

Time and bloom: the  
'winter' of elizabeth's  
life perpetuated by  
title and superfi...



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In elucidating a strong sense of time's passing in 'Persuasion', Austen evokes the seething pain and angst that Elizabeth's approach to 'the years of danger' affords in an era in which marriage and status were ultimately keystones of a successful life, and explores the oversights of the superficial group which Sir Walter and Elizabeth both pertain and aspire to, by showcasing Elizabeth's successive failures to be 'properly solicited by baronet blood' despite her ability to remain 'blooming'. An overarching idea of the novel is that marriage and happiness do not necessarily depend on shallow appearances or any specific, practical merits, but rather an indescribable connection which is anything but rational and considered.

As Sir Walter indulgently pontificates over his and Elizabeth's resistance to becoming a part of the 'wreck of the good looks of everybody else', Elizabeth and her bloom are separated by a metaphorical chasm from the 'coarse' Mary and the 'haggard' Anne whose blunt physical descriptions evoke a sense of disappointment on Sir Walter's behalf, emphasizing the vanity that underpins his character, as his reluctance to associate with even his own daughters who do not mirror his own aesthetic values is showcased. Sir Walter takes pleasure in his and Elizabeth's resilience and enduring ability to lose 'scarcely any charm' while 'every face in the neighbourhood' worsens, creating an extra layer to Sir Walter's pride, as the two are separated from the hoi polloi who are plagued by a decline in good looks. Here it is evident that only Elizabeth meets Sir Walter's exacting physical standards, and he can therefore be excused 'in forgetting her age' as she reflects the unattainable level of aesthetic he demands, despite being older

than his other two daughters, whose 'blooms' had far less longevity than those of Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is depicted as a commandeering and empowered character, having been mistress of a prestigious country house for 'thirteen years', with the specificity of this timeframe exactly mirroring the tight and astute way in which she had 'presid[ed]' and 'direct[ed]' with a 'self-possession' that such a position requires. The sense of movement created around Elizabeth is significant as it affords her many qualities. As she 'lead[s] the way to the chaise and four', her importance and lofty societal status is conveyed as she has the power to lead others. This dynamic and efficient air, and the weight of her word and social power are perpetuated by the idea that she socializes widely, attending 'every ball of credit' and gracing 'all the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms in the country'. Elizabeth is given further credibility by her 'walking immediately after Lady Russell', who is already known to be a woman 'of strict integrity...with a delicate sense of honour'. As Elizabeth rides on the coattails of Lady Russell, she is shown to be someone with great connection to title and status, and who associates with people of a high class, both socially and morally.

Austen implies that Elizabeth is well-versed in these duties through the way she manipulates time, Elizabeth having commanded the house for 'thirteen years'. The specific time frame since Elizabeth's transition from young girl to mistress and potential wife is repeated four times over as many pages, and this helps to educe a sense of bitterness on Elizabeth's behalf, and that she has been dwelling upon this lengthy period during which proposals and engagements were expected, but never came. This is also emphasized by <https://assignbuster.com/time-and-bloom-the-winter-of-elizabeths-life-perpetuated-by-title-and-superficiality/>

the description of the winters as 'revolving' which captures the cyclic nature of time and helps reinforce Elizabeth's inner pain, in that each winter just passes by, leading onto the next one, without promise of any engagement.

Elizabeth is evidently a prime candidate for marriage; beautiful and youthful, commanding, yet appropriately lady-like and social. Accordingly, such is the shock and revolt when the reader considers that in fact, Elizabeth is not married. However, not only has she failed to marry, but she has also been scandalously jilted by William Walter Elliot, whose 'rights had been so generously supported by her father'. Austen's early portrayal of marriage as an organized, rational 'right', which later is revealed to be highly sarcastic in contrast to the ardor of Anne and Wentworth's relationship, in combination with the status-centric and almost predatory images such as Elizabeth's desire for 'baronet-blood', dehumanize the act of marriage. Here Austen may be implying that despite Elizabeth's superficial advantages, her perception and lust for marriage and status is what prevents any chance of a harmonious relationship, and her angst and stress over this issue is taking precedence over its natural course. Her desire for her entry into the consecrated and revered 'book of books' to be extended, and tendency of her father to leave it 'open on the table near her' accentuates the magnitude stress and pressure felt by Elizabeth.

Austen suggests to the reader that Elizabeth and her father's obsessive craving for further marriage, title and association is in fact detrimental to the success of her endeavors. Elizabeth's failures lie not in herself, with her seemingly perpetual bloom and adept social skills, but rather the

environment in which she has been conditioned by her father, and living in <https://assignbuster.com/time-and-bloom-the-winter-of-elizabeths-life-perpetuated-by-title-and-superficiality/>

the shadow of the imposing 'book of books', and its pressurizing expectations of future status and wealth.