The Marriage Game

On play and performance in Jane Austen's *Emma*

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all who were involved and inspired me to pursue this process.

In particular:

Sarah Hall—for being my best friend and Theses Puff, for letting me be wild

Rego Jaquish—for being a Theses Puff and a good man

To Quinn Bull, Fisher Calame, Eliza Hogan, Ella Cobbs, Allie Dent, Derby Carlson, Kristopher Kennedy, and Sarah Jane Kemmer

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Abstract

Throughout Jane Austen's *Emma*, the playful and alluring titular character indulges in pleasurable pastimes and games, but the greatest game Emma plays is a psychological one. As opposed to the popular concept of the "marriage market," Austen facilitates a "marriage game." Indulging potential for a beneficial match, even though it might not be economically suitable, pushes players like Harriet Smith to transcend their lower-class backgrounds. Austen draws attention to the provisional and competitive nature of games, making Emma's version of playing with matches an ambivalent commentary on social privilege.

Lack, a term from psychoanalytic theory, focuses on individual needs; there is much sympathy for those with a great amount of lack and relatively little for those who scarcely lack. Despite minimal mentions of Emma's mother, the lack of this original object becomes critical to interpreting and sympathizing with Emma. Unable to connect due to her motherlessness, Emma turns to games in an attempt to gain sympathy and form connections with female companions to fill her lack. Additionally, games offer a rehearsal or low-stakes representation of the world. By examining games in Austen's novel, this study exhibits the way in which the singular phenomenon of original lack pervades an individual's interactions with their environment as they strive to supplementally fill their lack with the company they profoundly need despite the inefficiency of playfulness as a means to obtain it.

The Marriage Game

Throughout Jane Austen's *Emma*, the playful and alluring titular character indulges in pleasurable pastimes and games, but the greatest game Emma plays is a psychological one. As opposed to the popular concept of the "marriage market," Austen facilitates a "marriage game." The marriage market, most commonly attributed to Austen's other novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, is a selfish endeavor in which characters strive to make themselves as financially well-off as possible by means of a strategic marriage. Mrs. Bennet is known to shop around for suitors and put her bid on Jane and Elizabeth's odds with the new gentlemen in town; similarly, Mr. Knightley goes to a farmer on his land more or less offering a deal or financial advice for Robert Martin to marry Harriet Smith. In accordance with this model, people and characteristics are commoditized—reduced only to their economic value as a husband or wife.

In *Emma*, Austen deemphasizes the transactional dynamics of the marriage market in favor of the riskier marriage game. The marriage game involves components of imagination and speculation as Emma organizes the marital prospects of those around her with childish verve. Indulging potential for a beneficial match, even though it might not be economically suitable, pushes players like Harriet Smith to transcend their lower-class backgrounds. Austen draws attention to the provisional and competitive nature of games, making Emma's version of playing with matches an ambivalent commentary on social privilege. Perhaps most surprisingly, play exhibits a preoccupation with sympathy which the novel makes central to its understanding of community life.

In terms of sympathy, many novels within Austen's cultural milieu—including much of Austen's own writing—take a bildungsroman format, which glorifies the comedic plot of coming into fortune—a fate not often afforded to characters who are already members of the aristocracy.

Generally, this denies the wealthy sympathy, but Austen twists this trope by inspiring readerly sympathy through Emma, a paradoxically illegible character who embodies but also resists typological interpretation. Lack, a term from psychoanalytic theory, focuses on individual needs; there is much sympathy for those with a great amount of lack and relatively little for those who lack little. Despite the sparse acknowledgement of Emma's motherlessness—or even perhaps because of her mother's absence—the lack of this original object becomes critical to interpreting and sympathizing with Emma. Though she lacks little, her motherlessness pierces every element of her interactions with the other players within Highbury.

Unable to connect due to her lack, Emma turns to games in an attempt to gain sympathy and form connections with female companions to fill the void left by her mother. In the novel, charades and the Three Things Game are literal examples whereas speculation and the marriage game take on elements of metaphysical play. Additionally, the games offer a rehearsal or low-stakes representation of the world. By examining games in Austen's novel, this study exhibits the way in which the singular phenomenon of original lack pervades an individual's interactions with their environment as they strive to supplementally fill their lack with the company they profoundly need despite the insufficiency of playfulness as a means to obtain it.

To Speculate in Love

Within Austen's general canon, the game of Speculation takes prominence as an example of mimicry between a card game and characters' lives. Though, ironically, *Emma* is one of few Austen novels that does not feature the card game Speculation, its features of risk and pleasure are applicable to the lives of characters in Highbury. Speculation is a card game in which players slowly turn over cards hoping to have the highest of a particular suit; they are given the opportunity to bet on other player's cards—whether they have been turned over or not—in hopes of having the highest card, and thus, taking the ante pool. The word speculation, in Austen's day, would most recognizably refer to the economic endeavor. Though it has many definitions such as conjecturing or having to do with spectacle/sight—both of which could arguably also be applied to Emma's application of games in their own right—the definition at the forefront of the 1700s is one of investing in the market. *Mansfield Park* refers to Mr. Bertram and his eldest son being away speculating in the West Indies.[1] Even novels half a century later, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, portray speculation to the same effect as Mr. Bell and many masters make money off risky investments while the steadfast John Thornton refuses to partake in speculation, believing it to be too precarious.[2] Speculating itself is a risk and thus often carries a negative connotation, but it is worthwhile to note that speculating within the market in and of itself is not bad. Although the card game operates primarily based on chance, speculation within the marketplace bears elements of control and investigation. For example, John Thornton does not invest in the speculation because he has faith in his mills; Mr. Bertram chooses invest in a speculative endeavor because he has thoroughly investigated it by travelling to the West Indies to ensure success; Emma, similarly, invests in Harriet's romantic pursuits because she believes that a high-ranking husband is attainable. Ultimately, some benefit from their risk while others must pay for it.

Similarly to practice and rehearsal in *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* utilizes the game Speculation as a form of characterization meant to mimic players' lives. Scholar Robin Bates analyzes these games across Austen's canon and interprets the playing style of each character.[3] He suggests that Fanny Price wins the game because of her lack of speculation and desire to rely on the odds of having the winning card; others, such as Mary Crawford, would likely buy and sell cards with flagrant sums in anticipation of winning. The way each player interacts with the game betrays their personality and, to a certain extent, their motives. To force Harriet and Emma into the game of Speculation, Emma would most likely be a risky player unafraid of losing a few pounds so long as the game is exciting whereas Harriet resembles a modest player who would cautiously weigh options and odds due to her socioeconomic status. Consequentially, there is a mirror between the players in the game and the characters, which illuminates fundamental truths about each individual and their desires.

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[1] Austen, Jane. Mansfield Park. Bantam Dell, 2008.

[2] Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, and Alan Shelston. North and South: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism. 1st ed, W.W. Norton, 2005.

In addition to character, games become an effective and recurring motif throughout Austen's work due to their small-scale reflection of life events. Though *Mansfield Park* is the most prominent example of the game of Speculation—speaking of the card game and not the concept of speculation—*Pride and Prejudice* also makes a reference to the game. Unlike *Mansfield Park*, *Pride and Prejudice* stands out because of the heroine's avoidance of the game Speculation. Elizabeth Bennet "was immediately invited to join [the company at Netherfield]; but suspecting them to be playing high she declined it, and making her sister the excuse" (219).[4] Simply put, she cannot afford the stakes they are playing for. Harriet Smith is only able to afford the stakes of the speculative marriage game because she has Emma as a benefactor. Not only are the characters themselves betrayed through how they play, but their interactions with others—such as Harriet's financial reliance on Emma—are portrayed through their ability to invest in a game. Austen's meticulous and crystalline writing style insists upon meaning in each interaction including the seemingly minute—such as a game of cards.

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[3] Bates, Robin. "Card Playing in Jane Austen | Better Living through Beowulf." *Better Living through Beowulf | How Great Literature Can Change Your Life* (2019).

[4] Austen, Jane. Four Classic Novels. Fall River Press, 2012.

Note: All page numbers referring to quotes from *Emma* will be from this edition. I have selected this version because it is a compendium of four novels (*Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Emma*, and *Persuasion*), so it has allowed the acknowledgement of the world of Austen hiding behind this single text.

Initially, *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice* lay the foundation for interpreting the way in which games emulate life, but *Emma* becomes a unique example because of the novel's perspective. First, Austen shifts the narrative from one about an underprivileged character to one of a powerful young woman. Rather than focusing on the Elizabeth Bennets and the Fanny Prices, the focus is turned to the Caroline Bingleys and the Miss Bertrams despite the presence of a character like Harriet Smith who suits Austen's more familiar trope of the rise in social status and fortune. Additionally, Austen brings forth a protagonist who remains a child both at heart and in some of her actions. Youthfulness and naivety force the games to take on a more significant role in terms of interpretive qualities because they are the primary means through which Emma engages other characters. The uniqueness of Emma's situation illuminates the hidden meanings behind each of the word games similarly to Austen's integration of card games in other novels.

Despite the difference in nature between word games and card games, they serve similar purposes within Austen's narratives such as characterization and symbolism. Harriet, for example, would rather play safely, like Fanny Price, even if it means not maximizing her potential rewards, whereas Emma encourages high levels of speculation in the marriage game by pushing Harriet to indulge in newer and riskier matches. Emma declares that "the acquaintance she had already formed were unworthy of her… She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society" (419). Emma's fondness for Harriet has distorted her value as both a plaything and as a marketable wife. Knightley—not inflated with infatuation—gets upset by Emma's rejection of Robert Martin on Harriet's behalf: "'Not Harriet's equal!' Exclaimed Mr. Knightley…'he is as much her superior in sense as in situation'" (439). The ability to commoditize becomes difficult in an emotionally aroused state as Emma is with regard to Harriet. Meanwhile, Mr. Knightley remains unattached to Harriet and is thus able to see her economic worth more clearly. For this reason, the marriage game distinguishes itself as a uniquely emotional experience that ought to be taken with the same seriousness as economic speculation or investment.

In order to heighten the stakes of games within *Emma*, Austen adds the layer of interpretation not portrayed in less cerebral games such as cards. Rather than hiding behind a stack of cards, the Hartfield community invest their wit in games which more directly display their intelligence. While the game Speculation is constructed upon chance and, well, speculation, the charades and word games in Emma more directly display misinterpretations between characters. The level of intellect and lack of chance within the charades and word games lends an intellectual aspect to the games pushing them further into the realm of the psychological. While it is important with games that involve speculation or bluffing to read into each interaction, riddles like those in *Emma* beg interpretation for each individual word, forcing characters to pick apart language in hopes of deciphering a marriage proposal, not offending old friends, or keeping a mentee close. The games in and of themselves have no ante or cost, but the social elements could have more dire consequences than losing a few shillings.

Play and Practice

The death of the mother is an essential quality to survey when contemplating character, but *Emma* contains a startling absence of content relating to Emma's attachment to her mother, causing the framework of their relationship to be widely overlooked despite the consequences it imposes on Emma and her relationships with other women. Only on the first page of the text does Austen breeze past the loss of Emma's mother and strategically replace this figure with Miss Taylor:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father, and had, in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection. (409)

Already, we know that Emma experiences this loss deeply enough to mention the tenderness of "caresses". Within the novel's first paragraph alone, the mother plays a prominent role despite not being mentioned for the remainder of the novel.[5] The paragraph also implies the loss of the sister, Isabella, and the potential to lose Miss Taylor—if not to marriage then because she is growing old for a governess. Despite the list of splendors that the first sentence describes, it is not long before these blessings are tainted by her familial structure and lack of companionship. We know that Emma lost her mother, which was not unusual during the Regency period. There were typhus outbreaks and a high mortality rate for birthing mothers.[6] Still, the sheer absence of Emma's mother is noteworthy. The novel mentions no momentos of her and, aside from one comment from Mr. Knightley, she is only mentioned in the introduction as a modifier to explain

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[5] Mr. Knightley does make a single remark to Miss Taylor about how he regrets that Emma's mother is not there to offer her guidance. This is the only other mention of the mother found in *Emma.*

[6] Fergus, Jan S. Jane Austen: A Literary Life. St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Miss Taylor’s prominence within the household. The way in which Austen both integrates and omits Emma’s mother as a character suggests her overall importance to Emma’s development and her tendency to engage in games since her growth is stunted by lack.

One might not often think of the mother and the importance of the initial object, which is what makes this reading critical: the shortage of content related to Emma’s mother is cause for concern and question.[7] The novel opens with the loss of yet another mother figure, establishing a pattern of trauma for Emma related to a need for female companionship. She could acknowledge this pattern and break away from her behavior in favor of healthier coping mechanisms; rather, she continues to pursue other lower-class, dependent females like Harriet Smith who might validate her experience and meet her quota for praise. One example is after hearing Miss Fairfax play the pianoforte. Harriet flatters Emma:

> ‘Oh! If I could but play as well as you and Miss Fairfax!’
>
> ‘Don’t class us together, Harriet. My playing is no more like hers than a lamp is like sunshine.’
>
> ‘Oh! Dear—I think you play the best of the two. I think you play quite as well as she does. I am sure I had much rather hear you. Everybody last night said how well you played’
>
> ‘This who knew anything about it, must have felt the difference. The truth is, Harriet, that my playing is just good enough to be praised, but Jane Fairfax’s is much beyond it.’ (529)

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[7] Milivojeviæ, Liljana, and S. Iveziæ. "Importance of object relations theories for development of capacity for mature love." J Croat Med 45 (2004): 18-23.
Note: though this theory is credited to Klein, this particular article does an excellent job summarizing the consequences and realities of the child and their relationships throughout adolescence

In this instance, Harriet reassures Emma by insisting that she would rather listen to Emma play the pianoforte than Jane Fairfax. Emma makes an attempt at humility by stating what she considers to be “the truth”: that Jane Fairfax is simply better. Despite this assumed fact, Harriet insists upon Emma’s artistic prowess. Emma’s need for consolation and validation from Harriet is proof of a more profound lack. Though she has everything, Emma thrives on the attention and even the inauthenticity Harriet provides for her in order to bolster her ego, creating an expectation for future relationships to bear the same qualities.

The compulsion to interpret Emma as overindulgent in ludic desire and unconsciously manipulative of those around her is strong and not uncommon; however, the text also demands a sympathetic Emma. Conjoining the rejection of play as childish and the need for play as an environment in which one might interact with suitors mirrors Emma’s complexity. While she is wealthy, she uses her wealth to try—even if she fails—to obtain a high match for Harriet. One must also read Emma as a well-intended tragic hero whose ludic desire is her hamartia. In order to elevate feelings of self-worth attributed to her need for female company, Emma fantasizes about being the savior of lower-class women like Harriet who are deprived of the means to which she is entitled.

For a woman who wants nothing—“‘Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want’” (452)—it is difficult to imagine what Emma might lack. While she strives to fulfill the lack of others in her savior fantasy, she neglects her motherlessness as a critical feature of her being. Emma represents one of the fundamental deprivations: that of the orphan. Despite having a father, Emma fends for herself and is allowed free rein of Hartfield: “‘I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house, as I am of Hartfield’” (452-453). This freedom does not necessitate pleasure, though. Emma’s games are inspired by the lack of intellectual stimulation offered to her, but also by the absence of feminine influence to indulge such stimulation. Emma reasons away her wrongdoings by claiming that "'with common sense,' she added, 'I am afraid I have had little to do" (620)—a weak excuse for meddling in the lives of others. Mary Margaret Benson evidences the necessity for close female relationships within the world of Austen in her article "Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen".[8] The crucial capability of a mother to punish is sorely lacking in Emma's life of excess. Benson notes:

> Emma is unusual among our heroines in that she sets herself in the maternal role, and does so with disastrous results – consider her efforts at motherly guidance to Harriet Smith. Emma is the one who is accustomed to giving commands and being obeyed; she is left to choose her own path, and chooses the wrong one… Emma is the most outgoing of all the heroines, and thus her errors are the most blatant. She needs more guidance than the others, because, since her mother's death, she has had no guidance or example at all, except from Mr. Knightley. (118)

The general inconsistency and absence of female company—the death of her mother, the marriage of her sister Isabella, Mrs. Weston abandoning her for a husband, and later Harriet doing the same—leaves Emma raw. What few connections Emma maintains are tainted by inauthenticity and inequality of social status.[9] She, unlike Jane Fairfax, has no Mr. Dixon or Miss Bates to provide and care for her. "Jane is blessed with proper substitute parents, who educate her and rear her to understand her role in the world – uncomfortable though that role is" (120) as combined with her role as an impoverished gentlewoman; Emma, on the other hand, is not afforded the same luxury of substitutes. Despite having a father, she must care for him—to the extent that any suitor for Emma would also have to live at Hartfield rather than in his own home. While being forced to tend to her father, she is unable to address her own psychological needs, leaving her to maintain the playful facade she wears for those dependent on her.

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[8] Benson, Mary Margaret. "Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen." Persuasions 11 (1989): 117-24.

[9] Marcus, Sharon. Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England. Princeton University Press, 2009.

Play operates as a means for connection at which continually excels, but it leaves her at a loss for genuine vulnerability and connection. The loss of Miss Taylor to Mrs. Weston illustrates the fragility and inconsistency of intimacy within Emma's life. Emma returns to Mrs. Weston's doorstep for comfort:

> 'I could not think about you so much without doting on you, faults and all; and by dint of fancying so many errors, have been in love with you ever since you were thirteen at least.' [Mrs. Weston]
>
> 'I am sure you were of use to me,' cried Emma. 'I was very often influenced rightly by you' (652)

Losing Miss Taylor leaves Emma floundering to find her way in the world, which she often does in improper ways such as flirting shamelessly with Frank Churchill and employing Harriet as her puppet to test the marriage game—a game in which she is afraid of investing her own heart and hand in marriage.[10] Additionally, Miss Taylor was not capable of filling the role of the mother while she was with Emma. She doted on Emma too much, as she readily admits, but she also "treats Emma as an equal, or, more often, as a superior," which only goes to emphasize the socioeconomic barrier of those in different groups.[11] Despite being a close, older female guide, she could not be harsh towards Emma in the same way as someone of Emma's own social standing could. Emma's mother's "place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection" (409), but this model suggests that affection must yield to structure, learning, and respect.

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[10] Not to mention the Box Hill catastrophe, the carriage ride with Mr. Elton, her continued dismissal of Jane Fairfax, her speculation about the pianoforte gift, misreading Harriet's affections for Knightley, Harriet's initial rejection of Robert Martin—essentially the entire plot is a parade of the mistakes made by an unguided Emma.

[11] Benson, Mary Margaret. "Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen." Persuasions 11 (1989): 120.

According to object theory, Emma's insecure attachment to her parents suggests that she will not have successful or healthy relationships later on. Her attachments—or lack thereof—become prevalent during each of her attempts to keep Harriet close (such as rejecting Robert Martin or arranging matches with suitors that would not have Harriet just so that Emma can continue to occupy the role of mentor). She is possessive of Harriet to the extent that she declares, "'If I had set my heart on Mr. Elton's marrying Harriet, it would have been very kind to open my eyes; but at present, I only want to keep Harriet to myself'" (442). Emma idealizes both herself and Harriet as objects in a way which isolates them from the marriage market. She is beyond doing what is best—or even appropriate—for Harriet with consideration to finding her a match of respectable status and instead strives to restrain this female attachment figure who awards Emma the attention she craves. Only after a modicum of humbling or the breakdown of the transitional object (i.e. Harriet leaving to marry Robert Martin) can she fully commit herself to more realistic notions of connection. Emma glorifies Harriet's manipulated decision to reject Robert Martin by declaring her to be "'perfectly, perfectly right, my dearest Harriet; you are doing just what you ought… It would have grieved me to lose your acquaintance, which must have been the consequence of your marrying Mr. Martin… Now I am secure of you forever'" (434-435). Her commitment to Harriet is an eroticised grasp at maintaining an attachment figure. While we are not awarded an aftermath of whether or not Emma and Harriet remain friends after their respective marriages, the cyclical nature of the novel suggests that she will find a way to love Harriet despite her husband as she does with Mrs. Weston though she will continue to be in want of a mentor/mentee relationship just as she was previously unfulfilled without one.

As Emma struggles to engage with others as transitional objects, she must create ways to connect, choosing amusement as a means through which she can interact with others while still maintaining her authority. Emma is bored and desperately searches for amusement. Upon deeper reading, readers begin to participate in her lack—an experience so sensitive and universal that it transcends social class. One might consider elements of play throughout childhood development; if a mother is not present to be a love object, then one will search for the nearest possible substitute as a transitional object. Miss Taylor is a worthy substitute, but boundaries are clearly crossed since no child during that time would set out on a quest to find their mother a match. This forces Emma to occupy an in-between space of having female intimacy but not having the clear guidance that she needs to form secure attachments. As a psychosocial game, Emma arranges potential matches, whether they have potential or not, as a way of reenacting the formation of attachment. In having no initial love object, Emma does not learn how to bond properly, which Kleinian theory often suggests results in the idealization of the other object just as Knightley recognizes that "[Emma's] infatuation about that girl blinds [her]" (439). Both Emma herself and Harriet operate as transitional objects in this sense.[12] Emma has an ego the size of the sun, which is reinforced by her socioeconomic standing and by the encouragements of those she chooses to surround herself with—Mr. Knightley is the exception, but he is family and his presence is not her choice. The anxiety with which Emma eliminates her relationships with anyone who does not praise her—thinking of Jane Fairfax and, to a certain extent, Robert Martin—only deepens her self-illusion.

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[12] Milivojeviæ, Liljana, and S. Iveziæ. "Importance of object relations theories for development of capacity for mature love." J Croat Med 45 (2004): 18-23.

Freudian theory poses a more game-relevant example but comes to the same general conclusion as object theory with regard to substituting play for attachment influences an individual. Emma's loss is closely linked to the "Fort-Da Game" that Freud documented while living with his grandson.[13] The child would toss a toy away with mild distress only to then retrieve it again with elation. The experience as a whole is interpreted to be a net positive for the child. Freud attributes this pleasure to "the child's great cultural achievement - the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting" (432). By denying the self of pleasure, one proclaims that they are above their needs. It is a reenactment of deprivation—a rehearsal of loss. This serves many purposes that include proximity to loss, familiarity with the trauma cycle, and the pleasure that accompanies agency. Freud states that the child, "by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part" (432). The desire for agency over the surrounding environment frames the game as an exertion of force rather than a mere game. Overall, fort-da harps on themes of the need to rectify the occurrence of trauma, which is appropriate for Emma through her loss of the original object.

The way Emma goes about games is declared socially appropriate (though it borderlines on offensive with the misinterpretation of Mr. Elton's charade and Frank Churchill's Three Things Game) rather than childish or harmful because these activities are frequently thought of as practice for larger social traditions such as courting.[14] She engages in a misplaced practice that will prepare her for disappointment and reenact the abandonment scenario until it no longer evokes as much pain. Her rehearsal affords her proximity to rejection and pain that she has not been afforded as declared by the twenty-one years "with very little to distress or vex her" (409), though psychoanalytic theory would state that to be nearly impossible for anyone who has encountered the loss of the original object; she can also learn through observation and manipulation without putting her emotions in harm's way.

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[13] Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the pleasure principle." *Psychoanalysis and History* 17.2 (2015).
This piece is not immune to the greater criticisms of Freud as a whole, but it offers relevant insight into the greater drives assumed to be universal—though fort-da offers a specific example. There are many other elements that might also contribute to Emma's psyche on the loss of the mother or in fact it may have impacted her as much as it is listed in the novel: very little. Still, using this example as a critical lens and an allegorical representation works regardless of personal feelings and critiques of Freud.

[14] I have decided to call Frank's game at Box Hill simply the "Three Things Game" because of the significance of getting Miss Bates to stop at three dull things. The original instruction, of course, was to list one piece of juicy gossip, two interesting things, or three things very dull indeed—though Emma and Frank apparently get to judge how interesting something is. Other accounts may refer to it as the "Box Hill Game", "The Picnic Episode", etc.

As she forms her transitional relationships with Miss Taylor and Harriet Smith, she witnesses examples of healthy and—one would argue more so—unhealthy relationships that become formative for her relationships with each of the women and her other close relations. We must also consider that the only healthy couples in the text are, ironically, matches for Emma's friends. The Westons (though their relation, Frank Churchill, is a romantic train wreck) have a loving and companionate marriage; similarly, Harriet receives all the affection she requires from the Martins—as it is stated upon her engagement that "she would be placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself" (663).[15] Though Emma does not directly make the match for the latter, it must not be lessened that all of her friends end up getting the attention she craves. Witnessing these endearing relationships should be a triumph for Emma since she gets to witness a model which she can later reenact with the suitor of her choosing, but instead, Emma gets stuck mourning the loss of those who have left her for greener pastures and for relationships in which they do not have to be inferior to the shining Miss Woodhouse. Because she focuses on loss instead of the role models set before her, Emma has some relationship-ruining perspectives on marriage:

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[15] And plenty of walnuts!

> 'Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I would be a fool to change such a situation as mine' (452)

While Emma doubts that she could ever love enough to marry, she forms strong attachments to the women in her life only to see them married off. Their absence should create a void in Emma's heart—which she later attempts to fill by marrying Mr. Knightley against her prior declarations that she shall not marry—as she continues to describe how remaining single is beneficial to her:

> 'I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important.' (453)

In short, if she wants for nothing, why marry Knightley so promptly after Harriet has formed an attachment? Despite having countless men at her beck and call, Emma denies them all while she pursues Harriet (a match for Harriet, to be exact).[16] Emma does not emulate the positive romantic examples set before her despite their availability and proximity. If Harriet is doomed to marry soon, so must Emma. The desperate search for intimacy results in the development of noxious dynamics as one half of a friendship abandons the other for romantic endeavors.

Matchmaking as recreation offers Emma purpose in Highbury society—though her matchmaking efforts are more for personal gain than charitable action. While her actions might appear gracious to members of the lower class because of the apparent reciprocity between

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[16] Earlier drafts of this project sought to explore the potential for homoeroticism and even queer coding between Emma and Harriet, which still ought to be considered as a possibility but not taken as gospel. Down to the details such as the overly sexual physical description upon meeting Harriet and Knightley referring to her as Emma's "special little friend" were too suggestive to overlook

Emma and Harriet, the true purpose for these actions remains in the subtext. Emma benefits through entertainment and a reputation for being generous; Harriet benefits through access to upper-class luxuries and suitors. Emma's need, however, goes much deeper than the surface-level benefits of befriending Harriet. She is actually somewhat dismayed that she has made a match between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston since this means that her affectionate governess will now abandon her. Miss Taylor is often referred to as "sister" (409) and they have spent most of their lives together. After the Westons get married, "It was a black morning's work for [Emma]. The want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day. She recalled her past kindness—the kindness, the affection of sixteen years" (409). Emma feels this absence deeply, so it is natural that she would want to distract herself from the loss of yet another mother figure; she has already lost her biological mother and her older sister. While repeatedly initiating the same behavior—matchmaking—that previously left her companionless seems strange, it is a familiar pattern to Emma. Patterns are key to the fort-da-style game that she plays since it establishes her ability to make things happen with a generally positive outcome. She gives matchmaking another chance. While she does, her true desires slowly become apparent. Although Harriet has no parents, Emma is the true orphan in the story—one who seeks affection and attention from others. By engaging in the marriage game, she is allowed to dictate the consequences and extent of said affections. Surely, entertainment is an emotional screen for Emma. She plays making matches off as a psychosocial game when she is actually the main player rather than the architect. Just as in the fort-da game, she can be the master by bidding objects to come and go as she pleases. She does not grasp that the women in her life are not toys on strings; she cannot pull them back from a marriage or their death, but enacting this deprivation might help develop the pleasure principle. Adults do not play such petty games;

children are known for playing recklessly. Emma, having lost her mother and matronly figures, seeks to reignite the part of herself that was robbed of a childhood due to the absence of a true mother. Emma falls into the illusion of doing Harriet a favor when it is she who needs the game to continue most of all.

In terms of amusement and entertainment, Emma turns to pleasurable pursuits to distract herself from the displeasure of her lack. Garofalo poses a concept in "Dating on Faults in Jane Austen's *Emma*" summarizing how Emma plays with matches while Knightley monetizes them.[17] Emma makes matches because she has little else to do and these matches provide her with amusement. She indulges in the desire to feel like she is rescuing those with greater socioeconomic lack. Emma's "'infatuation about that girl'" (439) translates into her desire to improve Harriet even at the expense of imagining a potential that is not there in the more calculated and commoditized world of Highbury which follows the marriage market model.

The way in which Emma takes on others' lack while neglecting to acknowledge her own missing original object can only be interpreted as a distraction with the intention of achieving narrative fulfillment through a surrogate like Harriet. Garofalo interprets Emma's approach through close analyses of specific words in the novel: "Significantly, the term 'improvement' in the novel recalls the economic meaning of the word", similarly to how the term "speculation" functions.[18] While this is an accurate reading of the word, it warrants expansion. Emma frequently uses the term "improvement" when she speaks of her work with Harriet. She desires that Harriet marry well and gain status and financial security, but more importantly, she seeks to fulfill the narrative fantasy. She is not just improving Harriet's standing; she is improving Harriet's story. She no longer has to be the orphan remaining unseen; she is now the ward of the esteemed Miss Emma Woodhouse. Emma's fantasy is one of helping others. By fulfilling others' lack, she is able to fill a piece of her own. This is the general premise and appeal of charity and good deeds. Naturally, Harriet is the central object of Emma's fulfillment throughout the novel.

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[17] Garofalo, Daniela. "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's Emma." *European Romantic Review* 28.2 (2017): 227-240.

[18] Garofalo, Daniela. "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's Emma." p. 230.

> And with Emma it was grown into a first wish. She had scarcely a stronger regret than for her past coldness; and the person, whom she had been so many months neglecting, was now the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard or sympathy. She wanted to be used to be of use to her. (613)

Once the drama of Frank Churchill passes, Emma finds herself once again in need of purpose and amusement, so she returns to Harriet. Emma desires to "[lavish] every distinction of regard" upon Harriet, meaning she wishes to pour her life into the pursuit of bettering Harriet's life—though we have noted that past attempts at this have been unsuccessful. In fact, it is her "first wish" to indulge herself in fulfilling others' lack. The article suggests that Emma "gets narrative pleasure from the fantasy she creates about her friends" (228). Just as she has spent "so many months neglecting" Harriet, she has also neglected to care for her own lack—depriving herself of genuine female connection. Instead, she replaces her need with the games and buries it deeper by contemplating her superiority. Garofalo interprets Emma as Harriet's champion—or at least that is how Emma would see herself since she "could not quarrel with herself" (443)—but we must not exclude action from intention. Even if her genuine intent is to fulfill Harriet's needs and elevate her in society, she goes about it in a twisted way by tricking her into rejecting Robert Martin and putting Harriet onto a romantic battlefield full of men who are actually smitten with Emma.

Just as in most games, there is a winner and a loser; enforcing the rules of games onto Emma suggests that if Emma is the victor of a situation, it is at the expense of others. While

Harriet must reap the disappointment of one less suitor, Emma is validated by the reassurance that she has control over one more person in Highbury. Garofalo's article reads as such:

> What she lacks, here, is lack itself. Having successfully worked to make up for her governess's lack by getting her advantageously married, Emma finds herself at home with her father…By championing her governess's marriage, Emma first breaks through this stultifying world in which no loss is permitted to enter. The novel begins at the moment in which Emma has just manufactured an experience of loss. (228)[19]

The idea that Emma's lack is lack itself seems redundant but is fascinating because of its accuracy. If one has nothing to strive for, they have no motivation as characters or people. Emma would surrogate lack from others if she had the capacity, but to disagree with Garofalo, Emma does experience lack. Losing her governess was not the fulfillment of a lack but rather the loss of entertainment, which leaves Emma experiencing a tragic loss. Her inability to cope with "Miss Taylor's loss which first brought grief" (410) forces Emma to take on the matriarchal role that was presented for her though—as seen through psychoanalysis—Miss Taylor is not the complete mother figure as a secure attachment object because of the freedom and praise she affords Emma due to their socioeconomic disparity.

Lack in Building the Bildungsroman

The loss of the mother is a quality of *Emma* that is not unique to this novel but is a catalyst for the psychological development of the bildungsroman. During the regency, the death of the mother, the disappearance of the mother, or the existence of an abusive mother is not uncommon. What will soon become a necessary qualifier or precondition for the protagonist of the bildungsroman in the Victorian Era—wildly popular examples come from Dickens or the Brontës—precursors like *Emma* accuse the status of the mother to be a traumatic experience rather than one to be indifferent to.

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[19] Garofalo, Daniela. "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's Emma." p. 228.

Similarly to characters like Pip in *Great Expectations*,[20] David in *David Copperfield*,[21] Jude in *Jude the Obscure*,[22] or Jane in *Jane Eyre*,[23] the absence of the mother furthers the development of the protagonist as it does in *Emma.*[24] Again, orphanhood was not uncommon during Austen's time to have lost one or both parents, but Emma's lack calls attention to the fact that this is a damaging experience rather than an enabling one. The loss of the mother has implications of original lack for all of the characters, but their responses are what differentiates the characters of bildungsromane from Emma. The heroes from the bildungsromane examples offered above leave home to pursue occupations, fortune, or marriage; meanwhile, Emma has no need of occupation, fortune, or interested bachelors. The ability to control or satisfy their lack is what motivates the characters to develop in a way that Emma does not because she wants little other than a mother or female company. This is what displaces her within the establishment of the orphan as a bildungsroman trope: she has no need to make a name for herself. Her only lack is something that she cannot change unlike how other protagonists can pursue fortune, occupation, or change in marital status.

As a result of the lack of stakes or the motivation for betterment, Emma's only opportunity for recreation is through games to the extent that they become her world. Because her life of splendor does not thrust her into adulthood or industry, she is able to continue relishing in her youth to the extent that her immaturity is rarely scolded—with the exception of Box Hill or nearly any direct interaction with Mr. Knightley and his "'badly done, indeed!'" (605) remark. These conditions are a result of Emma's environment which includes the lack of an authoritative parent, an equal female companion, and threats from those of economically greater advantage. The apparent lack of material or socioeconomic means does not imply that there is no lack overall as seen in Emma's psychological experience.

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[20] Dickens, Charles, and Margaret Cardwell. Great Expectations. New ed, Oxford University Press, 2008.

[21] Dickens, Charles, and Jeremy Tambling. David Copperfield. Rev. ed, Penguin Books, 2004.

[22] Hardy, Thomas, and Dennis Taylor. Jude the Obscure. Penguin Books, 1998.

[23] Bronte, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. 3rd ed., The Easton Press, 1978.

[24] In future footnotes, these novels will either all be combined or not cited in the footnotes because readers ought to know the novels. Aside from *Great Expectations*, they all have the main character's name in the title. Readers can infer which novel I am referring to. If you have not read them yet and thus are not familiar with the characters, you have quite the adventure ahead of you!

Because one of the quintessential preconditions for bildungsromane protagonists is motherlessness, it has the potential to become a doorway to opportunity. Traumatic childhoods can fuel characters to strive for better conditions, but—in Emma's case—they can also invalidate loss and the need to psychologically regress as Emma does by engaging in petty affairs such as speculating with Harriet's romantic life in the marriage game and creating illusions in which Frank Churchill is in love with her and she is better than Jane Fairfax. At the beginning of *Great Expectations*, rather than remain at his parent's grave forever, Pip succumbs to issues which require his more immediate attention such as an escaped convict threatening his life or securing patronage from Miss Havisham. Similarly, Jane's harsh conditions in *Jane Eyre*—such as being secluded in the red room—inspired her to strive towards excellence at the Lowood School. Georgiana and Eliza Reed remain with their mother, Jane's aunt, and act as a foil for what might have become of Jane had she lived a life with little to distress or vex her (note the comparison to the opening lines of *Emma*). Emma has no death threats nor does she concern herself with finances—leaving her to toil away with word games and obtain others as supplements for her lack. In need of need itself, she takes on the socioeconomic concerns of characters like Miss Taylor and Harriet Smith under the guise of helping them.

Uniquely, *Emma* offers the perspective of the bildungsroman doomed to fail because of the lack of lack. The loss of the original object itself is enough to hinder well-being but not enough lack to motivate a character to action; thus, additional conditions must be imposed in order to form a compelling hero story. Readers root for Pip and Jane to succeed whereas they are less compelled to hope that Emma arranges a wealthy but unhappy match for Harriet throughout the marriage game. She is too spoiled for us to hope she might overcome what relatively minuscule adversity she faces. The novel is able to come to a satisfying conclusion *despite* Emma, not because of her.

To combine both lack and fantasy, Minma explores the potential for unconscious motivation—a signature quality of the psychoanalytic perspective. Mimna attributes Emma's engagement with the marriage game to "the absence of intellectual stimulus after Miss Taylor's marriage, a desire to display her own cleverness, a love of managing and arranging, and so on".[25] Emma's various motivations and desires culminate in a figure who—whether she realizes it or not—justifies her actions, believing that she knows best because she has the financial capabilities to accomplish that which others cannot—though she may misattribute this aptitude to her cleverness as well. Despite her best intentions, Emma grapples with the co-existence of her desire to play with others and her desire to save them. These desires can dwell together, but Emma neglects what is truly necessary for her. She fails to acknowledge or heal her own original lack—using play and fantasy as an excuse to distract herself.

Although *Emma* does not fit the Victorian bildungsroman as a genre, it lays some critical groundwork of elements to consider when critiquing Emma and creating characters dissimilar to her. Emma has a way of captivating audiences, making them extend sympathy despite her worst characteristics. Rather than these characteristics being the central driver of the plot in the typical bildungsroman, external forces generally facilitate the conflict. The meticulous insistence upon psychological hindrances as a source of conflict distances Austen from her successors as they demand external forces to oppress their heroes. Still, the tropes remain consistent. Apply the following to *Emma, Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield,* or *Jude the Obscure*: a child left motherless must grapple with the world around them while entertaining great ambitions of fulfilling what they lack and—through a series of missteps and victories—ultimately learns through experience and becomes able to view the world in a different way.[26] Simply, Emma creates the blueprint for a journey—whether it be philosophical or physical—that includes complications but results in an overall hope of becoming better. For Emma, though she often fails, the games are a necessity when creating a character that readers can both like and dislike. Without the marriage game and Emma's ambition to make another match while simultaneously fulfilling her lack, there would be no story. The architecture of the novel is not arranged around the character, but rather around the circumstances that are creating her.

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[25] Minma, Shinobu. "Self-Deception and Superiority Complex: Derangement of Hierarchy in Jane Austen's Emma." p. 51

Emma's demonstrations of puppeteering in the lives of others make her seem like a villain—a portrayal of the aristocracy that lower-class audiences would be pleased to see. It is a puzzle, then, that Emma remains a fascinating and study-worthy character. We are discontent with disliking Emma because of her motivation for the distasteful way in which she treats people. The key to Emma's motivation and the missing piece to a humanistic reading of the upper class lies in the discovery of lack.[27] Addressing lack would resolve Emma's need to resort to games rather than live a life in which she copes with grief in a mature way.

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[26] Bronte, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. 3rd ed., The Easton Press, 1978.
Dickens, Charles, and Margaret Cardwell. Great Expectations. New ed, Oxford University Press, 2008.
Dickens, Charles, and Jeremy Tambling. David Copperfield. Rev. ed, Penguin Books, 2004.
Hardy, Thomas, and Dennis Taylor. Jude the Obscure. Penguin Books, 1998.

Emma cannot acknowledge that games are an insufficient way to bond with others on an intimate level, forcing her into an inauthentic experience. She omits vulnerability in her interactions with those in Highbury to maintain a facade, even with her father. When she experiences inner turmoil after the loss of her beloved mother figure, Miss Taylor, she presents herself as jovial even to those closest to her. Miss Taylor's marriage was "Melancholy change; and Emma could not but sigh over it… till her father awoke and made it necessary to be cheerful" (410). Emma denies her true self—the darkness that comes with truth—substituting a favorable lie instead. She would rather suffer in silence and play in public than offer herself as a representation of the vulnerable aristocracy. Her illusion is ludic. She is, after all, "handsome, clever, rich" (409), making her the object of desire—though not necessarily of idealized sociality.

While games as a social rehearsal are deemed appropriate for all ages, it is Emma's immaturity which allows her to play games—not just in a literal sense but allegorically as well—with members of the lower class. Though Emma causes harm to the psyche of multiple characters, Harriet is perhaps the most deeply involved. Because of her emotional, economic, and social vulnerability, Harriet depends wholeheartedly on Emma until Robert Martin offers her another life (twice). Harriet is the only person whose attention Emma cannot maintain because of their proximity; the two have gotten so close that Harriet has seen beyond the facade of the playful Emma. She has experienced a version of her life in which a schaudenfreudic Emma demands that others engage with her and her games regardless of the cost.

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[27] Minma, Shinobu. "Self-Deception and Superiority Complex: Derangement of Hierarchy in Jane Austen's Emma." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 14.1 (2001): 49-65.

If Emma represents the naive aristocracy, then the point of this novel is to be a philosophical exploration of humanity. Though many of the issues in the novel originate because the upper class can offend and the lower class cannot refuse, Austen calls for sympathy even within companies that seem to have everything. The commentary within the novel demands that the aristocracy be viewed as humans who experience both fantasy and lack.

The Games are Lacking

Understanding the distinct nature of the games within *Emma*, one can then address their salient details and then explain them in terms of psychoanalytical analysis and their consequences. Similarly to the concept of fort-da, each of the word games played in *Emma* alludes to the larger social architecture of Highbury. Emma's interactions with each of these games. In the charades, there is a correct answer for her to strive for whereas the Three Things Game is subjective; each is a reflection of Emma's relationships with the other players and thus her place in society. The marriage game represents the confusion of stakes and reality. Emma, accustomed to play and—with the exception of her mother—not a target of great loss, is unable to understand the risk of speculating with matches for characters like Harriet. Her ignorance forces Highbury to become her playhouse and the larger game in which these smaller word games take place.

While the marriage game is the centerpiece of the novel, charades provide a quintessential example of Emma's power play due to the double-riddle of determining both the solution and the intended recipient. One reflects on the "charades" within Jane Eyre, which take a much different form: "They spoke of 'playing charades,' but in my ignorance I did not understand the term…Ere long a bell tinkled, and the curtain drew up…a ceremony followed, in dumb show, in which it was easy to recognize the pantomime of a marriage" (169-170).[28] Here, Blanche and Mr. Rochester perform "bride" as a charade. In *Emma*, though, the charade does not involve acting out scenarios but rather revealing a hidden message through rhetoric. While these both involve engaging the senses in order to come to a conclusion, the charade as a word game involves a certain level of deception. The high style of these riddles implies confusion and complication—a sort of indirectness which inhibits one from coming to the answer. In acting out a charade, the rules deny the players speech; the charades in Emma deny only the ability to be direct.

Emma is able to decode the meaning of Mr. Elton's charade (courtship) but she is incorrect about the intended audience—a detrimental lapse in communication, breaching the games to transcend into the real world. She assumes the charade to be for Harriet rather than for herself—a prominent example of Emma's understanding of language and play without the skills to take social cues from her environment. She understands the charade but remains unable to comprehend the delicate nature of human affection until Mr. Elton tells her outright during their carriage ride. Harriet, however, is not particularly clever and is vexed by the mental exercises.[29] One might argue that this is a sort of intellectualism that would result from Emma's years of upper-class education. Harriet, on the other hand, has emotional intelligence and tenderness. Emma is not able to register reactions from people as well as Harriet can so—even though Harriet is not the definition of clever—the socially inferior is also the more humane of the duo. Emma believed, in fact, that "to resemble her would be more for her own welfare and happiness than all that genius or intelligence could do" (482). She interprets Harriet as witty in this sense because her existence brings “happiness” whereas Emma and her low emotional intelligence must resort to “genius or intelligence”, which she declares inadequate in the novel’s matters of the heart. Her humanity is not of use when playing these games, though, making Harriet appear dull and even stupid. The riddles, like almost all of their interactions, harm Harriet and bolster Emma.

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[28] Bronte, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. 3rd ed., The Easton Press, 1978.

[29] Bree, Linda. "Emma: Word Games and Secret Histories." A Companion to Jane Austen 104 (2009): 133.

Unclearly placed affections are the main source of Emma’s fault throughout the novel and the central cause of Harriet’s turmoil. Though she deciphers the riddle, one might question whether or not Emma also inferred its intended audience.

> But, ah! United, what reverse we have!
> Man’s boasted power and freedom, all are flown;
> Lord of the earth and sea, he bends a slave,
> And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone
>
> Thy ready wit the word will soon supply,
> May its approval beam in that soft eye!
>
> Humph—Harriet’s ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love indeed to describe her so. (445)

The charade mentions “wit”, which Harriet is regularly referred to as lacking so much so that Emma believes a man must be completely enamored to believe her to be witty. Emma frequently notes how clever she is—and it is also mentioned by other players and the opening line of the novel. Someone as intelligent as Emma would either be lying to say she did not notice that the poem was about her or she would be employing confirmation bias and twisting her beliefs and the words into a single, coherent picture illustrating Elton and Harriet. Emma was "really for the time convinced that Harriet was the superior creature of the two" (482), demonstrating a glorification of Harriet and an inability to compromise on the worth of the characters—a potential explanation of Emma's misinterpretation. Once again, because of Emma's failure to comprehend the stakes of romance, she disregards the potential for Mr. Elton to indulge affections toward her because she cannot identify the potential threat to Harriet's wellbeing that accompanies her misinterpretation. Emma wishes that her emotional intelligence could trump her affinity for riddles. If she allowed herself to be vulnerable rather than reliant on the praise she receives for her intellectual prowess, she could level herself with the other women and form meaningful relationships.

Emma's understanding of people has been distorted through her lack of female connection in early childhood; her strategy of substituting games for genuine connection fails her as people—Mr. Elton in particular—breech the roles she had assigned to them in order to suit her narrative. Whether or not she was aware of Mr. Elton's affection may remain in question, but her encouragement for Harriet to court him was entirely conscious and even forceful. She regrets the way in which she went about convincing Harriet of Elton's affections, wishing she "'had not persuaded Harriet into liking the man'" (478). This is further proof that her intellectual intelligence far exceeds her emotional intelligence. By disobeying Emma's marriage game with his charade, Mr. Elton subverts her expectations, causing an uncomfortable situation for them both.[30] He dethrones Emma as puppetmaster, causing pain for Harriet that Emma did not predict. While one might have assumed that a man of quality such as Mr. Elton would not have accepted Harriet as a wife, his interest in Emma caused her emotional turmoil.

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[30] Ferguson, Frances. "Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form." MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly 61.1 (2000): 157-180.

Though Emma is known for being clever, the novel suggests that flattery might be a more cognitively advanced and potent form of connection than clever play. Mr. Elton's initial charade betrays his desire and ability to beat Emma at these games—if for no other purpose than to impress her. Before the one on courtship, he poses a basic and well-known charade:

> My first doth affliction denote
> Which my second is destin'd to feel.
> And my whole is the best antidote
> That affliction to soften and heal. (444)

The answer to the charade is not given in the novel, but it is assumed to be "women".[31] The affliction is "woe" and those destin'd to feel are "men". By joining the first and second syllables, one gets "women". Elton flatters the women reading his charade—as it is mentioned that he must be careful not to offend his audience, but most importantly Emma since there is no doubt she would understand the meaning. By engaging in such flattery, he bows to Emma's socioeconomic status even if he is more of a wordsmith than she is as evidenced by his creative courtship charade.

Aside from the riddle itself, charades are an attempt at deciphering another's intentions—a psychological practice which exceeds the academic. Emma fails to interpret her surroundings correctly as a result of her pride and her environment's lack of willingness to correct her. Because she is unsuccessful in this game-oriented rehearsal, she then continues to be unsuccessful in the context of reading Harriet's affections toward Mr. Knightley and Mr.

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[31] Selwyn, David. "Games and play in Jane Austen's literary structures. (Conference Papers)." Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal, vol. 23, annual 2001, pp. 15+.

Knightley's affections toward Emma. These mistakes lead to the climactic and heartbreaking conversation in which Harriet, must ask "'Dear Miss Woodhouse, how could you so mistake me?'" (623). Emma's practice at being a good friend falls short due to the guise of correctly interpreting a riddle. The decipherer—Emma—projects her intentions to marry off Harriet onto the riddle causing a blind between the writer and the interpreter. Had she read Mr. Elton and his social cues rather than projecting a facade onto the charade, she would not have felt such a victory. Blinded by praise for being clever, Emma's lack further develops to include misunderstanding her company whenever she is afforded it which goes to show the false nature of success. The charades are a prominent example of both Emma's superiority and failure. Her misreadings cause trouble for those around her—primarily Harriet and Mr. Elton in this example—but it is not just the charades that she misreads. Emma has difficulty reading and understanding people.

A Game of Perfection

Scholars are continually torn by the Box Hill Episode since some, like Garofalo, read it as an opportunity for Emma's growth while others, such as Selwyn, read it as yet another way for Emma to exercise her intellectual dominance; rather, I argue that it is a moment of reckoning from which Emma learns nothing. Overall, the Three Things Game is a rehearsal for being interesting company—something at which Emma generally excels. She still technically succeeds at the game, as she does at interpreting the charade to mean "courtship", but fails yet again to read her audience. Though Emma—as a companion—is interesting, she is not good, thus, failing the rehearsal.

While many see this as a turning point, Garofalo evidences it as an expression of her lack in her article, "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's Emma".[32] Although Frank Churchill initiates this Three Things Game rather than Emma, she still overindulges in it by mocking Miss Bates. This is perhaps the most closely-examined game within the novel because of its potential as a turning point for Emma's maturity. Because she must apologize to Miss Bates, one could interpret her actions as character growth; instead, this more closely resembles a child who only apologizes to win favor with their audience—in Emma's case, this would be Knightley and Miss Bates, primarily.[33] Scholars often suggest the events to be a transition or transformation for Emma because she is scolded and apologizes despite being of a higher social class than Miss Bates whom she offended with a minor quip.

While this is the first time we see Emma being ridiculed in a way that pricks her moral heartstrings, she was equally as apologetic and emotional when apologizing to Harriet for mistaking Mr. Elton's intentions, which discounts the accusations of increased maturity levels: "Such a blow for Harriet!—That was the worst of all. Every part of it brought pain and humiliation, of some sort or other" (478). In the instance with Harriet, Emma voluntarily mourns the pain she causes, but she might not have apologized after Box Hill were it not for Mr. Knightley's stern reprimand. Bharat Tandon refers to their relationship as a "perpetual crisis"—a circumstance in which the older, responsible, respected Knightley takes Emma under his wing (but in an erotic way).[34] Their relationship dynamic is one of offense by Emma and consequent admonishing by Knightley: “It was badly done, indeed!…This is not pleasant to you, Emma—and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will—I will tell you truths while I can” (605). Their interaction is reminiscent of a mother forcing her child to apologize. The resemblance between this interaction and one of a mother scolding a child is significant because of the relationship—or lack thereof—between Emma and her mother. Emma lacks female guidance or companionship from one of a similar socioeconomic status, so she resorts to this perpetual crisis as an alternative although it leaves her vulnerable as seen through Knightley’s harsh words.

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[32] Garofalo, Daniela. "Doating on Faults in Jane Austen's Emma." *European Romantic Review* 28.2 (2017): 227-240.

[33] For a thesis that originated by exploring Emma and Harriet's twisted relationship, Emma and Knightley quickly promised to become more Oedipally fascinating as a duo. One must not discredit the awkwardness and pointlessness of their relationship as if Austen simply needed a comedic ending rather than one in which couples make sense. Additionally, a psychological study from Grant and Kruger (see bibliography) sorted readers into groups who read excerpts from the beginning and the end of the novel then rated Emma on a scale of Big Five personality traits. Surprisingly, there were scientifically significant differences in the reader perception of Emma's traits from the beginning to the end of the novel, which suggests some change, though I remain uncertain of the validity.

[34] Tandon, Bharat. Jane Austen and the morality of conversation. Anthem Press, 2003.

The rules of society and the rules of the game debate whether or not Emma deserves to be scolded because she was, after all, playing the game well. The game asked for one interesting thing, which Emma more than provides by inciting a moment of tension—a thought-worthy and truthful comment. The rules are as follows:

> ‘She demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated—or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all.’ (603)

Emma has no issue being witty, which is why she technically succeeds at the game—though she could have won easily anyway because she is also the judge, as Frank Churchill declares. The affordances of interpretive games allow characters to be imaginative, but due to her status, Emma is once again set above her peers, breaking the rules of equal chance and minimizing the divide between the world of the word game and the politics of Highbury.

Similarly to the charades, Emma succeeds at the task before her only to fail socially at reading the cues well enough to avoid offense; the difference here is that Emma was in a position of power more so than she was with the charades. Both she and Harriet sought to decipher the charade set before them by Mr. Elton. At Box Hill, she is the judge and jury over what meets the standards of the game. Because of the open-ended nature of the Three Things Game, Emma exposes her true feelings. While guessing at the intended audience of Mr. Elton's charade did not offer many potential recipients and only a single correct answer, "courtship", the game at Box Hill allows players to speak whatever is on their minds—leading readers to believe that Emma's initial interpretation of her surroundings is a negative one.

Emma's negative outlook is proven unnecessary as an example from Mr. Weston lightens the mood and rekindles the motif of flattery, which disrupts a gratification-seeking mental state like Emma's. He amuses Emma by forming a charade in which he insinuates that the definition of "perfection" is "Emma". Both Mr. Weston during this game and Mr. Elton during the charades knew their audience well and were careful not to offend—unlike Emma. As Mr. Elton's first and unoriginal charade flatters women and Mr Weston's conundrum pays a direct compliment to Emma, the judge, the men exhibit a gentler way to approach the circumstances of each game. They lend a model that Emma ought to follow, though she resists it because it is not the company of these males that she desires but rather the women enamored with them. To fulfill the demand of the Three Things Game, Mr. Weston poses a conundrum. This clever wordplay amuses Emma sufficiently but also follows Emma's clever jab at Miss Bates. Technically, they both follow the rules of Frank's game. Mr. Weston might be trying to lighten the mood, or he could sincerely believe that Emma can do no wrong, which would include her inability to mean harm to Miss Bates.

Whether or not they are pursuing her romantically, the male game players flatter Emma in a way she ought to find gratifying except that it distances her from her female companions who are more likely to behave as surrogate mothers for her. Mr. Weston's opinion of Emma is distorted due to her playful and ostentatious manner, but to declare her “perfect” is to deny her lack:

> ‘I like your plan,’ cried Mr. Weston. ‘Agreed, agreed. I will do my best. I am making a conundrum… I doubt it’s being clever myself,’ said Mr. Weston. ‘It is too much a matter of fact, but here it is.—What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection?’
>
> ‘What two letters!—express perfection! I am sure I do not know.’
>
> ‘Ah! You will never guess. You, (to Emma), I am certain, will never guess.—I will tell you.—M. And A.—Em—ma.—Do you understand?’
>
> Understanding and gratification came together. It might be a very indifferent piece of wit, but Emma found a great deal to laugh at and enjoy in it—and so did Frank and Harriet—It did not seem to touch the rest of the party equally; some looked very stupid about it, and Mr. Knightley gravely said:
>
> ‘This explains the sort of clever thing that is wanted, and Mr. Weston has done very well for himself; but he must have knocked up everybody else. *Perfection* should not have come quite so soon.’ (603)

In this quote, the “sort of clever thing that is wanted” is any comment gratifying Emma. In Selwyn’s piece on play in Austen’s literary structures, he explores the consequences of Mr. Weston’s conundrum. Whether Mr. Weston realizes it or not, he is adopting a theory from “eighteenth-century moral philosopher Francis Hutchenson” who states that “the Perfection of Virtue where M=A…M here representing the ‘Moment of Good’...and A Ability or Agent”.[35] By recreating a philosophical claim, Austen promotes close analysis of these games. Emma is naturally an agent with the ability to construct clever puns and quips, but rather than a moment of good, she engages in a moment of bad behavior by reprimanding Miss Bates. In doing so, Knightley properly notes Mr. Weston's declaration of Emma's perfection to be premature, to say the least. Mr. Knightley—as close to Emma's equal as exists in this story—is the one to identify the potential for lack within the upper-class, calling players both to sympathy and realization.

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[35] Selwyn, David. "Games and play in Jane Austen's literary structures. (Conference Papers)." Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal, vol. 23, annual 2001, pp. 15+.

As much as the game is a practice of understanding one's company—similarly to the charades—it is also the practice of employing distraction as a coping mechanism. The game is a distraction from the burden of awkward silence. Emma employs similar tactics at the beginning of the novel when her family is feeling the loss of their beloved Miss Taylor. In this example, "Emma spared no exertions to maintain this happier flow of ideas, and hoped, by the help of backgammon, to get her father tolerably through the evening" (411). Backgammon is a less verbal substitute and thus does not allow for the exposure of inner feelings in the same way that a game which demands people to speak their minds does; however, it still operates as a point of comparison in proving that Emma often resorts to entertainment rather than the proper processing of awkward or painful events. While it is noteworthy that Emma offends during the Box Hill incident, it might be more important to note the circumstances of Emma's habit of employing games to avoid higher cognitive functioning. While the practice afforded by the Three Things Game—the practice of being pleasant company—is important, it denies the characters the practice of vulnerability. Emma grasps desperately, "[sparing] no exertion," to distract herself and others from the existence of unpleasant circumstances. Similarly, the novel distracts from the circumstances of the death of Emma's mother. By folding it into the exposition and discounting it by declaring that Miss Taylor "had fallen little short of a mother in affection" (409), Austen grazes over the loss of the mother just as Emma now glosses over a tense situation with a game that, because of poor motives, she is doomed to fail.

Overall, the Three Things Game is an element of particular interest because it is *not* Emma's snide remark towards Miss Bates which makes the scene interesting; instead, it is the way in which Emma continues to go about the game despite all surrounding obstacles. Her insistence on playing that game suggests an inability to cope, meaning that the game ought to be interpreted as a rehearsal for social situations within itself, but perhaps relinquishing games and play would better suit Emma's development rather than the rehearsal formal that she is familiar with and resorts to in situations of discomfort.

Playing with Matches

Emma slowly transcends a world of literal games by applying similar tactics to reality, but to detrimental effect. Though the line between reality and fantasy is vague for the character, the application of matchmaking as a form of entertainment is the best example of crossing boundaries. Yes, Emma misinterprets charades and offends at Box Hill, but what makes the marriage game particularly fragile is that it is not a game at all—at least it is not to everyone except for Emma.

The coexistence of the marriage game and the marriage market is essential to the understanding of each character and reflects Austen's perspective on the cooperation of commodities and childlike fervor within social engagements. Emma, for example, is the whole-hearted reflection of the marriage game and little else; meanwhile, Knightley is the prime representation of the marriage market within the novel. The marriage market, most closely associated with *Pride and Prejudice* implies that matches—and thus individuals—bear a commodifiable value. The combination of their wealth and agreeableness accumulates to signify their worth both in society and in marriage. Mr. Knightley seeks to optimize Harriet's match by taking into account her upbringing and relations—or lack thereof—as well as her demeanor, believing Robert Martin to be an appropriate match, arguing: "'What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin?'" (439). Emma, on the other hand, plays the game of speculation addressed earlier. She gambles with Harriet's chances of inspiring affection and consistently plays the field for other options. This playful approach nearly costs Harriet everything as Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, and Mr. Knightley all seek love elsewhere. Because of the way in which Austen orchestrates a variety of equal matches in this novel, we can assume she means to scold the speculation of the marriage game.

To explain the stakes and origins of the marriage game, Emma challenges Knightley's perspective on matches with regard to how she went about supposing that Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor would make a proper match. She then lays out a proposition which will test the marriage game:

> [Emma:] 'I made up my mind on the subject. I planned the match from that hour; and when such success has blessed me in this instance, dear papa, you cannot think that I shall leave off match-making'…
>
> [Knightley:] 'I do not understand what you mean by 'success'…success supposes endeavor. Your time has been properly and delicately spent, if you have been endeavoring for the last four years to bring about this marriage. A worthy employment for a young lady's mind! But if, which I rather imagine, your making the match, as you call it, means

> only your planning it, your saying to yourself one idle day, 'I think it would be a very good thing for Miss Taylor if Mr. Weston were to marry her,' and saying it again to yourself every now and then afterwards—why do you talk of success? Where is your merit?—what are you proud of?—you made a lucky guess; and that is all that can be said.' (413)

While Knightley's words are cutting, they are honest. He suggests that there should be no pride taken in a game of chance or speculation but rather in the meticulous development of compatibility—particularly one of socioeconomic equality—within a match.

The marriage game, while inherently flawed due to the amount of risk it requires, offers an allure for elevation unparalleled within the sensible context of the marriage market. Assuming that one of the matches Emma desired for Harriet had developed, Harriet would have been socially elevated. Helping Harriet aside, Emma also fulfils her own desires through the marriage game. She speculates with Frank Churchill but then ends up winning with Mr. Knightley's "wild card" proposal which Emma does not seem to be expecting considering Emma had "continued to entertain no doubt of her being in love" (546) with Frank. She gambles with Frank and loses, but she still ends up taking the ante with Mr. Knightley. Because of this fortune, she wins the speculation because of how elevated in esteem and fortune Mr. Knightley is seen as being in comparison to Frank Churchill.

If one is to suspend their (and seemingly that of Austen's) distaste for playing with hearts and marital arrangements, they would see how it benefits Emma despite the harm it causes those who do not fully commit to or invest in the game. Emma is able to fulfill her lack for female companionship under the facade of claiming to need amusement. Initially, Emma feels "as far as she was herself concerned, [there] was no remedy for the absence of Mrs. Weston" (418), but is able to develop these games as a coping mechanism to entice bonding with Harriet Smith in a way that satisfies her for the time being despite the consequences it bore for Harriet's heart.

The cyclical nature of the novel leaves the narrative in a similar situation to the way it started, yet still bears adequate narrative satisfaction because the circumstances are just different enough to inspire hope. Though Emma once again loses her transitional female object in whose love life she meddles, she has developed coping skills through the rehearsal process within the novel. She is finally able to relinquish the marriage game, allowing Harriet to marry Robert Martin. By relieving herself of the marriage game, the novel can then draw a comedic conclusion in which everyone gets married and is seemingly happy even though Emma is more or less back where she started in terms of fulfilling her initial lack. The novel promises an optimistic continuation of life, though, because of Emma's decision to merge her playful style with Knightley's commoditizing style. Together, they form a style which I like to refer to as "practical". The game has become realistic—using practical in the sense of its functionality—yet also practical in terms of the root from practice. Their marriage symbolizes the realization that relationships are a rehearsal, but have serious consequences. Austen calls a beautiful compromise into being that suggests some form of growth from Emma's previous failed attempts at understanding and interpreting others' intentions.

Conclusion

Through menial everyday amusement, individuals are able to work towards fulfilling their lack while simultaneously adopting skills which will assist them in more meaningful engagement with others. The central hindrance to attaining these skills is the lack of sympathy towards the aristocracy. The invalidation of Emma's lack because of other more apparent situations of deficiency—such as that displayed by characters of the typical bildungsroman—is inherently incorrect and shallow. Because of both her lack and her company, Emma cannot be held responsible for her misconceptions of the world around her. As we grow to understand Emma as a character, we also learn along with her both the social consequences of early childhood lack and the potential impact of playing games whether literally or metaphorically.

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