

Saadaoui, Nada ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5496-4187> (2025) Who was Jane Austen's best heroine? These experts think they know. The Conversation UK .

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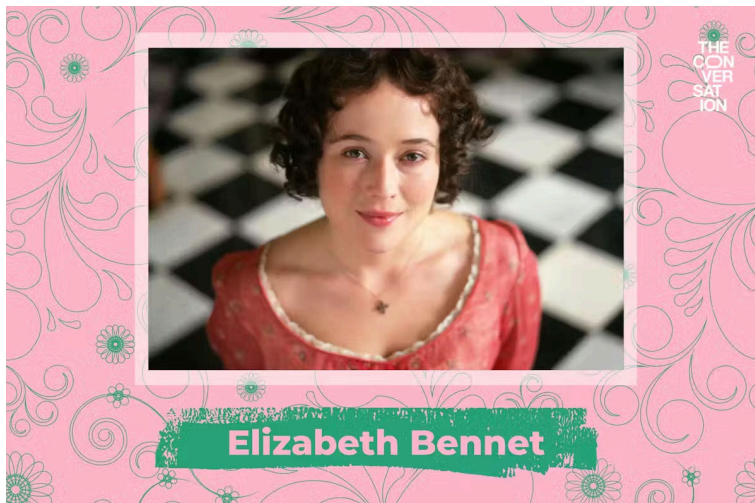
Felicity Jones in *Northanger Abbey* (2007). Album / Alamy Stock Photo

In the end, Catherine still bags herself Henry Tilney (one of the youngest Austenian heroes) and in Eleanor she gains a sister-in-law who keeps Henry's verbal pedantry in check. Catherine shows that you don't need riches, brilliance or carefully-catalogued talents to claim happiness: the best way forward is to be "nice" and wish for your life to be a never-ending gothic novel.

Elizabeth Bennet, *Pride and Prejudice*

Championed by Nada Saadoui, PhD candidate in English literature, University of Cumbria

Elizabeth Bennet's wit is legendary, but her true power lies in her refusal to conform. She declines her cousin Mr Collins not with coyness but as a "rational creature", asserting her right to choose. She speaks her mind, laughs at pretension, learns from error, and demands love founded on equality. She's an "obstinate, headstrong girl" who best embodies Austen's radical heart.



Jennifer Ehle in *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). Album / Alamy Stock Photo / Canva

Elizabeth does not drift into gothic fantasy like Catherine Morland, nor does she suffer the destructive excesses of sensibility like Marianne Dashwood. Instead, she strides through Austen's landscapes with perceptiveness, humour and growth. Her rejection of Mr Darcy's first proposal is as revolutionary as her refusal of Collins – she demands respect, not rescue.

Flawed yet gloriously self-aware, Elizabeth moves with purpose, defying social expectations to forge her own path. In her, Austen crafted not just a spirited protagonist but a timeless symbol of thoughtful rebellion. Two centuries on, Lizzy remains unapologetically sharp, delightfully human and utterly unforgettable.