

Reading is a common activity in Austen's work. This exhibition includes first editions of Austen's novels, works directly mentioned in her novels, and other relevant contemporary literature. *Northanger Abbey* is Austen's response to the popularity of Gothic novels. Characters within her novels often read poetry to one another, or are seen reading contemporary novels. Regency readers were just as likely to pick up Lord Byron's newest epic poem as acquire an Ann Radcliffe or Jane Austen novel.

Educational and occupational opportunities for firstborn gentlemen emphasized a classical education, on the assumption that they'd live off the wealth of their properties (located both in Britain and, as in *Mansfield Park*, in places Britain had colonized) while someone else managed them. Second and subsequent sons were likelier to have a slightly more practical education. Estate management, studying for the law or the clergy, or enlisting in the Army or Navy were all viable options.

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Making Mr. Darcy

Cultural Context for the Regency Gentleman

Curated by Lynne M. Thomas

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Our first impressions of the works of Jane Austen are often constructed through modern television and film adaptations of her novels. In adaptations, a "proper" Regency gentleman may be easily created simply by casting a British actor with a posh "received pronunciation" accent and a good costuming department. To be considered a gentleman in actual Regency society, however, was a different matter.

Works selected for this exhibition illuminate how gentlemen contemporary to Jane Austen (1775-1817) were educated, dressed, occupied themselves in work and leisure, participated in politics, and managed their love lives, providing additional context for Austen's characterizations of gentlemen, both admirable and troublesome.

Austen's most beloved heroes are considered "good" because of their self-education, care for others, and kind, often more equitable approach to those with fewer resources. Austen's "bad boys" tend to squander their fortunes, lack motivation for their own occupations, enter into inappropriate intimate relationships, or directly cause harm to others through inaction or indifference.

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Brochure created by: Eva Miller & Chloe Ottenhoff

The previous generation of eighteenth century British nobility preferred bright colors with extensive embroidery and lace trimmings on men's clothing, wearing wigs or powdering their own hair, as seen on the "Fancy Dress in 1700" paper doll. During the Regency period, the preferred aesthetic became a more "natural" look modeled on riding habits with much simpler lines. Some fussiness was retained through creative cravat tying, exemplified by George Bryan "Beau" Brummel (1778-1840), a fashion influencer of the day. Sadly, a falling out with the Prince Regent and debt put him out of favor and sent him into Continental exile.

Regency men's fashion was also influenced by an increasing emphasis on physical activity and fitness as an attractive, gentlemanly enterprise. Driving, horse racing, pedestrianism, boxing, fencing, and hunting were commonly undertaken. Not all gentlemen participated directly, of course; wagering (including upon the outcomes of sporting activities) was one of the most popular forms of gambling, along with playing cards. Prominent writers about sporting pastimes, Pierce Egan (pugilism) and George Tattersall (of the most famous Regency stable for acquiring horses, Tattersall's) published numerous works for sporting readers.

Attention to political life (and royal births, deaths, and scandals) was essential to successfully navigating Regency society, since Regency gentry were often Members of Parliament. The gap between the wealthy and the poor during this period was expansive, leading to riots and other social unrest as more stringent laws were put into place to control the populace.



Egan, Pierce. *Boxiana*, 1829.

George Cruikshank and James Gillray were well-known visual satirists for whom the Prince Regent, along with current politics, were frequent targets. The Prince Regent (later George IV) was extensively criticised for his general inattention to actual politics, profligate spending on the remodeling of Carlton House and other properties, his secret illegal marriage to Mrs. Fitzherbert, and his scandalous treatment of his consort, Princess (later Queen) Caroline.

Married in 1795, the King and Queen separated shortly after their daughter Charlotte's birth in 1796. The 1817 death in childbirth of Princess Charlotte at age 21 and her stillborn son were experienced as a national tragedy. In 1820, when the Prince Regent was preparing to be crowned King George IV, he made another, unsuccessful, attempt to divorce Caroline, by accusing her of adultery (despite his own long, public history of same). He barred her from attending his coronation, but she remained the more popular monarch until her death in 1821.



Cruikshank, George. *The law's delay*, 1820.



Alken, Henry Thomas. *Sporting sketches*, 1817.

ball at Almack's Assembly Rooms, the most reputable venue for the Marriage Mart, required ladies and gentlemen with the best reputations to impress the Lady Patronesses and thus gain a coveted ticket. Courtesans and other members of the demi-monde, on the other hand, created their own salons and courted scandal as a way of maintaining status and securing financial freedom. Regency gentlemen moved back and forth between the two spheres with varying levels of discretion, occasionally paying handsomely to be omitted from the published memoirs of notorious courtesans like Harriette Wilson. Publications about such scandals sold briskly.

Jane Austen held her gentlemen heroes to an even higher standard than that of "gentleman," drawing characters as examples of what NOT to do, even when contemporary social mores allowed (and sometimes encouraged) gambling and fornication. Distinguishing between a man who initially presents as a gentleman but is a poor candidate for marriage and stability, and a good man (self-made or otherwise) who demonstrates personal character despite not being completely fashionable, is crucial for Austen's heroines. Austen's approach to what constitutes a gentlemanlike manner was more narrow than that of Regency society on the whole, yet her novels created indelible characters that still resonate today.



Gillray, James. *The loyal toast*, 1798.

FIRST EDITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY WORKS

In addition to first editions of Austen's novels, this case contains works by Austen's contemporaries, including a handful of works mentioned directly in Austen's novels. Austen's characters often read poetry to one another, particularly while forming a romantic attachment. Romantic poetry is often taught separately from Austen's novels, but the works are contemporary to one another, and in conversation to a certain degree: scholars have studied narrative irony in Byron's and Austen's works side-by-side, for example. Austen notes works by Byron, Radcliffe, and Lathom in passing in her letters.

SPORTS

The Regency approach to men's fashion was also influenced by an increasing emphasis on physical activity and fitness as an attractive, gentlemanly enterprise. Driving, horse racing, pedestrianism, boxing, fencing, and hunting were all commonly undertaken. Gymnastics was an option as well. Not all gentlemen participated directly, of course; wagering (including upon the outcomes of sporting activities) was one of the most popular forms of gambling, along with playing cards. The images above the case here depict two major pastimes for Regency gentlemen: hunting and horse racing. Two of the most prominent writers about sporting pastimes, Pierce Egan (pugilism) and George Tattersall (of the most famous Regency stable for acquiring horses, Tattersall's) have several works in this exhibition.

POLITICS, SATIRE, AND THE PRINCE REGENT

Much of the Regency gentry were also directly involved in politics as Members of Parliament. Attention to political life (and royal births, deaths, and scandals) was essential to successfully navigating Regency society. The distance between the wealthy and the poor was expansive, leading to riots and other social unrest as more stringent laws were put into place to control the populace. The Prince Regent (later George IV) was extensively satirized and criticized for his general inattention to actual politics, profligate spending on the remodeling of Carlton House and other activities, his secret first marriage to Mrs. Fitzherbert, and his scandalous treatment of his consort, Princess (later Queen) Caroline. George Cruikshank and James Gillray were notable visual satirists for whom the Prince Regent, along with current politics, was a frequent subject.

THE ART OF DRESS

The previous generation of eighteenth century British nobility preferred bright colors with extensive embroidery and lace trimmings on men's clothing, wore wigs or powderd their own hair, as seen on the "Fancy Dress in 1700" paper doll. During the Regency period, the preferred aesthetic became a more "natural" look modeled on riding habits with much simpler lines, although some of the fussiness was retained in the emphasis on creative cravat tying, exemplified in the personage of Beau Brummel. George Bryan "Beau" Brummel (1778-1840) was a fashion influencer of the day, until his falling out with the Prince Regent (his infamous remark "Who's your fat friend" is depicted here) and his debts put him out of favor and sent him into exile.

EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION

The educational opportunities for firstborn gentlemen emphasized a classical education, on the assumption that they'd live off the wealth of the properties they owned (including colonial slave plantations in many cases) while someone else managed them. Second and subsequent sons were likelier to have a slightly more practical education, typically learning estate management, studying the law or to be a member of the clergy, or enlisting in the Army or Navy. A small subset of Regency gentlemen continued their self-education through extensive reading and group activities like scientific societies.

SCANDAL, SEX, AND ROMANCE

While we may think of the Regency period as being excruciatingly genteel and emphasizing the utmost correct manners and etiquette, sex-related scandals abounded. While women in good society (le monde) and more scandalous society (le demi-monde) were scrupulously guarded from one another, gentlemen moved back and forth, with varying levels of discretion. Works in this case range from the high social sticklers of Almack's (who once denied admission to the Duke of Wellington because he had the temerity to wear trousers, which they had recently banned) to some of the greatest scandals of the age: George IV's attempt to divorce Queen Caroline, the illicit relationship between the Duke of York and Mrs. Clarke, and the publication of Harriette Wilson's Memoirs.