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.

Lyne would like to thank Marco Valladares-Perez & Quinn Ferris from the Conservation Unit for their expertise in case design, layout, and installation; graphic designers, Chloe Ottenhoff and Eva Miller, for the various publications involved; Dennis Sears & Tony Hynes for spotting relevant items that were acquired especially for this exhibition; the Interlibrary Loan and Main Stacks departments for timely wrangling of secondary sources; and the rest of the RBML staff for their community and thoughtful contributions to this exhibition and its related events.

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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Riotous works for sporting readers. The famous Regency stable for acquiring horses, Tattersall’s) published numer-
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prominently writers about sporting pastimes, Pierce Egan (pugilism)
Including upon the outcomes of the Regency period, the preferred and the populace 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” Brummell (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
George Cruikshank and James Gillray were well-known visual satirists for Regency society, since the Prince Regent (later George IV) was extensively criticized for his general immorality to actual politics, preoccupied spending and current politics, were
Austen’s approach to what constitutes a gentlemanlike manner was more narrow than that of Regency society on the whole, yet her novels remodel the “gentleman” drawing characters as examples of what "NOT to do, even when contemporary social mores allowed (and sometimes encouraged) gam-
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