

LADY SUSAN



From the novel by Jane Austen

The performance runs for approximately 80 minutes plus an interval of 20 minutes, during which you are invited to share a "Jane Austen" teatime in the Upper Foyer.

Donations for this programme will go to the Questors Renewal fund

LADY SUSAN

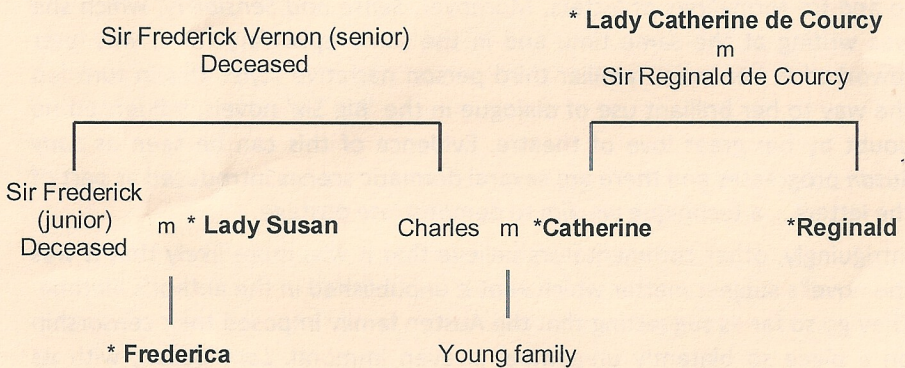
Cast

Lady de Courcy (of Parklands)	Anne Neville
Mrs Catherine Vernon (of Churchill) (her daughter)	Sarah Morrison
Reginald de Courcy (her son)	Andy Bewley
Lady Susan de Courcy (widow of the late Sir Frederick de Courcy)	Samantha Moran
Frederica Vernon (her daughter)	Ella Hooper
Mrs Alicia Johnson (of Edward Street, London)	Pamela Major
The Vernons' Music Master	Graham Reid
Narrator	Maggie Turner

Production devised and directed by	Jane Dewey
Music	Graham Reid
Stage Management	Penny Seyfert, Jean Masters
Lighting and projection	Terry Mummery, Andrew Whadcoat
Wardrobe	Anne Gilmour

Our grateful thanks to: Steven Cowan, Katy Knox, Anne Leeming,
Harriet Parsonage, Iain Reid, CJ

WHO'S WHO IN THE VERNON AND DE COURCY FAMILIES



Jane Austen and Lady Susan

The novella *Lady Susan* was most likely written in 1793/4 when the author was still in her teens. It was never published in her lifetime but had to wait until 1871 when her nephew, Edward Austen-Leigh, included it in his *Memoirs of Jane Austen*.

Why the delay? Many pages of commentary have pondered this question. Some critics have dismissed the work, written in the traditional C18th letter form, as an unsuccessful early experiment on the part of the author. This technique, so greatly admired by Jane Austen and her contemporaries in Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, nevertheless proved unsatisfactory and constraining for Austen herself. Certainly, the abrupt ending of *Lady Susan* seems to suggest its author got tired of finding ways to continue the plot through the to-and-fro formalities of letters. Moreover, *Sense and Sensibility*, which she was writing at the same time and in the same epistolary form, was later reworked in her more familiar third person narrative style. This in turn led the way to her brilliant use of dialogue in the 'Big Six' novels, influenced no doubt by her great love of theatre. Evidence of this can be seen as *Lady Susan* progresses and there are several dramatic scenes introduced as part of the letters ... a technique we aim to demonstrate onstage.

Intriguingly, other commentators believe that it was more likely that it was the novel's subject matter which kept it unpublished in the author's lifetime. They go so far as suggesting that the Austen family imposed their censorship on a piece so blatantly un-genteel ... even immoral. *Lady Susan*, with its portrayal of a conscienceless intriguer, seems closer to the manners and mores of the late C18th than those of a *Mansfield Park* and Fanny Price. Closer, even, to the world of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, should Jane Austen ever have read that scandalous novel! On the other hand, it's fascinating to recognise in the character of Lady Susan herself elements of Elizabeth Bennet's wit and Mary Crawford's sophistication.

But where does Jane Austen stand? Does she judge Lady Susan? Does she leave us believing her to be punished or rewarded? The ending of the novel is ambiguous and probably leaves us to make up our own minds.

(Jane Dewey)