

Is elizabeth bennet the 'perfect heroine'?

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Jane Austen wrote in a letter that she found Elizabeth Bennet to be 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print'. Is Elizabeth the 'perfect heroine'? Look at her character and its development throughout the novel to account for her appeal.

Elizabeth is the second of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's five daughters. She is her father's "favorite child" because she has 'something more of quickness than her sisters'. Despite this, in her mother's eyes 'she is not a bit better than the others...She is not half so handsome as Jane, nor so good humored as Lydia'.

As the book is written mainly from Elizabeth's point of view, we know little of her physical appearance. Darcy's admiration of her fine eyes is a constant source of teasing for Caroline Bingley.

"I am afraid... that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes".

We are also told that 'she was a reputed beauty' in Hertfordshire and that Colonel Fitzwilliam admires Mrs.

Collins' 'pretty young friend'.

At the start of the book, Lizzy is described as having a 'lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous'. She admits to finding diversion in 'follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies'. Towards the end of the novel, she believes that:

"by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened"

Her refusal to forgive Mr. Darcy after he has snubbed her at the ball shows her to be proud;

“ I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine.”

She is determined;

“”.

. Lizzy always speaks her mind, illustrating her ability to think for herself;

“ I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at you knowing any.”

It is this mixture of frankness, belief in her own opinions and playfulness;

“ Elizabeth’s spirits soon rising to playfulness again” that makes her such a real person and an independent young woman. She also knows how to use sarcasm;

“ Mr. Darcy is uncommonly kind to Mr. Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him.”

Lizzy is very perceptive, having ‘ quickness of observation’. When Darcy and Wickham first meet in Meryton, she notices ‘ the countenance of both as they looked at each other’. This quickness also leads her to see through the attentions of the Bingley sisters;

“ they were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited”

Lizzy's perceptiveness at the start of the book has a great bearing on the end because it sometimes leads her to judge too quickly and jump to conclusions. Her opinion of Wickham was ill founded and derived from this tendency;

" His countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue."

Elizabeth's opinion of Wickham was also influenced by her prejudice against Mr. Darcy. When Wickham fails to attend the ball at Netherfield, Elizabeth immediately attributes this to " his being purposely omitted for Mr. Darcy's pleasure in the Bingley's invitation". On hearing a different reason for his absence, and at a suggestion from Denny;

" It assured her that Darcy was not less answerable than if her first surmise had been just".

It isn't until this ball scene that we see the full extent of Lizzy's prejudice against Darcy. She declares that " Attention, forbearance, patience with Darcy was injury to Wickham". In a conversation with Charlotte Lucas, Lizzy exclaims;

" To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate!"

This quote is very significant as it shows that no matter what Darcy did, Lizzy would be prejudiced against him. Evidently Lizzy's prejudice has overcome her common sense. This is a highly uncommon characteristic for an author to bestow on her heroine, for it shows very clearly that this is a real girl and by no means a model young lady as most heroines are.

While dancing with Darcy at Netherfield, Lizzy ventures to say;

“ It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be sure of judging properly at first”

This later proves to be ironic, as it is she, not Darcy who had jumped to conclusions therefore, proving that she had judged incorrectly at first. Once Elizabeth has an opinion of a person, it takes a lot to change it. She only achieves this after receiving the letter from Darcy. Despite her faults, Lizzy is not afraid to admit them and own that she was wrong;

“ She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.”

As well as being able to admit her mistakes, Lizzy has great honesty of mind. She has great self-belief but doesn't try and delude herself;

“ The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial”.

As well as being honest with her self, she is honest with other people;

“ You know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that”

Throughout most of the book, Lizzy is prejudiced. This is where the 'prejudice' in the title stems from;

“ with a strong prejudice against anything he might say”

And

“ to find a man agreeable, who one is determined to hate”.

It is not until she reads Darcy's letter that Lizzy realises her error. She blames her prejudice on the fact that she was 'offended by the neglect of the other' (meaning Darcy).

It is clear by the end of the book, that she has learnt her lesson and will think before forming opinions about people in the future;

"We have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable".

Elizabeth has a reality about her, which is strong enough to make you believe that this person could have actually lived. She is not perfect and makes the same mistakes that anyone could, but learns from them at the same time. I think it is this and that she is such a model for the feminists of today that makes her such a charmingly different romantic heroine. It is that she is so unlike the majority of romantic heroines that must be held accountable for her appeal.

It is the fact that she isn't a perfect person, she is only the second prettiest in the Bennet family, which makes her so different from many of the stereotypical heroines, who are calm, passive, quiet, peaceful and vulnerable. She has survived time and, although set in the early eighteenth century, she gives you the feeling that as a person, Elizabeth Bennet would be just as at home in the year 2000. She is full of energy, witty, confident and independently minded, making her an ideal for modern femininity.

"we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterably".

"that I had not been so weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had!".

This again illustrates her hypocrisy as she had teased Mr. Darcy at the start

of the book for having 'vanity and pride'; here she admitted that she herself had been vain

This quote also illustrates her devotion to 'a most beloved sister', Jane