



Published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press  
Bentley House, 200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB  
American Branch: 32 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

© Cambridge University Press 1975

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 74-25640

ISBNs 0 521 20709 6 hardcovers  
0 521 09929 3 paperback

First published 1975

Printed and bound in the United States of America  
by R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company

PK  
11  
521  
cop 3

## CONTENTS

### I. SOME BACKGROUNDS

JOHN HALPERIN

Introduction. Jane Austen's nineteenth-century critics:  
Walter Scott to Henry James  
3

REUBEN A. BROWER

From the *Iliad* to Jane Austen, via *The Rape of the Lock*  
43

STUART M. TAVE

Jane Austen and one of her contemporaries  
61

JANE AIKEN HODGE

Jane Austen and her publishers  
75

### II. THE NOVELS

KATRIN RISTKOK BURLIN

'The pen of the contriver': the four fictions of *Northanger Abbey*  
89

Donald Greene

when Marianne is in trouble, by rousing herself, abandoning her rubber of whist, and taking her home (*Novels*, I, 34-5, 178).

- 24 *Novels*, III, 389.
- 25 *Novels*, II, 286.
- 26 *Novels*, III, 390.
- 27 *Novels*, I, 91.
- 28 *Novels*, I, 9-12.
- 29 *Moral Epistle* II, 'To a Lady,' line 76.
- 30 *Novels*, III, 449.
- 31 See, for example, *Novels*, III, 54.
- 32 Professor John Halperin calls my attention to Mr Price, Fanny's father, in *Mansfield Park*. But it might be argued that his drinking is not, like Dr Grant's love of his dinner and Mr Elton's intoxication, something out of the ordinary, but merely part of his general slovenliness: 'He read only the newspaper and the navy-list; he talked only of the dockyard, the harbor, Spithead, and the Motherbank; he swore, and he drank, he was dirty and gross' (*Novels*, III, 389).
- 33 *The Works of Jane Austen*, Vol. VI, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1954), p. 372.
- 34 *Works*, VI, 381.
- 35 *Works*, VI, 387.
- 36 *Works*, VI, 86.
- 37 *Works*, VI, 376.
- 38 *Works*, VI, 399.
- 39 *Works*, VI, 402.
- 40 Both the turgidity of his style and the appreciation of his own 'sensibility' remind one of the writings of Jane Austen's putative cousin, Sir Egerton Brydges (cf. my 'Jane Austen and the Peerage,' *PMLA*, 68 [December 1953], 1022-4).
- 41 *Works*, VI, 405.
- 42 *Works*, VI, 405-6.
- 43 *Works*, VI, 403-4.
- 44 *Letters*, p. 379.
- 45 *Works*, VI, 404-5.
- 46 M. Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (New York, 1967), p. 13.

ALISTAIR M. DUCKWORTH

'Spillikins, paper ships, riddles,  
conundrums, and cards': games in  
Jane Austen's life and fiction

Games of skill, games of chance, games with words were familiar features of Jane Austen's life from first to last. A few months before her death she began to write a rather gloomy letter to Fanny Knight: 'I must not depend upon being ever very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous Indulgence at my time of Life.' But in the evening, realizing she 'was languid & dull & very bad company when I wrote the above,' she makes an effort to be more 'agreeable.' Her thoughts turn to the troubles of others, to her mother worried (with reason as it turned out) that her expectations from Leigh Perrot's will would be disappointed, to an acquaintance whose young daughter was seriously ill, to Fanny's brother William suffering from a cough: 'Tell William . . . I often play at *Nines* & think of him.'<sup>1</sup> Her thoughts might have included memories of other games, of Battledore and Shuttlecock, for example, played with William at Godmersham in 1805: 'he & I have practiced together two mornings, & improve a little; we have frequently kept it up *three* times, & once or twice *six*' (*Letters*, p. 161). Or she might have remembered bilbocatch, at which she was an acknowledged expert, or spillikins, which she considered as 'a very valuable part of our Household furniture' (*Letters*, p. 179), or any number of card games: whist, commerce, casino, loo, cribbage, but especially Speculation, whose usurpation by Brag and other games at Godmersham during Christmastide 1808-9 'mortified' her

deeply, because 'Speculation was under my patronage' (*Letters*, p. 247).

Equally, she could have recalled the word games – riddles, conundrums and charades – which occupied her relatives and 'excessively' delighted her (*Letters*, p. 298). Clearly, games were not simply 'intervals of recreation and amusement . . . desirable for every body' (p. 87), as Mary Bennet sentimentiously concedes in *Pride and Prejudice*,<sup>2</sup> but an integral part of the Austen family life. Jane Austen could sympathetically anticipate the completion of one of Cassandra's journeys by writing: 'In a few hours you will be transported to Manydown & then for Candour & Comfort & Coffee & Cribbage' (*Letters*, p. 302). She could also understand the consolatory function games could serve at times of sadness, as when, soon after the death of Elizabeth Bridges Knight in October 1808, she took care of the two oldest Knight boys in Southampton. She writes to Cassandra: 'We do not want amusement: bilboche, at which George is indefatigable, spillikins, paper ships, riddles, conundrums, and cards' (*Letters*, p. 225). In the evening, she finds it perfectly natural, after Psalms, Lessons and a sermon at home, that the boys should immediately 'return to conundrums.'

Given the delight in recreation of all kinds that is often manifest in the letters, we may be unprepared for the negative uses to which Jane Austen puts games in her fiction. Seldom are games unambiguously ratified in the novels. One thinks of the 'merry evening games' (p. 28), reminiscent of those in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, that Harriet plays at the Martins' until Emma teaches her to play a new and more dangerous sport. In *Emma*, too, the geriatric amusement Mrs Bates and Mrs Goddard get from picquet and quadrille at Hartfield seems harmless enough. Like age, youth may be exempt from serious criticism. Catherine Morland's preference for 'cricket, base ball, riding on horseback, and running about the country at the age of fourteen' (p. 15) is perfectly suited to her unheroic debut, the carefree childhood prelude to more dubious recreational involvement with Gothic fiction. Such positive uses are slight, however, compared with Jane Austen's normal mode. Lovers of games in the novels, or of field sports, an outside and exclusively masculine form of games, are more often than not selfish, irresponsible or empty-headed characters whose pursuit of a favorite pastime labels them in various ways as morally or socially deficient.

Card games, especially, are suspect in the early novels, often becoming emblems of a vacuous and despicable society. Examples could be multiplied. For the moment, a description of a typical evening at Lady Middleton's in *Sense and Sensibility* will suffice:

They met for the sake of eating, drinking, and laughing together, playing at cards, or consequences, or any other game that was sufficiently noisy . . . The insipidity of the meeting was exactly such as Elinor had expected; it produced not one novelty of thought or expression. (p. 143)

Not surprisingly, the anti-social Marianne Dashwood 'detests' cards: while Lady Middleton and others play at the table, and Elinor and Lucy exchange information over the work basket, Marianne is at the pianoforte, 'wrapt up in her own music and her own thoughts' (p. 145).

The game-playing societies of the Middletons and the John Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*, which reveal 'no poverty of any kind, except of conversation' (p. 233), may remind us that Jane Austen did not always endorse games in the letters. Outside the family (though occasionally inside it, too) games could be viewed negatively. Jane Austen could share Elizabeth Bennet's distrust of 'playing high':

We found ourselves tricked into a thorough party at Mrs. Maitland's . . . There were two pools at Commerce, but I would not play more than one, for the Stake was three shillings, & I cannot afford to lose that, twice in an eveng. (*Letters*, p. 215)

She could go beyond Elinor Dashwood's recognition of social mediocrity to something like Marianne's misanthropy, as when she wrote to Cassandra from Bath in May 1801 about 'another stupid party':

there were only just enough to make one card table, with six people to look on, & talk nonsense to each other . . . I cannot anyhow continue to find people agreeable . . . Miss Langley is like any other short girl with a broad nose & wide mouth, fashionable dress, & exposed bosom. (*Letters*, pp. 128–9)

She could combine protest against the banal monotony of card-playing with her rather unlikeable fondness for obstetrical humor. Elizabeth Knight had just given birth to her eleventh child at Godmersham (the confinement from which she would not recover, though Jane did not know it) when the novelist wrote to Cassandra in October 1808:

at seven o'clock, Mrs. Harrison, her two daughters & two Visitors, with Mr. Debarry & his eldest sister walked in; & our Labour was not a great deal shorter than poor Elizabeth's, for it was past eleven before we were delivered. – A second pool of Commerce, & all the longer by the addition of the two girls, who during the first had one