

To my mind, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen's fast talking heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a real daughter of Rosalind, even though, in 1813, she doesn't cross-dress. Instead she tramps the fields six inches deep in mud like Ganymede, 'at a quick pace, jumping over stiles, and springing over puddles,' without any ladylike regard for petticoats. She's on a mission to visit her beloved sister Jane, a cousin Celia figure, who is marooned with 'flu at Mr Bingley's Netherfield. Here Elizabeth encounters Mr Darcy. Far from falling in love with each other at first sight they enjoy a mutual antipathy, the other side of the coin of mutual attraction. 'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*,' says Darcy. Elizabeth told the story 'with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous.' These are the exact qualities that Anna Jameson, one of the first female Shakespearean critics, noticed in Rosalind in 1832. 'The wit of Rosalind bubbles up and sparkles like the living fountain, refreshing all around. Her volubility is like the bird's song.'¹⁰ Elizabeth Bennet exhibits the same delight in witty observation as Rosalind. 'Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can.'

Elizabeth also shares Rosalind's capacity to teach, and to learn from the man who will become her life's partner. 'I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good.' Although apparently powerless as the second daughter of five in an only moderately comfortable family, Elizabeth is assertive in her dealings with Mr Darcy, with priggish clergyman Mr Collins, and with high and mighty Lady Catherine de Burgh. She believes she has the right to address men and women as her social equals even if they don't think they are hers. Rosalind, too, exercises social fluidity in the Forest of Arden, at ease with every class of person from dukes to goatherds. Elizabeth achieves emotional maturity like Rosalind, and combines reason with passion in her choice of a good man's love and final acceptance of Mr Darcy.¹¹ Jane Austen lets us know that Elizabeth will go on talking in her lively and 'sportive' manner with Mr Darcy long after their wedding. 'I am the happiest creature in the world,' she wrote to her aunt Gardiner, 'I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh.' Her wit is not going to be dampened by marriage and nor is Rosalind's.