
Daudnagar College, Daudnagar

Subject: English Literature

Class: B.A. Part II (Honours)

Paper: IV (Novel)

Topic: Significant Comments on *Pride and Prejudice*

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The Structure and Form of the Novels of Jane Austen's Novels:

“But, if her range was thus limited, within it she was supreme. Absolutely sure of her material, undistracted by external interests, she wrote with a singular freedom from uncertainty; and her novels have, in consequence, an exactness of structure and a symmetry of form which are to be found more often in French literature than in English. Of this precision *Pride and Prejudice* is an admirable example. Here the plot is the chief interest; simple, but pervasive; controlling every incident, but itself depending for its outcome upon the development or revelation of the principal characters.

Surrounding these characters is the world of provincial folk which Miss Austen handled brilliantly—cynical Mr. Bennet and his fatuous wife; Mary Bennet, the pedant, and Lydia, the flirt; Mr. Collins, the type of pretentious conceit, and Sir William Lucas, of feeble dullness. These ‘humours’ Miss Austen develops chiefly through her wonderful faculty for saying the thing appropriate to the character at the moment... Miss Austen’s later stories, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, are longer and slightly more elaborate than *Pride and Prejudice*, but in them the essentials of her art are still the same; a well-defined story, growing naturally out of the influence of character on character, and developed in the midst of a society full of the mild humours of provincial life” – **Moody and Lovett**

Some of the Comic Elements in the Novel:

“The logic underlying this position is that in the long run good breeding goes back to property and privilege, so that the genteel principle need not be violated by a marriage with the poor. Elizabeth

Bennet (in *Pride and Prejudice*) is given a decided advantage over the stiff and snobbish Mr. Darcy, who is brought so reluctantly to propose marriage; her pride is justified by his lofty condescension; yet the principle of gentility tells us he was essentially right in not wishing to lower himself, and he can easily be forgiven when once he comes to acknowledge that her proposal worth makes her his social equal. But while it lasts, his conflict of sentiments makes him a very funny person. He is the ideal English gentleman as comedy sees that type, honourable and sure of himself, dense and stiff, and easily made a fool of. Broader comedy is provided by the cruder snobbishness of Lady de Bourgh and the oily sycophantic clergyman, Collins; and the plot is managed by misunderstandings over matters of fact coming to reinforce the misunderstandings bred by sensitiveness and pride.” -- **J.W. Beach**

The Portrayal of Mrs. Bennet and of Mr. Collins:

“The fool simple is soon exhausted; but when a collection of mixed ideas is grafted upon him, he becomes a theme for endless variations. Mrs. Bennet is one of this kind. She is sooner introduced than she is defined, she is ‘a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper.’ That makes up the fool negative. Her positive qualities are these: ‘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.’ Her fixed ideas of the happiness of catching any young man for any of her daughters, of the inequality of an entail which prevented their succeeding to her husband’s estate, and of her weak nerves, make up the staple of her talk, always amusing because never to the purpose. Another fool of the same novel is Mr. Collins, somewhat of a caricature and, therefore, easier to analyse. He has a mean understanding, and is a bore to boot; that is, he esteems himself worthy to be always occupying a place in the notice of those with whom he associates, and he thinks it incumbent upon him always elaborately to explain his motives and his reasons. At the same time, he has some sense of the necessity of humility and lays claim to this virtue by always speaking of himself and his belongings as ‘humble’, and by the most expansive display of humility towards his patrons, and towards anyone of a rank above his own. To his own personal claims he adds the official claim derived from his being a rector in the Church of England, which gives him occasion to obtrude his advice, always wrong in the various vicissitudes of the tale. The contrast between his empty head and heart and his fixed ideas

constitutes the diversion of the portrait. He is perfect when he expects a father to forgive his erring daughter like a Christian, and never to speak to her again. ” – Richard Simpson