

“ABOVE VULGAR ECONOMY:” JANE AUSTEN AND MONEY

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Introduction: "Above Vulgar Economy"

At the Meryton ball in *Pride and Prejudice*, "Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a-year" (*P&P* 10). In 1813, the first readers of *Pride and Prejudice* knew exactly what that ten thousand a year meant, as Richard Altick maintains in *The Presence of the Present*: "If there was a single store of topical knowledge universally shared by author and reader, it was a practical awareness of what money would buy" (623). According to David Spring, in Jane Austen's novels "persons seem all to have their price" (45), but Austen's modern readers are strangers to the culture that Jane Austen and her contemporaries knew so intimately, and today we can be frustrated by the fact that we do not know quite what to make of her characters' various pounds per annum.

We are likewise confused by Austen's statements about money for which we have no referent. For instance, what does Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* mean when he talks about "the Bank attacked" (*NA* 113)? Why should Robert Watson in *The Watsons* examine his coins, and why is his halfcrown "doubtful" (*MW* 349)? And then there are economic clues in the texts that have no obvious meaning to us, such as the financial significance of Fitzwilliam Darcy's being from Derbyshire in *Pride and Prejudice*, the political economics behind Sir Thomas Bertram's plantation in Antigua in *Mansfield Park*, and the financial implications of *Persuasion's* timing, "the summer of 1814" (*P* 8).

We tend to read over the references we do not understand, and while the novels remain sufficiently intelligible to us, we are missing clues that the author provided, information that Austen thought important enough to include and which her first readers would have appreciated. This discussion is an attempt to clarify some of the economic references that modern readers tend to overlook or misunderstand and, in that process, to reveal Jane Austen's interest in economics and her familiarity with the ideas of the leading economists of her era. Numerous critics have commented on Austen's specificity about money and her characters' annual incomes, but it is also worth noting that Jane Austen was well informed and opinionated about the political economics of her age, and she expressed this in her novels.

To read Austen's novels only in the context of domestic economics, that is in terms of what kind of a lifestyle Fitzwilliam Darcy could afford on his income, we are not only missing *Pride and Prejudice's* more important economic point, but we are also perhaps unintentionally diminishing Jane Austen's achievement as a novelist. To limit the scope of Austen's novels to a counting of the pounds, shillings and pence in the characters' purses leads to a misreading of the novels and a subsequent harsh and unfair judgment of the books' author, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson's dismissal of Austen's novels as stories concerned only with "marriageableness": "All that interests in any character introduced is still this one, Has he or [she] the money to marry with" (qtd. in Southam *Critical Heritage Vol 1*, 28). D. H. Lawrence drew a similar conclusion when he depicted the author as "the mean Jane Austen," no more than a "thoroughly unpleasant," penny-pinching "old maid" (qtd. Southam *Critical Heritage Vol. 2*, 107).

Even Jane Austen's Victorian and Edwardian admirers had the tendency to underestimate her. Edward Fitzgerald damned Austen with faint praise: "She is capital as far as she goes: but she never goes out of the Parlour" (qtd. in Southam *Critical Heritage Vol. 2*, 300). Henry James pictured Jane Austen as a day-dreamer and a homebody whose novels took shape as she sat knitting by the hearth, when she "fell amusing... into wool-gathering, and her dropped stitches" (qtd in Southam *Critical Heritage Vol 2*, 231). No doubt, the male authors who found Austen's novels so limited were influenced by their own culture's attitudes towards female novelists and women in general, as it is impossible to imagine the same critics passing similar judgments on Henry Fielding or Charles Dickens or Anthony Trollope because their novels ended with prosperous marriages. But the Victorians and Edwardians were also sufficiently distanced from Georgian England so that they did not read Austen's texts with the same economic assumptions as her contemporaries. To consider Austen's novels in context with the Georgian economy and to the political economics of the time is to read them as Austen's first readers did and to find in them much larger economic themes than the characters' incomes. Indeed, Austen's novels are not isolated and sterile little love stories, as many readers and scholars assume, but are actively engaged with Georgian economic and political realities.

To consider Austen's texts as products of the Georgian economy is to read them as state-of-the-nation novels and as a series of books that progress and alter in response to the deterioration of the British economy. By limiting the main characters' income, *Sense and Sensibility* breaks new ground for the novel, as Austen's first readers noted. *Sense and Sensibility* also marks Austen's first tentative foray into the

public arena of political economics. As a state-of-the-nation novel, *Pride and Prejudice* opposes the assumptions of the most popular political economists of the 1790s, and *Northanger Abbey* continues to engage with political economics by taking a side in the controversial Restriction Act, Prime Minister William Pitt's political maneuver to protect the Bank of England from collapse. The fragment *The Watsons* is the beginning of a novel apparently abandoned because the characters were too poor to fulfill their destinies in the plot. *Mansfield Park* shifts the financial focus from the economists to politicians and broadens the economic scope from the nation to the British Empire. In *Emma*, the emphasis changes yet again from the macroeconomics of the empire to the microeconomics of an English village and offers an economic ideal in the model community of Highbury. Austen's last completed novel, *Persuasion* was written during the economic depression following the Battle of Waterloo, but the novel is set just before the Battle of Waterloo and the subsequent financial collapse. Thus, *Persuasion's* characters and their financial problems function as a comment on the causes of the Regency's own Great Depression.

Austen's final attempt to write a novel resulted in the fragment *Sanditon*, clearly a text about economics and one that reveals, as Oliver MacDonagh has observed, economic insight far ahead of its time. How Austen might have developed *Sanditon* is open to speculation, but the domestic economics of the novel's heroine, Charlotte Heywood, is not even a consideration in the surviving manuscript, suggesting that Austen's novels were always, from their inceptions, about more than the individual characters' poverty or wealth. Nevertheless, Jane Austen's modern readers often succumb to the same limited thinking as Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, unable to

imagine any more than Mr. Darcy's £10,000 and the "pin-money... jewels... carriages" such an income would provide (*P&P* 378).

In *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Mary Poovey notes "the single most frequently asked question about money in this period: How can we translate nineteenth-century money amounts into modern equivalents?" (7). As Poovey acknowledges, the answer is that we cannot, but that fact has not deterred people from trying. After nearly two hundred years, the exchange rate between a British pound and an American dollar has experienced innumerable changes due to inflation and deflation, recession and depression, gold standard, silver standard, economic booms and financial busts, national debts and budget surpluses, war and peace, creating constantly fluctuating exchange rates. As if the question were not already vexed enough, in the 1960s, the British monetary system went decimal. This helps to explain why numerous economic multipliers have been offered as conversion rates from Regency pounds to modern pounds, or dollars, but none are particularly reliable.

As Daniel Pool notes in *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, estimates in the 1990s "put the pound's worth in the neighborhood of \$20, \$50 or \$200" (21). In *Jane Austen: The World of her Novels*, Austen scholar Deirdre Le Faye offers the most frequently cited conversion rate, in British pounds: "a rough guide would be to multiply by fifty" (129), but in *Jane Austen: Obstinate Heart*, Valerie Grosvenor Myer claims that a Regency pound would be worth two hundred pounds today (30). No one has suggested more economic multipliers than American Austen scholar Edward Copeland, because Copeland has spent more than thirty years at the endeavor.

Copeland's 1972 article, "What's a Competence? Jane Austen, Her Sister Novelists, and the 5%," proposed that one Regency pound was equal to \$20 in U.S. currency (162). Due to modern, American inflation, by 1989 Copeland had recalculated and raised the amount to \$80, but only two years later, in "*Persuasion: The Jane Austen Consumer's Guide*," published in 1991, Copeland was forced to concede that he had underestimated yet again and offered a new figure, \$100 (113). By 1993, a sadder but wiser Copeland admitted in "Economic Realities in Jane Austen's Day" that "the conversion is out of date almost as soon as it is calculated" (33), but then the calculation was always, at best, only an approximation in the first place. Copeland used different economic indicators for his standards of conversion, such as comparing a Regency clergyman's salary to that of a modern, American public school teacher and comparing what the Austens spent for furniture to what comparable furniture costs today, but twenty-first century economists have a somewhat more complex method of comparing monetary systems.

Modern economists compare different economies by assembling "a market basket" of consumer goods, totaling the cost of the basket in each system's money and mathematically fixing a rate of exchange, but the equation is predicated on the notion that both economies use and value the same commodities (Schiller 170-71). For instance, the economists' market basket contains food items, such as a loaf of bread and a pound of beef, but in Georgian England, people ate a lot more bread than we consume today, and some working-class people died of old age without ever having tasted beef because they could not afford it, as the laborers' diets in Frederic Eden's 1797 *The State of the Poor* repeatedly documents. Another common market basket

commodity is an ounce of gold or silver, but Regency England's monetary system was based on gold and silver, their coins literally contained gold or silver, greatly increasing the demand for precious metals (Olsen 246). Our coins are merely tokens of value made from base metals, and the metal in our coins is practically worthless (Ferguson 30). An economist may attempt to equate a box of candles with a modern electric bill, and here the exchange system totally fails. A box of candles and an electric bill both provide light, but the electric bill is radically altered by the presence of a refrigerator, a furnace, an air-conditioner, a stove, a microwave oven, a hot water heater, a washer and dryer, a dishwasher, a television, a stereo, a radio, a vacuum cleaner, cell phones and hairdryers. Jane Austen and her contemporaries had none of those things. What Austen might have accomplished with a computer and printer boggles the mind, but with our modern appliances, lighting our homes represents only a small fraction of the cost of our electric bills, and even when market basket items are similar, another problem is relative value.

A common market basket item is a pair of shoes, but while handmade leather boots were standard footwear for men in the Regency, the cost and make of men's shoes varies enormously today. In comparison to Georgian England, all of our clothes are relatively cheap, made from machine-woven cloth, sewn on machines in factories, in standardized sizes and employing cheap, foreign labor. Jane Austen had the advantage of machine-woven cloth, but it was not yet cheap, only somewhat cheaper. Designs for sewing machines were being patented in Jane Austen's lifetime, but they were still experimental and not available for home use until 1850 (Donklin 135). Someone had to hand stitch every article of clothing (Byrde 103), and most stockings

were still knit by hand (Rutt 98). For instance, when Jane Welsh married Thomas Carlyle in 1826, she hand-stitched her husband's shirts and knit his stockings (Flanders 301). Tailors made the rest of Carlyle's clothing, but saving on the expense by using cheap, foreign labor was not an option. Due to the cost of transportation, imported goods in Georgian England were expensive (Porter 208), while today imports are cheap.

On the other hand, modern housing is relatively expensive. In 1804, a new two-room cottage with a lean-to shop behind could be built for £40 and rented for £3 and 3 shillings per year (Reed 74). When Jane Austen's parents rented the rectory at Deane, they paid £20 a year for rent (Le Faye *Family Record*, 11). A fashionable house in Mayfair could be rented for £200 a year (Murray 79). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Bingley rents a house on Grosvenor Street, but £200 a year represents less than 5% of his income. Obviously, attempting to draw direct correlations between the Georgian pound and the modern pound, or dollar, is a futile endeavor. This is important to recognize because, as Copeland maintains, "Money in Jane Austen's novels has an uncanny way of seeming so much like our own that we run the serious mistake of thinking that it is. Everything in the Austen novels seems to add up at the cash register in the usual way" ("Money" 317), but, of course, it does not.

A useful reference for the modern reader is Copeland's article "Money" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, where Copeland has compiled a sort of field guide to fixed incomes, which describes the various lifestyles people could maintain on incomes from £100 to £4,000 per annum (135-37). Copeland's article is an excellent resource, but the reader must still bear in mind that the Georgian economy was volatile.

Prices, particularly of food, changed from year to year. As Karl Marx notes in *Wage Labour and Capital*, when the cost of food increases and incomes remain the same, consumers suffer the same consequence as a reduction in income: “For the same money they received less bread, meat, etc., in exchange. Their wages had fallen, not because the value of silver had diminished, but because the value of the means of subsistence had increased” (24).

Additionally, the national economy was deteriorating continuously and buying power decreasing throughout Jane Austen’s life. The result was that £500 per annum was a much better income in 1795, when Jane Austen was writing *Elinor and Marianne*, later to be revised as *Sense and Sensibility*, than it was in 1815, when Austen began *Persuasion*. For instance, Jane Austen’s father kept horses and a carriage in the early 1790s but was no longer able to afford the luxury a few years later (Le Faye *Family Record* 112), and someone with a staff of a dozen servants in the late eighteenth-century could well have been reduced to a staff of three or four domestics by the beginning of the nineteenth-century (Horn 11). As Mary Poovey notes in *Genres of the Credit Economy*, it was a situation that caused a great deal of anxiety to Austen’s original reading public (370), and one which continues to frustrate those who try to make sense of the Georgian economy today.

It is far too easy to become distracted in chasing Georgian money round and round the mulberry bush with no hope of ever catching up to it. The pounds per annum remain ever elusive, and the much more common Georgian mediums of exchange, shillings and fractions of pennies, have disappeared, probably forever, from British

currency. Even if it were possible to identify an accurate economic multiplier, what could we do with the knowledge? As Copeland reminds us, no matter how realistically an author may make it appear, “money in novels is always fictional” (34), so how much useful information could we obtain even from the certainty that a Georgian pound was worth X number of pounds, or dollars, today? The best approach seems to be to attempt to clear one’s mind of our modern money, to learn as much about the Georgian economy as possible and to never lose sight of the bigger question: What is the author attempting to tell us by her use of money in the novels?

As W.H. Auden observed in his 1936 poem, *Letter to Lord Byron*, Jane Austen “shocks” in her ability to “[r]eveal so frankly and with such sobriety/The economic basis of society” (qtd. in Southam, *Critical Heritage Vol. 2, 3*), yet surprisingly little has been written on the subject of Jane Austen and money: a handful of articles, a few chapters in books and anthologies, such as Copeland’s “Shopping for Signs: Jane Austen and the pseudo-gentry,” Samuel Macey’s “Austen: Gaining a Sufficient Competence With an Insufficient Dowry” in *Money and the Novel*, and James Thompson’s “Conclusion: Austen and the Novel” in *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel*, but only Poovey has drawn a link between a Jane Austen novel and a specific economic event that occurred at the time the novel was being written.

In “Jane Austen’s Gestural Aesthetic,” a chapter in *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Poovey connects *Pride and Prejudice* to the 1797 Restriction Act. Given that throughout Jane Austen’s adult life, the British economy was a disaster, and that the years of Austen’s

writing career were punctuated by a series of economic crises, including a doubling of consumer prices, an unprecedented national debt, four waves of recession, two banking crises, the debasement of coins, a major economic crash and a depression, it seems amazing that Poovey was the first person to make a connection between Austen's novels and the British economy, and Poovey catches Austen at it early in her career; in fact all of Jane Austen's novels were also reacting to the national economy. Following Poovey's lead in considering *Pride and Prejudice* in relation to the Restriction Act, the following discussion considers the economics and politics of Georgian England and their possible influence on all of Austen's novels, not just *Pride and Prejudice* and not only the Restriction Act. Other controversial bills, such as Poor Law Reform, the national minimum wage proposal, and the Corn Law, appear to have found their way into the novels as well.

In order to consider Austen's texts in light of political economics, it is necessary to examine the historical record of the months and years when the novels were composed and to read the books in order of composition, not in order of subsequent revision or publication. It is certainly worth noting that, due to the Napoleonic Wars, the national debt seemed to be spiraling out of control at precisely the same time Jane Austen was writing her novels. Austen wrote the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1795 and finished *Persuasion* in 1816. As Niall Ferguson notes in *The Ascent of Money*, the British national debt swelled enormously in that timeframe: "Never had so many bonds been issued to finance a military conflict. Between 1793 and 1815 the British national debt increased by a factor of three, to £745 million, more than double the annual output of the UK economy" (81). In addition to such financial details, we must

also consider how the British public was interpreting their economy and take into account the politicians and economists, often the same people, who were influencing the Georgian economy and the public's thinking about money, value and worth.

Adam Smith's 1776 *Wealth of Nations* remains to this day the classic text of political economics, but Smith's 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* also addresses the economy, specifically the ethics of money. Although Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is neglected today, Jane Austen would certainly have been familiar with it. Austen likely also read at least some of the texts of political economists who came to prominence after Smith's death in 1790, as their books on political economics were bestsellers at the time and popular fodder for book clubs and circulating libraries (Oldfield 16). Austen's novels appear to be opposing the ideas expressed by political economists in works such as Thomas Malthus's 1798 *An Essay on the Principal of Population*, Edmund Burke's 1795 *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, Frederic Eden's 1797 *The State of the Poor* and Patrick Colquhoun's 1806 *A Treatise on Indigence*. The fact that Malthus, Burke, Eden and Colquhoun were Whigs while Jane Austen's novels appear to oppose their views, also raises the possibility of explicitly political messages embedded in Austen's fictional economics.

Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* is the seminal work on the subject of Austen and politics, but by no means the last word. Butler has some textual evidence and Austen family lore to support her claim, but Butler's assertion that Jane Austen was a Tory has been questioned. For instance, Edward Neill in *Jane Austen and Politics* claims that Austen sympathized with the Whigs. An even more common

assumption is that Jane Austen was not particularly interested in politics, as Deirdre Le Faye asserts: “the party politics of her day seem to have occupied very little of her attention” (59). However, two of Austen’s poems, “On Sir Home Popham’s Sentence – April 1807” and “On the Weald of Kent Canal Bill,” composed in 1811 as Jane Austen was also writing *Mansfield Park*, suggest that Austen was politically savvy and opinionated if not partisan. The Popham poem rails against “a [political] Ministry pitiful, angry and mean” (*MW* 446), and the Kent Canal poem objects to “the villainous Bill” and politicians, the “Wicked Men” (*MW* 449), who supported it, hardly the sentiments a reader would expect from a politically apathetic author.

An economic strand with debatable merit, and one that has been given more attention than it perhaps deserves, is the financial situations of Jane Austen and her family members, but, for my purposes, I will deal with the Austens’ domestic economics only when their personal experiences reflect larger, national economic trends. Jane Austen’s biographers have, in more or less detail, gone through what financial record remains of the Austen family, and Jane Austen’s personal economic difficulties are well known, especially the ones that occurred after the death of the Reverend George Austen, Jane Austen’s father, when Jane Austen, her mother and sister Cassandra were forced to make do on one third of the income that had maintained them when Mr. Austen was alive (Spence 148). Myer calls attention to the “penny-pinching” economies the Austen women took for granted (85), and David Nokes maintains that “vulgar economy was the order of [Jane Austen’s] existence” (310). According to biographer Claire Tomalin, Jane Austen was perpetually troubled by worries about “Money, money, money, again” (80). No knowledgeable person disputes that Jane Austen had to mind

her shillings and pence, but this fact sheds little light on Austen's use of money in the novels other than to suggest possible correlations between Austen's financial problems and the economic situations of some of her characters, but these links are based entirely on speculation.

Jane Austen's remaining letters are mines of information about the day-to-day domestic economics of gentry women, and the letters occasionally reveal insights into Austen's writing, but, more often than not, the references to money concern the cost of cloth, or postage, or bread, or tea, and, like the juvenilia, Austen's letters often treat money as a joke: "I write only for Fame, and without any view to pecuniary Emolument" (*Letters* 3), "People get so horridly poor & economical in this part of the World, that I have no patience with them. – Kent is the only place for happiness, Everybody is rich there" (*Letters* 28), "I shall eat Ice & drink French wine, & be above Vulgar Economy" (*Letters* 139), and "Money is Dirt" (*Letters* 245). One conclusion the reader may safely draw from Austen's letters is that they are a valuable reminder that an author can be serious or flippant about money when and where she chooses.

Even the interesting and oft-cited parallel between the Dashwoods' income at Barton Cottage and the Austens' income at Chawton Cottage loses its significance when one considers that *Elinor and Marianne* was written while Jane Austen was still living at Steventon, years before her father's death and her move to Chawton. One of Austen's letters reveals that she wanted to change the Dashwoods' income in 1811 after the manuscript of *Sense and Sensibility* was in the proof stage (*Letters* 182). We may make of it what we will, but there is no conclusive evidence to indicate that the

contents of Jane Austen's purse directly affected her fiction, while Britain's political economics certainly did, time and time again.

Another economic factor to consider is that Jane Austen lived and wrote in one of the poorest areas in England. In his 1826 *Rural Rides*, William Cobbett recorded that the poverty he observed in Hampshire, just north of Jane Austen's home in Chawton, was the worst he had encountered: "For, I have, in no part of England, seen the laboring people so badly off as they are here" (439). Jane Austen was well aware of the poverty and of the wealth in rural Hampshire, but she also traveled and observed the rich and the poor in London, in Kent and in other parts of England (Le Faye *Family Record* 365). Of course, Austen was writing for a reading public who was equally enlightened about poverty, politics and the events of the day, so much could be left unsaid because the reader's understanding was assumed. Unfortunately, Austen's modern reader may be privy to only part of the original reader's knowledge base, and where Austen's early nineteenth-century readers could appreciate her novels' insights, Austen's early twenty-first-century readers may fail to even detect them.

Juvenilia: "Too Wise to be Extravagant"

When Jane Austen was born in 1775, the Bank of England was 81 years old, a well established if not yet venerable institution that had been printing and circulating paper money for only 16 years. The British banking system was almost entirely unregulated. The South Sea Bubble stock scandal was 55 years in the past and rapidly disappearing from living memory, but The Bubble lived on in infamy and in the law. The Bubble Act, meant to prevent the repetition of a similar financial debacle, was still in effect. It would be another 24 years before the first income tax was levied and 26 years before the London Stock Exchange opened for business. Adam Smith was writing the definitive text of classical economics, *Wealth of Nations*, which would be published and distributed as Jane Austen slept in her cradle. Economically, it was an exciting and a perilous age, a brave new world of high finance, which the majority of the British public found baffling if not unfathomable.

At the time, people were generally suspicious of a financial system built entirely on trust, but not necessarily trustworthy. More people than ever were living on credit, and it had become difficult, on first acquaintance, to tell who was wealthy and who, like Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*, was only maintaining an impressive front on borrowed money. Someone with a large estate, like Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, knew approximately the market value of his land and chattels, but those with invested money were less certain. How safe was any unregulated bank or business? How secure was invested capital? How rich or generous were the parents negotiating a

marriage settlement? What would the Morlands' in *Northanger Abbey* be able to give their daughter, Catherine, and how much would General Tilney settle on his son, Henry?

A man could inherit an estate, but one encumbered by debt, like Colonel Brandon's Delaford in *Sense and Sensibility*. A woman, like Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, could reasonably expect a dowry, but if her father had financial difficulties, as Sir Walter Elliot does, she might never get it. An heir apparent, such as *Sense and Sensibility*'s Edward Ferrars, could be disinherited, and someone else could unexpectedly inherit a fortune, like Edward's brother Robert. Men and women could marry "up" and enjoy their wealthy spouses' money, as Elizabeth Bennet does in *Pride and Prejudice*, or they could marry imprudently and suffer the financial consequences, like Mrs. Price in *Mansfield Park*. Also worrying was the fact that, while the rich were getting richer, the poor were obviously growing poorer. Everyone knew that laborers were struggling to keep themselves fed, but what was less obvious was the fact that the poorest members of the gentry, like Mrs. and Miss Bates in *Emma*, were quietly adopting penny-pinching economies as they continually descended into a more humble, working-class lifestyle.

Jane Austen wrote her original version of *Sense and Sensibility*, an epistolary novel titled *Elinor and Marianne*, in 1795, and Mrs. Dashwoods' financial problems reflect those of Georgian England at the time, as the vast majority of people were learning to live on less. Between 1750 and 1794, the price of consumer goods increased by 50% to 100% (Burnett 137), although wages did not rise in proportion to the cost of living, only increasing about 25% (Hammond & Hammond 111). As Charlotte Smith wrote in a letter dated 20 January 1794, it seemed that "Everything

daily increases [sic] in price in England” (qtd. in Copeland, *Women* 15). In 1800, Dorothy Wordsworth recorded the opinion of a neighbor in her Grasmere journal: “he talked much about the alteration in the times, & observed that in a short time there would be only two ranks of people, the very rich & the very poor” (3). No doubt, it was a common feeling among the less prosperous gentry. The front page of *The Hampshire Chronicle* reported the latest winnings in the national lottery, but a much longer column on the inside announced the names of the week’s bankrupts.

Yet, in Jane Austen’s youth, most Britons still trusted their financial system, a confidence that would seem naïve by the time *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were posthumously published. In the early 1790s, the people’s faith had yet to be shaken by a series of financial blows that would cause them to question Adam Smith’s assurances in *Wealth of Nations* that the rational and invisible hand of the marketplace would prevail. Consumer prices fluctuated from year to year depending on good or bad harvests, so, in a bad year, people consoled themselves with the probability that food would be cheaper next year. Wars played havoc with the national economy, but people assumed that eventually hostilities would end and that peace would bring prosperity. An even more reassuring thought was that a pound coin was literally worth its weight in gold, and a shilling and a penny were worth their weights in silver. For John Bull in the waning years of the eighteenth-century, the weight of his farmer’s purse full of coins was tremendously comforting. People with lighter purses, like the Austen family, worried more and hoped for the best. In this spirit of cautious optimism, Jane Austen began writing about money.

The juvenilia, a three volume collection of plays, short stories, and fragments, were written when Jane Austen was twelve to seventeen years old. With silly characters, humorous dialogue and madcap plots, Austen's *Minor Works* read like a series of comic skits, but there is definitely method in the madness, as the juvenilia repeatedly mocks the unrealistic economics of eighteenth-century novels, demonstrating the young author's precocious understanding of money's usefulness in fiction as well as money's role in society. Whether rich or poor, the characters' unrealistic attitude, routinely scorning money and vowing "to exist on Love" (*MW* 83-84), is a recurring theme, a spoofing of the protagonists of eighteenth-century fiction, like Cecilia Beverley in Fanny Burney's 1782 novel *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* who blithely renounces her inheritance and perversely impoverishes herself in order to marry the man she loves: "Money, to her, had long appeared worthless and valueless" (796). The on-running joke of Jane Austen's juvenilia is the characters' similar foolishness about money.

Of course, a novelist is not compelled to write about money, nor to treat money realistically if she chooses to write about it. Austen demonstrates that she could tell a tale without referring to money at all, as she does in *The Visit: A Comedy in 2 Acts*, *The Mystery* and *Amelia Webster*. Fictional economies function in whatever way the author chooses to make them work, and a character's poverty is not necessarily an impediment to the story. In *The beautiful Cassandra*, the protagonist is penniless, "No money could she find" (*MW* 46), yet Cassandra nonetheless sallies forth into the world to enjoy a series of adventures, mostly stealing whatever she wants. As the author is at liberty to supply them or to deprive them, characters can maintain any manner of

lifestyle on any income assigned. Even with no visible means of support, characters may nonetheless possess expensive carriages, wardrobes and jewelry, and travel, like Wilhelminus in Austen's *A Tale*, with an entourage of family, friends and "a large number of Attendants" in their wake (MW 178).

Another fictional possibility is to endow all of the characters with wealth, making money a non-issue, and Austen chooses this option in *Edgar and Emma*, where Mr. Willmot "possessed besides his paternal Estate, a considerable share in a Lead mine & a ticket in the Lottery" (MW 31). Given that *Edgar and Emma* is an eighteenth-century work of fiction, Mr. Willmot could inherit more land, his mine could strike gold or his lottery ticket could turn out to be a winner whenever the plot required it. Rich protagonists also appear in *Memoirs of Mr. Clifford*, *Sir William Mountague*, *A Letter from a Young Lady, whose feelings being too Strong for her Judgement led her into the commission of Errors which her Heart disapproved*, and *Lady Susan*, the last work of Austen's juvenilia, composed just before *Elinor and Marianne*, around 1793-94 (MW 243).

Still happily spending the fortune she plundered from her deceased husband's estate, Lady Susan proudly proclaims her financial independence: "I am not at present in want of money" (MW 257), and, with more than one wealthy suitor waiting in the wings, she is in no hurry to marry again. Lady Susan seems to have spoken for Jane Austen herself when she proclaims that "Riches only, will not satisfy me" (MW 245), as Austen abandoned *Lady Susan* when it was almost finished, never again wrote a story

where all of the characters were rich and would not create another wealthy female protagonist until Emma Woodhouse, 21 years later.

More typical of the juvenilia is Austen's *Henry and Eliza*. Henry and Eliza Cecil "had lived since their Marriage at the rate of 18,000 £ a year, of which Mr. Cecil's estate being rather less than the twentieth part, they had been able to save but a trifle, having lived to the utmost extent of their Income" (MW 36). Only a fictional character could have such a generous line of credit. Although numerous characters in Austen's juvenilia are poor or bankrupt, another character with a well-endowed bank account is bound to save them from themselves, whether they merit rescue or not, as Eliza's fate demonstrates.

Eliza Cecil finds herself an impoverished and homeless widow with starving children, but she is rescued by Lady Harcourt who suddenly remembers giving birth to Eliza, leaving the baby in a haystack, meaning to return for her, but then absentmindedly forgetting that she had given birth at all. As ridiculous as Lady Harcourt's behavior undoubtedly is, the nonsense at Eliza Cecil's birth is only marginally more unbelievable than the confusion at the birth of the protagonist in Henry Fielding's 1749 *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* or Fanny Burney's 1778 *Evelina* where babies are swapped in their cradles. Once the infant mix-ups are explained and their true identities revealed, Eliza Cecil, Tom Jones and Evelina Anville become wealthy heirs, and their stories rapidly conclude. The protagonist's path to happiness is swept clean of any remaining obstacles by the acquisition of sudden wealth, which neatly ties up all of the loose threads of a picaresque plot.

In Austen's *Lesley Castle*, Louisa Burton, "a girl without a shilling" (MW 117), is elevated from a life of "extreme poverty" by "a distant Relation" who just happens to be conveniently wealthy: "Louisa was therefore removed from a miserable Cottage in Yorkshire to an elegant Mansion in Cumberland, and from every pecuniary Distress that Poverty could inflict, to every elegant Enjoyment that Money could purchase." As *Lesley Castle* suggests, experiencing both economic extremes was the common lot of many eighteenth-century fictional characters. As the mature Jane Austen noted in her 1816 *Plan of a Novel*, a heroine was routinely expected to be "reduced to support herself & her Father by her Talents & work for her Bread; - continually cheated & defrauded of her hire, worn down to a Skeleton, & now & then starved to death" throughout three volumes (MW 430). Even so, the heroine's poverty need not keep her from enjoying "the most elegant Society & living in high style."

One of Austen's earliest surviving stories, *Jack and Alice*, focuses on rags-to-riches marriages, not unlike maidservant Pamela Andrews's marriage to the wealthy Mr. B in Samuel Richardson's 1740 bestseller, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. Although admittedly "more accomplished than any other Taylor's Daughter in Wales" (MW 20), *Jack and Alice*'s working-class Lucy is given her choice of two lucrative options. Lucy is first made "an offer of marriage" by "the Duke of -, an elderly Man of noble fortune" and promisingly "ill health" (MW 26). Lucy's friend Lady Williams, "a widow with a handsome Jointure & the remains of a very handsome face" (MW 13), makes Lucy a counteroffer, inviting Lucy to move into her house, in spite of Lady Williams' conviction that living with the extravagant Lucy will bankrupt her: "It will to be sure be a great expence [sic] to me, to have you always with me – I shall not be able to support it..."

‘twill ruin me I know” (MW 28). At the conclusion of *Jack and Alice*, Lady Williams throws caution to the wind and impulsively marries her neighbor’s cook, but Lady Williams is not the only character in the juvenilia eager to impoverish herself.

The humor of *The Generous Curate: a moral Tale, setting forth the Advantages of being Generous and a Curate* lies in the impractical clergyman’s insistence on adopting the son of a man with four times the curate’s income and in spite of the fact that the curate already has a large family of his own to support on his meager salary. *Evelyn* is another Austen tale of generosity to a fault, but in contrast to the poor curate, the selfless Webbs are wealthy, at least when their story begins. In spontaneous outbursts of feeling, Mr. and Mrs. Webb are delighted to give all of their money, their house, their land, their daughter and her dowry to the fortunate Mr. Gower, a perfect stranger. *The Generous Curate* and *Evelyn* are obviously parodies of sentimental novels, like Laurence Sterne’s 1768 *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, where protagonists meet more or less interesting minor characters, listen to their various tales of woe, and when the main characters are sufficiently moved, usually to tears, by what they have heard, the protagonists give money to the objects of their pity, which presumably sets everything right for the minor characters. Drying their tears, the protagonists move on to their next emotional and financial encounter. Obviously, the sentimental novel requires an extremely wealthy protagonist who can afford to indulge in such an expensive lifestyle. *Love and Freindship* is yet another spoof of the sentimental novel, but the protagonists in *Love and Freindship* are given an unexpected financial twist.

Endowed with the hypersensitivity and impracticality of the typical sentimental protagonist, the main characters in *Love and Freindship* have no money, which greatly complicates their very complicated lives. Impoverished by a combination of their own perversity and fecklessness, the four main characters repeatedly congratulate themselves on their superior sensibilities and refuse to be limited in any way by their lack of financial resources. Augusta questions the wisdom of her insolvent brother's marriage to the equally penniless Laura, but instead of acknowledging the obvious, Edward is appalled by his sister's practicality: "Can you not conceive the Luxury of living in every Distress that Poverty can inflict, with the object of your tenderest Affection?" (MW 84). When their relatives fail to literally throw £50 banknotes at them, as their Grandfather does, the characters resort to thievery in order to finance their whims, something the sentimental novels' very wealthy protagonists are never tempted to do, but Austen's characters steal with *éclat*, of course.

Augustus funds his marriage to Sophia with "a considerable sum of Money which Augustus had gracefully purloined from his Unworthy father's Escritoire" (MW 88). As a guest in her cousin's house, Sophia helps herself to the money in his desk, until she is finally caught in the act of "majestically removing the 5th Bank-note from the Drawer to her own purse" (MW 96). Laura and Philander first steal and then waste their mothers' savings in a spending spree: "As soon as we had thus happily disencumbered ourselves from the weight of so much Money, we began to think of returning to our Mothers, but accidentally hearing that they were both starved to death, we gave over the design" (MW 107). Austen biographer Park Honan claims that the characters' romanticism and selfishness has a political message: "*Love and Freindship* is a fine,

politically reactionary spoof" (74), and certainly the juvenilia is not "all whim & Nonsense" (MW 210).

In *The Three Sisters*, a marriage is in the making, and, unusual in the juvenilia, the incomes and marriage settlements are very realistic. It is the characters who are impractical here, not the financial details. The widow Mrs. Stanhope and her three daughters have an income of £500 a year, just like Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters in *Sense and Sensibility*. The odious, miserly but well-to-do Mr. Watts proposes marriage to the eldest daughter, silly Mary Stanhope, although Watts declares before the assembled Stanhope family that he will happily settle for either of her younger sisters if Mary declines his offer.

Considering the financial eligibility of the match, Mrs. Stanhope encourages her daughter to accept Mr. Watts, in spite of Mary's frequently proclaimed contempt for him. Meanwhile, the youngest sister, Georgiana, claims that she is above the rest of her family and their mundane concern with Watts's income:

I never would marry Mr. Watts were Beggary the only alternative. So deficient in every respect! Hideous in his person and without one good Quality to make amends for it. His fortune to be sure is good. Yet not so very large! Three thousand a year. What is three thousand a year? It is but six times as much as my Mother's income. It will not tempt me.

(MW 62)

And yet the lady doth protest too much, as Georgiana is positively seething with jealousy at Mary's marriage settlement, which guarantees the new Mrs. Watts a chaise, a saddle horse, a maid, £200 a year in pin money, or £175 if Mr. Watts has his way, and the Watts' family jewels.

The Three Sisters foreshadows the economic realism that Austen recreates in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, with heroines whose modest incomes place them at the bottom of the gentry and precariously positioned to rise or to fall depending on their marriage prospects. In Austen's first two published novels, the foolishness of the Stanhopes and Mr. Watts will be confined to minor characters, Nancy Steele and Robert Ferrars, Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins. While Austen recreated the economic realism of *The Three Sisters* in her novels, she also chose to comment on the political economics of the day, as she does in *The History of England*, *Catharine: or the Bower*, *A Collection of Letters* and *A Fragment*.

In Austen's spoof of non-fiction, *The History of England*, "By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian" (MW 138), the narrative voice alludes to the author's ability to write her own political agenda into history, "to vent my spleen *against*, & shew my Hatred to all those people whose parties or principles do not suit with mine" (MW 140). How much easier then to achieve the same goal in fiction where the author has no inconvenient facts to contend with and no reality to restrict the plot and dialogue? Austen demonstrates in the other texts of her juvenilia.

National politics and political economics play a prominent role in *Catharine: or the Bower*, dated August 1792. The protagonist, Catharine or Kitty, lives with her aunt and

guardian, Mrs. Percival, a radical Whig, who maintains that “the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it’s [sic] individuals” (*MW* 232), a common Whig refrain at the time. Mrs. Percival’s the-sky-is-falling scenario is similar to the predictions of radical Whigs, like Jeremy Betham, Frederic Eden and Patrick Colquhoun, who blamed the immorality of the poor for Britain’s impending economic collapse (*Wilson Making of* 91-92). To Mrs. Percival, the personal is definitely political, and she is appalled to think that her niece “who offends in so gross a manner against decorum & propriety is certainly hastening [the Nation’s] ruin.”

Just to stir things up a bit, Mrs. Percival’s houseguest, Mr. Stanley, is “a Member of the house of Commons” and a conservative Tory (*MW* 197). Throughout Jane Austen’s lifetime, the Tory party was increasingly factionalizing into two opposing groups, “Reactionary” and “Liberal” Tories (Lee 28), the reactionary majority advocating political repression and the liberal minority calling for political reform. The liberal branch of the Tory party would eventually prevail in 1822, but not before Jane Austen’s death in 1817 and not until after the nation was collectively appalled by the 1819 Peterloo Massacre. Until 1822, the Liberal Tories were outnumbered by the Whigs, by Reactionary members of their own party and by the collective opposition of both Reactionaries and Whigs. In *Catharine: or the Bower*, MP Stanley is a Reactionary Tory, which, in Mrs. Percival’s house, is bound to cause trouble.

Whenever Mrs. Percival and Mr. Stanley are together, they represent the two opposing, extremist viewpoints of Parliament, and they are unable to refrain from beginning “their usual conversation on Politics,” specifically political economics:

This was a subject on which they could never agree, for Mr. Stanley who considered himself as perfectly qualified by his Seat in the House, to decide on it without hesitation, resolutely maintained that the Kingdom had not for ages been in so flourishing & prosperous a state, and Mrs. Percival with equal warmth, tho' perhaps less argument, as vehemently asserted that the whole Nation would speedily be ruined, and everything as she expressed herself be at sixes & sevens. (MW 212)

While Mrs. Percival provides no evidence, other than moral laxity, to justify her prediction of the imminent collapse of the nation's economy, Mr. Stanley dismisses Britain's real and pressing problems, such as deficit spending for the war, the unprecedented national debt, high unemployment and widespread poverty. As everyone was well aware, the flood of British immigrants to America suggested that all was not well at home. In defending their own extreme political persuasions, both Mrs. Percival and Mr. Stanley exaggerate the economic state of the nation until they become ridiculous.

The character of Catharine or Kitty functions as the voice of reason in her thoughts and dialogue, a harbinger of intelligent and prudent characters to come, such as *Sense and Sensibility's* Elinor Dashwood and *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth Bennet. Listening to Mrs. Percival's and Mr. Stanley's arguments without becoming involved in their irrational quarrel, Kitty's calm, non-partisan attitude invites the reader to assume a similarly moderate point of view, that of the Liberal, though ineffectual, Tory:

It was not however unamusing to Kitty to listen to the Dispute... without taking any share in it herself, she found it very entertaining to observe the eagerness with which they both defended their opinions, and could not help thinking that Mr. Stanley would not feel more disappointed if her Aunt's expectations were fulfilled, than her Aunt would be mortified by their failure.

The message here is plain: Political extremists lose sight of what is really at stake, the financial welfare of the nation, and descend into an endless series of disputes based on their own gross exaggerations. Mrs. Percival and Mr. Stanley MP, thus, reenact a contentious session of Parliament. When Mr. Stanley refuses to acknowledge that problems exist, he suggests that nothing needs to be done. By insisting that the nation is doomed, Mrs. Percival implies that it is futile to attempt any intervention. Thus, both extreme positions result in political inaction, regardless of party affiliation.

According to Jane Austen's nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, in his biography of his aunt, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, the author "probably shared the feeling of moderate Toryism which prevailed in her family" (71), although James Edward is admittedly speculating. In *My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir*, niece Caroline Austen is equally uncertain, as the Austen family rarely commented on politics: "The general politics Tory – rather taken for granted I suppose, than discussed, as even my Uncles seldom talked about it" (173). Remaining silent about their political opinions was no doubt prudent of the Austens.

Jane Austen's father, the Reverend George Austen, was dependent on patronage for his clerical livings, as was Jane Austen's eldest brother James, and clergymen had to remain in the good graces of their patrons, whether they were landowning Tories or aristocratic Whigs. The Austens' patrons were Tories, and, presumably, the patrons expected their clergymen to support whichever candidates they favored in elections. Gary Kelly notes that because there was no separation of church and state, one's religion usually dictated his political affiliation: "For Jane Austen and the majority of her contemporaries, religion and politics were inextricably intertwined" (149). The Church of England has been referred to as the Tory party at prayer, and Evangelicals, dissenters and non-conformists were generally Whigs.

But the Whigs championed the anti-slavery movement, and the Austen family supported the abolition of slavery; Jane Austen's brother Francis was particularly appalled by the slave trade (Honan 3). Brother Edward Austen Knight was, thanks to his adoption by wealthy relatives, a landowner and presumably a Tory, but although Edward was a magistrate and a High Sheriff, he refused to run for Parliament due to what Park Honan describes as "his horror of politics" (329). Hampshire, Austen's home county, was staunchly Tory. First elected in 1790, William Chute was a Tory MP for Hampshire for thirty years (Collins 115), but Jane Austen personally disliked him and was suspicious of his motives (*Letters* 4).

Austen's cousin Edward Cooper was an Evangelical clergyman and therefore presumably a Whig. Austen's sailor brothers, Francis and Charles, were dependent on Whig patronage for their naval promotions. As a London banker, Austen's brother

Henry would have had business dealings with both Tories and Whigs but, as a banker, might be expected to have Whig sympathies. In short, the Austens had divided loyalties, even if they were all in political agreement.

In *Jane Austen and the World of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler claims that Austen was “a Tory rather than a Whig” (2), while Edward Neill in *Jane Austen and Politics* disagrees with Butler and argues that, in her novels, Austen “seems to embody, and then to deconstruct, myths of Tory patriarchy” (8), supposedly proving that Austen actually sympathized with the Whigs, but this either/or scenario is based on an oversimplification of the politics of Jane Austen’s England. As Josephine Ross in *Jane Austen: A Companion* maintains,

The clear-cut distinctions of modern parliamentary politics had yet to emerge; and while the Whigs in the House of Commons tended to represent the interests of the aristocracy and upper classes, as well as expressing liberal ideals, the Tories – with their broad adherence to the more traditionally middle-class principles of upholding the Crown and keeping disaffection in check – were more identified with the landed gentry, and educated, but modestly situated, families such as the Austens. (237)

At the time, the two party system was still evolving, and there was a great deal of dissent in the ranks.

There were reactionaries, reformers and radical members in both parties. There were conservative, moderate and liberal Tories, and the Whig party was factionalized into Portland Whigs, Rockingham Whigs, Benthamites and Foxites to name a few.

William Pitt, the Younger's predecessor as Prime Minister, William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck, the Duke of Portland, began his career as a Whig and switched parties. Prime Minister Pitt claimed, rather unconvincingly, to be "an independent Whig" (qtd. in Hague 582), but Pitt consistently voted with the Tories and is considered to be the father of the modern Conservative party. Pitt's supporters and political appointees were an assortment of both Tories and Whigs. While other people called them Pittites, they referred to themselves as "Mr. Pitt's friends" (Hague 356). Pitt's personal friend, reformer William Wilberforce, originally a Whig, also declared himself to be an independent and voted sometimes with the Whigs and at other times with the Tories.

The death of William Pitt in 1806 left a void that, in such a divisive House of Commons, no one could muster enough support to fill, so an ineffective national unity government was formed under Prime Minister Lord Grenville in 1806, optimistically christened The Ministry of All the Talents. A former Tory who deserted Pitt in 1801 to join the Whigs, Grenville attempted to form a coalition government composed of both Tories and Whigs, but as Brian Southam in *Jane Austen and the Navy* summarizes it, The Ministry of All the Talents "was a Whiggish assembly" (143). Without the persuasive Pitt to lead them in compromise, the unity government was doomed to failure, and The Ministry of All the Talents survived only one contentious year, but it was enough time to provoke Jane Austen to write a poem, *On Sir Home Popham's Sentence, April 1807*. In its opening salvo, the Popham poem condemns Grenville's government as "a Ministry pitiful, angry and mean" (MW 446). Brian Southam describes the Popham poem as a "satire on a public event, the kind of ferocious little squib (in the tradition of Pope and Swift) which commonly appeared in the press on contentious

political issues and personalities (*Navy* 142). As Southam notes, the Popham poem is neither tentative nor ambiguous: “it burns with indignation, a document (if we want to look at it in this light) which upsets any notion of Jane Austen’s indifference to the battleground of public life and the to-and-fro of political debate.” Obviously, the Popham poem and a later political poem, *On the Weald of Kent Canal Bill* written in 1811, prove that Jane Austen had strong political opinions and was not at all hesitant to express them in writing, but when even the political affiliations of the era’s Prime Ministers proved difficult to pin down, Jane Austen’s political leanings have also been open to speculation.

In *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, Deirdre Le Faye records that Austen wrote political statements in the margins of the Austen family’s edition of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The History of England*: “marginalia in Goldsmith show that in her teens she was staunchly anti-Whig and anti-Republican” (59). One of Austen’s marginal notes seems clear enough, “Nobly said! Spoken like a Tory!” (qtd. in Tomalin 137), although Austen’s youth and her precocious sense of irony afford some justification to doubt the sincerity of the sentiment. This was, after all, written by the irreverent young author of the juvenilia and the same hand that recorded her own fictitious marriage entries on the specimen page of the marriage register in Steventon church, where Miss Jane Austen was united in ink to “Henry Frederic Howard Fitzwilliam, of London,” “Edmund Arthur William Mortimer, of Liverpool” and the no doubt rakish “Jack Smith,” address unknown (Le Faye 70). Deirdre Le Faye concludes that Jane Austen probably remained steadfast in her political opinions, “although in adulthood the party politics of the day seem to have occupied very little of her attention” (59). Austen’s political poems aside,

at least the adult Jane Austen failed to leave a series of similarly bold, handwritten political outpourings in the margins of books. Instead, she discretely inserted them in the texts of the novels she wrote herself.

Josephine Ross convincingly argues that Jane Austen would have recognized a kindred spirit in the witty and eloquent William Pitt, and that Austen would have been unimpressed by the radical Whigs who opposed him:

The cool, pragmatic, upright and clever Tory, William Pitt the Younger, who was Britain's Prime Minister during much of Jane's adult life, was far more to her liking than a swaggering, flamboyant populist such as the brilliant Whig leader Charles James Fox; and as the French Revolution disintegrated into misgovernment and bloodshed, in the early 1790s, she would have had no sympathy with the outlandish views of a crusading MP such as Thomas Paine. (238)

Nor does it seem likely that Austen would have aligned herself with Whig Edmund Burke, who made a public spectacle of himself while debating the Prime Minister on the floor of the House of Commons, hurling wild accusations and literally screaming at Pitt, to the shock and embarrassment of Burke's Whig colleagues (Hague 90).

Nancy Armstrong, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, also believes that Austen was a Tory, but Armstrong adds an important proviso, that Austen was not a reactionary or even a moderate Tory: "we would have to place Austen with the liberal Tories of her day" (159), which implies that while Jane Austen believed that Britain's economy was basically sound (Tory), she also acknowledged the

country's financial problems (moderate Tory), and she was not opposed to change (liberal Tory), such as William Pitt's Poor Law Reform bill. Political references in Austen's juvenilia and in her novels support Ross's and Armstrong's conclusion.

That Jane Austen should choose to write *Catharine: or the Bower* in 1792 comes as no surprise when one considers the political scandal of that year, when it was alleged that, due to rotten and pocket boroughs, 154 influential people had been able to choose 307 Members of Parliament (Hammond & Hammond, *The Village Labourer* 13). Due to the 1792 scandal, Parliament was presented with a petition in 1793 demanding political reform, which, in a rare act of non-partisan unity, both Whigs and Tories agreed to ignore. As it was, only one in eight Englishmen could vote (Ross 237), and the Members of Parliament they had voted for saw no problem with the existing political system.

Thus far in *Catharine: or the Bower*, the reader has been shown three political options, two extreme positions, radical and reactionary, and a third option of middle-of-the-road common sense, but *Catharine: or the Bower* admits that a fourth, though wholly unacceptable, choice remains available to the British public, willful ignorance. The reactionary Tory Member of Parliament and his radical Whig hostess are both irrational about political economics, but the real fool of the piece is Miss Camilla Stanley, the Tory MP's brainless daughter: "I know nothing of Politics, and cannot bear to hear them mentioned" (MW 201).

According to the petulant Camilla, still smarting over being slighted at a ball, her father "never cares about anything but Politics. If I were Mr. Pitt or the Lord Chancellor,

he would take care I should not be insulted” (MW 224). In Camilla’s opinion, Mr. Stanley should use his political influence to take revenge on people who irritate her: “I wish my Father would propose knocking all their Brains out, some day or other when he is in the House” (MW 204), and she is annoyed with Mr. Stanley that he does not oblige her. Camilla’s assumption that political office should be entirely self-serving is echoed by another character, Tom Musgrove, in *A Collection of Letters: Letter the fifth: From a Young Lady very much in love to her Freind* [sic]. According to his cousin, Lady Scudamore, when Tom Musgrove learns that his fiancé Henrietta Halton has no fortune of her own and “was totally dependant [sic] on my Uncle & Aunt”:

“He exclaimed with virulence against Uncles & Aunts; Accused the Laws of England for allowing them to possess their Estates when wanted by their Nephews and Neices [sic], and wished he were in the House of Commons, that he might reform the Legislature, & rectify all its abuses.”

(MW 169)

Camilla Stanley and Tom Musgrove are extremely silly characters, but their entirely self-serving view of politics is hardly a laughing matter. Camilla’s relentless stupidity suggests that ignorance of national affairs is not an option for any sensible or ethical person. But politics is not the only subject beneath Camilla’s notice. Miss Stanley is equally obtuse about money.

Camilla reports that a mutual acquaintance, Miss Wynne, required the assistance of her relatives “to find her in Cloathes. Is not it shameful?” (MW 203). Kitty agrees: “That she should be so poor? It is indeed, with such wealthy connexions as the Family

have,” but Camilla had something else in mind and adopts the ever handy expedient of blaming the poor for their condition: “Oh! no; I mean, was not it shameful in Mr. Wynne to leave his Children so distressed.” Camilla blithely dismisses the Wynne family’s poverty: “I do think there never was so lucky a Family” (*MW* 203); “I see no hardship in all that” (*MW* 205). Miss Stanley even perversely claims to envy them: “I should think it very good fun if I were as poor.” Kitty begs to differ: “I believe you would think very differently *then*,” but Camilla Stanley shows no inclination to think at all.

Like Camilla Stanley, the wealthy can afford to be politically and economically ignorant if they so choose. As Ivor Brown notes in *Jane Austen and Her World*, “ignorance was bliss for those with good homes and plentiful servants” (46). In 1809, Jane Austen made minor alterations to *Catharine: or the Bower*, and, as Claire Harman observes in *Jane’s Fame*, “It seems rather extraordinary that Austen was keeping this story from her teens in play at all” (50), but Jane Austen never abandoned the theme of political economics, and Austen also continued to explore the relationship between the rich and their less fortunate acquaintances.

In *A Collection of Letters*, specifically *Letter the third: From A young Lady in distress’d Circumstances to her freind* [sic], Austen’s quick witted protagonist Maria Williams is repeatedly humiliated by a wealthy acquaintance, Lady Greville, an earlier incarnation of *Pride and Prejudice*’s Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Lady Greville’s name is suggestive of the powerful, “free market orientated” Whig politician Lord Grenville (Hague 459), who opposed Poor Law reform. As a guest of Lady Greville’s, Maria braces herself for “the disagreeable [sic] certainty I always have of being abused for my

Poverty" (*MW* 157). In her carriage on the way to the ball, Lady Greville notes that Maria has a new dress: "I only hope your Mother may not have distressed herself to set *you* off" (*MW* 156), assumes that Mrs. Williams can only afford the usual diet of the working-class, "Bread & Cheese" (*MW* 157), and speculates that, because of her relative poverty, Maria's mother must go to bed as soon as it becomes dark: "Candles cost money, and Mrs. Williams is too wise to be extravagant" (*MW* 156). But Lady Greville saves her most venomous accusations for public recitation.

At the ball, Maria assumes that Lady Greville "wanted to mortify me" (*MW* 158), and her Ladyship certainly does her best. Before the assembled guests, and "loud enough to be heard by half the people in the room," Lady Greville questions Maria about her family's financial difficulties. First she attacks Maria on her grandfather's alleged misfortunes: "He broke did not he?" "Did not he abscond?" "At least he died insolvent?" Maria promptly denies each one of Lady Greville's malicious aspersions, but Lady Greville is not done; she merely switches generations: "Why was not your Father as poor as a Rat?" "Was not he in the Kings Bench once?" Maria maintains her cool composure throughout the inquisition and counters all of Lady Greville's slanders. Despite Lady Greville's efforts, Maria's evening is not entirely ruined, but the Greville assault continues on the following day.

First, Maria is called away from her dinner to stand outdoors in the cold while Lady Greville talks at her from the Greville carriage. Maria is invited to dine with Lady Greville, but Maria is told that she may not dine with Lady Greville's titled visitors and is only invited for dinner on the day after the important guests have all gone. Additionally,

although Lady Greville has transportation, she will not be using it for Maria's sake: "There will be no occasion for your being very fine for I shant send the Carriage – If it rains you may take an umbrella" (MW 159). Lady Greville excuses this slight by applying the same illogic that the rich often applied to the poor, that, unlike the upper class, the working class were impervious to suffering: "You young Ladies who cannot often ride in a Carriage never mind what weather you trudge in... some sort of people have no feelings either of cold or Delicacy." Lady Greville seems to take perverse satisfaction in speculating that Maria "will have an horrid walk home."

Mrs. Williams gives her daughter the same advice that was routinely offered to the poor: "Mother is always admonishing me to be humble & patient if I wish to make my way in the world" (MW 157), although it seems obvious that Lady Greville will be doing nothing to assist Maria. Lady Greville is even more obnoxious than Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Maria Williams is never given an opportunity to defend herself, as Elizabeth Bennet does in the garden at Longbourn. While *Letter the third: From A young Lady in distress'd Circumstances to her friend* certainly seems to be a dress rehearsal for *Pride and Prejudice* with the characters Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh engaged in their ongoing verbal warfare, but *Letter the third* is also an airing of a theme that will appear in all of Jane Austen's novels, that when the rich draw distinctions between themselves and the poor, they also apply their flawed criteria and faulty reasoning to other people, in fact to anyone with less money.

Unusual among the juvenilia is *A FRAGMENT written to inculcate the practise [sic] of Virtue*, which shares the same condemnation of the oblivious rich as *Catharine*:

or the Bower and Letter the third. *A Fragment* is a biting little satire written in an obviously less flippant mood, and there is no silliness to soften the message:

We all know that many are unfortunate in their progress through the world, but we do not know all that are so. To seek them out to study their wants, & to leave them unsupplied is the duty, and ought to be the Business of Man. But few have time, fewer still have inclination, and no one has either the one or the other for such employments. Who amidst those that perspire away their Evenings in crouded [sic] assemblies can have leisure to bestow a thought on such as sweat under the fatigue of their daily Labour. (MW 71)

As Emily Auerbach observes in *Searching for Jane Austen*, the narrative voice in *A FRAGMENT* is strikingly different than the omniscient narrator in Austen's novels:

This reads more like Jonathan Swift than Jane Austen. Members of the leisured class lack the time and inclination to concern themselves with tired, perspiring laborers, so they leave the needs "unsupplied." Like the narrator of Swift's *Modest Proposal* who pretends to approve of boiling the children of poor people for food, the narrator of Austen's fragment labels it the "duty" and "business" of the upper class to ignore the plight of workers. Did Austen abandon this fragment – erase it, in fact – because it was moving in a more radical direction than she felt comfortable pursuing, or did an Austen relative later erase it? Whichever the case, it remains fascinating that Austen wrote it at all. (57)

But Austen did write it, and we have no reason to think that she changed her mind about the pitiable state of the poor or the appalling indifference of the rich, as her novels continue to expand on the idea.

Like Camilla Stanley in *Catharine: or the Bower*, the rich in *A FRAGMENT* find poverty just too tedious a subject to dwell on, especially when there are so many pleasant things to think about instead, but their self indulgence is the lesser of their two evils. It is the conscious decision not to act, “to leave [the poor] unsupplied,” that is truly inexcusable here, the sin of omission so masterfully illustrated by John and Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. One of Jane Austen’s marginal comments in Goldsmith’s *The History of England* expresses the same idea in a terse phrase: “How much are the Poor to be pitied, & the Rich to be blamed!” (qtd. in Honan 74). In *Catharine: or the Bower, A Fragment* and even in her marginal notation, Jane Austen echoes a theme that will continue throughout her fiction, the ethics of economics.

It is suggestive that Jane Austen chose to retain three volumes of fair copies of her early writing and that her sister Cassandra preserved them, especially in light of the fact that Cassandra Austen burned the bulk of her sister’s letters and papers. Cassandra obviously appreciated that the juvenilia was significant. As scholars have noted, Jane Austen repeatedly mined her juvenilia for characters and scenes to develop in her later novels, and even the casual reader can see that Austen experimented with money and with politics in her earliest fiction. As the economy around Jane Austen continued to deteriorate, Austen’s novels became increasingly concerned with political

economics, but in her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen developed the idea of economic realism that she experimented with as a teenager in *The Three Sisters*.

Sense and Sensibility: "Wealth has Much to Do With It."

In 1795, as Jane Austen was writing *Elinor and Marianne*, to be revised in 1797 and 1798 as *Sense and Sensibility* (Le Faye, *Family Record* 104), Britons experienced

the first financial crisis of Austen's lifetime, a harvest failure of biblical plague proportions. The summer of 1794 was unusually hot and dry, and the withering drought was followed by a severe winter. The late spring of 1795 brought a series of what Edmund Burke in *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* described as "unnatural frosts" that killed one crop after another (271). By harvest time, there was "only withered hungry grain" where there was grain at all, and the price of cereal, flour and bread doubled. Farmers flooded the market with livestock they could not feed, and, in a few months, the price of meat, milk and cheese also doubled. As historians John and Barbara Hammond document in *The Bleak Age*, "in 1795, high prices created a position so desperate that it was universally recognized that something must be done for the agricultural labourer whose wages no longer maintained him" (94). Food riots broke out across England, and there was growing pressure on Parliament to assist the poor, but when it came to actually parting with money, both Tories and Whigs seemed gripped by inertia, the same kind of passive inaction that *Sense and Sensibility's* John Dashwood succumbs to in fulfilling his promise to "assist" his sisters (S&S 9).

It would seem to have been the perfect timing for Jane Austen to write a novel about financial loss and subsequent frugality, but treating money realistically in fiction was decidedly unconventional. In the waning years of the eighteenth-century, incredibly wealthy characters living the lifestyles of the rich and famous, preferably in haunted castles, sold books. No one was publishing novels about ordinary people who lived in a cottage down the lane. Would the reading public who frequented circulating libraries, the novelist's target audience (Oldfield 17), respond positively to a work of fiction about people like themselves, or would they demand the escapism typical novels already

offered? It seems a risky thing to have done at the time, but Jane Austen was about to break the mold with her heroines whose modest income would determine the course the story would take.

Typically, the wealth of the main character of a novel was a given, as money was vital to the novel's plot. In Fanny Burney's 1782 *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, protagonist Cecilia Beverley has the usual Midas touch of an eighteenth-century fictional character. As a minor, Cecilia already has an annual income of £750 (203). On her coming of age, Cecilia inherits a "splendid income" (55), £3,000 a year, an inheritance from her uncle, and £10,000 in stock from her father's estate. As Cecilia makes the social rounds typical for one in her class, a series of disreputable fortune hunters force themselves upon her notice. In the final volume, Cecilia loses her money, but her financial embarrassment is merely a temporary inconvenience with the beneficial side effect of clearing the field of greedy bounders. Several additional rich relatives materialize in order to die so that Cecilia can inherit their fortunes and become wealthier than ever. Although her family has been entirely annihilated, Cecilia is not particularly distressed, and she happily marries her true love from the first volume, who also just happens to be rich. Cecilia Beverley could not possibly have had such adventures while living on a fixed income of £500 a year, like the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Another even less realistic option remained available to Jane Austen, the gothic romance, but this formula also required a rich protagonist. Ann Radcliffe's tremendously popular 1794 gothic romance novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was a

best seller when Jane Austen was writing *Elinor and Marianne*. *Udolpho's* heroine, the fantastically wealthy Emily St. Aubert, is pursued by fortune hunters throughout two countries and four volumes. As John Willoughby accurately describes them, gothic novels are full of hyperbole, "Thunderbolts and daggers" (S&S 325). Following a series of harrowing escapes, Emily falls into the clutches of her depraved uncle, who is scheming to defraud Emily of her money by marrying her to a scoundrel. While waiting to be rescued from the castle where she is held prisoner, Emily manages to hold onto her inheritance and her virtue although both are continually in peril. After Emily's dramatic rescue by her faithful Colonel Brandon-like admirer, a man Emily respects but whose love she cannot return, Emily is restored to her vast estate in France and is at last able to marry the repentant libertine whom Emily has loved since the first volume. *Udolpho* is basically the same plot as *Cecilia* but with even wealthier characters and the addition of gothic terror. In many respects, *Sense and Sensibility* is the anti-*Udolpho*.

Jane Austen repeatedly mocks the melodramatic gothic romance in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, and in her fragment, *Plan of a Novel*, according to hints from various quarters. In *Plan of a Novel*, Austen notes that the fictional heroine often experiences bouts of poverty when she is "reduced to support herself & her Father by her Talents & work for her Bread; - continually cheated & defrauded of her hire, worn down to a Skeleton, & now & then starved to death" (MW 430). Even when she is penniless, the heroine's lifestyle defies her poverty: "Throughout the whole work, Heroine to be in the most elegant Society & living in high style." This is certainly the experience of Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Emily travels extensively, attends

lavish parties and sumptuous feasts with rich and titled people, as well as picnics and dances with gypsies and peasants, and Emily never lacks the appropriate and fashionable wardrobe for whatever the occasion requires. *Sense and Sensibility's* Dashwood sisters, with their £1,000 dowries, will not be realistically able to afford Emily St. Aubert's travels, nor will they attract legions of suitors, rich and titled, honorable and otherwise.

As Oliver MacDonagh maintains, Austen's first published novel was highly unusual in its use of money: "It may well be argued that *Sense and Sensibility* was the first English realistic novel, and that getting and spending is the ground floor, if not the very foundation of realism" (65). MacDonagh refers to the domestic economics of *Sense and Sensibility* where twelve characters are assigned specific incomes and commensurate lifestyles, but it was economically depriving the heroine that changed the entire novel. Unlike Cecilia Beverley or Emily St. Aubert, no one would be pursuing the Dashwood sisters for their money, so Elinor and Marianne would not be receiving a series of marriage proposals from English, French or Italian noblemen. What then would happen to them? What realistically could happen to them? Just as Marianne Dashwood's romantic fantasies fail to live up to her actual experiences, the reader's expectations of the novel's conventions were also being defied, making *Sense and Sensibility's* characters and plot intriguingly unpredictable and refreshingly original to its first readers.

As in Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*, wealthy relatives lead perilous lives in eighteenth-century novels, as they are prone to die at the convenience of the plot, thus leaving their

vast fortunes to reward the deserving and long suffering main characters with well financed happily-ever-afters. *Sense and Sensibility* begins with a reversal of this common plot, as rich, old Uncle Dashwood dies, as one might well expect, but at the beginning rather than at the end of the novel, and, through the entail, his money bypasses the deserving Dashwood sisters and enriches their undeserving brother. John Dashwood, “a steady respectable young man” (S&S 3), commits no dastardly deeds, as one would expect of the typical villain in a novel. No extraordinary contrivance on his part is necessary, as John legally inherits everything. John is guilty only of selfishness and neglect. This all too realistic, but nonetheless gross, economic injustice propels the plot forward, and everything else that happens in the novel also hinges on the heroines’ lack of money.

The Dashwood damsels-in-distress are rescued by a knight on a horse who offers himself as their patron, but the foxhunting squire, Sir John Middleton, has no shining armor. What he does have is a house to let “on very easy terms” (S&S 23). “A Benevolent, philanthropic man” (S&S 119), Sir John Middleton is John Dashwood’s polar opposite: “the friendliness of his disposition made him happy in accommodating those, whose situation might be considered, in comparison with the past, as unfortunate. In shewing kindness to his cousins therefore he had the real satisfaction of a good heart” (S&S 33). The Dashwoods move to Barton because they can afford no other alternative, and their modest income continues to determine their fates.

Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters are frequently invited to dine at Barton Park, Sir John is “for ever forming parties to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors” (S&S 33),

and he stocks Barton Cottage's pantry with meat, fruit and vegetables from his own larder. As expensive as food was in 1795, consistently feeding the Dashwoods is a significant financial contribution to their household budget. Sir John also puts his carriage at his tenants' disposal and even pays their postage and provides them with his newspaper. Only a petulant, self-absorbed teenager like Marianne could be so ungrateful as to complain: "The rent of this cottage is said to be low; but we have it on very hard terms" (S&S 109). Willoughby calls Sir John a "good-natured, honest, stupid soul" (S&S 330), but Sir John's "hospitality" demonstrates that a character need not be a handsome, young lover in order to save the day (S&S 32-33). John Willoughby only looks the part. In *Sense and Sensibility*, a wealthy and generous married man is a better rescuer than an impractical and impecunious single man.

MacDonagh speculates on Austen's motives for being so specific about her characters' incomes: "An obvious answer is that a great deal in the novel hung on money" (64), but it is also worth noting that Austen's fictional money is doled out in modest and even niggardly amounts, certainly for characters in an eighteenth-century novel, but the smaller amounts produce significant results. According to Lisa Hopkins in *Jane Austen and Money*, "very few of the characters in these early Austen novels are deaf to the call of cash" (76), but, as *Sense and Sensibility* repeatedly demonstrates, on their incomes, they cannot afford to be. Edward Ferrars cannot marry Lucy Steele, as "certain penury must attend the match" (S&S 267), and Lucy Steele has no intention of subjecting herself to penury: Edward "has only two thousand pounds of his own; it would be madness to marry upon that" (S&S 147). Without the allowance from his mother, Edward's income would be £100 a year, barely enough to afford one servant

and not considered enough to support a family (Adams & Adams 16). Colonel Brandon considers the living at Delaford, with an income of £200 a year, to be inadequate to support a married man. While Mrs. Jennings acknowledges that many people marry in spite of their meager incomes, she also recognizes their difficulties. As Hopkins maintains, the sensible characters are united in their practicality: “In *Sense and Sensibility*, love in a cottage is seen as lunacy” (78).

John Willoughby has an estate and a better income than the disinherited Edward Ferrars, but Willoughby has only one or two hundred pounds per annum more than the Dashwoods at Barton Cottage, and “he lived at an expense to which that income could hardly be equal, and he had himself often complained of his poverty” (S&S 71). For all of his complaints of “poverty,” John Willoughby is by no means actually poor, only relatively so for a person aspiring to his upper-class lifestyle, and his financial problems are entirely of his own making. Willoughby already owns an estate in Somersetshire and is to inherit another even better property, Allenham, but, unlike most elderly, rich, fictional relatives, Mrs. Smith is in no hurry to shuffle off this mortal coil in order to accommodate the young wastrel, so Willoughby has been borrowing money to tide him over until the Grim Reaper comes to his aid. According to Mrs. Jennings, Willoughby “is all to pieces” (S&S 194). With the possibility of debtor’s prison facing him, marriage to Marianne Dashwood “was not a thing to be thought of” (S&S 320). Eliza Williams stands to inherit Delaford (S&S 66), but only when Colonel Brandon dies. As Brandon is only ten years older and could well outlive Willoughby, marriage to Eliza is also out of the question: “That could not be” (S&S 323). Mrs. Jennings suggests frugality as the

answer to Willoughby's financial problems, but Willoughby never seems to even entertain the idea.

As Adam Smith noted in *Wealth of Nations*, the supposed profligacy of the poor was generally cited as the source of their financial woes: "The common complaint that luxury extends itself even to the lowest ranks of the people, and that the laboring poor will not now be contented with the same food, cloathing and lodging which satisfied them in former times" (82-83). While the working-class was being told over and over again to reduce their standard of living and to forego "luxury" in order to live on their meager wages, the upper-class, like John Willoughby, refused to adhere to the same advice. Willoughby's horses, carriage, hunting dogs and travel are obvious expenditures that he could presumably forego, but love and honor are the only two luxuries Willoughby is willing to live without, so Willoughby marries Sophia Grey because she has "Fifty thousand pounds, my dear" (S&S 194). But the other characters' fates are equally determined by the size of their bank accounts and pocketbooks.

Lucy Steele holds Edward Ferrars to their engagement because Lucy, who "shall have no fortune" (S&S 132), has no other prospects. Robert Ferrars assumes, correctly, that "means might have been found" to buy Lucy off (S&S 300), and Lucy is bought off, by Robert's means. Lucy jilts Edward to marry his brother when "Robert was inevitably endowed with a thousand pounds a-year" (S&S 374). Ever cautious, Lucy keeps Edward's incriminating letters and their legal hold over him until she is safely married to Robert and only destroys the letters and informs Edward of her change of "heart" and

“affections” when a marriage license makes her financial future secure (S&S 365). But it is not only the schemers in *Sense and Sensibility* who are prudent about money.

Though it was entirely unromantic and unprecedented for a hero and heroine to admit it in a novel, Edward and Elinor “were neither of them quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year would supply them with the comforts of life” (S&S 369), so they must wait until they can afford to marry, as people do in real life. In uncharacteristic fashion for a novel’s hero, Edward Ferrars must earn a living, and even more unconventional for a heroine’s love interest, Edward swallows his pride in order to obtain a marriage settlement of £10,000, “as much, however, as was desired, and more than was expected” (S&S 374). Colonel Brandon is able to financially assist Eliza Williams and Edward Ferrars because he has an estate and “Two thousand a year without debt or drawback” (S&S 196), and he could not afford to marry Marianne Dashwood without it.

Sense and Sensibility ends happily, but only because there is sufficient money, in realistic amounts, to fund such felicity. The residents at Barton Cottage have to mind their shillings and pence, but even without husbands, *Sense and Sensibility*’s heroines are realistically in no danger of being hungry or homeless with £500 a year, nor is the reader ever encouraged to believe either fate even remotely possible for them, although both misfortunes plague another character, a gentlewoman even poorer than the Dashwood sisters, a lady who has lost all of her money. In the subplot of Colonel Brandon’s unfortunate cousin, first love and sister-in-law, Eliza, the story conforms to the gothic novel pattern, at least to a point. Eliza Brandon begins as a typical beautiful,

rich, young heiress character, but her tale does not follow the anticipated plot nor provide the reader with a virtue-will-triumph, love-conquers-all, happily-ever-after ending.

Like Emily St. Aubert in *Udolpho*, Eliza Brandon is held captive against her will while her uncle schemes to get control over her inheritance by marrying her off to a man she does not love. Unlike Emily, who perseveres through her adversities and retains her fortune, Eliza Brandon succumbs to her uncle's demands, marries Colonel Brandon's despicable older brother and is defrauded of her inheritance. Once again, the legal system aids an unscrupulous man. Eliza Brandon, however, makes a character transformation, morphing from the Emily St. Aubert/sweet-young-thing of the gothic romance into the familiar fallen woman pattern, destined "only to sink deeper in a life of sin" (S&S 205).

As Oliver Goldsmith declares in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, "When lovely woman stoops to folly,/And finds too late that men betray" (148), she has presumably lost the sympathy of the reader and has no further function in the novel but "to die." Like Olivia Primrose, the disgraced Vicar's daughter who is "enfeebled by a slow fever" (152), or Clarissa Harlowe in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, Eliza Brandon's fate is, indeed, also sealed, and Eliza predictably dies as any novel reader might well anticipate. Like Olivia and Clarissa, Eliza's sad story serves as a cautionary tale, but with certain economic variations on the plot.

Eliza Brandon does not suddenly become ill, worn down by a guilty conscience like Olivia Primrose and Clarissa Harlowe, but Eliza immediately begins to descend into a fatal economic decline. Eliza's divorce settlement is meager: "Her legal allowance

was not adequate to her fortune, nor sufficient for her comfortable maintenance” (S&S 207), and Eliza lives in poverty for approximately four years before Colonel Brandon discovers her in a debtor’s prison, no doubt the realistic fate of many if not most discarded mistresses. Eliza dies of “consumption” (S&S 207), or tuberculosis, an illness associated with poverty and deprivation.

As Colonel Brandon consoles Elinor, Marianne Dashwood is no Eliza Brandon: “Their fates, their fortunes cannot be the same” (S&S 208). A significant difference between the two characters is that Marianne has no great fortune to tempt the greedy. With her safely invested £1,000 inheritance and her mother’s modest but adequate income, Marianne will never be reduced to Eliza’s abject poverty, and the generous Mrs. Jennings would surely be as willing to take Marianne in as she is to accommodate the disinherited Edward Ferrars: “I am sure he should be very welcome to bed and board at my house” (S&S 268). Marianne’s financial mediocrity adequately shields her from melodramatic tragedy and disaster.

As Robinson Crusoe’s father cautions his errant son, who refuses to study law and become an attorney, a comfortable income supplies the best possible lifestyle:

the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found by long experience was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind... this was the state of life which all other people envied.

(Defoe 3)

Sense and Sensibility echoes the same economic advice offered in *Robinson Crusoe*, “that peace and plenty were the handmaids of a middle fortune... society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, were the blessings attending the middle station of life; that this way men went silently and smoothly through the world” (Defoe 4). The wise characters in *Sense and Sensibility* are content with adequate incomes, but the foolish characters grasp for more.

In *Searching for Jane Austen*, Emily Auerbach comments on the dehumanizing results of the characters’ avarice: “In *Sense and Sensibility* more than in any other novel, Austen links the pursuit of money to the destruction of finer feelings” (117). As Auerbach maintains, Elinor Dashwood, Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon and even Mrs. Jennings are economically savvy but not greedy: “The happiest characters in Austen’s fictional world are those who understand money but are not destroyed by its corrupting power” (120). While Marianne and her mother’s “excess” sensibility and financial innocence are depicted as weaknesses (*S&S* 7), they are not morally degraded by their impracticality, which is more than one can say of John Willoughby.

Willoughby is just as Sir John Middleton labels him, “a scoundrel of a fellow” (*S&S* 215), and while Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are imprudent, they are left morally unscathed while Willoughby is nearly thoroughly corrupted and thus despicable. Willoughby’s extravagance is only one manifestation of his flawed personality, but his inability to live within his income should be the Dashwoods’ and the reader’s first clue that Willoughby is not to be trusted. Willoughby calls himself “a poor dependant cousin”

(S&S 75), but he is neither poor nor dependant, only deeply in debt: “for though Willoughby was independent, there was no reason to believe him rich... he lived at an expense to which that income could hardly be equal, and he had himself often complained of his poverty” (S&S 71). Auerbach notes the danger attached to economic imprudence: “Marianne’s naivete about money matters makes her too blind to Willoughby’s expensive lifestyle and the lengths he will go to preserve it” (120).

John Willoughby’s conversation with Elinor Dashwood at Cleveland is, for the most part, a confession of his financial irresponsibility. Although the Dashwoods seem oblivious to Willoughby’s extravagance, Mrs. Jennings is not at all surprised to hear that he is on the verge of bankruptcy: “No wonder! dashing about with his curricle and hunters!” (S&S 194). As Mrs. Jennings suggests, there is a logical solution: “Why don’t he, in such a case, sell his horses, let his house, turn off his servants, and make a thorough reform at once?” (S&S 194). The option of retrenchment never seems to occur to Willoughby, who admits to Elinor that extravagance is his way of life: “I had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income than myself. Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts” (S&S 320). Unlike the Dashwoods who retrench and do their best to live within their income, Willoughby appears to be incapable of frugality.

Instead of even considering Mrs. Jennings’ “thorough reform” (S&S 194), Willoughby takes the easiest way out by hastily proposing marriage to £50,000, and, incidentally, to Miss Sophia Grey. Miss Grey’s dowry does the trick, Willoughby is able to pay off his debts, and, in characteristic fashion, Willoughby goes on a shopping spree,

purchasing a new carriage and having his portrait painted. The Bible poses the eternal question: “What profiteth a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26). But with Miss Grey’s money, Willoughby purchases “no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity” (S&S 379), proving that Elinor Dashwood may sound cynical, and not at all romantic, especially for a heroine in an eighteenth-century novel, but Elinor is nonetheless right about happiness: “wealth has much to do with it” (S&S 91).

Colonel Brandon’s disgust with Willoughby mainly hinges on the fact that Willoughby left Eliza Williams “poor and miserable” and “in a situation of the utmost distress” (S&S 209). Like her mother, Eliza Williams is insolvent, pregnant, abandoned and probably, by this time, in debt. Had Willoughby financially provided for his discarded teenage mistress and for their illegitimate child, Brandon’s low opinion of him might have been somewhat mitigated, and the duel, “to punish his conduct” (S&S 211), might never have taken place. As Mrs. Jennings reminds the reader, illegitimate children were common enough; a “natural daughter” like Eliza Williams (S&S 66), or Harriet Smith in *Emma*, could be sent away to a private school, and the scandal of her birth would soon fade from society’s collective memory: “the little love-child, indeed; aye, I had forgot her; but she may be ‘prenticed out at small cost, and then what does it signify?” (S&S 196). Even Elinor Dashwood seems less scandalized by Eliza’s pregnancy than shocked by Willoughby’s financial irresponsibility in the situation.

At Cleveland, Elinor takes Willoughby to task, not so much for his seduction of Eliza, but for his “cruel neglect of her” (S&S 322). Elinor reminds Willoughby not that

Eliza was left pregnant but that she “was reduced to the extremest indigence.” Only Mrs. Smith, with “her ignorance of the world” (S&S 323), seems less concerned with money than with “the morality of [Willoughby’s] conduct in general.” Whether Marianne Dashwood pities Eliza Williams, “that unfortunate girl” (S&S 344), most for her loss of innocence or for her subsequent poverty is unclear, but Marianne certainly comes to see her own prospect of marriage to Willoughby in grim economic terms.

Elinor Dashwood speculates that Marianne’s life as Mrs. John Willoughby would not have been prosperous and therefore must have been unhappy:

Had you married, you must have been always poor. His expensiveness is acknowledged even by himself, and his whole conduct declares that self-denial is a word hardly understood by him. His demands and your inexperience together on a small, very small income, must have brought on distresses... he would have been always necessitous – always poor; and probably would soon have learnt to rank the innumerable comforts of a clear estate and good income as of far more importance, even to domestic happiness, than the mere temper of a wife. (S&S 350-52)

The sadder but wiser Marianne concurs: “I have not a doubt of it” (S&S 352).

Marianne’s acknowledgements of the power of money, and of the fragility of Willoughby’s attachment to her, reflects her emotional maturity, from a childish belief in a love-conquers-all fantasy to an acceptance of financial reality, even when it is unpleasant. Until Marianne makes this transition, she will never be ready to be “placed

in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village” (S&S 379).

In Chapter XVII, at the end of the first volume, Elinor and Marianne discuss a comfortable income, “a competence” (S&S 91), when enough is as good as a feast. This singular chapter is the most frank and realistic discussion of domestic economics in any of Austen’s texts, and Austen never felt compelled to repeat anything like it. £1,000, is Elinor’s idea of “wealth” (S&S 91), and it is indeed a very comfortable lifestyle according to the household advice manuals of the day (Adams & Adams 16). Marianne declares “About eighteen hundred or two thousand a-year” to be “a competence.” Although Marianne protests that twice the income is necessary to live comfortably, the reader must not forget that Marianne’s £1,800 to £2,000 is half the income of the Norland Park estate, so all of the members of the Dashwood family are learning to be content with less, and it is a lesson that John Willoughby is unwilling to learn. Of course, none of the young people, Elinor, Marianne, Edward or Willoughby, have sufficient incomes to maintain the lifestyles to which they have been accustomed, a seemingly insurmountable problem for which Margaret Dashwood proposes an entirely impractical solution.

Margaret suggests the romantic novel’s stock answer to their economic woes, to inherit money from a wealthy benefactor: “‘I wish,’ said Margaret, striking out a novel thought, ‘that somebody would give us all a large fortune apiece!’” (S&S 92). It is, indeed, “a novel thought,” as it is so easy to cure poverty in fiction, with a few strokes of the pen. This is *Sense and Sensibility*, however, where Austen’s use of money is

unflinchingly realistic, and, in light of the plot so far, Margaret's naïve suggestion is extremely ironic. No one bothers to remind Margaret that the particular opportunity she suggests has already passed them by when their great uncle Dashwood died. While a probable occurrence in the third volume of an eighteenth-century novel, Margaret's economic fantasy is highly unlikely to happen in reality, or to occur in the novel Austen's reader was then holding, not even for John Willoughby whose rich, elderly relative clings tenaciously to life throughout the novel.

As old Uncle Dashwood and John and Fanny illustrate, the Dashwood sisters are more likely to be disappointed by their wealthy relatives than rescued by them. In *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia Johnson notes that the dysfunctionality of the Dashwood family suggests a political message: "the family, far from being the mainspring for all moral and social affections, is the mainspring instead for the love of money, the principal vice in *Sense and Sensibility*, and in so much progressive fiction" (53). Even the deserving Colonel Brandon has inherited his estate only by his brother's untimely death, not because Brandon was rewarded by his father for his exemplary behavior. Margaret Dashwood, however, is only thirteen, but even Margaret should be familiar with the old nursery rhyme corrective: If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride.

To Marianne Dashwood's overactive imagination, however, Margaret's proposal sounds entirely plausible: "Oh that they would!" cried Marianne, her eyes sparkling with animation, and her cheeks glowing with the delight of such imaginary happiness" (S&S 92). The narrator's commentary embedded in these two passages contains an obvious

financial message to the reader: “A novel thought” equals “imaginary happiness,” and similar financial windfalls are not to be expected in real life where there is no author to save the reader with a timely inheritance or a financially advantageous marriage. Elinor attempts to nip Marianne’s latest flight of fancy in the bud: “We are all unanimous in that wish, I suppose,’ said Elinor, ‘in spite of the insufficiency of weath” (S&S 92). But “insufficiency of wealth” does not hold everyone back.

The irrepressible Lucy Steele, “the worthless hussy” (S&S 370), successfully connives her way to prosperity, while Edward Ferrars’s honesty costs him his inheritance. The moral of the story seems to be that crime pays:

The whole of Lucy’s behavior in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune. (S&S 376)

The unscrupulous characters, John and Fanny Dashwood, John Willoughby, Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars, are all wealthier by the novel’s conclusion, which suggests the perversity of the economic system which rewards the greedy at the expense of the honorable.

Mary Evans, in *Jane Austen and the State*, reminds us that “Austen’s characters lived at a crucial point in English history: the point at which a society which was already essentially capitalist was undergoing transformation into an industrial society – a society in which the accumulation of profit was to assume a new and more comprehensive

ruthlessness” (3), and that ruthlessness manifests itself in the reprehensible characters in *Sense and Sensibility*. Lucy Steele and John Willoughby reveal their moral depravity by turning themselves into marketable commodities, spouses for sale to the highest bidders, who just happen to be Robert Ferrars and Sophia Grey. Willoughby makes a handsome profit in exactly the kind of “commercial exchange” that Marianne has formerly deemed to be “no marriage at all” (S&S 38). We can see the dehumanizing effects of a cash nexus mentality in the way the villainous characters see one another as so many pounds per annum.

With an expert eye, John Dashwood quickly appraises Mrs. Jennings: “She seems a most valuable woman indeed. – Her house, her style of living, all bespeak an exceeding good income” (S&S 226), and likewise John attempts to affix a price tag to Colonel Brandon: “Is he a man of fortune?” (S&S 223). Emily Auerbach notes John’s tendency to financially appraise everyone he meets:

In *Sense and Sensibility* we meet a society so based on economics that it uses income to measure the worth not only of prospective marriage partners but also of people in general. John Dashwood would probably approve of having people wear name tags saying “Hello, my name is _ and I make _ pounds a year. (118)

John Dashwood’s step-mother and sisters never stoop to such meanness. As Mrs. Dashwood says, “Men are safe with us, let them be ever so rich” (S&S 44), but this is true, it seems, because the Dashwoods are ever so impractical. In the case of Edward

Ferrars, Lucy Steele is not the only woman who sees Edward as a source of income, as Edward's mother and sister also think of him in light of his earning potential.

Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny have been encouraging Edward to become a politician or at least to ingratiate himself to a politician in order to secure a lucrative government appointment: "His mother wishes to interest him in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day. Mrs. John Dashwood wished it likewise" (S&S 15-16). No doubt, their choice of a political career for Edward is motivated by their *nouveaux riches* status and social climbing aspirations. As historian John Burnett reminds us, there were numerous lucrative political appointments to be had, but "political office was the greatest prize, which could elevate a family from obscurity to an earldom in a generation" (150). To Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny, it is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

"[A]lways going about the country canvassing against the election" (S&S 113), the rude, arrogant and already wealthy Mr. Palmer aspires to become a Member of Parliament, and the unprincipled John Willoughby seems to be an MP as well, as Willoughby "is in the opposition" (S&S 114). Given the state of the nation in 1795, Edward's reluctance to become a politician would have been understandable. According to historian John Archer, the economic hardship brought on by the harvest failure caused "a turnabout in popular sentiment" (61). Politicians were generally considered callous and apathetic to the poor: "Increasingly, many people began to view the authorities with distrust" (62). In 1795, 150,000 people gathered in London to protest the opening of Parliament (Hague 376), and Edward's reluctance to join such an

unpopular and disreputable assembly as the House of Commons seems understandable, but without a profession, Edward remains an “idle, helpless being” (S&S 102). As it is, Edward must remain at Oxford, “properly idle” and “expensive” (S&S 103), a continuous financial drain on his mother, but thus also subject to her influence.

Critics generally consider Edward Ferrars to be Austen’s least appealing hero, a namby-pamby Milquetoast who seems incapable of freeing himself from the machinations of Lucy Steele and his mother. But, within the context of the novel, Edward is truly heroic in his passive resistance. In his unwavering commitment to remain untainted by selfishness and greed, Edward thus sets himself far above the dashing but morally bankrupt John Willoughby. Edward declines to become either a politician or a politician’s toady in order to fill his pockets with the taxpayers’ money, and he staunchly refuses to discard Lucy Steele because she is poor or to court Miss Morton because she is rich. The shadowy Misses Grey and Morton are merely £50,000 or £30,000 dowries, incomes of £2,500 a year or £1,500 a year to the man who can persuade one of them to hand it over to him in marriage. Willoughby succumbs to the temptation. Edward does not. Edward establishes himself as a respectable character, and a worthy husband for Elinor, primarily because he is a kindred spirit who likewise refuses to consider the people around him as marketable commodities.

While Edward Ferrars presents a new kind of hero who proves himself admirable in an unconventional way, Colonel Brandon is the traditional hero of the story, a serial savior who rescues those in need with his checkbook and provides the financing that

brings about *Sense and Sensibility's* happy ending. Brandon continues to accept the financial burden of Eliza Williams and to economically provide for Willoughby's baby as well. Colonel Brandon also rescues Edward Ferrars from penury by giving him a church living, one that Brandon might easily have sold, an unprofitable transaction that mystifies John Dashwood: "he might have got I dare say – fourteen hundred pounds" (S&S 295). Brandon's generosity, by extension, also saves Elinor from a life of penny-pinching spinsterhood. Of course, Brandon finally rescues Marianne from the same fate by marrying her. Colonel Brandon's voluntary redistribution of wealth is a somewhat conventional ending to an otherwise very unconventional novel.

As Deirdre Le Faye notes in *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*, *Sense and Sensibility* proved to be just what a significant group of the 1811 novel reading public wanted and what circulating libraries were willing to purchase for 15 shillings: "It sold well and Edgerton published a second edition in November 1813, increasing the price to 18s., and Jane was still receiving royalties from it in March 1817" (155). Brian Southam notes that *Sense and Sensibility* was "remarkably well-received. The reviewers were in no doubt about the superiority" (*Critical Heritage Vol. 1, 7*). An anonymous book review published in the February 1812 considered Austen's first novel to be different, "something new" (qtd. in Southam *Critical Heritage Vol. 1, 35*), and the author praised *Sense and Sensibility* for its realism: "The incidents are probable," but unpredictable. By 1821, Richard Whately declared that in Jane Austen's texts, "a new style of novel has arisen" (qtd. in Southam *Critical Heritage Vol. 1, 96*): "the final catastrophe is scarcely ever clearly foreseen from the beginning, and very often comes, upon the

generality of readers at least, quite unexpected.” Austen’s unconventionality, her willingness to take chances with her plots and characters, was paying off.

In *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World*, Claire Harman speculates on the reason for *Sense and Sensibility’s* favorable reception and for the admiration of such literary luminaries as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Maria Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott:

Austen’s popularity with her Romantic contemporaries perhaps suggests they saw more of the ‘modern’ in her than other people, more of a break with the past than had been supposed. Austen’s attacks on the cult of sensibility, her matter-of-fact anti-Wertherism, her rational – but not unfeeling – demolition of the clichés surrounding True Love, were all as revolutionary in their way as anything in *The Prelude* or *Don Juan*. (110)

And perhaps the Romantic authors also realized that Austen’s novels were engaging with serious contemporary concerns, not just providing escapism, but certainly not everyone was pleased with Austen’s version of reality.

In November of 1811, Lady Bessborough recommended *Sense and Sensibility* as “a clever novel” (qtd in Southam, *Jane Austen: Volume 1, 1811-1870: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1*, 7), but she was dissatisfied with the story’s conclusion: “it ends stupidly.” Lady Bessborough probably wanted more romantic marriages for Elinor and Marianne. “Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting” (S&S 378), Marianne becomes Mrs. Brandon “with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship.” Marianne, “in time”

(S&S 379), grows to love her husband, but theirs is not the idealized love match which readers expected in a novel. Lady Bessborough was not the only one to be disappointed.

When *Sense and Sensibility* was first translated into French in 1815 by a popular French sentimental novelist, Isabelle de Montolieu, the ending was changed to a more conventionally melodramatic conclusion. In the first French translation, Willoughby's wife, Sophia Grey that was, suddenly and unexpectedly dies when she is thrown from her phaeton, and Willoughby is at last rich enough to marry Marianne, who by this time has fallen madly in love with Colonel Brandon. Marianne reacts to Willoughby's belated and now unwelcome proposal by confessing her change of heart to Elinor, and Marianne throws herself at Brandon's boots in an emotionally charged proposal scene worthy of the most farfetched gothic novel. As Isabelle Bour concludes in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, Montolieu obviously considered Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* to be "too unromantic" (22), and Montolieu's alteration of the original text "illustrates the aesthetic gap between such an innovator as Austen and a routine sentimental novelist" such as Montolieu. As Bour notes, "Montolieu rarely misses an opportunity to have characters cry and fall into each other's arms" in her translation (23). Whether Jane Austen found Montolieu's rewrite more disgusting or amusing, or knew of it at all, is uncertain.

In spite of the carping of some diehard romantics, Jane Austen must have been encouraged by her first published novel's reception and sales, and *Sense and Sensibility* was not only popular in circulating libraries. The story of Austen's heroines

with modest means, perhaps surprisingly, appealed to upper-class novel readers, like Lady Bessborough, those rich enough to buy, not just to borrow, books. Wealthy readers tended to purchase non-fiction, preferring politics, current events and histories (Oldfield 15). The Hampshire Book Club, for instance, a private men's club, purchased more than 400 books in a seven year period; only ten were novels (Oldfield 16). But even the Prince Regent and other members of the royal family read and admired *Sense and Sensibility*. Princess Charlotte recommended *Sense and Sensibility* in a letter to a friend: "it certainly is interesting... I must say it interested me very much" (qtd. in Harmon 53). In her next novel, Austen would cast a wider net for readers, making her characters, like her readers, significantly richer and poorer than Colonel Brandon and the Dashwood sisters.

Pride and Prejudice: "Where Does Discretion End, and Avarice Begin?"

As Claudia Johnson notes in *Women, Politics and the Novel*, many critics have read *Pride and Prejudice* as a standard love story with "a markedly fairy-tale-like

quality” (74). Gene Ruoff in *Jane Austen: Modern Critical Views* considers *Pride and Prejudice* to be “an obvious enough rendering of the Cinderella myth” (59), and Samuel Macey in *Money and the Novel* claims that “Austen’s dreams are those of the Cinderella story” (172). Lisa Hopkins in *Jane Austen and Money* concludes that *Pride and Prejudice*’s treatment of money is similarly unrealistic:

Mr. Darcy – with ten thousand pounds, the richest of all her heroes – enables Elizabeth to step into the role of fairy-tale heroine by the sheer scale of her elevation. Whereas Catherine [Morland] and Elinor [Dashwood] will only ever be comfortable, Elizabeth will be seriously wealthy, and Jane [Bennet] will be distinctly well-off. The attitude to money in this novel, which Jane Austen herself termed ‘too light, bright, and sparkling,’ has, then, become arguably less bound up with realism and more with romance. (77)

But there is much more to *Pride and Prejudice* than a formula rags-to-riches marriage plot, and Jane Austen’s first readers knew it.

In fact, when *Pride and Prejudice* was originally written as *First Impressions* in 1796 and 1797, Austen’s novel appears to have been taking a stand in favor of two controversial economic proposals being debated in the House of Commons and in the press, a national minimum wage and Poor Law reform, thus *Pride and Prejudice* was much more than a satire of manners but was also a political critique of Jane Austen’s society. Both proposals were championed at the time by Tory Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger and supported by liberal Tories and moderate Whigs. Both proposals

were vehemently opposed by reactionary Tories and radical Whigs. The eligible bachelors in *Pride and Prejudice* are all associated with the Whig party, as is Lady Catherine de Bourgh, but the characters, like the Whigs in the House of Commons, have very different attitudes towards money and the working class.

Additionally, Austen's contemporaries would have known that Elizabeth Bennet's agricultural county, Hertfordshire, was, at least for the working class, the poorest county in England, just as Fitzwilliam Darcy's Derbyshire, financially stimulated by the Industrial Revolution, was the richest county, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh's Kent was a mixed county that varied enormously, from parish to parish, in prevailing wages and in treatment of the poor. The admirable Whig characters, like Fitzwilliam Darcy and Charles Bingley, are kindly and generous, while the radical Whig, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is selfish and stingy, and George Wickham is simply an opportunist and a scoundrel. By its presentation of the different Whig characters, the text appears to be appealing to Whigs to be generous to the working class and encouraging Tories to look approvingly on those Whigs who are willing to financially support the poor.

Pride and Prejudice also includes a large number of characters who are servants, many identified by name. As most of them have no dialogue and do nothing to forward the plot, their presence in the novel at all may seem curious, but the depiction of the working class in *Pride and Prejudice* is more subtle to the modern reader than it would have been to Austen's original readers. The servants in *Pride and Prejudice* refute the assumptions of prominent Whig economists and politicians, Edmund Burke, Frederic Eden and Patrick Colquhoun, who depicted the lower class as ignorant, wasteful and

immoral. Lady Catherine's financial neglect of the poor in Kent conforms to the economists' advice based on their assumptions that the working class was already adequately compensated for its labor and that poverty was the result of the irresponsible behavior of the poor. In stark contrast, Fitzwilliam Darcy's generosity to the poor in Derbyshire serves as a model response to poverty, and the general prosperity of Darcy's home county suggests that the solution to poverty is a combination of higher wages and liberal charity, exactly what the Prime Minister was proposing in 1797.

Without an awareness of the national economic debate raging in England at the end of the eighteenth-century, the modern reader tends to see only the first and still obvious money theme in the novel, the relationship between money and marriage, "the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune" (*P&P* 122-23). The economics of marriage is certainly the focus of the first half of the novel and a subject that time has done little to obscure. Thus, Samuel Macey categorizes Jane Austen's novels as tales of "economic wish fulfillment" (159). When Macey mentions "that typically vicarious pleasure which derives from a poor girl making good" (158), he hits nearer to the mark, as it appears to be the economic wish fulfillment of the reader that is satisfied, rather than the financial aspirations of Elizabeth Bennet. After all, fully aware of his annual income and "his large estate in Derbyshire" (*P&P* 10), Elizabeth rejects Fitzwilliam Darcy's first offer of marriage. Darcy would never have had to propose to Charlotte Lucas twice.

Through the first two volumes of the novel, Elizabeth Bennet expresses no desire to marry at all. When Elizabeth is slighted by Mr. Darcy, she decides to dislike him in return. Elizabeth is also pursued by William Collins, whom she loathes, and enjoys a flirtation with George Wickham, although she is not “seriously in love” (*P&P* 142). Colonel Fitzwilliam’s “situation in life was most eligible” (*P&P* 181), and Elizabeth’s friendship with the Colonel seems initially promising, but their entire acquaintance lasts only three chapters and ultimately, and rather abruptly, comes to nothing. Colonel Fitzwilliam’s confession that “there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money” takes Elizabeth by surprise: “‘Is this,’ thought Elizabeth, ‘meant for me?’” (*P&P* 183), but Elizabeth is only temporarily embarrassed, not at all heartbroken. Until the last volume of the novel, Elizabeth, like the reader, merely observes the other characters’ romantic entanglements with an amused detachment, waiting to see how it will all turn out.

Pride and Prejudice initially distracts the reader, just as Elizabeth Bennet is at first distracted, with the idea of money and matrimony: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (*P&P* 3), and the novel changes its original focus from domestic economics to political economics so seamlessly that readers often fail to notice the transition. As Edward Copeland in *Jane Austen in Context* observes, young women placed precariously on the abyss of poverty feature prominently in all of Austen’s novels: “the shadow of the single woman without money, Charlotte Lucas syndrome, continues to haunt her works to the end” (145-46), and certainly Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters are the poorest characters in the gentry class in which they have been placed.

The Bennet sisters are even more financially vulnerable than the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*. The Dashwood sisters and Bennet sisters are all assigned inheritances of £1,000, but the Dashwoods already have their money. The Bennet sisters will only get their £1,000 when their mother dies. When Mrs. Dashwood dies, her daughters will inherit again, and their £1,000 will more than double. As a widow, Mrs. Bennet would have an income of only £250 a year, half the income of Mrs. Dashwood at Barton Cottage, and Mrs. Bennet has two additional daughters to provide for. Elizabeth Bennet's relative poverty and the threat of penury in her future obviously raises the stakes in Elizabeth's gamble to secure a comfortable lifestyle, and it makes her refusal of the marriage proposals she is about to receive even more dramatic and surprising. The reduction in the incomes of the relatively poor characters seems tied to the marriage plot, but the elevated incomes assigned to the wealthy characters serve a different purpose as they help to forward the political economic theme.

Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* both have incomes of £2,000, but Charles Bingley's income is more than twice Colonel Brandon's. Bingley's £100,000 inheritance was enough to buy 10,000 acres of land and a large house (Burnett 140), exactly the kind of estate Bingley is shopping for. Fitzwilliam Darcy's income is twice Bingley's, and five times Colonel Brandon's. With an annual income of £10,000, Darcy would have been one of the 400 richest men in England (Burnett 141). As Mrs. Bennet says, "£10,000 a year! 'Tis as good as a Lord!" (*P&P* 378). Second only to James Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*, Darcy is Austen's richest hero and one of her richest characters, and Austen had good reason for making him so.

As Jo Beverley, in *Flirting with Pride and Prejudice*, observes, “wealth gives Darcy the freedom to be a fool for love” (35), but Darcy could have been just as imprudent with much less money. With half of Darcy’s income and no estate of his own, Charles Bingley is also at liberty to marry “the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!” (*P&P* 11), the dowerless Jane Bennet. Even Mr. Bennet’s £2,000 per annum enabled him to be similarly cavalier when he was “captivated by youth and beauty” (*P&P* 236). Darcy’s wealth only matters in that Darcy has the means to make a difference in the other characters’ lives by his acts of charity. Darcy is “generous” (*P&P* 311), “the most generous-hearted” (*P&P* 249), “the most generous of his sex” (*P&P* 312), and he can afford to act on his magnanimous impulses: “he had liberality, and he had the means of exercising it” (*P&P* 326). It is clear that Darcy’s superfluous wealth does not exist merely to enable him to marry a woman without a dowry or to provide his future wife with expensive luxuries.

In the fourth chapter of Volume 2, Elizabeth poses a question to Mrs. Gardiner, a difficulty Elizabeth has already been pondering: “Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin?” (*P&P* 153). In a flippant way, perhaps, Elizabeth concisely articulates the economic theme in the first half of the novel: What part should money play in matters of the heart? Mrs. Gardiner never directly responds to Elizabeth’s question and leaves her niece and the reader to work that out for themselves. After all, as Mrs. Gardiner has previously said, “You have sense, and we all expect you to use it” (*P&P* 144). As it is, Charlotte Lucas and George Wickham

provide Elizabeth, and the reader, with the answer as they demonstrate the difference between prudence and greed.

Charlotte Lucas's marriage to William Collins seems to suggest that many and possibly most Georgian marriages were matters of economic convenience, and at least one, if not both, of the spouses knew it to be so. For the first time in his life, Mr. Collins can afford a wife, and society, as personified by Lady Catherine and Mrs. Bennet, expect him to find one with all imaginable haste. Meanwhile, Charlotte Lucas needs a husband for financial support, so the ill-matched couple form an alliance and hope for the best: "his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband" (*P&P* 122).

Elizabeth and the reader are inclined to excuse Charlotte's gold digging because Charlotte is honest about her motives; "I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home" (*P&P* 125). Even more important, Charlotte makes an excellent wife for Mr. Collins, just what Lady Catherine ordered, "an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way" (*P&P* 106). Charlotte holds up her end of the bargain by being exactly what Mr. Collins needs, a good wife who practices "economy" (*P&P* 107). Even the impractical Mrs. Bennet recognizes Charlotte's uncommon commonsense: "Charlotte is an excellent manager, I dare say. If she is half as sharp as her mother, she is saving enough. There is nothing extravagant in *their* housekeeping... A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes. *They* will take care not to outrun their income. *They* will never be distressed for money" (*P&P* 228). As Darcy observes, "Mr. Collins appears very fortunate in his

choice of a wife" (*P&P* 178), but even Elizabeth must acknowledge that "in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her."

Elizabeth, "less clear-sighted perhaps in his case than in Charlotte's" (*P&P* 149-50), is similarly inclined to excuse George Wickham for his defection to Mary King's £10,000. Elizabeth initially believes that Wickham, like Charlotte, desires the financial security of a modest income: "handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain" (*P&P* 150). Once Elizabeth learns that Wickham's pressing debts were actually the motive for his hasty engagement, however he gets no sympathy from Elizabeth at all: "His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at any thing" (*P&P* 207). So between Charlotte Lucas and George Wickham, Elizabeth Bennet's question about money and marriage is answered.

Colonel Fitzwilliam has the final word on love and money while strolling in the park at Rosings. According to the Colonel, very few people are able to "marry where they like... Our habits of expence [sic] make us too dependant [sic], and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money" (*P&P* 183). As the Colonel points out, in order to be happy, a married couple must be able to afford at least an approximation of the lifestyle to which they are accustomed or they will feel deprived. The Colonel is the last person to attempt to discuss money and marriage with Elizabeth, and then there is no more to be said on the subject.

Thus, at Rosings, the money and marriage discussion concludes, but a second economic focus has just opened up as Elizabeth and the reader have seen how Lady Catherine de Bourgh treats her dependents in her parish in Kent. When Elizabeth Bennet leaves her home in Hertfordshire in Volume 2 to travel to Kent and then to Derbyshire in the first chapter of Volume 3, both Elizabeth and the reader are drawn out of Elizabeth's agricultural economy in Hertfordshire to different counties where Elizabeth and the reader observe wealthy residents in their homes and learn something significant about economics in the rest of England. Thus, *Pride and Prejudice* begins to function as a 1796-1797 state-of-the-nation novel.

Elizabeth Bennet is a relatively poor gentlewoman from a relatively poor, agricultural county. According to Frederic Eden's *The State of the Poor*, published in 1797, Elizabeth's home county, Hertfordshire, was probably the poorest county in England when *First Impressions* was written, or at least it seemed to be so for the working class. Elizabeth's particularly cozy little corner of the world, appropriately named Meryton, with its balls, and assemblies, and card parties and dinners, seems to be in stark contrast to the grim economic reality of Hertfordshire's low wages, expensive food, high unemployment and widespread poverty (Eden 205-07). Elizabeth's enjoyment of the present belies the economic threat looming in her future and just outside of her door.

Jane Austen began writing *First Impressions* in the autumn of 1796, in the wake of what Frederic Eden described as "the hard winter of 1795" (123). The majority of the British population had been struggling to live on low wages before the harvest failure,

when 80% of the average laborer's income went to buy food, mostly bread (Rule 196). When the price of bread doubled due to the scarcity of wheat, the result was predictable. Georgian economist Arthur Young estimated that after the harvest failure, the poor in England numbered eight million out of a total population of nine million (Himmelfarb 77). Whig MP Jeremy Bentham claimed that for "the great bulk of the inhabitants of this country...their utmost means are inadequate to their own maintenance" (12). Frederic Eden acknowledged the hardship of the times: "That [the poor] have, during the last two years, been subjected to great distress, from a rise, unexampled within the present century in the price of the necessaries of life, everyone will readily acknowledge" (120). What was also indisputable was that there had been a sharp increase in the number of people requesting Poor Law relief, including a large percentage who had never before in their lives applied for parish assistance and, most shocking of all, who were fully employed.

Normally, about 10% of the inhabitants in a parish received some form of aid through the Poor Laws, but, following the harvest failure, the average was more than 40% (Rule 116), and in some parishes, more than 60% of the parishioners were receiving poor relief. In most parishes, the taxes that funded parish relief, the poor rates, were woefully inadequate to meet the increased demand. Jeremy Bentham referred to the poor rates as "The Limited, or Inadequate-provision system" (151), and Church of England vicars, like Jane Austen's father, were going cap-in-hand to the local gentry to request additional money for the poor.

The January 9, 1796 *Hampshire Chronicle* documented various responses to the poverty in different counties throughout England in a prominent section of the newspaper titled “Relief to the Poor” (3). As Frederic Eden documents, magistrates in some parishes and counties, such as Hampshire, had raised their poor rates (195), while in other parishes and counties, like Hertfordshire, the poor rates stayed the same (206). In the parish of Chalk in northern Kent, “the great” voluntarily paid higher wages to their employees and further “assisted laboring people” by subsidizing the cost of wheat bread (Eden 209), but not so in other parts of Kent, like the parish of Westwell where, according to Eden, “The Poor are not well managed” (212). The gentry in other parishes, such as Chipping Barnet in Hertfordshire, chose to do nothing, presumably hoping to wait the crisis out, but, as Eden found, they were loathe to admit it: “The parish officers wholly refused to give any information whatever respecting the Poor or assessments” (206). Meanwhile, the well-fed fortified their houses, barns, stables and henhouses against their hungry neighbors.

In the two years Jane Austen was writing *First Impressions*, *The Hampshire Chronicle* was full of accounts of purloined food and missing livestock; sheep seem to have been particularly vulnerable to theft (5 March 1796, 4). Convicted thieves and poachers were either hanged or transported, but it must have been difficult to even narrow down a list of suspects when half of the village had a powerful incentive to steal. When some soldiers in Henry Austen’s militia joined in with local residents in a 1795 food riot, Jane Austen’s brother and the rest of the 10,000 soldiers at the Brighton garrison were assembled to witness their execution by firing squad (Fullerton 207).

Everyone acknowledged that the situation was critical, but what they could not agree on was the best response.

In April of 1796, the Lord Mayor of London imposed limitations on how much bakers could charge for a loaf of bread. According to the April 16, 1796 *Hampshire Chronicle*, “So great a reduction, at one time, was never heard of in this kingdom before” (3). The Lord Mayor’s price control was only feasible because the Prime Minister was quietly using government funds to buy wheat at its high price and then release it back into the market at a lower price to help keep the cost of flour down (Hague 377). Mayors in other cities followed the Lord Mayor’s example, and *The Hampshire Chronicle* regularly published the various prices of bread in major cities all over England. Additionally, William Pitt pushed a bill through Parliament that allowed bakers to mix wheat flour with cheaper rye, barley or oat flour, as long as the resulting loaves were significantly cheaper and marked with an “M” for mixture (Hague 377). Previously, mixing anything with wheat flour had been illegal as it was considered adulteration of food and an attempt to defraud the consumer. In his efforts to reduce the price of bread, Pitt was encountering considerable opposition in the House of Commons where politicians were reluctant to tamper with the free market and were adamantly opposed to raising taxes in order to help the poor. In local communities, people were more proactive.

On May 7 of 1796, five months before Austen began *First Impressions*, the front page of *The Hampshire Chronicle* reported the “Association and Subscription for Bread.” According to the newspaper, “in this emergency of dearness and scarceness of

bread,” and due to “the present exorbitant prices of WHEAT and FLOUR,” the local gentry had banded together to subsidize bread by their charitable donations. An article in another column on the front page contained the names of men who were contributing to a similar project but specifying that their bread subsidy was for “the deserving poor” only. The deserving poor was the term applied to people who were unable to work, generally orphaned or abandoned infants, the very elderly and the blind. The old Elizabethan Poor Law maintained that no one should be allowed to starve to death (Collins *The Clergy*, 118), but bread for the deserving poor and the maintenance of a poorhouse was all that the law required of any parish.

Tory politicians in London, like the Prime Minister, were making sympathetic speeches: “The present situation of the laboring poor in this country, was certainly not such as could be wished, upon any principle, either of humanity, or policy” (qtd. in Hague 380), but what Parliament might actually do was anybody’s guess. In *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, Gertrude Himmelfarb maintains that “the situation in this period, especially in the critical post-Smith, pre-Malthus decade of the ‘90s (Smith died in 1790 and Malthus’s *Essay* was published in 1798), was extremely fluid, and it was by no means clear what direction social thought and social policy might take” (65). In October of 1796, William Pitt proposed an ambitious plan to reform the Poor Laws. In the same month, Jane Austen began writing *First Impressions*.

The Prime Minister’s proposal was an early attempt to create a welfare state, and, had William Pitt’s Poor Law reform been adopted, it would have made a tremendous difference in the lives of the working class, providing short term relief and long term

assistance, such as the purchase of a cow for a working class family. But so much assistance to the poor would have dramatically raised taxes, thus impacting the bank accounts of the landowning upper-classes, which made Pitt's Poor Law proposal about as popular as the French with the majority of politicians. Liberal Tories supported Pitt's Poor Law reform, and a few moderate Whigs, such as the Whigs in Pitt's Cabinet, also supported the bill, but reactionary Tories and the majority of the Whigs vehemently opposed Pitt's Poor Law proposal, claiming the bill rewarded "the *idle and negligent*" at the expense of the prudent and industrious (qtd. in Himmelfarb 75).

The majority of MPs favored the do-nothing approach to welfare and obstinately waited for Adam Smith's invisible hand of the marketplace to set everything right, but they did not care to be quoted in the newspapers as saying so. Consequently, Pitt's Poor Law reform bill languished in the House of Commons until it died there of neglect. It was never given a hearing, debated or voted on. Whig Jeremy Bentham claimed to have been personally responsible for its ignominious defeat (Himmelfarb 75). In the meanwhile, as the April 30, 1796 *Hampshire Chronicle* recorded, the House of Commons chose to debate the dog tax instead (2).

The pragmatic Prime Minister made a tactical decision to abandon his Poor Law Reform bill and to focus on only one aspect of the bill, the feature that had the most bipartisan support, a national minimum wage. William Pitt was making the best of a bad business as it had become obvious that Pitt's generous, overly generous according to the majority of MPs, bill had no hope of becoming law. Although Pitt had considered Whig Samuel Whitbread's 1796 minimum wage bill to be an inadequate response to the

dire situation (Himmelfarb 74), in 1797 the Prime Minister proposed his own nationally subsidized minimum wage based on the price of wheat bread and the number of children in a laborer's family. Pitt's minimum wage proposal was based, like Whitbread's, on the Speenhamland system, a minimum wage plan devised by local magistrates in Berkshire in 1795 which guaranteed that at the end of a working day, a laborer's wages would be sufficient to buy a loaf of bread. If a man's wages were not, the laborer's parish would supply the difference. With Whitbread's support, and the support of other moderate Whigs and liberal and moderate Tories, Pitt's national minimum wage proposal had a fighting chance.

In *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith supports a living wage: "A man must always live by his work, and his wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him" (72). Smith also drew a correlation between high wages and a healthy national economy:

The liberal reward of labour, therefore, as it is the necessary effect, so it is the natural symptom of increasing national wealth. The scanty maintenance of the laboring poor, on the other hand, is the natural symptom that things are at a stand, and their starving condition that they are going fast backwards. (77)

Additionally, Smith asserts that a living wage is only just recompense for the laborer's contribution to the national economy, and his wages should not, therefore, be begrudged by his employer:

Servants, labourers and workmen of different kinds, make up the far greater part of every great political society. But what improves the

circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as an inconveniency to the whole. No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged. (*Wealth* 83)

But Smith left just enough ambiguity for his self-proclaimed disciples to seize on: “what is precisely necessary for their own maintenance... I shall not take upon me to determine” (72). Twenty years after the publication of *Wealth of Nations*, Whig political economists like Edmund Burke, Frederic Eden, Thomas Malthus and Patrick Colquhoun vehemently opposed Speenhamland, or any other minimum wage, claiming that the minimum wage should be whatever the market dictated and that the survival of the working class depended on their ability to adapt. As historian David Kent maintains, “the rhetoric of political economy seemed to prompt only one question, how little could the labourer live on” (6). Burke, Eden and Colquhoun insisted that laborers and their families could be maintained on their low wages, if they gave up eating wheat bread and adopted a more Spartan diet.

Frederic Eden reports that while laborers in Kent, Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s home county, formerly ate meat daily, by 1796, they had been reduced to a meager and monotonous vegetarian regime of tea, barley or oat bread, potatoes and cheese (208). As Eden conceded, they could not afford wheat bread, and not everyone could afford

tea or cheese: “Potatoes are a principal diet in large families,” and, for everyone, milk was “very scarce” (210). Although Eden was skeptical of their conclusion, he recorded the consensus of public opinion: “Poverty is generally ascribed to the low rate of wages and high price of provisions” (208), but Eden disagreed. According to Eden, “the miseries of the laboring Poor arose, less from the scantiness of their income... than from their own improvidence and unthriftiness” (100). Eden’s fellow economists concurred, and they all identified the working class addiction to wheat bread as a formidable obstacle to be overcome.

Edmund Burke recommended rye bread or oat cakes to the poor, but Burke grumbled about “the known difficulty of contenting them with any thing but bread made of the finest [wheat] flour” (243). Patrick Colquhoun favored replacing bread entirely with “nourishing, frugal, and wholesome” potatoes (*A Treatise on Indigence*, 274). Eden championed porridge as a new staple diet: “In the North of England, Scotland and Wales the poorest labourers, however, regale themselves with a variety of dishes” (101), which all turn out to be oatmeal varied “with a little milk or beer poured upon it, or with a little cold butter put into the middle, or with a little treacle.”

Although they differed in their menu suggestions, all three economists were in agreement that the poor drank too much, too much ale at the public house and too much tea at home. According to Colquhoun, “the alehouse swallows up a large proportion of [their] annual earnings” (*A Treatise on Indigence*, 234), and Eden referred to tea as “the deleterious produce of China” (101). The economists’ interest in the working man’s diet was, of course, a fairly obvious attempt to prove that the prevailing

low wages in most of England were adequate. It seems doubtful that they were truly concerned about what a laborer ate or drank but rather with how much he was paid, and they were firmly, even fanatically, united in their opposition to a national minimum wage.

The economists insisted that raising wages would be a monumental mistake with catastrophic consequences. Burke maintained that a man's labor was "a commodity like every other, and rises or falls according to the demand" (254), so a national minimum wage would undermine the free market system and create economic chaos: "The moment that government appears at market, all the principles of market will be subverted" (268). According to Eden, the Speenhamland system was "pregnant with dreadful mischief" (123), and he stressed "the fatal tendency of the system" (122). Colquhoun insisted that a "general rise of wages to that point which might be supposed sufficient, would be dangerous in the extreme" (*A Treatise on Indigence*, 279). There was also a consensus of opinion among the economists that the poor were ultimately responsible for their poverty, as they were lazy, ignorant, wasteful and immoral, and the last thing they needed or deserved was a pay raise. Apparently, the majority of people in England disagreed. As it became increasingly evident that the poor would be getting no assistance from Parliament, virtually every county in England, including Jane Austen's Hampshire, began adopting the Speenhamland system on their own (Himmelfarb 65), so that by the time *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813, the Speenhamland system had become the national minimal wage without Parliament's assistance.

According to historian Roy Porter in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, the top priority in the House of Commons was to further enrich the Members and their constituents, not to raise their taxes: “Taxation policy indicates how the state functioned blatantly as the patrimony of grandees” (118), who were devoted to “protecting their [own] interests.” Landowners, like Mr. Bennet, who were usually Tories, had to pay property taxes, ten per cent tithes on their farm produce, and poor rates to support the poor in their local parishes. Poor rates varied dramatically from parish to parish and county to county, from two shillings in the pound in Elizabeth Bennet’s Hertfordshire (Eden 206), to six or seven shillings in the pound in Jane Austen’s Hampshire, a taxation rate which Frederic Eden considered “excessively high” (195). If the Speenhamland system became the law of the land, poor rates in most counties would necessarily have to increase, as Hampshire’s had already voluntarily done, in order to cover the difference between the price of a loaf of wheat bread and a working man’s daily wages.

In David Ricardo’s 1817 *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Ricardo pointed out that taxation for the maintenance of the poor “falls with peculiar weight on the profits of the farmer” (179), while merchants, bankers and people living off of invested money, like Charles Bingley, presumably Whigs, were not yet taxed on their financial assets - nor did the Whigs in the House of Commons intend to be. As Roy Porter reminds us, many wealthy people paid no taxes whatsoever on their assets: “liquid capital as such escaped, and investment incomes of financiers and industrialists got off scot-free... most new levies were indirect taxes upon consumption. Thus in the late seventeenth century 35 per cent of taxation had been direct: by 1790 that had

dropped to 18 per cent” (117). Even with a war, the threat of foreign invasion and an unprecedented national debt, tax cuts were easy to pass, just as proposals for national welfare legislation were doomed to fail.

By the autumn of 1797, as Jane Austen was finishing *First Impressions*, Pitt was forced to set aside his plans to help the poor in order to concentrate on the war with France (Hague 380). The Prime Minister raised taxes where he could, as additional sales taxes on consumer items such as alcohol, sugar, tea and postage stamps, but the £2 million infusion from the new taxes was not nearly enough to fund the war (Hague 385). The Prime Minister needed all of his political clout for his revolutionary 1798 income tax proposal, the revenue from which would exclusively go to fund the war effort. Both Tories and Whigs in the House of Commons were polarizing in anticipation of the income tax debates, and, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen made it easy for her reader to identify the Whigs, both admirable and detestable, among her characters.

One of the first things that the Bennet sisters, and the reader, learn about Charles Bingley was that he “wore a blue coat” (*P&P* 9). As historian Venetia Murray reminds us, a blue coat was the well known “Trademark of the Whigs” (26), so donning a blue coat was as good as wearing a political campaign button. As Bingley is soon to convert his money into land, however, Bingley may not remain a Whig for much longer, but, even as a Whig, Bingley is a good, kind and “sensible” man (*P&P* 14). Regardless of political affiliation, once he becomes a landowner, Bingley will be liable to taxation, and his poor rates will support the needy in his local parish.

George Wickham also has “his blue coat” (*P&P* 319), but, as a military man, Wickham, like Colonel Fitzwilliam, is dependent on Whig patronage for promotions. Wickham’s political statement, which could be put on or taken off as the occasion required, could be merely a reflection of his rapacious opportunism, but we are also told that old Mr. Darcy “supported [Wickham] at school, and afterwards at Cambridge” (*P&P* 200). As historian Ben Wilson maintains, in the 1790s, Cambridge had a reputation for turning out religious non-conformists, hell raisers and Whigs (169). As students, Cambridge alumni, like Lord Byron, Thomas Malthus and the yet-to-be converted Evangelical William Wilberforce, had dined, drunk to excess and gambled at The True Blue club.

Pride and Prejudice’s hero is almost certainly a Whig as well since the choice of the name, Fitzwilliam Darcy, is highly suggestive. Lord Fitzwilliam, later Earl Fitzwilliam, was from the north of England and, as historian William Hague describes him, one of the “Three great Earls of the Whig aristocracy” (357), who were chosen to be members of William Pitt’s Cabinet in 1794 in an effort to form “a junction of parties if it could be attained” (Hague 356). A nephew of former Whig Prime Minister Lord Rockingham, Lord Fitzwilliam’s house, intriguingly named Wentworth Woodhouse, was and still is the largest private residence in Britain. As Lord Fitzwilliam was able to put aside party politics in order to support the Tory Prime Minister’s proposals and to work with other Cabinet members in the opposition, Fitzwilliam Darcy is similarly open to compromise in order to achieve the greater good, even when it means negotiating with a bounder like George Wickham.

The last name, Darcy, brings the wealthy Darby family to mind. The Darbys made an enormous fortune in smelting iron, and Abraham Darby the third, who died in 1791, built the world's first iron bridge, but he was also famous for his philanthropy to his employees. As Roy Porter summarizes them, the Darbys were among the group of Whig entrepreneurs, like Robert Owen, noted for their "industry, frugality and sober living, their secret being not to dissipate profits but to plough them back" into their businesses and employees (320). Darby bought farms to raise food for his iron workers, built housing for them and offered higher wages than other competitive employers. With a name like Fitzwilliam Darcy, in 1797 England, Austen's hero was bound to be a Whig, but a respectable, benevolent, moderate Whig, not a radical.

Even without a blue coat, tutoring at Cambridge or a suggestive name, Lady Catherine's political affiliation with the Whigs is also apparent. In Volume 2 of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and the reader are no longer dependent on William Collins' descriptions of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, tainted as they are by his "veneration for her as his patroness" (*P&P* 70), but we are allowed to observe Lady Catherine for ourselves through the lens of the novel's narrator. Lady Catherine's incessant interference in other people's affairs, her lecturing, accusing and scolding conveyed a wealth of information to Austen's original readers who would have quickly identified Lady Catherine's assumed superiority and unrelenting bossiness as a caricature of someone following the lead of the Whig political economists, such as Burke, Eden and Colquhoun, who felt entitled to look into the minutia of the day-to-day lives of the working class and to draw conclusions, pass judgment and offer advice.

Like Lady Catherine, “delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner as proved that she was not used to have her judgment controverted” (*P&P* 163), in his publications Patrick Colquhoun was free to make statements without considering any opposition. Certainly the poor were unable to defend themselves in print. This was one of the criticisms leveled at Colquhoun by his contemporary and earliest critic, R. Shaw (Wilson 103). Although Lady Catherine possesses no “extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue” (*P&P* 161), she assumes by virtue of her money and social position that she is more knowledgeable than the people around her. Distributing a “great deal of advice” and “dictating to others” (*P&P* 163), Lady Catherine’s “many instructions” and “advising” (*P&P* 176 & 213) are all she offers to the less fortunate. According to the economists, that was appropriate.

Frederic Eden insisted that the gentry should resist any misguided impulse to pay their employees higher wages but should, instead, “consult and co-operate with them in the practice of economy; it is far more useful to teach them to spend less, or to save a little, than to give them much more” (128). Eden maintained that the real problem with the working man was that he wasted his daily shilling:

Instead of the ill-grounded complaints, which have so often been reiterated by writers on the Poor, that the wages of industry are in general too inadequate to provide the labourers with those comforts and conveniences which are befitting his station in the community, they would better serve the cause of the industrious peasant and manufacturer by pointing out the best means of reducing their expenses. (100)

Colquhoun provided a list of topics to be elaborated on for the edification of the poor, including “providence and economy,” “frugal housewifery,” “frugality and sobriety,” “frugal cookery,” “patience under adversity,” “female chastity” and “the commendable pride of rearing a family without parish assistance” (99-100). Edmund Burke also advised advising: “Patience, labor, sobriety, frugality and religion, should be recommended to them” (253). According to the group consensus of the political economists, poverty was the direct result of the gross ignorance and rampant immortality of the working class, and the only possible remedy was to make clear to the poor the error of their ways.

The humorlessness, priggishness and self-righteousness of Lady Catherine, William Collins and Mary Bennet seem suggestive of a stereotype of the Evangelical movement, which had political as well as religious connotations. Most Evangelicals, dissenters and Quakers were Whigs, and in the 1790s, they were founding “visiting societies” to call at the homes of the poor, to inspect them and to offer advice and religious counseling to the inhabitants (Wilson 92). Whig MP Jeremy Bentham and political economist Patrick Colquhoun helped to form The Spitalfields Benevolent Society. Evangelical author Hannah More describes an idealized version of one of the Spitalfields Benevolent Society home visits in her 1817 religious tract, *The Delegate*. The visitors in *The Delegate* give the poor protagonist money at the conclusion of their home inspection, but first he must be judged morally worthy; his poverty is never in doubt. Victorian stereotypical Evangelical characters very much like Lady Catherine de Bourgh are Mrs. Pardiggle, “a formidable style of lady” (Dickens 94), in Charles Dickens’ 1853 *Bleak House*, and the “habitually authoritative” Mrs. Proudie in Anthony Trollope’s

1857 *Barchester Towers* (Trollope 23). As “Visiting lady” characters like Lady Catherine, Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Proudie demonstrate (Dickens 95), the primary focus of the visiting society evangelicals was to offer advice, not financial aid.

According to Ben Wilson, the apparent stinginess of the Whig economists and the religious zeal of the Evangelicals made them oddly compatible in their opinions:

The doctrines of political economy and evangelicalism said that wealth creation, discipline and competition were not just good in themselves but religious and moral duties. For those uneasy people worried about the personal disadvantage of suppressing their emotions, the exploitation of others in a fierce capitalist economy or the social stigma of new money, it offered immediate reassurance that what they were doing was natural, perhaps even a noble thing, and certainly the inevitable consequence of progress. It reassured people as consumers as well, for conspicuous consumption of luxuries was a stimulus to the economy. The successful deserved their riches by natural right; by the same token, the benighted poor merited their own position. (377)

No doubt, Lady Catherine would have agreed.

In *Jane Austen and the Clergy*, Irene Collins reminds us that a system for poor relief was already in place: “The parish vestry, at its annual meeting, elected not only the churchwarden but two overseers of the poor whose duty it was to collect and dispense the Poor Rate... The overseers of the poor were responsible to the magistrates” (118), but in *Pride and Prejudice* Lady Catherine de Bourgh usurps the

established system. Instead of going through the usual channels with the church council, Mr. Collins, in his self-appointed roles as toady and busy-body, carries all parish business directly to Lady Catherine who assumes the duties of the overseers and magistrate:

Elizabeth soon perceived that though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty. (*P&P* 169)

The reader will note that money plays no part in Lady Catherine's dealings with the poor. All Lady Catherine offers is officious interference, unsolicited advice and unhelpful criticism. The poor are no better off for Lady Catherine's meddlesome visits. She leaves them just as hungry and poverty stricken as she found them.

When Lady Catherine visits Hunsford parsonage, she conducts a tour of inspection similar to the fact-finding tactics of political economists Eden and Colquhoun who cajoled or forced their ways into poorhouses and cottages all over England. Like the poor targeted by the economists and the visiting societies, Charlotte Lucas Collins never knows when Lady Catherine may descend:

Now and then, they were honoured with a call from her Ladyship, and nothing escaped her observation that was passing in the room during

these visits. She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture, or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if she accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mrs. Collins's joints of meat were too large for her family. (*P&P* 169)

Lady Catherine's interest in what the Collinses were eating and her suggestion that Charlotte should be more frugal with the household budget seems to be an echoing of the political economists and their advice to the poor. As the text suggests, Lady Catherine's accusations and fault finding do nothing to render her advice more palatable; the same was true of the economists and presumably of the visitors.

Lady Catherine stages yet another "intrusion" at the Bennet's home (*P&P* 351). Arriving uninvited and unannounced, Lady Catherine obviously intends to take the family by surprise. She barges into the room as "the door was thrown open" (351), criticizes the Bennets' park and sitting room, and further inspects the house on her way out: "As they passed through the hall, Lady Catherine opened the doors into the dining-parlour and drawing-room, and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be decent looking rooms, walked on" (352-53). Like the economists during their home inspections, Lady Catherine expects Elizabeth Bennet to be humble and contrite through her accusatory tirade: "I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence" (*P&P* 356).

According to Edmund Burke, the haves were far too indulgent in listening to the have-nots at all: "The cry of the people... the most regarded, ought, in *fact*, to be the *least* attended to... for [the poor] are in a state of utter ignorance" (262). In her

“extraordinary visit” to Longbourn (*P&P* 360), Lady Catherine assumes a similar ignorance in Elizabeth Bennet and proceeds to tell Elizabeth, “if you were sensible of your own good” (*P&P* 356), what she should think. Elizabeth, naturally, resents Lady Catherine’s “interference” (*P&P* 360), but, in the novel, Elizabeth is free to do what the poor and the readers of the economists’ writing were not, to answer back.

When first hearing of Lady Catherine from Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet remarks that “It is a pity that great ladies in general are not more like her” (*P&P* 67), but Lady Catherine’s presence in the novel at all suggests that there may already have been too many. As historian David Kent observes, in Georgian England “desperate poverty existed in the midst of great wealth, none of which trickled down to ease the condition of the laboring poor” (5), certainly not in Lady Catherine’s parish at any rate.

The irony of the rich advising the poor on how to spend less money never seems to have occurred to the economists. In their view, the wealthy were inherently qualified to offer sage advice, but it was decidedly a case of do as I say, not as I do. As William Collins is ever ready to point out, Lady Catherine is not at all hesitant to spend her money frivolously and in ostentatious display. In “only one of Lady Catherine’s drawing-rooms... the chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds” (*P&P* 75). Given that the average British family survived on a combined annual income of £45 (Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Wealth* 124), although other estimates were lower, Lady Catherine’s conspicuous consumption seems insensitive, rather vulgar and utterly shameless. Lady Catherine’s “elegance of dress” (*P&P* 160), and “several” carriages (*P&P* 157), demonstrate that she routinely purchases expensive things she does not

need and probably has no use for, and Lady Catherine's rampant consumerism appears to be a corrupting influence on the impressionable.

Mr. Collins' "enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis De Bourgh" betray Collins's parroting of Lady Catherine's own boastful materialism (*P&P* 161). Although "the dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants, and all the articles of plate which Mr. Collins had promised" (*P&P* 162), Elizabeth remains unimpressed, at least until she travels into Derbyshire.

When "glancing over" a newspaper in Hunsford parsonage, Darcy asks Elizabeth her opinion of the county: "Are you pleased with Kent?" (*P&P* 179), but Elizabeth's "calm and concise" reply is limited to the scenery and is not recorded as dialogue. The omniscient narrator is likewise uninterested in describing the landscape in Darcy's home county: "It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire" (*P&P* 240). While the text makes it clear that the choice of different counties was not a pretext for a travelogue, it also suggests that there must be another motive, a different "object," for locating Rosings Park in Kent and Darcy's home in the north of England.

As mentioned earlier, at the time Jane Austen was writing *First Impressions*, the major difference in Hertfordshire, Kent and Derbyshire was in the availability of employment and in the wages paid to laborers. While unemployment and underemployment were chronic problems in Hertfordshire and Kent, and daily wages hovered around the price of a loaf of bread, things were much different in Derbyshire where there were, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, plenty of jobs and landowners like

Fitzwilliam Darcy had to pay their servants and agricultural laborers competitive wages with those of laborers working on canal projects and in foundries, factories and mills. The result was that a laborer in Derbyshire could earn three times the daily wage of a laborer in southern England (Eden 171). Additionally, factory workers were employed year round instead of seasonally, and food in Derbyshire was plentiful and relatively cheap (Eden 171-72). Derbyshire's mills chiefly employed women and children, allowing working class families to substantially supplement their incomes and enabling most widows and orphans to support themselves rather than living in Derbyshire's parish poorhouses, which just happened to be, by Eden's account, the best system of poorhouses in England.

Derbyshire's poor rates remained low, 2 shillings in the pound (Eden 169), the same as Hertfordshire's, but the combination of the poor rates and generous private charity proved sufficient. According to Frederic Eden, all of Derbyshire's poorhouses opened their doors and their books for inspection. As Eden reported, Derbyshire's poorhouses were "airy, clean, and well provided with good bedding" (169), the poor were surprisingly well fed, ate meat daily, and the children were "kept very clean" (172). Amazingly progressive at the time, the resident children at the Wirksworth poorhouse were taught to read and write, an early example of taxpayer funded education. Additionally, the gentry of Wirksworth generously contributed to a special fund to purchase "coal, beef, and potatoes" for the poor during the winter (Eden 172), and to a separate fund to be "distributed yearly among the Poor who do not receive any parish relief" (Eden 173). Given the county's superior treatment of the working class, when

Austen's original readers learned of Fitzwilliam Darcy's "large estate in Derbyshire" (*P&P* 10), they would have anticipated his benevolence.

Even in the act of character assassination, George Wickham allows that Fitzwilliam Darcy is "liberal and generous" and spends "his money freely" in order "to assist his tenants, and relieve the poor" (*P&P* 81). Wickham's story of his own mistreatment would have been immediately suspect without this disclaimer. Only Elizabeth's prejudice prevents her from questioning Wickham's allegations of Darcy's cruelty and neglect. Jane Bennet remains unconvinced by Wickham's account of Darcy as a hard-hearted, unprincipled villain who defrauds his dependents of their due: "It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it" (*P&P* 85), and when Elizabeth travels to Derbyshire, she learns that her sister was right. In *Models of Value*, James Thompson observes that "at Pemberley, Darcy's £10,000 a year is finally understood not as cash but as the financial expression of a life of landed gentry" (79), but, while the master of Pemberley obviously lives very well, Elizabeth learns that a significant part of Darcy's annual income is invested back into the local community.

At Pemberley, Wickham's grudging admission of Darcy's generosity is seconded by the much warmer commendation of Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, who gives Darcy "a most flaming character!" (*P&P* 248). Mrs. Reynolds praises Fitzwilliam Darcy for being "affable to the poor... the best landlord, and the best master... There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name" (*P&P* 249). As Mrs. Gardiner observes, high wages will ensure the loyalty of a man's employees, "he is a

liberal master, I suppose, and that in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue” (*P&P* 258), but, to remove all doubt, Mrs. Gardiner’s friends in Lambton also “acknowledged, however, that he was a liberal man, and did much good among the poor” (*P&P* 265). Darcy’s kindness to his underlings in Derbyshire covers a multitude of social faux pas in the ballrooms and drawing rooms of Hertfordshire, and Darcy is redeemed by his philanthropy.

As Elizabeth stares at Darcy’s portrait, she reflects on his generosity and begins to fall in love with him:

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. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship! – How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! – How much of good or evil must be done by him! (*P&P* 250-51)

Darcy’s “valuable qualities” are revealed in how he spends his money (*P&P* 265), and Elizabeth and the reader are simultaneously converted. Now assured that Darcy is “perfectly amiable” (*P&P* 376), the reader and Mr. Bennet are united in their acceptance of Darcy as Elizabeth’s husband: “I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to any one less worthy” (*P&P* 377). Everyone is prosperous and content in Darcy’s Derbyshire,

which suggests that a combination of higher wages and more liberal charity would produce similar results in the rest of the nation.

Just as Fitzwilliam Darcy has been maliciously slandered, *Pride and Prejudice* also calls into question the economists' assumptions about the working class. The economists blamed, not the crop failures, nor low wages, nor high prices, but the poor themselves for their failure to thrive. In Edmund Burke's opinion, the poor had a volatile, bloodthirsty, mob mentality, like the French revolutionaries, and would "rise to destroy the rich" (252), if they were given a chance. Jeremy Bentham argued that the rate payers should feed the poor out of "regard for the safety of the other classes" (150). Patrick Colquhoun also believed that the working class harbored decided criminal tendencies, and he compared the poor to an infectious disease spreading through the nation, "a gangrene in the body politic" which would grow "to threaten [the government's] total dissolution" (64). Whig hostess Mrs. Percival in Austen's *Catharine: or the Bower* would certainly agree, but none of this paranoid fear of the poor is evident in *Pride and Prejudice*, nor does *Pride and Prejudice* depict servants as fools for the purpose of comic relief, as was common in popular fiction such as Tobias Smollet's 1771 novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* and in David Garrick's popular plays, *High Life Below Stairs* and *Bon Ton; or, High Life Above Stairs*, plays Jane Austen knew well (Byrne 9), and which, according to an 1809 edition of *A Collection of Farces and Other Afterpieces*, were still being performed on the stage in London as Jane Austen was writing *First Impressions* and revising *Pride and Prejudice*.

The presence of so many industrious servants in *Pride and Prejudice* suggests the codependency of the classes and the inherent stability of Georgian England, a society dependent as it was on so much manual labor. American traveler Louis Simond recorded in his 1810 journal that the servants in England were surprisingly cheerful, hardworking, “civil and attentive” (2), especially so when compared to the servants in the United States: “Domestics are here not only more obliging and industrious, but, what is remarkable, look better pleased and happier” (5). As Simond noted, the tranquil lives of the gentry would not have been possible without staffs of competent servants: “The creditable and decent look of the servants is no less remarkable, and they are the mainspring of all the other comforts” (14). The servants in *Pride and Prejudice* would appear to confirm Simond’s observations and supply ample evidence that, as the Bible says, “the labourer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7).

Mrs. Nicholls at Netherfield, Mrs. Hill at Longbourn and Mrs. Reynolds at Pemberley keep the home fires burning. Charles Bingley’s acknowledgement that the Netherfield ball is entirely dependent on his servants preparing “white soup enough” is a tactful reminder that all of the gentry’s social events were made possible the labor of their servants (*P&P* 55). Mrs. Jenkinson and her four nieces, Miss Pope and Mrs. Annesley care for and educate their employers’ children. What would the Collinses do without their manservant John, or Mr. Philips without his man, Richard, or the Gardiners without their own John, or the Bennets without their footman? The Bennets’ upper maid Sarah and Bingley’s upper housemaid no doubt have an easier time of it than Mrs. Forster’s maid Sally and the chambermaid at the inn in Lambton (*P&P* 41). Dawson, Lady Catherine’s “waiting woman” (*P&P* 353), has, perhaps, the most unenviable job of

all and would presumably be happy to change places with either of “the two elegant ladies who waited on [Bingley’s] sisters” (*P&P* 41), but they all serve their employers without any hint of a complaint on either side.

The gardener at Pemberley escorts Elizabeth, her uncle and aunt through the grounds and, “with a triumphant smile” (*P&P* 253), reveals his pride in his employment. Austen’s original readers did not need reminding that all of those carriages transporting people here and there were being driven by coachmen, the horses cared for by grooms and ostlers, and that the various estates were also working farms that employed villages of agricultural laborers. Miss Darcy’s former companion, the perfidious Mrs. Younge, proves unworthy of the trust placed in her by her employer, but she is the shocking exception that proves the general rule. When Mr. Bennet teases Jane that, with her placid temperament and Bingley’s ample income, “every servant will cheat you” (*P&P* 348), no one, not even Mrs. Bennet, takes his remark seriously.

In a letter to Cassandra dated 29 January 1813, Jane Austen wrote to say that she had just received “my own darling Child from London” (*Letters* 201), the newly published first edition of *Pride and Prejudice*. According to Austen, she had significantly “lopt & cropt” *First Impressions* in the process of revision: “I imagine it must be rather shorter than S. & S. altogether” (*Letters* 202). William Collins’s exaggerated flattery, referring to Anne de Bourgh as the British court’s “brightest ornament” (*P&P* 67), must have been a later addition, as that particular phrase, an excessive tribute often repeated in the newspapers in 1812, was coined by politicians to posthumously describe the assassinated conservative Tory Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval (Hanrahan 102 &

143). Sir William Lucas also appropriates the compliment, as he congratulates Fitzwilliam Darcy “on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country” (*P&P* 384). Exactly what Austen edited out of the original manuscript is open to speculation, but perhaps there were more political references that the intervening years had rendered unnecessary or obsolete. At the time *Pride and Prejudice* was published, the Speenhamland system and the reform of the Poor Laws were still topics of heated debate in the House of Commons.

The Speenhamland system became both a minimum and a maximum wage in practice, a blessing and a curse to the working class, as historians John and Barbara Hammond put it, a well-meant “piece of pardonable but disasterous sentimentalism on the part of the upper classes” (*Village Labourer* 166). Beyond a doubt, it helped the poor to survive, but Speenhamland guaranteed the laborer bread but nothing more. When the cost of bread went down following a good harvest, the working man’s wages were reduced as well, which was not at all the original intention. In Jane Austen’s Hampshire, in 1830, agricultural laborers decided that their daily loaf was not enough, and the Swing Riots broke out, but in 1796 and 1797, Speenhamland seemed to be the best and most humane solution to England’s massive poverty, or at the least the one that the majority of Englishmen could agree to.

The issue of Poor Law reform remained controversial, and the Old Elizabethan Poor Law continued in effect until the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by a Whig government in 1834. Stephen Lee in *Aspects of British Political History* calls it “the most contentious piece of legislation passed during the whole era of Whig rule” (69).

The Poor Law Amendment Act overturned Speenhamland and significantly cut taxes by making it much more difficult for poor people to qualify for aid on the “less eligibility” principle. All “outdoor relief” was abolished, meaning the only people eligible for assistance were those confined in workhouses or poorhouses, and there were no more temporary “hardship” allowances. To further discourage people from applying for aid, the workhouses and poorhouses were intentionally made more unpleasant. For instance, married couples and families were arbitrarily separated. After the Amendment Act was in place, taxes going to the poor were reduced by one third, but it meant that someone elderly and infirm who applied for parish relief, like “Poor old John” Abdy in *Emma* (383), would have to leave his family and home to live in the poorhouse or get nothing. Having read *Pride and Prejudice* in its political and economic context, it is impossible to imagine that Jane Austen would have found that acceptable.

Northanger Abbey. “Open to Every Greedy Speculation”

Northanger Abbey begins with an “ADVERTISEMENT, BY THE AUTHORESS” (NA 10). This brief disclaimer added to the text in 1816 begins: “This little work was

finished in the year 1803.” At least 1803 was the year when the manuscript *Susan*, Austen’s original title for *Northanger Abbey*, was sold to Crosby & Co. for £10. According to Cassandra Austen’s chronology, *Susan* was written in 1798 and 1799 (MW 243), and the manuscript was slightly updated in 1802 (MW xiii & Le Faye 204). After the copyright for the still unpublished *Susan* was recovered from Cosby & Co. in 1816, the main character’s name had to be changed, as another novel with the same title had been published in 1809 (NA xii), so Jane Austen’s *Susan* was re-titled *Catherine*. By 1817, Austen had finished *Persuasion* and wrote to her niece Fanny about her other unpublished manuscript: “Miss Catherine is put upon the Shelve for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out” (*Letters* 333). Nevertheless, Austen had attached her 1816 preface in hope of publication, and Henry Austen is generally given credit for the novel’s final title, *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously with *Persuasion* in 1818.

In her “ADVERTISEMENT” to *Northanger Abbey*, “THE AUTHORESS” is very particular about the exact time frame of the novel’s setting: “The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.” In *Jane Austen and Regency Bath*, Maggie Lane informs us that the alteration in places was due to Bath’s 1809 street construction, as the author, with her “intimate knowledge of the city’s topography” (41), was well aware. The change in books refers to the 1790s’ craze for gothic novels that had, by 1816, somewhat abated. Catherine Morland overindulges in the romanticism of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, published in 1794, and John Thorpe mentions *The Monk* published in

1796: "I read that t'other day' (NA 48). In a letter to Cassandra dated 24 October 1798, Jane Austen wrote that their father was reading the circulating library's copy of *Midnight Bell* published earlier that year. *Midnight Bell* also finds its way onto Isabella Thorpe's reading list, as do two other gothic novels published in 1798, *Clermont* and *Orphan of the Rhine* (NA 40). All of this is important to a discussion of money in Austen's novels because it places *Northanger Abbey* in a specific timeframe and demonstrates that the author considered the timing to be significant information for her contemporary reader "to bear in mind," a reader who would have known that the novel was written around the time of the 1797 Restriction Act, an event which economically impacted everyone living in Britain at the time as it called into question the value of paper money, the reliability of the Bank of England and the honesty of the British government.

In light of the Restriction Act, mendacity and breach of promise in Austen's novels assumes even greater significance. Mary Poovey asserts that the three broken promises at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* suggest that the author was reacting to the paper money crisis of confidence:

Austen developed a *gestural* aesthetic, in other words, and not one that completely occluded the world outside the novel (through the use of fantastical settings and supernatural characters, e.g.), because she wanted to acknowledge the situation caused by the Restriction so that she could use her fiction to manage the anxieties it caused. (*Genres*, 370)

If Poovey is right about the Restriction Act's impact on the ending of *First Impressions*, which was begun in 1796 and completed in 1797 as the Restriction Act was being

argued in the House of Commons, debated in the press, and depicted in the popular cartoon prints of James Gillray, then what Poovey says of *Pride and Prejudice* should at least equally apply to *Northanger Abbey*, written in the year following the Restriction. By the time *Northanger Abbey* was penned, the economic crisis of early 1797 was generally acknowledged to have been a panic based on groundless fears (Hague 399), not entirely unlike Catherine Morland's wild surmises inspired by fiction.

On the front page of the March 11, 1797 issue of *The Hampshire Chronicle*, where the Hampshire Whig Club placed announcements of their regular meetings, is a large, eye-catching advertisement which would seem bizarre had it been printed at any other time: "WE, the undersigned, do agree to receive, as usual, the NOTES of the BANK of ENGLAND." Following a short paragraph explaining their intention to continue to accept as legal tender the banknotes used by their nation's government are the names of dozens of local landowners who felt compelled to reassure the public of their confidence in paper money. Presumably, all of the men who paid for the ad and signed their names to it were known to the Austen family. Certainly, the Austens were friends of "Wm. Chute, Esq. M.P." and of Lovelace Bigg-Wither, the father of the man who would propose marriage to Jane Austen in 1802. Such an extraordinary ad could only have been written as a result of the 1797 Restriction Act, which, after a heated debate in the House of Commons and repeated reassurances from Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger, all duly noted in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, had been approved by Parliament on the previous day.

The British public had always been a bit suspicious of paper money which contained no intrinsic value of its own and only served as a promissory note, pledging to exchange itself for gold. Adam Smith, in *Wealth of Nations*, compared silver and gold specie to a solid highway of commerce and exchange, but Smith saw the oversupply of paper banknotes, founded on nothing but trust, as being “a sort of wagon-way through the air” (259): “The commerce and industry of the country, however, it must be acknowledged, though they may be somewhat augmented, cannot be altogether so secure, when they are thus, as it were, suspended upon the Daedalian wings of paper money, as when they travel about upon the solid ground of gold and silver.” In spite of the insubstantial nature of paper, Smith reassured his 1776 reader that banknotes “payable upon demand without any condition, and in fact always readily paid as soon as presented, is, in every respect, equal in value to gold and silver money; since gold and silver money can at any time be had for it” (263). The problem was that by 1790, everyone knew the Bank of England had insufficient gold reserves to back the paper banknotes already in circulation.

Poovey reminds us that almost everyone in print at the time identified paper money as the major destabilizing force at work in the Georgian economy: “These writers represented a variety of political positions, and they occupied various positions in the business, legislative, religious, and journalistic communities, but their common focus on the fictive quality of paper money shows just how close to the surface the problematic of representation was in the first decades of the century” (*Genres* 177). In June of 1796, the *Hampshire Chronicle* reported that the proliferation of paper money with insufficient gold or silver to back it had “increased to a dangerous pitch,” that “the

fictitious circulation exceeds the real numerical circulation by more than double,” and so the entire system was doomed to collapse, as “with the *real capital* the *fictitious must fall*” (3).

Referring to paper money as “a fiction” or “fictitious” was, by this time, commonplace terminology (Poovey, *Genres* 175). The fictional element of paper money referred to the text printed on every banknote issued by the Bank of England, “payable to the bearer on demand in gold.” As everyone knew that this promised exchange of paper for gold was neither realistic nor even possible, the words, or story, printed on the banknote functioned as a brief work of fiction, but the promissory phrase was also a legally binding contract, meaning that the Bank of England had been operating one rush on the Bank away from insolvency for years. Nevertheless, the Bank kept printing more paper banknotes bearing the promise the Bank’s directors knew they could not, if pressed, honor, until 1797.

Rumors of a French invasion around Christmas time of 1796 prompted panic stricken farmers in Newcastle to besiege their local banks demanding gold in exchange for their paper banknotes. Three rural banks with insufficient gold reserves immediately collapsed as a result of the rush, and others closed their doors to avoid a similar fate. The directors of the Bank of England were horrified, as they knew that the same thing, albeit on a much larger scale, could happen to them. The Bank’s enemy was not the French but fear itself. The Bank was potentially one panicky mob away from collapse, and, even if the riot never occurred, troubles were coming as battalions of single spies.

By the end of February, £100,000 a day in gold was being withdrawn from the Bank of England, and the Bank's bullion reserves were depleted to £1.2 million (Hague 397-98).

According to David Ricardo, in spite of the proliferation of paper money and the unprecedented national debt, in 1797 the British economic system was sound, but the British public was not: "Neither the Bank nor government were at that time to blame; it was the contagion of the unfounded fears of the timid part of the community which occasioned the run on the Bank" (248-49). As William Pitt's biographer William Hague put it, if something were not done to stem the flow of gold, the Bank of England would fail, and, as a result, "the nation would be bankrupt and the entire system of finance and credit which had provided the tens of millions of pounds to sustain the war would collapse." Meanwhile, British Prime Minister William Pitt needed another loan.

After decades of deficit spending, Britain already had an unprecedented national debt, but Prime Minister Pitt went to the Bank of England, as per usual, but this time the Bank directors were hesitant to comply. William Pitt, however, was not a man to be denied, and Pitt proposed to solve the Bank's problem in return for a substantial loan to carry on the war effort. The Restriction Act was a bold, sly, perhaps unethical political maneuver devised and executed by Pitt. Knowing that the House of Commons would be uncooperative, Pitt waited until Parliament adjourned and then flew into action. Pitt's solution was a new law, the Restriction Act, which absolved the Bank of England from the obligation to redeem its banknotes with gold specie, in spite of the words clearly printed on each paper banknote. The 1797 Restriction Act essentially gave the Bank, like a woman at a dance, "the power of refusal" (NA 77). Additionally, Pitt assigned a

heavy military guard to protect the Bank twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week in order to discourage riots.

The Restriction Act began as an Order in Council, which was similar to an Emergency War Powers Act. All Pitt needed in the short term was the signature of the King, who was cajoled into cooperation. Pitt knew the House of Commons would be stunned by his audacity and enraged by his deception, but, once the dust settled, the gloating Pitt was confident that Parliament would be forced to comply, as the Prime Minister spun the entire affair as an act of patriotism which, in light of the threat from the French, any true Englishman would support. Whatever Britons may have thought of the Restriction Act, they could not help but be struck by their government's collusion with the Bank of England to make it legal for the Bank to disregard its oft printed promise to the public. Paper money was more fictional than ever and the politicians in Parliament even less trustworthy. No wonder the characters in *Northanger Abbey* make an effort to keep abreast of the developments in London.

In Bath, Mr. Allen "joined some gentlemen to talk over the politics of the day and compare the accounts of their newspapers" (NA 71), and at Northanger Abbey, General Tilney spends hours "poring over the affairs of the nation" and his "many [political] pamphlets" (NA 187). General Tilney's "club" in the country implies a political club (NA 210), such as the Whig club that regularly met in Winchester and advertised their upcoming meetings in *The Hampshire Chronicle*. Men's clubs at the time were expected to reflect their members' political views. In London, White's club members were Tories, and Brooks's members were Whigs, although some people, like Beau

Brummell, declared party neutrality, or political indecision, in order to belong to both clubs (Manning 141-42).

Catherine Morland shows no interest in Mr. Allen's politics or his newspapers, and she considers General Tilney's "stupid pamphlets" to be a rather flimsy excuse to be left alone (*NA* 187), but, even if Catherine is not, the British public in 1798 were generally keenly interested in politics and political economics, as, aside from the Restriction Act, William Pitt's new, controversial 1799 income tax to fund the war effort was looming large. It was the first income tax in British history, and, as Nicholas Roe observes in *Jane Austen in Context*, the tax "fell most heavily on those people with moderate incomes of from £200 to £600 a year, incomes that provided only a marginal hold on the consumer symbols of genteel life" (319), that is people with enough income to employ two or three servants but not enough to keep a horse (Adams and Adams 16), exactly the kind of people Jane Austen had written about in *Sense and Sensibility* and her target readers who frequented circulating libraries because they could not afford to buy books.

Heavily taxing the lowest strata of the gentry, the professional class and the upper strata of the working-class while leaving the wealthy comparatively unscathed was the only way Pitt had a chance of getting the tax approved by the House of Commons, but there was no system for auditing the tax. It was based entirely on trust, that the taxpayer would be honest in his accounting, and the rich had the most to gain by dishonesty. As it turned out, the income tax raised £6 million in 1799 and 80% of all of the new tax revenues imposed between 1793 and 1815 (Roe 319). No one in Britain

could have been indifferent to the income tax, least of all the income group to be most impacted, and everyone at the time was talking about politics and money.

As Poovey maintains, “in the wake of the [Restriction] act, money became a controversial and intensely political matter. As we have also seen, money remained a political issue for the almost quarter of a century in which the act remained in force – that is, for the remainder of Jane Austen’s life” (*Genres* 370). Like Poovey, Claudia Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* also notes the preoccupation with politics in *Northanger Abbey*:

Given the political ambience of British fiction during the 1790s, it is not surprising that of all Austen’s novels, *Northanger Abbey*, arguably her earliest, should be the most densely packed with topical details of a political character – enclosure, riots, hothouses, pamphlets, and even anti-treason laws authorizing the activities of ‘voluntary spies’. The political contemporaneity of *Northanger Abbey* does not stop with these allusions and with its critical treatment of paternal authority, but indeed extends to another, related theme: the status of promises... Debates about the value and violability of promises figure prominently in turn-of-the-century fiction. In anti-Jacobin novels, pernicious or merely benighted characters philosophize as they break their words and betray their trusts left and right.

(41)

Of course, Isabella Thorpe breaks all of her promises, as Henry Tilney reminds Catherine: “And did Isabella never change her mind before?” (*NA* 133). At *Northanger*

Abbey, when Isabella fails to write to Catherine, as “Isabella promised so faithfully” (NA 195), Henry challenges Catherine’s use of the term “faithful promise” (NA 196), pointing out the inherent redundancy of the phrase. Isabella’s consistent inconsistency should have prepared Catherine for Miss Thorpe’s failure to honor her engagement to James Morland.

Similarly, when General Tilney ungraciously thrusts Catherine Morland from his house, the General betrays not only Catherine’s but also the Allens’ and the Morlands’ trust in him. What is so striking about the behavior of the Thorpes and General Tilney is the way they say precisely the opposite of what they are actually thinking. Isabella Thorpe doth protest too much - “I hate money” (NA 136) - and Isabella’s dowry-hunting brother John declares that “Fortune is nothing” (NA 124). General Tilney also dissembles: “The money is nothing” (NA 176). As General Tilney has disingenuously assured Catherine that “he only valued money as it allowed him to promote the happiness of his children” (NA 205), Catherine is puzzled as to his possible motive: “why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable! How were people, at that rate, to be understood?” (NA 211). The Thorpes’ and General Tilney’s declarations reflect the irony of the printed promise on the Bank of England’s paper money, a disingenuous statement to a trusting public, but then *Northanger Abbey* is a novel about truth versus artifice, “broken promises and broken arches, phaetons and false hangings, Tilneys and trap-doors” (NA 87).

By way of contrast, Catherine Morland is “unequal to an absolute falsehood” (NA 174). Catherine lacks any flair for artifice and is thus confined to telling the truth: “I

cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible” (NA 133), a confession which Henry Tilney applauds: “Bravo! – an excellent satire on modern language.” Henry teases Catherine that her honesty is out of sync with the current standards of her society, that her “mind is warped by an innate principle of general integrity” (NA 219). Catherine’s spontaneous outbursts of truth, “I had ten thousand times rather have been with you” (NA 93), “I would have jumped out and run after you” (NA 94), fixes Henry on Catherine: “Is there a Henry in the world who could be insensible to such a declaration? Henry Tilney at least was not.” Henry sarcastically describes Isabella Thorpe as “Open, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise” (NA 206), but Eleanor Tilney recognizes her brother’s ironic description of everything that Isabella Thorpe is not, as being true of Catherine Morland: “Such a sister-in-law, Henry, I should delight in.” Henry not only values Catherine’s honesty, he is “open and bold” himself (NA 247), and Henry keeps his promises, even when they are only implied: “He felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland.” While *Northanger Abbey*’s respectable characters are entirely without guile, the text acknowledges that the world is a complex and confusing place where everything is not necessarily as it seems.

Significantly, when Henry is forced to leave for Woodston earlier than he had planned in order to prepare for Catherine’s visit, Henry frames the event for Catherine and Eleanor in terms of accepting a questionable banknote: “I am come, young ladies, in a very moralizing strain, to observe that our pleasures in this world are always to be paid for, and that we often purchase them at a great disadvantage, giving ready-moned actual happiness for a draft on the future, that may not be honoured” (NA 210). As it

turns out, of course, the debt for future happiness is, indeed, honored, and Henry was right to trust in the short term uncertainty for a long term reward, a thinly disguised statement about paper money.

In “Money,” Edward Copeland maintains that “Incomes are openly discussed in all of Austen’s novels” (133), but only three characters are assigned specific incomes in *Northanger Abbey*, Mrs. Tilney and James and Catherine Morland. Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* create a hierarchy of characters based on their given per annums, twelve and fourteen specific incomes respectively, but *Northanger Abbey* does no such thing. Like James Morland with Mrs. Allen’s muff and tippet, the reader is challenged to “guess the price” of the various characters (NA 51). The reader begins the novel in ignorant bliss, exactly as Catherine Morland does, and learns the three specific incomes only as Catherine is enlightened. Catherine is told of the deceased Mrs. Tilney’s dowry - “twenty thousand pounds, and five hundred to buy wedding-clothes” (NA 68). Mrs. Tilney’s “very large fortune” is the same amount as Miss Bingley’s dowry in *Pride and Prejudice* and provides the first specific financial revelation of the novel in Chapter Four at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Tilney’s dowry in significant information as it gives the reader some idea of the Tilneys’ wealth and of what kind of dowry General Tilney would expect from a potential daughter-in-law, but Catherine misses the clue. The knowledge of Mrs. Tilney’s dowry raises no curiosity in Catherine about what her own dowry may be, but, as Mary Evans affirms, in all of her novels, Jane Austen “is endorsing very firmly the belief that heroines *should* bother their heads about economic reality” (63). As Lisa Hopkins points out, “Catherine Morland overlooks money, but that is clearly shown to be a part of her dangerous

naiveté" (76), and perhaps a reflection of the dangerous naiveté of the fearful segment of the British public who also failed to understand the workings of their own economy.

The reader is told that Richard Morland, Catherine's father, "had a considerable independence, besides two good livings" (NA 13), but, armed with that much information, the reader knows as much about Richard Morland's finances as his own children know: "Catherine, whose expectations had been as unfixed as her ideas of her father's income" is as surprised as anyone to learn how much money will be settled on her brother James when he marries (NA 135), and James Morland must ride off to Fullerton to be informed of his own financial prospects. The reader and Catherine are told of Mrs. Tilney's dowry on page 68, and sixty-seven pages later, James Morland's economic future is revealed. The amount of Catherine's dowry is held back until the very end of the novel, in fact, until the next to the last paragraph. Of the three characters whose incomes are assigned, the specific amounts are disclosed at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the novel, very neatly done.

James and Catherine's marriage settlements are withheld from the reader because James and Catherine Morland are themselves in ignorance, and thus we know they are incapable of deception because, unlike Isabella and John Thorpe, they are unaware that they have any poverty to conceal. The Thorpes and General Tilney are deceived by their own greed, not by the Morlands, and in a similar way, the public had not been misled by the Bank of England. The promise to redeem their paper banknotes for gold had not presumably been printed in an attempt to defraud the public; indeed the

Bank had continued, up until the passage of the Restriction Act, to exchange their banknotes for gold coins “on demand” as promised.

As Adam Smith acknowledged in *Wealth of Nations*, the banks commonly printed “superfluous paper” banknotes (250), but not in any effort to trick the public, but because of their own naiveté: “every particular banking company has not always understood or attended to its own particular interest, and the circulation has frequently been overstocked with paper money” (251). When Smith wrote *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, no financial catastrophe had yet resulted from the practice. The proliferation of paper money created the possibility of “a run upon the banks to the whole extent of this superfluous paper” (*Wealth* 250), but the danger was as much to the Bank as to any investor. Additionally, the public had willingly accepted paper money as a medium of exchange, and the balance of their bank accounts had not been reduced due to the inflation caused by excess banknotes. Paper money was still legal tender, and, as *The Hampshire Chronicle* affirmed, people continued to accept banknotes in payment for commodities and debts, so no one had been actually harmed by the practice. As Smith declared, “paper money consisting in bank notes, issued by people of undoubted credit, payable upon demand without any condition, and in fact always readily paid as soon as presented, is, in every respect, equal in value to gold and silver money” (*Wealth* 263). On no less an authority than Adam Smith, the public, then, had nothing to fear but fear itself.

Northanger Abbey appears to break down the economic crisis resulting from the paranoia about paper money into terms everyone can readily understand, into the

domestic economics of a wealthy man with a large family. Thus, Jane Austen does what Adam Smith repeatedly does in *Wealth of Nations*; she uses the microeconomics of the individual to explain the macroeconomics of the British financial system. Like Catherine Morland's father, the Bank of England was truly rich, but there were many demands for its gold. Should all of Richard Morland's ten children marry at once, like a run on the Bank, Mr. Morland's resources would be sadly depleted, and he must always reserve enough money to remain financially solvent himself. When applied to, Mr. Morland provides marriage settlements for his children, certainly as much as he can afford, so Mr. Morland has fulfilled his financial obligations, as the Bank of England had, although he may not satisfy the expectations of everyone, such as the greedy Thorpes and General Tilney.

James Morland's £400 a year and at least another £400 when his father dies is "no niggardly assignment to one of ten children" (NA 135). As we find out later, when Catherine's dowry is revealed, Mr. Morland is being very generous to James, but Isabella Thorpe is extremely disappointed with what she dismisses as "an income hardly enough to find one in the common necessaries of life" (NA 136). Isabella had calculated on much more, "landed property... or funded money... a carriage... and a brilliant exhibition of hoop rings on her finger" (NA 122), but like the Bank of England, Mr. Morland cannot be expected to live up to everyone's unreasonable demands. In contrast, Catherine is incapable of being disappointed: "I am very sure," said she, "that my father has promised to do as much as he can afford" (NA 136), and "entirely led by her brother, felt equally well satisfied" (NA 135). It is only after Catherine begins to think

of marrying Henry Tilney that the disparity between Mrs. Tilney's £1,000 a year and James Morland's £400 a year begins to dawn on her.

Miss Morland fears that she may be "as insignificant, and perhaps as portionless as Isabella" (NA 208), and the reader learns only at the very end of the novel, and well after Henry Tilney's marriage proposal, that Catherine's dowry is £3,000. John Thorpe, once he believes he has acquired Catherine and her dowry for himself, exaggerates her wealth to General Tilney, and Thorpe also later maliciously exaggerates Catherine's poverty. Like the investors who panicked and ran on their banks demanding gold, General Tilney seizes rapidly and indiscriminately on rumors and only learns the truth much later, "as soon as the General would allow himself to be informed" (NA 251). The truth is that the Morlands are "in no sense of the word... necessitous or poor" (NA 251), just as a Commons Committee of Inquiry found on inspection that the Bank of England actually had considerably more gold than was generally assumed (Hague 399). £150 a year may sound like a modest income, but the reader must not forget that Catherine is one of ten children, and Catherine Morland suffers financially from her superfluity of siblings. Assuming that Mr. Morland would give at least equal amounts to all of his children, had Catherine been an only child, she would have been an heiress indeed with a dowry of £30,000, the same dowry as Georgiana Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*. With an income of £1,500 per annum, Catherine would have fulfilled John Thorpe's wishful thinking and exceeded even General Tilney's "greedy speculation" (NA 252), but innocent Catherine fails to consider that they have any financial expectations of her at all.

Like a babe in the woods, the naïve young Catherine sallies forth from her home in Fullerton with ten guineas in her purse and the promise from her father of “more when she wanted it” (NA 19). The Morlands have tried to prepare their daughter with at least a rudimentary education in economics. Richard Morland taught Catherine “accounts” (NA 14), and Mrs. Morland, “a very good woman, and wished to see her children every thing they ought to be” (NA 15), encourages Catherine to attend to her personal finance: “I wish you would try to keep some account of the money you spend; - I will give you this little book on purpose” (NA 18-19). Attention to domestic economy and an elementary knowledge of bookkeeping were recommended by all of the era’s conduct books, such as *The Female Instructor* published in 1817:

A woman, whatever other qualifications or accomplishments she may possess, who does not understand domestic economy, is a very improper person to make a wife of. Young women should endeavour, in early life, to lay in a store of knowledge on this subject, even before they are called to practice of it... The first and greatest point in domestic economy, is to lay out your general plan of living in a just proportion to your income. If you would enjoy real comfort... lay your plan considerably within your income. (177)

The Morlands’ instruction in arithmetic and economics, however, falls on their bored daughter’s deaf ears. Mrs. Morland fears that “Catherine would make a sad heedless young housekeeper to be sure” (NA 249), but the Morlands have not limited their children’s educations to mathematics and bookkeeping.

Mrs. Morland has also attempted to instill in her daughters a sense of the ethics of money by having Catherine and her sister memorize “The Beggar’s Petition,” Thomas Moss’s 1766 poem, in which a poor man pleads for help, which he will receive, from the very popular former Prime Minister, William Pitt, the Elder, father of the Prime Minister when *Northanger Abbey* was written. The mention of “The Beggar’s Petition” was perhaps a timely reminder of the general integrity of the Pitt family and the reputation of the Prime Minister who had masterminded the Restriction Act and the impending income tax. However, Catherine resists all “useful knowledge” (NA 15), so it takes her three months “to repeat the ‘Beggar’s Petition;’ and after all, her next sister, Sally, could say it better than she did” (NA 14). Although Henry Tilney is charmed by Catherine’s innocence, he also realizes that Catherine’s ignorance of the world renders her vulnerable to scoundrels like the Thorpes, so Catherine must give up her fantasies and learn about the real world as an act of self-preservation.

Henry takes up the burden of Catherine’s education where the Morlands have left off when he lectures Catherine on the picturesque and then ventures into politics:

to forests, the inclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government, he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. The general pause which succeeded his short disquisition on the state of the nation, was put an end to by Catherine, who, in rather a solemn tone of voice, uttered these words, “I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London.

(NA 111-12)

Ever the unpromising pupil, Catherine's mind wanders from politics to gothic novels, but, following her brother's line of reasoning, Eleanor Tilney is still thinking of "the state of the nation" when Catherine abruptly switches the subject: "It is to be uncommonly dreadful. I shall expect murder and every thing of the kind."

Rather than sharing Catherine's enthusiasm for a new gothic novel, Eleanor Tilney jumps to a different conclusion and is genuinely horrified. Eleanor assumes Catherine is referring to political protest, mob violence, and military intervention to restore the peace. As Henry explains, Eleanor imagines a different kind of fictional horror:

A mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George's Fields; the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood, a detachment of the 12th Light Dragoons, (the hopes of the nation,) called up from Northampton to quell the insurgents, and the gallant Capt. Frederick Tilney, in the moment of charging at the head of his troop, knocked off his horse by a brickbat from an upper window. Forgive her stupidity. The fears of the sister have added to the weakness of the woman; but she is by no means a simpleton in general. (NA 113)

Far from a simpleton, Eleanor Tilney is, in fact, very well informed.

Eleanor's fears of a riot in London, a run on the Bank of England, and an attempt to seize the gold reserves stored in the Tower of London were just what the directors of the Bank of England worried about, hence Prime Minister Pitt's round-the-clock military guard on the Bank. After all, the Bank of England had been targeted before during the

1780 Gordon Riots, and a church near the Bank had been demolished as it was feared the steeple would provide an ideal location for sharp shooters (Olsen 251). When Henry Tilney translates Catherine's description of horrors in London as a harmless, non-political reference to a gothic novel, he exposes the difference between Catherine's enjoyment of gothic fiction and his sister's more realistic but also groundless fears. Just as the French invasion had failed to materialize and the Bank of England continued to transact business as usual, the political fears of 1797 proved to be imaginary terrors, not entirely unlike the fantastical plots of Catherine's gothic novels. Both Catherine and Eleanor assume a threat where, in reality, no threat exists, which, at the time, was a Tory political position.

The modern reader may well remain as politically and economically unenlightened as Catherine from reading Henry Tilney's explanation of his sister's misunderstanding, but, as Nancy Armstrong asserts in *How Novels Think*, this may be because the text defuses the danger for the reader: "If we tend *not* to think of the eighteenth century in terms of the bitterness of its religious disputers, the volatility of the British economy, and the violence engendered by a factionalized government, it is quite possibly because so many authors performed the act of translation that Austen carries out in this passage from *Northanger Abbey*" (21). Henry and Eleanor Tilney's political savvy, like their comparatively extensive knowledge of history, illustrates the gap in their understandings and Catherine's. The combined efforts of the Morlands and Tilneys may have failed to teach Catherine much about politics or economics, but Catherine learns more from the papers she finds tucked away in the black and yellow Japan cabinet in her bedroom at Northanger Abbey.

Catherine's economic enlightenment really begins when she goes in search of gothic "treasure" and "precious manuscript" (NA 169), "these memoirs of the wretched Matilda" (NA 160), as Henry Tilney has teasingly predicted. In her search for gothic fiction in Northanger Abbey, Catherine discovers economic reality. Instead of anything wondrous, Catherine finds a roll of papers which prove to be a collection of petty bills, the financial tedium of common life, as Dierdre Le Faye notes in *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*:

Although the bills are common place to Catherine, for modern readers they point up the passage of time: five are washing-bills (laundry lists) for shirt, stockings, cravats and waistcoats; two others are the servant's lists of expenses on behalf of his master – the receipt of letters, hair-powder, show-strings and breeches-ball; the last one is a farrier's (veterinary surgeon's) bill for treating the chestnut mare. Shoe-strings (shoelaces) were just becoming fashionable as an alternative for of fastening for men's shoes instead of metal buckles; and breeches-ball was a dry-cleaning compound, a mixture of lightly abrasive powders and the natural detergent ox-gall, for removing greasy marks and dirt from leather breeches. (217)

The discovery of "those hateful evidences of her folly, those detestable papers" impresses on Catherine the economic realities of life better than anything anyone has ever said to her (NA 173). There is no elaborate plot behind the economics of paper, be it banknotes or paper bills, only a record of exchange for goods and services. "She felt humbled to the dust," but it is from this point that Catherine begins to learn about money

and about its power to influence her life. As Catherine has been ignorant of money as a reality, she is also learning about money as fiction and how people are influenced by what they believe about money whether it is true or false. Thus, because of their own fictions about her wealth and poverty, Catherine becomes first the prey and then the scorn of the Thorpes and of General Tilney although she has made no conscious effort to mislead any of them.

When Henry Tilney discovers Catherine snooping in his mother's bedroom, he challenges Catherine to put an end to her wild imaginings, but his advice to consider the probable and to discard the improbable, to allow reason to prevail over fantasy and fear, is again to side with the moderate and liberal Tories in the Restriction controversy and with the signers of the notice to the public in *The Hampshire Chronicle*. Prime Minister Pitt promised the House of Commons, and the public, that the Restriction Act was merely a temporary albeit necessary measure. The March 4, 1797 *Hampshire Chronicle's* account of the debate in the House of Commons reports that Prime Minister Pitt was attempting to assuage the fears of the Whigs and vowed that he "had no such idea as to make his motion of a permanent nature" (3). As it turned out, it was permanent, and the words "in gold" were discretely removed from new banknotes.

But when Henry Tilney reassures Catherine Morland that there is no evil conspiracy afoot, and nothing to be frightened of, Henry uses the same reasoning that Pitt used in the House of Commons and in the press to reassure the British public. Henry asks Catherine to:

Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? (NA 198)

Catherine realizes that her fears, like the panic following the rumors of the French invasion, “had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion” (NA 199). Catherine’s gothic novels have been playing on her imagination, like the Whigs and the enemy French attempting to frighten John Bull in James Gillray’s 1797 print, *Paper Money. – Bank Notes.—French Alarmists*. At Henry’s prompting, Catherine realizes that she has been indulging “an imagination resolved on alarm” and a “craving to be frightened” (NA 199-200). Catherine Morland learns to think rationally and to reject irrational, sensational fear, *Northanger Abbey*’s political and economic message to the British nation.

The Watsons: “Poverty is a Great Evil.”

With *Susan*, later to be published as *Northanger Abbey*, sold in 1803, and having been assured that her first novel would soon be in print (*Letters* 174), Jane Austen began writing *The Watsons* in 1804 but soon abandoned the story as an unpromising beginning. The manuscript copy of *The Watsons*, which features Emma Watson, a heroine “without a sixpence” (MW 352), is described by Brian Southam as an “undated

first draft, heavily corrected and revised” (MW 314). As relatively insignificant as it may appear at first glance, *The Watsons* offers us a unique opportunity to glimpse Jane Austen at work in an early stage of her writing process and at an early point in her career. *The Watsons* also affords us a sample storyline that Austen considered to be unworkable, yet she never threw it away. Significantly, the fragment is about money, or more precisely, about the absence of money, and this material alteration to Austen’s usual formula seems to have been the sticking point that rendered the manuscript unworkable. As Isobel Grundy observes, “*The Watsons* low level of social and financial status is its chief claim to originality” (203), and it is the poverty of the Watson family that makes *The Watsons* so intriguing.

Josephine Ross has noted that “[r]eality is never far below the surface in Jane Austen’s outwardly escapist, playful fiction” (226), but *The Watsons* is neither “escapist” nor “playful,” as the economic distress of the Watson family dominates the story. The dark and humorless world of *The Watsons* appears to be a harbinger of the literary realism to come at the end of the nineteenth-century, and the probable ending that the fragment seems to demand was not yet a literary option, not even for Charles Dickens when he published *Great Expectations* in 1861. Happy endings with happy marriages were required by Austen’s publishers, and a basic economic stability among the characters was necessary to render such an ending at all possible. Either the hero or the heroine or both had to have at least enough income to support a middle-class lifestyle, but the characters in *The Watsons* are too poor to afford comfortable gentility. Poorer even than Jane Fairfax in *Emma*, lacking Fanny Price’s safety net of rich relatives in *Mansfield Park*, Emma Watson’s financial situation is too limiting to allow the

character to make any choices at all. Everything that happens to Emma is beyond her control, as the protagonist and the other characters repeatedly acknowledge. Emma can only watch and wait, entirely at the mercy of time and chance, and the author's ingenuity, to see what will happen to her next.

Emma Watson concedes that "Poverty is a great Evil" (*MW* 318), and from the very beginning of Emma's existence, poverty has determined her fate. As a child, Emma was separated from the rest of the Watson family because her "poor" father had too many mouths to feed on his income (*MW* 315). Having been raised, although never officially adopted, by her relatively wealthy Uncle and Aunt Turner, the uncle's death, his neglect of Emma in his will, and her Aunt Turner's remarriage effectively disinherited Emma, and she is sent packing to swell the ranks of equally poor, unmarried women in the small, rural parsonage of her dying father. Emma's self-absorbed brother Robert reminds Emma of her misfortune and of her unwelcome status as another burdensome, poor relation: "What a blow it must have been upon you! – To find yourself, instead of heiress of 8 or 9000£, sent back a weight upon your family, without a sixpence" (*MW* 352). As old Mr. Watson's health declines, Emma's future hangs ever more precariously in the balance, as, when Emma's father dies, his parsonage home and his income go with him.

Without her father to provide for her, Emma has two brothers to fall back on for financial support, the begrudging Robert, "an Attorney" (*MW* 349), and younger brother Sam, "only a Surgeon you know" (*MW* 321). Emma Watson's brothers are unusually prominent for professional men in Jane Austen's fiction, and the fact that Austen

capitalized their professions seems meant to draw attention to them. Like Mary Edwards' parents in *The Watsons*, Jane Austen's novels usually "look much higher" for male characters, and the Watson brothers' professions also limit their sisters' options. Robert Watson is "prosperous" as an attorney (*MW* 349), but he is not a very rich man; he only seems well off because the rest of the Watson family are all so poor. No doubt, Robert and his annoying wife Jane would be at least somewhat justified in seeing Robert's orphaned sisters as additional drains on their own household budget. The younger Watson brother, Sam, is just beginning his career as a surgeon, the less prestigious and less well paid branch of the Georgian medical profession, and Sam cannot yet financially support Emma and her sisters, or at least not on his own. As an established surgeon, Sam Watson would be only a little better compensated than Mr. Perry in *Emma*, the Highbury apothecary who cannot afford a carriage. As bleak as *The Watsons* already is, the plot is poised to become grimmer still as old Mr. Watson's health is failing.

Oliver MacDonagh summarizes the general gloom of the fragment: "Emma is the solitary bright deed in a naughty world" (32). Emma Watson obviously merits better treatment than her fate allows, but her poverty affords her no alternatives, as Kathryn Sutherland points out: "*The Watsons* is a study in the harsh economic realities of dependent women's lives" (15). Emma and her pragmatic sister Elizabeth discuss their extremely limited possibilities for employment: "Poverty is a great Evil, but to a woman of Education & feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest. – I would rather be Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like" (*MW* 318). But there were worse fates, and Jane Austen's contemporaries well knew it.

The no-nonsense Elizabeth Watson considers her “inexperienc’d” younger sister “to be rather [too] refined” for their humble situation (*MW* 315 & 318), and Elizabeth reminds Emma that beggars cannot afford to be choosers: “I would rather do any thing than be Teacher at a school... I should not like marrying a disagreeable [sic] Man any more than yourself, but... I think I could like any good humoured Man with a comfortable Income” (*MW* 318). Like Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Watson sees marriage as their only feasible option: “you know we must marry” (*MW* 317). As Emma and the reader readily conclude, Elizabeth’s lack of success in the marriage market has made her desperate, and while Elizabeth’s advice to Emma makes both sisters appear pitiable, Elizabeth’s assessment of their limited options is irrefutable. Through no fault of her own, Emma Watson is backed into a poverty-stricken corner, as was *The Watsons*’ author, and, as Emma reminds Lord Osborne, she is unable to overcome her lack of resources: “Female Economy will do a great deal my Lord, but it cannot turn a small income into a large one” (*MW* 346). Emma’s economic vulnerability makes it highly unlikely that she would dare to turn down the marriage proposal of a wealthy man like Lord Osborne, although this is apparently what she was destined to do.

According to Jane Austen’s nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, Cassandra Austen told her nieces how the story was to develop: “Mr. Watson was soon to die; and Emma to become dependent for a home on her narrow-minded sister-in-law and brother. She was to decline an offer of marriage from Lord Osborne, and much of the interest of the tale was to arise from Lady Osborne’s love for Mr. Howard, and his counter affection for Emma, whom he was finally to marry” (qtd. in *MW* 363). If justice prevailed, and in an Austen novel justice was certain to, then Emma’s brother Sam Watson would have

also won his fair lady, Mary Edwards, and her £10,000 “at least” (*MW* 321), in spite of Mary’s parents’ opposition. But how Jane Austen would have brought such an unpromising beginning around to a series of even somewhat realistic happy endings seems unclear, and perhaps seemed so to the author of *The Watsons*.

One poor character’s refusal of an advantageous marriage may be rendered possible, but three characters in one novel who choose love over financial security is definitely stretching the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief, especially in the money grubbing world the Watsons inhabit. In a romance novel, such an impractical group of characters are fairly routine, but in Jane Austen’s novels, dubiously financed marriages are reserved for scoundrels and fools, like George Wickham and Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mary Edwards’ choice to give up her comfortable lifestyle in order to become a rural surgeon’s wife seems impractical but possible. Mr. Howard’s decision to spurn Lady Osborne, to risk offending his patrons and to jeopardize his career in order to marry the penniless Emma Watson seems highly unlikely. Should Mr. Howard throw caution to the wind and alienate the family on whom he is dependent for his living, would he still be able to afford to marry? And what would become of Mr. Howard’s widowed sister, Mrs. Blake, and her four young children who live with Mr. Howard and appear to be relying on him? But the other characters’ financial dilemmas pale in comparison to Emma Watson’s. In her bleak circumstances, and facing a lifetime of close confinement with her thoroughly obnoxious sister-in-law Jane, Emma’s refusal of Lord Osborne’s marriage proposal appears almost akin to madness.

Granted, aside from his money and title, Lord Osborne is no great catch. As Juliet McMaster maintains, Lord Osborne “is probably the one with the highest rank in [Austen’s] fiction, and he is not much better than a fool” (116), but he probably would not qualify as one of the few “very disagreeable Men” whom Elizabeth Watson would refuse (*MW* 318). Like Sir John Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility*, the master of Osborne Castle seems much more interested in fox hunting than anything else, but Lord Osborne lacks Sir John’s sociability. The most eligible bachelor at *The Watsons’* assembly is, in fact, fairly anti-social as he “out of his Element in a Ball room... was not fond of Women’s company, & he never danced” (*MW* 329-30). Lord Osborne only attends the ball because “it was judged expedient for him to please the Borough” (*MW* 329), and he just chances upon Emma Watson while endeavoring to advance his political career. The fact that dimwitted Lord Osborne even has political aspirations is highly suggestive, and it seems probable that Jane Austen would have further developed this political theme had she persisted with the novel, or perhaps she would have done something else in order to include the larger economic community.

There seems to be a hint of more than domestic economics about Robert Watson whose role in the novel was to become more significant: “Robert was carelessly kind, as became a prosperous Man & brother; more intent on settling with the Post-Boy, inveighing against the Exorbitant advance in Posting, & pondering over a doubtful halfcrown, than on welcoming a Sister, who was no longer likely to have any property for him to get the direction of” (*MW* 349). In this one sentence, the narrator reveals Robert Watson’s very limited world view, a reduction of everything and everyone around him into pounds, shillings and pence, money coming in or money

going out, and little interest whatsoever in anything that did not equate into money. Robert's "doubtful halfcrown" is probably not a government minted coin but a bank or business token coin, and Robert may well be wondering if the bank or company that issued the halfcrown token is still solvent.

At the time, England was awash with token coins issued by banks, businesses, mines and factories and by the counties of Hampshire and Cornwall (Olsen 246), as there was a shortage of government issued gold and silver coins. As Niall Ferguson reminds us in *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*, our modern coins "are literally made from junk" (30), but Georgian coins contained, or were supposed to contain, their value in precious metal. Unlike government issued coins, Georgian bank, business and county tokens contained little if any intrinsic value and were only accepted on faith that the issuing firm would make good on its tokens, but there was always the possibility of disappointment. Should the bank or business fail, the token was worthless, and newspapers like *The Hampshire Chronicle* kept people up-to-date on the latest bankruptcies that supplied a regular weekly column, which grew increasingly longer throughout Jane Austen's adult life and finally resorted to smaller print as the economy continued to deteriorate. Like Emma Watson's presumed inheritance, which fails to materialize, Robert Watson's halfcrown appears to suggest that token coins and paper money, in fact any economics based on trust, could prove to be equally disappointing. Perhaps that explains why Robert, like Lord Osborne, is also interested in politics.

When Tom Musgrave arrives at the Watsons' house, Robert Watson demands to hear the political news before Tom is allowed to make small talk with the Watson sisters,

“for as he came avowedly from London, & had left it only 4. hours ago, the last current report as to public news, & the general opinion of the day must be understood, before Robert could let his attention be yielded to the less national, & important demands of the Women” (*MW* 356). As Robert Watson shows no interest in any other topic than money, Robert’s curiosity about politics probably stems from his concern about the national economy and political economics. As cold and subhuman as Robert Watson appears, he is not the only member of the Watson family to be reduced into a grasping and petty character.

While Robert examines the coins in his pocket, Margaret and Penelope Watson scheme to achieve financial security by marrying men with money, like Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*. The insipid Margaret may yet capture that “great flirt” Tom Musgrave (*MW* 318), a Henry Crawford character with less than a quarter of Crawford’s income in *Mansfield Park* but who is, among the slim pickings in the village of Stanton, considered to be “A young Man of very good fortune” (*MW* 315). Meanwhile, Penelope is in hot pursuit of “rich old Dr. Harding” (*MW* 317), and, as “There is nothing she wd not do to get married” (*MW* 316-17), Dr. Harding’s bachelor days appear to be numbered. But given Margaret’s and Penelope’s situation, the old adage that all is fair in love and war seems to apply, and although Elizabeth Watson is not as ruthless, she is also on a manhunt.

Elizabeth lives in dread of her future as a spinster - “my Father cannot provide for us & it is very bad to grow old & be poor & laughed at” (*MW* 317) - and Elizabeth vows that she “should not refuse a man because he was not Purvis,” her first love. As she is

an honest and sympathetic character, a savior with a comfortable income could potentially rescue Elizabeth. Perhaps Purvis would have reappeared as a widower, another highly unlikely plot twist, or perhaps Lord Osborne, or Tom Musgrave, might have been persuaded to transfer his affections and his income to Emma Watson's twenty-eight year old sister, however improbable either of those scenarios might seem. As so many members of the Watson family are struggling financially, saving them all would be quite a challenge.

In *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, James Edward Austen-Leigh speculated that his aunt may have realized that she had erred in making her protagonist too poor:

My own idea is, but it is only a guess, that the author became aware of the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity as, though not necessarily connected with vulgarity, has a sad tendency to degenerate into it; and therefore, like a singer who has begun on too low a note, she discontinued the strain. It was an error of which she was likely to become more sensible, as she grew older, and saw more of society; certainly she never repeated it by placing the heroine of any subsequent work under circumstances likely to be unfavourable to the refinement of a lady. (296)

And it is this threat to Emma Watson's "refinement" which seems to worry Emma even more than her actual poverty. Emma does not want to grow desperate, like Elizabeth, nor conniving, like Margaret, nor cruel, like Penelope, but, as the reader and Emma

herself can both see, all of Emma's sisters have been warped by the same lack of financial resources which now threatens her.

When Lord Osborne proposes to her, Emma will be forced to make a Hobson's choice between financial self-preservation and her emotions, between sense and sensibility, with no possibility of reconciling the two. As Edward Copeland notes in *Women Writing About Money, The Watsons* "presents the pseudo-gentry woman's darkest social nightmare" (99), and, even more troubling, "*The Watsons* fails to show the way out of despair" (102). Perhaps this was because, other than marriage, in reality, there was no way out. As Janet Todd and Linda Bree maintain in *Jane Austen's Unfinished Business*, "it does rather look as if Austen had written herself into some sort of standstill" (230).

In writing *The Watsons*, Jane Austen appears to have discovered that in order to reach the conventional happy ending, her heroine required sufficient economic resources to maintain the illusion that marriage was about love, not money. If she had no money at all, the protagonist would be compelled to marry the first man with an income who proposed to her, be he ever so silly or dull, as a matter of commonsense and self-preservation. The heroine must have at least some money in order to exercise "the power of refusal" (NA 77). A comfortable home and even a moderate dowry, like Catherine Morland's in *Northanger Abbey*, was enough to enable the protagonist to be as romantic and as impractical as she pleased. Additionally, a theme of poverty seems to have severely limited Austen's opportunities for levity and humor. Money was also

necessary to finance the “light & bright & sparkling” and humorous version of reality that inspired Jane Austen to proclaim *Pride and Prejudice* so delightful (*Letters* 203).

Jane Austen put *The Watsons* and their financial problems aside, but she kept the manuscript in the drawer of her writing desk. Perhaps Austen planned to resurrect *The Watsons*, eventually, or perhaps she actually did. As far as is known, Austen gave up writing for a time following the death of her father in 1805, but the author was not finished with a dowerless heroine, a rich but unacceptable suitor, a clergyman hero or a sympathetic brother who had to take up a profession in order to make his way in the world. Emma Watson, Lord Osborne, Mr. Howard and Sam Watson in *The Watsons* seem to have paved the way for Fanny Price, Henry Crawford, Edmund Bertram and William Price in *Mansfield Park*, where the economic discussion continued, the political debate escalated and the home life depicted was considerably better financed.

Mansfield Park: “Her penny-worth for her penny”

While the ink was drying on the manuscript pages of what would become *Mansfield Park*, written in 1811 through 1813, the public was appalled by reports of

Luddite riots and the mass hangings of convicted Luddites in 1811 and shocked in May of 1812 when Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was shot in the lobby of the House of Commons by an assassin, bankrupt merchant John Bellingham, who blamed the conservative Tory Prime Minister and the British government for his financial problems. News of the Prime Minister's murder was met with a surprising show of support for the assassin, feasting, bell ringing, bonfires, cheering and what the newspapers referred to as "the most enthusiastic demonstrations of joy... savage joy" on the part of the working-class (qtd. in Hanrahan 89-90), who, like John Bellingham, also held the government responsible for their poverty.

The Regency's economic problems may seem a long way from "every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park" (*MP* 473), but a dismal economy threatens there, too, and when *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814, no one needed "a scene painter arrived from town" to illustrate the backdrop for the story (*MP* 164). Like *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* continues to explore the theme of money and marriage, but in a more abstract way by considering how women were valued or devalued by their society and by having a character, Mary Crawford, bluntly state what Austen's previous characters had been too polite, or too devious, to admit, that single women were often considered to be marketable commodities. The first Austen novel written entirely in the nineteenth-century, *Mansfield Park* was also the first published Austen text to openly join in the political fray, as *Mansfield Park* was, at the time, a recognizable parody of politicians and of business as usual in the House of Commons, and Austen's original readers would have recognized it as such.

As Austen critics have noted, *Mansfield Park* is an unsettling text charged with political messages and enough ambiguity to keep a debate raging. In *Jane Austen in Context*, Nicholas Roe maintains that “Austen’s novels present an England of small rural communities, farms and the landed gentry, but this is never a sleepy, pastoral setting and the organization of society (hotly debated in national politics throughout her lifetime) is always at issue” (360). Mary Evans in *Jane Austen & the State* has called *Mansfield Park* “Austen’s most fully ideological novel, in that she sets out in it with almost evangelical clarity her views on the proper organization of society” (26). Perhaps what Evans should have said was that *Mansfield Park* illustrates the improper organization of society, with a flawed government that the novel’s first readers would have recognized as a parody of their own leaders who were failing, rather spectacularly, to deal with the on-going national economic disaster.

In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler reads *Mansfield Park* as an affirmation of Tory politics, yet even Butler acknowledges that the novel questions the basic tenants of conservatism: “[Austen] can exploit to the full the artistic possibilities of the conservative case; and, at the same time, come face to face with the difficulties it presents.” Edward Neill, in *The Politics of Jane Austen*, claims that the text constructs a political bait and switch, first seeming to embrace and then undermining the conservative point of view: Fanny Price “contributes most to the ‘decentring’ of that patriarchy which *Mansfield Park* seemed poised to celebrate” (70). In *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia Johnson maintains that “Austen’s enterprise in *Mansfield Park* is to turn conservative myth sour” (97). Although Butler, Neill and Johnson are all correct to some degree, *Mansfield Park* is neither a condemnation of

Tories nor a diatribe against the Whigs but an accusation against the Members of Parliament from both parties who collectively fiddled while their country burned, an equal-opportunity, non-partisan jab at politicians.

For many of Austen's contemporary writers, creating a microcosm of England proved a convenient way to sort out national problems and to illustrate in a small way at least a piece of the larger picture. Like Fanny Price who is "fixed at Mansfield Park" (MP 20), the action of the novel is firmly rooted in a country estate. In *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, Roger Sales notes that many Georgian authors, both Tories and Whigs, represented the nation as a landed estate, which "allows *Mansfield Park* to be read as a Condition-of-England novel that debates topical issues such as the conduct of the war and the Regency Crisis" (87). Sales notes that Austen's depiction of the estate/nation in *Mansfield Park* is similar to the estate/nation analogy in Edmund Burke's 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In "Reading Aloud in *Mansfield Park*," Gary Kelly also considers *Mansfield Park* to be "quite of a piece with the social thought and institutional concern of Edmund Burke" (134).

Saul David, in *Prince of Pleasure*, considers the wastrel depiction of young Tom Bertram to be "Austen's thinly veiled criticism of the Regent" (366-67). Brian Southam, in *Jane Austen and the Navy*, agrees that *Mansfield Park* "was designed by Jane Austen as a 'condition of England' novel" (187), but Southam focuses on the text's references to colonialism and to the slave trade, as does Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*. Said reminds us that "these are not dead historical facts but, as Austen certainly knew, evident historical realities" (89), but not necessarily the only historical

realities of which the author was aware. Although Sales, David, Southam, and Said do not mention it, the most pressing and alarming topic in Regency England was the nation's troubled economy, even, as in our own day, overshadowing war as the primary subject of public concern and political debate.

Mansfield Park begins with the three Ward sisters who serve as a reminder that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. In *Mansfield Park*, as in *Sense and Sensibility*, wealth is entirely a matter of good luck which may enrich the most undeserving of people. The wealthy characters in *Mansfield Park*, the Bertrams (with the notable exception of Edmund), the Crawfords, the Rushworths, and The Honourable John Yates, are proud, materialistic, impulsive, frivolous, selfish, immoral and foolish, and yet they blunder along relatively unscathed in their protective layers of money.

Although intelligence, prudence, self denial, personal integrity and a Puritan work ethic are clearly valued traits in Fanny and William Price, the Prices' superiority plays very little part in aiding them financially; the nice guys seem destined to finish last. Fanny, William and the other Price siblings are somewhat able to better their conditions by their efforts, but, as Sir Thomas comes to realize, his niece and nephew are superior because of their poverty, "the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (*MP* 473). The young Prices must strive merely to avoid further financial descent and, regardless of their efforts, they will never achieve the kind of wealth that *Mansfield Park's* other characters take for granted and consider their due.

The first chapter of *Mansfield Park* demonstrates the range of lifestyles possible for gentry women. With dowries of £7,000 each, the three Ward sisters begin “with almost equal advantage” (MP 3). They have enough financial capital to be minimally acceptable to wealthy suitors, appealing to their equals and positively alluring to poor men. Having no inclination for being “an economist” (MP 32), Miss Maria Ward “had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram” (MP 3). Lady Bertram’s is not quite a Cinderella story, but near enough, and the narrator reminds us that in real life, as opposed to fiction, “there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them.” Lady Bertram has extraordinary luck, and her sisters have realistic and more common fates.

After six years of hoping for better things, Miss Ward accepts her best financial offer and becomes the wife of the Reverend Mr. Norris, a lateral move: “Miss Ward’s match, indeed, when it came to the point, was not contemptible.” With no children to make demands on the Norrises’ income, Mrs. Norris’s £350 p.a. and her husband’s income of nearly £650 gives them a combined annual income of “very little less than a thousand a year,” which allows Mrs. Norris to enjoy a comfortable gentry lifestyle and to save money as well.

The third Ward sister, Miss Frances, marries very imprudently “by fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections” (MP 3). Theoretically, Lieutenant Price could have risen in his very dangerous profession, but, in *Mansfield Park*, fortune does not favor the brave, and Mr. Price becomes “disabled for active service” (MP 4). What *Mansfield Park* did not have to tell its 1814 readers was that Mr.

Price's disability implied that he had probably lost an arm, or leg, or possibly, like Admiral Lord Nelson, had sustained multiple injuries. As a handicapped Marine, Lieutenant Price's career is over, and his future prospects are bleak. During the Regency, a handicapped person was virtually unemployable. Another truth universally acknowledged was that a half pay officer, with an income of less than £100 a year (Southam 138), could not afford to live like a gentleman. "Wishing to be an economist, without contrivance or regularity" (*MP* 389), Mrs. Price, Miss Frances Ward that was, makes do as best she can on the interest from her dowry and her husband's meager naval pension, approximately a combined £425 per annum, forcing Mrs. Price, with a family of eleven and "a very small income to supply their wants" (*MP* 4), to become "a manager by necessity" (*MP* 390). Having established in the first few pages that a combination of money, personal beauty, and luck determines one's fate, the action of the novel begins.

The reader is next introduced to the pompous but conscientious Sir Thomas Bertram, Member of Parliament (*MP* 20), and "master at Mansfield Park" (*MP* 370), as he formulates a "benevolent plan" (*MP* 18). Sir Thomas is confronted with the problem that continued to challenge country squires all over England, exactly how John Bull should endeavor to assist the poor. Sir Thomas already helps the working class who come within his purview by keeping estate workers employed year round (*MP* 142), and by retaining a large household staff, including an elderly servant, "the old coachman" (*MP* 69), "good old Wilcox" (*MP* 251). Acting on the promptings of Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas decides to assist the children of his sister-in-law, but he is unsure of how to proceed, so, like the politician he is, Sir Thomas "debated and hesitated; - it was a

serious charge" (*MP* 6). Fortified by Mrs. Norris's reassurances, Sir Thomas eventually commits himself to "so benevolent a scheme" as taking his eldest niece into his home (*MP* 8): "We will endeavour to do our duty by her" (*MP* 9). But Sir Thomas errs in assuming a vast difference between his niece and his daughters: "Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different" (*MP* 11). The only real difference between the Bertram sisters and their cousin is money.

Fanny Price is to live in the same house, as a member of the same family, to receive the same education, from the same governess, as his own daughters, all untitled, whether Miss Bertram or Miss Price, yet Sir Thomas declares that "still they cannot be equals." Because he is to become Fanny's wealthy patron, Sir Thomas assumes the kind of money nexus superiority to his niece that he assumes with his servants and his laborers. Edmund Burke referred to "this chain of subordination" when he compared an agricultural laborer to "the beast" that pulled the "plough and cart" and to the laborer's employer as the "thinking and presiding principle to the laborer" (256-57). The dependent is all body, the employer all brain, and Sir Thomas would probably have agreed with Burke that any "attempt to break this chain of subordination in any part is equally absurd" (257). Sir Thomas mistakenly attempts to maintain this superior-to-inferior relationship with his niece.

The underlying logical fallacy of Edmund Burke and of Sir Thomas Bertram is the assumption that, because he is the employer, the wealthier man has much more wisdom than his employee, who is presumed to be entirely ignorant. Because she is known to be poor, Fanny Price's uncle passes judgment on her sight unseen: "We shall

probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner" (*MP* 10), the same traits political economists routinely attributed to the poor. Sir Thomas has good intentions, but his "well-meant condescensions" do little to endear him to either his niece or to the reader (*MP* 13).

As Lisa Hopkins in "Jane Austen and Money" has noted, after *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, precise incomes become increasingly scarce in Austen's writing: "Money recedes still further into the background in the two novels of Jane Austen's middle period, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*" (77). Obviously, as consumer prices fluctuated wildly, doubling, halving, and then doubling again, the fixed value of so many pounds a year ceased to convey as much meaning. Hopkins points out that Sir Thomas "has no precise figure quoted for his worth... - effectively a direct invitation to the readers to endow him with whatever fortune they choose," and, however generous the reader may be to Sir Thomas, the text undercuts his financial stability. As Hopkins observes, "Sir Thomas's income proves in fact not to be quite as secure as we are led to believe at the outset: the dissipations of his son and the disappointments he sustains in his Antigua interests hit it quite severely." Of course, Sir Thomas is in no danger of becoming poor, only less rich than before. His financial problem is that he may be economically stagnating rather than continuing to grow wealthier.

In Austen's previous novels, the source of her characters' incomes was land, investments, or some vague sort of trade. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs. Jennings' deceased husband was a merchant who "got all his money in a low way" (*S&S* 228),

just as the Bingleys' fortune in *Pride and Prejudice* "had been acquired by trade" (*P&P* 15), and Elizabeth Bennet's Uncle Gardiner "lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses" (*P&P* 139). Whether they sold wine, tea, or beer, candles, coal, or cloth is immaterial to the story, but apparently Sir Thomas's source of income is not. Even the owner of Mansfield Park must count his shillings and pence and acknowledge that perhaps most of his income, and certainly much of Britain's, came from abroad. In addition to *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas owns a plantation in Antigua, and he must go there because of "the necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light" (*MP* 32).

At the time, as everyone knew, the West Indies were, by far, Britain's most profitable colonies, and the economy was based on slave labor. Austen's 1814 readers were also aware of the fact that in 1772 the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, Lord Mansfield, ruled in the landmark *Somerset* case that slavery was illegal in Britain, although Chief Justice Mansfield did nothing to interfere with the slave trade in the colonies (Picard 114). In 1789, Austen and her contemporaries would have read newspaper accounts of slave ship Captain Robert Norris's testimony in Parliament when Norris attempted to defend the slave trade as a humane enterprise (Rediker 328). Surely, Austen's use of the names Mansfield and Norris were more than coincidental, especially when one considers the additional references to slavery in *Mansfield Park*.

We are told that Sir Thomas's "business in Antigua had latterly been prosperously rapid, and he came directly from Liverpool" (*MP* 178). In the early eighteenth-century, Bristol and London were the major slave-trading ports in Britain, but by the late eighteenth-century, Liverpool had eclipsed both and become the busiest

British port for slave-traders (Rediker 50). When Fanny Price “asked [Sir Thomas] about the slave trade” (*MP* 198), none of the other characters seem at all interested in the subject, and Fanny is too shy to follow up her inquiry with additional questions, but Jane Austen’s point about the dubious economics of the British Empire has been made.

When Sir Thomas/John Bull chooses to secure his lucrative financial interests abroad, he abandons his family and home, but this would not, necessarily, have been seen as unpatriotic or anti-English. In *A Treatise on The Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* published in 1815, Patrick Colquhoun maintained that the owners of plantations in the West Indies almost always lived in England and brought their sugar profits home where the money enriched the mother country, “so that under all circumstances, the active capital of the nation is thus annually augmented, although not always to the advantage of the proprietors of West India Estates when prices are low, but uniformly more or less beneficial to the parent state” (87). In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas travels to Antigua to put his colonial affairs in order, but, while he is distracted in the colony, the situation rapidly deteriorates at home, which may well be a comment on the cost of British imperialism.

In Sir Thomas’s absence, his home descends into confusion and chaos, but, with Sir Thomas’s return and “under his government, Mansfield was an altered place” (*MP* 196). When Edmund Bertram maintains that “a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent” (*MP* 247), Edmund points out the problem of Sir Thomas’s absence from Mansfield Park and of his problems as an absentee landlord in

Antigua. As the saying goes, no man can serve two masters, but this was also one of the glaring flaws of the Members of the House of Commons. Many MPs represented boroughs they seldom visited and had no knowledge of, nor interest in, the welfare of the residents there. Like Mr. Rushworth at Sotherton, they may have been happy to show off their manor houses and to improve their pleasure grounds, but they took little interest in the lives of their dependents, as Maria Bertram notices: "Those cottages are really a disgrace" (*MP* 82).

For many Members of Parliament, like Sir Thomas, the colonies were a major source of income, so their loyalties were divided, and whose interests they were representing was questionable. When it came to a bill in the House of Commons, was it Britain's, the Empire's, the Members' constituents or their own financial interests which determined how they voted? Obviously, the economics of each group were intertwined and often interdependent, but what happened when those various economic interests conflicted with one another, as they sometimes did? And did the Members understand all of the facts and care enough to attempt to do the right thing? As Members of Parliament frequently demonstrated, they often did not, and the would-be MPs in *Mansfield Park* are similarly unpromising.

During the Regency, seats in the House of Commons were filled by a collection of privileged, often relatively young, men who spent most of their time in London and ventured only occasionally into their districts to give speeches and canvas for votes. In the autumn, Members of Parliament routinely deserted London for country estates to collect their rents and to entertain themselves with a few weeks of field sports, just as

the idle young men do in *Mansfield Park* (MP 114). Parliament convened in the late autumn, after the harvest and the annual extermination of the country's wildlife. As Maggie Lane in *Jane Austen's England* reminds us, "Only one-fifth of the population lived in towns" (18), so Members of Parliament living in London were by their very proximity out of touch with 80% of the nation, and a few weeks of shooting birds and hunting foxes at the most bountiful time of the year were insufficient to acquaint them with the concerns of the average man.

Londoner Mary Crawford demonstrates the city dweller's ignorance of rural economics when she attempts to hire a horse and cart to fetch her harp. As Edmund points out, "You would find it difficult, I dare say, just now, in the middle of a very late hay harvest" (MP 58). What the local gentry appreciates is that, without the hay, which must be quickly gathered in while the weather holds and before it begins to mold or rot, the sheep and cattle will have nothing to eat during the winter and will have to be, of necessity, slaughtered. Such a flood of meat on the market would drive meat prices down in the short term and force farmers to take a loss and then create a shortage of meat with high prices for the next few years until the area was able to recover, an economic disaster with both short term and long term affects. But this never occurs to Mary Crawford: "Guess my surprise, when I found that I had been asking the most unreasonable, most impossible thing in the world, had offended all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish." But Mary's attempt to hire a horse and cart is worse than the social faux pas she perceives it to be, merely a breach of "country customs." Mary betrays gross ignorance of the foundation of her nation's economy, and her brother Henry is just as bad. Instead of offering his own carriage horses to help with

the local hay harvest, Henry sends them off to London to fetch the harp (*MP* 59). Mary Crawford acknowledges that “coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money” does little to endear her to the rural population, but she never seems to understand the absurdity of her thinking.

Edmund Bertram feels compelled to explain to Mary Crawford the reason for their many differences of opinion: “*You* are speaking of London, *I* am speaking of the nation at large” (*MP* 93). Edmund asserts that people should look to rural England for spiritual guidance, but *Mansfield Park* implies that rural England should guide people in their temporal concerns as well. The Crawfords’ misunderstanding is the result of their sheltered lives as city dwellers, where, in exchange for money, food magically appears, and they are spared any concern about where their food comes from or how it is produced. Mrs. Grant reminds Mary that London tradesmen are often inconvenient or unreliable, certainly expensive, and bound to cause vexation, but Mary dismisses her objections: “I mean to be too rich to lament or to feel any thing of the sort. A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may secure all the myrtle and turkey part of it” (*MP* 213). Mary’s money certainly shields her, but her indifference to other people’s livelihoods and to the economic condition of the nation is selfish, offensive and, as the text suggests, unpatriotic.

Like the other characters in *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford reveals her attitude towards profit and loss as she plays at the card game Speculation: “No cold prudence for me” (*MP* 243). It is significant that her brother plays Speculation by risking nothing of his own and by merely advising other people. Mary dismisses practical financial

considerations as so much boring cant of “moderation and economy, and bringing down your wants to your income, and all that.” The Crawfords’ understanding of economics, where “every thing is to be got with money,” is revealed to be severely limited, fundamentally flawed, and ultimately, when applied to human beings, immoral, but the Crawfords only reflect the cash nexus worldview of bankers, stockbrokers, merchants in The City, the leading economists of the day, and the Members of the House of Commons.

For an eldest son in line to eventually inherit a title and to thus assume his place in the House of Lords, being a Member of the House of Commons was thought to be good preparation; the political career of Winston Churchill is a case in point. For the untitled but wealthy, like Sir Thomas Bertram and his heir, the House of Commons was an end in itself which allowed Members to control the wool bag, that is, the nation’s purse strings, and enabled them to protect their own moneyed interests. Many Members of Commons never set foot in the boroughs they represented and merely cast their votes as directed by the landowners who elected them. It is worth noting that the young men assembled at Mansfield Park either will be or at least could be Members of Parliament and in a position to make decisions about the economy of the nation. It is a thought which should give the reader pause. Their family connections, wealth and temperaments amply equip them to become dependable party hacks, but not inspired leaders, and, with the exception of outsider William Price, the only one who serves in the military, the male characters in *Mansfield Park* are representative of those who actually governed Britain at the time. Mr. Rushworth is an only child and heir to an estate, Henry Crawford an only son and has inherited an estate, Tom Bertram an eldest

son and heir to an estate, and The Honourable John Yates “the younger son of a Lord” (*MP* 121), exactly the same assortment of “dashing representatives, or idle heir apparents” that Mary Crawford meets with in London (*MP* 469).

Politically unimpeded by being “an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books, with opinions in general unfixed, and without seeming much aware of it himself” (*MP* 200), James Rushworth, the wealthiest character in an Austen novel, is destined for a seat in the House of Commons. Mrs. Grant speculates that Rushworth “*will* be in parliament soon. When Sir Thomas comes, I dare say he will be in for some borough, but there has been nobody to put him in the way of doing any thing yet” (*MP* 161). Mrs. Grant and Mary Crawford are both politically savvy enough to know that with Sir Thomas’s influence in the House of Commons, and James Rushworth’s 700 acre estate (*MP* 55), an income of £12,000 a year (*MP* 40), a large London house, “one of the best houses in Wimpole Street” (*MP* 394) - and “with not more than common sense” (*MP* 38) - Mr. Rushworth can easily become the representative of some rotten or pocket borough. Mr. Rushworth’s work ethic is nonexistent - “I think we are a great deal better employed, sitting comfortably here among ourselves, and doing nothing” (*MP* 186) - but his very do-nothingness may admirably suit him for a long if not distinguished political career. As useless as he is, Mr. Rushworth is no worse than the other young scions of wealth in the novel who will no doubt be assuming their places in Britain’s government as well.

Though certainly capable of more than Mr. Rushworth, Tom Bertram, “careless and extravagant” (*MP* 20), aspires to nothing more than horseracing, shooting,

gambling, and playacting. In fact, in his passion for horseracing, Tom resembles former Whig Prime Minister Augustus Henry Fitzroy, third Duke of Grafton, who, as a Member of Parliament and even as Prime Minister, routinely neglected pressing national affairs in order to spend the day at the race track (Stone *Broken Lives*, 140), just as Tom Bertram deserts Mansfield Park to attend the horse races. Prime Minister Fitzroy was also a notorious adulterer who lived openly in London with his mistress before finally, and hypocritically, divorcing his wife for adultery. The anonymous “Junius” letters made the Prime Minister’s immoral private life public knowledge. As was well known by the time *Mansfield Park* was published, the Prince Regent shared Fitzroy’s passions for fast horses and fast women, lived a remarkably similar lifestyle in London with his mistress Maria Fitzherbert, and planned to divorce his own wife, Princess Caroline, for adultery.

Young Tom Bertram is not yet so thoroughly corrupted, but his interests in racehorses, gambling, and playacting are suggestive of an unpromising future. Tom’s debts reminded the reader of the Prince Regent’s extravagance but also of the worrisome and continually swelling national debt that Prime Minister William Pitt’s scheme, The Sinking Fund, had failed to reduce. Tom’s knowledge of world events comes from a casual glance at the newspaper headlines, and his political opinions are entirely dependent on the advice of Tom’s better informed acquaintances, like the self-absorbed and not particularly insightful Dr. Grant: “A strange business this in America... What is your opinion? – I always come to you to know what I am to think of public matters” (*MP* 119). “With no fears and no scruples” (*MP* 126), and “with all the liberal dispositions of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment” (*MP* 17), Tom, before his reformation at the end of the novel, is not much better than

John Yates, Tom's future brother-in-law, whose theatrical turn would suit Yates well in making speeches before an audience in the House of Commons.

In the proposed *Mansfield Park* play, Yates desires a dramatic part which would afford "some very good ranting ground," so that he may "rant" and "re-rant" (*MP* 132): "To storm... was the height of his theatrical ambition." There was no better place than Parliament for putting on a show. Even playwright and Whig MP Richard Brinsley Sheridan was impressed by Edmund Burke's theatrical outbursts and his "scream of passion" in the House of Commons (qtd. in Hague 90). There is no real conviction behind Yates's theatrical outbursts; he is like an insincere politician delivering a prepared speech. But Yates enjoys feigning emotion and being the center of attention. Edmund Bertram attempts to oppose Tom and Yates, but when Henry Crawford arrives to cast his deciding vote in favor of playacting, Edmund concedes defeat: "The scheme advanced. Opposition was vain" (*MP* 129). For all of their enthusiasm, Tom Bertram and John Yates are mere amateurs beside the natural talent of a consummate politician, Henry Crawford.

"Thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example" (*MP* 115), and fortified with £4,000 a year (*MP* 118), Henry Crawford fits right in with his fellow wastrels, but his desire to be a leader and his powers as a manipulator are much superior to those of his friends. A self-styled and self-proclaimed improver, Henry Crawford feigns modesty but brags of his precocious abilities and early success: "My plan was laid at Westminster – a little altered perhaps at Cambridge, and at one and twenty executed" (*MP* 61). Mary Crawford brags of her brother, "You know Henry to be such a capital

improver" (*MP 244*), but, as Edmund Bertram wryly notes, even Crawford's simplest plans, such as the proposed improvements to Edmund's stables at Thornton Lacey, are subject to change: "we will add to the stables on your own improved plan, and with all the improvements of your improved plan that may occur to you this spring" (*MP 247*). Parliament adjourned in late March, so there was usually a flurry of last minute activity in the spring before everyone decamped.

Sensing a leadership vacuum, an ongoing problem in Parliament since the death of William Pitt in 1806, Henry Crawford puts himself forward to lead the rest. Crawford's "Sotherton scheme" (*MP 75*), to improve James Rushworth's pleasure grounds, is adopted by everyone's "ready concurrence" (*MP 62*). At Sotherton, Crawford proposes to "summon a council on this lawn," but his feckless Members cannot settle down to business: "there seemed no inclination to move in any plan... and all dispersed about in happy independence" (*MP 90*). Sensing their lack of purpose, "Mr. Crawford was the first to move forward" and began "fault-finding," which inspires the other characters to "form into parties" and to occupying themselves "in busy consultation."

Crawford tosses out his inspiration-of-the-moment ideas with no consideration of the difficulties or expense involved, and then launches into a typical politician's speech, "that their views and their plans might be more comprehensive" (*MP 97*), which implies a group consensus that he obviously has not formed: "It was the very thing of all others to be wished, it was the best, it was the only way of proceeding with any advantage" (*MP 97*). In the end, nothing comes of nothing: "Nothing was fixed on – but Henry

Crawford was full of ideas and projects,” and his failure to actually accomplish anything troubles him not at all.

When John Yates and Tom Bertram propose a play at Mansfield Park, Henry Crawford “was quite alive at the idea... I feel as if I could be any thing or every thing, as if I could rant and storm, or sigh, or cut capers” (*MP* 123). Fanny Price describes Crawford in political terms, as being “every thing to every body” (*MP* 306). Although Fanny Price considers them to have been an unmitigated travesty, Crawford remembers the Mansfield theatricals with pleasure, as a politician might reflect on an exciting session of Parliament: “There was such an interest, such an animation, such a spirit diffused! Every body felt it. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, solicitude, bustle, for every hour of the day. Always some little objection, some little doubt, some little anxiety to be got over. I never was happier” (*MP* 225). Crawford acknowledges that Sir Thomas’s return overruled him, but, had luck been on his side and delayed Sir Thomas, “if Mansfield Park had had the government of the winds just for a week or two about the equinox, there would have been a difference.” As Fanny Price listens to Henry Crawford’s gross exaggeration of the significance of their playacting, she can only conclude “Oh! What a corrupted mind! “ But Crawford also reveals himself through his reading of the speech of Shakespeare’s hypocritical, self-serving, ruthless and thoroughly corrupt politician, Cardinal Wolsey in *Henry VIII*. Crawford knows the power of his oratory, which was “truly dramatic” (*MP* 337), but Henry’s masterful delivery reminds Fanny of his insincerity as “his reading brought all his acting before her again” (*MP* 337). Crawford is only assuming a part yet again when

he feigns concern for the poor in order to impress Fanny Price with a show of compassion and sincerity.

In reality, Henry Crawford neglects his estate, Everingham, and the welfare of his tenants, as do James Rushworth and Tom Bertram. Like many a Member of Parliament, Crawford only visits Everingham in the autumn for the shooting, and when he feels it necessary to drum up support. In the meantime, he entertains himself, flirts, talks politics over his dinner (*MP 223*), and discusses “how to make money – how to turn a good income into a better” (*MP 226*). In the second half of the novel, Fanny Price becomes Henry Crawford’s skeptical public, to be wooed and won over, and Crawford takes on Fanny as his latest project; “my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me” (*MP 229*). Crawford approaches the process as a politician who wishes to obtain the support of his constituents, and he begins with a bit of audience analysis: “I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her... Her looks say, ‘I will not like you, I am determined not to like you,’ and I say, she shall” (*MP 230*), and so Crawford’s charm campaign begins.

Henry Crawford allows himself two weeks for the project, with “all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do” (*MP 231*), but Crawford discovers Fanny to be a more difficult conquest than he had anticipated. Like what we would call the silent majority, Fanny has little to say, but she is no fool, and Henry Crawford finds that he must alter his original plan when it fails to produce results. Crawford adds postscripts to his sister’s letters to Fanny that are “warm and determined like his speeches” (*MP 376*). Like an experienced political hack delivering a well rehearsed stump speech in his visit

to Portsmouth, Crawford launches into an account, “aimed, and well aimed, at Fanny” (*MP* 404), in which he boasts of his efforts to weed out corruption, blames someone else for his own neglect, and exaggerates his accomplishments:

Norfolk was what he had mostly to talk of; there he had been some time, and every thing there was rising in importance from his present schemes... For approbation, the particular reason of his going into Norfolk at all, at this unusual time of year, was given. It had been real business, relative to the renewal of a lease in which the welfare of a large and (he believed) industrious family was at stake. He had suspected his agent of some underhand dealing – of meaning to bias him against the deserving – and he had determined to go himself, and thoroughly investigate the merits of the case. He had gone, had done even more good than he had foreseen, had been useful to more than his first plan had comprehended, and was now able to congratulate himself upon it, and to feel, that in performing a duty, he had secured agreeable recollections for his own mind. He had introduced himself to some tenants, whom he had never seen before; he had begun making acquaintance with cottages whose very existence, though on his own estate, had been hitherto unknown to him. (*MP* 404)

The reader will note that Crawford talks at Fanny, not to her. Fanny is Crawford’s audience, not his equal, and he delivers a monologue rather than participates in a conversation.

Like the politicians who lived in London and represented boroughs they rarely visited, Henry Crawford assumes Edmund Bertram would do as Henry himself would in Edmund's situation, hire a curate at a very meager salary to do all of his work, rent out his vicarage house, and live with his parents, leaving all of Edmund's income for pocket money (*MP* 226). When his sister observes, "You would look rather blank, Henry, if your menus plaisirs were to be limited to seven hundred a year," Crawford concedes but also asserts his superior claims to wealth: "all that you know is entirely comparative. Birthright and habit must settle the business," and thus Henry Crawford speaks volumes for all of the wealthy young men at Mansfield Park.

As the younger son of Sir Thomas and the younger brother of the wastrel heir apparent, Edmund Bertram is literally the voice of the opposition whose warnings are ignored, overruled or shouted down. As a clergyman, Edward declares that it would be inappropriate for him to "be high in state or fashion. He must not head mobs, or set the ton in dress" (*MP* 92), as a politician may. Edmund clearly lacks the disposition for a life in politics: "I am worn out with civility... I have been talking incessantly all night, and with nothing to say" (*MP* 278). Mary Crawford, however, wishes for more. Mary calculates that Edmund is always just a heartbeat away from becoming "Sir Edmund" as his elder brother's untimely death would leave him "with all the Bertram property" (*MP* 434). As Mary observes, a man with an estate "might escape a profession and represent the county" (*MP* 161), and she later suggests this career option to Edmund Bertram.

Mary first proposes that Edmund “Go into the law” (*MP* 93), and later she urges a career in politics: “You ought to be in parliament” (*MP* 214). Mary finds national affairs boring when Fanny Price mentions them in her letters: “I have no news for you. You have politics of course” (*MP* 415). Although Mary betrays no interest in the state of the nation, she considers politicians to be fashionable. Edmund, however, is just not cut out for the job. For one thing, he insists on being scrupulously honest, and his concerns are not those of the other Members of the House of Commons: “as to my being in parliament, I believe I must wait till there is an especial assembly for the representation of younger sons who have little to live on” (*MP* 214). As Edmund observes, Parliament represents the interests of the rich.

In the Mansfield Park assembly, Edmund seems destined to remain the odd man out, continually out voted or overruled, and forced, in the face of overwhelming odds, to comply with the majority: “As I am now, I have no influence, I can do nothing” (*MP* 155). And if Edmund refuses to cooperate with the majority, as Tom reminds him, he can be easily replaced by an eager and cooperative candidate: “I could name at this moment at least six young men within six miles of us, who are wild to be admitted into our company” (*MP* 148). Edmund’s explanation to Fanny is reminiscent of a politician in the opposition party: “It is not at all what I like... No man can like being driven into the *appearance* of such inconsistency. After being known to oppose the scheme from the beginning, there is absurdity in the face of my joining them *now*, when they are exceeding their first plan in every respect; but I can think of no other alternative” (*MP* 154). Like an Opposition member, Edmund can only console himself with the thought

that the two opposing parties were at last in agreement, and that “we shall be all in high good humour at the prospect of acting the fool together with such unanimity” (*MP* 156).

As Fanny Price observes, the actors in the *Mansfield Park* play certainly seem to be enjoying the process which will ultimately produce no results, and her description would have been equally apt of the Members of Parliament: “Every body around her was gay and busy, prosperous and important, each had their object of interest, their part, their dress, their favourite scene, their friends and confederates, all were finding employment in consultations and comparisons, or in the playful conceits they suggested” (*MP* 159).

The only young man in *Mansfield Park* who is entirely excluded from the play, as he would be from any part in the political process, is midshipman William Price who, in *Mansfield Park*, represents the British military, fighting men busily engaged in waging and winning wars, enduring danger and hardship while the idlers they protect and whose financial interests they secure lounge in safety at home, amuse themselves with their chosen theatricals, plan unnecessary improvements, plot intrigues, and fritter away their superfluous funds. Though the most admirable male in the novel, William Price has no luck: “Every body gets made but me” (*MP* 250). In spite of his “good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and cheerfulness - every thing that could deserve or promise well” (*MP* 236), William was born the eldest son of a poor man and thus has no connections or patronage.

What is perhaps most intriguing about the Price sons is that they are Austen’s first characters, other than clergymen, to hold down jobs and to work for promotions. As

Sir Thomas notices, William's career has been the making of him, and William returns from sea "a very different person from the one he had equipped seven years ago" (*MP* 233). William and his younger brothers Richard and Sam are all midshipmen, implying that they, like Jane Austen's sailor brothers, had to work their ways up rather than jumping rank by buying promotions. Already in his brief career, William has "known every variety of danger, which sea and war together could offer" (*MP* 236). As a "clerk in a public office in London" (*MP* 381), John Price is safer than his brothers but probably not as well paid and no more socially acceptable. As William observes, despite his good qualities, as a poor midshipman, he was a social pariah: "One might as well be nothing as a midshipman. One *is* nothing indeed" (*MP* 249). William is frustrated by his inability to obtain promotion through hard work and by the ability of others less competent than himself to rise without sacrifice or endeavor.

What William Price needs is a patron, but Mr. Rushworth's social position will do William no good in his profession: "I would rather find him private secretary to the first Lord [of the Admiralty] than any thing else" (*MP* 246). Yet even without money and without influence, William Price is the most worthy male character in *Mansfield Park*, as even the cynical Henry Crawford is forced to acknowledge: "The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was!" (*MP* 236). William is eventually promoted to lieutenant, but not on merit, as he deserves. Henry Crawford uses a corrupt system of "interest" (*MP* 266), influence with his Admiral uncle, to promote William in an effort to woo Fanny

Price, the same type of military corruption which became public knowledge in 1809 when the “Duke and Darling” army scandal was revealed in the House of Commons.

As was gleefully reported in the press, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, the Duke of York, the younger son of King George III and younger brother of the Prince Regent, lived openly in London with his mistress, as does Admiral Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. The political scandal was that the Duke promoted his officers at the suggestions of his mistress, Mary Anne Clarke, who testified in the House of Commons that, in exchange for a specified sum of money, she added their names to the army promotions lists and pinned the lists to her bed curtains where her royal lover was sure to find them (David 296-97). Members of Parliament, and journalists, seemed enchanted by Mrs. Clarke’s flirtatious demeanor. The Duke’s letters to “Darling” were read aloud in the House of Commons, much to the amusement of the assembled Members, and the most salacious and damning excerpts from the incriminating letters were reprinted in the newspapers, along with the long list of bankrupts and the rising price of bread. Contrary to all of the evidence, Parliament found the Duke of York innocent of any crime.

Meanwhile, the House of Commons went on to be entertained by the lurid details of their next sex scandal, as Parliament devoted a great deal of time to listening to the evidence presented in divorce cases, such as the divorce case of Rushworth v. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*. On average, Parliament only granted three or four divorces a year, almost exclusively cases of a man suing another man for committing adultery with his wife, legally referred to as crim.con. As historian Lawrence Stone

maintains in *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857*, the husband had to be wealthy as the litigation was prohibitively costly: “The procedure was so expensive, because it involved three separate lawsuits, one in an ecclesiastical court, for separation from the adulterous wife; one in a common-law court, for damages for crim.con. against the wife’s lover; and a private bill before Parliament, for full divorce” (25). Considering the nation’s abysmal economy and its multiple wars, obviously an inordinate amount of the government’s attention was being devoted to the scandalous personal lives of the wealthy, and the newspaper accounts, full of suggestive innuendo and titillating details, could not have gone down well with the financially distressed public.

After hearing the evidence of the wife’s infidelity, previously presented in both ecclesiastical and common-law courts, the House of Commons ultimately decided how much in damages the accused man would have to pay the cuckold husband, anywhere from £500 to £25,000 (Manning 85), meaning the House of Commons determined the monetary value of the wife and how much money the wife’s lover owed her husband for despoiling her. As Lawrence Stones reminds us, the exchange of money marked a new way of thinking about adultery: “It is difficult to imagine a clearer sign of a change from an honour-and-shame society to a commercial society than this shift from physical violence against, or challenge to a duel with, one’s wife’s lover to a suit for monetary damages from him” (23).

A second financial decision the House of Commons made in a divorce case was how much money would be settled on the adulterous wife to adequately maintain her in

her new lifestyle as a social outcast. Regardless of her husband's superfluous wealth, or of the original amount of the woman's dowry, or how much money she had inherited since her marriage, the divorced woman was usually granted no more annual income than the amount specified as pin money in her marriage settlement and no alimony at all (Stone 22). To add insult to injury, salacious accounts of crim.con proceedings were published in newspapers and sold throughout England.

The Hampshire Chronicle reported plenty of titillating innuendo, but, according to the *Chronicle's* coverage of the crim.con proceedings of Lord and Lady Westmeath, much of the testimony was unprintable: "delicacy forbids our particularizing" (March 12, 1796, 2). For those with inquiring minds, however, a full transcript of the trial could be purchased. Lord and Lady Worsley's divorce transcript was a bestseller, going through seven printings in its first year (Manning 84). In light of the public embarrassment sure to accompany a divorce, Fanny and the Bertram family's reaction to Maria's elopement with Henry Crawford stems from more than prudery. As a Member of Parliament, Sir Thomas will either be listening to the testimony of his daughter's infidelity or staying away while his colleagues hear it.

As Britain's economy went from bad to worse, the House of Commons was considering the rather flimsy evidence presented in Lord Elgin's vindictive divorce case of 1807 and 1808, and the cases of Loveden v. Loveden in 1810 and Otway v. Otway in 1811. In 1813, the newspapers were printing the lurid details of Parliament's "Delicate Investigation" into the alleged infidelity of Caroline, the Princess of Wales, obviously warming up for the Prince's attempt at a Parliamentary divorce. As the testimony in the

House of Commons revealed, multiple branches of the government had been wasting time for years, at least since 1805, with their investigations of the Princess's personal life. The March 22, 1813 *Hampshire Chronicle* devoted several columns to the incriminating testimony against the Princess (2). When she read Caroline's letter printed in the newspaper, Jane Austen sided with the Princess - "Poor Woman, I shall support her as long as I can" (*Letters* 208) - but the author of *Mansfield Park* and her contemporaries surely believed that the House of Commons had more pressing national business, if they would just get on with it. Year after year, Parliament first argued about the economy, blamed one another for inaction, accomplished nothing, and then diverted themselves with a divorce case, much as the young people when they decide to enact a play at Mansfield Park.

Significantly, the Mansfield Park play is coming together just after shooting season, while Parliament was assembling in London, and the young men engaged in both pursuits spend their time arguing. Tom, Yates, Edmund, and Henry Crawford squabble over how to proceed, "so many things to attend to ... both sides must be pleased... No piece could be proposed that did not supply somebody with a difficulty" (*MP* 130-31). The working-class carpenter, Christopher Jackson, has solved their practical problems, accurately estimated the cost, and finished his work before the young men have even chosen the play (*MP* 130), although Jackson still has "some doubts" (*MP* 139). The would-be actors form into two opposing camps, "the tragic side" and "the comic" (*MP* 130).

Tom Bertram favors the play *Heir at Law* which summarizes his own and the Prince Regent's situations, and Tom's "determinateness and his power, seemed to make allies unnecessary," but the assembly continues to argue until Tom finally declares: "We are wasting time most abominably. Something must be fixed on. No matter what, so that something is chosen" (*MP* 131). The rest of the assembly seems equally frustrated: "Everybody was growing weary of indecision" (*MP* 132). Tom, "the same speaker," proposes a compromise that gives something to both parties: a sex scandal, *Lovers' Vows*, a tale both tragic and comic of corruption in high places, illicit sex, secrecy and public shame. Offended by the impropriety of the thing, Edmund is overruled, and Julia Bertram, a woman scorned, refuses to have anything more to do with their theatricals, but the majority is selfishly pleased.

Delighted as the play affords him "some very good ranting ground" (*MP* 132), John Yates speaks for the other actors: "After all our debatings and difficulties, we find there is nothing that will suit us altogether so well" (*MP* 139). Mary Crawford considers that while those involved in the play may feel relieved to have reached a compromise, those looking on, their public, are probably even more grateful: "The actors may be glad, but the by-standers must be infinitely more thankful for a decision" (*MP* 143). What no one actually performing in the play seems to consider is that those who are merely observers take little interest in their theatricals and see their squabbles for what they are, much ado about nothing. Like the British public reading about debates in Parliament, "Fanny looked on and listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less, disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would end" (*MP* 131). Predictably, at Mansfield Park and in London, everyone assembles and

debates, but nothing is accomplished, aside from the illicit understanding between Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford.

In *Mansfield Park*, “Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce” (*MP* 464), which implies that his case moved rapidly through the ecclesiastical and common-law courts before being introduced into Parliament. Inevitably, once the case made it to the House of Commons, all of the lurid details of the wife’s adultery were published in the newspapers for the entire nation to read and, as Julia Bertram foresees, “bring a public disturbance at last” (*MP* 163). As Fanny Price’s father comments when he reads of Maria Rushworth’s elopement in the newspaper, “so many fine ladies were going to the devil now-a-days that way” (*MP* 440). Obviously, the affair of Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth is the major plot twist of the novel and serves as another condemnation of the national government in the face of a looming economic crisis, but what is also economically significant about the adultery and divorce in *Mansfield Park* is that it is a reminder of the increasing tendency to consider women as commodities.

Lawrence Stone describes Mary Crawford as “the spokeswoman for worldly wisdom” (*Family* 238), and certainly no one in all of Austen’s texts so often nor so frankly equates women with their relative market values. As Stone observes, “There was a very marked contrast between mid-seventeenth-century patriarchy and late eighteenth-century romanticism, and the result among the upper classes was confusion and a wide diversity of ideal models of behavior.” Mary Crawford’s ideal model is one of financial pragmatism: “A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of” (*MP* 213). Mary considers marriage to be a business deal and an unscrupulous one at

that: “there is not one in a hundred of either sex, who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so; and I feel that it must be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves” (*MP* 46). Because Mr. Rushworth is so very wealthy, Mary categorizes Maria Bertram’s marriage as a fair exchange: “she has got her penny-worth for her penny” (*MP* 394).

Mary’s cynical statements are certainly not condoned, but the other characters rarely attempt to correct her, perhaps because, given Mary’s criteria, they know she is right. Ultimately, Mary’s tangible assets, “her beauty, and her 20,000£” (*MP* 469), assure her own success in the marriage market, as Edmund Bertram is forced to concede: “She has only to fix on her number of thousands a year, and there can be no doubt of their coming” (*MP* 213). Mary Crawford sets a high market value on herself and then drives a hard bargain. As Edmund is painfully aware, he could have married Miss Crawford himself, had he been able to afford her.

In stark contrast to Mary Crawford, Fanny Price sets no monetary value on herself. Like the “pearl of great price” in the Bible (*Matthew* 13:46), worth all a man owns, or the biblical virtuous woman whose “price is far above rubies” (*Proverbs* 31:10), Miss Price recognizes what the other characters do not, that her intrinsic value is priceless, and when she refuses the marriage proposal of Henry Crawford, his “situation in life, fortune” (*MP* 316), Fanny declares that she is not for sale. Fanny’s refusal to affix a price to herself or to immediately accept a lucrative financial offer comes as a complete

surprise to the novel's materialistic characters who are baffled by Fanny's different set of values.

Mrs. Norris shares Mary Crawford's view of women as marketable commodities, as Mrs. Norris's attitude towards the apricot tree in the Grants' garden reveals. In the language of flowers, an apricot blossom means "doubt" and the apricot itself is symbolic of women (Lehner and Lehner 111), so Mrs. Norris and Dr. Grant's argument about the apricot tree is loaded with symbolic meaning, as *Mansfield Park's* original readers would have realized and appreciated. Mrs. Norris first brags of the tree and calls attention to its beauty, "now grown such a noble tree, and getting to such perfection" (*MP* 54). Dr. Grant concedes that "the tree thrives well beyond a doubt," but he questions the tree's worth as it bears no fruit, which is ultimately its reason for being there in the first place. When Dr. Grant doubts the value of the apricot tree, Mrs. Norris bristles: "Sir, it is a moor park, we bought it as a moor park, and it cost us – that is, it was a present from Sir Thomas, but I saw the bill, and I know it cost seven shillings, and was charged as a moor park." The attributes Mrs. Norris offers in defense of the apricot tree are the same traits she values in Maria Bertram, beauty, name, and monetary worth, the same qualities she sees in her sister, Lady Bertram. Like the apricot tree, "Lady Bertram never thought of being useful to any body" (*MP* 219), but she was able to parlay her beauty and her £7,000 to her material advantage, and Mrs. Norris is impressed by her sister's advantageous marriage just as she approves of Maria Bertram's alliance with Mr. Rushworth. Mrs. Norris never doubts the apricot tree or the women, and she also fails to appreciate the intrinsic value of her niece Fanny, who is useful but who has no money. Like Mary Crawford, Mrs. Norris has also embraced a capitalist view of

marriage as a legally binding business contract, the same monetary reduction that the House of Commons adopted in their divorce cases.

Always quick to offer her unsolicited opinion, Mrs. Norris repeatedly echoes the political economists of the day and misapplies their reasoning to the individual members of her own family. Mrs. Norris's perverse cruelty to Fanny serves as a warning of what could result from adopting the economists' reductionist view of people as economic units, marketable commodities like bread or candles. According to Edmund Burke, "Labor is a commodity like every other, and rises or falls according to the demand" (254), so the price of a man's labor, his daily wage, determines his relative value. If the labor market becomes flooded by unemployment, the laborer's worth is diminished; thus Burke asserts that poverty is the direct result of superfluous population: "The laboring people are only poor, because they are numerous. Numbers in their nature imply poverty" (252). As the poor have brought poverty on themselves by their birthrate, Burke is unsympathetic to their suffering: "let there be no lamentation of their condition."

Claiming that his ideas first originated with David Hume and Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, in his 1798 *An Essay on the Principal of Population*, concurs with Burke and asserts that, regrettable as it may be, extreme poverty and subsequent deaths are inevitable as it all comes down to a simple mathematical equation: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second" (13). Mrs. Norris would no

doubt agree with Burke and Malthus as she is similarly annoyed by her relatively poor sister's tendency to procreate and shows no real sympathy for Mrs. Price or for her children.

Mrs. Norris expresses her irritation to Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram when she informs them "as she now and then did in an angry voice, that Fanny [Mrs. Price] had got another child" (*MP* 4). When she proposes "that poor Mrs. Price should be relieved from the charge and expense of one child entirely out of her great number" (*MP* 5), Mrs. Norris reduces her niece Fanny to a surplus commodity and an unfortunate drain on her sister's limited income. Fanny's removal to Mansfield Park is seen as an act of charity, but one predicated on the notion that Mrs. Price will consider the loss of her child to be a financial benefit, one less mouth to feed.

Mrs. Norris dismisses the cost of Fanny's upkeep, the "expense of it to them, would be nothing," and the cost of Fanny's upbringing will certainly be minimal to Mrs. Norris, as she "had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her maintenance" (*MP* 8). Mrs. Norris recommends charity to other people, but when an act of kindness threatens to encroach on her pocketbook, "the ardour of generosity went off" (*MP* 387), and Mrs. Norris reasons her way out of having to make any personal sacrifice. Mrs. Norris's unrelenting stinginess illustrates the flaw in Burke's logic; selfish people are not going to live up to their charitable responsibilities unless they are compelled to do so.

One of the great limitations of the age's politicians and economists was that in their speeches and writing they shared a tendency to consider the poor as a large,

ignorant, immoral, and dangerous mass only awaiting a favorable opportunity, as Burke puts it, to “rise to destroy the rich” (252). Burke’s inflammatory rhetoric, “the throats of the rich ought not to be cut,” resembles Mrs. Norris’s tendency “to be heightening danger in order to enhance her own importance” (*MP* 432). The depiction of the Price family in *Mansfield Park* somewhat legitimizes Thomas Malthus’s stereotypical depiction of those who must earn a living: “The laboring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention, and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving, they seldom exercise it; but all that is beyond their present necessities goes, generally speaking, to the ale-house” (40). This is a fairly accurate description of the Prices’ home in Portsmouth, but *Mansfield Park* also points out the arrogance and the inhumanity of categorizing anyone without money as an inferior being.

Mrs. Norris misapplies the economists’ assumptions about the laboring poor to the poorest members of her own family, presuming superiority and assuming an antagonistic, us-against-them relationship. *Mansfield Park*, however, makes the point that Fanny and William Price and their siblings, including their little sister Mary, a “remarkably amiable” little girl who had died (*MP* 386), are real people, not some faceless, nameless mass. Yet this is how Lady Bertram also thinks of her unseen nieces and nephews, when she condescends to think of them at all: “Three or four Prices might have been swept away, any or all, except Fanny and William, and Lady Bertram would have thought little about it; or perhaps might have caught from Mrs. Norris’s lips the cant of its being a very happy thing, and a great blessing to their poor dear sister Price to have them so well provided for” (*MP* 428). The cant from Mrs.

Norris's lips, of course, originated with the political economists and their assumptions about the inevitable fate of the surplus population. As Mrs. Price observes to her daughter Betsey, out of sight was out of mind: "Aunt Norris lives too far off, to think of such little people as you" (*MP* 387). Mary Crawford's detached attitude is similar to Mrs. Norris's: "Indeed how can one care for those one has never seen?" (*MP* 288), and yet, for all of their limitations, Mr. and Mrs. Price have children who are industrious, moral and useful members of society, while Mrs. Norris is sterile, like her apricot tree, and Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram have only produced one admirable child from their four.

According to Thomas Malthus, anyone unable to earn his or her own living was not a respectable person: "Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful" (40). But how then may Fanny Price be considered anything other than a disgrace? Mrs. Norris would certainly agree with Malthus, as she continually harries and attempts to humble the dependant Fanny: "Remember, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last" (*MP* 221). Also like many of the era's political economists, Mrs. Norris has the distinct tendency to make claims without any real evidence to back to them up: "Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to any body" (*MP* 6). Of course, this was absolute rubbish, as everyone knew. There was a well documented surplus of educated, single women, including Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra, who would remain spinsters and dependents as the supply much exceeded the demand.

Undeterred by any evidence to the contrary, Mrs. Norris continues to brag of her superior common sense, “I *am* of some use I hope in preventing waste and making the most of things” (*MP* 141), and to congratulate herself for every “economical expedient, for which nobody thanked her, and saving, with delighted integrity, half-a-crown here and there” (*MP* 163). In reality, of course, Fanny’s Aunt Norris is penny wise and pound foolish, or at least foolish with other people’s pounds. If she were merely saving and careful, Mrs. Norris’s economies would have been understandable for a woman in her circumstances, and even thought admirable in someone like Mrs. Price. As Fanny is forced to admit, her mother “might have made just as good a woman of consequence as Lady Bertram, but Mrs. Norris would have been a more respectable mother of nine children, on a small income” (*MP* 390). A good wife was expected to be practical and frugal, as Regency conduct books and housekeeping books were quick to remind people.

In 1811, Jane Austen’s future publisher John Murray released *The New Family Receipt-Book* which included several recipes for making homemade ink and instructions for recycling almost everything. Little bits of candlewick, “the contents of the common snuffers collected in the course of the evening” (205), could be reformed into tinder, and ashes from the fireplace could be mixed with water, compressed, and dried to form little lumps of “coal” to be mixed with fresh wood for a second burning in the fireplace. According to Murray’s *Receipt-Book*, absolutely nothing should be thrown out before being carefully examined for any recyclable potential: “The very high price of paper, at present, renders the saving of even the smallest quantity of linen or cotton rags of

consequence” (204). When the educated, book-buying gentry were resorting to such expedients, times were hard indeed for all but the extremely wealthy.

It is not difficult to imagine Mrs. Norris recycling her own fireplace ashes, but at Lady Bertram’s house, Mrs. Norris “was entirely taken up at first in fresh arranging and injuring the noble fire which the butler had prepared” (*MP* 273), thus wasting her sister’s expensive fuel. Even worse, Mrs. Norris has made sure that Fanny has no fire in her own room, although there is “snow on the ground” (*MP* 312), an unnecessary economy which Sir Thomas excuses in Mrs. Norris but rectifies himself. As an economist, all of Mrs. Norris’s financial decisions are based on selfishness; she stints the poor, plunders the wealthy, and hoards. Eventually, Sir Thomas acknowledges that “he had considerably over-rated her sense” (*MP* 465), and, at the end of the novel, Mrs. Norris and her false economies are banished from Mansfield Park, and thus from the country.

The narrative voice of *Mansfield Park* rather abruptly announces the novel’s concluding chapter: “Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest” (*MP* 461). So having admitted that people are miserable and that others are guilty for their suffering, the narrator consciously chooses neither to assign further blame nor to discuss the most likely but unhappy outcome. No matter how unrealistic the narrator acknowledges it to be, the good shall have their reward: “My Fanny indeed at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of every thing” (*MP* 461). The lot that falls to Susan Price, perpetual, dependent companion to her aunt and uncle,

demonstrates what Fanny's fate would have been had reality prevailed over the generosity of the narrator. Having told her cautionary tale of national woe, the narrator proceeds to patch on a highly improbable happy ending for the nation by reforming the idle rich who controlled the country and by exiling those beyond reformation.

“Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper” (*MP* 471), Sir Thomas Bertram, MP is made to see the error of his ways. Sir Thomas had “been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom” which blinded him to the virtues and faults of the people around him (*MP* 461). His “own errors in the education of his daughters” were that Sir Thomas taught by example his own arrogance and materialism, but he was not wholly bad. Like the man who has cast his bread upon the waters, Sir Thomas's happiness returns as the direct result of his benevolence: “His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself. His liberality had a rich repayment” (*MP* 472), suggesting that helping the needy is never money wasted.

Young Tom, who will succeed his father at Mansfield Park and, no doubt, in Parliament, appears to have reformed as the result of his near-death experience and abandons “the thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits” (*MP* 462). Most important of all for one in Tom's position, “he had learnt to think.” For no particular reason, Julia Bertram becomes “humble,” and even Julia's husband, who “had not much to recommend him” (*MP* 121), is not entirely a lost cause: John Yates “was not very solid; but there was hope of his becoming less trifling – of his being at least tolerably domestic and quiet; and, at any rate, there was comfort in finding his estate rather more,

and his debts much less, than [Sir Thomas] had feared" (*MP* 462). There is the suggestion here that it is never too late to reform and that wastrels and fools, even those hardened scoundrels in Parliament, are capable of amendment. So much for those "not greatly at fault."

The deeply flawed characters in *Mansfield Park* are beyond even the omniscient narrator's powers of redemption, and here, once again, unpleasant reality intrudes. The narrator takes a parting stab at the divorce laws and sides squarely with reform: "That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* [the husband's] share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue" (*MP* 468). As the narrator reminds the reader, the men in divorce cases always fared much better than the women both socially and financially: "In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished." Mr. Rushworth can afford a divorce and is able to marry again, and the narrator wishes him "good humour and good luck" (*MP* 464). Henry Crawford suffers "vexation and regret" (*MP* 468), but as the seducer in a crim.con divorce case, Henry would probably also have to pay at least several thousand pounds to compensate Mr. Rushworth for his wife's infidelity.

Probably forbidden by her divorce settlement from marrying her seducer, the usual practice at the time (Manning 84-85), Maria Rushworth enjoys "no second spring of hope or character" (*MP* 464), and her fate is decided by the men in control of her life: a "mortified and unhappy" husband, an estranged and humiliated father (*MP* 463), a bored lover and the House of Commons who had the power to end Maria's marriage and to decide her annual income. The adulteress and the self-proclaimed economist

are both banished from Mansfield Park with the exile of Maria and Mrs. Norris to “another country” (*MP* 465), just as adultery and self-serving economics should be banned from the business of the House of Commons. With all of her loose ends now neatly tied up, the narrator can pronounce, “Here was comfort indeed!” (*MP* 462), but it was a consolation not to be found in the Regency’s newspapers, nor in the household accounts of modest gentry homes, like Jane Austen’s, as the economy was getting worse.

In *Mansfield Park*, the cause of Britain’s financial problems had been suggested, and the blame had been assigned, but a realistic solution remained elusive. The Prime Minister and the House of Commons were not going to renounce their wicked ways and reform. Selfishness would continue to motivate them, political economists to advise them, and tales of adultery to divert them. The narrative voice acknowledges that *Mansfield Park’s* ending is wish fulfillment, but the next novel would be different.

Emma: “Valuable” Women and “Worthy People”

Jane Austen expressed her disappointment in the sluggish sales of *Mansfield Park* in a letter to her niece dated 30 November 1814: “People are more ready to borrow & praise, than to buy – which I cannot wonder at; - but tho’ I like praise as well as anybody, I like what Edward calls *Pewter* too” (*Letters* 287). At the time, Jane Austen had been working on *Emma* for almost a year. The Edward referred to in the letter was Jane Austen’s brother, Edward Austen Knight, and Edward’s use of the word “pewter” to describe money referred to the debasement of British coins. In December of 1813, one month before Jane Austen began writing *Emma*, the House of Commons heard a committee’s report that government-issued copper coins minted since 1806 contained a little less than two thirds of the copper content that the same denomination coins contained in 1797. The December 13, 1813 *Hampshire Chronicle* expressed disgust at the “excessive issue of base coin” (4). By calling his money “pewter,” Edward was conceding that his silver shillings had also been debased, but, as the May 13, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* recorded, it took the House of Commons an additional three years to admit it (2). In fact, the government had been quietly debasing silver coins for centuries (Thompson 63). The public was once again in doubt about the trustworthiness of their money, and the words “value” and “worth” were being questioned and redefined.

This was familiar ground to Jane Austen, as she had already dealt with the 1797 paper money crisis in *Northanger Abbey*, but instead of creating a witty, confident hero like Henry Tilney to alleviate the other characters’ and the reader’s fears with humor, in

Emma, Austen creates a stable, self-contained, idyllic, model economic community, “dear Highbury” (*E* 261). While the residents of Highbury go about their business and exchange goods, money rarely changes hands or plays any part in their transactions. Because they all know one another, and one another’s business, they extend credit or charity in their mutually beneficial society, an economic community that bears no relation whatsoever to the dog-eat-dog, cash nexus world described by political economists like Thomas Malthus and presumably festering just sixteen miles away in London. Highbury is, in fact, a world turned economically upside down, with Jane Austen’s only “rich” heroine (*E* 5), and the only hero since Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* who has “little spare money” (*E* 213). In Highbury, the characters have achieved the seemingly impossible in forming a communal consciousness, a group think, which allows the village to transcend money and to value people instead.

The residents of Highbury and Donwell have different priorities than the purse-proud intruders and interlopers, like Philip Elton, from London; Augusta Hawkins, from Bristol and Bath; the Coles, from London, and Frank Churchill, who vacations in Weymouth, travels to London and commutes from Richmond. These outsiders bring their materialistic, big city values to Utopian Highbury and must be converted before they can be fully accepted into the small, rural community. Highbury natives, Mr. Weston, John Knightley and Jane Fairfax, risk having their morals corrupted by their sojourns in London, but they remain fundamentally sound and escape the money-grubbing city to return to Highbury whenever they can. Because they have been exposed to both worlds and their different values, Mr. Weston, John Knightley and Jane Fairfax can see what Emma Woodhouse is “blind” to (*E* 427). Had Emma Woodhouse

paid more attention to the communal wisdom of her village, instead of dismissing it as “the tittle-tattle of Highbury” (*E* 56), and the “trivial communications and harmless gossip” of Miss Bates (*E* 21), Emma would never have made such “a series of strange blunders” (*E* 331). The imperious Miss Woodhouse must learn that she has “been used to despise [Highbury] rather too much” (*E* 221), and Emma must also learn to value Miss Bates and Robert Martin, people she holds cheap at the beginning of the novel. Emma also discovers that she has overvalued Philip Elton and Frank Churchill while misjudging the intrinsic worth of Harriet Smith.

When Highbury’s citizens use economic terms like “value,” which appears in the text fifteen times; “valuable,” nine times; “worth,” thirty times, or “worthy,” eighteen times, they are referring to their neighbors’ character traits and not to their incomes. Highburians speak of “the value of such a reconciliation” (*E* 447), the “hope for good, which no inheritance of houses or lands can ever equal the value of” (*E* 437), “equal worth” (*E* 465), “worth a regret” (*E* 477), or of Emma’s being “worthy of” Mr. Knightley (*E* 475), but the characters’ bank accounts play no part in these valuations.

As Adam Smith explains in *Wealth of Nations*, the term “VALUE” may be used in two ways: to describe intrinsic worth for which there is no monetary equivalent or to describe the exchange rate at which material goods may be purchased:

The one may be called “value in use;” the other, “value in exchange.” The things which have the greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange; and on the contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange have frequently little or no value in use. Nothing is

more useful than water: but it will purchase scarce any thing; scarce any thing can be had in exchange for it. A diamond, on the contrary, has scarce any value in use; but a very great quantity of other goods may frequently be had in exchange for it. (34-35)

In *Emma*, Miss Woodhouse has value in use, as Mrs. Weston observes: “With all dear Emma’s little faults, she is an excellent creature. Where shall we see a better daughter, or a kinder sister, or a truer friend?” (*E* 39-40). Mr. Knightley dares to depreciate Emma’s value in use to Mrs. Weston, but neither of them would dispute that, as “the heiress of thirty thousand pounds” (*E* 135), Emma has considerable value in exchange.

It is worth noting that Emma’s dowry is the only specific income provided in the novel, a distinct change from the income hierarchies carefully delineated in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs. Elton’s dowry, “so many thousands as would always be called ten... 10,000£ or thereabouts” (*E* 181), is given as an approximation and an unreliable one at that. Jane Fairfax’s “very few hundred pounds which she inherited from her father” is also an approximation (*E* 164), proving that Miss Bates can, on occasion, hold her tongue, but then so can the narrator. Harriet Smith is a pig in a poke, with no known dowry, and no known parents for that matter. All of the remaining characters in the novel are vaguely rich, or prosperous or poor, leaving Emma and the reader to attempt to determine their market values, their value in exchange, based on the clues provided.

In “Jane Austen and Money,” Lisa Hopkins points out that Mr. Knightley “is the only one of Austen’s heroes to receive rather than confer financial benefit by his

marriage: Emma's thirty thousand pounds will undoubtedly make a very useful addition to his cash flow" (77). True enough, although Hopkins underestimates Mr. Knightley's worth, as George Knightley has both value in use and value in exchange. In contrast to the other female characters, Mrs. Elton has no admirable character traits, thus no value in use, but her dowry, however much it is, has some value in exchange. Jane Fairfax's value in use is unparalleled, but her value in exchange is negligible. Like the rest of Regency England, Harriet Smith's financial future, her value in exchange, is uncertain, but Harriet has, as George Knightley says, "some first-rate qualities... An unpretending, single-minded, artless girl" (E 331). Harriet's character traits constitute value in use, so, as Mr. Knightley predicts, "in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman" (E 58). The "good hands" are "open, straight forward, and very well judging" Robert Martin's (E 59), and, with Robert Martin and his family, Harriet is proclaimed "most worthy" (E 431) and "valuable" (E 58).

Early in the novel, Emma Woodhouse seems to be familiar with Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as she paraphrases Adam Smith when advising Harriet Smith. Emma begins her attack on Robert Martin's marriage proposal with "I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet" (E 52), which is nearly a quotation of Adam Smith's phrasing "we may lay it down, I believe, as a general rule" (121), or the "We thus naturally lay down to ourselves a general rule" and "lay down to ourselves a rule of another kind" (153). Although it is possible that Emma acquired the cliché elsewhere, it was certainly a favorite phrase of Adam Smith's. Emma also paraphrases *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* when she remarks to her father that "One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other" (E 81). Smith words it slightly differently - "one

half of mankind make bad company to the other” (30) - but the idea is similar if not quite the same. *Emma's* use of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* suggests that the referencing of Adam Smith's earlier work might be a mental nudge to the reader, reminding him that *Wealth of Nations* was not Smith's only word on human interactions. Emma Woodhouse's appropriations of Smith and her imperfect recall of his text seem to suggest that Emma has perused *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, picking up its phraseology and some of its common sense, without entirely appreciating or remembering its morality, as others, perhaps even political economists, may also have done. As Mr. Knightley says, “Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do” (*E* 64).

Perhaps *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is one of the books that Emma has neglected to “read regularly through” (*E* 37), and yet Emma rightly discriminates between Augusta Elton and Harriet Smith just as Adam Smith describes two similar character types:

the one of proud ambition and ostentatious avidity; the other, of humble modesty and equitable justice. Two different models, two different pictures, are held out to us, according to which we may fashion our own character and behavior; the one more gaudy and glittering in its colouring; the other more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline; the one forcing itself upon the notice of every wandering eye; the other attracting the attention of scarce any body but the most studious and careful observer. (59)

Harriet Smith's first "studious and careful" observers are the Martins, whom Emma Woodhouse fails to appreciate for their value in use and for their value in exchange to Harriet, who has, as Mr. Knightley reminds Emma, "probably no settled provision at all" (E 61).

Emma originally undervalues Robert Martin, imagining Martin to be a "gross, vulgar farmer... thinking of nothing but profit and loss... business engrosses him" (E 33), but if Robert Martin actually were "too full of the market" (E 34), as Emma presumes, he would have, like Mr. Elton, no interest in marrying Harriet Smith who, for all he knows, has no dowry. Emma actually faults Farmer Martin for his prosperity, which, to Mr. Knightley and any unbiased observer, should have further recommended him to Harriet. Robert Martin seems to fit the description of the successful man in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

In the middling and inferior stations of life, the road to virtue and that to fortune, to such fortune, at least, as men in such stations can reasonably expect to acquire, are, happily, in most cases very nearly the same. In all the middling and inferior professions, real and solid professional abilities, joined to prudent, just, firm, and temperate conduct, can very seldom fail of success. (59)

Here, again, Emma should have heeded George Knightley's superior knowledge of the subject, as Adam Smith maintains that the acquaintances of a respectable man will acknowledge him and contribute to his advancement: "The success of such people, too, almost always depends upon the favour and good opinion of their neighbours and

equals; and without a tolerably regular conduct these can very seldom be obtained” (59-60). Robert Martin’s appreciation of Harriet’s value in use and his indifference to her value in exchange speaks highly of him, and here Robert Martin is considerably more discerning than Emma Woodhouse.

Emma accuses men of being distracted by a pretty face: “I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could possess” (*E* 63-64). But Harriet’s appearance is what originally appealed to Emma: “Miss Smith was a girl of seventeen whom Emma knew very well by sight and had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty” (*E* 22). Had Harriet’s appearance been very ordinary, Emma would never have taken any notice of her, or, if Emma had, she would have been likely to devalue Harriet, as she does Miss Bates.

Hetty Bates also possesses sweetness of temper, humility and intrinsic goodness. “She had never boasted either beauty or cleverness” (*E* 21), although Miss Bates is more intelligent and discerning than Harriet Smith, but, without beauty or wealth to recommend her, Miss Bates fails to attract Emma’s interest or, at times, even to receive Emma’s grudging civility. As Mr. Knightley asserts, Emma must learn to respect Miss Bates for her value in use, in spite of her value in exchange: “She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion” (*E* 375). And gain Miss Bates the sympathy of *Emma*’s original readers as well, as their incomes, too, seemed likely to sink with Miss Bates’s.

In 1814, as Jane Austen was writing *Emma*, Britain's unprecedented national debt seemed entirely out of control at an unimaginable £744.99 million (Poovey 15), and, hitting even closer to home, soaring consumer prices and plummeting wages perversely combined to impoverish the majority of the population of England. Between 1790 and 1814, wholesale prices doubled (Ashton 90), while wages for agricultural laborers fell from around 15 shillings a week to 6 shillings, slightly more than one-third of their former pay (Murray 85). The 1815 *Housekeeper's Receipt-Book* referred to the economy as "the present critical period, when the burthens [sic] of domestic life are so generally felt" (245). Shopkeepers wanted to sell, and the public wished to buy, but the goods in the shops were too expensive and the would-be consumers too impoverished, so shopkeepers and their customers expanded further into the world of creative finance, such as bartering and credit on account (Olsen 247). England's rural communities were being forced to become economically self-reliant, but, in *Emma*, this village financial autonomy is not at all a bad thing.

In *Emma*, "cheerful, happy-looking Highbury" is a character in its own right (*E* 196), with a logic and a will of its own, like Adam Smith's invisible hand of the marketplace in *Wealth of Nations*. Highbury has devised its own homegrown answer to the nation's financial ills: to cut itself off from the surrounding world and to take care of its own. Tara Wallace has noted that "*Emma* is the novel most frequently cited as the exemplar of Austen's focus on isolated and insulated country communities" (67), and as Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield maintain, *Emma* "offers no disruption of the community, which every other Austen novel seems to entail" (*E* 240). But unlike the

communities in Austen's other novels, Highbury has seceded from the rest of the world and maintains its own economy, almost independent of money.

Even in Ford's shop, "the very shop that every body attends every day of their lives" (E 200), money rarely changes hands or is even mentioned. As actor Jeremy Northam, who played Mr. Knightley in the 1996 Miramax film, astutely observed, "After I read the book I realized these people are not as wealthy as you think they are" (qtd. in Tyler 173), and yet Miss Bates may well speak for all of Highbury: "If ever there were people who without having great wealth themselves, had every thing they could wish for, I am sure it is us" (E 174). Highbury extends its collective good will to Jane Fairfax, who "belongs to Highbury" (E 163 & 201), and to Mr. Weston's son, Frank Churchill, who is similarly "a kind of common concern" (E 17). The individual residents of the village work in unison for the best interests of the group, for "Highbury entire" (E 145), and the only disruptions in the village are caused by Emma, who fails to appreciate the community, and by the Johnny-come-lately outsiders who make the same mistake and who will never be fully assimilated until they come to embrace Highbury's very different system of values.

Whether they are aware of the fact or not, all of the characters in Highbury enjoy a certain level of safety from the dog-eat-dog world described by Thomas Malthus in his 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, with its "constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence" (13), and its "misery and vice" (14). Highbury's residents seem to understand the benefits, security, and responsibilities of communal living, as delineated in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

All the members of human society stand in need of each others' assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices. (86)

Even Harriet Smith has a place in Highbury's circular economy, and Harriet is one of the only characters in the novel to actually conduct financial exchanges. Harriet resides at Mrs. Goddard's school, "where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price" (*E* 21-22). With her "very liberal" allowance (*E* 62), Harriet buys cloth and ribbon in Ford's (*E* 233), pays "a young woman" to make her clothes (*E* 178), gives the begging "gipsies" a shilling (*E* 334), and presumably drops a similar coin in the church collection plate on Sundays. The entire village benefits from Harriet's presence. As the narrative voice in *Emma* observes of the tempestuous relationships between Harriet, Emma, and Mr. Elton, their close proximity forces them to behave with at least outward civility: "Their being fixed, so absolutely fixed, in the same place" requires that they "encounter each other, and make the best of it" (*E* 143), but, with one another's support, the other inhabitants of Highbury seem to thrive. Certainly, mutual good will abounds in Highbury, and daily acts of charity result, as even a cursory reading of Miss Bates' monologues reveals.

Jeremy Bentham claimed that the problem with relying on private individuals for charity was that “What is every body’s business is nobody’s business” (13). But this is not the case in “dear Highbury” (*E* 261), where the entire community seems to have colluded to help the Bateses. Discounting the occasional rumor of “a very rude answer” (*E* 236), most of the village’s residents are like the baker Mrs. Wallis, “extremely civil and obliging,” and not, as Miss Bates notes, because Mrs. Wallis hopes to make money from her neighbors: “And it cannot be for the value of our custom now, for what is our consumption of bread, you know” (*E* 237). Mrs. Wallis not only bakes Miss Bates’ apples, apparently without charge, but she also sends her boy to deliver them, but Mrs. Wallis is only conforming to the general standard of behavior in Highbury.

Mr. Perry, the local apothecary, also offers his professional services to the Bateses pro bono, although his failure to send a bill worries Miss Bates; “he is so liberal, and so fond of Jane that I dare say he would not mean to charge anything for attendance, we could not suffer it to be so, you know. He has a wife and family to maintain, and is not to be giving away his time” (*E* 162). When Frank Churchill makes a joke about Perry profiting from other people’s colds, mild Mr. Woodhouse flares up to defend him: “‘Sir,’ said Mr. Woodhouse, rather warmly, ‘you are very much mistaken if you suppose Mr. Perry to be that sort of character. Mr. Perry is extremely concerned when any of us are ill’” (*E* 251). Without even knowing anything about him, it is difficult to imagine John Saunders charging Miss Bates to fix the rivet in her mother’s spectacles, but the generosity of “the second rate and third rate of Highbury, who were calling on [the Bateses] for ever” only reflects (*E* 155), in more modest ways, the benevolence of the local gentry.

Mr. Woodhouse and Emma send Mrs. and Miss Bates a hind-quarter of pork, which Miss Bates describes as “too bountiful” (*E* 173), and Mr. Knightley annually provides a “most liberal supply” of apples (*E* 238), food which could easily have been sold instead of given away. But no one in Highbury seems interested in making money, although they all wish one another to prosper. According to Miss Bates, William Larkins “thinks more of his master’s profit than any thing” (*E* 239), and, as Emma tells Frank Churchill, all that is required to be “adored in Highbury” is to “lay out half-a-guinea at Ford’s” (*E* 200).

Ford’s, of course, “was the principal woolen-draper, linen-draper, and haberdasher’s shop united; the shop first in size and fashion in the place” (*E* 178), and Ford’s serves as Highbury’s economic hub. Robert Martin and his family, for instance, “always dealt at Ford’s” (*E* 178). Although Emma, the Westons, Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax, and the Martins all go into Ford’s, in the text, only Frank Churchill and Harriet Smith actually buy anything there. Even as a stranger to Highbury, Frank Churchill appreciates Ford’s significance to the community:

Ha! this must be the very shop that every body attends every day of their lives, as my father informs me. He comes to Highbury himself, he says, six days out of the seven, and has always business at Ford’s. If it be not inconvenient to you, pray let us go in, that I may prove myself to belong to the place, to be a true citizen of Highbury. I must buy something at Ford’s.

(*E* 199-200)

The simple act of buying a pair of gloves is taken as evidence of Frank's "patriotism" as it establishes him as a member of Highbury's economic community. By even modestly enriching the Fords, Frank purchases the esteem of the entire village. *Emma's* characters occasionally shop in London, Weymouth, and Bath where they go to procure expensive luxury items that could not be found in a rural village shop - the mysterious pianoforte, Mrs. Bates's shawl, Mrs. Elton's trousseau, and Mr. Elton's carriage - but, as Jane Fairfax says of the pianoforte, such things really "have no business here" (*E* 384), in no-nonsense, work-a-day Highbury, where anything necessary for common life can be found in Ford's.

Mrs. Bates's compulsive knitting indicates how she, "a poor old grandmother, who has barely enough to live on" (*E* 194), may be contriving to get by financially and how Ford's shop would have contributed to the Bateses' economic well being. Whenever Emma Woodhouse calls on the Bateses, Emma finds Mrs. Bates "with her knitting" (*E* 156 & 454), "her usual employment" (*E* 240), but Mrs. Bates does not seem to be knitting for herself as Jane Fairfax knits for her grandmother (*E* 86). During the Regency, clergymen, charitable societies, and religious tracts all advised knitting stockings for sale as one of the best ways for poor people to earn money (Rutt 98-99). Orphanages and poor houses taught knitting to enable their charges to eventually support themselves, and knitting was one of the only ways for elderly women and for the blind to earn money. Widows, in particular, were known for knitting stockings for sale (Rutt 89).

For a professional knitter, a shop like Ford's served as employer, banker, supplier, and wholesaler. Shopkeepers dispensed wool to their supplier/patrons, and when the knitters returned with hand knit woolen stockings, they were paid for their labor, either in coins or, more often, in credit on their shop accounts (Rutt 101). According to *The Hampshire Repository* in 1799, women who knit stockings earned on average 4 shillings a week (qtd. in Rutt 99), enough to keep the family fed, though in a modest way, and they could earn £12 to £20 a year, nearly 2/3s of a laborer's wages, but only by knitting continually, as Mrs. Bates does. For Mrs. Bates and her daughter who live "in a very small way" (E 21), £12 represented a great deal of money and would more than pay the annual salary of their maid-of-all-work, Patty, or pay the rent on "the very moderate sized apartment, which was every thing to them" (E 155). As the protagonist in Hannah More's 1795 *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* admits, his wife and daughters' knitting "helps to pay our rent" (8). As humble as her contribution to Highbury's economy may be, Mrs. Bates' knitting connects her to the community and benefits her neighbors.

The view from Ford's door affords Emma, and the reader, a moment's reflection on the economics of the village: "Much could not be hoped from the traffic of even the busiest part of Highbury; - Mr. Perry walking hastily by, Mr. William Cox letting himself in at the office door, Mr. Cole's carriage horses returning from exercise, or a stray letter-boy on an obstinate mule, were the liveliest objects she could presume to expect" (E 233). What Emma and the reader are both shown is that Highbury is a bustling little community where the local professional men are coming and going as their neighbors

require their services, where a humble boy is usefully employed, and where a retired merchant like Mr. Cole continues to create jobs for other people.

Even Emma's seemingly useless father, Henry Woodhouse, employs a number of people at Hartfield, including Miss Taylor, James the coachman, Serle the cook, and a variety of unnamed servants, and it is Mr. Woodhouse who finds a job for Hannah, James's daughter, as housemaid to the Westons. As Emma reminds her father: "You got Hannah that good place. Nobody thought of Hannah till you mentioned her – James is so obliged to you" (E 9). As Mrs. Goddard "owed much to Mr. Woodhouse's kindness" (E 22), Henry Woodhouse appears to have bankrolled Mrs. Goddard's school, and Mr. Perry is no doubt well paid for his regular calls at Hartfield to attend to the whims of his wealthy, hypochondriac patient. As all of the lives in the village are economically interconnected, what is good fortune to one person sooner or later benefits everyone else.

Emma's next observation from her vantage point in Ford's is on Highbury's abundance of food. According to Maggie Lane in *Jane Austen and Food*, "One thing we can be sure of is that nobody will ever starve in Highbury. Food is always passing hands there" (154). Emma's view from Ford's door seems to prove Lane's point, as "when her eyes fell only on the butcher with his tray, a tidy old woman travelling homewards from shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone, and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread, she knew she had no reason to complain" (E 233). No one, not even a stray dog, is

going hungry in Highbury. From Miss Taylor's wedding cake to Mr. Woodhouse's gruel, throughout the novel the characters are continually feeding one another.

The Woodhouses and the Westons provide their friends with ample dinners at their homes, and Mr. Knightley invites everyone to Donwell Abbey to feast: "When you are tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there shall be cold meat in the house" (*E* 355). For Mrs. Bates, Miss Bates, and Jane Fairfax, these social occasions are also opportunities to devour food they could never afford to buy. The nouveau riches Coles reveal their social ineptitude when they neglect "the less worthy females" (*E* 214), inviting Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax, and Harriet Smith to come for tea, but only after the elaborate two-course dinner has been eaten and cleared away. Emma feels a bit guilty about her own neglect of Mrs. and Miss Bates, "not contributing what she ought to the stock of their scanty comforts. She had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency" (*E* 155), but when Emma does act, she proves herself to be "a true citizen of Highbury" by being very generous (*E* 200). Mr. Woodhouse means to send the Bateses a leg or a loin of fresh killed pork, but Emma sends the whole hind quarter instead. Mr. Woodhouse's pork and Mr. Knightley's apples are delivered to Mrs. and Miss Bates, just as the Martins' goose, "a beautiful goose: the finest goose Mrs. Goddard had ever seen" (*E* 28), is sent to Mrs. Goddard. In her turn, Mrs. Goddard promptly invites "all the three teachers, Miss Nash, and Miss Prince, and Miss Richardson, to sup with her" (*E* 28-29). As Lane notes, there are more references to food in *Emma* than in any other Austen novel: "the giving and sharing of food becomes a symbol or extended metaphor for human interdependence, resonating through the entire text." Even Mrs. and Miss Bates offer their guests tea and "sweet-

cake from the beaufet" (*E* 156), the best offering their humble means can afford. But food is only one manifestation of the characters' generosity.

At the Crown Inn, "a couple of pair of post-horses were kept, more for the convenience of the neighbourhood than from any run on the road" (*E* 197), and, while the horses do not seem to be making any money for Mrs. Stokes, attending to the horses provides employment for young John Abdy. "Keeping no horses, having little spare money" (*E* 213), Mr. Knightley is able to take advantage of the Mrs. Stokes's public spiritedness when he rents horses to convey Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax in his carriage, but Mr. Knightley is generally giving rather than receiving. Mr. Knightley, Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Weston, Mr. Cox, and Mr. Cole may confer "on business" (*E* 170 & 221), but it is parish business and nothing likely to financially benefit any of them. As principal landowner and magistrate, Mr. Knightley, with "his farm, his sheep, and his library, and all the parish to manage" (*E* 225), keeps a vigilant eye on all of the doings in and around Highbury, but, as Irene Collins reminds us in *Jane Austen and the Clergy*, Mr. Knightley's services are free: "The duties of a magistrate demanded a great deal of time and effort for no material reward" (119).

George Butte has declared that of all of Jane Austen's novels, *Emma* "is the least challenging for the landed gentry" (5), but what Butte does not consider is that the gentry in *Emma* are already pulling their weight in the community and thus serving as examples to be emulated. Even Emma and Frank Churchill do their bit for the village. Emma, we are told, is very generous to the working-class - "the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her

patience, as from her purse" (E 86) - and we are given a demonstration of her philanthropy when she has "a charitable visit to pay to a poor sick family" (E 83). Emma considers "what the poor must suffer in winter" (E 155), and, presumably, Emma would assist "an old servant who was married, and settled in Donwell" (E 186), if, on her visit, Emma found the woman in need. Frank Churchill "on recollecting that an old woman who had nursed him was still living, walked in quest of her cottage from one end of the street to the other" and "shewed, altogether, a good-will towards Highbury in general" (E 197). But, of course, George Knightley is the benevolent mastermind whose unflagging efforts keep Highbury a safe haven in a cruel world.

Mr. Knightley is like the wise man Smith refers to in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* who delights in a well-ordered and harmonious community:

The orderly and flourishing state of society is agreeable to him, and he takes delight in contemplating it. Its disorder and confusion, on the contrary, is the object of his aversion, and he is chagrined at whatever tends to produce it. He is sensible, too that his own interest is connected with the prosperity of society, and that the happiness, perhaps the preservation of his existence, depends upon its preservation. (88)

Like Smith's good citizen, Mr. Knightley is frustrated and annoyed by the "disorder and confusion" brought on by Emma, Frank Churchill, and the Eltons, and he does his best to counter their disruptions. However, when Emma humiliates Miss Bates in order to amuse herself and to exhibit her wit, Mr. Knightley is angered by Emma's callous disregard for Miss Bates, as it is an assault on Highbury at one of its weak points.

What Mr. Knightley finds most provoking is that Emma has gone beyond meddling and interference, and her witticism at Miss Bates's expense constitutes an unprovoked attack on one of the most valuable in terms of use members of the Highbury community. As Emma must admit, "I know there is not a better creature in the world" (*E* 375), and Mr. Knightley speaks for all of Highbury when he chastises Emma for her humbling of Miss Bates. Just as Smith explains in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, it is the contemptuous disregard for another person, and not the specific insult, that people find intolerable:

What chiefly enrages us against the man who injures or insults us, is the little account which he seems to make of us, the unreasonable preference which he gives to himself above us, and that absurd self-love, by which he seems to imagine, that other people may be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency or his humour. The glaring impropriety of this conduct, the gross insolence and injustice which it seems to involve in it, often shock and exasperate us. (95)

As Miss Bates is unwilling and perhaps unable to retaliate herself, Mr. Knightley comes to her defense.

According to Jane Austen's nephew, George Knightley was one of his aunt's favorite characters, and *Emma's* author protested that Mr. Knightley was not too good to be true. According to Jane Austen, Mr. Knightley was "very far from being what I know English gentlemen often are" (qtd. in Austen-Leigh 118). Jane Austen must have held English gentlemen in very high esteem, as Mr. Knightley is a paragon, consistently

“considerate” and “humane” (*E* 223), and he deserves to be Highbury’s leader as he is motivated by “simple, disinterested benevolence” (*E* 224). In an age of enclosure, Highbury still retains its “common field” (*E* 126), which is yet more evidence of Mr. Knightley’s reluctance to do anything that might create “inconvenience to the Highbury people” (*E* 106-07).

Another native of Highbury, John Knightley is a successful London attorney, but he may have become tainted by living in the city, as he is, by Highbury’s standards, a bit anti-social. Although he attends the Westons’ Christmas Eve dinner party, John Knightley grumbles about it, considering the evening to be a bad financial exchange - “nothing in the visit worth the purchase” (*E* 113) - and he expresses a similarly jaded attitude towards receiving “letters of friendship” (*E* 293): “Business, you know, may bring money, but friendship hardly ever does.” Jane Fairfax will have none of it, as she realizes that the happily married family man’s bark is much worse than his bite: “Ah! You are not serious now. I know Mr. John Knightley too well – I am very sure he understands the value of friendship as well as any body” (*E* 293-94). Jane Fairfax is obviously right that John Knightley doth protest too much, and John betrays a more benevolent side to his character as he regularly gives his brother, and thus all of Highbury, the benefit of his free legal advice, but John Knightley is not the only character at Hartfield with anti-social tendencies.

When Harriet Smith first tells Emma about Robert Martin, Emma declares that Farmer Martin is both above and below her notice, too well-to-do to receive her charity but too humble to be socially acceptable. Robert Martin represents the upwardly mobile

farmers that Emma seems to hold in contempt. Emma's Achilles heel is "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" and to be continually on guard against associating with "the inferior society of Highbury" (*E* 5 & 23), or of granting undue distinction to the Coles, "very good sort of people – friendly, liberal, and unpretending" but "of low origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel" (*E* 207). Harriet Smith's mysterious father must be elevated, if only in Emma's imagination, to the social class of gentleman so that Emma can justify her friendship with Harriet. Emma avoids calling on Mrs. and Miss Bates because of "all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury, who were calling on them for ever" (*E* 155), but Miss Bates considers the matter differently: "It is such a happiness when good people get together – and they always do" (*E* 175), at least in Highbury.

Miss Woodhouse discounts "the tittle-tattle of Highbury" (*E* 56), but Emma repeatedly discovers that she should have listened. "Highbury gossips" (*E* 58), like Miss Bates and Mrs. Cole, prove to be much more reliable sources of information than Emma Woodhouse herself. Over the course of the novel, Emma must learn to recognize the intrinsic worth of the Coles, the Martins, Jane Fairfax and the Bateses. Mr. Knightley, Mr. Weston and Robert Martin, Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella Knightley know better than to esteem people for their value in exchange. They admire Jane Fairfax, Miss Taylor, and Harriet Smith for their value in use, and they appreciate that Mrs. and Miss Bates are "worthy people" (*E* 102 & 194), in spite of the fact that they have "barely enough to live on" (*E* 194). Even the "spoiled child of fortune" (*E* 203), Frank Churchill, can see beyond Jane Fairfax's poverty and wishes to marry her despite Jane's meager value in exchange. Unfortunately, not everyone in Highbury is so enlightened.

With less than two years residence in Highbury (*E* 136), the greedy and calculating Rev. Philip Elton is still something of an outsider and has not yet come to appreciate Highbury's indifference to money. As Mr. Knightley maintains, former London resident Mr. Elton "knows the value of a good income as well as anybody" (*E* 66), probably because value in exchange is the only worth Mr. Elton recognizes, and because his own income is only marginally adequate. As Highbury's church is rural and its vicarage is "an old and not very good house" (*E* 83), and given that the frugal Bates family was unable to save much money in the same situation, Mr. Elton's income is, in all likelihood, somewhere near the 1812 average income of £200 a year for members of the "lower clergy" (Colquhoun 124). In spite of all evidence to the contrary, "Emma imagined a very sufficient income; for though the vicarage of Highbury was not large, he was known to have some independent property" (*E* 35), though obviously not enough to free Mr. Elton from the necessity of earning a living.

Emma's wishful thinking wills Mr. Elton to be prosperous just as her imagination socially elevates Harriet Smith, making her a gentleman's daughter. With Mr. Elton's income of approximately £200 and the income from his wife's £10,000 dowry, £500 a year, the Eltons have a combined annual income of about £700, enough to be comfortable, if well managed, but with their horses and carriage, their numerous servants, and Mrs. Elton's expensive wardrobe, sound financial planning seems improbable. If Mr. Elton is disappointed that his wife's dowry is considerably less than the £30,000 he had originally hoped to marry, he is temporarily consoled by the elevated lifestyle the Eltons enjoy with Mrs. Elton's dowry, at least until their money runs out. Their lame carriage horse seems to be a harbinger of what is to come.

The romantic Harriet Smith assumes that newlywed Mr. Elton must “have fallen in love” (E 271), but Emma quickly undeceives her: “A pretty fortune; and she came in his way.” As Emma concludes after his proposal to her, Mr. Elton “only wanted to aggrandize and enrich himself; and if Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, the heiress of thirty thousand pounds, were not quite so easily obtained as he had fancied, he would soon try for Miss Somebody else with twenty, or with ten” (E135). In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong observes that Mr. Elton “overvalues the income a woman will bring to a marriage and thus undervalues her as a woman” (141).

Mr. Elton is like one of the “hypocrites of wealth and greatness” that Smith describes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

He assumes the equipage and splendid way of living of his superiors, without considering, that whatever may be praiseworthy in any of these derives its whole merit and propriety from its suitableness to that situation and fortune which both require, and can easily support the expence. Many a poor man places his glory in being thought rich, without considering that the duties (if one may call such follies by so very venerable a name) which that reputation imposes upon him, must soon reduce him to beggary, and render his situation still more unlike that of those whom he admires and imitates, than it had been originally. (61)

As a rural clergyman with a small parish, Mr. Elton’s situation is humble enough, but he continually refuses to accept his financial circumstances. He aspires to marry an heiress, although he has nothing to offer her in return. He admires John Knightley’s

carriage and acquires one for himself, although he cannot afford it or the horses he buys to pull it. Even George Knightley has given up keeping his own carriage horses, but Mr. Elton is undeterred. As a citizen of Highbury, and as the local clergyman, Mr. Elton should be considering the poor in his parish and doing his part to assist the less fortunate, but he does neither.

A love-sick Harriet Smith declares that “Mr. Elton is so good to the poor” (*E* 155), but there is no evidence of Philip Elton’s charity anywhere in the novel. Mr. Elton’s only cited act of benevolence is to Mrs. Bates in “wanting her to sit in the vicarage-pew” (*E* 175), a very public demonstration of consideration that costs him nothing. After leaving the poor cottage on their charity visit, Emma and Harriet meet Mr. Elton in the lane. Mr. Elton claims he was just “going to call” at the cottage himself (*E* 87), but Mr. Elton never makes it down “the narrow, slipperty path through the cottage garden,” as he immediately turns back to walk with Emma and Harriet. Mr. Elton subsequently confesses to Harriet that he had not actually been on his way to the cottage at all: “he had seen them go by, and had purposely followed them” (*E* 90). Mr. Elton is perfectly willing to take part in “a very interesting parley about what could be done and should be done” to assist the poor (*E* 87), but actually helping them is another matter. As Mrs. Elton betrays, the Rev. Elton considers his parishioners to be nuisances (*E* 455). He would much rather spend his time playing cards than attending to the poor of his congregation.

When young John Abdy calls at the vicarage to talk to Mr. Elton about getting parish relief for his father, Mr. Elton hurries him away so he can return to his tea and card games, but Miss Bates manages to get the full story:

Poor old John, I have a great regard for him; he was clerk to my poor father twenty-seven years; and now, poor old man, he is bed-ridden, and very poorly with the rheumatic gout in his joints – I must go and see him to-day; and so will Jane, I am sure, if she gets out at all. And poor John's son came to talk to Mr. Elton about relief from the parish: he is very well to do himself, you know, being head man at the Crown, ostler, and every thing of that sort, but still he cannot keep his father without some help; and so, when Mr. Elton came back, he told us what John ostler had been telling him. (E 383)

As vicar of the parish, Mr. Elton could have added old John Abdy's name to the parish relief role, but we are given no indication that he has. The fact that Miss Bates is still so concerned about John Abdy suggests that Mr. Elton has turned him away, but the Abdys have one more chance. As Irene Collins in *Jane Austen and the Clergy* reminds us, "The overseers of the poor were responsible to the magistrates," and the magistrate in Highbury is George Knightley.

When Emma pays her last social call on the Bateses, Miss Bates is conspicuous by her absence, but Mrs. Elton is there and complaining about her husband's being "engaged from morning to night. – There is no end of people's coming to him, on some pretence or other" (E 455), though young John Abdy's visit was certainly no "pretence"

of need. Miss Bates returns while Emma is still there, but, uncharacteristically, Miss Bates makes no mention of where she has been, whom she has seen, or what she has been doing. When Mr. Elton arrives, we find that Mr. Knightley has also been missing from Donwell Abbey: "Knightley could not be found. Very odd! Very unaccountable! After the note I sent him this morning, and the message he returned, that he should certainly be at home till one" (*E* 457). Given these clues, Austen subtly suggests that Miss Bates appealed to Mr. Knightley and that they have both been to call on old John Abdy before the parish meeting at the Crown Inn scheduled for the following day, when applications for parish relief would be discussed and decided. With Miss Bates to forward his cause, with Mr. Knightley as attending magistrate, and with Mr. Weston, Mr. Woodhouse, and Mr. Cole as the parish council, the reader may rest assured of old John Abdy's receiving assistance, in spite of the indifference of his vicar. In his neglect of old John Abdy, Mr. Elton has violated the cardinal rule of Highbury, and of Christianity, to love thy neighbor as thyself, and Mrs. Elton is no better than her husband.

Decked out in her finery - "I would not wish to be inferior to others. And I see very few pearls in the room except mine" (*E* 324) - Augusta Elton truly believes herself to be as Miss Bates describes her at the Westons' ball, "Quite the queen of the evening" (*E* 329), but Mrs. Elton compares herself to her neighbors based entirely on the expense of the women's clothes, and she assumes that everyone else is judging by the same standard. As Edward Copeland notes in *Women Writing About Money*, "rank cannot be made stable in a social system run by competitive consumption" (109). Thus, Mrs. Elton, "as elegant as lace and pearls could make her" (*E* 292), feels entitled to assume precedence on every possible social occasion. As a fashion plate, no one in

Highbury even attempts to compete with Mrs. Elton, although Emma, Mrs. Weston, and Mrs. Cole could certainly outspend her, were they so inclined. The vicar's new wife seems oblivious to the financial reality of her situation and admittedly shows no moderation in her lifestyle: "My greatest danger, perhaps, in housekeeping, may be quite the other way, in doing too much, and being too careless of expense. Maple Grove will probably be my model more than it ought to be – for we do not at all affect to equal my brother, Mr. Suckling, in income" (*E* 283-84). Of course, aping the Sucklings is the business and joy of Mrs. Elton's life. All of Highbury is privy to the Eltons' "income, servants, and furniture" (*E* 184), and to the carriage and horses they obviously cannot afford. The Eltons employ so many servants that Mrs. Elton cannot keep track of them - "one of our men, I forget his name" (*E* 295) - and she protests that her servants do not have enough work to do. As Smith cautions in *Wealth of Nations*, a man "grows poor by maintaining a multitude of menial servants" (270), but Mrs. Elton's conspicuous consumption betrays an even more vexing problem, as according to Smith, "frivolous objects, the little ornaments of dress and furniture, jewels, trinkets, gewgaws, frequently indicates, not only a trifling, but a base and selfish disposition" (290).

As Mary Evans points out, Mrs. Elton "demonstrates an attitude to money and the material world that represents – to the obvious disapproval of Jane Austen – a crucial acceptance of the values of the emergent bourgeois state" (65), but beyond her personal imprudence, Mrs. Elton sins against all of Highbury in failing to appreciate the intrinsic value, the value in use, of her neighbors. Mrs. Elton esteems her brother-in-law because he has an estate, the now legendary Maple Grove, a large house, along with

two carriages, and all of the other trappings of wealth, and she trusts that everyone else in Highbury will be similarly impressed by Mr. Suckling's value in exchange.

It is also worth noting that Mrs. Elton works Maple Grove into every conversation, as she has absolutely nothing to say about her own family or her home in Bristol. By the time *Emma* was written, Bristol was infamous for its role in the British slave trade. When abolitionist Thomas Clarkson was gathering information for a report to be distributed in the House of Commons and subsequently published in 1788 and 1789, Clarkson began his slave trade investigation in Bristol (Rediker 319), but an even more obvious connection to the slave trade is Mrs. Elton's maiden name, Hawkins. As everyone knew, Admiral Sir John Hawkins had been a pioneer in the British slave trade in the sixteenth-century and was the first man to run the Golden Triangle trade route between Bristol, Africa and the West Indies, making a hefty profit at every stop. Another Sir John Hawkins was a Member of Parliament in the late eighteenth-century who argued in favor of the slave trade and sneered at the abolitionists (Porter 266). An American slave trader, Joseph Hawkins, published a popular memoir in 1797, *A History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa, and Travels into the interior of that country; containing particular descriptions of the climate and inhabitants, and interesting particulars concerning the slave trade* (Rediker 73-74). No wonder Augusta Hawkins Elton bristles when Jane Fairfax refers to "the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect" (*E* 300): "Oh! my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition." Significantly, Mrs. Elton never mentions her own family or their stand on abolition.

Slave ship captains could make as much as £10,000 on a successful voyage (Rediker 190), but it was a very high risk business. One half of the Europeans who traveled to West Africa died within a year (Rediker 244), mostly from disease, but ship captains were also in danger of slave revolts and from mutinies among their own sailors. Most slave ship captains came from working-class families and began as sailors who worked their way up the chain of command. Those who managed to return to England retired as quickly as they could, but, as historian Marcus Rediker maintains, “a captain who survived four voyages or more would likely have made a small fortune, far beyond what most men of his original station in life could expect to achieve. It was a risky but lucrative line of work, freely chosen” (190), but the money was obviously tainted, as Augusta Hawkins’ dowry may well be.

Mr. Elton’s bride is a stranger to Highbury, but Emma Woodhouse has no difficulty in learning all she needs to know about the former Miss Hawkins: “*What* she was must be uncertain; but *who* she was, might be found out; and setting aside the 10,000£ it did not appear that she was at all Harriet’s superior. She brought no name, no blood, no alliance” (*E* 183), or at least none to do her any credit. Mrs. Elton is an orphan, from “the very heart of Bristol,” that is from near the harbors where the slave ships docked, and Emma doubts the respectability of Mr. Hawkins’ occupation: “the youngest of the two daughters of a Bristol – merchant, of course, he must be called; but, as the whole of the profits of his mercantile life appeared so very moderate, it was not unfair to guess the dignity of his line of trade had been very moderate also” (*E* 183). By contrast, Mr. Weston and Mr. Cole were both merchants in London, but Emma Woodhouse has no qualms about their lines of business. Mrs. Elton’s possible

connection with the slave trade heightens the contrast between her selfish, materialistic world view and the depths to which someone so motivated could sink, and the very opposite values of Highbury, whose residents value everyone.

As Smith puts it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “We frequently see the respectful attentions of the world more strongly directed towards the rich and the great, than towards the wise and the virtuous” (58). In her adoration of Mr. Suckling and in the Eltons’ cruelty to Harriet Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Elton expose their moral perversion as encapsulated in Smith’s title for Chapter III: “OF THE CORRUPTION OF OUR MORAL SENTIMENTS, WHICH IS OCCASIONED BY THIS DISPOSITION TO ADMIRE THE RICH AND THE GREAT, AND TO DESPISE OR NEGLECT PERSONS OF POOR AND MEAN CONDITION.” Although Mrs. Elton brags of Mr. Suckling, of Maple Grove, wherever she goes, she never credits her brother-in-law with even one admirable character trait, absolutely no value in use, although it is doubtful that Mrs. Elton would detect or esteem such qualities, even if Mr. Suckling possessed any of them.

As Armstrong points out, Mrs. Elton’s value in exchange point-of-view alienates her from her value in use neighbors in Highbury: “Augusta Elton’s failure to appreciate Emma’s modest style of wedding dress – ‘Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!’ – is sufficient to brand her own taste as hopelessly bound to materialistic values that contradict the metaphysics of domesticity dominating Austen’s ideal community” (*Desire* 87). Emma recognizes that Mrs. Elton has nothing to offer but a pretentious fashion show of her bridal trousseau and whatever remains of her dowry. In time, all of Highbury will have seen Mrs. Elton’s wardrobe, which grows less

fashionable by the season, her dowry will be even more reduced, if it is not entirely spent, and there will be nothing left of Augusta Elton for anyone to admire, not even in value in exchange.

In contrast, Emma appreciates Harriet Smith's "tenderness of heart" and deems it "invaluable" (*E* 269). Mr. Knightley agrees with Emma's assessment of the two women: "Harriet Smith has some first-rate qualities, which Mrs. Elton is totally without. An unpretending, single-minded, artless girl – infinitely to be preferred by any man of sense and taste to such a woman as Mrs. Elton" (*E* 331). Mr. Knightley assesses people on their value in use and remains oblivious to their value in exchange. Meanwhile, Emma's "blunders" in this same consumer world must be acknowledged and corrected before she can take her place in society as Mrs. Knightley (*E* 331).

In *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds*, historian Oliver MacDonagh considers *Emma* to be an accurate reflection of the Regency world (143), and Copeland, in "Money, Class and Marriage," agrees: "The Austen fictional economy draws on a real economy in a state of rapid and unsettling transition" (74). Yet Highbury, where the residents primarily care about the welfare of their friends and neighbors, can hardly be considered a reflection of England's economic reality. As Miss Bates observes, there is nothing typical about her village: "I think there are few places with such society as Highbury. I always say, we are quite blessed in our neighbours" (*E* 175), and another resident, Mr. Woodhouse, likewise confesses that Highbury bears little resemblance to the rest of England: "I live so out of the world, and am often astonished at what I hear"

(E 252). But the world contained between the covers of *Emma* allows for the improbable, if not the impossible.

As James Thompson claims in *Models of Value*, the early English novel “remains this preserve of misrecognition, imagining a space in which symbolic capital is privileged over material capital” (197), just as Highbury’s residents have a high regard for value in use and a relative indifference to value in exchange. As Thompson points out, novelists had the ability to propose something even when their society failed to propose anything:

As a promise of freedom from a realm of purely financial and instrumental social relations, the early novel is both an incomplete and inadequate solution to insolvable social problems. But even so, the early novel presents an imaginary alternative where we have none today, and as such can be read as the record of a broken promise that we have yet to fulfill.

(198)

In *Emma*, the reader is offered a version of England as it should be, or perhaps a suggestion of England as it could be, but a bit of England as it was does intrude. Though *Emma* certainly suggests the possibility of a better way of life, the very real financial problems of the Regency occasionally undermine the novel’s hopeful message. In the same month that Jane Austen began writing *Emma*, the January 3, 1814 edition of *The Hampshire Chronicle* contained the following advertisement:

WANTED a SITUATION, as GOVERNESS, or as Teacher in a School, for a Young Person about 17 years of age, who has received a genteel Education.

The Salary not material, a comfortable home being the first object with the friends of the advertiser. The most respectable references will be given.

(4)

With an adjustment for age, it could have served as an advertisement for Jane Fairfax. Only a few years earlier, *The Hampshire Chronicle* contained advertisements for only four or five teachers and schools, but, by 1814, seventeen teachers and schools were advertising for students, an indication of the number of educated people who felt compelled to attempt to earn money by marketing what was, perhaps, their only asset.

As a governess, Miss Fairfax would earn approximately £31 a year plus room and board (Adams & Adams 17), so, with extreme frugality over the next ten to twenty years, Jane Fairfax could possibly save an additional £100 to £200 and be able to start her own school, as Mrs. Goddard has. Of course, Emma is failing to assist Jane Fairfax, although Miss Woodhouse certainly has the means, and a logical method of helping Jane is proposed. As Isabella Knightley suggests, in Miss Taylor's absence, Miss Fairfax "would be such a delightful companion for Emma" (E 104). Assuming Mrs. Weston's former position at Hartfield would provide Jane Fairfax with a comfortable home, an income, close proximity to her grandmother and aunt, and solve all of Jane's immediate and pressing problems. And, even should Emma find herself unable to penetrate Jane Fairfax's reserve enough to wish to retain her company, in a very few

years, though already provided with “a competent number of nursery maids” (*E* 91-92), Isabella Knightley will be in need of a governess for her children. Emma, however, will have none of it, and the only opportunities for employment that are offered to Jane come from Augusta Hawkins Elton who seizes on Jane and assumes the right to dispose of her.

Thus in the text, Jane Fairfax is presented as a commodity to be owned, bought, and sold, and Jane sees herself this way: “By birth she belonged to Highbury” (*E* 163). When her parents died, Jane “became the property” of her grandmother and aunt (*E* 163), and then she subsequently “belonged to Colonel Campbell’s family” (*E* 164). Thus far, Jane has been traded like a commodity, although by benevolent forces attempting to act for her own good and making no profit from her. However, Mrs. Elton’s interference in the disposal of Jane as a governess among her own acquaintances suggests that, in the working world outside of Highbury, Jane’s happiness and welfare will never again be a consideration. Jane describes her future profession as a governess as “the sale – not quite of human flesh - but of human intellect” (*E* 300). Jane’s value in exchange would reduce her to virtual slavery as a wage-slave/drudge, but if she did not have considerable value in use - her “superior talents” and “musical knowledge” (*E* 301) - she would not even be employable as a governess. If Frank Churchill fails her, Jane seems trapped, if not doomed, to survive by marketing her education.

As an enlightened Emma concedes, Jane Fairfax’s secret engagement, surreptitious correspondence and clandestine meetings are justifiable because of her

poverty: “If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax’s. – Of such, one may almost say, that ‘the world is not their’s, nor the world’s law’” (E 400). Emma is quoting Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, but the full quotation is an observation on the poor that the reader, it is assumed, will recall. In the play, Romeo correctly concludes that an educated man, a poor apothecary, will be forced by his extreme poverty to act unethically:

Famine is in thy cheeks,

Need and oppression starveth in thy eyes,

Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back;

The world is not thy friend, nor the world’s law,

The world affords no law to make thee rich. (5:1:69-73)

Although Jane does nothing illegal or immoral, her secret engagement to Frank Churchill, and the deceit that was required to maintain that secrecy, was unethical, as Jane is well aware. In agreeing to Frank’s desire for secrecy, Jane Fairfax could easily answer back, as the apothecary does to Romeo: “My poverty, but not my will, consents” (5:1:75).

But there are other dark corners, even in Highbury, and no Frank Churchills to rescue the individuals who languish there. Evans describes Mrs. and Miss Bates as “people who live if not actually in poverty, in the sense that it was experienced by sections of the eighteenth-century peasantry or urban poor, then at least uncomfortably

close to the possibility of becoming poor” (6). Copeland in *Women Writing About Money* maintains that “Miss Bates, as a pseudo-gentry woman fallen on hard times, feels more sharply than anyone in Austen’s novels the unforgiving facts of survival in a market culture” (108-09), yet, as Emma observes, Miss Bates remains virtually unscathed: “Poverty certainly has not contracted her mind: I really believe, if she had only a shilling in the world, she would be very likely to give away sixpence of it” (*E* 85). Like the biblical widow with her mite, Miss Bates’ small contributions to the poor represent more sacrifice than all of Miss Woodhouse’s well-funded acts of charity, and, in value in use to the village community, no one is more valuable, no one more worthy, than poor Miss Bates.

In 1797, Edmund Burke claimed that he did “not know of one man, woman, or child, that has perished from famine” (277). It is doubtful that Burke could have made the same statement a decade later when Austen was writing *Emma*, or have been believed if he had. The March 15, 1813 *Hampshire Chronicle* reported a coroner’s inquest into the death of Elizabeth Kilminster, whose emaciated body was found in a field near a farmhouse where she had gone to beg for food. The official verdict at the coroner’s inquest was “*Visitation of God*” (4). Nothing so grim could ever happen in the Highbury Austen represents, but the threat of what someone driven by desperation might do terrifies Harriet Smith and Miss Bickerton when they are assailed by “half a dozen children, headed by a stout woman and a great boy” begging for money (*E* 333). The fact that the woman is stout and the boy large implies that the “gipsies” are far from starving, but Harriet, a “soft-hearted girl” (*E* 473), gives the gypsies a shilling, which was the usual amount Dorothy Wordsworth records that she gave to the beggars she

encountered on the road in her Alfoxden and Grasmere journals. On hearing Harriet's story, however, Emma immediately sends "notice of there being such a set of people in the neighbourhood to Mr. Knightley" (E 334), so charity is extended while law and order are restored, a typical Highbury response to troublesome outsiders. When thieves make off with all of the Westons' turkeys and "Other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood also suffered" (E 483), the reader is again reminded of the hunger that must be allayed in order to maintain private property at the time the novel was written, but it is an ill wind that blows no good, especially in Highbury, and even these acts of "Pilfering" turn to Emma's advantage, as Mr. Woodhouse's fear of "*housebreaking*" reconciles him to Mr. Knightley's residence in Hartfield. Mrs. Elton, however, remains in Highbury and incorrigible to the last paragraph, still firmly entrenched in a world of value in exchange, and judging Emma by the expense of her wedding clothes - "all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own" (E 484). Even in an ideal village like Highbury, there are enemies in the camp, and the materialistic values represented by the Eltons are poised to live on in *Persuasion*.

Persuasion: “Growing Distressed For Money.”

In *Persuasion*, there is more than a little irony in Lady Russell’s prediction that “Time will explain” (P 147), as the precise timing of the novel’s setting is vital to both the domestic and political economics of the story. Jane Austen began writing *Persuasion* in August of 1815 and finished the manuscript twelve months later, in August 1816. As Austen wrote her final completed novel, England was experiencing the worse financial crisis of Austen’s life, one of the worst economic depressions in British history, and the beginning of England’s “Bleak Age.” Wartime prosperity, easy credit, and an unregulated banking system conspired to create the economic disaster, but the inevitable consequences of personal foolishness and collective greed took the country by surprise. Given the time during which the novel was written and the timeframe assigned to the story, the author and her original readers shared a secret, one that *Persuasion*’s characters cannot possibly know, that the England the characters inhabit is about to economically implode.

The financial disaster that followed the Battle of Waterloo can be compared to the American stock market crash of 1929 in that it was abrupt and unexpected, and it affected both prosperous people through bank and business failures and working-class people through low wages and unemployment. Unlike America’s Great Depression, the price of food was kept artificially high by the extremely unpopular Corn Law, which Parliament passed in March of 1815, six months before Jane Austen began writing *Persuasion*. Written as the Bleak Age unfolded, but set prior to the Corn Law and to the financial crash, *Persuasion* winds back the clock to look at the root cause of the

economic disaster, to speculate on which groups of people will fall by the wayside, survive, or prosper, and to offer hope to those “not greatly in fault themselves” (*MP* 461).

Significantly, the views of Austen’s contemporary economists are conspicuous by their absence in *Persuasion*, perhaps because by this time what the political economists had to say was generally considered to be unreliable. Like the economic Armageddon forecast in Thomas Paine’s 1796 tract *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, their dire predictions of impending doom had failed to materialize, and twenty years later, the economists’ celebration of the booming British wartime economy in works such as Patrick Colquhoun’s *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* seemed cruelly ironic. In *Persuasion*, as Anne Elliot’s personal experience suggests, the public is better served when people with common sense trust in themselves and their own judgment rather than relying on the advice of the overly cautious [Tories] like Lady Russell or foolish and extravagant [Whig] politicians like Sir Walter Elliot. Like Lady Russell in Bath, who sees only what she wants to see from her carriage window, Sir Walter also chooses his own version of reality in the *Baronetage*. Anne Elliot, and by extension the reader, learns that Lady Russell and Sir Walter may be older but not wiser than herself and that their advice, however well meant, has left her financially vulnerable.

Jane Austen began working on *Persuasion* about two months after the economic crash, when the financial repercussions were beginning to spread throughout the countryside, and she had been writing for about seven months when her brother’s banks collapsed. She would finish the manuscript in another five months, canceling and

rewriting the last two chapters in the final August. Austen composed her novel as almost everyone she knew was losing money, and there were no financial bailouts or economic stimulus packages to inspire hope in the long-suffering British public. At the conclusion of *Persuasion*, we leave the sympathetic characters happy, at last, but still oddly unsettled. There is a vague uncertainty about their future lives, “a tax of quick alarm” (P 252), that is not even a possibility for the characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Northanger Abbey*, but this only makes sense when one considers that for Britons the economic possibilities and probabilities had changed since Austen’s earlier novels were written.

As she did with *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen took pains to identify a specific timeframe for her novel, but while *Northanger Abbey*’s timing is clarified in a preface, in *Persuasion* the time is announced by the narrator within the novel’s text, “at this present time, (the summer of 1814)” (P 8). Thus, at the beginning of *Persuasion*, the narrative voice alerts the reader and sets the stopwatch running. *Persuasion* ends in February of 1815, only a few weeks before the Corn Law passed and four months before the Battle of Waterloo and the subsequent onset of The Bleak Age. In *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*, William Deresiewicz notes that “*Persuasion* is a novel that takes place in the shadow of Napoleon’s return – the shadow of Waterloo” (146). Deresiewicz sees Austen’s attention to the date as a means of allowing her to “subtly” comment on the politics of war (146), but the timeframe also, and not so subtly, opens up the text for a consideration of economics and casts an additional shadow over the action.

Jane Austen declared in an 1813 letter, “I do not write for such dull Elves As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves” (*Letters* 202), and, given her original readers’ 20/20 hindsight, Austen need merely suggest that Sir Walter Elliot was “growing distressed for money” in order for her readers to logically conclude that Sir Walter should respond with extreme frugality and to anticipate the inevitable financial consequences of his recklessness when he does not (*P* 9). With their superior knowledge of the pending financial depression, the readers would have considered Sir Walter’s behavior, even while retrenching in Bath, as wildly extravagant, his last hurrah as a man of consequence. By the same token, the readers’ foresight would have inclined them to sympathize with Anne Elliot in refusing the marriage proposal of “a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession” (*P* 27).

As “Captain Wentworth had no fortune” at the time of his first marriage proposal (*P* 28), and in light of his youthful extravagance, “spending freely, what had come freely,” Anne’s refusal seemed financially “prudent” at the time. Had Captain Wentworth not “always been lucky” (*P* 27), Anne could have been living on half pay with a disabled husband and children, like Mrs. Harville in Lyme or Mrs. Price in *Mansfield Park*. As Lady Russell fears, Anne’s married life could have been “a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence.” When Captain Wentworth returns with money in the bank and a brother-in-law well placed to assist him in his career, his financial future is considerably more promising, and, as Anne has come to realize, there is no certainty in life, economic or otherwise.

Frederick Wentworth, Anne Elliot and most of the other characters in *Persuasion* must adjust to financial reversals, and the reader is shown how individual characters respond to their loss or gain and how their lifestyles and attitudes towards money help them to comfortably survive or condemn them to penury. But this is hardly surprising when one considers that Jane Austen and her contemporaries were also simultaneously watching the people around them react to economic instability. As Peter Graham notes in *Jane Austen & Charles Darwin: Naturalists and Novelists*, Austen cast “a clear, cold eye at the concrete particulars of the world” and recognized change in progress when she saw it (xi-xii). England, like the houses of the Musgroves, was “in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement” (P 40), and *Persuasion*’s text acknowledges this worrisome evolution and reconciles the reader to the future, whatever it may hold.

During all of Jane Austen’s life, through a series of foreign wars and the expansion of British imperialism, the economy had been building up to supply the military. As Stephen Lee describes it in *British Political History 1815-1914*, “the government had become the major customer of the Industrial Revolution... Orders had been placed to supply the Royal Navy, and the troops fighting Napoleon in the Peninsular War, with uniforms from Lancashire and Yorkshire and arms from Sheffield and Birmingham” (21). By 1811, Britain’s military expenditure was 16% of the national income, the same level as in 1914-18 during World War I (Southam 125), and by 1815, the national debt had reached 744.99 million pounds (Poovey, *Financial* 15), an unprecedented amount at the time. For decades, bankers and merchants in the City had been growing rich from war profiteering.

Originally compiled in 1814 as a report written for the Prime Minister, Patrick Colquhoun's 1815 *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* was a smug, self-congratulatory appraisal of Britain's economy. Although Colquhoun admitted that one in four Britons, "a much under-rated estimate" (111), did not earn enough money to feed themselves and were officially classified by their government as paupers, vagrants or criminals, Colquhoun brushed aside the bad news to boast of British imports and exports and declared that the British "banking system, having been in the progress of gradual improvement during the last and the present century, has at length reached a state of perfection" (79).

The reality was that, with no gold or silver reserves and secured only by Bank of England banknotes, smaller banks were printing and issuing paper money entirely at their own discretion, or indiscretion. According to Colquhoun, this posed no problem as paper money would conform to the same laws of supply and demand that regulated consumer goods in the marketplace; therefore, banks required no government regulation: "Bank notes, in as far as they perform the functions of metallic money, appear to be regulated in point of amount or quantity by the same principle which regulates the other articles of life which are desirable to man, - where nothing is supplied beyond the actual demand" (83). When Colquhoun speculated that "A new [economic] era appears to be at no great distance" (86), he was certainly right, but the future of the British economy was not the secure and robust one that he predicted. In the economic depression that followed Waterloo, more than one in four of Colquhoun's perfect English banks failed (Olsen 251).

Listed first in the “BANKRUPTS” column on page two of the March 18, 1816 edition of *The Hampshire Chronicle* was “Henry Thomas Austin [sic], Henry Maude and James Tilson, Henrietta-Street, Covent-garden, bankers.” Henry Austen was, of course, Jane Austen’s brother, and the failure of his banks meant that he was legally liable for the banks’ financial losses, “to his last shilling and acre” (Poovey, *Financial* 16). Consequently, Henry lost all of his money, his fashionable London house, his furniture, servants, horses, and his luxurious barouche carriage. Only two years earlier, in June of 1814, Henry had been one of the guests at the selective White’s Club ball, when the oldest and most exclusive men’s club in London spent £10,000 on one evening’s entertainment, including £800 for candles and £200 to replace the china that was broken in the course of the evening (Kelly 184). White’s member and infamous dandy Beau Brummell was on the event’s planning committee, and the Prince Regent and King George III were also present. The exclusivity of White’s was legendary, and, on hearing of Henry’s attendance from their sister Cassandra, Jane Austen responded in dismay: “Henry at Whites! – Oh! what a Henry” (*Letters* 264). It was a long way down for Henry Austen, who fell back on the Church of England for employment and became the curate at Chawton for a humbling salary of 52 guineas a year, one pound and one shilling per week (Myer 223), but the collapse of Henry’s banks also devastated the finances of the entire Austen family.

Jane Austen’s sailor brothers, Captains Francis and Charles, lost hundreds of pounds, most of their savings and prize money from the wars, and were reduced to living, like *Persuasion’s* Captain Harville, on their half-pay from the British Navy. Another Austen brother, wealthy landowner Edward Austen Knight, could better sustain

his loss of £20,000, though a fortune in itself. None of the Austen siblings seemed to hold Henry personally responsible for the nation's financial debacle, but the Austens' uncle and aunt, the Leigh-Perrots, were less magnanimous and never forgave their nephew for the £10,000 of their money that vanished along with the rest. Jane Austen herself lost £13 and 7 shillings when Henry's banks failed (Myer 223), a significant amount for her and nearly six months' wages for the average Briton. The £600 profits from her copyright sales and Cassandra's £1,000 legacy from Tom Fowle were safely invested in the Navy Fives, government bonds paying five per cent interest, but Jane Austen's personal financial loss was greater than her £13. Henry and Frank were no longer able to contribute their annual £50 each to Mrs. Austen's household budget, so her previous income of £500 per annum was reduced to £400. Like the Elliots in *Persuasion*, the Austens at Chawton Cottage were retrenching. More desperate people were protesting, rioting, vandalizing, and looting.

According to Captain Rees Gronow in his memoir *Regency Recollections*, 1816 was "a most dangerous period... In the riots and meetings of those troublous times, the mob really meant mischief" (140). In May of 1816, Jane Austen still had three months of writing and revision left on *Persuasion* when *The Hampshire Chronicle* reported the "alarming state" of various parts of England where "malcontents" were protesting the high cost of food and low wages by smashing factory and agricultural machinery, setting fire to barns and hay ricks, and helping themselves to the food in shops and bakeries. When soldiers were called in to suppress the anarchy in Norfolk, the mob, estimated at 1,500 persons, was "read the Riot Act, and the greatest possible confusion ensued; several gentlemen narrowly escaped with their lives, brick-bats, stones, clubs & c. flying

about in every direction.” It was precisely the kind of mob violence and military intervention that Eleanor Tilney fears in *Northanger Abbey*, but no one in *Persuasion* mentions such possibilities, probably because their concerns are limited to the relatively stable pre-Waterloo economy before the financial crash and the economic depression.

Nevertheless, *Persuasion*'s characters and narrator are thinking of people in economic terms. Sir Walter appraises his three daughters and considers the younger two “of very inferior value” (P 5). The family is described as an economic unit, a “little social commonwealth” (P 43), and Captain Wentworth, who has not yet met his new sister-in-law, is willing to “take all the charms and perfections of Edward’s wife upon credit” (P 73). The birth of the “unprofitable Dick Musgrove” is considered “ill fortune” and his death is perversely “good fortune” (P 51-52). Even though Anne Elliot has no dowry to enrich him, as she must wait to inherit her £10,000, Captain Wentworth describes his marriage in terms of financial gain: “‘Like other great men under reverses,’ he added with a smile, ‘I must endeavour to subdue my mind to my fortune. I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve’” (P 147). *Persuasion*'s characters are generally thinking of their own happiness, but the characters’ “domestic virtues” are infused with “national importance” (P 252).

Austen’s “3 or 4 Families in a Country Village” (*Letters* 275), her ideal cast of fictional characters, represent larger groups of people and reveal the faults and merits of their class thus making *Persuasion* another state-of-the-nation novel. *Persuasion* begins with the impractical Sir Walter Elliot, who finds he can no longer live the good life by cashing in on the family name to borrow money and buy on credit. An unrepentant

and incurable wastrel, Sir Walter resists the inevitable “contractions and restrictions” on his lifestyle for as long as he can (*P* 13), but as the pragmatic Lady Russell points out, Sir Walter’s disastrous financial situation is not at all unusual for a person in his social class: “What will he be doing, in fact, but what very many of our first families have done, - or ought to do? – There will be nothing singular in his case” (*P* 12). Unfortunately, there was nothing particularly unusual in Sir Walter’s inability to retrench either.

As Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot amply demonstrate, *Persuasion* is a scathing indictment of the upper class, revealing their selfishness, arrogance, and impracticality. Sir Walter, Elizabeth Elliot, and Mary Musgrove console themselves with “artificial importance” (*P* 5), insisting on formality and precedence to reassure themselves of their superiority in a society that no longer values them. As the waiter at the inn in Lyme demonstrates when he says that Mr. William Elliot “would be a baronight some day” (*P* 106), most people neither knew nor much cared about the various titles of nobility. With the majority of Britons, a wealthy commoner who paid his bills ranked higher in their esteem than a baronet without money. Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mary never realize that people deferred to their supposed wealth, not to Sir Walter’s title or family connections. In fact, as Anne is painfully aware, Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mary are like their cousins the Dalrymples: “they were nothing. There was no superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding” (*P* 149-50), and not only are the Elliots ignorant, they are willfully ignorant.

While Lady Russell keeps abreast of current events by reading all of the “states of the nation that come out” (*P* 215), Elizabeth Elliot and her father avoid “tiresome”

books and turn away from unpleasant financial realities, whether personal or national. Like the aristocrats before the French Revolution, Sir Walter and Elizabeth choose the dangerous expedient of denial. Thus, they never seem to realize quite what has happened to them or to their class nor why. The only book Sir Walter consults is “the Baronetage” (*P* 3), “the book of books” (*P* 7), the only book that reassures him of his importance in the world, the only one “to drive the heavy bills of his tradespeople” from his mind. Throughout the novel, Sir Walter and Elizabeth merely feel “ill-used and unfortunate” (*P* 10), the victims of a new, impertinent social order which insisted that, titled or untitled, “the person who has contracted debts must pay them” (*P* 12). Unlike Admiral Croft, who acknowledges that “he must pay for his convenience” (*P* 22), Sir Walter is affronted by the notion of paying his bills, just as the Elliots shirk all of their other obligations to society.

As the Lady Bountiful of Kellynch Hall, Elizabeth Elliot fails miserably. When challenged with retrenchment, Elizabeth’s first act of economy is “to cut off some unnecessary charities” (*P* 9), though one imagines Elizabeth considers all charity to be more or less unnecessary. Elizabeth cannot be bothered to fulfill even the social expectations of her privileged position, “going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave” (*P* 39), and fobs the responsibility off on Anne. As Lord of the Manor, Sir Walter’s efforts are similarly feeble. Content to leave the local tradesmen unpaid and making no provision for the estate workers and the unemployed servants he leaves behind, Sir Walter departs from Kellynch Hall as he inhabited it, with a callous disregard for those who were financially dependent on him: “Sir Walter prepared with condescending bows for all the afflicted tenantry and cottagers who might have had a

hint to shew themselves" (*P* 36), and the estate is destined for no better owner in the foreseeable future.

Kellynch Hall's "Heir presumptive" (*P* 4), William Walter Elliot bemoans "the unfeudal tone of the present day" (*P* 139). Mr. Elliot regrets the loss of servile minions, but he does recognize a change in the power structure which Sir Walter and Elizabeth refuse to acknowledge. Originally, the young Mr. Elliot plans to sell his inheritance, as he confides in Charles Smith - "my first visit to Kellynch will be with a surveyor, to tell me how to bring it with best advantage to the hammer" (*P* 203) - but once he becomes financially secure, William Elliot decides that the title and the estate are more desirable than he originally thought. Mr. Elliot looks forward to being Sir William, but "without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself" (*P* 199), Sir William Walter Elliot will no doubt be just as indifferent to the hardships of his dependents as he has been to Mrs. Smith's suffering and will not be at all the kind of benevolent landowner to make any effort to improve the lives of the people who look to him for employment or assistance.

Seemingly better at managing his personal finances than his predecessor - "In all probability he was already the richer of the two" (*P* 140) - William Elliot lives "with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display" (*P* 146), but he has, like Sir Walter, borrowed money he has no intention of repaying. William Walter Elliot is a man "disposed to every gratification of pleasure and vanity which could be commanded without involving himself" (*P* 209), and, as his financial dealings with Charles Smith demonstrate, he will not be paying his debts if he can possibly avoid it. As his first

marriage reveals, Mr. Elliot's primary goal is to enrich himself: "Money, money, was all that he wanted" (P 202), "and by a rather quicker process than the law" (P 200). Mr. Elliot carefully calculated when he "purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth" (P 8), and, in his marriage, William Elliot betrays the economists' tendency to view people as commodities, all more-or-less exploitable and expendable. Mrs. Elliot, "a very low woman" whose "father was a grazier, her grandfather had been a butcher" (P 202), has experienced a rise in social status because her family has been hardworking, frugal and lucky. Her butcher grandfather elevated his son to the rank of a grazier, and the son was able to make a success of his occupation because almost everyone involved in raising sheep or cattle were, or were rapidly becoming, prosperous.

As John and Barbara Hammond maintain in *The Village Labourer*, high prices for meat and grain enriched the farmers at the expense of the consumers, and the Corn Laws ensured that that trend would continue: "The new farmer lived in a different latitude. He married a young lady from the boarding school. He often occupied the old manor house" (211-12). Farmer Robert Martin marries Harriet Smith from Mrs. Goddard's boarding school in *Emma*, Farmer Hillier lives in his landlord's old family home in *Sanditon*, and, in *Persuasion*, a prosperous grazier's daughter, Mrs. Elliot, marries the heir to a title.

Mrs. Elliot makes her husband wealthy by their marriage, just as the farmers and graziers who rent Sir Walter's land enrich him, but her well-being is immaterial to her husband. Mrs. Elliot's father and grandfather earned their money honestly, but William

Elliot plunders their savings, just as he did Charles Smith's inheritance, to pay for his extravagance, and his grazier's daughter and butcher's granddaughter wife is merely an embarrassing encumbrance. Like the servant who has been dismissed from the room with a cursory "That will be all," Mrs. Elliot's presence in the marriage is no longer required, and, while she lived, the Elliots "were not a happy couple" (P 200). When *Persuasion* begins, the Elliot family are "wearing black ribbons" in mourning for Mrs. Elliot (P 8), a show of concern for someone they never knew nor cared about, a meaningless gesture that was typical of the upper-class's token displays of concern for the lower classes: a spare coin for a widow or orphan, a pat on the head for an urchin, or one of Sir Walter's "condescending bows" (P 36).

However, like the superfluous poor in Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, the Elliots are also human commodities who have outlived their usefulness, and their presence at Kellynch is no longer required. Thus, *Persuasion* serves as a warning to the powers that be. If people are no more than marketable goods, then everyone, regardless of social class, is subject to appraisal and to the laws of supply and demand, and so it follows that they are subject to similar treatment when they are deemed to be worthless. The Elliot family cannot survive the application to themselves of what economists called the law of supply and demand, and they err when they value themselves too highly and hold other people too cheap. Penelope Clay blatantly appraises Sir Walter and Mr. Elliot for their marketable value and ultimately chooses "the richer of the two" (P 140). Anne Elliot creates her own market value and simultaneously alienates herself from the rest of her family by repeatedly proving to be

practical and useful to the people around her, and Anne ultimately defects to marry into the professional class who appreciate her contribution when her own family does not.

Sir Walter complains that the professions are “the means of... raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of” (P 19), but in *Persuasion*, this overthrow of the old order is by no means a bad thing. *Persuasion*'s nouveaux riches, represented by Admiral and Mrs. Croft, are replacing the feckless gentry as pillars of a new, pragmatic society based on ready money and merit rather than useless titles and precarious social connections. Admiral Croft contributes to society by defending Britain from the enemy and by paying his bills. England is safer and richer because the Admiral is in it. Sir Walter contributes nothing and consumes what he does not pay for. Sir Walter is a drain on his society, but, although he fails to realize it, his hey-day is over.

As reluctant as she is to leave her home, even to-the-manor-born Anne Elliot must acknowledge that her family's loss is ultimately for the best as it benefits society: Anne “felt the parish to be so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief, that however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners” (P 125).

As the Crofts and Captain Wentworth move into Kellynch, Sir Walter and Elizabeth slip away to Bath “to be important at comparatively little expense” (P 14), but having learned nothing and still spending more money than they ought. As historian Venetia Murray reminds us in *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England*,

“one of the classic characteristics of the nobility at the time was a sublime indifference to economic reality. Debt was a way of life, a matter only of juggling credit. Deficit financing may not have been invented as a term during the Regency, but they certainly knew the principle” (62). Like their cousin Lady Dalrymple, Sir Walter and Elizabeth continue “living in style” (*P* 149), although they cannot afford to. At Sir Walter’s rented house in Bath, the “elegant little clock on the mantle-piece had struck ‘eleven with its silver sounds,’ and the watchman was beginning to be heard at a distance telling the same tale” (*P* 144). It is the eleventh hour, and time is running out for Sir Walter, as the pages of *Persuasion* hasten towards the impending depression. Lady Russell’s “plans of economy” for Kellynch would pay off Sir Walter’s debts in seven years (*P* 12). Anne “wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt,” but, as Austen’s contemporaries well knew, Sir Walter has only a few months left before the economic collapse overtakes him. The debts of the “foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him” would likely soon be called in (*P* 248), and, in spite of his half-hearted attempt to retrench, Sir Walter will almost certainly be bankrupt. In that case, the land he used as collateral for his loans - and Sir Walter “had condescended to mortgage as far as he had the power” (*P* 10) - will be foreclosed on.

Even worse, people who lived on credit before the post-Waterloo financial crash were in peril as debtors’ prisons were waiting to swallow them up, although peers who ranked far above Sir Walter could not be arrested for debt (Murray 32). The economic depression ruined thousands of wealthy men, and, thus, according to Regency buck Rees Gronow, “the Dandy dynasty was overthrown” (171). In 1816, 1,000 “gentlemen”

in England were imprisoned for debt (Kelly 229), and many more escaped the country before they could be arrested. While Jane Austen was writing *Persuasion*, the June 17, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* reported a mass exodus: "Above two thousand passports have been issued to Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Manufacturers, about to proceed to the Continent, within the last month" (2). One of those "gentlemen" was Beau Brummell, who in May of 1816 secretly bolted from London at night and hastened to France in order to avoid being arrested for debt. Brummell's last days in England were devoted to attempting to borrow as much money as he could from the unsuspecting friends he was leaving behind. Within four days of Brummell's departure, the contents of his London house had been seized, advertised as "The Genuine Property of A MAN OF FASHION Gone to the Continent" and sold at auction (Kelly 225). Within three months of Brummell's sale, the final draft of *Persuasion* would be complete, beginning with Sir Walter Elliot's financial problems two years earlier.

In response to the charge that Sir Walter Elliot is an unrealistic or "overdrawn" character, Walter Pollock, in *Jane Austen: Her Contemporaries and Herself*, concedes the allegation may be true, but contends that Sir Walter's eccentricities were "very deliberate" on Austen's part (5). Roger Sales in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* maintains that Sir Walter would have been recognizable to Austen's original readers as a fictional representation of the Prince Regent, a vain, selfish, middle-aged, debt-ridden fop who had been unable to produce a son and heir (171). But "a dressy man for his time of life" (P 128), and surrounded by an impressive or, as Admiral Croft would have it, oppressive collection of mirrors, Sir Walter is even more like the King of the dandies, Beau Brummell - without a wife, without a son, without an

estate, but oversupplied with debt and ego. As Jane Austen's contemporaries were well aware, Beau Brummell spent all of his inherited fortune, approximated at £30,000 (Kelly 91), lived the high life on borrowed money until he could borrow no more, and then, as previously mentioned, was forced to flee his home in disgrace in order to escape from his creditors, just as Sir Walter has done.

Also like Sir Walter, Beau Brummell was famous for assuming his afternoon chair in the bow window - christened "the Beau Window" in Brummell's honor (Kelly 150) - of White's men's club and passing harsh judgments on the appearance of passersby for the amusement of his sycophantic followers. Upper-class women refused to walk or even to drive in an open carriage down St. James's street for fear of being ogled and insulted by Brummell and his cronies (Murray 91). According to Brummell's biographer Ian Kelly, the group peering through their quizzing glasses from White's bow window were "insular, exclusive, indolent, looking out on the world and down on it" (152). Sir Walter Elliot would fit right in.

Assuming a Brummell-like superiority, Sir Walter attempts to amuse his select audience by posing and showing off, just as the Beau did. At Kellynch, Sir Walter "sarcastically" belittles the navy (*P* 18), finding fault with "Lord St. Ives, whose father we all know to have been a country curate, without bread to eat" (*P* 19). Jane Austen did not need to remind *Persuasion's* original readers that the same could be said of the deceased national hero, Admiral Lord Nelson, whose father was also a rural clergyman, but Lord St. Ives is hardly Sir Walter's only victim. Sir Walter delivers a sweeping condemnation of the appearance of "Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable looking

personage you can imagine, his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree, all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side, and nothing but a dab of powder at top" (P 20). This sally of wit is followed by a sweeping dismissal of all sailors whose appearance fails to meet Sir Walter's exacting standards: "they are not fit to be seen." At Bath, Sir Walter "had stood in a shop in Bond-street," adopting a post similar to White's Beau Window and scorning the passing citizenry of Bath just as Brummell had sneered at the pedestrians in London:

he had counted eighty-seven women go by, one after another, without there being a tolerable face among them... there certainly were a dreadful multitude of ugly women in Bath; and as for the men! they were infinitely worse. Such scare-crows as the streets were full of. (P 141-42)

By way of contrast, Admiral Croft has a very different opinion of the people he sees in Bath: "Here are pretty girls enough, I am sure" (P 173). Sir Walter's conceit and cruelty frees the reader from any inclination to feel sorry for him in his probable fate, either in exile on the continent, like Beau Brummell, or bankrupt at home and left to be a burden on his family, like the useless, aged dandy Mr. Turveydrop in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.

As if his obnoxious personality were not enough to disgust the Regency reader, Sir Walter is, in addition, a politician. Like Jane Austen's wastrels in *Mansfield Park*, Sir Walter Elliot is, or at least has been, a Member of Parliament. Sir Walter's copy of the *Baronetage* notes that among his family's accomplishments is "representing a borough in three successive parliaments" (P 4), and the narrator notes that Sir Walter himself

“travelled up to London” every spring to take his place in “the great world” (P 7). When Sir Walter wished to confer favor on young William Elliot, then a law student in London, Sir Walter appeared with his heir “twice in the lobby of the House of Commons” (P 8), presumably introducing the young Mr. Elliot to the world of political privilege that he is to inherit along with the family estate. Once again, Austen makes a point of showing that her politicians, who are handling the nation’s finances, are incapable of managing their own money and only rally themselves to act in Parliament when it is in their own self interest. At the end of *Persuasion*, the narrator tells us that on their stroll down the gravel path in Bath, Anne and Captain Wentworth are temporarily oblivious to the “sauntering politicians” who presumably were neglecting the business of the nation to be there (P 241).

Parliament’s response to the Bleak Age depression was a combination of opportunism and apathy. As Carolly Erickson notes in *Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England*, as far as the public was concerned, after passing the Corn Law, “Parliament was the villain” (147), the selfish and merciless compounders of the nation’s economic woes. The Corn Law was a protectionist tariff designed to continue the high price of wartime British grain by prohibitively raising the cost of imported grain, thus keeping agricultural prices high and ensuring British landowners continuing profits. While this was all well and good for farmers, the gentry, and the landed aristocracy, the Corn Law meant hardship and misery for the poor who were already hard pressed to keep themselves and their families fed. As John and Barbara Hammond record in *The Bleak Age*, the Corn Law brought “hunger to the mass of the village population” (191). At the time, the average Briton ate a pound of bread a day, and the poor ate little else,

so, as Carolly Erickson summarizes it, the vast majority of people saw the Corn Law as being “initiated by rich and greedy landowners bent on enriching themselves still further at the expense of ordinary citizens” (148). Britons had been willing to sacrifice in times of war, but not in peacetime, and certainly not to benefit the wealthy. Hundreds of thousands of people signed petitions urging Members of Parliament to vote against the Corn Law, and Corn Law proceedings in the House of Commons were accompanied by public protests and riots. During the Corn Law debates, thousands of people stood outside of Parliament and disrupted the proceedings within by shouting and booing. Soldiers and Horse Guards were called in to maintain order, but they merely succeeded in harrying the protestors from one location to another. On March 6, Corn Law rioters vandalized the London houses of six Members of Parliament known to support the Corn Law, and 700-800 people looted the house of the MP who originally introduced the bill (Erickson 149). As few of the petitioners and protestors could vote, the spectacularly unpopular Corn Law passed in the House of Commons on March 10, 1815 by a vote of 245 for to 72 against (Erickson 150). There was never any doubt that the Corn Law would be approved by the House of Lords. It was business as usual in Parliament, and, as a Member of the House of Commons, Sir Walter’s allegiance to his own self-interest would seem to be a foregone conclusion.

Though in *Persuasion* Sir Walter is just beginning his economic decline, also retrenching in Bath is a woman nearly at the end of her financial tether, Anne Elliot’s “old school-fellow” (*P* 152), the much-tried Mrs. Smith. A young widow besieged by “difficulties of every sort” (*P* 152), Mrs. Smith’s physical illness parallels her financial “ruin” (*P* 199), and Anne finds her friend “living in a very humble way, unable even to

afford herself the comfort of a servant, and of course almost excluded from society” (*P* 152-53). Without a servant, Mrs. Smith’s middle-class status is no longer obvious, and Anne’s loyalty to her old friend is significant, as is Sir Walter’s disregard of “a mere Mrs. Smith, an every day Mrs. Smith” (*P* 158). In spite of her misfortunes however, Mrs. Smith’s “good sense” seems to have prevailed in the end (*P* 153). In stark contrast to Sir Walter and Elizabeth, Mrs. Smith has seen the error of her ways and reformed.

In *Jane Austen and The State*, Mary Evans maintains that “Poverty, [Austen] recognizes, is constructed: Mrs. Smith is poor because Mr. Elliot cheated her” (83), but it is not Mr. Elliot alone who has not reduced Mrs. Smith to penury. Her poverty is the result of her husband’s and her own “thoughtless” behavior (*P* 201). Mr. Elliot merely “would not act” as the executor of Mr. Smith’s will in order to help his friend’s widow to recover the property she still has left (*P* 209). Importantly, settling Charles Smith’s affairs would require Mr. Elliot to pay his own debts to his deceased friend’s estate. Considering that Charles Smith’s “purse was open to him” and that Smith “often assisted him” (*P* 200), Mr. Elliot apparently owes the Smith estate a considerable sum of money. Mrs. Smith has papers in William Elliot’s handwriting acknowledging as much, so some of the blame does rest with Mr. Elliot, but ultimately her financial troubles have the same root cause as Sir Walter’s. The Smiths’ “income had never been equal to their style of living” (*P* 209), and they bankrupt themselves by “careless habits” and “general and joint extravagance.” It is significant that the Elliots and the Smiths are not the victims of paper banknotes, debased coins, the Restriction Act, or the Corn Law but suffer the results of their own foolishness. In *Persuasion*, the fault is

not in our stars, nor in the economic system, but in ourselves and in our abuse of the system.

To paraphrase Austen, Mrs. Smith was forced into extravagance in her youth and learned prudence as she grew older – “the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning” (*P* 30). Because of her suffering and reformation, her conversion to reason and frugality, “poor” Mrs. Smith is a sympathetic character (*P* 152), and, like Anne Elliot, she is allowed a second chance at prosperity and happiness. Mrs. Smith’s property in the West Indies will “make her comparatively rich” (*P* 210), as the West Indies were, by far, Britain’s most valuable colonies (Colquhoun 87), providing 80% of England’s imports (Day 213), and relatively unaffected by the post-Waterloo depression. Most of *Persuasion*’s final paragraph is devoted to Mrs. Smith’s “improvement of income” (*P* 252), which allows the novel to end with a hopeful change of economic circumstances. While Sir Walter and Elizabeth could take Mrs. Smith’s fate as a warning and perhaps avoid some part of the misery to come, they characteristically refuse to acknowledge Mrs. Smith or to consider her situation as having anything to do with their own. Yet, Mrs. Smith’s unflinching optimism and her physical and financial recovery suggest that there is still hope for anyone who comes to his or her senses, however belatedly.

While the Bleak Age depression was economically crippling to most people, it was not devastating to everyone. Jane Austen’s former admirer and would-be husband, Harris Bigg-Wither certainly made money, though perhaps not as much as he would have liked, as he advertised his annual sale in the June 3, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* of “300 Southdown EWES and Ewe lambs” (1), presumably the yearly increase of his

flocks. Those who had stayed out of debt, lived within their incomes, and on land they owned, like the Bigg-Witherses - and the Musgroves and the Hayters in *Persuasion* - were relatively safe. Parliament had certainly done everything in its power to ensure the continuing prosperity of rural landowners. The Poor Laws substantially subsidized the wages of agricultural laborers and compelled men to work for farmers who paid only one third of their wages, the parish paying the remaining two-thirds (Hammond and Hammond, *Bleak* 94), and the Corn Laws guaranteed profits on grain and ushered in a long and prosperous period of “High Farming” that peaked in the 1850s and 1860s (Wild 70). With such agricultural safety nets firmly in place, the Musgroves, “an old country family of respectability and large fortune” (*P* 6), and their kinsmen the Hayters, who “had some property of their own” (*P* 74), are, of all of the characters in *Persuasion*, the best equipped to come through the depression unscathed, or perhaps even better off.

In the novel’s 1814 timeframe, Mr. Musgrove’s “landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter’s” (*P* 28), but, as the Musgroves’ land is unencumbered by debt, the untitled and unpretentious Mr. Musgrove is much more financially secure than Sir Walter or anyone else in the novel. The Musgroves’ property is safe, and it looks it: “the mansion of the ‘squire, with its high walls, great gates, and old trees, [is] substantial and unmodernized” by extravagance or by ostentatious display (*P* 36). Even silly and impractical Mary Musgrove realizes that when her father-in-law dies and her husband becomes squire of Uppercross, the Musgrove property will endow Charles with an economic security that Captain Wentworth is unlikely to achieve: “Anne had no Uppercross-hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family; and if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from

being made a baronet, she would not change situations with Anne" (*P* 250).

Additionally, Mary is fortunate to have secured her dowry in Sir Walter's better days.

Anne's dowry is "but a small part of the share of ten thousand pounds which must be hers hereafter" (*P* 248), meaning Anne's inheritance after Sir Walter dies. This implies that Anne's mother had a dowry of £30,000, secured in trust by marriage settlements to provide a yearly income. Although Sir Walter is apparently entitled to the interest from the money while he lives, the principle is unavailable to him, and the lump sum will be divided among his deceased wife's three children when he dies. So Anne has her maternal grandfather to thank that she has any dowry at all. In the meanwhile, Anne's marriage settlement of about £1,000-£2,000, and the £50-£100 annual income that it would yield, provides little more than a comfortable amount for Anne's pin money. While Sir Walter is unable to give Anne a dowry, Mr. Musgrove, with "a numerous family" (*P* 40), is yet "a very kind, liberal father" (*P* 218). The Musgroves "most honourably and kindly" provide Louisa and Henrietta with substantial dowries (*P* 182), even though both daughters marry at the same time. As Charles Musgrove confides in Anne, "Money, you know, coming down with money – two daughters at once – it cannot be a very agreeable operation, and it straightens him as to many things" (*P* 218), yet Mr. Musgrove willingly makes the financial sacrifice. No doubt this year Mr. Musgrove will forego his usual "handsome present" of "more money" for his son Charles and Mary in their annual allowance (*P* 44), but no one in the Musgrove family is likely to suffer any real deprivation.

Like George Knightley in *Emma* and Jane Austen's brother Edward, Mr. Musgrove is also a magistrate who assumes an active role in his community and takes a benevolent interest in all of his dependents, not only the ones who are related to him. As in *Emma*, *Persuasion* seems to suggest that any hope of economic stability and relief for the poor resides at the local, as opposed to the national, level. The Musgroves demonstrate that charity begins at home, as their "old nursery-maid" Sarah goes on "living in her deserted nursery" and leading a quiet, make-work existence by mending the family's stockings and acting as nursemaid to anyone who falls ill (*P* 122). As Samuel and Sarah Adams maintain in their 1825 manual *The Complete Servant*, "Nothing is so comfortable and creditable to all parties, as when a servant lives many years in the same family" (24). Although the Musgroves' Sarah is, in strictly economic terms, just another mouth to feed and thus a financial drain, the Musgroves nevertheless pretend that their elderly servant is necessary to their household and continue to provide for her. The Musgroves have a sense of the Christian idea of to whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48), and as they fulfill their obligation to their dependents, Austen demonstrates that the Musgroves deserve their prosperity.

The Musgroves' extended family is also financially secure from the impending depression as the Hayters live simply, even austerely, and wisely within their income and, unlike Sir Walter, they allow their money to accumulate. The Hayter family's "inferior, retired, and unpolished way of living" may not make them appear socially desirable to Mary Musgrove (*P* 74), but neither does it diminish their valuable property. Winthrop may be "an indifferent house, standing low, and hemmed in by the barns and

buildings of a farm-yard' (P 85), but it is no less prosperous for that. The bustling farm surrounding Winthrop economically enriches its owners, as opposed to the ongoing financial drain for the maintenance of the "pleasure-grounds" encircling Kellynch (P 18). As Mrs. Musgrove and her sister Mrs. Hayter "each had money" on their marriages (P 74), there is also some money from their mothers' marriage settlements for the Musgrove and Hayter children to eventually inherit, so the unpretentious Hayters are also somewhat immune to the vagaries of the marketplace.

Thus, although Captain Wentworth may be "a richer man" than Charles Hayter at present (P 250), in the long run, Henrietta Musgrove Hayter will, in all likelihood, be more financially secure than either Louisa Benwick or Anne Wentworth. As Charles Musgrove observes, his cousin Charles Hayter is a man with expectations:

whenever my uncle dies, he steps into very pretty property. The estate at Winthrop is not less than two hundred and fifty acres, besides the farm near Taunton, which is some of the best land in the country... with that property, he will never be a contemptible man. Good, freehold property. No, no; Henrietta might do worse than marry Charles Hayter. (P 76)

In fact, given the other single men in the novel, and considering Charles Hayter's clerical income, "And a very good living it was" (P 217), Henrietta could not have done better financially. As Charles Musgrove notes, "It is a very fair match, as times go" (P 218), and as times went, it was an even better one.

Only one character in *Persuasion* is given a specific income, so by this time it appears that Jane Austen had almost entirely abandoned her earlier practice of

attaching convenient price tags to her characters, as in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, probably because the exact amounts no longer conveyed any fixed meaning. Captain Frederick Wentworth has, we are told, accumulated a “handsome fortune” of £25,000 during the war (*P* 30). It is interesting to note that with an income of £1,250 per annum, Captain Wentworth is considered “rich” (*P* 30), since Wentworth is relatively poor when compared to *Pride and Prejudice*’s Mr. Darcy with £10,000 a year and a “large estate in Derbyshire” (*P&P* 10). Wentworth’s financial situation is even fairly modest when compared to *Sense and Sensibility*’s Colonel Brandon with £2,000 a year and an estate “without debt or drawback” (*S&S* 196), and not just because of the £750 per annum difference. Colonel Brandon owns Delaford which, as Mrs. Jennings assures us, is “a nice place!” (*S&S* 197), “full of comforts and conveniences” (*S&S* 196), and, as John Dashwood observes, also full of valuable timber, while *Persuasion*’s Captain Wentworth owns no property at all. Wentworth’s income is comparable to Edward Ferrars’s at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, but, after his disinheritance, Edward Ferrars is never considered rich, merely comfortable. With a combined income of about £850 a year, and a vicarage with glebe land, the admittedly unambitious Edward and Elinor feel they have “an income quite sufficient to their wants” (*S&S* 374), but no more, so, in Captain Wentworth’s “fortune” (*P* 30), we see a reassessment of the term “rich.” Significantly, what Frederick Wentworth has that Austen’s other heroes do not is his ability to earn money - large sums of money with a bit of luck - and thus to rise by endeavor. As Samuel Macey points out in *Money and the Novel*, “*Persuasion* is the only one of Austen’s novels in which the heroine marries a protagonist who has actually

accumulated his own wealth” (153), and in light of the bank failures and the depression to come, Captain Wentworth’s ability to earn money is a significant advantage.

Gene Ruoff, in Anne Elliot’s Dowry: Reflections on the Ending of *Persuasion*,” has noted that critics tend to classify *Persuasion*’s characters as “two alien camps, the inert landed gentry and the rising professional class, an aristocracy and a meritocracy” (61), but this is a rigid division that overly simplifies and fails to consider characters who are neither rising nor falling, who are neither aristocrats nor professionals, but who nevertheless maintain themselves in the very comfortable manner to which they have become accustomed. The Musgroves and the Hayters inhabit this middle ground, but we also have no particular reason to concern ourselves about Lady Russell’s economic future. She is “of steady age and character, and extremely well provided for” (*P* 5). As “a woman rather of sound than of quick abilities” (*P* 11), the cautious Lady Russell will be sure to live within her income, and, should she lose a great deal of money in a bank failure, Lady Russell would promptly retrench, as she advises Sir Walter to do, moving to a smaller home than Kellynch Lodge, reducing the number of her servants, and, like Mrs. Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, selling her horses and “handsome equipage” (*P* 158). In all probability, Lady Russell will be reduced but not entirely destroyed by the crash.

The up-and-coming Crofts live even more judiciously. Admiral and Mrs. Croft enjoy their “very handsome fortune” (*P* 21), but they wisely continue to live frugally as they have always done. After living rent-free for years in the Captain’s quarters of five ships, they lease Kellynch Hall, just as Captain Francis Austen rented Chawton House

from his brother Edward. Samuel and Sarah Adams estimate that “Rent, Taxes, and Repairs of House and Furniture” would amount to no more than “12 ½ per Cent. or One-eighth” of a gentry family’s annual income (15), so the Crofts presumably are only spending a small fraction of their annual income on housing. Additionally, there are indications that the Crofts employ only a skeleton household staff and are largely self-sufficient when at home. When Admiral Croft wishes to remove the many, expensive “large looking-glasses” from Sir Walter’s dressing room (*P* 127), the Admiral does the heavy work himself: “I got Sophy to lend me a hand” (*P* 128). Similarly, the Crofts use an umbrella stand instead of depending on a butler to fetch their umbrellas for them as the Elliots had done, and one can only assume that the Crofts know about the laundry-room door and repair it because they have passed through the door, at least on occasion, themselves. Admiral Croft could afford a carriage and four horses like Sir Walter’s, but the Crofts drive about the countryside in an economical one-horse, two-wheeled gig instead. The Crofts’ modest form of transportation translates into one quarter of the expensive horseflesh Sir Walter purchased, one fourth of the hay and grain, fewer horseshoes, less harness, a quarter of the annual tax on the horses, half the annual carriage tax, which was assessed per axle, and half fare on toll roads. Having four horses and four wheels, like Sir Walter’s equipage, gave one the right of way on the road, and a carriage bearing a coat of arms took precedence over a plain carriage like Lady Russell’s (*Poole* 146), but the Crofts care little about such things. Unlike Sir Walter, the Crofts do not feel humbled or humiliated by their economies, and they recall their former relatively lean years with great fondness, implying that people

can be happy with less - considerably less - an encouraging example to readers whose incomes were diminished by the 1815 economic crash.

Similarly, all of the sailors in *Persuasion* know that their own fates, financial or otherwise, are unpredictable, and yet they remain undaunted. Any of the officers could enjoy Admiral Croft's good fortune and amass a nest egg or suffer Captain Harville's bad luck and be reduced to a small pension. Rich or poor, the naval officers and their wives share a social equality and a good will that has nothing to do with their bank accounts, which sets them in stark contrast to the society Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot seek in Bath. If a sailor's money was safely invested, all was well and good. If he lost his savings, he could fall back on the Navy, either going back into active service or remaining ashore and living frugally, but not unhappily, as Captain Harville does, on half pay. Captain Harville is representative of the 300,000 men who were demobilized from the military in 1815 at the end of the war (Lee 21); 85% of the British Navy was discharged between 1814 and 1816 (Rogers 122), including Jane Austen's brother, Captain Francis Austen. In a letter, Francis Austen claimed that Captain Harville bore "a strong resemblance" to himself (qtd. in Austen-Leigh 206). On half pay, Francis Austen drew an annual salary of £230 in 1814, and, with less seniority in the Navy, his brother Captain Charles Austen was paid £192 for half pay in 1816 (Southam 292). Through no fault of his own, Charles Austen's ship, the *Phoenix*, was shipwrecked and sank in February 1816, and, like the wounded Captain Harville, by an unfortunate and unavoidable mishap, his naval career seemed at an end as he could not get another ship. After the Battle of Trafalgar, the Napoleonic Wars shifted from sea to land, and the Navy was cutting back, as Admiral Croft tells Anne Elliot: "These are bad times for

getting on" (*P* 171). Nevertheless, the Harvilles will at least be no worse off in a year's time, and, even on half pay, they can still afford "the maid" (*P* 113). Like the invalid Mrs. Smith, the injured Captain Harville carries on cheerfully, accepting his fate, making the best of his unpromising situation, and offering the reader, in the face of financial disappointment, a model to be emulated.

Captain Harville hobbles on the Cobb in Lyme, but Captain Wentworth realizes that his own fate as the Captain of "a ship not fit to be employed" could have been much worse (*P* 65): "I should only have been a gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost in only a sloop, nobody would have thought about me" (*P* 66). Anne shudders to think of it, and Louisa and Henrietta express "pity and horror" at the thought, but loss – either economic or of another kind - threatens everyone in the novel, even the prosperous. As many critics have noted, *Persuasion* has an overabundance of widows, widowers, those in mourning, and those seeking consolation. Sir Walter, Lady Russell, Mr. Elliot, Mrs. Clay, Mrs. Smith, and Lady Dalrymple have lost spouses, while Captain Benwick lost his fiancé, Fanny Harville. Mrs. Musgrove mourns the loss of Dick, "her poor son gone for ever" (*P* 51), (the only "unprofitable" Musgrove) and "Mr. Musgrove was, in a lesser degree, affected likewise," but, like the novel's bereft lovers, the Musgroves find consolation in one another and hope for the future in their children, grandchildren, and even in the little Harvilles. Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth are lost to one another for a time only, just as Henrietta Musgrove and Charles Hayter drift apart before being reunited, underscoring the idea of recovery from disappointment. The loss of Anne Elliot's mother and the loss of Sir Walter's financial security are equated: "While Lady Elliot

lived, there had been method, moderation, and economy, which had just kept him within his income; but with her had died all such right-mindedness" (P 9). As *Persuasion's* characters demonstrate, the loss of reason leads to Mrs. Smith's financial problems and Captain Benwick's immoderate grief, but common sense preserves both characters from despair. In *Persuasion*, where there is life, and reasonable behavior, there is hope and a second chance at both love and money.

As Anne Elliot says of the seemingly inconsolable Captain Benwick, "I cannot believe his prospects so blighted forever... He will rally again and be happy with another" (P 97), as, indeed, he does. By the end of the novel, James Benwick has achieved financial success and marriage, which had both previously eluded him. The same can be said of Captain Wentworth. Admiral Croft imagines Captain Wentworth must be disappointed that Louisa Musgrove is to marry someone else, but the Admiral never assumes that as a result his brother-in-law will remain single: "Now he must begin all over again with somebody else" (P 173); all of *Persuasion's* reasonable characters are capable of beginning again to find love or to seek financial security. Even Captain Harville may yet recover, just as Mrs. Smith recovers both her health and her fortune.

The theme of loss and recovery is even evident in the literature referred to in *Persuasion*: *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake*. As William Deresiewicz observes, "the central theme of each of these bodies of work, the Tales and the romances, is survival: who and what lives on, and on what

terms, after the experience of loss” (128). Deresiewicz also draws our attention to *Persuasion*’s repeated motif of rising and falling:

Little Charles’s injury is the result of a fall; Wentworth praises his famous nut for having clung to its high perch “while so many of its brethren have fallen”; and even the cliff at Pinney has experienced a “partial falling” – height itself tumbling down. But of course, the most important of the novel’s falling bodies is Louisa’s, the imagery of descent and ascent reaching its apogee of importance at the novel’s very pivot-point. Indeed, Louisa’s fall is an event that, with her repeated climbings and jumpings, possesses an emblematic significance. What goes up must come down, but by the same token, what goes down eventually comes back up – just as (the pun is inevitable) the season of “spring” inevitably succeeds that of “fall.” (142)

It is this repetition of rising again after a fall that suggests the possibility of economic recovery following a financial disaster, the novel’s message of hope for the individual and for the nation.

Both Deresiewicz and Ruoff have commented on the unusual, rootless conclusion which sets *Persuasion* in stark contrast to all of Austen’s previous novels, as *Persuasion* leaves the heroine and her hero without a permanent home. Anne and Wentworth have no Delaford, no Pemberley, no Woodston Parsonage, no Hartfield or Donwell Abbey, no “every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park” (*MP* 473). Ruoff refers to the characters as “tenters” (61), and Deresiewicz compares

them to the biblical vagabond Cain: “Anne and Wentworth will settle in the land of Wandering” (158). According to Ruoff, Anne Elliot’s homelessness “suggests a profound change in [Austen’s] attitudes on the possible foundation of a viable society” (67), and *Persuasion*’s society clearly offers characters the possibility of happiness even when there is no guarantee of financial security.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood declares that money has nothing to do with happiness, and Elinor Dashwood corrects her: “wealth has much to do with it” (S&S 91). But in *Persuasion*, the Crofts’ nostalgia for their early married life, “poor” but “cheerful” Mrs. Smith (*P* 153), and the Harvilles’ “great happiness” (*P* 99), in spite of their relative poverty, seem to prove that Marianne Dashwood was right after all. Although left alone, ill, and impoverished, Mrs. Smith is virtually unconquerable: “Neither the dissipations of the past – and she had lived very much in the world, nor the restrictions of the present; neither sickness nor sorrow seemed to have closed her heart or ruined her spirits” (*P* 153). Surely that is *Persuasion*’s message of economic hope to the Bleak Age reader and to readers ever since.

Sanditon: “When Rich People are Sordid.”

In the summer of 1816, *The Hampshire Chronicle* was full of reports of protests, riots, looting and vandalism. Poor people in England were desperate, and troops of soldiers were dispatched around the country to intimidate the protestors. The May 27, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* reported the “alarming state of the county” of Suffolk and the “various outrages” committed there (2), including the destruction of threshing-machines and mole-ploughs and the arson of barns and hayricks. Magistrates were forced “to request the assistance of Government to restore tranquility.” Suffolk’s “malcontents” were presumed to be agricultural laborers, as were protestors in Essex and Cambridgeshire, but miners were also rioting in Newcastle, and there were numerous reports of frame breaking by Luddites.

A mob, estimated to be about 1,500 strong, rioted in Norfolk, “owing to the late advance in [the price of] corn and the lowness of wages” (3). After helping themselves to flour at the mills and to the bread in bakers’ shops, the Norfolk rioters demanded ale from public houses, which was “brought in pails into the streets.” Emboldened by their success, the protestors “proceeded to the butchers, whose shops they cleared.” The looting and feasting continued until soldiers arrived. According to *The Chronicle*, “Magistrates, escorted by the troop, read the Riot Act” to the crowd, and then the soldiers began dispersing the mob. It seemed to be a dress rehearsal for the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, but, as the newspaper reported, in Norfolk “no lives were lost.” *The Chronicle* attributed the lack of fatalities entirely to the commanding officer who had ordered his men “to use the backs of their swords.”

Parishes reluctant to continue feeding their poor, hanging them for theft, or calling in soldiers to subdue them, were shipping them off to America, but that was also causing problems. On June 10, 1816, *The Hampshire Chronicle* reported an increase in applications for parish relief: “Numbers of the laboring poor who have applied to the different Sessions for certificates to enable them to go to America, have been under the necessity of leaving behind them their wives and children, to be supported by the parishes from which they have fled” (2). For those who could not emigrate, the economy was about to get even worse, as a new wave of unemployment dominated the news a week later.

The June 17, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* sympathized with the “great numbers of persons connected with the hosiery business, who are almost daily turned out of employment, in this town and country. We understand, that several hundreds were discharged on Saturday last, and many more are expected to share a similar fate” (2). As the newspaper reported, former agricultural workers who had adjusted to factory work, factory hours and factory pay were left with nothing when their factories closed, especially when they had been living in factory workers’ housing: “It is computed that not less than 12,000 persons in the counties of Stafford and Salop have been dismissed to wander in search of subsistence, in consequence of the falling off in the iron trade since the peace.” Because of the massive unemployment, more people were seeking jobs as servants, but the supply of willing workers greatly exceeded the demand: “At Carlisle Whitsuntide Hiring Day on Saturday, there was a great number of servants in want of employment, of both sexes. Men’s wages were very low, and few engagements

made.” There were more jobs for women servants, because, of course, women were paid much less.

Other than sending in troops to quell dissention, Parliament persisted in its noninterventionist course of political inaction, but, in an effort to restore some faith in Britain’s economic system, the government announced that it would issue new silver coins with a higher silver content. It was not an altogether successful tactic. The June 10, 1816 *Hampshire Chronicle* reported a “disturbance” in Norwich, “in consequence of notice from the banks that they would receive no old shillings and sixpences in future. The people immediately attempted to make what purchases they could with the interdicted pieces of money, which the shopkeepers refused to take in payment” (2). In a letter dated 20 February 1817, Jane Austen wrote to her niece Fanny Knight: “You are worth your weight in Gold, or even in the new Silver Coinage” (*Letters* 328). At the time, Austen was simultaneously working on a new novel and fighting off the symptoms of her fatal illness. Britain’s economy had never been worse, and Jane Austen would die before it began to improve.

Jane Austen’s last attempt to write a book resulted in the twelve chapter fragment, *Sanditon*, originally titled *The Brothers* (MW 363), begun in January and put aside as her health declined in March of 1817. As in Austen’s earlier fragment *The Watsons*, the reader is well into *Sanditon* when the story abruptly and frustratingly ends; the personalities of all of the characters have been revealed, their economic situations are clear, the plot is galloping along, but only a vague hint of a possible love story has emerged, which indicates, like *The Watsons*, that romantic entanglements were not

necessarily the skeletal frame on which Austen's stories were built. Both works abandoned in progress are clearly stories about money, not love.

According to Cassandra Austen, the Reverend Howard, the "quietly-cheerful, gentlemanlike" clergyman in *The Watsons* (MW 333), was to eventually marry the heroine Emma Watson, but in the roughly fifty pages of text, Mr. Howard is only a vague, peripheral character who dances with Emma Watson at a ball and has almost no dialogue. The presumed hero of *Sanditon* is even more of a nonentity, entirely absent until the last chapter and only briefly glimpsed then. *Sanditon*'s Sidney Parker, "very good-looking, with a decided air of Ease & Fashion, and a lively countenance" (MW 425), can be identified as the heroine's love interest because of a distinct lack of viable competition. Before the arrival of Sidney, heroine Charlotte Heywood has met only two single men, a comical hypochondriac, Arthur Parker, who is more interested in his cocoa and toast than in Charlotte, and an aspiring but not necessarily competent villain, Sir Edward Denham, who has dedicated himself to the seduction of another character, Clara Brereton.

From their first meeting, Charlotte considers Arthur Parker laughable and only "kept her countenance" with some effort (MW 416). When introduced to the "certainly handsome" Sir Edward Denham (MW 394), Charlotte is initially impressed, but, after "her halfhour's fever" (MW 395), Denham's character flaws become apparent and increasingly annoying until Charlotte concludes that "that she had had quite enough of Sir Edw: for one morn'g" (MW 398). But Charlotte never even has a conversation with Sidney Parker, never drinks a cup of tea, takes a turn in the garden or dances a reel

with him. Love is conspicuous by its absence in the twelve chapters of *Sanditon*, but money dominates the fragment, as it does in *The Watsons*. However, the focus of *The Watsons* is on the domestic economics of the Watson family, while *Sanditon* focuses on the economics of the larger society and on the assumptions of those who invest their capital at home in Britain.

The discussion here is not just about the financial viability of a sleepy little fishing village with doubtful spa potential. As Oliver MacDonagh observes, the reader is “scarcely launched into the opening chapter of *Sanditon* before the Political Economical debate begins” (151). Roger Sales concurs: “*Sanditon* represents the highly precarious nature of post-war society” (200), “the commercialization of leisure and, more generally, the Condition-of-England” (201). As *The Hampshire Chronicle* recorded, the primary problems that continued to plague England, and which had continually exacerbated throughout Jane Austen’s adult life, were low wages, expensive bread and unemployment. *Sanditon* seems to be suggesting an economic solution, the same advice Adam Smith offers in *Wealth of Nations*, that those with capital to invest should invest in food production, not in a service economy based on indulging the whims of wealthy people (287-88).

Sanditon’s premise is that there are two economic Englands, the practical, agricultural society, embodied in the heroine’s father Mr. Heywood, and the impractical world of financial speculation, represented by the entrepreneurial Thomas Parker, “an Enthusiast; - on the subject of Sanditon, a complete Enthusiast” (MW 371). Like the wise and foolish homebuilders in the Bible, the wise man, Farmer Heywood, builds on a

rock, while the foolish man, Thomas Parker, builds on sand. Mr. Heywood's foundation is the sound, financial bedrock of agriculture, with its capital invested in land, livestock and crops. People must eat, so there will always be a demand for what Farmer Heywood supplies. Heywood's very name, hay and wood, is composed of two tangible, marketable, renewable commodities.

In contrast, Thomas Parker's speculation is built on sand, his own overly optimistic, commercial pipedreams. There is little demand for the kind of sea bathing resort Parker markets and already an overabundant supply of spa towns, "Places, like Brighton, or Worthing, or East Bourne" (MW 368). Sanditon's hotel, bathing machines, billiard room, milliner's shop, shoe shop, and the Library - well stocked with "all the useless things in the World" (MW 390) - such as Sir Edward's gothic novels - "new Parasols, new Gloves" and "Drawers of rings & Broches" (MW 374 & 390) - all require consumers with disposable income. Nothing for sale in Sanditon is practical or necessary, and, in an economic depression, Sanditon's luxuries remain unsold. As Lady Denham's "shrewd eye" has noticed (MW 391), wealthy consumers are rare in Sanditon, and "Heiresses are monstrous scarce" (MW 401). Thomas Parker boasts of the "fine hard Sand" (MW 369), but Sanditon is built on sand nonetheless.

The story of *Sanditon* begins at another village, the agricultural community of Willingden, where the people are indeed *willing* to work and to help their fellow men, even strangers in distress, like Thomas and Mary Parker. Farmer Heywood is busy in his hayfield supervising the "Men, Women & Children" he employs (MW 365), an entire village. As an agricultural community, the working-class in Willingden would be

continually employed, and although agricultural laborers' wages were pitifully low, while they were working, they were also eating. In *Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that such labor benefitted the nation (288).

As agricultural work produces tangible results, Smith considered it "productive" as opposed to "unproductive" labor (*Wealth* 271). Smith maintains that investing money in agriculture "promotes industry; and though it increases the consumption of the society, it provides a permanent fund for supporting that consumption, the people who consume re-producing, with a profit, the whole value of their annual consumption" (*Wealth* 243). It is a mutually beneficial, win/win situation for the employer, employee and for "the gross revenue of the society." In contrast, the labor of servants produces no benefit to the nation. Smith classified the work of servants, whose efforts produce nothing lasting, to be "unproductive" labor: "His services generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them" (*Wealth* 270). Mr. Heywood also employs at least "two or three" maids (*MW* 370), Smith's "unproductive" labor, but they are definitely the minority of Heywood's workforce.

As Smith maintains, a society can function with "unproductive" laborers who serve a small leisure class, but those who produce nothing must be in the minority as they are ultimately dependent on the majority who raise or manufacture marketable products: "Both productive and unproductive labourers, and those who do not labour at all, are all equally maintained by the annual produce of the land and labour of the country" (*Wealth* 271). According to Smith, the man who invests his resources in "unproductive" labor "tends not only to beggar himself, but to impoverish his country"

(*Wealth* 279): “As the one mode of expence is more favourable than the other to the opulence of an individual, so is it likewise to that of a nation” (*Wealth* 288). Mr. Heywood’s agrarian pursuits, therefore, strengthen England, while Mr. Parker’s efforts to create a service economy in Sanditon weaken it, so there is a patriotic element to Farmer Heywood’s investment that Thomas Parker’s investment lacks.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith maintains that the good citizen will consider not only his own self interest, but also the good of his nation: “All the members of human society stand in need of each others’ assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy” (86). After their carriage wreck, Thomas and Mary Parker are fortunate to fall into the hands of Mr. Heywood who, like Smith’s wise man, comes to the Parkers’ rescue with “ready offers of assistance” and with no intentions of receiving compensation (*MW* 365). Things are much different in commercial Sanditon, where people must pay to recover their health, and Lady Denham’s own relatives are not allowed to stay with her: “I shall advise them to come & take one of these Lodgings for a fortnight. – Don’t you think that will be very fair? – Charity begins at home you know” (*MW* 402). Of course, Lady Denham’s motive is to make money off of everyone who crosses her path, be they strangers or kin. Were she like Smith’s wise man, Lady Denham would be “sensible, too, that [her] own interest is connected with the prosperity of society, and that the happiness, perhaps the preservation of [her] existence, depends upon its preservation” (*Theory* 88). Lady Denham’s greed sets her at odds with the rest of society, but things are much different in Mr. Heywood’s agricultural community where everyone thrives.

The right thinking Farmer Heywood is unimpressed with Thomas Parker's ambition to turn Sanditon, "a small cluster of Fisherman's Houses" (*MW* 383), into "a small, fashionable Bathing Place" (*MW* 371), and Heywood is extremely skeptical of the viability of a service-based economy:

Every five years, one hears of some new place or other starting up by the Sea, & growing the fashion.– How they can half of them be filled, is the wonder! Where People can be found with Money or Time to go to them!- Bad things for a Country;- sure to raise the price of Provisions & make the Poor good for nothing. (*MW* 368)

As Oliver MacDonagh notes, "Where People can be found with Money or Time to go to them!', are clearly pejorative comments, implying idleness and waste" (151), but, more importantly, Mr. Heywood has put his finger on the larger problem, what a service economy does to the working-class.

Parker's seaside resort, should it become successful, will create havoc in the local fishing village economy as it would do exactly what Mr. Heywood predicts. As Smith maintained, more people would result in greater demand for the available food supply, thus driving up the price of food, as *Sanditon's* miserly Lady Denham also realizes: "I should not like to have Butcher's meat raised, though - & I shall keep it down as long as I can" (*MW* 392). Additionally, Sanditon's new service economy creates only low-paid, part-time jobs for working-class women - "Cooks, Housemaids, Washer-women & Bathing Women" (*MW* 414) - who would be unemployed for most of the year. Meanwhile, working-class men, Sanditon's grocers - "old Stringer & his son"

(*MW* 381-82) - are having difficulty staying in business, and “Mrs. Whitby at the Library was sitting in her inner room, reading one of her own Novels, for want of Employment” (*MW* 389). The evidence is plainly set before him, but Thomas Parker is not a man to be deterred by reality.

A man of “easy though not large fortune” who has become obsessed with his pipedream (*MW* 371), Parker is “risking his fortune” on the economic viability of his village (*MW* 372), which has become “his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation & his Hobby Horse... the object, for which he seemed to live” (*MW* 371). Parker fantasizes that what would be good for him would be to the benefit of everyone else, “that paltry Hamlet,” nearby rival town Brinshore, excepted (*MW* 369). As Oliver MacDonagh puts it, Parker presents “Political Economy’s counter to the traditionalists like Heywood... in our jargon, they would increase employment and raise the basic standard of living and levels of consumption” (151). MacDonagh notes that Thomas Parker’s economic tactics prefigure those of twentieth-century economists, like John Maynard Keynes, who believed that infusions of capital would stimulate and revive a depressed economy:

Parker is a primitive Keynesian, a Keynesian, as it were, before the modern state. For all his folly, he argues consistently for investment, for expenditure, for inflation, for consumerism, and for economic growth as the basis of general prosperity; he even foreshadows, in rudimentary form, Kahn’s multiplier! The naivety of the economic language, and the Lilliputian scale and farcical nature of the speculative activity, should not deceive us. (152-53)

In his marketing of Sanditon, Parker has “planned & built, & praised & puffed, & raised [Sanditon] to a Something of young Renown” (*MW* 371), but Parker aspires to create an artificial demand where no real demand exists, to sell an intangible product with no intrinsic value.

Parker could have followed the advice of Smith and invested in his own home farm, “the honest old Place” (*MW* 380), or in fishing boats to boost the maritime industry already established in Sanditon, which would create much-needed new jobs and bring more and cheaper food into the economy. Parker might have had something useful to sell, like Mr. Heywood’s crops or the fishermen’s catch of the day, but all Parker has to show for his investment in Sanditon are new houses that no one particularly wants. A man “with more Imagination than Judgement” (*MW* 372), Parker practically chants his magical realism mantra: If we build it, they will come. And Parker has been building - “a Prospect House, a Bellevue Cottage, & a Denham Place” (*MW* 384) - as well as a line of row houses called The Terrace, and Parker projects more building in the coming year, Waterloo Crescent - “for Waterloo is more the thing now” (*MW* 380). Parker has used his inheritance to build upscale, vacation housing for a booming, consumer society, but, since the economic bust following Waterloo, the consumers Parker has in mind are either being cautiously frugal, retrenching, like the Elliots in *Persuasion*, or have been weeded out altogether. Their rural banks have gone bust, and their days of easy credit are over.

Parker’s projects have been built on the assumption that some aspiring someones from somewhere would have the desire, and the means, to occupy them,

and his lack of success in *Sanditon* suggests the foolishness of investment schemes based on supplying the whims of impractical people anxious to dispose of their disposable income. As Edward Copeland in *Women Writing About Money* observes, “Mr. Parker, trusting to eternally fair economic weather, sails into the uncharted investment waters of Sanditon” (113), but Parker “is clearly out of his depth in commercial investment” (114). Lady Denham, is unimpressed with Parker’s results: “Here are a great many empty Houses – 3 on this very Terrace; no fewer than three Lodging Papers staring us in the face at this very moment” (*MW* 402). While Parker remains optimistic, his “Colleague in Speculation” is more skeptical (*MW* 375).

The “very rich” Lady Denham is entirely motivated by insatiable greed (*MW* 375), and she is hesitant to part with her money until she can be assured of a profit. A shameless laissez-faire capitalist whose business philosophy would give Ebenezer Scrooge pause, Lady Denham plots to exploit the invalids coming to Sanditon for every penny she can squeeze out of them. In Lady Denham’s predatory view, the sickly West Indian heiress Miss Lambe comes to Sanditon as a sheep to the slaughter, an innocent to be fleeced. At the least the more benevolent Parker believes that turning Sanditon into a spa town will benefit everyone. According to his irrepressible optimism, the wealthy visitors will restore their health, and the disposable income of the tourists will trickle down to “excite the industry of the Poor and diffuse comfort & improvement among them of every sort” (*MW* 368). The miserly Lady Denham demonstrates the flaw in trickle-down economics, as Lady Denham has no intention of letting any money trickle below herself.

Even in her own home, Lady Denham trims her household staff to a bare minimum: “I do believe those are best off, that have fewest Servants” (*MW* 393). She reduces her housemaids’ workloads only in order to justify their low salaries: “If they had hard Places, they would want Higher Wages” (*MW* 401). Burdened with raising money for a number of worthy charities, Mary Parker knows that she will not “find [Lady Denham] in a Giving mood” nor will Lady Denham be “prevailed on to undrawn her Purse” for anyone else (*MW* 424), be they ever so deserving. Lady Denham adamantly opposes bringing a doctor into Sanditon, as it would “be only encouraging our Servants & the Poor to fancy themselves ill, if there was a Dr at hand” (*MW* 393), and she certainly has no intention of paying their medical bills. In fact, she is still holding a grudge against the doctor who treated her dying husband: “Ten fees, one after another, did the Man take who sent *him* out of the World. – I beseech you Mr. Parker, no Doctors here” (*MW* 394). Lady Denham is well supplied with the quack medical cure of the day, donkey’s milk, from her own donkeys, which she plans to sell to the recovering invalids for a tidy profit, and a doctor would only interfere with her sales.

Lady Denham’s ideal Sanditon is entirely dependent on a superfluity of gullible wastrels, but the few visitors Sanditon is drawing are not at all the sort to satisfy Lady Denham:

Families come after Families, but as far as I can learn, it is not one in an hundred of them that have any real Property, Landed or Funded. – An Income perhaps, but no Property. Clergymen may be, or Lawyers from

Town, or Half pay officers, or Widows with only a Jointure. And what good
 can such people do anybody? (MW 401)

Lady Denham shares Thomas Malthus's view of people as economic units to be utilized, but such selfishness was condemned by Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and apparently by Jane Austen in *Sanditon*. As Smith maintains, "he is certainly not a good citizen who does not wish to promote, by every means in his power, the welfare of the whole society of his fellow-citizens" (*Theory* 232). Once again, Austen uses Lady Denham in order to illustrate what not to do.

How *Sanditon* would have ended is as open to speculation as *Sanditon* itself, but it seems clear that Thomas Parker's carriage wreck at the beginning of the fragment is a harbinger of things to come. A second disaster of Parker's own making, but one that will take longer than a fortnight to set right, is already brewing in the background. Thomas Parker rubs his ankle and is forced to concede: "There is something wrong here" (MW 364). However, there is more amiss than he realizes. Just as Parker is compelled to admit that his quest for a doctor was a "wild goose-chace" (MW 368), so is his economic venture at Sanditon a foolish attempt to grab at riches he cannot reasonably expect to obtain. As Copeland maintains, it is "a situation that promises to mark a fatal separation between Mr. Parker and his fortune" (*Women* 114), but Smith had already foretold it: "Few, therefore, of those who have once been so unfortunate as to launch out too far into this sort of expence, have afterwards the courage to reform, till ruin and bankruptcy oblige them" (*Wealth* 289).

Thomas Parker's financial ruin seems certain, but how Jane Austen would have developed *Sanditon* seems to be less significant than the fact that she created the economic plot at all. *Sanditon* appears to be Jane Austen's final attempt to explain Britain's economy to the reading public, and *Sanditon* reveals that Austen's grasp of economics was extremely sophisticated for her time. Austen's last novels, *Emma*, *Persuasion* and the unfinished *Sanditon*, seem to share a hopeful message; the economy is ultimately in the hands of the people who may seize the initiative and wrest their financial future from the apathy, incompetence and selfishness of politicians. The admirable characters in *Emma*, *Persuasion* and *Sanditon* choose to cooperate, to strive and to invest in providing for and defending one another and the nation, and these are the type of people who will survive, if not prosper, even in the midst of economic upheaval.

Jane Austen began writing *Sanditon* in January of 1817, just after the November and December 1816 Spa Fields Riots, and she abandoned it in March of 1817, during the March of the Blanketeers, as her illness made it impossible for her to write. Only a few weeks after the Pentridge Uprising in June, Jane Austen died. She could not have foreseen the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 which shocked the nation, but the economic instability of *Sanditon* perhaps anticipates it. Still nothing was done to improve the lot of the poor. In fact, their circumstances became even worse when poor relief benefits were reduced and then reduced again, as historian David Kent notes:

Of all the humiliating, mean-spirited measures the labourers were forced to endure none was more bitterly resented than the reduction of their

allowances. Not only was relief harder to obtain, it was worth much less. In 1822 the Winchester magistrates, whose rates determined the [Hampshire] county standard, reduced the allowance of bread by 20 per cent and in the autumn of 1830 the rate was cut again. In the villages near Andover the male allowance was reduced to a quarter loaf per day which was effectively half the minimum allowance recommended by the Speenhamland magistrates in 1795. (6)

In 1830, the Swing riots broke out across southern England and ended when the rural laborers demanding higher wages were either hung or transported. The Whig government's 1834 Poor Law Reform Act further increased the suffering of laborers by limiting poor relief to the residents of workhouses and poorhouses. Instead of taking action to alleviate poverty, Parliament indulged in a frenzy of finger pointing and passing the buck. As Friedrich Engels summarized it in 1845, "the Liberals [Whigs] try to emphasize the distress in the rural areas and to argue away that which exists in the factory districts, while the Conservatives [Tories], conversely, acknowledge the misery in the factory districts but disclaim any knowledge of it in the agricultural areas" (31). All this apparent callousness on the part of the wealthy ruling class inspired Victorian novelists to take up where Jane Austen had left off.

In her juvenilia, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and in *The Watsons*, Austen experimented with fictional economics in her short stories and novels and learned the freedom and the constraint that resulted from assigning a character a specific income or no income at all, but Austen also appears to have been developing her published books

as state-of-the-nation novels in order to comment on the national economic developments of the day. *Pride and Prejudice* seems to take a stand on the minimum wage controversy and apparently supports the Speenhamland system, and *Northanger Abbey* appears to be reacting to the Restriction Act crisis. *Mansfield Park* more obviously functions as a state-of-the-nation novel that depicts the British Empire in the property of Sir Thomas Bertram and spoofs the politicians in the House of Commons who were failing to act as the British economy deteriorated. In *Emma*, the focus changes from the macroeconomics of Britain to the microeconomics of an English village, an idealized society that functions largely on good will and without money. The most disastrous financial calamity of Austen's lifetime was the economic crash that followed the Battle of Waterloo and The Bleak Age depression that resulted. Set just prior to Waterloo, *Persuasion* appears to be speculating on the cause of the crash and on who will be bankrupt and who will survive and even prosper in spite of the financial debacle. Although it was not published until 1933, *Sanditon*, in its consideration of economics, prefigures Victorian social-problem novels such as Benjamin Disraeli's 1845 *Sybil*, Charles Dickens' 1853 *Hard Times* and Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 *North and South*. As MacDonagh notes, *Sanditon* suggests "the faint foreshadowing of Dickens" (162), and, if the reader considers the economic basis of *Sanditon*, the likeness becomes much stronger.

From the earliest examples of her writing, Austen demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of both the use of money in fiction and of the political and economic theories of the Georgian age. There is much more to be discovered and to be said about Jane Austen and political economics if we follow Henry Tilney's advice in

Northanger Abbey: “Remember the country and the age in which we live” (NA 198). In the future, Austen scholars may write books on Jane Austen and the State-of-the-Nation Novel, Jane Austen and the Poor Laws, Jane Austen and Parliament, Jane Austen and the Economists, Jane Austen and the Prime Ministers and Jane Austen and the Coin of the Realm. The conversation here has included all of these topics and more without fully exploring any one of them, but we must begin somewhere. The discussion contained in these pages is by no means an exhaustive investigation of Jane Austen and Georgian political economics. As a book length manuscript, it is merely the first to do so.

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