The Improvement of the Estate

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The sense of isolation, followed by the sense of menace and of fear, is bound to arise as the feeling of oneness and community with our fellow men declines, and the feeling of individualism and personality, which is existence in isolation, increases. The so-called "cultured" classes are the first to develop "personality" and individualism, and the first to fall into this state of unconscious menace and fear.

D. H. Lawrence, *A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"

Nothing can more clearly follow than the manifest Repugnancy between Humour and good Breeding. The latter being the Art of conducting yourself by certain common and general Rules, by which Means, if they were universally observed, the whole World would appear (as all Courtiers actually do) to be, in their external Behaviour at least, but one and the same Person.

Certain critics have called into question the social and moral significance of *Emma*. Arnold Kettle, while granting to the novel the power of extending “human sympathy and understanding,” has asked us to consider whether Jane Austen’s vision is not limited by her “unquestioning acceptance of class society”; and Graham Hough has not only stressed the importance of certain extra-moral elements in the novel but has also, somewhat gratuitously, deprecated the quality of Jane Austen’s moral vision. Against this tendency one may set the opinions of other readers who conceive of *Emma*, not necessarily as a “Christian-existentialist introduction to the devout life” (the phrase is Hough’s), but as a novel treating the most serious of themes. Lionel Trilling, for example, has considered Emma’s snobbery to be of “nothing less than national import”; and in the essay which inspired Hough’s polemic response, Malcolm Bradbury has argued that, after reading *Emma*, “we have been persuaded . . . to see the full human being as . . . fine, morally serious, totally responsible, entirely involved, and to consider every human action as a crucial, committing act of self-definition.”

1 Quotations in the first paragraph are from Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* (rev. ed., 1967; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 90, 93; Graham Hough, *The Dream and the Task* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964), p. 45; Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 40; Malcolm Bradbury, “Jane Austen’s *Emma,*” *Critical Quarterly,* 4 (Winter 1962), 345-56. Hough’s interpretation, entitled “Morality and the Novel,” was first published in *The Listener,* 69 (1963), 747-48; Trilling’s essay, entitled “*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen,” was first written as the introduction to the Riverside edition of *Emma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). Kettle’s view of *Emma* will be discussed later in this chapter. Hough’s reading, to the extent that it brings into prominence the “dense atmosphere of the contingent, the small-scale, and the ludicrous” (p. 46) in *Emma*, has had perhaps a salutary effect: critics may well have been so concerned, in his words, to “distil the pure moral elixir” from the “particularized texture” (pp. 46-47) of the novel that they have missed an important—though, I think, still secondary—dimension of the work. But when Hough goes on to characterize Jane Austen’s ethic as an “English middle-class version of Christian morals—Christian morals with all the heroism, all the asceticism, all the *contemptus mundi* left out” (p. 47), he is arguing for effect. Cf., at any rate, his different recognition of a “firm and extensive culture” lying behind Jane Austen’s novels, in his review of Frank Bradbrook’s *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (*The Listener,* 76 [1966], 27).
As my choice of epigraphs may suggest, I am on the side of those who consider *Emma* as a novel of high seriousness. Following closely on the heels of *Mansfield Park* (*Emma* was published in December, 1815), the novel is not the "throwing off of chains" it has been considered.\(^2\) Indeed, it may be argued that *Emma* does not so much describe a different moral world from *Mansfield Park* as mix the same basic ingredients in different proportions in order to test further fictional possibilities. In some respects, for example, Emma bears resemblance to the vivacious Mary Crawford; she is a Mary made central and stationary, and to whose mind, significantly, we are granted access. As for the socially deprived female we have been accustomed to encounter in the previous fiction, she is not absent from *Emma*, merely displaced and dispersed among four secondary candidates: Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates, Harriet Smith, and (before her marriage) Mrs. Weston. But the most telling comparison between the two novels, we will see, is thematic, the central opposition between "house" and "theatre" in *Mansfield Park* reappearing as an opposition between "culture" and "games" in *Emma*.

In *Mansfield Park* Jane Austen had first broken free from the thematic dualisms inherited from eighteenth century fiction. No longer pushed toward effecting some mode of reconciliation between opposed terms—sense and sensibility, society and the self—she had chosen for special focus in this novel the social structure itself as this was symbolically represented in the estate. She had described the imperative need for preserving and, where necessary, improving a cultural inheritance, and had set the subdued but morally determined character of Fanny Price against the superficial and destructive vitality of the Crawfords. Against this background *Emma*'s special focus is clear. If *Mansfield Park* addresses itself to the subject of a culture endangered by excessive individualism, *Emma* focuses on the individual self as it becomes a conceivable threat to culture, the titles of the two novels thus being accurate predictions of their thematic directions. Given the prominence of her social position, as well as her greater powers of imagination, Emma is a greater social danger than Elizabeth Bennet, with whom she shares certain characteristics. For this reason, the novel, like

Mansfield Park, is not dialectical, if by this we require equal and mutual concessions from hero and heroine. In spite of recent criticism, and apart from occasional jealousy, Knightley remains the normative and exemplary figure he has traditionally been considered, while Emma, with all her attractive qualities of wit and vitality, is the character whose education we observe. As in Mansfield Park, however, the most serious threat to the social world of Emma comes from outside, the place of Henry Crawford, the actor and improver, being taken by Frank Churchill. From Churchill's arrival until the end of the novel Emma is faced with the choice of two directions, Churchill and Knightley, and the choice she comes to from the depths of her true self is as crucial as that made by Edmund Bertram in Mansfield Park when faced with the matrimonial possibilities of Mary Crawford and Fanny Price. Like Edmund, Emma in the end chooses society rather than self, an inherited order rather than a spontaneous and improvised existence.

As many critics have noted, the setting of Emma is carefully chosen. Like Henry James, Jane Austen is interested in the problem of human freedom. What consequences will ensue, she asks, if, instead of describing a heroine in a position of insecurity as to her social place, I postulate an heiress as my central figure and give her complete freedom of action? Like Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady after Ralph Touchett's legacy of £70,000, Emma is condemned to be free, as if by fictional fiat. "Handsome, clever, and rich" (5)—her inheritance of £30,000 makes her a bona fide heiress in Jane Austen's financial scale—she differs from all previous Austen heroines in having no sense of insecurity, social or otherwise. At the center of a world apparently unendangered by any possibility of discontinuity, Emma's boundaries are where she wishes to place them.

The origins of Emma's subjectivism are therefore not so much Quixotic as familial. Her father is a senescent valetudinarian whose debility carries to an extreme the parental ineffectiveness that may be traced through the complacency of the Morland parents, the cynicism of Mr. Bennet, and the educational misconceptions of Sir Thomas Bertram. By his abrogation of all parental function—

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3 For a reading of Emma placing it in the tradition of the "female Quixote" novels of Eaton Stannard Barrett and Charlotte Lennox, see Kenneth L. Moler's chapter in Jane Austen's Art of Allusion (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968).
indeed by his lack of any evidence of masculinity—he has relinquished effective power over Hartfield to Emma. His stipulation against taking his position “at the bottom of the table” (291) at the Hartfield dinner party for the Eltons is an index of his withdrawal from social and domestic responsibility. His only assertions are negatives: he wishes people would not marry, would not go out in the rain, would not overindulge in their eating; and his remedies are that everyone should stay single, remain beside their home firesides, and follow his own weak diet of thin gruel. Certainly, as Trilling has warned, it would be wrong to read Mr. Woodhouse’s character too harshly. At least as important as his old-maidishness is his function as the recipient of Emma’s piety.4 That she consistently honors her father is a major reason for our never losing faith in her fundamental goodness. Nevertheless her father’s weakness is what permits Emma to assume unusual domestic power, so that when the “shadow” of Miss Taylor’s authority leaves Hartfield, Emma’s situation is one in which the “power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself” constitute, as the narrator explicitly says, “real evils” (5).

The evils of Emma’s imagination resemble, but go beyond, those of Catherine Morland at Northanger. Like the “Gothic” heroine, Emma’s intuitions are never wholly wrong. Indeed her snobbish dismissal of Mrs. Elton before she even sees her turns out to be a remarkably accurate prediction of her character, and Jane Fairfax does after all have a secret motive for coming to Highbury. As in Catherine’s case, however, there is a difference between the sympathetic intuition of a truth and its exact intellectual formulation. Undisciplined by the rational faculty, the imagination may quickly distort the real nature of a situation. Emma’s “genius for foretelling and guessing” (38) may occasionally be a “poet’s demand” that life be made more colorful than it is, but this faculty leads her into increasingly more serious misconceptions, as in each of the three movements of the novel she attempts not only to judge but to define her world from a center of self.5 First she attempts to match Harriet Smith with Mr. Elton, only to find the Highbury vicar

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5 The quoted phrase is Trilling’s, ibid., p. 45. For a reading of “the significance and the consequences... of Emma’s endeavor to force an aesthetic ideal upon her world,” see David Lee Minter, “Aesthetic Vision and the World of Emma,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 21 (June 1966), 49-59.
proposing to her instead. Then she considers Frank Churchill as a husband for Harriet, only to discover that he is secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax. Finally she discovers to her horror that she has been unwittingly promoting a match between her friend and the man she herself wishes to marry.\(^6\)

In these increasingly serious "errors of the imagination" (343), Emma does more than endanger her own happiness and that of her circle of friends. Beyond the personal, her imaginative errors have social and even epistemological implications; initially humorous, they become, especially after the arrival of Churchill and his games, "total violations of a whole worthwhile universe."\(^7\)

Emma's position as "first in consequence" (7) in Highbury entails a certain social responsibility, and it is in her social arrogance that she most nearly merits the dislike that Jane Austen expected her to elicit from her readers. Though she is described as fulfilling her charitable obligations to the poor (I, x), there is a suspicion that this task is done without a sincere sense of obligation. Certainly, when she is not able to patronize her inferiors, as in the case of the Martins, she exhibits an unlikable snobbery:

"The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it." (29)

Part of her animus here is occasioned by her wish to turn Harriet's thoughts from Robert Martin to Mr. Elton, but even after the Highbury vicar spoils her scheme by having "the arrogance to raise his eyes to her" (135) rather than to Harriet, Emma's snobbery is not cured, however much she seems to learn about the errors of the imagination. Toward the end of the first volume she realizes that


\(^7\) Bradbury, "Jane Austen's Emma," p. 345.
she has “taken up the idea . . . and made every thing bend to it” (134), that she has been “adventuring too far” (137), and she comes to a resolution of “repressing imagination all the rest of her life” (142). Significantly, however, she feels no contrition over her decision to dissuade Harriet from accepting Robert Martin: “There I was quite right. That was well done of me” (137).

As Trilling has argued, Emma’s dismissal of Robert Martin has important implications. The industrious tenant farmer is as significant a figure in Emma as Mr. Gardiner is in Pride and Prejudice. Status alone, as her father most clearly shows, is not enough. Social position must be informed by personal worth, and as Emma expresses her unwillingness to have anything to do with the Martins, whom she considers on one occasion “another set of beings” (27), she aligns herself with those other characters in Jane Austen’s novels—Lady Catherine, General Tilney, Mrs. Ferrars, the Bertram sisters, and others—who wish to retain rank as privilege, money as an assertion of exclusiveness. Emma is filled with descriptions of social separations, of “first sets” and “second sets” (I, iii), of “the second rate and third rate” (II, i), of those families who move in the “first circle” and those who do not (II, xvii), but it would be to repeat D. H. Lawrence’s error if one were to consider that Jane Austen condoned these separations. Such a vocabulary of separation is mediated through the words or thoughts of Emma, or through that parody of Emma, Mrs. Elton, for whose unwelcome entrance into the Highbury scene Emma must herself take a large part of the blame. The snobbery, that is, belongs to the character and not to the author, whose concern in Emma is to heal through her art the social gaps described and to reconstitute a sense of community.¹⁰

D. H. Lawrence’s remarks in A Propos of “Lady Chatterley’s

¹⁰ Lawrence’s attack on Jane Austen, shortly to be quoted, occurs in A Propos of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover,” in Sex, Literature, and Censorship, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking Press, 1959), p. 109. It should be added that Lawrence was not always so severe with Jane Austen. In the chapter titled “A Chair” in Women in Love, Rupert Birkin grants Ursula’s charge that Jane Austen’s England was materialistic but goes on to insist that it “had the power to be something other.” Just prior to this, Birkin claims that Jane Austen’s England “had living thoughts to unfold . . . and pure happiness in unfolding them.”

¹⁰ Cf. Edgar F. Shannon: “In the other major novels, Jane Austen has portrayed her heroines as victims of snobbery. In Emma, she has undertaken the much more difficult task of incorporating and correcting snobbery within the character of the heroine herself” (“Character and Construction,” p. 644).
“Lover” have always seemed to me, in this context, to be curiously misapplied. Take away his terminology of “blood connection” and “phallic consciousness” and his concern is not distant from Jane Austen’s own, as the Lawrentian epigraph to this chapter may suggest. There Lawrence laments the loss of “togetherness” and the rise of individualism in modern English society; but shortly after this passage he goes on to write one of the most vicious attacks on Jane Austen in existence:

This . . . is the tragedy of social life today. In the old England, the curious blood-connection held the classes together. The squires might be arrogant, violent, bullying, and unjust, yet in some ways they were at one with the people, part of the same blood-stream. We feel it in Defoe or Fielding. And then, in the mean Jane Austen, it is gone. Already this old maid typifies “personality” instead of character, the sharp knowing in apartness instead of knowing in togetherness, and she is, to my feeling, thoroughly unpleasant, English in the bad, mean, snobbish sense of the word. . . .

Yet with how little change can these remarks be made properly applicable to Emma. Lawrence has confused authorial identity with dramatic presentation. Had he argued that Jane Austen dramatically represents “personality” and “the sharp knowing in apartness”—had he accused the character Mrs. Elton of being “English in the bad, mean, snobbish sense of the word”—then, surely, we could have agreed with him. Certainly, as I shall argue later, Lawrence’s description of social fragmentation seems precisely to describe the state of affairs at Box Hill, where we do indeed encounter “hostile groupings . . . for the sake of opposition, strife.” But this is a social condition, possible certainly, which Jane Austen deplores.10

It is, of course, difficult to prove precisely when such an elusive concept as “class consciousness” came into being, but if with Lawrence and Raymond Williams one accepts the beginning of the nineteenth century as roughly the date, it is perfectly feasible to cite Jane Austen’s fiction as supporting evidence.11 Emma is “about” the relatively new phenomenon of class consciousness, as Emma’s description of the Martins, quoted above, and Mrs. Elton’s comments

10 Lawrence, Sex, Literature and Censorship, p. 109.
11 See Williams, Culture and Society: 1780–1950 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), esp. the introduction, for a consideration of such terms as “class,” “class prejudice,” and “class consciousness.”
passim, would indicate. But it needs to be repeated that Jane Austen shares Lawrence's concern over the rise of "personality" and snobbery, dramatizing these traits in Mrs. Elton and for a time in Emma, no less effectively than Lawrence represents the inhumanity of capitalism in Gerald Crich.

Contrary to Arnold Kettle's contention, therefore, Jane Austen did "notice the existence of the problem of class division," though one has still to face the charge he raises that her "standards" are "inseparably linked with a particular form of social organization."¹² Kettle's argument is not easy to answer, since his chapter, despite its reservations, is a genuine appreciation of the novel, and he has taken care to anticipate opposition. One can take exception to some of the readings of particular scenes with which he supports his thesis (of Emma's view of property qualifications,¹³ for example, or of the inadequacy of her charity¹⁴), and one can object to a certain looseness of sociological terminology,¹⁵ but the main charge merits a more direct answer. One has, I think, to question whether his critical requirements are reasonable. When he writes, for example, that "the true elegance which Emma so values could not exist in Hartfield without the condemnation to servility and poverty of hundreds of unnamed (though not necessarily unpitied) human

¹² Kettle, English Novel, p. 94. Future page references will be made in the text of the chapter.

¹³ Kettle often seems to miss the wood for the trees. Thus, though we may accept that Emma has "an attitude to marriage typical of the ruling class" and "sees human relationships in terms of property qualifications," it is surely weak support of these statements to argue that "her chief concern about Mr. Knightley is that his estate should be preserved for little Henry" (ibid., p. 90). Her chief concern—did she but know herself—is that Donwell Abbey be preserved for herself! Moreover, when she comes, under Knightley's influence, to a "more critical and more fully human view," is she not being educated to a more social view also? Knightley represents Jane Austen's ideal social responses throughout the novel.

¹⁴ Here again I differ from Kettle. Emma's too quick transition from pious concern for the Highbury poor to renewed interest in the Harriet-Elton scheme on the latter's sudden appearance on the scene (I, x) is not a shelving of the "essential moral issue" (ibid., p. 97); rather it is another indication of Emma's lack of consistency and real sense of obligation. In trying to shift from Emma's psychology to a consideration of the social inequities of Highbury, Kettle is forcing his thesis.

beings” (p. 95), the Marxist assumption is surely prescriptive. One need not be among those “who think aristocracy today a morally defensible form of society” (p. 94) to accept as authentic Jane Austen’s affirmation of traditional social values. Nor need one exhibit a narrow historicism if one entertains doubts as to Jane Austen’s capability—given her social environment and predilections—of ever espousing the socialist ethic Kettle seems to require. The logic of his argument, indeed, has curious repercussions if one carries it backwards to authors who exist in even more indubitably hierarchical societies than Jane Austen: is one to consider Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale” inadequate because its moral values are inseparably linked with an outdated cosmological scheme and view of divine providence? Is Pope’s “Epistle to Bathurst” vitiated because it embodies the untenable doctrine of concordia discors? Or is it only in post-French Revolutionary literature, where other, perhaps Godwinian, possibilities are available to an author that one is to question his social and moral outlook?

Kettle would perhaps argue the latter case, for what he particularly values, it seems, are those parts of the novel which suggest that all is not well in the social world of Jane Austen’s England: “[Emma] gives us glimpses of something Mr. Woodhouse never dreamed of—the world outside the Highbury world and yet inseparably bound up with it: the world Jane Fairfax saw in her vision of offices and into which Harriet in spite of (no, because of) Emma’s patronage, was so nearly plunged: the world for which Jane Austen had no answer” (p. 98). The question here is one of emphasis: are we to pay more attention to what Kettle calls “the dark side of the moon” in Emma—to Jane Fairfax’s dependent situation and the hypothetical horrors outside of Highbury—than to Emma’s own problems? I think not, though Kettle’s point about Jane Austen’s concern for the fate of women in her society is better taken than his criticism of her “unquestioning acceptance of class society.” As I have argued in previous chapters, the predicament of the unsupported woman was never far from Jane Austen’s thoughts. The “degradation” of the Dashwoods in Sense and Sensibility, Fanny Price’s stay at Portsmouth, Jane Fairfax’s dependent situation, all exist on the periphery of Jane Austen’s vision as they exist in the backgrounds of her novels as problems to be solved. They are not the subject of these novels, and it would be wrong to suggest that Jane Austen was evading the problem or somehow failing to write
of a world for which she had no answer. At the end of her life, in *Persuasion*, she describes a "world outside the Highbury world," and reaches an answer. It is an answer which might not satisfy Kettle, since it puts faith in a Christian stoicism in face of adversity, but it is, as I shall argue in the next chapter, an honestly arrived at and estimable answer.

While *Emma* takes into account the predicament of the socially reduced self—"ours is rather a dark staircase" (239), says Miss Bates, as usual telling us more than she knows—it is more centrally concerned with the social obligations of those in positions of authority. This is why the tensest moment of the novel, the perigee of Emma's moral journey, occurs when Emma insults Miss Bates on Box Hill. Without a sense of social responsibility on the part of the privileged, there is a very real danger of society becoming what Lawrence describes; properly informed by individual commitment, however, society for Jane Austen in *Emma* is a structure to be quite uncomplacently affirmed.

The point is clear even as Emma's snobbery bids fair to obscure it, for against her attitudes the exemplary conduct of Knightley is set. As Emma's undisciplined imagination permits her to confer on Harriet an illusory parentage and fictional status, Knightley's "thorough regard" for Robert Martin and his family (59) evidences his respect, as it predicts the rise of the tenant farmer. Knightley and Martin together, indeed, offer instructive contrast to Emma and Harriet. Whereas Martin reads the Agricultural Reports, Harriet has only read "the Romance of the Forest" and "the Children of the Abbey" (29). Whereas he writes a letter which Emma is forced to admit "as a composition . . . would not have disgraced a gentleman" (51), Harriet's education—or lack of it—is revealed in her ugly grammar, even as she denies that "Mr. Martin would ever marry any body but what had had some education" (31). Emma's intelligence and education of course far exceed Harriet's, but, as with Elizabeth Bennet's piano playing, application is lacking. Unlike Knightley, who, when at home "is either reading to himself or settling his accounts" (312), Emma is not to be expected to pursue a "course of steady reading" (37).

Knightley is another of Jane Austen's "professionals," and the most convincing of them. Like Robert Martin, he is always at work, "busy" around the estate or in Highbury. Fully aware of the responsibilities which his position entails, "with his farm, and his sheep,
and his library, and all the parish to manage" (225), Knightley has little time for leisure. What Darcy may reliably be imagined to do, Knightley is constantly described as doing. Darcy retains much of the air of an eighteenth century landowner, and when he speaks most feelingly of his landed responsibility it is to his library that he naturally refers. Knightley, too, has a library, but he also has a farm, and we can imagine him as an heir of Coke and Townshend more easily than we can Darcy. Aware, like Darcy, that his is an office of trust, Knightley is given more opportunity in this novel to demonstrate his social responsibility in words and actions. Thus, when his brother comes on a Christmas visit, the conversation is sure to be of a "business" nature:

As a magistrate, he had generally some point of law to consult John about, or, at least, some curious anecdote to give; and as a farmer, as keeping in hand the home-farm at Donwell, he had to tell what every field was to bear next year.... The plan of a drain, the change of a fence, the felling of a tree, and the destination of every acre for wheat, turnips, or spring corn, was entered into with as much equality of interest by John.... (100)

Later, at the Coles', and doubtless initiated by Knightley, the after-dinner talk is "over parish business" (221).

Knightley's name is well and intentionally chosen, for not only does he continually bring into the daily life of Highbury the spirit of chivalry—providing his coach as transport for Miss Bates whenever she needs it, and not, as the Eltons do on the occasion of the ball at the Crown, promising to provide it and then forgetting—but more importantly he exemplifies the kind of behavior Jane Austen considers necessary for the maintenance of a morally founded society. Until Emma comes to realize the values and importance of such behavior, she will remain a danger to the social community in which she plays such a prominent part.

If the social evils of Emma's individualism are in primary evidence, the novel goes more than a little way toward suggesting that part of Emma's problem is epistemological, that she is a victim of subjective idealism. Her relations with others typically reveal an egoism that goes beyond a social or moral selfishness to suggest a consciousness unaware of the real existence of others. Like
a later novel heroine, Emma fails to grant to the other in a relationship "an equivalent centre of self." This aspect of the novel merits attention, for Emma’s subjectivism compounds the potential evil of her social attitudes and, with the arrival of Churchill on the scene, finds insidious company.

At the end of the novel Emma will herself come to formulate the error of her mode of relating to others; she has, she sees, "with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny" (413); she has attempted nothing less than a god role. This role is already latent in her early relationship with Harriet. Though she is "not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation" (23), Emma finds her "altogether very engaging": "not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk—and yet so far from pushing, shewing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of every thing in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense and deserve encouragement" (23). But the "good sense" which Harriet exhibits is not so much the property of Harriet as of Emma’s perception of Harriet, and even in this first description of Mrs. Goddard’s boarder, it is her deficiencies rather than her qualities of which we are made aware.

Emma’s view of Harriet is comparable to the subjective speculation of Henry Crawford, who, imaginatively planning to improve Thornton Lacey, “saw how it might all be” (MP, 242). As Crawford wishes to improve an estate or the delivery of a sermon, so Emma wishes to improve Harriet. “She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers" (23–24). Harriet is to become a mode of Emma’s activity, a psychic extension of Emma’s self.17

Only with the entrance of Mrs. Elton in the second volume are the evils of Emma’s patronage fully realized. As wife of the High-

16 George Eliot's phrase, describing the egoism of Dorothea in her relationship with Casaubon in Middlemarch, chap. 21 (end).

17 The most perceptive and incisive account of Emma’s “will-to-power” is contained in Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery, pp. 181–206.
bury vicar, she takes precedence over Emma though she has only £10,000 and, in Emma’s words, brings “no name, no blood, no alliance” (183) into Highbury. At the ball at the Crown, “Emma must submit to stand second to Mrs. Elton. . . . It was almost enough to make her think of marrying” (325). With her *nouveau riche* snobbery, Mrs. E. (as her husband doubtless came to call her) is a more subtle form of the parody of the heroine first illustrated in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane Austen’s intention is clearly to repeat certain of Emma’s characteristics in a manifestly inferior personality and thus to expose them. As Emma in the first volume had patronized Harriet Smith, so for much of the rest of the novel Mrs. Elton patronizes Jane Fairfax. She does not, as Emma did, try to find a husband for her protégée, but her attempt to force on Jane a “situation” with some of her “respectable” friends is no less noxious, and in spite of Emma’s hint that “those who have known her longer than yourself” (283) are the ones who should help Jane, Mrs. Elton, with magnificent imperiousness, pre-empts the office. Her vulgarity and lack of breeding are as obvious to us as they are to Emma, of course, and when her patronage of “Knightley” (as she immediately begins to call him) sends Emma into an ecstasy of indignation, we feel as Emma does (279). Still, the point is made to the reader, if not to Emma, that patronage may all too easily become an egoistical praise of the self rather than the selfless act it purports to be.\(^\text{18}\)

Not surprisingly in view of her wish to improve reality, Emma is an artist. She considers Harriet, with “all the natural grace of sweetness of temper and artlessness” (42), as a kind of unimproved nature in need of the hand of the designer. She only needs “drawing out” (42), and when Mr. Elton seconds her wish to make a “likeness” (43) of Harriet, Emma is all too pleased to concur:

There was no want of likeness, she had been fortunate in the attitude, and as she meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance, she had great confidence of its being in every way a pretty drawing at last, and of its filling its destined place with credit to them both—a standing memorial of the

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\(^{18}\) In my remarks concerning Mrs. Elton’s function as a parody of Emma, I am indebted to Mudrick. As he sees, Mrs. Elton is “Emma’s true companion in motive.” *Ibid.*, p. 194.
beauty of one, the skill of the other, and the friendship of both; with as many other agreeable associations as Mr. Elton's very promising attachment was likely to add. (47)

Reminiscent of Crawford's plans for Thornton Lacey as this scene is, it also objectifies one of several triangular relationships set up by Emma in the novel. In these groupings, Emma is able (as she thinks) not only to bring together two people in a little world of her own creation, but also to participate vicariously in the relationship she has created. Here, her "skill" will "improve" Harriet's beauty so that Mr. Elton's "very promising attachment" may be consummated. But Emma's triangles have a way of coming out differently from what she expects. Sitting at the apical point, she is soon to be surprised when one of the bases of her construction, instead of closing the gap to the other base, turns his eyes in her direction, and makes out of what had been a vicarious experience an actuality: returning in the carriage from the Christmas party at Randalls, "she found . . . her hand seized—her attention demanded, and Mr. Elton actually making violent love to her" (129).

Emma has of course no excuse for her impercipient. Even before she had sketched Harriet's picture, Elton's "perception of the striking improvement of Harriet's manner" (42) had been praise of the improver and not of the material. "Skilful has been the hand," he tells Emma (43). Additionally, she has been told by Mr. Knightley that Elton is not "at all likely to make an imprudent match" (66), and by his sagacious, professional brother that she herself is "Mr. Elton's object" (112). But Emma (like Catherine Morland) refuses to include a sense of the probable in her outlook, and even amuses herself, when John Knightley warns her, "in the consideration of the blunders which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstances, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into" (112).

Emma's inability to make objective assessments of actuality is best revealed in her finished portrait of Harriet. At the same time the portrait becomes a means of exposing the characteristic deficiencies of several other figures and an important indication that an objective reality exists against which the unbiased observer may measure the truth of a subjective construction. For the hopeful lover, Mr. Elton, the portrait "appears . . . a most perfect resem-
blance in every feature. I never saw such a likeness in my life” (48). Mrs. Weston is more perceptive but still unwilling to criticize her former pupil. She sees that it is not a true likeness—“Miss Smith has not those eye-brows and eye-lashes”—but she cannot find it in herself to blame Emma: “It is the fault of [Miss Smith’s] face that she has them not” (48). Emma’s father mixes indiscriminate praise—“So prettily done! Just as your drawings always are, my dear”—with his inevitable hypochondria: “The only thing I do not thoroughly like is, that she seems to be sitting out of doors, with only a little shawl over her shoulders—and it makes one think she must catch cold” (48). Only Mr. Knightley is able to free his judgment from a desire to please, on the one hand, and a subjective response, on the other: “You have made her too tall, Emma” (48). Though Emma knows he is right, she will not admit it. From this point on, pace J. F. Burrows, Knightley remains the reader’s objective point of reference within the novel.¹⁹

As Wayne Booth has shown, the narrator of the novel is herself an important measure against which to set the heroine’s subjective aberrations.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is well to stress that the problem of subjectivity is at the heart of the book. Late in the novel, in a crucial scene, Knightley will remind himself of Cowper’s line, “Myself creating what I saw,” before allowing rein to his imaginative intuition; and throughout the novel there are indications of Jane Austen’s concern with the nature and origin of mental knowledge. The narrative presentation itself comes nearer to suggesting the processes of subjectivity than any of the earlier works. Not only are we for much of the time within the consciousness of the heroine (in a way that, as several critics have noted, anticipates the Jamesian third person limited point of view) but Jane Austen has also indicated the prominence of subjectivity in experience by including in Emma a large number of characters who exist only as references in another character’s speech or thoughts. I am not only thinking here of Mr. and Mrs. Churchill of Enscombe, or of the Campbells

¹⁹ Much of the argument of Burrows’s carefully detailed monograph (Jane Austen’s “Emma” [Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968]) is aimed at discrediting Knightley’s claim to be a normative figure in the novel (see esp. his introduction).

and Mr. and Mrs. Dixon who are in Ireland during the course of
the novel, but of certain characters much nearer at hand. Robert
Martin, for example, so important in connection with the social
theme, is hardly ever encountered, as it were in person, by the
reader. We hear frequent good accounts of him from Mr. Knight-
ley; he is the object of one of Emma's snobbish attacks; Harriet
gives a breathless description of her accidental meeting with him in
Ford's. But apart from a brief glance (I, iv), this is as near as we get
to him. William Larkins, Mr. Knightley's responsible steward, is
another character who has existence only in other characters' speech.
Then there are the Highbury and London medical authorities, Mr.
Perry and Mr. Wingfield. Did Mr. Perry really say, as Mr. Woodhouse
claims, that "colds have been very general, but not so heavy as he has
very often known them in November" (102)? Did Wingfield really
consider "the vicinity of Brunswick Square decidedly the most favour-
able as to air" (103), as Isabella Knightley avers? Or are these figures
merely the embodiments of subjective opinions? In Mrs. Elton's con-
versations, at any rate, the use of characters as reference is suspect; she
introduces a whole setting—Selina, Maple Grove, and the barouche-
landau—to support whatever position she is for the moment defend-
ing.

Amusing as many of these references are, they testify to a concern
over the problem of subjectivity which, from Sterne onward, has
occupied many novelists. *Emma*, one might suggest, exists in a tra-
dition begun by *Tristram Shandy* and only finding its culmination
in such novels as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, in which
no objective reality outside of the consciousness of the various
characters can be inferred. For Jane Austen, though not for Virginia
Woolf, an objective reality outside of consciousness does exist, yet
W. J. Harvey is right to qualify Wayne Booth's reading of *Emma*
by pointing to the importance of what he terms the "shadow-novel-
within-the-novel" which results from the narrator's choice of keep-
ing us, as well as Emma, in the dark about the Jane Fairfax–Frank
Churchill engagement. The opacity of the plot is quite deliberate,
as a late comment of the narrator suggests: "Seldom, very seldom,
does complete truth belong to any human disclosure" (431). The
remark leaps out of its immediate context, the proposal scene, to

define a central concern of the novel, the essentially limited nature of individual human perception. In limiting her point of view largely to the horizon of her heroine’s vision, the narrator also limits the point of view of the reader. Of course we know much more than Emma does; the narrator has permitted us again and again to measure the heroine’s aberrations against norms that are present in the oratio obliqua of the narrative discourse. But for a long time, as Harvey points out, we are left in the dark about many truths.

Thus Jane Austen has allowed the plot of the novel itself to demonstrate the frequently “closed” nature of interpersonal relations which is part of its subject. As readers we are teased by the possibility of that complete subjective imprisonment, which haunts so many later writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of that enclosed world in which “my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it.”

Even after many readings of the novel, Jane Fairfax’s character remains impenetrable to us, not because Jane Austen has failed to draw a “round” character but precisely because she has wished to suggest the limitations of an individual’s ability to know another in a problematic world.

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When Emma’s comedy of errors becomes, with the arrival of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill in volume two, a comedy of intrigue, both the social and epistemological implications of Emma’s subjectivism are compounded. If, as we have seen, Mrs. Elton usurps Emma’s social position, then Jane Fairfax pre-empts her intellectual prominence (she is “the really accomplished young woman, which Emma wanted to be thought herself” [166]), and Churchill takes over her powers of managing and directing. Though in one amusing scene she goes so far as to imagine Churchill in

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22 T. S. Eliot is here quoting from F. H. Bradley’s Appearance and Reality. The quotation, of which I have given part, is found in his note to line 411 of “The Waste Land.”

23 For a discussion of Emma’s movement from a “comedy of errors” to a “comedy of intrigue,” see Burrows, Jane Austen’s “Emma,” pp. 34–35.
love with her, making his declaration, and being tenderly refused, all such dreaming is without possibility of enactment. For, with Churchill's entrance, Emma is no longer the puppet-mistress of Highbury but instead becomes a marionette in Churchill's more subtle show.

A dramaturgical vocabulary is inevitable with Churchill, for if he reminds us of any other character in Jane Austen's fiction it is the histrionic Henry Crawford. Like that actor, Churchill is an impresario of some ability. When, on his initial walk through the town, he sights the Crown Inn, "its character as a ball-room caught him; and instead of passing on, he stopp'd for several minutes . . . to look in and contemplate its capabilities" (197-98). The last word, of course, alerts us to Churchill's desire to "improve." Like Crawford at Mansfield or Sotherton, Churchill wishes to introduce movement and flexibility into a landscape of peace and stability.

It is not sufficient to argue that his schemes are forced on him by the restraints of his dependent social position and the enforced secrecy of his engagement to Jane Fairfax. The secret engagement is important to the novel, but it is not the only, or even the major, reason for Churchill's "manceuvring and finessing" (146). He delights to play-act. He will, of course, use the secret engagement as his excuse in his late letter of apology: "you must consider me as having a secret which was to be kept at all hazards" (437). This is a far cry from Jane's disclosure to Emma: "I had always a part to act.—It was a life of deceit!" (459). And there can be little doubt that Jane Austen intended us to see him taking a positive delight in "disguise, equivocation, mystery" (475). There is something gratuitous about his secrecy. No less than Henry Crawford looking back with pleasure on the play period, Churchill recalls with gratification his Highbury career. At the end of the novel, his claims of honorable expediency merely reveal another pose.

There are no actual theatricals in *Emma*, but the theme is continued in minor key in the preparations for the ball and in the children's games which are a curious feature of the novel. Both aspects of *Emma* invite somewhat detailed attention.

When Emma takes up Churchill's enthusiasm for the ball, plans are immediately made. Randalls is their first choice of location, and they are soon engaged, with the help of Mrs. Weston, in the "interesting employment . . . of reckoning up exactly who there would
be, and portioning out the indispensable division of space to every couple” (248). It is at once evident that the number of couples is greater than the room can comfortably hold. In what follows we are reminded of the preparations for the play at Mansfield, as the communal desire of a group of people bent on pleasure is sufficient to overcome material objections to their “scheme.” Furthermore, something of the ontological subversiveness suggested by the mistreatment of the Mansfield house is here repeated as more and more of the house is appropriated for the ball: “The doors of the two rooms were just opposite each other. ‘Might not they use both rooms, and dance across the passage?’ It seemed the best scheme; and yet it was not so good but that many of them wanted a better” (248). As the disagreements of the participants in the scheme recall the bickering of the would-be actors in Mansfield Park, so the increasing list of couples to be invited reminds us of the plans to invite more and more of the neighborhood to take part in the play at Mansfield. Finally, when Mr. Woodhouse’s hypochondriacal objections to the use of more than one room forced them to return to the “first scheme,” we are shown how subjective desire may ignore objective facts in the pursuit of its goal. Through Churchill’s persuasion, “the space which a quarter of an hour before had been deemed barely sufficient for five couple, was now endeavoured to be made out quite enough for ten” (249).

Churchill’s pre-eminence in the preparations for the ball—his revised plan for holding it at the Crown—reveal how far he has already usurped Emma’s powers of directing and organizing. But Churchill’s real power over Emma, and the nature of his threat in the novel, are more evident in his love of games. Games are not, of course, introduced by Churchill—the amusing episode of the misunderstood charade announces the motif in the first volume (chapter ix); but it is Churchill who initiates the word game at Hartfield (III, v) and the games on Box Hill (III, vii). Moreover, it is Churchill who makes a running game out of his conversations with Emma on the subject of the mysterious piano—at Mrs. Cole’s (II, viii), for example, and in Miss Bates’s parlor (II, x).

Such games need have no meaning in individual instances beyond revealing the characteristic deficiencies of the players. In the episode of the charade, for instance, Harriet’s immaturity is evident: “the only mental provision she was making for the evening of life, was
the collecting and transcribing all the riddles of every sort that she could meet with" (69); and her irresponsibility is indicated when she prefers the flowery sentiments of Elton's verse to the "good sense in a common way" of Martin's letters (76). Beyond this, Elton's charade, "To Miss _____," reveals the characteristic deficiency of Emma's imagination, her preference for believing what she wants to happen rather than what her sense of the probable would indicate. Obviously addressed to her (who but a deluded Emma could imagine "ready wit" as a description of Harriet?), the charade exists, like the blank of the title, as an empty space to be filled by the imagination. When Emma, thinking further to promote the match between Harriet and Elton, transcribes the verse into Harriet's book, we have a repetition of the sketch episode: each of the three participants misapprehends the real situation, but Emma is responsible for the confusion. Mr. Elton is hardly to be blamed if he thinks his suit is progressing well when he hears Emma admire the hidden meaning of his poem (courtship).

Taken cumulatively, however, games carry crucial meaning in Emma; they are Jane Austen's means of conveying her apprehension over the continuity of a public and "open" syntax of morals and of manners. Whatever Huizinga might argue, games for Jane Austen—at least as she explores the motif in Emma—are antisocial, and the "ludic" personality as exemplified by Churchill is a threat to the structures of society and morality that she affirms.24 Both play and player are suspect, play because it sets up a world of freedom from the ordinary patterns of existence ("it is . . . a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own"25), the player because while playing—for Jane Austen

24 J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), esp. chap. 1. Huizinga, in support of his view that "civilization arises and unfolds in and as play" (p. ix), insists upon the ethical neutrality of play—"It lies outside of the antithesis of wisdom and folly" (p. 6). And from Huizinga's point of view, no doubt, even Knightley is a player, if of a different kind from Churchill. But Jane Austen sets culture against play in Emma (as, in Mansfield Park, she sets the estate against theatricality), and invests her games with negative social and moral value. It may be as well to add that I am aware that Jane Austen delighted in domestic games, as in her youth she is said to have delighted in private theatricals. Interested readers are referred to Charades Etc. Written a hundred years ago By Jane Austen and Her Family (London: Spottiswoode, 1895).

he is absolved from the rules and requirements of ordinary social discourse.

Even before Churchill's entry upon the Highbury scene, the episode of the charade, in exemplifying the concealment and opacity of a game world, had foreshadowed Churchill's behavior. With his entry a whole vocabulary of concealment begins: nouns like riddle, enigma, conundrum, mystery, equivocation, puzzle, espionage, double-dealing; verbs such as guess, conceal, blind; adjectives such as hypocritical, insidious, suspicious. There is "doubt in the case" (120) even of his arrival, and Churchill takes care to maintain a doubt as to his motivations and character, not merely because he is secretly engaged to Jane (a transgression of some magnitude in contemporary terms), but also in order to retain his sense of superior manipulation and secret power. His unpredictability is particularly disliked by Mr. Knightley, who considers surprises to be "foolish things" (228).

In requiring predictability of her exemplary characters Jane Austen reveals an attitude toward behavior that will be found in many later English novelists of manners, from Trollope and James to Ford and Waugh. Predictability is pre-eminently the mark of the gentleman; further, it points to the existence of a structured society with a large body of shared assumptions, to a world where few situations lack appropriate and public response and where individuals can communicate by means of a common vocabulary of words and gestures. In such a world dramatic tension is to be expected when a character thought to be a gentleman fails to act predictably. In Trollope's The Last Chronicle of Barset, the drama of the novel centers on the horrifying possibility that the curate of Hogglestock may have stolen a check entrusted to him. In A Portrait of a Lady, Madame Merle's claims to the status of lady, and Gilbert Osmond's to that of gentleman, are suddenly put into question when Isabel sees her standing while he sits. In Ford's The Good Soldier, the narrator, Dowell, speaks of the "modern English habit . . . of taking everyone for granted," and much of the irony of the novel stems from the fact that the good soldier, Ashburnham, is incapable of acting like the gentleman he is considered to be.26 In

26 The title of the first volume of Parade's End, "Some Do Not . . .," is of further interest here. Although it has numerous applications in the volume, one implication is that there are certain things that gentlemen do not do.
Evelyn Waugh's fiction, of course, the gentleman, from Tony Last to Guy Crouchback, is doomed to be duped by persons who do not act as they might once have been expected to act.

Given the residual faith in, or nostalgia for, behavioral predictability which these and other novelists exhibit, we may understand more forcibly the importance of the issue in *Emma*. Someone like Frank Churchill, who suddenly goes "off to London, merely to have his hair cut" (205), poses a threat to the trust and confidence of an ordered world; he drops a "blot" (205) on the transparency that should characterize his behavior. This is why Knightley is justified in suspecting Churchill even before he sees him. The point in question is quite clear. Frank's father has married again, and it is his son's duty to call on his stepmother. Though Emma argues that it is "unfair to judge of any body's conduct, without an intimate knowledge of their situation," Knightley points out: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution. It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay this attention to his father" (146). And later (after Emma has excused Frank by citing his obligations to his adoptive parents) Knightley adds: "Respect for right conduct is felt by everybody. If he would act in this sort of manner, on principle, consistently, regularly, their little minds would bend to his" (147). Knightley introduces into *Emma* the serious tone and social commitment that are characteristic of Mansfield Park. His call for duty, for the observance of certain prior moral and social imperatives, for consistent and predictable action—these mark Knightley as an exemplary gentleman.  

The contrast with Churchill is consistently drawn, often in terms that remind us of Fielding's distinction, quoted as an epigraph to this chapter, between "Humour" and "good Breeding." While Churchill sees life as a game, Knightley sees it as a serious responsibility; while Churchill is typically described as amiable (or "aimable") and gallant, Knightley is described as courteous and humane;

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27 Clearly I do not agree with J. F. Burrows's reading of the debate between Emma and Knightley over Churchill's delay in visiting Randalls (Jane Austen's "Emma," pp. 55–56). Knightley will himself admit to Emma later in the novel that he was "not quite impartial in [his] judgment," but he will add that even if Emma had not been "in the case" he would still have distrusted Churchill (445).
while Churchill promotes his schemes of secrecy, “Mr. Knightley does nothing mysteriously” (226). Churchill, the “closed” personality, is a creature of interiors; he prefers the company of women. Knightley, who loves an “open manner” (260), is a man of the outside, a man’s man. At the Coles’, while Mr. Knightley stays behind to discuss “parish business” with the other gentlemen, Churchill is the “very first of the early” gentlemen to rejoin the ladies (220). And on that later occasion at Miss Bates’s, while Churchill plays his double game with Emma and Jane (and before an audience of no less than six ladies), Mr. Knightley rides by outside, on an errand of duty, as a reminder of the values of an “outside” existence. Moreover, when he hears that Churchill is inside, he refuses to come in at Miss Bates’s invitation. His refusal is in its implications a refusal to leave an “open” world of consistency and regularity for the interior existence of variability and process which Churchill stage-manages.

Churchill’s game-playing is not to be dismissed as venial. It is symptomatic of a world in which once given certitudes of conduct are giving way to shifting standards and subjective orderings. Churchill rejects an inherited body of morals and manners for a little world he himself creates. He is at home in a world of opacity and of separation, preferring it, indeed, to the older world where communication existed by way of public assumptions, for that world required responsibility and consistency, qualities conspicuous by their absence in his character.

We may now be in a position to understand why all the fuss is made about the “entirely unexpected” (215) gift of the piano to Jane Fairfax. All the doubt and speculation that occupy the minds

28 Knightley himself sets the contrast in terms of English versus French behavior: “No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very ‘aimable,’ have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him” (149). For a discussion of Jane Austen’s conception of a “specifically English ideal of life,” see Trilling, “Emma,” in Beyond Culture, pp. 40–41. For an interesting argument setting the Churchill-Knightley contrast in terms of “the contrast between Lord Chesterfield’s and Dr. Johnson’s social and ethical points of view,” see Frank W. Bradbrook, Jane Austen and Her Predecessors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 32–33. In condemning Churchill, Bradbrook suggests, Knightley “condemns by implication, the point of view of Lord Chesterfield.”
of the characters are intentionally introduced by Frank Churchill, when he deposits his gift anonymously in Miss Bates’s drawing room. (The piano was of course his real reason for going to London.) The object of the game is known; it is addressed to Miss Fairfax. And there is no secrecy as to what it is: it is a “very elegant looking instrument—not a grand, but a large-sized square pianoforté” (214–15). Only its sender is unknown, as if—like another charade—it were “From ——.”

Again it can be argued that Churchill’s gift stems from no other wish than to provide his beloved Jane with an instrument for her musical talents. Churchill’s schemes, however, are never this simple. In addition to providing a topic for surmise in Highbury, Churchill soon finds that he is able to play a game with Emma. In one of her flights of fancy, “an ingenious and animating suspicion” (160) enters Emma’s brain concerning a possibly illicit relationship between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon, the husband of Jane’s friend. Thus when Miss Bates and Mrs. Cole assume that the pianoforte “of course . . . must be from Col. Campbell” (215), Emma refuses to agree, but instead conveys her suspicions of the “real” identity of the giver to Churchill. At first pretending to think she means Mrs. Dixon, he quickly accedes to Emma’s real suspicion of Mr. Dixon, and convinces her that he is her secret accomplice in knowledge. Churchill is now in his favored position of superior awareness and power—and not only with respect to Emma. Jane is almost as powerless as Emma. Though Emma is vulnerable, since she is being laughed at behind her back, she is invulnerable in that she cannot know until near the end that she is being duped. Jane, on the other hand, presumably discovers from Churchill the nature of Emma’s suspicions, but this cannot give her much satisfaction when she sees Churchill taking obvious delight in Emma’s company, or when, on Box Hill, he and Emma conduct themselves in a way that “no English word but flirtation could very well describe” (368).

The Emma-Churchill-Jane triangle provides the structural setting of many of the scenes in the second half of the novel, scenes in which, though Emma remains the center of attention, the reader increasingly suspects that it is Churchill who is pulling the strings. At the Coles’, for example, the triangular relationship appears as first Emma plays, and is surprised when Churchill accompanies her
singing, and then Jane plays, and Churchill sings again (II, viii). Later, at Miss Bates's (II, x), Churchill is again able to play his double game with great enjoyment. Jane and Frank have been left alone with the sleeping Mrs. Bates while Miss Bates has gone to invite Emma, Mrs. Weston, and Harriet into her house for a brief visit. The chapter opens with the entrance of the ladies at a point just after one of the few moments of intimacy that Frank and Jane have been able to enjoy. The visitors see Mrs. Bates slumbering by the fire, “Frank Churchill, at a table near her, most deedily occupied about her spectacles, and Jane Fairfax, standing with her back to them, intent on her pianoforté” (240). They have no inkling (nor, surely, does the average reader on first reading) that the lovers have just sprung apart. The rest of the chapter is a subtle description of Churchill's expert ability to play a double game with consummate skill. Consider, for example, how in the following passage, as he addresses first Emma and then Jane, he is able to poke fun at both girls while delighting both. (He is speaking of the piano which he himself has introduced into the house):

“Whoever Col. Campbell might employ,” said Frank Churchill, with a smile at Emma, “the person has not chosen ill. I heard a good deal of Col. Campbell's taste at Weymouth; and the softness of the upper notes I am sure is exactly what he and all that party would particularly prize. I dare say, Miss Fairfax, that he either gave his friend very minute directions, or wrote to Broadwood himself. Do not you think so?” (241)

By mentioning Col. Campbell, Churchill seems to be entering into complicity with Emma, to whom at this point he turns “with a smile.” This impression can only be reinforced when he seems (to Emma) to make a clandestine reference to Mr. Dixon with the phrase, “all that party.” And when he next addresses “Miss Fairfax” by referring to the “friend” who is supposed to have undertaken the purchase of the piano, Emma still believes that he is teasing Jane about Mr. Dixon. She even feels that he is going too far. “It is not fair,” says Emma in a whisper, “mine was a random guess. Do not distress her” (241). On a first reading, such an interpretation would be reasonable. But if we now consider how the scene appears to Jane, a very different meaning is evident: to her Churchill's remarks can only appear as an amusing ridicule of Emma, and as a
series of embarrassing but touchingly nostalgic remembrances of their shared experiences.\textsuperscript{29}

Churchill's games are not always as successful as this. At the ball at the Crown, Emma senses that "Frank Churchill thought less of her than he had done" (326), and the reason is that his genuine love for Jane, and his frustration at the distance that separates them, lead him to lower his mask of amiability to Emma. If we consider the "shadow-novel-within-the-novel" of which W. J. Harvey speaks, however, we can infer other reasons for Churchill's diminishing success as player. The time draws near when Jane must decide whether or not to accept the position as governess so officiously arranged for her by Mrs. Elton—to place herself in what she regards as slavery; and still Churchill has not committed himself. In this light it is not to be wondered at that Jane should find his continued game-playing repugnant. Certainly in the last two games played in the novel—at Hartfield and on Box Hill—Churchill's attempts to communicate with Jane by the indirect means of a game will be rebuffed.

\textbf{The two episodes are excellent examples of Jane Austen's ability to carry major themes on apparently trivial vehicles. In the first instance, an insidious note is present from the first sentence of the chapter (III, v): "In this state of schemes, and hopes, and connivance, June opened upon Hartfield" (343). Soon after, we are witness to Churchill's famous "blunder," when he asks those assembled "accidentally" outside Hartfield, "what became of Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage?" (344) This information—it becomes clear from one of Miss Bates's rambling speeches—must have

\textsuperscript{29} The question arises as to how far Churchill thinks he is keeping Emma in the dark. Soon after this scene (in II, xii), Churchill, before leaving for London, calls on Emma and almost reveals to her the secret of his engagement. She thinks, however, that he is about to propose to her. At the end, in his letter of apology to Mrs. Weston, Churchill will say: "I have no doubt of her having since detected me, at least in some degree.—She may not have surmised the whole, but her quickness must have penetrated a part" (438). Whether Churchill was really mystifying Emma or merely conniving with her remains, therefore, in some doubt, but the cruelty to Jane remains, whatever one decides, as does his use of Emma as foil.
come from his secret correspondence with Jane, and not, as he had thought, from his legitimate correspondence with Mrs. Weston. (Whether all readers gather this the first time round is an interesting question; certainly clues as to the secret correspondence have previously been deposited, as in the argument between Mrs. Elton and Jane over whether or not she should be permitted to go to the post office in the rain [II, xvi].) Since, as in Sense and Sensibility, a correspondence constitutes evidence of engagement, Churchill is anxious to cover up his blunder, and he says that he must have dreamed it. Nevertheless—and here surely we have conclusive evidence for the gratuitous nature of his game-playing—when they enter Hartfield, Churchill invites Emma to join him in a children's game of letters.

The scene is carefully set around the "large modern circular table which. Emma had introduced at Hartfield:" 30 "Frank was next to Emma, Jane opposite to them—and Mr. Knightley so placed as to see them all" (347). Knightley's position is especially important, for in this chapter, in the one major shift of point of view in the novel—indeed in Jane Austen's fiction—Knightley is granted knowledge given to no other character. 31 Prior to the game we have been informed of Knightley's growing dislike of Churchill, and of his suspicion—started by a "look" he had seen Churchill give Jane at the Eltons'—of "some double dealing" (343). Now, as he stands apart from the game, he sees Churchill pass an anagram to Jane, and she "with a faint smile" push it way. At this point, Harriet

30 A nice touch this, when one recalls the dubious significance that is attached both to Marianne Dashwood's wish to give Allenham new furniture in Sense and Sensibility and to Mary Crawford's wish to make Thornton Lacey a "modern" residence in Mansfield Park. Why a round table should merit comment is perhaps best indicated in Barchester Towers where Archdeacon Grantly says: "A round dinner-table . . . is the most abominable article of furniture that ever was invented" (chap. 21). For Grantly there is "something peculiarly unorthodox" in the idea of a round table, "something democratic and parvenue."

31 Jane Austen on only one other occasion, and there unsuccessfully, changes her point of view in this radical way. I refer to the curious scene in Sense and Sensibility (III, iii) where we are given a conversation between Elinor and Colonel Brandon on the subject of the Delaford living through the misconceiving eyes of Mrs. Jennings. She thinks that she is witnessing the Colonel's proposal to Elinor, whereas in fact they are really discussing the timing of his gift to Edward Ferrars. Having demonstrated Mrs. Jennings's misconception, Jane Austen then repeats the conversation as it really occurred, a narrative device she never repeated.
steps in to retrieve the word. She is too stupid to solve the anagram, but Mr. Knightley, to whom she turns for help, sees that the word is "blunder" (348). His thoughts are reported:

Mr. Knightley connected it with the dream; but how it could all be, was beyond his comprehension... He feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and double-dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part. (348)

When Churchill continues his "double-dealing" by now pushing the anagram for Dixon to Emma "with a sly and demure" (348), Knightley sees that Emma, though she judges it "proper to appear to censure" it, is in spite of herself seduced by Churchill's cunning and charm. "Nonsense! for shame!" she answers, as she opposes "with eager laughing and warmth" (348) his suggestion for now giving the word to Jane. Jane, for her part, is "evidently displeased," and on seeing Knightley watching her, she says with some anger, "I did not know that proper names were allowed" (349).

The anagram game repeats Churchill's previous game in Miss Bates's parlor and anticipates the climactic scene on Box Hill. Inside Miss Bates's house, and with Knightley absent, Churchill had been able to satisfy the vanity and trust of both girls, without betraying either. Knightley could only there serve as a passing reminder of responsible conduct. Here, inside the Hartfield house, and with Knightley present, Churchill's maneuvering is not only a quite voluntary danger to Jane's reputation, but is also a cause of justifiable jealousy, as she sees Frank and Emma indulging in a kind of "courtship" game.

The scene reveals more. By allowing us access to Knightley's rational consciousness, we are granted an awareness of the permissible use of the imagination. Careful to avoid the errors of the undisciplined imagination (even as he speculates, Knightley reminds himself of Cowper's line, "Myself creating what I saw"), he is able to intuit a "something of private liking, of private understanding... between Frank Churchill and Jane" (344), and the word game confirms and gives substance to his well-grounded suspicions. Secrecy and concealment, the scene allows us to see, are not invulnerable to the intelligent and responsible mind.
But precisely here Emma reveals how far her participation with Churchill has taken her, for when Knightley asks her if she perfectly understands "the degree of acquaintance" (350) between Churchill and Jane, her confident reply—"I will answer for the gentleman's indifference" (351)—leads him to assume a much closer relationship between Emma and Churchill than he had ever considered possible, and he "walk[s] home to the coolness and solitude of Donwell Abbey" (351). In spite of Knightley's judicious assessment of probabilities, that is, Emma's collusion with Churchill has caused further concealment. Because of this, the novel at this point reaches toward solemn possibilities; through the next two chapters, at Donwell and on Box Hill, a satisfactory resolution seems remote. Frank's rash actions have alienated his already nervous confidante, so that she will cut him short on their meeting in Donwell Lane; the vacuous Harriet is lost in her impossible, Emma-inspired dreams of Knightley; and Emma has unwittingly damaged her own best prospects.

It is important to stress that the combined actions of Emma and Churchill have done more than endanger three relationships; whether one calls it a culture, an ethos, or a social disposition, what has been threatened is an entire way of life, and in face of the symbolic resonance of the scenes which follow, it is quite insufficient to argue that "we do not get from Emma a condensed and refined sense of a larger entity." Consider, for example, the implications of the walk taken by most of the major characters in the pleasure grounds of Donwell (one is reminded of the walk in the wilderness at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*):

> It was hot; and after walking some time over the gardens in a scattered, dispersed way, scarcely any three together, they insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes, which . . . seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds.—It led to nothing . . . (360)

The suggestion, even in this brief extract, of a group without sense of community or feeling ("insensibly" carries due force) is strongly made, as is the implication that the selfish pursuit of pleasure may, indeed, lead to nothing. The possibility of social disintegration is very real at this juncture. But, having made her point, Jane Austen

now posits an alternative hope in her description of the view from Donwell of the Abbey-Mill Farm, as if to underscore the contrast between the present fragmentation of the party and the enduring possibilities of an organic society (360). Emma, who has yet to commit her grossest act of selfishness, is here provided with her true "grounds" of moral and social action, though full awareness is still some way off. A little earlier, like Elizabeth at Pemberley, she had reached some awareness of the value of Knightley's estate, noticing

...the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered—its ample gardens...of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight—and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up...[The house] was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was.... (358)

The distrust of fashionable improvements here expressed not only reminds us of the theme in *Mansfield Park*, but comments, too, on the recent actions and intentions of the visitors to Donwell—especially, perhaps, on Mrs. Elton's attempt to redefine what is "natural" by coercing Knightley into giving an alfresco "gipsy-party," complete with donkey and "caro sposo" (355-56). 33

Emma not only views Donwell with "honest pride" (358); her view will soon include, as Trilling notes, what she has previously excluded from her outlook: "at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood;—and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it" (360). The Martins' farm is indeed "favourably situated," and Emma's visit to Donwell is followed not only by her discovery of her hidden love for Mr. Knightley (and her consequent acceptance of the values which he upholds), but by her admission that now "it would be a great pleasure to know Robert Martin" (475). As Elizabeth and Darcy

33 Knightley, of course, will have nothing to do with Mrs. Elton's absurd "scheme." As opposed to her plan for gathering strawberries, Knightley's "idea of the simple and the natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room" (355).
“were always on the most intimate terms” (PP, 388) with the Gardiners, so Emma and Knightley will remain the friends of the Martins. And in Emma, no less than in Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, the social gaps which individual actions threatened to widen, will be closed around the marriage of the central figures.

Richard Poirier has most clearly understood the importance that such scenes have in promoting Jane Austen’s “positive vision of social experience,” and in illustrating her capacity, as contrasted with American writers of the nineteenth century, “to imagine society as including the threat of conformity and artificiality and as offering, nevertheless, beneficial opportunities for self-discovery.”

In a brilliant comparison of the episode on Box Hill and Huck’s treatment of Jim in chapter fifteen of Huckleberry Finn, he comes to the conclusion that “the stakes for Jane Austen and her heroine are very high indeed—to prevent society from becoming what it is condemned for being in Huckleberry Finn,” and one well appreciates the point. For it is in this famous episode that the novel—and, with it, the games motif—reaches a fitting climax, and here too that the specter of social fragmentation comes closest to actualization.

On Box Hill, where, as one eighteenth century description has it, the mazes make it “very easy for amorous couples to lose and divert themselves unseen,” a “principle of separation” (367) divides the company into separate groups. There is a “want of union” (367) which the indiscriminately benevolent Mr. Weston is quite incapable of harmonizing: “The Eltons walked together; Mr. Knightley took charge of Miss Bates and Jane; and Emma and Harriet belonged to Frank Churchill” (367). Here is Lawrence’s “sharp knowing in apartness,” but how greatly is the separation to be deplored, and how appropriately does Jane Austen distinguish between the selfishness of the Eltons, the social stewardship of Knightley—he at least is concerned about the fate of single women in society—and the continued and misguided collusion of Emma and Churchill, with Harriet, as usual, in tow. What follows on the hill is an em-

blem of a vitiated society where selfishness is uncurbed and no publicly accepted rules of behavior permit free and "open" communication.

In Poirier’s terms, what Emma does when she so flagrantly insults Miss Bates is to violate a social contract; spurred on by Churchill, she forgets her social obligation (or proper role) and adopts the role of an ironic and theatrical wit. After the insult, and a short-lived attempt to play a conundrum game (the last game of the novel), the group erupts into barely concealed hostility (between Mrs. Elton and Emma, between Elton and Churchill, between Churchill and Jane), and were it not for Knightley’s fidelity to his social duty and Emma’s ability soon after to realize the “evil” of her words and wit and truly to repent of them, the ultimate social vision of the novel would be bleak. Something of the seriousness of the issue involved is apparent in Knightley’s rebuke to Emma: “How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible” (374). Only in the degree that Emma comes to an awareness of her fault and to an acceptance of the principles by which Knightley lives is a positive social alternative to the game world convincingly affirmed.

Emma’s repentance is genuine, and the novel succeeds in achieving, in the end, a positive vision of society. But something of the seriousness of the issues treated is revealed in Jane Austen’s careful choice of a religious vocabulary in the closing chapters: we hear, for example, of Emma’s “contrition” and “penitence” (377). Given the degree of her transgression, moreover, her absolution cannot be immediate; Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax for a long time resist her penitential overtures. But henceforth her sorrow and guilt, unlike her previous temporary resolutions to suppress her imaginative tendencies, are real. Now her eyes are “towards Donwell” (378), the proper home of her values, and, like Elizabeth before Darcy’s portrait at Pemberley, all her actions are now considered in the light of Knightley’s imagined regard: “could Mr. Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not . . . have found any thing to reprove” (391).

36 Poirier, World Elsewhere, p. 176. My argument in this paragraph is much indebted to Poirier’s reading.
Emma must still come to a recognition of the personal evils of her subjective schemes when Harriet reveals to Emma’s momentary horror that Knightley is the unnamed superior she hopes to marry. And she must become aware of the degree to which she has been sucked into the vortex of Churchill’s play-acting: “What has it been but a system of hypocrisy and deceit,—espionage, and treachery?—To come among us with professions of openness and simplicity; and such a league in secret to judge us all!—Here we have been, the whole winter and spring, completely duped . . .” (399). But she will soon agree with Knightley’s views on the desirability and “the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other” (446), and with her marriage to Knightley, Harriet’s to Martin, and Jane’s to Churchill, society is finally reconstituted as the plot is resolved.

Let it be admitted, however, that the Churchill marriage leaves some “doubt in the case” even at the end. Had the domineering Mrs. Churchill not fortuitously died, would Frank still have married Jane and saved her at the eleventh hour from a life of “slavery”? It will be said that the question is not legitimate, yet the novel’s presentation of Churchill’s menace has tended to arouse expectations of a less rewarding fate for Jane. Perhaps we should be satisfied with the circumscriptions of his power which are provided. Churchill’s epistolary *apologia pro vita sua* in chapter fourteen of the third volume is followed by Knightley’s searching explication of the text in chapter fifteen, and as throughout the novel he has stood as a model of excellence against which the reader may judge Churchill, so now Knightley points out to Emma where in Churchill’s excuses the unthinking act becomes immoral, where undisciplined behavior becomes antisocial.

Yet Jane’s character and role remain in the memory after the novel ends, and if it is true that another novel “shadows” the novel we read, it is also true that other possible outcomes shadow the resolution we have. It may be that Jane Austen sensed this herself.37 At any rate, in *Persuasion* she wrote a novel about a heroine whose predicament is closer to that of Jane Fairfax, and in so doing, defined a new outlook in her fiction.

37 According to family tradition, Jane Austen divulged that Jane Fairfax survived her marriage to Frank only nine or ten years.