



Lynda A. Hall

WOMEN AND
'VALUE' IN
JANE AUSTEN'S
NOVELS

*Settling, Speculating
and Superfluity*



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To Ken, Catherine, and Ryan—my lifelines.

PREFACE

This book is the culmination of many years of reading, studying, and enjoying the fiction of Jane Austen. I first read *Northanger Abbey* as a part of an undergraduate course on the history of the English novel. We had read *The Castle of Otranto* the week before, and I found myself laughing aloud as I read Austen's parody. I was not expecting the humor and was immediately hooked. After a semester-long independent study reading all of the published novels, I was fascinated by the way she drew her characters through their own words. A few years later I took a graduate course comparing Austen to contemporary British novelist, Barbara Pym, and then found greater contemporary comparisons with American novelist Anne Tyler. Jane Austen's novels are not only a treasure trove of skillfully-composed prose, I also find them a place to understand the frustrations that might have been felt by women, like Jane Austen herself, who were less valued because they were not married. At first I thought this book would be about governesses—those women who were trained to be proper ladies but never became wives. But after reading the novels from the point of view of several minor female characters, I found that there were more stories behind the scenes. This idea is the foundation of this book. And as I have told several people, if writing a book is truly akin to childbirth, this “child” would be in middle school by now.

Looking back at the journey that became this book, I must thank the late Dr Paul Frizler for first introducing me to Jane Austen's novels. I am also indebted to the late Dr Terri Brent Joseph for helping me to understand the newly emerging feminist critiques of the novels in those days. Louise Griffith (the mother of my life-long friend, Carolyn Griffith Howard) then introduced me to the Jane Austen Society of North

America (JASNA) of which I have been a member for over 30 years. Continued and unfailing support has come through this organization from Claire Bellanti, Nancy Gallagher, Diana Birchall, Susan Wampler, and all of the various members both at the local and national level. My doctoral dissertation committee members, Dr Marc Redfield, Dr Lori Anne Ferrell, and Dr Sarah Raff provided invaluable advice for transforming the initial piece into a monograph. And Dr Devoney Looser assisted me through the publication proposal process. Finally, I am forever indebted to my colleagues at Chapman University, Dr Joanna Levin and Dr Myron Yeager, for reading countless drafts, and to Dr Kevin O'Brien for being the tenacious cheerleader along my path. My daughter, Catherine Sullivan, has been on call at various times to read and proofread drafts, and my son, Ryan Hall, to borrow a double-negative from Jane Austen, has not been unsupportive. Of course, I could not have done any of this without the constant encouragement from my husband and life-partner, Ken Hall. He has more faith in me than is warranted, and has been behind me every step of the way.

Portions of this book are based on content from previously published articles. First, in The Jane Austen Society of North America's journals *Persuasions* and *Persuasions Online* were the following essays:

"Jane Fairfax's Choice: The Sale of Human Flesh or Human Intellect."

Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal Online. 28, no. 1 (2007)
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28no1/hall.htm>.

"Secret Sharing and Secret Keeping: Lucy Steele's Triumph in Speculation"

Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal 33 (2011): 166–71.

In *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* appeared,

"A View from Confinement: *Persuasion's* Resourceful Mrs. Smith."

Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies 7 no. 3, (Fall 2011), <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue73/hall.htm>.

And in *Eighteenth Century Novel* appeared,

"Valuing the Superfluous Spinster: Miss Bates and the Struggle to Remain Visible" *Eighteenth Century Novel*. (2012), 281–99.

I thank the editors and publishers of these volumes for allowing me to update and publish the materials from these publications.

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Introduction

Jane Austen is “quietly waiting in the wings” to replace Charles Darwin on the British £10 note, according to Sir Mervyn King, the retired governor of the Bank of England.¹ Since, 1970, sixteen historical figures other than monarchs have appeared on British money, but only two women have filled that place.² As the world celebrates the bicentennial of Austen’s published novels, it is also appropriately ironic that a woman whose formal likeness was never taken and who had little money of her own to claim will soon recast the currency of a prosperous nation. In her lifetime, Austen published her books anonymously, and even in her family, as a single woman, she was not valued enough to deserve a professional portrait. A small, unfinished watercolor, painted by her sister, Cassandra, is easy to miss in the National Portrait Gallery. Jane Austen might herself have been understood to be of minor value within her own social milieu. So, placing the portrait of a woman—who published her novels anonymously and who might be seen to pride herself in obscurity—on the £10 note is something noteworthy.

This wedding of image to value is especially apt since during Austen’s lifetime the idea of a national paper currency was slowly taking hold. When she was writing the novels that would ultimately establish her own enduring value as a literary artist, the economy of England was rapidly developing from agrarian to consumer based with an unstable currency structure to represent value. As Sheryl Craig explains, the images on the new £10 note do not reflect the economic instability during Jane Austen’s

lifetime: "She lived through recessions, depressions, bank failures, and political and economic scandals that make ours look tame by comparison."³ During this tumultuous economic period, gold and silver coins were gradually being replaced with paper notes, and these forms of representative value were not perceived as secure since they were not fully regulated by the government. Just as Mrs. Ferrars's family within the fictional world of *Sense and Sensibility* was "exceedingly fluctuating" (SS 373),⁴ the world that fiction represents was reconsidering definitions of economic value while it continued to debate moral value. Thus, throughout the long eighteenth century,⁵ novelists often wrote about the entanglements between economic value and moral behavior. Although Jane Austen was not likely writing her novels about the political economy *per se*, the world she created within those novels mirrors the social and economic experiences she was observing around her. As Sir Walter Scott observed, Austen's writing was "a class of fictions . . . which draws characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life," since she was "copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader . . . a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him."⁶ Writing in this realistic vein allowed Austen to comment indirectly on the social and economic concerns that created the conflicts in that "common" and "daily" world to which Scott referred.

Fiction was particularly suited to this kind of observation. The eighteenth-century novel might be considered "mythic," as Elsie B. Mitchie suggests, "allow[ing] the novelists to explore at the level of structure, action, and characterization, the economic demands the story cannot address directly without becoming too crassly materialistic."⁷ Thus, we might look to Austen's novels to understand how people were valued in the world she observed and about which she wrote. Austen was depicting her "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village," as she advised her niece Anna, while she also instructed her to "make full use of them while they are so favorably arranged" (*Letters* 275). Her seemingly self-deprecating description of her art also reveals her subtle use of irony, which "is directed not only against characters' personal weaknesses but also against contemporary values and practices," argues Marie Nedregotten Sørbo.⁸ It is with these snapshots of the life Austen observed around her, therefore, that her fiction is able to reveal the struggle between the expressed and intrinsic value women experienced on the marriage market.

The term “marriage market” as it was present in England’s long eighteenth century has come to be understood as the process by which gentry and upper-middle-class men and women would be matched, often for financial gain for at least one of the parties involved, and various urban centers provided the backdrop for the parading of marriageable women. This process was criticized by some, such as Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, “what can be more indelicate than a girl’s *coming out* in the fashionable world? Which, in other words, is to bring to market a marriageable miss, whose person is taken from one public place to another, richly caparisoned.”⁹ In this study, “marriage market” refers to both the physical construction of these market places and to the social and psychological effect that marketing had on the behavior of women both “on” and “off” that market. Austen’s heroines might ultimately find satisfying marriages that portend a happy future life, but the other women depicted in her stories reveal the complicated problems that persisted within that marketplace.

The allure and the moral behavior or proper manners of the Austen heroine are easy to recognize. Elinor Dashwood is able to summon “a composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before” (*SS* 135), even as she keeps Lucy Steele’s secret when the rival for the man she loves manipulates her; Elizabeth Bennet, after learning the truth of Wickham’s dealings with Miss Darcy, realizes that “she had been blind, prejudiced, absurd” (*PP* 208), but still keeps Mr. Darcy’s trust and does not reveal her knowledge of the affair; Emma Woodhouse, who begins “having rather too much her own way” (*E* 5), eventually recognizes the “difference of woman’s destiny” (*E* 384) and is humbled by her own rude treatment of the spinster Miss Bates. The women behind the scenes, the minor female characters in Austen’s novels, however, are the ones who often provide the norm and the ground for value reflected within her novels.¹⁰ Their intrinsic value—reflected in their (im)moral behavior as well as their sometimes deficient manners—is examined, and their stories are not always satisfactorily resolved. The heroines, however, eventually transcend the struggle with value that is thus revealed as a problem for the average (minor) female. Although Austen peoples each novel with dozens of minor characters, a few of the minor female characters can be read to best represent problematic facets of the marriage market system on which the plots are based. Each of these minor women also provides a comparison or a contrast to

the *expressed* (economic or exchange) value or to the real or *intrinsic* (human or moral) value of the heroine in her respective novel.

The historical foundation for the terms *expressed* value and *intrinsic* value reflect the debate about economic value as it developed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England. Chapter 2 traces this discussion, considering the balance of trade, the idea of a body politic that would control wealth and growth, and the eventual shift in the idea of money's "real" value from its intrinsic composition to its "stamped" or stated value. Overlapping with the ongoing debate about value among the economic writers was the development of the novel—most notably for this study, the fiction that concerned itself with economic questions. The first chapter also considers two It-narratives, popular in the eighteenth century, which give a voice and a character to the actual money circulating throughout the English economy. With Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal; Or the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), we follow a piece of gold cast in various forms as he observes and participates in the economy and (im) moral behavior of his various possessors. Similarly, Thomas Bridges's narrative, *The Adventures of a Bank-note* (1770) capitalizes on the allure of value. In this story, however, the money is paper and is only worth its expressed value—that is the value placed on it by the bank from which it was issued. Bridges's protagonist is also circulating throughout the English economy, revealing the power of the economy and the (im) moral behavior of his possessors, but the bank-note cannot be recast and is only of significance to those who believe in the fictional expressed value of the paper note. These popular circulation narratives not only reveal the reading public's fascination with circulating money,¹¹ but they also expose the split between the guinea's intrinsic value and the bank-note's mere expressed value—a tension between types of value that Jane Austen's fiction will also explore as her female fictional characters are developed.

As the eighteenth century comes to a close, Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (pub. 1776) represents the culmination of this evolving debate about economic value. In Smith's terms, *expressed* value is that which is assigned to an object according to its utility and purchasing power on the current market: "The word VALUE, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes *expresses* the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys."¹² A woman's expressed value within the Austen novels refers to that economic value which is assigned to her and which might purchase her an even higher

expressed value with a lucrative marriage. Smith also refers to *intrinsic* or *real* value, and this term signifies the invariable value of an object, that which was tied to its unchangeable character. Gold and silver could be melted down and recast, but they always remained intrinsically gold or silver, unlike the uncertain value of paper money, which would fluctuate with the larger economic situation as well as with the stability of the bank on which it was drawn.

In addition to the economic debates throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, [Chapter 3](#) traces another historical shift of interest to this study—the evolution of marriage law and practice and its reflection in the marriage market. In 1753, traditional marriage practices following Anglican canon law were codified in Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act, which was presumed to prevent so-called clandestine marriages and to protect the estates of the landed gentry. The social pressures and practices that prescribed, as well as those that resulted from, this law are reflected in much of the fiction of the long eighteenth century. Jane Austen’s novels continue to reinforce this “feminist theme,” or what Katherine Sobba Green refers to as “a woman’s right to fall in love, to choose her own love object,”¹³ even as her characters strive for what Austen’s narrator refers to as a “preservative from want” and a “comfortable home” (*PP* 123, 125). Within the Austen novel, companionate marriage based on affection (a marriage with intrinsic value) is privileged, but the marriage of convenience (to increase expressed value) is recognized as the practical reality for many of the other women who represent the norm. And this is where we often find the divide between Austen’s heroine and her minor female characters: the heroine is able to “choose her own love object” against the backdrop of women in her community who must participate actively in their own commodification. As the heroine emerges into a world of personal choice, the minor female character often disappears from the narrative and is translated into her mere exchange value, reminding the reader that most women were not valued on the marriage market for their intrinsic nature and were not able to choose partners based on affection.

[Chapter 3](#) considers the marriage market structure and its reliance on a woman’s expressed value as well as her credit, which can be traced in a few eighteenth-century novels that consider women and credit: Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana* (1724),¹⁴ Sarah Fielding’s *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and *Volume the Last* (1753), Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* (1763), and Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782) reveal a progression

in thought about credit and a woman's place in the market economy. Much like the It-narratives discussed in [Chapter 2](#), these fictional works depict the development of the market economy, but this time the focus is on the relative value of women's credit—both monetary and personal. The various female characters in these fictional works struggle to reconcile their identities and reputations with their economic value, but where Defoe ultimately supports and even celebrates the value of credit in the market economy, the subsequent female writers focus more on the struggle of women to retain their personal credit as the society around them is negotiating their expressed value. Each of these fictional works reveals the inherent danger of relying on perception—often a fiction—to assign value to a person (in each case a woman). As the market economy developed and the concept of value moved from an emphasis on intrinsic value to a reliance on the fictional value of paper money and credit (expressed value), the popular fiction of the period questioned the legitimacy of that shift within both the financial and the marital marketplaces. Austen's fiction continues this questioning with minor female characters who struggle to retain their intrinsic value in a marriage market that relies primarily on expressed value to determine their worth.

In addition to the novels that concern themselves with women's credit, other writing of the period addresses various concerns about women's education and the behavior that reflects their intrinsic and expressed value. [Chapter 3](#) also considers how Jane Austen's novels and her minor female characters were informed by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), as well as by John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), James Fordyce's *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex, and the Advantages to Be Derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women* (1776), Hannah More's *Essays on Various Subjects Principally Designed for Young Ladies* (1777), and Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773). As revealed in the popular novels and various treatises on women's education, a woman's value was largely determined by her behavior. Even if she had high expressed value, her credit might be damaged with transgressive or immoral behavior, or even by mistaken perceptions of possible transgressions. Jane Austen's minor female characters highlight this issue as their stories chronicle their navigation through the marriage market. As Maria Bertram learns, for instance, high expressed value might just be debased by a transgression of the moral code.

Jane Austen's novels, then, reflect both the economic developments and the social structure of the long eighteenth century. As we consider the value and behavior of Austen's female characters, referring to them as "minor" presents a semantic question. If we study each character's position within her novel, we can also come to understand how her minor role within the novel correlates to her minor space in a patriarchal society dominated by a market economy. Each character is valued according to the attention she is given both within the narrative space and within the social structure of the world that narrative represents.

A useful model for considering this question comes from Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* where he establishes a paradigm from which to judge minor or "flat" characters, considering "how the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative's continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe."¹⁵ The minor female fictional characters considered here, then, might be first examined as they function within the narrative structure, and then as each of their stories represents a historical economic reality. Woloch's model divides "minority" within the narrative structure into two extremes: "the *worker* and the *eccentric*, the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative, and the fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot."¹⁶ The minor character, he explains, is either "smoothly absorbed as a gear within the narrative machine, at the cost of his or her own free interiority" or "grates against his or her position and is usually as a consequence, wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed (within the *discourse*, if not the *story*)."¹⁷ This theory will be useful in the final four chapters of this study in order to consider the position of the minor female characters in Austen's fiction; we can see how each character is valued within the narrative structure, since "the strange significance of minor characters . . . resides largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing."¹⁸ The "vanishing" that each of these minor female character experiences (either temporarily or permanently) from the narrative structure can also be understood to reflect each character's fluctuation in expressed and intrinsic value within the society the novel represents.

Although Austen includes many minor characters in her novels who perform various narrative functions, the minor women characters considered in this study are those whom we recognize as viable companions,

counterparts, or even rivals to the heroines. These minor characters are more important than merely acting as foils to the heroines, and only a few scholars have recognized their significance.¹⁹ Their stories reveal that women often have some intrinsic value even if it has been tarnished: Charlotte Lucas has the wherewithal to make the best of an awkward marriage; Miss Bates finds ways of being necessary in a world that has forsaken her; Mrs. Smith proves her resilience and regains her health and lost property. And while exposing the other side of the heroine's choices, by showing the desperation and elasticity of those with little intrinsic value, their small triumphs are highlighted: Maria Bertram temporarily escapes from her life with the bumbling Mr. Rushworth, and Lucy Steele becomes Mrs. Ferrars's favorite. Though these women are not heroines, they are often drawn with sympathetic understanding; these characters survive and make the best of life in a difficult world.

Of course, there are other "minor" female characters within the Austen canon, but many of them are not as fully developed as those considered in this study. Mrs. Allen is a one-dimensional parody of the wealthy woman focused on dress and appearance, for example. Lydia and Kitty Bennet, Julia Bertram, and Louisa Musgrove are immature girls who are not prepared for the serious business of marriage. Harriet Smith and Eliza Williams are "natural" daughters who find very different fates. Mrs. Clay is a speculating young widow looking to find a permanent place in the gentry's ranks. Various mothers and mother-surrogates are overly focused on lucrative marriages for their children (Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. Bennet, and Lady Russell all come to mind), and the younger married women often reflect the potential spoils of the marriage market: Mrs. John Dashwood, Charlotte Palmer, Lady Middleton, and Mrs. Elton each have made a lucrative match, but the marriages do not reflect the affection desired by the heroines. Austen's juvenilia and unfinished novels also contain female figures that represent various aspects of the marriage market culture and resemble aspects of the completed characters in the published novels: Miss Stanley from "Catharine, or The Bower," for example, might be understood as an early version of *Northanger Abbey's* Isabella Thorpe. Lady Susan is clearly a speculator, as are Lady Denham and the Parker sisters in *Sanditon*. And conversations about marriage between the Watson sisters predict a similar conversation between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith in the completed *Emma*. While the settling, speculating, and superfluous aspects of other female characters are present throughout Jane Austen's works, the development of these

characteristics are more vibrantly demonstrated in the minor female characters considered at length in this study. Charlotte, Maria, and Jane; Isabella, Lucy, and Mary; Miss Bates and Mrs. Smith each has a vital role in dramatizing the desperate measures some women needed to take to survive in the marriage-market economy.

Survival often required a woman to settle for a marriage of convenience. Though the so-called companionate marriage was becoming more prevalent, marriages for economic convenience or gain were still common in the early nineteenth century and are reflected in Jane Austen's novels by her minor women who *settle*. Chapter 4 explores three characters who represent the many women who were encouraged to settle, both financially and socially, as Charlotte Lucas does, for the first somewhat suitable man, as "the pleasantest preservative from want" (*PP* 122–3), since her intrinsic value would not provide sufficient financial support. This representation of the woman who settles is complicated with the wealthy Maria Bertram of *Mansfield Park*: she marries a buffoon merely to increase her already high expressed value and then chooses to transgress both the moral code and the rules of that market. After taking ownership over her own body and giving it to Henry Crawford, Maria is banished from her social world as well as from the larger narrative structure that represents that world. In *Emma*, however, the issue of settling is further illustrated with the most accomplished female character in all of Austen's fiction, who is also one of the poorest. Jane Fairfax's story reflects another conflict of intrinsic and expressed value and another type of ownership of a woman's body: her equation of the governess profession to the slave trade might also portray her discomfort with her alternate choice—marriage to Frank Churchill—since marriage could be considered another type of servitude. The existing social structure assumed that women must marry to reach full adulthood and gain some personal autonomy, and the stories of these three female characters reveals how many women settled for less-than-desirable marriages as they competed for the finite number of suitable men.

As the result of multiple wars and a high infant mortality rate for males,²⁰ competition for "a single man in possession of a good fortune" (*PP* 3) was fierce. Some women were driven to extremes in order to secure a place for themselves in the increasingly competitive market. Chapter 5 considers the minor role of the *speculating* female character, beginning with the story of *Northanger Abbey's* Isabella Thorpe, who is a virtual caricature of the speculator on the prowl for the richest husband. This

speculating female is more carefully developed in *Sense and Sensibility* with Lucy Steele, who is well-schooled in marriage market behavior, successfully dropping a sure marriage prospect in favor of one with a higher market value (the very thing Isabella Thorpe fails to do), thereby continuing to find ways to increase her expressed value. This paradigm is further complicated in *Mansfield Park* with a wealthy speculator. Although she begins the novel with high expressed value, Mary Crawford is determined to convert the man she loves into a gentleman of rank and social stature. Women with small price tags, like Isabella Thorpe and Lucy Steele, attempted to move into the highest social rank possible, and wealthy women, like Mary Crawford, were encouraged to enhance their established economic and social position. Each of these characters is focused on economic status rather than the intrinsic value of a marriage of mutual affection. And thus, Isabella, Lucy, and Mary are ultimately banished from the foreground of Austen's texts, freeing the good clergymen from their webs, allowing their respective heroines to transcend the confines of expressed value, and highlighting the heroines' superior intrinsic worth. The speculators' stories also reveal dangers posed by such women who are driven to predatory behavior in a market economy.

The average woman in England's long eighteenth century, however, was not able to transcend her low expressed value on the marriage market. The marriage market had its limits, and many women found themselves unvalued creatures within a world that saw only their (lack of) monetary worth. Chapters 6 and 7 consider the so-called *superfluous* women depicted in Austen's last three and arguably most mature of the completed novels.²¹ These three novels highlight these vulnerable women, sometimes referred to as "surplus" or "redundant." Only a few decades after Austen's novels were published, the issue of "redundant" women came under scrutiny, most likely due to the results of the 1851 census, which was the first to record details of births, deaths, marital status, origins, and occupations of the residents of England. In 1869, W. R. Greg published an essay entitled, "Why Are Women Redundant?" proposing, "three or four hundred thousand women who are condemned to celibacy, struggle, and privation here, might, if transferred to the colonies or the United States, find in exchange a life, not indeed of ease, but of usefulness, happiness, domestic affection, reasonable comfort, and ultimate prosperity."²² One such economically and socially vulnerable woman is *Emma's* Miss Bates. Although, for most of the novel, Miss Bates is portrayed as a ridiculous stereotype, the old maid's humility and humanity is ultimately

underscored. Miss Bates is a character who has already failed on the marriage market where she had little expressed value, and it is her struggle to assert her intrinsic value within her small corner of society that is both comic and distressing, yet revelatory. The superfluous female appears again in *Persuasion* with the character of Mrs. Smith, a widow who was at one time successful on the marriage market but who has found herself dependent on the charity of others to survive. Her expressed value has been spent and she must assert her tarnished but ultimately reclaimable intrinsic value to retrieve her lost fortune (and re-express her value). Unlike Miss Bates, Mrs. Smith is able to recover her health as well as her wealth and position in the genteel social world.

One additional way to understand Austen's concern for the superfluous woman is through her depiction of the heroine of *Mansfield Park*. Chapter 7 traces Fanny Price's story, beginning in a minor space—she rarely speaks and is often sidelined or forgotten during the action of the first volume of the novel. Fanny's place is assumed by many in her family to be superfluous, since she has no expressed value. When Fanny is thrust onto the marriage market, and has the chance to gain some expressed value, however, she finds a voice and refuses to be commodified. Thus, as Fanny Price asserts her rights not to *settle* for a marriage without affection, rejects the possibility of *speculating* on the marriage market, and sheds her *superfluous* and minor role, she ultimately earns her place as a heroine with solidified intrinsic value. Fanny Price is an example of a potentially superfluous woman who ascends to a place of primacy. For the most part, however, superfluous women, by definition, have already disappeared: they are no longer a part of the active marriage market, and they must scrape to retain even a minor place in that society (and in the narrative structure of their respective novels) through reasserting their intrinsic value as morally respectable characters. By not neglecting minor women who were often overlooked within their society, Austen's fiction shows the tenuous place of women with little expressed value and represents each superfluous woman's minor role in her novel as a reflection of her marginal value (and the marginal value of many women like her) within the contemporary social structure.

By focusing on these minor (or would-be minor) characters and their fates, then, this study examines how the characterization of these women presents an implicit argument for change in the social and economic position of women. Whether depicting the plight of the women who found themselves beyond the prospect of a marriage of affection, those who believed

that they must speculate in order to build their expressed value, or those who were left beyond the prospect of any marriage, often neglected or forgotten, Austen's novels look beyond the heroines to the minor female characters who must confront precarious social and economic exigencies. The minor characters, therefore, function thematically as more than conventions and foils; they offer a subtle and often ironic call for proto-feminist change.

Ultimately, Jane Austen's novels are able to expose contradictions in the value structures under the guise of fiction. The female characters considered in this study not only expose the possibilities Austen's heroines might have faced had they made different choices or had circumstances been slightly altered, but they also depict the difficulties that many women faced, difficulties that could encourage them to settle for marriages of convenience, to become speculators on the marriage market, or to evolve into superfluous women—women “on the shelf,” struggling to survive and working to find value in an increasingly competitive consumer society. These minor female characters are more than plot devices: by illuminating the reality of their lives—their lack of choice, their confinement, their desperation, and sometimes their villainy—Austen's fiction reveals the grim realities of life for many women of her time. The fates of these characters illustrate a plausible, though often bleak alternative for Austen's heroines, and they provide a representative reflection of the struggle between the moral and the marketable, between intrinsic and expressed value.

NOTES

1. Carolyn Kellogg, “Austen's Currency Might Still Be Rising,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 2013, E2.
2. Pioneering nurse, Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) was on the £10 note from 1975 to 1992. Social reformer, Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) recently has been replaced on the £5 note by Winston Churchill. All other women depicted on the notes have been monarchs.
3. Sheryl Craig, *Jane Austen and the State of the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.
4. Citations for Jane Austen's fiction and letters are made in the text by following quotations with a title abbreviation and page numbers. For the six published novels as well as the “minor works” of Jane Austen, *The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen* edited by R. W. Chapman, 6 volumes, 3rd edition, 1988, has been used. For Austen's letters, *Jane Austen's Letters*, edited by Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edition, 1985, has been used. Where a number of

consecutive references to a particular work is made, the title is omitted after the first reference.

5. Historians often refer to the long eighteenth century as extending roughly from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the battle of Waterloo in 1815 as a more “natural” historic period than calendar dates.
6. Walter Scott, “An Unsigned Review of *Emma*,” *Quarterly Review* Dated October 1815, issued March 1816, xiv, 188–201, in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, Volume I: 1811–1870, ed., B. C. Southam (New York: Routledge, 1979), 64, 67.
7. Elsie B. Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry James* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 6.
8. Marie Nedregotten Sørbo, *Irony and Idyll: Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park on Screen* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2014), 25.
9. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), 253.
10. Although almost any character other than the protagonist might be considered “minor” in the narrative structure of a novel, I use the term “minor” here to refer to those who play an important, albeit secondary role within the plot.
11. Five editions of *Chrysal* were issued between 1760 and 1763. Kevin Bourque, introduction to *Chrysal; or, The Adventures of a Guinea*, by Thomas Bridges (Kansas City, MO: Valancourt Books, 2011), viii.
12. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Books I-III* (1776), ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 131. (Emphasis added.)
13. Katherine Sobba Green, “The Heroine’s Blazon and Hardwicke’s Marriage Act: Commodification for a Novel Market,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 9, no. 2 (1990): 275.
14. The novel we now refer to as *Roxana* was published anonymously in 1724 and attributed posthumously to Daniel Defoe in 1775.
15. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13.
16. *Ibid.*, 25.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 38.
19. See Laura Fairchild Brodie, “Society and the Superfluous Female: Jane Austen’s Treatment of Widowhood,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 34, no. 4 (1994): 700; Cynthia L. Caywood, “*Pride and Prejudice* and the Belief in Choice: Jane Austen’s Fantastical Vision,” in *Portraits of Marriage in Literature*, eds., Anne C. Hargrove and Maurine Magliocco (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University Press, 1984), 36.

20. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 381.
21. Sometimes referred to as the “Chawton Novels,” as they were conceived of and written after Austen settled into her final home in Chawton Cottage, these three novels (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*), were presumably conceived of and written there, and show a higher level of maturity in both the style and the subject matter.
22. W. R. Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: M Trübner & Co., 1869), 17–18.