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*Inspirational Romance
for the Jane Austen Soul*



The Regency Debutante: A Feast of Fictional Heroines

But when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way.

Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey

A dictionary will tell you that a debutante is “a young woman making a formal debut into society.” During most of the 19th century, a debut required a formal presentation at court—at least for young ladies of the “upper crust.” Once she was presented to the monarch, in a ritual of long-standing tradition, she was free to join the social scene, as it were. She could attend balls and evening parties, be included in invitations, and most important of all, be courted for marriage.

This tradition, however, only applied to young women of the upper echelons of society. Other girls, such as the heroines in most novels, would scarcely qualify for gaining the monarch's attention. And, even for those who were presented officially, it is doubtful that they thought of themselves as “debutantes.” Yet, this word helps us recognize them as young, inexperienced newcomers.

We are not referring to an old “femme fatale,” for instance. While some authors nowadays use this older woman for their main character, I prefer the more traditional young lady. In fact, for authors like me, the Regency debutante is quite handy, even though she's as individual as the writers who create her. And, because she is new to society, she is the perfect vehicle for showing it in a fresh way to readers.

So, who is a Regency debutante? She is the young heroine of a romance who must keep the rules of Regency society while navigating her way to a successful life, beginning with a good marriage. She can be most any shape and size, as long as she has the ability to attract “Mr. Right.” Half the fun of a romance is being able to understand and relate to this young heroine. Therefore, she must be wonderful in some ways and definitely lacking in others.

For instance, she must be attractive, but not so perfect that you can't believe in her. She must strike a chord in every female reader who picks up the book she is in. And, any heroine can be such a character simply by being human. It is her humanity, with all its foibles and faults, which makes us love her.



Yet, how is a Regency debutante different from other fictional heroines? Actually, it is Regency society which is unique and makes following our heroine so much fun. No other time period was quite like the Regency. Jane Austen taught us how to poke gentle fun at it while still taking its issues seriously, such as in *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Then, Georgette Heyer came along and showed us ways to really turn up the volume of fun. Books such as, *Regency Buck*, *Arabella*, and *Charity Girl*, are lively concoctions with characters plucked from many layers of that society. Her heroines are usually feisty, innocent, and strong-minded.

Another interesting aspect about a Regency debutante is that she could be from almost any quarter of England—with one catch. She had to appear “up to snuff” among the haughty upper classes. This meant being able to dress for the part, dance properly, sing “tolerably well,” and so on. If she possessed these accomplishments, her family might send her to London or Bath for a debut among the rich and titled. The purpose was to try and see her advantageously married. Marriage was so much the aim, in fact, the “Season,” that time of great social activity, was often called the “marriage mart.”



If a young woman was heiress to a fortune, then she was supremely qualified to join this marriage mart. On the other hand, if she was from a poorer family, she might take great pains to hide the fact. But, whether rich, poor, beautiful, or plain, nearly any premise can make for an exciting regency novel!

Think of it. Any country miss and her mama might aspire to a London Season. A pretty face, a good “*connexion*,” a lucky invitation to the right establishment, and a girl might just catch the eye of the Regency hero. Thereafter came the chance, albeit slim, of making an astounding success. Definitely the stuff romance novels are made of, wouldn’t you say?

Not all Regency novels use debutantes as the heroine. But, to understand many Regency romances, as well as my book, “*Before the Season Ends*,” one must recognize this formal female creature. She often was not in it for fun and games. The whirl of social entertainment on her schedule could be exhausting and nerve-wracking. If she happened to be pretty, and even more importantly, wealthy, then her path was smoother. But, not all girls could be so endowed. This dilemma, of course, makes for conflict that authors like me love to use!



Linore Rose Burkard writes *Inspirational Romance for the Jane Austen Soul*. Her characters take you back in time to experience life and love during the Regency in England (circa 1800 – 1830). Ms. Burkard’s novels include *Before the Season Ends* and *The House in Grosvenor Square* (coming April, 2009). Her stories blend Christian faith and romance with well-researched details from the Regency period. Experience a romantic age, where timeless lessons still apply to modern life. And, enjoy a romance that reminds you happy endings are possible for everyone.

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