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## "A Base and Pernicious Vice": Gambling in the Regency Era

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# Pride and Prejudice: The Student Blog

Sunday, April 14, 2013

## "A Base and Pernicious Vice": Gambling in the Regency Era

During the Regency period in England, gambling was a very popular pastime, one that both the rich and the poor could enjoy. While providing conversation and entertainment, as well as a way to meet people and pass the time, gambling also had a darker side. In Josiah Woodard's "[A Disswasive from Gaming](#)", he warns against the evils of gambling, claiming that "all such sports and games, as are manifest temptations to sin, and do many times expose men to ruin, are to be renounced with disdain" (4). As men increasingly began to become addicted to gambling and more and more lost their fortunes and their dignities, a person prone to excessive gambling was looked down upon as being sinful and having "a deplorable character" (8). While it was usually acceptable to play whist or other such card games at dinner parties or other social gatherings, once one began to display overindulgent gaming habits and destructive behavior that is when the problems began. Sir William Addington's "[An Abridgement of Penal Statues](#)", is a publication that outlines common criminal offenses as well as the punishments related to them. It also recognizes that gaming houses, "being great temptations to idleness, and apt to draw together numbers of disorderly persons, and as such [are] liable to indictment" (363). Gaming houses were seen as dirty, unlawful and sinful places that no man of good moral standing should expose himself to. Fights often erupted within gambling houses over bets lost and won, and people were even occasionally killed over a game of cards gone wrong.



While no one in *Pride and Prejudice* is murdered over a bad card game, Mr. Wickham proves himself to lead a "life of idleness and dissipation" (Austen 242). He gambles away the money that Mr. Darcy gave him after his father's death, and greedily pesters Darcy for more. When Darcy refuses to appease Wickham's voracity, Wickham seduces Darcy's little sister in the hopes of obtaining the thirty thousand pounds that she was to receive as her inheritance. When he marries Lydia, he does so only because Mr. Darcy forfeits a large sum of money over to Mr. Wickham. As more comes to light about the atrocities that Wickham has committed, the once highly favored man is ruined in both Elizabeth and Jane's opinions. His marriage to their sister is seen as deplorable, and his character condemned; the sisters react accordingly with Woodard's claim that men who are ruined via gambling should be avoided and looked down upon. Colonel Forester, a member of the regiment to which Wickham formerly belonged, even expresses changed opinions of Mr. Wickham as more of his character unfolds, "he did not speak so well of Wickham as he formerly did. He believed him to be imprudent and extravagant. And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said, that he left Meryton greatly in debt" (331). The characters in *Pride and Prejudice* behave in ways reflective of the Regency culture's attitude toward gambling and gamblers, acknowledging the improper behavior of excessive gambling and condemning it as an immoral character trait.

Posted by [Chelcie Hinders](#) at 1:29 PM

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### About

A blog site featuring original research by undergraduate students at Wright State University enrolled in Crystal B. Lal's *Pride and Prejudice* (Spring 2011).

We hope you enjoy reading about it and historical contexts surrounding famous novels. And be sure to participate in CELIA's Bicentennial events on October 2013. Click [here](#) for more information.

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