Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*: Revolutionary, Feminist, Romantic

The Romantic Movement encompasses many different revolutionary ideas. One of these ideas, feminism – a subcategory of human rights, a popular topic among Romantic writers – is extremely important, especially among, though not exclusive to, female authors and artists. Though it was not given the name ‘feminism’ until much later, the idea that women should be given equal rights, or at least more freedoms and a better education, can be found in many Romantic works. One of the most well known of these works is Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In what is arguably her most famous novel, Austen subtly incorporates feminist ideas into her story. Many critics argue that Austen is not, in fact, representative of the Romantic Movement, and that she does not demonstrate the defining characteristics of many other Romantic writers, especially the famous male poets (i.e. Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, and Keats). Perhaps this is because Austen typically juxtaposes her more rebellious characters against those who conform to society’s more traditional and conservative values. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the independent nature of the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, is highlighted against Charlotte Lucas’s inability to escape societal pressures. Still, Austen’s novels, including *Pride and Prejudice*, address many of the issues popular with Romantic writers, including feminism, human rights (which, in this case, includes feminism), a great respect for nature, and an emphasis on the importance of education. In order to establish this, one has to look no further than the writings of fellow Romantic Mary Wollstonecraft, often called the “mother of English-language feminism” (Ford 189). While Austen’s writing clearly reflects the Regency Era, the period of time in which she lived and wrote, it also demonstrates many of the revolutionary ideas characteristic of the Romantic Movement, particularly the feminist concepts presented in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 
Although it covers a relatively short period of time, the Romantic Era is an extremely important time for art and literature, with several defining characteristics. One of the most popular ideas of the Romantic Movement is the significance of nature, which “became a fulcrum in the balancing of subjective and objective in the Romantic construction of reality, and most of the period’s leading writers were particularly preoccupied with the relationship between the natural world and the individual world” (“The Age of Romanticism” LI). Like a majority of other Romantic writers, Jane Austen expresses a great appreciation for nature in her novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the main character, Elizabeth Bennet, demonstrates a great love for nature, often to a point of rebelling against society’s ideas of what is proper. Throughout the novel, she often takes long walks, reveling in nature, and shocking a few of the more reserved characters by how close to nature she allows herself to get. For example, after discovering her sister is ill, and stuck at the home of an acquaintance, Elizabeth walks to visit her and is criticized by Miss Bingley; “To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles [sic] in dirt, and alone, quite alone! what could she mean by it? It seems to me to shew [sic] an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum” (Austen 41). While the characters look down on Elizabeth for enjoying nature so much, or at the very least not being overly concerned with dirt, Austen makes an entirely different point. It is Elizabeth who eventually proves to be the better of the women; Austen shows her as much more intelligent, confident, independent, and virtuous than most of the other women in the novel. If Elizabeth’s love of nature is not entirely obvious from the fact that she is frequently portrayed outdoors, Austen makes it abundantly clear later in the novel when Elizabeth utters one of the most iconic lines in *Pride and Prejudice*: “What are men to rocks and mountains?” (179). In this scene, Austen establishes the Romantic nature of her protagonist, juxtaposing Elizabeth’s love of
nature against her sisters’ appreciation for men; while the younger Bennets are more inclined to go to town to observe the soldiers, Elizabeth is perfectly content to spend her time outdoors alone. Elizabeth echoes the “late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century tendency to see the natural world in opposition to the human world” (“The Age of Romanticism” LI). The opposite of man is nature, and Elizabeth – as well as perhaps Austen herself – professes to prefer the latter, a sentiment shared by many of the undisputed Romantic “greats,” such as Shelley, Byron, Keats, and Wordsworth.

Austen’s similarities with other Romantic authors are not exclusive to nature. Many Romantic authors, such as Mary Prince, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley, advocate for human rights in varying degrees within their work. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen integrates a theme of feminism – or women’s rights – throughout a story that also realistically portrays Regency England. While feminism is not exclusive to female Romantics, nor is it the only Romantic topic they addressed, it was a popular subject; “In the work of female writers of the period, interesting in the individual and the mind often took different forms from those that engaged the interest of male writers. The Romantic period abounded in outspoken female writers who engaged with the issues of their day and sought to make a difference in their world” (“The Age of Romanticism” LI). Mary Wollstonecraft was by far one of the most outspoken female writers of the Romantic Movement, and many of her ideas can be seen in Austen’s work. In her essay, “The Radical Ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft,” Susan Ferguson writes, “Like that of her radical contemporaries, Wollstonecraft’s work is informed by a firm conviction that people are the products of their environment. Women are not predisposed to be petty and self-indulgent. These traits develop only because political and social forces deny then the expression and
development of the defining feature of humanity: the capacity to reason” (435). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft herself writes:

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists – I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. (13-14)

Wollstonecraft’s idea that women will ultimately be happier when they stop adhering to the stereotypical idea of “the weaker sex” was somewhat revolutionary for its time. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen subtly demonstrates this idea by creating two very different types of female characters: those who Wollstonecraft refers to as “weak, artificial beings” and those who behave with a sense of intelligence and independence (13). The youngest of the five Bennet sisters, as well as their mother, are excellent examples of the former:

Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavor to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother’s indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Catherine, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia’s guidance, had always been affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain. (Austen 246)
This passage serves to state plainly Catherine (Kitty) and Lydia’s nature while also contrasting them against their older sisters, who behave with more common sense and decorum. Wollstonecraft writes, “Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sexual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice” (228-229). She laments that, often women are raised or choose to be ignorant, and thus fall victim to the idea that women are frivolous beings only concerned with love and pleasure. This characterization can perfectly describe the youngest Bennet sister in Pride and Prejudice; Lydia is preoccupied only with men and fashion, and ends up disgracing her family by running off and entering into an unsavory marriage with Mr. Wickham. Her family, along with Mr. Darcy (and likely Mr. Bingley as well), regard her as silly and irresponsible. And while Austen presents a character that so wholly embodies the type of woman Wollstonecraft advocates against, she does so in a negative way, clearly supporting the idea of a stronger, more intelligent woman.

There are several instances throughout Pride and Prejudice where Austen portrays intelligent, independent women. Elizabeth Bennet is the most obvious example. Elizabeth is not just intelligent, which in itself seems to go against society’s traditional image of women, she pushes further against the norm and shows her intelligence, rather than pretending to be weak and insipid. In A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Mary Wollstonecraft discusses the traditional societal expectations of female “intelligence;” “Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of a man; and should they be beautiful,
every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives” (28). It is this form of intelligence, that which is obtained only in order to make oneself appear weaker through manipulation that greatly annoys Wollstonecraft, and goes against what she is trying to achieve; “Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those contemptible infantine airs that undermine the esteem even whilst they excite desire” (16). In *Pride and Prejudice*, it is exactly this type of false intelligence, cunning, that is exhibited by Miss Bingley. She prides herself in an intellectual façade in order to catch the attention of Mr. Darcy, but Austen makes it clear that Miss Bingley is not inclined towards true intelligence, and portrays her in a slightly negative light because of it;

Miss Bingley’s attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy’s progress through *his* book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page. She could not win, however, to any conversation; he merely answered her question, and read on. At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she gave a great yawn and said: “How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything but a book! – When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library.” (Austen 64)

In this passage, Miss Bingley chooses to read solely to gain Mr. Darcy’s notice, and makes a big show out of doing so. Austen then contrasts this against Elizabeth Bennet’s genuine love of reading, proving she has more in common with Mr. Darcy than Miss Bingley does. In the end,
true intelligence, rather than cunning or pseudo-intellect, wins over Mr. Darcy. Susan Morgan, in her essay, “Intelligence in *Pride and Prejudice*,” writes:

> Its heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, witty, self-confident, with those dancing eyes, and not quite beautiful face, depicts for all of us that is flawed and irresistible about real people. Lionel Trilling has observed about *Emma* that we like Mr. Knightley “because we perceive that her cherishes Emma not merely in spite of her subversive self-assertion but because of it.” This applies to Mr. Darcy as well, and Elizabeth, perfectly aware of it, cannot resist inquiring when she demands an account of his having fallen in love with her: “Did you admire me for my impertinence?” Her impertinence, of course, is why generations of readers have admired her and why we recognize that the major concern of the book is with the possibilities and responsibility of free and lively thought. (54)

Clearly, intelligence, and the use of said intelligence, is a major theme in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is not enough to possess superficial knowledge, as Miss Bingley does (or believes she does), one must also use it in a way that does not undermine or contradict one’s own intelligence. This didactic aspect of Austen’s novel perfectly aligns with one of Wollstonecraft’s Romantic morals: “intellect will always govern” (Wollstonecraft 16).

While very few, if any, of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* can boast a formal education (and those that were are most likely all male), Austen still makes a point of addressing the subject. And she is not alone in stressing education; “many [female writers of the Romantic period] were concerned with education” (“The Age of Romanticism” LI). Wollstonecraft was one of these writers; not only does she write about education in *A Vindication of the Writs of Women*, she also authored *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *The Female Reader*, which show just how passionate some Romantic writers were about education, particularly that
of women and girls. Despite the fact that she is not a particularly nice character, Catherine de Bourgh is adamant about education, and makes her feelings known during dinner at her estate. However, her idea of education is likely very similar to that of Miss Bingley, who, at the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice* proclaims, “A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages” (Austen 45). This is precisely the type of education of which Wollstonecraft writes:

> The little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour \[sic\] necessary to give vigour \[sic\] to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. (32-33)

It is this indiscriminate and shallow form of education that, according to Wollstonecraft, “gives this appearance of weakness to females” (33). In *Pride and Prejudice*, it is the women who are content with this education, women like Miss Bingley and Lydia Bennet, who educate themselves, not for the sake of knowledge or their own improvement, not because they believe themselves equally as intellectually capable or intelligent as their male counterparts, but because they want to make themselves appealing to privileged or wealthy men, like Mr. Darcy. Austen reveals the flaw in this way of thinking, since, as previously discussed, her discerning Mr. Darcy chooses not the accomplished Miss Bingley, but the more genuinely and deeply intelligent Elizabeth Bennet. While Elizabeth is primarily self-educated – her love of reading is well
documented in *Pride and Prejudice* – she does not subscribe to the traditional ideals of female education. In fact, Lady Catherine criticizes her lack of dedication to playing the piano (Austen 204). By creating a character who lacks the traditional, expected female virtues – Elizabeth Bennet – and then showing that she is both intelligent and desirable (and, in fact, desirable because of her intelligence), Austen produced a heroine who embodies the new, Romantic idea of what women should strive to be.

There are some critics who might cite the presence of weak and frivolous female characters, like Lydia, alongside strong characters, such as Elizabeth, as a reason that Austen is *not* a Romantic or feminist writer. However, the simple fact that Austen even created such a variety of female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* was, at the time, somewhat revolutionary in itself. In 1743 – seventy years before Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813 – Alexander Pope published his “Epistle II to a Lady: Of the Characters of Women,” in which he writes:

Nothing so true as what you once let fall,

“Most Women have no Characters at all.”

Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear,

And best distinguish’d by black, brown, or fair. (1-4)

This demonstrates the previous way of thinking in which women were often considered objects, and appreciated mainly, if not solely, for their external beauty. Wollstonecraft also mentions this idea in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, writing, “It is acknowledged that [women] spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves, - the only way women can rise in the world, - by marriage” (15).

Encouraged by her mother, this is exactly what Lydia does in *Pride and Prejudice*. However,
Austen shrewdly juxtaposes Lydia and Kitty against their older sisters, Jane and Elizabeth, who behave both more properly and more intelligently, especially in regards to marriage. *Pride and Prejudice* also contains female characters from different economic and social backgrounds. For example, Lady Catherine is extremely wealthy and, as such, can enjoy some control over her own life and has some independence and authority. By contrast, Charlotte Lucas settles for marriage because it provides her with financial security she would not have otherwise. By creating a large number of female characters from different social, political, economic, and familial backgrounds, as well as of different levels of sensibility and intelligence, Austen flouts the idea of women as a relatively homogenous group, and promotes the idea that women are human beings, as complex and capable as men.

As evidenced above, marriage is an important issue in terms of feminism, particularly during the Romantic Movement. Many Romantic authors – including both Austen and Wollstonecraft - who address the subject of feminism do so, at least part relation to marriage. An advocate for women’s equality in society in general, Wollstonecraft, “envisage[d] a form of marriage that incorporates the major features of the classical notion of higher friendship such as equality, free choice, reason, mutual esteem, and profound concern for one another’s moral character” (Abbey 79). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Wollstonecraft writes:

The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, not to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband’s passions. (40-41)
The common form of marriage in which women were considered subordinate or inferior to their husbands in every day, and that the women themselves encouraged this image, was not acceptable in Wollstonecraft’s opinion. And in Pride and Prejudice, Austen makes a point of this as well. During the course of the novel, we encounter quite a few marriages and relationships, but only three with which Austen intimately acquaints her readers: Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, and Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. The novel opens with an interaction between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, after which Austen writes:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develope [sic]. She 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. (4)

This passage is telling in multiple ways. First, Austen’s readers are given a good idea of the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet; as is later shown throughout the novel, Mr. Bennet is intelligent and of a good nature, though often sarcastic. He loves his wife, but occasionally becomes annoyed with her antics (for example, when Mrs. Bennet tries to force Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, whom Mr. Bennet is convinced is not good enough for his daughter). Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, is the type of woman Wollstonecraft wouldn’t tolerate; she is content with being superficial, and wholeheartedly supports the idea that her daughters’ only value lies in potential marriages. She is “the conventionally educated woman whose sex-oriented view of women’s roles limits her ambitions in her own marriage, and, eventually, the marriages of her daughters” (Brown 337). On the other hand, Elizabeth’s friend, Charlotte Lucas behaves
according to different logic. While she seems to be more intelligent than Mrs. Bennet, her actions do just as much by way of encouraging the stereotype of weak females. Charlotte settles for marrying Mr. Collins because of familial and financial pressures (something, it is worth noting, Austen herself refused to do). Austen reveals the motivations behind Charlotte’s agreeing to marry Mr. Collins:

Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But he would still be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving her happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (Austen 144)

Clearly, Charlotte is not entirely happy with her potential marriage, though she sees it as a positive thing, as it will save her from poverty and being seen as a spinster. But even after Charlotte and Mr. Collins are married, she seems to have to convince herself that she’s happy with the arrangement; “When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, [Elizabeth] involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear” (181). While Mrs. Bennet is simply too superficial to pay much attention to propriety, Charlotte is a different type of woman, though one whom Wollstonecraft would be equally disappointed by. Of this sin against feminism, Wollstonecraft writes, “Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected” (40). Charlotte shows that she is intelligent, though misguided, when she
convinces herself to marry Mr. Collins. However, she then pretends at weakness to avoid domestic conflict, and it’s evident from their interactions that her husband does not respect her for it. Lloyd Brown writes:

Jane Austen’s treatment of marriage in her work is best understood in relation to her skepticism about male definitions of female emotions, sexuality, education, and modesty. The similarities with Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas and the feminist tradition as a while suggest that such skepticism questions the conventional assumptions about marriage, insofar as those assumptions are rooted in a restrictive view of the woman’s identity.

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Austen portrays these poor marriages as a way of warning against them, subtly aligning herself with the radical ideas of Wollstonecraft.

The marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and Charlotte and Mr. Collins, both of which go against the type of marriage advocated for by Wollstonecraft, serve a further purpose: to highlight the partnership between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. Having observed multiple bad, or at the least mediocre, marriages, Elizabeth “is determined not to make a mistake which will echo the pattern of her parents’ marriage.” (Myers 228). In her essay, “Womanhood in Jane Austen’s Novels,” Sylvia H. Myers writes, “[Elizabeth] will not be pushed by practical motives like Charlotte or sensual ones like Lydia. In fact for Elizabeth the fear of being fulfilled hardly seems to present itself” (228). Despite her mother’s insistence, Elizabeth waits until she has fallen in love before agreeing to marry. Over the course of the novel, she turns down two separate proposals, one from Mr. Collins (who was encouraged by Mrs. Bennet to propose), and another from Mr. Darcy (whom she later ends up marrying). Elizabeth proves she does not take marriage lightly, and will not willingly subject herself to a life of quiet subjugation. Astute readers will
detect the irony in Austen’s famous first line: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife” (1). By the end of the novel, it is quite obvious that Austen’s views are more in line with those of Wollstonecraft on the subject of marriage. For example, Mr. Darcy – who, from a financial standpoint, is the biggest “catch” of the novel – chooses not the pandering Miss Bingley, who pretends at intelligence, but Elizabeth Bennet, who is more his equal, and therefore will make a much better partner in marriage. Indeed, it is not only Elizabeth’s attitude towards marriage that aligns with Wollstonecraft’s feminist and Romantic ideas regarding the practice, but Mr. Darcy’s as well. After Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have settled their engagement at the end of the novel, Elizabeth asks him “Did you admire me for my impertinence?” to which Mr. Darcy responds, “For the liveliness of your mind, I did” (Austen 433). Though brief, this is a significant moment in the novel. While Wollstonecraft prescribes a set of guidelines for the treatment and behavior of women, Austen creates an attractive protagonist, one which many of her readers can identify with, and has her behave in a way that supports with Wollstonecraft’s ideas. And that Darcy loves Elizabeth not in spite of this, but for of it, gives Austen’s readers a perfect example of a relationship that embodies the Romantic ideas set forth by Wollstonecraft and other writers. It is this relationship – along with the fact that it is starkly contrasted against marriages that adhere to the more traditional domestic dichotomy between husband and wife – that largely makes Pride and Prejudice an iconic Romantic work of fiction.

Jane Austen wrote and published her novels during the Romantic Era, at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. However, “the tradition of regarding Jane Austen as non- or even anti-Romantic is long standing” (Lau 91). Because while Austen does share some characteristics with many of the undisputed Romantic writers, William Blake, for example, Austen also accurately
represents the everyday lives of English citizens during the Regency Era. Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is generally accepted as a Romantic work, since, in it, she presents revolutionary ideas quite clearly. Austen on the other hand, more subtly incorporates similar ideas into a work of fiction. Not only that, but, according to Anne K. Mellor, in her article, “Romanticism, Difference and the Aesthetic,” “The women writers of the Romantic era... tended to promote a more gradual, ameliorationist approach to social reform” (136). Mellor specifically addresses Austen, saying that she “typically ends her novels with the marriage of a member of the landed gentry with a member of the professional classes, thus signaling her ideal of an empowered middle class that combines the good breeding of the aristocracy with the energy and intelligence of the educated professional” (136). While the various marriages of the novel, contrasted against each other, ultimately support the Romantic, feminist, and revolutionary ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft, they may also serve as another reason *Pride and Prejudice* might be considered non-Romantic. Critics might claim the fact that many of the female characters end up married by the conclusion of the novel goes against the idea of female independence. As previously discussed, the marriages themselves encourage unions based on friendship rather than more superficial elements, particularly beauty and money, which is, as evidenced by Wollstonecraft, a Romantic concept. However, one might argue that the importance of marriage in the novel is a concern. However, rather than being non- or anti-feminist or Romantic, Austen’s readers can view this as simply a result of her environment; “A heroine who must work for wages turns the ideological order of the genteel novel upside down” (Copeland 116). The reality of Austen’s novels is that they take place during the Regency era in England, a time when women were still largely subject to make dominance, both domestically and politically. By incorporating Romantic ideas into a setting many of her readers would
recognize, Austen is actually demonstrating a high level of intelligence; had she written a completely revolutionary fictional novel, it might have been received as something more akin to science fiction. For example, if Elizabeth Bennet flouted all societal norms, went to study at a university, got herself a job in London, and became successful, Austen’s contemporaries would likely viewed the character as a joke, or at the very least, completely ridiculous. What she would have achieved over the course of the novel would have been unrealistic, and unattainable. By more delicately incorporating Romantic ideas – real intelligence as a virtue, an appreciation for nature, and friendship in marriage, for example – Austen creates characters that can realistically inspire young women. Young girls may have read *Pride and Prejudice* and gained strength to resist familial and social pressures to settle when choosing a potential husband, for instance. And while that may not be completely revolutionary, or quite as obvious as Wollstonecraft’s message in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that’s not what Austen intended. *Pride and Prejudice* is a brilliant work of fiction that maintains entertainment value and drama, while also quietly promoting many of the ideas and themes of the Romantic Movement.

As evidenced by the many subtleties in Jane Austen’s popular novel, *Pride and Prejudice* is undoubtedly a Romantic work. By examining *Pride and Prejudice* through a feminist lens, alongside one of the most famous feminist works of the Romantic Era, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, it becomes obvious that Austen was promoting many of the same ideas as her fellow Romantic authors and encouraging independent and intelligent thought among women. While *Pride and Prejudice* reflects the Regency Era of England’s history, and includes many of the more conservative values of this time period, it balances this with the more revolutionary Romantic ideas such as appreciation of nature; friendship, equality, and partnership in marriage; knowledge and education for the sake of intelligence rather than
cunning; and, finally, more freedom of thought, particularly from Austen’s female readers. It is these factors that cement Austen’s status as one of the great Romantic writers, and *Pride and Prejudice* as a decidedly Romantic work of literature.


