

Play in Emma

English 311

Play Theory

- Play is a noun that denotes various types of material play: children's play and games ↔ parlor games/ board games ↔ sports
- Play is characterized by flexible rules, imagination, spontaneity, freedom, fun, motion, and energy: play is an end in itself.
 - Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955), Roger Cailliois, "The Structure and Classification of Games" (1955), Special Edition of *Yale French Studies* (1968) on play and games
- Games have the characteristics of play but have firm, specific rules, promote competition, and have a specific purpose—to win. Games can be a means to an end, particularly complex, competitive games—sports.
 - Christian Messenger, *Sport and the Spirit of Play in Contemporary American Fiction* (1990)
 - Nancy Morrow, *Dreadful Games: The Play of Desire in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (1988)
 - Kathleen Blake, *Play, Games, and Sport: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll* (1974)
 - Alistair M. Duckworth. "Emma and the Dangers of Individualism." *New Casebooks: Emma*. Ed. David Monaghan. St. Martin's P, 1992.
 - J. M. Q. Davies. "Emma as Charade and the Education of the Reader." *New Casebooks: Emma*. Ed. David Monaghan. St. Martin's P, 1992.

"In an increasingly complex world, the Victorians felt the need to create an existence that was manageable, self-contained, and regulated." Ira Bruce Nadel, "*The Mansion of Bliss, or the Place of Play in Victorian Life and Literature*, (1982), p. 20

- The paradox of games is that their structure and purpose limit (not eliminate) play.
- Games are an artificial construction designed to promote competition, ensure fairness, and reward merit-based performance. In play, the boundaries of play and daily life merge, and the player exists in two simultaneous spheres: play-self and real-self. Although absorbed in play, the player never loses a sense of his/her real-self, which allows for moral and ethical perspective. However, when life itself is a game, this awareness disappears, creating the illusion that life can be ordered and meaningful, and the individual can assert him- or herself over others, over society—win at all costs, a zero-sum game. To claim that life itself is a game—a contest—is an attempt to negate the ambiguity and chaos of society and the unpredictability of human thought and actions.