

LECTURE 4: MINOR CHARACTERS IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Jane Austen's ironic gaze and witty observations inform all the characters in her novel. The major as well as minor characters have been portrayed with all their eccentricities and never cease to engage us. The characters have a life-like quality and their speech habits make authentically observed characters.

- Mr Collins-the pompous clergyman-his interest in religious matters does not mask his materialistic nature-his manner is bordering on obsequious as he always tries to gain the preferment of his patroness Lady Catherine. His attempt to solve the matter of the entail is done in a most dramatic manner. Austen makes him the target of ridicule when he first tries to win Jane, but on being told of her chances of an early engagement, he promptly transfers his attentions to Elizabeth. When she refuses he adamantly pursues her. Afterwards his quick resolve to marry Charlotte is equally swift.He is too deluded to understand that Charlotte manipulates him to arrange the proposal in a manner which pampers his ego.(Important chapters: 13, 14, 15,18,19, 20, 22)
- Mrs Bennet-is portrayed as a woman of mean understanding. She is endlessly complaining about her nerves and is mocked by Mr Bennet. As the business of her life is to get her daughters married she leaves no stone unturned to that end. Her conduct in public places is the source of her family's discomfort. She behaves in a coarse manner at the Netherfield Ball, thereby ruining Jane's chances for a happy married life with Bingley. She does not understand the implications of Lydia's elopement and joyfully celebrates her marriage to the imposter Wickham. Although Austen makes fun of her ways she is empathetic to Mrs Bennet's anxieties and critical of Mr Bennet's lack of sensitivity towards her (Important Chapters:1,18,20,42,51)
- Lady Catherine-is a titled aristocrat and her manners are condescending and patronizing. Her aristocratic demeanour is forbidding, yet in her encounters with Elizabeth she loses out to her self-possessed and witty manner.Lady Catherine is Austen's satirical portrait of the aristocracy , which was on its way out in the nineteenth century.(Important Chapters:29,56)

- This answer ideally should also have points on Austen's use of humour to depict the characters in a small-town society. Also each character represents a certain class and one must judge whether he/she is a representative of the class or has certain other dimensions to make him individualistic enough. Moreover, you also have to point out the complexity in Austen's art of characterization whether the characters are flat or rounded. You may also choose to discuss Charlotte Lucas OR Jane Bennet.

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