despite the fact that Austen wrote before the formal rise of Feminism, her works reflect a feminist orientation. It also hypothesizes that her portrayal of her characters in *Pride and Prejudice* does to some extent represent feminist ideals.

The present research begins by laying the foundation in Chapter one. We delved into the historical emergence of feminism and the various waves that have shaped the movement. While Austen's novels were penned during a time of significant gender disparity and societal restrictions on women, it is essential to distinguish between the historical context of feminism and Austen's literary intentions. The absence of formal feminist movements during her era necessitates caution in imposing modern feminist labels onto her characters and narratives.

Chapter two took us on an exploration of the major themes within *Pride and Prejudice* and scrutinized the portrayal of female characters within the novel. While our analysis uncovered instances of agency, defiance of gender norms, and assertiveness among

Austen's heroines, it is crucial to distinguish these qualities from a deliberate feminist agenda. Austen's characters, while spirited and independent, also reflect the societal norms and satirical commentary that characterized her writing.

This dissertation seeks to navigate the intricate landscape of Austen's work, acknowledging the strengths and complexities of her characters while resisting the temptation to ascribe them an anachronistic feminist label. By reevaluating Austen's narratives in light of their historical context and literary nuances, we aim to demonstrate that her works offer a multi-layered perspective on gender and society. Our research challenges the prevailing assumption that Jane Austen was a feminist author, encouraging readers and scholars to appreciate the richness of her storytelling without superimposing contemporary labels that may not do justice to her intricate narratives.

In this work we delve deeper into Austen's world, aiming to uncover the intricacies of her characters' agency in a society marked by constraining gender norms. In doing so, we seek to shed new light on Austen's timeless narratives and provoke thoughtful reflections on the complexities of feminism and its intersection with literature.

CHAPTER ONE:

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CHAPTER ONE: FEMINISM

1.1 Introduction

In the realm of literary history, few names shine as brightly as Jane Austen's. Her novels, celebrated for their wit, social commentary, and intricate character studies, have earned her a place of enduring significance in English literature. Among the myriad themes and subjects she explored, the question of whether Jane Austen can be characterized as a feminist writer has sparked considerable debate and intrigue. This thesis embarks on a meticulous journey to decipher the layers of Austen's work and persona, striving to discover whether she indeed falls under the feminist mantle.

The study of Jane Austen's feminism is an exploration that traverses not only her literary creations but also the broader canvas of feminist thought and the historical context in which she lived and wrote. As a starting point, Chapter One delves into the emergence and history of feminism, offering essential insights into the evolution of this multifaceted movement. We shall elucidate the various waves of feminism, from the pioneering efforts of the first wave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the contemporary resurgence of the fourth wave in the present day. This comprehensive historical overview will set the stage for a nuanced examination of Austen's relationship with feminist ideals.

Chapter one further delves into the core tenets of feminism as an ideology. Here, we dissect the diverse branches of feminist thought, from liberal feminism to cultural feminism, each offering distinct perspectives on gender equality and women's rights. By dissecting these ideologies, we aim to evaluate how Austen's works align with or challenge the prevailing feminist paradigms of her time.

Understanding Jane Austen's position as a writer necessitates an exploration of the gender roles that defined 19th-century Britain, the era in which she lived and composed her literary masterpieces. Chapter One illuminates the contrasting expectations and limitations placed upon women and men during this period, providing crucial context for assessing Austen's portrayals of gender dynamics in her novels.

Lastly, Jane Austen, the person behind the pen, occupies a pivotal role in our quest for feminist insights within her work. This chapter examines key aspects of her biography, shedding light on her experiences, social milieu, and personal beliefs, all of which have the potential to influence her literary contributions and her stance on women's rights.

In this intricate tapestry of history, ideology, and personal biography, we embark on a compelling exploration of Jane Austen's feminism. Through a comprehensive analysis of her literary oeuvre and the surrounding world, we seek to uncover whether Austen's writings reflect the spirit and ideals of feminism, thereby determining whether she should be celebrated as a feminist or regarded as an artist whose perspectives remain enigmatic and open to interpretation.

1.2. The Emergence and The History of Feminism:

The seeds of discontent with societal limitations on women were sown early in British history. From isolated acts of defiance against restrictive social norms to the organized movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British women have consistently fought for greater rights and freedoms. This ongoing struggle, known as feminism in Britain, has evolved over time, reflecting changing social and political landscapes.

1.2.1. Definition:

Feminism, a word coined in 1837 by French philosopher, Charles Fourier (as *féminisme*). It originally referred to “feminine qualities or character,”¹ but that connotation is not used any more, rather, what it refers to nowadays is The Women’s Liberation Movement. Firstly, appearing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it is a social and political movement which calls for the equality between the sexes, a movement that challenges the system of patriarchy and sexism with the aim of dismantling it. It aims to shine the light on the gender inequalities, promote women’s rights, also social, political, and economic justice for women. As noted by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “feminism encompasses various philosophies that aim to dismantle the patriarchal system and achieve gender equality”². One core aspect of

¹<https://www.dictionary.com/e/womens-movement-what-does-feminism-actually-mean/>

²Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy - Feminist Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-philosophy/pen_spark

feminism is the pursuit of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for both men and women across all aspects of life. This includes social, political, economic, legal, and personal spheres. “Feminism critiques and dismantles systems of patriarchy, where power is primarily held by men”³, feminism also combats sexism, which is discrimination or prejudice

1.3. Historical Context:

Feminism emerged as a response to the inequalities and injustices faced by women throughout history⁴. Its origins can be traced back to various historical and cultural contexts.

The emergence of feminism, a movement that advocates for gender equality, can be identified over the course of history, from late nineteenth and early twentieth century and onwards. It emerged as a response to gender-based discrimination, inequality, and the systemic oppression of women⁵. Women were relegated to subordinate positions in society, and their voices were often silenced. Feminism sought to challenge and dismantle patriarchal power structures that perpetuated these injustices. It emerged through various means, including intellectual discourse, social movements, activism, and the sharing of women's experiences. Feminists worked to challenge existing norms, advocate for women's rights, and promote gender equality. One of the earliest waves of feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with suffragettes fighting for women's right to vote. The second wave of feminism occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, with activists fighting for reproductive rights, equal pay, and an end to gender-based violence⁶. The third wave of feminism emerged in the 1990s and focused on issues such as intersectionality and representation of marginalized groups⁷. The emergence of feminism can be traced throughout history, and it has been a response to gender-based discrimination, inequality, and the systemic oppression of women. Feminism has evolved over time, and it continues to be an important movement that

³Dictionary.com

⁴Simone de Beauvoir "*The Second Sex*" 1949 pp 223-240; Betty Friedan, "*The Feminine Mystique*" 1963 pp 48-56.

⁵duBois "*Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*" 1978 pp86-102.

⁶Baumgardner and Richards "*Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*" 2000 pp 152-164.

⁷Tong "*Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*" 2017 pp 116-132.

advocates for gender equality and challenges existing power structures. In what follows, the development of the movement ever since its rise, its evolution through its four waves, and a special focus on particular points relevant to the argument of this dissertation, shall be discussed.

1.3.1. First-wave 1848-1920: the first wave of feminism focused on securing legal rights for women and to open up opportunities for them, particularly suffrage (the right to vote) and property rights⁸. This movement found its formal beginnings in the activism of women like Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst⁹. Fawcett, a pioneering suffragist, played a significant role in the British first wave feminist movement, advocating for women's rights through peaceful means and constitutional reform. Pankhurst, on the other hand, was at the forefront of the more militant suffragette movement¹⁰. Her leadership in organizations like the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) marked a shift towards more radical tactics, such as hunger strikes and civil disobedience.

Women demanded political enfranchisement and the right to participate in the democratic process¹¹. The fight for women's right to vote was a central driving force of the first feminist movement. They advocated for legal reforms to secure rights in areas such as property ownership, divorce laws, and child custody¹². They sought to challenge discriminatory laws that limited women's autonomy and economic independence. Feminists fought for increased access to education and employment opportunities for women¹³. They advocated for the removal of societal expectations that confined women to domestic roles and limited their educational and professional aspirations. The first wave feminists were involved in social and moral reform movements, advocating for issues such as temperance, abolition of slavery, and improvements in working conditions¹⁴. They aimed to challenge societal inequalities and promote social justice. The first wave of feminism was influenced by and

⁸Angela Smith "Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War" 2005 pp 102-114.

⁹Purvis "Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography" 2002 pp 206-220.

¹⁰Jane Marcus "Suffrage and the Pankhursts" 1987 pp 76-94.

¹¹Jane Marcus "Suffrage and the Pankhursts" 1987 pp 152-175.

¹²Jean H. Baker "Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited" 2002 pp 140-155.

¹³Bennett "Feminist History and the History of Feminism" 1989 pp 251-272.

¹⁴Kent "Gender and Power in Britain" 1999 pp 303-326.

intersected with other social and political movements of the time, such as the abolitionist movement and progressive reform. Activists drew inspiration and tactics from these movements to advance women's rights.

The first wave of feminism emerged for several reasons, including the fight for women's right to vote, legal and property rights, education and employment opportunities, social and moral reform, and inspiration from other movements. The first wave of feminism laid the foundation for future feminist movements and continues to inspire activists today.

1.3.2. Second-wave 1960-1970: the second wave of feminism, which occurred from 1960 to 1970, the catalyst for it was Betty Friedan's 1963 book, "*The Feminine Mystique*". It critiques the limited roles imposed on women in post-World War II society and their discontent with being confined to the domestic sphere and the belief that a woman's role was to marry and bear children. Like first-wave feminism, the second wave was largely defined and led by educated middle-class white women who built the movement primarily around their own concerns.

Firstly, it coincided with significant social and cultural shifts, including the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and the sexual revolution. These movements inspired activists to challenge existing power structures and advocate for gender equality.¹⁵ Secondly, Betty Friedan's book, "*The Feminine Mystique*", published in 1963, played a crucial role in sparking the second-wave feminist movement. It revealed the frustrations and discontent experienced by women confined to traditional gender roles, inspiring women to seek greater opportunities and rights.¹⁶ Thirdly, the fight for reproductive rights, particularly access to safe and legal abortion, became a significant aspect of second-wave feminism. Activists argued for women's autonomy over their bodies and reproductive choices.¹⁷ Fourthly, second-wave feminists aimed to address workplace discrimination, including unequal pay, limited job opportunities, and gender-based barriers to career advancement. They aimed to challenge systemic

¹⁵Gail Collins "*When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*" 2009 pp 256-271.

¹⁶Betty Friedan "*The Feminine Mystique*" 1963 pp 85-103.

¹⁷Betsy Hartmann "*Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control and Contraceptive Choice*" 1987 pp 325-341.

inequalities and promote equal rights in the workforce.¹⁸ Lastly, consciousness-raising groups provided spaces for women to share their experiences and collectively challenge societal norms and expectations. Women's liberation groups advocated for women's rights and broader social and political changes.¹⁹

The second wave of feminism progressed on the groundwork laid by the first wave, and it arose due to the multiple factors, of significant social and cultural transformations, the release of "The Feminine Mystique," the fight for reproductive rights, the challenge against workplace discrimination and unequal pay, and the promotion of consciousness-raising and women's liberation.

1.3.3. Third-wave 1990-2000: the third wave of feminism is characterized by its focus on inclusivity, intersectionality, and the exploration of diverse feminist perspectives. It emerged in the 1990s and continued into the 2000s as a response to the perceived limitations of the second wave feminist movement. It is about refusing to separate theory from personal experience and about honoring the different experiences and perspectives of women of all races, ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, and economic classes.²⁰

One of the key features of the third wave of feminism is its focus on intersectionality and inclusivity. Third wave feminism recognized that women's experiences and identities are diverse and complex, and that there is no one-size-fits-all feminism. As such, the third wave sought to expand the definition of feminism and embrace a variety of feminist perspectives.²¹ This approach allowed for the inclusion of women from different backgrounds and identities and helped to create a more diverse and inclusive feminist movement. The third wave also engaged with popular culture and media, blogs, and social media to disseminate feminist ideas and challenge mainstream narratives about gender and sexuality.²² This approach allowed for feminist ideas to be more widely disseminated and accessible, and helped to challenge traditional notions of

¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir "The Second Sex" 1949 pp 274-291

¹⁹Kathie Sarachild "Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement" edited by Robin Morgan 1970 pp 166-180.

²⁰Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards "Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future" 2000 pp 131-150.

²¹Bell Hooks "Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics" 2000 pp 36-49.

²²Nadine Monem "Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!" 2007 pp 65-83.

gender and sexuality. The third wave recognized the importance of promoting positive self-image and sexual expression among women, as well as the need to challenge societal expectations and stereotypes.²³ Furthermore, third wave feminism aimed to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promoting body positivity, sexual agency, and diverse expressions of gender identity. This movement recognized the importance of promoting positive self-image and sexual expression among women, as well as the need to challenge societal expectations and stereotypes. The third wave also recognized the need to address issues such as sexual violence and harassment and worked to create a more supportive and empowering environment for survivors.

In conclusion, the third wave of feminism emerged as a response to the perceived limitations of the second wave feminist movement. This movement is characterized by its focus on inclusivity, intersectionality, and exploration of diverse feminist perspectives. The third wave aimed to address critiques of the second wave, expand the definition of feminism, and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Its impact on feminist discourse has been significant, as it has brought attention to the complexities of gender, race, class, and sexuality and the need for intersectional approaches to social justice. It has helped to create a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement and has contributed to important social and political changes.

1.3.4. Fourth-wave 2010-present: the fourth wave of feminism is a relatively new and evolving movement that has emerged in response to ongoing gender inequalities and injustices. While the exact parameters of the fourth wave are still being defined, it is generally understood to be characterized by its use of technology and social media, its focus on intersectionality, and its efforts to address issues such as sexual harassment and assault.

One of the defining features of the fourth wave of feminism is its use of technology and social media to mobilize and amplify feminist voices. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, women are more likely than men to use social media platforms such

²³Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards "Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future" 2000 pp 91-115.

as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram²⁴. This has allowed feminist activists to connect with one another, share information, and organize protests and campaigns. For example, the #MeToo movement, which began in 2017 as a hashtag on social media, quickly became a global phenomenon, with millions of women sharing their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. This movement has led to increased awareness of these issues and has put pressure on institutions and individuals to take action. Another key feature of the fourth wave of feminism is its focus on intersectionality. This refers to the recognition that gender intersects with other forms of oppression such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. The fourth wave of feminism seeks to address these intersections and to amplify the voices of women from diverse backgrounds and identities. According to a report by the United Nations, women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination are often the most marginalized and face the greatest barriers to equality²⁵. By focusing on intersectionality, the fourth wave of feminism aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society. The fourth wave of feminism also seeks to address issues such as sexual harassment and assault. According to a report by the World Health Organization, one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime²⁶. This is a pervasive issue that affects women of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The fourth wave of feminism seeks to raise awareness of these issues and to hold perpetrators accountable. For example, the Time's Up movement, which was launched in 2018 in response to the #MeToo movement, seeks to provide legal and financial support to women who have experienced harassment or assault in the workplace²⁷.

In conclusion, the fourth wave of feminism is a dynamic and evolving movement that seeks to address ongoing gender inequalities and injustices. Its use of technology and social media, its focus on intersectionality, and its efforts to address issues such as sexual harassment and assault make it a powerful force for change. By amplifying the voices of women from diverse backgrounds and identities, the fourth wave of feminism aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

²⁴<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>

²⁵<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/Patel45.htm>

²⁶<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564625>

²⁷<https://time.com/5189945/whats-the-difference-between-the-metoo-and-times-up-movements/>

Feminism is a dynamic and evolving movement with diverse perspectives and ongoing developments. The categorization of it into waves is a simplified framework and the waves serve as a way to understand the historical context and shifts in feminist activism and thought over time.

1.4. Feminism as an Ideology:

“Ideology” is a Greek term which consists of two words “idea” and “logos” which means science, and the literal meaning for the word ideology is the science of ideas, the economic French philosopher Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy in 1796 was the first one to define Ideology to indicate thoughts and the process of its creation and the law of human thoughts²⁸. Ideology - by definition - is a structure of ideas expressing practical goals, whose owners believe that it reflects the goals of a nation, class, or group of people, at a specific historical stage, and includes - this structure - the necessary means for practical activity. Therefore, in order to study the feminist ideology some key features must be considered:

Systematically: Ideologies are not simply a collection of ideas. They are a systematic way of thinking about the world, and they offer a comprehensive explanation of how the world works.

Normatively: Ideologies do not only describe the world, they also prescribe how the world should be. They offer a vision of a better future, and they provide a guide for how to achieve that future.

Politically: Ideologies are often used to justify or explain political systems and policies. They can be used to mobilize people to support or oppose particular political causes.

These statements represent a general understanding of ideologies within the fields of political science, philosophy, and social theory. It reflects the idea that ideologies are more than just a random assortment of ideas; they are organized belief systems that provide a framework for interpreting and understanding the world.

²⁸Antoine Destutt de Tracy "*Elements of Ideology*" 1801pp 155-180

To study feminism as an ideology, we have to know that it is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Women express their own unique perspectives on the world. This ideology can be about anything, from personal experiences to political beliefs and has been a way for women to share their voices and to be heard and the movement has been the feminists' ideology to promote a more just and equitable society for all. This principle challenges the idea that men are superior to women, and it argues for a society in which everyone is treated with respect and dignity to demand greater equality for women. Feminists have faced many challenges throughout history. Some of the most common challenges include Inequality where women continue to confront it in many areas of life, including education, employment, and healthcare²⁹.

Women had to fight by describing their thoughts in a pattern of ideas as literary works across history, those ideas were the basics to create the feminist ideology by time as belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. That philosophy became a system and social movement that seeks for gender equality on social, political, and economic equalities. Until it became interested in fighting and eliminating structural oppression and discrimination against women.

In order to Learn about the history of the feminist ideology, from its early beginnings this study sheds light on the milestones passed by many authors who publicly spoke about women's issues, issues that have been regarded as feminist concerns in modern history. Undoubtedly, one of the first figures in the history of feminism 'Margaret Cavendish' (1623-1673) she was a British philosopher, scientist, and writer and is considered as one of the first women to write about science and philosophy. Her work had a significant impact on the development of feminist ideology. Cavendish's literature challenged the traditional view of women as inferior to men. She argued that women are just as capable of intellectual achievement as men, and she called for greater equality for women in society. Her work was an inspiration to many later

²⁹Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy. *Elements of Ideology* 1976. Ideology pp.01-16.p15

feminists, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf³⁰. Critics argue that Cavendish's books affected feminist ideology particularly her belief in women's intellectual achievement which seemed to her to be as prominent as that of men, she was an inspiration to many later feminists who supported their claims by using her as a backbone for their cause. *The Blazing World* 1666 is a novel written by Cavendish that imagines a world where women are equal to men in all respects. Her other major work is *Philosophical Letters* published in 1655 which is a collection of philosophical topics, including the nature of women. Most of her books casted strong lights over women in history. Cavendish was an influential thinker who inspired great women and inspired them to advocate for the rights of women. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 –1797) followed in the footsteps of Cavendish. A British writer who is considered to be one of the founding mothers of feminism. Her classic, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792, has and continues to be a guiding map for women to navigate their voice around their societies. In that work, Wollstonecraft had a noble goal that she didn't want to have power over men when she says: "I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves." *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* came as a response to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who did not believe women should receive a rational education. Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men.³¹ *The Female Reader* 1789 is a collection of stories for girls in which she included a variety of works by women writers and used it to promote the work of other female authors. Wollstonecraft's books were groundbreaking in their time. They challenged the traditional view of women as inferior to men, and they helped to pave the way for the feminist movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In her article "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination," Barbara Taylor argues that Wollstonecraft's work had a profound impact on the feminist movement and that her ideas continue to be relevant today. Taylor writes, "Wollstonecraft's critique of

³⁰ Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673). *The Blazing World and Other Writings*. Edited by Kate Lilley. Cambridge University Press, 2001. Chapter 1, pp. 1-13.

³¹ "Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" By Gary Kelly. In *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*. Edited by Claudia L. Johnson. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pages 113-132.

patriarchal power and her insistence on women's equality with men remain an inspiration for feminists today."

Wollstonecraft's work is still relevant today, and continues to inspire women around the world. Over time, various schools of thought have emerged within feminist theory, each with its own approach to understanding and addressing issues of gender inequality. These schools of thought have been shaped by the historical, social, and political contexts in which they emerged. Some examples of feminist schools of thought include liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and postmodern feminism.

In order to explain the principles and beliefs of each school of thought and how they differ from one another. By providing this information, the next section is aiming to give a general understanding of the diversity of ideas and approaches within the feminist movement.

To get a better understanding of the different ways in which feminists have approached issues of gender inequality over time. We are not going to argue for or against any particular school of thought but rather presenting them as different perspectives within the feminist movement.

***Liberal feminism:** is the oldest school of thought within feminism. It argues that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men, and that they should be able to participate fully in society on an equal footing. Liberal feminists believe that the key to achieving equality is through legal and political reform.

***Radical feminism:** is a more radical school of thought that argues that the root of women's oppression is patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system of male domination that oppresses women in all areas of life, including the family, the workplace, and the government. Radical feminists believe that the only way to achieve true equality for women is to overthrow patriarchy³².

³² Radical Feminism: "The Dialectic of Sex" by Shulamith Firestone, "Sister Outsider" by AudreLorde, "The SCUM Manifesto" by Valerie Solanas

***Socialist feminism:** is a school of thought that combines elements of liberal feminism and radical feminism. Socialist feminists believe that the root of women's oppression is both patriarchy and capitalism. They argue that capitalism exploits women by paying them less than men for the same work, and that patriarchy oppresses women by confining them to traditional roles in the family and the home. Socialist feminists believe that the only way to achieve true equality for women is to overthrow both, patriarchy and capitalism ³³

***Cultural feminism:** is a school of thought that focuses on the ways in which women's culture is different from men's culture. Cultural feminists believe that women have a unique way of thinking and feeling that is often suppressed by the dominant culture. They argue that women should celebrate their differences and create their own culture.³⁴

While theoretical discussions and debates are important in shaping feminist ideology, they need to be complemented by activism and advocacy in order to have a real-world impact. Feminist activists throughout history have fought for and won important rights and opportunities for women, such as the right to vote, access to education, and the right to make personal decisions about their own lives. By taking concrete actions and strategies, such as protests, demonstrations, and civil disobedience, these activists have been able to create a lasting impact on society and make history. Therefore, it is through the combination of theoretical discussions and practical actions that feminist ideas can be transformed from theory to practice and have a meaningful impact on society.

In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice. Literary works can be used to explore the experiences of women and to challenge the stereotypes and assumptions that perpetuate their oppression. By shining a light on the ways in which women have been oppressed, literary works can help to raise awareness

³³ Socialist Feminism: "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State" by Friedrich Engels, "This Bridge Called My Back" edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, "Feminism is for Everybody" by bell hooks

³⁴"Cultural Feminism." By Elizabeth V. Spelman. In *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Beacon Press, 1988. vol 3, pp 73-100.

of these issues and to promote social change. Feminist activists have fought to challenge these norms and structures and to create a more just and equitable society for women. By taking action and advocating for change, feminist activists have made significant progress in increasing educational opportunities, securing the right to vote, and expanding women's ability to make personal decisions about their own lives. These actions have left a lasting impact on society and have helped to shift attitudes and beliefs about women's rights and gender equality. In this way, feminist activism has played an important role in shaping the ways of thinking about gender and in creating a historical legacy of women's struggles for equality. Novels and biographies have played an important role in educating and inspiring individuals to strive for equality and self-respect. Many writers have used literary works to express their personal experiences and feelings, and to shed light on issues of inequality and injustice. One of the most famous writers in English literature is an example of this, using her novels to challenge societal norms and advocate for women's rights. Her books are read by people all over the world and have been made into countless TV, film, theatrical plays and radio adaptations. The fact that she only wrote six full-length novels, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* which are considered classics of English literature highlights the remarkable impact and enduring legacy of her relatively small body of work. Jane Austen was also a master of social satire, and her novels often poked fun at the manners and customs of her time. During Austen's time, women were not widely accepted as professional writers, and their works were often dismissed as trivial or lacking in substance. As a result, Austen faced significant barriers to achieving recognition and success as a writer.

In the next section, we will explore Austen's life and work and highlight how certain elements in her life, such as her childhood, family and education have played a significant role in shaping her writing and ultimately her career while also discussing the themes and ideas that are found in her novels, and how they can be seen from their social and gender norms of her time.

1.5. Gender Roles in 19th century Britain:

In 19th-century Britain, gender roles and expectations were largely based on a patriarchal framework, which assigned specific roles and responsibilities to both genders. Here are some aspects of those roles in 19th-century Britain, providing an insight to the general gender roles concerning men and women, with a broad overview in order to grasp an idea about the circumstances in which the writer Jane Austen grew up and lived, to get a better understanding of that time.

1.5.1. The gender roles regarding women in the 19th century: in 1800 Britain, gender roles regarding women were highly restrictive and limiting. Women were expected to embody virtues such as modesty, chastity, and submissiveness, with their primary roles seen as maintaining the household, raising children, and supporting their husbands. This following, will explore the key features of gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain, including limited educational opportunities, economic dependence, restrictions on property ownership, and limited political participation.

Limited educational opportunities were a significant feature of gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain. Formal education for women was minimal, and their access to higher education and professions was restricted. Education primarily focused on skills needed for marriage, motherhood, and household management. According to historian Amanda Vickery, "the education of girls was intended to create good wives and mothers, rather than independent individuals with their own careers".³⁵ This lack of educational opportunities significantly limited women's ability to pursue careers and achieve economic independence. Economic dependence was another significant feature of gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain. Women had limited economic autonomy and were financially dependent on their fathers or husbands. Their economic activities were often confined to domestic tasks or cottage industries. According to historian Jane Humphries, "women's work was generally seen as an extension of their domestic duties".³⁶ This economic dependence significantly limited women's ability to make independent decisions and achieve economic mobility. Restrictions on property

³⁵Vickery, A. (2010). Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history. *The Historical Journal*, 53(1), 215-237.

³⁶Humphries, J. (2017). Women's work in the industrial revolution. *History Today*, 67(7), 28-35.

ownership were also a significant feature of gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain. Women faced legal limitations on property ownership and inheritance rights, which were often transferred to male relatives. Married women had limited control over their own property, as it was legally considered their husband's. This lack of property rights significantly limited women's ability to achieve economic independence and make independent decisions. Limited political participation was another significant feature of gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain. Women were excluded from political participation, including the right to vote and hold public office. Their voices and opinions were rarely considered in matters of governance. According to historian Sonya O. Rose, "women were seen as too emotional and irrational to participate in politics".³⁷ This lack of political participation significantly limited women's ability to make their voices heard and influence policy decisions.

In conclusion, gender roles regarding women in 1800 Britain were highly restrictive and limiting. Limited educational opportunities, economic dependence, restrictions on property ownership, and limited political participation significantly limited women's ability to achieve economic independence, make independent decisions, and participate fully in society.

1.5.2. The gender roles regarding men in the 19th century: gender roles regarding men in 1800 Britain were highly flexible. Men were expected to be the primary breadwinners and providers for their families, responsible for earning a living through employment or managing their own businesses. They held positions of authority within the family and society, with legal and political privileges. Their opinions and decisions were often prioritized, and they dominated fields such as law, government, academia, and commerce.

Men had greater access to the public sphere and were encouraged to participate in politics, intellectual pursuits, and professional careers. According to historian John Tosh, "men were expected to be active citizens, participating in the public sphere and

³⁷Rose, S. O. (1986). *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*. University of California Press.

contributing to the betterment of society"³⁸. This emphasis on public sphere participation significantly shaped men's roles and expectations within society, providing them with greater opportunities for economic and social mobility. Marital and familial authority were also significant features of roles regarding men in 1800 Britain, men held authority within the household and were considered the heads of their families. They made important decisions regarding finances, education, and the overall well-being of their wives and children. According to historian Amanda Vickery, "men were expected to provide for and protect their families, and their authority within the household was seen as essential to maintaining order and stability"³⁹. This emphasis on marital and familial authority significantly limited women's ability to make independent decisions and achieve economic independence. Masculine traits and stoicism, there was an emphasis on masculine traits such as strength, self-control, and emotional restraint. Men were expected to exhibit stoicism and avoid displays of vulnerability or weakness. According to historian Michael Roper, "masculinity was defined by the ability to control one's emotions and exhibit strength and self-reliance"⁴⁰. This stress on masculine traits and stoicism significantly shaped men's expectations and behaviors, leading to a culture of emotional repression and limited expression of vulnerability.

In conclusion, gender roles regarding men in 1800 Britain were highly flexible, emphasizing public sphere participation, marital and familial authority, and masculine traits and stoicism. These expectations significantly gave men unlimited ability to make independent decisions and achieve economic and social mobility.

In the 19th century, gender roles in Britain were sharply defined, with distinct expectations and limitations for both men and women. Understanding these gender roles provides valuable insights into the context in which the writer Jane Austen lived, helping us comprehend the societal norms of her time.

³⁸Tosh, J. (1999). *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*. Pearson Education.

³⁹Vickery, A. (1998). *Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History*. *The Historical Journal*, 41(2), 413-429.

⁴⁰Roper, M. (2000). *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*. *Gender & History*, 12(3), 584-602.

For women in 19th-century Britain, the gender roles were characterized by extreme restriction and constraint. They were expected to epitomize virtues like modesty, chastity, and submissiveness, with their primary roles revolving around maintaining households, these gender roles included limited educational opportunities, and negligible political participation. Women's education primarily aimed at preparing them for marriage and motherhood, limiting their career prospects. Economic autonomy was minimal, and property rights were constrained. In contrast, men in 19th-century Britain enjoyed more flexibility in their gender roles. They were the primary breadwinners and held positions of authority in families and society. Men were encouraged to participate in the public sphere, engaging in politics, intellectual pursuits, and professional careers. They were seen as active citizens contributing to societal betterment. Marital and familial authority were emphasized, with men regarded as the heads of households, responsible for decisions. Masculinity was defined by traits like strength, self-control, and emotional restraint.

In conclusion, the gender roles of 19th-century Britain placed women in a highly restrictive and limiting position, while men enjoyed greater flexibility and opportunities for public engagement and authority within their families. These gender roles shaped the lives of individuals like Jane Austen, which emphasize the importance of considering historical context when analyzing her works and experiences.

1.6. Conclusion:

In the exploration of the emergence of feminism, we have delved into its multifaceted nature encompassing historical context and the waves that have shaped its evolution. This ideology, deeply rooted in the desire for gender equality, has progressed through distinct phases - from the first-wave's fight for suffrage, to the second-wave's focus on broader social issues, and the subsequent waves that have refined and expanded its reach. Feminism stands not only as an advocacy movement but also as a philosophy driving societal transformation.

A thorough understanding of feminism's emergence requires an examination of the prevailing gender roles in 19th century Britain. The rigid expectations and limitations imposed on women during this era cast a shadow over their aspirations and agency.

Society's constructs confined women to domestic roles, effectively curtailing their participation in broader spheres of influence. These historical dynamics laid the foundation for the feminist movements to challenge these constraints and advocate for equality.

Jane Austen's life and work offer a unique perspective on the challenges and realities faced by women of her time. Her experiences within a society constrained by gender norms undoubtedly influenced her keen observations and critical portrayals of these societal limitations in her novels. While not explicitly a feminist by modern standards, Austen's writings subtly challenged conventional gender roles, shedding light on the complexities of women's lives in the 19th century.

In Chapter One, we explored the historical emergence of feminism in Britain, the evolution of feminist ideologies, and the gender roles prevalent in 19th-century Britain. We also delved into Jane Austen's biography to gain insights into her personal experiences and societal influences. Now, in Chapter Two, we turn our attention to Austen's renowned work, *Pride and Prejudice*. This chapter aims to analyze the novel's portrayal of female characters, relationships, societal norms, and themes in the context of our ongoing inquiry. By closely examining *Pride and Prejudice*, we seek to provide a nuanced perspective on whether Jane Austen's literary contributions align with or diverge from feminist ideals. This analysis will contribute to our overarching argument regarding whether it is appropriate to categorize Austen as a feminist writer.

CHAPTER TWO:
ANALYSIS OF
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

2.1. Introduction

In this pivotal chapter, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of Jane Austen's timeless classic, *Pride and Prejudice*. Our journey begins by delving into the major literary themes that underpin Austen's work. These themes encompass the intricate dance of courtship and marriage, the complexities of social class, and the profound individual character development that unfolds within the narrative. We will dissect why these themes are crucial to our analysis, as they provide the very foundation upon which Austen crafts her story.

As we venture deeper into the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*, we direct our focus towards the portrayal of female characters within the novel. Through close examination, we'll uncover the roles these characters inhabit and how they navigate the societal expectations of Austen's Regency-era England. From the steadfast Elizabeth Bennet to her sisters, we'll explore their agency, resilience, and the challenges they face, all while drawing inspiration from the rich tapestry of their interactions and dialogues with the male characters that populate Austen's world.

In our investigation, we'll pay particular attention to the manner in which these characters challenge traditional gender roles. Through their actions, words, and choices, we will seek to understand the extent to which they disrupt established norms, exemplifying strength, wit, and individuality.

Moreover, we'll cast a discerning eye on the intricate web of relationships woven throughout the novel. The courtship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy will be at the center of our analysis, reflecting the societal norms of Austen's time, with their initial *Pride and Prejudice* mirroring the rigid social hierarchy of the period. We'll also delve into Austen's nuanced views on marriage as evidenced in the character of Elizabeth and the array of relationships that populate the novel, ranging from those marked by power dynamics to those shaped by societal pressures and women's agency.

In the course of our exploration, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*, elucidating how Austen masterfully intertwines these themes,

characters, and relationships to create a narrative that continues to captivate readers and scholars alike.

2.2. Jane Austen's Biography:

It is said that Jane Austen lived a quiet life⁴¹, secluded in the rural village of Chawton, where she spent a significant portion of her life, focusing on domestic life and family matters, contributing to the perception of a quieter existence. However, it's worth noting that while Austen's life may have been comparatively quiet by today's standards, she was still actively engaged with her family and social circle, and her works provide keen insights into the society of her time. Only a few of her manuscripts remain in existence and the majority of her correspondences were either burned or heavily edited by her sister, Cassandra, shortly before she died. As a result, the details that are known about her are rare and inconsistent. What can be surmised through remaining letters and personal acquaintances is that she was a woman of stature, humor and keen intelligence. Family remembrances of Austen portray her in a kind, almost saintly light, but critics who have studied her books and the remnants of her letters believe she was sharper than her family wished the public to think.

Jane Austen was born in Steventon, Hampshire on December 16, 1775 and grew up in a tight-knit family. She was the seventh of eight children, with six brothers and one sister. Her parents, George Austen and Cassandra Leigh, were married in 1764. Her father was an orphan but with the help of a rich uncle he attended school and was ordained by the Church of England. Subsequently, he was elevated enough in social standing to provide Cassandra a worthy match whose family was of a considerably higher social status. In 1765, they moved to Steventon, a village in north Hampshire, about 60 miles southwest of London, where her father was appointed rector.

Like their father, two of Austen's older brothers, James and Henry, were ordained and spent most of their lives in the Church of England. Of all her brothers, Austen was closest to Henry; he served as her agent, and then after her death, as her biographer. George, the second oldest son, was born mentally deficient and spent the majority of his life in institutions. The third son, Edward, was adopted by their father's wealthy

⁴¹Claire Tomalin «*Jane Austen: A Life* "1999pp 102-134.

cousin, Thomas Knight, and eventually inherited the Knight estate in Chawton, where Austen would later complete most of her novels. Cassandra, Austen's only sister, was born in 1773. Austen and Cassandra were close friends and companions throughout their entire lives. It is through the remaining letters to Cassandra that biographers are able to piece Austen's life together. The two youngest Austen boys, Francis and Charles, both served in the Navy as highly decorated admirals.

When Austen was 7, she and Cassandra were sent to Oxford to attend school but sometime later the girls came down with typhus and were brought back to Steventon. When Austen was 9 they attended the Abbey School in Reading. Shortly after enrolling however, the girls were withdrawn, because their father could no longer afford tuition. Though this completed their formal schooling, the girls continued their education at home, with the help of their brothers and father.

The Austens often read aloud to one another. This evolved into short theatrical performances that Austen had a hand in composing. The Austen family plays were performed in their barn and were attended by family members and a few close neighbors. By the age of 12, Austen was writing for herself as well as for her family. She wrote poems and several parodies of the dramatic fiction that was popular at the time, such as *History of England* and *Love and Friendship*. She then compiled and titled them: *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second* and *Volume the Third*.

In 1795, when she was 20, Austen entered a productive phase and created what was later referred to as her "First Trilogy." Prompted by increasing social engagements and flirtations, she began writing *Elinor and Marianne*, a novel in letters, which would eventually be reworked and retitled *Sense and Sensibility*. The following year, she wrote *First Impressions*, which was rejected by a publisher in 1797. It was the first version of *Pride and Prejudice*. She began another novel in 1798, titled *Susan*, which evolved into *Northanger Abbey*.

The Austens lived happily in Steventon until 1801, when her father suddenly announced he was moving the family to Bath. Austen was unhappy with the news. At the time, Bath was a resort town for the nearly wealthy with many gossip and social climbers. As they traveled that summer, however, she fell in love with a young

clergyman who promised to meet them at the end of their journey. Several months later he fell ill and died.

Bath was difficult for Austen. She started but did not finish *The Watsons* and had a hard time adjusting to social demands. She accepted a marriage proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, the son of an old family friend, but changed her mind the next day. A few years later, in 1805, her father died, leaving Jane, Cassandra and their mother without enough money to live comfortably. As a result, the Austen women relied on the hospitality of friends and family until they were permanently relocated to a cottage in Chawton, Hampshire, belonging to her brother Edward Austen-Knight. There, Austen began the most productive period of her life, publishing several books and completing her “Second Trilogy.”

Austen finished the final drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in 1811. They were published shortly after and she immediately set to work on *Mansfield Park*. In 1814, *Mansfield Park* was published and *Emma* was started. By this time, Austen was gaining some recognition for her writing, despite the fact that neither *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice* were published under her name.

Austen began showing symptoms of illness while she worked on *Persuasion*, her last completed novel. It was published with *Northanger Abbey* after her death. Unknown at the time, Austen most likely suffered from Addison’s disease, whose symptoms include fever, back pain, nausea and irregular skin pigmentation. On her deathbed, when asked by her sister Cassandra if there was anything she required, she requested only “death itself.” She died at the age of 41 on July 18, 1817 with her sister at her side.⁴²

Discussing Jane Austen's biography provides valuable insights into the author's personal experiences, societal context, and the limitations she faced as a woman in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Austen's biography helps us understand her background, family dynamics, and the societal norms of her time, which can shed light on her perspective and the themes she explored in her novels. By examining her upbringing and her close-knit family, we can appreciate the challenges she may have

⁴² William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, “*Jane Austen: A Family Record*”. Revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye. G. K. Hall, 1989.

encountered and the societal pressures she would have been aware of. This contextual understanding allows us to approach her works with a more nuanced perspective and helps to evaluate whether applying the label of "feminist" accurately reflects her beliefs and intentions. In essence, her biography serves as a crucial foundation for a comprehensive analysis of her literary contributions and whether they align with the feminist ideals that emerged centuries later.

2.3. Literary Themes in *Pride and Prejudice*:

The following themes provide a lens through which we can assess the extent to which Austen's female characters challenge or conform to the societal norms of their time. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet's refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal highlights her agency and independence in choosing a life partner, aligning with feminist ideals of self-determination. Examining how women navigate courtship, social class, and personal development allows us to gauge the degree of agency and independence depicted in the novel and contributes to the discussion of whether Austen's work aligns with feminist principles or perpetuates traditional gender roles.

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the central themes is the intricate dance of courtship and marriage in Regency-era England. Austen's exploration of the theme of marriage is evident in Mrs. Bennet's opening statement: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."⁴³ This statement succinctly captures the societal expectation that marriage is not just a personal choice but a necessity for economic and social stability.

Equally pervasive is the theme of social class, it is deeply ingrained in the narrative, shaping characters' interactions and decisions. Mr. Darcy's comment about Elizabeth Bennet, reflects this theme: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."⁴⁴ Here, Darcy's initial *Pride and Prejudice* stem from his perception of Elizabeth's lower social standing, illustrating the influence of class distinctions.

As the narrative unfolds, another theme surfaces throughout the novel, individual character development is a theme that unfolds gradually. Elizabeth Bennet's

⁴³Chapter 1, page 01

⁴⁴Chapter 3, page 16

transformation is reflected in her introspective realization: "Till this moment, I never knew myself."⁴⁵ This theme underscores the importance of self-awareness and personal growth, as characters struggle with their own limitations, biases, and the complex interplay of societal expectations.

2.4. The Relevance of Examining Feminism in *Pride and Prejudice*:

Examining feminism within the context of Austen's work is both complex and illuminating. It is important to acknowledge that, given Austen's time, applying a strict feminist lens to her narratives is a nuanced endeavor, and that comes back to the fact that she wrote before formal feminism emerged, so her writings don't explicitly champion feminist ideals but reflect the gender norms of her time. Secondly, her use of satire makes it challenging to interpret her intentions as overtly feminist. Additionally, her critiques of societal norms are subtle, requiring careful reading. Women's limited agency in the 19th century complicates assessing feminist elements in her characters, who often prioritize marriage for financial security. Lastly, the evolution of feminism means what's considered feminist has changed. To understand Austen's work, we must consider her historical context, satirical style, and nuanced portrayal of societal norms, recognizing the insights it offers into women's challenges and aspirations in her era. Jane Austen's literary contributions predate the formal feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, making it essential to approach her works with historical sensitivity. Nevertheless, Austen's novels inherently engage with essential issues related to women's agency and the societal constraints that governed their lives during the Regency era. Her portrayal of strong-willed female characters, notably exemplified by the spirited Elizabeth Bennet, challenges the traditional gender roles of her time. Elizabeth's refusal to conform to conventional norms offers a valuable perspective on the struggles and aspirations of women during this period.

In examining feminism in Austen's work, we must recognize that it is not a direct commentary on modern feminist principles. Instead, it offers a historical glimpse into a time when gender dynamics were vastly different. While we explore the potential for her literature to contribute to ongoing discussions of gender equality, we do so with the

⁴⁵Chapter 36, page 349

awareness that Austen's perspective was shaped by the social norms and limitations of her era. By adopting this nuanced approach, we can both appreciate the complexity of Austen's narratives and respect the historical context in which they were crafted.

2.5. Aspects of Feminism in the Novel:

One prominent aspect we will explore is the examination of women's freedom in choosing their life partners. Elizabeth Bennet's resolute refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal on page 100 serves as a sharp example. Her determination to marry for love and personal compatibility, rather than succumbing to societal pressure for financial security, underscores a timeless feminist principle. This aspect of the novel invites us to consider how Austen's portrayal of Elizabeth's freedom in matters of the heart aligns with contemporary discussions on the importance of autonomy and choice in relationships, a concept important in both the past and today's feminism.

Another facet we will delve into is the portrayal of female friendships and support networks, as exemplified in Elizabeth's relationships with her sister Jane and her close friend Charlotte Lucas. These relationships reflect the enduring significance of female camaraderie and solidarity, values that resonate strongly with modern feminism. Examining how Austen's characters support and empower each other within the constraints of their society offers a lens through which to appreciate the timeless importance of women's networks and alliances in the pursuit of shared goals. It's like saying, "Hey, women should be good friends to each other."

Furthermore, our analysis will examine the societal expectations placed upon women, particularly the formidable pressure to conform to conventional norms of femininity and propriety. Elizabeth's steadfast refusal to capitulate to Lady Catherine's overbearing expectations, vividly illustrated on page 349 "I have not the smallest intention of ever marrying a man who I cannot entirely esteem. It is my not doing his character justice. He deserves better than a woman who never could understand him, and who probably never would think very highly of him"⁴⁶ embodies a feminist resistance to the constraints imposed by the rigid gender norms of her time. This aspect

⁴⁶Chapter 36, page 349

of the novel encourages us to contemplate how Austen's characters navigate societal expectations and provides a compelling backdrop for discussions on the enduring struggle against gendered limitations.

By exploring these aspects of feminism within *Pride and Prejudice*, our analysis aims to offer a nuanced examination that acknowledges the complexities of gender, agency, and societal norms as portrayed in Austen's timeless work. We will bridge the historical context of Austen's era with the modern feminist perspective, highlighting both the evolution and persistence of these crucial themes in the ongoing pursuit of gender equality.

2.5.1. Portrayal of Female Characters and Their Roles:

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet sisters, especially Elizabeth, hold central positions in the narrative. As we read on page 2 "In a village about fifty miles from London lived a gentleman named Bennet. He had a wife and five daughters. Mrs. Bennet was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news. Mr. Bennet was a lively, intelligent, well-informed man, who unfortunately had a sharp and satirical humor. He was rather fond of his daughters, but too wise a man to spoil them"⁴⁷ the initial description of the Bennet family paints a vivid picture of the five unmarried daughters. This early introduction immediately underscores the societal emphasis on marriage as a pivotal goal for women in this era. The Bennett sisters, each with their distinctive personalities, find themselves navigating this marriage centric society.

As the second eldest sister, Elizabeth emerges as the novel's focal point. Her intelligence and independence are highlighted in Mr. Darcy's initial assessment of her: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."⁴⁸ This emphasis on her character rather than mere physical appearance indicates that Elizabeth is not solely defined by her looks. The Bennet sisters are all educated and intelligent women, which is unusual for women in Regency England, as most women were not expected to

⁴⁷Chapter 1, page 02

⁴⁸Chapter 3, page 16

pursue an education. They are also all creative and talented women, with Jane being a gifted musician, Elizabeth being a skilled writer, and Lydia being a talented dancer.

Despite their many admirable qualities, the Bennet sisters are still subject to the societal expectations placed upon them. They are all expected to marry well, and they are all under pressure to do so. Mrs. Bennet's obsession with marrying off her daughters is a reflection of the limited options available to women in Austen's time, as marriage was the only way for women to achieve financial security and social status. Elizabeth's character is particularly significant because she challenges these societal expectations. She is not willing to marry a man she does not love or respect, even if it means sacrificing her social standing. Her story is a powerful example of female empowerment and resistance to gendered limitations.

In conclusion, the Bennet sisters represent the diverse experiences of women in Regency England, all while navigating the societal pressure to marry well. Elizabeth's character, in particular, stands out for her intelligence, independence, and resistance to gendered norms. Her story is a timeless reminder of the importance of choosing one's own path in life, regardless of societal expectations.

2.5.2. Agency and Navigating Societal Expectations:

Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Collins's marriage proposal showcases her unwavering agency and stands as a defining moment in the novel "I must declare my conviction that you are not serious in your proposals. I have not the smallest intention of ever marrying a man who I cannot entirely esteem"⁴⁹. When Mr. Collins, heir to the Bennet family's estate, proposes to Elizabeth, he does so not out of love, but rather out of a sense of duty and societal expectation. He believes that by marrying her, he is providing for her and her family, adhering to the conventional belief that women should prioritize financial security in marriage.

However, Elizabeth's response is a testament to her unwavering agency. Her words, firmly asserts, "You could not make me happy, and I am convinced I am the last

⁴⁹Chapter 19, page 103

woman in the world who could make you so.⁵⁰" This pivotal moment illuminates Elizabeth's resolve and articulate her determination to choose a partner based on personal happiness and emotional connection rather than societal pressures. This refusal is a striking declaration that she will not succumb to a loveless marriage, even if it means defying the conventions of her time.

2.5.3. Relationships, Interactions, and Dialogue with Male Characters:

Elizabeth's interactions with Mr. Darcy are characterized by spirited verbal exchanges that showcase her assertiveness and sharp wit, when Mr. Darcy inquires about her opinions during their first meeting, Elizabeth responds with a retort that exemplifies her independent spirit "My opinions are all my own. I never adopt the opinions of others."⁵¹ This exchange is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it reveals Elizabeth's willingness to engage in intellectual discourse with male characters, challenging the notion that women opinions should be secondary. Secondly, her pointed remark highlights her refusal to be intimidated by Darcy's initial arrogance, suggesting that she values honesty and straightforwardness over social niceties. This moment underscores her agency in asserting her own perspective and sets the stage for their complex relationship throughout the novel.

Elizabeth's dynamic with Mr. Collins provides another insightful glimpse into her character. Mr. Collins, who condescendingly praises women for their "delicate and highly cultivated minds," exemplifies the societal belief in women's roles as genteel and decorative, primarily focused on accomplishments. This is evident when he delivers his condescending speech.

Elizabeth's response is telling of her refusal to conform to traditional gender roles. Instead of meekly accepting such praise, she responds with humor and wit "I should have been taken for an idiot, if I had not."⁵² Her reply serves to level the intellectual playing field, suggesting that she possesses the same mental acuity as any man. This exchange reinforces her independence of thought and her unwillingness to be

⁵⁰Chapter 35, page 345

⁵¹Chapter 3, page 16

⁵²Chapter 3, page 16

patronized by men who perceive themselves as superior. These interactions collectively underscore Elizabeth's strong-willed character, her willingness to challenge male characters when they exhibit arrogance or condescension, and her rejection of traditional gender roles. Elizabeth's assertiveness and wit in her dealings with both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins not only make her a memorable character but also position her as a symbol of resilience and independence within the constraints of her society.

2.5.4. Challenging Traditional Gender Roles:

Throughout the novel, Elizabeth consistently challenges traditional gender roles. She delivers a sharp critique: "I am no longer surprised at your knowing ONLY six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing ANY."⁵³ This bold statement confronts the notion that women should primarily focus on acquiring accomplishments to please men. Instead, Elizabeth emphasizes that women possess diverse talents and should not be defined solely by their ability to entertain or impress. In her critique of societal views on women's accomplishments, Elizabeth emerges as a resilient voice for feminism within the novel. Her willingness to speak out against gendered expectations and her assertion that women should not be limited by society's narrow definitions of femininity contribute to her enduring appeal as a character who defies conventions.

In conclusion, Elizabeth's bold statement on women's accomplishments serves as a powerful symbol of her refusal to be confined by traditional gender roles. It reflects her belief in women's diverse talents and autonomy, challenging societal expectations and positioning her as a character ahead of her time in advocating for women's rights and individuality.

In summary, *Pride and Prejudice* intricately portrays female characters navigating a society where marriage is paramount for women. Elizabeth Bennet's character, in particular, shines as a symbol of intelligence and independence. Her agency, refusal to conform to societal expectations, and spirited interactions with male characters challenges traditional gender roles. These instances, illustrate the complexities of

⁵³Chapter 35, page 345

gender dynamics within the novel and how Jane Austen's characters defy the conventions of their time.

2.5.5. Relationships and Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*:

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the courtship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy reflects the societal norms of Austen's time, particularly in terms of class and social expectations. Early in the novel, Mr. Darcy's initial pride and Elizabeth's prejudice against him illustrate the rigid social hierarchy of the period. On chapter 3, Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth, deeming her socially inferior. The courtship also underscores the social expectations and gender roles prevalent in Austen's society. Women of Elizabeth's class were expected to secure advantageous marriages to enhance their family's social standing and financial security. Mrs. Bennet emphasizes the importance of her daughters' marriages, stating, "I am thinking of his marrying one of them."⁵⁴ This quote illustrates the societal pressure on women to find suitable husbands.

Elizabeth Bennet's character challenges these societal norms. Her refusal of Mr. Collins's marriage proposal on chapter 19 showcases her independence and the importance she places on personal compatibility and love over financial security. Her eventual choice to marry Mr. Darcy reflects her growth and her recognition of his changed character. While Mr. Darcy's character also undergoes transformation throughout the novel. His willingness to reconsider his prejudices and his eventual proposal to Elizabeth on chapter 34, demonstrate a departure from the societal expectations and class-based pride that initially defined him. This transformation highlights Austen's belief in the capacity for personal growth and change.

Jane Austen's portrayal of the courtship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy provides a nuanced critique of the social norms of her era. While it acknowledges the societal constraints and class divisions, it also celebrates individual agency and the potential for characters to transcend these limitations. The novel invites readers to consider the complexities of love, class, and societal expectations in Regency-era England.

⁵⁴Chapter 1, page 02

In summary, the courtship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* is a microcosm of the societal norms, class distinctions, and gender roles of Austen's time. Through the characters' development and the challenges they face, Austen offers a multifaceted commentary on the social dynamics of her era, illustrating both the constraints and possibilities within the confines of early 19th century British society.

Jane Austen's portrayal of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* emphasizes the importance of emotional compatibility and personal happiness over purely practical considerations. This perspective challenges the prevailing notion of the time that marriage should primarily serve as a means to secure financial stability or elevate one's social status.

Austen's belief in the significance of love and respect within marriage is particularly evident through the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth's character embodies the idea that mutual respect and understanding are essential for a successful and fulfilling marriage. On chapter 6, Elizabeth boldly declares, "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." This statement underscores her belief that the outcome of a marriage should not be determined solely by societal pressures or material considerations. Instead, it suggests that genuine happiness can only be achieved when there is a genuine connection between the individuals involved. Elizabeth's statement also reflects Austen's acknowledgment of the unpredictability of romantic relationships, and it introduces an element of uncertainty into the narrative in a society where arranged marriages and societal expectations played a significant role in the selection of spouses.

This uncertainty challenges the notion that one's marital fate is predetermined or entirely dictated by external factors. Instead, it suggests that the outcome of a marriage can be influenced by individual choices and the development of genuine feelings between partners. In portraying marriage as a matter of chance and emphasizing emotional compatibility and mutual respect, Jane Austen offers a subtle critique of the prevailing marital norms of her time. She encourages readers to question the societal pressures that often led individuals to enter into loveless or incompatible marriages.

Furthermore, Austen's portrayal of Elizabeth's eventual choice to marry Mr. Darcy, based on love and mutual understanding rather than social status, exemplifies her belief in the potential for personal growth and change within the context of marriage.

In conclusion, Jane Austen's views on marriage, as reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*, prioritize emotional compatibility and mutual respect. Her characters, particularly Elizabeth Bennet, challenge the prevailing norms of their society by emphasizing the importance of genuine connection and individual agency in choosing life partners. This perspective aligns with modern notions of love and partnership within marriage and contributes to the enduring appeal of Austen's work.

2.5.6. Alignment with Feminist Ideals:

While Austen's portrayal of Elizabeth's character demonstrates a degree of independence and defiance of traditional gender roles, it is still rooted in the context of her time. The novel reflects the challenges women faced in pursuing their own desires and the compromises they often had to make due to societal pressures.

Elizabeth Bennet's independent spirit, her sharp wit, and her determination to marry for love rather than financial security align with feminist ideals of autonomy and self-determination. Her refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal exemplifies her willingness to prioritize personal happiness over societal expectations, challenging the notion that women should be passive in their romantic lives. Also, her defiance of traditional gender roles, especially in her interactions with male characters, reflects feminist ideals of gender equality. Furthermore, her refusal to be patronized by Mr. Collins and her willingness to engage in intellectual exchanges with Mr. Darcy demonstrate her belief in her own intellectual and emotional equality. However, it's important to acknowledge that while Elizabeth embodies feminist principles, she operates within the societal constraints of her time. This aspect of the novel also aligns with feminist ideals by highlighting the systemic barriers women faced in the nineteenth century.

The novel realistically portrays the challenges women faced in pursuing their desires and the compromises they often had to make due to societal pressures. This portrayal underscores the importance of feminism in challenging and dismantling the societal norms and structures that limited women's choices. Elizabeth's character reflects the complexity of feminism. She is both a pioneer in her independence and a product of her time, navigating a world where women's rights and opportunities were limited. This

complexity is a reminder that feminism acknowledges the progress made while advocating for further change.

Some Pro-feminist interpretations of *Pride and Prejudice* focus on the novel's strong female characters and its subversive elements. For example, critic Mary Poovey argues that Elizabeth Bennet is a proto-feminist heroine who challenges the social constraints imposed on women in Regency England. Poovey writes, "Elizabeth is a feminist because she is aware of the constraints on her life and actively seeks ways to overcome them."⁵⁵

Another pro-feminist interpretation of the novel focuses on its subversive elements. For example, critic Judith Wilt argues that *Pride and Prejudice* is a subversive novel that challenges the patriarchal social order. Wilt writes, "Austen's novel is subversive because it challenges the traditional gender roles of its time"⁵⁶

Pride and Prejudice aligns with some feminist ideals and differs with others. For example, the novel celebrates strong female characters and challenges some of the social constraints imposed on women in Regency England. However, the novel also reinforces some traditional gender roles, such as the importance of marriage for women that aligns with feminist ideals like when Elizabeth Bennet was not afraid to challenge the status quo or to stand up for herself the social constraints imposed on women in Regency England, such as the importance of marriage and the limited educational and career opportunities available to women ,they were are capable of making their own decisions and that they should not be forced to marry for money or social status ,The novel reinforces some traditional gender roles, such as the importance of marriage for women and women should be financially dependent on men subordinate to them.

In summary, *Pride and Prejudice* aligns with feminist ideals through the character of Elizabeth Bennet, who embodies independence and challenges traditional gender roles. Simultaneously, the novel portrays the challenges women faced in a patriarchal society, highlighting the ongoing need for feminism to address systemic barriers and work

⁵⁵ (Poovey, *Pride and Prejudice* and the Politics of Class, 1981, p. 12)

⁵⁶ (Wilt, *Pride and Prejudice* and the Novel of Manners, 1990, p. 15)

toward gender equality. Elizabeth's character represents a nuanced perspective that acknowledges both progress and the enduring struggle for women's rights and agency.

2.5.7. Women's Limitation in Education, Marriage and Financial Status:

Throughout history, women have encountered numerous challenges and restrictions in various aspects of their lives, cementing their position as second-class citizens in society. This chapter focuses on the specific areas of education, marriage, and financial status, aiming to shed light on the limitations imposed on women and their far-reaching consequences. By exploring the experiences of women within these domains, we seek to challenge preconceived notions and deepen our understanding of the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Education is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of personal and professional growth. It provides individuals with opportunities for intellectual development and opens doors to career advancements. However, women have long been denied equal access to education due to deeply entrenched gender biases and societal expectations. In this chapter, we will delve into the historical context of women's education, examining the societal barriers that hindered their academic pursuits and stifled their potential for personal and professional development. Marriage, as an institution, has traditionally played a pivotal role in shaping women's lives. For generations, societal expectations have dictated that women's primary purpose is to marry and build a family, often relegating them to subordinate roles. We will explore the constraints imposed on women within the institution of marriage, such as societal pressures to marry at a certain age, limited agency in selecting partners, and the power imbalances that often permeate marital relationships. By analyzing the impact of these limitations, we seek to debunk conventional assumptions and shed light on the ways in which marriage has hindered women's personal fulfillment and broader achievements. Financial status is another critical aspect that has marginalized women throughout history. Economic disparities, coupled with discriminatory practices, have perpetuated women's economic dependency on men. Whether through restricted inheritance rights, limited employment opportunities, or unequal pay, women have faced insurmountable obstacles in attaining financial independence and self-sufficiency. By closely examining the historical and societal factors that have disadvantaged women financially, we aim to challenge prevailing perceptions and

highlight the urgent need for gender equality in economic spheres. In investigating women's limitations in education, marriage, and financial status, we strive to challenge societal assumptions and perceptions that have perpetuated gender inequalities. Our objective is to contribute to the broader feminist discourse and advocate for a more inclusive and progressive society that empowers women. Through this research, we hope to spark informed discussions and inspire actions that lead to tangible changes in dismantling the barriers that hinder women's progress and opportunities for growth.

The portrayal of societal norms in *Pride and Prejudice* unveils a stark reality of Regency England. Women of this era were ensnared within a web of financial dependence on men, a circumstance that denied them the agency to own property or establish independent businesses. Instead, their economic sustenance hinged precariously on the benevolence of their husbands or fathers. Marriage emerged as the paramount aspiration for women, eclipsing other potential pursuits. This overarching expectation placed immense pressure on them to wed and bear children, a duty seen as their primary path towards attaining both social standing and financial security. The rigidity of these conventions is palpably reflected in the characters' lives.

Consider the words of Charlotte Lucas, who had been "brought up to think that to be married is the chief end of existence; and that having married, the business of her life was over" (Page 12). This sentiment encapsulates the prevailing ethos, underlining how marriage was perceived not only as a societal norm, but as the very essence of a woman's existence. Elizabeth Bennet, despite her intelligence and acumen, found her educational prospects confined to the domestic sphere. The prospect of university or a career beyond the confines of her home remained tantalizingly out of reach. She resorted to seeking solace in reading, expressing, "I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library" (Page 39). This declaration poignantly underscores the limited spheres of influence available to women of her station. Similarly, Charlotte Lucas's decision to marry Mr. Collins, Charlotte marries Mr. Collins, even though she does not love him, because she needs financial security. This shows how the social constraints imposed on women can force them to make difficult choices. (page 67)

Lydia Bennet's elopement with Mr. Wickham. Lydia Bennet is seduced by Mr. Wickham because she is not properly educated or supervised. This shows how the lack of opportunities for women can lead them to make bad choices. (page173)

devoid of romantic inclination, serves as a poignant illustration of the economic imperatives that underpinned many unions. It was a calculated move to secure her financial future, a choice driven not by affection, but by necessity. This echoes the sentiment that "a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Page 1), illustrating how the pursuit of marriage was intrinsically linked to financial stability. Mrs. Bennet's ceaseless preoccupation with her daughters' marital prospects speaks to the societal anxieties surrounding these unions. The fear of social degradation looms large, underscoring the harsh consequences that could befall unmarried women of their station. Meanwhile, Lady Catherine de Bourgh's efforts to forestall Elizabeth's union with Mr. Darcy betray the deeply entrenched class distinctions that shaped matrimonial considerations. As she declares, "You must not blame my aunt. Lady Catherine is a very respectable woman, and very fond of me. I have heard her say she would give anything to see me settled in life" (Page 69), it becomes evident that Lady Catherine's concern is less for Elizabeth's personal happiness than for the preservation of societal norms. These excerpts serve not merely as illustrative snippets, but as crystalline windows into the systemic constraints that governed the lives of women in this era. They illuminate the inescapable truth that a woman's social standing was irrevocably bound to her marital choice, her autonomy circumscribed by prevailing norms.

Yet, it is essential to recognize Jane Austen's subversive stance against these societal strictures. Through *Pride and Prejudice*, she champions the cause of women's education and autonomy. In Elizabeth Bennet, she crafts a protagonist who embodies intelligence and independence, challenging the status quo and forging a path towards a more liberated future.

2.6. Austen's Critiques of Gender Constraints:

Elizabeth Bennet is the revered protagonist in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, emblematic of the defiance against societal expectations that pervaded Regency

England. Her intelligence, wit, and independence distinguish her as one of the most cherished female characters in English literature. A notable demonstration of Elizabeth's rebellion against social constraints is her refusal to marry solely for financial security and social status. Chapter 12 depicts Mr. Collins proposing to Elizabeth, despite knowing her lack of affection towards him. In defiance of familial and societal pressures, Elizabeth rebuffs his proposal, stating, "I had not the smallest inclination for Mr. Collins; and to assure her aunt that I never would have him, seemed almost like saying that I never would be married at all; which was very dreadful!" (Austen 59).

This rejection epitomizes Elizabeth's autonomy and her determination to select her own life partner, refusing to sacrifice her happiness for conformity. Additionally, Elizabeth challenges societal norms through her exceptional intellect and outspoken nature. Chapter 19 showcases a renowned conversation between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, where she defends her right to marry Mr. Darcy, despite his absence of wealth or aristocratic lineage. Elizabeth firmly declares, "If I were to marry one of your acquaintances, neither I nor my children would be the more respected by those who know us" (Austen 139).

Elizabeth's unwavering stance against Lady Catherine, despite her influential status, demonstrates her fearlessness in expressing her thoughts and defending her beliefs. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth's character continuously defies societal expectations, encouraging readers to embrace their independence and challenge the constraints imposed upon them.

Another female character in *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas, serves as a complex embodiment of the limited choices women faced during Austen's time. Pragmatic and intelligent, Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins' proposal in Chapter 21, despite lacking affection for him. In a candid conversation with Elizabeth, she explains her decision, stating, "I have no care at all about Mr. Collins, and if I can get him to believe that I shall make him a very good wife, I shall not mind his having a few amiable qualities, which must be short-lived" (Austen 159). Charlotte's acceptance of Mr. Collins reflects the pragmatic acceptance of the limited options available to women. However, her

intelligence and practical mindset imply her ability to make the most of her situation and find contentment within her marriage.

Jane Bennet, the eldest Bennet sister, challenges the stereotype of beauty as synonymous with vanity and shallowness. Described by Elizabeth in Chapter 10, Jane's disposition is characterized as "excellent, and her manners gentle" (Austen 51). Her ability to see positivity within others, even in the face of their flaws, exemplifies that beauty encompasses more than outward appearances. Jane's character defies conventional expectations, reminding readers that women can possess both intelligence and beauty.

Lydia Bennet, the youngest sister, represents impulsiveness and a lack of self-discipline. In Chapter 36, her elopement with Mr. Wickham, a man she scarcely knows, serves as a cautionary tale against recklessness and a lack of self-control. Nonetheless, Lydia's resilience and determination to create a fulfilling life in the aftermath of her mistakes signify redemption and growth. Chapter 58 portrays Lydia's determination when she professes, "I was determined to make the best of a bad bargain" (Austen 453). This portrayal suggests that women possess the capability to overcome missteps and find happiness in their lives.

The Bennet sisters were financially dependent on their husbands, as there is no other way for them to make a living. This is a reminder of the economic constraints that women faced in Austen's time (Chapter 1, page 1). The Bennet sisters had no legal rights over their own property or income. This is another reminder of the legal constraints that women faced in Austen's time (Chapter 41, page 316). Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins even though she does not love him, because she knows that it is the only way for her to achieve financial security (Chapter 21, page 159). This is a realistic portrayal of the limited choices that women had in Austen's time. Lydia Bennet's elopement with Mr. Wickham is a cautionary tale about the dangers of impulsiveness and a lack of self-discipline. However, Austen also suggests that Lydia is a victim of the social constraints of her time, as she has been taught to believe that she must marry in order to be happy (Chapter 36, page 274).

Elizabeth Bennet rejects Mr. Collins' proposal even though she knows that it would be a wise financial decision. This is a powerful statement of her independence and her right to choose her own husband (Chapter 12, page 59). While we have to mention her acceptance to Mr. Darcy's proposal, even though he comes from a wealthy and aristocratic family. This suggests that Austen does not believe that women should be limited to marrying men of their own social class (Chapter 53, page 423).

2.7. Other Critiques of *Pride and Prejudice*:

Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Brontë* (1984)

Poovey argues that Austen's novel reinforces traditional gender roles and ultimately upholds the patriarchal status quo. She points to the fact that Elizabeth Bennet and other female characters in the novel are ultimately rewarded for their conformity to social expectations. For example, Elizabeth marries Mr. Darcy, a wealthy and powerful man, and Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins, a wealthy but foolish man.

Poovey also argues that Austen's novel is limited by its focus on the domestic sphere. She argues that Austen's female characters are not concerned with social or political issues, but only with marriage and family. In Chapter 58 Mr. Bennet gives Elizabeth his blessing to marry Mr. Darcy. He tells her that he is "happy to know that you will be united to such a worthy young man." (Page 418). Also to mention in Chapter 19 Lady Catherine de Bourgh visits Elizabeth and tries to persuade her not to marry Mr. Darcy. She tells Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy is not a suitable match for her because he is from a lower social class. Lady Catherine also tells Elizabeth that she is "degrading" herself by marrying Mr. Darcy. (Pages 138-139) Chapter 43 Mr. Bennet is furious when he learns that Lydia has run off with Mr. Wickham. He disowns her and refuses to have anything to do with her. (Page 343)

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Gilbert and Gubar argue that Austen's novel is a product of its time and that it reflects the patriarchal society in which it was written. They argue that Austen's female characters

are ultimately constrained by the social norms of their time and that they do not achieve true independence or self-determination.

They also argued that Austen's novel is limited by its focus on marriage and family. They argue that Austen's female characters are not concerned with social or political issues, but only with finding a suitable husband. Like in Chapter 1: The novel begins with the famous line, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Page 1) This line sets the stage for the novel's focus on marriage and the importance of social status. Elizabeth Bennet's mother in chapter two, Mrs. Bennet, is obsessed with finding suitable husbands for her daughters. She tells Elizabeth that she must marry Mr. Collins, a wealthy but foolish man, even though Elizabeth does not want to. In Chapter (19) Lady Catherine de Bourgh tells Elizabeth that she is not a suitable match for Mr. Darcy because he is from a lower social class. She tells Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy's family would be "injured" by such a marriage. (Page 139)

It is important to note that both Poovey and Gilbert and Gubar wrote their books in the 1970s, and their criticisms of Austen's novel reflect the critical and cultural context of their time. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in Austen's novel from feminist critics. Many feminist critics now argue that Austen's novel is more complex and subversive than previously thought. They point to the fact that Austen's female characters are intelligent, independent, and outspoken, and that they challenge some of the social norms of their time. Ultimately, whether or not *Pride and Prejudice* is a feminist novel is a matter of interpretation. There is no one definitive answer to this question. However, the critical perspectives discussed above suggest that Austen's novel can be read as both a pro-feminist and an anti-feminist text.

2.8. Conclusion:

We explored the major themes of the novel, such as marriage, social class, and individual character development. I also discuss the relevance of examining feminism in Austen's work and introduce some of the specific aspects or elements of feminism that I will explore in relation to *Pride and Prejudice* in subsequent chapters. By examining the portrayal of female characters in the novel, including Elizabeth Bennet

and her sisters, we analyze their roles, agency, and how they navigate societal expectations. I also analyze their relationships, interactions, and dialogue with male characters. Finally, I highlight instances where these characters challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

Delving into the relationships depicted in the novel, especially the courtship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. I explore how these relationships reflect the societal norms of Austen's time. I also investigate Austen's views on marriage as reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*. I analyze how marriage is portrayed in the novel, particularly in relation to power dynamics, societal pressures, and women's agency. Finally, I discuss whether Austen's portrayal aligns with feminist ideals or if it perpetuates traditional gender roles. By discussing how the novel addresses issues of social class and status. I analyze how characters' attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their social positions. I also explore the social constraints imposed on women in the society depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*. I discuss the limited options available to women in terms of education, marriage, and financial independence. Finally, I analyze how Austen critiques and challenges these constraints through her portrayal of female characters and their experiences. We presented various feminist perspectives on *Pride and Prejudice* and examine how the novel aligns or differs with feminist ideals. This section highlights both pro-feminist and anti-feminist interpretations.

We found that Austen's novel is complex and multi-layered, and it explores a variety of literary themes, including marriage, social class, and individual character development. Austen's work is relevant and important because it provides insights into the experiences of women in the early 1800s, explores themes that are still relevant today, and has been influential on feminist writers and thinkers. She explores a variety of feminist themes, such as women's agency, gender roles, social constraints, and feminist ideals without forgetting to mention that her portrayal of female characters is complex and nuanced. Her female characters challenge traditional gender roles and expectations in a number of ways. Austen's portrayal of relationships and marriage is also complex and nuanced. She explores the ways in which relationships reflect the societal norms of her time, as well as Austen's own views on marriage.

She addressed issues of social class and status in a critical way. She explores the ways in which social class influences characters' attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities. She also critiques the social constraints imposed on women in her time.

The Feminist perspectives on *Pride and Prejudice* vary. Some critics have argued that the novel is pro-feminist, while others have argued that it perpetuates traditional gender roles.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a complex and thought-provoking novel that can be read and interpreted in multiple ways. It is a novel that is both relevant to feminist studies and enjoyable for general readers.

Whether or not Jane Austen can be considered a feminist is a complex question that has been debated by scholars for many years. There is no easy answer, as Austen's work is both progressive and conservative in many ways. On the one hand, Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* explores a number of feminist themes, such as women's agency, gender roles, social constraints, and feminist ideals. Austen's female characters, such as Elizabeth Bennet, are intelligent, independent, and outspoken. They challenge traditional gender roles and expectations in a number of ways. For example, Elizabeth Bennet refuses to marry Mr. Collins, even though he is a wealthy man who would provide for her financially. She also rejects Mr. Darcy's initial proposal because she believes that he is arrogant and proud. On the other hand, Austen's novel also reinforces some traditional gender roles. For example, all of the female characters in the novel are ultimately rewarded for their marriages. Elizabeth Bennet marries Mr. Darcy, Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins, and Lydia Bennet marries Mr. Wickham. Additionally, Austen's novel does not address some of the more pressing issues facing women in her time, such as the lack of women's suffrage and the legal and economic limitations imposed on women. Ultimately, whether or not Jane Austen can be considered a feminist depends on how one defines feminism. If feminism is defined as the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes, then it is difficult to say definitively whether or not Austen was a feminist. Her work is both progressive and conservative in many ways. However, it is clear that Austen was a complex and

thoughtful writer who was interested in exploring the experiences of women in her time.

It is important to remember that Austen was writing in a different time period than we live in today. The feminist movement as we know it today did not exist in Austen's time. Therefore, it is unfair to judge her work by our modern standards. Austen's work has been influential on feminist writers and thinkers, such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. This suggests that Austen's work has been interpreted as feminist by many people whether or not Jane Austen can be considered a feminist is a matter of personal interpretation. There is no right or wrong answer.

Modern feminism is having a significant impact on literature, both in terms of how it is written and how it is interpreted. On the one hand, feminism has led to a greater diversity of voices in literature, with more women writers and more stories about women's experiences being published. On the other hand, feminism has also led to some backlash, with some critics arguing that feminist readings of classic literature are too simplistic or reductive.

One of the most controversial aspects of modern feminism is its tendency to classify literature as either "feminist" or "not feminist." This can be a dangerous practice, as it can lead to the censorship or dismissal of works that do not fit neatly into one category or the other. It is important to remember that literature is complex and multifaceted, and that it can be interpreted in many different ways

It is impossible to definitively state whether or not Jane Austen was a feminist. Austen's novel is a work of fiction, and it is ultimately up to the reader to interpret her work. Additionally, Austen was writing in a different time period than we live in today, and her views on feminism may not align with modern feminist ideals in all respects.

We believe that it is important to appreciate Austen's work for what it is: a complex and well-crafted novel that explores a variety of themes, including feminism. We do not need to label Austen as a feminist or not in order to enjoy her work and learn from it.

We would add that it is important to be respectful of all readers, regardless of their feminist beliefs. No one should be forced to read or interpret literature in a way that they do not agree with.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

This dissertation undertakes a critical reappraisal of the prevailing narrative that positions Jane Austen's work as an unequivocal champion of feminist ideology. By employing a multifaceted approach, we have delved into the rich social milieu of 19th-century Britain (Chapter One) and conducted a meticulous textual analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* (Chapter Two). This in-depth exploration has yielded compelling evidence that challenges the traditional feminist lens applied to Austen's work, revealing a nuanced and potentially contradictory portrayal of gender roles.

Chapter One provided a robust foundation by meticulously tracing the emergence and history of feminism, with a particular focus on its development within the British context. This historical grounding proved crucial in understanding the limitations imposed upon women during Austen's era. We explored the societal expectations, economic realities, and nascent feminist thought of the time period. By establishing this context, we were able to appreciate the complexities of applying a later feminist lens to Austen's work. This nuanced understanding allowed for a more critical evaluation of the potential alignment between Austen's portrayals and core feminist principles.

Chapter Two then shifted focus to *Pride and Prejudice*, meticulously dissecting the novel's intricate literary themes and their connection to feminist ideals. Our analysis meticulously deconstructed the text, revealing a tension between the portrayal of intelligent and witty female characters and their ultimate reliance on societal conformity for happiness. Austen undeniably crafts strong and independent heroines, such as Elizabeth Bennet, who possesses a sharp wit and a critical mind. However, their agency is often severely circumscribed by the relentless pressures of marriage and the harsh economic realities that restrict their choices. Marriage, presented as the primary pathway to financial security and social mobility, potentially undermines the ideals of female empowerment and independent choice central to feminist thought.

Furthermore, while Austen's use of satire is undeniable, its primary target appears to be the superficiality and vanity of the landed gentry, rather than launching a systemic critique of the patriarchal power structures that perpetuate these inequalities. While her

satire may expose the flaws and limitations of the existing social order, it does not necessarily advocate for a complete dismantling of these structures.

In conclusion, by examining the historical context of feminism and the intricate portrayal of women in *Pride and Prejudice*, this dissertation decisively challenges the traditional interpretation of Austen as a straightforward feminist writer. Our analysis suggests that Austen's work does not necessarily align with core feminist principles in the way it has often been interpreted. While her characters possess undeniable intelligence and wit, their happiness ultimately hinges on navigating and often conforming to the existing social order. This focus, coupled with the limitations placed upon female agency, suggests a perspective that does not necessarily advocate for a radical transformation of the gender hierarchy.

However, Austen's work remains a significant contribution to understanding women's experiences and societal limitations during a pivotal historical period. By reevaluating Austen's portrayal of gender roles, we gain a deeper understanding of the historical context of feminism and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Furthermore, this study compels us to move beyond simplistic classifications of literary works within the feminist framework. Austen's work demonstrates the complexities and nuances of earlier perspectives on gender roles within their specific historical contexts. This nuanced understanding allows us to appreciate the richness and complexity of literary portrayals of women, acknowledging the limitations and possibilities of applying later ideologies to earlier works. Ultimately, this dissertation encourages a more critical and multifaceted approach to the intersection of literature and feminist thought.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Pride and Prejudice

"It is a truth universally acknowledged,
that a single man in possession of a good fortune,
must be in want of a wife."

Pride and Prejudice

"...for as to Elizabeth, great as was the summons of honor on Miss Bingley's side,
her refusal had been equally decided and prompt. 'Thank you,' she replied, 'I am
engaged already.' Elizabeth laughed readily, and the offer seemed to divert her entirely;
though she had not the least intention of accepting it."

Pride and Prejudice

"Mary had the best of tempers, but Lydia, though equally fond of him, had a temper
somewhat irritable. Mary knew how to keep her feelings close; but Lydia, less capable
of concealing her resentment, said in a pet, 'Aunt Philips! Well, but the more fool she to
make herself scarcer.'"

Pride and Prejudice

"It must be imputed,' said Miss Bingley, 'to his wish of increasing his intimacy
with the family. But the expression of his eyes was so much more penetrating than
Mrs. Bennet's that it prevailed. How handsome he looked then!"

Pride and Prejudice

"Mrs. Bennet, however, was not so well pleased. 'Think of Mr. Collins having to walk
three miles to come to Hunsford!' said she. 'How can Elizabeth bear it?' - 'It is only a
proof of his attachment,' observed Miss Lucas. 'If Darcy had walked three miles to see
me, I should have thought it only right.'"