Chapter One

STORIES OF THE GEORGIAN ERA: Jane Austen Revisited

For every adaptation the foundation is always the story of the novel and of course the time when the story of the novel was written. Since Jane Austen’s novels are set against the background of daily life in English Georgian society at the turn of the nineteenth century the mannerism of the society of the Georgian era are reflected in the novels of Jane Austen. Even the films made on the novels of Jane Austen tried to depict this society in their films, infact in this chapter stress is laid how Jane Austen’s novels revisited the modern society through the mode of films. For better interpretation of the films made on Jane Austen’s novels, it is necessary to study the society which existed during the time when the novels were written, since it helps the modern viewers to analyze the films in a much better way. The two films undertaken in this chapter are Pride and Prejudice 2005 directed by Joe Wright and Emma 1996 directed by Douglas McGrath.

Jane Austen’s novels are entirely situated during the reign of George III; they describe everyday lives, their joys and sorrows as well as their loves. Jane Austen’s novels deal with such varied subjects as the social hierarchies of the time, the role and status of the clergy, gender roles, marriage, or the pastimes of well-off families. Without even the reader noticing, many details are broached, whether of daily life, of forgotten legal aspects, or of surprising customs, thus bringing life and authenticity to the English society of this period. Jane Austen describes England of that period very nicely because she herself was the part of English gentry, belonging to a reasonably well- off family, well connected and remarkably well educated for rural England around the late 1790s or early nineteenth century. Some essential aspects of the Georgian era
such as the American Revolutionary War and the loss of the Thirteen Colonies, the French Revolution, and the birth of the British Empire are absent from her novels. The reign of George III if one includes in it the Regency period that took place during his final illness encompasses all of Jane Austen’s life, and even beyond, as it started in 1760, just before her parents married in 1764 and ended up in 1820, after the death of Jane Austen in 1817.

**WOMEN’S PLACE IN SOCIETY DURING JANE AUSTEN’S TIME**

During the time when Jane Austen was first trying her hands at novel writing she was only nineteen years old. She began serious writing in the 1790s at a time when at least half the nation of Great Britain was under twenty-one years of age and Jane Austen could be sure that there were many readers of her own age who would identify with the world she presented. Life expectancy back then was about thirty-seven years but she herself lived four years longer than the life expectancy for the period, reaching just forty-one years.

During the time when Jane Austen was writing, women were not given equal rights and place with that of men. Women were considered as secondary while men were primary. All kinds of restrictions were for women only and men were free to do anything. During that time girls were not given any access to legal rights or professional opportunities. There was an assumption that men and women were different in natural capabilities. In the words of Nico Hubner:

Eighteenth century England was time in which women had little to say in society. They did not have the right to vote, they were not allowed to own properties, when married and as the husband was the chief breadwinner, they were not supposed to work. As they could
not leave the house alone without being considered a prostitute, they were confined to the home where they would have to take care of children and the household, ‘a subordinate role’ […] in society. (1)

Both men and women were denied equality of opportunities in areas such as education, business and action. Girls were praised for being submissive, modest, pure and domesticated. The qualities of being independent minded, studious or talented were seldom regarded as feminine attractions. Austen in her novels tried to keep the female characters within the boundaries which were made by the society of her times. She even tried to show how a female is disliked when she tries to come out of these boundaries. Elizabeth, the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*, is the best example. She earns the disliking for herself from her mother when she refuses to marry Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet calls her “headstrong, foolish girl” (92). But in Joe Wright’s film she is shown more independent than she is portrayed in the novel. In the film she is shown roaming from one place to another all alone. This film focuses mainly on Elizabeth and her journey, nowhere in the film we find her absent. That’s why the famous opening lines of the novel “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a large fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1) have been entirely excluded in the film and the film instead opens with a long close-up sequence of Elizabeth. She is shown walking through a field of tall meadow grass. She is shown reading a novel *First Impression*. She approaches Longbourne, a fairly run down seventeenth century house with a small moat around it. Elizabeth jumps up onto a wall and crosses the moat by walking on a wooden plank duck board, a reckless trick learnt in early childhood.

Another example of unequal opportunity between the sexes concerned is the physical relationships before marriage. A girl’s chastity was absolutely vital for her good name, while a
man’s was not. Even Austen was aware of this. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Bennets becomes very upset when Lydia runs away with Wickham before marriage. In the film this scene is projected in the similar way. In the film when Elizabeth comes to know about the elopement of Lydia, she is shown crying with the open letter in her hand. Darcy and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner stand dumb, not quite knowing what to do. Elizabeth tries to speak but bursts into tears again. She cries for a longtime. From the conversation between Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Darcy it is quite clear that how Lydia’s act will bring bad name to the family.

Mr. Gardiner: I am afraid we go at once- I will join Mr. Bennet and

find Lydia before she ruins the family forever.

Mr. Darcy: I am so very sorry. This is grave indeed.

The reason behind this was if a young lady slept with a man other than her husband, there was a risk that any baby boy born in the subsequent marriage might inherit property which did not rightfully belong to him, as the baby had been secretly conceived out of the marriage. A baby girl posed less of a risk as she didn’t inherit property. This inheritance arrangement was called ‘male primogeniture’, and it was an established legal system at that time. Jane Austen presents the five Bennet girls as victims of this procedure in *Pride and Prejudice* and even in *Sense and Sensibility* the Dashwood sister were the victims of this procedure. This system ensured that women rarely became heirs to property. If there were no sons available, closest male relatives inherited the family estates. Jane Austen in her works illustrates the injustices and problems which women faced, with lack of fortune and legal rights. This is pointed out by the feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in the book *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

Austen examines the female powerlessness that underlies monetary
pressure to marry, the injustice of inheritance laws, the ignorance of women denied formal education, the psychological vulnerability of the heirness or widow, the exploited dependency of the spinster, the boredom of the lady provided with no vocation. (136)

Courtship, then was a complicated business for the more privileged members of society in England during Jane Austen’s time. A son from a noble family might successfully court a merchant’s daughter, if she had a large fortune and her reputation beyond question, in order to bring in a huge boost to the family’s wealth. However, a nobleman’s daughter was never allowed to get married to a merchant because family’s estates might then fall under the control of a dealer in trade, and the family name and continuity might be lost. In those days, people who were born into the higher classes regarded themselves as more established and important than people who had only recently become wealthy. Being ‘in trade’ was thought of as earning “new money” in contrast to being rich with ‘old money’.

Jane Austen herself, as a clergyman’s daughter, did not hold sufficient promise of land or dowry to attract a noble suitor. But her attractive vitality did win her the interest of more than one suitable young man during her courtship days but she was not prepared to endure “the misery of being bound without love” and therefore chose to reject the offer.

EDUCATION

In most of the eighteenth century education was confined to the monied classes. Male children of the upper class were either educated at home by tutors or sent to the primary preparatory school and then public schools. After that they entered university, usually one of the two oldest, Oxford or Cambridge and later went to the church or went into the Army, civil
service or back to the family estate to begin their role as great or small proprietors. Sons of upper middle class who could scrape up the money took the same route but with a different destination, depending upon their social ambitions. Like Mr. Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, the newly arrived gentleman’s social goal was to but an estate and become a great proprietor. The most important phase in their schooling took place at public schools, where their characters received the stamp of the class.

In the early nineteenth century there were nine, all male public schools namely, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Winchester, Westminster and Charterhouse where boys boarded, and two London day schools, St.Paul’s and Merchant Taylor’s. These ancient institutions were the most prestigious and drew mostly upon upper class families; below them a large number of other public schools of Anglican, Non Conformist or Catholic origin flourished that catered more to the sons of the middle class. All these institutions openly aimed to inculcate aristocratic and bourgeois values as much as to educate. The ancient motto of Winchester was ‘Manners Makyth the Man’. The headmaster of Rugby, Dr. Thomas Arnold, crystallized the nineteenth-century ideal of the ‘Christine gentleman’ who combined aristocratic and bourgeois virtues with a natural ability to rule, a sense of social responsibility, and a strong competitiveness in sports as well as classroom subjects.

At the beginning of the century the curricula of these schools were extremely limited and consisted almost entirely of reading, writing and memorizing Greek and Latin. Even Derek Robson said:

The study of classics became increasingly one of a literary nature and less that of a language of use. Greek studies were advanced
and prose writers were neglected in favour of Greek and Latin poets. (44)

Dr. Arnold is generally considered the great innovator of the public schools system; he introduced new subjects such as French, history and mathematics, and emphasized content as well as language in reading classical authors. He is also credited with improving living conditions and discouraging practice of the harsher forms of discipline. Though the above mentioned public schools were not founded by the Church of England but they were connected to it. Therefore, school masters, like private tutors were likely to be Anglican clergyman. The public school education, followed by Oxford or Cambridge shaped the sons of the upper middle class and upper classes for position of leadership in the Church of England, the Army, the Political world and the professions.

Daughters of middle class families during that time were educated at home by tutors or sent to schools that taught music and drawing things that were not ‘serious’ like girls in Jane Austen’s novels were praised for playing piano and for painting. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* Austen very nicely makes the readers aware of the talents of the female characters. But the talents were not at all related with the studies rather the talents were that of painting, playing piano, stitching etc. the activities which were not considered serious. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth plays piano when asked by Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Joe Wright too portrayed the basic elements of Regency period in his film. In the film, Elizabeth is never shown studying except in the starting of the film, where she is shown reading a novel. She is never shown taking up any activity which is associated with the males. Similarly in *Emma*, we can notice that Emma is rich enough to study but she is bestowed with the talent of painting. Everyone appreciates her talent of painting when she makes a portrait of Harriet Smith. In the novel, Emma’s talent of
painting is shown when she makes the portrait of Harriet but in McGrath’s film this talent is shown in the beginning of the film when she presents one of her painting to Mrs. Weston on her wedding. The conversation between Emma, Mrs. Weston and Mr. Elton depict how nicely McGrath has portrayed this artistic talent of Emma.

Mrs. Weston: Oh, thank you Emma. Your painting grows more accomplished every day.

Emma: You are very kind, but it would be all the better if I had practiced my drawing more, as you urged me.

Mrs. Weston: It’s very beautiful.

Mr. Elton: I should never take sides against you, Miss Woodhouse, but your friend is right. It is indeed a job well done.

Women’s during that time were not at all encouraged to study. Even the protagonist of the Vanity Fair, throws her copy of Dr. Johnson’s dictionary out of the window of her departing carriage when she leaves her secondary school, in order to survive in the social world of London, all she needs to understand are the forces of class and money. From 1850 to 1880, several boarding schools and day schools were opened which offered more serious education for girls. During the beginning of 1871 at Cambridge, women were admitted to universities in small numbers. But still, educational equality for women was not achieved until twentieth century.

Certain town schools, old charity foundations were opened for children of middle and lower middle class and if they had money, private schools were also there, that varied greatly in quality. Voluntary schools were also opened, for children of the poor who could afford the limited tuition fee and they kept going by contributions from religious foundations. The majority
of these schools were voluntary and many parents could not spare their children from wage earning positions in factories, mines or other work places or from the work they could do at home, a large portion of the working classes missed even this elementary education. The voluntary schools taught children to the age of thirteen, when they went out to work, therefore by passing what today we call adolescence. During that period about one-third of the adult male population could not sign their names; we can assume that one-half of the working class benefitted from this elementary education, the rest remained illiterate. In 1833, Parliament made its first annual grant to the large private educational societies (one Anglican, the other Dissenting) to help them to build schools. In 1839, the amount was increased, and a system of Government inspection was established. In 1846, teacher’s salaries began to be subsidized, and the old inefficient monitorial system began to disappear. For the first time, a system of apprenticeship programs, training colleges and retirement pensions was provided for teachers and a sense of professionalism developed, as can be seen in the professional pride of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe*.

Conservative wanted to preserve the social order by including discipline and right ideas. They wanted to provide sense of one’s place in the hierarchy rather than getting out of it. Churchmen and Dissenters were more interested in teaching Christianity according to their doctrines. Then came the Education Act of 1870 because the country became aware that voluntary schools were not working. This act tried to lift the education system of the country.

**MARRIAGE**

To get married during that time was very important for a middle class lady with a limited fortune. Marriage is one of the major themes of Austen’s novels as she herself was aware of the
importance of marriage during Regency period. In the words of Jaclyn Geller:

A young woman of small fortune in England in 1813 had few options. She was barred from the professions and could exercise no voting rights to alter this state of affairs. In marriage she ceased to exist as a legal entity; outside of wedlock, she was destined to a life of grinding poverty and shameful spinsterhood. Domestic law in itself effected the legal oppression of women by making it virtually impossible to exist outside of marriage. (13)

People looked down upon those who remained unmarried and had no fortune. Like Miss Bates in Jane Austen’s *Emma*. In the film McGrath has very nicely portrayed the plight of Miss Bates. The poverty of Miss Bates can be seen through the kind of house they live in. Even when asked by Harriet if Emma will not marry her plight would be like Miss Bates, Emma says that she is rich and she will not undergo the same plight like that of Miss Bates.

Harriet: I do so wonder, Miss Woodhouse, that you are not married.

Emma: I have no inducements to marry. I lack neither fortune, nor position, and never could I be so important in a man’s eyes as I am in my father’s.

Harriet: But to be an old maid, like Miss Bates…

Emma: She is a poor old maid, and it is only poverty which makes celibacy contemptible. A single woman of good fortune is always respectable.
In *Pride and Prejudice* as well Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins just because she already twenty-seven, still unmarried, and is not as rich as Emma. Wright in his film depicted the plight of Charlotte so well that the pain of remaining unmarried can be seen on her face. She says:

Charlotte: To become an old maid, at best tolerated, at worst a burden, dependent on the kindness of others? Or to seek the protection of marriage.

In olden times, before industrialization, there was domestic industry in which both the parents that is husband and wife together worked as a team, so wife was also given the due respect as she too works for the earning of the livelihood. But industrialization changed the position of middle class wives, by making them economically useless at home. With the rise of living standards deprived women from the work they earlier did at home. Servants took over household chores, and clerks and assistants those of the home centered business. Not only the middle class women but upper class women were affected by these changes. In Austen’s *Emma*, an interesting comparison can be drawn between the married lives of the two sisters, Emma and Isabel, to the two brothers, Mr. Knightley and Mr. John Knightley. Emma and Mr. Knightley will stay in Highbury and manage the affairs of their property together, whereas Isabel and her husband are part of the migration to the city. By the means of suggestions in the narrative, we learn that John Knightley, a lawyer, divides his time between work and family with little energy for anything else. His wife spends all of her time at home with the little children. Consequently, the two men view their wives differently. Mr. Knightley sees Emma as a partner with whom he collaborates in decisions, as suggested by the lively dialogue between them. John Knightley sees his family as a burden, the modern male professional view of marriage. As women had fewer responsibilities, they became a greater burden to their working husbands. In country families the husband and
wife viewed the home as their joint territory. Yet, when the all male professions began to take the man away from the home, the home became the exclusive territory of the women. The separation of husband and home contributed to the polarization of sex roles that characterized the age and was partly responsible for its sexual stereotypes that took hold most strongly in the middle class. Austen was very well aware of this kind of stereotypes existing in her society. She made use of this in her novels as well. It can be noticed that for Mrs. Bennet (who is the part of middle class) her five daughters are burden on her and she is always concerned about their marriage no matter her daughters like the boy or not. But on the other hand Mr. Woodhouse who is of rich class does not consider his daughter Emma as a burden and even he is not concerned about her marriage. The restlessness of Mrs. Bennet and the relax mood of Mr. Woodhouse can be seen in the films undertaken for study. In England, the upper class has always, to some extent, been free of them. Women of the upper class had more control over their money and so found themselves in a less subordinate role. This can be traced in the upper class female characters of Austen’s novels. For instance, Emma is the part of upper class, she is proud of herself. She is so snobbish that she looks down upon all those who are beneath her. She is the young mistress of Hartfield. In *Pride and Prejudice* the upper class is represented by Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. In the film Wright presented Lady Catherine as a haughty and bossy woman which is true to her character. Upper class women also joined in some masculine pursuits such as hunting. Finally, the fact that upper classmen did not work made women their equals in idleness. The situation of middle class women was more isolated.

Individual women like Harriet Martineau and Caroline Norton rebelled against this life of genteel uselessness in the first half of the century, but it was not until the 1850’s that legal reforms were enacted that affected women as a class. English matrimonial law stipulated that
through marriage the husband became the owner of property, including real estates, of his wife. In 1855, a movement led by Barbara Bodichon began to protest this, but did not have its first victory until 1870.

The Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870, 1882, and 1893 gave wives the same property rights as unmarried women. This strengthened the position of upper class women who had money and property to inherit, but since women of the middle class were still denied entrance into most areas of work and the professions, few had earnings to keep. Careers for genteel women were confined to writing, journalism, and governess work until the end of the century, when teaching, civil service, and nursing rose in status. Lower middle class women began to fill jobs in shops and offices that had multiplied by the Property Acts. Working class women were, of course, unaffected by these new laws because they had no property, and their earnings were immediately used up for survival.

Before 1857, divorce could be obtained through a private act of Parliament and at great expense, but in the year 1857 divorce was made an ordinary civil action, thus making it easier for the middle class. The Matrimonial Causes Act maintained the doubled standard because divorce was granted on the proof of the wife’s adultery but husbands were not charged for adultery rather they were charged for their cruelty if divorce was to be granted to any wife.

**Prohibitions to Marriage**

- A widower could not marry his deceased wife’s sister.
- A widow could not marry her deceased husband’s brother.
- A widower could not marry his niece by marriage.
- A widower could not marry his stepdaughter.
• A widower could not marry his aunt by marriage.
• A lunatic could not lawfully contract a marriage, except during lunatic interval.
• Insanity after marriage did not invalidate it.

While these prohibitions existed legally, clandestine marriages still took place between two people who knowing full well that their marriage would not be legal, still wanted to go through with some sort of ceremony in order to solemnizing their vows. Perhaps the most infamous clandestine marriage was that between the Prince Regent and Maria Anne Fitzherbert. In this case, a clergyman was bribed to look the other way in the absence of a marriage license and in light of the fact that Fitzherbert was a catholic widow. The marriage was further invalidated by the fact that the Prince Regent as an heir to the throne under the age of twenty-one, hadn’t gotten the King’s permission.

PROFESSION

To take up profession during the England of 1800, was considered a low status. In traditional or aristocratic society, working for a living is held in lower esteem than in living on the proceeds of inherited wealth. But there were very few professions as compared with today. The modern bureaucratic industrial society created new professions and elevated old ones. The rise in status and number of the professions is a one of the characteristic of modernism. In America, professional are glorified but in an aristocratic country like Great Britain the rise of profession was more difficult and complex process. As George Orwell observed that the upper middle class acquired its strength and prestige in the late nineteenth century largely because powerful bourgeois professions absorbed aristocratic culture and values. Some of the Great Britain’s economic problems today can be traced to this tendency among well off men of the previous
century to avoid commercial activity. While their counterparts in America dove right into it. Profession explored in the early nineteenth century by the law of primogeniture, in which only the eldest son would inherit the family property, and so the younger sons were freed up for the professions. In many of the early nineteenth novels we find that, younger sons of the gentry and aristocracy usually enter Army or the Church because they had the money to purchase commissions in the Army. In Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Mr. Knightley is the owner of his parental property but his younger brother is a barrister.

Army was traditionally considered more gentlemanly than the Navy. Therefore, a young man of ability with neither blood nor wealth had a better chance of rising in the Navy than the Army. Until 1871, the infantry and cavalry were still almost entirely purchased that is, manned by the rich, who were in a far better position to buy commissions. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the lazy and dishonest Wickham too purchased a commission. Professional options for women of the gentry in Jane Austen’s day did not exist. Marriage was the only honourable provision for a well educated young woman. But a lady who found herself without support could become a governess. In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax compares becoming a governess to entering the slave trade. McGrath in his film though didn’t mention about governess as entering into slave trade but he has made it necessary to show a scene in which Mrs. Elton was forcing Jane Fairfax to take up governess as a job. She says:

Mrs. Elton: I have some wonderful news. I have found a position for you. It is with a choice family in Bath, and the position is in---

Jane: I’m most obliged, but I would not consider leaving Highbury.
Mrs. Elton: As your protector, I cannot allow you feel that way. I’m sure everyone agrees with me. What are your options? After all, Jane.

In many houses, governess was little better than a servant, with survival wages, unspecified hours and no prospects for the future expecting escape through marriage and with no other professional options open to them, many governesses found themselves unemployed. Professional options for women increased very slowly, by the end of the century. Some advances had been made in journalism, low level public jobs and above all, teaching.

The prospects for middle class and upper middle class men were far better as the nineteenth century progressed. The two old profession law and medicine rose in status. Barristers had always enjoyed a good deal of prestige because of their connection with the Inns of Court in London. Members of the medical professions had much less social standing than barristers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Surgeons bore the stigma of having been barbers in the seventeenth century and most people were treated by apothecaries rather than doctors well into the nineteenth century. Medical education in England was inferior to that found in Scottish Universities.

Though the Army and the Church were slow to open their doors to middle class men, but some progress was made during the century toward the democratization of both. Resistance of the Army to middle class infiltration of its upper ranks was also strong. But the sorry state of the militia, and its weak leadership in contrast to the Navy, finally led to reforms after some of the scandals of the Crimean War became known. In 1871, a bill abolishing the purchasing of commissions was introduced in Parliament. In addition to the rise in status, organization and
professionalism in law and medicine and the move toward democratization of the Military and Government, several new professions emerged in the nineteenth century. The needs of business and industry created the new professions of engineering and accounting. Nursing became professionalized through the efforts of Florence Nightingale. Positions in the civil service grew in number with the advent of decent salaries and pensions, and recruitment became more competitive. Teaching became professionalized as the movement toward a system of national education gained strength. Many of the historians are of the view that middle class victory of the nineteenth century is owed to the professions.

In literature of the nineteenth century, professional ideals were expressed in many genres in the great biographies and autobiographies of Carlyle, Mill and Darwin, in poetry about the vocation of art by Tennyson, Browning, and the Pre-Raphaelites, and in many novels of the period- Austen’s *Persuasion*, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. Jane Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* didn’t talked much about the profession of that period rather she made some of her characters to take up professions that were in vogue during that period. For instance Mr. Wickham of *Pride and Prejudice* is the part of military, Mr. Elton of *Emma* and Mr. Collins of *Pride and Prejudice* were in church, and Mr. Knightley’s younger brother was a barrister. In the films undertaken for study not much is talked about profession rather characters are assigned their professions as given in the novels. Joe Wright has shown Mr. Wickham in the military uniform and Mr. Collins is shown delivering lecture in a church.

**FASHION**

There has been much written about eighteenth century fashions, and there are innumerable
books devoted to the description and illustration of dress. The dress worn by labour, industrial worker and those living and working in the countryside is more serviceable, rather than fashionable clothing. The majority of people sought to keep up with the fashionable minority, copying their clothing in less expensive materials. “Like us, eighteenth-century people needed clothing for warmth and comfort, but they quickly abandoned those needs if fashion or occasion dictated” (Baumgarten 11).

**MALE ATTIRE**

A well-dressed man requires different costume for every season and occasion. There are four kinds of coats which a man requires or must have: a morning coat, a frock coat, a dress coat and an overcoat. George IVth’s wardrobe was sold for fifteen pounds and a single cloak brought no less than eight hundred pounds. The dress of an English gentleman in the present day should not cost him more than position, if a gentleman’s income is large it will take a much smaller proportion, if small a larger one.

A black cloth trouser is worn for the evening wear. The only evening waistcoat for all purposes for a man of taste is one of simple black cloth, with simplest buttons possible. The only distinction allowed is in the neck tie. The neck tie must be white and smaller, for dinner, the opera, and balls. The black tie is only admitted for evening parties, and should be equally simple. The gloves must be white not yellow. Gloves should always be worn on entering the room and drawn off for dinner. There are shades of being ‘dressed’, and a man is called ‘little dressed’, ‘well dressed’, and ‘much dressed’, not according to the quantity of his coverings. To be ‘little dressed’ is to wear old things, of that is no longer the fashion, having no pretension to elegance,
artistic beauty, or ornament. To be ‘much dressed’ is to be extreme in fashion, with brand new clothes. To be ‘well dressed’ is the happy medium between these two.

Jane Laver’s *Costume and Fashion* (1985) is an excellent reference guide for the male and female clothing styles for the period. The clothes of English changed drastically during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Jane Laver stated that:

Like all great social upheavals […] had a profound effect on the clothes of both men and women […] In the male dress the quest for simplicity meant the abandonment of French “court” clothes and the acceptance of English country clothes, […] made of plain cloth [without] lace. […] And […] for the universal three-cornered hat they substituted a primitive form of a “topper”. (148-149)

By 1800 the English gentleman had adopted a new style of clothing with “a top hat, a not too exaggerated neck cloth, a coat with revers and a collar of medium height,…a waistcoat, … breeches with a square flap…fitting into ridding boots” (Laver 153)

**FEMALE COSTUME**

For a married woman of rank, five hundred pounds a year ought to be maximum and hundred pounds a year the minimum. The wives of ministers and more especially of diplomatists, who require appearing frequently either in foreign courts, or in our own may require five hundred pounds. When a lady of rank appears dressed for the morning, she should be richly dressed. Silk, or if in winter, some material trimmed with silk or velvet, should compose her dress. The morning dress of the present day is worn close up to the throat and the sleeves, richly worked, or
trimmed with lace, may be seen hanging down, or fastened round the wrist with a bracelet. Even Rudolph Ackermann has given the description of dress worn by ladies in those days, “A white dress over a white satin slip, the bottom of the shirt is trimmed with a drapery with full blown roses which are placed at regular distances…” (9). If the stockings are visible, they should be of the finest silk or thread, the shoe well made, slight and somewhat trimmed, the fashion of wearing gloves indoors or even mittens has much died away lately.

One point of dress has been much amended lately. The full dinner dress, in England admits and indeed, in the present days of luxury, demands great splendor. The dress may be blue, silver, grey, maize, lavender or very pale green, pink is suitable alone to balls, it may be of any thick texture of silk in vogue. At large dinners, diamonds may be worn, but only on a brooch or a pendant from the throat, a full suite of diamonds is suitable for very full dress alone. The same rule applies to emeralds, but not to pearls. Row of pearls, confined by a diamond snap, are beautiful in every dress. Ball dress requires less art than in the dinner costume. For a ball, everything in married woman must be light, fanciful and airy. The heavy, richly trimmed silk, is only appropriate to those who do not dance. For the married lady ‘moire’ dresses, either trimmed in lace, or tulle and flowers, or white silk or thin dresses over white satin are more suitable. Small feathers are even worn at balls, and for the married, produce perhaps more effect than any other ‘coiffure”; but they are wholly out of fashion on a young lady’s head.

During the festive occasions, the court dress must not be admitted. This costume consists of an entire dress, generally made of some plain but costly silk. The dress forms one component part, next comes the petticoat, usually of some lighter material and lastly the train. The dress is made even for elderly ladies. The petticoat is usually formed of rich Brussels lace or of Honiton lace or tulle, and often looped up with flowers. The train is of richest material of the whole dress.
Formerly it was often of satin, now it is of moiré or glace silk, though satin is again beginning to be worn. It fastens half round the waist, and is about seven yards in length and wide in proportion. It is trimmed all round with lace, on the edge, with bunches of flowers at intervals, and is lined usually with white silk. The petticoat is ornamented with the same lace as the train. The bodice and sleeves are all made in strict uniformity with the train and petticoat. The head dress comprises a lappet of lace, hanging from either side of the head down nearly to the tip of the bodice. Diamonds or pearls or any other jewels sufficiently handsome, may be worn in the hair but diamonds and pearls are frequently adopted. The same ornaments should be worn on the bodice around the neck and arms. The shoes should be white satin and trimmed according to fashion. The fan should be strictly a dress fan.

Women’s attire, like men’s underwent the same fashion revolution in the 1790s. “In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century the general lines of costume were already laid down: for women a version of what came to be known as the “Empire gown” was the order of the day” (Laver 153). In the words of Laver:

Women’s dress at this period was less extravagant [than men’s], but showed an even more drastic break with the past. Paniers, bustles and corsets were all abandoned, as were also the rich materials of which dresses had formerly been made. Instead women, wore a robe en chemise, which did indeed look like an undergarment, for it consisted of a white, high waisted muslin cambric or calico garment falling to the feet and sometimes so transparent that it was necessary to wear white, or pink, tights underneath. (152)
To produce a film that depicted the Regency period, it requires a certain adherence to historical fact and style of clothing. Jane Austen in her novels has only a few references to clothing but none of which are in detail. But both the films tried to imitate the clothing of the Regency period.

McGrath’s *Emma* is a heritage production that lovingly displays period clothing but still it is not able to mimic the clothing of the Regency period. Since bonnets were very much in fashion but we rarely see Emma in a bonnet rather she is just wearing ribbon on her head but Harriet on two-three occasions can be seen in a bonnet. The gowns which Emma or other females are wearing in the film are not so heavy and even they are not wearing lots of accessories. The gowns used in the films are made up of light fabric. As mentioned earlier that rich clothing were abandoned in the film too none of the female character can be seen in the rich clothing rather they are wearing clothes which came into fashion after the abandoning of the clothes worn by the ladies.

Like bonnets were the part of fashion during that time for female, for men hats were very much in fashion. McGrath has made use of hats in his film since his male characters on some occasions can be seen wearing hats while riding on a horse.

But when viewing Joe Wright’s *Pride and Prejudice* the first impression is that it does not follow the fashions of the Regency period. The characters in the film seem much less refined in clothing. The dresses of the Longbourne and Meryton females seen at Meryton balls are simple in design, dark grey or brown in colour, and course in material. But we still find the glimpse of the Regency period fashion when we see Mrs. Bennet wearing feather in her head that was very much popular among female during that period. The dress of the female characters turns lighter and more refined throughout the film, by not rigidly following the patterns of the Regency
period. Bonnets were an important accessory at this time, as seen in many fashion plates and portraits of this period in history. In general the female characters in Joe Wright’s film *Pride and Prejudice* are not very often seen wearing hats when moving out doors either by foot or carriage, and Elizabeth, who is always seen bare headed.

Though the film does not follow the fashions of the times but to enhance certain scenes and ideas the film uses clothing to express. As stated by the director Joe Wright, the film is set in 1797 at the time the book was written and the clothing and hairstyles of the militia, who still wears a pigtail, certify this assertion. “[W]hen the Government imposed a tax on [hair powder] in 1795, it ceased to be worn except by some of the older men. The pig-tail was given up except by the military, who kept it for another ten years” (Laver 153). Thus in the film Mr. Wickham can be seen with a pig-tail.

After going through all the basic characteristics of the Regency period it can be concluded that these characteristics were the integral part of the Jane Austen’s novels. Each and every kind of character in the novel is portrayed according to the kind of people she was surrounded. Even the filmmakers tried their level best to portray the Regency society in their respective films.

As Jane Austen’s novels were published two hundred ago, but with its theme of courtship and proposals, mastery of characterization and delicate observations of character is still captivates readers and filmmakers alike. By viewing both the films, the spectator finds it evident that, it does not follow Austen’s novels closely. The films modernizes and simplifies the storyline and changes the physical setting of the characters in the novel, including their houses, costumes and fashion, while at the same time maintaining an overall feeling of the Regency era.
These simplifications of the novels are done in an attempt to bring the story closer to the present, on the apparent ground of reaching a wider audience.