Life is Really Too Short: Wasting Time with Regency Entertainment

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The Author of "Thoughts On Card-Playing" (1791) believes that, although card games are an enjoyable activity, this popular form of entertainment is nevertheless a “trifling and dangerous” (9) way to “kill time” (5). Refuting the common thinking of cards as causing inappropriate passions and an arrogant temper in all persons, the Author insists that these reactions when playing cards are only apparent in those that already possess these feelings beforehand. The Author claims that players who play at cards for good natured fun cannot be held in the same light as those that play for more deviate purposes. However, if even these well intended players should happen to devote too much of their free time to playing at cards, they are in danger of wasting their life on one single activity. As the Author states, “Life is really too short, and time to valuable, to have so large a proportion of both thus wasted” (11). The character of a card player, as is suggested in "Thoughts On Card-Playing," is more reluctant to interact and participate in conversations and other activities that do not involve cards, unlike a non card player who would be more interested in free conversations and bettering the mind, body and soul. Contrary to the assertions in "Thoughts On Card-Playing," Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) illustrates many examples where the characters spend much of their time enjoying these “trifling and dangerous” amusements. Also, the illustrations of when the characters are playing cards in Pride and Prejudice conflict with the Author’s claims that card-playing interferes with a person’s ability to hold a beneficial conversation. As can be seen within the novel, Austen reveals many important particulars concerning character’s backgrounds and behaviors when the characters are together playing cards. However, when taking a closer look at Austen’s Mr. Hurst and how he reacts when no one desires to play cards with him, it can be seen just how some individuals in the Regency “killed time” when their more favorable amusements were unavailable. When tea was over, Mr. Hurst reminded his sister-in-law of the card table – but in vain. ... She assured him that no one intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the subject seemed to justify her. Mr. Hurst had therefore nothing to do, but to stretch himself on one of the sofas and go to sleep. (ch. 11, my italics) Mr. Hurst, evidently, enjoys only his card and board games and does not normally partake in many beneficial conversations with the other characters. Rather than reading, which he exclaims in “astonishment” (ch 8) at Elizabeth’s favoring reading over cards, or speaking with anyone else Mr. Hurst simply goes to sleep. One could assume that, after reading "Thoughts On Card-Playing," card games were considered activities that, although enjoyable, should be experienced with discretion. A person should spread their time out among many other activities and amusements that benefited and improved the mind and soul. When compared with Pride and Prejudice this belief is secured with the many instances of characters that enjoy several different amusements such as letter writing, reading, and walks through beautiful landscapes. However, the belief is also contradicted with characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Hurst who have nothing better to do then to “stretch...on one of the sofas and go to sleep” (ch. 11) and be “principally occupied in playing with ... bracelets and rings” (ch. 11).