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In *Pamela*, the virtuous heroine says to her master:

Cards, 'tis true, I can play at, in all the games that our sex usually delight in: but they are a diversion that I am not fond of; nor shall I ever desire to play, unless to induce such ladies, as you may wish to see, not to shun your house, for want of an amusement they are accustomed to. (Richardson 300)

Pamela's words point toward a complicated eighteenth-century emotion towards card games: the diversion itself is not immoral, but still people with high moral standards avoid it. The right attitude towards card games, as Pamela suggests, is to know the rules and play moderately when there is a social need. In relatively conservative eighteenth-century England, card games are morally tolerable, although warnings against the diversion exist. Pamela's opinions regarding gaming have influence on one of Richardson's keen readers, Jane Austen, who games with self-restraint.

By "cards" Pamela actually means gambling, and she is not the only character with this moral concern. Not all writers distinguish card-playing from gambling, since gambling was not an eighteenth-century word, and its concept was developed quite late.<sup>1</sup> However, eighteenth-century commentators basically concur that an indulgence in gaming is harmful. John Essex writes that "a Woman who has once given herself up to Gaming has taken leave of all Moral Virtues, and consequently lies expos'd to all Vices" (37). Wetenhall Wilkes

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson does not include the word gambling in *Dictionary*; instead, he defines "to game" as "to play wantonly and extravagantly and for money." John Ashton in 1898 explains the difference between gambling and gaming. By the first he says that "chance" and "money motif" dominate the entire behaviour. He denounces gambling, for it "has the disadvantage of being both vulgar and dangerous" (2). Since gaming is closer to eighteenth-century context, I use it to suggest gambling as we know it today.

further mentions damages brought to the human body by card-playing, which “perverts the natural Succession of Day and Night and softens the Understanding” (135). Charles Allen has the fictional mother Portia warn her daughter that playing too much “might produce a habit of avarice, the most base and sordid passion that can enter into the breast of a young lady” (120). John Gregory calls gaming “a ruinous and incurable vice” (26), while John Moir calls it “the worst species of diversion” (207). By the end of the century, John Bennett denounces gaming in *Letters to a Young Lady* with harsh words, for “it has a tendency to eradicate every religious and moral disposition, every social duty, every laudable and virtuous affection” (29). Even Henry Fielding refers to gambling as the “great Evil which arises from the Luxury of the Vulgar” (92). Milder critics like John Trusler accept that this amusement, “provided you do not play deep or often, is harmless” (14). All writers share a core belief, that card-playing has social functions, but that indulgence in it should be avoided.

Still, conduct book writers’ severe opinions on gaming indicate a gaming fever in Georgian England. During this period, “[t]he propertied classes suffered fewer and fewer moral and cultural restraints on enjoying themselves. Fashion ruled: prostitution and gambling flourished” (Wasson 29). “England was gripped by gambling fever,” as Roy Porter boldly puts it, “Men bet on political events, births and deaths—any future happening” (255). Porter concludes that “Cards were the opium of the polite.” Gillian Russell observes that Britain’s passion for gaming was one of the “enduring themes of eighteenth-century commentary” (481). Gaming in Georgian England is not just “petty gambling” (15) as Malcolmson mentions; its popularity crosses gender and class boundaries and causes moral and social concerns.

However, “petty gambling” best describes Jane Austen and her family’s modes of recreation. Different card games—Whist, Cribbage, Vingt-un, Quadrille—are mentioned throughout her letters. Austen further shows her particular preference for Speculation and

Prejudice against Brag, a popular card game among contemporary British families and sometimes played with high stakes. Writing to Cassandra from Castle Square, Austen proudly says that she “introduced *speculation*, and it was so much approved that we hardly knew how to leave off” (L 59). Brag, however, “mortifies me deeply...When one comes to reason upon it, it cannot stand its ground against Speculation” (L 62). The very names of the two games suggest their different natures, and their differences explain Austen’s taste. While Speculation is a lively game that relies on players’ recollection and calculation to win (Jones iv), Brag requires one’s fabrication and exaggeration (Bohn 332). The latter is therefore a highly dramatic game in which each player has to disguise and act like someone he/she is not. In fact, to take a look at Pamela’s comment on card games again, one can see that she also has to “pretend” to enjoy the game. Accordingly, gamers become performers; playing against each other requires camouflage, just like actors and actresses on the stage have to put on make-up or costumes in order to convince audiences of their false identity. The duplicity of Brag and its role of blind betting all show that what Austen disapproves is the game based on boast, pretension, and dramatic skills.

Modern critics also examine Austen’s attitude towards gaming in relation to the moral questions she raises. Alistair Duckworth points out that although Austen in real life was fond of many sorts of games, she uses them negatively in novels. “Card games, especially, are suspect in the early novels, often becoming emblems of a vacuous and despicable society” (280). He notices that although in letters Austen mentions card games frequently, in her novels, she does not approve of playing outside of the family. Duckworth suggests that by distinguishing private gaming among family members from gaming in public, Austen imagines a better and more civilized world in which the games have true value.<sup>2</sup> Roger Sales reads *Mansfield Park* as a reflection of the condition of English society, pointing out that

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<sup>2</sup> Duckworth, p. 282.

Tom Bertram and Henry Crawford, along with their fascination on games, represent Regency dandyism.<sup>3</sup> The study shows that card-playing is open to various interpretations, as well as highlighting Austen's topicality. Penelope Joan Fritzer reads Austen's novels and eighteenth-century courtesy books together and concludes that moderation is the core rule for all entertainments (41). David Selwyn emphasizes card games' function as representations of characters' personality and moral guidance in Austen's works. For Selwyn, Austen follows conduct book writers when she sees card games as "also an occasion for guidance in good principles, if rather more subtly carried out" (263). This coincides with Austen's personal concern shown in her correspondences. In *Jane Austen and Crime*, Susannah Fullerton lists gaming among scenes of vice in Austen's novels. The author particularly observes that in comparison with gaming, Austen "strongly disapproved of any man not paying his debts, no matter how those debts were incurred" and "knew gamblers and the trail of destruction they left behind them" (150). If so, what bothers Austen is not the game itself, but what it leads to. Critics agree with each other that gaming serves as a touchstone for Austen's characters. The entertainment reveals one's true face and ethics.

Gaming is morally problematic, but what escapes critics' attention is that Jane Austen also treats game players as performers. She is aware of the shared principle of the two activities: the effort to feign and convince. This paper examines Austen's gamers and performers in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*; in the former she criticizes gamers' immorality and in the latter she explores the relationship between gaming and acting. Also, in these two novels, one reads that Austen's gaming characters have theatrical qualities, while her dramatic characters make everyday life a game. I first elaborate on Selwyn's suggestion that "particular games are very carefully chosen for any given set of people or circumstances" (261) and argue that they are metaphors of personas in *Pride and Prejudice*. I then argue that

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<sup>3</sup> Sales detects the Regent's shadow on Tom. Gambling in the novel therefore has a political meaning that threatens the country.

while card games are seemingly given less emphasis in *Emma*, the novelist actually elaborates the idea of “player at table” by making them “players on stage.” The study shows that Austen’s social criticism is more artistic than didactic. She knows the art (games) and assigns it to proper characters and occasions in her chosen method of expression (theatre) to convey her opinions on gaming.

### **Gamers’ Natures**

When she was young, Jane Austen realized that gaming could be a significant literary motif. Card games appear in Austen’s juvenile works for comic effect. In “Jack and Alice,” the Johnsons are a good family “though a little addicted to the Bottle and the Dice” (*Juvenilia* 14). Mr. Willmot in “Edgar and Emma” also possesses “a considerable share in a Lead mine and a ticket in the Lottery” (*Juvenilia* 34). The young author may not have a strong motive to judge characters by alluding to games and gaming, but she was indeed aware of the connection between games and personal qualities and manners. A little addiction to gambling does not diminish honor and virtue, and lottery as the production of developing capitalism is a new way of gaining fortune.<sup>4</sup> Austen represents real games in her early work. If Austen fails to assign moral meanings to card games as she does in her later, mature novels, she is nevertheless sensitive enough to notice that card games permeate her society.

In her juvenile writings, Austen’s humorous tone regarding card games indicates that she sees them merely as social fashions. It is in her mature work, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, that the connection between card games and personal morality is strong. In the novel, card games become unrefined pastimes associated with coarse characters. The first character reported to be fond of card playing is Mr. Hurst, Mr. Bingley’s brother-in-law. The

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<sup>4</sup> National lottery not only offers a chance for individuals to be rich but also generates profit for the country. As Porter suggests, “Gambling itself became nationalized. The State ran a lottery from 1709 to 1824, national institutions, from the British Museum to Westminster Bridge, being partly funded out of the proceeds” (256).

man “was an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards,” (*P&P* 62) and when there are no games, he “stretch[es] himself on one of the sofas and go[es] to sleep” (*P&P* 98). This minor character deserves little of readers’ attention; however, Austen uses him to suggest that card games are not recommendable for anyone who wishes to be intellectual and elegant. By paralleling card games with basic human needs (eating and drinking), Austen is actually emphasizing Hurst’s incapability of sophisticated understanding. Hurst also opens the first card playing episode of the novel. After Elizabeth retires from attending the ill Jane, “she found the whole party at loo, and was immediately invited to join them” (*P&P* 66). Elizabeth’s declination surprises Hurst, who expresses that her indifference towards cards “is rather singular.” Caroline adds that Elizabeth “must despise cards. She is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else” (*P&P* 66). The episode is significant for the contrast between Elizabeth’s sensible mind and others’ unkind words. Elizabeth refuses to join the game because she suspects them “to be playing high;” after all, she is with the rich Bingleys. In addition, Elizabeth refuses to play because entertaining herself with a patient to care for is improper. Both reasons manifest Austen’s personal concern: the first echoes her words in her letter, and the latter corresponds to her moral standard.<sup>5</sup> The episode not only indicates that certain amusements should be enjoyed at the proper time, but also reveals different characters’ personalities through games.

Both upper-class and middle-class players shame themselves in card games. If Mr. Hurst’s vulgarity is represented by his sole concern for games, Lydia’s is highlighted by her being frivolous. When she plays, she abandons herself to the game and reveals her recklessness. At Mrs. Philip’s party, Lydia shows her lack of intelligence with her clear preferences. There are at least two card tables: Whist, played by Mrs. Philips, Mr. Collins, and other guests, and Lottery Ticket, which Lydia joins. The novel suggests that Lydia does

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<sup>5</sup> Austen’s letter to Cassandra on 7 Oct, 1808 recorded that in Castle Square there were Commerce with stakes of three shillings, but she “cannot afford to lose that, twice in an evening” (*L* 215).

not join the Whist game because she enjoys talking to Wickham, who is no longer playing, “but being likewise extremely fond of lottery tickets, she soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes, to have attention for any one in particular” (*P&P* 142). Lydia’s two choices reveal her to be an intellectually deficient woman. Her inclination towards Lottery Ticket, the flexible game that requires less skill, denotes her inability or unwillingness to deal with intricate games and her lack of attentiveness.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the fact that gaming attracts her more than talking to Wickham suggests that she is not a sophisticated lover. Lydia’s fondness for games much annoys her family, as do her other vulgarities. After Mrs. Phillip’s party, she “talked incessantly of lottery tickets, of the fish she had lost and the fish she had won” (*P&P* 156). Being different in social status and preference for games, Lydia and Mr. Hurst are nevertheless similar to each other in their lack of seriousness and strong interest in playthings. Lydia’s highly exaggerated behavior especially implies her theatricality.

Hurst and Lydia are vulgar players; however, in comparison to Collins, they are honest to themselves. Much to our surprise, Mr. Collins the clergyman is the one who games the most. The reinterpretation of theology in the eighteenth century, as Porter has pointed out, leads to Christianity’s acceptance of human nature, sin, and pleasure-seeking (“Enlightenment and Pleasure” 10-11). Therefore, Collins is not to blame for being a gaming clergyman. What makes Collins blameworthy is the distance between his fine words and ill deeds. Mr. Collins first plays a game when he visits Longbourn; that night during tea time, he proposes to read Fordyce’s *Sermons* to the family. Disappointed and probably annoyed by Lydia’s impatience towards the reading, Collins then turns to Mr. Bennet and “offered himself as his antagonist at backgammon” (*P&P* 126). James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young*

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<sup>6</sup> Bohn introduces the game as “without doubt one of the most amusing” (326) and suggests that it is a suitable game for a great number of players. The game can be simplified according to the number of players, and with many players, the noise and clamor accompanying it are imaginable.



*Women* functions significantly in this passage; it is the text that Collins uses to “educate” the Bennet daughters, especially when he becomes familiar with Kitty and Lydia’s bad manners. It is therefore easy to link Collins’s earnestness to the sermon’s serious lectures. However, once he fails to offer his cousins a lesson, Collins immediately turns to gaming. The dramatic and sudden change creates a comic effect, for it implies Collins’ moral insincerity.<sup>7</sup> Collins continues to be an insincere clergyman at Mrs. Philips’s party, sitting down at the Whist table with the words: “I know little of the game, at present [...] but I shall be glad to improve myself, for in my situation of life —” (*P&P* 142). He is interrupted by Mrs. Philips, but it is clear that he wants to mention his career as a clergyman again. The irony is that as a clergyman, Mr. Collins believes his economic circumstances allow him to lose a bit of money: “I know very well, madam,” he says, “that when persons sit down to a card table, they must take their chance of these things, —and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make five shillings any object” (*P&P* 154). Even after he returns, he protests “that he did not in the least regard his losses at whist” (*P&P* 156). Collins’s reiterated assurance that he is indifferent to losing only reveals how much he cares about it. He games with pretention, that is to say, he plays and acts at the same time. His welcoming gesture of playing betrays religious doctrine and echoes a poem by William Cowper, arguably Austen’s favorite poet. Cowper in “The Love of the World Reproved; or, Hypocrisy Detected” mocks those who pretend to follow the preaching:

Renounce the world—the preacher cries.  
 We do—a multitude replies.  
 While one as innocent regards  
 A snug and friendly game at cards;

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<sup>7</sup> Fordyce’s *Sermons* also offers opinions about games and amusements. They also do not encourage playthings: “By the most favourable reckoning, the greatest part of those hours they are devoted to play is lost. That which was begun for amusement is lengthened out to fatigue. No one improving or generous idea is circulated; no one happy or solacing recollection is secured. The whole is to be set down as a large portion of the span of life cut off without advantage, and without satisfaction, as far as reason or virtue is concerned”. (Sermon VI, 113) Collins’s readiness for Backgammon and other games elsewhere in the novel suggests that either he misreads the passage or he is an irresponsible clergyman.

And one, whatever you may say,  
Can see no evil in a play;  
Some love a concert, or a race;  
And others—shooting, and the chase. (25-32)

Cowper's target is not the entertainment and pastimes he lists, but human hypocrisy. Austen makes a similar criticism: in Mr. Collins we see that what is to be questioned is never the game itself, but how it is played.

Mr. Collins's attitude towards gaming reveals his unpleasant social ambition. The repeated allusion to how he can afford losses suggests that he regards himself as superior to his relatives economically. Yet, when playing with wealthy aristocrats, he obsequiously lowers himself. At Rosings Park, Lady Catherine, Sir William, and the Collins couple play Quadrille. During the game, Mr. Collins, as always, "was employed in agreeing to everything her Ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he won, and apologizing if he thought he won too many" (*P&P* 306). The contrast between this passage and that of the party at Mrs. Philips' is obvious: Mr. Collins treats his middle class relatives with arrogance and those of high birth with fawning meekness. He makes himself ridiculous at the card table, displaying his true nature as a social climber.

Games also display the domineering manners of the rich upper class. Near the end of the novel, two games, Quadrille and Casino, are played at Rosings Park. The first is said to be Lady Catherine's preference while the second is Miss De Bourgh's. Lady Catherine continues her arrogant and imperious attitude in the game. She "was generally speaking—stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdotes of herself" (*P&P* 306). The game is aptly chosen for the Lady since its difficulty gives her a reason to nag.<sup>8</sup> Selwyn puts that Quadrille is "a difficult game with irregular ranking of cards, an auction for

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<sup>8</sup> Bohn introduces quadrille with great length, including thirty-four special terms and seventeen manners one should pay attention to when playing. Lady Catherine obviously breaks rules that "Every person is to play as he thinks proper, and most advantageously to his own game" and "No one is to encourage his friend to play; but each person should know what to do when he is to play" (229).

principle player and a complicated system of settlements; having plenty of scope for mistakes, it requires concentration to play well” (269). However, Lady Catherine gives orders in a way that bothers other players. Furthermore, her playing with/against other male players not only implies the possibility of gender reversal which becomes one of the eighteenth-century objections to gambling, but may also remind contemporary readers of the failed political star Charles James Fox and his patroness.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the Quadrille table, the Casino table where Miss De Bourgh, Elizabeth, Maria, and Mrs. Jenkinson sit is dull:

Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her fears of Miss De Bourgh’s being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. (*P&P* 306-7)

Although the two tables present different levels of liveliness, they nevertheless suit their players. Casino, the game in which neither complicated strategy nor good skill is necessary, is appropriate for Miss De Bourgh’s delicate body and reticence.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the indirect involvement in bets and stakes makes it a game for innocent girls like Elizabeth and Maria. Juxtaposing two different card games, Austen makes them appropriate to the temperaments of the scolding mother and the silent daughter.

The above-mentioned characters are all players, but none of them are true gamblers. Although playing makes Lydia appear less feminine, Mr. Collins betrays his professionalism, and Lady Catherine represents a woman who “condescends” to become an instructor, it does not make them villains who should be banished. This is only “petty gambling,” after all. The unbearable gamer in *Pride and Prejudice* is Wickham, who never

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<sup>9</sup> Fox’s political career failed due to his excessive gambling and his supporter Georgiana Cavendish, herself a gamestress. See Phyllis Deutsch’s “Moral Trepas in Georgian London: Gaming, Gender, and Electoral Politics in the Age of George III”.

<sup>10</sup> Bohn’s introduction to the game does not make it a difficult one. The key to the game is remembrance: “The principal objects are to remember what has been played; and when no pairs or combinations can be made, to clear the hand of court cards, which cannot be combined” (309).

participates in actual playing. After Wickham's trick and evil-doing are revealed, the Bennetts learn that he is reproachable for being both a womanizer and a gambler. Wickham

had left gambling debts behind him, to a very considerable amount. Colonel Forster believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear his expenses at Brighton. He owed a good deal in the town, but his debts of honour were still more formidable. Mr. Gardiner did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Loungbourn family; Jane heard with horror. "A gamester!" she cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it." (540)

It is likely that Wickham does not actually play with other characters in the novel because domestic entertainment does not attract him. Gambling itself is punishable and describes Wickham's personality.<sup>11</sup> As Gillian Russell points out:

The gambler was frequently criticized as a dissembler, an actor who was not to be trusted, but allied to this was the fear that the performance of the gaming table actually exposed the reality of eighteenth-century man as a self-interested, antisocial cipher. (483)

Considering Wickham's fake sincerity to Georgiana Darcy and Elizabeth, the man is indeed an actor who acts to court women. But leaving gambling debts is even worse in the eighteenth-century sense. "A tradesman's bill could be left for years, but gaming debts were supposed to be paid immediately" (Fullerton 149). Accordingly, Wickham's poor reputation further comes from his irresponsible attitude to gambling. It is not surprising that Jane calls Wickham a gamester, a serious accusation.<sup>12</sup> To summarize, Austen's characterization of human beings and gambling fits both eighteenth-century discourse and her personal moral standard. While gaming makes tasteless and ignorant individuals more vulgar, gaming with high stakes and huge debts are real sins.

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<sup>11</sup> In English history, fine for gambling can be dated as early as 1575 at least. See *Crime and Punishment in England: A Sourcebook*, page 72.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Johnson in *Dictionary* explains "gamester" in all negative terms; its meaning ranges from who is "[viciously] addictive to play" to "a prostitute; not in use." The word is officially recognized, whereas "gambler" for Johnson is only a cant for game or gamester.

However, card playing is not always objectionable and not all players are always vulgar. In “The Watsons,” Elizabeth’s proposal for card games is objected to by Mrs. Robert. Elizabeth explains,

“I was thinking of its being something to amuse my father,” answered Elizabeth—“if it was not disagreeable to you. He says his head won’t bear whist—but perhaps if we make a round game he may be tempted to sit down with us.” (*Later Manuscripts* 125-6)

Elizabeth’s invitation to play is distinguished from both Mr. Hurst’s stupidity and Lydia’s complete indulgence in games. She senses that a game or two can benefit her father’s mood, so gaming meets its social need. Emma, as will be mentioned later, also comforts her sick father with card games. Similarly, in *Pride and Prejudice*, elegant characters play games only when they have to. Elizabeth Bennett does not play in Netherfield Park out of economic prudence and sisterly love. The only time she plays cards is at Rosings with Miss De Bourgh; present as a guest, Elizabeth knows it would be rude if she did not help make up the party. Similarly, Darcy only plays when he is asked to. When he visits Longbourn with Mr. Bingley, Elizabeth cannot help but see the former affectionately “fall a victim to her mother’s rapacity for whist players, and in a few moments after seated with the rest of the party. She now lost every expectation of pleasure” (*P&P* 620). The tone suggests that both Elizabeth and Darcy are reluctant to play games; Elizabeth because she is deprived of the chance to talk to him, and Darcy because he is forced to play with the unpleasant party. Fullerton is correct in saying that Austen’s “fine characters do not have the gaming instinct. Indeed, many of them do not enjoy playing cards at all” (151). Austen does not make Elizabeth and Darcy condemn card playing, and by making them reasonable characters for whom playing is not their primary choice, she is sending a message to readers.

All in all, card games in *Pride and Prejudice* constitute a small but significant motif. They reveal the player’s social status, moral sense, and character. When debating with

Charlotte whether Bingley and Jane need a long courtship before being married, Elizabeth confidently claims that “Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like Vingt-un better than Commerce; but with respect to any other leading characteristics, I do not imagine that much has been unfolded” (*P&P* 38). The name Commerce connotes market trades, and Bingley and Jane’s disapproval of the game suggests that their marriage is based on a true mutual affection rather than trades in the marriage market. Elizabeth, though being ironic, is suggesting that the preference for certain card games is one of the leading characteristics through which to know an individual. *Pride and Prejudice* participates in the eighteenth-century discourse of gaming, but Jane Austen distinguishes herself from other moralists in attacking the amusement with deep irony. The exaggeratedly portrayed Lydia and the pretentious Mr. Collins are both mockable not only because of their obsession with gaming but also because of their theatricality.

### **Gaming or Acting**

Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* explores the relationship between each character’s nature and the essence of card games. Games are metaphors through which readers can come to know the characters better. However, in *Emma*, Jane Austen adopts a different strategy in treating card games. In *Emma*, card games are given sophisticated meanings beyond personal traits. Characters who enjoy or have strong connections with games have another identity: they are also actors. Gillian Russell’s words apply again here, and Austen appears to be familiar with the idea that “[t]he gambler was frequently criticized as a dissembler, an actor who was not to be trusted.” In *Emma*, usually people who “play” at the game table also “play” in their daily lives to hide their true selves.

Several apparent differences regarding games distinguish the two novels. First, the number and types of games mentioned are fewer in *Emma* than in *Pride and Prejudice*. Only seven games (including Charades and the box of letters) are found in *Emma*. Second, there are no notorious gamesters like Hurst and Wickham in the novel.<sup>13</sup> The low-spirited, hysterical Mr. Woodhouse often only joins the card table to while away the night, and even the vulgar Mrs. Elton does not play. Last but not least, while in *Pride and Prejudice* readers actually see games being played in front of them, in *Emma*, almost no actual gaming scenes are presented to us. Games serve as backgrounds; we realize that there is a card table around, but we are ignorant of what specific game is being played, who is playing, and what is happening at the table. These characteristics encourage us to reconsider the role of games in this novel. The direct and apparent link between characters and games is broken.

Just as card games were Austen's occasional amusement, theatrical performances also interested her when she was young. Austen acquired knowledge about drama performances from the private theatre in Steventon. In her youth, "plays may also have been a feature of Jane's and Cassandra's education" (44) as Claire Tomalin notes. Dramatic speeches, stage arrangements, and theatrical effects all enrich Austen's imagination, and either purposely or unconsciously, Austen makes her characters act the way performers sometimes do. She "delights in imagining whole vivid sets of people, never on stage, yet vital in the play" (Farrer 68). Modern scholarship also finds similarities between Austen's novels and eighteenth-century plays that possibly constituted her sources. Paula Byrne introduces Austen's relationship with her contemporary theatres and actors/actresses, finding the same

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<sup>13</sup> A gamester, as previously noted, is a negative word. But it can also be, as *OED* defines, "A person who takes parts in theatrical performance; an actor." The definition adds credibility to the interchangeability of "player" and "actor" in *Emma*.

attributes shared by Austen's works and eighteenth-century plays.<sup>14</sup> Penny Gay further reads Austen's six mature novels along with plays she enjoys. Gay instances many resemblances between her heroes/heroines and contemporary roles in comedies or tragedies, asserting that Austen shows particular preference for plays that interest audiences intellectually and sympathetically. What Austen dislikes is "cheap sentimentality" and being "theatrical" (Gay 22), the word that covers both *Emma*'s gamers and performers.

Games are less about personal virtue and morality in *Emma* than in *Pride and Prejudice*. The kind, motherly Mrs. Goddard loves Piquet and can afford to "win or lose a few sixpence by [Mr. Woodhouse's] fireside" (*E* 36), a small amount in comparison to Mr. Collins's five shillings. Emma plays only to please her father, and Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax never play. Even so, Austen is still averse to gaming. When introducing the Crown Inn in Highbury, the narrator remembers the past prime of the building, which is built for local balls. Yet "such brilliant days had long passed away, and the highest purpose for which it was ever wanted was to accommodate a whist club established among the gentlemen and half-gentlemen of the place" (*E* 350). The passage suggests two levels of understanding. First, there appears to be regret for the replacement of the more feminine activity of balls by the all-male gathering. Second, it involves Austen's preference of balls for cards. The inclination to dance rather than play games becomes an even more severe criticism. Later on at the party at the Crown Inn, Mr. Knightley's indifference towards dancing bothers Emma: "he ought to be dancing, — not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up" (*E* 574). Mr. Knightley, as Emma knows very well, is not a Whist-playing gentleman like Mr. Elton. In addition, the word 'pretending' links "card players" and "drama players", and Mr.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Byrne finds the shared themes of *Emma* and eighteenth-century dramas, including "The assimilation of the social classes through marriage" and the "alliances between 'blood' and 'money', or 'old' money and 'new'" (211).



Knightsley inhabits neither role. Although no particular character is morally condemned due to excessive gaming, the disagreement with the sport is detectable. Mr. Woodhouse is the only obsessive gamer, often encouraged to play games, but this is understandable as the card games suit the body and soothe the mind of the delicate and neurotic old man. When other people gather in the Crown Inn, Mr. Woodhouse and Mrs. Bates, the older generation in Highbury, play backgammon at home. Also, Emma realizes that “by the help of backgammon” she can “get her father tolerably through the evening” (*E* 10). Playing games is almost his only social activity, and as long as he is “sure of his rubber,” he does not need Mr. Elton with him (*E* 144). Although he is less intelligent, Mr. Woodhouse’s playing does not threaten his personal virtue – he is not a vulgar player like Hurst or Lydia.

But Mr. Woodhouse’s gaming makes us understand the relationship between “game player” and “drama player.” As a fanciful invalid, Mr. Woodhouse worries and imagines situations that may do harm to other people. His speeches therefore tend to be dramatic, exaggerated, and theatrical. In many instances, he endeavours to convince his company of incidents that may happen, a gesture that is itself very stage-like. Mr. Woodhouse the game player is the imaginative one who also likes to control other people, for example by interfering with the meal arrangement (*E* 40, 300). What distinguishes Mr. Woodhouse from other Highbury players and actors is that his theatricality remains verbal, while others engage in actual presentation.

Besides Mr. Woodhouse, the other person mentioned frequently in conjunction with card games is Mr. Elton. It is unusual to find him absent at “the whist-club night, which he had been never known to miss before” (*E* 116). This is a direct, though tiny, clue suggesting Mr. Elton’s avocation. Handsome and well-mannered, Mr. Elton is the “star” of Highbury; both he and the yet to arrive Frank Churchill are topics that Highbury denizens never tire of. Mr. Elton is aware of his popularity and endeavors to display himself every time he has

chance. When Emma draws the picture of Harriet, he “entreated for the permission of attending and reading to them again” (*E* 78). The reading suggests Mr. Elton’s tendency towards performance; he needs himself to be seen/listened to and demands an audience. Emma and Harriet welcome his performance for they are neither aware of the acting nor willing to see more. After the likeness is done, Elton praises it “in continual raptures” (*E* 80) in a rather theatrical manner. Elton’s voluntary willingness to bring the portrait to London is suspicious; he “looked very conscious and smiling, and rode off in great spirits” (*E* 118). We know that Elton takes the picture to Bond Street, a fashionable shopping street in Georgian London, for framing.<sup>15</sup> But where else Elton goes we do not know. Neither do we know if Elton rushes back to Highbury as he hurries to London. Does bringing the picture to town justify Mr. Elton’s amusement-seeking? For example, is he searching for a bigger Whist-club there? Austen leaves these details deliberately obscure to show Mr. Elton’s true motive. Still, what Elton does in front of Emma and Harriet is both a show and a game, and Emma voluntarily submits herself to Elton’s performance. “Mr. Elton’s manners are not perfect,” Emma claims, “but where there is a wish to please, one ought to overlook, and one does not overlook a great deal” (*E* 196). “The wish to please” proves Elton’s performing nature, and he continues to play his role/game.

Mr. Elton has his most violent and dramatic moment of acting when he proposes to Emma in the carriage. Mr. Elton woos Emma, “making violent love to her,” “availing himself,” “declaring sentiments,” and “hoping—fearing—adoring—ready to die if she refused him” (*E* 226-8). The series of exaggerated movements then creates a theatrical atmosphere, turning Elton into a passionate actor. Gay observes that the whole village of Highbury is a theatre, in which Austen shows high sensitivity in creating a stage-like atmosphere (127). If so, to propose in the confined carriage highlights the possibility of

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<sup>15</sup> In *Sense and Sensibility*, the vain and dishonest John Willoughby also lives on Bond Street. Austen seems to give the street certain characteristics by making it the area which negative characters linger.

private theatre acting; by separating himself and Emma purposely, Mr. Elton means to amuse them, in a similar manner to Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* when he remarks on the significance of a private theatre. Inside the carriage, Emma barely recognises Mr. Elton; the gentle vicar is no more. Elton here unmask himself, making Emma realize that the true Elton is a hypocrite. Elton fails to satisfy Emma in the same way that an actor would fail Austen's expectations.

On 5 March 1814, Austen wrote a letter to Cassandra and commented on Robert William Elliston, the actor she admired:

We were too much tired to stay for the whole of *Illusion* (Nour-jahad) which had 3 acts;—there is a great deal of finery & dancing in it, but I think little merit. Elliston was Nour-jahad, but it is a solemn sort of part, not at all calculated for his powers. There was nothing of the *best Elliston* about him. I might not have known him, but for his voice.— (L93, 380)

Elliston was a star in Georgian theatres. He first gained a reputation in Bath and then London and was one of Austen's favorite actors. However, the letter shows Austen's disappointment after seeing Elliston's *Illusions; or The Trances of Nourjahad*. It is highly possible that in portraying Mr. Elton as a total stranger for Emma in this scene, Austen has Elliston's frustrating traits in mind. In comparing Elton's dramatic behavior to Elliston's disappointing performance, one can see that Austen does give Elton some theatrical attributes, writing and criticizing at the same time.

The failed proposal expels Mr. Elton from the narrative temporarily. Interestingly, his destination is Bath, the eighteenth-century resort known for casinos, public houses, and theatres. Bath offers Georgian Englishmen a place of amusement and is sometimes morally questionable. A similar discussion can be found in *Northanger Abbey*. If the whole of Highbury is a theatre, Mr. Elton's leaving means he is bowing out of the main show. But in Bath he can act again and restore his confidence; he returns with his wife, another actress,

and displays a readiness to go back to the stage. His performance culminates in the Crown Inn ball, where he participates in one of Austen's most notorious scenes by refusing to dance with Harriet. Following Emma's and Mrs. Elton's eyes, we become an audience watching this show. Emma first sees how Mr. Elton belittles Harriet: he never speaks to Harriet but "did not omit being sometimes directly before Miss Smith, or speaking to those who were close to her.—Emma saw it." Emma next witnesses that Mrs. Elton is watching the whole process as an attentive audience: "she perceived that his wife, who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances" (*E* 576). Mr. Elton mortifies Emma with "smiles of high glee [which] passed between him and his wife" (*E* 578), and her watching, listening, and advising all indicate that she is both a viewer and a director.

The Crown Inn passage witnesses Mr. and Mrs. Elton's co-performance, whose marriage is sophisticatedly illustrated by Austen to explore the closeness of theatricality and gaming, and especially their duplicity. Just as Mr. Elton is both a gamer and actor, Mrs. Elton also has theatrical characteristics. Mrs. Elton is described as a self-centered, pretentious woman. She

was a *vain* woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; that she meant *to shine and be very superior*, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; that all her notions were drawn from *one set of people*, and *one style of living*. (*E* 478, emphasis mine)

Mrs. Elton attracts men with "the studied elegance of her dress, and her smiles of graciousness" (*E* 564). Her manners belie an actress's nature, and if her husband is a Highbury star, she strives to be his equal. Her language is dramatic. She speaks "with a little sigh of sentiment" (*E* 478), a phrase Austen uses to mock passionate but vain characters. Mrs. Elton's theatricality comes from her Bath experience. The famous eighteenth-century resort offered pleasures ranging from theatre-going to gambling and spouse-hunting. Bath's

thespian quality allows visitors to impersonate various personas, and as Mary K. Hill writes, the place “attracted many types of people—aristocrats, tradesman—and beggars; but they all shared one trait—they were all strangers...Many people were not like what they seem in Bath; appearances often belied the truth” (48). People, including the Elton couple, created their own new identities in this dreamy place. But Bath influences Mrs. Elton so deeply that she continues to mask herself outside the resort; she continues acting in Highbury.

Mrs. Elton’s performance, unlike her husband’s, aims to conceal her old self. She seldom mentions her social standing, although we know that she “brought no name, no blood, no alliance...And all the grandeur of the connection seemed dependent on the elder sister, who was *very well married*, to a gentleman in a *great way*” (*E* 322). Her deliberate mentioning of the sister’s family and life in Bath testifies not only to her vanity but also to her acting which provides her with a new identity: she is no longer the poor merchant’s daughter from Bristol but a gentleman’s sister-in-law in Bath. From Bath to Highbury, Mrs. Elton’s performance manifests Austen’s disapproval of theatricality. The imbalance between words and deeds, as Byrne brings out, comes from Austen’s recognition of theatrical performance: “the disparity between what characters think and what they say and do is an essential part of her dramatic inheritance” (216). Mrs. Elton’s union with Mr. Elton therefore establishes the alliance between gaming and performance; the two are inseparable due to their shared nature of concealment.

To conceal, or to disguise oneself, is one of the important skills at the game table, yet neither Mr. Elton nor his wife are better at this than Frank Churchill. Frank is relatively mysterious from the beginning, and if the Elton couple makes a show, Frank creates a spectacle. He “was one of the *boast* of Highbury, and a *lively curiosity* to see him prevailed, though the compliment was so little returned that he had never been there in his life” (*E* 26, emphasis mine). Even before his appearance, Highbury citizens make him a legendary figure.

His unpredictable departure and arrival at the village also remind us of a circulating troupe.<sup>16</sup> Frank has an actor's manner: the short trip to London for the hair-cut (preparation for the future show), his excellent skill in singing, his fondness of dancing, and the way he rescues Harriet from the group of gypsy children, all indicate this.<sup>17</sup> Not failing to meet Highbury's expectation, Frank plays the role properly, proving himself capable of acting. Frank's spectacle, though less theatrical and pretentious than that of Elton, also relates to the games he plays. The only game he plays in the novel is the box of letters:

“Miss Woodhouse,” said Frank Churchill, after examining a table behind him, which he could reach as he sat, “have your nephews taken away their alphabets—their box of letters? It used to stand here. Where is it? This is a sort of dull-looking evening, that ought to be treated rather as winter than summer. We had great amusement with those letters one morning. I want to puzzle you again.” (*E* 614)

Frank's proposal to play the game indicates his ludic nature, though not necessarily regarding games of chance. The word “puzzle” further suggests his very essence as a player, actor, and even liar. But only Mr. Knightley senses Frank's trick: “It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part” (*E* 616). Although Frank does not make himself vulgar and blamable, his indulgence in the performance and the game makes him morally problematic.

The connection between performance and game is scattered all through the narrative of *Emma*. Theatrical characters either adopt gaming skills to their lives or live everyday as if they are playing games. Even in the minor character of Mr. Martin we see the similarity of the two: Harriet claims that “sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, [Mr. Martin] would read something aloud out of the Elegant Extracts” (*E* 46). Mr. Martin's reading before

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<sup>16</sup> Frank's elusiveness brings Highbury citizens excitements and disappointments. For Emma he is the one “so long talked of, so high in interest” (*E* 334). And “When Frank left us,” continued [Mr. Weston], “it was quite uncertain when we might see him again, which makes this day's news doubly welcome. It has been completely unexpected” (*E* 542).

<sup>17</sup> The whole passage is highly dramatic, and it climaxes by Frank's sudden appearance, that “[t]he terror which the women and boy had been creating in Harriet was then their own portion. He had left them completely frightened” (*E* 590). Frank here becomes the traditional hero in adventurous story, saving the vulnerable heroine from barbarians.

playing reminds us of an actor memorizing his lines before a performance. Juxtaposing gaming episodes in *Pride and Prejudice* and those in *Emma*, one finds how Austen sharpens her thoughts and adheres to a moral standard, though remaining caustic as always.

Jane Austen's moral lecturing on gaming is inspired by and at the same time deviates from eighteenth-century conduct books. She has moral concerns, but she does not moralize her readers in a didactic way. Instead, she is able to explore her characters' deeper personality using games and to criticize them in this way. It is important to note that as an author opposed to too much gaming she does not deny gaming completely, and that, as an author who criticizes theatricality, she must have profound knowledge of theatre. Austen's attitude towards cards in *Persuasion*, also reflective of her personal stance, shows that games are just social amusements with limited benefit: "It was but a card-party, it was but a mixture of those who had never met before, and those who met too often - a common-place business, too numerous for intimacy, too small for variety" (P 468).

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