

J.M.S. COLLEGE, MUNGER
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Department of English
B.A. Part-II, English (Hons.)- Paper IV

Character Sketch of Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Bingley in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Mrs. Bennet

Mrs. Bennet is the mother of the five unmarried daughters. Mrs. Bennet is a hypochondriac who imagines herself susceptible to attacks of tremors and palpitations ("[her] poor nerves"), whenever things are not going her way.

Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous.

Her materialistic behavior is seen since her main ambition in life is to marry her daughters off to wealthy men. Whether or not any such matches will give her daughters happiness is of little concern to her.

Mrs. Bennet "Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

Mr. Bennet "How so? How can it affect them?"

Mrs. Bennet "My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

Mrs. Bennet is a miraculously tiresome character. Noisy and foolish, she is a woman consumed by the desire to see her daughters married and seems to care for nothing else in the world. Ironically, her single-minded pursuit of this goal tends to backfire, as her lack of social graces alienates the very people (Darcy and Bingley) whom she tries desperately to attract. Austen uses her continually to highlight the necessity of marriage for young women.

She attempts to force Elizabeth her daughter to marry Mr. Collins merely to remain in possession of Longbourn because of the patriarchy inheritance system. She threatens not to ever speak to Elizabeth again if she refused to marry her choice of a man.

Mrs. Bennet also serves as a middle-class counterpoint to such upper-class snobs as Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley, demonstrating that foolishness can be found at every level of society. In the end, however, Mrs. Bennet proves such an unattractive figure, lacking redeeming characteristics of any kind, that some readers have accused Austen of unfairness in portraying her—as if Austen, like Mr. Bennet, took perverse pleasure in poking fun at a woman already scorned as a result of her ill breeding.

Mr. Bingley

Mr. Bingley is described as gentlemanlike, lively and unreserved, and he does not seem to demand much to be satisfied. For example, when he is at the first ball, he says the following to Mr. Darcy: “Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of them you see uncommonly pretty”. This sentence really highlights the difference between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley.

At the ball in Netherfield, Darcy refuses to dance with the women in the room saying none was as handsome as not to be a punishment for him to stand up with. Bingley on the other hand dances with any girl that was available to dance.

First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all; indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going down the dance. So, he inquired who she was, and got introduced, and asked her for the two next. Then the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy.

A further proof of his tolerance toward people can be found at the end of the novel where it is stated that Mr. Bingley and Jane often let the troublesome couple Lydia and Mr. Wickham stay with them, and often “so long, that even Bingley’s good humour was overcome, and he proceeded so far as to talk of giving them a hint to be gone.”

The character of Mr. Bingley, much like Jane Bennet, is rather sketched out by Austen than properly drawn and crafted – like Mr. Darcy. Austen associates Mr. Bingley with wealth and a close relationship with her hero Mr. Darcy. However, there can be identified several differences amongst the two. For example: Mr. Bingley is seen listening and being persuaded by others rather than to listen to his own mind and heart. When his sister Caroline suggests that they leave the estate in Meryton and return, he agrees without considering the growing

relationship between him and Jane. Likewise, when Mr. Darcy enumerates to him the social problems and the rift seething between Jane and him, he quickly decides to end his relationship with Jane without considering how he actually feels about her.

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