



E4
More4
Film4
4Radio
4oD

A-Z
Sitemap

Find your dream partner with Channel 4 Dating
Start the romance now

Channel 4 The web Search | Powered by Google

Home Watch Online TV Entertainment Lifestyle News Documentaries Interact



Sex, Marriage and Power

Marriage was the most important decision one could make in the Regency period: fortunes were lost and made on the altar and the decision (particularly for women) was one on which her future well-being was dependent.



Marriage and Money

Marriage and money were inextricably linked to power and inheritance. It was a world where a married woman's fortune was owned legally by her husband. The feudal laws of primogeniture meant that a daughter could not inherit her father's estate, and if her father died without a male heir, his wife and daughters would have to move out of the family home – a situation illustrated in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. The inheriting male heir might be a very distant relation, and perhaps completely unknown to the widow and her daughters. If a lady came from the super rich aristocracy, a father could pay for an act of parliament which would allow his daughter to inherit his wealth, with her husband taking the family name. This was however extremely rare.

Love

However important money was to a marriage, it was only in the Regency period when marrying for love started to become a viable option for the upper classes. In a culture obsessed with the cult of politeness, the love match became the era's literary ideal. The novels of the day focused on the suitability of partners along a different set of criteria, where manners and elegance were ranked as important as wealth and status. Previous to this era, the rich married to consolidate their fortunes and to increase their Courtly or governmental influence.

Licentiousness

The Regency was also a period of licentiousness, where extra-marital sex among the upper classes was not uncommon. A powerful marriage where an heir had been secured, enabled both husband and wife to have numerous discrete affairs. However the licentiousness of the period shocked many: the pre-reformers of the emerging middle classes were appalled at what they saw of their grandparents' behaviour. A revolution in sexual relations was on the cards.

The Importance of Marriage for Women

For women, making the best marriage possible was of utmost importance. Their financial future, as well as their position in society depended on it (single women were often deemed mentally ill). During the early nineteenth century women married relatively late as a family would wait until the daughter had completed her education and perfected her accomplishments. Once this was the case, a relative or close family friend would 'out' the lady during the season, perhaps travelling to the capital or one of the fashionable spa towns, such as Brighton or Bath, where they would act as chaperone and introduce a lady to society.

Time would be of the essence for females during the "season". She would, by this time, be in her early twenties and deemed of appropriate age to marry. If she was to circulate in fashionable society during the season, she would only have a couple of years before either her reputation would be tarnished as either too fast, fussy or worse...

[Back to top](#)

[Next: A Regency Buck](#)

© 2004 Channel4. All rights reserved

drench
Test your mental performance for a chance to win an MP3 download of 'Rhythm is a Dancer'.
[click here](#)



[Shop](#) | [About C4](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Access Advice](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertising on 4](#)

Ads by Google		
<p>Date Vietnamese Women Find Your Vietnamese Beauty. Browse Photo Profiles. Join Free! www.VietnamCupid.com</p>	<p>The Regency House Find Deals, Read Reviews from Real People. Get the Truth. Then Go. www.TripAdvisor.com</p>	<p>Fix Your Marriage An Alternative to Counseling. Get Free Marriage Help Immediately. MarriageMax.com</p>