

“A Creditable Establishment”: The Irony of Economics in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*

by

Kandice Sharren
Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2009

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

© Kandice Sharren, 2011
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

“A Creditable Establishment”: The Irony of Economics in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*

by

Kandice Sharren
Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2009

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Robert Miles, Department of English
Supervisor

Dr. Gordon Fulton, Department of English
Departmental Member

Dr. Andrea McKenzie, Department of History
Outside Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Robert Miles, Department of English

Supervisor

Dr. Gordon Fulton, Department of English

Departmental Member

Dr. Andrea McKenzie, Department of History

Outside Member

This thesis contextualises Austen's novel within the issues of political economy contemporary to its publication, especially those associated with an emerging credit economy. It argues that the problem of determining the value of character is a central one and the source of much of the novel's irony: the novel sets the narrator's model of value against the models through which the various other characters understand value. Through language that represents character as the currency and as a commodity in a credit economy, *Mansfield Park* engages with the problems of value raised by an economy in flux. Austen uses this slipperiness of language to represent social interactions as a series of intricate economic transactions, revealing the irony of social exchanges and the expectations they engender, both within and without the context of courtship.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Role of Credit and Debt in Establishing Character.....	27
Chapter 2: Character as Currency.....	62
Chapter 3: Character as Commodity.....	87
Conclusion	117
Bibliography	122

Dedication

To my grandmother, Inge Sharren, who first introduced me to Jane Austen when I was at an impressionable age. The following is entirely her fault.

Introduction

In February of 1811, the year that Jane Austen began work on *Mansfield Park* (1814), *The Edinburgh Review* ran a review of several publications discussing the problem of inflation, then termed “depreciation.” The article claims that, “If a pound of gold is coined, according to law, into 44 guineas and a half, it must, in an undergraded state of currency, be equal in value to £45 14s. 6d. It cannot now be purchased for less than £56.” As a result of these alarming figures, the article goes on to express anxiety about the use of paper currency, referring to it as, “the substitution of a very cheap instrument for a very dear one.”¹ A function of the developing credit economy, paper money was defined by the *Edinburgh Review* as “either promissory notes to pay on demand certain coins of a known weight and fineness, which are mentioned upon the face of them; or they are intended to represent, and, on their first issue, generally do represent, the value of such coins in all the exchanges of commodities for which they may serve as a medium.”² However, the Bank Restriction Act of 1797 enabled the Bank of England to refuse to exchange bank notes for bullion in order to lessen the demand for gold created by the overprinting of bank notes. Thus, the deferral became indefinite, and the relationship between paper currency and the bullion it claimed to represent, nominal.

In *Genres of the Credit Economy*, Mary Poovey discusses the intended effect of the Restriction Act, which she claims was to prevent a crisis of faith in the British banking system. In her description of the events leading up to the Restriction Act, she

¹ “Publications on the Depreciation of Paper Currency” *Edinburgh Review* 34 (1811) 351-52.

² “The Bullion Question” *Edinburgh Review* 35 (August 1811) NEED PAGE NUMBER/PHOTOCOPY ARTICLE.

contrasts the atmosphere with that which preceded various other eighteenth century economic crises: “Whereas each of the crises of the late eighteenth century had followed a speculative boom and was alleviated by the Bank’s willingness to extend credit, the events leading up to the Restriction provoked a crisis of confidence in the overall monetary and banking systems.”³ Unlike in previous situations, where credit was the means by which the effects of the crisis were minimised, the efficacy of credit itself came into question. By allowing the Bank of England to refuse the exchange of bank notes for bullion, the Restriction made the promissory, or credit-based, aspect of paper currency a fiction that became increasingly invisible to the public eye. Poovey’s description of the immediate effects of the Restriction Act portrays bank notes’ former visibility as an act of writing—in this case, a lie:

. . . the suspension of cash payments meant that contemporaries critical of the government rushed into print to charge the Bank—and the moneyed interests who benefited from the national debt—with violating the promise printed on the face of every note. On the other hand, the Restriction also encouraged the proliferation of provincial banks’ notes and banks of issue . . . by inviting country banks to issue notes in any denomination in order to compensate for the shortage of coin.⁴

While the Restriction’s detractors tried to highlight the violation of trust inherent in the refusal to make the promised exchange, banks were free to issue notes that claimed to

³ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 176.

⁴ *Ibid.*

represent a coin value that might or might not have existed. Without the freedom to exchange those notes for bullion at will, the bearer had to rely on his or her powers of scrutiny to determine the validity of the note.

In August 1811, an *Edinburgh Review* article addressing the question of bullion summed up the anxiety surrounding the issue by drawing attention to the socially constructed nature of the value of bullion, particularly how its value was widely agreed upon: “What is of more importance in the commercial intercourse of society, all civilised nations have happily agreed in the selection of the precious metals as their measure of value.”⁵ Without an accepted standard against which value could be measured, the value of currency became relative and, potentially, worthless, especially in the matter of international trade. However, the February 1811 article acknowledges “that a bank-note is not considered valuable, only because it enables him to obtain a given quantity of the precious metals. The holder is in general satisfied if he feels quite sure of always obtaining for his note a quantity of commodities *equal in value* to the quantity of the precious metals specified in it.”⁶ In short, as long as others accept the bank note as representative of the value to which it lays claim, whether or not banks will exchange it for bullion is irrelevant; public confidence in the bank note forms the basis for its value. More than a commercial issue, the problems posed by paper currency and the depreciation of bank notes raised questions about authenticity and the nature of value, one with broad ideological implications for eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.

⁵ “The Bullion Question” NEED PAGE NUMBER/PHOTOCOPY ARTICLE.

⁶ “Publications on the Depreciation of Paper Currency” 352.

The linked questions of depreciation, bullion, and how to determine value were not the only economic issues prevalent in the public consciousness of early nineteenth-century Britain. In addition to the attempts to address the problematic paper currency and its subsequent depreciation, *The Edinburgh Review* devoted a number of articles to the rapidly plummeting price of sugar and the fiercely debated issues of the slave trade and chattel slavery in the West Indies, which led to the 1807 Abolition Act. An article in the January 1809 issue of *The Edinburgh Review* links the two issues in its discussion of two pamphlets, by William Spence and Archibald Bell, on West Indian affairs:

Mr Spence clearly traces the distresses of the planters to their overtrading; and shows that no remedy exists for the evil but a decrease of sugar. Mr Bell examines one of the remedies proposed,—demonstrates its impolicy and injustice,—and admits, that the evil originates in overtrading. But neither of these authors has stated to what cause this overtrading was owing. Neither of them (and on Mr Spence it was peculiarly incumbent) has denounced the African slave traffic as the root of the whole evil. Their deductions are thus materially defective; for they leave their reader to wonder, how so strange a thing can have happened as a continued supply of rude produce all over the tropical colonies, for years exceeding the demands of the market; and, unless this difficulty is clearly explained, many thinking persons will be slow of believing the positions which involve it.⁷

⁷ “Pamphlets on West Indian Affairs” *Edinburgh Review* 26 (1809) 383-84.

Here the article labels the economic situation in the West Indies as an “evil,” brought on by the glut of sugar in the British market, which the article traces directly to the African slave trade; this use of distinctly moral language to describe an economic condition demonstrates one implication of the inability to separate moral from commercial language: that commerce must be moral to be effective. Elsewhere in the article, the connection is made even more explicit, when the article figures the slave trade both as “a branch of commerce” and as a moral problem:

We were led, by these inquiries [into the source of the alarming state of colonial affairs], to a demonstration as rigorous as the nature of the subject would allow, that the slave traffic alone is the cause of the distresses in question; that the consequences of that long course of crimes which men have, by a singular perversion of language, been accustomed to call a branch of commerce, are now felt in their full force; and that our mercantile interests are at length suffering most severely for our long neglect of humanity and justice.⁸

The intersection of suffering mercantile interests and “neglect of humanity” suggests an intrinsic link between commerce and morality: in the context of the early nineteenth century, meaning the smooth functioning of a free market economy. In *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776-1838*, James Walvin points out that “the emergence of a free-trade mentality made the task of abolition and later emancipation much easier; slavery could be damned as a drain on the hard-pressed British taxpayer and as a brake on the broad

⁸ “Pamphlets on West Indian Affairs” 382.

economic progress in which so many contemporaries took pride.”⁹ However, Walvin also addresses the ironies inherent in the abolition movement: “British slaves lived, 5000 miles away from the metropolis, in the Caribbean colonies. Hypothetical questions may seem out of place in historical analysis, but can we seriously imagine abolition provoking such a show of unity, had slavery in Britain persisted in any other than a vestigial form?”¹⁰ Despite the economic significance of West Indian plantations, abolition of the slave trade and the subsequent emancipation of slaves had little impact on the day-to-day lives of Britons. Widespread, vocal support for abolition required little in the way of personal sacrifice from most people.

On the surface, *Mansfield Park* appears unaware of national concerns, focusing only on the events that take place within the titular Northamptonshire estate; with the exception of the heroine, Fanny Price’s, temporary exile to Portsmouth, the narrator portrays events that take place beyond the immediate vicinity of Mansfield through second-hand accounts, effectively distancing the reader from the outside world. Despite this apparent insularity, events that occur outside have consequences for the estate and its inhabitants: Maria’s adulterous elopement with Henry Crawford, Tom’s illness, and even Edmund’s aborted courtship of Mary Crawford threaten its stability. External events permeate Mansfield Park in subtler ways, too: although the novel does not reference contemporary concerns about the political economy of Britain directly, the language of commerce pervades the novel, even in apparently non-commercial situations. Through this use of economic language, the novel engages with the contemporary concerns

⁹ James Walvin, *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776-1838* (London: Macmillan, 1986) 148.

¹⁰ Walvin 178.

surrounding value expressed by *The Edinburgh Review* articles: characters and institutions give credit, find themselves indebted, and assign value to each other with varying degrees of discretion. Through the social transactions it represents, *Mansfield Park* relates the fluctuating value of paper currency and the problem it poses for determining worth to the movement or exchange of characters from household to household, often but not always through marriage, thereby likening them to the currency in a credit economy. The question of how credit may be obtained and who is in whose debt becomes ironic as the apparent value of the novel's characters comes increasingly into question.

In the introduction to *The Improvement of the Estate*, Alastair M. Duckworth dismisses previous attempts to engage with Austen's use of economic language, particularly that of Mark Schorer,¹¹ by claiming that much of its significance derives from misplaced emphasis and a lack of context:

Not only are his [Schorer's] "economic" derivations frequently false—such words as "credit," "figure," "independence," and "prospect" may have quite other than economic meanings in given contexts—but he also fails to realize that Jane Austen's use of economic words is often conscious and thematic, that she is fully aware of the motivations which a financial vocabulary may reveal.¹²

¹¹ Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix,'" *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*, ed. John W. Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press, 1952).

¹² Alastair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1994) 29-30.

In order to illustrate his point, he draws on the scene in *Mansfield Park* where Maria Bertram, upon realising that Henry Crawford has no intention of pursuing her seriously, decides that “he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity.”¹³ Here, he argues, Maria’s misinterpretation of terms like “credit” and “independence” allow her to gain them “financially and socially” through her marriage to Rushworth, yet, in doing so, “she loses . . . any claim to a moral ‘independence’ or ‘credit.’”¹⁴ In focusing on those moments when Austen’s use of economic language has a clear purpose and dismissing it as out of context when its effects are murkier, Duckworth does not take note of the wider implications: that the language of financial and moral value share a vocabulary, and that the narrator’s awareness of the “motivations . . . [of] a financial vocabulary” allows her to develop an ironic tone that distinguishes between the commercial and the non-commercial in a way for which that the language of value does not account.

Less obliquely, Sir Thomas’s position as a landowner on the West Indian island of Antigua situates him in the middle of the debate that took place in the years following the Abolition Act. Numerous critics have followed Edward Said’s attempt in *Culture and Imperialism* to consider the implications of the novel’s references to the West Indies and the slave trade, and, by extension, the abolition debate. However, Trevor Lloyd argues in “Myths of the Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire,” that the significance of references to the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* has been exaggerated and that Sir Thomas’s “Antigua estate was simply not an important part of his income,”¹⁵ ignoring the

¹³ Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (London: Penguin Classics, 2003) 187.

¹⁴ Duckworth 30.

¹⁵ Trevor Lloyd, “Myths of the West Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire,” *Comparative Criticism* 21 (1999) 66.

fact that the production of sugar and the use of slaves in the West Indies helped inform Britain's discourse of political economy during the period of the novel's composition. Lloyd's argument has many compelling points, but it does not engage with the wider political and economic discussion in which *Mansfield Park*, through its references to the West Indies, takes part. In his *Specters of the Atlantic*, Ian Baucom illustrates a link between the late eighteenth-century slave trade and the credit economy, when he describes the role paper currency played in the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

The system . . . was fairly simple: on reaching the slave markets of the Caribbean or the Americas, a vessel would assign its cargo to a local factor or sales agent. These were often, but not always, business partners of the ship's British owners . . . That factor would then sell the slaves (by auction, parcel, scramble, or other means) and then, after deducting his commission, "remit" the proceeds of the sale in the form of an interest-bearing bill of exchange. This bill amounted to a promise, or "guarantee," to pay the full amount, with the agreed-upon interest, at the end of a specified period, typically from one to three years—though there were also shorter-term bills dated for three to six months. The Caribbean or American factor had thus not so much sold the slaves on behalf of their Liverpool "owners" as borrowed an amount equivalent to the sales proceeds from the Liverpool merchants and agreed to repay that amount with interest. The Liverpool businessmen invested in the trade had, by the same procedure, transformed what looked like a simple trade in commodities to a trade in loans. They were not just selling slaves on the far side of the Atlantic, they were lending money across the

Atlantic. And, as significantly, they were lending money they did not yet possess or only possessed in the form of the slaves. The slaves were thus treated not only as a type of commodity but as a type of interest-bearing money. They functioned in this system simultaneously as commodities for sale and as the reserve deposits of a loosely organized, decentered, but vast trans-Atlantic banking system: deposits made at the moment of sale and instantly reconverted into short-term bonds.¹⁶

Within Britain, these bills of exchange often found their way into wider circulation, because “the bills themselves could be sold at a discount if the traders to whom they had been assigned experienced their own cash shortfall.”¹⁷ One of the results of these sales was the prevalence, particularly in Liverpool, of a form of currency that contained a visible record of its origins in the slave trade:

As bills traveled from one hand to another, each succeeding possessor canceling the name of the previous holder and writing her or his name in as the party to whom the initial endorser now owed payment, the business of credit became not simply a financial transaction but the business of reading the solvency or character of each preceding party on this relay of exchange. The four, or six, or ten degrees of separation that distanced the present holder of a bill from its initial issuer exerted a sort of inflationary pressure not only on the financial value of the note but on the system of credibility that permitted each succeeding party to

¹⁶ Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 61.

¹⁷ Baucom 62.

believe that they could trust the promise of the person giving them the note *because* that person had been wise to trust the promise of its previous owner that the promise initially given was sound . . . If the system were to survive, it depended not only on the soundness of the slave markets of the Caribbean but on the stability of this network of mutually invested trust and, ideally, on some means of training individuals in how to read one another's character, trustworthiness, and credibility.¹⁸

The series of crossed-out names on each bill provided a clue as to the history that linked it directly and legibly to the slave trade. Of equal importance to this visible link to the slave trade is the language of credit that binds discussions of the slave trade to the language of political economy and indicates that the slave trade relied on and helped develop the institutions and methods of the credit economy.

Within *Mansfield Park*, the language of political economy reveals the commercial nature of social interaction and the expectations such interaction engenders, both within and without the context of courtship. The repeated use of such language serves as a constant and cynical reminder of the financially conditioned power dynamic that underscores interpersonal exchanges in the novel. By frequently inflecting her use of economic language with irony through the use of free indirect discourse, the narrator attempts to distance herself from the language of commerce by filtering it through another character's thoughts, in order to suggest a form of value outside of the cash nexus. However, this gesture towards a non-commercial model of value lacks a

¹⁸ Baucom 64.

vocabulary distinct from the language of commerce; in the absence of adequate terminology, the narrator must rely on events, characters, narrative techniques like free indirect discourse, and the fluidity of the words themselves (highlighted particularly through the use of puns and double entendres) to create irony, which allows the reader to differentiate between commercial and non-commercial models of value and to attempt to define this non-commercial model of value positively. The heroine, Fanny Price, becomes the embodiment of the non-commercial value that the novel cannot otherwise express; in typical fashion, her name also encompasses one of the most overt puns on commercial language in the novel, which draws attention to one of the novel's primary preoccupations: determining Fanny's price. The idea of "price" as presented in *Mansfield Park* carries multiple connotations, which can be grouped into the two linked but distinct categories of cost and value, or cost and worth.¹⁹ As such, Fanny's surname configures her as an object of value, as a repayment to the Bertrams and Mansfield Park from her family in exchange for their aid, and in terms of the cost a potential husband must pay to obtain her. In some senses, Fanny's price depends on how others value her; in others, on some quality or qualities that she possesses or will come to possess in the future. As such, her position becomes loosely analogous to that of the slaves that Baucom describes: she functions "not only as a type of commodity but as a type of interest-bearing money." At the same time, in its inability to articulate, and thereby "fix," Fanny's price, in any sense

¹⁹ From the OED: "The quality or condition of being (much or little) prized, valued, or esteemed"; "The amount of money (or a material equivalent) expected, required, or given in payment for a commodity or service"; "The actual cost of acquiring or producing something calculated in terms of a specific measure; the value of a commodity or service regarded or estimated in relation to some quantifiable unit of comparison; the exchange value of something (esp. labour) expressed in monetary terms."

of the term, the novel renders her priceless, indicating that her value is located outside of the cash nexus.

The difficulty that the novel faces in expressing Fanny's value contrasts sharply with the ease with which the narrator defines the value of other characters, usually in terms of their monetary worth or their public character. The novel opens with a meditation on the marriage of Miss Maria Ward to Sir Thomas Bertram, which states that her marriage portion, of "only seven thousand pounds"²⁰ "allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim" to the match. Presumably, those qualities that enable her to have "the good luck to captivate"²¹ Sir Thomas compensate for her financial lack; nevertheless, this statement's location at the beginning of the novel ensures that, from this point on, Lady Bertram's failings as a baronet's wife will recall her insufficient monetary value upon marriage, and emphasise that her primary value was her beauty, preserved by her life of indolence. Similarly, the narrator's repeated emphasis on Mary Crawford's fortune of twenty thousand pounds makes it impossible for the reader to conceive of her value without taking it into account; however, she is also "remarkably pretty," with "lively and pleasant" manners, which, although they do not indicate any intrinsic worth on her part, add to her social cachet.²² Her brother Henry Crawford's income of £4,000 a year is middling in comparison to those of the other estates in the novel, such as Mr Rushworth's, and he is not initially considered handsome, but his liveliness and charm cause Maria and Julia Bertram to declare him "the most

²⁰ MP 5.

²¹ MP 5.

²² MP 40.

agreeable young man the sisters had ever known.”²³ Unlike Henry, Sir Thomas Bertram is defined almost entirely by his role as a landowner with the minor title of baronet, a position that reflects onto his children: his eldest son, Tom, is termed valuable by his role as heir, despite the gambling debts that rob Edmund of one of his future livings, and his daughters, Maria and Julia, are “fully established among the belles of the neighbourhood,”²⁴ as a result of both their status—and probable marriage portions—and their beauty and accomplishments. Only Edmund, the younger son training to be a clergyman, lacks the fortune and status of his siblings; notably, he also lacks many of their charms. In a reversal of the trend wherein characters compensate for their financial shortcomings with their agreeableness, Maria’s fiancé (and later husband), Mr Rushworth—whose name suggests a hastily formed judgement of his value—owns an estate with a yearly income more than twice that of Mansfield Park and three times that of Henry Crawford, but, as Edmund reflects in a rare moment of humour, “If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow.”²⁵ His pocketbook makes him desirable, even if his company does not.

Although it would be reductive to claim that these are the sole defining attributes of those characters listed, the narrator uses them as a form of shorthand, tinged with irony, in order to indicate status within the established hierarchy of the Mansfield community. Indeed, the use of such features as shorthand, or a type of blazon, often encapsulates the way in which characters define each other, in a process that mimics the granting of credit; each character is expected to repay the good opinion of others by

²³ MP 42.

²⁴ MP 33.

²⁵ MP 38.

possessing the value that his or her public character indicates. Within this hierarchy, only Fanny's place remains uncertain. Her position as a ward without fortune or other connections forces her to act out her gratitude in order to repay her debt to the Bertrams and justify her presence at Mansfield; the constant, unspoken threat that she might be sent away prevents her from taking on a clear role. Early in the novel, Mary Crawford attempts to clarify Fanny's position by asking Tom and Edmund, "I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price . . . Pray, is she out, or is she not?—I am puzzled.—She dined at the parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being *out*; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she *is*."²⁶ Edmund's initial response fails to satisfy Mary, and only after much anecdotal discussion and a more precise definition of what constitutes being "out" can Mary determine that "Miss Price is *not* out,"²⁷ and therefore not yet a commodity available on the marriage market.

Mary's difficulty in determining Fanny's status as a young woman is indicative of the novel's more general struggle to assess Fanny's value, which is also notable in the gap between the narrator's estimation of Fanny's worth and the value that the novel's other characters, especially the Bertrams, assign to her. Lady Bertram finds Fanny valuable as a companion, Sir Thomas recognises Fanny's potential marriageable worth despite her lack of fortune, and Henry Crawford values "the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, the excellence of her principles,"²⁸ but, in all cases, their recognition of Fanny's merit is incomplete. The Bertrams define her by her usefulness, whether in her ability to act as "occasionally an acceptable companion" when Maria and Julia's

²⁶ MP 46.

²⁷ MP 49.

²⁸ MP 435.

“pleasures and schemes were sometimes of a nature to make a third very useful, especially when that third was of an obliging, yielding temper,”²⁹ or in her willingness to keep Lady Bertram company while Mrs Norris acts as Maria and Julia’s chaperone. The extent of Fanny’s modesty, judgement, and principles only become clear to Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram after Maria’s adultery and Julia’s elopement. While Henry’s appreciation of Fanny’s qualities falls in line with the narrator’s, his understanding of that value increases while he lives with Maria. Even Edmund, who most consistently assigns Fanny the greatest worth throughout the novel, must learn to value her attributes above those of Mary Crawford:

Scarcely had he done regretting Mary Crawford, and observing to Fanny how impossible it was that he should ever meet with such another woman, before it began to strike him whether a very different kind of woman might not do just as well—or a great deal better, whether Fanny herself were not growing as dear, as important to him in all her smiles, and all her ways, as Mary Crawford had ever been . . . With such a regard for her, indeed as his had long been, a regard founded on the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness, and completed by every recommendation of growing worth, what could be more natural than the change? Loving, guiding, protecting her, as he had been doing ever since her being ten years old, her mind in so great a degree formed by his care, and her comfort depending on his kindness, an object to him of such close and peculiar interest, dearer by all his own importance with her than any one else at Mansfield,

²⁹ MP 18.

what was there now to add, but that he should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones?³⁰

The language of improvement that Duckworth examines in relation to estate improvement doubles as the language of investment: Fanny improves because the Bertrams invest themselves in her wellbeing as a child—Edmund, particularly, takes an interest in her happiness—to their eventual benefit. Edmund’s increasing valuation of Fanny is expressed by the language of investment; her “growing worth” is both the result of his increasing affection and his role in “Loving, guiding, protecting her” from the time of her arrival at Mansfield onwards. Unlike his previous emotional investment in Mary, which “[relied] on future improvement,”³¹ Fanny already possesses a “mind in so great a degree formed by his care.” He views the improvements of Fanny’s mind that he has already helped bring about as a part of the increase in her value; with his marriage to her, he realises his investment.

Despite Edmund’s and Sir Thomas’s attempts to portray Fanny’s “growing worth” as the result of her education, *Mansfield Park* does not fit neatly into the category of the conventional Bildungsroman: the novel summarises Fanny’s education and adolescence in the first three chapters, before focusing on a period in Fanny’s life where, although she is not yet “out,” Edmund can describe her as having “the age and sense of a woman.”³² While the other characters, such as Sir Thomas and Edmund, view the increase in Fanny’s value in terms that suggest investment, the novel shows her growing

³⁰ MP 436-37.

³¹ Ibid.

³² MP 46.

worth to be the result of a shift in their understanding of what constitutes value. As such, the novel acts as an inverse Bildungsroman, in that it traces the educations of those surrounding the heroine as she instructs the other characters in how to understand value. The novel does not depict Fanny's "growing worth" so much as the process by which she is given credit for the worth that she already possesses. However, although the focus of the novel is not Fanny's education, this should not suggest that she lacks agency or dynamism. Rather, her agency, which is expressed most notably through her refusal to "price" herself through marriage to Henry Crawford, and her circulation between Mansfield and Portsmouth demonstrate her ability to respond and adapt to her environment, without becoming a chameleon as Henry Crawford does or failing in her duties, like her mother. Unlike those characters whose value depends upon their context—for example, their income or their social graces—Fanny's patience and constancy allow her to interact with her environment and reshape it, both on a small scale, such as when she solves the feud between her sisters by purchasing a second pocket knife, and on a broader level, as when she brings about a shift in the way that Mansfield's inhabitants define value. Her ability not only to respond to her environment, but also to act upon it in a way that remains consistent with her expressed values, is unique within the novel and grants her the agency to dissolve the stringent boundaries set by the traditional hierarchies determined by rank and title, while resisting the credit-based economic model that has replaced them.

This final recognition of Fanny's full worth and her permanent establishment as a member of the Bertram family through her marriage to Edmund links the recognition of Fanny's worth—or the credit she is given for it—to the idea of Fanny as a payment or

reward. Although Fanny's love for Edmund is a constant throughout the novel, his reciprocation and their subsequent marriage occur only after the undesirable elements of Mansfield Park's society have been expelled or reformed: Mrs Norris leaves with the adulterous Maria for a life of isolation, both Crawfords are cut off after Henry's conduct and Mary's failure to respond appropriately, Dr Grant finds a stall at Westminster, and Tom's illness sobers him, so that he "[becomes] what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself."³³ Although less dramatic than Maria's adultery, Julia's elopement with Yates separates her from Mansfield Park as well, leaving Sir Thomas with Fanny, whom he begins to think of as "a great acquisition . . . for a daughter."³⁴ Although the Bertrams have already, in a sense, "acquired" Fanny by taking her on as a ward, her marriage to Edmund completes the transaction. Because the Bertrams have now recognised her worth, she can be counted as a credit to them.

Only the narrator prizes Fanny highly throughout, placing her merits above those of the other characters, and thereby positioning Fanny as the standard of value against which other characters can be compared and their value determined. Unlike the instances in which other characters grant each other credit for various attributes without adequate assessment, Fanny possesses those merits with which the narrator credits her and her actions fulfil the resultant expectations placed upon her: in short, the credit that the narrator grants Fanny is equivalent to her worth. *Mansfield Park's* narrator establishes a system of moral value in self-conscious opposition to a more overtly monetary system, where Mary Crawford's fortune of twenty thousand pounds renders her incomparably superior to Fanny, whose economic status is as tenuous as her presence at Mansfield.

³³ MP 429.

³⁴ MP 438.

Although the narrator's preference remains consistent throughout the novel, the continuous presence of alternate value systems underscores the concept of intrinsic worth and renders the relative nature of value visible to the reader. Furthermore, while the narrator attempts to persuade the reader to submit to her system of value, represented by her heroine, the reader may disagree: after all, Lionel Trilling described Fanny in his essay on *Mansfield Park* with the definitive statement, "Nobody, I believe, has ever found [her] possible to like."³⁵ Since the publication of Trilling's essay, a number of defences of Fanny Price have been published, but his argument serves as a reminder that Fanny's value to the narrator does not ensure her value to the reader, particularly a reader conditioned by Romantic individualism: without an acceptance of the narrator's value system, however temporary, the novel proves a frustrating endeavour.

Just as Fanny's existence as a character in a novel situates her as a saleable object, the surname "Price" also indicates her status as a commodity to be bought and sold, whose cost determines her treatment at Mansfield Park and her marriage. As previously noted, following Said's discussion of *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism*, much has been made of Sir Thomas's Antigua estate. In a related strand of criticism, a number of scholars have linked the novel's allusions to slave trafficking in the West Indies to the marriage market. In her article, "Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism," Susan Fraiman makes the case that Austen does not invoke "the literal slave trade in the West Indies but a paternal practice she depicts as possibly analogous to it: Sir Thomas's bid (successful in Maria's case if not in Fanny's) to put female flesh on

³⁵ Lionel Trilling, "Mansfield Park," *The Opposing Self* (New York: Viking Press, 1955) 212.

the auction block in exchange for male status.”³⁶ Although Fraiman overstates the case somewhat, the idea of women being bought and sold within the marriage market was common in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century feminist discourse. However, in *Mansfield Park*, ultimately both Fanny and Maria set the prices at which they are sold: Maria sells herself for Rushworth’s wealth and position, an estate of twelve thousand pounds a year, and Fanny for Edmund and the accompanying “true merit and true love.”³⁷ Although Sir Thomas plays a role in both matches, he is not the auctioneer that Fraiman represents him as. Recognising Rushworth’s insipidity, he offers Maria an opportunity to back out of her engagement, which she refuses. His attempts to convince Fanny to accept Henry Crawford do indeed carry the suggestion of a sale of “female flesh,” as he values Crawford’s wealth above other considerations—except in Sir Thomas’s failure to complete the transaction. If Sir Thomas acts as Fanny’s auctioneer, he does so unsuccessfully, not only by failing to persuade her to accept Crawford, but also by being nothing more than a passive, approving spectator of her eventual match with Edmund.

The autonomy that Maria and Fanny—and Julia in her elopement with Yates—display in their choice of husbands suggests a marriage market in which women have the ability to set their price, although this freedom is limited by economic concerns and the possibility that their price will not be met—in short, they set their price in response to the demands of the market. Mary Crawford’s situation provides an example of a woman trapped by her own demands; as the narrator informs the reader at the novel’s close:

³⁶ Susan Fraiman, “Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism” *Critical Inquiry* 21.4 (1995) 812.

³⁷ MP 439.

Mary, though perfectly resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again, was long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir apparents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her 20,000*l.* anyone who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had learnt there to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.³⁸

Unlike Fanny, whose lack of economic independence makes her vulnerable to the whims of her uncle, or Maria and Julia, whose desire to escape from the oppressiveness of Mansfield pushes them into less than ideal marriages, Mary Crawford believes that she has little need for marriage and therefore sets a higher price than most. However, the interest on twenty thousand pounds cannot keep Mary Crawford in the style to which she is accustomed; by living with her sister, she submits to a standard of living below what she might otherwise enjoy, even in marriage to a younger son. The “better taste she had acquired at Mansfield” has taught her how to “estimate” value and happiness according to a non-commercial model, yet she remains unable to ignore the monetary implications of marriage; caught between two methods of determining value, she remains perpetually unsatisfied. Although women may act as their own “auctioneers,” the sale depends on the forces of the market and the woman’s ability or inclination to wait for the desired purchaser. For women, setting their own price carries with it the risk that others will have a lower estimation of their value, a risk that is more pronounced for women such as Fanny with no fortune to fall back on. Yet, by committing herself to a non-commercial

³⁸MP 436.

model of value despite her financial vulnerability, in her rejection of Crawford and her decision to marry Edmund, Fanny prices herself more reasonably than Mary and simultaneously takes a greater risk.

The three facets of this above discussion of Fanny's name—which configures her as a valuable object, as a repayment for outstanding debts, and in terms of what she demands from a potential husband—form the basis for this thesis. The first discusses the role of credit in *Mansfield Park*, starting with the situations that rely on the language of credit and debt to examine who and what determines the extent to which credit is assigned and debt calculated. As the novel progresses, the process becomes increasingly ironic: events reveal the frequency with which the inhabitants of Mansfield Park misplace their trust, and the usefulness of credit comes into question as it becomes clear that the exchanges between characters do not correspond to an exchange of value. Only the omniscient narrator, who holds herself at an ironic distance, often even from her heroine, has the ability to grant credit reliably.

This chapter will also examine the role of those characters such as Fanny, who can participate in such an economy only as a debtor: she is indebted to her rich relations, the Bertrams, for taking her in as a ward, to Mary Crawford (and by extension Henry Crawford) for the necklace, and even to Henry Crawford for his attentions. With no credit to offset her debts except that which results from her connection to wealthier relations, Fanny occupies a tenuous position in the household, heightening the irony when, rather than finding Mansfield Park a credit to her, she becomes a credit to Mansfield Park.

The second chapter is linked closely to the discussion of the credit/debt economy in the previous chapter: using the metaphor of characters as currency, it engages with the ideas of establishing value in an economy of depreciated currency. Here, I develop the historical context alluded to at the beginning of the introduction, where the issues raised into public consciousness by the Restriction Act allowed the complex relationship between monetary and non-monetary value to become available for fictional exploration. By exploring the instances in which a character's worth is either undervalued or overvalued, this chapter examines the standards used to determine value and the problems inherent therein. The novel sets the model that most of *Mansfield Park*'s inhabitants rely on to measure value against the narrator's moral framework, which places Fanny Price as the gold standard against which the other characters are compared. The novel juxtaposes the rarity of Fanny's merits with the abundance of monetary wealth possessed by the Bertrams, the Crawfords, and the Rushworths, in order to question the way in which a standard can be set, against which worth is determined.

In my third and final chapter, I discuss the critical history surrounding *Mansfield Park* and the question of the slave trade within the context of the economic concerns addressed in previous chapters, relating it to the previous two chapters through the idea of the movement and exchange of people. The role of slavery and the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* has been widely addressed and disputed by scholars responding to Edward Said's discussion of it in *Culture and Imperialism*, where he reads *Mansfield Park* "as part of the structure of an expanding imperialist venture."³⁹ Works by authors such as Gabrielle D.V. White, Susan Fraiman, George E. Boulukos, and John Wiltshire

³⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993) 95.

examine Said's claims and those of subsequent critics closely, often correcting his assumptions about the period. However, despite the numerous articles and books devoted to the subject, the economic context in which the abolition debate occurred, and the way that this context finds its way into *Mansfield Park* through the commodification of character has remained largely unexplored.

While the majority of this thesis relies on the central metaphor of characters as a credit-based currency, in the third chapter, I relate the problematic idea of worth as discussed in the previous chapters to the slave trade, to explore the economics of the exchange of people in the novel. Here, I explore the frequent critical claim that the references in *Mansfield Park* to the West Indies and the slave trade draw an implicit comparison between the position of women on the marriage market and the act of slave-trading. The above discussion on "price" touches on the possibility that these two claims are not wholly incompatible; rather, they draw on the discourse of the economy and the discourse of abolition respectively to explore the way that public character acts as a commodity as well as a currency.

As suggested earlier, the question of slavery cannot be separated from other economic concerns of the period: specific instances such as the economic effects of the plummeting price of sugar were not the only link between the political economy and the slave trade, as Ian Baucom's depiction of the widespread use of bills of exchange illustrates. However, most criticism accounts only for the question of *Mansfield Park's* relationship to the abolition movement; the relationship between abolitionist discourse and the political economy must be accounted for in order to elucidate Austen's

representation of the contemporary anxieties about worth and social exchange, and their broader societal implications.

Chapter 1: The Role of Credit and Debt in Establishing Character

Near the midway point in *Mansfield Park*, the narrative pauses to describe a card game called Speculation, played by the Crawfords, Fanny, William, Edmund, and Lady Bertram. The game, which focuses around the buying and selling of trump cards, affords Henry Crawford an occasion to forward his interest in Fanny, as he must simultaneously instruct her and Lady Bertram in how to play; his instructions punctuate the conversation, continually drawing the reader's attention to the bargaining that is taking place. Although Fanny learns the game quickly, Henry endeavours "to inspirit her play, sharpen her avarice, and harden her heart, which, especially in any competition with William, was a work of some difficulty."⁴⁰ Fanny's unwillingness to compete forms a sharp contrast with Mary Crawford's highly competitive willingness to take risks. Upon completing her final transaction, the latter exclaims, "There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence for me. I am not born to sit still and do nothing. If I lose the game, it shall not be from not striving for it."⁴¹ While on one level, the game acts as a metonym for the events of the novel, by displaying the extent to and the manner in which characters pursue their own interest and are engaged in a series of transactions, it also acts as a way of disguising true interest. When Edmund makes a pointed remark about his future prospects, Mary responds by bargaining aggressively with William, a move that allows her to win the game but at steep personal cost. Similarly, Fanny attempts to hide her interest in Henry's description of Thornton Lacey by turning her attention to the deal she is making with her brother, who is "driving as hard a bargain and imposing on her as

⁴⁰ MP 222.

⁴¹ MP 224.

much as he could.”⁴² Only Henry can comfortably make his true interest in Fanny known, which Sir Thomas observes with approval. Because he is responsible for his own cards, as well as Lady Bertram’s and Fanny’s, Henry occupies a position of power in the game, much like his position in the circle as the only young man of fortune. It is therefore fitting that the chapter ends with Fanny, who is the member of the group least able to express her desires, unwillingly in Henry’s debt: “Fanny’s last feeling in the visit was disappointment—for the shawl which Edmund was quietly taking from the servant to bring and put round her shoulders, was seized by Mr. Crawford’s quicker hand, and she was obliged to be indebted to his more prominent attention.”⁴³ Although over the course of the game Fanny was encouraged to participate in the transactional processes as an equal (despite Henry’s determination to prevent her from “cheat[ing] herself as she wishes”⁴⁴), Henry’s gesture as she leaves serves as a sharp reminder of her place in the network of credit/debt relations in the novel.

Before any deeper analysis of these relationships and their influence on perceptions of character in *Mansfield Park* can be undertaken, the distinction between credit and value, and how each is determined, must be established. The OED provides a number of definitions for credit relevant to the period, which can be broadly placed into two categories: one pertains to the quality of a person’s character, and the other to commerce. Of the first, most definitions follow from the idea of credit as, “Belief, credence, faith, trust,” or, “to believe in, put faith in, credit.” In relation to commerce, the OED defines credit as “Trust or confidence in a buyer’s ability and intention to pay at a

⁴² MP 225.

⁴³ MP 232.

⁴⁴ MP 226.

future time, exhibited by entrusting him with goods, etc. without a payment,” or as “A sum placed at a person’s disposal in the books of a Bank, etc., upon which he may draw to the extent of the amount; any note, bill, or other document, on security of which a person may obtain funds.” The entry also defines credit within the specific context of determining character: “(a) to trust a person for the future fulfilment of something expected or due from him; to ascribe (a quality) to him on trust, to put it to his account in one’s estimate of him; (b) to acknowledge that it is due to him; to ascribe the merit of it to him.” The use of credit indicates a relationship based on trust and future fulfilment, although the final definition shows that credit can also refer to the acknowledgement of something that one already possesses. It implies a debt wherein payment is deferred but ultimately necessary; the inability to repay damages not only the creditor, but also the debtor, who is proven untrustworthy.

Like credit, value has a number of divergent definitions, and, of those relevant to this discussion and current at the time of *Mansfield Park*’s publication, most refer to either the measure of commercial value or quality of character. Generally, value can be summed up as “The relative status of a thing, or the estimate in which it is held, according to its real or supposed worth, usefulness, or importance.” Commercially, this definition indicates, “[t]hat amount of some commodity, medium of exchange, etc., which is considered to be an equivalent for something else; a fair or adequate equivalent or return”; in relation to people value is determined by “Worth or worthiness (of persons) in respect of rank or personal qualities.” Unlike credit, which is determined by trust, character, and an assessment of what the recipient will be able to repay, the value of an object can only be measured in relation to another commodity or medium of exchange,

such as currency. Similarly, measuring value in relation to character requires a referent, but the unit of measurement is defined less clearly: the value of a person is measured by this or her social currency—which defines either one’s status or one’s merit—rather than by a monetary currency. *Mansfield Park* makes the difficulty of distinguishing between monetary and social currency apparent by representing character as a function of monetary value: Mary Crawford’s fortune of £20,000 seems as much a feature of her personality as her wit and beauty, and Maria Ward cannot be distinguished from her £7,000—once she becomes the mistress of an estate of £5,000 per annum, she takes on an entirely new identity. This use of income or portion as a defining personal trait is one of the techniques that the narrator relies on to commodify the characters and contributes to the blurring of the commercial with the non-commercial that pervades the novel.

Margot Finn describes the interdependence of commercial credit and character:

Character functioned . . . at once as the basis upon which lenders extended credit to borrowers and consumers and as a broader social and cultural measure of personal worth. Perceptions of personal worth, in turn, registered the successful use of goods and services obtained on credit to construct creditworthy characters.

Credit thus reflected character, but also constituted it.⁴⁵

According to Finn, personal and commercial credit not only inform each other, but can also be used as a way of measuring the value of a person: in order to have a “creditworthy character” by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century standards, one must also be a

⁴⁵ Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 19.

creditworthy consumer, never accepting more credit than what can be repaid. However, creditworthiness was determined by the creditor's ability to read the character of those to whom they extended credit; the process of deciding whether or not people could be trusted depended as much, if not more, on their personal attributes and reputation as it did on their commercial habits. Finn highlights the paradoxical nature of the act of extending credit when she describes the techniques used to determine character:

Determinations of individual creditworthiness in England only rarely reflected precise knowledge of individual wealth: personal credit was a fluctuating identity concocted by a shifting range of interested parties from a fluid series of representations of the self. Creditors sought constantly and unsuccessfully to read debtors' personal worth and character from their clothing, their marital relations, their spending patterns and their perceived social status, attempting to assign stable cash values to consumers in markets continuously buffeted by the vagaries of credit. Legal definitions of personhood, agency and contract, far from serving to fix these individual economic identities, worked actively to subvert and multiply them.⁴⁶

More than the lack of available financial information, the problem in determining the creditworthiness of a character was the availability of credit itself, which made it impossible "to assign stable cash values to consumers." Creditworthiness became self-perpetuating: by appearing creditable through the manipulation of external factors such as

⁴⁶ Finn 21.

clothing, one could obtain further credit, and thereby obtain the means to appear even more creditable in an indefinite cycle. “Personal worth and character” became obscured by the very thing that required them to operate; credit displaced value, making creditworthiness impossible to determine until repayment was required.⁴⁷

The overlap in definitions of credit as future fulfilment and credit as the recognition of present value is particularly relevant to a discussion of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century credit economy, when currency took the form of bank notes, which operated as a substitution for the stated value of bullion. Through the expression of characters’ worth in monetary terms, *Mansfield Park* engages with the problems of value and the anxiety arising from the production and use of paper money, which James Thompson identifies in *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel*:

Defining money involves defining value, and clarifying the relation between money and value leads ineluctably to the question of representation: are gold and silver inherently valuable; do they represent some anterior value, or is their value merely conventional and arbitrary? How does coin of precious metal differ from coin of base metal, and does the former embody or contain value while the latter represents value? What value does light silver hold? How do coins of both base and precious metal differ from bills of exchange, which also seem to represent value? What is the difference between a bill of exchange, which was a written document describing and transferring a debt, and a banknote issued by the Bank

⁴⁷ For further discussion on the economic and social functions and consequences of credit and its roots in early modern England, see Craig Muldrew’s *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998).

of England, which was more like a check of a draft on its stock? Does the negotiability of paper money affect its function as money? . . . What is it [value] and where is it located—in the signifier, in its referent, or in some signifying process that occurs in the act of exchange?⁴⁸

This series of questions demonstrates the condition of uncertainty that resulted in what Thompson terms a “semiological crisis over the concept of value.”⁴⁹ The problem of how to determine and express value is foremost among them, particularly in an economy where the increasingly inflated currency does not provide a standard for measurement. This phenomenon, termed depreciation, had consequences beyond the immediate economic problems; it created an atmosphere of anxiety that heightened the public awareness of what Mary Poovey terms “the ‘fictitious’ nature of paper money.”⁵⁰ Yet, despite the anxiety surrounding value produced by the use of paper money, Poovey also makes the case that “Britain’s growing commercial economy . . . thrived on the credit represented by the expansion of paper notes and prospered, in part because of the commodification of a wide range of fashionable and leisure products, including books and pamphlets.”⁵¹ When represented by paper notes, credit could be read in a way similar to books and pamphlets, and, like books and pamphlets, could contain fictions and distortions—most notably, the post-Restriction Act fiction that the notes represented a given value of bullion possessed by the issuing bank and could be exchanged for them.

⁴⁸ James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Poovey 173.

⁵¹ Poovey 153.

The “substitution of a cheap instrument for a very dear one”⁵² that the *Edinburgh Review* describes resulted in more than an unstable currency; it brought about an uneasy shift in the way that the British public related to value, particularly in relation to credit in practice and in concept.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions surrounding the concept of value are linked closely to the use of credit as an indicator of trust, as a measure of character, and, as the second chapter will explore, as currency. To grant credit implies trust, but, as Finn observes, in an economy where credit was necessary, people became adept at fashioning themselves to appear trustworthy. From the first chapter until the final paragraphs of *Mansfield Park*, Austen engages with the uncertainty of value within a credit-based economy, using the novel to represent interactions between characters as a credit-based exchange; indeed, the language of credit and debt underlines—and sometimes defines—daily interactions, often defining a character’s worth in the eyes of other characters. To give a character credit implies a degree of indebtedness that often remains unfulfilled, and, as a result, the act of assessing where credit is due remains problematic and highly speculative. The narrator functions as the only consistent judge of character and is therefore alone in her ability to assign credit reliably; our assumption of her omniscience places her in a position through which she can reveal a character’s undesirable traits and motivations to the reader while they remain hidden to other characters. However, prior to the final chapter, the narrator rarely uses direct statements to indicate when a trait or character is undesirable. Rather, through free indirect discourse, she focalises on a number of characters and leaves the reader to decide which

⁵² “Publications on the Depreciation of Paper Currency” 351-52.

representations carry the ironic undertone that indicates her disapproval. She relies indirectly on a number of techniques to guide the reader towards understanding when irony is deployed, many of them contextual or based on syntax: foremost among them is her tendency to lace the thoughts and speech of such characters with the language of commerce.

Thus, while discussions and meditations on granting characters credit and determining their worth may not be overtly or intentionally commercial, the blending of commercial and non-commercial language means that those characters who rely on it indiscriminately will always be suspect. Discussions of credit and value will always connote merit and commerce simultaneously; rather than attempting to draw the distinction in the face of vague and fluid terminology, the novel directs the reader's attention to the difficulty of doing so through the repetition of words that signify the economic and the personal simultaneously. In order to avoid being caught up in the same linguistic restrictions as many of the novel's characters, the narrator uses the language of value deliberately in order to highlight the difficulties of such a distinction, thereby forcing the reader to examine the ways in which value is constructed. As a device that tries to predict both present and potential value, credit is instrumental in the process through which value is created and determined. Within *Mansfield Park*, networks of credit and debt operate both implicitly and explicitly, creating a hierarchy of creditors and debtors that empowers those able to represent themselves as creditable, while oppressing those who lack the means to construct themselves as creditworthy. At the same time, the novel reveals the fragility of such a system as events demonstrate the difficulty of reading character in order to grant credit.

The novel opens with a summary description of the marriages of the three Ward sisters, which focuses on their financial gains and losses, establishing the general view of marriage as an economic transaction that recurs throughout the novel and forming an implicit contrast with the final union between Fanny and Edmund, in which “true merit and true love,”⁵³ form the basis for marital happiness, rather than the accumulation of fortunes. The first marriage, of Miss Maria Ward and her “only seven thousand pounds” to Sir Thomas Bertram, a baronet with “a handsome house and a large income,”⁵⁴ the amount of which is never overtly specified, causes the Ward sisters’ uncle to “[allow] her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it.”⁵⁵ In “Myths of the Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire,” Trevor Lloyd discusses marriage portions and jointure, drawing on Habakkuk’s *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System* to establish that “in general a man could expect his bride’s portion to be twice his annual income”⁵⁶ and that Maria Ward’s deficiency of £3,000 suggests that Sir Thomas had an annual income of about £5,000 at the time of their marriage. Thus, although not explicitly stated in such terms, the novel’s opening implies a debt owed to Sir Thomas and his estate of Mansfield Park by his bride and her family. Simultaneously, the narrator takes care to point out that Maria Ward’s “elevation” also grants credit to her two sisters, at least among their immediate acquaintance, who do not “scruple to predict their marrying with almost equal advantage.”⁵⁷ Despite this increase in credit, neither sister profits from their sister’s marriage, and, rather than creating a straightforward situation in which they are

⁵³ MP 439.

⁵⁴ MP 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lloyd 60.

⁵⁷ MP 5.

both indebted to Sir Thomas and Maria—now Lady Bertram—for improving their prospects, they find themselves unable to repay their debt in the expected manner: that is, by reinforcing the Bertrams’ social currency by providing them with equally important—or at least respectable—connections. Although the eldest Miss Ward—who becomes Mrs Norris—married a man with “a narrower income than she had been used to look forward to,”⁵⁸ she has the consolation of a match that, “when it came to the point, was not contemptible.” By contrast, the third sister, Frances, “married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family,”⁵⁹ in response to which the narrator remarks:

Sir Thomas Bertram had interest, which, from principle as well as pride, from a general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability, he would have been glad to exert for the advantage of Lady Bertram’s sister; but her husband’s profession was such as no interest could reach; and before he had time to devise any other method of assisting them, an absolute breach between the sisters had taken place.⁶⁰

Sir Thomas’s willingness to invest in his wife’s family without any promise of personal gain or even repayment, except in the form of respectable rather than contemptible connections, complicates the credit/debt system that governs marital and familial relations: financial aid can be repaid with the social currency of respectability. However, the most obvious route of assistance, Lieutenant Price’s principal prospects as “a

⁵⁸ MP 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ MP 5-6.

Lieutenant of the Marines, without education, fortune, or connections,”⁶¹ seem bleak, and, as the later problem of William Price’s promotion shows, Sir Thomas lacks connections in naval circles. Sir Thomas’s potential benevolence must take the form of credit granted indefinitely; the only possible way that the principal will be repaid is through the prosperity of the Prices. Sir Thomas’s “interest” in his wife’s family is both disinterested, in the sense that it will not result in any material gain on his part, but also self-interested: his willingness to be generous not only reflects well on his character, but also ensures that he will avoid “contemptible” connections. The idea of “interest” as both a selfish and selfless motivation recurs throughout the novel, particularly in connection with Fanny: Edmund commends Henry Crawford’s “proper estimation of the blessing of domestic happiness, and pure attachment”⁶² that demonstrates his ability to be capable of “ardent, disinterested love,”⁶³ while Edmund’s love for Fanny grows out of his longstanding interest in her improvement through her education. Although Edmund views “disinterestedness” as a virtue, the novel avoids adopting a clear moral position on interest. This ambivalence arises from the ironic tone that the narrator adopts when characters represent their self-interest as disinterest, which indicates an awareness that the same self-interest is the driving force behind many of the novel’s ultimately positive events, such as the decision to take Fanny in as a ward. Nevertheless, unlike many of her contemporaries who proclaimed the virtues of the free market, Austen avoids representing self-interest as a necessarily moral force by linking it to obligation. In order to appear creditable, one must have good public character, and in order to have good

⁶¹ MP 5.

⁶² MP 325.

⁶³ MP 303.

character, one must fulfil one's obligations. As such, pre-existing interest in the form of obligation provides the grounds for extending credit; that interest is increased once credit has been granted and a debt is owed.

In the case of Sir Thomas's desire to help the Prices, his interest is dictated by his wife and Mrs Norris. This potential instance of credit being granted takes several years to materialise, as an angry exchange of letters between Mrs Norris and Mrs Price ends the contact between the sisters, lessening Sir Thomas's sense of obligation to the Prices. The remainder of the first chapter takes place eleven years after the initial breach, when Mrs Price's need for assistance causes her to write to Lady Bertram; Mrs Price's appeal for financial aid constitutes an attempt to invoke the interest due to her as Sir Thomas's sister-in-law, despite her undesirable past conduct. The decision to take in Mrs Price's eldest daughter, Fanny, as a ward results in the first discussion that addresses the issues of credit and debt overtly. Lady Bertram's characteristic indolence excuses her from involvement in the decision, and she immediately acquiesces: "I think we cannot do better . . . let us send for the child."⁶⁴ From there, the decision rests on Mrs Norris's ability to persuade Sir Thomas that taking Fanny in is an appropriate action. While Sir Thomas voices some very real concerns about the place Fanny would occupy in the household and how to bring her up fairly, while still "mak[ing] her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*,"⁶⁵ Mrs Norris persuades him through a combination of flattery and dismissal of such "important considerations."⁶⁶ She concerns herself particularly with the

⁶⁴ MP 7.

⁶⁵ MP 12.

⁶⁶ MP 11.

cost of such a venture, paying particular attention to the question of Fanny's lack of fortune, which she regards as irrelevant:

Give a girl a good 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. A niece of our's, Sir Thomas, I may say, or at least of *your's*, would not grow up in this neighbourhood without many advantages. I don't say she would be so handsome as her cousins. I dare say she would not; but she would be introduced into the society of this country under such very favourable circumstances as, in all human probability, would get her a creditable establishment.⁶⁷

Mrs Norris's professed expectations for Fanny stand in stark contrast to the disappointments of her own marriage and the marriage of Fanny's mother, both of whom presumably had a portion comparable to Lady Bertram's £7,000; according to Mrs Norris's speculations, Fanny will be able to acquire the "credible establishment" that neither of Lady Bertram's sisters could, on the strength of her connections alone—without any portion and with supposedly inferior beauty. Of course, given Mrs Norris's initial low expectations of Fanny and subsequent determination to ensure that Fanny remains below her cousins in status, her definition of "a creditable establishment" remains ambiguous: an advantageous marriage for Fanny Price would likely be "contemptible" for Maria or Julia Bertram. Her vague phrasing suggests simultaneously a match that will be a credit to Fanny and a credit to Mansfield; the former implies that

⁶⁷ MP 8.

Fanny's connection to the Bertrams will need to be supplemented by a profitable marriage, while the latter draws an implicit comparison between Fanny's potential prospects and the prospects her mother threw away for a marriage that has resulted in comparative poverty. Here, Mrs Norris recalls the narrator's earlier, highly ironic commentary on the marriages of the Ward sisters, by configuring Fanny's connections to Mansfield Park through the language of credit and debt. But where the narrator maintains an ironic distance, inviting the reader to join in the subtle ridicule of a situation in which expectation greatly exceeded outcome, Mrs Norris speaks with an oblivious earnestness at odds with her own experience attempting to find a husband, projecting Fanny's future marriage into respectability as an act that will redeem Fanny's mother's marriage and reinforce the Bertrams' superiority.

A second reading of the novel reveals yet another layer of irony in her expectations for Fanny; with Henry Crawford's proposal, Mrs Norris's predictions become more accurate than she expects or wishes, and she reacts with resentment: "Angry she was, bitterly angry; but she was more angry with Fanny for having received such an offer, than for refusing it. It was an injury and affront to Julia, who ought to have been Mr. Crawford's choice."⁶⁸ What constitutes "a creditable establishment" for Fanny Price becomes clearer as Mrs Norris reveals her disapproval of Fanny exceeding the expectations set for her by her mother's marriage, and reinforced by her lack of fortune and position of enforced inferiority at Mansfield. In Mrs Norris's view, Fanny's association with Mansfield Park has been the source of more credit to her than desired or

⁶⁸ MP 306-7.

deserved and has, mistakenly, raised her to a level where she can compete with the Bertram sisters.

Sir Thomas takes a more realistic, although no less financial, approach to Fanny's marriage prospects. He responds diplomatically to Mrs Norris's expectation that Fanny will be able to "get"⁶⁹ a desirable marriage without a portion:

I only meant to observe, that it ought not to be lightly engaged in, and that to make it really serviceable to Mrs. Price, and creditable to ourselves, we must secure to the child, or consider ourselves engaged to secure to her hereafter, as circumstances may arise, the provision of a gentlewoman, if no such establishment should offer as you are so sanguine in expecting.⁷⁰

Despite his more pragmatic approach to the matter, Sir Thomas is as vague as Mrs Norris about the costs involved in adopting Fanny. It is unclear whether the "provision of a gentlewoman" refers to a marriage portion or some other financial settlement, or a position as a governess or companion, which would be far less desirable. Also like Mrs Norris, Sir Thomas is concerned with the credit that the charitable act of taking in a ward will bring to him and his family; however, he has a more comprehensive understanding of how to arrange the situation so that it may be advantageous to all. While Mrs Norris does not "aim at more than the credit of projecting and arranging so expensive a charity,"⁷¹ Sir Thomas is more far-sighted and takes into consideration both the potential

⁶⁹ MP 8.

⁷⁰ MP 8-9.

⁷¹ MP 10.

effects on his family, such as “cousins in love, &c.”⁷² and whether Fanny’s presumed “gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner”⁷³ will affect his daughters, as well as the effect that the shift will have on Fanny herself: “a girl so brought up must be adequately provided for, or there would be cruelty instead of kindness in taking her from her family.”⁷⁴ Sir Thomas understands that, in order for the act of charity to be truly creditable, it must be responsible and impose obligations on the benefactor. Rather than assuming, as Mrs Norris does, that the credit will result immediately from the act of charity, he regards Fanny as an investment that, if handled properly, will bring about mutually beneficial returns, and that, in order for his investment to be have a favourable return, he must be willing to commit his own resources to it.

However, until the credit granted to Fanny results in the fulfilment of her potential, she remains acutely conscious of what she owes the Bertrams. Sir Thomas’s apprehension that taking her in will result in “cruelty instead of kindness” proves prophetic: Fanny’s early misery at Mansfield Park goes ignored and her later oppression is taken as a matter of course by most of the family, including Fanny herself. By drawing the reader’s attention to the Bertrams’ neglect, the narrator questions Fanny’s indebted state even though Fanny herself does not. Even without taking into account the neglect she experiences, no further mention is made of “the provision of a gentlewoman” that Sir Thomas deems a necessary condition of taking her in. Although Crawford’s proposal offers Fanny the “creditable establishment” that Mrs Norris predicts, regardless of her

⁷² MP 7.

⁷³ MP 11.

⁷⁴ MP 7.

financial situation, the assumption throughout the novel appears to be that Fanny will not have anything settled on her. When Mary Crawford congratulates her brother on his determination to marry Fanny, she contrasts Fanny's merits and connections with Crawford's fortune: "There is not a better girl in the world, and you do not want for fortune; and as to her connections, they are more than good. The Bertrams are undoubtedly some of the first people in this country. She is niece to Sir Thomas Bertram; that will be enough for the world."⁷⁵ In highlighting Fanny's family connection, Mary echoes Mrs Norris at the opening of the novel; however, Mary draws a distinction between Fanny's merits and the connection that establishes Fanny as a suitable wife for her brother in the eyes of the world at large.

Fanny's rejection of Crawford means that the novel does not address the financial negotiations involved in the engagement and, therefore, the question of Fanny's portion. Habakkuk discusses the role of these negotiations in determining the financial wellbeing of both parties, indicating their importance in determining future security:

The basic and fundamental object of such negotiations was to establish a due proportion between the contribution of the two families to the creation of the new household. It was to avoid imprudent marriages, where the balance of advantages was uneven. To achieve this object, to ensure a just balance of interests, it was convenient to conduct negotiations around a formula governing the relation of the

⁷⁵ MP 270.

portion to the jointure. By the late seventeenth century there was a standard ratio: a £1000 portion commanded a jointure of £100 p.a.⁷⁶

Although Crawford has proposed with no apparent financial expectations, Sir Thomas, as Fanny's guardian, would be at least partially responsible for her financial situation if she were to marry and survive Crawford. Without a portion, Fanny's potential jointure cannot be calculated with any degree of certainty, and she could be left in an even more economically vulnerable position than she is in the Mansfield household. However, Fanny's eventual marriage to her cousin, Edmund, creates a situation in which a financial settlement is unnecessary, and the novel sidesteps the issue of whether or not Sir Thomas would have fulfilled what he deems part of his duty to Fanny at the beginning of the novel: "the provision of a gentlewoman." By avoiding a return to this discussion, the novel develops a sense of ambiguity surrounding Fanny's sense of indebtedness to the Bertrams.

The suggestion that Sir Thomas may not have fulfilled his duty to Fanny adds a layer of cynicism to his final reflections on her merits:

Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted. His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself. His liberality had a rich repayment, and the general goodness of his intentions by her, deserved it. He might have made her childhood happier; but it had been an error of judgment only which had given him

⁷⁶ John Habakkuk, *Marriage Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 147.

the appearance of harshness, and deprived him of her early love; and now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong.⁷⁷

Sir Thomas's interpretation of events is at odds with the narrator's, who has spent much of the novel bearing witness to Fanny's oppression. Through free indirect speech, the narrator undercuts Sir Thomas's apparent epiphany by infusing the language of commerce into his musings on his "charitable kindness," just as the narrator's ironic tone undercuts Sir Thomas's apparent earnestness. Although the narrator establishes one of Sir Thomas's motives for taking Fanny in as being "from a general wish of doing right,"⁷⁸ the novel juxtaposes Sir Thomas's genuine kindness with his less altruistic motives: he sees the act of taking Fanny in to be simultaneously "really serviceable to Mrs. Price, and creditable to ourselves,"⁷⁹ his "desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability" comes "from principle as well as pride,"⁸⁰ and as a result of the "general goodness of his intentions . . . [he] deserve[s]" the "rich repayment"⁸¹ he receives in the form of Fanny as a daughter, who, in turn, is a credit to him and his family. Sir Thomas treats charity as an investment that carries a degree of risk, for which he hopes to be repaid; the result is a much higher return than expected, although one that he believes he deserves. However, the emphasis on the idea that Sir Thomas "deserved it," created by isolating the phrase from the rest of the sentence with a comma, highlights the distance between Sir Thomas's perspective and the narrator's. Despite his passing

⁷⁷ MP 438.

⁷⁸ MP 5.

⁷⁹ MP 8.

⁸⁰ MP 5.

⁸¹ MP 438.

acknowledgement of his own neglect and misjudgement as a factor in Fanny's childhood misery, Sir Thomas takes full credit for Fanny's development into "the daughter that he wanted" and congratulates himself on it, while recognising that Fanny has repaid her debt to the Bertrams in full. In doing so, he fails to give credit to Fanny's own qualities; unlike Edmund, he does not recognise Fanny "to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense,"⁸² qualities that help with her intellectual and moral development.

Through the tidy moral that he offers regarding "the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure,"⁸³ he credits himself with Fanny's successful development into a creditable woman; however, as the reader and the narrator are aware, Fanny possessed some of those qualities at the beginning of the novel.

Through the implicit question of what is deserved, raised by Sir Thomas's rewriting of events to credit himself with the happy outcome, the novel itself becomes involved in the relationships of credit and debt, asking to whom it owes a happy ending. The final chapter opens with the narrator's statement, "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,"⁸⁴ which is followed by an assessment of the novel's central characters, in which the narrator repays them for their behaviour throughout the novel, either with "tolerable comfort" or varying degrees of dissatisfaction. While Fanny and Edmund are allowed

⁸² MP 22.

⁸³ MP 439.

⁸⁴ MP 428.

“true merit and true love”⁸⁵ and the remaining inhabitants of Mansfield experience a return to order, Maria’s and Mrs Norris’s “tempers [become] their mutual punishment,”⁸⁶ Henry Crawford experiences “vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness,” and Mary Crawford is “long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir apparents . . . any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.”⁸⁷ Those “greatly in fault,” with whom the narrator wishes to “have done,” suffer primarily from regrets brought about by their own actions; their punishments result from an inability to maintain the appearance of credibility with the inhabitants of Mansfield.

The abrupt conclusion of the novel is, in itself, dissatisfying, and haunted by alternate possibilities, most explicitly in the case of Henry Crawford: “Would he have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained.”⁸⁸ This statement is couched within an extended meditation in the past conditional tense on what would have rendered Crawford deserving. Although the requirements are extensive, the statement echoes one made by Crawford earlier in the novel, when he defends himself from Fanny’s disapprobation:

My conduct shall speak for me—absence, distance, time shall speak for me.—

They shall prove, that as far as you can be deserved by any body, I do deserve

⁸⁵ MP 439.

⁸⁶ MP 432.

⁸⁷ MP 436.

⁸⁸ MP 433.

you.—You are infinitely my superior in merit; all *that* I know . . . It is not by equality of merit that you can be won. That is out of the question. It is he who sees and worships your merit the strongest, who loves you most devotedly, that has best right to a return.⁸⁹

Upon a second reading of the novel, the irony in the speech becomes apparent; Crawford's words prove prophetic, except in his claim to deserve Fanny: his conduct does, indeed, speak for him, proving him unworthy. Despite his failure to act appropriately, his understanding of Fanny's merits proves sound, if somewhat hyperbolic, and he is one of the first characters to give her full credit for them. His claim that Fanny will be unable to find an equal also proves true: the novel shows Edmund's judgement to be inferior to hers. However, Edmund "sees," if not "worships," Fanny's merits first, encourages their development, and can recognise their value, even over Mary Crawford's, and acknowledges his own inferiority: "Even in the midst of his late infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny's mental superiority . . . She was of course only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing."⁹⁰ Yet, prior to the revelation of Mary Crawford's amorality, Edmund acknowledges only Fanny's intellectual and moral merits; he requires a point of comparison that teaches him to "learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones."⁹¹ The novel makes explicit the contrast between Fanny's two suitors through their shared appreciation of Fanny's merits, and which merits they

⁸⁹ MP 318.

⁹⁰ MP 437.

⁹¹ MP 436-7.

appreciate: ultimately, Edmund gives Fanny the most credit and is thereby the most deserving.

Yet, Edmund and Henry Crawford are also linked through the discourse of investment. Crawford claims that, “It is he who sees and worships your merit the strongest, who loves you most devotedly, that has the best right to a return,” while the narrator summarises the process through which Edmund falls in love with Fanny: “With such a regard for her, indeed as his had long been, a regard founded on the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness, and completed by every recommendation of growing worth, what could be more natural than the change?”⁹² Both cases treat Fanny as the realisation of an investment: Edmund views Fanny as “an object to him of such close and peculiar interest,” who has been responsible for “Loving, guiding, protecting her, as he had been doing ever since her being ten years old, her mind in so great a degree formed by his care, and her comfort depending on his kindness,”⁹³ whereas Crawford invests his affection and conduct in order to show himself to be deserving and thereby earn the “return” of Fanny’s affection.

Unlike any of Crawford’s other acquaintances, Fanny requires him to prove the credibility of his character through his conduct rather than his self-representation; in doing so, she dispels the self-perpetuating and wholly ineffective method of allotting credit that Finn describes. Whereas others allow his manners, his wealth, and his speech to determine their opinions of him, Fanny requires that he demonstrate his creditworthiness through his past and present actions. To use Finn’s terms metaphorically, she demands “precise knowledge” before trying “to assign stable . . .

⁹² MP 436.

⁹³ MP 436.

values”⁹⁴ to Crawford and, as such, behaves as a responsible creditor who is not open to avoidable loss. By contrast, those characters who relied on Crawford’s self-representation and credited him with more than he deserved suffer to varying degrees. Crawford’s inability to repay the credit he has been granted with “true merit” results in more than the loss of Fanny: it begins the chain of events that lead to the discredit of his sister, Maria, Mrs Norris, and, to a lesser extent, Julia and Sir Thomas.

By configuring Crawford as the catalyst for revealing misplaced trust, the novel situates him as the most culpable; however, the narrator mitigates some of his guilt by painting him as a victim of circumstance, “ruined by early independence and bad domestic example.”⁹⁵ Similarly, the novel represents Maria and Julia as the products of a mismanaged education, “where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with [Sir Thomas’s] . . . severity.”⁹⁶ Even Sir Thomas, who holds himself responsible for his daughters’ conduct, cannot be blamed solely for the result. Rather, the opportunity for Maria’s elopement with Crawford, and the subsequent fallout, arises from a situation in which credit has been granted under a false pretext by all of the characters involved. The failure of the novel’s creditors to judge character accurately draws attention both to the act of extending credit and to the creditors themselves, using the failure of credit to question the novel’s power structure.

As the owner of Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas functions as the primary arbiter of credit; his financial power over the inhabitants of Mansfield and its parsonage grants him and those who influence him the authority to direct them in non-financial matters—in

⁹⁴ Finn 21.

⁹⁵ MP 433.

⁹⁶ MP 430.

short, the power to extend credit at his discretion. Yet the process that Sir Thomas uses to determine who may also be a creditor is as inconsistent as the process he uses for granting credit. As the opening chapter establishes, Mrs Norris functions as his primary consultant and the one responsible for passing judgement in his absence; only in the final chapter does Sir Thomas acknowledge her failings conclusively:

His opinion of her had been sinking from the day of his return from Antigua; in every transaction together from that period, in their daily intercourse, in business, or in chat, she had regularly been losing ground in his esteem, and convincing him that either time had done her much disservice, or that he had considerably overrated her sense, and wonderfully borne with her manners before.⁹⁷

By labelling all of his interactions with Mrs Norris as “transactions,” viewing both “business” and “chat” through the lens of commerce and exchange, Sir Thomas distances himself from any personal relationship with her, thereby viewing his daughters’ conduct and his misplaced faith in Mrs Norris as failed investments rather than personal affronts. He relies on the language of commerce to indicate that his friendship with Mrs Norris has ceased to maintain the appearance of a mutually beneficial exchange to Sir Thomas: Mrs Norris has failed to repay the credit he has granted her with “sense” or “manners.” As the novel shows Mrs Norris’s behaviour and judgement to be consistent throughout, both the reader and the narrator are aware that time has not altered Mrs Norris; rather, events have

⁹⁷ MP 432.

placed Mrs Norris in a position where she can no longer keep Sir Thomas “foiled by her evasions, disarmed by her flattery.”⁹⁸

Yet in demonstrating Sir Thomas’s ready susceptibility to “evasions” and “flattery,” the novel establishes him as an unreliable and potentially weak-minded judge, traits made more pronounced by the lack of subtlety Mrs Norris displays in her attempts to manipulate and manage. By placing his faith “in Mrs. Norris’s watchful attention, and in Edmund’s judgment,”⁹⁹ he leaves his family in the hands of someone who has gained his ear through sycophancy rather than real merit; although Edmund displays an understanding of his father’s wishes, he lacks both the financial authority and the intimidating persona that would enable him to carry them out. Left as the primary creditor in Sir Thomas’s absence, Mrs Norris participates in and even encourages two of the events leading to the final catastrophe: Maria’s engagement to Mr Rushworth and the performance of *Lovers’ Vows* that provides her nieces and nephews with ample opportunity to associate unchecked with the Crawfords. The ease with which Maria and Julia manipulate her in turn permits them to enjoy a degree of freedom to which they are unaccustomed. As entitled members of the household, they have the power to influence the creditors, even if they are unable to grant credit themselves.

By contrast, Fanny’s lack of power appears in her inability to have any effect on the distribution of credit. After the introduction of the Crawfords, the narrator observes Fanny’s lack of importance before describing her opinion:

⁹⁸ MP 177.

⁹⁹ MP 31.

And Fanny, what was *she* doing and thinking all this while? and what was *her* opinion of the new-comers? Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called on to speak their opinion than Fanny. In a quiet way, very little attended to, she paid her tribute of admiration to Miss Crawford's beauty; but as she still continued to think Mr. Crawford very plain, in spite of her two cousins having repeatedly proved the contrary, she never mentioned *him*.¹⁰⁰

Although the reader learns Fanny's extensive observations on both of the Crawfords later, here the narrator restricts Fanny's opinions almost entirely to what she speaks. By representing Fanny's spoken admiration of Miss Crawford briefly and indirectly, the narrator demonstrates how little the others value Fanny's opinion. Yet in placing equal weight on what Fanny does not say, the narrator establishes her as a discreet observer; while Maria and Julia go from believing Crawford to be "absolutely plain" to "the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known,"¹⁰¹ Fanny's judgement of his appearance remains unspoken and consistent. Despite her keen perception and consistency, Fanny's lack of influence prevents her from being involved in the process of assigning credit. Even Edmund, who confides in Fanny and encourages her to express her opinions, fails to attend to her observations when she attempts to warn him of Crawford's flirtation with Maria; however, Edmund does not dismiss Fanny's ability to observe, but to interpret: "I believe it often happens, that a man, before he has quite made up his own mind, will distinguish the sister or intimate friend of the woman he is really thinking of,

¹⁰⁰ MP 46.

¹⁰¹ MP 42.

more than the woman herself.”¹⁰² Fanny doubts her own reading of events as a result of this conversation (although not enough to forget it entirely), but the narrator’s earlier insinuations about Crawford and Maria undercut Edmund’s explanation and reveal it to be a wilful misinterpretation on his part.

Fanny’s position as a poor relation forces her into a position where she can only participate in a credit/debt economy as a debtor, a condition heightened by her “strong feelings of gratitude.”¹⁰³ Without material recourse to repay her debt to the Bertrams, she must enact her gratitude to the point of servitude, which still fails to protect her from Sir Thomas’s attempts to persuade her into accepting Crawford’s proposal. Even more minor instances of gratitude leave her open to manipulation, such as the sense of obligation that accompanies the necklace Mary Crawford gives her; because she lacks the means to reciprocate, even petty gifts are accompanied by an implied debt. Pierre Bourdieu discusses the obligations and strategy of gift exchange in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, contrasting it with the act of loaning:

In every society it may be observed that, if it is not to constitute an insult, the counter-gift must be *deferred* and *different*, because the immediate return of an exactly identical object clearly amounts to a refusal (i.e. the return of the same object). Thus gift exchange is opposed on the one hand to *swapping*, which, like the theoretical model of the cycle of reciprocity, telescopes gift and counter-gift into the same instant, and on the other hand, to *lending*, in which the return of the loan is explicitly guaranteed by a juridical act and is thus *already accomplished* at

¹⁰² MP 109.

¹⁰³ MP 438.

the very moment of the drawing up of a contract capable of ensuring that the acts it prescribes are predictable and calculable.¹⁰⁴

According to Bourdieu, the act of gift giving differs from the act of lending in that the terms of repayment have been laid out at the moment of the loan, whereas gift exchange requires a delay: “The *interval* between gift and counter-gift is what allows a pattern of exchange that is always liable to strike the observer and also the participants as *reversible*, i.e. both forced and interested, to be experienced as irreversible.”¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu adds that, “If the system is to work, the agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth of their exchanges . . . while at the same time they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it.”¹⁰⁶ Finn responds to Bourdieu’s description, focussing on the use of the gift economy and gift-giving in the novel in order to argue that it was often used as a way of portraying the pervasiveness of the credit economy in English society, even outside of the cash nexus:

Gifts afforded authors opportunities to explore exchange relations outside the cash nexus and within the domestic sphere, proving an especially useful mechanism for the fictional representation of women’s debt obligations. But gifting was also an essential device for depicting market activity in the novel. Both the marriage market and retail credit transactions shared essential features with traditional gift exchange whilst also participating in processes of commodification. By including

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) 5.

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu 6.

¹⁰⁶ Bourdieu 6.

gifting activities within their models of the market, rather than building their fictions upon the polar oppositions between barter and the cash nexus favoured by economic theorists, English novelists underlined the social meanings and significance of contemporary exchange relations.¹⁰⁷

Whereas Bourdieu draws a sharp distinction between credit relations and the obligations resulting from the gift economy, Finn blurs the two by portraying the obligation that results from receiving a gift as a form of debt. Due to their already tenuous economic status and limited means of earning money, women were particularly vulnerable to this form of debt. While in some respects, Fanny appears to be functioning in the type of gift economy described by Bourdieu, wherein the terms of exchange are uncertain and “the receiver is ‘*obliged*’, expected to show his gratitude towards his benefactor,”¹⁰⁸ particularly if no counter-gift is forthcoming, the continued acknowledgement of her need to perform gratitude and Sir Thomas’s attempts to manipulate her into a marriage with Crawford by way of her indebted state suggest otherwise. *Mansfield Park* presents a far more cynical and self-conscious view of gift exchange than that which Bourdieu describes: the gift economy operates as a function of the credit economy, rather than independently of it, and is used to manipulate those who cannot reciprocate the act of gift-giving. As in Finn’s depiction, *Mansfield Park* brings the economics of gift-giving to the forefront, forcing both the characters and the readers to acknowledge the debt implied by accepting a gift.

¹⁰⁷ Finn 35.

¹⁰⁸ Bourdieu 6.

As an economic dependent, Fanny's inability to give counter-gifts is more pronounced, which places her in a constant position of obligation; Edmund reminds her of the necessity of gratitude when Fanny tells him of her wish to return the necklace to Mary Crawford: "to be returning them [Miss Crawford's attentions] with what must have something the *air* of ingratitude, though I know it could never have the *meaning*, is not in your nature I am sure."¹⁰⁹ More significantly, her gratitude to Crawford for his role in her brother's promotion can only be expressed adequately by accepting his subsequent marriage proposal, a position that Crawford, Sir Thomas, and Fanny acknowledge with varying degrees of consciousness. While Crawford merely takes advantage of her reaction to the news of William's promotion—"The opportunity was too fair, and his feelings too impatient"¹¹⁰—Sir Thomas lists explicitly the ways in which Fanny is obliged to accept him:

Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body. And he is not an acquaintance of to-day, you have known him some time. His sister, moreover, is your intimate friend, and he has been doing *that* for your brother, which I should suppose would have been almost sufficient recommendation to you, had there been no other. It is very uncertain when my interest might have got William on. He has done it already.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ MP 243.

¹¹⁰ MP 277.

¹¹¹ MP 291.

According to Sir Thomas, Fanny is obliged to accept Crawford, not only because of William's promotion, but also because of the friendship of his sister and the compliment that someone of his manners and fortune has paid her by wishing to marry her. Fanny recognises the implications of her indebted state immediately after Crawford proposes, when she rejects him, saying, "Your kindness to William makes me more obliged to you than words can express; but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must not listen to such—No, no, don't think of me."¹¹² Later, after Sir Thomas berates her for her refusal, Fanny acknowledges her own appearance of ingratitude: "Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?"¹¹³ Fanny understands the vulnerable position in which the "air," if not the "meaning," of ingratitude has placed her and fears the result; because she can only reciprocate what she has been given with proper behaviour, her refusal of a connection that would be beneficial to both her and the Bertrams indicates a refusal to acknowledge what they have done for her, as well as what Crawford has done. As much as it is a punishment, the novel portrays Sir Thomas's decision to send her to Portsmouth as an act intended to demonstrate the magnitude of her debts and manipulate her into repaying them, both by reminding her of the necessity of gratitude and of her tenuous position in his household, making the security of Crawford's offer more desirable. As the narrator informs us in the final chapter, this ploy, when combined with

¹¹² MP 278.

¹¹³ MP 295.

Crawford's persistent affection, would have been successful in time had he not been "ruined by early independence and bad domestic example."¹¹⁴

Fanny's eventual integration into the society of Mansfield Park results as much from the failure of others as her own merits. Before Fanny can be recognised as "the daughter he [Sir Thomas] wanted,"¹¹⁵ Maria and Julia must be shown to be wanting, and when the commercial model of value that Sir Thomas upholds fails him, Fanny embodies an alternate system based on personal merit that he can adopt in its place. Similarly, Fanny replaces Mary Crawford in Edmund's affections and both Mrs Norris and Mrs Grant as the mistress of Mansfield's parsonage. Acting as a substitute for that which has been found lacking places Fanny in a position where her judgement and abilities can be universally recognised: once she has been given the credit she deserves, she can give credit to others. Yet the reader sees almost nothing of Fanny's actions in her new position of power; rather, the novel concludes with the recognition of her merits and the suggestion that she has become Sir Thomas's valued confidante, in place of Mrs Norris: "the object of almost every day was to see her there [at Thornton Lacey], or to get her away from it."¹¹⁶ Fanny's only act as a creditor is to bring her sister, Susan, to Mansfield and establish her as a suitable replacement when Fanny takes on her new role as Edmund's wife. On the strength of Fanny's recommendation, reinforced by Susan's own abilities, Susan becomes a permanent fixture: "Susan could never be spared. First as a comfort to Fanny, then as an auxiliary, and last as her substitute, she was established at

¹¹⁴ MP 433.

¹¹⁵ MP 438.

¹¹⁶ MP 438.

Mansfield with every appearance of equal permanency.”¹¹⁷ With this single, decisive act, Fanny establishes herself as a far more discerning creditor than those other characters who hold the position throughout the novel. However, even as it demonstrates the shift to a non-commercial model of value, Fanny’s new position as creditor serves as a reminder that the process of determining value through credit remains. Even in a system where value is not defined by commercial considerations, the language of commerce continues to be inextricable from expressions of value, and one’s character acts as the visible, and therefore legible, representation of one’s value.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Character as Currency

The role of the credit economy in *Mansfield Park* extends beyond the complex network of credit/debt relationships in which the novel's characters find themselves entangled; the problems of value posed by a credit-based currency operate as a metaphor for the often disjointed relationship between a person's public character and his or her true character. As discussed in the previous chapter, credit in *Mansfield Park* is often—and almost as often erroneously—granted based on one's ability to appear creditworthy; however, as the novel reveals, one's public character is often at odds with and, indeed, conceals one's inner state. In *The Economy of Character*, Deidre Lynch explores the role interiority, or psychological depth, plays in Austen's novels, examining the way in which the reader's knowledge of the heroine's introspective moments through free indirect discourse places the reader at odds with many of the other characters. She particularly addresses *Persuasion*, which “frames itself as ‘a second novel’—a successor narrative to that first novel that is off the record.”¹¹⁸ She goes on to explain, “Participating in Anne's point of view means being privy to another, secret story in a way that generates a constant awareness of the lacunae in what is being narrated.”¹¹⁹ In *Mansfield Park*, this effect is compounded by the narrator's tendency to shift her focalisation between characters in the story's present, often in order to display the gap between their outward appearance and their private intentions in a negative light. As a result, there are more “secret stories” in the novel than Fanny's hidden love for Edmund, including Maria's struggle with her feelings for Crawford and her determination to marry Rushworth in spite of them, Crawford's initial determination to make Fanny fall in love with him and

¹¹⁸ Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 215.

¹¹⁹ Lynch 215.

the subsequent process by which he falls in love with her, and the incomplete shift in Sir Thomas's perspective away from a purely commercial one. Unlike *Persuasion's* single, past "secret story" that draws the reader in, *Mansfield Park* uses its plurality of secrets to reveal the process by which characters conceal their true value through self-representation. By rendering the gap between public and private character legible through free indirect discourse and the language of credit and debt, the narrator implicitly likens public character to a promissory currency that does not always accurately reflect the value of one's private character. In such a system, the written, and therefore legible, promise on the currency—or the visual promise implied by one's appearance and behaviour as indicative of character—acts as a form of assurance against the possibility that the promise will not be fulfilled. Poovey describes the reassurance of this writing in relation to the naturalisation of bank notes:

The naturalization of the credit economy was intimately tied to the mediation of value, of course, for writing that embodied, interpreted, or made (what counted as) value comprehensible helped individuals accept deferral, slippage, substitution, and obscurity, which are constitutive components of any credit economy, and abstraction, which is a feature of the capitalist system in particular.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Poovey 90.

The act of writing involved in the creation of credit instruments was therefore what made them acceptable to the general public, even after the 1797 Restriction Act allowed banks to refuse the promised exchange of bank note for bullion.

Paper currency in the form of bank notes and bills of exchange began to enter into common use in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and, by the end of the eighteenth century, paper money proliferated. In a discussion on the rapid inflation that occurred over the second half of the eighteenth century in *Women Writing About Money*, Edward Copeland cites Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole's estimation that "prices at the end of the century must have averaged 'more than a third above those of the first decade of the century' and that at the peak of the Napoleonic Wars, 'prices may have been double what they had been fifty years earlier.'" ¹²¹ But while Copeland discusses the effects of inflation in relation to the lifestyle changes it caused, particularly to "the fixed annuitant" ¹²² and women, Poovey explores the wider economic and ideological effects of the lack of adequate regulation, blaming "the impenetrability of Britain's paper currency, at least in terms of volume," ¹²³ on the lack of "regulation requiring that banks publish any part of their accounts," which, when combined with "conventions of secrecy shrouding the denominations and volume of the outstanding bills of exchange," meant that no accurate information was available. ¹²⁴ As a result, the British public remained ambivalent about credit instruments:

¹²¹ Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 19.

¹²² Copeland 22.

¹²³ Poovey 162.

¹²⁴ Poovey 161.

No credit money could be taken for granted . . . because every banknote was as subject to evaluation in relation to the notes of competing banks as every bill of exchange always was. Until some institution took control over note issue in general, and until it was possible to rank and keep track of various kinds of paper credit, all notes would compete with each other, and, as a consequence, they would remain objects of cultural scrutiny.¹²⁵

At the end of the eighteenth century and during the early years of the nineteenth century, this lack of regulation surrounding the issue of bank notes was held responsible for rapidly rising prices; contemporaries referred to the phenomenon in which paper currency appeared to be worth less than it once had been as “depreciation.”

As a relatively new occurrence in conjunction with paper money, the depreciation of paper currency led to a wider cultural unease about the ways in which value and character could be measured and determined. In the years leading up to the publication of *Mansfield Park*, both the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* devoted a number of articles to discussing the related topics of depreciated currency and bullion. In the November 1810 issue of the *Quarterly Review*, an article links the depreciation of currency to a wider problem in which traditional indicators of value and status are questioned, and even disregarded entirely:

Of the many changes which, within our own recollection, have taken place in our national manners, there is none more deplorable than the decay of that worship

¹²⁵ Poovey 162.

and reverence which our ancestors were accustomed to pay to the higher classes of society. Whether this depreciation of rank and title has been occasioned by an over issue of honours, or derived to us from some neighbouring nation, and increased by the present perturbed state of the Continent, we know not: but certain it is, that those denominations of value which, when regularly stamped on any character, were wont to become a sufficient guarantee of its weight and sterling excellence, and which enabled it to pass current in the world, are now too frequently questioned; and that a petulant disregard of authority is become the general characteristic of this age and country.¹²⁶

Like *Mansfield Park*, this article employs the language of economics metaphorically to engage with contemporary methods of distinguishing character. Stamped bullion acts as a metaphor for “rank and title”: both operate as a standard of value against which paper currency or character can be measured. The article acknowledges that these standards have ceased to hold the significance that they once did, troubling the nature of value itself; indeed, the very fact that “rank and title” can be depreciated questions their validity, as well as their stability as a unit of measurement. As when bank notes, issued indiscriminately and by various banks, replace coined bullion, the movement away from the representation of a person’s value by a hierarchically determined rank results in an unclear and potentially invalid method of representing value; both conditions result from a breakdown in authority. When Sir Thomas echoes the *Quarterly Review* article at the end of *Mansfield Park*, by “prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and

¹²⁶ “Sir John Sinclair’s Observations on the Reports of the Bullion Committee,” *Quarterly Review* 8 (1810) 518.

temper,”¹²⁷ he engages with the same problem of how to measure value, particularly since his measure of “sterling good” has shifted from “ambitious and mercenary connections” to “principle and temper” and “domestic felicity.”¹²⁸ As a result of this movement, the novel accepts tentatively what the article shies away from: that reconfiguring cultural conceptions of value can provide respite for those who have been unfairly oppressed by the traditional use of social status to determine a person’s value. Although the novel is by no means embracing a view of value as unfixed and arbitrary, it engages with contemporary discussions about the nature of value to offer an alternative to the idea of personal value as measured by rank, based on individual merit and accumulated through education.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, the metaphor of characters as currency often takes the form of characters functioning as a metonym for the size of their fortune or income. Maria Ward’s £7,000 and Mary Crawford’s £20,000 are the two most prominent examples, but Mr Rushworth’s annual income of £12,000 is well established, and there are numerous other examples in which characters are more vaguely labelled as having a fortune. By contrast, Henry Crawford has inherited the estate of Everingham, termed “a good estate in Norfolk,”¹²⁹ which is later revealed to be worth “four thousand a year.”¹³⁰ *When* the novel reveals a particular character’s financial worth becomes as important to our reading of them as their financial status. The novel establishes the income of Mr Rushworth’s estate, Sotherton Court, immediately and as a defining trait, when Edmund muses, “If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very

¹²⁷ MP 437.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ MP 39.

¹³⁰ MP111.

stupid fellow.”¹³¹ By contrast, Henry Crawford’s income is only glanced at once, several chapters after he has been introduced and his other qualities have been well established. Although Rushworth’s precise income is also only mentioned once, its location in the text makes it more memorable and therefore more significant, particularly because it indicates that his wealth alone makes him desirable company. Compared to Rushworth’s, Crawford’s income is middling, yet, as Maria and Julia’s antics reveal, he is the more desirable of the two. By distancing Crawford from his income, the novel highlights his other characteristics and Rushworth’s inferiority, thereby inflating his worth beyond its usual market value. As a result, the reader understands the irony when Rushworth’s mother responds to Mrs Norris’ revealing Crawford’s income with the dismissive remark, “Very well.—Those who have not more must be satisfied with what they have.”¹³² Wealth is not the only indicator of a character’s value, and Crawford’s wit and manners make those around him consider him more valuable than Rushworth. Nevertheless, events reveal that Crawford’s manners do not indicate his true character, just as Rushworth’s income fails to indicate his; style, particularly in the case of the Crawfords, does not indicate substance.

Whereas Sotherton and Everingham have clearly defined incomes, the income of Mansfield Park and the financial value of most of its inhabitants remains undefined. Based on the information that Maria Ward’s £7,000 is “at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim,”¹³³ Sir Thomas’s income can be calculated at about £5,000 per year at the time of his marriage, but whether or not this includes his West Indian

¹³¹ MP 38.

¹³² MP 111.

¹³³ MP 5.

property—and whether “the Antigua estate[‘s] . . . poor returns”¹³⁴ affect his income negatively—remains unclear. However, about twenty years after Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram’s marriage, Mary Crawford’s £20,000 may not be enough to entice the eldest son of a baronet; whether or not this discrepancy indicates an increase in the income of Mansfield Park over the intervening years, or is the result of inflation or a shortage of inheriting sons remains unaddressed by the novel. Unlike Mary Crawford, neither Maria nor Julia Bertram appear to have a settled portion; rather, such a determination seems dependent upon the income of their future husbands.¹³⁵ The ambiguity created by their unfixed monetary value suggests a mindset in which their worth will be defined against that of their husbands. However, Julia’s elopement with Yates forgoes the issue of the portion before the marriage, leaving it to Sir Thomas to make financial arrangements for his daughter at his own discretion. Yet, like Julia, Yates is an indeterminate quantity; the novel comes closest to revealing his income when Sir Thomas finds “his estate rather more, and his debts much less, than he had feared.”¹³⁶ Without knowing Yates’s monetary value, Julia’s cannot be determined. The financial malleability that surrounds Mansfield Park and its inhabitants emphasises the problems with which the novel engages about defining the value of people. Although the Bertram are undoubtedly a wealthy, landed family, the absence in the text of a clearly defined income, the apparent financial instability of Sir Thomas’s West Indian properties, and the “spacious, modern-

¹³⁴ MP 29.

¹³⁵ Based on Lloyd’s statement that “in general a man could expect his bride’s portion to be twice his annual income” (60), Maria Bertram’s portion at her marriage to Rushworth can be estimated to be £24,000.

¹³⁶ MP 429.

built house”¹³⁷ work together to undercut the sense of importance that the family cultivates.

But even in those cases where a character has a clearly defined fortune, the implications of their wealth may be skewed. Much like Rushworth’s income of £12,000, Mary Crawford’s £20,000 is expressed in terms that indicate it to be an impressive sum, but while Rushworth’s income places him in the category of the landed elite, Mary Crawford’s £20,000 seems more ambiguous. Rushworth’s income comes from his estate and, as such, has a stability that Mary’s portion lacks; Mary’s £20,000 and the income that she derives from its interest exist in the realm of commerce and are vulnerable to loss of value through inflation. Stewart points out that “commerce in the eighteenth century, like fortune in earlier ages, was represented as a feminine force, unreal, imaginary, and lacking the solidity of real estate,”¹³⁸ which indicates a clear (and gendered) hierarchy of wealth: the stability of land made it more desirable, and therefore more valuable, than money, regardless of the monetary value attached to each. Habakkuk outlines the ways in which this hierarchy affected young women of fortune on the marriage market:

The rules governing their [younger sons’] marriage ensured that this shortage of husbands of the appropriate social class was felt most severely among the daughters of the lesser gentry. The only daughter of a great landed family with a portion of £20,000 would expect to marry the eldest son of a similar family who, even if he had an income at the lower end of the range of his group, of, say,

¹³⁷ MP 45.

¹³⁸ Maaja A. Stewart, *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen’s Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 32.

£10,000 p.a., would have no difficulty in settling on her a jointure of £2,000 p.a. She might also marry a member of the greater squirearchy if he were ambitious to marry into the aristocracy and were prepared to offer a higher than average proportion of his income as jointure; or if she were prepared to accept a below-average jointure in order to obtain a husband. But the lower the income and standing of the family, the narrower the choice, until the daughters of the lesser gentry might find it impossible to find husbands from landed families.¹³⁹

The size of Mary Crawford's fortune suggests that her expectations ought to be in line with what Habakkuk describes: the eldest son, heir to an estate with an annual income of at least £10,000. Even her willingness to settle for Tom Bertram, the heir to an estate that appears to be worth half of the ideal, does not seem improbable. However, Mrs Grant's assessment that, "the eldest son of a Baronet was not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds, with all the elegance and accomplishments which Mrs Grant foresaw in her,"¹⁴⁰ suggests that Mary would be marrying up, rather than settling, which reminds the reader that, despite possessing a portion comparable with that of "[t]he only daughter of a great landed family," Mary Crawford does not belong to the upper gentry; her brother's estate, which was presumably inherited from their father, is worth £4,000 p.a., which is a third of Rushworth's estate and about £1,000 p.a. less than the presumed income of Mansfield. As a result of her lack of clear aristocratic conventions, Mary's value in the marriage market is somewhat more ambiguous than Habakkuk's calculations account for,

¹³⁹ Habakkuk 166-67.

¹⁴⁰ MP 40.

which Mary seems aware of when she muses on the possibility of marrying Tom Bertram:

Miss Crawford soon felt, that he and his situation might do. She looked about her with due consideration, and found almost every thing in his favour, a park, a real park five miles round, a spacious modern-built house, so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen's seats in the kingdom, and wanting only to be completely new furnished—pleasant sisters, a quiet mother, and an agreeable man himself—with the advantage of being tied up from much gaming at present, by a promise to his father, and of being Sir Thomas hereafter. It might do very well; she believed she should accept him; and she began accordingly to interest herself a little about the horse which he had to run at the B—— races.¹⁴¹

The standard that Mary relies on to examine Tom Bertram as a potential husband appear purely mercenary in this instance. Although the repeated use of the conditional indicates hesitation—Tom Bertram “and his situation might do”—her appreciation of Mansfield Park goes beyond “due consideration”; she slips out of the mode of cool observation, betraying genuine enthusiasm with the repetition in the phrase, “a park, a real park.” While her decision to accept him seems tentative, her excitement at the prospect of becoming Mansfield’s future mistress and the extent of her admiration for the estate itself shows that she finds the prospective match more desirable than the apparent reluctance of

¹⁴¹ MP 45-46.

her verb choices would suggest. Unlike Mrs Grant, who considers “the eldest son of a Baronet . . . not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds,” Mary Crawford does not directly acknowledge the possibility that she will be marrying up, but neither does she consider it a marriage beneath her; as her covetous response to the Mansfield house and grounds suggests, she desires the lifestyle and permanency that would accompany marrying a member of the landed gentry more than the members of the landed gentry desire her £20,000. Thus, while her fortune might allow her to expect a larger income, her lack of aristocratic connections has a negative impact on her prospects, forcing her to rely on “her beauty and her 20,000*l.*” alone.

As the narrator notes in the novel’s opening passage, “there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them,”¹⁴² a statement that Mary Crawford appears to understand without objection. In a marriage market suffering from “a shortage of husbands of the appropriate social class,” the cost of marriage for women and their families increases, resulting in a depreciation of portions that would have been more than adequate in previous years. Moreover, Habakkuk also points out that in the early nineteenth century, conventions in the settlement of marriage portions were shifting: “Early in the century £20,000 for a daughter was quite a common portion in the settlements of the wealthiest landed families, where there was issue male. There was no evident increase by the 1770s.”¹⁴³ He goes on to examine the increase of portions in the early nineteenth century, citing multiple cases in which wealthy landowners provided portions of £30,000 to their daughters:

¹⁴² MP 5.

¹⁴³ Habakkuk 138.

. . . there was no case for a general increase in provision for wives and younger children made in *new* settlements until around 1800. It was commonly alleged in the agricultural depression of the 1820s and 1830s that the difficulties of landowners were aggravated by the settlements made in the period of high and rising rents before 1815 and the going rate for portions fixed in these years appears to have been higher in absolute terms (though not necessarily in proportion to rental income) than in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁴

Here, the fluctuating value of currency manifests in the form of rising rents, rather than the depreciation of paper money, but the idea that money became somehow worth less remains. By the time of *Mansfield Park*'s publication, a portion of £20,000, although still substantial, would no longer have been considered as extensive as the emphasis placed on it suggests. By contrast, the heroine of Austen's subsequent novel, Emma Woodhouse, possesses a fortune of £30,000, a fact with which the reader is well acquainted, but which does not receive the same emphasis by the narrator, despite Emma's own repeated, sometimes veiled, references to it. The narrator's references to the precise sum of Mary Crawford's fortune create an inflated sense of her worth by implying that her fortune is worth mentioning; however, although Mary Crawford often makes observations about the fortunes of other people, she rarely mentions her own, even in instances of free indirect discourse. The emphasis on Mary Crawford's £20,000 is almost entirely the narrator's work, resulting in an exaggeration of snobbish tendencies that Mary herself exhibits ironically and primarily in jest, or at least the appearance of jest. Mary does not

¹⁴⁴ Habakkuk 139.

contribute overtly to the novel's ironically inflated sense of her worth; rather, through her acute awareness of the economics of marriage, she displays a nuanced understanding of her own value on the marriage market.

Rather than establishing Mary Crawford as a possible marriage partner for the sons of "the wealthiest landed families," her fortune places her among the more vague "dashing representatives, or idle heir apparents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her 20,000*l.*,"¹⁴⁵ and who fail to captivate her sufficiently, not because of their lack of wealth or their lack of interest, but because she fails to find "any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head."¹⁴⁶ The presence of young men "at the command" of her wealth and beauty indicates that her difficulty in finding a satisfactory husband does not appear to be the result of financial considerations or a lack of prospects, as much as her own reluctance to marry without affection; her time at Mansfield has altered her from the woman who stated, early in the novel, "every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage."¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, her continued willingness to search for a husband suggests that her opinion has not changed, even if her definition of "advantage" has; although she is "perfectly resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again,"¹⁴⁸ her standard has shifted from one based almost entirely on her potential husband's financial situation to a desire for "the domestic happiness she had . . . learnt to estimate" at Mansfield. As a result, Mary Crawford finds herself caught between

¹⁴⁵ MP 436.

¹⁴⁶ MP 436.

¹⁴⁷ MP 41.

¹⁴⁸ MP 436.

two systems of value, unable to find a potential husband able to live up to her high standards. Her ability to judge both the commercial and personal value of others prevents her from passing current in a society where “her beauty, and her 20,000*l.*” are the only indicators of her worth.

However, the metaphor of characters as currency goes beyond the use of a character as being represented by a particular monetary value. While the novel often appears to emphasise the monetary value of a character more than his or her other traits, the placement of emphasis is often ironic and used to denote a deficiency elsewhere. As in the implicit comparison drawn between Mr Rushworth and Henry Crawford, as Maria’s two love interests, personal qualities often outweigh the advantages of wealth; Crawford’s wit and charisma help to create the liveliness of the Mansfield circle, rendering him necessary, while Rushworth’s insipidity causes him to be sidelined and occasionally mocked. The importance of personal qualities is heightened when one compares Crawford to the comparatively impoverished younger son, Edmund Bertram. Although Crawford’s social graces in addition to his fortune make him valuable, his failure to behave appropriately causes him to be expelled from the society of the Bertrams. By contrast, Edmund possesses moral steadiness, but at the cost of style—early in the novel, Mary compares him unfavourably with his brother: “*He* [Tom Bertram] had been much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund.”¹⁴⁹ Likewise, the “liveliness and gallantry” that Tom Bertram shares with Crawford exists in place of a strong sense of morality. However, while the novel tempts the reader to draw a straightforward distinction between the worldliness that renders a person desirable and

¹⁴⁹ MP 45.

the possession of strong principles, it places the characters on a continuum, and requires them to have some degree of social grace in order for their morality to be conveyed effectively—an ability that both Fanny and Edmund, to varying degrees, lack.

The novel emphasises the importance of both moral and social importance most strongly through its heroine, Fanny Price, who begins the novel as a marginalised character, with no economic value and no social currency beyond her usefulness in tending to Lady Bertram and being “occasionally an acceptable companion” to Maria and Julia when “their pleasures and schemes were sometimes of a nature to make a third very useful, especially when that third was of an obliging, yielding temper.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, for much of the novel, Fanny’s “obliging, yielding temper” is her only defining feature to those around her and thus the entirety of her value to them. Her social capital begins to increase after Maria’s marriage, when Julia visits London with the Rushworths. As the only young woman remaining in the Mansfield household, she becomes the recipient of attention that formerly belonged to her cousins, including invitations to dine at the parsonage, Crawford’s flirtations, and being “placed above so many elegant young women”¹⁵¹ when Sir Thomas holds a ball in her honour. Her increase in social value culminates with Crawford’s proposal, an appreciation that is complicated by her refusal.

When Sir Thomas reacts to Fanny’s rejection of Crawford with disappointment that she is not “peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all

¹⁵⁰ MP 18.

¹⁵¹ MP 254.

common offence,”¹⁵² he signals his belief that she does not embody the “obliging, yielding temper” that first made her valuable to the inhabitants of Mansfield, and that would enable him to use her as the currency in a marriage transaction that would bring him further desirable connections. Fanny’s almost hyperbolic reaction to his words illustrates her understanding of her expendable position and the limitations of her value: by failing to maintain the temperament that simultaneously marks her gratitude and makes her useful to them, she has jeopardised her place in the household. Yet even as her rejection of Crawford’s proposal has decreased her value in Sir Thomas’s opinion, the very fact that Crawford has proposed to her increases her consequence in the eyes of other members of the household. While Mrs Norris reacts to this increase with vicious bitterness that Fanny has been chosen over her cousins, Lady Bertram takes it as an indication of traits in Fanny that have gone unrecognised:

She [Lady Bertram] had been a beauty, and a prosperous beauty, all her life; and beauty and wealth were all that excited her respect. To know Fanny to be sought in marriage by a man of fortune, raised her, therefore, very much in her opinion. By convincing her that Fanny *was* very pretty, which she had been doubting about before, and that she would be advantageously married, it made her feel a sort of credit in calling her niece.¹⁵³

While Fanny herself has not changed as a result of Crawford’s proposal, her value and the type of value she represents has: it demonstrates to Sir Thomas that Fanny is less

¹⁵² MP 294.

¹⁵³ MP 307.

biddable than he had previously thought, provides Lady Bertram with the affirmation that Fanny qualifies as a beauty, and confirms to Mrs Norris that Fanny has begun to usurp Maria's and Julia's places in the household.

Fanny's lack of control over the way her value is perceived is perhaps best represented by Crawford's reaction to her refusal: "He was in love, very much in love; and it was a love which, operating on an active, sanguine spirit, of more warmth than delicacy, made her affection appear of greater consequence, because it was withheld, and determined him to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing her to love him."¹⁵⁴ His unwillingness to be deterred by her vehement refusals baffles Fanny, "who had known too much opposition all her life, to find any charm in it,"¹⁵⁵ and she finds herself unable to persuade him otherwise because he understands her value beyond her recently acquired social currency:

He would not despair: he would not desist. He had every well-grounded reason for solid attachment; he knew her to have all the worth that could justify the warmest hopes of lasting happiness with her; her conduct at this very time, by speaking the disinterestedness and delicacy of her character (qualities which he believed most rare indeed), was of a sort to heighten all his wishes, and confirm all his resolutions.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ MP 301.

¹⁵⁵ MP 302.

¹⁵⁶ MP 301.

Through her protests, Fanny proves her worth to him further by confirming that she possesses those qualities that he has ascribed to her and, as a result, unwittingly strengthens his resolve. Furthermore, he is the first to pinpoint the source of Fanny's particular value: the rarity of her "disinterestedness and delicacy of . . . character." The commercial connotations of "interest," both in the sense of the pursuit of personal gain and in the sense of the interest accrued on an investment, place Fanny, through her "disinterestedness," in direct opposition to the financial model of value to which many of the other characters subscribe. Her refusal to accept Crawford demonstrates Fanny's lack of self-interest; it displays her unwillingness to increase her social and economic value by investing herself against her moral inclinations and her grave reservations about Crawford. In a sense, Crawford determines Fanny's "price," by altering the way that those around her measure her value, by recognising the qualities that make her valuable, and by claiming to know what she has set her price at: "he who sees and worships your merit the strongest, who loves you most devotedly."¹⁵⁷ Because it provides the novel with an opportunity to articulate Fanny's value directly, Crawford's proposal becomes integral to the reader's understanding of Fanny's merit.

However, much as Fanny's perceived value shifts as a result of Crawford's proposal, Crawford's value increases as a result of his affection for Fanny, by proving him to be capable of "ardent, disinterested love."¹⁵⁸ When discussing Crawford's proposal with her, Edmund remarks, "And I must say, that its [his regard] being for you, has raised him the highest honour; it shews his proper estimation of the blessing of domestic happiness, and pure attachment. It proves him unspoilt by his uncle. It proves

¹⁵⁷ MP 318.

¹⁵⁸ MP 303.

him, in short, every thing that I had been used to wish to believe him, and feared he was not.”¹⁵⁹ Through his love for Fanny, Crawford appears to be in a position where the credit granted to him by the Bertrams upon first acquaintance will be repaid by this proof of his sound judgement, which seeks to replicate a measure of the “domestic happiness” that defines Mansfield Park to those who live on its fringes. But while Crawford’s love for Fanny demonstrates his ability to measure value soundly, thereby increasing his value in Edmund’s estimation, that increase in value proves to be a temporary fluctuation; his worth becomes less than ever when he elopes with Maria, revealing his lack of principles. Like her brother, Mary Crawford’s value increases somewhat as a result of her genuine affection for Fanny: when describing his final meeting with her to Fanny, Edmund tells her, “She went on, began to talk of you;—yes, then she began to talk of you, regretting, as well she might, the loss of such a—. There she spoke very rationally. But she always has done justice to you.”¹⁶⁰ Mary Crawford’s acknowledgement of Fanny’s value proves the only element of her “blunted delicacy and . . . corrupted, vitiated mind”¹⁶¹ that can partially redeem her to Edmund, and even there he expresses his belief that Mary’s affection is itself corrupted:

She spoke of you with high praise and warm affection; yet even here there was alloy, a dash of evil—for in the midst of it she could exclaim “Why would she not have him? It is all her fault. Simple girl!—I shall never forgive her. Had she

¹⁵⁹ MP 325.

¹⁶⁰ MP 422-23.

¹⁶¹ MP 423.

accepted him as she ought, they might now have been on the point of marriage, and Henry would have been too happy and too busy to want any other object.”¹⁶²

Mary’s unwillingness to blame her brother entirely and the glib deflection of blame onto Fanny and, elsewhere, onto Maria, display to Edmund the extent of her amorality and her unawareness of it. The ability to recognise and appreciate the “domestic happiness” Fanny represents indicates an understanding of the way value operates in the novel, but does not necessarily indicate value itself. Thus, when Crawford tells Fanny, “It is not by equality of merit that you can be won . . . It is he who sees and worships your merit the strongest, who loves you most devotedly, that has the best right to a return,”¹⁶³ he demonstrates his understanding of Fanny’s value, while acknowledging his own lack. However, despite the disparity between his value and Fanny’s, Crawford believes that he deserves her on the basis of the strength of his affections alone, a line of thinking that remains undisputed: “His affection had already done something. Her influence over him, had already given him some influence over her. Would he have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained.”¹⁶⁴ Edmund and, to a lesser extent, the Crawfords place Fanny in a position where she functions as a standard of value; they measure themselves and others against her, in much the same way that the narrator does.

However, in “Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*,” Margaret Kirkham points to the irony that the novel develops through Crawford’s

¹⁶² MP 423.

¹⁶³ MP 318.

¹⁶⁴ MP 433.

expressions of love, particularly his claim that she has “some touches of the angel”¹⁶⁵ in her; Kirkham reminds us that, in Austen, “only fools or villains make this analogy.”¹⁶⁶ She contrasts Crawford’s “deeply sentimental” understanding of Fanny as “innocent, virtuous, tractable, and crying out for protective love,”¹⁶⁷ with Edmund’s practical attempts to improve her health: “[He] is never shown as encouraging Fanny in her partly self-imposed fragility and timidity, although he is kind to her when he observes her genuine tendency to tire easily. He gets her a horse, encourages her to ride regularly, and tells her to speak up for herself, even to her uncle.”¹⁶⁸ Whereas Crawford relies on the language “used to define the defects of the more complex anti-heroes”¹⁶⁹ to describe his love for Fanny, Edmund’s treatment of Fanny as a rational being marks him as “[t]he true hero.”¹⁷⁰ Although Crawford’s “disinterested” love shows him to be more valuable than he initially appears to Fanny, Edmund’s interest in Fanny manifests in such a way as benefits her, thereby proving him worthy. Thus, the Crawfords are placed in a paradoxical situation, wherein Crawford’s and, by extension, Mary’s ability to recognise that Fanny has value redeems them, even as their failure to interpret and express that value correctly contributes to their condemnation.

Fanny’s determination to avoid marriage to a man she does not love, despite the clear financial advantage, stands in sharp contrast to Maria’s refusal to renounce her

¹⁶⁵ MP 318.

¹⁶⁶ Margaret Kirkham, “Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*,” *Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 118.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Kirkham 124.

¹⁶⁹ Kirkham 119.

¹⁷⁰ Kirkham 124.

engagement to Rushworth, despite her contempt for him, even when Sir Thomas provides her with the opportunity:

Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield most sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit. Her mind was quite determined and varied not.¹⁷¹

Largely motivated by anger towards Crawford, Maria views the “liberty” and “fortune and consequence” that a marriage to Rushworth would bring her as an adequate alternative to love—or, at the very least, a fitting revenge. However, as her later elopement with Crawford shows, her marriage does not provide the degree of independence that she craves, or enough satisfaction to outweigh her love for Crawford. Already, her sense of being restrained becomes clear through the use of free indirect discourse; the swift, decisive phrases are also abrupt and contained, mirroring how Maria has been trapped by her own determination. By situating Fanny as Maria’s unwilling competition for Crawford, the novel draws an implicit comparison between Maria’s desire for liberty and Fanny’s need for order and enclosure, particularly the order that Mansfield Park provides.

¹⁷¹ MP 187-88.

During the novel's denouement, after Maria's adultery, Tom's illness, and Julia's elopement have rendered Mansfield's ordered existence chaotic, Fanny's desire for order gives her the ability to create it. Upon her return from Portsmouth, she is greeted by her aunt with uncharacteristic urgency: "Fanny had scarcely passed the solemn-looking servants, when Lady Bertram came from the drawing room to meet her; came with no indolent step; and, falling on her neck, said, "Dear Fanny! now I shall be comfortable."¹⁷² Despite the reflections that cause Fanny to feel that, "the knowledge of what must be enduring there [at Mansfield], invested even the house, modern, airy, and well situated as it was, with a melancholy aspect,"¹⁷³ the narrator cannot help poking fun at Lady Bertram's sudden lack of indolence and her desire for a return to comfort above all else; nevertheless, Fanny's value at the end of the novel results from the comfort she provides through her ability to restore order, as much as it does from the shift that Sir Thomas and his family undergo, from valuing "ambitious and mercenary connections" to "the sterling good of principle and temper."¹⁷⁴ Fanny's return from Portsmouth coincides with her vindication for refusing Henry Crawford, as well as the beginning of her role as a fully integrated member of the Mansfield household. Just as Fanny does not change, her actions remain much the same as they have throughout the novel: she acts as a companion to Lady Bertram and a confidant to Edmund, "returning to every former office, with more than former zeal."¹⁷⁵ However, where before it was dismissed, Fanny's role as a comforter takes on new importance in the aftermath of events that have deprived the family of their comfortable existence and given Mansfield Park "a melancholy

¹⁷² MP 415.

¹⁷³ MP 415.

¹⁷⁴ MP 437.

¹⁷⁵ MP 417.

aspect.” Her ability to create comfort and order manifests itself finally in her marriage to Edmund, where their mutual desire for “domestic life” and “country pleasures” allows “their home . . . [to be] the home of affection and comfort.”¹⁷⁶

The stability offered by the moral, merit-based mode of value that Fanny represents is at odds with the superficial and fluctuating values that surround her, just as “the home of affection and comfort” that she and Edmund create, first at Thornton Lacey and later at the Mansfield parsonage, contrasts with the domestic chaos of Fanny’s Portsmouth home and the oppressively enforced quiet represented by Mansfield Park. Unlike Mrs Norris, Fanny does not view her marriage and the style of living that accompanies it as inferior to her expectations. As such, the novel draws an implicit comparison between the “affection and comfort” that defines the parsonage under its new tenants and the “strict line of economy”¹⁷⁷ that characterises Mrs Norris’s time there. Fanny’s ability to recognise the value of her husband’s income, and as a consequence spend it effectively, marks her ability to participate harmoniously in her daily economic and interpersonal transactions. Furthermore, unlike those characters whose worth became inflated as a result of their misrepresentative public character, Fanny’s value does not depreciate by the end of the novel; rather, it appreciates the more she is appreciated.

¹⁷⁶ MP 439.

¹⁷⁷ MP 10.

Chapter 3: Character as Commodity

Mansfield Park's representation of character as a form of currency implies an exchange of value that permeates even the minutest daily interactions: currency acts as a measure of value, but always in relation to what it has the power to obtain or purchase. Through its portrayal of characters as currency, the novel represents interactions as transactions, a viewpoint expressed explicitly by both Mary Crawford and Sir Thomas on more than one occasion. But while Sir Thomas uses the word "transaction" vaguely, seeming to refer to any number of situations "in business, or in chat,"¹⁷⁸ Mary Crawford uses it only once, early in the novel and in direct reference to marriage, in a speech about the impossibility of understanding or appropriately valuing one's potential spouse prior to marriage:

With all due respect to such of the present company as chance to be married, my dear Mrs. Grant, 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.¹⁷⁹

In this characteristically cynical speech, Mary represents marriage as an exchange wherein either or both parties assess value inaccurately, as a result of a (potentially deliberate) misrepresentation of "one particular advantage in the connection, or

¹⁷⁸ MP 432.

¹⁷⁹ MP 44.

accomplishment or good quality in the person.”¹⁸⁰ As with a credit-based currency, value is displaced and the desired object (in this case, a spouse) is obtained with a representation of value in the form of character, which may or may not be an accurate reflection of a person’s value. Mary makes a point of describing the marriage transaction as double-sided: either, or both, of the parties can be “taken in.” According to this model, marriage consists of a transaction, wherein each party uses his or her character—and related attributes, such as fortune—to obtain a desirable spouse. Although Mrs Grant dismisses her sister’s cynicism with good humour, Mary Crawford’s speech sets up a view of marriage that pervades the rest of the novel, in which an equal exchange of value occurs rarely, if ever. The novel does little to counteract this view in the marriages it represents: the opening paragraph makes much of the financial inequalities between Sir Thomas and Maria Ward, but the novel does not suggest that she compensates for her financial lack in her role as Lady Bertram. Rather, her sister, Mrs Norris, seems more involved in the running of the household. Similarly, although Maria Bertram’s marriage to Rushworth appears to be financially equitable, Rushworth is undoubtedly “taken in” in the matter of Maria’s character. Only the final marriage between Fanny and Edmund offers a counterpoint to the idea of marriage as transaction, in its description of their union as an accumulation of value rather than an exchange. However, the difficulty of representing marriage without resorting to commercial—and therefore transactional—language means that the narrator must summarise the courtship narrative that leads up to Edmund’s proposal and displace the transactional aspect onto Sir Thomas in order to challenge the transactional model of marriage effectively.

¹⁸⁰ MP 44.

The idea of marriage as a transaction complicates the novel's metaphor of character as currency: for a "sale" to occur, currency must be exchanged for a commodity. However, the line between currency and commodity is not always distinct. Stamped bullion functioned as a currency because gold and silver were valuable commodities, and much of the anxiety surrounding the use of paper money came from the fact that paper was viewed as less intrinsically valuable than the precious metals that had formerly comprised currency: paper currency was "the substitution of a very cheap instrument for a very dear one."¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, the promise of value inscribed on bank notes and bills of exchange made them desirable objects. In order to be accepted in lieu of gold or silver, paper currency had to be considered equally valuable; on a basic level, in order for an object to be considered currency, it must first be desirable as a commodity, either because of its usefulness or the symbolic weight it carries as a luxury item. In *Mansfield Park*, the role of character as a form of currency means that character also acts as a commodity, particularly in the double-sided marriage transaction, which consists of two simultaneous "sales," wherein each party commodifies him or herself and uses the apparent value of his or her character as currency, in a process similar to bartering. In such a system, determining the value of one's character depends on reputation and the perception of others; like paper currency, character is an unstable representation of the value of a person, not an inherently valuable or useful object that can be exchanged for another. This representative nature of character is what allows for the deception Mary describes. Although in *Mansfield Park*, the deceptiveness of public character is not gender specific, the instability of self-representation was linked closely to women in the

¹⁸¹ "Publications on the Depreciation of Paper Currency" 351-52.

form of the feminisation of commercial discourse in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse, as Maaja A. Stewart notes in *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions*:

The consciousness of potential loss creates a kind of “commodity self,” drawn as early as the seventeenth century by Thomas Hobbes. Such a self is seen as an unstable exchange value confirmed only by the presence of others who would be willing to invest in or speculate on its reality (Agnew 11). Like the stock market, the marriage market exchanges “unreal” properties: women live in the realm of speculation, expectations, and credit, where worth is conferred not by unchanging and dependable valuation but by the power of radically changeable and undependable opinion.

Austen’s heroines attempt to remain stable moral protagonists while using and becoming themselves unstable and changeable currency . . . Fanny’s own price can rise and fall with similar arbitrariness.¹⁸²

By drawing her readers’ attention to the eighteenth-century discourse that associated women with the instability of finance and the stock market, Stewart explores the implications of women’s characters acting as both promissory currency, or the means to buy, and commodity, or what is bought, simultaneously. Their status as “unreal properties” likens them to investments whose value becomes realised upon marriage. Yet Austen examines what happens when promissory currency in the form of character becomes a commodity, and therefore an end in itself. The novel literalises this process in

¹⁸² Stewart 33.

its depiction of Mrs Norris, who hoards money in the same way that she hoards pheasant's eggs from Sotherton or the green baize curtain from the aborted performance of *Lovers' Vows*. However, while Mrs Norris finds some use for the eggs and the curtain, the money that she endeavours to save never proves useful, beyond the satisfaction it gives her: "Had there been a family to provide for, Mrs. Norris might never have saved her money; but having no care of that kind, there was nothing to impede her frugality or lessen the comfort of making a yearly addition to an income which they had never lived up to."¹⁸³ In hoarding money with no intention of spending it, Mrs Norris displays a view of money as an end in itself, not as the means of acquiring something else. Mrs Norris's hoarding demonstrates a warped understanding of value that the narrator pokes fun at repeatedly; the disappointment of Mrs Norris's hopes in the marriage market, as a result of "having married on a narrower income than she had been used to look forward to,"¹⁸⁴ has led to an inability to spend that which she does have, under the pretence of setting aside her savings for her (Bertram) nieces to inherit. Acquiring currency for its own sake ignores its purpose as something to be invested towards future improvement.

The process through which Mrs Norris transforms currency into a commodity and the improper understanding of value that she demonstrates as a result is mirrored by Maria's choice of husband. Maria, along with a number of the novel's other characters, is aware of Rushworth's many deficiencies, yet she remains engaged to him because she understands that being the wife of a wealthy and respectable landowner will allow her the greater freedom she desires; she recognises Rushworth's social currency (and his monetary worth), which she ranks as more important than his lack of any more personal

¹⁸³ MP 10.

¹⁸⁴ MP 10.

graces. Yet it is Maria's ability to represent her character as desirable that enables her to attract Rushworth and, ultimately, obtain him as a husband. Thus, character acts simultaneously as the currency that enables the novel's characters—especially women—to acquire their desired social position, often but not exclusively through marriage, and as the commodity that a prospective husband wishes to acquire. In order to be desirable objects on the marriage market, women must be able to obtain *and* use their character as a bargaining chip in the marriage transaction, while simultaneously marketing it, a process that the novel critiques by offering a foil to those characters that participate actively in self-commodification in the form of its heroine, Fanny Price.

However, Mary Crawford's description of marriage understands the institution of marriage as more than a straightforward sale: both men and women are commodified, as a result of their personal attributes or their wealth, and both use these qualities as currency to attract potential spouses. Although Stewart focuses on female commodification, she confirms Mary Crawford's opinions and discusses their cultural implications:

The courtship plot echoes the transactional experiences of the market economy. Like the realm of finances, the realm of courtship always projects real value into the future, while looking at the present experience as something that needs to be transformed into a greater value. In the present time experience and desire remain separate: only the unknown future promises their "natural" convergence . . . Both the stock market and the marriage market thus remain necessarily unstable, unpredictable, and incomplete. They are markedly inscribed by forces of

contingency while idealizing a future state as offering closure and fulfilling expectations.¹⁸⁵

The promise of “real value” that is obtained upon marriage suggests a fluidity of value in unmarried women that ceases with the conclusion of the courtship narrative. As a result of the marriage transaction, women exit the realm of “perpetual gambling with potential profit and loss.”¹⁸⁶ But the courtship plot concludes with the act of marriage, at the moment where the potential for “closure and fulfil[ed] expectations” is at its height, ignoring the fact that stability as a result of marriage is not a certainty. Rather, marriage signifies a movement into a different economy, with its own risks, wherein the woman may have even less agency. Edward Copeland illustrates this point in *Women Writing About Money* when he cites an example with which Austen would have been familiar: “In 1813, Jane Austen’s near neighbours, the Harwoods, suffered an appalling fate,” as the result of Mr Harwood’s excessive borrowing and mortgaging, unbeknownst to his family. Upon his death, his widow and sister were left entirely dependent on his heir, due to the fact that he had spent his sister’s portion and left his widow nothing.¹⁸⁷ Austen represents a similar situation in *Persuasion* in the impoverished widow, Mrs Smith, who is prevented from acquiring the income of her husband’s estate in the West Indies by her negligent trustee, Mr Elliot. Less dramatically, Mrs Norris’s marriage at the opening of *Mansfield Park* represents disappointed expectations in the form of “a narrower income

¹⁸⁵ Stewart 32.

¹⁸⁶ Stewart 32.

¹⁸⁷ Copeland 17.

than she had been used to look forward to”¹⁸⁸: “at the end of half a dozen years, [she] found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune.”¹⁸⁹ As a result of her disappointments in the marriage market, Mrs Norris becomes bitter and miserly, allowing the “very strict line of economy”¹⁹⁰ that she fancies necessary to become a point of pleasure that compensates for the lack of fortune brought about by her marriage.

By contrast, *Mansfield Park* demonstrates how men’s value is defined with greater solidity, particularly if they are landowners, by placing emphasis on their income. Simultaneously, the novel recognises and seeks to correct the inequalities engendered by the marriage market: in an inversion of Mrs Norris’s courtship narrative, Fanny rejects Henry Crawford, despite his status as a wealthy landowner, because of his character, and eventually marries the comparatively impoverished younger son, Edmund. By choosing the fate that Mrs Norris is forced to accept, Fanny confirms the non-commercial understanding of value that she first exhibits when she rejects Henry. More importantly, she refuses to accept the appearance of value in the form of character over real value in the form of moral principles. The narrator supports the value system to which Fanny subscribes, particularly when she objects overtly to the gendered double standard that allows Henry to emerge from his adulterous affair with Maria relatively unscathed:

In this world, the punishment is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly

¹⁸⁸ MP 10.

¹⁸⁹ MP 5.

¹⁹⁰ MP 10.

consider a man of sense, like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret—vexation that must rise sometimes to reproach, and regret to wretchedness—in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved.¹⁹¹

In comparison to the loss of status from which Maria suffers, Henry's social capital does not diminish as a result of this revelation of his character; rather, his punishment must come from his own regrets and the way in which individuals measure his worth. The inhabitants of Mansfield, especially Fanny, and his own conscience must be the source of his "reproach" and "wretchedness," rather than any broader social ostracisation, and his value in the marriage market remains fixed at £4,000 p.a.

Only Fanny and Edmund's marriage seems to stand in direct opposition to Mary's transactional description of marriage, in its suggestion that the worth of each party can be combined rather than exchanged:

With so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be.—Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort; and to complete the picture of good, the acquisition of Mansfield living by the death of Dr. Grant, occurred just after

¹⁹¹ MP 435.

they had been married long enough to want an increase of income, and feel their distance of the paternal abode an inconvenience.”¹⁹²

Rather than describing their marriage in transactional language, the narrator presents Edmund and Fanny’s individual worth as complementary; the “true merit and true love” resulting from their marriage is not the result of one of them, but of their combined values. And, although the narrator suggests earlier that Edmund has gained more through the match,¹⁹³ the novel tries to conclude on a harmonious note, emphasising the equality of their desires and the happiness that results from it. However, the subsequent increase of their domestic comfort relies on the death of a “friendly and sociable,”¹⁹⁴ if somewhat “indolent,”¹⁹⁵ man. The casual reference to his death as the reason for Edmund and Fanny’s gain casts a shadow over the two final paragraphs, which, in their brief and abrupt declaration of Fanny and Edmund’s domestic happiness, do little to alleviate the sense of dissatisfaction that pervades the final chapter. The narrator consigns Edmund and Fanny’s courtship narrative to a brief summary of events, while meditating at length on an alternate conclusion, in which Crawford “[h]ad done as he intended, and as he knew he ought, by going down to Everingham after his return from Portsmouth.”¹⁹⁶

This focus on potential rather than actual events combines with Sir Thomas’s unsettling final acknowledgement of “the advantages of early hardship and discipline,

¹⁹² MP 439.

¹⁹³ “She was, of course, only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing, and it was not possible that encouragement from her should be long wanting.” (MP 437)

¹⁹⁴ MP 30.

¹⁹⁵ MP 45.

¹⁹⁶ MP 434.

and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure,¹⁹⁷ to develop a sense of uneasiness that undercuts the apparent “security” of Fanny and Edmund’s “earthly happiness.” Although, due to their close familial relation, the question of marriage portions can be sidestepped, Mary’s early remarks suggest that the marital economy involves the exchange of “accomplishment[s] or good qualit[ies]”¹⁹⁸ as it does on the exchange of money and status; by representing their courtship narrative with summary rather than showing the reader the process through which Edmund falls in love with Fanny, Austen also avoids directly representing this transactional aspect of their marriage. Rather, the novel displaces the transaction by portraying Sir Thomas as the primary beneficiary, through his “high sense of having realized a great acquisition in the promise of Fanny for a daughter.”¹⁹⁹ Through the marriage of his son, he acquires “the daughter he wanted”²⁰⁰ and, in so doing, reconfigures her as the desired object—or commodity—rather than the currency that allows him to obtain wealth, status, or satisfaction.

The representation of women as commodities—and often slaves—was a common trope in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly within the context of the transactions that occurred on the marriage market. Austen engages with this discourse explicitly in *Emma*, when Jane Fairfax compares the “governess-trade” to the “slave-trade,” by referring to finding work as a governess as “the sale of—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect.”²⁰¹ As one of the few alternatives to marriage

¹⁹⁷ MP 439.

¹⁹⁸ MP 44.

¹⁹⁹ MP 438.

²⁰⁰ MP 438.

²⁰¹ Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Ronald Blythe (London: Penguin Classics, 1985) 300.

available to genteel women, the “governess-trade” operates analogously to the marriage market: both are enslaving forces that require women to set a—very negotiable—price on their abilities, fortune, or characteristics. A July 1811 issue of *The Examiner* ran an article discussing the Berkeley Peerage case, in which a witness describes a conversation with Lady Berkeley that concludes with her stating, “I have been as much sold as any lamb that goes to the shambles.”²⁰² Such a direct reference to the “sale” of women is not an isolated incident; nearly two decades earlier, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* described the condition of women’s education as an enslaving force when she asks, “Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subjected to prejudices that brutalise them, when principles would be a surer guard of virtue?”²⁰³ Kirkham discusses the way that this discourse appears in the novel, arguing, “the language of law and property as well as the language of capture and captivity are shown as improperly applied to marriage and to decent sexual relationships.”²⁰⁴ She goes on to claim that Fanny “is shown as unfit, by her nature, to become a commodity in the marriage market,”²⁰⁵ due to her refusal to sell herself to Crawford in exchange for the financial security offered by his proposal, which would give her a “price.” However, in focusing on legal language and the idea of captivity, Kirkham ignores the language of commerce and exchange that pervades the novel and receives increased emphasis in the final chapter.

Regardless of whether or not Fanny participates in a marriage from which she benefits economically, she is repeatedly represented as a valued object to be obtained,

²⁰² “Berkeley Peerage,” *The Examiner* (1 July 1811) 431.

²⁰³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* **MORE!**

²⁰⁴ Kirkham 127.

²⁰⁵ Kirkham 127.

first by Henry Crawford, and later by Edmund, who replaces Mary Crawford with Fanny: “He had not to wait and wish with vacant affections for an object worthy to succeed her [Mary] in them.”²⁰⁶ Once he acknowledges Fanny as the “object” of his affections, marked by his “learn[ing] to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones,”²⁰⁷ he goes “in pursuit”²⁰⁸ of her. By viewing her as an object to be pursued and subsequently obtained, Edmund commodifies Fanny, an effect that is amplified when she is reduced to a pair of “soft light eyes.” The subtlety of Edmund’s commodification of Fanny contrasts with the often heavy-handed use of economic language elsewhere in the novel. While Austen often relies on free indirect discourse to indicate that such language is used to ironic effect, such as in Sir Thomas’s final reflections on “the sterling good of principle and temper,”²⁰⁹ this instance of Fanny’s commodification lacks the narrative irony that allows the narrator to maintain an ironic distance from the language of commerce. Here, the narrator is complicit in the language that commodifies Fanny, indicating an inability to discuss value without resorting to the vocabulary of economics, whether deliberately or unintentionally. The language of “true merit and true love”²¹⁰ is also the language of bullion and banknotes, just as the language of interaction is also the language of transaction. The narrator’s frequent and self-conscious use of commercial language indicates the inability of language to express value with a vocabulary independent of the cash nexus; as such, the narrator’s heavy-handed use of commercial language gestures implicitly to a non-commercial conception of value. However, the novel recognises the

²⁰⁶ MP 436.

²⁰⁷ MP 436-7.

²⁰⁸ MP 437.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ MP 439.

impossibility of representing completely non-transactional interactions without a vocabulary to describe them free of commercial connotations. The absence of a detailed depiction of Edmund and Fanny's courtship reinforces this impossibility; showing the process would emphasise the transaction rather than the resulting cumulative effect.

Critically, any discussion of the transactional nature of marriage in *Mansfield Park* would have to take into account slavery, the slave trade, and Sir Thomas's Antigua estates. Much has been said on the role of slavery in the novel, from journal articles devoted to the subject to Patricia Rozema's 1998 film adaptation, largely in response to Edward Said's observation in *Culture and Imperialism* that,

According to Austen, we are to conclude that no matter how isolated and insulated the English place (e.g., Mansfield Park), it requires overseas sustenance. Sir Thomas's property in the Caribbean would have had to be a sugar plantation maintained by slave labor (not abolished until the 1830s): these are not dead historical facts but, as Austen certainly knew, evident historical realities.²¹¹

According to Said, without the income derived from Sir Thomas's Antigua estates, Mansfield Park would be unable to sustain itself. Already, Said's argument displays a weak grasp of early nineteenth century views of abolition, both of the slave trade and slavery, as well as economic practices. In *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900*, Franco Moretti relies on specific historical analysis to object to Said's claims, pointing out, "the gentry of Northamptonshire (the county of *Mansfield Park*) . . . engaged in

²¹¹ Said 89.

business activities (including colonial investment) in a percentage that oscillated *between one and two percent*.²¹² The economic insignificance of the West Indian economy to the Northamptonshire gentry does not render Said's claims entirely void, but it casts Sir Thomas's imperialist activities in a different light: according to Moretti, Sir Thomas's voyage occurs because of narrative necessity rather than economic necessity. Moretti proposes that Austen, and other novelists, rely on the colonies and their "fictional fortunes" to remove characters, "not so much because of reality, but for strictly *symbolic* reasons."²¹³ However, Moretti also posits that the symbolic reason for Sir Thomas's journey to Antigua is that it distances the wealth of the elite from the suffering of the labouring poor by "remov[ing] the production of wealth to faraway worlds, in whose effective reality most nineteenth-century readers were probably 'not at all interested.'"²¹⁴

In suggesting that the reading public had no interest in the realities of colonial life and production Moretti discounts the vast array of contemporary publications dealing with the economic and moral problems posed by sugar production in the West Indies. In the five years leading up to the publication of *Mansfield Park*, *The Edinburgh Review* ran eleven articles addressing the economic and social problems of the West Indies, particularly relating them to slavery and the slave-trade; *The Quarterly Review* ran five, including a review of a collection of poems by James Montgomery entitled *The West Indies and Other Poems*. The titular poem "contains a rapid sketch of the rise, progress, and extinction of the trade in human flesh,"²¹⁵ and demonstrates a liveliness of discussion on the subject of the slave trade in literature as well as in political publications. The

²¹² Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998) 25.

²¹³ Moretti 27.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ "Montgomery's Poems" *Quarterly Review* 12 (1811) 414.

discussion was not limited to literature; the legal system was also engaged in cases surrounding both the legal and illegal slave trade. A February 1813 article comments on the trials of illegal slave traders in Sierra Leone, viewing the convictions as a triumph of humanity:

While the law sanctioned it [slave-trading], a deference to the constituted authorities of the country, rather than any tenderness towards the thing itself, might prescribe somewhat of forbearance in regard to the slave-dealers. But, thanks to the steady friends of humanity, that day is now past; and Parliament having declared the slave trade to be a crime, we are to witness the grateful spectacle of those persons who still engage in it, being treated like other felons.²¹⁶

The opportunity for “spectacle” and the public shaming of illegal slave-traders that the trials provide contrasts with the artistic renderings of the horrors of the slave trade that Ian Baucom discusses in *Specters of the Atlantic*. Baucom presents an extended case study of the 1781 *Zong* massacre, wherein 133 slaves were thrown from a slave ship, allowing the ship’s owners to file an insurance claim that led to extended legal proceedings. In his book, Baucom examines the case and public reaction to it, as well as the position that the massacre occupied in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century abolitionist discourse and the public imagination into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through artistic and literary representations, especially painting and poetry. However, to Baucom, “the system of credit by which slaves were produced,

²¹⁶ “The Trials of the Slave-Traders” *Edinburgh Review* 41 (1813) 72-73.

acquired, sold, and finally transformed into the reserve deposits for the large and small ‘bills’ circulating across the Atlantic and throughout its metropolitan capitals”²¹⁷ was the most notable form in which the slave trade was represented: “The full catastrophe and evil of the slave trade . . . included its ability not only to turn human beings into a form of property but to treat them as a species of money, to regard them, on the point of sale in the new world, as the account deposits for a network of interest-bearing money.”²¹⁸ The author of the *Edinburgh Review* article attempt to counteract this commodification (and the related process by which the slaves were treated as a form of interest-bearing money) by describing the inhumane treatment of slaves, both during transportation and after; however, this attempt to humanise slaves is limited by the author’s reliance on numbers to make his point: “One Portuguese vessel carried from Africa to Bahia, (or St Salvadore), eleven hundred slaves, but five hundred died on the voyage, and the remainder were landed in a state which insured the death of a large proportion of them.”²¹⁹ However, as Baucom reminds his reader, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century bodies belonged to “a modern system of finance capital capable of turning anything it touches into a monetary equivalent,” wherein the “wounded, suffering human body [is] incessantly attended by an equal sign and a monetary equivalent.”²²⁰

Said touches on the idea of commodification when he describes Fanny’s return to Portsmouth as the domestic equivalent of Sir Thomas’s voyage to the West Indies during the first volume: “To earn the right to Mansfield Park you must first leave home as a kind of indentured servant or, to put the case in extreme terms, as a kind of transported

²¹⁷ Baucom 90.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ “The Trials of the Slave-Traders” 85.

²²⁰ Baucom 7.

commodity.”²²¹ He goes on to add that Fanny’s movements between Portsmouth and Mansfield are “a domestic or small-scale movement in space that corresponds to the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas, her mentor, the man whose estate she inherits.”²²² By describing Fanny as a “transported commodity,” Said appears to configure Fanny as an indentured servant or an African slave who has been transported to the West Indies, albeit one with “the promise of future wealth.”²²³ Yet by linking Fanny’s movements to Sir Thomas’s visit to Antigua, he interprets her as a colonial force rather than as a victim of colonialism, making his description of Fanny as a “transported commodity” a puzzling one that remains unsatisfactorily explained: does Said view her as analogous to a displaced slave, an imperial force whose return to Portsmouth provides her with the opportunity to “colonise” her family by spreading the values she has learned at Mansfield, or the commodity (perhaps comparable to sugar) produced by the act of colonisation that enables the values of Mansfield to be carried forward? Rather than specifying to what his metaphor of commodification refers, Said focuses on the scene that he believes reveals the novel’s unwillingness—or inability—to acknowledge the source of the Bertrams’ wealth: the “dead silence”²²⁴ that follows Fanny’s question about the slave trade upon Sir Thomas’s return from Antigua. He posits that the silence indicates “that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both.”²²⁵ For the most part, Brian Southam supports Said’s interpretation of this silence, although he aligns Austen with Fanny, rather than Sir Thomas, by portraying

²²¹ Said 88.

²²² Said 89.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ MP 184.

²²⁵ Said 96.

Fanny's question as a revelation of what Sir Thomas wishes to hide: Sir Thomas is "not at all the character 'West-Indine' fresh from the Caribbean—vulgar, flamboyant, free-spending and high living— . . . but a Mr Nibbs, a second-generation absentee, set on rising above and obscuring the origins of his wealth."²²⁶ Like Said, Southam assumes a universal silence in response to Fanny's "forbidden question," which allows him to conclude, "The gap of 'silence' between his [Sir Thomas's] slave-owning 'values' and those of Fanny, the sole questioner of those 'values', could not be more effectively shown."²²⁷ Said situates Fanny as the inheritor of Sir Thomas's values; Southam claims that she is their only challenger.

However, Said's and Southam's shared reading of this silence constitutes a misinterpretation of the scene described by a conversation between Edmund and Fanny. The "dead silence" signifies the lack of interest in the topic displayed by Fanny's other cousins, but not by Sir Thomas, who, Edmund says, "would have [been] pleased . . . to be inquired of farther."²²⁸ Moreover, Fanny's reluctance to pursue the issue with more questions does not result from the lack of a "common language" to describe England and Antigua, but from her natural delicacy and a desire to avoid the appearance of setting herself off at the expense of others, "by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel."²²⁹ Susan Fraiman argues against Said's claim that Austen treats Sir Thomas's Antiguan property as the necessary means of supporting the style of life enjoyed at Mansfield by invoking the discourse of the marriage market as a slave market:

²²⁶ Brian Southam, "The Silence of the Bertrams" *TLS* (15 February 1995) 14.

²²⁷ Southam 14.

²²⁸ MP 184.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

Austen deliberately invokes the dumbness of Mansfield Park concerning its own barbarity precisely because she means to rebuke it. The barbarity she has in mind is not literal slavery in the West Indies but a paternal practice she depicts as possibly analogous to it: Sir Thomas's bid (successful in Maria's case if not in Fanny's) to put female flesh on the auction block in exchange for male status.²³⁰

Although she reinterprets the same passage, her reading follows from Said's, requiring the silence to be an oppressive one, wherein "The imperialist gesture is to exploit the symbolic value of slavery, while ignoring slaves as suffering and resistant historical subjects."²³¹ However, Austen limits "the dumbness of Mansfield Park" to Maria and Julia, the two characters who participate most earnestly, and in Maria's case forcefully, in the marriage market and the process of self-commodification that it requires. Although Fanny is unwilling to set herself off at their expense, the novel has no such qualms: it contrasts Fanny's desire to be engaged with her uncle's exploits in the West Indies with Maria and Julia's apathetic silence. Whereas Fanny rebels against the commodification that she experiences as a result of her increasing value, Maria and Julia foster it. In a highly speculative article, "Myths of the Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire," which dismisses the importance of the slave trade to *Mansfield Park* to a lesser extent than Moretti's, Trevor Lloyd argues that Sir Thomas's voyage to Antigua served the primary purpose of selling his Antiguan property in order to provide his daughters with marriage portions, pointing out: "When he heard about Rushworth's engagement to

²³⁰ Fraiman 812.

²³¹ Fraiman 813.

Maria he showed no signs of concern about the financial implications. A couple of years previously he had been reduced to selling off a ‘next presentation’, and now he had to find a substantial amount of disposable capital for a portion.”²³² Lloyd posits that Austen’s reading public would have been able to fill in the gaps in the text and understand his time in the West Indies as a necessity involved in overseeing the sale; in doing so, he emphasises the economic importance of the Antigua estate over its symbolic importance. Nevertheless, he touches on the same silence that Said and Southam discuss, arguing that the “dead silence” upon Sir Thomas’s return is understandable because it signifies the end of the Bertrams’ involvement in Antigua and occurs because of their unwillingness to acknowledge their unhappiness at Sir Thomas’s sudden return:

Discussing Abolition opened up uncomfortable facts about relationships in the Bertram family . . . His family was not brazen enough to say “We were glad Abolition came when it did, because it kept you in the West Indies longer than you would otherwise have stayed there”, nor devious enough to say “We wish Abolition had happened at some other time, to let you come home sooner.” Silence was the only response that could be both polite and honest.²³³

Whereas Moretti focuses on the symbolic power of the West Indies, Lloyd emphasises the pragmatics of the Bertram family dynamic. Nevertheless, his contention that “even Lady Maria and Miss Julia might have shown some mild interest if the family still owned the estate with a mortgage which could cause trouble in the event of a collapse in sugar

²³² Lloyd 69-70.

²³³ Lloyd 72-3.

prices,”²³⁴ gives the Bertram daughters perhaps too much credit and ignores the already plummeting price of sugar, which would have provided a rationale for Sir Thomas’s voyage that would have been believable to early nineteenth-century audiences. Moreover, in glossing over the symbolic significance of the West Indies, Lloyd ignores the power that abolitionist rhetoric gave to feminist arguments.

In “Decolonising *Mansfield Park*,” John Wiltshire argues that the excess of postcolonial debate on *Mansfield Park* has colonised the novel, and as a result he downplays the significance of the commodification of the novel’s female characters through reference to the slave trade, but at the same time, acknowledges the role of abolitionist language in early nineteenth-century feminism:

Pursuing this supposed analogy or parallel [between the marriage market and the slave trade] enables postcolonial readers to see the adoption of Fanny as a purely commercial transaction, Sir Thomas treating her and his daughters as property, to be married off for economic and political advantage . . . These young women are beneficiaries of a system in which slaves have partially generated the wealth and comfort they enjoy. They are lesser beneficiaries than the males, but the issue of consent (which the novel of course foregrounds) means that they are free as no slave, by definition, can be. More and Wollstonecraft were good publicists and knew the value of enlisting the liberal sentiment that had been aroused by the abolition agitation to bolster their own causes.²³⁵

²³⁴ Lloyd 72.

²³⁵ John Wiltshire, “Decolonising *Mansfield Park*,” *Essays in Criticism* 53.4 (2003) 309-10.

Wiltshire's reference to the "issue of consent" highlights the problem with the reference to slavery and abolition sentiments in the language of commodification, particularly as it has been applied to *Mansfield Park*. No reading of *Mansfield Park* that consults the text can describe Sir Thomas as analogous to a slave trader in the matter of Maria's marriage to Rushworth. Rather, Maria's engagement occurs during Sir Thomas's absence and he is consulted only as a matter of form. Upon his return, he questions the wisdom of her choice, going so far as to offer her the opportunity to withdraw her acceptance, but Maria remains determined to obtain access to Rushworth's income of £12,000 (and to spite Crawford in the process). Maria oversees her own sale, supervised only by her indulgent aunt; unlike the suggestion made by Fraiman and various other critics that Sir Thomas acts as an auctioneer of women, Maria places her own "flesh on the auction block" in exchange for social status, revenge, and freedom from the restraints placed upon her by her father's presence.

Maria's agency in managing her marriage is second only to Mary Crawford's, whose complete absence of parental restraint leaves her free to accept anyone, regardless of wealth or status, whom she deems worthy. However, despite this complete freedom of choice, the final chapter reduces Mary to "her beauty, and her 20,000*l.*," and, elsewhere, a pair of "sparkling dark" eyes. Mary's cynical understanding of the transactional nature of the marriage market and subsequent self-conscious commodification leave her in a better position than Maria, whose open adultery results in a lifetime of confinement with Mrs Norris, but Mary is trapped, nevertheless, by the price she has set for herself.

Unlike Maria or Mary, Fanny uses what agency she possesses to a very different effect: she refuses to consent to her own commodification by selling herself to Henry

Crawford for future financial security and in order to repay her debt to the Bertrams for fostering her. However, her refusal to participate in the marriage market does not prevent commodification; rather, this exercise of the freedom of choice that Wiltshire references has the potential to force her to participate in a different and potentially more dehumanising form of commodification: employment. Copeland makes the unpleasantness of being a woman seeking employment clear when he says:

The professions of companion and governess, the two classically genteel employments available to contemporary women, raise universal horror across the entire range of women's fiction. The two employments come up against Jameson's wall of "intolerable closure," trapped as they are between the demands of genteel station and the demands of economic survival.²³⁶

Copeland goes on to cite Fanny as one example of a heroine forced into the indignities of acting as a companion, the odiousness of which Henry Crawford remarks on when he informs Mary that he intends to marry Fanny:

Had you seen her this morning, Mary . . . attending with such ineffable sweetness and patience, to all the demands of her aunt's stupidity, working with her, and for her, her colour beautifully heightened as she leant over the work, then returning to her seat to finish a note which she was previously engaged in writing for that

²³⁶ Copeland 166-67.

stupid woman's service . . . you would not have implied the possibility of her power over my heart ever ceasing.²³⁷

Reading between the lines of Henry's proclamations of his devotion to Fanny reveals perhaps the most forthright description of Fanny's duties as Lady Bertram's (unpaid) companion. Although the novel represents the tedium of Fanny's existence and the frequent lack of consideration to which she is subjected, this is the only instance of another character expressing indignation over the expectation that she submit herself to it. Edmund protests on Fanny's behalf when the work that Mrs Norris demands of her proves physically exhausting, but does not question the unspoken expectation that she act as Lady Bertram's companion. Employment—even unpaid employment—requires a woman to commodify herself in a way comparable to that of a woman on the marriage market. Thus, although Fanny does not “sell” herself to Crawford for the promise of future financial security, she cannot avoid commodification entirely: her presence at Mansfield Park remains dependent upon her ability to demonstrate her gratitude through her usefulness.

By returning her to Portsmouth and the relative poverty in which her family live, Sir Thomas seeks both to remind Fanny of these obligations and to “teach her the value of a good income.”²³⁸ Rather than exerting his economic and social power over Fanny directly in order to bring about her marriage, he uses it to affect the appearance of benevolence by providing Fanny with the opportunity to visit her family, thereby

²³⁷ MP 273.

²³⁸ MP 342.

reminding her of the unpleasantness of poverty, a tactic that nearly succeeds. Early in her visit, Fanny compares Portsmouth unflatteringly to Mansfield:

At Mansfield, no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence was ever heard; all proceeded in a regular course of cheerful orderliness; every body had their due importance; every body's feelings were consulted. If tenderness could ever be supposed wanting, good sense, and good breeding supplied its place; and as to the little irritations, sometimes introduced by aunt Norris, they were short, they were trifling, they were as a drop of water to the ocean, compared with the ceaseless tumult of her present abode. Here, every body was noisy, every voice was loud, (excepting, perhaps, her mother's, which resembled the soft monotony of Lady Bertram's, only worn into fretfulness.)— Whatever was wanted was halloo'd for, and the servants halloo'd out their excuses from the kitchen. The doors were in constant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke.²³⁹

Fanny's sense of the differences between behaviour at Mansfield and at Portsmouth manifests itself in the punctuation. Mansfield is discussed in precise, self-contained phrases divided by semi-colons, whereas the ills of Portsmouth form an overwhelming, cluttered list consisting largely of onomatopoeia. The lack of order in the Prices' Portsmouth home is made apparent through the noise, which prevents any of the family

²³⁹ MP 363-4.

members from being heard. However, through free indirect speech, the narrator reminds the reader of the failings of Mansfield Park. Although, here, Fanny dismisses Mrs Norris's abuses as "little irritations" and allows "good sense, and good breeding" to serve as adequate substitutions for "tenderness," the narrator uses the opportunity to remind the reader of Fanny's treatment at Mansfield and to insinuate that, while the failings of Portsmouth are more immediately painful, the "orderliness" of Mansfield masks a deeper moral disorder that would not go unchecked if not for the pervading silence that Fanny takes as an indicator of order. Indeed, Fanny's presence in Portsmouth results from the Sir Thomas's unspoken decision to send Fanny away in an attempt to alter her values so that they comply with his: "It was a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding, which he must consider at present diseased. A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing or judging."²⁴⁰ Sir Thomas's "experiment"²⁴¹ is an attempt to teach Fanny the necessity of self-commodification as much as "the value of a good income." Just as he wishes her "to go willingly"²⁴² to Portsmouth, he wishes her to accept Henry Crawford of her own free will. Far from Fraiman's depiction of Sir Thomas as the perpetrator of "domestic tyrannies,"²⁴³ the novel portrays him as a man who rarely acts without the consent of others; however, the techniques he employs to obtain consent are morally questionable and economically motivated. In *Mansfield Park*, consent is not the straightforward matter that Wiltshire represents it as: from Fanny's silent, inarticulate denial of her feelings for Edmund to the machinations that Sir Thomas carries out in order to obtain consent from

²⁴⁰ MP 342.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² MP 341-2.

²⁴³ Fraiman 812.

his family members, the novel continually highlights the social forces that cause characters to either accept or reject proposals (of marriage or otherwise). Sir Thomas's failure to convert Fanny to his cause is not the result of a flaw in his "experiment," but, rather, an interruption in it, in the form of Henry and Maria's adulterous elopement. Fanny can resist the demand that she commodify herself, but not indefinitely; eventually, the narrator informs us in the final chapter, Fanny would have accepted Henry: "could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him."²⁴⁴

As in the case of Maria's marriage to Rushworth, Sir Thomas does not act overtly as Fanny's "auctioneer," although his attempts to encourage the match with Crawford seem to place him in that role. In "The Politics of Silence: *Mansfield Park* and the Amelioration of Slavery," George E. Boulukos offers a means of reconciling the apparently contradictory representations of Sir Thomas as benevolent benefactor and tyrannous patriarch, through the idea of amelioration, a "position [that] held that slavery and colonialism were morally redeemable and potentially even heroic pursuits for men such as Sir Thomas Bertram,"²⁴⁵ and the popular trope of the grateful slave:

Given the context of amelioration, and Austen's description of the scene, it makes far more sense that Sir Thomas sees himself in the role of the human, ameliorationist reformer of his Antiguan plantation, and that Fanny's eager

²⁴⁴ MP 433.

²⁴⁵ George E. Boulukos, "The Politics of Silence: *Mansfield Park* and the Amelioration of Slavery," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (39.3, 2006) 362.

questioning helps confirm his self-image. In eighteenth-century and Romantic-era fiction there was a well-established trope of the grateful slave—a trope which represents and idealizes amelioration . . . Such fictions have often been associated with anti-slavery because they acknowledge slavery’s cruelty. It is notable, however, that the slave owner or overseer—in his role as reformer—is the hero of the grateful slave fictions.²⁴⁶

Boulukos’ account of the position of amelioration establishes it as one amenable to abolitionists and slave owners alike;²⁴⁷ he also uses it to explain Fanny’s eagerness to discuss the slave trade with her uncle and her apparent lack of criticism: “by asking Sir Thomas about the “slave trade” in the immediate post-abolition context, Fanny most likely invokes . . . the expectation that Sir Thomas has now more than ever been able to realize humane and ameliorationist reforms on his own estate.”²⁴⁸ Interestingly, Boulukos does not expand his argument to address the metaphorical implications of Sir Thomas as an ameliorationist slave owner. If, as critics such as Susan Fraiman argue, Sir Thomas’s position as a slave owner is analogous to his position within the confines of his family, then his position as an ameliorating slave owner alters considerably how the novel intends him to be perceived. Throughout the novel, his behaviour is consistent with a policy of amelioration: despite the “gravity of deportment”²⁴⁹ that causes Fanny to fear him and prevents his daughters from behaving freely in his company, he acts with kind and generous intentions throughout. Even his attempts to manipulate Fanny into

²⁴⁶ Boulukos 363.

²⁴⁷ Boulukos 362.

²⁴⁸ Boulukos 372.

²⁴⁹ MP 13.

accepting Henry Crawford display a regard for her wellbeing and happiness: he ensures that a fire be lit for her in the former schoolroom, and his plan to send her to Portsmouth requires her consent. He desires her marriage to Henry more for her personal happiness than any connection that the match will bring him, as his thoughts upon sending her to Portsmouth demonstrate: “Her Father’s house would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised.”²⁵⁰ Although the novel shows his attempts to be ultimately misguided, his desire to ameliorate Fanny into a marriage with Henry rather than force it upon her indicates a degree of concern for her emotional as well as her material well being. Moreover, his continued generosity towards her demands her gratitude; as the first chapter discusses, Fanny’s economic dependency places her in a position of perpetual and accumulating debt, which she can repay only with the appropriate demonstrations of gratitude. By configuring her as a “grateful slave” figure, the novel implies that, as much as the marriage market, the economy of credit and debt is an enslaving force, particularly for those unable to participate, except as debtors. In such an economy, repayment demands commodification, with or without consent, and only the partial and not entirely satisfying shift in Sir Thomas’s understanding of value that occurs at the close of the novel allows Fanny to avoid this process, and repay her debts by being “the daughter he wanted,”²⁵¹ rather than an object he can manipulate at will.

²⁵⁰ MP 342.

²⁵¹ MP 438.

Conclusion

When discussing Jane Austen, too often the impulse is to ascribe to her some clear-cut moral agenda that plays out through the events of her novels. In the criticism surrounding *Mansfield Park*, this impulse is particularly strong, perhaps because, as Lionel Trilling points out, “There is scarcely one of our modern pieties that it does not offend.”²⁵² He goes on to explain the problems that the novel poses to the Romantic and post-Romantic reader:

Its impulse is not to forgive but to condemn. Its praise is not for social freedom but for social stasis. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, but only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being, indeed, deterrents to the good life.²⁵³

In such a reading, “spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness” are set against “virtue and happiness” in a straightforward opposition that all but invites the reader to take offence. But, as Trilling goes on to argue, such a reading does not do justice to the moral complexity of the novel; rereadings allow the process by which “irony directed against irony itself,”²⁵⁴ or the “impersonation and . . . insincerity”²⁵⁵ of “mere style,”²⁵⁶ to become apparent to the reader. The novel does not condemn style backed by substance,

²⁵² Trilling 210.

²⁵³ Trilling 211.

²⁵⁴ Trilling 224.

²⁵⁵ Trilling 221.

²⁵⁶ Trilling 224.

but style where substance does not exist; it condemns style that attempts to pass as substance as a forgery.

The tendency towards oversimplification is not limited to the reader's immediate response; in "Jane Austen and Edward Said," Susan Fraiman quotes John Leonard's review of *Culture and Imperialism*, criticising the diminutive treatment he gives Austen: "See Jane sit, in the poise and order of *Mansfield Park*, not much bothering her pretty head about the fact that this harmonious 'social space,' Sir Thomas Bertram's country estate, is sustained by slave labor on his sugar plantations in Antigua."²⁵⁷ However, although Fraiman gives Austen more credit than either Said or Leonard, her argument defends Austen to an extreme that is equally unbelievable, in its assertion that, "The barbarity she has in mind is not literal slavery in the West Indies but a paternal practice she depicts as possibly analogous to it: Sir Thomas's bid . . . to put female flesh on the auction block in exchange for male status."²⁵⁸ While Fraiman's linking of early nineteenth-century abolitionist and feminist discourses is certainly accurate, the decisive condemnation of Sir Thomas that she reads into the novel is problematic and ignores the nuances of Sir Thomas's character that arise out of Austen's use of free indirect discourse.

My intent has been to avoid imposing upon *Mansfield Park* a similar agenda in the form of a purely anti-commercial reading that laments the loss of a system wherein "those denominations of value [rank and title] which, when regularly stamped on any character, were wont to become a sufficient guarantee of its weight and sterling

²⁵⁷ Fraiman 805-06.

²⁵⁸ Fraiman 812.

excellence.”²⁵⁹ Rather, it has been to explore the complexities of value and morality that arise from the limitations of Austen’s—and our own—language. For all that *Mansfield Park* engages with questions of morality in an increasingly commercial world, it does not provide the reader with a straightforward dictum for how to live what Trilling terms “the good life.”²⁶⁰ Instead, it offers an intricate series of events to which the reader responds with varying degrees of satisfaction. Just as Sir Thomas cannot be wholeheartedly condemned for his treatment of Fanny or his commercial understanding of the world, neither can he be entirely vindicated: although at the end of the novel he renounces “ambitious and mercenary connections” in favour of the “sterling good of principle and temper,”²⁶¹ the passage of free indirect discourse in which he does so is steeped in the “mercenary” language of commerce. Like Emma Woodhouse, Sir Thomas undercuts his own epiphany as it occurs.

Similarly, although Fanny is indeed a “priceless” heroine, Trilling’s observation that, “Nobody . . . has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*,” remains a testament to the fact that virtue does not always endear a character to the reader; even as a character in a novel, Fanny Price resists commodification. And, despite the fact that the narrator offers Fanny up as gold standard of right behaviour, she cannot resist gently poking fun at her on occasion, such as in the scene where she meditates on nature rapturously to Mary Crawford: “The evergreen!—How beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful the evergreen!” The contrast Fanny’s remarks form with Mary’s more ironic appreciation of country shrubberies create a moment where the reader is expected

²⁵⁹ “Sir John Sinclair’s Observations on the Reports of the Bullion Committee” 518.

²⁶⁰ Trilling 211.

²⁶¹ MP 437.

to laugh at Fanny's naïveté rather than applaud it. By refusing to treat her heroine's earnest declarations completely seriously, the narrator avoids aligning herself with any one character and requires the reader to engage with the novel's events in order to understand where value is located. Nevertheless, although Fanny's enthusiasm for "The evergreen!" creates a moment of humour at her expense, it would be reductive to assume that Fanny's idealism about nature extends to idealism about power relations. Her powerlessness in her uncle's house allows her to understand the economics of human transactions from a vastly different position than those around her; her refusal to self-commodify and thereby clarify her value through a marriage to Henry Crawford is also a refusal to adopt the type of power that has been used against her and to accept the appearance of value without evidence of its existence.

Austen's portrayal of a world in which the ability to appear creditable is both a financial and a moral imperative—and the ability to recognise credibility is even more so—is particularly notable because, unlike in her other novels, it portrays a heroine who lacks both wealth and social cachet entirely. Fanny's appreciation depends entirely upon the rest of the world acknowledging her worth: the novel's events guide its characters, including Sir Thomas, Henry Crawford, Edmund, and even the reader, towards an understanding of Fanny's value and the systems in which their—and our—conceptions of value are enmeshed.

The problems presented by a language that does not differentiate between commercial and non-commercial value require the reader to engage with the shared vocabulary in order to determine the extent to which characters' interactions are underscored by an economy of credit and debt relationships. However, even as the

repeated use of such words as “credit,” “price,” and “value” seems to point inevitably to a reading of the novel that accounts for these commercial undercurrents, they remain an almost invisible element of the text. As Duckworth’s dismissal of Schorer demonstrates, the tendency to discount alternate definitions of words as out of context has the ability to blind the reader to the layers of irony surrounding the transactions and interactions between characters. Like the process that Poovey describes, where paper currency became naturalised as it came into common use and lost its visibility as a form of writing, the intersection of commercial and non-commercial language has become something that goes unnoticed, despite the ironic emphasis Austen places on it, which suggests that this was not and need not always be the case. *Mansfield Park* constitutes an attempt to distinguish between different—but not necessarily diametrically opposed—conceptions of value and provide a template for “true merit and true love” that exists outside of the cash nexus.

Bibliography

- Austen, Jane. *Emma*. Ed. Ronald Blythe. London: Penguin Classics, 1985. Print.
- Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. Ed. Kathryn Sutherland. London: Penguin Classics, 2003. Print.
- Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. E-book.
- “Berkeley Peerage.” *The Examiner*. 1 July 1811. 429-31. Print.
- Boulukos, George E. “The Politics of Silence: *Mansfield Park* and the Amelioration of Slavery.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39.3 (2006): 361-83. PDF file.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print.
- Copeland, Edmund. *Women Writing About Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.
- “Credit.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 21 July 2011.
- Duckworth, Alistair M. *The Improvement of the Estate*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1994. Print.
- Finn, Margot C. *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.
- Fraiman, Susan. “Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism.” *Critical Inquiry* 21.4 (1995): 805-821. PDF file.
- Habakkuk, John. *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994. Print.
- Kirkham, Margaret. “Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*.” *Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. 117-33. Print.
- Lloyd, Trevor. “Myths of the Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire.” *Comparative Criticism* 21 (1999): 59-78. Print.
- Lynch, Deidre Shauna. *The Economy of Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Print.

- “Montgomery’s Poems.” *Quarterly Review* 12 (1811): 405-419. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. London: Verso, 1998. Print.
- Muldrew, Craig. *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998. Print.
- “Pamphlets on West Indian Affairs.” *Edinburgh Review* 26 (1809): 382-413. Print.
- Poovey, Mary. *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.
- “Price.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 21 July 2011.
- “Publications on the Depreciation of Paper Currency.” *Edinburgh Review* 34 (1811): 339-372. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Random House, 1993. Print.
- Schorer, Mark. “Fiction and the ‘Analogical Matrix.’” *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*. Ed. John W. Aldridge. New York: Ronald Press, 1952. Print.
- “Sir John Sinclair’s Observations on the Reports of the Bullion Committee.” *Quarterly Review* 8 (1810): 518-536. Print.
- Southam, Brian. “The Silence of the Bertrams.” *Times Literary Supplement* 15 February 1995. 13-14. Print.
- Stewart, Maaja A. *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen’s Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993. Print.
- “The Bullion Question.” *Edinburgh Review* vol. 18, no. xxxv (Aug. 1811): NEED PAGE NUMBER/PHOTOCOPY ARTICLE.**
- “The Trials of the Slave-Traders.” *Edinburgh Review* 41 (1813): 72-93. Print.
- Thompson, James. *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. Print.
- Trilling, Lionel. “Mansfield Park.” *The Opposing Self*. New York: Viking Press, 1955. 206-230. Print.
- “Value.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 21 July 2011.
- Walvin, James. *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776-1838*. London: Macmillan, 1986. Print.

White, Gabrielle D.V. *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition: "a fling at the slave trade."* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Print.

Wiltshire, John. "Decolonising *Mansfield Park*." *Essays in Criticism* 53.4 (2003): 303-322. PDF file.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.