Ethos in Jane Austen’s *Emma*

1. Introduction

For early readers, the realism of Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815) was both the making and undoing of *Emma*’s didacticism. At first, Walter Scott in his 1816 review celebrates the novel for the “spirit and originality” of its sketches of everyday life, which replace the thrill of extraordinary events and *le beau idéal* of sentiment. The substitute for these excitements, he explains, “was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader . . . a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.” For Scott and also for reviewer Richard Whately, Austen’s realism contributes to the immersion of the reader and thus to morally instructive and, in William Galperin’s words, hegemonic and controlling ends. Scott’s enthusiasm for *Emma*’s didactic realism, however, diminishes over time. A decade later and after repeated readings, his once “overbearing” attitude towards Austen’s novels softens into a more humble, “less decidable” regard for her “exquisite touch which renders ordinary common-place things and characters interesting.” Galperin argues that Scott eventually seems to grasp, though he fails to articulate, what other early readers notice: that the “vivid

2. Scott, BCS, 63.

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details [of Emma’s prose] seemed . . . strangely ungoverned by didactic aims,” they “strike” and “flash” upon the reader with uncanniness that opposes the “hegemony” of realism.6

Scott may have miscalculated the regulatory effect of Emma’s realism, not because Emma is not an instructional text, but because Emma’s didacticism extends beyond the purview of realism and its controls.7 Despite the detail and precision with which Austen creates the illusion of “copying from nature,” Austen, like all novelists, does not describe “lived experience . . . but the conventions for organizing and interpreting that experience.”8 As the reviewer for the Champion (March 1816) notes, the “force of nature” in Emma is “so strong” that readers find “a rational pleasure in the recognitions which . . . flash upon them of the modes of thinking and feeling which experience every day presents in real life.”9 What shocks, strikes, or flashes upon the reader is also the recognition of the paradigms through which he or she makes sense of the world beyond the page. I suggest that the parody of literary form, in addition to a fealty to “real life,” constitutes the didactic in Emma. Austen is not just a precision copier of lived context, but also, and as importantly, a deft manipulator of genre. Part of the “lesson” of Emma, like that of Sense and Sensibility (1811) and Northanger Abbey (1817), consists of attentiveness to generic conventions and the affective responses they elicit. In short, Emma is made up much more of the stuff of romantic and sentimental narratives than most critics have previously acknowledged.10 But whereas these types of narrative are typically powerful

7. Like other major novels of the period, education comprises a major theme in Emma. Alan Richardson explains this shift in the development of characters in novels: “Whereas the earlier novel tended to dispose of childhood expeditiously (Tom Jones grows from two to fourteen in two paragraphs) and to stress an inherited character or ‘disposition’ over experience and training, the Romantic-era novel more often reflects the notion, stated with typical assurance by Godwin that ‘the characters of men are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education,’” in Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.
10. Reviews of Emma contrast the work with romantic and sentimental novels, ironically implying a relationship between Emma and these genres. For example, the Literary Panorama (June 1816) notes that the story is not “ill-conceived” because it is “not romantic but domestic” (BCS, 70). The Monthly Review (July 1816) mentions that “the fair reader may . . . glean by the way some useful hints against forming romantic schemes, or indulging a spirit of patronage in defiance of sober reasons.” The reviewer continues, “the work will probably be-
purveyors of pathos, *Emma* operates through a different rhetorical approach, which I identify as ethos. Realism plays a significant role in the ethos of *Emma*, but it comprises only part of a didactic strategy that also entails generic parody and affective stylistics, as I show below.

2. Highburian Ethos

*Ethos* emphasizes the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private. The most concrete meaning for the term in the Greek lexicon is "a habitual gathering place," and I suspect that it is upon this image of people gathering together in a public place, sharing experiences and ideas, that its meaning as character rests. To have *ethos* is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks.

—Michael Halloran

[Austen’s] dramatis personae conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognize as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances.

—Walter Scott, Unsigned Review of *Emma* (1816)

I am at Highbury all day, & I can’t help feeling I have just got into a new set of acquaintance. No one writes such good sense. & so very comfortable.

—Mrs. C. Cage, "Opinions: Collected by Jane Austen" (1816?)

In many ways, Highbury is a "habitual gathering place" in which values and ideas are shared and character is shaped and tested, not only for its fictional inhabitants but for *Emma*'s readers as well. For Scott and come a favorite with all those who seek for harmless amusement rather than deep pathos or appalling horrors in works of fiction" (BCS, 70). The Gentleman's Magazine writes that *Emma* "is amusing, if not instructive; and has no tendency to deteriorate the heart" (BCS, 72). Although *Emma* is rarely considered as a sentimental parody, Janet Todd alludes to the way in which "the clichés of sentimental fiction are overturned" in Austen's novels, including *Emma*, in *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 144. Other critics have sought to place *Emma* in a generic category that is distinct from that of Austen's earlier works, for example, Paul Fry and Lionel Trilling, identify *Emma* as a "georgic" or "pastoral idyll"; see Fry, "Georgic Comedy: The Fictive Territory of Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979): 129–46 and Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking, 1965), 45–46.

12. Scott, BCS, 64.
Mrs. Cage, to experience *Emma* is to become part of the Highburian community by recognizing one’s own morality and manners reflected in the text. In other words, they respond to ethos. This readerly identification marks a break from the affective strategies of earlier sentimental and romantic novels, in which pathos forges an exaggerated emotional bond with the reader. The two modes of appeal are opposites: as Quintilian notes, where pathos “is lively and animated,” ethos is “mild and composed. . . . The former [is] made for commanding; the latter for persuading: This for troubling and disturbing minds, that for softening and gaining them.” In *Emma*, however, pathos and ethos work together. *Emma*’s “ethos emphasizes the conventional” and not only in that it appears to privilege commonly held early nineteenth-century standards of propriety with which romantic and sentimental novels are allegedly at odds. The novel also repeats tropes and other generic conventions of these types of narratives, sapping them of pathetic appeal. In doing so, *Emma* dismantles pathetic paradigms of sentimentalism found in literature and art, thwarting the reader’s sympathy at seemingly sentimental moments. The repeated dispersal and restraint of passions in the novel come to constitute a social virtue in *Emma*. The ethos of Highbury is the calculated control of pathos.

The “Highburian ethos” I trace in *Emma* is kaleidoscopic, like the definition of ethos itself. As Michael Halloran explains, ethos refers to “character” as understood by habits or repeated actions. The process of character development, however, is not an isolated activity; on the contrary, it requires regular participation in a community defined by location and shared values. In a rhetorical sense, ethos empowers a speaker (or writer) to per-

14. Another Austen contemporary, Lady Gordon, likewise acknowledges the act of dwelling with characters while reading *Mansfield Park*; Austen transcribes, “‘In most novels you are amused for the time with a set of Ideal People whom you never think of afterwards or whom you the least expect to meet in common life, whereas in Miss A-s works & especially in M P. you actually live with them, you fancy yourself one of the family; & the scenes are so exactly descriptive, so perfectly natural, that there is scarcely an Incident or conversation, or a person that you are not inclined to imagine you have at one time or other in your Life been a witness to, born a part in, & been acquainted with,’” in “Opinions of Mansfield Park; collected and transcribed by Jane Austen” (BCS, 51).


16. Quintilian struggles to find a translation for ethos. The closest term he locates is “manners, and hence that part of philosophy, denominated ethics, or moral.” But as he points out, “upon more mature consideration it should seem, that we are not to understand so much manners in general, as a certain propriety of manners. For the word Manners signifies generally all the habitudes of the mind; on which account more cautious authors, chose rather to explain these terms in regard to the will, than shew themselves nice in barely interpreting names” (*Institutes of the Orator*, 1: 367–68).

17. In Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, ethos (argument from authority), comprises one of the three *pistis* (modes of persuasion), along with pathos (emotional appeal) and logos (reason).
suade based on his or her proper identification of the morals and values he or she has in common with the audience.\(^{18}\) Thus, the pragmatics of ethos is profoundly dialogic. It is a “general character of goodness, not only mild and pleasing, but humane, insinuating, amiable, and charming to the hearer,” provided that these characteristics symptomize the illocutionary “mutual tie” or “strict union” between speaker and audience.\(^{19}\) In this article, I am interested in the modern interrelation of the word’s ethical, rhetorical, local, and communal\(^{20}\) significations that make ethos such a complex term and effective mode.\(^{21}\)

Ethos, which comes from \textit{etho}, “to be accustomed, to be wont,” connotes territory: its most basic Greek denotation refers to “an accustomed place” and, in plural form, the “haunts or abodes of animals” and also “the abodes of men.”\(^{22}\) In \textit{Emma}, ethos originates in the abundant gathering places in and around Highbury, from the drawing rooms of Hartfield and Randalls, to Ford’s and Mrs. Bates’s cramped apartments. As Edgar Shannon notes, the rhythm of \textit{Emma} is structured around six major social events—the party at Randalls, dinner at the Coles’ and at Hartfield, the dance at the Crown Inn, the visit to Donwell Abbey, and the excursion to

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The idea that \textit{ethos} comes from repeated acts or habits that define character over time comes from the \textit{Nichomachean Ethics}. See Halloran, “Aristotle’s Concept of Ethos,” 60–61.

\(^{18}\) Halloran, “Aristotle’s Concept of Ethos,” 60.

\(^{19}\) Quintilian, \textit{Institutes of the Orator}, 1:368.

\(^{20}\) Other Austen critics have explored the “communal” implications of Austen’s \textit{Emma}. See, e.g., Frances Ferguson, “Jane Austen, \textit{Emma}, and the Impact of Form,” \textit{MLQ} 61, no. 1 (2000): 157–80. Ferguson argues that Emma’s faults as a heroine are mitigated by her “communal contribution,” which is deployed formally in the novel through free indirect speech.


\(^{21}\) Although often used by eighteenth-century English speakers as a foreign word in the context of rhetoric, the term did not enter the English lexicon until the mid-nineteenth century (\textit{OED}, 2nd ed., s.v. “ethos”). Even as late as 1888, writers in English relied on other languages to hone the definition of \textit{ethos}, as shown in an editorial in a Chicago journal: “‘[\textit{ethos anthrophi daimon}]’ is almost untranslatable into English. The translation ‘character is man’s destiny’ although quite correct, does not exhaust its meaning. ‘[\textit{Ethis}]’ means, like the German \textit{Sitte}, custom or habit or character. But it conveys more than custom; it means the habits of man so far as they produce civilization and make him humane. It includes his morals. In this sense Schiller says: ‘Und allein durch seine \textit{Sitte} / Kann er (der Mensch) frei un matching sein.’ / From \textit{[ethos]} is derived the English word \textit{Ethics}, which has acquired the narrower meaning of \textit{[ethos]} in the sense of moral behavior” (Editorial, \textit{The Open Court}, January 19, 1888).

Box Hill—all but one of which take place in familiar dwelling places. Much of the action of Emma consists in paying social visits to these locales and such attentions often do credit to the visitor’s character and affirm communal belonging. Thus, we learn right away that the virtuous Mr. Knightley “lived about a mile from Highbury, was a frequent visitor, and always welcome.” Not surprisingly, in his first act of kindness in the novel, Mr. Knightley calls on the Woodhouses despite a late hour. Similarly, their regular visits to Hartfield denote the goodness of Mrs. Bates, Miss Bates, and Mrs. Goddard. And while Mr. Perry’s frequent stops at Hartfield evince his gentlemanlike personality, Frank Churchill’s prolonged absence from Randalls calls his character into question. Later, Frank jokingly hopes that by making a purchase at Ford’s, the shop that “every body attends every day of their lives,” he “may prove [him]self to belong to the place, to be a true citizen of Highbury” (187).

In addition to the community of Highbury, Austen did, at least on paper, envision her own community of readers in the “Opinions of Emma.” This aggregation of over forty entries from Austen’s friends and family includes both praise and censure for her novel. As they were collected and transcribed by Austen, the entries reflect not only the opinions of what readers felt was important, but what she valued knowing about her readers’ responses. Many remarks respond to moral aspects of the text. Captain Austen, for example, “liked it extremely” but noted “an higher Morality in M[ansfield] P[ark].” Mr. Knightley was the character most “liked” by Austen’s readers and one reader “thought Frank Churchill better treated than he deserved.” Austen also recorded two instances of disapproval for

25. While not all of the visits in Emma do credit to character, the principles of ethos are often still at work. For example, Emma’s scheme to arrange a visit to Elton’s vicarage under the pretense of a broken shoelace is executed upon the hope not only that Harriet and Elton will be alone together, but that they will create the spectacle of a shared abode, a “favourable aspect” that will raise Harriet in Elton’s esteem (87).
26. Brodie notes how changes in the formatting of Austen’s readers’ collected opinions of Emma from those she collected of Mansfield Park indicate an emphasis on the communal: in the “Opinions of Emma,” “each entry constitutes a paragraph with the speaker’s name indented,” which “indicate[s] that [Austen] devoted ongoing thought to her presentation of these comments, envisioning them as something more than collections of notes jotted down in random fashion. When gathered in this format, the readers constitute an interrelated community, testifying to Austen’s perpetual fascination with enclosed societies” (my emphasis; “Austen and the Common Reader,” 59).
27. Austen, BCS, 55.
her coarse treatment of clergymen in the depiction of Mr. Elton. From these notes we see how the moral balance of the characters in her novels concerned both readers and the author. This documentary practice appears especially important in light of ethos's rhetorical function: the speaker or writer labors to understand his or her audience's values in order to persuade the audience effectively.

To be clear, I am not tracing a particular Highburian ethos. Multifarious ethical systems inform Emma's ethos but do not encompass it. Indeed, the last half-century of critical debate furiously contends the instability of moral authority in any one character (even in the seemingly infallible English gentleman, Mr. Knightley) and in Austen's ironic language. As Julia Prewitt Brown argues, Highbury is not a hierarchy but a "system of interdependence, a community of people all talking to one another, affecting, and changing one another" and the key to the community's harmony lies in accommodation. Individuals share their value systems to an extent limited by propriety and buffeted by irony, not as "a form of social detachment but a form of social adjustment." The reader, too, is drawn into this exchange through "persistent irony," which requires him or her to "participate in constructing the value system that governs the novel," as Mary Poovey asserts. While much critical ground has been covered regarding irony at the grammatical level, here I examine how Emma engages the reader through parody and manipulation of generic affect more broadly. As in her earlier, more conspicuously parodie works, what matters is less the value system under attack, than the rhetorical strategy employed to dismantle it.

Still, the word "ethos" is derived from the same stem as eethike, or "moral and ethical virtue," and eethos, or "character"; simply put, it "says in effect, Believe me because I am the sort of person whose word you can believe." Emma educates by way of such rhetoric: instead of demanding that

29. For example, Joseph Litvak's "Reading Characters: Self, Society, and Text in Emma," PMLA 100, no. 5 (1985) challenges the "unilateral ethical scheme in which morally superior Knightley transforms a morally inferior Emma" (771). Also, John Hagan's "The Closure of Emma," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 15, no. 4 (1975) reads Knightley's marriage proposal as an impulsive decision rather than "the result of cool deliberation" (554) and "reasoned recognition and acceptance of [Emma's] maturation" (560), shattering his reputation as a priggish moral exemplum.


the reader simply “learn this,” the narrator implies, “Of course you (reader) already know this (whether the reader knows it or not) because you share in my ethos.” This extension of Highburian ethos beyond the text to the reader occurs, for example, in the episode of Mr. Knightley’s proposal to Emma. Austen abruptly screens the reader from enjoying the sentimental exchange as the narrator eludes the climactic moment of the heroine’s reply with “What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does” (404). The narrator’s intrusion invites the reader into the narrative framework, first by repeating the question a reader or listener might ask. The rhetorical question reveals a dialogue between reader and narrator that the reader suddenly realizes has been going on throughout the novel; the subsequent dash punctuates this moment of recognition. That Emma has said “just what she ought” presumes not only that the reader knows what she ought to have said but also that he or she can measure it as precisely what is proper. The colloquial “of course” contrasts with the higher ethical appeal to behaving as one “ought” and affirms that Emma’s propriety does not descend from a superior moral understanding, but from one that is casually shared with the reader. The reader does not know what Emma actually said; the dialogue, so essential to the elevated sentiments of pathetic narratives, is irrelevant here. What matters instead is that the reader is “characterized by . . . the values and norms which seem to be taken for granted in the text” making it seem “obvious that they define [the reader’s] own views.” By occluding the passionate climax, Austen parodies the rhetoric of sensibility critiqued by Keats and Hazlitt that “explore[s] not what it felt to be another person or object, but what it felt like to be looking at a person or object and how such looking affirmed [one’s] own sensibility.” Whereas sentimental tropes suggest that the reader should be granted an affirmation of his or her sensibility in Emma, that affirmation is

33. The narrator in Mansfield Park makes a similar gesture by appealing to a collective of readers regarding the marriage of Edmund and Fanny: “I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary as much to time in different people——I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire.” Here, however, the narrator acknowledges a variation of opinion on the “proper” date, while in Emma readers are assumed to be in agreement with one another and with the narrator on the issue of Emma’s reply to Mr. Knightley (Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, ed. Kathryn Sutherland [London: Penguin, 2003], 436). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as “MP” by page number.


35. Todd, Sensibility, 143.
denied, or worse, as in this example, where the reader’s susceptibility to sentimental contrivance is deliberately exposed and even mocked.

Here and throughout *Emma*, Austen debilitates pathos subtly rather than rejecting it outright like many of her anti-sentimentalist literary counterparts, who often emphatically declare their intentions with explanatory prefaces. In contrast to earlier, more explicitly didactic eighteenth-century narratives, *Emma’s* characters are less than paragons of virtue and yet above the unwaveringly evil antiheroes of cautionary tales. Rather, in *Emma*, Austen appears to offer the “psychological portrait” typical of the Romantic-era domestic novel, which “represented an educational ideal designed to produce a ‘well-regulated mind.’” Indeed, *Emma*, like all of Austen’s heroines, appears most didactic when considering her past actions, often with regret, and with the hope of making future improvements to her character. Yet even in reflection, *Emma’s* educational focus takes more of a turn toward the communal and the conventional than other character-centered novels: as Marilyn Butler notes, “where [William Godwin’s] Caleb Williams and [Maria Edgeworth’s] Belinda mature by learning to think for themselves, Emma matures by submitting her imaginings to common sense.” Furthermore, the psychological regulation of character in *Emma* is not only illustrative but also performative: the text is didactic in the way the reader’s active speculation upon his or her own affective responses in the act of reading contributes to the repetitive, habit-forming reflection that builds character. Other writers of the period also achieve this, but they do so through more heavy-handed means. For example, at the conclusion of Edgeworth’s *Belinda* the theatrical Lady Delacour literally stages a sentimental tableau with the novel’s characters, underscoring the artificiality of novel endings. Even in Austen’s earlier work, *Northanger Abbey*, her “too . . . pedestrian” heroine Catherine, “serve[s] as a cudgel against . . . sensationalistic fiction.”

In the process of challenging pathetic reader response, the “Highburian ethos” reveals the ways in which boundaries between ethos and pathos break down in sentimental literature. Entangled in “pure, disinterested benevolence that encourages us to suffer with fictive beings” is an indulgence in the good feeling of self-approbation and, furthermore, the sense

of belonging to a group of like-minded approbators. Thus, Lady Louisa Stuart, writing to Scott about Henry Mackenzie’s classic sentimental novel, *The Man of Feeling*, recalls, “I remember so well its first publication, my mother and sisters crying over it, dwelling upon it with rapture! And when I read it, as I was a girl of fourteen not yet versed in sentiment, I had a secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility.” In the following examples, however, Austen’s *Emma* forms a collective based on the propriety of withholding pathetic response in moments that half a century earlier would have presented obvious climaxes of emotional crisis. This restraint is a function not only of detailism, but of narrative structure as well. Instead of presenting the pathetic tale’s “peripeteia in media res,” as the story unfolds and upon subsequent readings, postponed reflection rather than immediate action regulates both characters and readers.

3. Leveling Lavinia: Highburian Ethos as the Subversion of Pathos

Austen’s shift away from the pathetic mode in *Emma* coincides with broader historical changes in reading practices. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the popularity of pathos and its eighteenth-century cultural incarnation, sentimentalism, gave way to more rational, “mild and composed” approaches to literature, particularly in the category of didactic fiction. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, writers of both fictional and pedagogical texts became more vocal with their concerns about the over-excitement of emotions, especially in the reading habits of young women. Maria Edgeworth, for example, delineates the grave consequences of wasting sympathy on romance and poetry in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), while Mary Wollstonecraft decries novels along with music, poetry, and gallantry as the means of instilling in women an “overstretched sensibility,” which “naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others, and content with its own station.” Likewise, Hannah More critiques the “class of contemporary authors” who turn “all the force of their talents to excite emotions, to inspire


sentiment, and to reduce all mental and moral excellence into sympathy and feeling . . . [a]t the expense of principle.”

In their fictional works, novelists like Charlotte Lennox, Mary Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Jane West warn against impassioning readers rather than cultivating reason and reflection. Though admittedly unattractive to modern readers for their comparative blandness, these cautionary narratives tout their intention to be less fantastic and their characters less idealized than those of sentimental novels.

Unlike her anti-sentimental predecessors, however, Austen tones down, displaces, and deflects pathos subtly. Indeed, Austen’s nineteenth-century admirers applauded the fact that her moral lessons, “though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward” or “forced upon the reader.” Rather, the “didactic intention” is “interwoven with the . . . plots and texture of the novel.” Austen’s morality considers above all the propriety of pathetic response, allowing the reader to indulge not in solipsistic passions, but reasonable, communal moral sentiments. Rather than attacking pathos directly in a didactic and apologetic preface, Austen’s Emma chips away with diligence and precision at archetypal sentimental motifs such as the pitiably devoted unmarried daughter, the deliriously joyful engagement announcement, the righting revelation of genteel birth, the charitable visit to the poor, and the sentimental object. Like Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, Emma too satirizes genre by apposing emotionally exuberant motifs with the limits of propriety.

Austen’s depiction of the domestic situation of Miss and Mrs. Bates, for instance, offers an unsentimental echo of James Thomson’s famous widow and daughter pair of pathetic verse. Austen knew well the affecting georgic romance of Lavinia and Palemon from Thomson’s Autumn and may have had it in mind while writing the history of Miss and Mrs. Bates—indeed,

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44. Hannah More, Strictures on Female Education (1799; Oxford: Woodstock, 1993), 73.
45. In the preface to Emma Courtney, Mary Hays explains that the “errors of [her] heroine were the offspring of sensibility; and that the result of her hazardous experiment is calculated to operate as a warning” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney [London, 1796], 8).
46. A dialogue between “Prudentia,” the author, and “Mentoria,” a friend, in the first chapter of Jane West’s Advantages of Education: or, The History of Maria Williams (1793; New York: Garland, 1974) acknowledges the unpopularity of texts without exceptional romance and heightened sentiments: “‘Your intentions,’ replied my friend, ‘are as romantic as those which you design to eradicate; at least, if improbability of success constitutes the romantic. Your work will, I foresee, rest peaceably on the shelves of your bookseller, unless you condescend to bind it in gilt paper, and send it into the world with a little alteration of its title, and call it The renowned History of Miss Williams, who, by being a very good girl, gained the love of all her friends and acquaintance’” (1:4).
47. Whately, BCS, 95.
48. Richard Simpson, unsigned review of the Memoir, North British Review, April 1870, BCS, 244.
49. In addition to the fact that Austen owned a copy of The Seasons, many of Austen’s works point to Thomson’s influence. Austen quotes from The Seasons in Northanger Abbey,
the tale’s didactic appropriations throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though forgotten today, were legion. As evinced by its inclusion in literary and instructional anthologies such as *Elegant Extracts* (1789) and with its structurally parallel courtship plot and rural setting, the tale offers a useful contrastive model for the kind of story Austen writes in *Emma*. Thomson’s tale, based on the biblical story of Ruth, centers on the unfortunate and lovely young Lavinia who takes the low occupation of gleaning the fields to support her widowed mother. While walking among his fields, Palemon, the wealthy and beloved “pride of swains,” spies the beauty, discovers she is the daughter of his deceased patron, and proposes to marry her. The opening lines of the vignette illustrate a situation similar to that of Miss Bates living contentedly with her mother:

The lovely young Lavinia once had friends:
And fortune smiled deceitful on her birth;
For, in her helpless years deprived of all,
Of every stay save innocence and Heaven,
She with her widow’d mother, feeble, old,
And poor, lived in a cottage, far retired . . .

Content and careless of to-morrow’s fare.

(*Autumn*, 177–82, 191)

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ed. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3. She references Thomson in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) as well when Edward Ferrars, imagining how Marianne Dashwood with her “greatness of soul” would spend a large fortune, remarks, “‘And books!—Thomson, Cowper, Scott;—she would buy them all over and over again; she would buy up every copy I believe, to prevent their falling into unworthy hands; and she would have every book that tells her how to admire an old twisted tree’” (*Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Ros Ballaster [London: Penguin, 1995], 91). Peter Knox Shaw’s “Persuasion, James Austen, and James Thomson,” *Notes and Queries* 49, no. 4 (2002): 451–53 illustrates the influence of *Autumn* on the poetry of Austen’s eldest brother and on her depiction of Anne Eliot’s autumnal walk in *Persuasion* (1818).

50. For decades after it was published, the pathetic tale of Lavinia and Palemon from James Thomson’s *Autumn* (1730) circulated independently from this masterpiece of English Georgic. The popular allegory survived in grammar books and poetic anthologies, it was publicly recited and expanded into a longer poem, and it provided the subject for paintings by Henry Singleton and William Redmore Bigg, a mezzotint engraving by John Raphael Smith, a satirical print by James Gillray, a ballet performed at Covent Garden, and, on both sides of the Atlantic, young women’s needlework. The tale was regularly adapted for juvenile moral, elocutionary, and literacy instruction. Lavinia and Palemon became so ingrained in popular culture that even the forces of gravity called them to attention; in *The Mystic Cottager of Chamouny: A Novel* (Dublin, 1795), 107–8, the pages of *The Seasons* fortuitously fall open to the story, striking the heroine, Rosalie, with déjà vu.

Miss Bates, although not “lovely” or “young” and who “never boasted either beauty or cleverness,” devotes herself “to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible,” resembling Lavinia’s plight and striking a similar chord of humble and contented virtue (22). While Thomson’s poetically painted image of Lavinia and her mother excites readers’ emotional sensibility—Lavinia is “helpless” and pitifully “sunk into poverty,” characteristics which are romantically heightened by their contrast to her virtue and beauty—Austen’s corresponding portrayal of Miss and Mrs. Bates is lighter and more matter-of-fact. Rather than appearing as “feeble”—an adjective that evokes sympathy with the physical and psychological frailty of Lavinia’s mother—Mrs. Bates is described as “almost past every thing but tea and quadrille” (22). Austen’s description, unlike Thomson’s, humorously points to the minutiae of the old woman’s day-to-day life, invoking a generalization that little old women do little but. Austen derails her reader’s sympathetic expenditure with unsentimental detail: Miss Bates’s being “a great talker upon little matters . . . full of trivial communications and harmless gossip” (22) amuses rather than touches the reader. And while Lavinia and her mother are secluded in the woods “Among the windings of a woody wale; / By solitude and deep surrounding shades . . . conceal’d” (Autumn, 183–85), Miss Bates represents a staple of the community, garnering public favor as her humble home becomes the regular and often overcrowded gathering place for the novel’s characters.

Jane, too, with her future prospects hanging precariously in the novel’s balance would seem to be an object of sympathy, yet Emma’s jealous feelings towards the second belle of Highbury often mediates and moderates readers’ emotional response. Emma unreasonably restrains her friendly disposition in Jane’s company and resents the general assumption that the two women should be intimate acquaintances. Emma appeals to Mr. Knightley that “she could never get acquainted with her: she did not know how it was, but there was such coldness and reserve—such apparent indifference whether she pleased or not—and then, her aunt was such an eternal

52. Writing on Mansfield Park, Alan Richardson argues that Fanny Price’s sensibility is contrasted with the “other characters’ lack of subjective response” through her allusions to Cowper’s Task and Scott’s Lady of the Lake and through her lyrical commentary that recalls both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Richardson notes that “these references and thematic affinities begin to suggest the complicity of the domestic novel with high Romantic poetry in what [Nancy] Armstrong calls the ‘invention of depths in the self,’ the production, through certain kinds of literary experience, of a modern ‘psychological’ subject open to (and further carved out by) new technologies of surveillance and self-discipline” (Literature, Education, and Romanticism, 198). In Emma, however, thematic affinities with Thomson’s The Seasons denote surveillance and self-discipline to the extent that readers eschew the sentimental snares of lyricism.
talker!—and she was made such a fuss with by every body’” (156). When Jane with irritating decorum fails to provide any juicy details about the character and looks of Frank Churchill during her first visit, the narrator succinctly concludes the chapter with “Emma could not forgive her” (159). Furthermore, Frank Churchill’s teasing—which we later learn conceals his connection to Jane—encourages Emma’s moderate disdain for her so-called friend. Mrs. Weston’s presumption that Knightley may not only esteem but love Jane exacerbates Emma’s contempt for her and her low connections:

If it would be good to her, I am sure it would be evil to himself; a very shameful and degrading connexion. How would he bear to have Miss Bates belonging to him?—To have her haunting the Abbey, and thanking him all day long for his great kindness in marrying Jane?—‘So very kind and obliging!—But he always had been such a very kind neighbour!’ And then fly off, through half a sentence, to her mother’s old petticoat. (210)

The initial pity Emma feels for Jane quickly devolves into envy of the regard others pay her and is expressed—unflatteringly to Emma’s “perfect” character—as scorn and ridicule.

In this passage, not only sentiment but parody is curtailed by propriety. As Emma’s envy distorts the reader’s potential sympathy with Jane, Mrs. Weston calls attention to the diversion but also the bad taste of Emma’s caricature; she exclaims, “‘For shame, Emma! Do not mimic her. You divert me against my conscience’” (210). Unlike the narrator’s disdain in Pride and Prejudice (1814) for Mrs. Bennet’s “ill-judged officiousness”53 upon Mr. Bingley’s proposal to Jane Bennet, in the hypothetical engagement between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates’s unfortunate circumstances and inherent goodness suggest a blunder in the satiric critique of her social shortcomings, even as Emma, Mrs. Weston, and the reader are tempted to sneer at them. Emma’s witty but indecorous behavior is ultimately trained to conform to the Highburian ethos by way of pathos when, following Emma’s affront of Miss Bates on Box Hill, Mr. Knightley scolds, “‘Her situation should secure your compassion’” (351).

Towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Weston’s calm demeanor cools the language describing the happy celebration of Frank and Jane’s engagement at the Bates’s home. The conventionally affecting scene of the marriage an-

53. “[Mr. Bingley’s] ease and cheerfulness rendered him a most agreeable addition to their evening party; and he bore with the ill-judged officiousness of the mother, and heard all her silly remarks with a forbearance and command of countenance, particularly grateful to the daughter” (Pride and Prejudice [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993], 250). Hereafter cited parenthetically as “PP” in the text.
The news immediate to her mother brought,
While, pierced with anxious thought, she pined away
The lonely moments for Lavinia’s fate;
Amazed, and scarce believing what she heard,
Joy seized her wither’d veins, and one bright gleam
Of setting life shone on her evening hours;
Not less enraptured than the happy pair

(Autumn, 301–7)

The same descriptive vocabulary of “joy” and “rapture” denotes the Bates’ reaction: “The quiet, heartfelt satisfaction of the old lady, and the rapturous delight of her daughter—who proved even too joyous to talk as usual had been a gratifying, yet almost an affecting scene” (my emphasis, 391). Yet what would be an emotionally effusive meeting in Thomson’s sentimental world is described as merely “gratifying” and “almost affecting” in the more reserved climate of Austen’s Highbury. While this passage typifies Austenian understatement, the tactic takes a communal turn in Emma. Emma learns of the Bates’ joyful feelings through her conversation with Mrs. Weston; the first sentence of the paragraph sets up the style indirect libre, informing the reader that the narration derives from Mrs. Weston’s relation of the event.54 The emotional restraint of the language inflected through Mrs. Weston’s unquestionable decorum allows Austen to check her reader from getting carried away. The context of a social visit between Emma and Mrs. Weston authorizes the pathetic recalibration.

Emma breaking her own nuptial news to Mr. Woodhouse comprises a second, ludic revision of the affecting engagement announcement motif. While Lavinia brings the news immediately to her mother, Emma delays informing her widower father, for whom she, Lavinia-like, so steadfastly cares. Mr. Woodhouse, like Lavinia’s mother “pines away,” racked with “anxious thought” over his daughter’s fate; yet his greatest fear—along with “horror of late hours and large dinner-parties” (21), inclement weather and dyspepsia—consists in marriage-inflicted domestic rearrangements. Knowing that her nuptial announcement would discompose him, Emma postpones the discussion. When it finally arrives, Mr. Woodhouse’s reaction to the happy news, unlike Lavinia’s mother’s response, is neither

54. “A little curiosity Emma had; and she made the most of it while her friend related” (391).
sudden nor joyful. He cannot “soon be reconciled” to the idea, but must be convinced with “time and continual repetition” (436). While joy for her daughter envelops Lavina’s mother in “one bright gleam” (Autumn, 305), Mr. Woodhouse requires “another year or two” for his sentiments to concur with his neighbors’ assurances that “it might not be so very bad if the marriage did take place” (436). Mr. Woodhouse’s surprisingly cheerful consent comes only after he begins a practical consideration of Mr. Knightley as a deterrent to poultry thieves.

The discovery of genteel birth cloaked in unfortunate circumstances marks so common a theme in eighteenth-century romance—as once again in Lavinia and Palemon—that its inevitability in the history of Harriet Smith is presupposed from the beginning of Emma. Following the sentimental convention that good-looking orphans tend to be nobility in disguise, Emma misjudges Harriet’s unknown parentage. The narrator’s anaphorical presentation of the word “somebody” in the description of Harriet’s origins poignantly brings the instability of Emma’s romantic assumption to a head: “Harriet Smith was the natural daughter of somebody. Somebody had placed her, several years back, at Mrs. Goddard’s school, and somebody had lately raised her from the condition of scholar to that of parlour-boarder” (23). Like Emma, the reader knows not whether “somebody” refers to any unknown or unnamed person, or to its secondary definition as “a person of note, consequence, or importance,” perhaps implied with Austen’s signature disdain for somebodies like Mrs. Churchill or Pride and Prejudice’s Lady Catherine De Bourgh.55 The repetition of the pronoun dances around its antithetical significations, foreshadowing Austen’s ultimate upending of the archetypal class reveal. At the end of the novel, Harriet’s illegitimate origins cause Emma to breathe a retroactive sigh of relief that she failed to bring about now-improper matches to Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, or Mr. Knightley.56 The truth of Harriet’s birth makes her marriage to Robert Martin more appropriate than it first appeared in Emma’s eyes and Harriet appears to be well matched.57 The instant of revelation

55. OED, 2nd edition, s.v. “somebody.”
56. “She proved to be the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been hers, and decent enough to have always wished for concealment.—Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!—It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connexion had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley—or for the Churchills—or even for Mr. Elton!—The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed” (450–51).
57. A conservative, similarly class-conscious, hack rewriting of Lavinia and Palemon appears in “The Generous Lover. A Pastoral Anecdote,” appended to The Unfortunate Happy West Country Couple (London, 1795?). In this version, the poor but venerable Ernesto fathers the virtuous Lavinia loved by the generous, landowning Palemon. Lavinia’s heart, however,
in *Emma* comes not as a momentous release from escalating class and romantic conflict, but as a sudden, embarrassing acknowledgment that recedes quickly from the spotlight. Like dirt swept under a rug, the hasty reconciliation and engagement of Harriet and Robert Martin allows the reader to react as is proper in the face of such a horrifying social predicament: with only one paragraph devoted to the truth and the consequences of Harriet’s birth, the reader cannot dwell on the shocking circumstances but is suddenly left to celebrate in yet another impending marriage as the novel hastens toward a conclusion.

Emma and Harriet’s December visit to a poor sick family outside of Highbury introduces another at first seemingly sentimental scene of destitution, despair, and delightful pathetic indulgence for the reader. En route to her charitable deed, however, Emma uncharitably disparages Miss Bates as the subject of poverty crosses Emma’s mind in an unsentimental way; she aphorizes, “it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls” (83). Emma’s cruel unconcern for her friend preempts any extreme of pleasure the reader might feel during the visit. The description of the visit itself contains no pathetic fever pitch, but deliberately and rationally documents how Emma understands the ignorance and temptations of the poor and has “no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue, from those, for whom education had done so little” (84). Although the poor family moves Emma and although she leaves with a sense of self-approbation, even these first-hand distresses prove fleeting, as she tells Harriet, “I feel now as if I could think of nothing but these poor creatures all the rest of the day; and yet, who can say how soon it may all vanish from my mind?” (84). Rather than wallowing in her sentiments, Emma finds that the society and conversation of Harriet and Mr. Elton quickly “restore[s] the mind to its tranquility . . . which is so necessary to satisfaction and enjoyment.”58 And she does so alongside the reader, who quickly discards a quintessential sentimental motif for the intrigue of Harriet’s crush.

Sentimental objects also lose their pathetic impact in *Emma*. If one man’s trash is an unrequited lover’s treasure, what differentiates the sentimental

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object from other material items is the narrative of origins particular to
the object and its owner. In *Emma*, however, Austen disaggregates this rela-
tionship, giving us the putative sentimental object without the narrative
context that valorizes it. In the third volume of *Emma*, Harriet’s cotton-
lined parcel of “Most precious treasures”—a scrap of court plaister and a pen-
cil stub once belonging to Mr. Elton—appears to represent sentimental
souvenirs *par excellence*, except that the histories of these objects are missing
from the novel. Until the moment of the mementos’ imminent purgation,
the narrator has left out any prior description of Mr. Elton cutting his finger
on Emma’s penknife or his jotting down a note on spruce beer in Harriet’s
presence. The embarrassing irrelevance of these objects to Harriet’s now de-
funct romantic future with Mr. Elton is heightened by the impossibility of
the reader’s romantic recollection of their origins. By the time the reader be-
comes aware of these objects, their sentimental value has depreciated almost
to worthlessness. Humorously, only their use-value remains; Emma offers,
“But Harriet, is it necessary to burn the court plaister—I have not a word to
say for the bit of old pencil, but the court plaister might be useful” (319). In
contrast, the episode of Edmund Bertram’s scrap of writing that accompa-
nies his jewelry gift to Fanny in *Mansfield Park* (1814) indulges the reader in
both the originary history of the specimen and subsequent girlish refuse-
worship. Fanny catches him (much to her surprise and delight) at her writ-
ing desk, upon which ensues a tender exchange between the would-be
pair. Immediately following Edmund’s departure, the narrator hyperboli-
cally delves into the object’s emotional effect: “Two lines more prized had
never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author—never more
completely blessed the researches of the fondest biographer. . . . This speci-
men, written in haste as it was, had not a fault; and there was a felicity in
the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of ‘My very dear
Fanny,’ which she could have looked at for ever” (MP, 245). The intimate
scene escalates to the aphoristic sublime: “The enthusiasm of a woman’s
love is even beyond the biographer’s. To her, the hand-writing itself, inde-
pendent of any thing it may convey, is a blessedness” (MP, 245). Emma’s
private reaction to Harriet’s keepsakes, on the other hand, further devalues
the naïf’s sentimental attachment to her “precious treasures”; Emma mur-
murs, “Lord bless me! when should I ever have thought of putting by in

59. For a discussion of sentimental objects in the eighteenth century, see Festa, “Sterne’s
Snuffbox,” in *Sentimental Figures of Empire*, 67–110. Sentimental objects work much like what
Susan Stewart calls the “souvenir”: “we need or desire souvenirs of events that are report-
able, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the in-
vention of narrative. . . . The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of
longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of
the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia” (Stewart, *On Longing*, 13).
ETHOS IN AUSTEN’S EMMA

Cotton a piece of court-plaister that Frank Churchill had been pulling about!—I never was equal to this” (318). Here, Emma’s repulsed, unsympathetic reaction parodies the pathetic reader-response as understood by Samuel Johnson: we “sympathize with fictional characters in imaginary distress because we fearfully recognize that such things could happen to us.”

In Emma, Austen slyly attacks more than sentimental narratives. In the episode of Emma illustrating Harriet, she also spoofs sentimental visual culture. Here, Emma aims not for an exact copy, but rather to affect the viewing audience, especially Mr. Elton, by “throwing in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance” (46). Emma appeals to the observer’s sensibility, like the artists who designed the paintings and etchings of the pathetic tale of Lavinia and Palemon. The moment in which Palemon is first struck by conflicting emotions of admiration for Lavinia’s beauty and pity at her reduced state was a popular motif in eighteenth-century paintings, prints, and needlework. In John Raphael Smith’s mezzotint after William Lawrence’s picture completed in 1780 (fig. 1), Palemon gazes longingly at the spectacular Lavinia with his hands clasped at his heart. Lavinia does not return his look, but casts down her eyes and turns her head aside, demonstrating her modesty and humility while exhibiting for Palemon the elegant turn of her neck. Likewise, in Henry Singleton’s ca. 1792 oil painting of the same scene (fig. 2), Palemon faces Lavinia with an imploring look and his right hand resting over his heart. He gently clasps her right hand with his left as she demurely turns away. The importance of vision in Thomson’s tale makes the allegory an especially apt meta-criticism of sentimental visual art: in these artistic works, Palemon metaphorically represents the observer, who stares affectedly and longingly at the “picture” of beauty and virtue before him. It is through sight that Palemon and the observer love.

Interestingly, Emma attempts to replicate this dynamic of gaze and object in her performance of painting Harriet. Harriet presents “a very sweet mixture of youthful expression” and Elton’s station behind Emma affords him the opportunity to “gaze and gaze again,” on the object before him. Like the artists of Lavinia and Palemon, Emma pictures Harriet in the romantic outdoors and near, as Elton puts it, a “tree . . . touched with such inimitable spirit!” (47). At first, it appears that the water-color painting has successfully magnified Elton’s affection and admiration for Harriet. Elton seems to praise Harriet by denying that Emma has deliberately enhanced her friend’s beauty in the image. He proclaims, “It appears to me a most perfect resemblance in every feature” and, too moved to complete his own sentences, gushes: “The naïveté of Miss Smith’s manners—and

Figure 1: John Raphael Smith, mezzotint engraving, 1780. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.
altogether—Oh, it is most admirable! I cannot keep my eyes from it” (47). Later, when Elton’s true motivations come to light, Austen exposes his hollow flattery masquerading as aesthetic appreciation and love. In *Emma*, sentimental art becomes the touchstone not of elevated passions but rather of opportunistic eulogium worthy of Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The unsentimental effect of Harriet’s portrait revises the romantic interest enabled by paintings in *Pride and Prejudice*. The portrait of Mr. Darcy in
the Pemberley picture gallery “arrests” Elizabeth Bennet “as she [beholds] a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her” (PP, 181). This instance of contemplation before Darcy’s likeness marks a turning point in her affection for him; the narrator interrupts, “There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth’s mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance” (PP, 181). Harriet’s image provides no similar change of heart in Mr. Elton.

Beyond these specific instances, the mystery driving Emma’s plot as a whole further mitigates potential pathos. Lacking knowledge of Frank and Jane’s secret engagement, the reader cannot make sense of Jane’s blushes, tears, and looks of embarrassment at best, and at worst, fallaciously attributes them to an improper liaison with Mr. Dixon. Rather than feeling alongside Jane as we do in pathetic tales like that of Lavinia and Palemon, Austen temporally disconnects the reader’s compassion; only upon final revelation of the engagement, in the calm of reflection can the reader comprehend the true force of Jane’s distress before the toy alphabets of Emma’s nephews or on Box Hill. Even Emma’s latent feelings for Mr. Knightley remain unknown to the heroine (and the reader) for much of the novel. Austen, however, does not eradicate pathos from Emma. Instead, the pathetic response of the reader increases in rereading the tale as he or she recognizes the hidden drivers of the characters’ emotions. Furthermore, Austen displaces emotional intensity from the typical passionate moments of the romance genre, such as a proposal or celebration of parental consent, to the most subtle and seemingly insignificant ones. Virginia Woolf notes this incongruity of structural and emotional climaxes in Austen’s novel: “There comes a moment—‘I will dance with you,’ says Emma—which rises higher than the rest, which though not eloquent in itself, or violent or made striking by beauty of language, has the whole weight of the book behind it.” Austen tempers sentimental response, granting it only when and where appropriate, and shapes the reader’s character as she develops the narrative.

Not only does Austen withhold key information needed for a sentimental response in media res, she also enables emotionally poignant moments through the repeated performance of reading: second-time readers cannot

quickly pass over silent sufferings such as Jane's anguish in the alphabets scene.\textsuperscript{63} Even the most climactic event of the novel, Emma's slight of Miss Bates on Box Hill, attains its full emotional force not at the instance, but several pages later as Emma revisits her behavior and reflects upon it. Thus in \textit{Emma}, passion is permitted, but as part of a repetitive and reflective process.\textsuperscript{64} In its characters and readers then, \textit{Emma} develops ethos in the sense of "character" formed by habits or repeated actions.

The seasonal timeframe of the narrative also emphasizes the repetition that enables character development. Indeed, the sign of Emma's maturity comes not upon her engagement, but at the moment when her future hopes of marriage have been dashed. Situating a contemplative Emma alone and trapped indoors by a rainstorm, the narrator tells us, "the only source whence any thing like consolation or composure could be drawn, was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone" (396). Here, Emma realizes that one builds moral character not in the progressive trials of courtship but in weathering the \textit{cyclical}—or rather, seasonal—ups and downs of life. This message reaches the reader who, like Emma in this moment, fears she cannot be a romantic heroine but may settle for becoming a didactic one.

\textbf{4. Speech Acts: Highburian Ethos as Rhetorical Effect}

While I have been eliding the spoken and written word in my discussion of ethos, elocution informs the canny didacticism of \textit{Emma}. The novel encourages the reader to speak words aloud in \textit{Emma}'s homophonic riddles such as "woe-man" and "court-ship." These instances demand that the reader not only scan the text visually but "hear" each syllable in order to

\textsuperscript{63} Several critics have commented upon the poignancy of rereading \textit{Emma}. Galperin views only the first read of \textit{Emma} as a pedagogical exercise, explaining, "where an initial reading of \textit{Emma} may likely be reading for plot and aligned thereby with the pedagogical trajectory that tracks and celebrates Emma's development under Knightley's tutelage, a rereading of \textit{Emma}, in which the reader will resemble Miss Bates in actually 'seeing' what is before her, is likely to recall readers to all that has been lost in a development where the prerogative of trying to make a difference must be relinquished" (Historical Austen, 12). By way of contrast, I argue that subsequent readings are integral to \textit{Emma}'s didacticism and the inculcation of ethos through repetition. See also Tita Chico, "The Intimacy of Re-Reading Emma," \textit{Persuasions: Journal of the Jane Austen Society of North America} 25 (2003): 205-12 and Sarah Raff, "Blame Austen, Janeites, \textit{Emma}, and the Betrayal of Fanny Knight," \textit{Eighteenth-Century Novel}, vol. 8, eds. Albert J. Rivero and George Justice (NY: AMS Press, 2011), 271-318.

\textsuperscript{64} Galperin notes the importance of nostalgia in Austen's narratives, focusing on the role of the character of the narrator as a "reflexive apparatus" (Historical Austen, 11).
comprehend the solution. Similarly, during the episode on Box Hill, the reader must speak Mr. Weston’s two letters that “spell perfection” (“M” and “A”) to catch the reference to Emma. Though playful, these riddles provide a key to the novel’s affective stylistics, in Stanley Fish’s terms: how the language of a text unfolds as the reader skims the page contributes to the critical determination of the text’s meaning. In *Emma*, word games and riddles, solvable only through enunciated speech, metaphorically implicate the reader’s performance as essential to the novel’s design. As in more didactic works, Austen’s reader is implicitly present before the text.

Although Austen presents much of the novel from Emma’s point of view, the range of the reader’s didactic experience in *Emma* goes beyond the pupil/teacher metaphor embodied in the relationship of Emma and Mr. Knightley and based on “the Platonic idea that the giving and receiving of knowledge . . . is the truest and strongest foundation of love.” While critics have noted how the reader shares in Emma’s blunders, to the extent that the process of reading *Emma* is about assimilating to the ethos of Highbury, the reader’s plight, it would seem, is thematized in the figure of Harriet. Interestingly, in the pivotal episode with the alphabet blocks of Emma’s nephews, the reader unexpectedly assumes Harriet’s perspective. This scene is significant not only because it offers the reader the first substantial clues that suggest a liaison between Frank and Jane, but also because it dramatizes the affective relationship between author and reader with graphic signs that resemble movable type:

Frank Churchill placed a word before Miss Fairfax. She gave a slight glance round the table, and applied herself to it. Frank was next to Emma, Jane opposite to them—and Mr. Knightley so placed as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation. The word was discovered, and with a faint smile pushed away. If meant to be immediately mixed with the others, and buried from sight, she should have looked on the table instead of looking just across, for it was not mixed; and Harriet, eager after every fresh word, and finding out none, directly took it up, and fell to work. She was sitting by Mr. Knightley, and turned to him for help. The word was *blunder*; and as Harriet exultingly proclaimed it, there was a blush on Jane’s cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible. (326)

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65. Simpson, BCS, 244.
From the moment Frank places the letters before Jane, the reader strains to
discover the special word. Much happens—six sentences worth of action—
between Frank setting down the word and our discerning it. The reader’s
anticipation builds as we read the characters’ reactions to the mystery word;
Jane glances and smiles faintly while Harriet works eagerly at it with little
success. The curious reader’s interest remains piqued by the continued nar-
rative of the traveling word. One wonders: why would the word cause a
faint smile? Why should it be “buried from sight”? Why would Frank pass
Jane such a word as to create such a reaction in her and why would the
narrator spend so much narrative time following the movement and effects
of the word? What will happen to the word if it is not mixed?

The reader’s interest in such a trifling game echoes Harriet’s childish en-
thusiasm: just as the short, simple sentences of the paragraph hasten the
reader along toward the final revelation, Harriet appears “eager after every
fresh word.” The longed-for moment arrives like the juvenile practice of
calling “jinx” when two people speak the same word aloud at the same
time; the reader unknowingly reads the word “blunder” in accord with
Harriet’s articulation of it. The typography indicates emphasis without ex-
plicitly designating the word as dialogue, but a line later we discover that it
was, in fact, Harriet’s speech. The semicolon after blunder forces a pause in
the narration, perhaps a pause for reflection and enjoyment at the discovery
of the word. Following the semicolon, we learn that Harriet has “exul-
tingly proclaimed” the word at the exact moment of discovery when the
reader has proclaimed it as well. In this episode, through the style of
the paragraph and typography, Austen aligns the “experience” of reading
Emma with Harriet’s experience.

Here, Austen has positioned the reader in a highly suggestive way. John
Preston argues that in the eighteenth century, novelists like Samuel Rich-
ardson placed their readers in a perspective relative to the other characters
in the text. In the case of Richardson, this is achieved in part through the
epistolary form of the novel and through the tragic plot of Clarissa (1748),
which demands a witness as part of its hermeneutic fulfillment. He ex-
plains, “We realize that we are not the only readers of these narratives, that
the act of reading is assumed to lie within the novel as well, indeed that it is
necessary to the continuance of the novel. The novel is in this sense about
writing and reading.”

Preston compares the reader’s standpoint to that of

67. Coincidentally in the original 1816 edition, “blunder” falls at the end of the line, re-
quiring the eye to hesitate for a jump to the next line before reading the rest of the sentence
and enhancing the punctuated break.

68. My reading of Harriet aligns with Raff’s notion of the “victimized and abjected”
reader in Austen’s Emma in “Blame Austen.”

69. John Preston, The Created Self: The Reader’s Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (Lon-
the characters Belford and Anna Howe, who are “emotionally involved, yet denied entry into the action.”

Austen, like Richardson, wants her readers involved in the text. She makes us question and strain our imaginative faculties to surmise the word in play but insists that we wait for the revelation of the word so that we find out simultaneously with the other characters. But the character she has in mind is meant to surprise the reader; while the reader thinks he or she is assuming Mr. Knightley’s perspective, “so placed as to see them all,” the reader, tricked, finds him or herself in the unflattering shoes of Harriet. Austen’s identification of the reader with Harriet is no passing coincidence: indeed, the reader, like Harriet, undergoes the process of education and acceptance into the ethos of Highbury over the course of the novel. As Emma determines from the outset, “She would notice [Harriet]. She would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and manners” (24).

Our readerly acquaintance with Emma mirrors that of Emma and Harriet’s to the very end. In the final chapter, after Emma has guided us through three volumes of blunders, the “intimacy must sink” as we put down the book and the “friendship must change into a calmer sort of goodwill . . . in the most gradual, natural manner” (451) as Harriet returns to the landscape of Abbey Mill Farm, from whence she came. In keeping with Highburian ethos, marriage is less a climactic culmination of the narrative—indeed, as Austen tells us, Emma’s “wedding was very much like other weddings” (453)—than a reason for closing the book. Emma, Harriet, and Jane’s nuptials mark a shift of their attentions to the domestic duties of wifehood, and likewise, signal to the reader a “gradual, natural” transition back to his or her own ordinary life.

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70. Preston, The Created Self, 59.


