



Beauty and Attention

Liz Rosenberg

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The riveting story of one brave young woman's struggle to free herself from a web of deceit.

For misfit Libby Archer, social expectations for young women in Rochester, New York, in the mid-1950s don't work. Her father has died, leaving her without parents, and her well-meaning friends are pressuring her to do what any sensible single girl *must* do: marry a passionate, persistent hometown suitor with a promising future. Yet Libby boldly defies conventional wisdom and plans to delay marriage—to anyone—by departing for her uncle's Belfast estate. In Ireland, Libby seeks not only the comfort of family but also greater opportunities than seem possible during the stifling McCarthy era at home.

Across the Atlantic, Libby finds common ground with her brilliant, invalid cousin, Lazarus, then puts her trust in a sophisticated older woman who seems to be everything she hopes to become. Fraught with betrayal and long-kept secrets, as well as sudden wealth and unexpected love, Libby's journey toward independence takes turns she never could have predicted—and calls on courage and strength she never knew she had.

Beauty and Attention Details

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From Reader Review **Beauty and Attention** for online ebook

Adrienne says

Thank you GoodReads for giving me this enjoyable book.

It gets 4 stars because it was a well written, engaging read. The characters were varied, interesting and well drawn and I either loved, disliked, got, or didn't get, each one of them, which, for me, is key in a good novel. The negative, for me, was the period, 1950's, was painted as too Victorian which it was definitely not, at least, not in the USA.

Elaine says

I won a free Kindle copy from a Goodreads Giveaway.

A note from the author at the end of the book says she based the story on Henry James' classic **Portrait of a Lady** which I never read. That's probably a bad thing since I may have understood **Beauty and Attention** better.

Libby Archer is an orphan after the death of her alcoholic father. She seems comfort and a change of a pace in Ireland at the home of distant relatives after turning down the love of a good man because she doesn't feel like she would ever marry. This, apparently, makes her a social misfit. After another catch of a man proposes to her, she, instead, marries a cold and distant widower with a child, Gilbert Osmond.

Also, is it just me or are all her suitors sexist, pompous and brash? I'm just saying.

Unfortunately, the readers are not given enough information as to why Libby decides to marry this douche. At least she admits to herself (and to us, the reader) that it was her mistake and her choice to make. There is a serious lack of characterization and exposition so potential interesting characters like Lord Warburton and the conniving Madame Merle are cardboard cutouts of the dashing English gentleman and the snotty two-faced bitch.

There's a *Lifetime* twist in the end that you should see coming but I didn't, but in my defense, I wasn't paying attention because I was trying to finish the book as fast as I could.

P.S. The way cousin Lazarus kept calling his father 'Daddy' just creeped me out.

Deb says

Probably 3.50 to 3.75 stars for me total--rounded up to 4 stars. I wanted more depth in the characters but I very much enjoyed the story and descriptions.

This is the second book by Liz Rosenberg that I have read and reviewed. The first was her 2014 *The Moonlight Palace*. Like *The Moonlight Palace*, *Beauty and Attention* is a short and quick historical novel, with a young female main character looking to find her place in the world. In *Beauty and Attention*, we meet

Libby Archer, in her early twenties and a bit adrift since her alcoholic father has died--he never quite recovered from the death of her mother. Libby isn't sure what she wants to do--she just knows she isn't ready for marriage and settling down as most of her peers are doing in the the mid-1950s. Faced with a marriage proposal from inventor and entrepreneur Cap Lockwood, she instead travels to the Belfast estate of her uncle in Ireland, forming a fast friendship with her sickly cousin Lazarus and attracting the attention of an English Lord. As the synopsis says, there is a betrayal (I don't want to go into any detail and spoil the story), and Libby seeks to find herself and her happiness.

Libby is a likable, if perhaps too mild of character--especially in the beginning of the book. Her logic and reasoning are hard to follow at times and I found myself struggling to get to know her. I far preferred her spunkier and more dimensional best friend Henry (Henrietta) who seemed to know her own mind much more than Libby. I think with the short length of the book, it was tough to form as strong of attachment to the characters as I would have liked. I would have enjoyed a deeper dig into Libby, Henry, Lazarus and Cap Lockwood, as well as some of the other characters that we meet later on. It was hard to determine the motives for behaviors and understand why Libby and others made the decisions they did. For example, there is a big plot point in the book that suddenly just happened and I wanted the back story of how we ended up there.

The author notes in the afterward that the book is her homage to the Henry James classic, *Portrait of a Lady*, brought forward from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Since I must confess to not ever reading *Portrait of a Lady* (although I just might now...), I can't judge how well she accomplished that goal. The settings--particularly Ireland and Rome, and Rosenberg's descriptive writing were beautiful and drew me into the story, I just wanted to stay there longer. I did like some of the twists--although I saw one of the main ones coming, and I liked seeing Libby's eventual growth and the ways things resolved, so ultimately I did enjoy the book and will definitely read more from Rosenberg. If you like a shorter book and enjoy historical fiction set in 1950s Europe, and/or have a fondness for Henry James and *Portrait of a Lady*, *Beauty and Attention* is an easy read and a pleasant diversion, just maybe a bit too quick to the finish.

You can see my review and a recipe for Sundried Tomato Spread inspired by my reading on my blog post: <http://kahakaikitchen.blogspot.com/20...>

Note: A review copy of "Beauty and Attention" was provided to me by the publisher and TLC Book Tours. I was not compensated for this review and as always my thoughts and opinions are my own.

Ellen says

Libby starts out as an innocent young woman, brought up by her father in Rochester, NY in the 1950's. Anxious to experience the world, Libby leaves home after her father's death to visit relatives in Ireland. An ill-fated meeting with a woman she sees as refined and worldly leads to some tragic choices. Well written with some twists.

Grace Troxel says

This review originally appeared on my blog, Books Without Any Pictures: <http://bookswithoutanypictures.com/20...>

Beauty and Attention by Liz Rosenberg is the story of a 1950s New York socialite who feels stifled by the options available to a respectable young lady in society. When Libby Archer is orphaned, she decides to leave New York to visit relatives abroad, even though she has a suitor at home. Libby wants freedom and adventure, and Ireland seems like a dream come true. Disclaimer: Beauty and Attention is loosely based on A Portrait of a Lady, which is one piece of classic literature which I have not read. This likely colors my opinion of the story, and should be taken into account as you read this review.

At its essence, Beauty and Attention is about two things: love, and choices. As Libby travels, she encounters several young men, and yet she keeps rejecting them because she's a free spirit who doesn't want to be tied down. And when Libby eventually succumbs to the social pressure to make a choice, she feels trapped by her decision, and finds herself cast in the very role she's been trying to avoid. Reading this novel made me realize yet again how lucky I am to be alive today, in a time when women have far greater options in life, and whom (and even whether) we marry is not the choice that defines our destinies.

I have so many feelings about this book. I loved the way the author described life abroad. It made me want to jump through the pages and into Europe. It's when we progressed past the early part of the story and Libby started interacting with her suitors that things got a bit complicated. I admired Libby's independent spirit, but pretty much her entire existence and storyline is defined by the men around her. I wanted to see more character depth, and to see Libby involved in adventures that didn't involve her suitors. I'm not sure whether this novel would even pass the Bechdel test. That said, I was also empathetic towards her as she finds herself propelled by social forces beyond her control. And by the end of the story, Libby once again takes charge of her own fate.

I found myself drawn to the minor characters far more than to Libby herself. I'm always happy to see LGBT characters mentioned in historical fiction, because way too often we fall into the trap of thinking that folks having non-heterosexual orientations is something new (spoiler: it's not).

All in all, I think I'd have appreciated Beauty and Attention a lot more if I'd have read Portrait of a Lady first. Even so, it was lovely glimpse into expat life in the 50s, and I'm happy to have read it. Many thanks again to TLC Book Tours for introducing me to so many great books outside my comfort zone!

Cristina says

Great read up to about 60% - I felt like the rest of the book wasn't even written by the same person. Libby's portrayal is weak. The only character I liked was Lazarus. I'll probably not read anything else written by the same author.

MetLineReader says

A little bit of a mixed bag for me but on balance it's a great retelling of a classic story. Some truly fabulous scenes, with some wonderful characters I would have liked more characterisation and development of the story line - think this only really scratched the surface and so much was left unsaid about Libby's choices.

3.75-4*, makes you think about choices, family ties and societal expectations.

J. Roslyn says

It is 1954 in Rochester, New York, a city known for its cold winters, where summer sometimes comes early "and sometimes not at all." Libby Archer's father has just died and left her with a large Victorian-style house, no college education and a fierce desire to see the world and experience life. Pressured by her neighbors and friends to marry as soon as possible, the complex Libby yearns for more. In what she hopes is an escape to independence she flies to family in Ireland aboard an early transatlantic airplane.

Liz Rosenberg captures the suffocating, parochial environment of Rochester in the 1950s, as well as Libby's disappointment at the stifling mores found in Ireland and Europe. Mores such as marriage, which "she drew away as instinctively as a bird that finds itself in a vast cage. The bars were there, no matter how much she might try to ignore them."

Rosenberg writes in an afterword that "this novel is an homage to one of my favorite books: Henry James's classic *Portrait of a Lady*, brought from the nineteenth century forward, with various changes, into the mid-twentieth." Is it ironic or sad that, seventy-five years after Henry James's Isabelle Archer fled upstate New York for the gossamer cages of Europe, Libby Archer also found herself entangled in that same web? Moreover, in 2016, sixty-years after Libby's flight, can we honestly assert that a version of this cage doesn't still exist? *Beauty and Attention* is literature worth reading. Five stars.

Keith Williams says

Let me first say, I am a long time fan of Liz Rosenberg's writing; poetry, biography, novels, all leave me satisfied that my time was well spent in her worlds full of beautiful description and smart dialogue. "*Beauty and Attention*" is no exception.

As another reviewer pointed out this book is loosely based on plot points from "*Portrait of a Lady*" by Henry James. Moved into the 1950's U.S., Northern Ireland (where Rosenberg did a Fulbright), and Rome the settings are ripe for the contrasting settings that support the changes in the heart of our heroine, Libby Archer. The book opens to the grey oppression of Rochester, NY (my home town) where Libby has forgone college to nurse her alcoholic father who has recently died when the story begins. She looks to get away and travels to the country outside of Belfast to visit with relatives of her mother the have moved there many years before. In this land of endless green, overgrown rhododendrons, and most importantly, her witty cousin and his father, she finds a home. Surrounded by love that she seems to feel she scarcely deserves, she finds solace among these kind people, if not the answers to her questions.

On a trip to Rome Libby is dazzled by a man with wealth and taste, marries him, only to realize that there is neither love nor passion for the world inside this cold collector of things. This transpires quickly in the book and I even backtracked to make sure I'd not missed something. But upon rereading I realized that Rosenberg had captured the surreal quality of "how did I get here" we experience after making a catastrophically bad life decision. We look around and can't believe we've been so foolish. We spend the last section of the novel rooting for Libby to escape this poor choice in the same way we all hope to escape our own poor choices.

I look forward to each of Rosenberg's novels. I don't miss any of them. Don't miss this one.

CL says

Libby's story starts out in the 1950's and after the death of her alcoholic father she feels liberated and decides to go to Ireland to visit family to escape the insistent marriage proposal from a man she does not know if she loves. She wants to find out who she really is and through these new relationships and decisions she will make along the way she may just discover that life is never as easy as it seems. Good read. I would like to thank the Publisher and Net Galley for the chance to read this ARC.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

In "Beauty and Attention," Libby is a young woman trying to make a decision that faced so many women during the 1950s. Things were much different then when women were basically expected to get married and have kids. If they did work a job, it was something like a secretary or another job that wasn't anything like what men were able to do. Libby rejects that idea and finds herself across the ocean in Belfast drawn to a world that she is only beginning to understand.

Books like this make me so happy that I have all of the choices that I have as a woman now. I appreciated that Libby was not content to simply do what society expected of her. She has that gumption in the very beginning of the book and it sticks through right until the end. I really liked seeing the world through her eyes where going off the path that everyone else seems to expect for her barely seems to faze her. This is a strong, independent woman that I really enjoyed following throughout the story.

While I appreciated Libby's character and was drawn to her story, the writing of the book lost me a little bit. This is a relatively short book but there is so much telling rather than showing. In trying to introduce detail to the book, the narrative really gets bogged down and made this book feel like a bit of a slog in some parts. Overall, this was an interesting story that could have been edited more.

Elizabeth says

"Beauty and Attention" by Liz Rosenberg is a modernized re-imagining of Henry James' classic novel, "Portrait of a Lady." I felt that Rosenberg did an excellent job bring this story forward into the 1950s, wrote well rounded characters, interesting dialogue, all of which lead to a a satisfying reading experience. I would most certainly recommend this book to friends and fellow historical fiction devotees. 5 stars.

John Hanscom says

A Fatal Flaw

This could have been so good. However it revolves around tragic marriage. The reasons for the marriage are never explained. That whole part is left out. It's crucial.

Carrie Schmidt (Reading is My SuperPower) says

Beauty and Attention is smartly written with interesting characters and a look back at a fascinating time in world history. A loose remake of Henry James' Portrait of a Lady, the story follows Libby Archer through grief and independence and self-discovery.

This novel started out strong for me, the characters well-defined and the plot intriguing. I liked Libby and Henrietta (Henry) and their friendship, and great possibilities awaited Libby's journey to Ireland to visit relatives. (I did not know at the time that Beauty and Attention is an homage to Portrait of a Lady or I might have had different expectations.) However, as the novel continued – and Libby was on her own, away from Henrietta's more vibrant personality – I found I didn't quite see why everyone was so drawn to Libby. Other than her sweetness, she seems flat and weak. While she seemed independent at first, this either isn't developed beyond people saying that she is ... or she never really was in actuality. Perhaps this was intentional on the author's part, but it didn't endear me to Libby.

And really, that's an example of my main issue overall with Beauty and Attention – just when I began to enjoy a character or an aspect of the plot, the character disappeared or the plot shifted abruptly.

Bottom Line: Overall, Beauty and Attention is a fine book. As an adaptation of Portrait of a Lady, it's very good. It just didn't hold my attention. But the beauty of literature is that what doesn't appeal to me may very well be your favorite book. The author's writing voice is engaging, and her ability to create setting is excellent.

Reviewer's Note: Readers should be aware that there is swearing in this book, though it is a minimal amount and not excessive.

(I voluntarily reviewed a complimentary copy of this book.)

See my full review at [Reading Is My SuperPower](#)

Linda Zagon says

I would like to thank NetGalley and Lake Union Publishing for the ARC of "Beauty and Attention" by Liz Rosenberg. The author uses beautiful descriptions and vocabulary in the novel. In my opinion the main character is weak, easily manipulated, and has very poor self esteem. Libby has lost her father, and is not sure what she wants to do with her life. She is not educated, and doesn't want to marry which is what many ladies feel they have to do. She goes and visits family in Ireland to try and find herself. Her family and friends would be a good support system if she allowed it. In trying to find herself, Libby meets with betrayal and deceitful characters.

I feel that the author describes growth and trying to find love.
