

LADY SUSAN

The Art of the Novella Series

Jane Austen

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Praise for the Art of the Novella Series

“ I wanted them all, even those I'd already read.”

— **Ron Rosenbaum, *The New York Observer***

“ Small wonders.”

— **Time Out London**

“ Some like it short, and if you're one of them, Melville House, an independent publisher based in Brooklyn, has a line of books for you... elegant-looking paperback editions ...a good read in a small package.” — **The Wall Street Journal**

THE ART OF THE NOVELLA

LADY SUSAN
JANE
AUSTEN

NOTE TO THE READER

The Art of The Novella Series

Too short to be a novel, too long to be a short story, the novella is generally unrecognized by academics and publishers. Nonetheless, it is a form beloved and practiced by literature's greatest writers. In the Art of the Novella series, Melville House celebrates this renegade art form and its practitioners with titles that are, in many instances, presented in book form for the first time.

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I am indeed provoked at the artifice of this unprincipled woman.

This high-spirited tale, told through an exchange of letters, is unique in Jane Austen's small body of work. It is the story of Lady Susan, a brilliant, beautiful and morally reprehensible coquette who delights in making men fall in love with her, deceiving their wives into friendship and even tormenting her own daughter, cruelly bending her to her will.

Austen clearly delighted in her wicked heroine—tracing Lady Susan's maneuverings to remarry yet continue on with her lover, and to marry off her young daughter, with great wit, zest and unflinching panache.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the structure of this novella (a series of letters) affect the plot, the experience of reading the novella, and how we see the characters?
2. Whose side of the story do you believe? Were any of the characters unbiased? Why or why not?
3. How do the women in this novella claim agency over their own actions and futures? Give some examples of how each character accesses their free will in this novel.
4. What is the role of perception in this novella? How do other people's perceptions around intent, character, and relationships drive the plot? What does Austen tell us about how we perceive others?



PARNASSUS ON WHEELS

5. There is a complex tension between mothers and daughters in this novella. How do you see this play out? Why is the relationship between mother and daughter so important, and so complicated?
6. What are the power dynamics in this novella? Who holds power? Does this change throughout the course of the novella? How do characters exert their power?
7. What is the effect of having the conclusion told by an omniscient third person narrator? Does the detached narration at the end change your understanding of the novel or your opinions on any of the characters?
8. Gossip is, and always has been, a powerful tool particularly as a form of communication and knowledge sharing for women in a world built on patriarchy. What points do you think Austen is making about the nature of gossip?
9. Lady Susan is a subversive female character, who is shamed for her trickery and coquette-ery by characters in the text and by readers alike. Do you think Austen is shaming this behavior? Why or why not?
10. What did you think of the ending? Do the characters get what they deserve? Why or why not?
11. What do you make of the male characters in this novella? Do they have sway over the women in their lives? How do their characteristics inform the power dynamics within the novella?
12. How would we treat Lady Susan in modern times? Would she be described as a “pick-me” girl? Is she a character that a modern audience respects or condemns?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen was an English author whose novels of manners captured, with an early realism, the social forces of the day. Acknowledged as a master of the form, her novels, including *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, are still widely admired today.

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