

How does Austen  
convince the reader  
that Lizzy is right to  
reject Mr. Collins' pro...



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From the first sentence of the passage, Austen demonstrates that Mr Collins is not a suitable husband for Lizzy when she says " Mr Collins was not a sensible man. " In Chapter 15, Austen describes the character of Mr Collins in more detail reinforcing the statement made in the opening sentence. Mr Collins is then described as being stupid and his natural stupidity has not been helped by 'education or society. ' Although Mr Collins had been to university, he had 'only kept the necessary terms. ' so he had not improved himself as a result of attending.

Mr Collins was brought up as by a stingy father who gave him no guidance and gave Mr Collins a 'great humility of manner' meaning he was reluctant to involve himself in society. When Mr Collins is recommended to the living of Hunsford by 'fortunate chance' he is forced into society and his 'early and unexpected prosperity' has gone to his head. He venerates his patron Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Austen's use of the word 'veneration' suggests the religious awe with which Mr Collins regards Lady Catherine. It is ironical that a clergyman who prides himself on setting an example to his parish practically worships his patroness.

Austen describes him as 'a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance, and humility. ' Mr Collins intends to marry one of the Bennet daughters, but Austen's description of Mr Collins convinces the reader that his behaviour makes him unsuitable for anyone. Before arriving at Longbourn, Mr Collins had decided he would marry the eldest of the five daughters, Jane. However, Mrs. Bennet tells him that Jane is likely to be engaged so Mr Collins decides to marry Elizabeth instead. This decision to

change his affections was made 'while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire,' which highlights the absurdity in the switch in his affections.

Chapter 19 shows Mr Collins at his most well intentioned, but also at his most stupid. Lizzy feels awkward when Mr Collins asks to speak with her, and she is 'torn between distress and diversion,' meaning that she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Mr Collins however, sees this awkwardness as a mark of a good upbringing and shows his insensitivity by failing to see Lizzy's unhappiness at the interview. Mr Collins then claims he will be 'run away with by (his) feelings' which brings Lizzy to the verge of laughter at the very notion. Mr Collins' "solemn composure" would ever lead him to be romantic.

Mr Collins gives three reasons for marrying, but none of them consider Lizzy's feelings, they only satisfy him. The first reason is to set an example to his parish; the second is to ensure his happiness, without considering Lizzy's, and the final reason is his patron, Lady Catherine de Bough told him to marry. Mr Collins shows his absurd veneration of Lady Catherine by recalling the whole conversation when she told him to choose a suitable wife. So part of the reason Mr Collins is marrying is to satisfy his patron, who, according to Mr Collins, will think Lizzy a suitable wife.

Mr Collins assures Lizzy that were she to marry him, she would be able to meet Lady Catherine, something he sees as a real privilege. Mr Collins explains to Lizzy how Lady Catherine will enjoy her 'wit and vivacity,' yet also says how Lady Catherine's high social rank demands silence, so it is a mystery how Elizabeth will be able to demonstrate 'wit and vivacity' when she is required to remain silent! It is evident from Mr Collins's attitude that

he views Lady Catherine as being more important than his intended wife, but he further compounds his errors by telling Lizzy there are many 'amiable young women' in his neighbourhood.

He also believes the marriage is right as a reconciliation because Mr Bennet's estate is entailed away from the family line to Mr Collins. So far, the reader has not seen a motive of love at any point in this proposal, Mr Collins has talked of pleasing himself and his patron. However, from chapter 15, the reader can see that there is no depth to Mr Collins's affections; he had simply resolved to choose a wife, almost for the sake of having one. Mr Collins, however, assures Lizzy of the 'violence' of his affection. He also claims that at as soon as he entered the Longbourn house he had 'singled out' Lizzy as the companion of his future life.

The reader knows this to be untrue as Mr Collins only chose Lizzy when he was told Jane was likely to be engaged. Austen convinces the reader here that Lizzy should reject Mr Collins because it is evident that there would be no element of love in the marriage, and Mr Collins is portrayed as being selfish and dishonest during this conversation. Austen shows the reader that Mr Collins has a complete lack of self-knowledge. Mr Collins claims to be 'perfectly indifferent' to Lizzy's fortune as she is not entitled to a large inheritance, yet he knows the precise details of her inheritance and speaks at length on the subject.

It is evident although Mr Collins professes to have no interest in her fortune, that he is interested enough to research the exact nature of Lizzy's inheritance. Mr Collins's blundering would make Lizzy even less likely to

marry him than she was before the start of the proposal. He tells Lizzy there are plenty of pretty girls in his Parish, and speaks at length about the death of Lizzy's parents, further demonstrating the fact that he had no idea about the correct way to behave in society.

Whilst making his long speech, outlining the benefits of the marriage for himself and venerating Lady Catherine, Mr Collins had not considered that Lizzy might refuse him which shows great arrogance and complete lack of thought. When Lizzy is finally able to reply, she replies politely, thanking Mr Collins for his compliments, and unsurprisingly, refuses Mr Collins's proposal. Yet, Mr Collins further shows his complete ignorance of society by refusing to accept Lizzy's refusal! Mr Collins, claiming to have great knowledge of society, believes that 'it is usual for young ladies to reject the man they secretly mean to accept. He does not understand society and the idea that young ladies would refuse to marry a man they loved is ludicrous. Lizzy tries to convince Mr Collins to accept her refusal by referring to Lady Catherine, claiming 'she would find me in every respect ill-qualified for the situation. ' Mr Collins however, thinks exactly the opposite believing Lizzy's 'modesty and economy' make her a suitable wife. These were two of the qualities Lady Catherine instructed Mr Collins to look for in a wife. Mr Collins continues to persist and he outlines the reasons why he is convinced Lizzy secretly loves him.

These include 'my situation in life, my connections with the family of de Bough'. He further insults Lizzy saying she might not get another chance of marriage largely because her 'portion is so small' meaning her lack of wealth will ruin her chance of marriage and he is probably the only man who will

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accept her. He still refuses to accept Lizzy's refusal, and Lizzy leaves the room to appeal to her father 'whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as must be decisive. ' Austen does not make the reader feel sorry for Mr Collins, but portrays him as a totally unsuitable husband for Lizzy.

The initial description of Mr Collins in chapter 15 tells the reader what Mr Collins is like, and Austen's view of him as 'not a sensible man' is totally accurate. In chapter 19, we see Mr Collins's stupidity during his proposal to Lizzy, and it is obvious Mr Collins does not know how to behave, neither does he have any understanding of people's feelings. It is Austen's description and portrayal of Mr Collins that convinces the reader that Lizzy is right to reject Mr Collins and that she deserves a much better husband.