

**Lady Susan as a Hypocritical Heroine in Jane Austen's
*Lady Susan***

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ABSTRACT

Lady Susan is one of Jane Austen's epistolary novels. It was written in 1795, but unpublished until 1871. It is composed of forty one letters and a conclusion. The novel centers around Lady Susan, a widowed woman who is seeking a husband for herself and another one for her daughter. She used to engage in the affairs of others.

The paper will explain how Lady Susan uses hypocrisy as the only way to find a husband for herself and another one for her daughter.

The paper will also shed light on all married and unmarried characters who have been the victims of Lady Susan's hypocrisy; she has succeeded in seducing them like Reginald De Courcy and Mr. Mainwaring. Instead of making a suitable match between her daughter and the rich Mr. James Martin, Lady Susan marries Mr. James Martin because of her daughter's refusal to marry him.

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Lady Susan is an epistolary novel about a widowed woman called Lady Susan. She is 35 years old. Four months after her husband's death, Lady Susan starts to look for a new husband for herself and her only daughter Frederica. Frederica is named after her late father's name Frederic.

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Lady Susan is a selfish and attractive woman. She is always seen trying to seduce men especially the married ones in order to choose the best husband for herself and her daughter. She is very active, beautiful, and quick witted. Many men wanted to make her their matches; all of them were younger than her.¹

After her husband's death, Lady Susan left her home in Langford to live in Churchhill at Charles's, her brother-in-law, home. At Churchhill, Lady Susan has a sister-in-law called Catherine Vernon. Reginald de Courcy, Catherine Vernon's brother, came to Churchhill to meet Lady Susan because he was allured by her. She seduced him in order to get his inheritance. Then she turned her attention from Reginald to the married Mr. Mainwaring of Langford. She wrote to Reginald from London that it would be unwise for them to marry quickly. She believed that Mr. Mainwaring, the married man, is more suitable for her to marry than Reginald. She succeeded in twisting him around her fingers. He left his wife in Langford and went to London to continue his affair with Lady Susan. Within the same time, Lady Susan tried to turn Sir James Martin to marry her daughter.

At the end, Frederica refused to marry Sir Martin. Mr. and Mrs. Vernon decided to rescue Frederica from her mother after her refusal of marrying Sir James Martin. After three weeks, Lady Susan decided to marry Sir James Martin for his money. A year later, it was implied that Frederica would develop a love interest and marry Reginald de Courcy.²

During the 1790s a lot of epistolary novels were available before Jane Austen, especially Charlotte Smith's epistolary novel *Desmond*. It was one of Austen's sources in writing *Lady Susan*. It gave Austen a good appreciation of epistolary novels and encouraged her to think about writing *Lady Susan*. *Desmond* was written in the form of letters. It was made up of many letters dating from 9th of June 1790 to 6th of February in 1792. It gave us an account about the politics of the French Revolution in both England and France. *Desmond* was a response to Edmund Burke's

Reflections on Revolution in France. It was published on the first of November, 1790. Austen was influenced by her cousin Elizade Feuillide. Elizade decided to remarry after her husband was sentenced to death. Austen referred to her indirectly through *Lady Susan*.³ *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos was another source that Jane Austen used as she was writing *Lady Susan*. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Mr. Craven made her daughter her servant. She oppressed her a lot. As a result of that, the daughter escaped to marry one who is under her class and has little money.⁴

Austen probably wrote *Lady Susan* around 1795 when she was twenty years old. She wrote a fair copy of the novel on the paper watermarked 1805. The dating of the text is still moot, but David Nokes, the writer of *Jane Austen: A Life* (1997), is so sure of the date of *Lady Susan*. He believes that *Lady Susan* was the first work written at Austen's writing desk, a gift from her father to her on her twentieth birthday.

Lady Susan has forty one letters and a conclusion. The forty one letters can be divided into two parts. The first part has seventeen letters which are between Lady Susan and her best friend Alicia Johnson. They are full of Lady Susan's plots, outrageous past affair with another friend's husband, her plans against her sister and brother-in-law and how to fix her sixteen year-old daughter to an expensive school while she tries to skip out on education. The second part has twenty four letters which are between Catherine de Courcy and her mother Lady de Courcy. Within the second part of the letters, Catherine informs her mother that day by day Reginald is going to be under Lady Susan's charm.⁵

Lady Susan was the last epistolary mid-length novel of Austen's epistolary novels. It was written in 1795 but unpublished till 1871. It was untitled when Jane Austen died on 18 July 1817. Cassandra, Jane Austen's sister, gave the manuscript to Austen's favourite niece, Fanny Knight (Lady Knatchball). In 1871, she allowed James Edward Austen Leigh to publish a transcription as an

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appendix to the second edition of his *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, in which it was entitled *Lady Susan*.

Through letters, Austen had a good scope to dramatize the events and people into scripts just to curb the society around her. She was forced to be rude in order to enhance her curb. She was seen as an impatient narrator who had nothing to do except insulting the characters before neglecting them from the stage.⁶

Lady Susan is seen in a continuous conflict with Catherine Vernon because Lady Susan tried for six years to prevent her brother-in-law, Charles, from marrying Catherine. Now, Catherine tries to keep her twenty-three-year-old young brother, Reginald, from Lady Susan's shot and rescue Frederica from her dominance. In addition to that, Catherine does not want to lose her control over her family's fortune.⁷

Lady Susan is a heartless, brutal, scheming and wicked heroine. After her husband's death, she did not want to be a frail widow. She used hypocrisy in order not to be exploited by the others especially the females of the family who "are united to be against" (Letter2, p.4) her. Her letters display her refusal to consider others except herself. She looks a selfish widow and directs all of her powers to achieve her aims through hypocrisy.

She derives her hypocrisy from her beauty and her language, "she is clever and agreeable, has all that knowledge of the world which makes conversation easy and talks very well, with a happy command of language which is too often used to make black appear white" (Letter6, p.11). She always praises her skills in dialogue. She writes to Mrs. Johnson to tell her "If I am vain of anything, it is of my eloquence" (Letter16, p.26). Although Lady Susan is ten years older than the young Reginald; she reveals her ability to seduce him "I may venture to say at least half in love with me"⁸ (Letter10, p. 18)

Catherine seems to be the only character who is staring so doggedly to see the truth and has known the true nature of Lady Susan. She has also enough abilities to evaluate Lady Susan's

genuineness. When Frederica runs away from her private school in London, her mother tries to play the role of a mother and to represent a plaintive scene, but Mrs. Vernon sees something completely different because Lady Susan told a great deal about that to Mrs. Vernon and " she talks vastly well, I am afraid of being ungenerous or I should say she stalks TOO well to feel so very deeply" (Letter15, p.26).

Lady Susan and Catherine have been seen in an antagonistic relationship. Lady Susan is seen as a pretender while Catherine Vernon is seen as an investigator. She reveals her impatience and Lady Susan's hypocrisy within her letters to her mother. Mrs. Vernon starts all of her letters with words like "believe, sure, declare,..etc" to reflect her early prophecy of Lady Susan's hypocrisy.

Lady Susan used a mask to deceive the people around her. Her mask was too perfect for all characters except Mrs. Vernon to whom it was too imperfect to reflect her unadorned face. She felt fear of Lady Susan's abilities to seduce her husband and cause unexpected results because her husband lacked concomitant ability to be incompetent⁹:

*But I will not look for faults. She may be Reginald's wife. Heaven forbid it!- but why should I be quicker sighted than anybody else? Mr. Vernon declares that he never saw deeper distress than hers.*¹⁰ (Letter15, p. 26)

Lady Susan always feels triumphant; she directs her talent at fabrication and hypocrisy to avoid plight. She has been senior at taking the benefits from human being's inclination. For her, hypocrisy is the state of pleasure and not the substitute. She enjoys deceiving the lovers especially Reginald de Courcy. She has a systematic panorama of hypocrisy. She has used her "eloquence"

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and "command of language" (Letter16, p. 28) in order to achieve self mimesis more than self- expression.

Reginald de Courcy wanted to make pseudo love relationship with Lady Susan, but Lady Susan's passion to Reginald was not love at all. She was motivated to attract the attention of the wealthier. At the beginning, Reginald refused to believe in Lady Susan's rumoured hypocritical nature till he was informed about that by someone out of Lady Susan's globe. As a hypocritical heroine, Lady Susan's prophecies which were filled with ill intentions are coming true. Once and for all, Reginald decided to consider the motives of the people around him, especially Mrs. Vernon's motivation which was to cut himself off from Lady Susan. When Lady Susan knew Reginald's ultimate decision, she decided to revenge. She denounced Reginald's indecisiveness and immaturity.¹¹ In her last letter to Reginald, Lady Susan wrote:

I am so satisfied... will trouble you no more when these few lines are dismissed, the engagement, which you were eager to form a fortnight ago is no longer compatible with your views. I rejoice to find that the prudent advice of your parents has not been given in vain. (Letter37, p. 65)

Jane Austen, in *Lady Susan*, elucidates the psychology of an intelligent hypocritical heroine within a malicious personality. Catherine Vernon, Lady Susan's fierce enemy, sees Lady Susan as a "dangerous creature [Lady Susan]...possesses an uncommon union of symmetry, brilliancy and grace" (Letter 6, p. 11). Lady Susan usually manipulates her daughter, relatives and lovers without any sense of duty and respect to them. She wants to be a constant heroine she feels that her conscience is her only enemy.¹²

Chronologically, Jane Austen did not date the forty -one letters of *Lady Susan*. She achieved a coherence between a lot of movements within specific days. The work was based on external events and the internal psychology of the characters. Dramatically, Tuesday is an important dramatic day in *Lady Susan*. On Tuesday, Sir James Martin arrived to tell Vernons and Reginald the main reason behind Frederica's escape from school because Lady Susan wanted to make a suitable match between him and her daughter. Sir James Martin went again to Vernon's home on another Tuesday "to remain a few days" (Letter 23, p. 39). Reginald came to London on Tuesday also. The climax of the novel also happened on Tuesday when the relationship between Lady Susan and Reginald broke down. So, Reginald wrote to Lady Susan " I write only to bid you farewell, the spell is removed; I see you as you are, since we were parted yesterday" (Letter 34, p. 62). In return, Lady Susan replied "I will not attempt to describe my astonishment on reading the note. ... Have I not explained everything to you with respect to myself which could bear a doubtful meaning" (Letter 35, p. 63).

On Tuesday, Mrs. Mainwaring went to Mr. Johnson's home whose husband left her and travelled to London to meet Lady Susan but he could not.¹³ Before *Lady Susan*, Jane Austen wrote *Catherine, or the Bower* which was a complex narrative novel about a young girl's access into the world. Later on, Austen deserted writing novels and she did not complete it. Again she returned to write epistolary novels; she wrote *Amelia Webster*, *The Three Sisters*, *Love and Friendship*, and *Lesley Castle* before writing *Lady Susan*.

Through *Lady Susan*, Austen wanted to substitute the feelings with actions in order to represent a new kind of plot. The plots of her epistolary novels were taken from letters and the actions from emotions. Lady Susan's letters to Alicia revealed her concrete actions and factual feelings, but her letters to the others revealed her imaginary actions and hypocritical feelings. The letters in *Lady*

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Susan narrated Lady Susan's life since the death of her husband till her marriage to Sir James Martin.¹⁴

No one has been in safe of Lady Susan's hypocrisy except her ally Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson used to help Susan in making intrigues against the others. Lady Susan considers the others her servants and they must serve her when she needs them to achieve her purposes. Frederica, Reginald, Mrs. Vernon and the Mainwaring family have been Lady Susan's victims. Frederica Vernon, Lady Susan's teen daughter, is her mother's first victim. Since the beginning, Lady Susan is trying to marry Frederica off to Sir James Martin, but the latter loathes her. Frederica does not receive any sense of motherhood. She may have maturity and kindness under the care of Vernon's family.

Reginald de Courcy was Lady Susan's second victim. He devoted himself and his feelings to Lady Susan and fell in her love. He heard a lot of terrors about Lady Susan, but she attracted him and succeeded in keeping him close to her. At the end, Reginald contradicted his feelings towards Lady Susan and was ashamed himself because of believing Lady Susan's lies and hypocrisy.

Catherine Vernon was Lady Susan's third victim. Lady Susan ordered her to stay at home for an unlimited period of time because of social customs. She respected Catherine in appearance, but spoke ill about her in her letters to Mrs. Johnson. She destroyed the moods of Mrs. Vernon's family. In addition to that, she used to describe Mr. Mainwaring as something meaningless to be lobbed aside. Mrs. Mainwaring tried hard to keep her family and husband's feelings away of Lady Susan's seducing, but she couldn't because Lady Susan succeeded in making Mr. Mainwaring fall in her love and trifle with her. Miss Maria Mainwaring was Lady Susan's last victim. She wanted to marry Sir James Martin but couldn't because Lady Susan married him when her daughter refused that.¹⁵

Lady Susan wanted to be more than a woman. To be a woman, it means to be a coquettish. To achieve hypocrisy, Lady

Susan changes her coquetry according to her power over all. She does not relinquish her hypocrisy which harms others. She is a slick figure. She must never be a model for the females to follow.¹⁶

Lady Susan does not have any love to anyone. As a result of that, there's no love between Lady Susan and her daughter who has rebelled against her decision. There's no love between Frederica and Sir James Martin at all. Love has been unstable between Mainwarings. Lady Susan loves only her power over Reginald and her abilities in twisting Mr. Mainwaring. She married Sir James Martin for his money. Lady Susan used hypocrisy to conceal the weakness that she felt after her husband's death.

CONCLUSION

Lady Susan is a widowed woman. After her husband's death, she wanted to have a social stability. She refuses to be a passive widow. She is a high-handed and a highbrow widow. She believes that hypocrisy is the only way to achieve social stability for a widowed woman. Instead of being a widowed Susan, she wants to stay Lady Susan in order to attract the attention of men. She is a careless widow. She feels no responsibility towards others. She is a guilty lady since she tries to seduce both the married and unmarried men. She listens to no one except Mrs. Johnson. She always wishes to hear happy news about the victims of her hypocrisy. She does not accept to be wrong.

Since the beginning, she admires no one, protects no one even her daughter. She is interested in making all characters her victims. She wants all characters, especially the males, to be either her victims or admirers. She feels that her wit and power are over her competitors. She will remain one of Jane Austen's dangerous heroines. She does not consider hypocrisy a sin. Through her, Austen wanted to enable sincerity to triumph over hypocrisy.

NOTES

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الخلاصة

الانسة سوزان هي من احدى الروايات الرسائية للروائية جين اوستن. كتبت هذه الرواية في ١٧٩٥ ولكنها لم تنشر حتى ١٨٧١. تحتوي هذه الرواية على (٤١) رسالة خاتمة. تدور احداث هذه الرواية حول الانسة سوزان. فالانسة سوزان ارملة تبحث عن زوج لها و لابنتها الوحيدة فريدريكا. توضح الدراسة كيفية استخدام الانسة سوزان النفاق وسيلة وحيدة لتجد زوجا لها و لابنتها.

تلقي الدراسة الضوء على كافة الشخصيات (المتزوجة وغير المتزوجة) والتي اصبحت ضحية لنفاق الانسة سوزان لانها تمكنت من اغراء شخصيات رئيسية مثل ريجنالد دي كورسي والسيد مين ورنك. فبدلا من ان تعقد الانسة سوزان زواجا مناسباً بين ابنتها والسيد جيمس مارتن الشري فانها عقدت الزواج بينها وبين السيد مارتن الشري بعد ان رفضت ابنتها هذا الزواج.