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The Wicked Widow: Reading Jane Austen's *Lady Susan* as a Restoration Rake

Amanda Teerlink

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

The Wicked Widow: Reading Jane Austen's *Lady Susan* as a Restoration Rake

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Of all of Austen's works, *Lady Susan* tends to stand alone in style and character development. The titular character of the novella in particular presents a literary conundrum for critics and readers of Austen. Despite varied and colorful readings, critics have failed to fully resolve the differences between Lady Susan and Austen's more beloved, maidenly heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliott.

This paper delves into one explanation that has hitherto been overlooked—Lady Susan's relationship to the Restoration rake character trope. In light of Lady Susan's philandering, independent, and mercenary ways, as well as her likeable yet reprehensible personality, the connection to the Restoration rake is readily apparent. Reading *Lady Susan* as a rake better informs critical understanding of this character and sheds new light on Jane Austen's own perspectives on gender, while also forming a dialectic for critics and audiences for their own perspectives on gender, gender roles, and acceptable behavior.

To accomplish this task, this paper explores Austen's own early experiences with theatre and her predilection for theatrical allusions, the rake character's genealogy and influence on literature, and a close reading of the novella in context of Restoration comedies.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Lady Susan*, rake, Restoration drama, theatre, Romantic literature

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## Introduction

*“Artlessness will never do in love matters” (Austen 29).*

Due to the 2016 film adaptation *Love and Friendship*, Jane Austen’s posthumously published *Lady Susan* has come to the attention of critics and scholars as well as the general public. Of all of Austen’s works, *Lady Susan* presents the most unsettling characters in the least judgmental light. The titular character in particular presents a literary conundrum to many, if not all, readers and critics. As a relatively young, attractive widow fallen on difficult circumstances, Lady Susan’s good looks and social graces allow her to manipulate her family and friends, even as she plots her ultimate triumph over poverty. Moreover, the epistolary form adopted by Austen allows readers to view her character from multiple perspectives, including those of a lover, a sister-in-law, and a close friend. While her ability to charm and coax is laced with rhetorical genius, her moral compass is disrupted by her own ambitions and instincts for survival.

These features of *Lady Susan* have generated a wide range of responses from critics. In the context of Jane Austen’s later, better-known works, such critics as Maggie Lane and Geneviève Brassard view Lady Susan as a merry widow, focusing on her bereaved status and comparing her to other Austen widows like Mrs. Clay from *Persuasion* and Mrs. Thorpe of *Northanger Abbey*. Susan stands out, however, because she is the focus of the narrative, rather than the young maiden heroines of Austen’s other works, like *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and so forth (Lane). Other critics, like James Mulvihill, pursue a materialist and Machiavellian examination of Lady Susan’s character and propensities, focusing on her social maneuverings and her ability to conquer poverty (hardly an easy feat, even for a single male). From a psychological perspective, it has even been argued that Lady Susan is a sociopath, suffering from a personality disorder, as she barely exhibits affection for even her own daughter. As Beatrice Anderson points out, when time Susan does express emotion, it is usually as a means to an end,

and her relationships reflect her egocentrism (193). For a novella with significantly fewer words and pages to work with than Austen's major work, the opportunities for analysis are nonetheless seemingly endless, though almost all critics of Austen's novella focus exclusively on Lady Susan's character. Why would Austen write a character that so obviously defies her own supposedly conservative views of social behavior?

Such a question, however, may be irrelevant if we dismiss *Lady Susan* as a piece of juvenilia, written without serious purpose, and therefore not good enough to publish during Austen's lifetime. For many, *Lady Susan* could likewise be considered a "failed" attempt at epistolary writing (Kaplan 163), a form that ill-suits the imaginative character descriptions and realistic dialog that we see in Austen's mature novels. The epistolary format is certainly limiting for the exposition of plot as well. On the other hand, dismissing *Lady Susan* too quickly might do Austen and her reading community a disservice. We might see the novella as an effort to experiment with character and stronger, more risqué themes than Austen attempted to tackle in her other works (Russell). Still, all of these efforts to diagnose *Lady Susan*, while intriguing and fruitful, fall short of determining where *Lady Susan* belongs in the scope of Austen's literary works, and, more to the point for the purposes of this essay, how it responds to and reformulates earlier literary traditions.

I wish to propose an interpretation of *Lady Susan* that revolves around the stage. Although Lady Susan is difficult to understand as an Austenian character, she makes perfect sense in the framework of the Restoration and post-Restoration theatre. *Lady Susan* was written more than a century after the height of Restoration comedy, most likely in 1794, but the novella was not published until much later, in 1871 (Austen Leigh 201). Despite never publishing the novella, Austen did revise, create a clean copy, and add her third-person conclusion in 1805

(Byrne 94). And yet, the titular character bears a striking resemblance to the Restoration rake, a stock character of comparable moral repugnance and delightful wit that was well known to literate people of Austen's class in the late eighteenth century. While critics have wrestled with *Lady Susan's* placement in the Austen canon, it is possible to trace its roots and inspirations to that earlier time when cuckolding husbands and ravishing maidens were the order of the day. Austen brings a well-worn theatrical type into modernity, flipping the gender with humorous and insightful results.

In pursuing this thesis, reassessing how scholars discuss Austen's reliance on the theatre tradition will be necessary. Oddly enough, two recent books have both been titled *Austen and the Theatre*: Penny Gay's 2006 study and Paula Byrne's 2002 Cambridge monograph. With the research and primary documents on Jane Austen's life then available, Gay assembles all known correlations with Austen's life and the theatre, including her interactions with theatre and plays as a developing young woman. Contrary to the common view (largely based on an oversimplified reading of *Mansfield Park* on the part of earlier critics) that Austen flatly disapproved of drama, Gay argues, "she found theatre – not just the dramatic text, but its embodiment in actors on a stage at a particular time and place – a curiously fascinating and thought-provoking experience" (ix). Gay concludes that Austen's engagement with the theater should shape readers' understanding of all of her canonical works. Meanwhile, Paula Byrne contends that "There is enough evidence in the few surviving letters to suggest that she [Austen] was utterly familiar with contemporary actors and the range and repertoire of the theatres. Her taste was eclectic; she enjoyed farces, musical comedy and pantomime, . . . as much as she enjoyed Shakespeare, Colman and Garrick" (44). Byrne traces theatrical allusions in Austen's

juvenilia to at least 40 plays, although she argues that it is likely that Austen was familiar with many more.

While Gay makes little or no mention of *Lady Susan* in connection with theatre, Byrne explores how this the novella serves as a transition between Austen's playwriting and novel composition. She makes a direct comparison between Samuel Richardson's rake character Lovelace and Lady Susan. However, she does not ascribe to Lady Susan the rake moniker, but instead calls her the "temptress" because she "manipulate[es] men by employing her personal charms" (94). Yet the comparison Byrne makes between Lovelace and Lady Susan is one of the most compelling reasons to read her as a rake. To delve further into the link between Lady Susan and the Restoration rake (as well as the tradition of Restoration theatre generally), the conversation around *Lady Susan* can develop into a stronger examination of the link between theatre and the novel, as well as a conversation about Austen's juvenilia that shifts the focus from reading her juvenilia as lesser or secondary works to understanding the juvenilia on its own merit. For instance, in *Lady Susan* (as in early drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, as we suppose) Austen experimented with the epistolary style, which is not found in any of her later novels despite the inclusion of some correspondence between characters (Kaplan 163). Anne Widmayer, in her monograph about theatre and the novel, notes that the similarity between the epistle and the theatre lies in audience autonomy and consumption: "The reading audience, like the audience at a play, is expected to help shape meaning instead of passively viewing or ingesting a text" (2). There are arguably greater opportunities for interpretation in a novella like *Lady Susan* than in texts like Austen's later works. Here, the most important distinction is that of Lady Susan's characterization in connection with the theatre. Lady Susan is the primary focus of all correspondence—like a stage director, her actions guide the plot and

inspire any given character's judgments and actions. How does theatre affect Austen's characters, their interactions, and the action of the plot?

I would argue that Austen engages with the Restoration theatre tradition in a number of ways—for example, in her sharp wit, in her characterization of Frederica and Sir James Martin, and most importantly, in the striking resemblance between Lady Susan and the figure of the Restoration rake. In doing so, Austen interacted with theatrical narratives and characterization to create a character that defies social expectations for gender in a radical way. Understanding this helps us conceptualize Austen's links to the theatre in the rest of her work. Reading Lady Susan as a masculine character allows literary critics to reconcile her existence with Austen's comparatively staid works of "feminine" heroines and establish a stronger association with the heroines than has been previously explored. By examining Lady Susan as a woman outside the regular framework of societal expectations, we see her relationship to Elizabeth Bennet's quietly rebellious nature and Marianne Dashwood's passionate will to love. The Austen heroines are still assimilable to the feminine ideal, while Lady Susan's rebellion against society is amplified beyond an Austen reader's expectations, as well as society's. In this framework, Lady Susan becomes *almost* palatable, and certainly more entrancing.

### **Austen and the Theatre**

As scholars have learned more about Austen's life, we have been able to glean small details that tell us about her literary and familial upbringing—and her familiarity with the theater. As Gay notes, "there is plenty of evidence that from childhood, Austen was reading plays, dissecting their characteristics, and delightedly reproducing them in her early experiments in writing" (1). Some of that evidence emerges from contextual readings of Austen's works, such as *Mansfield Park* and the play *Lovers' Vows*, which that novel's characters plan to perform.

Austen uses *Lovers' Vows* to great effect in *Mansfield Park* because, as Gay reminds us, “it provides two strong female parts in scenes which suit perfectly the development of plot, character, and theme in this novel” (107). Maria and Mary are able to act out their fantasies, while Fanny remains an almost passive bystander. In a distinctly different analysis, Byrne examines *Lovers' Vows* as an adaptation from the German dramatist August von Kotzebue’s play *Das Kind der Liebe*, with which Austen was very familiar. Austen had seen several of Kotzebue’s other plays adapted for the English stage, like *The Birth-Day* and *The Bee-Hive*, and seemed to be aware of the plays’ implications about fallen women and the society that created them (Byrne 150). The fact that Austen incorporated a play from this playwright and situated it with Edmund’s criticism of all things theatrical indicates a strong knowledge of contemporary theatre.

But *Mansfield Park* takes us rather late in Austen’s career. Byrne and Gay have also gathered earlier data from Austen’s letters and documents that family members wrote. For instance, one letter written to Austen’s sister on 19 June 1799 explicitly states that the Austens were to attend a play later that week (*Letters* 47). Gay also points out that much of Austen’s juvenilia consists of plays—for example, her theatrical adaptation of Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel *Sir Charles Grandison*. While it is known that Austen went to many plays and performed them with her family, it is not possible, with the dearth of journals and correspondence, to know every title that Jane Austen saw or knew. We do not really know much about her father’s library, and we do not have much of her correspondence. However, Byrne documents a fair amount that we do have record of, including Austen’s attendance at a pantomime called *Don Juan: or The Libertine Destroyed*, which was based on Thomas Shadwell’s *The Libertine* (50). Austen referred to the pantomime in one of her letters, comparing

it to another she had seen, saying, “I must say I have seen nobody on the stage who has been a more interesting Character [Don Juan] than that compound of Cruelty & Lust” (*Letters* 221). Despite this incident occurring in 1813, well after the writing and transcription of *Lady Susan*, Austen’s delight in Don Juan’s “cruelty and lust” indicates that she found rakish characters intriguing in some regard.

Although definitively proving that Austen attended specific Restoration plays is problematic, such dramas were still commonly performed during the 1790s, when Austen was writing *Lady Susan* and also attending the theater. Some Restoration plays, such as William Congreve’s works, were performed as written during the late eighteenth century. Meanwhile, some of the era’s more notoriously risqué titles were adapted to more conservative tastes. For instance, William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* was amended for 1790s audiences to condemn rather than endorse the rakish behavior that troubled earlier critics like Jeremy Collier and his adherents (Hume 62). Austen seems to have been familiar with such a revision of *The Country Wife*, as she alluded to the “Country Girl” from that play in one of her letters (June 1799, *Letters* 48), although it is possible that she saw it sooner, as the play was staged at Drury Lane from 1785 to 1800 (Byrne 62). With Austen and her family deriving so much of their entertainment from the theatre, it seems likely that she was at least familiar with the theatrical traditions of the Restoration.

Austen’s Romantic contemporaries in general were familiar with Restoration comedies. People could read them in less expensive reprints, since they were familiar and out of copyright. Essayists like William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb wrote essays and letters on the subject, and, even though it was a couple of decades after *Lady Susan* was written, we can learn the general attitude toward Restoration drama and comedy at this time. Hazlitt’s series of talks on the topic,

collected as *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, and Leigh Hunt's discussions of the plays in his theatrical criticism, included in *Comic Dramatists of the Restoration*, provide additional insight into the conversation surrounding theatre at the time. Jason Curtis Gieger, in an effort to trace the development of the comedy of manners genre, established that Lamb and Hazlitt were among the first to designate Restoration comedies as comedies of manners and that this literary term, in fact, began with them, even if more concrete genre expectations and nuances were hashed out in the mid-twentieth century (77–78). Restoration plays continued to be studied, read, and performed in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, despite their racy content. Even though proving Austen read these plays or saw them performed is difficult, she clearly lived in a time when exposure to these plays and their adaptations was extremely likely.

In tracing the evidence of theatricality in Austen's life, it is also vital to trace the theatricality of comparable works to *Lady Susan*, like *Mansfield Park*. Critics like Deborah Kaplan argue that *Mansfield Park* is actually an expansion and adaptation of *Lady Susan* that allowed Austen to work within a style of prose that is far more advantageous than the epistolary style found in *Lady Susan*. This strategy is more evident in earlier works like *First Impressions*, which was later expanded into *Pride and Prejudice* (Kaplan 174). *Lady Susan* can be discovered in Mary Crawford's character, just as Frederica can be discovered in Fanny's. As the link between theatre and *Mansfield Park* is undeniable and unavoidable, the link between the *Mansfield Park* and *Lady Susan* allows us to perceive an even stronger relationship between *Lady Susan* and theatre. Whether or not the link between *Lady Susan* and *Mansfield Park* is as strong as Kaplan suggests, *Mansfield Park* stands as a poignant example of Austen's love for and involvement with theatre and theatrical writings.

### **The Restoration Rake and His Posterity**

The Restoration rake, an early iteration of the rake figure found in eighteenth-century literature and art, certainly elicits plenty of controversy among contemporary and Restoration audiences alike, much like *Lady Susan* did and does even now. Robert Hume, in his work *The Rakish Stage*, defines the conversation about this type of comedy well: “The prevalence of ‘libertine’ sentiment and antimatrimonial talk in their [Restoration] comedies is a response to genuine social problems and a reflection of an age-old clash between individual inclination and social demands” (175). Restoration rakes are defined by their sexual conquests, ability to dodge creditors and tradesmen, and witty repartee. Characters like Dorimant from George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* (1676) and Horner from *The Country Wife* (1675) exemplify the Restoration rake’s characteristics. As Elaine McGirr argues, “Dorimant’s combination of impeccable style coupled with raw sexuality typifies the rake. His appeal lies in large part in this paradox of ‘wild civility,’ of being simultaneously untamed and polite” (28). Modelled on Charles II’s preferences and proclivities, the rake was a new male standard, representing and exerting authority over women and society. Because he was above the law, a rake was able to elude any tradesmen to whom he owed money (McGirr 29). This abuse of power, much like the ravishing of women, was just another form of exerting power and superiority over others.

Perhaps the most notable and memorable aspects of a rake’s identity are his sexual prowess and seductive charm. A rake derived his reputation amongst his friends from sexual encounters with maidens and married women. His social value was correlated with his sexual abilities, defined or evaluated by the homosocial bonds of the group he inhabits. Thus, he must be constantly on the prowl for a new conquest, and he must be as persistent and clever as possible in doing so. Horner, the rake in Wycherly’s *The Country Wife*, intentionally spreads a rumor that he is castrated to cure his syphilis, creating a new persona for himself as a eunuch in

order to inveigle himself further into female society—the theory being that men with pretty wives will no longer see him as a sexual threat and that women concerned for their reputations could engage in sexual encounters with him without social consequences. With the fear of cuckolding laid to rest by Horner’s supposed castration, he could move freely among the married women in high society, making sexual conquests along the way, which he does.

Wycherly’s famous china scene (Act IV, scene iii) is particularly representative of the innuendo and sexual nature of rake society. Sex is never overtly mentioned, much in the way of Lady Susan’s descriptions of her escapades with Lord Manwaring. When Lady Fidget, a married woman, comes to Horner’s home to engage in a dalliance, her husband Sir Jaspar shows up. Because Lady Fidget’s alibi for her tryst with Horner is that she went to purchase china, a conversation takes place in which crockery terms become euphemisms for sex. Even as Horner engages in sexual relations with Lady Fidget one room away from her husband, her friends arrive. Leaving Horner’s room, Lady Fidget jokes with her friends, “For we women of quality never think we have china enough” (216–17), implying that a woman’s sexual appetite is equivalent or comparable to a man’s. Horner’s ability to escape detection from the very man he cuckolds, Lord Jaspar, is a sign of his social adroitness. Not only does he succeed in his plan, he does so with a flair for the dramatic. This is representative of the way rakes can handle the most awkward and farcical incidents with wit and humor, even with an imminent threat of violence.

Similar to the rhetorical power of Horner, Willmore from Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677) talks a courtesan into free sex through sheer rhetoric and wit, despite the pecuniary demands of her profession. The courtesan falls in love with Willmore, which eventually causes her to threaten his life after he leaves her. Once the conquest has been made, the rake moves on fairly quickly, unless he meets someone who could be his equal in wit and repartee. In the case

of *The Rover*, Willmore meets Hellena and falls in love after several exchanges between the characters, but the connection arrives through their ability to spar verbally. Hellena matches Willmore's ability to get in and out of trouble—after all, Hellena was willing to dress in drag to attend the Carnival. In the end, Willmore and Hellena find that they are equals in wit and daring, which makes their marriage more plausible and acceptable.

Much like the couple in *The Rover*, Dorimant and Harriet from Etherege's *The Man of Mode* are a rake and a coquette who seem to be on equal footing. While not quite as adventurous as Hellena, Harriet is able to return Dorimant's verbal attacks stroke for stroke and thus turn Dorimant from his seducing intentions to marriage. In both cases, Willmore and Dorimant perceive their own wit as superior to that of others. Their wit is essential to their appeal, both to the women they court and to the audiences of the Restoration theater. Likewise, Lady Susan's wit is essential to her engagement with the novella's readers, even when she does terrible or morally reprehensible things.

Verbal acuity and sharpness are vital to the rakish identity, particularly on the stage where such skill could be showcased. McGirr establishes this by comparing the rake's verbal skills to the fighting or jousting abilities: "The verbal is a duel that the rake always wins, and wins at the expense of another" (30). Willmore and his compatriot Belvile from *The Rover* constantly undermine their companion's (who is fittingly named Blunt) wit, portraying him as a fool and a bumpkin. Willmore's repartee at the expense of Blunt is representative of the way rakes cuckold their rivals both sexually and verbally. In *The Country Wife*, Horner also does this to Pinchwife, the husband of Margery, whom Horner wishes to seduce. After hearing Pinchwife is married, Horner jokes, "Why, the next thing that is to be heard is thou'rt a cuckold" (Wycherley I.i.399–400). Despite Pinchwife's frequent avowals that he knows "the Town" and

can avoid exposing his wife to men like Horner, he still falls victim to Horner's exploits as he, mistakenly, delivers his wife into Horner's hands—fulfilling Pinchwife's greatest fear with significantly little trouble (Wycherley I.i.490).

While the Restoration rake fared well with the courtier audiences of the late seventeenth century, the success of this particular character began to decline along with the social status of audience members seen in theatres (Bevis 85). As more Britons, especially women, from the lower gentry and middle classes began regularizing the theatre, the rake character became distasteful and even offensive to audiences. Starting in the late seventeenth century and extending into the eighteenth century, gender codes increasingly suggested that men belonged in the public sphere and women in the private. Thus, the rake was displaced, and the sentimental comedy was born at the beginning of the eighteenth century. McGirr discusses this transition in context of its effects on women: "the female character was increasingly defined by chastity. Poetic justice meant that female characters who kept their virginity were rewarded, and those who lost it outside of marriage were punished, even if the character's 'fall' was not consensual" (84). Thus, it became imperative that any male characters that endangered that status quo should be punished, rather than rewarded. Finding a place for women in this narrative meant deciding whether they were virtuous or fallen, a strict dichotomy that allowed for little complexity, unlike Lady Susan's character.

With this development, the rake character gradually made a transition on the eighteenth-century stage, and in eighteenth-century prose, from a loveable rogue to an irredeemable villain. In particular, this change surfaces in sentimental comedies like *The Conscious Lovers* by Richard Steele (1722), where the rake, Cimberton, plays the villain by coming between Lucinda and Myrtle. His role as a rake is limited to a lesser storyline in the play, and he is essentially reduced

to a clownish shadow of his more virile and engaging ancestors. By stark contrast, the villain Robert Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) relentlessly lusts after the heroine and ultimately develops into a full-blown villain. Lovelace, rather than experiencing redemption through Clarissa's love, rapes her, causing her death. Unlike jaunty Willmore or witty Dorimant, Lovelace becomes an unlikeable, unredeemable blackguard, who must be killed to satisfy justice.

During the eighteenth century, the close relationship that emerged between English drama and the ascendant novel led to the rake increasingly crossing over into prose fiction. We see this crossover in many of Austen's works, most likely inspired by her familiarity with Richardson and Fielding's novels as well as with plays. As Anne Widmayer reflects, "drama provided early female novelists with 'images and tropes which helped them to dramatize the performative nature of female experience'" (14). While no longer regarded as a heroic figure in a comedy, the novelistic rake was demoted to a roguish villain who threatened the virtue and happiness of the heroine—becoming an obstacle to happiness, not the vehicle. Although many rakish characteristics remained the same, the rake's appeal as a hero had decreased. As McGirr notes: "Sprezzatura and sex appeal no longer – instead, the same qualities connote vulgarity and lack of class, a failure of politeness and civility" (38). The rake, by the end of the eighteenth century, became a punchline, a secondary or stock character that no longer appealed to theatre-goers as the central focus of comedy.

### **Lady Susan, Philanderer**

Even in the supposedly demure Austen's works, the tradition of the rake lives on, albeit in less obvious ways. Mr. Wickham from *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr. Willoughby from *Sense and Sensibility* are two such characters, although their rounded personalities bear many more complications than the rake stock character. Wickham, in his pursuit of Elizabeth Bennet,

eventually abandons their flirtation for a more affluent lady, Miss King. Later, his seduction of Lydia seems perfectly in line with the actions of a rake, even if he is caught and compelled to make her his wife. Mr. Willoughby, similarly, seduces and impregnates the young Eliza, Colonel Brandon's ward. Thus, in counter-distinction to Restoration rakes, Willoughby and Wickham are cast as libertine villains. Without Wickham and Willoughby's respective functions as villains, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy might not have ended up married, and Marianne would certainly have not recognized Colonel Brandon as a potential husband. Unlike the exploits of the Restoration rake, the sexual offenses of these two men are revealed and denounced in their respective narratives, while the protagonists are free to marry and move on with life. This is an obvious shift away from the plot of *Lady Susan*, containing a rakish character who could be described as a heroine or anti-heroine, but not a villain. Lady Susan is certainly the protagonist; she may be the subject of gossip, but she is never openly disowned by her family or society. This is not to say she is celebrated as a paragon of female virtue, but her relatively playful position in *Lady Susan* is a much stronger representation of the theatrical rake figure, as shall be explored hereafter.

An important distinction in making the comparison between Lady Susan and the rake is the possibility of mistaking her for a coquette. Because of her gender and flirtatious personality, Lady Susan is typically considered a coquette by default—Hugh McKellar described the entire novella as a “chronicle of flirtation” (208)—but the designation is a little more complicated. In *Eighteenth-Century Characters*, Elaine McGirr examines the different stock characters from Restoration drama and comedy. The coquette, as outlined by McGirr, is defined by her youth, flirtatiousness, and charm. She has the right to choose whatever suitor she pleases (21). Furthermore, though she is witty, her wit is complementary to her partner's, not the other way

around. Lady Susan, by contrast, voices her wit in letters, but also makes her thoughts known to friends and family quite vocally, enough so that her friend Mrs. Johnson's husband despises her. Above all, the difference between the rake and the coquette hinges on the question of sexual activity. The coquette is a flirt, but not a seductress. Certainly, in early Restoration plays, the coquette was flirtatious and artful, but not open to full-on unchastity. Her sexuality was still reserved, for the most part, for marriage, which was still on the horizon. On the other hand, a rake's sexuality is defined by his right to conquer, and part of the fun lies in bettering one's opponent—namely, other men. We see this tendency early on in Lady Susan, when she writes Mrs. Johnson to explain that she has to leave the Manwaring residence to avoid further entanglements with Lady Manwaring over having an affair with her husband. Her behavior is not just loose, it smacks of the same playful quality as the rake—conquering the unconquerable.

One of the most obvious connections between the rake and Lady Susan is her propensity for sexual entanglements. One of the kinder descriptions of her character occurs in a letter from Mr. Reginald de Courcy to his sister Mrs. Vernon. He calls her “the most accomplished Coquette in England” and a “very distinguished Flirt” (Austen 12), as if he has the full measure of her through these observations. (What Reginald fails to realize is that Susan is a different breed altogether, which is why she so easily fools and manipulates him.) Reginald then goes on to accuse Lady Susan of causing unrest in the Manwaring family, which is, of course, true. Society has already judged Lady Susan, not without cause, to be an adulteress, and yet her family cannot avoid her. This is, in part, what troubles Austen's scholars because, as Russell suggests, “Austen emphatically made an anti-heroine out of an adulteress” (470). Much like any other rakish character, Lady Susan doesn't seem to mind flouting the rules of virtue as long as she can support herself and her lifestyle. This is in direct conflict with more maidenly characters like

Elizabeth Bennet, who falls into despair at the prospect of her sister Lydia's elopement and loss of virtue. Lady Susan possesses few scruples about entangling herself with men she shouldn't.

As rakes go, there is at least one other subset with which Lady Susan could identify. She bears some resemblance to what Hume calls "extravagant rake," like Welbred from *The English Monsieur* (1663), who courts Widow Wealthy for the sake of his extravagant lifestyle (150–51). While Lady Susan does indulge in some extravagance, she also pursues an amorous relationship with Lord Manwaring that has little to do with her financial straits. It could be easily argued that she is both an "extravagant rake" and a "free gallant." However, she most closely fits the traditional category of the "free gallant," meaning that she maintains multiple flirtations at a time (Hume 150). First, she "cuckolds" Lady Manwaring, undermining her relationship with her husband; then, shortly after Susan leaves the Manwaring family, the narrative follows her flowering relationship with Reginald de Courcy, the younger brother of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Vernon. Much like Margery in *The Country Wife*, Reginald displays a vulnerability to the rake's rhetoric, making him susceptible to a possible romantic entanglement. He's young and inexperienced at love, which allows him to be easy prey to an older, experienced woman. He falls quickly and is slow to give up the entanglement, despite hefty evidence suggested of Lady Susan's free gallantry, so to speak. Even when he does decide to leave Susan based on her treatment of her daughter, Frederica, we soon find his resolution does not last. Mrs. Vernon, Reginald's sister, believes she has detached Reginald from Lady Susan's influence in one letter, but her next letter demonstrates that she spoke too soon: "Little did I imagine my dear Mother, when I sent off my last letter, that the delightful perturbation of spirits I was then in, would undergo so speedy, so melancholy a reverse! ... The quarrel between Lady Susan and Reginald is made up, and we are all as we were before" (Austen 103–04). In a matter of a few hours, Lady

Susan's influence has reversed Reginald's originally strong intentions to leave her. Lady Susan's power in this relationship is superior and far-reaching, while Reginald is dependent and subservient to her will—typical of a rake's interactions with “weaker” female characters.

Because of Lady Susan's resemblance to libertines and rakes, critics and Austen fans alike may question why Austen would create such a controversial character. One possible answer to this question stems from Austen's attempts to break into a print culture that published countless examples of adultery among the aristocracy, as was fashionable at the time. As Russell points out, it is possible to see “Lady Susan as evidence of Austen's engagement with the subject of adultery, not simply as a signifier of sexuality and desire, but as a complex textual phenomenon, a distinctive genre of the print culture of her time in which Austen was seeking a place for herself as a professional writer” (Russell 470). When Austen drafted *Lady Susan*, it was in the beginning of her writing career, when she was still experimenting with plot and form. Because her true popular success did not occur until well after her death, during the Victorian era, her attempts to break into this slightly different genre are not very surprising and demonstrate her ability to exercise her skills in a different genre than the domestic romances for which we know her.

Austen might also have been examining the psychological factors in cases of adultery and scandal. In an article about Restoration sex comedy, Laura Rosenthal explores the meanings of libertinism in Restoration theater. She posits that critics too often read libertines or rakes as succumbing to individual desires, without taking into account their placement as “children” in a societal “family.” These individuals partake in sexual encounters as a way of escaping or rebelling against “parental or guardian oversight” (9) and, by extension, social constraints or authoritative figures, like the king or queen. As described earlier, rakes like Horner defy

convention, in part, to exert power and control over others. Similarly, Lady Susan seems often to be trying to escape her role as a mother to Frederica, her teenage daughter. She even refers to Frederica as the “torment of her life” (5), hardly a maternal sentiment. Lady Susan’s lack of connection with her daughter is connected to her need for escape or freedom, particularly since she is bound by even stricter rules than her male counterparts. It also doesn’t help that Frederica is young, unattached, and better liked by everyone—evoking a sexual jealousy that would be difficult for Susan to overcome.

### **Lady Susan, Woman and Widow**

The primary point of difficulty in comparing Lady Susan to the rake is gender. Even though the connections between the rake and Lady Susan seem obvious, her femininity might cast doubt on the comparison. However, reading Lady Susan as a male character type allows us to reinterpret what Jane Austen accomplished with her character. Part of what defines the rake is his masculinity in a world where the fashionable man attains the highest prestige (Mackie 130). The fop, the alternate male standard of the Restoration, was defined by many effeminate traits like the love of dancing, clothing, and the use of makeup and powder. Conversely, the Restoration rake is defined as an individual that practices “anti-civility” and pushes back on the more fashionable male standard (Mackie 131). While the fop represents the effeminacy and deviancy of maleness, the rake represents the violence and power of maleness. The rake behaves the way he does to establish his own sense of masculinity and combat how society perceives men of the upper class as foppish and feminine. Because a rake’s reputation is defined by his conquests and how they are perceived by other men (McGirr 30), his masculinity and reputation depend on the society of other rakes. Lady Susan, while not a man and not wrestling with notions of manliness, or even reputation, lives outside the boundaries of regular female behavior. And

her friendship with Mrs. Johnson, a woman of equal wit and ability to deceive, allows her to define her own rules in relation to a likeminded peer. Judging from both Reginald's and Mrs. Vernon's accounts of her, she doesn't behave in predictably feminine ways, which is part of her allure as well as her undoing. Reginald ultimately cannot cope with her philandering and manipulations, which is why she ends up marrying Sir James and why Frederica ends up with Reginald.

Reading Lady Susan as a rake character also allows us to better understand the themes of dependence throughout the novel. All of her powers are extended towards freeing herself from her constant dependence on others for a home and income. She comes to Churchill, the Vernons' home, as a last resort, and must rely on them for sustenance. Once Frederica runs away from school, she too must rely on the Vernons. Yet there's a difference between the way mother and daughter respond to such dependence. Frederica is welcomed by the Vernons as a younger sister or daughter and treated with affection. Mrs. Vernon refers to Frederica as pretty, sweet, and shy (Austen 26). Conversely, Lady Susan chafes at her dependence and is merely tolerated by the Vernons. While one seems to embrace dependence as a womanly duty, the other abhors it and strategizes to escape it. Lady Susan constantly avoids her responsibilities as a mother, drawing notice from her fellow women. As Mrs. Vernon explains, "I am led to believe as heretofore that the former has no real love for her daughter and has never done her justice, or treated her affectionately" (Austen 26). The comparison between the mother and daughter is stark. Unlike Frederica, Lady Susan cannot behave as conventionally female in this strict, gender-encoded society because she cannot and will not submit to any authority or convention, nor limit herself to the private sphere.

Lady Susan's widowhood is an important aspect of reading her as a masculine character. Rakes are typically defined by their bachelor status, until they are led, tricked, or enticed into marriage by the right female. Lady Susan appears to be on the other end of this spectrum, as a widowed female, but she clearly was not faithful to her first husband's memory (as may be expected of a widow) and most likely had flirtations, if not affairs, while Lord Vernon was alive. Mrs. Vernon refers to such behavior in a letter to her mother, stating, "I might have believed that concern for the loss of such a husband as Mr. Vernon, to whom her own behaviour was far from unexceptionable, might for a time make her wish for retirement" (Austen 11). Mrs. Vernon also refers later to Lady Susan's neglect of her husband at the end of his life. So, while her marital status is important, it doesn't really separate her from the rake figure. Indeed, although Restoration comedies do typically end in marriage, there does not seem to be a complete transformation from philandering rake to faithful husband. For instance, Willmore in Behn's *The Rover*, while he marries Hellena at the end of the play, doesn't seem to be all that much changed in the play's sequel, which occurs after Hellena has died. Similarly, Lady Susan's happy presence at Frederica's wedding to Reginald in the book's epilogue indicates her lack of transformation, despite her marriage to Sir James Martin. The newly introduced narrator at this scene remarks on Lady Susan's demeanor: "No remembrance of Reginald, no consciousness of guilt, gave one look of embarrassment. She was in excellent spirits . . ." (61). Much like previous rakes, therefore, Lady Susan doesn't truly reform. As with the Restoration rake, her reform is "founded on 'witty understanding,' not on mere capitulation to a repressive social code" (Hume 172).

While Lady Susan remains a widow, she maintains her single status as long as possible to avoid feminine submission within marriage. Indeed, widow status may be the only way a woman

of that time could even come close to being a libertine by definition. Lane states, “Though the situation of these widows could be dire, it also offered opportunities for sexual enterprise and freedom of action. The obverse of having no male protection was having no male constraint, with all the licence that implied” (71). As a widow, Lady Susan could exercise sexual license, which is why Reginald eventually finds out that she is entertaining Lord Manwaring in her London lodgings. When she does finally marry, her husband, Sir James, is her intellectual subordinate, allowing her to maintain control over her own sexuality.

As Susan’s sexual exploits with Manwaring are her ultimate undoing in her relationship with Reginald, there is a sense that this undoing is just like that of the rakes of old—she is defeated by her own physical desires. Reginald’s exchange with Susan exposes the limits of her perceived power over her circumstances and men. She cannot completely control Reginald—a man clearly cast from a different mold from that of the rake—nor his feelings, which eventually leads to their separation and marriages to different people. Just like the rake, she achieves her ultimate goal, and procures her fortune and standing in society once more, through someone more easily manipulated than Reginald—Sir James Martin.

### **Lady Susan, Wit**

Lady Susan is one of the wittiest characters designed by Jane Austen. And her wit is not of the variety that was usually ascribed to eighteenth-century women by society. Her wit is a byproduct or indication of her social power and acumen, and certainly appeals to her masculine audiences. Her ability to manipulate male characters like Reginald and Mr. Vernon is reflected in her verbal prowess, which she uses without restraint. Although *Lady Susan* is written purely in an epistolary format, readers get the sense that she is witty in any setting. She even asserts this

herself, saying, “If I am vain of anything, it is of my eloquence” (Austen 24). And from everything readers can observe in this text, she has every right to feel a little vain on that score.

However, unlike other witty Austenian heroines, Susan’s wit has an edge to it, an acridity, and it is usually directed against characters less experienced or inferior to her, like Frederica, Reginald, or Sir James Martin. The intent of her wit is sarcastic and malicious, not inspired by a sense of humor like Elizabeth Bennet or other Austenian protagonists. The mode of communication has a lot to do with this, as much of the audience’s experience is firsthand, addressed to Mrs. Johnson in the “privacy” of a letter. Other evidence of her wit is conveyed largely through Reginald and Mrs. Vernon’s correspondence with each other and their parents. As Reginald falls deeper under Susan’s spell of wit and rhetoric, Mrs. Vernon remains unimpressed, as evidenced by her obvious lack of trust in Lady Susan’s motives.

In contrast to the later Austenian heroines, Lady Susan’s wit has a different motivation and direction—she always has a particular goal in mind and operates out of self-interest or interest in her daughter’s independence. For example, while Elizabeth Bennet laughs off Mr. Darcy’s rejection of her amongst friends, she does so from a defensive position, to alleviate the pain and awkwardness of the experience. On the other hand, Lady Susan is nearly always on the offensive. She voices her concerns about Frederica’s education and intelligence to Mrs. Johnson, but also to Reginald and even Mrs. Vernon, calling her a “simpleton” (Austen 4). Before Reginald even meets Frederica, he knows about her, at least from Lady Susan’s perspective, writing to his father that “Every person of sense . . . will join me in wishing that Frederica Vernon may prove more worthy than she has yet done, of her mother’s tender care” (22). Susan’s attitude toward others is often dismissive, but she seems almost vindictive in her wit against her own daughter. In nearly every epistle to her friend, Lady Susan is by turns witty and cruel on the

subject of Frederica, and she is no kinder to Mrs. Vernon or Reginald either. She confides that “I have subdued him [Reginald] entirely by sentiment and serious conversation, and made him I may venture to say *half* in love with me” (Austen 15). Her cavalier attitude towards Reginald’s feelings prevents any true sympathy for her when he turns to Frederica at the end of the narrative, but readers can still enjoy the sort of heartless humor that accompanies Susan’s machinations.

Much like the rakes of the Restoration, Lady Susan’s wit is sharp and typically derogatory. Unlike another of Austen’s characters, Emma, Lady Susan makes no attempts to reform her character, even when she is reprimanded. Emma, on the other hand, undergoes a transformation of character after the famous Box Hill episode, when Mr. Knightley berates her for misusing her wit on the feeble-minded Miss Bates. While Emma subsequently tries to tame her wit to suit her love interest’s notions of propriety, Lady Susan only holds to her own standard. Furthermore, Lady Susan constantly shares her frustration about Frederica’s lack of education, yet Mrs. Vernon points out that this is largely due to Susan’s need to socialize and her neglect of Frederica as a child (Austen 10). Yet Susan cannot truly empathize with her daughter’s circumstances or emotions as a mother is expected to do. Her animosity seems to center around Frederica’s naiveté: “I never saw a girl of her age, bid fairer to be the sport of mankind” (Austen 29). Frederica seems to be almost completely without guile, or wit. This is so diametrically opposed to Susan’s *modus operandi* that the two will remain in opposition until they are both married.

Her rhetorical jabs at any number of characters represent her ability to place herself above others in a position of authority. Her ability to convert Reginald so quickly from holding a mild curiosity to a dogged admiration (which he is eventually cured of, admittedly) demonstrates

her rhetorical abilities to bend individuals to her will, not just amuse them. In a letter to Mrs. Johnson, she exclaims, “Oh! How delightful it was, to watch the variations of his countenance while I spoke, to see the struggle between returning tenderness and the remains of displeasure. There is something agreeable in feelings so easily worked on” (Austen 45). She is not merely sharpening her wit, but skillfully manipulating the men in her circle. Likewise, Mr. Johnson’s disapproval of Lady Susan as a confidante for his wife seems an indicator of his own fears towards Susan’s rhetorical power over his wife—a figure that should surely be in his control as the head of his household. Lady Susan’s ability to cause division among even the most tight-knit familial spheres proves just how capable she is of convincing others to support her or take her part.

This kind of rhetorical power surfaces again and again in Restoration comedies, particularly in Behn’s *The Rover*. Willmore’s ability to convince Angellica Bianca to not only sleep with him for free, but to believe that he is in love with her, is masterful. Angellica recognizes his persuasive power when she says, “No, I will not hear thee talk. / Thou hast a charm / In every word that draws my heart away. And all the thousand trophies I designed / Thou hast undone” (Behn 141–44). The fact that Willmore can sleep with a courtesan, receive threats from her, and still convince Hellena to marry him is certainly fantastical, but the plot rests on Willmore’s smooth-talking capabilities, abilities which highly resemble Susan’s own rhetorical skills.

### **Lady Susan, Mercenary**

Another trait that bears a comparison between Lady Susan and the rake figure is their mercenary aspirations. Lady Susan, as a widow, is in dire straits. She lives an extravagant life. She must marry rich, and marry off her daughter to someone rich, to be able to survive in the

aristocratic world. This means that she is often thinking, talking, and plotting about money. As a result, it becomes nearly unavoidable to compare Lady Susan with noted Machiavellian villains from other works. James Mulvihill notes that “Like Machiavelli's Prince, Lady Susan masters contingency by intrepidly responding to consequences of her own making” (624). The narrative revolves around Lady Susan’s attempts to bring Reginald de Courcy to heel, as her husband. Her purpose in doing so seems ambiguous at first, but we soon find out that her intent is focused on Reginald’s inheritance: “I am still doubtful at times, as to Marriage. If the old Man [Sir Reginald De Courcy] would die, I might not hesitate; but a state of dependence on the caprice of Sir Reginald will not suit the freedom of my spirit” (Austen 50). Her goal is the De Courcy fortune, but she must wait for Reginald to inherit it, a prospect abhorrent to her plotting mind and her financially desperate situation. In this same passage, she compares Reginald to Manwaring and concludes that Manwaring is superior in looks and personality, although she won’t marry him because he doesn’t have money of his own and is still married himself.

As a penniless widow, Lady Susan relies on relatives and friends of the family for sustenance and housing, yet one would never know it from her attitude. Much like Willmore and other Restoration rakes, her disdain for her own debts is rooted in the entitlement of her class and social power (McGirr 29). She openly mocks her inability to pay Frederica’s headmistress, joking that “My young lady [Frederica] accompanies me to town, where I shall deposit her under the care of Miss Summers in Wigmore Street, till she becomes a little more reasonable. . . . The price is immense, and much beyond what I can ever attempt to pay” (Austen 5). It is far more important that Frederica become finished and associate with members of the best families than it is to live within one’s means. Certainly, this is an attitude that extends beyond Restoration rakes,

but Susan's playful, unconcerned attitude toward her financial situation, as well as her utter dismissal of even attempting to pay, is what indicates that connection to the rake so strongly.

Infamous as she is lovely, Lady Susan's recklessness is well-known to the class she inhabits, and even beyond that to slightly lower classes. All of her family at Churchill is firmly aware of her financial situation, yet she deflects all pity for her situation, transforming her need for financial stability into a desire to visit and get to know her brother- and sister-in-law better. While this professed aim doesn't really reflect her strategy of securing a wealthy husband, her letters to Mrs. Johnson give us an idea of her plotting to marry Reginald for his inheritance, implied by her constant comparisons of Reginald to Lord Manwaring (Austen 16).

Lady Susan's avaricious and superior behavior in the aforementioned passages clearly reflects the Machiavellian side of the Restoration rake. For example, Dorimant in *The Man of Mode*, who plans to marry the young Harriet on account of her fortune, is another Machiavellian individual; he compares winning Harriet's hand to winning the lottery when he first sees her (Etherege 184). We receive the same impression of mercenary behavior when Lady Susan writes to her friend, extolling the virtues of Reginald's fortune. And although Reginald is an heir to a large fortune, he is not aware of Lady Susan's true attraction to his wealth. Like Reginald, heiresses in both plays and novels are usually victims of the rakes' charms and manipulations, and Lady Susan is clearly the hunter here, not the victim. Her need for vast funds pre-empts all other considerations, even the knowledge that her daughter Frederica has fallen in love with Reginald. Lady Susan certainly does not have a positive mother-daughter relationship, but beyond that, as noted above, she also may feel some sense of competition with Frederica. Like the rake, Lady Susan's motivation for manipulating conquests stems from the assertion of power, as well as gaining substance, and she mentions this to Mrs. Johnson: "There is exquisite pleasure

in subduing an insolent spirit, in making a person pre-determined to dislike, acknowledge one's superiority" (Austen 12). Lady Susan subdues Reginald and expects her daughter to submit to her as well, regardless of feelings on either side.

However, those feelings are not so easily overcome. In the resolution of the novella, Lady Susan ultimately marries Sir James Martin, the man she had intended for Frederica to marry, despite the fact that Lady Susan was the one to flirt with Sir James, not Frederica! Thus, she still liberates herself financially, while possibly keeping Lord Manwaring around under pretenses that Sir James, as an idiot or fop, cannot comprehend. His idiocy and blindness prevent what would become obvious clashes with almost any other male character Lady Susan could have married. Sir James is not intelligent enough to possess the same scruples as Reginald about Susan's sexuality and relationships with other men. She may not end up with her match in wit and character, Manwaring, but she does end up with a complementary match, Sir James. While Lady Susan's original plot to marry Reginald does not pan out, she does get what she truly wants: financial security and a naïve husband whom she can control.

## **Conclusions**

Many critical approaches illuminate *Lady Susan*. Scholars have unfolded Susan's sociopathic personality (Anderson), her Machiavellian methods (Mulvihill), and her widowed status (Lane), while I have drawn on many of their insights here, reducing Susan character to any one of these roles is to oversimplify Austen's abilities as a young writer, eager to prove herself. Finding a place for *Lady Susan* in Austen's canon can be a surprisingly difficult task, given that the protagonist's sharp wit, strong independence, and dominant presence put her outside of Austen's coterie of feminine heroines. However, recognizing Susan as an altered rake allows us to understand the masculine gendering of her character and build a more layered reading of an

Austenian protagonist. In particular, we can see how young Austen was when she first began to experiment with existing models and genres to explore gender and society. The sophistication of *Lady Austen's* interaction with theatrical and epistolary tropes points to an ingenious and precocious mind (not that that is surprising). This reading also raises a question about young Jane Austen's perceptions of womanhood—was she even more revolutionary than her later works suggest? Perhaps her commentary on womanhood grew subtler over time, as her playful sense of humor continued to develop. Or perhaps she simply changed her mind or shifted her focus to different aspects of femininity and gender. Either way, the result of this analysis of *Lady Susan* indicates that even at a young age, Austen was thinking about gender expectations and how they influenced society.

Perhaps more importantly, comparing Lady Susan and the Restoration rake provides clarity as to why her character can be simultaneously so enjoyable and so reprehensible. Even in modern television, with rakes like *How I Met Your Mother's* Barney Stinson and *Friends's* Joey Tribbiani, we can't quite seem to shake our fascination with the rake, even as we condemn his behavior. And yet, audiences are confounded by an Austen heroine with such character flaws as Lady Susan's extravagance, greed, and manipulative behavior, to say nothing of her overt sexuality. Because she is a woman, she is interpreted differently. But once we recognize our own bias towards gender, something the novella and its ties to the tradition of the rake figure compel us to do, Lady Susan becomes much more intriguing.

If we were to look at Susan's behavior as we would a male character's, her rakishness would be unsurprising, entertaining, and perhaps less offensive. As a male character, she would, even now, be more acceptable to most audiences. But she is a woman, and that role reversal creates a radical effect throughout the novel. Whether or not we think of Jane Austen as a

feminist or a radical, we can see how she wrote a character that defied gender norms and expectations in a striking way. All of the strongest moral judgements about Lady Susan come from characters that align with their assigned gender roles: Mrs. Vernon, the strait-laced housewife; Reginald, the young dashing hero; and Frederica, an insipid feminine ideal. Their judgments coincide with gendered expectations that Austen's original audience would largely share. Because of this, Lady Susan fascinates and repels readers. We're drawn in by her masculine behavior and repelled by its dissonance with sociocultural expectations for her feminine gender. As an anti-heroine, she is unique; as an anti-hero, she is a typical rake.

Ultimately, Lady Susan's rake-like habits and persona allow readers to view her as a powerful, subversive figure even when Western feminism was in its infancy. Her unlikely ability to control any situation was decidedly mannish in an age that defined femininity by its domesticity and submissiveness. Young Jane Austen wrote *Lady Susan* as an adolescent to experiment in epistolary form and to appeal to an audience that thrived on gossip and drama (Gaston); but I have tried to demonstrate that she likewise wrote the novella as a way to interrogate, if not challenge, conventional ideas about gender—and she used the Restoration rake trope as a vehicle to do so. There may not be a direct confluence of evidence that allows us to trace the exact relationship between Lady Susan and the Restoration rake—to be sure, Austen would have known rake characters from novels as well as from plays—yet those characters from novels were themselves related to characters from the stage, and in any case the comparison still allows for meaningful conversation about Austen's life and works.

In Austen's most accomplished early narrative, we see an anti-heroine that can wield incredible power, both rhetorically and sexually, in a world where few women can do so. Even though her behavior could be classed as sociopathic or worse, identifying her as a rake helps us

to understand why we can't quite hate her, any more than we can hate Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* or Horner in *The Country Wife*. These characters entertain us even as they flout the laws of society, and after all, who doesn't love a rebel?

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