

Lady Susan is a short epistolary novel by Jane Austen, possibly written in 1794 but not published until 1871. This epistolary novel, an early complete work that the author never submitted for publication, describes the schemes of the main character—the widowed Lady Susan—as she seeks a new husband for herself and one for her daughter. Although the theme, together with the focus on character study and moral issues, is close to Austen's published work (*Sense and Sensibility* was also originally written in the epistolary form), its outlook is very different, and the heroine has few parallels in 19th-century literature. Lady Susan is a selfish, unscrupulous and scheming woman, highly attractive to men, who tries to trap the best possible husband while maintaining a relationship with a married man. She subverts all the standards of the romantic novel: she has an active role, she is not only beautiful but intelligent and witty, and her suitors are significantly younger than she is (in contrast with *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, which feature marriages by their female protagonists to men who are 16 years older). Although the ending includes a traditional reward for morality, Lady Susan herself is treated more leniently than the adulteress in *Mansfield Park*, who is severely punished. The main character is aged about 35 or 36 years old. Given her courtesy title, she is the daughter of either an Earl, Marquess or Duke. She is a widow of just a few months, who is known to flagrantly manipulate and seduce single and married men alike. As she has been left in a financially precarious state due to the death of her first husband, she uses flirtation and seduction to gain her objectives and maintain a semblance of her former opulent lifestyle. As a widow and a mother, her main goals are to quickly marry off her daughter Frederica (of whom she is contemptuous, regarding her as stupid and stubborn) to a wealthy man, and to marry an even better match herself. Mrs. Vernon describes her as ...really excessively pretty. I have seldom seen so lovely a woman as Lady Susan. She is delicately fair, with fine grey eyes and dark eyelashes; and from her appearance one would not suppose her more than five and twenty, though she must in fact be ten years older. I was certainly not disposed to admire her...but I cannot help feeling that she possesses an uncommon union of symmetry, brilliancy and grace. Lady Susan is cold towards her daughter, for whom she feels little or no affection: she calls her a stupid girl who has nothing to recommend her. It is possible that Jane Austen drew on the character of the mother of her neighbour, a beautiful Mrs. Craven, who had actually treated her daughters quite cruelly, locking them up, beating and starving them, till they ran away from home or married beneath their class to escape.

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