

Report on Competition 1986

Readers were asked to write one of the 'missing' letters from one of the novels, prefacing the letter with the relevant quotation. The judge was J. David Grey, a founder of JASNA and managing editor of *The Jane Austen Companion* published by MacMillan, 1986. The identity of the competitors was not known to either the judge or the editor until after the decision was reached. The winners were **Judith Judson** of Alexandria, VA and **Janice Kirkland** of Bakersfield, CA.

JUDITH JUDSON
Alexandria, Virginia

"Lady Catherine . . . in her reply . . . sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth . . ."—*Pride and Prejudice*

My dear nephew,

I am astonished to have received your last. I find it in every way insupportable. I cannot comprehend how you can have the effrontery to persist in this wayward—nay, perverse conduct, when I have taken the trouble to set before you your evident duty to the noble family from which your dear mother sprang, and your no less duty to your worthy father's forbears. My pen at this time does not linger on this subject, since in your phrensied obstinacy you have flung aside all regard for the obligations you owe to both your family and your station in life.

It nonetheless remains my duty to point out the certain results of your continuing in the criminal folly of this engagement. You must be aware that this hardened young woman, lacking in all propriety as she is—as well as in proper respect to me (but of that I forbear to speak further)—this wily creature, ensnaring you with what arts I dare not conjecture—is only one of a needy and necessitous parcel of wanton hoydens! The infamous behaviour of her youngest sister has been noised abroad! With what trembling did I place this deplorable situation before your dear cousin—who in her maidenly reserve had never heard of such licentiousness—and then with the son of old Wickham! To hear that her more than brother—hope of his house—had been enticed by the blood of such a creature! What a connexion for the de Bourghs! You know my child's delicacy—what we have both endured—cherished hopes put by; solely that you might indulge this obdurate and unfeeling selfishness!

Though for that you will not care—nevertheless, Fitzwilliam, you must reflect! The low connexions of this scheming creature will enmesh you in every sort of embarrassment—I dare say Mr. Bennet is head over heels in debt and I am sure I heard Mr. Collins say that her uncle is a country lawyer with scarce bread to eat. No doubt they got it up between them, and placed her in your way. I cannot conceive what unseen weakness in your character caused you to fall for the smiles of a strumpet! Surely in the

Fitzwilliams there was never such profligacy—but I am bound to tell you that your great-uncle Reginald Darcy was a loose-screw (as the cant goes)—and I hope you do not end as he did, a hardened libertine—but all the Cyprians of Covent Garden were better than such a marriage!

I cannot go on—my agitation is too severe—the post has been waiting this half hour—I have more kindness for my horses than you have for your afflicted Aunt

It is with sincere sorrow, Fitzwilliam, that I must tell you that Rosings and Mount Street shall see you no more if you persist in this hardened indifference to all calls of proper feeling—nay religion! I cannot have my dear charge—the heiress of all the de Bourghs—contaminated by the presence of such a creature as Elizabeth Bennet or her dupe!

Lavender and Steele

JANICE KIRKLAND

Bakersfield, California

The Steele sisters Anne and Lucy in *Sense and Sensibility* may owe their surname to a shop in London frequented by the Austen sisters. Jane wrote to Cassandra January 14, 1801, that their friend Martha “desired me to ask you to purchase for her two bottles of Steele’s Lavender Water when you are in town, provided you should go to the Shop on your own account.”¹ On the first appearance of the Misses Steele in the novel, the screaming little Annamaria Middleton has “her wound bathed with lavender-water by one of the Miss Steeles” (p. 121). How the Austens must have laughed when reading this aloud!

Once Lucy Steele has married Robert Ferrars, she secures a pardon for the imprudent match from her mother-in-law:

perseverance in humility of conduct and messages, in self-condemnation for Robert’s offense, and gratitude for the unkindness she was treated with, procured her in time the haughty notice which overcame her by its graciousness, and led soon afterwards, by rapid degrees, to the highest state of affection and influence. (377)

One such persevering message from Lucy might read as follows.

Dear Madam,

I hope dear Mrs. Ferrars will excuse the liberty I take of writing to her from the humble lodgings we have taken on returning from our honeymoon in Dawlish. Her son Robert who I have the honour to address as husband will deliver this letter when he calls to beg forgiveness for our recent trip to the altar, made without first seeking your permission and blessing. Being very sure I can claim no share for myself of your much-coveted pardon, I nonetheless take pen in hand to beg leave to assure you that *he* is guiltless of wishing to offend, and am sure you will be too generous to blame him for what was all my offense. Mr. Robert Ferrars gained my affections entirely and although we could not live without one another, was most unwilling to enter into any engagement without your

approbation. We have went through a great deal of heartsearching on the matter, I assure you. (Unlike Mr. Edward Ferrars who persuaded me against my inclinations when I was too young to see the enormity of a secret engagement.) Everything concerned in my nuptials to Mr. Robert Ferrars is sacred to me, down to the very bonnet I wore to the altar, which I would lay away in lavender if we was not so wholly without means that I must wear the few garments I possess. Several months at Dawlish was costly in spite of my many connections we visited, and my sister who gave me all her savings to begin my new life. Your liberal allowance to your son will certainly keep us from want, but we will need help to build a cottage, should you approve one of the magnificent plans he has drawn. Knowing that you wish nothing so much as to be on good terms with your children I cannot forbear to add that nothing in all the world could induce me to come between mother and son; 'twould be my greatest joy to witness such maternal affection, even as a humble intruder at the edge of the family circle. Begging to be remembered to Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood and your dear grandson—how I do dote upon that child, who is certainly taller than Lady Middleton's second son William—hope you will not long think unkindly of your

Most respectful and grateful servant,
Lucy Ferrars

NOTE

¹ *Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. by R. W. Chapman, 2d ed. Oxford: University Press, 1979, pp. 108-09 and index II, addenda, which identifies the shop as Steel and Meyer, Lavender-Water wareh., Catherine St., Strand. The quotations from *Sense and Sensibility* are from the Chapman edition.

Competition 1987

For a change, the next competition will draw on the artistic talents of our members. You are invited to contribute an illustration, in black and white or tone (alas, we cannot reproduce colour), to one of Jane Austen's works. And since our next conference is on the *Juvenilia* and *Lady Susan* (and also because other illustrators have left us a free field here), your illustration should be from one of those works. Your caption should be a brief quotation from the passage you illustrate, with a reference provided from the Oxford edition of the *Minor Works*.

RULES: 1. Open to JASNA members only. Entries should be the original work of the contestant. 2. Dimensions of the illustration should not exceed 5" x 8". No colour, only line, or line and tone. 3. Submit under a pen name only. Enclose with your illustration a sealed envelope with the caption of your illustration and your pen name on the *outside*, and your real name and address on the *inside*. If you would like your entry returned after the competition, please say so. 4. Post by September 1, 1987, to: JASNA Competition, c/o Juliet McMaster, Department of English, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E5, Canada.