

Elizabeth meets Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy at a party in the neighborhood. They begin their acquaintance by insulting

one another, develop strong feelings for each other, and eventually recognize those feelings as love. Obstacles to their marrying include differences in wealth and social position, the behavior of members of their respective families, and their own proud and prejudiced views of themselves and each other, which temporarily prevent them from communicating openly and honestly with each other about their feelings, hopes, dreams, and fears. Ultimately, as in all of Jane Austen's novels, the right people marry one another, having learned lessons about themselves and the world around them as they endure and overcome the difficulties set in their paths by themselves and others.

This summary of the plot is accurate, as far as it goes, but it does the novel a great disservice to oversimplify the plot and the issues the novel dealt with in such a way. In fact, *Pride and Prejudice* explores the moral and social conditions of life in the early nineteenth century in ways that enable us both to understand that earlier time better and to examine with greater insight our own attitudes and actions within the moral and social conditions of life in our own time, enabling us to determine ways in which our decisions about love, marriage, and proper behavior reflect our own truths about what is ultimately right and wrong. Yet, for all of its emphasis on morality, the novel is not preachy. Through her ironic style, Austen causes us to laugh at and with her characters as we explore our own pridefulness and prejudices along with theirs.

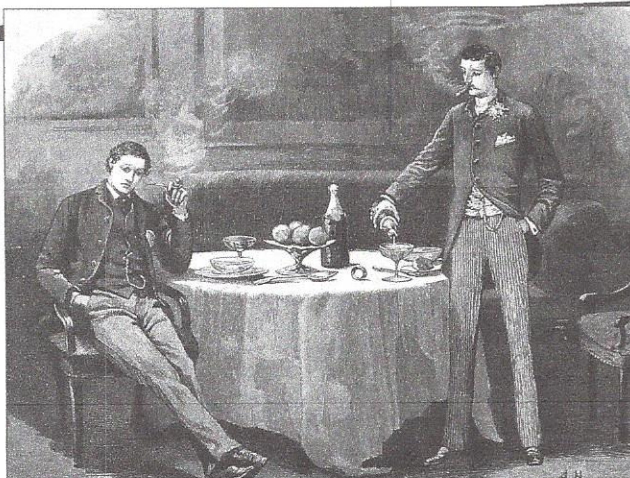
Jane Austen's England

The English Regency, in its most literal interpretation, encompasses the years 1811 to 1820. It began when the Prince of Wales was appointed Regent of England after his father, King George III, fell insane. The Industrial Revolution, which had begun in the mid-18th century, continued to bring innovation to the Western hemisphere during this era, while the political world remained entangled in wars and revolutions. In the Regency's broader interpretation—when used to describe periods of art, literature, fashion, design, and architecture—the Regency can encompass years as early as 1790 and as late as 1830.

Britain was transformed by the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. Until then most people lived in the countryside and made their living from farming. By the mid 19th century most people in Britain lived in towns and made their living from mining or manufacturing industries.

Below is a list of standard practices of behavior during this time period and some of the ways the story is impacted as a result. How do they differ from today's accepted standards of behavior? How are they similar?

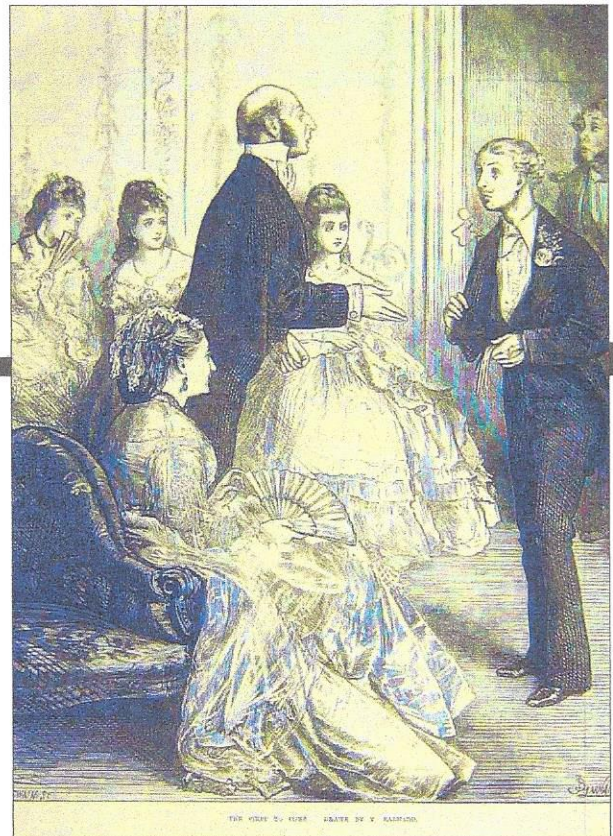
- A man always walks or rides on the outside of the woman on the street (so that she is protected from the street).
- You should not fidget, bite your nails, or scratch. You should stand or sit sedately and move in a smooth and graceful manner.
- Be cheerful and smile, but do not laugh loudly.
- A man never smokes in the presence of ladies. After dinner is served at a dinner party and the women retire to the drawing room the men may remain behind to smoke.
- You should not sit with your legs crossed (unless gracefully at the ankles)
- Never lift your skirts above the ankles.



- A lady never dances more than two dances with the same partner. Two would last approximately half an hour.
- Dancing is one of the few places respectable women can talk to a man privately (that's why balls play such an important role in finding a spouse.)
- It is considered rude for a lady to turn down an invitation from a gentleman to dance.
- A man at a ball is expected to dance if there are any ladies not already engaged. This is why it is an affront that Darcy does not dance with Elizabeth at the first ball.

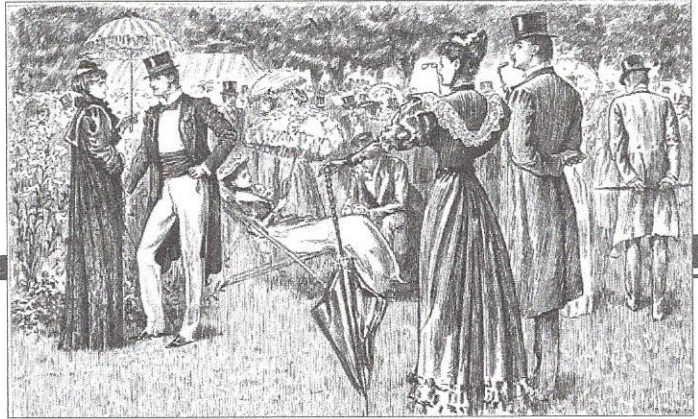


- As Darcy and Elizabeth discuss, women are expected to be "accomplished", which includes activities such as reading, riding, singing, playing piano, sewing, dancing and playing music. Society does not allow ladies of a higher class to have a profession.
- Women have no power of earning money, therefore it is their duty to marry as well as possible (hence Mrs. Bennet's obsession).
- If a woman does not marry, she is forced to rely on the charity of her male relatives.
- Whatever a married woman inherits becomes the property of her husband (which is why Wickham actively seeks a wealthy and naïve heiress).
- If a woman engages in sexual activity or even the vaguest hint of it, she is considered ineligible for marriage or for any lower class (but respectable) position such as governess, teacher, or paid companion. This is why it was so important to get Lydia married to Wickham after they had run off together.
- Formal, academic education is not considered important for women. Most women are taught at home, and studies focused on "accomplishments" and wifely duties rather than academics.

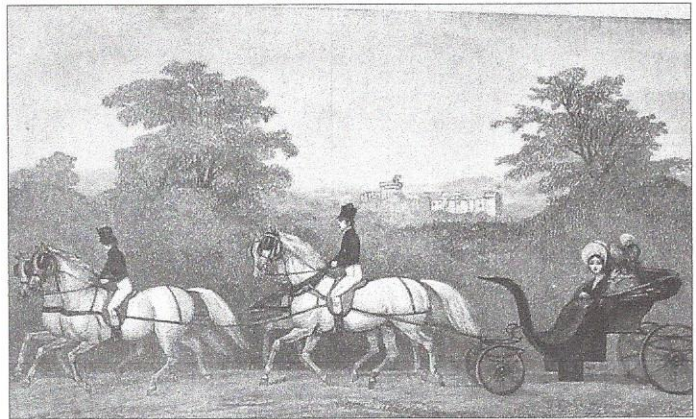


- Conversation should be appropriate to your gender, age, and class.
- Women should not debate—for example, fiscal or military policy—but they may comment on the price of veal or the welfare of their cousins in the army.
- Shouting, arguing, or whistling are essentially forbidden.
- When speaking to someone of a higher social standing, it is critical to remember the correct forms of address and be polite but not overly familiar.
- It is not polite to discuss money or the advantage of a particular marriage in public. This is why Elizabeth is so embarrassed when her mother declares the likelihood of Jane's marriage to Bingley.

- Gentleman should bow to a lady before leaving, rather than simply walking away.
- Among men, handshakes are exchanged only between those of equal class.
- Gloves must be worn at all times and may only be removed at the supper table (or buffet).



- A man always waits for a woman; she acknowledges him first with a bow and then he may tip his hat, using the hand furthest away from her.
- It is rude to introduce yourself; you must wait to be introduced formally by someone else, especially when the other person is of a higher rank. This is why Elizabeth tries to dissuade Mr. Collins from approaching Mr. Darcy.
- When acknowledging a woman with whom a man is familiar, with whom he wishes to speak, he may turn and walk with her as she speaks. It is not mannerly to make a woman stand in the street.
- When first meeting a gentleman the lady should acknowledge him with a bow of the head and a curtsy. When a lady knows a gentleman she may acknowledge him with a bow of the head.
- A lady waits to be introduced to a gentleman and never introduces herself.
- When introduced to a man a lady never offers her hand, she merely bows/curtsies politely and says, "I am happy to make your acquaintance."
- If someone greets you, or visits you, you must respond in kind. This is why Elizabeth thinks Darcy is proud and contemptuous when he barely acknowledges Wickham, and why Jane is offended that Caroline's return visit to her at her aunt's house is rudely brief.
- When entering the dining room, people generally enter in couples, with the rank of the ladies determining the order. This is why after she returns with Wickham, Lydia declares she will enter before her sisters, as a married woman outranks an unmarried one.



- A lady may never call on a man alone.
- Visitors should give advance warning of their arrival (like Mr. Collins's letter to Mr. Bennet). This is why it is especially shocking when Lady Catherine arrives unannounced.
- In a carriage, a gentleman sits facing backward. A gentleman should never sit next to a lady when he is alone with her in a carriage unless he is her direct relation.
- A lady under thirty years old should not walk alone without another lady, man, or servant unless walking to Church in the early morning. This makes Elizabeth's walk to Netherfield to visit Jane mildly scandalous.

