

J. DAVID GREY
Young Writers' Workshop



SEX, MONEY AND POWER
in Jane Austen's Fiction



JASNA NEW YORK METROPOLITAN REGION
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LETTERS WERE WRITTEN BY:

Students from:
the Fontbonne Hall Academy in
Brooklyn, New York
&
The Walter Panas High School,
Cortlandt Manor, New York

COORDINATORS

Margaret Doria and Frances Sullivan Schulz



THE YOUNG WRITERS

Participants from Fontbonne Hall Academy:

Nicole Adjami
Sarah Cappiello
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Participants from Walter Panas High School:

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Adrena Daw
Michelle Fischer
Jackie Kavana
Alissa Kelly
Jasmine Montes
Maura Murphy

DEAR ABBEY IN A REGENCY FRAME

The participants used the Format of a Regency "Dear Abby", by having one of Jane's characters write to another character - from the same novel- or from one of her other novels. In some cases, the participant provided both the question and the response (advice or further thoughts). However, three of the letters only asked for advice and did not provide the response. Conference attendees have the opportunity to create their own responses to these letters. Let your imagination flow.

Of-course, the questions (and answers) all deal with issues surrounding Sex, Money and Power in Jane Austen's Fiction. The characters' reactions are true to their natures and even when the events may be slightly different - the truth is there!

Students met multiple times in small groups and worked - quite happily - on their letters. They were given a model which allowed them to understand who is Dear Abby. For we sometimes forget how very young our students are. But their youth NEVER implies our age for no lover of Jane's fiction ever grows old!



LENORE FEDOW

Fontbonne Hall Academy, Brooklyn

Dear Georgiana,

Please forgive me for not writing to you sooner. I have been preoccupied in Meryton as of late. I trust that you are enjoying your new sitting room. I took notice of your liking for the room the last time I was at Pemberley. Please send my thanks to Mrs. Reynolds once again for her help. I hope the musical instruments I have placed there will fill the space my absence has left in the past months.

As you may have presumed, my time shared with Bingley has been quite an experience. He took a liking to Meryton but a moment after our arrival. I, however, was less eager to be pleased. Yet, there was one exception to my opinion. In fact, this exception has recently been made known to you in the form of Miss Elizabeth Bennet. It was such luck to find her at Pemberley with Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. She herself had not known of my presence there. Given the opportunity, I could not help but take her to meet you, dear sister.

I would like to apologize for any discomfort that may have been brought to you by Miss Bingley's comment concerning the Meryton militia. I realize how deeply those thoughts must pain you. I will not linger on such a topic for long, but please allow me to offer my counsel. Do not judge yourself too harshly for the incident with Wickham. You have matured most wonderfully since that time, and I am sure you shall continue to bring honor to my title as your brother. Despite the harshness of the remark made by Miss Bingley, to me you are still the best of sisters.

As this letter comes to an end, please do not mistake its brevity for impoliteness. As my sister and last of my immediate family, I value your opinion greatly on a pressing matter. I must tell you what I once told Miss Bingley, which is that Miss Elizabeth Bennet is one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance. I am eager to know your feelings regarding her. I beg you to make haste with your response for, though I am hesitant to admit to this new found quality, I am rather impatient of late concerning the matter.

Your loving brother,
Darcy

DALIA AKHNOUKH

Walter Panas High School

Dear Jane,

How things have changed, my lovely sister! I miss you dearly. I am writing to ask for advice, Jane. You are cognizant of my current predicament, and I am sure you have plenty to say about it. Marriage, Jane, is not what I thought it would be. Sharing your life with someone is difficult!

Most of all, Mr. Wickham is not who I thought he was. I am a stranger in my own home. The man I must spend the rest of my life with makes me feel invisible. What should I do, Jane?

I realize that divorce is out of the question, but I am simply unhappy. I need encouragement, dear sister; what should I do? Please, help!

Sincerely,
Lydia Bennet

Dearest Lydia,

My beautiful young sister, what have you done? Oh, I miss you so much! You know that I have never been the type to say, "I told you so," and I will not start now. But I can always provide some words of encouragement!

To begin, you must realize, dear sister, that marriage is difficult! Even the wonderful Mr. Bingley and I have our ups and downs. Even though I know our love is true and will last for a lifetime, we have days when marriage is difficult, even for such fortunate lovers as we. Just know that you can change your situation if you are so inclined. The only thing you must do to be a good wife is to please your husband. And I know you can do it!

Don't forget that you are a beautiful young woman, and you are capable of sharing your life with Mr. Wickham. He is very dashing as well, and I am sure he can change his ways, if you are patient enough and show him how much you love him.

Be positive, Lydia, and remember that I am hoping for the best for you.

With love,
Jane Bingley

Dear Mr. Bennet,

We have noticed that your daughters sometimes seem in need of male role models. Your household is so filled with females that we would love to help provide another male figure for the girls. Perhaps we could take the girls for weekends or for little vacations and enjoy their company and they could enjoy ours. We are especially fond of Jane and Elizabeth. We are planning a weekend jaunt to Pemberly next weekend and we would love to take the girls for a weekend of fresh air, fishing, and dinner at a local hostel. We assure that they would not need anything more than luggage as well as a change of clothing. We would take care of all the expenses for our two favorite nieces.

We have noticed that Jane and Elizabeth have seemed greatly wretched lately. Ever since they met Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, they have seemed quite different and I think a change of venue will cheer their spirits. Please let us know if this is workable and if our nieces would enjoy a vacation.

Sincerely,
The Gardiners

Dear Aunt and Uncle Gardiner,

Thank you so much for your kind offer. Sometimes I think I have a great deal of time, but I never know where it goes. I spend a great deal of that in my library and I frequently miss opportunities to spend time with the family. I assure you that I have never had the intentions of becoming a somewhat aloof father because I truly love Jane and Elizabeth who are young women with kind hearts and strong minds. I second the notion that spending time with their aunt and, especially, their uncle would provide a marvelous role model of a kind, intelligent, and loving man. Jane, regrettably, is unable to attend the said excursion, however Elizabeth looks forward to spending the weekend with her favorite aunt and uncle and I am sure she will provide as much pleasure to you as you will provide for her. I acknowledge that it would be a novel idea to keep the destination a secret for as she has met Mr. Darcy and the circumstances were not pleasant, yet his home, I understand, is an architectural masterpiece. Please tell me when you would like to take this weekend and I will make sure that Mrs. Bennet will prepare Elizabeth for her journey.

Sincerely,
Mr. Bennet

JACKIE KAVANA

Walter Panas High School

Dear Miss Bennet,

I supported Mr. Bingley's decision to stay in London. I encouraged my brother's decision to leave Netherfield since it has so little to offer him and is not his type of society at all. Jane is very pretty and I am sure that she will find someone of equal social standing to marry her. I feel that Jane might feel unwelcome in Mr. Bingley's social circle and home since it is a society that she is not used to. I am also sure that your family will feel uncomfortable and I would never want that to happen.

You might be interested to know that Mr. Bingley has been spending a lot of his time with Miss Georgiana Darcy. We look forward to a future when the Bingleys and Darcys can be united in at least one marriage.

I wish the best for you, Elizabeth Bennet, and also for Jane, all of your sisters, and your interesting mother.

Your dear friend,
Miss Caroline Bingley

Dear Miss Caroline Bingley,

I would like to thank you for writing to me and giving me your opinion. I feel that Jane and Mr. Bingley have a wonderful relationship and everyone in town can clearly see this. I think that they could have a very promising future if Mr. Bingley left London to live in Netherfield but I also believe that Jane could make him happy in London. Jane's qualities make her an equal partner for Mr. Bingley so there is no need to worry on that matter.

I would also like to thank you for your concern on Jane's assimilating into Mr. Bingley's society. I feel that Jane would be perfectly fine and would have no trouble in being a part of his life. Our family would be very pleased to assimilate into his society as well.

Miss Georgiana Darcy is a very lovely girl and I wish her the best. However, your good wishes alone will not create a happy marriage for them. I wish you happiness within your society in London and hope to see you soon.

Yours,
Elizabeth Bennet

ALISSA KELLY

Walter Panas High School

Dear Miss Elizabeth Bennet,

Recently, I have noticed you hanging around Mr. Darcy quite often. I think it would be in your best interests if you would distance yourself from him. Being the handsome and clever man that he is, Mr. Darcy would much rather associate with individuals, such as myself, who are in a higher social class. Mr. Darcy would prefer to marry someone like me, who can provide the right class and fortune for a proper wife and mother. In contrast, don't you think that your partnership skills are not quite up to par? If I were you, I'd want Mr. Darcy to be with someone with whom he could live a happy life. Georgiana and I are such close friends and I am sure she would much rather see her brother with me. I assure you that it would be best for you and everyone if you found another potential husband.

Sincerely,
Miss Caroline Bingley

Dear Miss Caroline Bingley,

Where did you ever get the idea that I was interested in Mr. Darcy? He has been rude to my family and especially to my mother since the day I met him. I have a very negative opinion of him. Even your slightest suggestion that I have a fondness for him is quite offensive and repulsive. I recently ran into Mr. Darcy and he had the nerve to mention the gap between our social standings. I was extremely offended by his pride and arrogance. I also noticed that you brought up your relationship with his sister Georgiana. I could not care less whether you are friends with her or not. I want nothing to do with Mr. Darcy or his family. Rest-assured, I am not interested in Mr. Darcy. You don't have to spend even one sleepless night worrying about my standing in your way of becoming his wife. Mr. Darcy is all yours.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Bennet

Dearest Fanny,

Family has always been of upmost importance to me. With all due respect: I understand how difficult it is for you to treat my sisters like your own. In your favor I understand how important your social standards are and that you only want the best of the best for us. But my sisters Elinor and Marianne have wonderful qualities that should not be missed because of their sex. I am extremely thankful that the fortune of my family has been passed down to me but, we need to make sure that their financial status is acceptable to our friends. Quite frankly, I understand your concern. Our child must be taken care of and we must not waste money on my family. However we must be careful and not appear too selfish.

I would enjoy nothing more than to keep you happy, you must understand. But I assure you that we will never lose sight of the importance of our economic status. However perhaps, they could visit us occasionally for tea.

I feel that the three of you could have an entirely civil relationship that could benefit everyone. It would mean a lot to me if you would do this. I cherish our marriage and your love more than anything. I also resent my father re-marrying as quickly as he did and having 3 daughters and not providing for them as I provide for you.

Love,
John

My beloved John,

I sincerely appreciate your understanding my opinions towards our tricky situation. I would love nothing more than to host your sisters for a tea every once in a while. As long as our position with our friends and peers is upheld, I suppose I could adjust the way they are treated by me. Your father did create a situation that has made our lives more difficult. He married again so quickly and neglected to take care of his second family. I am glad that you understand my concerns, for you have been a wonderful husband and father and I believe you have been a more than kind brother, who has taken responsibility for a family that is not really yours.

Considering my appreciation for how great you are I would like to invite your sisters for a brunch on the 17th of the month. They are, of course, expected to dress accordingly and bring their manners. I am so glad you are such a wonderful and understanding husband.

Yours truly,
Fanny

Dear Bingley,

What a lovely ball you dragged me to last night. It was extravagant, as only poor, uneducated country folk can arrange. What smart conversations we produced with such lovely rustic bumpkins. You danced all night with a beautiful young woman who does not love you enough for you to stay here any longer. You should not stay here; it is obvious that she does not want to be in your presence. Did you see her family, her mother was frightening and her sisters were impulsive, without any manners; it is amazing that Jane is as lovely as she is. Since you had the prettiest young woman to dance with, I danced with the second prettiest young woman at the ball. Her name is Elizabeth; and conversation with her was quite different. When we talked, she was very intelligent, and quick witted, she is very clever for a young woman. However, she declined to dance with me and how dare she refuse to accompany me to the dance floor. She did finally do me the honor of dancing with me, but she was not shy in sharing her opinion about what I had said concerning her family. I never meant for her to overhear my comments, but they were all very precise and I think she knows the validity of those statements. However you are my best friend and I forgive you for that night, but again we should leave for London in the morning.

Yours,
Darcy

Dear Darcy,

I agree with you. It was an extravagant ball because I danced with the loveliest and sweetest woman, Jane Bennet. Though my best friend, you are far too judgmental and I do not agree with you about the beautiful Miss Jane Bennet. She is beautiful, sweet, and shy about her feelings. There is a humility about her and she is unaware of her beauty. She is very much different than the women of London, who are far more forward in expressing their feelings. I caught a glimpse of Elizabeth refusing to dance with you; I could not help but smile when I saw the look on your face for I know that you are unaccustomed to hearing the word no when you have made a request. I think it was probably good for your character. Though you may have talked about Miss Elizabeth's family in such an insensitive manner, you should have apologized to her at the time, perhaps then she might not have refused your dance request.

Yours,
Bingley

MAURA MURPHY

Walter Panas High School

Dear Miss Margaret,

I understand that you are very young, but you must think of your future. A good man will take care of you and provide for you all your life. But once you find this man, you must immediately latch on to him and do not let go. This man is your escape into the blissful state of marriage and true love. You must also make sure that this man is responsible and will bring a good fortune and a proper name to your family. That is all that is important in a husband. No more, no less. I would like to use myself as an example of a woman who has made all the right choices and whose life will be comfortable and happy. It is a woman's responsibility to dedicate her life to her husband and children and no female is too young to plan for her future. Your sisters are lovely, yet they do not plan wisely; I hope that you will be different in that aspect.

Fondly,
Lucy Steele

Dear Miss Lucy Steele,

Why are you writing to me on this matter? I am very young, and do not need to plan so coldly and precisely. My sisters are wonderful and are the role models I intend to imitate. They are full of life, and while they may not plan every aspect of their lives, they are extremely happy- at least some times. The man I choose to marry will likewise be full of life. I do not mind if he is unacceptable to you, as long as he loves me. That is all that will matter. Right now all that I want to do is enjoy life, play outdoors and spend time with my family. You are too intrusive into my life and you do not allow your emotions to lead you to the path of happiness. I could never follow your advice and be happy.

Sincerely,
Margaret Dashwood

SARAH CAPPIELLO

Fontbonne Hall Academy, Brooklyn

My dearest Kitty,

I know, darling sister, how much you had hoped to accompany the Forsters and me to Brighton and, I must say, though I have been here only a few days, I see how much you should have hoped for such good fortune!

I am really having the most marvelous time. Mrs. Forster and I help entertain the soldiers every day and there is not a one of them I do not like—and not a one of them who does not like me, I might add.

Now, since I finally have one moment to myself to breathe, I have decided to share with you all the secrets to attracting the attention of the handsomest, most important soldiers. You must never get it into your head to behave like our poor sister, Mary. Do not speak to the soldiers of the books you have read or the artwork you admire. Rather, laugh often, tell them how very much you long to see the places they have traveled to, and fill your head with nothing but music and dancing.

Oh, how these men in Brighton love to dance with me!

Well, dearest, I must be off now. Mr. Wickham has just arrived to walk with me.

I shall write to you as soon as I am able, but do not expect another letter for some time.

Your most darling sister,
Lydia

ADRENA DAW

Walter Panas High School

Dear Miss Elizabeth Bennet,

Hope you are doing well, my dearest. I have noticed lately that you have been associating yourself with Mr. Darcy. While you two look very attractive together, I do not believe that you should be expecting any further relationship. Not to be rude, my dear, but he is, well beyond your class. Although you are a lovely woman and he is a very proper man, he deserves a more appropriate lifetime companion, a woman who shares his own background-- a woman such as I, one who has had the upbringing and the education to match his own. We are members of the same class and I believe our wealth could bring much happiness, the proper kind of happiness- that which comes from the right people marrying the right people. Our lives would be perfect and we would be the perfect couple together. Therefore I would much appreciate it if you would find another man who is closer to your own social standing. I hope that you understand my real concern for you, your family and your future.

Sincerely,

Miss Caroline Bingley

I have received your letter and I am amazed and horrified with your concern. Forgive my directness in writing this but your attack on my family and myself has allowed me the right to state that Mr. Darcy is considered an arrogant boor in my family. The fact that Mr. Darcy, without truly knowing my family, criticized them is incredibly rude and offensively proud of him. I do not know where you received the idea of our sharing anything and certainly not a life together because I truly dislike him and his manner of judging others. Clearly, he and you, Miss Caroline Bingley, are perfect for each other. Neither of you knows how to truly be considerate of the feelings of others, including my beloved sister, Jane. So, as I said before, nothing is going on between Mr. Darcy and me nor will there EVER be anything between us. I send my regards to your brother, Mr. Bingley, and ask him to remember the worth of my Jane.

Sincerely,

Miss Elizabeth Bennet

NICOLE ADJAMI

Fontbonne Hall Academy, Brooklyn

Dear Edward,

I wish I could tell you how I feel. Watching and hearing about you and Lucy kills me day by day.

You are making a bad choice, my dearest Edward. I have known about your secret engagement for a while now, and I was distraught upon hearing such news. As much as it hurts that you are keeping such a secret from me, it does not bother me as much as knowing the choice you are making is going to hurt you. This secret engagement will only lead to sorrow for you.

I understand you, Edward. We are made for each other. I must admit that I thought that lock of hair you had in your ring was mine, and it hurt me so much to discover that it was Lucy's. But these feelings I have for you, unlike hers, are real.

When you left, I threw myself into my artwork, knowing that was the only way I could handle such hopelessness and misery. When you came to notify me of Colonel Brandon's plan, I knew about your engagement, but I kept my emotions in check.

I may not be as outgoing as Lucy, but my intentions and emotions are genuine, unlike hers. She is a sly and selfish person, although you may not want to hear or agree with that. I keep my emotions inside and am reserved, which is why I am alone.

I know where your heart is, and I know Lucy cannot treat you the way you deserve to be treated. Please come back to me.

Love,

Eleanor

Dear John,

I am finding it more and more difficult now to maintain our household on the allowance that we presently have. I am reluctantly writing this letter and asking for your help. Your sisters and I are finding it difficult to maintain our household. We would never ask for help if we were not in dire circumstances, and had no other choice. I know that you love your sisters dearly, the only sisters that you have.

I am sure that your father would be pleased to know that you're taking care of his family. I am sure that your father meant to revise his will, but his death was so sudden, he didn't have a chance. I am sure you would like to fulfill your father's unspoken intentions and help us maintain our living situation.

I understand that you have other priorities with your growing family and your responsibilities as head of the Dashwood estate. I am sure Fanny loves your sisters as much as you do and would agree with my proposal.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon,
Your loving step mother

Dear Mrs. Dashwood

I was happy to receive your correspondence and I would happily consider your proposal. But the time is not right for me now. I have many other duties, in addition to my extended family, to deal with at this time but, I will carefully consider your needs.

Of course, I will follow my father's will and last intentions to the letter. I cannot judge what my father's intentions were, I can only follow his written instructions. I can understand that his death was sudden, and perhaps he was meaning to revise his will, but he did not and the law states that we must follow his last will and testament.

I am well aware of your concerns I shall share them with my wife, who sends her love and best wishes. I must also tell you that my son favors the Dashwood side of the family. But times are difficult for us all and we will all get through this unscathed.

I am sure Fanny will invite you and your daughters to dinner soon.

Yours truly,
John Dashwood