

ROUTLEDGE IAFFE ADVANCES  
IN FEMINIST ECONOMICS

ROUTLEDGE

# Women's Economic Thought in the Romantic Age

Towards a Transdisciplinary Herstory  
of Economic Thought

Joanna Rostek



“In this stimulating study, Rostek adopts the radical premise that women writing about money across a range of genres should be classified as economists. She argues that while the emerging discipline of economics was marginalising the experiences of women as economic subjects, a great flourishing of alternative proto-feminist knowledge formation was taking place elsewhere, in the pages of novels, pamphlets and memoirs. Rostek’s incisive readings allow us to appreciate the intellectual daring of relatively unknown writers such as Sarah Chapone, Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Ann Radcliffe while seeing even the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen anew.”

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University of Edinburgh



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# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC THOUGHT IN THE ROMANTIC AGE

This book examines the writings of seven English women economists from the period 1735–1811. It reveals that contrary to what standard accounts of the history of economic thought suggest, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women intellectuals were undertaking incisive and gender-sensitive analyses of the economy.

*Women's Economic Thought in the Romantic Age* argues that established notions of what constitutes economic enquiry, topics, and genres of writing have for centuries marginalised the perspectives and experiences of women and obscured the knowledge they recorded in novels, memoirs, or pamphlets. This has led to an underrepresentation of women in the canon of economic theory. Using insights from literary studies, cultural studies, gender studies, and feminist economics, the book develops a transdisciplinary methodology that redresses this imbalance and problematises the distinction between literary and economic texts. In its in-depth readings of selected writings by Sarah Chapone, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, Priscilla Wakefield, Mary Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen, this book uncovers the originality and topicality of their insights on the economics of marriage, women and paid work, and moral economics.

Combining historical analysis with conceptual revision, *Women's Economic Thought in the Romantic Age* retrieves women's overlooked intellectual contributions and radically breaks down the barriers between literature and economics. It will be of interest to researchers and students from across the humanities and social sciences, in particular the history of economic thought, English literary and cultural studies, gender studies, economics, eighteenth-century and Romantic studies, social history, and the history of ideas.

**Joanna Rostek** is Junior Professor of Anglophone Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at the University of Giessen, Germany. She was a visiting scholar at institutions in Scotland, Poland, and the US and is co-founder of the research network *Methodologies of Economic Criticism*. She has published extensively on women's writing and on the relationship between literature, culture, and the economy.

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*Joanna Rostek*

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Can you name any English women to have made original contributions to economic thought around 1800? Any women from that period that would qualify as economists? If your answer to these questions is no, then it aligns with what remains a glaring research gap: no detailed study of English women economists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries exists to date. This book redresses this lacuna in two respects: firstly, drawing on literary studies, cultural studies, feminist economics, (feminist) history of thought, and gender studies, it develops a transdisciplinary methodology that enables the identification of women economists of the past – a method that can also be applied in future research. Secondly, using this methodology, the book presents and analyses selected contributions to economic thought developed by seven English women during the Romantic Age and beyond. The women economists covered are Sarah Chapone (1699–1764), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), Mary Hays (1759–1843), Mary Robinson (1756/1758?–1800), Priscilla Wakefield (1750–1832), Mary Ann Radcliffe (1746–1810?), and Jane Austen (1775–1817). The earliest examined text was published in 1735 and the most recent in 1811. The book concentrates on the authors' observations on the economics of marriage, women's access to paid work, and moral economics. It reveals that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women thinkers were formulating demands for equal pay, investigating how women could earn money, negotiating property and marital rights, criticising cultural norms that led to women's economic marginalisation, and challenging the institutionalisation of male economic privilege.

Before expanding on the main argument and structure of this book, I wish to lose a few words about its genesis. My impulse to write it arose from the seeming non-existence of women economic thinkers that would be contemporaries of men whose names are well-known: Adam Smith, Thomas Robert Malthus, David Ricardo, and James Mill. I thought back to my time as a student when I took a



## 2 Introduction

degree in International Cultural and Business Studies: in none of the classes on the foundations of economics had I been acquainted with a single theory developed by a woman. I consulted anthologies devoted to the history of economic thought: hardly any women were mentioned, and those that were for the most part (had) lived in the twentieth century. At the same time, as a literary and cultural scholar, I knew very well what numerous scholars of English had demonstrated: economic concerns permeated the writings, especially novels, of women authors of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. I was also familiar with the publications by early nineteenth-century female popularisers of political economy, Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau. The discrepancy between the absence of women in accounts of the history of economic thought and the presence of economic matters in women's literature struck me as odd. Why were the discourses so gendered? Where were women in the history of economic theorising? And what did they have to say about economic matters while the founding fathers of classical political economy were penning their texts?

My declaration that I was working on women's contributions to economic thought in England in the decades around 1800 commonly met with one of the following reactions: "That's an interesting topic. But isn't suitable material to analyse hard to come by?" or "That's an interesting topic. Are you then reading Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and so on and discussing how the work of female authors relates to their theories?" Both responses made sense, but they also made me question the premises of my project. If my interlocutors were correct, I would have to do the exact reverse of what had been my intention: instead of reading many economic texts by female writers, I would have to read many economic texts by men, firstly because the latter's publications were the standard to which I had to relate, and secondly because women had not written much in that domain anyway. It was true that I could write a book exploring if and how female authors of the Romantic period engaged with the thought of male economists of their time. But I did not want women to end up as satellites revolving around and responding to the standard set by male economists. To borrow Mary Eagleton's expression, my aim was to "rescue [. . .] women's work from being secondary source material, merely an interesting gloss on the primary male text" (252). This made me probe a different perspective: what if the problem lies not with the meagre quantity and quality of economic texts produced by women but with the very notion of what 'the economy' and 'economic knowledge' are? What if not the amount of available material is too limited but the notion of what counts as 'economic thought' and 'economic writing'? Out of these considerations, this book emerged.

The texts introduced and examined in the following chapters prove that contrary to what standard histories of economic thought convey, English women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries developed and formulated original ideas on the economy. They wrote as women (i.e. from a female perspective), revealing how fundamentally gender determines economic experiences, roles, and outcomes. Their gender-sensitive approach does not mean that their contributions

represent a biased supplement to an objective, gender-neutral enquiry by their male contemporaries. Rather, women's texts constitute an equally important counterpart to the writings by men classical political economists. It is socially relevant to pursue the aim of a 'herstory' of economic thought, not only because "economic discourse is a prime terrain for political struggle" (Seiz, "Gender" 43), but also because the formation and dissemination of knowledge touches upon relations of power, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and ways of making sense of the world – both in the past and present.

The observations of English women economists around 1800 convey that what their contemporaries – but also some scholars today – considered as simply 'the' economy was a system in which material and immaterial resources and privileges were distributed unevenly between men and women, to the overall detriment of the latter. From this vantage point, 'the' economy emerges as a patriarchal economy, for whose functioning it was indispensable that women's dependence persists and men retain the discretion over women's economic agency. The analysis and critique of the patriarchal economy marks radical interventions (Wollstonecraft, Hays, Robinson) as well as more moderate, in parts even conservative, texts (Chapone, Wakefield, Radcliffe, Austen). Similar economic phenomena, then, preoccupied women from differing ideological backgrounds. Their common gender and class experiences – they all hailed from and for the most part wrote about middle-class women – certainly contributed to these parallels. But the parallels also suggest how entrenched the patriarchal economy has been.

To recuperate these significant and topical contributions to economic thought by women of the Romantic Age, it has first been necessary to reveal and dismantle the gender bias inherent in established definitions and practices of scholarship generally and economics in particular. Furthermore, it has been indispensable to make visible and uproot the gender bias underlying the distinction between genres of writing around 1800 and thus between literary and economic texts. This is also why the title of my book, *Women's Economic Thought in the Romantic Age: Towards a Transdisciplinary Herstory of Economic Thought*, purposefully avoids signal words that would point to literature. My aim is not to show that 'literature' (by women) was processing similar topics as 'economic thought' (by men) around 1800 but to delegitimise the rigid distinction between the two. In some contexts, this distinction is useful and indispensable; in others – such as women's economic thought around 1800 – it is problematic. Finally, I had to cross the boundaries between academic disciplines so that knowledge of women's economic writing as well as methods that already exist in English departments could travel to economics. Part I of this book retraces this epistemological groundwork and develops a transdisciplinary methodology for a herstory of economic thought. Part II illustrates that once it is applied, women's contributions to economic thought are no longer needles in a haystack. They provide a vital and hitherto neglected perspective on the economy and enlarge our understanding of economic processes, historically and today. This is why women's texts ought to be included in the canon of economic writing.

## *Transdisciplinarity*

In focusing on texts authored by women, my project shares the impetus of early feminist scholarship, which has successfully made women visible – as writers and readers, as minds and bodies, as subjects and objects – and confirmed the value of their contributions. From the viewpoint of literary and cultural studies, the feminist project has been so successful as to establish gender studies within the academic mainstream and render self-evident the presence of Jane Austen or Mary Wollstonecraft in the literary canon and academic curricula. Four decades ago, literary scholar Elaine Showalter coined the term “gynocritics” to describe “the study of women *as writers* [and of] the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (184–85).<sup>1</sup> Since then, literary feminism and gender studies have evolved, gone through various phases and controversies, yielded numerous results, and developed into sub-fields.

But the fact that feminist approaches are relatively established within literary and cultural studies does not mean that the project of analysing the intersections of gender on the one hand and epistemological (dis-)empowerment on the other has become superfluous. There remain academic disciplines that have not sufficiently responded to and incorporated the insights yielded by women’s and gender studies. Heike Kahlert notes that “[w]ith respect to the history of science, gender studies and gender research are new- and latecomers in academia. This reflects the history of science and academia which is built on a long tradition of the dominance of men and the exclusion or marginalisation of women as subjects and objects of scientific knowledge” (“Introduction” 2). Economics and its history remain a blatant case in point in this regard, despite notable efforts by feminist economists. A first weighty argument in favour of a transdisciplinary methodology presents itself at this point: because literary and cultural scholars have by now more experience in retrieving women’s texts and perspectives, they may lend their expertise to other disciplines.

This book, in fact, uses and promotes transdisciplinarity as an approach that is paramount for a herstory of economic thought. I do not seek to delegitimise alternative terms, such as ‘interdisciplinary’, ‘cross-disciplinary’, or ‘multidisciplinary’, which often designate projects that work along similar lines as mine. But the prefix ‘trans’, which comes from the Latin ‘across’, ‘over’, or ‘beyond’, has the advantage of highlighting that rather than merely enabling a dialogue between academic disciplines, a transdisciplinary approach seeks to go beyond, reposition, and partially blur the boundaries between them. In my understanding, it *translates* the languages that different academic disciplines speak so that they can communicate with each other; it *transports* ideas and texts from one domain to the other so that they can travel and circulate; it *transcends* conceptual and generic boundaries that both delimit and limit what is recognised as legitimate and valuable knowledge; and, ideally, it *transforms* the disciplines involved. Gender studies frequently resorts to transdisciplinary research because, as I explain in the course of this book,

modern scholarship and contemporary academic mapping are suffused with androcentric biases that are apt to marginalise women's (and other social groups') contributions. Knowledge historically produced by women and other underprivileged subjects often evades the frameworks of established disciplines, which is why to move beyond gender it is necessary to move beyond disciplines. This is also true of economic thought.

Transdisciplinarity entails the benefits but also potential dangers inherent in any approach fusing divergent academic disciplines: dilettantism, inconsistency, methodological reductionism, oversimplifications, and so forth. Besides, writing a transdisciplinary book invariably carries the risk of remaining unintelligible and/or banal to practitioners from the respective academic fields.<sup>2</sup> I nevertheless follow Sandra Harding's optimistic assessment that "[f]eminist work in economics and other social sciences, as well as in biology and the humanities, has made its greatest contributions to the growth of knowledge when it has been able to step outside the preoccupations of the disciplines" ("Feminist" 164). She notes that although

there is nowhere that is outside all culture; there are no vantage points anyone could find that are not themselves also discursively constructed within power relations, it will be easier to identify the contours of a given conceptual scheme or paradigm from 'outside' than from within its categories, puzzles and other preoccupations that usually fill up the entire horizon of our thought. We want to start off our thought from 'elsewhere'.

("Feminist" 160)

As a literary and cultural scholar, I propose that my disciplines can serve as the "outside" or "elsewhere" for the history of economic thought. Janet A. Seiz predicts in this regard that "[f]eminist historical/literary/sociological analyses of economics will undoubtedly meet resistance, but they may over time contribute substantially to the reduction of gender bias in economic discourse" ("Gender" 35). When literary or cultural scholars look at economics, they might notice things that for most economists have been naturalised to such an extent as to become blind spots. The reverse obviously also holds true when economists look at literary or cultural studies – which, however, appears to happen less frequently (Amann 14; Horvath 48; Priddat 159).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, transdisciplinarity means that it is not easy to situate my book theoretically and relate it to extant research because the major issues I broach – women/gender, the history of ideas and scholarship, the history of economic thought, literature – are interrelated in a myriad of ways and have been variously conceptualised by scholars from different academic disciplines. Historians, cultural and literary scholars, as well as feminist philosophers of science, for example, have commented on the role of *women* in the *history of knowledge*. The comprehensive approach of feminist economists focuses on the place of *women* in *economics*. Literary and cultural scholars practising economic criticism have provided vital insights into how *literature*, *culture*, and the *economy* have intersected historically and in the

present. Instead of giving an overview of all these approaches here – which would risk becoming too extensive and disorderly – I introduce, discuss, and explain how I relate to contributions from each field in the respective chapters of Part I.

### ***Timeframe and terminology: ‘Romantic Age’ and ‘herstory’***

As mentioned previously, what prompted me to write this book was a research gap condensed into the question “What did women have to say about economic matters while the founding fathers of classical political economy were penning their texts?” The temporal focus implicit in this question explains why the bulk of the texts under consideration stems from a period which I alternatively (and admittedly somewhat vaguely) term ‘around 1800’. The latter half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth saw the emergence of political economy, the publication of seminal economic texts such as *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, the establishment of economics as an academic discipline (see the section “Women and the Emergence of Modern Scholarship in the Romantic Age”), and the emergence of the word “economist” to designate “an expert in or student of economics” (“economist” *OED* 3.a).<sup>4</sup> No precise dates frame the beginning and ending of this process, but it roughly coincides with what in English literary and cultural history is known as the Romantic Age, Romantic period, or simply Romanticism, spanning the decades between c. 1780 and c. 1830.

In the process of writing this book it occurred to me that in making the ‘birth’ of modern economics my point of departure, I had initially bought into what had been my intention to challenge, namely an unwittingly androcentric history of economic thought. By choosing the period around 1800, I had premised my research on what is a male-centred account of economic thought. Barbara Caine writes in the context of political and social debates of the Romantic period that

[w]omen were rarely overt reference-points in discussing the rights of man, the issue rather being the assertion of the rights of all men as against the privileges of a small group of men. By contrast, all discussions of rights of women necessarily involved a demand that at least some of the rights of men be extended to women. Thus men were set up as the standard, and debate centred on the extent to which women resembled or differed from them intellectually and morally. Inevitably, this meant that while women could demand some specific rights, the term ‘man’ remained synonymous with the term ‘human’.

(42–43; see also *Golightly* 12)

In a similar vein, the standard history of economic thought tends to universalise a particular process (e.g. the rise of classical political economy) that has been experienced, shaped, and defined by a relatively small, male group. Women’s writings suggest that a comprehensive history of their economic thought would point to different temporal markers and key events within the evolution of economic

theorising. In such a herstory, the granting of property rights to wives, the admittance of women to universities, or the passing of equal-pay laws are likely to turn out to be more relevant points of reference than the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*. To signal that common periodisations do not necessarily apply to women's oeuvre, I include Sarah Chapone's treatise of 1735, although it predates the Romantic timeframe. I would indeed encourage historians of female economic thought to reconsider established narratives and caesuras.

The term 'Romantic Age' raises similar difficulties, given that with respect to gender, literary and cultural history face analogous problems of periodisation as the history of economic thought. Jennifer Golightly explains in her study of *The Family, Marriage, and Radicalism in British Women's Novels of the 1790s* (2012) that

[t]he difficulty with the term Romanticism is nearly as old as the works themselves; the problem is that it was coined to describe a small group of poems by a select group of poets. The sensibilities of the works of the "major six" male Romantic poets were used to create a definition of Romanticism; when Romanticism began to broaden in response to New Historicism [in the 1980s – J.R.] and the new cultural historicism to include different genres and writers, the old definition no longer fit – and was particularly inappropriate as a label for the novels of the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries.

(16)

Due to these reservations and to highlight the specificity of the texts by women she examines, Golightly decides not to use the term and to opt out of a terminology that generalises male experience (16–17). Instead, she creates a woman-focused narrative with a different temporal demarcation (the 1790s rather than Romanticism). Anne K. Mellor, by contrast, in *Romanticism & Gender* (1993), consciously employs the initially androcentric term and argues that for pragmatic and theoretical reasons it ought to be broadened to encompass contributions by women: "If we are to present ourselves as students and teachers of literary Romanticism, we can no longer confine our attention to the work of the six canonical male poets. In conversation and contestation with masculine Romanticism, we must learn to hear at the very least one other voice, what I have been calling feminine Romanticism" (209). Such debates on the relation of gender to established periodisations and terminology have arguably yet to take place and bear fruit in the context of the history of economic thought. Golightly and Mellor negotiate the challenges of any revisionist project: is it better to set up a new, competing discourse or to attempt a reform of extant discourses?

This book combines both approaches, as the title makes apparent. On the one hand, I use the expression 'Romantic Age' to indicate that women were not the 'other', but a constitutive part of the political, social, economic, cultural, and aesthetic processes that are by now subsumed under the term.<sup>5</sup> On the other, I write a 'herstory': a historical account that puts women, their experiences, topics, and

concerns at the centre and consciously reduces the presence of the male standard. It is not the case that men's economic thought is irrelevant or cannot be fruitfully compared to the texts I analyse here. Yet, there already exists a myriad of academic publications on men's economic thought around 1800 but virtually none on women's. Virginia Woolf, an early critic of such imbalances and an advocate of herstories, remarked in *A Room of One's Own* (1929): "And there is the girl behind the counter too – I would as soon have her true history as the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon or seventieth study of Keats and his use of Miltonic inversion which old Professor Z and his like are now inditing" (117–18). To borrow Woolf's biting phrasing, instead of submitting the hundred and fiftieth treatise on the admirable Adam Smith, I give as much room as possible to hitherto marginalised women economists and their thoughts.

A focus on the period around 1800 is justified from such a 'herstorical' perspective, too. The 1790s especially mark a noteworthy moment, as radical women thinkers set out to "challenge notions of women's helplessness, weakness, and 'natural' innocence" and to expose "the threats faced by women in Britain on an everyday level as a result of specifically British laws, customs, and values" (Golightly 23). The proliferation of such interventions explains why most of the texts under consideration in this book stem from the 1790s. The decade has to be seen within a wider context. In the words of Gary Kelly, "[t]he period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was one of radical and rapid change – too radical and rapid for some and not enough for others" ("Introduction" ix). It is impossible to enumerate and explain here all the developments that took place around 1800.<sup>6</sup> They would include the repercussions of the American and French Revolutions, the Napoleonic Wars, the rise of capitalist forms of investment and management, the shift to wage economy, the rise of the banking system in Britain, inflation, national debt, the so-called restriction period, Imperialism, the slave trade, abolitionist movements, the second scientific revolution, and changes in publishing and the literary market. Crucially, especially in the last decades of the eighteenth century, these processes were accompanied by heated and consequential debates about individual rights, citizenship, political participation, and social organisation, with the 'rights of man' becoming a central, if contested, concept.

As a result, writers and social commentators also began to inquire into the status and rights of women. In the early 1790s, this led to a wave of early feminism. Before the developments in post-revolutionary France and the onset of the Napoleonic Wars stimulated a conservative backlash in Britain towards the end of the decade, female authors with differing political and ideological leanings explored the questions of the rights a woman should enjoy, what her role in society should be, what her particular duties consist in, and how she should position herself vis-à-vis men. Nowadays, the best-known early feminist is probably Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the by now canonical *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Yet Wollstonecraft was not the only outspoken female writer challenging patriarchal norms. They were also, if differently, put into question by Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, and Mary Robinson, as well as by conservative writers

such as Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth.<sup>7</sup> The social climate in Britain of the 1790s was therefore particularly favourable to the publication of gender-sensitive social analyses, and the (anti-)feminist debates often revolved around economic concerns. E.J. Clery, who has extensively researched the interconnections of gender, literature, and political economy in the long eighteenth century, claims that the “‘republican’ feminism of the 1790s broke decisively with the [. . .] insidious linkage of the progress of commercial society and the progress of women” which, according to Clery, had been characteristic of eighteenth-century ideology. This break “freed feminism [. . .] to develop in critical relation to the capitalist status quo” (*Feminization* 12). For a herstory of economic thought, the 1790s are therefore a treasure trove: women claimed their stake within what they often described as an exclusionary economy, which denied them access to material and immaterial resources on a par with men.

However, notwithstanding the undisputed relevance of the 1790s, earlier and later texts imply that similar concerns preoccupied women economic thinkers beyond the feminist window of opportunity that this remarkable decade had opened. The 1790s were exceptional in terms of the freedom of expression granted to radical women, but not with regard to economic topics relevant for women social thinkers as a whole. A specific cultural constellation allowed women to formulate outright what at other times they could not bring as easily into public consciousness. This does not mean that their economic concerns disappeared during periods when women’s freedom to make emancipatory demands was more strongly curbed. Much of women’s economic theorising has been a response to material outcomes produced by patriarchy, and the longevity of patriarchy has translated into a century-long recurrence of specific topics in women’s economic thought. 200 years after the publication of the texts considered in this book, many of the issues that women thinkers of the Romantic period raised remain pressing – and more often than not depressing – economic concerns for women across the globe.

## **Chapter outline**

The first step in developing a transdisciplinary methodology for a herstory of economic thought – which is the subject of Part I – is to consider “Women and Scholarship” (Chapter 2). I focus on the vital insight of historians of thought and feminist philosophers of science that any type of scholarship is a cultural practice and therefore also gendered (see the section “Scholarship as a Cultural and Gendered Practice”). I draw, among others, on the work of Michel Foucault and complement it with research by Sandra Harding and Patricia Fara, who have revealed that modern scholarship and its history carry an androcentric bias. In the section “Women and the History of Thought”, I present two approaches that feminist philosophy of science has employed to counter this androcentrism, which I term the Lost-Gems approach and epistemological criticism. I discuss their respective merits and disadvantages and explain how I utilise a combination



of both in this book. Lastly, in the section “Women and the Emergence of Modern Scholarship in the Romantic Age”, I consider how gender ideology has impacted the place of women in relation to the emergence of modern scholarship during the Romantic Age, that is, the period in which the academic discipline of economics took shape. Overall, what emerges from this contextual chapter is the insight that in order to produce more gender-sensitive histories of knowledge – including economic knowledge – it is essential to revise certain received notions and practices of scholarship as well as conventional narratives of its history.

Having established this point, I then zoom in on “Women and Economics” (Chapter 3). It would certainly be convenient at this point to offer a neat definition of this academic discipline and its areas of research. But, as feminist economist Julie A. Nelson notes, “the diversity of endeavours undertaken by economists suggests that there is no easy, definitive description of what economics is, and what projects are outside its realm” (“Gender” 78). I argue in this chapter that what is true for (the history of) scholarship in general also applies for (the history of) economic thought: to lessen its gender bias, the very definition of economics and its practices need to be reconsidered. Whether implicitly or explicitly, each definition performs an act of demarcation, inclusion, and exclusion: something is identified as this and not that. Such demarcations and the value judgements they entail have consequences for making sense of the world, which is also true of any definition of economics, as Nitasha Kaul points out: “Th[e] delineation/demarcation of the ‘economic’ itself is an intensely political act, for often privileges accrue to what gets defined as being so” (202). My goal is to render visible economics’ outside(r)s, in this case women as well as their topics and genres.

This project does not need to begin from scratch but can build on feminist economics, a heterodox school of contemporary economics. Chapter 3 presents the vital groundwork generated in this academic field. Scholars I refer to include Drucilla K. Barker, Robert W. Dimand, Marianne A. Ferber, Nancy Folbre, Edith Kuiper, Kirsten K. Madden, Julie A. Nelson, Michèle A. Pujol, Janet A. Seiz, and Diana Strassmann. I begin with a brief definition of feminist economics, its major claims, and its position within contemporary economics (see the section “Feminist Economics and Powerful Demarcations: Centre Versus Periphery, Mainstream Versus Heterodoxy”). I then introduce the notable work that it has already undertaken regarding women’s history of economic thought (see the section “The Androcentric Bias of the History of Economic Thought”). But I also show that the task is far from complete: standard histories of economic thought are still androcentric, and in accounts that do take women into consideration the Romantic period remains blatantly under-researched. In the section “The Androcentric Bias of Mainstream Economics: Topics, Concepts and Methods, Code”, I turn to the androcentrism of what today constitutes the mainstream approach within economics, namely neo-classical economics. Feminist economists have disclosed that the latter perpetuates gender biases at the level of research topics, concepts, methods, and codes for formulating academic results. I maintain that these contemporary problems

are relevant when investigating a period predating neoclassical economics because what counts as economic today determines which topics, concepts, and modes of expression count as economic in the past. The androcentric bias of today's definitions of 'the economy' must therefore be made visible and challenged first before women's contributions to economic thought can come to light. Revising the definition of 'the economy' based on feminist economic research moreover has great potential for stimulating economic criticism within literary and cultural studies because it can lead to more gender-sensitive analyses of the interrelations between literature, culture, and the economy (see Rostek, "Implementing").

In Chapter 4, devoted to "Women and Writing", I turn to the gendered legacy of genre and assert that this is a further category that must be reconceptualised for a herstory of economic thought. My claim is that for the period around 1800 certain texts written by women, including novels, pamphlets, or memoirs, should be classified as economic thought on a par with scholarly treatises such as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or David Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817). More strongly, I propose that a herstory of economic thought becomes possible only when the conceptual distinction between a literary text and an economic/theoretical text loses its primacy as a category for classifying a piece of writing. I do not maintain that there is no difference whatsoever between literary and theoretical texts, but I do claim that economists, historians of economic thought, and literary and cultural scholars consciously and unconsciously continue to give priority to and rest their analyses on the distinction between 'literary' and 'economic' genres. This overlooks that, historically, genres were much more malleable than they are now and neglects that genre is strongly related to gender (and other identity markers that are beyond the scope of this book to consider).

In the section "Gender, Genre, and Academic Disciplines in the Romantic Age and Beyond", I bring into play research by literary and cultural scholars such as Mary Poovey and Anne K. Mellor, who have investigated the concept of (literary) genre and the relationships between women and writing in the Romantic and Victorian periods. I transfer some of their observations regarding genre onto the history of economic thought. I highlight that for a long time, women did not have access to academic or scholarly genres of writing and therefore were more likely to express their thoughts in genres more easily available to them. In such a way, novels, for instance, became outlets for their social, political, and economic deliberations. Although as a literary scholar, in my day-to-day work I tend to foreground fictional and literary aspects of texts, for the purposes of a herstory of economic thought it is crucial to reverse the approach: to give priority to the theorising in women's texts and *call* it (economic) theorising. To borrow a term introduced by Caroline Levine, I argue in favour of recognising hitherto neglected "affordances" of Romantic women's writing. A form's affordances are the "potential uses or actions latent" (6) in it. I posit that around 1800, women's writing across genres affords the formulation of economic thought. The section "Gender, Genre, and Academic Disciplines in the Romantic Age and Beyond" explains further that genres of writing could perform various functions at the turn of the nineteenth century because they were

not yet as specialised as they are now. The same is true of realms of knowledge. I aver that, as a consequence, the history of economic thought must pay attention to these ambivalences and overlaps rather than apply today's generic and disciplinary divisions to a period in which these distinctions were not yet as pronounced, even if they were coming into being. Herein lies a further crucial argument supporting a transdisciplinary methodology. Besides, because contemporary academic mapping makes different disciplines responsible for different genres, retrieving lost affordances of (women's) texts requires a methodology that transcends the boundaries between literary studies and economics. To substantiate my claims, I show with the example of Jane Austen how the category of genre can become a hindrance when applied to women's writing in connection with economic thought (see the section "The Limitations of Genre in Practice: The Example of Jane Austen").

Part I finishes with an interlude on "Gender, Genres, and Knowledge Formation Today", where I briefly consider how the reflections made in the preceding chapters impact on my own academic work. Seeing that I produce 'knowledge' about the cultural embeddedness of knowledge formation, I give at least a brief thought to the cultural processes that determine the very knowledge that *I* am producing. This book unavoidably forms part of the system whose history and flaws it retraces. On that note, I should add that I am aware of the fact that presenting the work of the thinkers I have chosen for this study is just one and in itself a biased endeavour within the larger project of epistemological pluralisation and democratisation: many of the authors were underprivileged in terms of their sex but were privileged on other grounds, such as geographical provenance (Europe), nationality (English), ethnicity (white), class (middle class), and education (starting with the ability to read and write). My focus on gender downplays other equally decisive and divisive markers of identity. I hope that future research will build on and complement my results through intersectional and less Eurocentric approaches. Apart from that, when I use the word 'women' or 'men', I do not propose that the processes I describe pertained to all members of a given sex. I am interested in carving out particular tendencies within a specific period and region, which does not mean that there were no exceptions to them or that all women or men – regardless of class, ethnicity, religion, ability, or other identity markers – were similarly affected by them.

In Part II, I put the methodology developed in the first part into practice. In this manner, I identify and analyse the economic thought of seven English women economists. As can be expected, I sum up their observations on the patriarchal economy in the conclusion to this book (Chapter 8), which is why at this point, I shall only outline the texts and topics covered in the respective chapters. Literary and cultural scholars have extensively discussed some of the texts, especially the novels, and I have profited from their insights for my own analyses. For historical background information, I relied on helpful research by social, economic, and feminist historians such as Bridget Hill, Joan Perkin, and Amy Louise Erickson.

For centuries, marriage was the principal means for women to attain economic security and provisioning. Chapter 5 concentrates on Romantic women's

contributions to the economics of marriage. It begins with a historical contextualisation about the legal and economic effects of matrimony for English women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see the section “The Legal Context: The Economic Effects of Coverture”). A particularly influential legal concept was coverture, which stipulated that upon marriage, a husband obtained extensive rights to a wife’s person, children, and property. Women economic writers analysed and criticised the crass material imbalance between spouses that resulted from this arrangement. The first publication I address (see the section “Marriage as Economic Risk”) is Sarah Chapone’s pamphlet titled *Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735). It is a forerunner, as it were, given that it predates the Romantic Age, but it also formulates in a systematic way many of the observations and arguments on the injustice of coverture that women economists would return to in the 1790s. Chapone particularly exposes how property regulations give incentives to and legalise economic violence against wives. The section “Illustrations of the Patriarchal Economy” analyses a text by the political thinker, writer, and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Her posthumously published and incomplete novel *The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria* (1798) describes the economy from the perspective of (married) women. From this viewpoint, the economic arrangement of marriage serves the purposes of a patriarchal economy, which turns wives into exploitable and disenfranchised resources. Condemnation of this state of affairs also characterises the economic thought of Mary Hays in her pamphlet *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798) and Mary Robinson in her public *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799). The section “Egalitarian Economics of Marriage” posits that both writers advocate an egalitarian economics of marriage by insisting on the equal value of women’s and men’s distinct contributions to society in general and the marital economy in particular. This, they argue, ought to find reflection in a widening of women’s legal and economic rights. Both authors moreover comment on the sexual division of labour within marriage and insist on the value of women’s domestic work. The destructive consequences of coverture women faced in real life are the subject matter of the short section on the testimonies of poet and novelist Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) and governess Nelly Weeton (1776–1849). Their private writings indicate that women’s analyses of the economics of marriage were grounded in and responding to stark gender inequalities of their time.

What were women to do when the standard economic scenario of matrimony did not materialise? What were the options for unmarried women, widowed women, or women wed to husbands who were unable or unwilling to provide for the family? (How) could they make a living through paid work? The economists whom I introduce in Chapter 6 address these questions. The section “Women and Work Around 1800” provides a historical overview of women’s relation to paid and unpaid work. I then consider the writings of Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Ann Radcliffe, who censure that cultural impediments limit middle-class women’s access to remunerated work by allowing for only a few acceptable professions

and stigmatising the remaining ones as ‘unfeminine’. Their texts lay bare how in the sphere of work, cultural norms and gender ideology translate into economic outcomes. In the section “A Conservative Demand for Women’s Right to Paid Work”, I analyse the pamphlet *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798) by Priscilla Wakefield, author of educational books and co-founder of the first English savings bank. Wakefield offers a systematic, class-by-class exploration of suitable work for women and ponders the social consequences of women’s limited access to paid professions. Her approach is noteworthy in that it develops progressive demands, including the improvement of women’s (vocational) education, based on a conservative mind-set, which perceives differences between genders and socio-economic classes as fixed. The section “Let then the claim to these female occupations be developed” focuses on the pamphlet *The Female Advocate* (1799) by Mary Ann Radcliffe (the namesake of the Gothic novelist) as well as on her *Memoirs* (1810). Though generically and stylistically challenging, at the level of content, her texts align with several observations made by Wakefield. Radcliffe concentrates on the culturally unscripted role of the middle-class female breadwinner – a role that she unwillingly had to take on throughout her life. *The Female Advocate* exposes the gap between gender ideology, which disenfranchised women in exchange for economic ‘protection’ by men, and actual practice that left women struggling if a man reneged on his culturally prescribed obligations. The economic thought by Wakefield and Radcliffe is moreover remarkable in that both authors engage with ideas that would re-emerge in the twentieth century, such as positive discrimination, occupational segregation, the demand for equal pay, and the economic causes of prostitution.

Women’s economic thought around 1800 displays a persistent concern with the moral dimensions of the economy. Chapter 7 examines moral economics with the example of Jane Austen. After briefly explaining why in the context of this book I consider her writings as novel economics rather than economic novels (see the section “Revaluing Jane Austen”), I examine in the section “The Benefits of Balance” the moral economic significance of her first published text, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Austen is likewise concerned with marriage, but she lays a stronger focus on the question of how to balance economic self-interest with one’s moral obligations towards other members of the community. In this, her reflections show parallels to those of male moral philosophers of her time, notably Adam Smith, but provide a female – and perhaps therefore more pessimistic – take on the matter. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen presents a panoply of characters who epitomise commendable and faulty moral economic behaviour. The model she advocates for women and men is that of an equilibrium between self-interest and social obligations as well as between economic and emotional needs. Through the portrayal of female characters, Austen moreover foregrounds women’s practical and economic skills and implicitly argues for women’s property rights, which serves as a veiled critique of their factual economic disenfranchisement and dependence. The “Coda” in the section “Billing Jane Austen in the 21st Century” brings us back to the twenty-first century. I perform a close reading of the £10 note depicting Jane

Austen, which the Bank of England released in 2017. I conclude that, unfortunately, though the note might celebrate Austen the novelist, it fails to do justice to Austen the economist.

## Notes

- 1 In this and all subsequent quotations, emphases are in the original unless stated otherwise.
- 2 Accordingly, I expect that the affiliation of the reader of this book will affect their reading experience. A feminist economist, for example, hardly needs to be familiarised with this school of economic thought, whereas to most literary scholars, this approach is probably unknown. Conversely, literary scholars might wish for a more extensive discussion of genre theory, while economists might deem it too detailed as it is. For a brief but helpful discussion of conceptual and practical problems inherent in multi- and interdisciplinary research in the context of British cultural studies, see Lenz and Stedman 118–20.
- 3 One reason for this imbalance is that since the 1970s at the latest, processes of knowledge formation (i.e. also those relating to economic knowledge) have become a favoured object of study for literary and cultural scholars. Consequently, for them, making economics a topic of enquiry can represent a mainstream activity. Over the last ten years, (English) literary and cultural studies have moreover seen the rise of economic criticism. This approach “(i) analyses how the economy and what is seen as its constitutive elements (e.g. money, consumption, economic agents) are represented in literature, film, visual arts, etc.; (ii) studies non-fiction about the economy (e.g. the foundational texts of classical political economy or Marxism) as primary literature; (iii) scrutinises activities and phenomena associated with the economy (e.g. shopping, work, class) with methodologies of cultural and literary studies; (iv) investigates how economic frameworks influence the creation of literary and cultural products as well as the production of knowledge in academic disciplines; (v) explores points of convergence between terms, concepts and methods of economics, literary and cultural studies (e.g. circulation, representation, value, utility).” (Grünkemeier, Pleßke, and Rostek 117)
- 4 As a term describing “[a] person who manages a household [. . .]; a housekeeper”, the word “economist” was already employed in the sixteenth century (“economist” *OED* 1.a). Tellingly, women figure prominently in the *OED*’s examples of this usage – yet not so in the more modern and still current usage that refers to an expert in economics. When I term women authors in this book “economists”, I have the modern meaning in mind, notwithstanding the fact that many of them also managed households and as such were economists in that sense, too.
- 5 I also employ ‘Romantic Age’ for pragmatic and strategic reasons: Routledge, the publisher, has suggested that it scores better as a key word in online searchability than ‘around 1800’, which increases the chances that my book – and hence the women whose contributions I champion – will be noticed. This example underlines that the terminology used in academic discourse is related to politics and “the economy of attention”. (Franck; N.B. All translations from German are mine, unless stated otherwise.)
- 6 For a succinct overview, see Sedlmayr, “Political and Social History, c. 1780–1832”.
- 7 For detailed analyses of women’s (anti-)feminist writing during the period, see the studies by Golightly and Mellor (*Romanticism and Gender* as well as *Mothers of the Nation*), Gary Kelly’s *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790–1827* (1993), and William Stafford’s *English Feminists and Their Opponents in the 1790s* (2002).



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## **PART I**

A transdisciplinary  
methodology for a  
herstory of economic  
thought





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# 2

## WOMEN AND SCHOLARSHIP

### The cultural forms of knowledge formation

#### Scholarship as a cultural and gendered practice

Commonly, as Margaret Alic observes, “we think of the history of science as a history of men. More than that, we think of the history of science as the story of a very few men [. . .] who drastically altered our view of the universe” (1). This is unproblematic as long as we follow the widespread notion that it does not matter which individual – whether male or female, black or white, young or old – has produced ‘knowledge’, because knowledge is an objective, transcultural, and trans-historical phenomenon, independent of the concrete person that has happened to put it into words or numbers. Within this concept, gravitation could have been discovered by an Isa Newton, evolution by a Clara Darwin, and the benefits of the division of labour by an Eve Smith. That men formulated these far-reaching theories is a mere coincidence irrelevant to the neutrality and validity of the information thereby provided.

Michel Foucault was one among several historians of thought, though perhaps more influential than others, to complicate this picture. He argued that knowledge is not a transhistorical, stable, continuous phenomenon which develops and grows from one thinker to the next. Instead, what is a legitimate and valuable thought in one historical or cultural context can suddenly become illegible, irrelevant, or unthinkable in another. One reason for this, Foucault argues in *The Order of Things* (1966), is the existence of “a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse” (xi–xii). From the vantage point of cultural studies, one possible term for this “*positive unconscious*” would be ideology or culture. These are not the terms favoured by Foucault himself, although he speaks of culture at a later point: “Ultimately, the problem that presents itself is that of the relations between thought and culture: how is it that thought has a place in the space of the world, that it has its origin there, and that

it never ceases, in this place or that, to begin anew?" (56). Foucault has doubtlessly co-initiated a cultural turn in the philosophy of science by drawing attention to the contextual, invisible, and unconscious "structures of feeling" (to use Raymond Williams's term [47]) that make a thought thinkable in the first place. Accordingly, Foucault posits in his preface to the English translation of *The Order of Things*:

Discourse in general, and scientific discourse in particular, is so complex a reality that we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels and with different methods. If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that [. . .] which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice.

(xv)

The implications of Foucault's discursive take on the history of science are manifold. For him, knowledge is conceivable as links that people establish between words and things (which is echoed in the title of the French original, *Les mots et les choses*). It makes certain phenomena (e.g. women, money) visible and others invisible, certain things desirable and others irrelevant. In shaping our understanding of the world, knowledge production and dissemination constitute a discourse of power. Since the history of knowledge is one of "the relations between thought and culture", it is steeped in cultural, power-related questions, such as: Which topics are identified as worth knowing? Which questions are identified as worth asking? Who is identified as a legitimate creator of knowledge? Which institutions and methods acquire epistemological authority and how? Who are the gatekeepers and by what means do they attain this position? Accepting the validity of such questions implies that far from merely retracing the gradual discovery of various natural and social phenomena, the history of knowledge is also a history of and a means of negotiating power relations. Foucault speaks in this context of "power-knowledge relations", which he explains in *Discipline and Punish* (1975):

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the object to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical

transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.

(27–28)

Since knowledge formation therefore does not happen outside of but *within* culture, and is thus both influenced by and influencing its norms, values, and conflicts, received notions of ‘objective’ knowledge and ‘neutral’ science are likewise steeped in cultural norms and thus, paradoxically, neither fully objective nor neutral. John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth write in a similar context about literature and science that they are not simply

products of different human faculties, such as ‘creative imagination’ and ‘rationality’, expressed individualistically according to an unanalysable distribution of talent, preference, impulse and so forth. Such individual expression is always dependent for its possibility on an institutionally differentiated culture, a terrain already mapped, localised and internally bounded. [. . .] What we take as ‘creative imagination’, ‘rationality’, ‘method’, ‘objectivity’, located as internal human faculties, are historical artefacts produced by institutionally located practices and their communicative forms.

(1, 3)

Given that scholarship and science are the outcomes of cultural processes, gender is relevant for the history of knowledge. Foucault pays virtually no attention to women; the thinkers he cites for the most part belong to a slightly revised canon of white men. Yet because knowledge is both resulting from and generative of social practice, gender as a powerful category structuring social organisation forms part of the history of thought. In particular, it is relevant to enquire, both historically and in the present, which groups have (had) access to producing knowledge and thus to negotiating power relations:

If women, the poor, racial and ethnic “colonies” are kept illiterate, not permitted or encouraged to speak in public, and excluded from the design of the dominant institutions that shape their lives, they do not have the chance to develop and circulate discourses – their politically and scientifically produced perspectives on the dominant institutions – that could provide the most trenchant critiques of them.

(Harding, “Feminist” 161)

The excluded groups thus remain trapped in powerful signifying processes that are not (primarily) of their own making.

This has been the position of the vast majority of women, who for a long time – and certainly during the Romantic Age – were excluded from most social

practices constituting what traditionally is recognised as scholarship. Girls received less formal education, if any, than boys and this in fields that were removed from the preoccupations of academia. Women were consequently more likely to be illiterate and were taught from early on that their primary realm of activity was the domestic sphere. They were for a long time discouraged as authors and for an even longer period barred from universities and scholarly societies so that they lacked access to institutions and skills that have been bedrocks of scholarship in the conventional sense. Frustrated by such discrimination, Mary Robinson, in her spirited *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* of 1799, pondered the establishment of a university for women:

Had fortune enabled me, I would build an UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN; where they should be politely, and at the same time classically educated; the depth of their studies, should be proportioned to their mental powers; and those who were *incompetent to the labours of knowledge*, should be dismissed after a fair trial of their capabilities, and allotted to the more humble paths of life; such as *domestic and useful occupations*. The wealthy part of the community who neglected to educate their female offspring, at this seminary of learning, should pay a fine, which should be appropriated to the maintenance of the unportioned scholars. In half a century there would be a sufficient number of learned women to fill all the departments of the university, and those who excelled in an eminent degree should receive honorary medals, which they should wear as an ORDER OF LITERARY MERIT.

(159)

It took some 70 years before Robinson's vision of a university for women came into existence in England and several more decades before women's capacity to be scholars and scientists was culturally accepted. Alic moreover suggests that since, historically, women remained "dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands for their training [. . .] they were in constant danger of having their work attributed to their male colleagues" (10). Additionally, man-made science itself was in time used as a justification for keeping women away, as "new physical criteria – anatomical difference, hormonal systems – provided new rationales for keeping women below men in the intellectual hierarchy" (Fara 11). The more science became accepted as the purveyor of transcendental and objective truths, the more difficult it became to fend off allegedly scientific pronouncements on women's academic unsuitability. A means of refuting them would have been to produce scientific counterevidence, but banned from scholarship and relegated to a lower intellectual status, women had no means of providing it. In such a way, the system has been reiterating patriarchal privilege in a self-sustaining loop: "Those who might have criticized the new scientific views were barred from the outset, and the findings of science (crafted in their absence) were used to justify their continued exclusion" (Schiebinger 439).

Sarah Chapone, a writer I turn to in more detail later, described this mechanism as early as 1735 in her pamphlet *Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to*

*Wives*. To the standard argument that men's overall privileged position is justified by their superior reason, she retorts:

as the World now is, it would generally fall to the Men; they having the Advantages of Universities, publick Negotiations, and a free unconstrained Converse with Mankind, in Pursuance of their several Professions, Arts, and Occupations. But if we argue from a State of Nature, we must consider the Abilities of each Sex, antecedently to these accidental Advantages; and we do not see in Fact, that, amongst the vulgar unlearned People, Men are so much *wiser* than Women, as to induce us to suppose that their natural Endowments are much greater.

(49)

Chapone was conscious that she might herself fall victim to the patriarchal logic she describes so that her arguments, convincing as they are, can be swept aside by a simple objection, "which I am sensible no Art or Eloquence, can ever obviate, namely, *my Sex*" (48).

Chapone's remarks serve as a reminder that discursive strategies of excluding women from knowledge formation have proven at least as effective as formal prohibitions. Even the celebrated Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth, who on the whole encouraged female education, emphasised in *Practical Education* (1798), written together with her father, that

[i]n the education of girls we must teach them much more caution than is necessary to boys: their prudence must be more the result of reasoning than of experiment; they *must* trust to the experience of others, they cannot always have recourse to what *ought to be*, they must adapt themselves to what is. [. . .] Timidity, a certain tardiness of decision, and reluctance to act in public situations, are not considered as defects in a woman's character; her pausing prudence does not to a man of discernment denote imbecility, but appears to him the graceful auspicious characteristic of female virtue.

(271)

Despite emphasising that girls are capable of rational judgement, Edgeworth, like many writers of her time, nevertheless curtails the sphere within which this judgement can be exerted. Yet if a girl is instructed from early on that public exposure endangers her reputation and that she must rely on the experience of others rather than finding out things for herself, she is likely to internalise this attitude and abstain from engaging in scholarship – which is public and experimental – out of her own 'free' will.

The discursive construction of Western scholarship as a masculine activity reaches even deeper, as feminist epistemologists (and feminist economists in their wake) have illustrated. Janet A. Seiz, for example, points to the androcentrism

engrained in “[t]he persona of the autonomous, emotionally detached, impersonal inquirer, and the related notion that the purpose of knowledge is to obtain control over the object of study” (“Gender” 24). Julie A. Nelson in turn draws attention to the fact that the very language of scientific enquiry is steeped in gendered metaphors privileging masculinity: “The experience of sexual intercourse from the male point of view is often reflected in historical and contemporary language with imagery of penetration, probing, and piercing of nature, and the ‘overpowering rush’ of scientific advance” (“Gender” 80).<sup>1</sup>

Doing justice to such developments in the history of thought involves acknowledging exclusions and opening up a space for the hitherto marginalised groups within the sphere of knowledge production. These groups are obviously not only women, but this book takes them into focus in the context of economics. The insertion of their voices into the history of economic thought makes for better economics, but not because women created or are capable of creating better economics than men. Such a proposition would solidify essentialist notions of gender and replace one discriminatory hierarchy with another. Yet it is true that for the most part, women have created *different* economics from men. This is due to physiological differences (the implications of which are the subject of constant debates and power struggles), but first and foremost because, for ages, they have been legally, educationally, and culturally treated differently from fellow human beings sporting a penis. I am aware that in claiming a conditioned difference, I run the risk of reiterating gender differences, even as I try to overcome them. This is a problem inherent in any analysis of gender and was pithily described by, among others, Nancy Armstrong:

So basic are the terms “male” and “female” to the semiotics of modern life that no one can use them without to some extent performing the very reifying gesture whose operations we would like to understand and whose power we want to historicize. Whenever we cast our political lot in the dyadic formation of gender, we place ourselves in a classic double bind, which confines us to alternatives that are not really alternatives at all. This is to say, any political position founded primarily on sexual identity ultimately confirms the limited choices offered by such a dyadic model.

(24)

At the same time, I agree with Londa Schiebinger that “[w]e cannot give up a careful analysis of gender differences at least until they cease to plague us” (447) – which is not yet the case. The inclusion and acknowledgement of female (or black, gay, poor, disabled) perspectives makes scholarship in general and economics in particular more just – yet expressly *not* because women can be supposed to be innately morally superior or endowed with characteristics such as solidarity, benevolence, or sympathy, but because it renders academic and economic discourses and practices fuller, more pluralistic, and therefore also more realistic. The point is not to suppress ‘bad masculine’ science or economics and to replace them with ‘good feminine’ science or economics, but to reveal the situatedness of knowledge in

order to open it up for debate. This involves creating *equally viable* speaking positions for all individuals and groups producing knowledge: those that have been historically privileged and those that have been excluded from equitably co-shaping the world that they live in.

From the viewpoint of privileged groups (to which I, as a middle-class intellectual paid by one of the richest countries on this planet in many respects belong), this process understandably looks like a demotion. Expressed in economic terms, it involves, like most democratising processes, sharing one's amassed prestige and claims with others. History shows that the most common strategies of defending accumulated privileges have been either to negate their very existence or to pronounce their unequal distribution as unalterable, as ordained by some transcendental power beyond human reach (God, nature, the DNA, the rational market). As John Stuart Mill put it in *The Subjection of Women* (1869): "was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?" (134). This logic has also been at work with scholarship and science, as Karin Hausen demonstrates using the example of Germany, where

[t]he opponents of admitting women to universities [were] at the same time the most ardent supporters and defenders of the true, natural profession of a woman, namely that of being a housewife, a wife, and a mother. No scholar formulates this argument for his own sake. No, the claims are made on behalf of the natural order, of the social order, of the world order, which must be preserved and defended against possible individual rights of women who are interested in engaging in scholarship.

(37)

While Hausen's example may be discarded as a closed debate that has been decided in women's favour, the problem nowadays regarding the unequal distribution of privileges within scholarship – that is, of legitimate and effective speaking positions – is that those defending their elevated status frequently choose science itself as a transcendental justification. To epistemological critics attacking their stance, they point out that academic practice in its present form cannot be fundamentally changed because this would render it un-academic. This self-immunising, circular logic, to which I will yet return, largely neutralises competing epistemologies, which consequently continue to operate in self-contained loops of their own. In this regard, my book not only records historical contests within the field of knowledge formation but is just as much these conflicts' outcome and an active participant on the battlefield.

### **Women and the history of thought: Lost-Gems approach versus epistemological criticism**

Regarding the history of thought, different strategies of introducing neglected contributions made by women have been proposed. In this sub-chapter, I shall



comment on two of them – which I term the Lost-Gems approach and epistemological criticism – and then delineate to what extent they bear on the design of my book.

The Lost-Gems approach is epistemologically, though not intellectually, less challenging. It searches for “gems that were always there for the looking” (McDonald 2), that is, for women who have produced texts that on the whole correspond to received notions of scholarship. With regard to the social sciences – of which economics forms a part – such an approach infuses, for example, Lynn McDonald’s *Women Theorists on Society and Politics* (1998) and Dorothy Lampen Thomson’s pioneering *Adam Smith’s Daughters* (1973). One undeniable advantage of this approach consists in making visible what had hitherto been overlooked because it was “unavailable to any but the intrepid user of [. . .] research collections and archives” (McDonald 2). The second, possibly even greater advantage lies in its compatibility with the established system of knowledge production, so that the vast majority of scholars that have been trained to perceive a certain notion of knowledge as the only one that is legitimate and objective are likely to recognise the claims made by the ‘discovered’ women as worthy of their attention. Demonstrating the compatibility of endeavours by women (or other marginalised groups) with conventional rules for formulating academically valid claims is initially probably the easiest route into having their intellectual contributions noticed and recognised.

A drawback of this approach, however, is that the number of female scientists revived in such a way will remain limited because, as I have already explained, women were for a very long time excluded from traditional scholarship. An even graver disadvantage of the Lost-Gems approach is that it is unlikely to displace the patriarchal bias at the heart of institutionalised knowledge production and may ironically even serve to solidify a system that works to the detriment of the marginalised. The title of Lampen Thomson’s valuable contribution mentioned previously makes this problem evident: the women she presents in her study are Adam Smith’s “daughters”, that is, junior researchers overshadowed by a looming and recognisable father figure. Lynn McDonald’s study entails a similar difficulty. On the one hand, she clearly promotes the valorisation of female contributions to the history of knowledge: “For most of the themes the case to be made is that women theorists made contributions that are worthy of consideration, that should be taught, discussed and remembered, although they are not identifiably different as women’s work or appropriate to be called feminist theory” (6). On the other hand, McDonald measures the value of the lauded contributions against what still remains a male standard of merit: “In the analysis attention is paid to the issue of similarities and differences with writing by, usually better known, male theorists of the same time” (2). Therefore, while the Lost-Gems approach facilitates the recognition that theories developed by women were just as interesting and illuminating as those by men, the criterion by which something is identified as interesting or illuminating remains one that has been shaped by patriarchy: women can join a game the rules of which have been formulated in their absence. The pitfalls of

the Lost-Gems approach thus recall a fundamental problem of feminist literary critique described by Elaine Showalter in 1981. She complained that

the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems. What I mean here by 'male critical theory' is a concept of creativity, literary history, or literary interpretation based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal.

(183)

Aware of this problem, the advocates of epistemological criticism emphasise that finding a place for women in the history of knowledge cannot stop at inserting them into the established canon but involves rethinking and dismantling the gendered dimensions of scientific practice as such. To pick up the metaphor used earlier: women should be able to join the game, but the game's rules must be reformed, too. This approach foregrounds scholarship and science as a discursive and thus historically mutable practice. Obviously, it cannot entirely cast off what Showalter has termed "male critical theory" because, arguably, a space wholly unaffected by it does not exist. Nevertheless, the proponents of epistemological criticism attempt to lay the foundations for practices of knowledge production which are further removed from patriarchy (which does *not* mean devoid of men).

This attitude informs, for example, Patricia Fara's perceptive *Pandora's Breaches: Women, Science & Power in the Enlightenment* (2004). Like most scholars researching female contributions to science, Fara begins by assessing the deficient status quo: "[W]omen have not been written out of the history of science: they have never been written in. This neglect is part of the large-scale omission of women from the historical record, but there is no simple way of rectifying this situation" (19). On the face of it, Fara's attempt to mend the neglect of female scholars takes up the Lost-Gems approach, as her study illustrates how hitherto unnoticed women made possible the achievements of famous male scholars (e.g. René Descartes or Carl Linnaeus). Yet, at bottom, Fara's method is epistemologically more radical because it invites a reconsideration of the very notion of science as well as of the histories that are written about it. Fara partially transfers the propositions of the narrative turn in historiography to the history of thought, since she suggests that the emplotment (*pace* Hayden White) of historical narratives about science already produces epistemological hierarchies: "Traditional histories of science focus on discoveries and inventions, almost invariably made by men who are elevated to the status of great heroes. Such models of progress may be appealing, but they distort the past by leaving out important parts of the story" (24). Consequently, Fara does not seek to prove that remarkable women made significant scientific discoveries because this would corroborate a gender-biased and individualist notion of science: "Making women from the past into brilliant proto-scientists is just creating a female version

of solitary male geniuses.” Instead, “[m]ore realistic models are needed for both the sexes” (21).

This entails the recognition of science as a collective endeavour rather than as the playing field of certain gifted (male) individuals. Scholarship and science rely on the work of numerous, yet systematically overlooked people. The reason for their invisibility is a twofold partiality: firstly, in favour of an understanding of science as the result of individual, ingenious achievements. Secondly, in favour of progressive historical narratives about science, which *create* (and not merely represent) valiant and solitary scientific heroes, thereby obscuring the collective and mundane dimensions of knowledge formation. Fara expounds:

When historians focus on famous individuals, they leave out many vital people who made science central to everyday life. Science’s intellectual class system rates the achievements of gentlemen far higher than those of artisans and women. What about the technicians and administrators who made instruments work, recorded observations, collected and prepared specimens, catalogued results, organised the laboratory? [. . .] And surely tribute should be paid to those who provided financial support, or were knowledgeable enough to make constructive criticisms, check experimental readings and proofread manuscripts? Retrieving these invisible assistants – male and female – gives a far more realistic picture of how science was actually carried out.

(24)<sup>2</sup>

The method adopted by Fara hence takes up the project of making women (but also overlooked men) more visible in the history of thought and at the same time gestures towards an epistemological revaluation by questioning the received notion of science and its history. It draws attention to *the content of the form* of historical writing (to borrow historian Hayden White’s expression), which likewise affects historical writing about science. Fara argues that by privileging certain plots, certain events, and certain characters instead of others, narratives about the history of science have contributed to the continuous prevalence of gender and class bias.

Sandra Harding’s pioneering work is also worth introducing in connection with epistemological criticism, not least because feminist economics has subsequently drawn on her insights: an essay by Harding entitled “Can Feminist Thought Make Economics More Objective?” programmatically featured in the first issue of *Feminist Economics* in 1995, which is the publishing organ of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE). Harding is less concerned with individual scholars, be they male or female, than with revealing the foundational gender bias inherent in the traditional notion of science. In *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986), she formulates her epistemological credo as follows:

If we are not willing to try to see the favored intellectual structures and practices of science as cultural artifacts rather than as sacred commandments handed down to humanity at the birth of modern science, then it will be

hard to understand how gender symbolism, the gendered social structure of science, and the masculine identities and behaviors of individual scientists have left their marks on the problematics, concepts, theories, methods, interpretations, ethics, meanings, and goals of science.

(39)

Like many of the scholars mentioned previously, Harding emphasises that scholarship is a cultural and therefore value-laden enterprise: “Local cultures, not individuals, are the active agents of knowledge” (“Feminist” 155). The problem with the established self-image of scholarship is that it often claims to embody the exact opposite, namely value-neutrality and objectivity. From this vantage point, interventions made by scholars who explicitly endorse particular values, such as gender or economic equality, can be discredited as politically motivated, relativist, unscientific, and thus not worthy of attention. For Harding, however, it is the traditional notion of scholarship which departs more blatantly from its own rule of objectivity, because in contrast to politically motivated positions, it is blind – and worse still, chooses to remain so – to its own cultural and historical situatedness:

[W]hen culture-wide values and interests shape research projects, the neutrality ideal is not just useless; even worse, it becomes part of the problem. [. . .] It certifies as normal, natural, and therefore not political at all, the policies and practices through which powerful groups can gain the information and explanations that they need to advance their priorities. [. . .] Thus, when sciences are already in the service of the mighty, scientific neutrality ensures that “might makes right”. Feminists in every discipline have argued that androcentric “might” has all too often appealed to neutrality-maximizing standards in order to justify as “right” distorted descriptions and explanations of natural and social regularities and their underlying causal tendencies.

(“Feminist” 152–53)

For Harding, dismissing feminist and other politically motivated academic interventions because they allegedly violate the principle of scientific neutrality impedes what would be a *more* objective scientific stance. More objective, because it at least explicitly states and reflects on the values it promotes, thus opening them up for discussion instead of immunising itself through appeals to allegedly neutral methods and transcendental truths. Harding makes a case for what she terms strong objectivity: a scientific standpoint that consciously states and reflects on its values and interests instead of pretending to be neutral. (I also aim for such strong objectivity.)

The risks and benefits of epistemological criticism are nearly the mirror-opposites of the Lost-Gems approach. By questioning and widening the received notion of scholarship and science, it on the one hand invites a new conception of knowledge which is less dominated by patriarchy. On the other hand, the problem with fundamental epistemological critiques remains that the claims made from radical positions might be simply ignored or not accepted as legitimate by the majority

accustomed to the traditional paradigm. The enunciations can be overlooked or dismissed because they fail to adhere to “what counts as a valid exercise of reason” (“Feminist” 151) according to received criteria.

Feminist economists, whose work I introduce more systematically in the next chapter, have extensively debated the difficulty of an effectual speaking position for feminist critics.<sup>3</sup> Seiz points out that “there are practical reasons to remain in the mainstream: to suggest that feminist economists forsake neoclassical work is, given the profession’s current structure and values, to demand that they jeopardize their careers and abandon hope of reaching audiences unwilling or unable to hear arguments framed in different languages” (“Gender” 43). Gillian Hewitson argues in a similar vein when she writes that for the majority of economists, “[f]eminist critics of neoclassical economics [ . . . ] are, within the terms of neoclassical economics, irretrievably biased unless they can speak with the authority and dispassion of the economic scientist” (14), in which case, however, feminist critics would have to play along the rules that they wish to see changed. Marianne A. Ferber and Nelson comment that “[o]ne may well ponder whether feminist economics has a better chance of creating change by head-on confrontations within the mainstream or in more indirect ways, such as proving its superior usefulness for social, political, and economic analysis in the other social sciences and public policy” (“Ten Years” 29). Edith Kuiper and Jolande Sap finally admonish that “[t]he challenge [ . . . ] is to find a language which enables a fruitful dialogue between mainstream and feminist economics” (8).

Ultimately, the situation of the marginalised – no matter in which social field or academic discipline – remains perennial regardless of which strategy is chosen to effect their insertion into the dominant discourse: in complying with the established system and trying to change it from within, the marginalised risk strengthening it and thus unwillingly buttressing mechanisms that work to their detriment; attempting to step out of the established system entails the risk of not even being heard and remaining on the margins. Revealingly, radical English author Mary Hays described this dilemma in her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* of 1798 with regard to women whose cause she championed:

Indeed, their fate in this respect is extremely hard; for every method they can attempt, to improve their situation, is equally inefficacious. Silence and submission are looked upon as proofs of acquiescence and content; and men will hardly of themselves, seek to improve a situation, with which many are apparently satisfied. On the other hand any marks of spirit, or sense of injury, or desire to better their situation either as individuals or in society; is treated not only with contempt, but abhorrence [ . . . ].

(71–72)

The challenge thus comes down to choosing between resignation, reform, or revolution, with no strategy promising certain and instant success.

The task of choosing an academically valid and at the same time effectual speaking position is of course also relevant with regard to this book. The difficulty is heightened by the fact that I hope to write a text that will speak to economists and scholars from the humanities alike, yet they have quite different standards of judging what amounts to the mainstream and what forms its radical critique. For strategic as well as epistemological purposes, I attempt to combine the two approaches presented earlier. The fact that I introduce and discuss several writers whose names, let alone their work, are still rather unknown complies with the Lost-Gems approach. Besides, authors such as Sarah Chapone or Priscilla Wakefield are more likely to be recognised as proto-economists, according to the conventional notion of that discipline. The chapters on Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, by contrast, draw more heavily on epistemological criticism: their texts can only be acknowledged as ‘lost gems’ of economic inquiry (rather than as old hats of literature) if the notion of what counts as economic inquiry is repositioned. To those socialised within the usual disciplinary divisions, it may seem that my book alternates between analysing economic thought and literary texts. My claim is that it does not: the formulation of economic thought by women remains my constant preoccupation. It is not the case that the chapters on Chapone and Wakefield were written with economists in mind while those on Wollstonecraft and Austen are aimed at literary scholars. The perceived shifts from ‘economic thought’ to ‘literature’ in my book are above all changes in *genre* (e.g. from pamphlet to novel). Yet, as I argue in more detail in Chapter 4, because of the epistemological and gendered hierarchies it entails, the notion of genre needs to be reconsidered and partially displaced if female contributions to economic thought are to be rendered visible and accorded a legitimate status.

## Women and the emergence of modern scholarship in the Romantic Age

For the history of Western thought, the decades around 1800 represent a noteworthy period, as they saw an intensification of developments that led to the establishment of modern scholarship and academic disciplines, such as geology, chemistry, palaeontology, physiology, anthropology, comparative anatomy, botany, zoology, and – importantly for this book – economics. As Michel Foucault puts it in *The Order of Things*, “[t]he last years of the eighteenth century” witness an “unexpected mobility of epistemological arrangement” when “things are no longer perceived, described, expressed, characterized, classified, and known in the same way” (235). For Foucault, the period marks “a radical event that is distributed across the entire visible surface of knowledge” (236): it is the onset of a new epistemological paradigm that he denotes as Modernity. Fara likewise avers that “[m]any experts see a gradual transition around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when modern scientific disciplines were being created [and] the financial rewards of research were being recognised” (23). She calls to mind that it was in 1833 “that

the word ‘scientist’ was invented – a new term to identify a new social category” (23; Kelley 357). Stefanie Fricke, Felicitas Meifert-Menhard, and Katharina Pink postulate for the Romantic period that it is

an age of seeking and contemplating new forms of knowledge. [. . .] The nature of knowledge, whether it is an ‘art’ or a ‘science’, whether it should be ‘philosophical’ or ‘historical’ or ‘empirical’, whether there can be a ‘disaggregation of disciplines’ or whether the boundaries between the disciplines are fluid – these issues were very much under negotiation [. . .]. As such, knowledge in the Romantic era was not only generated and proliferated by scientific discovery and progress, but it also became a proper subject of theoretical and disciplinary reflection, creating self-reflexive metadiscourses that shaped the understanding of how knowledge is created, defined, systematized, stored, and communicated.

(9)

The Romantic Age hence saw the rise not only of specific branches of knowledge but also of a particular notion of what (academic) knowledge *is* in the first place and how it should be mediated. Today’s academics are still very much the children of this epistemological reconfiguration.

Because of this heritage, what is sometimes referred to as the second scientific revolution around 1800 is, from a Western perspective, considered a universally shared phenomenon, an event in the history of humanity, as it were. Yet while it is true that, to some extent, most of humanity, independently of gender, class, race, etc., has been *influenced* by this epistemological reorientation, it is also true that much of humanity was *excluded* from actively shaping it. The standard of arriving at truth and knowledge that coalesced around 1800 and continues to operate up to this day was the work of a comparatively small community, dominated by white and socio-economically privileged men. Mary Wollstonecraft observed in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* of 1792 that “men of genius and talents have started out of a class, in which women have never yet been placed” (98). So when Foucault posits that at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “knowledge takes up residence in a new space” (235), one should also ask: in which space do women take up residence with regard to this knowledge?

Foucault largely ignores that producing modern knowledge was fundamentally tied to gender: women could not participate in it in the same way as men. Modern academic disciplines are up to this day premised on the identification of a conglomerate of (a) particular phenomena or human activities that should be (b) observed and described in a particular way and (c) within particular institutions. These three points relate to the identification of research topics (a), genres of academic writing (b), and academic institutions (c). It is crucial to remember that in the context of the epistemological shift around 1800 all three items intersected with a division along gender lines, with women being excluded from many of the topics, genres, and institutions of modern knowledge formation. The more “research was starting

to move out of people's private homes into laboratories, museums and hospitals" (Fara 23) and the more modern knowledge took root and expanded in its new, public space, the bigger, as Cornelia Klinger argues, grew its need for a counter-space. That anti-space of alleged non-knowledge became both literally and metaphorically the home: the space where woman was meant to reside (Klinger). Social historian Bridget Hill notes that this trend coincided with economic developments:

What was new in the eighteenth century, at least in the final decades, and in the early years of the nineteenth was that as the family economy was eroded and the household was no longer the focus of work within the family, women were left stranded in the home. Attempts to justify their retention there were based on what was held to be the moral duty of wives and mothers to devote themselves exclusively to home and family.

(123)

The minutiae of the gendered process of differentiating the public from the domestic realm are impossible to retrace here, and the import of the separate-spheres doctrine, in particular as regards the disparities between ideology and lived experience, remains a contested issue among historians, literary scholars, and cultural scholars (see, for example, Clery, *Feminization*; Mellor, *Mothers*; Rennhak and Richter; Taylor and Knott). One group of critics tends to foreground that the actual practice of gender relations was much more flexible than the separate-spheres doctrine, which allotted women to the private and men to the public sphere, would theoretically allow for. They thus warn against using the doctrine as an explicative tool, as it might serve to discursively endorse an image of passive women, thus belying their actual historical agency. In the words of William Stafford, "we must remember that prescription is not the same as description [. . .]. That there was a *rhetoric* of separate spheres is beyond doubt; but in spite of [. . .] the notion that 'reality' is discursively constructed, we cannot assume that rhetoric and reality correspond" (46, 49). The second group of critics, to which Stafford alludes in his statement and whose point of view I largely share, would respond that they are well aware of the gap between reality and rhetoric but that rhetoric attempts to shape opinions and worldview and thus has an immense power in constructing reality. Analysing rhetoric conveys a notion of the implicit and explicit norms, values, and standards of behaviour within a particular group at a particular time – norms that have had an impact on influencing the historical reality under scrutiny. Yet Stafford's interjection is important in cautioning discursively oriented scholars not to set up historical narratives that effectively repeat the disempowering gesture of the ideologies that the scholars seek to describe and criticise.

In her insightful analysis of *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England* (2004), Clery has demonstrated that gender was a fundamental category informing public debates on morality, commerce, and capitalism. The first half of the eighteenth century saw what Clery terms a feminisation of economic discourse: writers of the period argued that society and commerce would benefit from "the



acquisition of certain characteristics gendered ‘feminine’: sociability, civility, compassion, domesticity and love of family, the dynamic exercise of the passions and, above all, refinement, the mark of modernity” (*Feminization* 10). However, the ideological endorsement of a particular kind of femininity “failed to address the real problems facing women in every rank of society – inadequate legal rights and the sexual double standard, lack of access to education, paid work and fair wages”. It even “exacerbated them by imposing new restrictive definitions of idealized femininity. It contribute[d] to the general tightening of the code of feminine propriety around the mid-century that has been observed by feminist historians” (11).

Cornelia Klinger has argued that this tightening intensified as the century drew to an end. In a noteworthy essay, she explores the question of whether the period around 1800 constitutes a watershed in the history of gender relations. Klinger claims that on the level of ideology the period saw the consolidation of a putatively ‘non-modern’ conceptual space of ‘non-knowledge’ for women: the home, with the woman within, was meant to function as a counterweight to the alienation, rationalisation, and fragmentation of the modern world, from which (middle-class) women were effectively barred, even if this exclusion was frequently understood as a means of shielding them from a harsh world. ‘Woman’ embodied everything that Modernity endangered: tradition, nature, emotion, stability, coherence, and purity (29). I would suggest that one can extend this claim to the realm of the economy as well: the more the market became a dominant factor in shaping the political and social world ‘outside’, the more activities associated with women – childbearing, nurturing, charity – were associated with the non-marketable, and thus non-economic ‘inside’. However, as Klinger makes plain, it is crucial not to reiterate the ideology of the separate spheres by corroborating the view that women around 1800 were indeed ‘non-modern’ or ‘anti-modern’, epitomising a recluse from an otherwise progressively developing society of men. Rather, the modern project hinged on making women’s sphere *appear* non-modern, although the outlines of that sphere were determined by succinctly modern requirements. The position of women was functionally related, if conceptually diametrically opposed, to the modern project. They became Modernity’s other (i.e. also the other of the economy, of science, of politics), precisely because Modernity needed this other to stabilise itself/its self. Somewhat paradoxically, then, the space of women around 1800 was intrinsically modern, precisely because it was cast as non-modern. Women became the outside(r)s of modern knowledge; but because without these outsides the identity of the core would collapse, they are an essential, albeit still hidden, part of the process of modern knowledge formation.

Importantly for this book, the period around 1800 coincided with the beginning of today’s academic discipline of economics. The publication of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 is ritually cited as a landmark event in this context, but one book alone does not make for the emergence of an academic discipline – the latter needs to be recognised by others and, above all, institutionalised as a legitimate and valuable purveyor of knowledge. At the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, this began to happen to political economy in Britain. Margaret Schabas

explains in her overview of “British Economic Thought from Locke to Marshall” that classical economists, comprising Adam Smith, David Hume, Thomas Robert Malthus as well as David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill in their wake,

took measures to establish their subject in universities and scientific societies. Malthus was the first professor of political economy, with an appointment at the East India College [. . .] in 1805. Oxford established the Drummond Chair in 1819 [. . .]. Both Cambridge and University College, London, created teaching posts in political economy in 1828, followed by King’s College in 1831. [. . .] The reputation of political economy was also enhanced by the formation of Section F for Statistics (and subsequently Political Economy) at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1833, and by the establishment of the Tripos in the Moral Sciences at Cambridge in 1838. Other forums for informed debate were the Political Economy Club (founded in 1821) and the London Statistical Society (1834). The contents of the leading periodicals of the day suggest that Britons were captivated by the debates on trade, currency, and labor reforms.

(178–79)

Schabas enumerates here outer symptoms of a deep reconfiguration of the knowledge field. Evidently, it is not the case that the economy as such suddenly sprang into existence in the decades from c. 1770 to c. 1840 – people had laboured, consumed, traded, and used money before. Rather, the economy became visible and was increasingly identified *as an academic field of knowledge*, that is as a conglomerate of particular phenomena and human activities that should be observed and described in a particular way within particular institutions.

This development, again, was not gender neutral. Klinger avers that around 1800, “the economy, family, and work” (17) acquired a new meaning. As her choice of terms implies, she perceives the economic discourse as one in which the reconceptualisation of knowledge and of gender roles overlapped in a conspicuous way: political economy was now disengaged from household economy, production was severed from reproduction, work parted ways with labour. While the first term of each pair became the ‘public’ domain of men, the second fell to the ‘private’ or ‘domestic’ realm of women. While the first set was associated with the economy proper and was to be studied in the framework of the newly developing academic discipline of political economy, the second set was cast as basically non-economic and detached from the market. This conceptual split occurred despite the fact that activities taking place within the home – such as marriage, education, parenting, cooking, tending to the sick and elderly, etc. – are likewise vitally concerned with “how humans try to meet their need for material goods and services” – which is what Nelson sees as the proper subject of economic analyses (“Gender” 90). In this manner, an entire realm of economic topics – concerns that were especially relevant for women – began to disappear from academic view.<sup>4</sup>

It is vital to render visible and redress such processes of exclusion to produce a more accurate history of knowledge and of economic thought in particular. Claudia Klaver makes a comparable point, though not with an explicit focus on gender, in *A/Moral Economics* (2003). She argues that the emergence of economics as an academic discipline was anything but smooth. She draws attention to “the unevenness and internal contradictions of a process that becomes linear and teleological only in retrospect and through the suppression of the texts and contexts of early-nineteenth century culture” (xi).<sup>5</sup> This observation is crucial, as it suggests two possible ways of explaining the absence of women in contemporary historical accounts of economic thought. One explanation would suggest that women around 1800 were precluded from producing it; here, the problem is located in the reality of the historical period in question. The second line of argument, favoured by Klaver and similar to Patricia Fara’s approach introduced earlier, puts forward that the exclusion of certain groups, texts, etc. has occurred not predominantly or solely in historical reality, but above all through narratives that have been subsequently told about it. According to the second explanation, various agents were involved and accepted in producing economic knowledge, but their contributions have been gradually written out.

My own take on the matter combines both approaches. As I had explained, there was a real gender bias at the level of academic topics, genres, and institutions around 1800: women could factually not engage in the process of knowledge formation on a par with men – which actually made them indict this inequality in the 1790s. But this gender bias has been subsequently aggravated by a reevaluation of genres of writing, by the solidification of academic disciplines, and by narratives in standard histories of scholarship and economic thought. This has obscured topics, genres, and institutions that in the past would have enjoyed more authority than they do now. A novel or a travelogue around 1800, for example, was perhaps not as weighty in terms of yielding ‘serious’ knowledge as an academic treatise, but it had a comparatively higher value as a contribution to knowledge formation than a novel or a travelogue has in the twenty-first century. In the late eighteenth century, the question of which genre is best suited for mediating political economy was yet open and contested: “the fate of political economy in a revolutionary age would be decided in part by generic manoeuvring”, Catherine Packham points out (“Genres” 252), so that “genre became a battleground on which arguments over the new political economy, and the establishment of commercial capitalism, were fought” (251).

Women’s marginalisation happened therefore first through social *practices* around 1800 but was then augmented and reified by historical and academic *discourse* about that period. Widening the scope of female perspectives on and in scholarship consequently involves the double re-investigation of historical practices and academic discourse. Complex as this endeavour is, it remains vital. Most academic disciplines today look back on founding fathers but lack mothers. In this way, standard histories of science and scholarship present themselves as endless tales of Frankensteins, who, like the eponymous hero of Mary Shelley’s novel, birthed knowledge without

women being involved. What Frankenstein's creature longs for most is a female companion, yet the scientist refuses to grant this request, fearing that "one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (170–71). Frankenstein's anxiety that the male and the female would procreate and thereby create something new, something different from what he has grown accustomed to, is so immense that he can only envision the outcome in a language of rejection, denigration, and fear: as "a race of devils". He tears apart the female creature's yet lifeless body with his bare hands. Rather than risking that his existence as a man becomes "a condition precarious", he chooses to prevent the existence of a female being at the cost of his own and his family's life. Shelley, who published the first version of *Frankenstein* anonymously in 1818, seems to have sensed that admitting women into scholarship and knowledge formation would meet with immense obstacles. Yet she is quite clear on the consequences of the refusal to allow for the female's existence, of the explicit fear of her (pro)creative energies: the absence of a female companion turns the male creature into a monster and ultimately leads to catastrophe.

## Notes

- 1 Incidentally, one of the most paradigmatic fictional male scholars uses such language: Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). Frankenstein reports, for example, how he had always been "imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature" and fascinated by philosophers who had "penetrated deeper" and "partially unveiled the face of Nature" (41). As an early instance of a woman's critique of a patriarchal conception of pursuing knowledge, Shelley's novel constitutes not only a female contribution to Romantic literature but also to the philosophy of science.
- 2 Peter Jaszi and Martha Woodmansee demand a similar reevaluation regarding the notion of literary authorship. To them, an "individualistic construction of authorship" can be traced back to the Romantic period and the "heroic self-presentation of Romantic poets" (195). This construction of authorship has led to an enduring lack of acknowledgement of creative work by groups who fail to meet the post-Romantic criteria: "With its emphasis on originality and self-declaring creative genius, [it] has functioned to marginalize or deny the work of many creative people: women, non-Europeans, artists working in traditional forms and genres, and individuals engaged in group or collaborative projects, to name but a few" (195). It would thus seem that the individualist notions of science and authorship that emerged around 1800 have contributed to the marginalisation of female (and other) voices. The Enlightenment's championing of individual rights (which also finds expression in political economy's emphasis on *self-interest*) has thus apparently had the downside of weakening the position of those who contributed to communal endeavours.
- 3 This fundamental problem is also addressed from a transdisciplinary and Germany-based point of view in Karin Hausen and Helga Nowotny's perceptive collection of essays programmatically titled *How Masculine is Academia? (Wie männlich ist die Wissenschaft?)* [1986].
- 4 Michael Roberts has also suggested that during the period between 1660 and 1800 the patriarchal bias of economics grew, expunging topics such as marital economy from its research focus. As a result, "[e]conomics, by representing the complex interlocking of producers' actions and consumers' choices at the national and international level as a *natural* system, created for men who knew its secrets a new kind of authority, less directly

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dependent on their roles as husbands or fathers, and by dint of their association with a universal, law-governed system, even more remote and powerful” (253). For an account that foregrounds the positive role the category of ‘woman’ had in eighteenth-century economic discourse, see Clery, *Feminization*.

- 5 For a ‘smoother’ history of political economy as a science, see Deborah Redman. For the role that genre played in the process of political economy’s disciplinary disaggregation, see Packham, “Genre”.

# 3

## WOMEN AND ECONOMICS

### The outside(r)s of economic discourse

#### **Feminist economics and powerful demarcations: centre versus periphery, mainstream versus heterodoxy**

For considerable periods of time, Western economics has been an academic discipline from which women were absent in many ways: as practitioners of that field, as thinkers within the history of economic thought, and as objects of economic inquiry. But in the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist interventions slowly entered the discipline and coalesced, among others, into a branch known today as feminist economics. It gained momentum in the late 1980s and was academically institutionalised in 1992 with the foundation of the International Association for Feminist Economics. Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper provide a useful working definition of feminist economics. It is

an emerging discussion, working toward the construction of a new economics, an economics that allows for an interrogation of hierarchies based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nation in theorizing and practicing economics. It is a philosophy that welcomes transdisciplinary scholarship and displaces the old theory/practice debate. It is a philosophy that takes seriously the importance of caring labor, while working to displace the dualisms that name it a “woman’s issue”. Finally, it is a philosophy that takes seriously the questions and challenges posed by a recognition of the social nature of science, as well as by postmodernism and postcolonialism.

*(“Sketching” 15)*

Because it contests the assumptions of the mainstream tradition, feminist economics is considered a heterodox economic school, alongside other approaches such as post-Keynesianism, institutionalism, Marxism, social economics, etc.

Wilhelm Amann claims in this context that contemporary “economics is marked by a pronounced internal differentiation: mono-paradigmatic mainstream theories dominate the discipline’s discursive centre, surrounded by a corona of heterodox schools [. . .] with weaker institutional ties, which form the periphery” (11). Amann deems this centre-periphery constellation of particular relevance for cultural readings of economics and my own reflections confirm his claim. After all, the distinctions between centre and periphery or between mainstream and heterodoxy suggest hierarchies and relations of power.

Power relations – as well as the Foucauldian knowledge–power relations – are relevant in the context of economics. From the vantage point of my analysis, one needs not be a Marxist to concede that the question of how material goods are produced, distributed, and consumed among humans is linked to questions of power – although feminist economist Janet A. Seiz claims that the dominant neoclassical paradigm in economics is still marked by an “inability to deal with power relations” (“Gender” 37). Economist Lionel Robbins famously defined his academic discipline as “the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” (qtd. in “Economics”, *Penguin Dictionary* 128). The definition does not refer to power explicitly but implies that economics describes various forms of scarcity and thus of social rivalry. Similarly, Nelson promotes a definition of economics that would bring “previously taboo or fringe subjects like power and poverty into the core” (“Gender” 90).

The definitions and self-conceptions of economics are consequential, since the conclusions derived from economic analyses enter the social sphere and shape the reality of entire communities. Economic historian Steven Kates maintains – although arguably not all of his colleagues would agree – that “economics is a policy science. Its role is not just to develop a set of abstract theoretical tools but is for the most part an attempt to provide a workable understanding of the nature and structure of the economy with the aim of framing economic policies” (115). Economics started out as political economy which, as Elizabeth and Richard Jay point out, “connoted a discipline devoted not merely to analysing economic relations, but also to formulating public policy” (6). With regard to the nineteenth century, they note that for Adam Smith’s “intellectual successors, and the Victorian public servants inspired by them, Political Economy was not merely, or even, the science of free markets, but, as the titles of so many of their published works testify, a set of ‘principles’ which helped in formulating constructive social policies and estimating an equitable distribution of the burdens of public expenditure” (7). Both historically and today, therefore, the relation between knowledge and power is amplified in the case of economics, because knowledge generated in this field tends to translate into politics more manifestly and perhaps more quickly than in some other academic disciplines; it has direct consequences for a vast number of people and their access to resources.

For this reason, and given the overbearing influence of economic considerations on contemporary life, it is socially relevant to enquire into economics’ epistemological heritage. If entire groups have been from the outset excluded from

the formation of economic knowledge, if their interests and concerns have been neglected, if they could not speak for themselves, then the precepts political economy and economics have been disseminating rest on and possibly perpetuate foundational biases. A reconsideration of the origins of economics is obviously unable to turn back the hands of time, but it may uncover blind spots, thereby fostering a new perspective on today's economic practice and resulting in actual political and social change. Epistemological considerations are not gratuitous pastimes of critics locked up in the ivory tower, but risky endeavours that can shake up the tower's very foundations, upset structures of meaning, and affect social practice. Harding draws attention to the possible politico-economic consequences of such endeavours: "In our culture, reflecting on an appropriate model of rationality may well seem a luxury for the few, but it is a project with immense potential consequences: it could produce a politics of knowledge-seeking that would show us the conditions necessary to transfer control from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'" (*Science Question 20*).

The question to be asked with regard to female contributions to economic thought is similar to that pertaining to the science question more generally: how can hitherto peripheral groups move towards the centre and be granted access to knowledge formation in this field? At least three interrelated takes on this question are possible: firstly and fundamentally, the realisation and exemplification that within a given realm of knowledge, a particular group has been marginalised; secondly, the insertion of hitherto overlooked contributions made by this group into the dominant scientific paradigm; thirdly, the more radical invitation to change the theoretical and methodological premises of the dominant scientific paradigm. In 1986, German economist Hedwig Rudolph observed:

It is hard to imagine that women will be willingly offered more comfortable seats in and by economics; they must claim that space by and for themselves. In this, they must achieve a balance between excessive expectations and the limitations of their possibilities: since they hail from the margins and are therefore less in a rut, they are encumbered with every hope for innovation; yet those who have power – also the power to define 'science' – in economics are (still) men!

(142)

As I illustrate in this chapter, the heterodox school of feminist economics has lived up to Rudolph's challenge by pursuing the three approaches named above within the yet unaccomplished task of enhancing the status of women in (neoclassical) economics and the history of its ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Before presenting these insights in the following two sections and explaining how they bear on my own approach, I should state at this point that whenever I refer to 'economics' in the following, I use the term as an admittedly at times too sweeping shorthand for the mainstream tradition at the discipline's centre, often also referred to as neoclassical economics. I am aware that not all economists



subscribe to it and that there is an ongoing internal debate within the discipline about its goals and methods. But in subsequently employing the term ‘neoclassical economics’, I follow the bulk of economic literature I have consulted which uses the term almost interchangeably with ‘the economic mainstream’. However, economist Tony Lawson has argued that the common usage of ‘neoclassical economics’ is often imprecise and misleading. He suggests that economic schools can be subdivided into three major groups depending on the relationship between the method they use and the social ontology to which they subscribe: the first group uses mathematical methods and assumes an atomistic ontology of the social realm. This, for Lawson, is the quintessential attitude of the mainstream. The second group sees the social realm as processual, that is as marked by perpetual causality and interaction; it is furthermore rather sceptical of mathematical modelling, deeming the latter inadequate for properly representing a processual social ontology. This stance characterises heterodox schools *sensu stricto*. The third group persists in using mathematical methods while at the same time subscribing to a processual social ontology. Drawing on Thorstein Veblen, Lawson proposes calling only the third group, and not the mainstream, ‘neoclassical economics’, although he concludes that it would be “better, on balance, to abandon the category” (981) altogether. Lawson himself, just as feminist economics, seems to lean towards the second cluster. For him, and this is a crucial point for my own argumentation, “the real source of the discipline’s problems is the very emphasis on mathematical modelling that defines the mainstream, an emphasis that usually results in formulations implicitly constrained to be consistent with *a deficient social ontology*” (955, my emphasis). This contention, the implications of which I shall return to further on, sheds light on the fundamental problem confronted by studies such as mine which stem from what Amann calls the periphery and which attempt to influence and change the mainstream: the clash of heterodox and mainstream theories is not just one of two different epistemologies or methods, but, according to Lawson, of two different worldviews.

### The androcentric bias of the history of economic thought

The important and diverse work that has been carried out by feminist economists is not easy to sum up, but the history of economic thought offers a good point of departure. Historical narratives in general, and those of a given academic discipline in particular, far from merely depicting the past, provide a means of orientation for the here and now. Historiography is not an innocent means of elucidating closed chapters of a bygone past, but a value-laden process of making sense of the present. For this reason, it is relevant who tells the history as well as what and whom the history is about, as variations in authorship and/or topics may lead to a different understanding of contemporary life and academic practice. According to Gillian Hewitson (8–9), feminist economists have concentrated on three basic strands in exploring the history of their discipline. The first she terms “contribution history”, which, as explained earlier, looks for ‘lost

gems' of economic writing by women hitherto not included in the canon. The second examines early economic writing, mostly by men, with a view to explicit and implicit constructions of gender within these texts. The third strand questions the validity of the canon as such, which it perceives as a product of biased and androcentric attitudes.

Commenting on the absence of women in the economic canon, Seiz pointed out in 1993 that "we know almost nothing about how many women have worked as economists in the past, what sort of work they did and under what conditions, and how their work was received" ("Feminism" 189). Hewitson confirmed the validity of this gloomy diagnosis in 2010: "As late as the 1990s, economists, including many feminist economists, would have been hard pressed to name women economists, apart from perhaps Joan Robinson and Rosa Luxemburg. (Truth be told, most neoclassical economists are still in that position.)" (8–9) Since then, the situation has been somewhat ameliorated thanks to several noteworthy publications. One of the earliest monographs devoted to female economists appeared in 1973: Dorothy Lampen Thomson's *Adam Smith's Daughters*. Focusing mainly on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Thomson portrayed six authors: Jane Marcet, Harriet Martineau, Millicent Fawcett, Rosa Luxemburg, Beatrice Webb, and Joan Robinson. While the year of publication of Thomson's pioneering book might be read as evidence that the interest in female economists was soaring as early as the 1970s, its actual publishing history is rather sobering: "Publishers were not very interested and [Thomson] finally paid to have it published. Like Harriet Martineau she was convinced that people wanted to know about the history of women writers in economics. She was less lucky than Martineau, and sales were lack-lustre" (Polkinghorn and Thomson viii). A quarter of a century later, Thomson published a revised and extended version of *Adam Smith's Daughters* together with Bette Polkinghorn, in the hope that "the climate had changed and that a revised and expanded edition might be useful and successful" (viii).

In 1995, Mary Ann Dimand, Robert W. Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget edited a collection of essays entitled *Women of Value: Feminist Essays on the History of Women in Economics*. In the introduction, they enumerate the guiding questions underlying the book: "Why is it often thought that women were unimportant or virtually absent from the field? What were women economists writing about, and what were their contributions to the literature, to the profession and to the shaping of their society? Who listened to them, supported them or hindered them?" (ix). Like Thomson, the contributors focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They throw light on the sociology of the economic profession and the obstacles faced by women in that discipline. Robert W. Dimand programmatically argues in his essay on "The Neglect of Women's Contributions to Economics" that

[t]he history of economic thought must, if it is to portray the discipline's past, take account of the role played by women and consider why the participation of women in the economics profession declined. [. . .] Economic

historians of both Britain and North America would find in the writings of women economists a treasure trove of learning on the economic history of the neglected majority of the population.

(18; see also Dimand “Women in the Canon”)

The treasure trove is explored in articles devoted to the work of individual female economists, such as Jane Marcet, Harriet Martineau, Harriot Taylor, Barbara Bodichon, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Mary Paley. Not coincidentally, perhaps, two of these women – Harriot Taylor and Mary Paley – were married to famous economists, namely John Stuart Mill and Alfred Marshall respectively, who have come to overshadow the contributions made by their wives.

In 2000, Mary Ann Dimand, Robert W. Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget published a second crucial volume: *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists*. Containing short profiles of mostly nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors, the dictionary is noteworthy for what James and Juliane Cicarelli have called “dimensions of democracy and inclusiveness” (xviii): not only does the dictionary provide information on 120 women, it also eschews a uniquely British and/or North American bias by introducing authors from various countries. The editors emphasise that they do not deem their project complete and encourage readers to take up and expand their work. Acting on similar motives, James and Juliane Cicarelli published a biographical dictionary of *Distinguished Women Economists* in 2003. Containing profiles of over 50 female biographees, the book reflects the authors’ wish “to have a balance of accomplished and emerging economists; deceased and living economists; cognitive, policy, and business economists – economists who cover virtually every philosophical perspective there is to economic reasoning” (xix). With Jane Marcet, born in 1769, being the earliest economist mentioned in the volume, *Distinguished Women Economists*, like its comparable predecessor, focuses mostly on scholars from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A different tactic informs the momentous *Bibliography of Female Economic Thought to 1940*, edited in 2004 by Kirsten K. Madden, Janet A. Seiz, and Michèle Pujol. Instead of concentrating on specific writers, it provides a comprehensive list of economic texts. The bibliography refers to an impressive “10,000 articles, books, and pamphlets on economic issues, written by more than 1,700 women, published between 1770 and 1940” (xiii). The book is notable because it showcases the prolific work of female economists and identifies a few crucial methodological challenges which also have a bearing on my own work. Madden, Seiz, and Pujol mention that the “definitions of ‘economist’ and the ‘economic’ were in considerable flux in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth”, which made their “decisions about which writings and writers to include quite complex” (xx). They ponder the difficult status of genre as a criterion for defining an economic text, particularly regarding texts published before the mid-twentieth century:

Prior to the professionalization and ‘academicization’ of the social sciences, writers tended to be broadly educated and to move between topics and

approaches with relative ease. Women who wrote on political economy might pen novels and philosophical tracts as well, and any individual text on economic issues might also be laden with religious or other non-economic content.

(xx)

The editors admit further that “[d]eciding which subject areas should be considered ‘economic’ was far from simple, again especially for the earlier period” (xxi). The project undertaken by the three authors thus shows the challenges of bringing female economists to light. Besides the arduous archival groundwork involved in identifying lost voices (a job increasingly facilitated through online research and databases), the task inevitably elicits fundamental epistemological questions pertaining to the definition of economics, the implications of genre, and the question of relevant subject matter.

Madden, Seiz, and Pujol’s bibliography lists references to titles of economic publications. In contrast to that, the anthology edited in 2010 by Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper contains excerpts from writings by female economists. Their vital four-volume collection *Feminist Economics: Critical Concepts in Economics* contains economic texts by and about women from 1800 until the present. Barker and Kuiper’s is an invaluable reference work: it offers proof that women have been variously contributing to economic discourse and provides a compelling historical perspective on gender within economic thought. Kuiper enriched this accomplishment by editing another essential four-volume anthology devoted to *Women’s Economic Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (2014). She confirms that to reappraise the role of women in economic thought in the eighteenth century, it is not sufficient to compare select writings by women with standard theories developed by male classics at that time. Instead, the project calls for a reevaluation of the genres and topics of economic writing (“Introduction” xii). Consequently, her anthology features texts that can be more easily aligned with the standard academic tradition (such as Priscilla Wakefield’s *Reflections* which I discuss in this book) as well as excerpts from novels and poems (e.g. Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* [1788] or Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s lyrical “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade” [1792]).<sup>2</sup> The anthology is a fundamental reference work in providing convenient access to early economic texts by women (some of which I explore in more detail in the ensuing chapters) and in widening the received definition of economic writing.

At present, the most recent addition to the growing corpus of books on women’s economic writing is *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Women’s Economic Thought* (2018) edited by Kirsten Madden and Robert W. Dimand. In this collection, which, as Madden notes in her introduction, “is not easy to capture, condense, or consolidate into leading archetypes and primary themes” (1), the editors build on their previous work, insights, and expertise. The *Handbook* widens the geographical coverage beyond the usual Anglo-American focus by discussing

women economists from Africa, Asia, the European Continent, and Latin America. It moreover contains four chapters (one by myself) that explore “a minimally charted territory” (2): the period before 1850. As a whole, however, the *Handbook* maintains the usual predominance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While careful to avoid exaggerated generalisations, Madden notes in the introduction that “[w]here women do contribute to the construction of knowledge, they often write about exclusionary economy: whether based on gender, class, race, economic sector or entire economy” (2). As my analyses in the second part of this book reveal, the theme of an “exclusionary economy” also runs deep in women’s economic thought in the Romantic Age.

All the contributions mentioned so far for the most part belong to that strand of feminist enquiry into the history of economic thought that seeks to discover ‘lost gems’ and their work. A second strand has analysed the gendered dimensions of those texts that already have a secure place within the economic canon. Michèle Pujol’s ground-breaking *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought* (1992) introduced the since then often-repeated notion of the “mainstream/malestream tradition of economic theorists” (15). Pujol analyses, among others, equal pay debates of the early twentieth century as well as the role of women in the work of Alfred Marshall and Arthur Cecil Pigou. Her study moreover deals with theories developed by nineteenth-century British economists Harriet Taylor Mill and Barbara Bodichon. Importantly, Pujol does not succumb to a simplistic ‘bad masculine’ versus ‘good feminine’ dichotomy in appraising the (anti-)feminist dimensions of the theories under scrutiny. Instead, she carves out how gender can be both an overt and a covert subject matter of economic texts. Published in 1994, the interdisciplinary volume on *Feminism and Political Economy in Victorian England*, edited by Peter Groenewegen, likewise contains gender readings of standard economic texts, with a particular emphasis on the late nineteenth century. The book moreover features two chapters on female economists: Beatrice Potter Webb and Clara Elizabeth Collet.

Edith Kuiper’s first major venture into the field of feminist economics entitled “*The Most Valuable of All Capital*”: *A Gender Reading of Economic Texts* (2001) is premised on the crucial realisation that “[e]conomic texts are of a dual nature: they are a means in the negotiations over gender and power and also the results of these negotiations” (63). With this thought in mind, Kuiper analyses the gender implications of neoclassical theories developed by Gary Becker and John Pencavel. She also looks back on Adam Smith’s classical economics as well as on nineteenth-century texts by the British ‘fathers’ of the marginal revolution, William Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall. Another contribution is Robert W. Dimand and Chris Nyland’s edited volume on *The Status of Women in Classical Economic Thought* (2003). The book retraces the role of gender in texts from the late seventeenth up to the early nineteenth centuries, and illustrates that accusing all classical economists of misogyny and gender-blindness does not do justice to the diverse range of their attitudes. The editors explain in their introduction that their volume has two goals: “It challenges the conventional wisdom by showing that the classical

economists did concern themselves with gender analysis. But in so doing, it also makes the point that the classical tradition developed, over time, a sophisticated response to the question, why is it that in all human societies women have suffered a lower status than that enjoyed by men?" (2). The individual articles collected in Dimand and Nyland's volume reveal that answers to this question mostly featured a mixture of philosophical, biological, and cultural arguments. Depending on the political and cultural climate, gender equality was at times actively encouraged, at others fought off as detrimental to the economic and political wellbeing of a community. Therefore, besides shedding light on gender as a recurring topic of classical economic writing,<sup>3</sup> the book demonstrates that economic knowledge is crucially influenced by the cultural contexts within which it is formulated.

The contributions mentioned so far might create the impression that women have by now acquired a safe place within the history of economic thought – even if the period around 1800 still constitutes a major lacuna. Yet a glance at randomly selected, relatively recent publications on the history of economic thought reveals that despite the impressive and persistent research sketched out earlier, the male bias has not disappeared. The *Handbook of the History of Economic Thought: Insights on the Founders of Modern Economics*, published in 2012 and edited by Jürgen Georg Backhaus, is a telling case in point. It contains 28 chapters retracing the development of economic thought from ancient classical times to the twentieth century. 23 spell out the name of the economist whose theory is to be explained: not a single name is that of a woman. Yet not only does the book contain a history about male thinkers only, it is also told almost exclusively by men: from what I could ascertain, merely one chapter in the collection was written by a female scholar.

A similar bias permeates Stanley L. Brue and Randy R. Grant's student textbook on *The Evolution of Economic Thought*, the eighth edition of which was published in 2013. The authors explain that "the study of economic thought provides perspective and understanding of our past, of changing ideas and problems, and of our direction of movement. It helps us appreciate that no group has a monopoly on the truth and that many groups and individuals have contributed to the richness and diversity of our intellectual, cultural, and material inheritance" (7). Yet despite this initial emphasis on multiperspectivity, out of more than 70 names of individual scholars mentioned in the book's chapter headings, only one, that of British economist Joan Robinson, refers to a woman. Her *Economics of Imperfect Competition* (1933) is moreover the only text authored by a woman to be mentioned in the textbook's list of "Selected Classics in Economics", which encompasses over 50 titles. Given that "[i]n any field, textbooks define the legitimacy of topic areas, distill the current body of knowledge, and mirror the field's research priorities" (Feiner and Roberts 60), Brue and Grant's contribution is unlikely to make economics students aware of female contributions to their discipline.

In this regard, Bo Sandelin, Hans-Michael Trautwein, and Richard Wundrak's *Short History of Economic Thought* (2014) almost deserves an honourable mention because, despite its relative brevity, it at least features the names of five women (still a flagrant minority) in its index. Regrettably, however, it does not mention

gender or feminist economics in its final chapter on “Orthodoxy and Change”, which introduces novel methodologies and perspectives. The message that only men have produced important economic texts and theories is conveyed by Steven G. Medema and Warren J. Samuels’s *The History of Economic Thought: A Reader*, the second edition of which was issued in 2013. Again, not a single excerpt from this 750-pages-strong anthology was penned by a woman. Interestingly, “women” feature as a term in the anthology’s index, yet there is no correspondent entry for “men”. This could imply that economists rarely write about men, because ‘men’ are perceived as the unmarked, universal norm of humanity, while women are the marked ‘other’. ‘Man’ does not appear as an explicit object of study, because the way the texts seem to proceed, ‘man’ is synonymous with human. The female perspective on life and the economy by contrast remains on the outsides and thereby assumes what Kaul calls “a ‘constitutive’ function in maintaining the inside” (203).

Even a history of economic thought which gained fame on grounds of being somewhat heretical from the standpoint of mainstream economics – namely Tomas Sedlacek’s *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street* (2011) – is not exempt from androcentrism. Sedlacek has been acclaimed for arguing what feminist economists, among others, had been putting forward for decades, namely that “[e]conomics, as we know it today, is a cultural phenomenon, a product of our civilization” (3). In his book, he retraces an unconventional history of economic thought:

[W]e shall set out as early as the written legacy of our civilization allows. We shall search for the first traces of economic inquiry in the epic of the Sumerian king Gilgamesh and explore how Jewish, Christian, classical, and medieval minds considered economic issues. Additionally, we shall carefully investigate the theories of those who laid the foundations for contemporary economics.

(6)

Sedlacek’s phrasing thus lays claim to a universal perspective and his scope is deliberately wide, both temporally and spatially. Yet his compelling and thought-provoking journey into the past inadvertently exposes and corroborates the masculinity of “Jewish, Christian, classical, and medieval minds” as well as women’s exclusion from “the written legacy of our civilization”: the 12-pages-long index of Sedlacek’s book contains a mere six references to women, and that is counting in Pandora with her inevitable box as well as Mother Nature. Sedlacek has been doubtlessly successful in challenging the boundary line between economics and literature, as the preface by the late Czech president-poet Václav Havel evinces. But he seemingly did not notice that his far-flung history about “us” (the first-person plural is omnipresent in the book) in fact neglects at least half of humanity: “our civilization” emerges as almost exclusively the work of men.

The overall impression gained from perusing these volumes is that of a double androcentrism (i.e. as regards authorship and subject matter) as well as of a general

insensibility towards the blatant absence of female voices.<sup>4</sup> It would seem that the (predominantly) white, male lineage of the history of economic thought has been naturalised to such an extent as to become imperceptible to its practitioners. I do not accuse the authors named above of deliberately omitting women; I rather suspect that most of them were not even conscious of this omission. While feminist studies often justify themselves for concentrating on women only, the authors cited previously apparently do not even realise or at least do not reflect on the fact that they rely (almost) only on male thinkers. Whereas feminist economics is sometimes disregarded for being value-laden and not neutral, the standard history of economic thought, despite being man-dominated, can pass off as ‘the way things are’. Male preponderance in the history of economic thought seems not even to be treated as an explainable fact – because a fact is something of which one is conscious – but emerges as an unconscious, unrecognised blind spot. In Foucauldian parlance (who, ironically, is himself guilty of omitting women), it is “a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse” (xi–xii).

The harmlessness and irrelevance of such blindness can be maintained as long as the epistemological credo is upheld that knowledge is independent of both the person that produces it and the cultural circumstances in which she or he lives. Such a view of knowledge is of course convenient to those who (possibly unconsciously) profit from it. It is a self-immunising, self-confirming standpoint because it presents its own stance as transcendental, value-neutral, and truthful, thus automatically discrediting interventions that are not congruent with its rules: “as long as dissent is labeled not economic and suppressed, critique of standard economic assumptions remains taboo” (Strassmann, “Not a Free” 108). Incidentally, Tomas Sedlacek’s ‘heresy’ partially consists in drawing attention to this mechanism: “being value-free is a value in itself, a *great value* to economists anyway. It is a paradox that a field that primarily studies values wants to be value-free” (7). Once the situatedness of knowledge production is acknowledged, the androcentric bias within the history of economic thought becomes not coincidental to but *constitutive* of economics’ self-conception.

### **The androcentric bias of mainstream economics: topics, concepts and methods, code**

Diana Strassmann explains that “[i]n calling for an economics more responsive to the voices of women and other disempowered groups, feminist economists have sought to understand how feminist voices have been kept out, whether through institutional barriers or through intellectual restrictions that have limited the scope and nature of economic theorizing” (“Feminist” 368). Research into this question has revealed that both factors have been relevant. Just as with scholarship more generally, women have been excluded from economics both formally (e.g. through limited access to education, graduate programmes, academic jobs) and epistemologically, that is through androcentric biases at the heart of economic



theory and method. Referring to standard histories of economic thought, Hewitson advances that

[w]hite males have, mostly unconsciously, formed the disciplines' central tenets, techniques and methodology in their own image. In particular, the disciplines' theory of human nature, analytical technique and positivist methodology reflects the particular needs of a privileged, Western, white male identity. Hence orthodox economics, as currently constituted, is at best partial, and at worst incapable of producing reliable knowledge.

(3)

This observation leads me to the second major area of feminist economic enquiry besides the contributions to the history of economic thought discussed so far. Its focus is more palpably, though not exclusively, contemporary and challenges the androcentric bias of neoclassical, or mainstream, economics – the (yet) dominant economic paradigm of today. It can be roughly subdivided into three approaches: the first demands the inclusion of *topics* of enquiry into mainstream economics that reflect the needs and interests of women and other excluded groups; the second critiques the *foundational theoretical concepts and methods* of mainstream economics; the third is concerned with the gendered dimensions of what I would term *code*, i.e. of how economic knowledge must be packaged and presented in order to be deemed credible and legitimate.

All three approaches inform the premise of my book, despite the fact that I am clearly not dealing with neoclassical but with much earlier texts. However, present-day conceptions of economics determine what counts as economic in the past, not just in the here and now. Put differently: when looking at the past, the 'glasses' of contemporary mainstream economics prevent us from discerning huge portions of economic theory because they filter through only objects that are consistent with the neoclassical notion of relevant topics, concepts, and codes. Therefore, to notice and acknowledge earlier economic texts by women, the limited range of vision of neoclassical glasses needs to be demonstrated first, so that a different pair of glasses may be put on. In some respects, then, my following reflections attempt a genealogy *à rebours*: instead of retracing how past phenomena have shaped the present, I wish to highlight how present-day conceptions affect our view of the past. Nancy Armstrong's proposition is helpful in this regard:

culture appears as a struggle among various political factions to possess its most valued signs and objects. The reality that dominates in any given situation appears to be just that, the reality that dominates. As such, the material composition of a particular text would have more to do with the forms of representation it overcame [. . .] than with the internal composition of the text per se. I would pursue this line of thought one step further and say that the internal composition of a given text is nothing more or less than the

history of its struggle with contrary forms of representation for the authority to control semiosis.

(23)

From this vantage point, scrutinising the “internal composition” of neoclassical economics is paramount to recognising its outsides and uncovering alternative approaches that have been more or less successfully fended off by “the reality that dominates” economic discourse today.

### Topics

In all academic endeavours, topics of enquiry and preferred research questions indicate whether particular phenomena are at all ‘visible’ to the practitioners of a given discipline. They also indirectly reveal the relevance accorded to these phenomena. As several (not only feminist) critics have pointed out, gender has traditionally been economics’ blind spot, not only as regards the discipline’s history, but also topic-wise, which has led to a relative devaluation of economic phenomena that affect women (Ferber and Nelson, “Social” 2). For Nitasha Kaul, “[i]t is instructive to note what is the outside of neoclassical stories about the economy: women, nonmarketable ideas/objects, the environment, history, emotions, nonreductive, nonformalizable, nonmeasurable elements of comprehension” (203). For a long time, processes that have more strongly shaped the female than the male experience of daily life (e.g. childbearing, managing the household, caring labour) have remained outside of economics’ purview. Preference was given to research questions touching on realms that were once the sole domain of men (national budget, political economy, foreign affairs, business and trade, etc.). Economists have recently begun to discern that the allegedly female and domestic sphere, far from being ‘natural’, ‘private’, and non-economic, has an unquestionable material dimension. Mukesh Eswaran claims about his study *Why Gender Matters in Economics* (2014) that “[a]lthough the subject matter of this book is extremely important, interest in it among mainstream economists has been surprisingly recent. Only in the past few decades have scholars in economics started addressing these issues systematically” (1–2).

Diana Strassmann argues that the bias against topics and research questions that are important for women has been largely due to the prevalence of what she terms economic fables (“Not a Free”). According to her, economics has tended to conceive of certain social spheres in ways that obliterate women’s standpoint and agency. Mirroring the patriarchal legal conception of marriage, female experience was simply subsumed under that of men and thus rendered invisible and thought unworthy of further scrutiny. Strassmann gives two examples of such fables, the first being the story of the benevolent patriarch, which has been used to theorise the economic functioning of families. Within this model, the man acts as the head of the family and makes economic decisions on its members’ behalf with their good in mind. For Strassmann, the concept has the theoretical advantage of reducing

complexity by turning entire families into a single economic unit. Yet the downside of this abstraction has been the negation of power relations within families as well as of the individual needs and interests of wives and children. Strong traces of this economic fable can be found, for example, in James Mill's *Essay on Government* (1824). For Mill,

[o]ne thing is pretty clear, that all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals, may be struck off without inconvenience. In this light may be viewed all children up to a certain age [. . .]. In this light also, women may be regarded, the interest of almost all of whom is involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands.  
(*Qtd. in Hall, "Private" 221*)

The passage is typical of much of classical political economic writing in insouciantly "striking off without inconvenience" one half of humanity.

A second example Strassmann cites is the story of the woman of leisure:

Another old economic fable is that women do not work. The woman of leisure stays at home tending to the domestic needs of her family. Although she may perform many activities, these activities are limited to her family and have no value because they are not traded in the marketplace. Dependent on her husband, the benevolent patriarch, she relies on him and the money he earns from his productive and marketed activities to provide for her needs.  
(*"Not a Free" 103*)

For Strassmann, this model rests on a problematic and androcentric definition of labour which only takes into account work that is performed and remunerated on the market (i.e. the 'public' sphere). One may add further that the fable of the woman of leisure has obscured the fact that work – also work performed outside of the household – has been a constant preoccupation of female economic writers. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, some women authors around 1800 make female access to paid occupations one of their prime concerns. In fact, they remonstrate against the deliberate refusal on society's part to acknowledge that women are forced to work when, for example, the patriarch turns out to be less benevolent or reliable than expected. In this regard, economic writing by women around 1800 can be read as an early protest against economic fables whose enduring prevalence Strassmann condemned some 200 years later.

The topics covered in Eswaran's award-winning *Why Gender Matters in Economics* likewise reveal the economic dimensions of realms deemed private, domestic, feminine, and non-marketable. He devotes an entire chapter to the balance of power in a household and the question of "what determines women's autonomy, independence, or status" (5) within domestic arrangements. In this context, he probes the longevity of patriarchal norms: how much say do women have in household expenditure? Are they allowed to undertake paid work? How much control do

they retain over their earnings? Can they influence how many children they will have? Another major chapter discusses the economic implications of the institution of marriage. Eswaran looks into aspects such as the financial benefits of matrimony, the function of dowries and bride prices, the sexual division of labour, spousal violence, and the consequences of divorce. He also examines the “economic forces [that] lead to monogamy as the preponderant marital arrangement in most countries” (10), thereby showcasing that economic factors permeate the seemingly intimate and private realms of love and sexuality. A further chapter covers fertility and childrearing. It analyses the economic consequences of motherhood, the relationship between fertility rates and maternal mortality, the costs of having and raising children, etc. Additionally, Eswaran investigates the economic consequences of female suffrage and examines how “a large number of economic outcomes hinge on women’s ability to exercise autonomy” (13).

It could be argued that since Eswaran’s focus is on contemporary and global economic phenomena, his theses and findings have little bearing on texts written by English women around 1800. Yet this is not the case. Firstly, Eswaran asserts that despite obvious cultural and historical differences, “[t]o a certain extent, some of the problems of women in poor countries today are similar to those that were faced by women in the rich countries when those countries were at the corresponding state of development” (2). Selected phenomena he addresses were therefore relevant to women in Britain around 1800, and their writings corroborate this. Secondly, the range of topics covered by Eswaran highlights the distinct economic character of the texts I will discuss in the following. Whether it is Chapone’s, Hays’s, and Austen’s focus on marriage, or Wakefield’s, Radcliffe’s, and Wollstonecraft’s thoughts on education; whether these authors talk about motherhood, family budget, or caring duties – their topics are *just as economic* as Thomas Robert Malthus’s reflections on the growth of population in relation to food. Traditionally, marriage and childbearing have been associated with the feminine and private topics of love and parenting; education has been relegated to the equally feminine realm of pedagogy. Taxation, state expenditure, or business administration, by contrast, are still considered serious economic topics. Yet this distinction – which basically reiterates a division between the private/domestic and the public – is in itself highly gendered and discounts a huge portion of female economic experience. It perpetuates “the division of discourse that makes it so difficult to see the relationship between the finer nuances of women’s feelings and the vicissitudes of a capitalist economy run mainly by men” (Armstrong 27). For this reason, looking solely for female writers who expressed their thoughts on taxation or inflation around 1800 would be too narrow an approach. It is not the case that women did not write about economic topics back then, but that until quite recently, many of the topics they addressed have simply not been recognised as economic, but shoved away into an allegedly domestic, non-economic realm. To valorise early female contributions to economic thought, women’s thematic preoccupations need to be taken seriously and acknowledged as no less economic than treatises with a public and macro-economic focus.

Eswaran maintains that mainstream economics, “partly under the influence of feminist economists [. . .], has seriously turned its attention to issues pertaining to gender” (2). In fact, the inclusion of research topics related to gender and women’s experience has been probably the area where feminist economists have been most successful in influencing the mainstream. One conceivable reason for this is that it is possible to include gender topics into neoclassical economics without seriously changing the discipline’s overall epistemological and methodological core. John Stuart Mill had already argued in the foundational essay “On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It” (1836) that his discipline defined itself not only through the objects under its scrutiny, but also through its method. For Mill, “with the consideration of the definition of a science, is inseparably connected that of the *philosophic method* of the science; the nature of the process by which its investigations are to be carried on, its truths to be arrived at” (141). According to this logic, the demand to amplify the scope of research questions is less radical than the demand to abandon received theoretical concepts, methods, and codes. For scholars operating in the mainstream, it is possible to cover new research fields, such as gender, without having to abandon familiar tools. Consequently, not every economist paying attention to women is automatically a feminist. Nevertheless, the fact that certain gender-related topics which were hitherto largely overlooked have now been included into economic research is a success, because it valorises and renders visible concerns that for a long time were the neglected ‘outside’ of economic theory.

### **Concepts and methods**

Drawing on (feminist) philosophy of science, the more radical critique of neoclassical economics’ theoretical and methodological foundations has targeted the androcentric bias of certain key assumptions that pass off as neutral and/or helpful within mainstream economics. The *homo economicus* – economic man – has been one of the first concepts to come under attack: programmatically, an important early feminist economic publication (an essay collection edited by Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson in 1992) bears the title *Beyond Economic Man*. In mainstream economics, the *homo economicus* provides a concept of the ‘standard’ human being, which is used for modelling and predicting economic behaviour. In very brief terms, the *homo economicus* is an autonomous, rational, and self-interested individual with certain preferences, not all of which he can satisfy due to limited means. For this reason, he must continually choose the best way of spending his scarce resources. In this, he strives for the most advantageous trade-off between costs and benefits (which do not have to be pecuniary). When aiming for his personal optimum solution, he rationally assesses the value of the respective options, with ‘value’ not necessarily being expressed in absolute numbers but in relative terms.

It is acknowledged that economic man is an artificial construct, an auxiliary tool, since the idiosyncrasies of each and every individual will inevitably cause departures from the presumed model. Michael Horvath writes, for instance, that

the “*homo economicus* is by no means meant to explain *in nuce* human behaviour or collective actions, but constitutes merely a paradigm of thought, which, under particular circumstances, allows to conduct analyses within the social sciences” (55). A consensus seems to prevail, at least within mainstream economics, that abstracting from individual traits and agreeing on this admittedly simplistic model of a ‘universal human’ is helpful and necessary if economic analyses are to yield applicable results. Not every human being conforms precisely to the traits ascribed to the *homo economicus*, yet the latter is accepted as a possible tool in modelling human behaviour. For feminist economists, however, the matter is far more problematic. They argue that the *homo economicus* is not a benign auxiliary abstraction that helps conceptualise what is common to all humans, but rather a construct that posits as universal a distinctly masculine (and white and middle-class) experience. Nelson notes that

[t]he conception of human nature underlying neoclassical economics is of an individual human [. . .] radically separate from other humans and from nature; the emphasis is on separation, distance, demarcation, autonomy, independence of self. *Homo economicus* is the personification of individuality run wild. ‘Economic man’, the ‘agent’ of the prototypical economic model, springs up fully formed, with preferences fully developed, and is fully active and self-contained. He has no childhood or old age, no dependence on anyone, no responsibility for anyone but himself. The environment has no effect on him, but rather is merely the passive material, presented as ‘constraints’, over which his rationality has play. He interacts in society without being influenced by society [. . .].

(“Gender” 87; see also Nelson, “Economic Man”; Rudolph 129–32)

Accepting the *homo economicus* as the standard against which human (economic) behaviour is measured thus promotes an inaccurate vision of human interaction and excludes the experience of economic agents whose lives are marked by dependency and constraint. It presents as normal what is in fact palpably normative.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, critics have demonstrated that the literary character of Robinson Crusoe is a widely used example in explaining the concept of the *homo economicus* (Hewitson 5, 15–16). Yet given that *Robinson Crusoe* is a paradigmatic narrative of Western, white, male, middle-class imperialism, the protagonist’s success as a model for universal economic human behaviour strikes as fairly disconcerting. Ursula Grapard has illustrated that neoclassical economics’ use of the story ignores the power relation between Crusoe and his black servant, Friday, and is unconcerned with the marginalisation of women in the tale. But without the efforts of his mother, who bore and raised three sons, Crusoe would not have made it into adulthood in the first place. Without the help of Friday and other characters, he would have perished on his island. Many economists, however, tellingly tend to overlook or reinterpret the contributions made by these characters and present Crusoe as the quintessential self-sufficient model of economic behaviour. Grapard

deduces from this that “[e]conomists’ complicity with Defoe in ignoring female agency, their models’ abstraction from the novel’s reality, and the shifts in the relative positions of Crusoe and Friday, make it easier for our discipline to avoid the ethical burden of examining our narratives and of addressing the disturbing issues of race and gender” (328).

Choice is another crucial concept for mainstream economics. Traditionally, economic behaviour is seen as the act of making conscious choices necessitated by scarce resources. Yet for feminist economists, what is frequently undertheorised or omitted within this model is the aspect of power, which for a substantial amount of people factually limits the possibilities to choose freely. Privileged groups may make their choices under less constraint than groups whose options are severely circumscribed by their social and cultural locatedness. ‘Free choice’ is thus a concept that perhaps seemed plausible to its privileged founding fathers, but it is not universally applicable. In fact, as many texts discussed in this book reveal, economic writing by women around 1800 addresses precisely the material and psychological consequences of the impossibility of choosing (a job, a husband, a divorce). Strassmann puts forward that in economic theory, “[t]he lack of emphasis on constraints and interdependence [. . .] deemphasizes (if not ignores) the fact that human beings begin (and often end) life in a state of helplessness and unchosen dependency. Although the dependency of infancy lessens, our lives are always a mix of connectedness and separation” (“Not a Free” 106). Since traditionally, women have been responsible for the work that is associated with human frailty and need (raising children, cooking, caring for the sick and elderly), the relative denigration of human dependency within economic thought goes hand in hand with a denigration of what traditionally counts as ‘women’s work’. Yet without this work, knowledge production and science as such could not have developed, as Nelson judiciously points out: “The male’s ‘transcendence’ of nature and society is made possible only through the subjection of the female to full-time maintenance of the social and physical connections that are, after all, indispensable for human existence [. . .]” (“Gender” 87). The androcentric conception of economics as resting on autonomy and free choice hence often fails to properly take into account an important aspect of the *conditio humana* and does not acknowledge the value of caring labour without which it would not have come into existence in the first place.

A further problem addressed by feminist economists concerned with the conceptual foundations of their discipline is its implicit endorsement of hierarchical dualisms which locate phenomena culturally associated with femininity below those associated with masculinity.<sup>6</sup> Seiz, for example, maintains that “Western thought, including scientific thought, is pervaded by dualisms – mind/body, reason/emotion, culture/nature, objectivity/subjectivity – in which the first of each pair is associated with the masculine and the second with the feminine, and for centuries the project of civilization has been said to require the dominance of the former over the latter” (“Gender” 24). Ann L. Jennings has examined the implications of

such dualisms with a particular focus on the value judgements inherent in the economic distinction between public and private. Her analysis has unearthed a whole range of binaries that align sex with particular (economic) features:

public/private  
 (market) economy/family  
 man/woman  
 rational/emotional  
 mind/body  
 historical/natural  
 objective/subjective  
 science/humanities  
 economics/sociology  
 competitive/nurturant  
 independent/dependent

(121)

According to Nelson, such dualisms have had momentous consequences for economics. She claims that “dualistic, hierarchical metaphors for gender have permeated the way we think about what economics is, and how it should be done” (“Gender” 75; see also England’s critique of “Dichotomous Thinking in Economics”). She demonstrates how metaphors unconsciously used in economics are distributed along the lines of masculine = positive versus feminine = negative. Instead of simply endorsing the reversal of this dualistic model, Nelson suggests complementing it with the two factors that are missing so far: masculine = negative and feminine = positive. Her article “Gender, Metaphor, and the Definition of Economics” consequently features several orthogonal illustrations in which she virtually tries to ‘fill in the blanks’ – an endeavour that turns out to be more difficult than expected.

A further hierarchical distinction that is of huge interest to feminist (and not only) economists is that between positive and normative economics. As Susan F. Feiner and Bruce B. Roberts point out, “economics seeks to be value free by grounding itself philosophically in the traditional positivist notion of a strict separation between positive and normative statements” (54). For some critics, however, the prioritising of positivist over normative statements is epistemologically flawed because it fails to acknowledge that the positivist stance is – just as its supposed counterpart – steeped in cultural values and clandestinely promoting the interests of particular groups. In line with Sandra Harding’s claims introduced earlier on, critics of the positivist–normative distinction put forward that the allegedly superior positivist stance is in fact inferior in terms of objectivity and scientific rigour, because it refuses to reflect on its own situatedness. Yet students of economics are apparently nevertheless taught to distrust as ‘normative’ and thus ‘unscientific’ economic analyses that explicitly state their values. They are instructed to follow the positivist model instead, which accords the status of value–neutrality to what in



fact is value-blindness. For Feiner and Roberts, this attitude hampers comparative critical thinking within economics. Standard textbooks

would have students divide themselves in two, with the positive and rational knower of true statements held rigorously separate from the subjective chooser of individual and social values, a stance that fosters fatalism about the status quo and discourages criticism and imaginative thinking about alternative ways of producing goods and distributing economic rewards.

(61)

It goes without saying that the “positive and rational knower” is implicitly associated with masculinity in this context.<sup>7</sup>

The prioritising of (allegedly) positivist statements over normative claims has several consequences for the evaluation and efficacy of female and feminist contributions to economics. Scepticism towards normative claims from the outset discredits feminist and other critiques of the neoclassical paradigm – they are deemed normative and thus less reliable. Here, the self-affirming mechanism of knowledge production makes itself felt again: if no legitimate speaking position is possible outside of the dominant (i.e. positivist) paradigm, its pre-eminence is nearly impossible to displace. Claims that do not adhere to its rules can be termed illegitimate, whereas those that remain within its domain reinforce its dominant status. Nelson argues further that “[f]or the most part, ‘the moral’ has been put over on the soft and subjective side [ . . . ] while ‘the economic’ goes on the hard and scientific one. Morality is left to the humanists, while mainstream economists pursue ‘objective’ study [ . . . ]” (“Moral” 135). As a glance at Jennings’s table of dualisms shows, characteristics associated with moral and thus normative statements (soft, subjective, humanists) are also those that are deemed ‘feminine’. The promotion of the ‘masculine’ values of positivist science (hard, scientific, tough, objective) thus cements a gendered hierarchy within economics’ methodological core: students of economics are basically taught to beware of allegedly ‘feminine’ values and to champion supposedly ‘masculine’ ones instead.

The privileging of positivist claims has moreover implications for the significance attributed to the history of economic thought. As I will discuss presently in relation to the issue of code, a focus on positivism promotes the ascendancy of numbers over words because the former are perceived as more objective and positivist than the latter. This entails a relative devaluation of older contributions to economic thought, since prior to the twentieth century they would rely on words rather than numbers to carry their arguments. In addition, the bulk of economic writing, at least up to the late nineteenth century, falls into the category that mainstream economics considers normative. These developments lead to the decreasing value of the history of economic thought in economics today. Steven Kates asserts that

students of economics are served a diet of pre-digested concepts whose historical origins only a small and diminishing proportion of economists now

know. Other than in the most rudimentary ways, none of the debates that led to the acceptance of one set of theories rather than another is taught. [. . .] Thinking about superseded ideas is seen as a waste of time better spent coming to grips with the latest statistical techniques and mathematical tools.  
(2–3)

One epistemological consequence of such an approach is that economic theories appear as universal and given truths, rather than as the result of historical and culturally contingent processes. The theories and their underlying assumptions are thereby naturalised; students of economics are neither sufficiently confronted with alternative models and explanations, nor made aware that they are taught just one version of what the truth might be. This is why Kaul observes about economics that its “practitioners and practices are part of the performance of an enterprise of knowledge creation which produces its own Real (the economy) and then claims privileged access to it *as if* it existed already performed – the entity ‘economy’ or the category ‘economics’ as itself the production of the very theories that are supposed to reflect it” (202). The history of economic thought would be one means of illustrating the continuous process of discursive meaning-making that adds up to what economics is. Yet in choosing to be a discipline without a memory, as it were, mainstream economics risks universalising as true and positivist what is provisional and contingent. The problem is heightened by the fact that since the paradigms of mainstream economics are modelled on the natural sciences, which pursue the discovery of stable, unchangeable laws, conscious a-historicity might even be championed as a virtue, rather than exposed as a blind spot (Horvath 52; Priddat 164). Evidently, all this augurs rather badly for the visibility of a project like mine within mainstream economics: not only is it a contribution to the ‘irrelevant’ history of economic thought and not only does it focus on texts that depart from the positivist ideal, but it also consists almost entirely of words and stems from the ‘normative’, ‘soft’, and ‘feminine’ humanities. The self-affirming, power-driven mechanisms within knowledge production inevitably entrap and enwrap this book.

## Code

The choice of methodologies translates directly into the question of what I shall term code. Economists affirm that, “as a quick glance at the leading journals and textbooks will show, economics is nowadays strongly characterized by strictly formalized reasoning in mathematical models, and by the quantification of market interaction and effects of policy measures in terms of econometrics, simulation or even experiments” (Sandelin, Trautwein, and Wundrak 1). For Tony Lawson, “[m]odern mainstream economics [. . .] is just a form of mathematical deductivism” (953) and its “defining feature [. . .] is the *insistence* on methods of mathematical modelling” (957). As a result, the majority of present-day economists rarely write articles or books that consist of words only because such a mode of expression – such a code – has lost the legitimacy it had enjoyed well into the late nineteenth

century. With mainstream economics attempting to model itself on the natural sciences rather than the humanities, the discursive rules for presenting valid knowledge have shifted accordingly. Nelson explains that certain forms of economic writing are now more likely to be invested with credibility and authority than others:

The prototypical scholarly work in economics is an article that studies market behavior using sophisticated mathematics to formalize the model in a “theory” section, accompanied by econometric analysis of data in an “empirical” section. Few works in economics follow the prototype exactly [. . .] but for a work to be accepted as “being economics”, it must bear a family resemblance to the core model. [. . .] The less a work has in common with the prototype, the more it will be considered to be “on the fringe” or “not economics at all”. [. . .] Articles that consist of “just words” are rarely recognized as “economics” – you might see them in the *American Economic Review* as presidential addresses or in clearly suspect journals such as those that deal with history or philosophy.

(“Gender” 78)

The epistemological implications of this development are momentous, and I will return to them in the next chapter. For the time being, one may note that Nelson’s observations imply that nowadays, an economic text can be discredited even without having been read. It is code alone that can decide on a text’s credibility: if the text is devoid of numbers or models, it can be discarded as not being proper economics. This provides another means of stabilising the mainstream: verbal arguments against it do not have to be refuted any more, as they will not be heard in the first place, expressed as they are in the ‘wrong’ language of words.

This logic becomes apparent in Arjo Klamer’s comment on a feminist economist article by Diana Strassmann and Livia Polanyi. He acknowledges the validity of their claims and classifies their economic approach as “interpretative” (which interestingly establishes a connection with the inherently interpretative discipline of literary studies). Klamer doubts, however, that the knowledge generated in their article will reach a sizable number of fellow economists because

[j]udgment of interpretative studies like these is hampered by a pernicious prejudice that is cherished inside neoclassical circles and tacitly entertained by many outside. This is the idea that interpretative work is easy and analytical work difficult. The reason for this prejudice may be that analytical studies tend to rely heavily on mathematics whereas interpretative studies use . . . well, mere words. How mistaken this is.

(167)

In other “mere words” (do I wish it were numbers?), the dominant system allows for, listens to, and understands only its own mathematical code, in which doubtlessly

pertinent and valuable things can be phrased, yet crucially, not a fundamental epistemological critique of itself.

Feminist economists are particularly aware of the serious epistemological consequences of economics' mathematical code because they perceive that it is apt to delegitimise their work and hamper their project of reforming economics' methodological and theoretical foundations. But non-feminist scholars, too, have emphasised that, ultimately, economic models rely on narratives, and thus words, to translate theoretical economic findings into practice. Especially when economics leaves the realm of specialised circles and offers analyses meant to influence public policy, numbers and models alone do not suffice. The relevance of stories and rhetoric for economics has been analysed in some detail by Mary S. Morgan who claims that

[m]odelling involves a style of scientific thinking in which the argument is structured by the model, but in which the application is achieved via a narrative prompted by an external fact, an imagined event or question to be answered. Economists use their economic models to explain or to understand the facts of the world by telling stories about how those facts might have arisen. The stories are neither 'merely heuristic' nor 'just rhetoric' but an essential part of the way models are labelled and used.

(361)

Accepting Morgan's thesis implies that neither are numbers and models automatically positivist, neutral, and transparent, nor are 'just words' their subjective and opaque counterparts. Kates, a historian of economic thought, goes even further in claiming that "a mathematical answer to an economic question is seldom any answer at all unless it can be put into words and the conclusions explained in terms of historical circumstance" (15). He quotes John Maynard Keynes who had remonstrated more sharply in 1936 that "[t]oo large a proportion of recent 'mathematical' economics are merely concoctions, as imprecise as the initial assumptions they rest on, which allow the author to lose sight of the complexities and interdependencies of the real world in a maze of pretentious and unhelpful symbols" (qtd. in Kates 34). Obviously, for the wider project of knowledge formation, narrowing down the debate to a quarrel over the supremacy of words or numbers is not helpful. As I have argued previously, hierarchical conceptual dualisms frequently impede knowledge creation by cutting off the perspective of the supposedly inferior 'other' within the pair. The point cannot be therefore to put words over numbers or the other way around, but to aim for equal legitimacy and usefulness of both modes of expression. Yet it is precisely this equality that some feminist and other economists see endangered or already abandoned in their discipline.

One could ask once again whether contemporary debates on the neoclassical economic code have any bearing on texts written by women around 1800. Again, my conviction is that they do. As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this chapter, we look at the past from the vantage point of today, with today's definitions

delimiting our range of vision. The more words are expelled from economics, the more unlikely it becomes for a contemporary economist to ‘discover’ early texts by women and acknowledge them as economic.<sup>8</sup> Given that these texts in many ways depart from what today counts as a legitimate expression of economic thought, they are prone to remain on the outside, unseen. Yet if today’s scholars largely fail to see viable contributions women made to economic thought in the past, it is not because they do not exist but because we look for them through glasses that have been forged by patriarchy. Once it becomes conceivable (again) that meaningful economic knowledge can be mediated in other than numerical codes, genres adopted by female writers around 1800 – pamphlets, travelogues, essays, memoirs, novels, letters, diaries, novels, or poems – acquire a higher legitimacy. It is here that literary and cultural scholars come into play: the knowledge and the means of decoding such texts constitute their field of expertise, which is another argument in favour of a transdisciplinary approach to the history of economic thought by women.

## Notes

- 1 For succinct, though not recent, overviews of the various endeavours, see Margaret Lewis’s article on “History of Economic Thought” and Diana Strassmann’s contribution on “Feminist Economics” in *The Elgar Companion to Feminist Economics* (1999).
- 2 For an extensive analysis of how Barbauld’s poetry, especially her piece “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” relates to the politico-economic circumstances of her times, see E.J. Clery’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven: Poetry, Protest and Economic Crisis* (2017).
- 3 For a brief overview of gender in classical economics, see the eponymous article by Robert W. Dimand, Evelyn L. Forget, and Chris Nyland.
- 4 A laudable exception to this tendency is Daniel M. Hausman’s *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology* (2008), which features contributions by feminist economists Deidre N. McCloskey and Julie A. Nelson. It is interesting to note, however, that this volume does not carry the expression ‘economic thought’ in its title, but overtly presents economics as a ‘philosophy’. The editor is a philosopher, not an economist or a historian of economic thought: someone from outside the discipline champions the feminist perspective on economics and its history.
- 5 Such criticism has been voiced not only by feminist economists. Jakob Tanner, for example, draws attention to the ascendancy of game theory within economics, which views the individual as inescapably dependent on the interaction with other economic agents (204–05). Birger P. Priddat stresses the impact of behavioural economics which puts into question assumptions of rationality and foregrounds the involvement of individuals in “processes, networks, events, and stories”. In this context, he speaks of a “nexus poetics” (162). Both authors posit a shift from the concept of the *homo economicus* to that of a *homo reciprocans* (Tanner 205; Priddat 170), yet Priddat nevertheless diagnoses a relative reluctance of mainstream economics to embrace the methodological implications of this shift: “We are facing theoretical sea changes, which we do not (yet want to) perceive: contexts and atmospheres become as crucial as the neurophysiological constitutions of individual agents” (171).
- 6 Interventions focusing on this issue bear resemblance to theories developed, among others, by French poststructuralist feminists. This connection is not established explicitly, yet the parallels are numerous. Nelson, for example, draws attention to the problem of expressing feminist claims in a language that is marked by patriarchy: “[T]he hierarchical dualism that links femininity with all things inferior is so ingrained in our cognition and

our language that a feminist writer is often at a literal loss for words to express what she (or he) means.” (“Gender” 92) This statement calls to mind Hélène Cixous’s demand for an *écriture féminine* which would eschew the pitfalls of phallogocentrism.

- 7 Feminist economists are not the only ones to doubt the plausibility of the positivist ethos. Tomas Sedlacek likewise puts forward in *Economics of Good and Evil* that “contrary to what our textbooks say, economics is predominantly a normative field. Economics not only describes the world but is frequently about how the world should be. [. . .] Despite this, economics tries, as if in panic, to avoid terms such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’. It cannot” (6–7).
- 8 Wilhelm Amann nevertheless remains optimistic when he claims that in economics, “incentives for serious modifications are to be expected less from the established centre and more from the marginal realms of allegedly peripheral positions, which, in contrast to central institutions, are flexible and open towards neighbouring forms of knowledge” (12).

# 4

## WOMEN AND WRITING

### The gendered legacy of genre

#### Gender, genre, and academic disciplines in the Romantic Age and beyond

The question of what I have termed ‘code’ in the preceding chapter is linked to genre, and genre is a gendered concept, as feminist literary historians and critics have revealed. In a helpful overview of major debates surrounding genre and gender, Mary Eagleton points out that “[f]eminist criticism has insisted that [. . .] generic divisions are not neutral and impartial classifications, and that our aesthetic judgements are ideologically bound”. The critique of “the tendency in literary history to privilege the male-dominated forms” (252) has led to a revaluation of genres of writing that takes into account the historical experience of women authors. For the Romantic period, a pioneering contribution in that regard was Anne K. Mellor’s *Romanticism & Gender*. Mellor argued that the construction of Romanticism as a literary period had been predicated on a gender-biased hierarchy of literary genres, which downgraded the importance of women’s writing. Traditionally,

the novel would be assigned to the realm of ‘feminine’ discourse, the higher forms of poetry and drama to the realm of ‘masculine’ discourse. Before we become comfortable with this construction of gender difference in romantic genre, however, we must recognize that the ideological ‘feminization’ of the novel proved historically problematic for women authors. As male writers appropriated the discourse of the feminine for the novel, they effectively trivialized the voices of actual women writers.

(7)

In the decades after the publication of Mellor’s study, Romantic literary studies has indeed become more sensitive to the interdependence of gender and genre, which has led to fuller, more diverse accounts of the literary and cultural history of that period.<sup>1</sup>

I propose in what follows that the insights of feminist literary scholars as regards genres of writing can and ought to be transferred onto the history of (Romantic) economic thought. Implicit gendered hierarchies between genres of writing affect not only literature but also the history of thought, as they raise questions such as: Which textual genres are perceived as particularly suited for expressing 'properly' academic knowledge? Did/does everyone have the legal, educational, economic, cultural access to writing in these privileged genres? If not, does it mean that valuable knowledge in a particular field has not been produced outside these genres? Or should we rather assume that by epistemologically favouring certain genres over others we have overlooked significant areas of knowledge production simply because they were expressed in different, and thus 'invisible', textual forms? My claim is that by granting superior authority to certain genres (such as academic treatises), which only a select few could practice, the history of economic thought has largely neglected female contributions because they were frequently expressed in what today we would categorise as 'personal writing' or 'literature'. Roger Chartier draws attention to

the tensions existing between the inertia of vocabulary, which implicitly supposes the universality of the categories that allow us to distinguish between different genres of discourse and the historical variations of such distinctions. Behind the lazy convenience of vocabulary, what we need to recognize are singular demarcations, specific distributions, and particular systems of exclusion. From this Foucauldian perspective, the distinction between science and literature cannot be taken as universal or stable.

(15–16)

To destabilise this distinction and to lay bare the discursive "systems of exclusion" that have affected women, it is necessary to revisit and contextualise genre. As Michael Roberts puts it, "[o]ne of our tasks [. . .] is to deconstruct the literary forms within which 'family' and 'market' came to be imprisoned" (239). This step also makes it necessary to partially deconstruct and transcend modern academic disciplines because of their alignment with genre and, therefore, with gender. Genres of writing and academic disciplines are forms in a broad sense of the word, as proposed by Caroline Levine. As such, they are not neutral: "'[F]orm' always indicates *an arrangement of elements – an ordering, patterning, or shaping*. [. . .] It is the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics" (Levine 3).

Within modern academic disciplines, results are conveyed through specific genres of writing. This process of linking a particular kind of knowledge with a particular form of writing began to consolidate in the Romantic period. John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth note that the establishment of science and its growing authority

took place on the terrain of expression, of language and discourse. As a writing practice, science would now forego the whole realm of rhetorical persuasion and of figuration. Instead it would cultivate plain, naked,



unadorned language, a univocality fit to express the true meaning of nature as understood through the authoritative interrogation of experimental method. This in turn was going to require not just an appropriate language, but novel discursive forms, such as the experimental essay, to be invented and extended.

(2)

Around 1800, an academic mode of writing increasingly took shape. At the same time, Romantic writers made a case for Literature with a capital L as a mode of writing that was different in form, yet just as (or even more) valuable in terms of its content than academic writing. In *Genres of the Credit Economy* (2008), Mary Poovey observes with regard to literary authors of the nineteenth century that they “often concentrated on differentiating the *formal* characteristics of their writings and linked these formal features to the contribution their works supposedly uniquely made to the mediation of value in general” (166). She asserts that the eighteenth century saw “the gradual breakup of a continuum that once linked (what we call) fact to (what we call) fiction” (61). This development was “one that had immeasurable consequences for all modern forms of writing” (60–61) as they began, at the turn of the century, to align themselves with different endings of the now broken fact/fiction spectrum. According to Poovey, this resulted in a differentiation between genres of writing with lasting import for the realms of the economy and literature:

In the genres associated with economic writing, writers elaborated the category of fact by analogy to a distinction that natural philosophical writers had been making for decades, as a way to make market transactions seem as regular and harmonious as nature. [. . .] Imaginative writers, meanwhile, elaborated the category of fiction as a particular kind of relation between representation and the real world.

(6)

The split in genres Poovey describes is crucial for my reflections not so much as an aesthetic turn in the history of the style of writing but as an event in the history of thought. In Foucauldian terms, she describes a moment in which the field of knowledge was reconfigured as new phenomena ‘worth’ knowing emerged, produced by and at the same time producing new ways of writing about them. The period around 1800 brought the gradual consolidation of a long-lasting split between academic writing on the one hand and literature on the other.

Yet from the point of view of women, this disaggregation of genres and branches of knowledge took a different shape. Above all, around 1800, the vast majority of women factually did not have the choice between penning a novel and penning an academic treatise. On a historical level, the process of differentiating between forms of writing was clearly gendered. This might not be evident at first glance, given that the turn of the century saw a remarkable upsurge in publications by

female writers. As Virginia Woolf put it in *A Room of One's Own*: “towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write” (84).<sup>2</sup> William Stafford quotes figures according to which the 1790s saw publications by some 300–400 women authors (51).

The rise in female authorship was remarkable given lingering ideological impediments. For a woman, authorship, which per definition included a public role, meant that she was leaving the culturally prescribed private sphere. Jan Fergus explains that “[p]ublishing her own writing could threaten a woman’s reputation as well as her social position. [. . .] Proper women [. . .] were modest, retiring, essentially domestic and private. Authorship of any kind entailed publicity, thrusting oneself before the public eye – thus loss of femininity” (2; Frost 256). The figures cited by Stafford indicate that such cultural obstacles did not prevent women from entering the literary market in impressive numbers. This does not mean, however, that ideology was entirely inconsequential, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown in their authoritative *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) or Poovey in her study of *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984). Not for nothing did many women writers publish their works anonymously, pseudonymously, and/or include prefaces in which they apologised for the alleged presumption of taking up the pen. These are but small indicators that although middle-class women became increasingly active as authors and were thus not entirely powerless or deprived of agency, they were not on equal terms with men. One female writer to have experienced this was Mary Robinson; in 1799 she inveighed against patriarchy’s tendency to stunt the growth of female knowledge: “Man says you *may* read, and you *will* think; but you shall not evince your knowledge, or employ your thoughts, beyond the boundaries which we have set up around you” (156).

The category of genre is to a certain extent one such man-made boundary and therefore flawed as the primary focus for classifying women’s (economic) writing around 1800. Female authors could not choose as freely from the available range of genres, particularly the ‘higher’ ones (Eagleton 252). Marina Benjamin avers that literature and pedagogy (e.g. in the form of conduct books) were the few areas where women were most likely to acquire “some public presence” (415) and where the “[pairing] of woman and culture” was tolerated (411). Stafford takes a more optimistic view and emphasises that, in the 1790s, “[b]oundaries between types of writing were fluid and permeable, giving the writer a freedom and a range which women too could exploit” (13). Moreover, “[l]arge areas of the public realm of publishing and reading [. . .] were not closed to women; or at worst, the barriers were not insurmountable” (8). Stafford concludes that “[t]he gendering of genres in this decade and the exclusion of women from certain types of writing, though obviously issues in that so many women writers pay attention to them, were by no means straightforward nor absolute” (13). Yet while he is rightly emphasising that in practice, a number of women authors managed to circumvent gender and genre

hierarchies that were more malleable than is assumed today (see also Eagleton 259; Packham, “Genre”), his own wording makes clear that there nevertheless *were* barriers which female authors, in contrast to men, had to surmount. Terming these barriers fixed and absolute would indeed obscure a considerable amount of writing activity by women. But neglecting the barriers’ existence and the effect they had on female authors goes from one extreme to the other. One of these effects was that, in the realm of pedagogy, female authors mostly “wrote for an audience of women and children; they would not have presumed to instruct men” (Benjamin 423) – which again paved the way for their marginalisation in what (today) would count as academic discourse. It must also be remembered that women were excluded from academic institutions and thus from their discursive practices. Universities, clubs, and scholarly societies involved in the formation of modern academic knowledge for the most part did not accept female members.

Given such obstacles, women around 1800 turned to other genres of writing, such as journals, letters, diaries, and, in particular, novels, to make their thoughts known. They used them as a textual arena on which they could systematically probe various concerns, among them economic ones. This is the reason why some – though not all – women’s novels from that period are both literary *and* economic texts. Edward Copeland remarks in his study on women’s fiction in England between 1790 and 1820: “The accomplishment of women novelists of all stripes lies in their success in making the novel the sounding-board for the discussion of women in the economy. Women’s fiction captures the economy for women not only by assigning women the supervision of domestic spending in their novels, but by seizing a format for talking about the economy” (*Women* 86–87). Poovey similarly observes that “[t]he prevalence of financial topics in women’s novels suggests that these matters were not far from women novelists’ minds, even if few women contributed articles to the financial press” (*Financial* 7). This was so because as one of the most easily accessible genres of public writing for women at that time, the novel performed more functions than only that of being a piece of fiction. In her *Letter to the Women of England*, Mary Robinson expressly claims:

The best novels that have been written, since those of Smollet, Richardson, and Fielding, have been produced by women: and their pages have not only been embellished with the interesting events of domestic life, portrayed with all the elegance of phraseology, and all the refinement of sentiment, but with forcible and eloquent, *political, theological, and philosophical reasoning.*

(160, *my emphasis*)

The novel made it possible for women to address phenomena that men could explore in genres that were exclusively available to them. Women moreover actively used the possibilities (or, in Levine’s wording, affordances) provided by this form:

In the Romantic period, women novelists frequently employed the novel as a site of ideological contestation and subversion, exploiting its generic capacity

for heteroglossia and dialogism, for disruptive laughter and a sustained interrogation of existing social codes [. . .]. In the Romantic period, then, in ways we have only begun to perceive, the ‘feminized’ novel was in fact the site of a powerful struggle over the very construction of gender.

(Mellor, *Romanticism* 9–10; see also *Golightly* 8–9)

It was also, as I demonstrate in this book, the site of a struggle over the construction of the economy. This is why the novel, alongside other genres used by women in the Romantic Age, must be reclaimed for and as economic thought. Literary and cultural scholars have something important to add to this process because of their skill in decoding literature’s “generic capacity” evoked by Mellor in the previous quotation.

The limited access of women to certain forms of writing around 1800 and well into the nineteenth century resulted from institutional barriers – for instance through women’s limited access to education – but also, even more trenchantly perhaps, from cultural conditioning. Poovey notes that “[b]ecause gender roles are part of familial, political, social, and economic relationships, the terms in which femininity is publicly formulated dictates, in large measure, the way femaleness is subjectively experienced” (*Proper* x). These terms also dictate what a woman allows herself to think, speak, and *write*. The gender/genre conventions in all likelihood produced a kind of unintentional epistemological self-censuring on the part of many women: they faced “self-imposed constraints generated by their participation in and conditioning by the patriarchal regime into which they were born” (Frost 253). Essentially barred from a scholarly discourse and its genres of writing, as consumers and above all as producers, women who wanted to express their thoughts on a particular subject arguably did neither have the means nor even considered adopting forms of writing that would be regarded as academic: the latter were coded as unfeminine and thus culturally beyond their reach. They were written in a language that most women were per definition neither taught nor expected to speak.

Dismissing women’s claims to the development of economic thought on the sole ground that they might be contained in novels or other ‘lesser’ and/or ‘literary’ genres reiterates therefore a gendered and biased conception of knowledge. In order to arrive at the economic level of their writing, it is crucial for the contemporary scholar to divest herself – to the limited extent that this is possible – of the critical tradition of the past two centuries which has foregrounded and cemented some functions and possibilities (affordances) of those texts we term ‘literary’, but obscured others. To find knowledge beyond the ‘novels’ in Austen or Wollstonecraft, one needs to put in second place what ‘literature’ is to eschew the generic straightjackets and epistemological limitations inherent in this concept. Importantly, such a perspective neither ignores the fictional dimensions of novels nor asserts that there are no formal differences between Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*. What this perspective does, however, is to challenge the epistemological and gendered hierarchies that have been attached

to this difference. It argues that the difference, both as a product and stimulator of cultural processes, has ultimately marginalised women in the history of knowledge production. At least as long as gender impeded an equal access to genres of writing, women produced texts which often enough were hybrids of what, from a contemporary perspective, we would classify as ‘fiction’ or ‘literature’ and ‘theory’. Today, this hybrid nature of the texts is not sufficiently done justice to, which becomes apparent in the fact that they are for the most part deemed to fall under the purview of literary and cultural scholars but not economists or historians of economic thought. This obscures a significant dimension of these texts and contributes to the continuous androcentrism of the history of economic thought. The hybridity of historical texts by women needs to be reproduced at the level of academic investigation today – hence my insistence on a hybrid, transdisciplinary framework.

There is a further reason why genre is a problematic touchstone for evaluating a text’s significance for the history of economic thought during the Romantic Age. Several scholars have observed that around 1800 the boundary lines between academic disciplines were sharpening but not yet as clearly drawn as now. The division of labour (to use Adam Smith’s central economic concept) between the then nascent literary studies and economics was just emerging, as Poovey, among others, has amply demonstrated. In *Genres of the Credit Economy*, she is especially interested in the interrelationships between the transformation of (writing about) knowledge on the one hand and money as a representational form of writing on the other. She particularly emphasises that economic and literary texts share a common point of departure, namely, the issue of representation. (A bank note made out of paper is, after all, a worthless object in itself and merely represents value.) For Poovey, their gradual separation should be thought of as a process that paradoxically relied on their initially strong connection – on what she calls “a *primary relationship* to each other, through which each group of writers increasingly defined the uniqueness of its own products *by differentiating these from the products produced by the other set of writers*” (27). In order to reconsider the intertwined hierarchies of (economic) knowledge, genre, and gender one therefore needs to attempt to re-immense oneself into what Poovey calls “the fact/fiction continuum” (27) that was just breaking up into a fact/fiction divide around 1800. This involves the willingness to think of genres of writing and of academic disciplines as more malleable and overlapping. From today’s point of view, the difficulty of writing a book about economics from the vantage point of the humanities is that of trying to reunite two worlds that have drifted apart and are hence populated by different inhabitants, filled by different objects, and speaking different languages. But because these worlds were fairly close to each other prior to their “disciplinary disaggregation and specification” (27), a contemporary literary scholar may nevertheless say something useful about early economic thought, even if she is likely to perceive and emphasise different things than a colleague from the ‘world’ of economics.

The question remains, of course, of whether the findings generated in one world will be at all of interest in the other. In trying to fill what it has identified as a research gap, this book risks falling through the gap that began to open up around

1800 between the academic disciplines of literary studies and economics. Yet it is precisely in this gap that women economists from that period have remained hidden. The only way of identifying them is by reclaiming and rearranging the territory where literature and economics converge. I therefore follow Jakob Tanner who posits in his essay on the relationship between economics and cultural studies that given our “rapidly changing academic landscape, we should less than ever rely on the disciplinary mapping of the 19th century” (208) and pursue transdisciplinary research instead. But this task is challenging, as it falls upon institutions such as universities, literary departments, or schools of business and economics, which themselves are products of modern disciplinary mapping. That a literary and cultural scholar writes this book is indicative of this problem: the epistemological heritage which I describe here has rendered the texts under scrutiny invisible to the vast majority of economists. Largely due to their genre and their thematic concerns, they are known to literary and cultural scholars, who, however, lack the institutional credentials to proclaim them economic and therefore, *nolens volens*, keep testifying to their literariness.

This becomes apparent in the titles of many insightful books by literary and cultural scholars that analyse the interrelationships of the economic and the literary discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They often contain specific signal words pointing to each of the two fields. For the literary discourse, these can be ‘literature’, ‘novel’, or ‘fiction’. For economics, the terms used are, among others, ‘political economy’, ‘commerce’, ‘money’, or ‘commodity’.<sup>3</sup> In such a way, the two realms are brought nearer to each other, but by retaining a dichotomous logic, the studies nevertheless confirm their lineage with the academic mapping whose historicity they retrace and in part challenge.<sup>4</sup> Literary texts remain literary texts and economic theory remains economic theory: the studies lay bare their common concepts and concerns but stop short of wholly questioning the distinction between them. Most of these studies are immensely helpful in thinking through the historical relationship of literature, culture, the economy, and gender. But for the project of creating a gender-sensitive definition of the economy and of economic thought, their dualistic approach has the disadvantage of tending to buttress a gendering of discourses: men feature in both literature *and* economic theory while women fall ‘only’ on the side of literature. In this way, literary and cultural studies unwittingly reproduce and perpetuate the androcentric bias of economics (see also Rostek, “Implementing”).

To change this, my approach questions for women’s writing during the Romantic Age the primacy of genre as a criterion for distinguishing between literary and economic texts. Not every novel or poem or play written in the Romantic period is automatically an economic text. The primary criterion for deciding whether besides being literary (or personal, as in the case of memoirs, diaries, and letters) a text also constitutes economic thought, is that of content, helped by a gender-sensitive historical contextualisation. This requires a careful (re)reading of individual texts. Evidently, content cannot and should not be entirely separated from form. A text’s form can also carry economic content; it can make possible the expression

of particular economic observations through means that this form is especially suited for – for example, through narrative techniques in the case of novels (multiperspectivity, focalisation, conception of characters, character constellation). Melissa Kennedy points out that “[a]s economics is a narrative of human interaction, invented and imagined into being with the help of figurative language and dominant story tropes, literary studies’ interpretative and critical approaches open new ways of framing and engaging with economic criticism” (158). Within a transdisciplinary approach, literary scholars are therefore well trained to reveal the content of the form, while economists have the skill to analyse, compare, and contextualise the actual economic content. It is not a question of either/or, but of prioritising content over form. When looking for economic content in women’s writing, it is moreover important not to reify the androcentric conception of the economy and economic topics that feminist economists have consistently laid bare. In sum, I put forward and illustrate through readings in the second part of this book that irrespective of genre, we may consider a text written by a woman around 1800 an economic text and a contribution to economic thought if it consistently explores the circumstances and effects of how human beings access and manage material goods.<sup>5</sup>

The challenge remains that our contemporary field of knowledge is structured in such a way that as a literary scholar I may legitimately testify only to the literariness of a text (also of an economic one), but not to its economicity: this is the prerogative of an economist. Producing credible knowledge in a particular domain requires a specific set of academic credentials that uphold the validity of one’s truth claims in the respective field. Yet, if literary and cultural scholars are much more likely to take note of the texts analysed here, and if contemporary economics rests on foundations that systematically render such texts invisible and ‘irrelevant’ to economists, how can these texts ever be recognised as genuinely forming part of economic thought? How can the disciplinary circuits of today be punctured, the epistemological divides bridged? It is on these grounds that I make the somewhat audacious move to usurp the right to claim that all writings discussed in what follows are economic texts. In defiance to the disciplinary forms that of course still enfold me, even as I seek to disclose their limitations and loosen their embrace, I testify to the texts’ *economicity*, not (only) to their literariness. I do not take their belonging to ‘my’ academic discipline as a given but as a consequence of cultural processes that perpetuate foundational inequalities and seriously impoverish our field of knowledge. Hopefully with the endorsement of economists, literary scholars, and cultural scholars, it is time to liberate these texts, to the limited extent that this is possible, from the generic and disciplinary confines in which they have been historically locked up.

### **The limitations of genre in practice: the example of Jane Austen**

I want to present an example of how maintaining a conceptual distinction between ‘literature’ and ‘economics’ that is premised on genre and an implicitly

androcentric definition of the economy impedes the acknowledgment of women's contributions to economic thought. My case study is that of Jane Austen. It is especially instructive because Austen is universally known as a novelist and, at the same time, there is a consensus among Austen scholars that money and the economy play a substantial role in her writings (see Chapter 7). For literary critics discussing her oeuvre, this has created the problem of how to characterise the relationship between the literary and the economic discourses so prevalent in her oeuvre. I will return to Austen in Chapter 7, where I read *Sense and Sensibility* as an economic text devoted to moral economics. For now, I shall discuss two interpretations of Austen by literary scholars: Oliver MacDonagh's reading of *Sense and Sensibility* in *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (1991) and Robert D. Hume's more recent article "Money in Jane Austen" (2012). Both are informative critical pieces premised on the observation that Austen's fiction abounds in economic and monetary information. But they also reveal that upholding a distinction between literary and economic texts carries an unconscious gender bias, which can result in a denial of epistemological authority to women, even to the point of argumentative incoherence. They moreover expose that the definition of 'the economy' applied by literary scholars is often unwittingly an androcentric one.

MacDonagh writes of *Sense and Sensibility* that "[m]oney constitutes a sort of underlying beat below the narrative. Even the central antithesis of the book can be expressed – though this is far from saying that it was meant primarily or deliberately to be expressed – in economic terms" (61). The insertion is indicative of MacDonagh's repeated grappling with the question of Austen's authorial intent and of his attempts at trying to deduce it: could Austen have "deliberately" developed economic thought? Despite the substantial proofs of Austen's economic knowledgeability that he provides throughout his chapter, MacDonagh appears unwilling or unable to entertain the possibility that Austen was consciously engaging in not just literary but also economic writing and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Having systematically and convincingly addressed the relevance of sums and financial constrictions both in Austen's own life and in her novels, MacDonagh concludes that

it is as needless as it would be tedious to set about matching the economic particulars of *Sense and Sensibility* and Jane Austen's own life. It is enough to say that a secure but straitened girlhood in Steventon; stays at Godmersham and Manydown, the Biggs' country house, and other homes of the wealthy gentry; the constant family interchange on spending, values and receipts; businesslike and business-loving brothers (Edward and Henry in particular); and domestic management and the casting of her own miniscule accounts, provided all the data bank she needed. The question remains, why did she draw on it so extensively in *Sense and Sensibility*? An obvious answer is that a great deal in the novel hung on money.



Pursuing this “obvious answer” further would suggest that by having “a great deal in the novel h[a]ng on money” – which MacDonagh goes on to corroborate by summing up various economic circumstances that keep *Sense and Sensibility’s* plot in motion – Austen wanted to say something *about money itself*. Curiously and incongruously, however, this level of determination and awareness is explicitly denied to the author of a novel which MacDonagh himself repeatedly praises for “the plenitude and exactness of the material detail” (61). His compelling economic reading of *Sense and Sensibility* surprisingly leads him to the following conclusion, which appears illogical given the foregoing analysis: “Doubtless it was instinct rather than design which led Jane Austen to embody a profusion of material detail, to render economics omnipresent, and even to use John Dashwood and Mrs Jennings, as a sort of ironic chorus, to price everything. But if so the instinct was sure” (65). To rephrase this sentence somewhat bitinglly: regardless of her remarkable attention to material detail, Austen did not write about the economy consciously, by employing her cognitive skills and her brain, but – as befits a female – she relied on her “instinct” instead (which, in the context of MacDonagh’s reading, seems far removed from the ingenious instinct that Austen’s male contemporary, the Romantic Poet, might have claimed for himself). Yet, if a literary analysis which systematically scrutinises the conspicuous economic dimension of a novel concludes by simply stating – not proving – that “the design” of the author must have “[d]oubtless[ly]” been something else than to engage in economic discourse, then the rationale behind this claim is possibly not logic but an internalised generic and gendered preconception. In other (in fact, in MacDonagh’s own) words, it would seem that “it was instinct rather than design” which was responsible for this argumentative flaw.

A further instance of such paradoxical reasoning occurs earlier on in MacDonagh’s chapter, where he first puts forward but then downplays the import of the economy for Austen’s novel:

[I]t is notorious that *Sense and Sensibility* is firmly founded in contemporary economic reality. Jane Austen knew the exact value of money, as gained, lost and used by her particular class. This is not to claim for her any knowledge of economics beyond that of the ordinary educated person. As G.H. Treitel says in another connection (that of law), it was the ‘accuracy of her observation rather than any expert knowledge [that] saved her from errors’. Besides, she wrote for people who shared her background of everyday information, for whom further explanation was unnecessary.

(43)

The phrasing is problematic in several respects. Firstly, the evocation of “everyday information” and “an ordinary educated person” to classify Austen’s intellectual horizon is unspecific and rather impractical given that at the time she was writing her texts, an ordinarily educated man would have differed significantly from an ordinarily educated woman, not to mention the differences in education resulting

from social class. The terms “everyday” and “ordinary” belittle the extent of Austen’s knowledgeable ability and locate it on an unspecified average level. In this reading, only the more enlightened latter-day literary critic is able to discover ex-post Austen’s unintentional economics of whose full purport she is assumed to have been unaware. Secondly, the cited lawyer G.H. Treitel presents Austen not as actively pursuing an epistemological goal, but, like the heroines of sentimental novels, as being passively “saved” from (in this case intellectual) disgrace: her gift of observation luckily preserves her from committing errors in “expert” (male?) domains of knowledge, such as law or economics. Thirdly, it is not clear what MacDonagh means by the term “economics”. He explicitly denies “any knowledge” of it to Austen, despite conceding in the preceding sentence that she “knew the exact value of money, as gained, lost and used”. A few pages later, he explains at length that

[s]he also knew, *en famille*, the daily round of the superior orders. Again, Jane was privy to both the low and high finances of her own family. She relayed information about agricultural prices and her father’s and brothers’ purchases and sales of stock and produce. She was told of James’s increase in income and what Edward paid for carriage horses. She knew of all the losses and gains, and costs and charges, of her father’s removal to Bath, as well as the everyday minutiae of domestic expenditure. Clearly, money was often, openly and comprehensively discussed within the Austen family. [. . .] There can be no doubt that Jane Austen was thoroughly grounded in the significance of all sums great and small [. . .].

(51)

Yet what is such thorough grounding in the significance of sums and financial transactions but “knowledge of economics”, which Austen is denied to have possessed in the passage quoted earlier? Apparently, a text can be full of specific sums and describe economic processes, yet if it is a *novel* the economics risks being placed on the less weighty side of coincidence or instinct, rather than on that of intent.

Similarly to MacDonagh, Hume posits that Austen is “hyperconscious of money” (289) and that her “concern with money and incomes permeates her novels” (289–90). For this reason, as Hume explains, an understanding of the comparative value of the sums peppering Austen’s plots is important for a plausible estimate of her economic stance. Hume then convincingly reads *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as “a glum but telling satiric protest against the socio-economic position of early nineteenth-century women, elegantly camouflaged in a fantasy romance” (308). The phrasing suggests that Hume is not blinded by generic conventions and deems it possible that Austen sought to offer a socio-economic analysis which she “camouflaged” within a particular form of writing. To arrive at this interpretation, Hume first analyses a paradox at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*: Mr Bennet is acting in a financially irresponsible manner by not making provisions for his five daughters, but is at the same time not censured for this failure by the narrator or

Elizabeth Bennet, the likeable heroine whose point of view the readers are largely invited to share. To resolve this contradiction, Hume enters into speculations on Austen's motives: "I suspect that Austen understood very well what Mr Bennet had done (and what he failed to do). The disjunction between author and the protagonist's point of view is, in my opinion, central to the meaning of the text. [. . .] As I read the novel, Elizabeth simply does not or will not see what is all too gruesomely plain to her author" (308). Hume's interpretation thus crucially hinges on surmising what Austen wanted to achieve. The paradox of *Pride and Prejudice's* portrayal of Mr Bennet is resolved by imputing a particular authorial intent to Austen, namely, a precise economic agenda to which she consciously gave expression through the design of her novel. Hume's following assertion corroborates this further: "I believe that money affects a great many of the judgements a reader needs to make of characters, situations, and events in Austen's novels" (305). But if such is the case, one is at a loss to make sense of Hume's early avowal: "I doubt that Austen consciously used money in ways that give it an authorially conceived 'function'" (290). This is a less blatant case than MacDonagh's discussed previously, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that Hume, too, on the one hand forecloses a purposeful economic agenda on the part of Austen but on the other proves and argues for the exact reverse in his reading of *Pride and Prejudice*. It would seem that when it comes to speculating on Austen's intentions, the novelist again beats the economist. The two cannot coexist, regardless of textual evidence to the contrary.

Hume on the one hand reads *Pride and Prejudice* as a sophisticated critique of the economic constraints faced by women yet on the other remains sceptical of Austen's economic expertise. The scepticism seems to arise, among other things, from a particular notion of the subject matter a text should treat of to be classified as economic thought *sensu stricto*: precise sums, taxation, inflation, etc. In some respects, Hume appears disproportionately critical of Austen on that account. He avers, for example, that "Austen never mentions [. . .] inflation" (301), which apparently ignores Mr Parker and Lady Denham's rather informed conversation in *Sanditon* (1817). Imagining the consequences that the arrival of a rich West Indian family in Sanditon is likely to have for the local economy, Lady Denham observes that

'[. . .] they who scatter their money so freely never think of whether they may not be doing mischief by raising the price of things. And I have heard that's very much the case with your West-injines. And if they come among us to raise the price of our necessaries of life, we shall not much thank them, Mr. Parker.'

'My dear Madam, they can only raise the price of consumable articles by such an extraordinary demand for them and such a diffusion of money among us as must do us more good than harm. Our butchers and bakers and traders in general cannot get rich without bringing prosperity to *us*. If *they* do not gain, our rents must be insecure; and in proportion to their profit must be ours eventually in the increased value of our houses.'

(180)

The brief exchange proves that Austen not only mentioned but also understood the mechanism behind inflation, as well as its social consequences. Besides, Mr Parker's proposition that the prosperity of rich families would trickle down to Sanditon's less-affluent inhabitants calls to mind the workings of the famed 'invisible hand', as expounded by Adam Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species.

(74)

Austen is thus not fully ignorant of the economic topics that Hume posits to be missing from her texts.

Yet, even if Austen had entirely ignored issues such as taxation or inflation, this would not justify questioning her position as an economist, as long as a less-androcentric notion of economic topics is adopted.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, Adam Smith is equally unlikely to be stripped of his claim to significant contributions to economic thought, despite the fact that his analysis is often oblivious of the existence of women and their input to the wealth of nations.<sup>7</sup> Hume's reservations show that the gendered notion that taxation or inflation are 'hard' economic topics, while consumer behaviour or marriage are 'soft' and less weighty, appears to live on in contemporary discussions of Austen's writing, thereby obscuring the import of her contributions to economic thought.

Another of Hume's findings is that Austen uses overgenerous sums when 'pricing' her novels' characters. Drawing on figures provided by Patrick Colquhoun, "[t]he political arithmetician closest to Austen [. . .], who produced ambitious 'social tables' for 1801–1803 and 1812" (296–97), Hume demonstrates that the incomes enjoyed by most of Austen's characters would have placed them financially in the extravagant top 1% of English society. Discussing Darcy's impressive income of £10,000 a year, which would locate him in the top 0.02% of English families, Hume surmises that "we have to wonder how clear an idea Austen had of the rarity of such an income, of the actual source of that money, or of the cost of operating a magnificent estate and an appropriately grand house in town" (297). These reservations are important and instructive, as they remind us to treat the various sums named by Austen with caution.

Yet her contribution to economic thought is not exclusively to be ascertained by the accuracy of her sums – although Hume himself admits that they “are within the realm of the possible: they are not the stuff of fantasy” (299), and according to economist Thomas Piketty, they “reflect very concrete and stable realities” (106; see also 619 n. 36). The moral economics Austen develops is of a different kind, as I demonstrate in my reading of *Sense and Sensibility*: it lays bare and evaluates economic (im)possibilities and their moral and social consequences. It is the kind of normative economic theorising that Hume himself sees at work in *Pride and Prejudice*, for which it is not necessarily crucial that “Jane Austen seems unlikely to have read Colquhoun, and if she had, she would probably not have had the math to calculate the rarified percentages into which these incomes fell (though she might have sought help from her brother Henry)” (Hume 303). As a woman, Austen has in all probability indeed lacked the math and Colquhoun’s tables – although Winborn cites evidence “that she was familiar with some of the economic and agricultural pamphlets that were published during the Napoleonic Wars” (9) and Clery mentions her novels’ “computational quality” (*Banker’s* 140). But even an absence of mathematical precision would not make Austen’s writing any less economic: by virtue of her gender and the perspective it entailed, hers is a different type of economics exploring different topics.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf condemns the fact that the quality of literature is frequently ascertained by standards shaped by male experience and preferences:

since a novel has this correspondence to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life. But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are “important”; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes “trivial”. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.

(65–66)

Over the century since Woolf’s publication, literary criticism has made significant progress in terms of raising awareness for and countering such gender-based value judgements. The definition of the economy and of economic topics, however, appears to lag in that regard. Austen exemplifies that economics does not need to concern itself with taxes or inflation: it can and does arise out of scenes set in drawing-rooms and shops.

Literary criticism on Austen (e.g. by Sheryl Craig, E.J. Clery, Edward Copeland, and Lynda A. Hall), has significantly contributed to unsettling some of the biases permeating MacDonagh’s and Hume’s interpretations. Yet some of the newer

contributions still struggle to come to terms with the relationship between the literary and economic components in Austen's writing. Lynda A. Hall, for example, notes in her perceptive analysis of *Women and 'Value' in Jane Austen Novels* (2017) that "throughout the long eighteenth century, novelists often wrote about the entanglements between economic value and moral behavior. Although Jane Austen was not likely to write about the political economy *per se*, the world she created in those novels mirrors the social and economic experiences she was observing around her" (2). The phrasing reveals that literary critics writing about literature and the economy still unwittingly tend to employ an androcentric definition of *the* economic discourse around 1800: it is political economy, shaped by the writings of those male thinkers whom Hall discusses extensively in the second chapter of her book. In this approach, political economy provides the background against which literary contributions on the economy ought to be set. But because it is androcentric for all the reasons explained earlier, traditional political economy, by definition, cannot accommodate women. This is why it becomes so difficult for Hall, MacDonagh, or Hume to resolve the paradox that Austen writes a lot about the economy but apparently cannot be called an economist. As soon as the unwittingly androcentric assumptions about economic topics and genres of writing are displaced, it becomes possible to see the economic thinker in Austen and call her by that name.

To repeat: I do not claim that Jane Austen's or other women writers' texts are not literature. I do claim that they are *not only* literature. And I do claim that it is possible – even imperative within the specific project of a herstory of economic thought – to read these texts *primarily* as economic, not literary, texts. The content, not the genre – even if the two cannot be entirely kept apart and affect each other – is the criterion according to which a text is classified as economic thought. As should be clear by now, a novel by a woman around 1800 is not the 'other' of academic writing. The process of separating literary from economic discourse based on the distinction between 'fiction' and 'fact' was just occurring, but not yet fully completed, in Austen's lifetime. The novel, in particular, had yet to be forged in theoretical terms, and Mary Poovey identifies Walter Scott as a singularly influential figure within this generic differentiation:

Almost single-handedly, by his example and through the reviews he wrote of other novelists (including Jane Austen), Scott helped the nineteenth-century novel begin its slow ascent in the hierarchy of Literary genres [. . .]. Until writers could find a way to include a novel in the hierarchy of Literary works – in a way that made sense of the novel's tendency to provide information, its denotative use of language, and its undeniable market appeal – the Romantic model [of poetry – J.R.] would remain only one candidate among many in the campaign to define the terms of Literary value.

(*Genres 300–01*)

If the chronology implicit in Poovey's description is correct, then Austen and other women writers, when they took up the pen in the Romantic period, were not

writing novels in the sense that we attribute to this word today; this genre and its unequivocal association with literariness came fully into existence slightly later, albeit with the help of the very texts they were penning. Scott and others initiated an undeniably fruitful tradition of reading Austen in a particular way (i.e. as literature, as novels) which, however, has become so naturalised that other affordances of her texts (for instance, as economic thought) have disappeared from view. I propose that we retrieve them.

## Notes

- 1 For a recent example, see the *Handbook of British Romanticism* (2017) edited by Ralf Haekel.
- 2 Woolf was one of the first literary critics to draw attention to the material reasons behind this development. She avers that for women “writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind, but was of practical importance. A husband might die, or some disaster overtake the family. Hundreds of women began as the eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded even in text-books, but are to be picked up in the fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road. The extreme activity of mind which showed itself in the later eighteenth century among women – the talking, and the meeting, the writing of essays on Shakespeare, the translating of the classics – was founded on the solid fact that women could make money by writing. Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for. It might still be well to sneer at ‘blue stockings with an itch for scribbling’, but it could not be denied that they could put money in their purses” (83–84).
- 3 To cite a few exemplary titles: *Political Economy, Literature and the Formation of Knowledge, 1720–1850*, edited by Richard Alderman and Catherine Packham; *Charlotte Riddell’s City Novels and Victorian Business: Narrating Capitalism* by Silvana Colella; *Writing about Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790–1820* by Edward Copeland; *The ‘Invisible Hand’ and British Fiction, 1818–1860: Adam Smith, Political Economy, and the Genre of Realism* by Eleanor Courtemanche; *Romanticism and the Gold Standard: Money, Literature, and Economic Debate in Britain 1790–1830* by Alexander Dick; *Women, Love, and Commodity Culture in British Romanticism* by Daniela Garofalo; *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry James* by Elsie B. Michie; *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740–1800: The Price of a Tear* by Gillian Skinner; *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* by James Thompson; *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* by Deborah Wynne. In some studies, the dichotomous evocation of the economy and literature in the title is bridged by the term ‘culture’. The analysis proper, however, often retains a distinction between the two realms.
- 4 The powerful heritage of the disciplinary disaggregation also manifests itself in Iuditha Balint’s definition of literary economics in her introduction to the eponymous volume *Literarische Ökonomik* (2014). It is “a method encompassing the following dimensions: *firstly*, the analysis of literary representations of the economy as a social sphere, *secondly*, the interpretation of the economy as a metaphor, *thirdly*, the exploration of literary knowledge about economics’ theories and models, *fourthly*, the analysis of economic and quasi-economic texts regarding their literariness, and *fifthly*, the amplification and correction of economic theories and models with the help of methods and theories stemming from literary studies” (15). While this useful definition on the one hand captures the manifold ways in which literary and cultural studies, literary texts, economics, and the economy can shed light on each other, it on the other invokes the very disciplinary divide it seeks to bridge by reaffirming the existence of two different realms of knowledge: a literary and

an economic one. All five dimensions of literary economics mentioned by Balint and the term “literary economics” itself perform this contradictory operation.

- 5 I am aware that this claim raises further questions. One is whether it should also apply to writings by men. Another whether it applies beyond the Romantic period. In other words: should we read, for example, Charles Dickens’s novel *Hard Times* (1854) as economic thought? I hesitate to reply to this question conclusively, even if my impulse is to answer in the affirmative. However, turning this impulse into a substantiated thesis would require research into men’s writing and the specificities of other periods, which is beyond the scope of this book.
- 6 Such an androcentric notion emerges from a much earlier appraisal of Austen, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson’s revolted and dismissive reaction to two of her novels: “Never was life so pinched and narrow. The one problem in the mind of the writer in both the stories I have read, *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, is marriageableness. All that interests in any character introduced is still this one, Has he or (she) the money to marry with, and conditions, conforming?” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 109). Emerson seems blissfully unaware that for most of Austen’s female contemporaries, marriage, money, and economic conditions were co-related and made all the difference between a contented life and a “pinched and narrow” existence, which explains why they feature so prominently in Austen’s texts.
- 7 In the *Wealth of Nations* (unlike in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*), Smith rarely mentions women at all and when he does, he has a rather narrow notion of how women can and ought to contribute to society. He comments approvingly on the education of women: “They are taught what their parents or guardians judge it necessary or useful for them to learn, and they are taught nothing else. Every part of their education tends evidently to some useful purpose; either to improve the natural attractions of their person, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity, and to economy; to render them both likely to become the mistresses of a family, and to behave properly when they have become such” (169). With an education such as this, a woman was indeed unlikely to pen a second *Wealth of Nations*. For comments on Adam Smith and gender, see the contributions to the section on “Smith and Women” in *The Adam Smith Review*, vol. 7 (2014) as well as Dimand, Forget, and Nyland 229–32; Kuiper, “Construction” and *Valuable* 89–112; Nyland; Pujol, *Feminism* 16–23.



# INTERLUDE

## Gender, genres, and knowledge formation today

I want to mark the transition from Part I to Part II on a slightly provocative note that links the reflections made so far with the interrelationships of gender, genres, and knowledge today. As I have argued, the separation between economic theory and literature around 1800 coincided with additional developments. During the Romantic and throughout the Victorian period, two notable processes took place: the entrance of women into the domain of literature and the increasing differentiation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation of what today we consider academic disciplines. It was not until the late nineteenth century that women in Britain were slowly and reluctantly admitted to academic institutions. Literature thus became a realm available to both sexes around 1800, whereas academia remained an exclusively male privilege for almost one more century, turning into an increasingly prestigious and lucrative endeavour. Christie and Shuttleworth speak of the gradual “public ascendance of science to a position of cultural authority in the West, advancing science as the privileged form of cognition and action” (4). Harding, too, states that “the social use of science has shifted: formerly an occasional assistant, it has become the direct generator of economic, political, and social accumulation and control. [. . .] Neither God nor tradition is privileged with the same credibility as scientific rationality in modern cultures” (*Science* 16). The chronology of this development suggests that the kind of knowledge produced in the realm that preserved its exclusively male privilege for a longer time (academia) has come to overshadow that realm which had become accessible to women a century earlier (literature).

I would argue that a comparable phenomenon can be retraced up to this day, for instance, regarding contemporary hierarchies between academic disciplines. To pick one example: the humanities face a growing demotion and marginalisation, which manifest themselves not only in economic problems of underfunding but also in essential questions of legitimacy. It is no longer taken for granted that the

kind of knowledge produced by, let's say, literary scholars or art historians has unquestionable relevance for today's world. (Admittedly, this is not helped by the fact that some colleagues from the humanities feel almost offended at the thought of explaining to themselves and to others how their work benefits society.) Such problems of money and authority seem less trenchant for colleagues working in the schools of business, marketing, and economics, because the kind of knowledge produced by them is more readily recognised as useful for society, even if their authority has been somewhat strained by financial crashes and the perceived crisis of capitalism. For Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper, "[i]t is certainly true that mainstream economics has been wildly successful in establishing its scientific credentials in the eyes of the academy, the government, and the general public" as well as in acquiring "social, cultural, and political authority" ("Sketching" 2). My Germany-based experience likewise suggests that not all academic disciplines at universities are recognised as producing similarly valuable knowledge claims, and the value judgements can be fairly literal, as they translate into concrete funding decisions. Melissa Kennedy observes:

In today's increasingly neoliberalising university, the humanities are under pressure to justify their value in economic terms, in which concepts of the imagination, critical thinking, 'soft' skills, literacy and foreign languages have little use-value. In the current late-capitalist, developed world that has almost fully succeeded in attributing financial values to formerly non-financialised things – including the commons, water, air, education, knowledge, and ideas – the humanities have been so sidelined, and literature so devalued, that it is hard to even imagine that these disciplines might have an important role to play as interpreting or critiquing economic beliefs.

(162)

This consolidation of hierarchies between various realms of knowledge within universities seems to me in many ways comparable to that which gradually put literature below science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the same time, epistemological hierarchies nowadays coincide again with gender: economic departments, not to mention STEM disciplines, maintain a higher proportion of male scholars in influential positions. Seiz, quoting respective figures, deems economics "the most male dominated of the social sciences" ("Gender" 29). Nelson notes that compared to other social sciences, "economics as a profession has managed [. . .] to hold the line more strongly against the influx of women" ("Gender" 81). In the USA, for example, in 2014, only 12% of economic professors were women ("Proper Reckoning"). For the UK, the proportion of women professors working in economic departments and research institutes in 2016 was 15.5%, according to a report by The Royal Economic Society (Tenreyro 2). Ferber and Nelson grant that "[t]he discipline includes both nonfeminist women and feminist men. The continued dearth of women in economics is, however, one indicator of the persistence of cultural sexism, which manifests itself in

the composition and behavior of the economics profession as well as in the core assumptions and methods of the discipline” (“Ten Years” 2). A further case in point is the fact that the so-called Nobel Prize for Economics, received since 1969 by some eighty laureates, went to a woman but twice: the late Elinor Ostrom in 2009 and Esther Duflo in 2019. The accepted version of the history of economic thought is moreover one in which women’s intellectual input is virtually non-existent: it is a discipline with an assumed men-only lineage.

Drawing a parallel to the differentiations between realms of knowledge that occurred in the course of the nineteenth century, one can thus observe again that those realms which have more amply admitted women (e.g. literary and cultural studies) have moved towards the bottom of the epistemological scale, while the realm that has retained a clearer male privilege (mainstream economics) enjoys higher authority. In light of this, an observation made by Ferber and Nelson acquires a gloomy overtone. They posit that while mainstream economics has been reluctant to implement the radical epistemological and methodological claims made by feminist colleagues, their “critiques have [. . .] had more of a hearing among practitioners of public policy, the other social sciences, women’s studies, and the humanities” (Preface 8). On the one hand, this is good for feminist economics because it reveals its innovative and transdisciplinary potential. Yet on the other, could it be a matter of a union between the ‘feminised marginalised’?

What is more, just as the increasing distinction between literature and economic theory in the nineteenth century related to a style of writing, that is to the specification of genres deemed legitimate for expressing ‘serious’ knowledge, the contemporary hierarchy has its generic equivalent, too. Steven Kates describes the already mentioned changes in the modes of representing economic knowledge as follows: “Amongst the most momentous changes in the manner in which economics has been taught, which is unmistakable from an examination of textbooks written before and after World War II, is the proliferation of diagrams. The argument in earlier texts was carried in the words and not in the manipulation of lines on a graph” (101). Kates thus corroborates Nelson’s claim cited previously that nowadays “[a]rticles that consist of ‘just words’ are rarely recognized as ‘economics’” (“Gender” 78) by the mainstream practitioners of that discipline. Arguably, this trend, related to the ‘pure’ language of the natural sciences, slowly slips into other academic disciplines as well: note the rise of digital humanities, for example, which are strongly based on quantitative methods. With technical developments of the – *nomen est omen* – digital age facilitating the counting of all sorts of phenomena, the number, the chart, and the diagram gain epistemological authority over “just words”, with the consequence that traditional ‘just-words’ disciplines find themselves under pressure to demonstrate their legitimacy. The language the humanities speak increasingly appears just as subjective and removed from ‘hard’ knowledge as the language of literature began to be seen in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Simultaneously, women inhabit the reputedly subjective and soft just-words disciplines more palpably than the allegedly objective and hard just-numbers ones. The parallels between Romantic and contemporary processes of

knowledge differentiation thus suggest that, up to this day, patriarchal standards imperceptibly define what the language of truth is.

That this book stems from a humanities department is in itself part of the long-lasting consequences of the phenomena it retraces, namely, gendered and genred hierarchies within realms of knowledge. This book on hitherto marginalised purveyors of economic thought stems from an academic discipline which finds itself repeatedly on financial margins and is moreover forced to adopt the rules of a neoclassical economic logic that often works to its own detriment (Kahlert, *Gender Studies*; Kennedy). This logic has palpable epistemological consequences: am I, for example, primarily producing *knowledge* in writing these words, or am I primarily producing a *book*, a scholarly commodity that will enhance my *value* on the academic market depending on its impact on the scientific community – measured, among others, in frequency of citations, number of reviews, etc.? If I am producing a scholarly commodity (and, of course, this is also what I am doing), should I focus on my target group, that is my peer scholars from the realm of literary and cultural studies, and ‘customise’ my findings accordingly? And what will, in the long run, prove more relevant for my academic career and thus for my economic provisioning: ‘knowledge’ contained in this book or the net sum of external funding I was able to generate for my department – represented in a neat diagram attached to my future job applications? How does all this impinge on the ‘knowledge’ produced on these pages, produced within the academic system of which I inevitably form part?

Such unnerving questions possibly violate the reticence generically expected from the aloof author persona of an academic book. After all, although “[m]en as well as women are affected by their family and financial worries, their loves and losses, joys and despairs, [. . .] the ethos of science demands that its practitioners perform with icy detachment” (Fara 21). I choose to put forward these questions nevertheless for at least three interrelated reasons: firstly, because the detached author persona is in itself (or rather, in *himself*) an agent of the patriarchal tradition of knowledge production that I criticise in this book. Secondly, I wish to underline that knowledge – also that presented here – is not the result of a transcendental epiphany descending on the impassioned scholar but a contingent product of very specific cultural and economic circumstances. Thirdly, the questions raised above illustrate that many of the issues discussed in this book affect knowledge production here and now: hierarchies of gender, genre, knowledge, and (economic) power have not been overcome but transformed. This, I believe, is one more reason to shed light on the historicity of their interrelations.



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## **PART II**

# Women's economic thought in the Romantic Age



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# 5

## FEMINIST ECONOMICS OF MARRIAGE

### The legal context: the economic effects of coverture

For centuries, marriage had significant and ambivalent economic consequences for English women: on the one hand, a married woman fulfilled social expectations and obtained a claim to maintenance from her husband; on the other, the right to own and dispose of her property devolved almost entirely on him. Economically, marriage meant quite different things for English women and for English men. Social and economic historian Amy Louise Erickson has suggestively argued that this gender imbalance was instrumental in bringing about the capitalist economy in England: “[T]he legal particularities of England in relation specifically to marriage would have directly contributed to the development of a money economy, and to the development of the complex legal and financial instruments that go with a money economy” (“Coverture” 2). However, Erickson also notes that “[i]t is safe to say that the marriage system has been overlooked entirely as a casual factor in the development of a complex economy. I can find no other reason that the marriage system has not been examined in this respect by economic historians than the fact that marriage, of necessity, involves women” (2). Addressing the research gap identified by Erickson, it is the aim of this chapter to shed light on how four English women writers from 1735 to 1799 conceptualised the relationship between the marriage system and the economy: Sarah Chapone, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Mary Robinson.

To understand the economic consequences of marriage for women, it is necessary to delve into the intricacies of English law. Under common law, an English woman became one person with her husband upon marriage, and he obtained the right to her body, her children, and most of her property. A wife’s economic and legal autonomy was smaller than that of an unmarried woman of age, the legal term for whom was *feme sole*. The regulations were known as coverture, because the



legal, economic, and civil existence of a married woman (a *feme covert*) was 'covered' by that of her husband. These common-law principles remained in place from the Middle Ages until the late nineteenth century (Perkin 1; Stretton and Kesselring 7).

While for some, 'cover' was synonymous with protection and shelter, for others, it connoted subjection and an unwarranted tutelage of women by men. Jurist William Blackstone painted a positive picture of coverture in his monumental and influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769), a document that subsequently shaped the legal framework of England and the United States:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a *feme-covert*; is said to be *covert-baron*, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her *baron*, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*.

(430)

Blackstone emphasises the aspect of protection, which he mentions twice, besides the image of a protective "wing". Victorian women-rights activist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, by contrast, rephrased his passage some hundred years later in such a way as to underline that, for married women, 'protection' comes at a price. In her *Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women: Together with a Few Observations Thereon* (1854), she writes: "A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband. He is civilly responsible for her acts; she lives under his protection or cover, and her condition is called coverture" (25). Bodichon makes clear that, for a woman, marriage not only means "protection and cover" but also losing "all her rights" that were hers as a *feme sole* and agreeing to her existence being "entirely absorbed" by that of her husband. The two examples demonstrate that the gender of the person commenting on the law can make a difference as to how this law is interpreted – which is also true of considerations on the economic effects of marriage.

Although Bodichon's *Brief Summary* stems from the mid-nineteenth century, it remains a useful guide to common-law regulations of earlier periods, since the premises of coverture persisted for a, from today's perspective, startlingly long period of over eight centuries. Bodichon privileges a female viewpoint in her depiction and enumerates, among others, the following economic consequences of marriage for English women:

What was her personal property before marriage, such as money in hand, money at the bank, jewels, household goods, clothes, etc., becomes absolutely her husband's, and he may assign or dispose of them at his pleasure whether he and his wife live together or not.

A wife's *chattels real* (i.e. estates held during a term of years, or the next presentation to a church living, etc.) become her husband's by his doing some act to appropriate them; but, if the wife survives, she resumes her property. [. . .]

Neither the Courts of Common Law nor Equity have any direct power to oblige a man to support his wife, – the Ecclesiastical Courts [. . .] and a Magistrate's court at the instance of her parish alone can do this.

A husband has a freehold estate in his wife's lands during the joint existence of himself and his wife, that is to say, he has absolute possession of them as long as they both live. If the wife dies without children, the property goes to her heir, but if she has borne a child, her husband holds possession until his death.

Money earned by a married woman belongs absolutely to her husband; that and all sources of income, excepting those mentioned above, are included in the term personal property.

By the particular permission of her husband she can make a will of her personal property, for by such a permission he gives up his right. But he may revoke his permission at any time before *probate* (i.e., the exhibiting and proving a will before the Ecclesiastical Judge having jurisdiction over the place where the party died.) [. . .]

A married woman cannot sue or be sued for contracts – nor can she enter into contracts except as the agent of her husband; that is to say, her word alone is not binding in law, and persons giving a wife credit have no remedy against her. There are some exceptions, as where she contracts debts upon estates settled to her separate use, or where a wife carries on trade separately, according to the custom of London, etc. [. . .]

When a woman has consented to a proposal of marriage, she cannot dispose or give away her property without the knowledge of her betrothed; if she make any such disposition without his knowledge, even if he be ignorant of the existence of her property, the disposition will not be legal.

(26–27)<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the emotional aspects of the union, then, marriage inevitably meant entering a specific economic relation, which distributed rights to property unequally between husband and wife. Yet because the law maintained the fiction of the two spouses becoming one person, it regarded this imbalance as unproblematic.

It can be argued that the function of a woman as enshrined in English common law was to serve as a conduit for the circulation of capital within transactions performed by men: she embodied the property that would pass from one family (usually represented by the father) to another (usually represented by the husband). A woman was expected to secure the circulation of capital in the future, by producing a male heir and taking care of the offspring. The curtailment of female economic agency within marriage followed a similar rationale as

primogeniture, since it favoured the concentration of economic power within few male hands. Historian Joan Perkin similarly asserts in her study of *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (1989) that the economic severity of coverture was a “surprising by-product of landed society and primogeniture” (5): both led to the accumulation of landed capital over time, with marriage as a crucial means of consolidating and transferring property among families and generations. Within marriage, consolidation occurred by transferring the economic rights of a woman to her husband. Phillip Mallett moreover suggests that the economic discrimination of wives buttressed women's exclusion from political participation (4): since until the early twentieth century, the right to vote depended on the ownership of property, the systematic rejection of equal property rights to (married) women contributed to their continuous electoral disenfranchisement.

One of the most drastic illustrations of the extent to which wives could be treated as property is visible in the custom of wife-sales, practiced among the English labouring classes from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Historian Bridget Hill notes that a wife-sale tended to provide a substitute for the legally unobtainable divorce (216). Sometimes the wife agreed to the transaction, but a husband could also sell his wife without her consent. From today's perspective, the procedure of the sale offers an almost grotesque embodiment of coverture's overall tendency to turn the wife into a passive, exploitable merchandise. As Hill explains, most wife-sales took place on markets and were overseen by butchers, which made the ‘value’ of women comparable to that of livestock:

Almost invariably the wife to be sold was led into the market by a halter round her neck or tied to an arm. The sale took the form of an auction, the wife going to the highest bidder. Witnesses were essential to the procedure, and often some form of contract, duly witnessed, was drawn up after the sale. [. . .] The wife was frequently sold by weight, just as were cattle – so much a pound.

(216, 219)

By selling his wife, a husband also transferred all his economic obligations toward her to the new purchaser. Hill speculates on whether wives were aware of the humiliating nature of this process and argues that even if they were, they had no substantial means of protesting against their demeaning situation (217). Both the practice of wife-sales among lower classes and mercenary, arranged marriages among the upper and middle ones confirm Meghan Jordan's observation about women's position in eighteenth-century England: “Like the increasing privatization of land and the growing importance of property ownership, women's value was calculated on the value of owning them” (563).

In view of the substantial economic discrimination faced by married women of all classes, one may well wonder why, for over eight centuries, most English

women acquiesced to such arrangements. The question offers enough material for a study of its own, but I briefly want to suggest six possible reasons:

- 1 Most men and women accepted the truth of and took for granted the patriarchal ideology underlying coverture. After all, the economic subjection of wives constituted only one aspect of an entire culture built on a quasi-naturalised subordination of women. In hindsight, it is easy to identify the patriarchal bias of common law, but for many contemporaries immersed in these norms, they were self-evident and unquestionable.
- 2 Marriage was for many women an economic necessity. The alternative to marriage was to remain single, which in many respects could be a much worse fate, economically and emotionally. Elizabeth Bergen Brophy confirms that marriage was “[i]n theory [. . .] a condition ordained by God that provided them the widest opportunities for practicing and promoting virtue. In practice marriage was usually the only way that women could achieve some measure of economic security” (139; see also Hill 192). Laura E. Thomason equally stresses that “[m]arriage was the most important practical decision affecting a woman’s life: the means of fulfilling an accepted social role and ensuring financial security” (7). Single women not only had a hard time making a living due to limited income-earning opportunities (see Chapter 6); certain needs, such as those for love, sexuality, or children, could, according to prevalent cultural norms, be only legitimately satisfied within marriage. Society tended to stigmatise a single life, and women in particular were from an early age inculcated with the belief that marriage was a woman’s utmost goal in life.

Female writers criticising the economic dependence of wives recognised the cultural and financial pressures exerted upon women to marry. Sarah Chapone, for instance, remarks in her pamphlet *The Hardships of the English Laws*:

I suppose [marriage] cannot be said, to be always voluntary, for in many Instances Women are commanded and directed into it, by their Parents and Guardians, and in some other Circumstances ’tis their only Way of advancing themselves, and settling in the World. Indeed as to many Persons, ’tis their own free Choice, to whom Marriage with its complicated Hazards, appears more eligible than the solitary, unfriend’d, ridiculed Condition of a single Life; and no wonder, since the usual Way of educating young Women seems as if it were calculated on Purpose to awaken all the Affections of the Heart, at the same Time that it deprives them of their proper Counter-balance, the Strength of the Head.

(44)

Chapone puts forward a claim that women writers would reiterate in decades to come: women do not necessarily choose marriage freely – cultural constraints as well as their education predetermine the decision. Their alleged

freedom exists only within bounds determined by patriarchy: "their Choice is in a great Measure determined by their Education, and their Education is at the Discretion of the Men" (Chapone 45). Besides, marriage is for women often the less onerous out of two economically risky options. In Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas represents this position when she decides to marry Mr Collins out of a rational, economic calculation:

Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But he still would be her husband. – Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (120)

The quotation perfectly illustrates a point Cicely Hamilton would acidly reiterate in *Marriage as a Trade* (1909): "Some day [man] will discover that woman does not support life only in order to obtain a husband, but frequently obtains a husband only in order to support life" (25).

- 3 Coverture worked not only to women's detriment but in some respects also to their advantage. From a material point of view, a major benefit for wives was that the husband was answerable for his wife's debts contracted both before and during marriage. If a wife took out credit, it was assumed that she acted with her husband's permission and on his behalf (unless he had publicly, for example through newspaper advertisements, declared her untrustworthiness), so that the obligation to repay would be his. Stretton and Kesselring state with reference to research by Mary Beth Comb that some women used this provision "to dodge creditors and protect family assets from bankruptcy seizures, a practice that became more and more problematic in an increasingly commercialized society and contributed to the formulation and passage of the Married Women's Property Acts of the nineteenth century" (12).
- 4 It is probable that some women simply did not mind the loss of economic rights or were even content that the law relieved them of certain obligations related to money and property. As Chapone put it with respect to coverture: "some Wives have so little Apprehension of this Law of *Annihilation*, that they are in Fact the *freer* Agents of the two" (48). Economic rights inevitably come with economic obligations, and the assumption that each individual desires positive liberty (i.e. is happy to acquire rights *and* responsibilities), universalises an attitude that in practice does not apply to everyone.
- 5 The constraints of coverture were not necessarily enforced in everyday life, so that a wife did not automatically experience the economic disadvantages of common law. Many people were not familiar with the legal framework, and

the mere existence of coverture did not prompt all husbands to exert their legal privileges. Perkin observes that “[t]he law and theory of marriage were rarely the same as the actual practice, which in everyday life was based on the personalities of the spouses and how much hostility or affection they felt for each other” (4). Arguing in a similar vein, Nicola Phillips points out that there is “strong evidence to show that significant numbers of women could and did remain in business throughout the years from 1700 to 1850, and that even married women could *de facto* and *de jure* continue to trade” (259). It should be borne in mind, however, that legal regulations became consequential in times of disagreement between spouses and had ideological and normative power.

- 6 Over and above common law was equity, administered by the Lord Chancellor and the Court of Chancery, whose regulations with regard to wives were much more lenient, if not downright opposed, to those of common law. Perkin provides a helpful overview of the contrary principles of common law and equity (16–17), which illustrates that under equity, a wife’s economic rights were often comparable to those of a *feme sole*. Barbara Bodichon likewise notes in her *Brief Summary* that “Equity endeavours to treat [a wife] as a single woman” (28) and explains that

*Equity* is defined to be a correction or qualification of the law, generally made in the part wherein it faileth, or is too severe. In other words, the correction of that wherein the law, by reason of its universality, is deficient. While the Common Law gives the whole of a wife’s personal property to her husband, the Courts of Equity, when he proceeds therein to recover property in right of his wife, oblige him to make a settlement of some portion of it upon her, if she be unprovided for and virtuous.

(26)

Equity was used to set up marriage settlements and trusts safeguarding a future wife’s property; her husband, however, had to agree to such an arrangement. To quote Bodichon again: “It is usual, before marriage, in order to secure a wife and her children against the power of the husband, to make with his consent a settlement of some property on the wife, or to make an agreement before marriage that a settlement shall be made after marriage” (27). It is therefore not the case that the law lacked mechanisms protecting married women’s property. Yet they were a privilege of the few: the setting up of trusts and settlements under equity was relatively costly and complicated, typically benefiting women from the higher classes (Hill 201). Perkin moreover argues that William Blackstone’s relative neglect of equity in his *Commentaries* “concealed the revolution wrought by Equity in the domain of marital property relations by the wealthy” with the result that “the rising middle class seemed less aware of the possibilities of using trust funds and marriage settlements, or even of ways of giving a married woman a small legacy secured to her own use, than were the upper classes” (18). Mallett draws attention to the irony that although

until the passage of Married Women Property Acts in the late nineteenth century English Members of Parliament refused to incorporate equity regulations into statute law, they frequently resorted to equity themselves to protect their wives and daughters (2).

In sum, then, around 1800, English legal practices respecting marriage added up to a complex and partially contradictory set of regulations with regard to marital property. But their overall tendency was to deny equal property rights to married women and to restrict their economic autonomy. Women did not start on the same economic footing as men but had to make an additional effort (e.g. by taking recourse to equity) to safeguard their property. Coverture hence institutionalised and made legally possible what in modern parlance is termed “economic violence” against women. It occurs when a person, usually a man,

maintains control of the family finances, deciding without regard to women how the money is to be spent or saved, thereby reducing women to complete dependence for money to meet their personal needs. It may involve putting women on strict allowance or forcing them to beg for money [. . .]. Economic violence may also include withholding or restricting funds needed for necessities such as food and clothing, taking women's money, denying independent access to money, excluding women from financial decision making, and damaging their property [. . .], refusing to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, preventing women from commencing or finishing education or from obtaining informal or formal employment, and controlling access to health care and agricultural resources.

*(Fawole 2–3)*

While not all women around 1800 took issue with the spirit of the law, the writers I shall concentrate on emphasised the drawbacks rather than the benefits of coverture, thus engaging in what I term feminist economics of marriage. Historian Lawrence Stone, who has posited for the eighteenth century the rise of a more woman-friendly ‘companionate marriage’, admits that “[e]ven under the new arrangements, successful marriage [. . .] depended on the docility and adaptability of the woman, as it had always done in the past, which is one of the reasons that some women were so vociferous in their disappointment and frustration in the eighteenth century” (249). Arguably, for them, just as for their successors in the nineteenth century, “the written word became a means by which to exercise the power that they otherwise lacked” (Thomason 1).

Before presenting in more detail selected examples of English women's thoughts on the economic consequences of marriage, I want to stress five relevant points. Firstly, women's writing on the economics of marriage adopts what from a contemporary standpoint would be termed an inter- or transdisciplinary perspective. Within some analyses, there is a significant overlap between legal and economic discourses because the limited access of wives to property was enshrined in the

common-law practice of coverture. In other texts, economic considerations form part of a broader feminist agenda that includes related topics such as education or religion. In my readings, I attempt to distil the economic observations out of these documents, but I touch upon other subject areas where it clarifies the writers' overall argument.

Secondly, in the course of my research it emerged that discussions of married women's property are not exclusive to female economic thought of the 1790s but, due to the remarkable longevity of coverture regulations, form a strand of analysis spanning centuries and genres. This is why English women's writings on the economic consequences of marriage are well-suited to support a claim I made in the introduction, namely, that a herstory of economic thought is likely to encompass different timeframes than a history of economic thought by men. As I wish to suggest in this chapter by including Sarah Chaponé's text written in the 1730s, certain economic problems continued to concern British (and not only) women over centuries, yielding recurring observations and arguments. In the mid-nineteenth century, feminist economics of marriage would re-emerge in Bodichon's *Brief Summary* as well as in the *Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (1855), written by Caroline Norton. In the early twentieth century, playwright and campaigner Cicely Hamilton would publish a still little-known, but remarkable pamphlet titled *Marriage as a Trade*. Its opening paragraphs make the economic perspective on marriage explicit and hint at the androcentric bias of traditional economics:

The only excuse for this book is the lack of books on the subject with which it deals – the trade aspect of marriage. That is to say, wifehood and motherhood considered as a means of livelihood for women. [. . .] The love of man and woman is, no doubt, a thing of infinite importance; but also of infinite importance is the manner in which woman earns her bread and the economic conditions under which she enters the family and propagates the race. Thus an enquiry into the circumstances under which the wife and mother plies her trade seems to me quite as necessary and justifiable as an inquiry into the conditions of other and less important industries – such as mining or cotton-spinning. [. . .] [T]he trade of marriage tends to produce its own particular type; and my contention is that woman, as we know her, is largely the product of the conditions imposed upon her by her staple industry.

(17)

The fact that women's writing on the economics of marriage spans centuries suggests that the decades around 1800 are in this regard but one period within a much longer debate. For this strand of economic thought, the 'birth' of modern economics in the late eighteenth century or the marginal revolution of the 1870s, for example, were less significant than the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 or the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. Female economic enquiry has been reacting to legal frameworks and their reforms.



Thirdly, I focus on the gendered economic dimensions of marriage laws as discussed by particular women writers, even if there were discrepancies between legal stipulations and the experience of marriage in the daily lives of men and women. Importantly, for women writers analysed in the following, the existence of happy marriages does not prove that the law does not in principle discriminate against women. Jacqueline Broad argues (with reference to Sarah Chapone's text) that this attitude reflects a republican view of freedom, because "[f]or the republican, it is irrelevant whether the slave master is cruel or kind – regardless, the slave is not free because she remains subject to his power and is dependent upon his goodwill" (82). Following this premise, I, too, contend that the fact that in the past (as now) legal provisions did neither automatically override individual choices nor prevent satisfactory arrangements does not invalidate the need for a critical analysis of the law's normative and discriminatory effects. With respect to historical research on marriage laws, Stretton and Kesselring warn against downplaying the relevance of coverture on the grounds of the apparent gap between legal theory and lived reality: "this is to risk misunderstanding coverture and underestimating its power. In day-to-day life the niceties of coverture mattered little to many wives and husbands, yet in ideological terms they counted for everything. In marking ownership coverture delineated inequality and confirmed the ultimate power of the husband" (9). Variances between theory and practice were used to different ends by different people: supporters of extant laws claimed that happy marriages and wives existed *thanks to* the legal provisions; opponents of the law – who are at the centre of this chapter – retorted that these cases were lucky exceptions occurring *in spite of* the law. Chapone, for instance, avers in *Hardships*: "I am persuaded there are many Wives in England, who by the Favour of their Husbands, are still in a State of Existence" (48). Yet to her this is only a matter of fortunate coincidence, not the result of the law: "But no Thanks to the Laws of our Country for that Exemption; let every particular Woman who is well treated, thank God and her Husband for the Blessing. At the same Time, she may reflect, that she is in the Condition of a Slave, tho' she is not treated as such" [ . . . ] (45). As I moreover point out in the brief section on real-life echoes, the personal testimonies of writer Charlotte Smith and governess Nelly Weeton suggest that although coverture did not automatically translate into abusive marriages, it allowed for a shocking degree of economic violence on the part of husbands when marital conflicts arose. The economic thought presented in the following is hence not merely speculative.

Fourthly, the analysed texts most adequately reflect the experience of women from the middle classes. As Perkin points out, "[d]espite the same general legal constraints and the same perils of pregnancy, childbirth, and illnesses peculiar to women, experience of marriage varied enormously according to social status, to an extent barely comprehensible to the modern democratic mind" (4). Middle-class women like Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson were at the forefront of protests against coverture. Their specific economic and cultural position

augmented their dissatisfaction, but also provided them with the means of stimulating change. On the one hand, compared to the aristocracy, they had too little capital to 'buy' economic freedom, on the other, compared to the labouring classes, they had capital enough to feel and act on the consequences of economic discrimination:

Without the trust funds and marriage settlements, not to mention the political clout and social power of upper-class wives, and without the innocence of the law of most working-class wives, the middle-class wife and mother was the most vulnerable if the marriage began to go sour. Her husband was likely to know and exert his legal rights over custody of children and control of his wife's property and income.

*(Perkin 7–8)*

The authors introduced in what follows are therefore not representative of the experience of all English women. Barbara J. Todd, for example, has argued that the interests of poor women were generally better answered for when their economic rights were subsumed under those of the husband (354–55). But it is also true that the analyses produced by middle-class authors helped to bring about legal and economic changes women from all social classes would profit from, at least to some degree. As Mallett remarks with regard to efforts by Victorian feminists:

Change came piecemeal, typically in response to campaigns driven by women, mostly from the middle-class, which overlapped without being integrated, were reactive rather than systematic, and diverged in tactics and in philosophy. [. . .] If these early campaigners trusted too much to the power of the law to remove evident injustice, instead of looking beyond legal reform to the restructuring of economic, social and family life demanded by post-1970s feminism, the changes they did achieve were real and significant.

*(2)*

The texts scrutinised in the following show that Victorian feminists were not the first ones to criticise the economic dependence of wives and that feminist economics of marriage can be traced back to earlier centuries. In fact, it seems likely that as long as wives were economically discriminated against, selected women (and men) formulated dissent, even if sources documenting their protest might not have been preserved and/or examined yet.<sup>2</sup>

Fifthly, in terms of assessing Wollstonecraft's, Hays's, and Robinson's contributions to economic thought around 1800, it must be considered that they represent only a particular strand of it, a radical and controversial one, even by the standards of the revolutionary 1790s. Not all women writers around 1800 took issue with coverture and the marriage economy. The influential conservative author Hannah More, for example, argued that women's vital social and cultural functions arose precisely from their traditional association with domesticity and

charity. For Eileen Cleere, More's didactic novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) entails the message "that the destabilizing effects of war, poverty, starvation, and violence can be both forestalled and displaced by the gracefully inconspicuous but highly political home trading activities of aristocratic women" (5). My focus on feminist economics of marriage should therefore not imply the absence of a conservative economics of marriage developed by women.<sup>3</sup> Nor were Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson the only female writers to criticise coverture and its economic effects. To get a fuller picture of the extent of female economic thought on marriage, further research is needed that encompasses more authors, periods, texts, and genres. It would also be vital to transpose into economics and the history of economic thought some of the results already formulated by scholars of English, who have variously analysed representations of marriage in literature (e.g. Boone; Golightly). This chapter cannot but be a step in this direction.

Nevertheless, I would tentatively surmise – although more research is needed to substantiate this hypothesis – that the radical strand on which I focus in this chapter has generated more economic material than competing approaches. The reason for this is that within debates on matrimony, female advocates of women's subordinate status arguably drew less explicitly on economic vocabulary and concepts, partly because they built their foundations predominantly on the authority of the Bible, which traced women's inferior position to Eve's responsibility for the original sin. Those who could cite the Word of God in their favour were less in need of secular arguments than radical writers challenging the status quo. (It must be remembered, however, that progressives also made use of the Bible for their cause. Sarah Chapone in *Hardships* or Mary Hays in *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* attempted to reconcile the biblical story of creation with their own demands for female emancipation. As a result, their texts today read like a mixture of religious tract and economic analysis.) Radical women writers moreover relied more heavily on liberal ideals than conservative ones and rested their claims on the rhetoric of rights, freedom, progress, and rationality. This approach of mobilising an economic analysis for an essentially liberal cause is one that also permeates the thought of many male representatives of classical political economy. Similarly to political economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, or, later, John Stuart Mill, feminist economists of marriage around 1800 champion some of the core values of liberalism, but from the point of view and on behalf of wives: the preservation of an individual's rights, the maximisation of freedom of choice, social betterment, moral progress, a just relationship between power and consent, and the right to self-protection. They also emphasise a key tenant of liberal economic thought, namely the right to possess and dispose of private property; they explore this right in connection to married women. While the feminist writers presented in the following sections are therefore not typical of all *women* economists of their period, their combination of economic analysis with a liberal agenda makes them, in that respect at least, typical *classical economists*.

## Marriage as economic risk: Sarah Chapone's *Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735)

### *Introducing Chapone and the structure of Hardships*

In 1735, an anonymous author published a 70–pages-long pamphlet entitled *The Hardships of the English Laws. In Relation to Wives. With an Explanation of the Original Curse of Subjection Passed upon the Woman. In an Humble Address to the Legislature*. On the basis of letters and notes on the manuscript, scholars (especially Ruth Perry and Janice Thaddeus, but also Broad, Paterson Glover, Keymer, and Campbell Orr) have subsequently identified a woman as its author: Sarah Chapone. Her pamphlet constitutes a noteworthy early eighteenth-century analysis of the economics of marriage from the ‘insider’ perspective of a wife.

Born Sarah Kirkham into the family of an English clergyman on 11 December 1699, Chapone spent most of her life in Gloucestershire.<sup>4</sup> From an early age, she seems to have been “talkative and forward” (Campbell Orr 96) and consequently considered by some of her contemporaries “too free and masculine” (Mary Delany, qtd. in Perry 92 and Paterson Glover, “Further” 98). The fact that outspoken Sarah apparently deviated from the cultural ideal of a restrained and modest woman can to some extent explain her continuous commitment to women’s rights, which she discussed, among others, with her influential Bluestocking friend Mary Granville (Mary Pendarves upon her first marriage and Mary Delany upon her second). With Granville, she shared an interest in the writings of the early English feminist Mary Astell, which, as Paterson Glover has argued, have influenced Chapone’s own reflections on marriage (“Introduction” 11–12). However, while “Astell’s observations on marriage addressed not the issues of property, inheritance, and descent” (Paterson Glover, “Further” 98), Chapone made the first two of these considerations central to her polemic. *Hardships of the English Laws* was published in 1735 in London and Dublin, but Chapone’s feminist activities did not stop at that. Together with her friend Mary (by then Pendarves) and Anne Dewes, Chapone helped to rehabilitate the destitute scholar Elizabeth Elstob and to secure for her a pension and employment as a governess. This suggests that Chapone was attuned to the economic needs of women and keen on promoting female contributions to knowledge formation. A similar motivation can be suspected behind her long-term support for George Ballard’s anthology of learned women, which Ballard published in 1752 as *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for Their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences* (see Perry 91–94). From 1750 to 1759, Chapone moreover corresponded with the influential novelist and printer Samuel Richardson, challenging his views on marriage and a woman’s place in society (see Broad 83–85; Campbell Orr 102–07). Her forthrightness and unflinching devotion to women’s autonomy made Richardson proclaim that she was “a great championess for her sex” (qtd. in Broad 84) but also patronisingly reproach her for not reading his letters with sufficient care (Paterson Glover, “Further” 106–07).

In 1725, Sarah married a local vicar, John Chapone, with whom she had five children and ran a small boarding school. The family encountered temporary financial difficulties, which forced the Chapones to move several times (Keymer, "Chapone"). Nevertheless, the marriage seems to have been a happy one, and Chapone explicitly pays tribute to her husband in *Hardships* by averring: "But God be thanked, I have an Husband who lets me be *alive*, and gives me leave to be *some Body*, and to tell other People what I think they are" (47). As the phrasing indicates, Chapone views her unique, free position as a cause for gratitude, but also as a matter of luck. Her awareness that other women, who have not been blessed with a benevolent husband, find their bodies, children, and property unprotected by law is one of the palpable driving forces behind *Hardships*. Chapone recognises her privileged position of being "some body" and having leave to speak her mind, and she uses it to make the case for women in less fortunate circumstances, who lack the power of articulation. Chapone's other publication was *Remarks on Mrs. Muilman's Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield* (1750) in which she censured the adulterous behaviour of courtesan Teresia Constantia Phillips. Chapone died in February 1764.

Research on *Hardships* is still relatively scarce but will hopefully intensify thanks to the first scholarly edition of her text, presented recently by Paterson Glover (Routledge 2018). It is interesting to note that despite Chapone's engagement with married women's property rights, scholars rarely identify the text primarily as a contribution to economic thought. This is partially due to the manifold, interrelated issues *Hardships* raises but also reflects the effects of the disaggregation of academic disciplines: the organisation of knowledge today predetermines how knowledge of the past is designated and interpreted. While all contemporary scholars agree that Chapone's pamphlet is a feminist document, they place it alongside different subject areas depending on their respective affiliation: legal historian Barbara J. Todd, for example, has looked at *Hardships* as a contribution to legal discourse; historian Clarissa Cambell Orr has placed it in the context of eighteenth-century religious feminism; philosopher Jacqueline Broad has read it against the background of liberal thought and political theory. Unsurprisingly, the identification of *Hardships* as a contribution to economic thought stems from an economist, namely Edith Kuiper, who has included (but not analysed) a facsimile of Chapone's pamphlet in her anthology of *Women's Economic Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Following Kuiper's cue in my own reading, I will first present the structure of Chapone's pamphlet and then concentrate on those parts that contain explicit economic considerations.

*Hardships* displays a fairly clear argumentative organisation: the document begins by evoking a civil right and a cornerstone of English national identity, namely, "the Privilege of the Free-born Subjects of *England* to approach their Sovereign, represent their Grievances, and humbly to implore Redress" (28). Chapone boldly claims this (allegedly) universal civil right for women, in particular wives, whose point of view she adopts in the following. Paterson Glover maintains that this perspective was "to this point completely absent in English legal discourse" ("Further"

99; for a differing opinion, see Greenberg xlii). Speaking on behalf of married women, Chapone makes known her addressee and her overall objective: “we humbly address his most sacred Majesty, and the honourable Houses of Parliament, for an Alteration or a Repeal of some Laws, which, as we conceive, put us in a worse Condition than *Slavery* itself” (28). *Hardships* is hence a legal, an economic, but also a political document aiming at reform. The legal, economic, and political dimensions interlock and determine the further line of argument, which is additionally grounded in Chapone’s Anglican values. Two quotations from the Bible provide the epigraphs to *Hardships*, thus hinting at Chapone’s religious education and mind-set.

Next, Chapone enlists her three major points of criticism:

- I That the Estate of Wives is more disadvantageous than *Slavery* itself.
- II That Wives may be made Prisoners for Life at the Discretion of their *Domestick Governors*, whose Power, as we at Present apprehend, bears no Manner of Proportion to that Degree of Authority, which is vested in any other Set of Men in *England*. [. . .]
- III That Wives have no Property, neither in their *own Persons, Children, or Fortunes*.

(29)

While all three grievances are interconnected, it is the third that most explicitly refers to the economy by emphasising married women’s inadequate property rights. The term property, as Chapone uses it here, encompasses three distinct areas: women’s property in their own person refers to physical liberty and integrity as well as to bodily and sexual rights. Property in their own children refers to women’s custody rights, which were limited under common law. Property in their own fortunes, finally, refers to material resources, that is to a woman’s right to possess and freely dispose of money, land, and other valuables. In the ensuing parts of her pamphlet, Chapone repeatedly returns to this latter kind of property but also accentuates its interdependence with the other forms.

In a third step, Chapone substantiates her criticism with examples of wives harmed by English laws. Mostly relying on newspaper reports, she first quotes and comments on four legal cases discriminating against married women (29–32), two of which refer to economic effects of coverture. Economic considerations also characterise her following, more abstract, observations on the hazardous position of rich heiresses (33). She moreover criticises the double standard with regard to sexual rights (33), the biased regulations on custody (34–35), and the reduced answerability of married women regarding certain criminal offences (36–37).

Fourthly, Chapone argues both historically and by comparison (38–39). She demonstrates that common law grants less economic rights to wives than was the case under Roman civil law (i.e. before the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century and the resultant onset of coverture) and is the case in Portugal. On this, she evokes the authority of two popular texts: Charles Wheatley’s *Rational Illustration of*

the *Book of Common Prayer* (1710) and Thomas Wood's *New Institute of the Imperial or Civil Law* (1704), an early eighteenth-century textbook on civil law.

In the fifth and longest section (39–48), Chapone proceeds by refutation. She enumerates ten possible objections (although strictly speaking, she formulates 12) to her preceding claims and rebuts them methodically. Seven of these objections touch upon economic concerns.

In the final part of *Hardships* (48–55), Chapone enters upon religious considerations and ponders the question of whether the Bible validates the subordination of wives. She cites and assesses arguments brought forward in three philosophical and/or religious treatises: William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722), Thomas Hobbes's *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society* (1651), and Rev. Patrick Delany's *Revelation Examined with Candour* (1732). Mostly agreeing with Delany's propositions (Delany would, in fact, become her friend Mary's second husband), Chapone finally concludes that although in consequence of the original sin, divine law ordains a certain amount of subjection on the part of wives, English laws go far beyond it and insofar deviate from godly intention.

### ***Examples of economic violence against wives***

Chapone is in some respects a radical, in others a conservative critic. She does not argue against marriage per se, which to her is “the very Basis, Foundation, and Cement of Society, an Institution of God, and productive of the greatest Blessings in human Life” (45). Nor does she demand absolute equality between husband and wife. She indicts, however, the extent of the inequality under the present system and accuses the law of not protecting women sufficiently in case the husband reneges on his obligations. Her criticism is hence of a dual nature: she censures that wives are from the outset discriminated against in terms of (economic, but not only) rights and responsibilities, and she condemns the relative impunity of husbands who fail to fulfil their (economic) duties. She buttresses these points by arguing both on an abstract plane and with references to concrete examples of economic violence towards women.

The first legal case she mentions exposes the unequal economic rights of husbands and wives as well as the long-term consequences of this inequality. It pertains to the validity of a will a Mrs Lewis had drafted upon the death of her first husband and prior to her second marriage. Mrs Lewis outlived her second husband and became a widow again. When she died, the question arose of whether the will she had made during her first widowhood was still binding. To clarify this question, the court resorted to an analogy between women and slaves, as both lost the ability to make wills while they ‘belonged’ to their husband/master. Yet Chapone notes with some acrimony that while under Roman law, the will of a slave revived when her or his “*State of Captivity*” (30) terminated, the court decided that the same did not apply to married women, as their altered legal position did not result from compulsion but a voluntary act, the effects of which legitimately prevailed beyond her death. The court apparently concluded that by marrying a second time, Mrs Lewis

had ‘voluntarily’ annulled her own previous will, so that it was now void. Chapone, by contrast, doubts that marriage can always be regarded a voluntary act, as women frequently decide to marry out of economic, social, and emotional pressure (44). Besides, the fact that to clarify a wife’s right to dispose of her property, the court drew parallels with slavery, discloses for Chapone the *de facto* captivity of married women. The injustice of the extant system goes even further because wives end up worse off than slaves, as marriage makes some of their prior rights non-reclaimable. Chapone concludes that “[t]he Arguments of the Council make the Estate of Wives equal to, the Distinction of the Court worse than, Slavery itself” (29).

Another set of examples illustrates that common law offers no protection to women whose husbands neglect their obligations. Chapone cites the case of a woman “possest [*sic*] of a considerable Fortune in Land and Money” (30) who married a gentleman without reserving a portion of her goods to herself through a marriage settlement. Instead, as Chapone puts it, she “flung her whole Fortune with her Person entirely into his Power” (30), and he took advantage of both: “As he had no Fortune of his own, it was a fine thing to him to be master of an Estate; he launched out into the most extravagant Expences, but soon finding some Frugality necessary, he thought fit to *confine* his Wife in her Country House, with the bare Allowance of the necessary Supports of Life, and one Servant to attend her, who was also her Jailer” (30). In this case, the husband effectively transformed his wife into a financial resource he could exploit at will. Though morally censurable, his behaviour was in accordance with the common law. Chapone returns to this injustice and the double standard it perpetuates later when she ironically imagines the outrage that would ensue if husband and wife were to change their respective places: “Women were designed for *Domestick Animals*, ’tis but allotting them their proper Place; give them *Needles* and *Prayer Books* there, and there’s no great harm done. But to think to confine the *Lords* of the *Creation*, is Insolence beyond a Parallel” (32). The trapped heiress whose lot Chapone describes finally died, and Chapone notes somewhat resignedly that the young woman was thus “set [. . .] *Free*” (30) by God.

Chapone’s relation of the heiress’s case contains several topoi that will resurface in women’s economic writing around 1800. She makes evident that the law allows a destitute man to turn a woman’s substantial property against her and to his advantage – a topic to which Jane Austen, for example, will return in *Sense and Sensibility*. The wife’s imprisonment evokes a gothic-economic scenario that Mary Wollstonecraft, among others, will explore in *The Wrongs of Woman*. The adage that in certain circumstances death, and thus a return to God, is woman’s only escape from an emotionally and economically oppressive situation, is another recurrent motif, to be found, for example, in Mary Ann Radcliffe’s story of Fidelia or in governess Nelly Weeton’s journal. The parallels indicate that the dependence of wives has been a long-term strand of economic analysis by English women, yielding recurrent observations, motifs, and points of criticism.

Chapone returns to the peculiar position of heiresses in a later passage. Interestingly, she deems their affluent position particularly vulnerable because a husband



can be enticed to marry them merely for their money.<sup>5</sup> Once he obtains the right to dispose of his wife's fortune, he might turn against her:

I shall now proceed to consider the Case of Heiresses, there, if any where, the Wife Retains some Property. The Husband has the Disposal of the whole Income of the Wife's Lands, for his and her Life. [ . . . In cases where the wife's land generates rent, the husband has the right] to employ that Money so raised upon his Wife's Estate, according to his particular Pleasure, which perhaps may be upon an Harlot to injure her yet more for her Generosity.  
(33)

Chapone admits that a wife must give her consent before a husband can raise money from her lands. She argues that this right should extend not only to a woman's approval of how her land is used but also of what happens with the profits thereby obtained (33). Chapone's sympathy with the lot of rich heiresses raises the question of whether she was aware of the extent to which wealthy families resorted to equity to secure their daughters' property. Here, she appears to argue from legal principle, not in relation to actual practice. As she puts it elsewhere: "I am not enquiring into Facts, I am reporting what I take to be the Law" (48).

In another case Chapone brings up, a middle-class wife finds herself powerless against a husband who is not only economically irresponsible but also legally entitled to exploit her labour and property. A well-educated, "modest agreeable Gentlewoman" (31) marries a young tradesman, apparently without any equity provisions. After a few years, he runs into debt and enlists as a common foot soldier. To provide for herself and their two children, the wife seeks a post as a servant to a noblewoman, but the husband, backed by law, refuses to give his permission, unless he is granted the right to visit her whenever he pleases and receives her wages. Chapone notes that his wish to have unrestrained access to his wife "effectually barred the Doors against her as a Servant" (31), presumably because no employer would accept such an arrangement. In this case, therefore, the husband's right to his wife's body has direct implications for her right to work, since if she cannot freely dispose of her body, she likewise cannot employ her body freely as an economic resource. The husband's right to a wife's income augments his economic power even further. Chapone speculates that "[i]f by the Kindness of Friends [the wife] should be enabled to take an House [*sic*], and set up in any Way of Business to maintain herself and helpless Infants, it would be only giving him an Opportunity to *Plunder* her at *Discretion*" (31). A wife in this situation has no means of maintaining herself through honest work. She can either "transact her Business in another's Name" or must rely on the goodwill of her friends, who might attempt to "afford her a small Pittance by Stealth in the Nature of an Alms" (31).

The wife's overall lack of legal and economic autonomy as exemplified by this case leads Chapone to elucidate further on women's limited property rights: "Wives have no Property neither in their intellectual, or personal Abilities, nor in their Fortunes" (31). Chapone's mentioning of women's intellectual and personal

(i.e. bodily) abilities in conjunction with financial property implies that she sees them as economic resources. She returns to this point at a later stage, where she offers the following critique:

our Laws give an Husband the Power [. . .] to take all things from his Wife, and then to prevent her obtaining any thing more, by her Labour or Ingenuity. Her intellectual and personal Abilities seem to be her own, since no Pacts can transfer them to another, yet her Husband can prevent her Exertion of them, either for herself or Children, even when he won't do any thing for them himself.

(54)

Chapone implicitly demands here a woman's right to work, at least in those cases where the husband fails to live up to his economic role of breadwinner. She vindicates a woman's right to freely exert her person (i.e. body) and intellect, which are inalienably her own, as well as the right to the income that her physical and intellectual labour generates. She adopts a liberal stance when she puts forward that no law is justified that deprives women of this right:

I confess that I hardly believe it possible to reconcile these Laws, with the Rights and Privileges of a free People. That there should be so great a Part of the Community, who have never been notorious Offenders against it, entirely deprived of their Liberty, or even of making Use of their Ingenuity and Industry to procure them a Subsistence, when those who should provide it for them, refuse it, or are incapable of it.

(46)

The emphasis on "Rights and Privileges" demonstrates Chapone's philosophical indebtedness to what Broad has identified as "the republican rhetoric of property and liberty" (80). As Broad asserts, for Chapone, women's true liberty "consists in both freedom from the domination of men *and* the freedom to be their own masters" (85). This means that women must be able to choose freely how they dispose of their property, which not only encompasses material possessions, but also their bodies, their intellect, and their labour.

Referring to further examples, Chapone illustrates how the husband's economic dominance allows him to impose his will in other, non-economic realms, thereby infringing on a woman's already restricted right to her children and her body. She cites the case – although she admits that it is a unique one – of a man who had used his property to prevent his daughter from associating with her mother upon his death. He stipulated in his will that his daughter could live on his fortune only on the condition that she should cease any intercourse with her mother. Chapone notes that "[t]he unhappy Mother was therefore constrained to give up all Interest in, and Conversation with her Child for ever; her Jointure being too small to support them both" (35). In this case of economic violence, the husband thus used his

financial influence to force his daughter and wife to buy their economic maintenance at the heavy cost of giving up their relationship.

With regard to sexual rights, Chapone detects another injustice with pecuniary consequences:

By the very Nature of the Marriage Contract, the Husband and Wife acquire a Property in each others [*sic passim*] Person. Our Laws give the Husband the entire Disposal of the Wife's Person, but she does not seem to retain any Property in his. He may recover Damages of any Man who shall invade his Property in her, but she cannot recover Damages from a Woman, who shall invade her Property in him.

(33)

The excerpt alludes to the economic dimension of the sexual double standard, which made men's adultery less condemnable than women's because a man's infidelity could (allegedly) not lead to bastard children taking over a family's property, while a woman could conceal a child's true parentage and taint the blood line. As Hill notes, this ideological stance "was only a short stop to justifying polygamy for men but not polyandry for women" (214; see also Jordan 563). It is safe to assume that Chapone condemned adultery in both men and women. Her objection in this context is that once the deed is done, husbands and wives have unequal rights to sue for damages to their property (i.e. their spouse's body). While a husband can seek financial redress from the man his wife had sex with, no such measure is available to a betrayed wife.

A husband's economic power can finally factually annul a wife's legal right to swear the peace against a violent and abusive partner, that is to allege that she is in bodily fear from him and to apply for his restraint or imprisonment. Chapone points out that a husband may lock up his wife, thus preventing her from making a complaint at all. Besides, a complaint might have detrimental consequences for the wife in the long run, as the husband might take revenge on his return home. But above all – and here Chapone again connects legal with economic rights – a wife often depends on her husband for her and her children's support, which *de facto* cancels out her legal right to file for his imprisonment: "if he is a Tradesman, or a Labourer, she, and her Family depend upon him for Bread, and the Consequence of his lying in Jail must be, that she, and her Family must starve" (40). This implies that without women's economic emancipation, laws protecting them can be but a dead letter.

The ensuing comparison of the present laws with those that had been in place in England in Roman times and with those that apply to wives in Portugal proves that the far-reaching economic disenfranchisement of wives cannot be justified with claims to its historical and geographical universality. Chapone quotes Charles Wheatley's *Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer* as stating that "[t]he Laws of Rome appointed the Wife to be sole Heir, when the Husband dyed without Issue" (Wheatley qtd. in Chapone 38). She contrasts this with the less favourable

provisions of common law: “The most a Woman can claim by the Laws of *England*, is one third of her deceased Husband’s Estate” (38). She then turns to so-called paraphernalia, which gave wives free use of personal items, even if the latter technically remained the husband’s legal possession for the duration of marriage. Referring to Thomas Wood’s *New Institute of the Civil Law*, Chapone criticises common law’s more restrictive understanding of paraphernalia in comparison with Roman law, as the former includes “‘only the Woman’s wearing Apparel, Ornaments, and Jewels, which adorn her during the Marriage’; which she wears not as hers, and for her own Sake, but as her Husband’s, or as it is express’d, suitable to his Quality, and to do him honour” (38). On the question of a wife’s protection against the economic irresponsibility of a husband, Chapone quotes Wood again:

by the Civil Law [of Rome], the Husband during the Marriage, receives the Profits accruing from the Wife’s Portion, yet if he declines and grows low in Fortune she may by Law seize her Portion, or Security, or bring her Action against him, and lodge it out of his reach, for the Property of the Portion is not transferred from the Wife by the Intermarriage.

*(Wood qtd. in Chapone 30)*

The present laws of England, Chapone elaborates, have again curbed the rights of wives in that regard:

The Laws of *England* allow a Wife no such Privilege; for if a Man having no real Estate, marries a Woman with any Fortune in Money, and covenants to leave her such a Part of it at his Death, if afterwards she perceives that he designs to spend the whole in his Life–time, she cannot take any Method to prevent it, the Law allowing her no Remedy. Thus we see that by the Laws of *Rome*, the Wife had her distinct Properties, as well as the Husband. But that by the Laws of *England* she is divested of all Property.

*(39)*

Expanding on the topic, Chapone notes that, in Portugal, a wife by marriage acquires similar property rights as those a man obtains in England: “a Wife in *Portugal* if she brought never a Farthing, has Power to dispose of half her Husband’s Estate by Will; whereas a Woman by our Laws alienates [. . .] all her own Property so entirely by Marriage, that if she brought an hundred thousand Pounds in Money, she cannot bequeath one single Penny, even if she left her own nearest and dearest Relations starving for Want” (39). Chapone’s wording makes clear that she deems this state of affairs unjust. Her emphasis on children and the family (“nearest and dearest Relations”), which reappears in the entire pamphlet, suggests that she does not argue exclusively for a woman’s *individual* right to property. Rather, she claims economic rights for women as a prerequisite for securing the (material) wellbeing of the family unit and, consequently, of society.

It is fair to say that Chapone's juxtaposition of common law with other legal practices is fairly selective. As a reviewer of *Hardships* (to whom I will return presently) pointed out in 1736, she omits those aspects of Roman and Portuguese law that put wives in a worse position than the laws of England. At the same time, Stretton and Kesselring confirm that the "extraordinary power of ownership [of husbands] set England apart from most other European countries and territories, where spouses held personal property separately or shared in a 'community of goods'" (8; see also Erickson, "Coverture" 3–8). Chapone therefore does not distort the overall picture. From the point of view of evaluating her contribution to economic thought, it is significant that she singles out legal provisions pertaining to the wife's right to dispose of various forms of property. Throughout, she argues for an augmented scope of women's economic agency. The references to Roman and Portuguese law serve to prove that her demands are neither exorbitant nor unrealistic, as they have already been practiced in other times and countries.

Chapone is clearly aware that her criticism and suggestions will not meet with universal acclaim, so she seeks to ward off potential criticism by enumerating and refuting a set of objections that her pamphlet could raise. Before having a more thorough look at them, it is instructive to note that her efforts were apparently lost on at least one reader, who reviewed *Hardships* in the *Weekly Miscellany*.<sup>6</sup> In his review of October 1736, the pseudonymous commentator, identified by Paterson Glover ("Responses" 87) as the journal's editor, the Rev. William Webster, picks up on some of the cases Chapone discusses, but his different interpretation of them reveals exactly that kind of gendered mind-set that she saw enshrined in English law. Webster welcomes, for example, the court's ruling on the nullity of Mrs Lewis's will drafted during her first widowhood on the following grounds:

Now I cannot, for my Life, see, how any Judge can be blamed, for not confirming a Will made in the first Widowhood of a Female, never known to be of the same Mind two Hours together, after her being marry'd, and a Widow the second Time, and she had forgot it, or, at least, presum'd no one could imagine that to be her last Will, between which and her last a thousand contradictory ones must have intervened.

(*qtd. in Paterson Glover, "Responses" 89–90*)

To justify the widow's economic disenfranchisement, then, the reviewer evokes an image of women as unreliable, fickle, and capricious. His sneering tone allows him to largely bypass a genuine engagement with Chapone's arguments. Instead, he conjures up gender stereotypes to discredit the legitimacy of her claims. For him, women are principally not to be trusted with economic matters, which is why men will change their stance on women's property rights only

if our Women will give up their Ornaments to the Exigence of the State, or, at least, avoid Dressing to the Ruin and Destruction of it: When they cover their Heads with Ten Pounds instead of an Hundred, in case of a common

Calamity, and cease to sink the Joy of their Nuptials with an Expence, which often ruins a Family: When the Publick and Private Peace are their first Ambition: When we no longer see the Woods of an ancient Estate rooted up to glitter in Pebbles round a Neck which is far handsomer without that Collar, nor the Provision for half a Dozen Children thrown away for the Amusement of the fond Mother of them [ . . . ].

(91–92)

Webster evidently universalises a cliché of women as wasteful, irresponsible, and vain to defend the general economic tutelage they are under. Referring to Chapone's observation that women often refrain from exerting their marriage settlements, he remarks: "If Women are often *kiss'd* or *kick'd* out of those Previous Settlements (according to the Joke of one of our Judges) it shews the Weakness of the Sex, and how improper it is they should be trusted with the Interests of others, who cannot maintain their own" (90). The immature and imprudent behaviour he imputes to women evokes a parallel with children, which for centuries has been cited to legitimise women's inferior legal and economic status. The reviewer is thus deaf to Chapone's indignant reproach: "why are [wives] treated like Children or Idiots?" (Chapone 36). Or rather, his implicit reply seems to be: because women by their very nature behave like children or idiots. This ideological stance on women's assumed inaptitude is what every woman economic writer had to contend with. The review of *Hardships* in the *Weekly Miscellany* is but one text and does not represent the entirety of reactions to women's economic writing – after all, Chapone received encouragement and praise from men such as Charles and John Wesley, George Ballard, and Samuel Richardson. Nevertheless, Webster articulates a prevailing cultural assumption about women's allegedly inborn incompetence in economic matters that female writers continued to grapple with and write against in the decades and centuries to come.

### ***A risk-benefit assessment of marriage from the perspective of wives***

All cases and examples, present and past, reinforce Chapone's underlying point: contrary to what marriage is legally supposed to grant to a woman, namely, cover and protection, it in some instances endangers her financial autonomy and physical integrity. Chapone explains that even if the cases she cites derive from "Tricks and Cheats, which the Law neither ordains, nor is answerable for" (41), the law is "so far defective" (42), as it fails to make sufficient provisions against them. As long as this deficiency lasts, marriage inevitably constitutes a risk for a woman: emotionally, physically, and economically. In this, Chapone turns against the dominant legal and cultural reading of marriage as a contract through which a woman secures provision, and thus benefits, in these areas. Her primary aim, evidently, is for the legislature to amend the law in such a way as to limit the power of the husband and augment that of the wife. But in case male decision-makers ignore her request (after

all, she is but a woman), she has a secondary audience and aim in mind, namely, that of educating and warning “the Unmarried [women], to whom I now Address myself, entreating them to consider the Hazards they run, when they venture an Alliance with the other Sex, who were designed by Nature for their *Counter-parts*, but who have taken upon themselves to be the *whole*, insomuch that they have voted us *Dead in Law*, except in criminal Causes” (47). Chapone's wording in this passage is reminiscent of advice given to a person who is about to enter into business relations with another party. To some extent, her analysis of the economics of marriage looks at the relationship between husband and wife through the lens of a transaction. Particularly, her emphasis on “hazard” – a word that she uses five times throughout her pamphlet – has an economic ring to it, as it connotes, among others, gaming and business speculations. Chapone states that she wants “to have the Hardships of [marriage] known at least, that if they can't be amended, they may be avoided, by making Women more cautious, how they deliver themselves into the Hands of a Man, *lest he bring them to nothing*” (48). Given Chapone's persistent focus on property, it may be assumed that the italicised nothing also refers to a wife's risk of losing her possessions and economic autonomy.

This strategy of assessing risks and benefits of marriage from the perspective of women also informs Chapone's list and refutation of objections that she supposes her pamphlet can raise. The first half of *Hardships* exposes the manifold risks of marriage for women. The following objections, by contrast, contain illustrations of how this risk is allegedly mitigated and the balance between wife and husband restored – be it through benefits the wife obtains, or through risks that become the husband's. With regard to each objection, Chapone maintains that the fundamental imbalance in the distribution of risks remains to the disadvantage of wives. Four examples can illustrate her method of proceeding:

- 1 “*Obj.* III. The Wife may put her Fortune into Trustees Hands before Marriage, and by that Means secure it for her own Use” (40). This objection stresses that a wife's risk of losing her property can be minimised by equity, which enables her to retain parts of her possessions. True, says Chapone, but the negotiating parties are not on the same footing: the husband must first give his consent to such an arrangement and the power he subsequently has over his wife's body means that he can “easily [find] Means to bend her to his Will” (40). Besides, knowledge of the law is unequally distributed. An insufficient education prevents women from using legal instruments through which they could protect their assets:

if we reflect how extremely ignorant all young Women are as to points in Law, and how their Education and Way of Life, shuts them out from the Knowledge of their true Interest in almost all things, we shall find that their Trust and Confidence in the Man they love, and Inability to make use of the proper Means to guard against his Falsehood, leave few in a Condition to make use of that Precaution.

(40)

The husbands are thus manifestly at an advantage in the marriage transaction, as they have access to more information. Against the background of this observation, *Hardships* can be read as a contribution enlightening women on their position, thereby indirectly strengthening their limited bargaining power. An advice Chapone formulates having related the financial difficulties of a widowed woman corroborates this: "I would therefore recommend it to the unmarried of my Sex, to secure by Article such a Sum of Money as will support them during such an Exigency [having to give birth soon after the husband's death], till their Jointures shall come in [which happens once a year]" (40). Chapone advises unmarried women to reduce their financial risks by making proper provisions beforehand. That she addresses herself to the unmarried makes sense because it is these women that have, relatively speaking, most bargaining power. If they fail to use it during the period of courting to attain some form of long-term security, the marriage trap described by Chapone snaps shut, leaving them powerless and at the mercy of their husbands.

- 2 "Obj. V. The Laws obliging men to pay their Wives Debts contracted before Marriage is as hard upon them" (41). This objection argues in favour of a balance between husband and wife slightly differently from the previous one, by highlighting not the wife's reduced risks, but the husband's augmented ones. Chapone disagrees, however, on similar grounds as previously. To her, the respective risks are distributed unequally, since the parties entering the transaction (i.e. marriage) again do not have equal access to relevant information: "Womens Debts being more easily known than Mens, [men have] many Ways of concealing and misrepresenting their Circumstances which Women have not" (41). The unequal economic agency of women and men makes it more difficult for a woman to incur debts in her own name. A man is therefore more likely to know the extent of the debts of the woman he marries. A woman, by contrast, may marry a man who only borrowed the fortune he claims to possess to get hold of her money. In a worst-case scenario Chapone evokes, he can eventually use the wife's money obtained by such a fraud to pay back the debt: "A Spend-thrift may buy a young Heiress of those about her, and afterwards pay the purchase money out of her Estate" (41).

The expression "buy a young heiress" confirms that Chapone was not fooled by romantic notions of marriage but very much aware of how it could be (ab)used for strictly monetary ends. This is also borne out by her indignation that the law "gives the sole Property of the Wife's Fortune to the Husband, by which he is enabled to pay the Debts contracted to purchase her, out of her own Estate" (42). For Chapone, such transactions defile the institution of marriage by turning women into mere financial assets that can be literally bought. In her correspondence with Samuel Richardson, she had similarly made a case for women who do "not look upon marriage as a common bargain, and [do] not cho[ose] to be barter'd for like a horse or a cow" (qtd. in



Campbell Orr, 104). She condemns the law's tendency to create incentives for such a dehumanising behaviour in men, while preventing the reverse scenario: a woman, after all, "can't borrow a Sum of Money, and at her Marriage put her Husband in Possession of it as her Fortune, and afterwards secretly repay it, out of his Substance without his Knowledge" (42). In sum, then, for Chapone, the objection does not hold, and the fundamental imbalance remains: "Men suffer very little from being answerable for their Wives Debts contracted before Marriage, in Comparison to what Women suffer, from their Fortunes being liable to pay their Husbands Debts contracted before Marriage" (43).

- 3 "Obj. VII. Amends is made for all this by Womens Exemption from Imprisonment in Civil Causes" (43). This point argues in favour of a balance by highlighting women's benefits. Chapone refers here in particular to the fact that, under coverture, women are not answerable for debts. This is correct, she admits, but this 'benefit' is only an unintended side-effect of their economic discrimination:

'Tis fit indeed they should be exempted, as having no Property, and consequently no Way of getting out again; but this Exemption was never intended as a Favour to them; however it may sometimes accidentally become so. One Reason of such Exemption I take to be this, that a Woman's lying in Jail will pay no Man his Money [. . .]; 'tis therefore Decreed, that her Husband who possesses her Property, shall be answerable for her Debts.

(43)

The fact that Chapone refuses to be fully convinced by this objection points again to what Broad has termed her republican notion of liberty (82). Chapone does not see the reduction of obligations (in this case responsibility for debts) as sufficient recompense for the reduction of rights (in this case to property). She would have women retain their autonomy and risk imprisonment as a consequence of their independent decisions, rather than risk losing their autonomy to an irresponsible husband, thus ending up in a *de facto* prison of marriage.

- 4 This liberal attitude becomes particularly evident in another objection: "Obj. VII. Whether the Exemption of Wives from a Jail in Civil Causes, was originally designed as a Favour to them, is not the Question; if that Exemption is a Recompence for divesting them of all Property, the Law is justified [. . .]" (43). The word "recompence" is again indicative of Chapone's economic take on marriage. The question she asks is whether by being exempt from certain civil cases, women receive a sufficient equivalent for the loss of their property rights. For Chapone, it is clear that the equivalent "is not a Recompence" (43). She thereby departs from standard interpretations of the law, which cited measures 'protecting' women from civil and economic liabilities as proof of how coverture

as a whole worked in their favour. In his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, for example, Blackstone concludes the chapter “Of Husband and Wife” with the often-quoted assertion: “These are the chief legal effects of marriage during the coverture; upon which we may observe, that even the disabilities, which the wife lies under, are for the most part intended for her protection and benefit. So great a favourite is the female sex of the laws of England” (433). Chapone takes a different stance. What Blackstone would interpret a few decades after *Hardships* as protection, Chapone sees as a fundamental denial of subjecthood for women:

To divest a Man of all Property, and then exempt him from a Jail in Consequence of his Debts, is just such a Privilege in his Civil Capacity, as it would be in his Natural one, to divest him of all Pleasure, and in Return to decree that he should feel no Pain. As such Exemption from Pleasure and Pain would, in Effect, strike him out of *Being* as a *Man*, so such divesting him of all Property, with such Exemption from Payment of *Debts*, is, in Effect, to cut him off from being a Member of *Civil Society*. As a Man would chuse to retain his Natural Pleasures, and run the Hazard of Natural Pains, so he would chuse to retain his Civil Rights, and run the Hazard of Civil Inconveniencies.

(43–44)<sup>7</sup>

Chapone demands a woman’s right to private property but also the right to risk (other than the risk to marry), the right to “run the Hazard”: as a citizen, but also as an economic agent. Implicitly, she requests therefore a fundamental prerequisite for women’s participation in the capitalist economy, which relies on the subject’s ability to autonomously take risks in the hope of future gains. She also formulates a basic tenet of liberal feminist thought that would be taken up around 1800 and again in later centuries, namely a woman’s right to civic existence, including its privileges and responsibilities, be they economic or legal. With regard to the economics of marriage, Chapone advocates a free transaction, where both parties set off with the same amount of information, risks, and advantages. In its present state, the marriage transaction is skewed in favour of one (the male) party: women have less access to information than men; they are not equal partners in framing the terms of the agreement; they therefore face more risks than men, while at the same time profiting less from the benefits. Felicitous exceptions notwithstanding, this bias, for Chapone, “is [. . .] the Scope and Tendency of the *English Laws in Relation to Wives*” which “sink us lower than Captivity itself” (39).

### ***Evaluating Chapone’s contribution***

It is true that just as the reviewer of *Hardships* universalises one particular image of women, Chapone universalises another. Whether all wives were indeed eager to acquire more rights at the price of more risks, is up to debate. But from an

economic viewpoint, her analysis constitutes an important advocacy of liberalism *for women*, especially in the realm of marriage. Chapone's analysis of the economics of marriage from the viewpoint of wives is moreover reminiscent of a balance sheet: on the one hand, she enumerates the liabilities, on the other, the assets. Her result is that unless a woman chances upon a good husband – as Chapone apparently did herself – the English common law puts her in a position where her liabilities are very likely to exceed her assets and where she may easily become the victim of economic violence. In that sense, Chapone's repeated claim that the present law exposes married women to potential "oppression" (28, 35, 46), "slavery" (28, 29), and "captivity" (29, 39) is not empty rhetoric but the result of a consistent risk-benefit-assessment. By default, marriage is a bad deal for women, but since they are often unaware of it, and since the alternative – namely, a single life – is even worse, women must settle for it regardless.

Chapone's liberal stance sits somewhat squarely with her simultaneous indebtedness to what Campbell Orr has described as her Anglican feminism (92–94). It is in some respects less radical and less egalitarian than the positions of late eighteenth-century Unitarian and Dissenting feminists, mostly because Chapone accepts that, until the second coming, women's subordination is a just punishment for Eve's responsibility for the original sin: "That Sex which gave the first Proof of a disobedient Will, should have an additional Restraint upon it, to disappoint and over-rule it, that for the Future it might be less able to contend with the Understanding, and the Law of God" (53). The task of curbing women's unruly will has fallen to men, whom God, according to Chapone, punished less harshly, since Adam's involvement in the fall of humanity was secondary. In the final part of *Hardships*, she explains that man was appointed to act as "the Executor of [God's] Resentment" (53), and it would be, by implication, sinful to demand full equality on the part of women.

This section of her pamphlet does not touch upon economic questions directly, except for two passages in which the author reminds men that their privileges are justified only as long as they live up to their concomitant obligation to provide for women and children: "When the Men refuse to bear their Part of the Curse, with what Equity can they require us, to bear ours? *In the sweat of thy Brows shalt thou eat Bread.* But when they refuse to stir a Finger for their Support, is it equitable that they should tye their Wives Hands behind them, and make their helpless Offspring Fatherless and Motherless also?" (53). Yet even if Chapone cuts down on economic observations in this part of her pamphlet, it is insofar relevant for an overall evaluation of her contribution, as it reveals the wider normative framework in which she develops her economic analysis. A paradox ensues: although Chapone sees through and objects to the cultural norms responsible for the economic discrimination of wives, she does not recognise the full extent of patriarchal ideology, parts of which she has internalised.

The benefit of hindsight allows those of us who do not accept the Book of Genesis at face value to discern where patriarchy inhibited Chapone's economic analysis and feminist critique. But her case also suggests that, in all likelihood,

contemporary feminist analyses contain similar blind spots. Paterson Glover notices in her reading of *Hardships*: “Repeatedly we see Chapone struggling to contain her deep sense of outrage and injustice within the framework of revealed truth” (“Further” 103). Chapone indeed does not (dare to) question the validity or truthfulness of the Bible. Instead, she seeks to align her economic demands with the then prevailing ways of making sense of the world. Therefore, she ‘only’ puts forward that “the Laws of *England* go far beyond” (48) what God has ordained. She challenges many cultural assumptions in *Hardships* but stops short of challenging the patriarchal story of Adam and Eve because to her, understandably, the story speaks a universal, incontestable, if problematic, truth – a truth shielded and upheld in myriad ways by the culture surrounding her, of which the authoritative texts (by men) she quotes in her pamphlet formed a part. Arguably, she goes as far as was possible in her times without becoming unintelligible or being pronounced mad and/or dangerous by her contemporaries – as would happen to Mary Wollstonecraft – so as not to lose the ability to effect immediate change.

On a systemic plane, the same mechanism is at play today when (feminist) scholars do not (dare to) question the validity or truthfulness of certain dogmas of mainstream economics or scholarship more generally but seek to align their demands for reform with today’s prevailing ways of making sense of the world. The difference is that one foundational, incontestable discourse that discriminates against women (i.e. the Bible) has been replaced by another (i.e. mainstream economics, certain aspects of scholarship). From a present-day perspective, we may look at Sarah Chapone simultaneously admiring her far-sightedness and wondering at her blind spots. Yet it is more than likely that future generations will pass similar judgement on today’s (feminist, but not only) contributions to scholarship and public debate: they will plainly see and wonder at the powerful taboos that we rarely broach, because they have been naturalised to such an extent as to become transparent and/or unassailable to us.

## **Illustrations of the patriarchal economy: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798)**

### ***Wollstonecraft: a feminist and a feminist economist***

Penned some six decades after *Hardships of the English Laws*, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria. A Fragment* indicates that Sarah Chapone’s appeal to ameliorate women’s economic position had not come to fruition. *The Wrongs of Woman*, published posthumously in 1798 by Wollstonecraft’s husband William Godwin, reads like an echo and reinforcement of Chapone’s analysis. The respective titles already point in this direction: both announce that the authors seek to expose and criticise what they perceive as women’s hardships and wrongs, which, to a substantial degree, turn out to consist in economic discrimination institutionalised in marriage laws. The partial similarity of the two texts does not undermine the relevance of Wollstonecraft’s later contribution. Rather, it highlights that the economics of marriage

as a strand of economic analysis has preoccupied women writers for centuries: as long as the legal status of wives remained unchanged, female authors continued to develop similar arguments in the hope of stimulating reform. Again, therefore, there is a case to be made that a herstory of economic thought follows a different chronology and thematic arrangement than standard histories of economic thought.

Wollstonecraft's turbulent biography has all the makings of a captivating story. It is impossible to render it here, but a few facts pertaining to her life are helpful to contextualise her thoughts on the economics of marriage. The second of seven children, Mary Wollstonecraft was born on 27 April 1759 in London, to relatively well-to-do middle-class parents. In the course of her youth, she witnessed the gradual financial decline of her family, largely brought about by her father, who seems to have been not only an inept breadwinner but also prone to drink and violence. These experiences shaped Wollstonecraft's subsequent view of marriage. With her family impoverished, the largely self-taught Mary was forced to make a living by herself. She tried out most of the genteel professions available to women of her station: lady's companion, governess, teacher, schoolmistress, needlewoman. But she found these occupations frustrating, personally and economically (another factor that would resurface in her writing), and so finally decided to earn her bread by wielding a pen.

At the outset of her career, Wollstonecraft took to the genre deemed most appropriate for female authors, namely didactic texts intended for young women and their parents. But around 1790, as her radical convictions grew firmer, as the French Revolution gave momentum to English progressive circles, and as she received encouragement from her Dissenting friends and mentors, Wollstonecraft joined the political debates of her time as a published author. The first tract with which she made a name for herself was *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, a response to Edmund Burke's condemnation of the French Revolution. It was published in 1790 by Joseph Johnson, anonymously at first, but soon afterwards under Wollstonecraft's name. In it, Wollstonecraft already comments on what she sees as a pernicious and corrupting link between marriage and property – a topic to which she will return in her other writings:

A brutal attachment to children has appeared most conspicuous in parents who have treated them like slaves, and demanded due homage for all the property they transferred to them, during their lives. It has led them to force their children to break the most sacred ties; to do violence to a natural impulse, and run into legal prostitution to increase wealth or shun poverty; and, still worse, the dread of parental malediction has made many weak characters violate truth in the face of Heaven; and, to avoid a father's angry curse, the most sacred promises have been broken. [. . .] [T]he barbarous cruelty of allowing parents to imprison their children, to prevent their contaminating their noble blood by following the dictates of nature when they chose to marry, or for any misdemeanor that does not come under the cognizance of public justice, is one of the most arbitrary violations of liberty.

The term “legal prostitution” as a synonym for forcing young women into an unwanted, mercenary marriage is a recurrent one in feminist economics of marriage.

The 1790s turned out to be an eventful period in Britain – and in Wollstonecraft’s life. She set out on two longer journeys (one to France, one to Scandinavia), she fell in love with two men (first unhappily with Gilbert Imlay, then happily with William Godwin), she made two attempts on her life, and she gave birth to two daughters (Fanny in 1794, Mary in 1797). Through all these personal experiences, Wollstonecraft continued to write and comment on the developments of her day. The year 1792 saw the publication of her demand to expand the ‘rights of man’ to the overlooked half of humanity: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Overall, it was a success, stimulating translations into German and French as well as an American edition. *A Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* followed in 1794, the well-received *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* in 1796. Characterising Wollstonecraft’s philosophy, Barbara Taylor notes that she

has been described as a liberal thinker, but this is to understate the scope of her political ambitions. [. . .] [S]he should be seen rather as belonging to the utopian wing of eighteenth-century progressivism: that visionary, world-regenerating style of radicalism, heavily indebted to left-wing protestantism, that reached a high point in the revolutionary upheavals of the 1790s.

(“Wollstonecraft”)

Accordingly, radical circles welcomed Wollstonecraft’s writings and celebrated her as a bold intellectual and talented mouthpiece for their cause. Conservative critics, by contrast, though often enough respectful of her analytical acumen, took issue with the egalitarian premises of her philosophy. In the mid-1790s, Wollstonecraft began to compose her second novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*. Yet she did not live to finish it: on 10 September 1797, she died of puerperal fever, having given birth to Mary, the future author of *Frankenstein*.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a vociferous advocate of women’s rights and a prolific commentator on social and political questions. Especially thanks to her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she is today mostly remembered as a pioneering liberal feminist. For Taylor, she is possibly “the most discussed, admired, criticized, and mythologized feminist intellectual in history” (“Wollstonecraft”). I wish to emphasise that given the kind of economic questions permeating her oeuvre, there are good reasons for considering Wollstonecraft also a pioneering feminist economist. The aspects I investigate in what follows pertain mostly to the situation of women, particularly wives. But the scope of Wollstonecraft’s economic analysis was wider and merits further scrutiny. Her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, for example, contain observations on the Norwegian tax system, on what Wollstonecraft considered the pernicious effects of

commercialisation, and on disparities between rich and poor.<sup>8</sup> The author claims: "I believe it may be delivered as an axiom, that it is only in proportion to the industry necessary to acquire wealth that a nation is really benefited by it" (*Letters* 19). In a different passage, she maintains:

If the chief use of property be power, in the shape of the respect it procures, is it not among the inconsistencies of human nature most incomprehensible, that men should find a pleasure in hoarding up property which they steal from their necessities, even when they are convinced that it would be dangerous to display such an enviable superiority? Is not this the situation of serfs in every country; yet a rapacity to accumulate money seems to become stronger in proportion as it is allowed to be useless.

(106–07)

Such observations reveal Wollstonecraft's liberalism and her radical promotion of equality. The "hoarding up of property" and power – be it political, legal, landed, or monetary – by one group is to her always a sign of a corrupt system. This emphasis on an equal distribution of resources between members of society, which expressly includes the equal distribution of resources between the sexes, also underlies her feminist economics of marriage.

Already in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft takes issue with "the social laws which make a nonentity of a wife" (221) and criticises the passive, dependent role ascribed to women within "the slavery of marriage" (193). In this polemical treatise, however, she is not primarily concerned with marriage and its laws but demonstrates how women's subordination stems from a deficient system of education. Wollstonecraft establishes explicit and implicit links between women's education and their economic wellbeing. In particular, she finds fault with the fact that training young girls in the art of attracting and pleasing a potential husband – that is making marriage the only 'trade' for a woman – is a short-term, narrow, and risky economic strategy. Wollstonecraft deplores that girls "spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves, – the only way women can rise in the world, – by marriage" (15).<sup>9</sup> She points out that "[g]irls who have been thus weakly educated, are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision; and, of course, are dependent on, not only the reason, but the bounty of their brothers" (84). Echoing the stance of other middle-class authors, both from the radical and conservative spectrum, Wollstonecraft argues that in order to secure a durable, happy marriage – and, by extension, to obtain sustained financial provisioning – women must be educated to be rational and competent companions to their husbands.<sup>10</sup> A further advantage of such an education is that of making women economically more independent in case they cannot fall back on the financial support of a man. As Wollstonecraft points out, a woman whose 'training' consists only in attracting a

future husband remains in an economically vulnerable position even after securing a satisfying match:

a woman, trained up to obedience, [. . .] married to a sensible man, who directs her judgment without making her feel the servility of her subjection, [. . .] cannot ensure the life of her protector; he may die and leave her with a large family. A double duty devolves on her; to educate them in the character of both father and mother; to form their principles and secure their property. But, alas! she has never thought, much less acted for herself. She has only learned to please men, to depend gracefully on them; yet, encumbered with children, how is she to obtain another protector – a husband to supply the place of reason?

(63–64)

Wollstonecraft argues in *Rights of Woman* that to make women economically more autonomous, they should be allowed to make a living independently of men. She frames the right to work as a civic, democratic right: “is not that government then very defective, and very unmindful of the happiness of one half of its members, that does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations? [. . .] they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single [. . .]” (184–85). The phrasing implies that Wollstonecraft doubts that under the present system, wives have “a civil existence”. Even if coverture is not her primary concern in *Rights of Woman*, she already identifies it as a problem and contemplates further inquiry into the topic: “The laws respecting woman, which I mean to discuss in a future part, make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then, by the easy transition of only considering him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere cypher” (180).

### ***The generic hybridity of Wrongs of Woman***

With *Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft makes good on her intention to examine the position of wives. Although her text has remained incomplete, the surviving fragments reveal the contours of Wollstonecraft’s feminist economics of marriage. Before carving out its main premises, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the genre of Wollstonecraft’s text. Ostensibly a sentimental novel about the heroine’s unhappy marriage and subsequent romance, *Wrongs of Woman*, as several critics have pointed out, is a generically challenging hybrid of literature, autobiography, and social theory. Anne K. Mellor, for example, sees Wollstonecraft develop a “political argument” (“Righting” 413), while Margaret Kathryn Sloan reads *Wrongs* as “a text of reform” (231). Agreeing with and building on these claims, I put forward that Wollstonecraft mobilises a part-fictional, part-autobiographical tale for a decidedly economic analysis. The story of the eponymous heroine and the experiences of the minor female characters serve as illustrations of specific economic mechanisms and their detrimental effects on women: volume one renders



a (working-class) woman's experience of work, volume two focuses on the economics of marriage. Where Sarah Chapone in *Hardships of the English Laws* chose to cite actual legal cases from newspapers to sustain her claims, Wollstonecraft, partially drawing on her own experiences, creates emblematic female figures, who epitomise and channel economic, social, and political observations: "The sentiments I have embodied" (67), she explains in what Godwin compiled to become her preface to *Wrongs*. Crucially, Wollstonecraft's fictional women expose the same underlying economic discrimination and violence as Chapone's real women. The strategy of both texts is also similar, namely, to make readers see and empathise with the lot of particular women in order to criticise extant marriage laws and argue for their reform. In contrast to Chapone, Wollstonecraft attempts to harness the potential of literature to engage readers emotionally and raise their awareness. Yet she makes clear in the preface that the literary dimension of her text is subordinate to its overall analytical aim:

In many instances I could have made the incidents more dramatic, would I have sacrificed my main object, the desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society. In the invention of the story, this view restrained my fancy and the history ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual.

(67)

Like in Chapone's *Hardships*, then, individual cases serve as vehicles for exemplifying general truths, with the difference that Wollstonecraft resorts to fiction to make the reader understand her underlying argument.

In that sense, *Wrongs* adopts a textual strategy that Harriet Martineau would re-invent some 30 years later in her highly successful series of didactic tales entitled *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–1834). In the preface to *Illustrations*, Martineau explains why she chose to exemplify the principles of political economy through fictional stories. Describing extant texts on political economy, she notes:

There are a few, a very few, which teach the science systematically as far as it is yet understood. These too are very valuable, but they do not give us what we want – the science in a familiar, practical form. They give us its history; they give us its philosophy; but we want its *picture*. They give us truths, and leave us to look about us, and go hither and thither in search of illustrations of those truths. [. . .] We cannot see why the truth and its application should not go together, – why an explanation of the principles which regulate society should not be made more clear and interesting at the same time by pictures of what those principles are actually doing in communities.

(xi–xii)

Martineau distinguishes between two modes of conveying economic maxims. On the one hand, she claims, "we may make the fact and the reasons very well

understood by stating them in a dry, plain way” – which would correspond to a scientific mode of presentation. On the other, “the same thing will be quite as evident, and far more interesting and better remembered, if we confirm our doctrine by accounts of [among others] the hardships suffered by individuals [. . .]” (xii). Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs* adopts the second mode and thus functions analogously to Martineau’s *Illustrations*: it contains fictional “accounts of the hardships suffered” by individual women, which “confirm” an underlying economic “doctrine”. Similarly to *Illustrations*, the narrator and the characters in *Wrongs* additionally explain and comment on the issues at hand in expository passages.<sup>11</sup> In Wollstonecraft’s novel, however, the characters illustrate and embody not the established teachings of political economy but mechanisms of what I shall term the patriarchal economy.

Martineau’s self-appraisal of 1832 that her “method of teaching Political Economy has never yet been tried” (xii) is hence justified if a narrow definition of political economy, namely, as the theories embodied by Smith, Ricardo, Mill, et al., is accepted. A less androcentric definition (which, tellingly, Martineau herself had not adopted) reveals that female authors of previous decades had already used the hybrid genre of fiction and theory to process economic deliberations. What is more, while Martineau employed it primarily to popularise economic theories developed by other, male, thinkers, Wollstonecraft selected it to disseminate her own thoughts on the economy. The fact that today’s historians of economic thought are nevertheless more likely to be familiar with Martineau’s ‘derivative’ than with Wollstonecraft’s ‘original’ contributions is an effect of the interrelated, gendered, genred, and disciplinary processes of knowledge formation described in this book’s first part. To draw attention to them is not to downplay the relevance of Martineau’s *Illustrations of Political Economy* but to argue for acknowledging as economic thought Wollstonecraft’s illustrations of the patriarchal economy contained in her ‘novel’.

Mellor posits that Wollstonecraft’s choice of genre was a conscious attempt to carve out a space for the female public voice:

Wollstonecraft, appearing before her public, seek[s] to speak in a way that can be both understood and believed. What style, what genre, can most convincingly articulate the experiences of women? [. . .] By turning to the novel, and away from the genre of the political treatise utilized for her *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft subtly implied that the genre of the novel – a genre historically associated with women authors – offered a representation of truth superior to that found in the philosophical tract, a genre historically associated with men. [. . .] Wollstonecraft assigns to the novel the highest artistic status because it can most accurately portray “reality” and hence function most effectively as a moral guide [. . .].

(“Righting” 418–19)

The reception of *Wrongs* indicates, however, that Wollstonecraft did not succeed in subverting the hierarchies of gender and genre, in so far that her text is still more

likely to be identified as fiction and read by (female) scholars of English literature than accredited the status of economic thought and read by, for example, economists. In fact, *Wrongs of Woman* is not even fully appreciated as a novel, as Claudia L. Johnson explains:

All of [Wollstonecraft's] works are of a piece in their very diversity, blending overlapping discourses of education, political commentary, travel literature, autobiography, moral philosophy, and fiction by turns, and while this makes for challenging and often bracing reading, it is also probably a little dizzying to audiences whose generic expectations are more straightforward, who expect novels to execute a well-managed plot or to unfold incrementally developing character.

(“*Wollstonecraft's Novels*” 189)

Or, one could add, to audiences who expect economic thought to contain abstract formulations and claims derived from empirical cases, rather than stories about fictional characters.

In *Wrongs of Woman*, even more so than in Martineau's *Illustrations*, the economic analysis occurs at two levels: at the fictional and aesthetic level of the story, which thereby becomes a sort of economic parable, and in a more straightforward fashion at the level of explanatory and authoritative utterances by the narrator and the characters. To do justice to *Wrongs*, both levels need to be taken into consideration and decoded, which calls for a ‘literary’ as well as a more strictly ‘economic’ analysis. The problem remains, however, that the hybrid (and, following Mellor, consciously feminist) genre chosen by Wollstonecraft has no hybrid counterpart in today's academic disciplines: given the disciplinary mapping of present-day academia, hardly any scholar is able to perform a literary *and* an economic reading and/or be heard in both disciplines. Several scholars representing literary and cultural studies – among them Anne K. Mellor (“Righting”), Mary Poovey (*Proper* 94–113), Mona Scheuermann (“Women” 316–19), and Eleanor Ty (31–45) – have insightfully commented on the economic import of Wollstonecraft's novel. But given their affiliations, their analyses have occurred ‘only’ in the context of their academic discipline of English studies. Drawing on their research, the aim of this chapter is to flesh out Wollstonecraft's economic arguments and to attempt to transpose them into a different context by changing the primary epistemological focus: to consider *Wrongs* mainly as economic thought expressed through the genre of the novel and not as a novel containing economic observations. This change of perspective is indispensable for identifying and acknowledging women's contributions to economic thought. Given that the economic thought of Mary Wollstonecraft (and other women writers) resides in a realm between literature and economics, its analysis must occur in, reclaim, and to some extent replicate this still largely uncharted transdisciplinary interspace.

The benefits of a transdisciplinary perspective, which allows for the decoding of literary tropes in terms of economic postulates, become manifest when

examining the opening of Wollstonecraft's novel. In terms of plot, *The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria* recounts the story of the eponymous heroine, an upper-middle-class woman in her mid-twenties, who, as the narrative begins, finds herself in a madhouse, kidnapped and imprisoned by her avaricious husband. The opening scene is laden with Gothic elements, with the initial sentence evoking "[a]bodes of horror [. . .] and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras" (69). Maria wakes up full of "anguish", "rage and indignation" in a half-ruined, ivy-clad "mansion of despair". Surrounded by "groans and shrieks" of the "terrific inhabitants" of the asylum, "this most horrid of prisons", she pines for her daughter, from whom she had been forcefully separated. She attempts to convince the asylum's overseers of her sanity, but to no avail: the owner of the asylum ignores her "rav[ing] of injustice" with "a malignant smile" (69–70).

While at a first glance, the Gothic opening of *Wrongs* has nothing to do with economics, on a deeper level, it provides a metaphor for one of the novel's principal concerns, namely, the economic dependence of wives. Maria's imprisonment is an allegorical representation of the legal, economic, and emotional constraints of married women. It gives us the "picture" – to take up Harriet Martineau's expression – of how existence feels for a wife who falls victim to "the selfish scheme of her tyrant – her husband" (70): he owns her body (Maria's husband imprisons her), he owns her children (Maria's husband takes away their daughter), and, as will transpire later, he *de facto* owns her property. When she protests against the injustice of this system and demands freedom and equality, she is declared mad, which neutralises her objections, 'justifies' her incarceration, and thus prevents her from bringing about change. Maria's "dreary cell", her "manacled arms", and "the small grated window of her chamber" (70) are hence emblems of the situation of women generally and wives in particular, who are at the mercy of their male 'overseers'. Gerold Sedlmayr has demonstrated that between 1790 and 1815, the asylum "is still an absolutist space", with the male moral manager "represent[ing] the law, and even more than that: he is at once legislature, executive, and judiciary" (*Discourse* 199). By setting substantial parts of her novel in an asylum, Wollstonecraft makes it a master metaphor for the workings of a patriarchal economy: marriage is an absolutist space and the husband an absolutist ruler, exerting, unchecked, all three political powers. Maria makes explicit the analogy between her particular predicament and women's general oppression: "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (73). And later: "Marriage had bastilled me for life. [. . .] fettered by the partial laws of society, this fair globe was to me an universal blank" (137).<sup>12</sup>

Combining the Gothic with the economic was, as Edward Copeland has averred, a general trend in women's writing of the 1790s. Analysing fiction by Jane Austen, Charlotte Smith, Frances Burney, Eliza Parsons, and Anna Maria Bennett, Copeland concludes that "Gothic terror in women's fiction is unremittingly economic" (*Women* 36; Ty 33, 36). With regard to women's fiction published in the popular Minerva press, he states that "[i]n Minerva gothic, it is the economy, as it is represented by unpredictable, feckless, improvident, destructive, and tyrannical males, that provides the active source of terror for women" (41). An amalgamation

of existential anguish, helplessness, and anger vis-à-vis women's economic disenfranchisement also fuels Wollstonecraft's narrative. But in contrast to some of her contemporaries, she goes beyond an exploration of the emotional consequences of female financial vulnerability. *Wrongs of Woman* stands out for combining a fictional investigation into the psychological effects of coverture with an analysis of its legal and economic mechanisms.

### ***The prison of marriage***

English marriage laws rested on a presumed ideal, in which the husband dependably provided for his wife and children, while the wife was his obedient helpmate and partner. Generations of women economic writers have been at pains to demonstrate that this ideal of a benevolent patriarch was at odds with the daily experience of many wives whose husbands failed to live up to the role of responsible and judicious breadwinners. Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs* forms part of this tradition. Its heroine records her unhappy marriage to George Venables in a diary which she compiles for her infant daughter. The diary form reveals a parallel between Wollstonecraft and Chapone: both texts comment on marriage from the insider perspective of a wife, and they contain cautionary advice for unmarried women. While on an intratextual level, Maria addresses her daughter with the words "my dear girl, you may gather the instruction, the counsel, which is meant rather to exercise than influence your mind" (111), on an extratextual plane, it can be surmised that the instruction and counsel is (economic) advice directed at the *feme sole* reader (see also Rennhak 195 and Sloan 231). Maria's example is a warning for young, unmarried women not to naively trust the ideal of marriage perpetuated by the cultural norms of their times – and promoted by that brand of sentimental novel from which Wollstonecraft sought to dissociate herself. By (over)emphasising the risks of marriage and exposing the pernicious effects of Maria's "extreme credulity" (127), Wollstonecraft, like Chapone, attempts to scare young female readers into emotional and economic prudence. Maria's story retraces the process by which she gradually arrives at the disaffected insight: "I could not sometimes help regretting my early marriage; and that, in my haste to escape from a temporary dependence, [. . .] I had been caught in a trap, and caged for life" (128).<sup>13</sup> Wollstonecraft's narrative suggests that the institution of marriage does not by default liberate a young woman from the dependence on her parents, but is likely to increase her dependence.

The major spring of Maria's "trap" turns out to be the interdependence of patriarchy and property, upheld by the faulty assumption that a man, by virtue of his sex alone, is economically more capable than a woman. Maria's narrative exposes the injustice and implausibility of this supposition by continually offsetting Maria's economic responsibility and resourcefulness with her husband's and other men's wastefulness, incompetence, and lack of financial skill. (Jane Austen will return to a variant of this constellation in *Sense and Sensibility*.) Maria's memoir brims with

examples of how she fulfils what is essentially the role of the male breadwinner or head of the family. To name but four of them:

- Maria (much like Wollstonecraft herself) indirectly supports her sisters, by convincing her uncle to settle £1,000 on each and, upon his death, another £2,000 on the surviving sister. She also helps them find employment as governesses and plans to set up her younger brother. She thus compensates for her father's and oldest brother's egocentric behaviour.
- When Maria's brother attempts to take over the entire family fortune, Maria applies to her uncle to help her "prevent the whole property of the family from becoming the prey of my brother's rapacity" (133). She eventually succeeds in "settl[ing] my father's affairs" (134), thereby fulfilling what is allegedly a man's duty.
- Maria helps procure funds for the industrious shopkeeper Peggy, who must pay off debts as well as support her children and herself after her husband dies. Maria thus indirectly fills in the place of the deceased husband and mitigates the harshness of the law as administered by the unsympathetic male magistrate who refuses to postpone his demand for Peggy's rent.
- Maria pays "two shillings a week" (133) to a nurse who takes care of George's illegitimate baby daughter. She thus lives up to what is actually her husband's moral obligation. George's sexual rapacity combined with his pecuniary stinginess harms no fewer than four women in this case: Maria as his wife; the servant girl whom he seduces and turns out; the nurse whom he refuses to pay adequately and who is "almost afraid to ask master for money to buy even a pair of shoes" (133) for the child; and his daughter who is nearly starved to death.

The continuously irresponsible, selfish, and dissipate behaviour of George, as contrasted with his wife's prudent and judicious management of the family's finances, exposes the absurdity and injustice of laws which endow men with prerogatives merely because they are men, independently of their individual merits. Mary Robinson, a friend of Wollstonecraft's, would observe in her *Letter to the Women of England*:

Supposing that destiny, or interest, or chance, or what you will, has united a man, confessedly of a weak understanding, and corporeal debility, to a woman strong in all the powers of intellect, and capable of bearing the fatigues of busy life: is it not degrading to humanity that such a woman should be the passive, the obedient slave, of such a husband? [. . .] [Y]et, if from prudence, or from pity, if for the security of worldly interest, or worldly happiness, she presumes to take a lead in domestic arrangements, or to screen her wedded shadow from obloquy or ruin, what is she considered by the imperious sex? but an usurper of her husband's rights; a domestic tyrant; a vindictive shrew;

a petticoat philosopher; and a disgrace to that race of mortals, known by the degrading appellation of the defenceless sex.

(131–32)

In its depiction of the Venables' marriage, *Wrongs* presents a variant of the scenario evoked by Robinson. Maria is clearly a smart woman united to an inferior man whom the law nevertheless deems her superior. But contrary to what the law and the ideal of marriage presume, it is Maria who takes care of the family finances, all the more so since her husband's "character in the commercial world was gone" and he "was considered [. . .] as a swindler" (141) at the stock exchange. Maria describes how during the first five years of her marriage, she "had most reluctantly extorted several sums from my uncle, to save my husband, to use his own words, from destruction. At first it was to prevent bills being noted, to the injury of his credit; then to bail him; and afterwards to prevent an execution from entering the house" (129). Recognising the financially unstable situation of her family, Maria vainly seeks to restore some economic sense into her lavish husband: "I endeavoured to prevail on him to retrench his expences; but he had always some plausible excuse to give, to justify his not following my advice" (136–37). She bitterly observes that although she is the one "who now almost supported the house by loans from my uncle", she must consider her spendthrift husband "the *master* of it" (131) and ask for his permission if she wants to assist her ill sister or settle the household accounts. George, meanwhile, not only exploits his wife, but also abuses his social rank to exploit the services provided by members of lower classes. Maria relates:

[I]f I demanded money for the house expences, which I put off till the last moment, his customary reply, often prefaced with an oath, was, 'Do you think me, madam, made of money?' – The butcher, the baker, must wait; and, what was worse, I was often obliged to witness his surly dismissal of tradesmen, who were in want of their money, and whom I sometimes paid with the presents my uncle gave me for my own use.

(131)

The narrative makes plain that George views his marriage primarily as a means of getting at his wife's money. He frustrates Maria's attempts to provide financially for herself, her sisters, and her daughter, which makes her indict coverture regulations through expository comments:

a wife being as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing she can call her own. He may use any means to get at what the law considers as his, the moment his wife is in possession of it, [. . .] and all this is done with a show of equity, because, forsooth, he is responsible for her maintenance. The tender mother cannot *lawfully* snatch from the gripe of the gambling spendthrift, or beastly drunkard, unmindful of his offspring,

the fortune which falls to her by chance; or (so flagrant is the injustice) what she earns by her own exertions. No; he can rob her with impunity, even to waste publicly on a courtesan; and the laws of her country – if women have a country – afford her no protection or redress from the oppressor, unless she have the plea of bodily fear [ . . . ].

(140)

Maria's experience is symptomatic of what Wollstonecraft takes to be a pillar of the patriarchal economy, namely the intertwined sexual and economic exploitation of women. Maria never has unrestrained control over her person and her economic assets. Quite the reverse: she is herself a good, circulated among men. She begins her life under the roof of a despotic, financially irresponsible father (much like Wollstonecraft's own), only to be passed on to a spendthrift, unfaithful husband, with the blessing and help of her well-meaning, but evidently misguided uncle. The fact that Maria's uncle clandestinely pays the future bridegroom £5,000 (123) underscores the extent to which the patriarchal economy objectifies women into merchandise. The transaction, of which Maria is unaware, sets the tone for George's attitude towards his wife, whom he continues to treat as an exploitable resource, sexually and financially. The exploitation culminates in George locking up his wife in the asylum in order to get at her independent fortune, but also in his offer to a male acquaintance of his to have sex with Maria in exchange for lending him £500 (143). While George deems his proposition sensible – after all, “every woman had her price” (143) – Maria indignantly opposes his “selling me to prostitution” (143).

On a meta-level, the narrative makes plain that by marrying George, Maria had already been *de facto* sold into a form of prostitution, as this is what her husband's extended rights to her body and property have reduced their union to. Even before George attempted to sell Maria's body to his friend, she already registered her unwillingness to have sex with him: “personal intimacy without affection, seemed, to me the most degrading, as well as the most painful state in which a woman of any taste [ . . . ] could be placed. [ . . . ] [C]ould I then have returned to his sullied arms, but as a victim to the prejudices of mankind, who have made women the property of their husbands?” (129–30). Here, *Wrongs of Woman* takes up a point Wollstonecraft had already alluded to in *Rights of Woman*: “To rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, [women] must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted” (77). In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft blames a faulty education for inculcating women with the belief that instead of independently earning their subsistence, they should offer their bodies in exchange for the maintenance obtained through marriage. She criticises “the state of idleness in which women are educated, who are always taught to look up to man for a maintenance, and to consider their persons as the proper return for his exertions to support them” (91). *Wrongs* demonstrates that because of a sexual double standard, for women, this transaction may end in



unbearable sexual and economic exploitation. As Maria explains in one of her expository comments:

A man would only be expected to maintain; yes, barely grant a subsistence, to a woman rendered odious by habitual intoxication; but who would expect him, or think it possible to love her? And unless 'youth, and genial years were flown,' it would be thought equally unreasonable to insist [. . .] that he should not love another: whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate. He may even spend in dissipation, and intemperance, the very intemperance which renders him so hateful, her property, and by stinting her expences, not permit her to beguile in society, a wearisome, joyless life; for over their mutual fortune she has no power, it must all pass through his hand.

(136)

Wollstonecraft here again draws attention to the interdependence between the sexual and economic disenfranchisement of women. She reiterates a point Sarah Chapone had also made: a husband can use his economic prerogatives to exploit his wife's body and, conversely, he can use the right to her body in order to deprive her of her freedom and, subsequently, independent property. Wollstonecraft's criticism of the sexual double standard, which sees this behaviour as pardonable in husbands but unacceptable in wives, is reiterated by Robinson in her *Letter to the Women of England*:

Man may enjoy the convivial board, indulge the caprices of his nature; he may desert his home, violate his marriage vows, scoff at the moral laws that unite society, and set even religion at defiance, by oppressing the defenceless; while woman is condemned to bear the drudgery of domestic life, to vegetate in obscurity, to *love* where she abhors, to *honour* where she dispises [*sic*], and to *obey*, while she shudders at subordination. Why? Let the most cunning sophist, answer me, WHY?

(134)

What Robinson terms women's "drudgery of domestic life" is a topic that Wollstonecraft also pays attention to in *Wrongs*. More specifically, she detects a further wrong with regard to the sexual division of labour, namely, the lack of proper acknowledgement for women's caring and emotional work – a key concern of feminist economists up to this day. In *Wrongs*, Maria dutifully attends to her sick and needy relatives, only to find out that even her mother takes this kind of help for granted. (This echoes Wollstonecraft's own experience, who resented the favours and fortune that her family bestowed on her eldest brother Ned.) Maria, as Wollstonecraft's alter ego, concludes that

though boys may be reckoned the pillars of the house without doors, girls are often the only comfort within. They but too frequently waste their health and spirits attending a dying parent, who leaves them in comparative poverty.

After closing, with filial piety, a father's eyes, they are chased from the paternal roof, to make room for the first-born, the son, who is to carry the empty family-name down to posterity; though, occupied with his own pleasures, he scarcely thought of discharging, in the decline of his parent's life, the debt contracted in his childhood.

(120)

Wollstonecraft not only takes issue with the one-sidedness of primogeniture and its automatic privileging of first-born sons, regardless of their actual behaviour. She does not question the assumption that caring work is a woman's obligation, but she states that it has a distinct value, which is why those who profit from it incur a "debt" towards those who perform it: a debt that should be repaid, also in monetary terms. Unfortunately, however – and here, again, Wollstonecraft anticipates twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminist interventions – women's caring work is frequently not properly acknowledged as *work* but taken for granted as the willing fulfilment of her 'natural' instincts.

Already in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft was adamant that "woman was not created merely to gratify the appetite of man, or to be the upper servant, who provides his meals and takes care of his linen" (54). To her, marriage should be more than a contract in which maintenance by the husband is exchanged for domestic labour performed by the wife. The economy of marriage also encompasses emotional and sexual exchanges, but women are in this respect as much at a disadvantage as in financial matters:

how many women [. . .] pass their days; or, at least, their evenings, discontentedly. Their husbands acknowledge that they are good managers, and chaste wives; but leave home to seek for more agreeable, may I be allowed to use a significant French word, *piquant* society; and the patient drudge, who fulfils her task, like a blind horse in a mill, is defrauded of her just reward; for the wages due to her are the caresses of her husband; and women who have so few resources in themselves, do not very patiently bear this privation of a natural right.

(*Rights of Woman* 86)

Wollstonecraft continues this line of thinking in *Wrongs*, where she has Maria's uncle – a male voice of authority – proclaim that reducing wives to the performance of their domestic duties can constitute a form of exploitation that is sufficient ground for claiming a divorce:

The magnitude of a sacrifice ought always to bear some proportion to the utility in view; and for a woman to live with a man, for whom she can cherish neither affection nor esteem, or even be of any use to him, excepting in the light of a house-keeper, is an abjectness of condition, the enduring of which no concurrence of circumstances can ever make a duty in the sight of God or just men.

(139)

The phrasing evokes an economic logic of transaction: marriage is not an indissoluble bond but a contract presupposing the balance (“some proportion”) of costs (“sacrifice”) and benefits (“utility”). When the former significantly exceed the latter, it is legitimate to revoke the contract. This secular and strikingly modern approach to marriage prepares the ground for the radical – indeed, blasphemous by the standards of its time – solution Wollstonecraft envisages in *Wrongs* for partners whose ‘costs’ surpass the ‘benefits’: the possibility of obtaining a divorce. In such a way, exploited wives can regain control of their financial resources and find a more suitable partner. Accordingly, Maria asserts before a judge: “I claim then a divorce, and the liberty of enjoying, free from molestation, the fortune left to me by a relation [. . .]” (173).

By openly promoting divorce, Wollstonecraft goes much further than most of her contemporaries or than Chapone did in *Hardships*. Yet in other respects, her illustration of the patriarchal economy as embodied by Maria’s marriage to George Venables touches upon several points that Sarah Chapone had also debated. Chapone, for example, discussed in detail whether the fact that a wife was not answerable for debts was sufficient recompense for depriving her of most of her property rights. She concluded that it was not, and Wollstonecraft appears to share this conviction. Although she devotes less space to the issue, Maria nevertheless notes:

When I exhorted my husband to economy, I referred to himself. I was obliged to practise the most rigid [economy], or contract debts, which I had too much reason to fear would never be paid. I despised this paltry privilege of a wife, which can only be of use to the vicious or inconsiderate, and determined not to increase the torrent that was bearing him down. I was then ignorant of the extent of his fraudulent speculations, whom I was bound to honour and obey.

(137)

Another economic injustice Chapone had criticised was the sexual double standard regarding financial compensations for adultery: while a betrayed husband could sue for damages done to his property (i.e. his wife’s body), the reverse was not possible. In *Wrongs*, Wollstonecraft likewise takes issue with this inequality:

Such are the partial laws enacted by men; for, only to lay a stress on the dependent state of a woman in the grand question of the comforts arising from the possession of property, she is [. . .] much more injured by the loss of the husband’s affection, than he by that of his wife; yet where is she, condemned to the solitude of a deserted home, to look for a compensation from the woman, who seduces him from her?

(137)

Chapone had moreover argued that the husband’s right to his wife’s body and children can factually annul her claim to an independent fortune, because he can

use physical and mental violence as well as the threat of taking away the child in order to deprive her of her property. Exactly this scenario materialises when Maria attempts to leave her husband and live on the fortune left to her by her uncle. George's attorney, she reports, "indirectly advised me to make over to my husband [. . .] the greater part of the property I had at command, menacing me with continual persecution unless I complied, and that, as a last resort, he would claim the child" (160). In the end, George makes good on his threat by taking away their daughter and incarcerating Maria in the asylum as a means of getting at her money.

That Maria's is not a singular case, but that women's economic dependence makes marriage a hotbed of female suffering and insanity, at immense material and immaterial cost for wives, is one of the novel's chief propositions. One of Maria's fellow inmates, for example, is a young woman whose mental decline apparently ensued after she was sold into marriage: "she had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous (no wonder, for she was a charming creature); [. . .] in consequence of his treatment, or something which hung on her mind, she had, during her first lying-in, lost her senses" (80). Suggestively, the upset young woman (whose lot partially mirrors that of Wollstonecraft's sister Eliza) keeps singing the Scots ballad of "Auld Robin Gray", penned by Lady Anne Lindsay in 1772. Told from the perspective of young peasant girl Jennie, the ballad recounts how she decides in spite of her feelings not to wait until her beloved Jamie earns enough money to set them up but to marry old Robin Gray instead, since he is able to provide for her ailing parents:

[. . .] my father brak his arm, and the cow was stown awa;  
My mother she fell sick, – and my Jamie at the sea –  
And auld Robin Gray came a-courtin' me.

My father couldna work, and my mother couldna spin;  
I toil'd day and night, but their bread I couldna win;  
Auld Rob maintain'd them baith, and wi' tears in his e'e  
Said, 'Jennie, for their sakes, O, marry me!' (ll. 10–16)

Jennie agrees, though her "heart it said nay" (l. 17), only to see Jamie return a few weeks after her economically motivated marriage had taken place. Like Wollstonecraft's novel, Lindsay's ballad is only superficially a sentimental tale about unfulfilled love but in fact registers the economic dimensions of marriage and the emotional cost women pay to secure provisioning. Jennie barter her person and sacrifices her personal happiness to maintain her parents.

Jennie's story is a variant of the situation most women in *Wrongs* experience at some point. Another minor character, the landlady who offers shelter to Maria when she flees from George, has an even grimmer economic autobiography to tell. As a young, single woman, the landlady had worked as a servant and laid by some savings. She then married a poor footman and decided to take in lodgers to make a living. The footman fell in love with another woman, indebted himself to buy

presents for her, and, as the landlady reports, secured these debts by signing “an execution on my very goods, bought with the money I worked so hard to get” (157). The story thus features a recurrent topos of women's economic writing, namely, the fact that a husband can use his wife's money and property to spend it on a lover: emotional and economic oppression go hand in hand in this case. Deprived of financial means, the landlady returned to service as an employee, which she found “very hard, after having a house of [her] own” (157). Her husband pursued her and, again backed by coverture regulations, continued to exploit her: “he even stole my clothes, and pawned them; and when I went to the pawnbroker's, and offered to take my oath that they were not bought with a farthing of his money, they said, ‘It was all as one, my husband had a right to whatever I had’” (157). The husband then enlisted as a soldier and disappeared for six years, during which time the woman, by almost starving herself, recovered financially. Her spouse then returned, but so did his creditors, and he again legally sold his wife's goods to pay back his debts.

Though the landlady's tale might seem an extreme case, it is not unrealistic. In her study *Women, Work & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989), Bridget Hill confirms that “when a husband deserted his wife there was nothing to prevent him coming back whenever he liked and resuming his role as head of the household” (213). Based on her experience, the landlady draws two conclusions. The first is legal: “I know so well, that women have always the worst of it, when law is to decide” (157). The second is economic: “Women must be submissive. [. . .] Indeed what could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands? Every woman, and especially a lady, could not go through rough and smooth, as she had done, to earn a little bread” (155–56). The second remark suggests that women's submission is not natural, God-given, or freely chosen – as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideology would maintain – but the effect of structural economic discrimination. There are but two options for women to maintain themselves: either going “through rough and smooth [. . .] to earn a little bread”, as the landlady has done, or relying on “their husbands”. Because of the ample power given to husbands by law, women who choose the second variant “must be submissive”. The case of another unhappy landlady whom Maria meets validates this inference. She, too, suffers from blatant economic, physical, and emotional abuse: “she toiled from morning till night; yet her husband would rob the till, and take away the money reserved for paying bills; and, returning home drunk, he would beat her if she chanced to offend him, though she had a child at the breast” (149). Lacking the strength to defy her husband, this wife internalises patriarchal ideology and resigns herself to the fact that “when a woman was once married, she must bear every thing” (149).

The wives Maria (and, by extension, the reader of *Wrongs*) encounters along the way are variants of her own economic experience, which, in turn, embodies what Wollstonecraft takes to be the general situation of wives within a patriarchal economy. In all these cases, marriage forces an economically resourceful woman to make exorbitant sacrifices, which can range from personal happiness, mental

health, economic independence, and custody over her children to personal liberty and physical integrity. Wollstonecraft indirectly repeats the risks-versus-benefits calculation performed by Chapone in *Hardships* and comes to the same conclusion: extant laws are biased and make marriage economically, emotionally, and physically riskier for women than men. Contrary to what legal theory maintains (as embodied by the judge in Chapter 17 of *Wrongs*), in practice, marriage does not protect women but curtails their liberty and exposes them to dangers. Maria therefore “exclaim[s] against the laws which throw the whole weight of the yoke on the weaker shoulders, and force women, when they claim protectorship as mothers, to sign a contract, which renders them dependent on the caprice of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them” (171). Marriage is not a fair, balanced transaction (“contract” in Wollstonecraft’s words), but a game of hazard, which women are forced into if they want to have a family and the prospect of some economic security.

Like Chapone, Wollstonecraft also registers that the alternative of remaining single carries with it comparable economic, emotional, and physical risks. The gruelling biography of Jemima, Maria’s warden in the asylum, exemplifies this predicament: prior to taking up work at the madhouse, Jemima endured physical and mental abuse by her employers, rape, forced abortion, hunger, and injuries. To survive, she worked in a slop shop, as a prostitute, a beggar, a thief, a washerwoman, and a kept mistress. Born to a seduced and abandoned female servant, Jemima embodies the indissoluble link between the sexual and economic exploitation of women – a link of which she is fully aware: “I was, in fact, born a slave, and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of existence” (95). Mary Poovey has read the “radical, indeed feminist story” of Jemima, a *feme sole*, as an alternative economic scenario for women, one that defies the bourgeois trap of matrimony and consequent dispossession. Poovey also observes that “Wollstonecraft does not develop the revolutionary implications of Jemima’s narrative. [. . .] Wollstonecraft is not willing to consider seriously so radical an alternative to women’s oppression” (*Proper* 104). I would argue that the reason why *Wrongs* does not celebrate Jemima’s relative economic agency as a viable alternative, is because it is none, seeing the heavy cost at which it comes. Recounting her biography, Jemima clearly states that “I was still a slave, a bastard, a common property” (98). For Wollstonecraft, Jemima’s suffering as a *feme sole* is but the mirror-opposite of the oppression of a *feme covert*: the patriarchal economy by default forces women, whether married or unmarried, to pay an unreasonably high price for ensuring their survival and material provisioning. It principally relies on the economic exploitation of women, and as long as it lasts, there is no escape: hence the prison metaphor.

Where Chapone seems to have maintained at least some hope that lawmakers would pay heed to the intervention she makes as an English subject, Wollstonecraft sees the denial of subjectivity to women as too pervasive, too systemic, to make reform probable. Anger and a feeling of impotence fuel her narrative. Chapone wrote a text that she hoped would stimulate a fair and rational debate. Wollstonecraft gloomily pre-empts the result of such a debate by imagining how a judge

would respond to her radical challenge of marriage laws, namely by resorting to a one-sided, patriarchal interpretation of utilitarianism: "Too many restrictions could not be thrown in the way of divorces, if we wished to maintain the sanctity of marriage; and, though they might bear a little hard on a few, very few individuals, it was evidently for the good of the whole" (174). For Wollstonecraft, however, like for Chapone, the laws discriminate not only against "a few, very few" unlucky individuals, but systematically sanction the exploitation of one half of humanity to the benefit of the other. This is why, like Chapone, Wollstonecraft sees a structural parallel between slavery and the position of women – a parallel which she had already made explicit in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, [. . .] only to sweeten the cup of man?" (180).

Given that the manuscript of *Wrongs* is incomplete and surviving sketches for its conclusion ambivalent, we cannot be sure on what note Wollstonecraft would have finished her analysis of the economics of marriage. But, as Katharina Rennhak notes, the fragments are rather pessimistic regarding the probability of change (182). Not much, it seems, can be gained from direct opposition, as Maria acknowledges time and again: "By force, or openly, what could be done?" (70). While the patriarchal economy lasts, it is only individual benevolence and the solidarity of like-minded persons that offer some respite. Women must pledge the support and protection of the few enlightened men (Maria's uncle; Darnford) and, above all, exert female economic solidarity (e.g. Maria and Peggy, Maria and her sisters, Maria and Jemima's affective relationship).<sup>14</sup> The latter strategy, Jennifer Golightly points out, also appears in other novels by radical women writers of the 1790s, such as Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, Eliza Fenwick, and Mary Hays:

The radical novels of the 1790s [. . .] frequently end by affirming the conclusions of earlier feminist thought: to experience true independence, women must form alternative communities through which they can work for social change outside the framework of blood, sex, or marriage. Rather than the triumph, therefore, of what comes to be in these novels the male-associated values of property and power through marriage, the female radical novels end by suggesting an alternative community, one that will shelter those members of society who are most frequently exploited in male attempts to accumulate this property and power: women, servants, and children.

(3)

Yet in her hybrid of fiction, autobiography, and theory, Wollstonecraft does not naively imagine an all-female economic counter-utopia. She clearly perceives that the patriarchal economy does not allow for genuine female solidarity but makes women its willing and unwilling accomplices. When George pursues her, Maria is twice evicted from her lodgings, yet not by men but by women; and women, at that, who are in the same position as she, namely, unhappily married to abusive men. The explanation for this paradox is that they act not as free subjects, in

accordance with their own preferences, but bow to the authority of their husbands and man-made law. Mellor hence correctly emphasises “Wollstonecraft’s recognition that often women have no choice but to exploit one another, however unwillingly” (“Righting” 415).<sup>15</sup>

Where solidarity between women is possible, it should, for Wollstonecraft, span class divides. Sloan notes that the fictional biographies of women Maria encounters offer Wollstonecraft’s “middle-class reader access to another world, the reality of existence of many working class women” (229). Indeed, in contrast to Maria, most other female characters in *Wrongs* stem from the labouring classes. Wollstonecraft thus attempts to give voice to and represent them, aesthetically and politically. She formulates this aim in her preface: “to show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various” (68). She therefore suggests that the economic dependence of middle- and lower-class women is a universal, class-spanning phenomenon (which, from a contemporary, intersectional perspective, is a debatable point). The economic female biographies rendered in *Wrongs* add up to the message that within the extant patriarchal economy, it is not in women’s own hands whether they can lead an economically and personally satisfactory life. Regardless of their own efforts, merits, and, to a large extent, class, they remain at the mercy of men in positions of relative power: brothers, husbands, fathers, uncles, judges, attorneys, whoremongers, and prison owners.

### ***Evaluating Wollstonecraft’s contribution***

In her illustrations of the patriarchal economy, “Wollstonecraft finds that one of the most serious of the wrongs society inflicts on woman is that it places virtually insurmountable obstacles in her way to getting and keeping money” (Scheuermann, “Women” 317). She goes to lengths to demonstrate that women of various social classes are perfectly capable of economic activities. Despite the “partial laws of society” (*Wrongs* 137) which significantly and unjustly curtail their economic agency, they manage to earn a living, not only for themselves but also for their children and dependant relatives. Frequently, their diligence, perseverance, and financial prudence must make up for the lack of similar skills in their husbands. But although manifold examples included in the text clearly show that women have all the necessary prerequisites to be endowed with economic liberty and responsibility, they are effectively and lastingly barred from obtaining these rights by a number of interconnected reasons. At the heart of them is the patriarchal organisation of society, enshrined in marriage laws, which turn women into an exploitable resource for men. Wollstonecraft focuses on how husbands may deprive women of their fortunes and wages, but also condemns the concomitant commodification of the wife’s body, which marriage laws reduce to a literally consumable and tradeable good. But not only coverture is detrimental to female economic agency. As *Wrongs* repeatedly puts forward, women have insufficient opportunities to perform waged work and obtain financial independence – which effectively forces them to accept



the unfair marriage deal. In censuring the limited work opportunities for women, Wollstonecraft's text is in keeping with other texts of the late 1790s that demand an extended right to paid work for women, such as Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* and Mary Ann Radcliffe's *The Female Advocate*. Wollstonecraft sees the gap between rich and poor as a further economic factor detrimental to society as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

The major, if socially overlooked, effect of the patriarchal economy – or, in modern economic parlance, its unacknowledged externality – is universal female suffering. *Wrongs of Woman* does not feature a single female character who leads a happy existence. No matter whether affluent or impoverished, married or single, women are rendered miserable by legal, economic, and cultural regulations, which are constructed in such a way as to make women accomplices of the very system that oppresses them. The laws in place essentially leave them but two choices: either that of being socially respected but economically dependent (like Maria in the beginning) or that of being economically relatively independent but poor and/or socially spurned (like Jemima and Maria later on). No matter which of the options a woman chooses, she appears as the weaker sex, which in turn strengthens the patriarchal system with its discriminatory economic effects. In other words, in an act of faulty but self-sustaining logic, patriarchal economics takes for its foundational, 'natural' justification what it systemically brings about in the first place, namely, female submission: an outcome is turned into a cause.

Paradoxically, those who disclose and criticise the defective premises of this 'mad' logic are, like Maria, themselves associated with madness, which neutralises and discredits their criticism. That *Wrongs of Woman* is for the most part set in and thus communicated from a madhouse, is an expression of the restraint on female articulation – a restraint that feminist interventions address and cope with up to this day. The narrator hopes to convince readers that Maria is a sane person held captive in an asylum. But Wollstonecraft's contemporaries largely took the opposite view of *Wrongs of Woman* and, for decades to come, its author would be the one to be considered a mad *persona non grata*. This reaction was partly due to the radical nature of her postulates, partly to the ill-timed decision of her husband William Godwin to publish fragments of *Wrongs of Woman* together with his frank memoirs of her life. While thus doing justice to Wollstonecraft's courage and their shared contempt for hypocrisy, Godwin nevertheless seems to have misjudged the spirit of the times, thereby lastingly damaging his late wife's reputation. Anne K. Mellor sums it up:

In the *Memoirs*, Godwin publicly revealed Wollstonecraft's love affair with Gilbert Imlay and his fathering of her illegitimate daughter Fanny, Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts (in defiance of the Anglican Church's definition of suicide as a sin), and his own sexual liaison with Wollstonecraft long before their marriage. He further asserted, inaccurately, that Wollstonecraft did not call on God on her deathbed. The popular press then widely denounced Wollstonecraft as a whore and an atheist, as well as a dangerous

revolutionary. Their attacks were fueled by the chauvinist, anti-French feelings roused by England's declaration of war against France in 1802, and the hysterical British reaction against all French revolutionary ideas and practices during the Napoleonic campaigns.

(*"Women Writers of Her Day"* 155)

Arguing in a similar spirit, the influential evangelical feminist Hannah More averred in her bestselling *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) that Wollstonecraft belonged to a "most destructive class in the whole wide range of modern corruptors" (1.48) for attacking the sanctity of marriage, and thus both religious doctrine and social stability. It would take nearly two centuries with its momentous cultural shifts until Wollstonecraft's reputation would fully recover and the knowledge she produced be seen as the opposite of madness. From the perspective of today's liberal feminism and feminist economics, many of Maria's/Wollstonecraft's economic observations sound, in fact, like the voice of reason in a mad patriarchal economy.

**Egalitarian economics of marriage: Mary Hays's *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798) and Mary Robinson's *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799)**

***Appeal and the question of authorship***

The year 1798 saw another woman's contribution to feminist economics of marriage besides Wollstonecraft's posthumous *Wrongs of Woman*: the 300-pages-strong *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, published as an anonymous pamphlet by the radical press of Joseph Johnson. The unnamed author, who identifies herself as female throughout the text, explains in her "Advertisement to the Reader" why she chose to conceal her identity: "having written a book which I wish to expose to the public; I yet have not the resolution to submit it, to the eye of friendship or affection; whether most, from fear of partiality or censure, I scarcely myself know" (n. pag.). Adopting a somewhat self-demeaning posture, she adds in the introduction that she wishes "to introduce my defence of the female sex [as] an obscure individual, who wishes not to be thought even the anonymous circulator of opinions, which however just in themselves, might in their tendency breed animosities, where peace and mutual confidence had before been only known" (iv). The author's reticence is understandable, given the egalitarian feminist agenda of *Appeal* and the reactionary mood taking hold of the British public in the late 1790s and early 1800s. But her "fears" (iv) also remind modern readers of the cultural constraints on female articulation, which even this radical author had internalised to some degree. While on the one hand she determined to make her thoughts known to the public, on the other she clearly sensed that she might be pushing the limits of what was considered acceptable by her peers,

even those she called friends. In the "Advertisement", she describes her ambivalence as "a situation perhaps as truly ludicrous as can well be conceived" (n. pag.). It is therefore worth remembering that the economic considerations contained in *Appeal* were formulated not in the certitude of speaking within the mainstream, but from what the author perceived to be a culturally and epistemologically ex-centric vantage point.

Based on a remark by William Thomson and Anna Doyle Wheeler in their *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men* (1825), the authorship of *Appeal* is generally attributed to the Dissenting feminist Mary Hays. Born to a middle-class English family on 4 May 1759, the largely self-educated Hays earned her living through work – a decision that was possibly reinforced by the example of her widowed mother who conducted business as a wine merchant as well as by the fact that Mary Hays never married. (Her fiancé, John Eccles, died unexpectedly in 1780, shortly before the marriage ceremony was to take place.) For most of her life, Hays lived in and around London, pursuing a career as a professional writer and social commentator. Her lifetime output includes poems; pamphlets on religion, politics, and the status of women; two autobiographical novels; journalistic articles and reviews for the *Analytical Review* and *Monthly Magazine*; didactic stories for children and the labouring classes; historical profiles of public female figures; and – together with Charlotte Smith – a history of England. Around 1790, Hays began to form friendships with leading radical intellectuals. Her male acquaintances included William Godwin (whom she introduced to his later wife Mary Wollstonecraft), William Frend, and Joseph Priestley. She was friends with other women writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Eliza Fenwick, and Charlotte Smith; she also met Mary Robinson. However, not all of these friendships endured due to ideological, religious, and personal differences. The public perception of Mary Hays was, similarly to Wollstonecraft's, controversial: while radicals respected and supported her, conservatives condemned and satirised her. She died on 20 February 1843.

The lack of absolute certainty as to who wrote *Appeal* has persisted until today. Gary Kelly has put forward that "much of the *Appeal* resembles the even tone, straightforward style, didactic bent, and pious seriousness characteristic of Eliza Hays" (*Women* 113), Mary's sister. Gina Luria Walker, by contrast, finds that *Appeal* "bears many of [Mary] Hays's hallmarks: feminist claims argued by way of scriptural exegesis [. . .], attention to queenship as proof of women's mental competence, and emphasis on women's natural rights to cognitive and vocational training" (195). The incertitude perhaps explains why scholars so far have tended to pay relatively little attention to *Appeal*, privileging instead the two partially autobiographical novels definitely penned by Mary Hays: *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). I shall reverse this approach in this chapter: although both novels can be and in parts already have been fruitfully investigated for their economic import,<sup>17</sup> I focus only on *Appeal*. To some extent, this shields my analysis from the question of whether Mary Hays truly wrote the text. Even if future research shall reveal that she was not the author (I follow the general tendency and

assume she did), the main claim of my analysis will remain valid: *Appeal* contains an egalitarian economics of marriage formulated by a woman during the Romantic period. In the second half of this chapter, I demonstrate that the egalitarian stance also appears in another feminist document of the late 1790s: Mary Robinson's *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*.

### ***Hays's egalitarian economics of marriage: equality-in-difference***

Hays develops an egalitarian economics of marriage through her recurrent insistence on the equality between men and women and through her demand to balance out the economic rights of husband and wife. In *Appeal*, her observations on coverture and the economic position of (married) women often build on the following points:

- description of the ideal of marriage enshrined in coverture and upheld through social norms: 'Women are protected by men.'
- description of the actual status quo which departs from this ideal: 'Women are exploited by men.'
- suggestions as to which ideal and/or cultural practice ought to be adopted instead: 'Women should be treated as the equals of men and hence granted more (economic) rights.'

Hays's brand of egalitarianism is akin to what in modern parlance is sometimes referred to as difference feminism (see e.g. Lucas): Hays does not negate that there are certain natural differences between men and women. She takes those for granted and even uses them to justify the sexual division of labour within households. But she denounces how the present organisation of society and the economy has translated *differences* between the sexes into a *hierarchy* between the sexes. Hays, by contrast, promotes equality-in-difference, that is an arrangement which recognises that the different contributions both sexes make to society and the economy are different in kind but equal in value, which is why men and women can lay claim to comparable (economic) rights.

Hays explains in the introduction that *Appeal* is "an attempt to restore female character to its dignity and independence" (iv) addressed to the men of Great Britain, as this is the group invested with the power to amend women's legal, economic, educational, and social position. In terms of its aims, therefore, *Appeal* is comparable to Chapon's *Hardships*. In contrast to Chapon and Wollstonecraft, however, Hays's *Appeal* does not single out coverture as one of her major concerns. Instead, she develops a broad feminist argument that exposes "the arts which had been employed, to keep [women] in a state of PERPETUAL BABYISM" (97). Proceeding from her belief in the equality of the sexes, Hays offers a critique of how education, religion, the institution of marriage, and limits on female legal and economic agency combine to deny an equal status to women. This line

of thinking is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and Hays indeed pays tribute to "the Rights of Woman by Miss Wollstonecraft" (n. pag.) in her "Advertisement". She explains that she began to write *Appeal* in the early 1790s, but when *Rights of Woman* appeared in 1792, she temporarily abandoned her project, deeming it secondary to her friend's achievement. As several critics have shown (e.g. Kelly, *Women*; Nowka; Rennhak; Sloan), although the feminisms represented by Wollstonecraft and Hays do have much in common, Hays's writings are nevertheless worthy of consideration on their own. This also holds true of *Appeal*. According to the *Orlando* database of women's writing, "[i]f it had indeed preceded Wollstonecraft it would no doubt be seen now as a landmark text" (Brown et al. "Mary Hays: Writing"). Because of its ample, feminist scope, *Appeal* cannot be considered an economic text in its entirety. Put differently, *Appeal* is feminist first and economic second, but the two strands are indissolubly interconnected. To carve out the pamphlet's egalitarian economics of marriage, I will retrace its quinquupartite structure and then focus on the main claims of the fifth and longest part.

The first two parts of *Appeal* are in some respects comparable to Part I of my book, in that Hays, too, engages with epistemological contexts. The first section (1–25) treats of "Arguments Adduced from Scripture against the Subjection of Women". Hays uses religious considerations derived from her Dissenting background to lay the ground for the egalitarian attitude that will fuel her subsequent economic reflections.<sup>18</sup> The economy appears in this section but is not central to it. Like Chapone, Hays stresses that the Old Testament, and in particular humanity's fall from grace, neither exempts men from taking up the same share of labour as women nor justifies women's enslavement by men:

I therefore upon the whole sum up my argument with this conclusion, that if those texts of scripture that we allude to, are considered binding and entailed upon the human race; [. . .] the men are as much bound to perpetual toil and hard labor, as the women to perpetual and undistinguished obedience. And that men, by breaking through laws of equal authority, with those by which they endeavour to enslave the other sex; with all their boasted superiority, set women a very bad example, both in principle and practice.

(6–7)

Yet Hays goes on to argue that modelling the relation between men and women on that between Adam and Eve is "absurd" (6), as it disregards the "clear, simple, practical, and merciful" (15) teachings of Christ which ordain a more equal relationship between the sexes. Hays quotes passages from the New Testament to prove an axiom of her entire argument: "God created mankind male and female, different indeed in sex for the wisest and best purposes, but equal in rank, because of equal utility" (21). She thus reads the New Testament as propagating equality-in-difference – a standpoint that also influences her economic considerations in the second half of *Appeal*, for instance, when she implies that although the work

performed by men and women is different in kind (mostly because of the disparity in physical strength), it is equally useful and thus of equal value. Hays moreover references the New Testament to prepare the ground for her ensuing critique of marriage laws: “we find that our Saviour is [. . .] far from giving men any encouragement to assume authority over their wives, and put them away for every cause” (22). She concludes by boldly translating Christ’s teachings into an egalitarian feminist proposition: “in the Christian system, as delivered by its divine founder, there is not [. . .] a single sentence [. . .] against the liberty, equality, or consequence of Woman” (25). In the first part of *Appeal*, then, Hays draws on the Bible, that is on what at that period was still the universal authority on moral and epistemological questions, to demonstrate that her demand to recognise the equality of the sexes is not heresy, but congruent with the established system of thought.

Having engaged with religious doctrine, Hays moves on to confront a second, secular source of authority: reason. The next part of *Appeal* challenges “Arguments Adduced from Reason against the Subjection of Women” (27–46). Here, Hays elaborates on an issue raised by Chapone, Wollstonecraft, and Robinson, but also by conservative writers like Hannah More, namely, the gender bias in education, which often produces those inferior qualities in women which are then used to justify their subordination. Hays repeatedly emphasises that women are debarred from equal access to knowledge: she can think of “no age or nation” where women were “educated with the same attention to mental improvement as men” (33). Her observations resonate with my claim in this book, as Hays also seeks to explain the scarcity of women’s contributions to scholarship and points to the special status of literature:

If in the arts and sciences women have not so frequently excelled, as in politics<sup>19</sup> and literature; it is impossible to prove that it is not, nay there is every probability that it is, because their education and opportunities have been still less suited, to give them a chance for perfection in these; and because their natural delicacy of frame, nursed to a vicious extreme, is here, generally speaking, evidently against them.

(39–40)

While Hays therefore concedes that there is a “natural delicacy” in women, she avers that cultural conditioning has disproportionately magnified biological differences. She declares in the conclusion to the second part of *Appeal* that “the abilities and capacities of the sexes are so nearly alike, that with equal advantages it were difficult to determine to whom the palm were due” (45). Detectable behind those words is the fairly modern demand for equal opportunities.

Alternating in tone between sarcasm and self-imposed humility, *Appeal*’s third part considers “What Men Would Have Women to Be” (47–65). Significantly, Hays opens this section by proposing that the organisation of gender relations in society should be viewed as a “system” (47). She explains that this approach would mitigate the anger her reflections might produce, presumably by making her

criticism systemic rather than personal. At the same time, the attempt to describe the gender-based organisation of society as a system – namely as a “system of contradictions” (49), a “fanciful system of arbitrary authority” (52) – clearly bespeaks the perspective of an early social scientist. It is on these rational grounds and embracing an allegedly ‘masculine’ mode of reasoning that Hays then attacks the sexual double standard and exposes its inconsistency: women are expected to be virtuous and chaste, but are at the same time denied rights that are indispensable for fulfilling this social role. In this context, Hays emphasises that without economic agency, it is impossible for wives to live up to the cultural ideal of virtuous and charitable femininity:

[W]omen are often connected with men, whose shameful extravagance leave little for their families to hope for, but poverty, and the consequent neglect of a hard-hearted world. In this case perhaps, in the little sphere in which she is permitted to move, a wife may likewise be permitted to economise; but the fruits of her economy are still at the mercy of an imperious master, who thinks himself entitled to spend upon his unlawful pleasures, what might have procured her, innocent enjoyment, and rational delight. And, I am sorry to add, that the men in general are but too apt in these cases, as well as upon most other occasions, to take the part of their own sex; and to consider nothing as blameable in them to such a degree, as to justify opposition from the women connected with them.

Again, women of liberal sentiments and expanded hearts [. . .] who would willingly employ fortune in acts of benevolence and schemes of beneficence; are connected with men, sordid in principle, rapacious in acquiring riches, and contemptibly mean in restraining them from returning again into society, through their proper channels. Woman here again is the sport, of the vices and infirmities of her tyrant [. . .].

(53–54)

Hays advances that by limiting women's scope for action, coverture may hinder the welfare of a family and the creation of a virtuous society. She thus lays bare the material dimensions of morality, which is a central aspect of Jane Austen's moral economics. Hays's remark that through charity, money “return[s] again into society, through their proper channels” moreover suggests that she conceives of the ideal economy in terms of uninterrupted (monetary) circulation; clogging up this system by amassing fortunes is seen by her as both an economic and a moral failure – an issue that Austen also raises in *Sense and Sensibility*. By evoking examples of spendthrift, miserly, and greedy husbands, Hays furthermore demonstrates – like Chapon, Wollstonecraft, and, again, Austen – that marriage laws take for granted the ideal of a financially responsible male head of the family, but leave women powerless when reality turns out to be less satisfactory.

Hays continues her polemical, yet stringent line of thought in the next part entitled “What Women Are” (67–123). Here, she concentrates on the perceived flaws of women, but hastens to add that these are largely the result of an oppressive system. It is remarkable how she describes the longevity and self-sustaining mechanism of what in contemporary phrasing would qualify as hegemonies:

I hold it as an infallible truth [. . .] that any race of people, or I should rather say any class of rational beings [. . .] may be held in a state of subjection and dependence from generation to generation, by another party, who, by a variety of circumstances, none of them depending on actual, original superiority of mind, may have established an authority over them. And it must be acknowledged a truth equally infallible, that any class so held in a state of subjection and dependence, will degenerate both in body and mind.

(69)

Hays then makes apparent through what she calls “a little story” (72) that one means of achieving the “subjection and dependence” which stabilises hegemony is by taking away property rights from the oppressed – in this case, women. Hays’s biting and, it seems, self-invented tale is worth quoting in length:

A Brother and Sister were one day going to market with some eggs, and other country provisions to sell. ‘Dear Jacky’, said the sister, after a good deal of consideration, and not a little proud of her powers of calculation, – ‘Dear Jacky, you have somehow made a very unfair division of our eggs, of which you know it was intended that we should have equal shares; so pray give me two dozen of yours, and I shall then have as many as you have.’ ‘No’, says John, – John Bull as likely as any John, – ‘that would never do; but dear, sweet, pretty sister Peg, give me one dozen of yours, and then I shall have five times as many as you have; which you know will be quite the same as if you had them yourself, or indeed better; as I shall save you the trouble of carrying them, shall protect you and the rest of your property, and shall besides give you many fine things when we get to the fair – Bless me, Margaret! What is the matter with you? How frightful you always are when in a passion! And how horribly ugly you look whenever you contradict me! I wish poor Ralph the miller saw you just now, I’m sure he’d never look at you again. Besides, sister of mine, since you force me to it, and provoke me beyond all bearing, I must tell you, that as I am stronger than you, I can take them whether you will or no.’ The thing was no sooner said than done, and poor Peg, found herself obliged to submit to something much more convincing than her brother’s logic.

On they jogged however together, Peg pouting all the way, and John not a bit the civiler for having got what he knew in his heart he had no title to; and when they got to the fair, poor Peg’s property, of which he was to have been the faithful guardian, and careful steward; went with his own, to purchase



baubles and gin for his worthless favorite. But then, had not Peg pretended to put herself upon a footing of equality with him; or had she even after all, but calmly and quietly given up her own rights without murmuring, – nothing so easy as that, till it comes home to a man's own case, – he swore manfully that there should not have been a word between them.

(72–74)

Hays's acrimonious economic parable renders in a nutshell and at the same time parodies the functioning of English marriage laws. As brother and sister, Margaret and John – much like husband and wife – should mutually support each other, divide their work, and have the right to “equal shares” of their property. Yet the man demands a larger share and justifies his claims to the woman's possession with his intention to “protect” it, to be its “faithful guardian, and careful steward”. This is a clear nod to validations of coverture and perhaps even to the “wing, protection, and *cover*” evoked by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries*. Hays exposes coverture's flaw by illustrating that it does not sufficiently protect the weaker party from potential usurpations by the stronger one – stronger both in actual and metaphorical terms. The parable makes clear that regardless of whether the woman protests or complies – of whether she “pout[s]” or “calmly and quietly give[s] up her own rights without murmuring” – in economic terms, the result stays the same: the man self-righteously takes over her property. The tale also revisits the familiar trope of a man squandering the woman's property on another “favorite”. Hays's parable thus endorses a key proposition of feminist economics of marriage: wives incur more risks in the marriage transaction than men.

The fifth and longest part of *Appeal*, titled “What Women Ought to Be” (125–293), reiterates that matrimony constitutes a risk for women. Hays states that “upon the whole women gain nothing, and lose much” (141) and “in general feel the mortifications only, – without the promised and boasted benefits” (143). The logical consequence of this imbalance is for Hays to demand “that wives are insured of something which they can call their own” (284), particularly in cases where both partners dispose of fortunes. Here, she apparently backs protective regulations obtainable under equity. Her usage of the word “insure” is notable, as it implies that if only common law is relied upon, marriage becomes a hazardous and potentially unfair transaction for women. Hays avers that it is untenable to have the subsistence of women depend merely on an ideal and to make them incur more risks than men if this ideal does not materialise:

It is pretty bold to defend a custom [i.e. a wife's right to separate property], which is much objected to by many, – and I believe with much sincerity and good intention, – as tending to a separation of interests in a connection, where no such distinction *ought* to take place. I am most ready to allow, that no such distinction ought to take place, if it could be avoided; but alas! Where there are different tempers, different opinions, and where different passions predominate; it is not perhaps possible, but that this distinction

should often in some degree, take place. And if it does so, where is the justice of throwing all the weight into one scale?

(284–85)

The passage is characteristic of Hays's overall take on the economics of marriage, in that she contrasts cultural ideals with actual social practice. Often, it is from the exposed disparity between the two that she derives the legitimacy to champion legal, economic, and cultural changes.

Hays challenges the patriarchal assumption that the subordination of wives can be justified as deriving from a father's authority over his daughter. For Hays, "matrimony – though a bond so sacred, so absolutely essential to the comfort and peace of society [. . .] – is yet in a great degree but a civil contract" (262–63), not a natural relationship established through birth. This contractual notion of marriage presupposes a degree of voluntariness in both partners, which allows Hays to subsequently assert that it is necessary to "adjust the balance" (286) between the spouses as regards their property rights.<sup>20</sup> She argues in a longer passage devoted to the economic dependence of married women that "fortune being in the present state of things, that which procures every comfort, conveniency, elegance and honour, which this world affords; [women] cannot be accused of being too palpably interested, in wishing to share in it, in a reasonable degree" (280). *Appeal* consequently condemns the fact that men have, "by the most ample and exclusive privileges, secured [money] chiefly in their own hands" (281). The justification men usually provide for the economic disparities between the sexes is "that it is of little consequence whether women have fortunes or not, as in the course of human events it circulates among them; and that the equilibrium is restored by marriage, which raises women to a participation and communion of fortune" (281). Like Chapone in *Hardships*, Hays takes issue with the patriarchal doctrine of the "equilibrium". She points out that it falsely universalises marriage as the norm and that coverture perpetuates economic imbalances between men and women instead of mitigating them:

For, *all* men do not marry. *All* women are not married. And even those who *are*, find that this participation and community of fortune is often merely verbal; – words without any meaning whatever; – and that they are in this respect, as well as in most others, as completely dependent upon their husbands, as it is possible for any one human being to be upon another. They find in short and few words, that a wife is neither more, nor less, than – a great baby in leading-strings – a character which a woman cannot help being a little ashamed of [. . .].

(281–82)

For Hays, such discriminatory effects of common law derive from a faulty legislative system in which those whom the laws affect do not have a say in devising them:

I may be permitted to say, that it [i.e. coverture] is a very unjust, and a very clumsy contrivance, and bears very evident marks of a barbarous age, and of

barbarous and bungling legislators; who, with some general and confused ideas in their head, of the necessity of subordination – though without sufficient political discrimination, to reconcile necessary subordination with justice – sat down with all the gravity imaginable to make laws [. . .]. And who, in the true pride of ignorance, were too consequential to apply for elucidation to those, who, most undoubtedly were best able to detail their own grievances, and perhaps [. . .] not least able, to point out an antidote or prescribe a cure.

(285–86)

Hays's implicit demand for women's political emancipation and right to participation echoes Wollstonecraft's request in *Rights of Woman* that "women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (182). Both authors highlight therefore the interdependence of women's political and economic marginalisation.

Because of her clear grasp of patriarchy's hegemonic nature, Hays is aware of her own precarious position in it: to bring about change, she needs the support of those who profit from it and whom she attacks in her text. She stresses that "the greatest difficulty is to bring men to consider the subject with attention" (68–69): since men benefit from the system, they have little incentive to reform it. As a way out of this impasse, Hays resorts to a utilitarian argument and emphasises that if women were "put in full possession" of rights, they "would not only increase their own stock of happiness; but, however it might affect individuals, which can never be guarded against in any system, or any plan of reformation whatever, would certainly meliorate the mass of humanity upon the whole" (75). It is on this rich version of utilitarianism that she concludes her *Appeal*: "Of this however we are certain, if universal justice were to prevail among mankind, – in which of course we include womankind, – that we should then be on the high road to happiness [. . .]" (291). In *Appeal*, then, as in Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections*, the author harnesses a utilitarian rationale to make the emancipatory aspirations of the disenfranchised palatable to the beneficiaries of the asymmetrical social organisation. Hays hopes that in such a way, she can persuade men to "voluntarily contribute their mite, by sacrificing some of their self-formed, self-claimed privileges, to the same important purpose, to which women are forced to contribute so large a share" (156). As this formulation evinces, Hays sees society as a system of giving and taking, with men at present living at the expense of women. In more abstract terms, then, Hays's *Appeal* advocates a redistribution of material and immaterial resources within society from men to women. The direction she proposes for establishing a balance is hence the exact opposite of the patriarchal doctrine of 'equilibrium' manifest in coverture, which transferred resources from women to men.

Hays combines the utilitarian outlook with an argument that is usually associated with Adam Smith: she claims that a woman's self-interest redounds to the public good. Addressing men in the name of women, she explains: "there are two things, the first of which we ought, and the last of which we do, prefer even to you;

because it is in the very nature of things that we must do so – And these are – Our duty to God, – And the consideration of our own happiness” (145). Adopting a similar logic as Smith, and grounding it explicitly in faith in Providential benevolence, Hays puts forward that women’s attention to their own wellbeing will translate into collective welfare:

[S]elf, either in a bad or a good sense must ever predominate, ever in the end prevail. [. . .] [This] principle, like all the other operations of an all-wise Providence, tends to universal good, though it may be perverted to partial, or temporary evil. It may be reduced to a very narrow, or extended to a very comprehensive circle. It may be indeed selfish, in the worst sense of the term; or it may be trained to find its happiness in communicating happiness to all around it, by channels, which will return it an hundred fold, in its own bosom.

(223–24)

The distinction between narrow selfishness and a morally and economically commendable self-interest is at the centre of Jane Austen’s moral economics in *Sense and Sensibility*. Neither author explicitly refers to Adam Smith or to political economy, yet it is noteworthy that a variant of the key proposition of classical political economy also appears in women’s economic thought around 1800. The doctrine of ‘universal good through self-interest’ allows female economic writers to frame their demands for women’s/wives’ subjecthood and emancipation as conducive to public wellbeing rather than reflecting partisan egoisms. The strategic advantage of this approach is that it makes their claims potentially more acceptable to those who have the power to endorse reforms.

### ***The sexual division of labour within marriage: Hays’s Appeal and Robinson’s Letter***

In its egalitarian economics of marriage, *Appeal* in some respects resembles *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination, with Anecdotes*, written by the author and actress Mary Robinson. Robinson first published her tract in 1797 in several periodicals (Brown et al. “Mary Robinson: Writing”) and in 1799 as an independent, 104–pages-long piece. Both times, she concealed her identity under the pen names Miss Randall and Anne Frances Randall. Ashley Cross observes in this context that “[b]y the time *Letter* appeared, writing such a tract was not remarkable, nor financially rewarding, and more than likely damning” (149). A first similarity between *Appeal* and *Letter* is therefore that the economic observations in *Letter* were also originally formulated from a socially hazardous position – even if in 1799, a year prior to her death, Robinson chose to reissue *Letter* under her own name as *Thoughts on the Condition of Women and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*. A second parallel is that both authors explicitly pay tribute to *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Wollstonecraft, whom Robinson terms “an illustrious

British female, [. . .] whose death has not been sufficiently lamented, but to whose genius posterity will render justice" (131). In fact, much of Robinson's writing evinces the radical positions embraced in the intellectual circles frequented by her, Hays, and Wollstonecraft. A third parallel is that *Appeal* and *Letter* develop economic arguments in the larger framework of a feminist agenda: neither text is an economic analysis in its entirety, but both condemn women's economic disenfranchisement and the particularly vulnerable position of wives as obstacles to an equal and just society, and both comment in insightful ways on the sexual division of labour within marriage. This is why although *Letter's* focus lies more explicitly than *Appeal's* on the promotion of women's educational and mental emancipation, it is instructive to read the two pamphlets alongside each other as contributions to feminist economics of marriage.

Before turning to *Letter*, it is informative to say a few words about its author. Mary Robinson's was a turbulent and relatively short life. She was likely born on 27 November 1758 and died on 26 December 1800. From 1776 to 1780, she was a celebrated actress on the stages of London, and it is safe to say that she also played many parts in her biography: she was the wife of a lawyer's clerk and the mistress of the Prince of Wales (later George IV); a professional earning money through acting and writing and a debtor fleeing from creditors; an object of reverence and desire for men of power and the butt of ridicule and vicious satire for the popular press; an attractive, attention-seeking fashion icon and an impoverished invalid tarnished by the reputation of a fallen woman. While a full account of Robinson's life by far surpasses the scope of this analysis, a few details from her economic biography suggest that some of Robinson's observations in *Letter* derive from first-hand experience. Robinson was born Mary Darby in Bristol to a middle-class family. Her father was a merchant who lost the family property in a miscarried overseas investment. According to the *Orlando* database, "[t]he collapse of her father's entrepreneurial venture plunged [her] and her family from affluence to poverty. He made things worse for his wife by remaining in America with a mistress" (Brown et al. "Mary Robinson: Life"). Mary's mother consequently sought to support herself and her children by opening a school where Mary worked as a teacher. But the brief spell of economic agency ended when Mary's father returned and, "shocked by this example of his wife's enterprise" (Levy), ordered the school's closure. It would therefore seem that by witnessing her parents' relationship, Mary Robinson experienced the negative effects of a husband's economic prerogatives already in her youth.

Robinson's own marriage, which began in 1773, confirmed that a wife's economic status is inextricably linked to that of her husband. Because of debts he had incurred before and during marriage, Thomas Robinson was arrested and put into the Fleet Prison in 1775, where he was duly accompanied by his wife and daughter, who remained there for the duration of almost ten months. The *Orlando* article mentions further that Robinson's posthumously published *Memoirs* contain a description of how "[o]ne of her husband's creditors tried to blackmail her into bed with him to save Thomas Robinson from another spell in jail" (Brown et al. "Mary Robinson: Life") – thus subjecting Mary to a similarly degrading experience as the

one made by her fictitious namesake in Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman*. Before and after their release from prison, the Robinsons frequently moved from one place to another to escape creditors. Because of her own tendency to overspend and indulge in a lavish lifestyle, Mary would continue this pattern of behaviour after her separation from Thomas, which ensued after she became involved with the Prince of Wales.

Robinson's notorious affair with the Prince of Wales in 1779/80 also had an economic underpinning: the Prince promised in writing that he would pay the considerable sum of £20,000 upon her becoming his mistress. Robinson seems to have been keenly aware that female sexuality could be priced, and she took advantage of this fact as well as of her sexual value during this and her later liaisons. She might have calculated that by becoming the Prince's lover despite being married, she ran the danger of compromising herself as a 'fallen woman'; she perhaps regarded the sum as a suitable compensation for incurring the risk of social ostracism. In the end, the affair between Robinson and the Prince lasted for a few months and became public, seriously damaging Robinson's reputation. When the Prince found a new favourite, he declined to pay the agreed sum, and it took the intervention of Robinson's new lover, Charles James Fox, to extract an annuity of £500 from the Prince, that is 2.5% of the amount he had promised to pay her outright.

Traces of Robinson's personal experiences can be found in her published works, which include love poems, erotic sonnets, satirical odes, plays, journalistic pieces, novels, and autobiographical writing. At least three of her novels deserve further attention regarding their economic import: *The Widow* (1794), *Angelina* (1796), and *The Natural Daughter* (1799). Cross, for example, has commented on the remarkable similarity between *The Natural Daughter* and Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* as regards their cautionary representations of marriage:

Each [novel] begins with the supposedly stable state of mature femininity, marriage, to exhibit the costs of the heroine's bad choices. Both heroines choose husbands based on a superficial perception of them and are unprepared for the subjection their marriages entail. These husbands misinterpret their behavior, accuse them of adultery of which they themselves have been guilty, hunt them down [. . .], and mentally and physically abuse them.

(154–55)

While Cross reads these parallels as a critique of the marriage plot prevalent in (sentimental) fiction of the period, I would argue that Wollstonecraft's and Robinson's novels are not only responses to a literary tradition but also analyses of economic reality. *Angelina*, too, as Sharon M. Setzer has demonstrated, expresses Robinson's condemnation of "the marriage market, the slave trade, and the 'cruel business' of war" (56–73).

A keen awareness of the interrelation between gender politics and the economy pervades Robinson's *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental*

*Subordination.* One of *Letter's* argumentative cornerstones is a logical flaw within justifications of patriarchy: although patriarchy on the one hand proclaims women to be the weaker sex, it on the other systematically forces them to endure more hardships than men. Robinson sees this paradox at work in the unjust property regulations of coverture:

There is scarcely an event in human existence, in which the oppression of woman is not tolerated. The laws are made by man; [. . .] woman is destined to be the passive creature: she is to yield obedience, and to depend for support upon a being who is perpetually authorised to deceive her. If a woman be married, her property becomes her husband's; and yet she is amenable to the laws, if she contracts debts beyond what that husband and those laws pronounce the necessaries of existence. If the comforts, or even the conveniences of woman's life rest on the mercy of her ruler, they will be limited indeed. We have seen innumerable instances, in cases of divorce, where the weaker, the defenceless partner is allotted a scanty pittance, upon which she is expected to live *honourably*; while the husband, the lord of the creation, in the very plenitude of wealth, in the very zenith of splendour, is permitted openly to indulge in every *dishonourable* propensity. Yet, he is commiserated as the injured party; and she is branded with the name of infamous: though he is deemed the *stronger*, and she the *weaker* creature.

(154–55)

Robinson stresses a point that is vital for Hays but also for Chapone and Wollstonecraft: under extant laws, wives are not truly free, but remain at the mercy of men. Robinson repeatedly proclaims in *Letter* that with limited political and economic rights women are “defenceless” (131, 134, 155) and “denied the power to assert the first of Nature's rights, self-preservation” (133; see also 153). Hays similarly concludes: “In the married state therefore, a woman has but one chance for justice [. . .] that of her husband happening to be, a sensible, a reasonable, a humane man, in a more than ordinary degree” (282). A wife's personal and economic well-being is shown to hinge on luck; marriage once more emerges in this context as a highly speculative and risky transaction for women and thus as the opposite of the protecting arrangement it is declared to be. Mary Hays elaborates further on this claim by demonstrating that with limited economic rights, a wife's material comforts are more dependent on her husband's character than on her own actions:

And what is indeed very hard, and shews that there is no kind of injury to which a woman is not *liable* in the married state, she is often nearly as ill off with a spendthrift, as a miser. For the first has too many bad ways of laying out his money, to be supposed always ready to allow his wife a decent and reasonable share; whereas if a miser is ungenerous to his wife, she sees, that what he is mean enough to withhold from her, he has likewise lost the power of using himself; except we allow voluntary *privation* to be *enjoyment*.

And if she has a family, it will be some consolation to her to reflect, that he is *amassing* for them, what he denies to her. Both profligate and avaricious characters are however detestable; and hard enough it is, for people of a right and moderate way of thinking, to be pensioners at will of either.

(283–84)

With this statement, Hays condemns overspending and parsimony and therefore repeats her implicit advocacy of the perfect economy as a harmonious balance between consumption and saving.

Robinson also comments on the economic agency of women but emphasises a different aspect. She denounces the fact that regardless of how a woman disposes of money, she is likely to be associated with squandering or stinginess, that is the condemnable extremes of economic behaviour singled out by Hays:

If she is liberal, generous, careless of wealth, friendly to the unfortunate, and bountiful to persecuted merit, she is deemed prodigal, and over-much profuse; all the good she does, every tear she steals from the downcast eye of modest worth, every sigh she converts into a throb of joy, in grateful bosoms, is, by the world, forgotten; while the ingenuous liberality of her soul excites the imputation of folly and extravagance. If, on the contrary, she is wary, shrewd, thrifty, economical, and eager to procure and to preserve the advantages of independence; she is condemned as narrow-minded, mean, unfeeling, artful, mercenary, and base: in either case she is exposed to censure. If liberal, unpitied; if sordid, execrated! In a few words, a generous woman is termed a *fool*; a prudent one, a *prodigal*.

(156)

Whether Robinson's starkly negative portrayal was accurate is certainly up to debate. Yet it is true that the stereotype of women as unsuited to deal with money did exist and was circulated (see, for instance, the review of Chapone's *Hardships* quoted earlier). Such deep-seated cultural assumptions created cultural barriers to women's full economic agency, on top of legal ones. They perpetuated the belief that reducing women's access to money was a sensible and inevitable precaution. Women's economic thought during the Romantic Age marks a condensed effort to disprove the validity of this supposition and to make a case for women's economic rationality and agency.

Hays's *Appeal* and Robinson's *Letter* are particularly noteworthy for their comments on the sexual division of labour within marriage. Restating the basic premise of her egalitarian economics of marriage, Hays puts forward that women "ought to be considered as the companions and equals, not as the inferiors, – much less as they virtually are, – as the slaves of men" (127). Robinson also endorses equality, in the biting tone that pervades her entire polemic: "I shall remind my enlightened country-women that they are not the mere appendages of domestic life, but the partners, the equal associates of man [. . .]" (131). The statements imply that



the relationship between the sexes is at present not an equal, but a hierarchical one. Significantly, both texts connect this asymmetrical relation to the economy: the subordination of women, and wives in particular, works to men's favour by compelling women to perform particular forms of labour, above all in the realms of sexuality, household duties, and care work. Robinson proclaims: "There are but three classes of women desirable associates in the eyes of men: handsome women; licentious women; and good sort of women. – The first for his vanity; the second for his amusement; and the last for the arrangement of his domestic drudgery" (147). Hays underscores that women "were originally intended, to be the helpmates of the other sex, as the Scripture most emphatically and explicitly calls them; and not their drudges in the common ranks, and the tools of their passions and prejudices in the higher" (127–28). She thus repeats an argument Chappone had also made: the present structure of the economy is a perversion of God's original intention in being more punitive towards women than is warranted by the Bible.

Hays and Robinson analyse women's involvement in what they tellingly term "domestic drudgery" (Hays 256; Robinson 134, 147) and investigate the status of household and care work. Neither Hays nor Robinson questions the sexual division of labour as such. In contrast to many feminists today, they agree that domestic and care work falls into the feminine realm. What they do object to, however, is that by denying autonomy to married women, the institution of marriage in its present form makes this kind of work compulsory for wives, thereby decreasing its prestige and value. Robinson states in this context:

I agree that, according to the long established rule of custom, domestic occupations, such as household management, the education of children, the exercise of rational affection, should devolve on woman. But let the partner of her cares consider her zeal as the effect of reason, temporizing sensibility, and prompting the exertions of mutual interest; not as the constrained obsequiousness of inferior organization. Let man confess that a wife, (I do not mean an *idiot*), is a thinking and a discriminating helpmate; not a bondswoman, whom custom subjects to his power, and subdues to his convenience.

(151)

Implicit in this reasoning is the understanding that those who can freely decide on how to employ their skills have more bargaining power and consequently enjoy a higher economic and cultural status than those who do not. Robinson suggests that by automatically allocating domestic and care work to (married) women, patriarchy obscures the value of their contributions, demeans their social position, and therefore makes it comparable to that of a "bondswoman" or slave, that is a person who may not dispose freely of her or his bodily and intellectual resources. A drudge is, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, "[o]ne employed in mean, servile, or distasteful work; a slave, a hack; a hard toiler" ("drudge" *OED*); Robinson and Hays

repeatedly employ the words “drudge” and “drudgery” with regard to women’s domestic work.

The authors assert that such a denigration of women within households not only contradicts holy strictures but is also wholly unnecessary: as men’s equals, women would continue to voluntarily contribute what they now perform under compulsion. Robinson explains:

The aristocracy of kingdoms will say, that it is absolutely necessary to extort obedience: if all were masters, who then would stoop to serve? By the same rule, man exclaims, if we allow the softer sex to participate in the intellectual rights and privileges we enjoy, who will arrange our domestic drudgery? who will reign [. . .] in our household establishments? who will rear our progeny; obey our commands; be our affianced vassals; the creatures of our pleasures? I answer, women, but they will not be your slaves; they will be your associates, your equals in the extensive scale of civilized society; and in the indisputable rights of nature.

(134)

The passage makes visible how Robinson, like Hays, attempts to sell her reformist agenda to the beneficiaries of the present economy: for men, she argues, not much would change in terms of the sexual division of labour if women were emancipated. It is difficult to gauge to what extent Robinson really held this opinion and to what extent her assuaging argument has above all strategic purposes.

Hays equally stresses that “attention to children and family [. . .] ought to be the prominent feature in the character and employment of every woman who has children and families to attend to” (169). Yet she avers that it is socially undesirable that all women perform domestic and care work: “I hope I am already too well known to my readers, for them to suppose, that I mean [. . .] that all women should be mere nurses and household drudges. This is neither to be expected nor wished for in the present advanced state of society” (169). Nevertheless, revealing a conflicted attitude to the gender norms of her times, Hays later mitigates this challenge to the sexual division of labour. A longer passage draws on the language and imagery of sensibility to emphasise that although women have the right to individual fulfilment, it ought to remain secondary to their caring duties:

Thus if a woman is so circumstanced, as sometimes unfortunately happens, that the pursuit of knowledge, or accomplishments of whatever kind, interfered with her duty in any of the leading characters of the sex, as daughter, sister, wife, or mother; a woman of sense will not for a moment balance between these. Shall she to acquire, or cultivate such – however genius may impel, or interest bribe, or vanity allure her from her post – shall she neglect the aged parent, who trusts to her alone for comfort and support? Shall she who in infancy drank of his cup when it was full, and pleasant to the taste; leave him in his old age, to drink the bitter dregs alone? Shall she who lay

in his bosom and was fondly cherished there; return his fostering care and tender love, with partial attention, and forced services? Forbid it gratitude! – forbid it tenderness! – and every female charity forbid it! Were a woman to gain all the riches of the Indias, and all the talents and accomplishments which men adore and women envy, – she would gain a portion of misery along with them, sufficient to dash the cup of happiness from her lips, and destroy her peace for ever.

(202–03)

Although the excerpt features economic vocabulary (“balance”, “acquire”, “interest”, “bribe”, “forced services”, “riches”, “gain”), it derives its persuasive force more from rhetoric and emotional manipulation than, as is the case elsewhere in *Appeal*, from rational arguments. By evoking the lonely, suffering parent and by heaping rhetorical questions, exclamations, and hyperboles, Hays presents women who fail to take up care work as guilty, selfish, ungrateful, and morally condemnable. To the modern reader, the passage reveals that the sexual division of labour has been upheld not only through institutional arrangements, but also through moral and emotional conditioning. While throughout *Appeal*, Hays shows herself aware and critical of the institutional contexts, in the question of feminine duties she remains complicit with the gender dictates of her times and paradoxically stabilises the patriarchal economy that she takes issue with elsewhere.

Robinson concurs, if perhaps more reluctantly, that caring for the sick and needy is a wife's duty. However, she does not idealise this type of feminine work, but draws attention to its unacknowledged onerousness instead:

A wife is bound, by the laws of nature and religion, to participate in all the various vicissitudes of fortune, which her husband may, through life, be compelled to experience. She is to combat all the storms of an adverse destiny; to share the sorrows of adversity, imprisonment, sickness, and disgrace. She is obliged to labour for their mutual support, to watch in the chamber of contagious disease; to endure patiently, the peevish inquietude of a weary spirit; to bear, with tacit resignation, reproach, neglect, and scorn; or, by resisting, to be stigmatized as a violator of domestic peace, an enemy to decorum, an *undutiful* wife, and an unworthy member of society. Hapless woman! Why is she condemned to bear this load of persecution, this Herculean mental toil, this labour of Syssiphus; this more than Ixion's sufferings, as fabled by heathen mythologists? Because she is of the *weaker* sex!

(151)

Robinson uses various rhetorical techniques – hyperboles, enumerations, mythical references – to render visible how arduous a wife's caring duties and emotional labour can be. She thus vindicates the value of women's household and care work and returns to the paradox that women are termed “the weaker sex”, but nevertheless expected to perform difficult labour. Hays, too, criticises the double standard

when she rhetorically asks: “while a man is squandering his fortune at a gaming house, or on the turf, or in other places which it becomes not the delicacy of a female scarcely to allude to; – can he have the conscience to preach up – can he reasonably expect – that his wife shall dedicate her time, to domestic drudgeries at home?” (245–46). Yet Hays’s criticism does not translate into the demand that women should abandon their “drudgeries”; rather, she concludes that their “submissive and homely employments” would constitute “better conduct” than that of a prodigal husband (246). In this, Hays’s attitude towards the sexual division of labour remains more in tune with extant gender dictates than Robinson’s.

### ***Evaluating Hays’s and Robinson’s contributions***

Unsurprisingly, Hays and Robinson do not fully transcend the cultural norms behind the patriarchal economy they criticise in *Appeal* and *Letter*. The thought that a husband could engage in household and care work, for example, does not even seem to enter their minds. This, however, does not diminish their overall achievement in thinking the economy outside of the box of their times. Their egalitarian economics of marriage seems to opt for a variant of what today qualifies as difference feminism: it recognises the differences between the sexes but emphasises their *equality-in-difference*. For Hays and Robinson, men and women are not alike: the value of their social and economic contributions, however, is equal. While justifications of coverture partially purported to follow a similar rationale in praising women’s domestic qualities, Hays and Robinson expose that coverture serves as an excuse to exploit women because it remunerates them only symbolically, by promising them the protection of a husband and applauding their beauty, chastity, and virtuousness. This symbolical remuneration often turns out to have no actual value for wives and is, as Mary Hays puts it, “merely verbal; – words without any meaning whatever” (281). It moreover serves to obscure the fact that men profit from women’s disenfranchisement by obtaining the unrestrained power to exploit them sexually and economically. The systematic lack of acknowledgment of the value of women’s arduous household and care work serves the same purpose. The egalitarian economics of marriage in Hays’s *Appeal* and Robinson’s *Letter* suggests that to truly install a balance and do justice to the fundamental equality-in-difference between the sexes, the economic value of women’s contributions also deserves an economic, not just symbolic, compensation: (married) women hence deserve more economic rights.

### **Real-life echoes: the testimonies of Charlotte Smith and Nelly Weeton**

Mary Hays’s acquaintance with poet and novelist Charlotte Smith possibly gave her a personal insight into how coverture could wreck a woman’s life. In fact, Smith’s case provides a chilling real-life echo to the feminist economic claims developed in Chapone’s *Hardships*, Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Women*, Hays’s *Appeal*, and

Robinson's *Letter*. As Judith Stanton deduces from an analysis of Smith's personal correspondence, which encompasses some 430 letters, "Charlotte Smith's 41-year marriage to Benjamin Smith was a textbook case of the atrocities a man could legally inflict upon his family in the 1700s" (7). Benjamin gambled away his family's property, abused his wife and children physically and verbally, had mistresses and illegitimate children, and claimed with success Charlotte's interest from property that was originally hers as well as much of what she earned through her abundant writing. The couple married in 1765 and separated in 1787, which did not end Charlotte's financial anxieties, as it left most property rights with Benjamin (11).

Since Smith was relatively frank in communicating her situation – which partially attracted the censure of her patron, the Earl of Egremont, as offending good taste (Stanton 19) – it is possible that Hays was at least partially aware of it, also through their common friend, the writer Eliza Fenwick. In a surviving letter of Smith's to Hays, dated 26 July 1800, the former explicitly mentions the emotional and financial problems resulting from her unhappy marriage. The respective passage is worth quoting in length:

I have known so much of pecuniary distress myself & feel so acutely what it is to have children for whose future fate the mothers heart is always oppressed, while their immediate wants claim every hour of the passing day [. . .]. I wish I had the house & the income I ought to have; less for any other reason (for I am become indifferent to almost all the world calls good) than because I could then sometimes receive my friends & sometimes ask proofs of their friendships, but I am – married – ! & tho released by my own resolution from the insufferable misery I endured from the age of fifteen (tho then like a child, I was half unconscious of it) till my thirty-seventh year, yet I am still in reality a slave & liable to have my bondage renew'd [tho] I am now well content to purchase a remission by giving up far the greater part of the interest of my own fortune & obtaining my own & much of my children's support by my labour. [. . .]

My family have now a clear estate worth nearly twenty thousand pounds in the West Indies, & this I am this year about to sell.<sup>21</sup> But this you will perhaps hardly believe that, tho I have rescued this & about seven thousand pounds more for them, I have been opposed & thwarted in every thing I have done by their father & now have from day to day to contend with him when any step is to be taken for the benefit & security of his own children, more than half of whose patrimony he wasted, & then to save himself from the consequences of that folly gave up the rest to be plunder'd by his own relations from whose clutches I have, after incredible difficulties, rescued it.

(350)

Smith's personal letter conceives of a wife's position as slavery and bondage, alludes to the strain of care work, emphasises female economic acumen, and dispels the myth of a protective and economically responsible husband. As such, it revisits

several propositions of the feminist economics of marriage presented in this chapter and highlights its factual foundation.

An excerpt from a letter to Sarah Rose written on 15 June 1804 conveys Smith's despair and resentment at the fact that despite her separation she has not regained economic autonomy. She describes her attempts to secure a particular sum of money to buy a military commission for her and Benjamin's son – a transaction she could not conduct by herself, but for which she had to obtain her husband's permission:

I entered into a correspondence with the person who *barely* can be calld [*sic*] human from his form [. . .]. Tho the monster (whose name it has been so long my misery to bear & to whom I was sold a *legal prostitute* in my early youth, or what the law calls *infancy*, & while it admits not a contract for ten pounds) tho this monster could not lose, while his odious existence lasts, one shilling by the act of justice I require & tho it is for the advancement and perhaps to save the life of his own Son, he refused unless I would give up to him 30£ out of about 108£ (for it is not more when the tax is deduced) on which I am to live and keep his daughter & supply his youngest Son [. . .].  
(625)

Termining marriage legal prostitution and thus taking up Wollstonecraft's formulation, Smith criticises the hypocrisy of the law which permits young girls to marry in their "infancy", an irrevocable and momentous step when they are still immature, but disallows adult married women to sign a contract for the sum of ten pounds without their husband's consent. In the further course of her letter, she relates that Benjamin later increased his demand; she speaks of "the additional infamy of the monsters asking 40£ instead of thirty & 100£ in ready money" (625). It is noteworthy that in rhetorical terms, Smith dehumanises her husband by repeatedly calling him a monster. She thus presents her economic situation in the framework of a Gothic constellation (like Wollstonecraft in *Wrongs*), from which she emerges as the struggling prey of a dangerous, inhuman, and voracious force, but also as the valiant protector of her children. Arguably, Benjamin functions in this context as a representative of the 'monstrous' patriarchal economy which allows husbands to threaten women and children and feed on their resources instead of protecting and feeding them, as the theory of coverture ordains. This and other letters contain detailed accounts of Charlotte's financial difficulties, her numerous attempts to resolve them, and her deep outrage that the economic exploitation she is subjected to is backed by the law.<sup>22</sup>

Another real-life echo to the feminist economics of marriage discussed in this chapter appears in the correspondence and journal of the English governess and wife Nelly (Ellen) Weeton. None of Weeton's writings, which are thought to span from seven to nine letter-books, were published during her lifetime. It was only in the 1930s that Edward Hall came across and edited three of the surviving books (Symes). (The second two-volume edition of Weeton's letters and journal – the

one I use and quote from in the following – builds on Hall's work and was issued in 1969. The most recent one-volume edition is Alan Roby's of 2016.) Ruth A. Symes notes in Weeton's biographical profile for the *ODNB* that her writings "have enormous interest as social history, providing vivid first-hand accounts of the life of the governess and of the developing industrial landscape of north-west England". While this is true, the letters and journal are also noteworthy for describing the harmful effects of coverture for wives. Weeton turns to this topic in relation to two events in her life: her work as governess for the Pedder family in 1809 and her subsequent disastrous marriage to Aaron Stock, which took place in 1814 and ended with a deed of separation in 1822. While it would be too much of a detour to go into the details of Weeton's life here, quoting a few passages from her personal testimony confirms what Charlotte Smith's case likewise implies: the hardships enumerated and attacked by Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson were not merely theoretical conjectures on how coverture could potentially harm wives but reflected experiences of actual (middle-class) women.

One of Weeton's several employers, the 34-year old Edward Pedder, descended from a family of bankers; in 1809, shortly before Weeton joined the Pedder household as a governess and lady's companion, he married his 17-year old dairy maid in Gretna Green, against the wishes of their relations (Weeton 1.210, 1.218). Yet if the governess's account is to be trusted, the marriage turned sour very quickly. In a journal entry of April 1810, Weeton indignantly describes Pedder's mean treatment of his wife and denounces his selfishness. She highlights Pedder's economic inaptitude and condemns him for using his power over household spending to abuse both her and his wife:

He thinks he does enough for his wife by feeding and clothing her. She has, at this time, been weeks, almost months, begging money from him to pay the washerwoman, and cannot get it. She may be said to live in splendid misery. [ . . . ] He will grudge his wife a decent gown at the very time he is squandering 20, 30, 40, 50 or 60 guineas at once on a hobby horse, of no use to any living creature but himself; and even he gets tired of one hobby horse after another, before he has had them many weeks in his possession. *I* am only kept here from ostentation, not out of real kindness to his wife. I was a sort of hobby for a time. He is now grown tired of me, and I verily believe grudges the expence of keeping me. Whether I am to be discarded, as many a hobby has been before me, I know not. This I know, he treats me unjustly, tyrannically, and meanly in the extreme.

(1.257–58)

The constellation echoes the scenarios evoked by the writers discussed in this chapter: because they are financially dependent on him, women find themselves at the mercy of a morally dubious and economically irresponsible man, who uses his economic privileges to extort obedience and inflict psychological pain. Weeton notes that Pedder "seems to think that by lording it over two or three women,

he increases his own consequence; and the more we submit, the worse he grows” (1.259). In a journal entry of August 1810, she returns again to the topic. Echoing the trope of slavery pervading feminist economics of marriage, she remarks on how the law makes the position of a wife worse than that of a servant, since she cannot dispose freely of her person:

If anything has displeased [Pedder], however innocent his wife may be of having caused the vexation, he seldom fails to wreak his vengeance on her – for this laudable reason – she is as a victim fastened to the stake – she must endure whatever he chooses to inflict. She has no help for herself; she cannot escape – the laws of the realm prevent that. ‘A servant’, as he said one day, ‘must not be spoken harshly to, for they can quit you when they please’. – What a sorry motive! what a contemptible reason for using a servant well. [. . .] A wife, I suppose, may be treated in any way, according to the whim of the moment, because – she is tied by the law, and cannot quit you when she pleases.

(1.276–77)

The conclusion Weeton draws from witnessing the Pedders’ marriage is to recommend that prospective spouses have a similar social and economic status. As she puts it in a letter to Miss Winkley on 25 February 1810: “Let the husband ever be so kind, it cannot compensate for the numberless mortifications a woman [who marries above her rank] must endure. Those married people have the greatest chance of being happy whose original rank was most nearly equal” (1.239). She reaffirms this conviction in her journal where she writes of the young Mrs Pedder:

The world thinks her fortunate in having married a man whose rank and fortune are so much superior to her own. How much is the world mistaken! Had she married a man of her own rank, she would at least not have been, as she often is now – penniless. She would have been, what now she is not – *mistress* of her house. She has not even power to order the necessary provisions into the house.

(1.257)

Given Nelly Weeton’s perceptive observations, the further course of her life as documented in her correspondence and journal strikes as bitterly ironic, because the meanness of her own future husband, Aaron Stock, seems to have surpassed that of her former employer. In the second volume of Weeton’s *Journal*, Edward Hall recreates a detailed picture of how the marriage unfolded, which he intersperses with passages from Weeton’s personal writings. Hall notes: “Thus, in September of the year 1814, Miss Weeton became Mrs. Aaron Stock, with the privilege – nay, the legal obligation – of delivering up practically all her shrewd investments and savings, to bolster up a tottering cotton-spinning concern in a Wigan back-lane [. . .]” (2.134). Hall speculates that Stock married Weeton only because he



needed her money. What led her to unite herself with Stock remains unclear, but it is evident that the marriage was not a happy one. The journal records the physical and verbal abuse Weeton suffered as Mrs Stock and relates how he locked her out of their house and had her arrested for window breaking when she attempted to forcefully re-enter it (2.176). Mirroring the experience of the fictional heroine in Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman*, Weeton reports that her husband threatened to imprison her in a lunatic asylum (2.176). In a journal entry of 1818, she deplores how much he departs from the ideal spouse that coverture regulations relied upon: "He that should nourish, cherish, and protect me; he that should protect me, so that even the winds should not blow too roughly on me – he is the man who makes it his sport to afflict me, to expose me to every hardship, to every insult" (2.159).

In a letter to her brother (14 January 1818), Weeton makes explicit that Stock systematically resorts to what amounts to economic violence: "My principal ground of complaint is the being kept so totally without money, at times when he is angry with me; his frequently refusing it to me, and, at the *same time*, and for the *same purpose*, giving it to his daughter [Jane], to Hannah, or to the servant" (2.163). She also muses that the reason why Stock might not agree to separate from her and grant her an annuity of £70 in exchange is because she is more valuable, more productive to him, as a wife: "[I]f I were so bad to live with, do you think Mr. Stock would not think me cheaply bought off, for £70 a year? [. . .] He well knows that I am such a check upon Hannah, Jane, and the servant, that much more of his property would be wasted, or spent extravagantly, than it now takes to keep me" (2.164). It thus seems quite obvious to her that as wife, she is an economic resource used by her husband. Weeton stipulates in the same letter that it is essential for her to regain some economic agency:

If I remain here, my proposition is:

1st. That on no occasion of quarrel, I am ever again deprived of Money for house-keeping, and for my own and [my daughter] Mary's cloaths. I would prefer a regular weekly sum for the one, and an annual one for the other, half a year paid in advance.

2dly. Wholly to give up housekeeping to Jane or Hannah, and have only an allowance for cloaths, and pocket-money; and to live like a boarder in the house; I shall very willingly accede to this.

(2.165)

At that point, her marriage has apparently become a predominantly financial transaction, with her as the weaker partner with less bargaining power. In a diary entry of 1818, she affirms on a similar note:

Mr. Stock wants me either to remain at home penniless, as an underling to his own daughter, or to be kept by anyone that will take me. I cannot agree to such a reconciliation, or such a separation, while he has plenty of money. I am obliged to totally withdraw myself from any domestic affairs, in

obedience to my husband's orders; to live in an apartment alone; not to sit at table with the family, but to have my meal sent to me; and amuse or employ myself as I can. When, and how will this end?

(2.159)

It took in fact four more years of agony and conflict until some sort of 'end' ensued and Weeton separated from her husband. He granted her an annuity of £70 (which, according to Hall, was the same amount she earned before her marriage), but in exchange she had to agree that she would permanently leave Wigan and not see their daughter Mary more than thrice a year. She also gave up to Stock property and investments from before their marriage (2.184–85, 2.189). Though daughter and mother would reunite eventually, a diary entry of 1825 reveals that Weeton, understandably, was to retain a negative opinion of the English marriage system and of the legal status granted to English women:

If man injures man, the injured has a great portion of power to defend himself, either from natural strength of body, of resolution, of the countenance of many of his fellows, or from the laws; but when man injures woman, how can she defend herself? Her frame is weaker, her spirit timid; and if she be a wife, there is scarce a man anywhere to be found who will use the slightest exertion in her defence; and her own sex cannot, having no powers. She has no hope from law; for man, woman's enemy, exercises, as well as makes those laws. She cannot have a jury of her peers or equals, for men, every where prejudiced against the sex, are her jurors; man is her judge. Thus situated, thus oppressed, she lives miserably, and by inches sinks into the grave. This is the lot not merely of a few, but of one half, if not two thirds of the sex!

(2.376–77)

It does not seem likely that Weeton was personally acquainted with Wollstonecraft, Hays, or Robinson. Nor does she appear to have been a radical herself. Yet her harrowing words confirm the accuracy of her radical contemporaries' economics of marriage.

Obviously, Smith's and Weeton's accounts have to be taken with a grain of salt. Theirs are personal and subjective testimonies, yielding a one-sided view of marital conflicts. Besides, Smith's and Weeton's experiences were arguably extreme: felicitous marriages existed as well (it seems that Chapone's marriage and Wollstonecraft's to Godwin fell into this happy category), regardless of coverture regulations. Nevertheless, these real-life echoes are important because they manifest that the feminist economics of marriage discussed in this chapter was not speculative scaremongering but a response to reality: it rested on an empirical basis. Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson persistently admonish that coverture makes matrimony a risky endeavour for women. Smith's and Weeton's cases illustrate that this estimate was correct. Both wives relate how their husbands' legally enshrined economic prerogatives allow them to exert nearly unmitigated control over the

wife's property, earnings, body, and children. They confirm what feminist economists warned against: by institutionalising and legalising an enormous disparity in economic power between the sexes, coverture enabled systematic economic violence on the part of the husband and condoned the exploitation of wives. Pondering this state of things, Weeton wonders in a journal entry: "What numbers of men murder their wives; and that, by the most cruel of all means – slow torture" (2.377). Historically, it was not until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870, 1874, and 1882 that some of the farsighted observations made by Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson were implemented into English law and the instruments of economic torture at least partially blunted.

## Notes

- 1 Translating these stipulations into twenty-first-century terminology, Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring conclude about the effects of coverture: "Upon marriage a wife lost the ability to own or control property, enter into contracts, make a will, or bring or defend a lawsuit without her husband. A married woman's real property – her lands – fell under her husband's control. [. . .] A woman's movable property – her money, livestock, and personal possessions – became her husband's outright. He had total control over any cash she brought to marriage or inherited or earned thereafter. He could sell her possessions, including her clothes and personal effects, or make bequests of them in his will without her permission" (Stretton and Kesselring 8; see also Erickson, "Coverture" 3–8; Hill 196–202; Mallett 1–5; Perkin 10–15).
- 2 This supposition is supported by Amy Louise Erickson's observation that "[m]any early modern English autobiographies have examples of the man who squanders his wife's property, or the woman whose husband abandons her only to return later, confiscate her hard-won earnings (perfectly legally) and then abscond again" ("Coverture" 7). Michael Roberts has suggested that Hannah Wolley, who wrote texts on cookery, medicine, and household economy in the seventeenth century, as well as Celia Fiennes, whose travelogues from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contained her comments on the economy of the countries she had visited, should also be classified as women's observations on what Roberts terms the "marital economy".
- 3 Pascal Fischer has investigated conservative projections of the economy and family in literary works of 1790–1805 by male and female writers (133–215).
- 4 For a comprehensive biography of Chapone's and a helpful contextualisation of *Hardships*, see Paterson Glover's "Introduction".
- 5 Writer Frances Burney would explore the economically, socially, and emotionally ambivalent position of rich heiresses in her novel *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782). Meghan Jordan has discussed how Cecilia's marriage in the end of the novel is possible only after Cecilia's prior self disintegrates and dissolves in a bout of madness – a trope Wollstonecraft would re-employ in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Jordan infers that "[t]he conclusion of *Cecilia* [. . .] suggests that married women are just as 'shackled' as single ones" (567). For a more optimistic reading of Cecilia as financial subject, see Roxburgh 173–78.
- 6 Fragments of this review were republished in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (see Anon., "Remarks on a Pamphlet"), which had published excerpts from Chapone's pamphlet in May and June of 1735.
- 7 Chapone would reiterate this position in a letter to Samuel Richardson of 1752 (?): "To deprive a woman of her natural liberty, under pretence of keeping her out of harms way, is just such a favour as it would be, to deprive a man of all pleasure, and then, in return, graciously decree he should feel no pain. As such deprivation would strike a man out

- of being, as a human creature, who has the image of God imprest upon him, so such deprivation of liberty would strike a woman out of being, as a member of civil society. What degrading notions must it give her of herself? [. . .] She must behold herself as a puppet, danced about by foreign impulses – a wooden thing upon wires, to be plaid [*sic*] off at the will and the pleasure of (most likely) her more wooden director” (qtd. in Broad 84–85, see also Paterson Glover’s edition of *Hardships* 115–16).
- 8 For a discussion of the economic dimensions of *Letters* by English-studies scholars, see Buus; Bode; Favret; Richards. For economic readings of Wollstonecraft’s texts on the French Revolution, see Packham, “Cottage” and “Common”.
  - 9 Mary Hays makes a similar observation in *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*: “[T]he highest pitch of virtue, to which a woman can possibly aspire on the present system of things; is to please her husband, in whatever line of conduct pleasing him consist. And, to this great end, this one thing needful, men are impolitic enough to advance, and to expect, that every thing else should be sacrificed” (55).
  - 10 In a noteworthy contribution, Ruth Abbey illustrates that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft “envisages a form of marriage that incorporates the major features of the classical notion of higher friendship such as equality, free choice, reason, mutual esteem and profound concern for one another’s moral character” (79). Abbey demonstrates that Wollstonecraft makes an important feminist contribution to liberal thought by collapsing the traditional distinction between the public and the private realm: “Wollstonecraft applies the values that liberals believe should govern the public realm, such as equality, autonomy, consent, reciprocity, and the diminution of arbitrary power, to the putatively private world of love, romance, and family life” (90). Abbey argues therefore against the tradition of crediting John Stuart Mill with the initial idea of applying liberal thought to marriage and concludes that “Wollstonecraft’s thought should lead us to recount the history of liberalism in a slightly different way” (90).
  - 11 (Literary) critics’ discussions of the tension between literature and theory in Wollstonecraft and Martineau’s texts also suggest that the two authors experimented with a similar hybrid genre of fiction and economics – and faced similar difficulties. Mary Poovey, for example, claims that at certain points in *Wrongs*, “the theoretical wisdom of the narrator simply collapses” over and against the behaviour and feelings of the fictional characters (*Proper* 105). Suggestively, Claudia Klaver makes a very similar observation with regard to Martineau’s *Illustrations*. She argues that when the emotive appeal of the literary strand contradicts the conveyed economic messages, “a kind of narrative violence” (68) ensues, which reveals the tensions between the literary and the scientific discourses.
  - 12 Wollstonecraft had already hinted at the connection between marriage and a woman’s (civic) death in her first novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), whose eponymous heroine is “thrown away – given in with an estate” (28) by her father to an unloving husband. Significantly, marriage and death coincide in the span of just one sentence: “The clergyman came in to read the service for the sick, and afterwards the marriage ceremony was performed. Mary stood like a statue of Despair, and pronounced the awful vow without thinking of it; and then ran to support her mother, who expired the same night in her arms” (17).
  - 13 Wollstonecraft had already advised against early marriages in her first publication, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). She opens the relatively short chapter on “Matrimony” with the following observation: “Early marriages are, in my opinion, a stop to improvement. If we were born only ‘to draw nutrition, propagate and rot’, the sooner the end of creation was answered the better; but as women are here allowed to have souls, the soul ought to be attended to. In youth a woman endeavours to please the other sex, in order, generally speaking, to get married, and this endeavour calls forth all her powers. [. . .] When a woman’s mind has gained some strength, she will in all probability pay more attention to her actions than a girl can be expected to do; and if she thinks seriously, she will chuse for a companion a man of principle; and this perhaps young people do not sufficiently attend to, or see the necessity of doing” (31).

- 14 In "Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels" Claudia L. Johnson notes that "Maria's attachment to Jemima is new in the history of the novel, and in representing a turn towards solidarity and affective community even with the most despised and unlovely of women, it suggests an alternative to the disastrousness of heterosocial relations" (204).
- 15 Bridget Hill also draws attention to how the elevated status of the husband impeded female solidarity within the household: "Wives, children, and servants were all in the same category of those owing complete obedience to the head of the household. Some husbands denied their wives any control over servants, and made little distinction in their treatment of either. This cannot have endeared female servants to wives. Many husbands looked rather to their female domestics than to their wives for sexual satisfaction" (146).
- 16 In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft establishes an explicit parallel between the situation of women and that of labouring men. Both, she argues, are exploited and lack political representation: "But, as the whole system of representation is now, in this country, only a convenient handle for despotism, [women] need not complain, for they are as well represented as a numerous class of hard working mechanics, who pay for the support of royalty when they can scarcely stop their children's mouths with bread. How are they represented whose very sweat supports the splendid stud of an heir apparent, or varnishes the chariot of some female favourite who looks down on shame? Taxes on the very necessaries of life, enable an endless tribe of idle princes and princesses to pass with stupid pomp before a gaping crowd, who almost worship the very parade which costs them so dear" (182–83).
- 17 *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* exposes, among others, the relationship between property, passion, and marriage (for readings exploring this theme, see e.g. Golightly; Rennhak). Regarding *The Victim of Prejudice*, Susan Brown et al. note that its "social critique is both precise and wide-ranging: sexual violence, legal inequity, the class structure, and attitudes to prostitution are all trenchantly analysed" ("Mary Hays: Writing"). Ada Sharpe and Eleanor Ty argue that Hays uses "the feminized genre of the novel" (102) as a vehicle for social and political commentary: "through the heroine's struggles in the face of insuperable social, economic, and legal barriers", Hays is "encouraging critical reflection on the ideals, mores, and institutions that shape actual women's lives in the immediate historical context" (91). It is also worth noting that in 1815, Hays wrote a didactic story intended for the working classes, entitled *The Brothers; or Consequences: A Story of What Happens Every Day; With an Account of Saving Banks*. The narrative recommends the institution of savings banks to its readers. Commenting on the middle-class bias of this text, Gary Kelly concludes that "[i]n this postwar crisis [of 1815], Hays sides less with the downtrodden than with the propertied classes" ("Mary Hays" 129).
- 18 Gary Kelly explains the relevance of Hays's Dissenting background for her feminist philosophy as follows: "Dissenting culture seemed to encourage women's claims to intellectual, if not legal and civic, equality with men. This receptivity derived from a theological argument of liberal Dissenters that salvation required a mind educated and disciplined to choose good over evil. Therefore, women had as much need of intellectual and moral cultivation as men" ("Mary Hays" 125).
- 19 With "politics", Hays refers to the reign of queens. In 1821, she would publish her unfinished *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrious and Celebrated*. This project reflects her lifelong interest in the public achievements of women, which was already evinced in her six-volume compendium *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries* (1803).
- 20 The contractual approach to marriage is reminiscent of Olympe de Gouges's far-reaching proposition in her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791). De Gouges based her feminist manifesto on the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* of 1789; she claimed for women the democratic rights of the French Revolution and exposed the androcentric bias of the revolutionary ideals. Her *Déclaration* comes with a postscript that condemns marriage in its present form as "the tomb of trust and love" (94). As an antidote, de Gouges proposes among others that spouses sign a "Form for a

Social Contract between Man and Woman". Crucially, de Gouges's envisioned contract above all regulates questions of custody and affirms the spouses' equal right to possess and dispose of property: "We, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, moved by our own will, unite ourselves for the duration of our lives, and for the duration of our mutual inclinations, under the following conditions: We intend and wish to make our wealth communal, meanwhile reserving to ourselves the right to divide it in favor of our children and of those toward whom we might have a particular inclination, mutually recognizing that our property belongs directly to our children, from whatever bed they come, and that all of them without distinction have the right to bear the name of the fathers and mothers who have acknowledged them, and we are charged to subscribe to the law which punishes the renunciation of one's own blood. We likewise obligate ourselves, in case of separation, to divide our wealth and to set aside in advance the portion the law indicates for our children, and in the event of a perfect union, the one who dies will divest himself of half his property in his children's favor, and if one dies childless, the survivor will inherit by right, unless the dying person has disposed of half the common property in favor of one whom he judged deserving" (94–95).

- 21 It is interesting to note that Smith aligns her own situation with that of slaves ("I am still in reality a slave"), but then moves on to inform in passing of her family's possessions in the West Indies, the income from which, it can be assumed, is made possible through actual slavery. She seems oblivious to her own complicity with the exploitative imperial economy. This example – along with the one of Mary Ann Radcliffe – suggests that, despite women economic writers' frequent references to the trope of slavery, there was no automatic solidarity between their and the abolitionists' cause. In fact, as with Smith's possessions in the West Indies, the relative economic enfranchisement of one group depended on the continued economic exploitation of another.
- 22 Stanton concludes from her analysis of the correspondence that Charlotte Smith's fiction bears evident traces of the author's gruesome economic biography. Against this background, Smith's novels merit further attention as potential contributions to women's economic thought.

# 6

## WOMEN AND PAID WORK

### Women and work around 1800

“[W]omen should receive equal rewards with men, for the same services equally performed. [. . .] The inequality of the wages of men and women for the same services, is a glaring evil, which stands greatly in need of reform. [. . .] [T]his absurd and unjust depreciation of female talent [. . .] certainly operates as a check to the exertions of women [. . .].” Contrary to what the topicality of this statement might suggest, it was neither uttered by a twenty-first-century feminist nor a twentieth-century political campaigner. This demand for equal pay of men and women is more than 200 years old. It stems from a letter written by “P.W.” on 15 January 1801 to the editors of the *Monthly Magazine* and published in April of the same year. The letter attests that modern debates surrounding women’s access to and their conditions of paid work can look back on a heritage that extends at least to the Romantic Age. This chapter retraces this heritage by examining the economic thought on women and paid work by Priscilla Wakefield (who some critics assume to be P.W. in the previously quoted letter) and Mary Ann Radcliffe.

Wakefield and Radcliffe were not the only female writers to address an issue that became especially pressing for women in the second half of the eighteenth century. Throughout her writing, Mary Wollstonecraft highlights the difficulties of (middle-class) women to make a living outside of marriage. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she devotes a chapter to the “Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated, and Left without a Fortune” (25–27), where she points out that, for women from her class, “[f]ew are the modes of earning a subsistence, and those very humiliating” (25). In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she repeats her observation and endorses women’s right to paid work:

The few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial; and when a superiour education enables them to take charge of the education

of children as governesses, they are not treated like the tutors of sons. [. . . ]s not that government then very defective, and very unmindful of the happiness of one half of its members, that does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations? [. . . ] How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry [. . . ]. How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty, than the most accomplished beauty!  
(184–85)

In *Wrongs of Woman*, Jemima's story offers an imagined working-class perspective on women's experience of work. As can be expected from a novel that exposes female suffering within a patriarchal economy, Jemima's condensed tale depicts her working life as marred by continuous economic, physical, and sexual exploitation. She recapitulates how she struggled along as an apprentice, a beggar, a prostitute, a thief, a kept mistress, a washerwoman, in a workhouse, and as a guardian in an asylum for lunatics. She indicts the sexual double standard with regard to work that she witnessed first-hand:

How often have I heard [. . . ] in conversation, and read in books, that every person willing to work may find employment? It is the vague assertion, I believe, of insensible indolence, when it relates to men; but, with respect to women, I am sure of its fallacy, unless they will submit to the most menial bodily labour; and even to be employed at hard labour is out of the reach of many, whose reputation misfortune or folly has tainted.  
(102)

Mary Hays voices similar criticism in *Appeal*:

[I]t were much to be wished that women were somewhat more attended to, in the distribution of fortune. This attention to their worldly comfort, is the more reasonable, that they are debarred by the tyranny of fashion [. . . ] from availing themselves of their talents and industry, to promote their interest and independence. However high the sphere of life in which a man is born, if his fortune be not equal to his birth or his ambitions, there are a thousand different ways by which he may advance himself with honour in the world; whereas women of a certain rank, are totally excluded from a possibility, even of supporting that stile of life to which they have been accustomed, if they are left without competent fortunes. But what is infinitely worse – because it leads to want, or infamy, or both – few, very few are the employments left open even for women of the inferior classes, by which they can secure independence; and to which without a doubt may be greatly attributed, the ruin of most of the sex, in the lower ranks.

(278–79)



Amy Gates has shown that women's access to paid work is also an important topic in Hays's novels, *The Victim of Prejudice* and *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Through the complicated biographies of her middle-class female characters, Hays exposes the practical difficulties that women seeking "gainful employment and financial independence over loveless marriages" (132) have to face. For Gates, Hays's novels illustrate that "Romantic-period women still lack self-sufficiency and access to respectable professions" (134).

In the quotations, Wollstonecraft and Hays raise several recurring issues of women's economic thought on paid work around 1800: women's limited access to paid occupations, female unemployment, cultural impediments to women's work, impractical education, prostitution, class-consciousness, and middle-class women's fear of downward social mobility. At the same time, paid work, though important, is not the dominant concern of these radical writers. This is different for the two authors whose writings I analyse in detail in this chapter. Priscilla Wakefield in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* and Mary Ann Radcliffe in *The Female Advocate* place the question of how a woman can secure subsistence through work at the centre of their respective pamphlets.

### ***Changes in women's work in the eighteenth century***

To contextualise Wakefield's and Radcliffe's contributions, it is helpful to sketch out the contours of the relationship between women and work in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This entails several challenges. In the words of Amy Louise Erickson, "it is work that is the most universal economic activity of all, and yet work is the aspect of people's economic lives about which historians know least" ("Women's Work"). Erickson notes that as regards the eighteenth century in particular, historians have tended to research into other realms of economic activity, such as consumption, inheritance laws, or coverture, not least because the sources about these topics are ampler, better organised, and easier to obtain. Sources relating to (women's) work are, by contrast, "more sprawling [and] more complicated" (Erickson, "Women's Work"). They lend themselves to qualitative rather than quantitative analyses, because historically, much, if not most, of women's work was unwaged and thus rarely quantified in statistical documents. As a result, for the period around 1800, it is possible to deduce tendencies, but not precise numbers as to how many women worked, what percentage of a given profession or trade they accounted for, and how much pay they received on average. In the words of Bridget Hill, "attempts to re-create the occupational structure of women's work in the eighteenth century are difficult [and] subject to such margins of error as make any definitive conclusions unwise" (155).

Another challenge lurks behind the question of what constitutes work. Neo-classical economists and several censuses of the nineteenth century privileged a definition of work as waged and exchanged on the labour market. Inevitably, this has marginalised and devalued exertions by women, which, up to this day, tend to involve domestic, informal, seasonal, irregular, and unpaid work. For most

feminists, proper acknowledgment of what still tends to be regarded as ‘women’s work’ *as work* has been a prime concern. Feminist economist Julie A. Nelson reminds us that “[i]t is still the case, for example, that the value of unpaid work in the home, done primarily by women, is totally overlooked in national income and product accounts” (“Male Is a Gender, Too” 1365). Like the demand for equal pay, however, that for acknowledging the monetary value of women’s domestic work is not a twentieth- or twenty-first-century invention but was already formulated during the Romantic period, as a remarkable letter of 1815 to the editors of *The British Lady’s Magazine and Monthly Miscellany*, titled “On Needle-Work”, testifies. Its author, mantua-maker and children’s book writer Mary Lamb (1764–1847), draws attention to the strenuous, time-consuming, often involuntary, and unpaid nature of all kinds of needlework that women are performing at home as part of their ‘natural’ duty. She wonders: “Is it too bold an attempt to persuade your readers that it would prove an incalculable addition to general happiness, and the domestic comfort of both sexes, if needle-work were never practised but for a remuneration in money?” (257). As an alternative to paying women, Lamb submits the revolutionary proposal of calculating its value and considering it a part of the domestic budget:

It would be an excellent plan, attended with very little trouble, to calculate every evening how much money has been saved by needle-work *done in the family*, and compare the result with the daily portion of the yearly income. Nor would it be amiss to make a memorandum of the time passed in this way, adding also a guess as to what share it has taken up in the thoughts and conversation. This would be an easy mode of forming a true notion, and getting at the exact worth of this species of home industry, and perhaps might place it in a different light from any in which it has hitherto been the fashion to consider it. [. . .] At all events, let us not confuse the motives of economy with those of simple pastime.

(260)

Lamb’s letter – written under the pseudonym Sempronia – corroborates Hill’s conclusion that the majority of women in the eighteenth century tended to work hard, for many hours, and at tasks that were heavy or unpleasant (Hill 259). But because their work was frequently unwaged, multi-occupational, flexible, involving a range of skills, and thus eluding straightforward definitions, their contributions risked being overlooked as secondary to those of men (45). Lamb also draws attention to the double standard attached to women’s and men’s occupations:

*Real business* and *real leisure* make up the portions of men’s time – two sources of happiness which we certainly partake of in a very inferior degree. To the execution of employment, in which the faculties of the body or mind are called into busy action, there must be a consoling importance attached, which feminine duties (that generic term for all our business) cannot aspire

to. [. . .] In how many ways is a good woman employed, in thought or action, through the day, in order that her *good man* may be enabled to feel his leisure hours *real substantial holyday*, and perfect respite from the cares of business!  
(258)<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore crucial not to repeat the mistake of discounting the value of women's domestic work. Women's work has taken on many shapes, which more often than not departed from the concept of full-time, paid labour and consisted in catering to the needs of others.

Several noteworthy contributions by mostly female and/or feminist historians have shed light on women's experience of work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Their research stresses that women's work is not a stable category lending itself to easy generalisations, because it has varied significantly depending on class, region, religion, and the decades under consideration. At the same time, since sex and gender function as powerful ordering criteria within social and economic structures, they have informed the organisation of work, leading to a sexual division of labour, many aspects of which have remained in place until today. Important individual variances between women from diverse backgrounds notwithstanding, what united them is that they engaged in work along different parameters than men. A gendered perspective on work also manifests itself in women's economic thought around 1800, as Lamb's letter already indicates.

The differentiation of labour based on gender seems to have intensified in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in response to the complex and intertwined processes usually subsumed under the headings of the Industrial Revolution and the British Agricultural Revolution. Within the emergent sexual division of labour, women held particular duties. As modern readers would perhaps expect, they were responsible for, among others, chores. These involved procuring the ingredients for food, cooking, washing and mending clothes, keeping the house clean, and fetching water and fuel. In more affluent and numerous households, women were in charge of supervising servants and labourers who assisted them with or took over these responsibilities. Women's tasks moreover encompassed care and emotional work, above all the bearing and rearing of children, but also tending to the sick, aged, and needy. Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson trace this component of the sexual division of labour to what they term social maternalism, that is "the assumption that women, by virtue of their sex, were naturally carers and nurturers" (15). The caring duties could extend beyond the nearest relations, and they affected the life choices of women, who were expected to accommodate to the needs of others. In the middle classes, for example,

[w]omen played an important role in caring for pupils, shop men, apprentices as well as nephews, nieces and their younger siblings or those of their husbands who might be resident in the household. In addition to providing meals, clean linen and tidy rooms, women were responsible for the moral and emotional development of these young people. [. . .] [D]aughters and

sisters [. . .] took over the care of children left motherless through death in childbirth; they followed their brothers to other towns or villages when they went to set up a new business.

*(Davidoff and Hall 282)*

Women hence engaged in activities indispensable for the sustenance of life and the maintenance of the social and economic fabric. When they entered the waged work force, their jobs were frequently a continuation of the caring duties they performed at home, which led to the feminisation of certain employments, such as teaching; governessing; nursing; penning children's literature and education books; philanthropy; domestic service; sewing; or dress-, hat-, and stay-making.<sup>3</sup>

Historians caution, however, against representing the scope of women's economic activity as limited to household and caring tasks. Sources suggest that married, single, and widowed women engaged in traditionally feminine work but also in agricultural labour, skilled crafts and trade, business, and manufacturing – as helpmates of husbands and brothers as well as in their own name. This implies that women were not always passive, housebound victims of economic oppression, which is why presenting them exclusively in this light in historiographic accounts inadvertently repeats the domesticating gesture of patriarchal ideology. As Erickson succinctly sums up, scholars researching into the economic status of women confront an

apparent contradiction between patriarchal legal and economic structures which attempted to control women's labour, property, and reputation to a much greater extent than they attempted to control men's labour, reputation and property, and evidence of women not merely entering the labour market and the public sphere, but not infrequently doing so successfully and on a long-term basis.

*(“Women's Work”)*

A historical account of women's work therefore involves a similar balancing act as appraisals of the separate-spheres doctrine: it calls for an accurate description of the functioning and effects of discriminatory mechanisms without negating the agency of those who lived with and partially eschewed them. Either extreme risks belying the more ambiguous historical reality as well as reducing women to mere stand-ins within a particular ideology. The effort to draw attention to women's marginalisation while simultaneously doing justice to their entrepreneurship, acumen, and skill in fact characterises much of women's economic writing in the Romantic Age. It has been strategically vital for women to demonstrate both: that they are discriminated against *and* that they are economically capable and knowledgeable, as this allowed them to call into question the patriarchal coding of the economy as unfeminine and justify their demands for economic rights.

The question of how industrialisation and the Agricultural Revolution influenced women's experience of work is relevant for the period around 1800, as the

effects of by then roughly a century of gradual, yet seminal changes that would lead to a fundamental rearrangement of social and economic structures were making themselves felt. Ivy Pinchbeck's rather optimistic appraisal in *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850*, which foregrounded new employment opportunities and the enhanced financial independence of female factory workers, has been partially challenged by subsequent studies which have adopted a more cautious perspective. Research by Bridget Hill, Katrina Honeyman, and Joyce Burnette suggests that examples of entrepreneurial women notwithstanding, the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw an intensified sexual division of labour and occupational segregation, with women's employment opportunities steadily narrowing down to those deemed feminine: domestic service, washing and laundering, gardening, dressmaking, millinery, mantua-making, or sewing. Mary Hays deplored this situation in *Appeal*: "Indeed the business appropriated by custom for women, are so very few in proportion to the number of candidates, that they are soon monopolized" (279–80). For genteelly educated women of the middle classes, the limited range of acceptable professions included those of teacher, schoolmistress, governess, or lady's companion. Mary Wollstonecraft, however, was sceptical of their desirability, partially based on her own experience: "A teacher at a school is only a kind of upper servant, who has more work than the menial ones. A governess to young ladies is equally disagreeable. It is ten to one if they meet with a reasonable mother [ . . . ]. The children treat them with disrespect, and often with insolence. In the meantime life glides away, and the spirits with it [ . . . ]" (*Thoughts* 25). An educated woman could also consider becoming a published author, preferably of moral and educational texts aimed at children, women, or the labouring classes. Priscilla Wakefield – herself a successful author of children's books – notes in *Reflections* that this "emolument is precarious, and seldom equal to a maintenance, yet if the attempt be tolerably successful, it may yield a comfortable assistance in narrow circumstances" (126). Occupational segregation based on sex predictably resulted in overcrowding, that is the oversupply of female workers in the few acceptable fields, which in turn depressed wage levels. In realms where women worked side by side with men – domestic service, agriculture, and manufacturing – their wages tended to be lower than those of men. Declining employment opportunities, underemployment, and low pay created economic incentives for women to engage in prostitution, despite the risk of social stigma, sexually transmitted diseases, and an unwanted, illegitimate pregnancy. In sum, then, women around 1800 faced difficult working conditions on several accounts. Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Ann Radcliffe were describing and responding to these unsettling developments.

### **Cultural and market-oriented approaches to women's work**

Historians disagree as to whether the deterioration of women's working conditions stemmed primarily from economic processes unrelated to gender or from ideology and gender norms. The three studies quoted earlier represent three different

viewpoints within the spectrum of possible answers. Katrina Honeyman's *Women, Gender, and Industrialisation in England, 1700–1870* highlights the role of ideology. For Honeyman, industrialisation ought to be considered a gendered process and the worsening of women's working conditions not as inevitable but as forged by patriarchy: "That women became confined to the least skilled and lowest paid sectors of employment and to a subservient position within the domestic division of labour was the result of prolonged intervention by their husbands and fathers, by paternalist employers and the state" (15). Joyce Burnette, in *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain*, takes the opposite view. She does not question women's restricted working opportunities and lower pay but calls into question the relevance of ideology and gender norms for explaining these developments. Instead, she sees them as brought about by a neutral market logic: labour being remunerated based on skill and physical strength, women, who in general were less qualified and weaker, reasonably received a lower pay than men. In addition to that, Burnette argues that occupational segregation actually benefitted women, as it shielded them from competition with men in jobs where they would have been at a disadvantage. Compared to Honeyman's and Burnette's assessments, Bridget Hill takes a middling position in *Women, Work & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*. Hill attributes the deterioration of working conditions for women to economic processes, in particular the gradual transition from the family economy to a wage-based economy. This transition meant, among others, that husbands and wives were no longer cooperating within a household in what Hill claims to have been a more collaborative relationship, but competing with each other for waged work on the labour market.<sup>4</sup> Yet ideology, for Hill, aggravated women's situation and weakened their initial position relative to men when bargaining for work. Summing up the effects of both economic and cultural changes in the course of the eighteenth century, she comes to a much more pessimistic conclusion than Pinchbeck: "Far from industrialization meaning the emancipation of women, for many the first phase must have meant a greater servitude and conditions where they had no defence against the arbitrary wielding of patriarchal power" (263).

My own stance within the market-logic-versus-culture debate is closer to that of Hill and Honeyman, who both underscore the relevance of culture and gender norms. I contend throughout this book that economic theory and practice do not evolve in a vacuum but interact with cultural norms within a multifaceted process, of which gender ideologies form a significant part. Not every economic or social phenomenon arises out of gender relations, but conversely, as Natalia Mora-Sitja points out in her review of Burnette's study, "attempts to filter gender ideology out of any economic decisions ring as historically inaccurate. Labor markets, after all, do not operate in isolation from society" (810). The conviction that cultural norms shape the economy in fact permeates women's economic thought around 1800: the authors identify "custom" and "prejudice" as major obstacles to women's access to paid occupations. They posit that a shift in cultural norms is a precondition for changing the economy and deplore, as Radcliffe puts it in her introduction to *The Female Advocate*, that "when custom has given permanency to any practice,

however evil in its tendency, it is next to impossible to effect its removal, or to succeed in any reasonable claim" (ix). While discussions of coverture and the economics of marriage around 1800 frequently expose legal impediments to female economic autonomy, demands for women's access to paid professions continuously revolve around obstacles grounded in cultural norms.

"Custom" dictated, for example, that women's education and training ought to be different from that of men, which reduced their employment opportunities, particularly at a period when formal qualifications were slowly gaining in importance. The doctrine of separate spheres might not have been as pervasive and clear-cut as previously assumed, but the more pronounced differentiation between the feminine home and the masculine public realm had an impact on the organisation of labour. Davidoff and Hall assert that for middle-class women, "[t]he equation of outdoor activity with men, and the indoors as the setting for respectable femininity affected the division of labour in a myriad of ways from farming [. . .] to the expectation that within an enterprise women could do preparation of products and services or finance as long as these activities were kept out of sight" (275). While historical evidence implies that the gendering of spaces and activities did not prevent all women from openly engaging in agriculture, business, trade, or manufacturing, negating its shaping power altogether is to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Changing concepts of propriety and gentility were indeed a crucial factor modifying the nature of work for men and women: a woman might not have faced legal consequences for engaging in particular forms of economic activity, but she was risking social disapprobation. Davidoff and Hall note that "[f]or a middle-class woman of the early nineteenth century, gentility was coming to be defined by a special form of femininity which ran directly counter to acting as a visibly independent economic agent" (315).

A related set of influential cultural norms with manifest consequences for women's work surrounded, as discussed in the previous chapter, marriage. The naturalised assumption that each woman will marry and thus gain the financial support of her husband narrowed down the scope of their education, solidified the sexual division of labour within households, and prevented an adequate response to the precariousness faced by unmarried and widowed women. Lamb's letter "On Needle-Work" emphasises the detrimental economic incentives created by the expectation that every woman will in due course become "a *happy* English wife" (259):

Plenty of resources would then lie open for single women to obtain an independent livelihood, when every parent would be upon the alert to encroach upon some employment, now engrossed by men, for such of their daughters as would then be exactly in the same predicament as their sons now are. Who, for instance, would lay by money to set up his sons in trade; give premiums, and in part maintain them through a long apprenticeship; or, which men of moderate incomes frequently do, strain every nerve in order to bring them up to a learned profession; if it were in a very high degree probable that, by the time they were twenty years of age, they would be taken from

this trade or profession, and maintained during the remainder of their lives by the *person whom they should marry*. Yet this is precisely the situation in which every parent, whose income does not very much exceed the moderate, is placed with respect to his daughters.

(259)

Lamb anticipates again arguments that twentieth-century feminists would restate. Feminist economist Michèle Pujol, for example, has drawn attention to the long-lasting consequences that economists' denial to engage with women's existence outside of marriage has had for their position on the labour market. Although Pujol's article is three decades old, and some of the premises of neoclassical economics she critiques have evolved since then, her reasoning remains important in highlighting a self-sustaining dynamic within which particular cultural assumptions translate into economic theory and thus stimulate particular economic policies and outcomes which are then interpreted as confirming the originally made cultural assumptions. More specifically, Pujol claims that the understanding of gender roles suffusing twentieth-century mainstream economics has perpetuated the ideological convictions of nineteenth-century economists Alfred Marshall, Arthur Cecil Pigou, Francis Ysidro Edgeworth, and Stanley Jevons, whose voice she characterises as "laden with patriarchal condescension" ("Into the Margin!" 258). By accepting the unacknowledged gender bias of these Victorian texts, neoclassical economics has imperceptibly replicated it in its core assumptions. As a result, according to Pujol, neoclassical economists tend to surmise that all women are or will be married and thus gain the financial support of a man. They furthermore suppose that all women are or will become mothers and embrace caring duties, mostly outside of the (waged) labour market. These assumptions set "the stage for questioning women's presence in the labor market or for refusing to take this presence seriously. Women, being supported, have no reason to be in the labor market. The concerns they might have – particularly for higher wage levels and for access to employment – can be and have been dismissed as inconsequential" (260). Pujol criticises a double standard in this regard, as men's engagement in waged labour has never been questioned.

It should be remembered that the cultural norms surrounding gender and (paid) work have limited the choice of economic behaviour for women (by pushing them out of the labour market) and men (by pushing them into it). What Pujol does not comment on is that the concept of the breadwinner has also subjected men to a prescriptive cultural ideal, which sees their non-activity on the labour market as 'abnormal' and condemnable. Wakefield and Radcliffe, for example, take this notion of 'economic virility' for granted. However, the bias regarding women has exposed them more severely to economic vulnerability in so far as it has curtailed their means of achieving financial independence. Pujol accentuates this point in her discussion of writings by nineteenth- and twentieth-century neoclassical economists, who largely ignore this problem: "By implicitly generalizing from married women to all women, the existence and the needs of women who are not attached



to men are denied, and the 'norm' of women's economic dependence is ideologically reinforced" (261). This was already true of the eighteenth century, as Bridget Hill confirms: "The lack of any acknowledgment of the problems facing single women was part of the failure to recognize that women had any existence outside marriage" (263). Pujol asserts that the discrepancy between neoclassical theoretical models and the real experience of many women has led female economists to press for "the means to economic independence for women: access to jobs, education, professional employment and equal pay" (262). She points to these economic concerns in texts by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminists, such as Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and Beatrice Webb. An analysis of women's texts from the Romantic Age reveals, however, that the demand for women's access to paid work, education, and adequate pay predates the Victorian period. The situation of women who cannot rely on male support is central to Wakefield's and Radcliffe's considerations.

A culturally informed critique of economic gender discrimination does not mean – as I have already stated with regard to *coverture* – that *all* women suffered from or took issue with it because their individual experience varied depending on their rank, income, region, and personal preferences. This is also true of women's relation to (paid) work around 1800. Middle-class women, for example, on the one hand faced few employment opportunities and restrictive codes of gentility, but on the other profited from the possibility of delegating many an unpleasant or menial task to the growing army of mostly female domestic servants from the labouring classes. Women's economic thought on paid work shows more starkly than texts on the economics of marriage that many female writers objected to some of the cultural norms in operation, but accepted others to such an extent as to propose solutions to the depicted problem of female (un)employment along the lines of the prevalent system, for instance, by encouraging class divisions, an even more rigid occupational segregation, and the exclusion of men from feminine occupations.

Culture therefore influenced economic thought, and economic circumstances in turn influenced cultural norms. The keeping up of genteel appearances, for example, demanded from housewives increased efforts in running the household along specific codes and in engaging in particular forms of consumption. It also entrenched class divisions within the female workforce, as middle-class women became the employers – sometimes exploitative and ruthless ones – of domestic servants from the labouring classes. Another example of the interrelation of the economy with culture is the increasing importance of teaching women 'female accomplishments'. It was a response to shifting notions of gentility but also to the conviction that the natural way to earn a living for a woman was to become a wife, which for aspiring parents created an incentive to make their female offspring conform to a culturally promoted – and thus marriageable – ideal of femininity. This intensified the demand for a particular kind of feminine education, which generated employment opportunities for women in this field (governess, teacher, school mistress) but at the same time – as female economic writers kept emphasising – reduced the agency of young girls thus educated and amplified their

dependence on potential husbands. In view of such complex processes, it is essential to factor in both ideological and economic contexts when examining women's paid and unpaid work.

### ***Beyond paid work: women's economic thought on domestic economy and charity***

A noteworthy strand of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's economic thought on work that mostly adheres to established gender roles are treatises on household economy and charity. In terms of genre and content, these moral and educational texts both epitomise and focus on forms of female labour congruent with the cultural ideals of their times. It is actually here that the words 'economy' and 'economising' appear most frequently, reflecting the dominant usage of the word "economy" around 1800 as "the art or science of household management, esp. with regard to expenditure" ("economy" I.2a, *OED*). Extended passages on household economy can be found, for example, in Hester Mulso Chapone's conduct book *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773) and in Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth's pedagogical treatise of 1798, *Practical Education* (Rostek, "English Women's" 37–41). Philanthropy is an important topic in Sarah Trimmer's pamphlet *The Oeconomy of Charity* (1787) and Hannah More's novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1808). Though these texts conform to ideals of bourgeois femininity, they nevertheless stress the vital role of women's work, as the example of Trimmer's *Oeconomy of Charity* shows.

Trimmer raises economic concerns on several levels. Fundamentally, she is concerned with the problematic economic situation of the poor. She attempts an analysis of the various reasons leading to their situation and proposes means of ameliorating it. She develops solutions in line with established hierarchies of gender and class and, like Wakefield in *Reflections*, ascribes different economic and social functions to women of different social ranks. Her pamphlet is explicitly addressed to "ladies" of higher ranks and to women from the "middling ranks" whom she entreats to assist the poor, in particular girls. This act of charity is conceived as having palpable economic consequences for all social ranks: the elevated ranks prevent social unrest and thereby protect their property, while the poor improve their living standard. Trimmer is thus encouraging women – if in a different manner and with a different focus than Wakefield or Radcliffe – to become economically active. What she shares with all women economic writers is the crucial role she ascribes to education as the source of social and economic change. Yet she pays particular attention to the question of how improved access to instruction may improve the situation of England's poor. Deeply convinced of the beneficent effects of religion, Trimmer proposes Sunday schools as the domain in which the eponymous *Oeconomy of Charity* may be practiced to the best (economic) advantage of women and men of all social classes. As regards the ideologically similar novel by Hannah More, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, Anne K. Mellor claims that More conceptualises "for the first time the female professional career of what we would now call the

'social worker', the organized and corporate, as opposed to the spontaneous and individualistic, practice of philanthropy" ("Writers of Her Day", 148–49). From today's vantage point, then, texts by Trimmer or More can be read as early engagements with the caring economy.

Women's publications on domestic economy and charity for the most part accept the prevalent sexual division of labour and embrace social maternalism. Taking for granted that it is women's duty to manage their father's, brother's, and/or husband's household and to look after children, the poor, and the needy, the authors put an emphasis on education and practical concerns: women must be taught the necessary moral and practical skills to perform their economic and social functions well. The texts address those forms of work that until now tend to be regarded as 'women's work': domestic, caring, emotional, educational, mostly unwaged, but nevertheless vital for the survival of families and society. Although I do not analyse women's thought on household work and philanthropy in the following sections it certainly merits further scrutiny within the wider project of a herstory of economic thought, as it provides a female perspective on that realm of the economy that for centuries has been most readily associated with and attributed to women.

### ***Women and paid work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: a brief outlook***

The economic thought I turn to in this chapter is characterised by an emphasis on women's access to and experience of *paid* work. As should be clear by now, my focus on this strand does not mean that it represents the experience and views of all women, nor that it stands for the whole of women's economic thought on work around 1800; considerably more research is needed to create a fuller picture, including the perspectives of other than middle-class women, on whom I concentrate here. Their economic thought on paid work reacts to a twofold problem many women were confronting at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century: the more strictly economic question of how to make a living at all, and the related cultural-economic one of how to make a living without incurring social stigma as a penalty for violating cultural codes. This dilemma was salient especially for women who could not rely on male support and thus had no choice but to engage in activities that would generate an income.

The problem would persist during the Victorian period and attract public attention especially during the so-called surplus-women crisis of the mid-nineteenth century, when national censuses revealed that women outnumbered men to such an extent as to make marriage unviable as a default economic option. Women continued to analyse and respond to this predicament, for example, in the contributions of the Langham Place group, whom Katherine Mullin characterises as "a small number of middle-class women, mostly young, single, and frustrated by the lack of educational and professional opportunities available to

them” (Mullin). The titles of some of their texts, many of which appeared in *The English Woman’s Journal* founded by the group, give a glimpse into their concerns: Bessie Rayner Parkes’s “The Market for Educated Female Labour” (1859), “The Condition of Working Women in England and France” (1861), or “The Balance of Public Opinion in Regard to Woman’s Work” (1862); Jessie Boucherett’s “On the Obstacles to the Employment of Women” (1860), “On the Choice of a Business” (1862), or “On the Cause of the Distress Prevalent among Single Women” (1864); Emily Davies’s “Medicine as a Profession for Women” (1862) or “The Influence of University Degrees on the Education of Women” (1863).<sup>5</sup> Similarly to women’s analyses of the economics of marriage, then, women’s economic thought on paid work spans a period of more than two centuries, shows recurring thematic concerns, and accentuates different experiences than the history of economic thought by men.

Change has come slowly and incrementally. Roughly a century after the texts examined here were published and half a century after the interventions of the Langham Place group, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 came into force, stipulating that “[a] person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society [ . . . ]” (“Sex Disqualification [Removal] Act 1919”). It took another five decades and more political campaigning until, in 1970, UK parliament passed the Equal Pay Act, “to prevent discrimination, as regards terms and conditions of employment, between men and women” (“Equal Pay Act 1970”). Yet the enduring gender pay gap, occupational segregation, the uneven distribution of household tasks between the sexes, and the underfunding of caring professions in which women are over-proportionately employed suggest that despite significant progress, gender continues to be a determining factor for the experience of (paid) work in the twenty-first century. In her introduction to a new edition of Alice Clark’s foundational study *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, Amy Louise Erickson goes as far as to aver that

a comparison of medieval circumstances with those that prevail today [the early 1990s] reveals more continuity than change in the important features of women’s working lives. [ . . . ] [T]he essential features of women’s economic position relative to men – the sex ratio of wages, access to training, concentration in the lowest-paid sectors of the labour market, and the sexual division of labour – appear to have been unaffected by either capitalism or industrialization.

(“Introduction” xviii)

Given the disheartening longevity of these phenomena, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the concerns permeating today’s economic debates on gender and (paid) work were already present in women’s economic thought around 1800.

**A conservative demand for women's right to paid work:  
Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition  
of the Female Sex* (1798)**

***Wakefield: author and co-founder of the first  
English savings bank***

Most economists are probably unfamiliar with Priscilla Wakefield's name. According to Robert Dimand ("An Eighteenth-Century" 194–95), if she is known at all, it is in her 'feminine' functions as mother of political economist Edward Wakefield and anxious grandmother of the promoter of colonialization, Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Yet Priscilla Wakefield did not devote her entire life to rearing famous men, and she deserves a place in her own right within the history of economic thought: she has a claim to have founded the first savings bank in England and to have authored the most systematic exploration of women's employment opportunities around 1800 – *Reflections on the Present Conditions of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for Its Improvement*.

An attempt to sum up Wakefield's biography epitomises the difficulties regarding women's relationship to work that I have discussed in the previous section: throughout her long life, Wakefield pursued different undertakings, some of which were paid and others not. She was born Priscilla Bell on 20 November 1750<sup>6</sup> to a middle-class family with a strong Quaker heritage. Her father was a coal merchant based in Tottenham, just outside London. Her mother took over the education of her children so that Priscilla was schooled at home where she learnt, among others, Latin and Greek. In 1771, Priscilla married the merchant Edward Wakefield, with whom she had three children. Much of her life was devoted to her family. The *Lady's Monthly Museum* lauded her in an article of 1818 as "remarkable for performing those duties which devolve on a daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother (she has seventeen grand-children)" ("Mrs. Priscilla Wakefield" 62).

In the course of the 1790s, however, Wakefield seems to have faced precisely that economic constellation that would preoccupy her and other female authors commenting on women's limited access to paid work: her family ran into financial difficulties precipitated by her husband's unsuccessful business ventures (Brown et al. "Priscilla Wakefield: Life"; Shteir; Wakefield, *Diaries*). Edward Wakefield's temporary inability to serve as the sole breadwinner prompted Priscilla to look for ways to contribute to the family budget without endangering their reputation. She opted for what was consistent with her talents, skills, and expectations of genteel femininity: in her early 40s, she entered the burgeoning market for educational literature and became an author of instructive books for children. Wakefield pursued a writing career for the rest of her life (she died on 12 September 1832), even after her family's pressing economic needs had subsided. She published 17 books on a wide range of themes, some of which have become enduring bestsellers: *An Introduction to Botany, in a Series of Familiar Letters with Illustrative Engravings* (1796) ran through 11 editions, was translated into French, and published in the USA.

*Juvenile Travellers* (1801), which followed a fictitious family on its travels through Europe, reached its 19th edition in 1850. The success prompted Wakefield to pen several other travel books for young readers, which acquainted them with the landscape and customs of the British Empire, North America, and Africa. *Reflections on the Present Conditions of the Female Sex* is Wakefield's only publication aimed at adult readers. In this almost 200-page-long contribution to women's economic thought, she accentuates the necessity of preparing women of all classes for what she experienced first-hand: the need to contribute financially to the maintenance of themselves and their families.

The second realm besides writing in which Wakefield was remarkably prolific and deserves far more public recognition than is currently her due was practical, institutionalised philanthropy directed at the labouring poor.<sup>7</sup> She supported lying-in hospitals, which provided linen and the assistance of midwives to pregnant women and young mothers. In 1798 – the same year in which she published *Reflections* – Wakefield established a female benefit club, whose members paid regular contributions to receive pensions in old age. In an article of 1816, the *Quarterly Review* appraised various tracts on savings banks and noted that the institution co-founded by Wakefield was the first to put theory into practice, making it England's first savings bank:

Although the project of encouraging industry and independence among the lower classes, by thus securing to them the fruits of their labours, appears so simple, [. . .] the first institution of the nature of a Saving Bank, which we have hitherto been able to discover in this kingdom, is one [. . .] established on the 22d of October, 1798, at Tottenham, under the patronage of a number of ladies. Combined with the main design of this institution were two other objects, viz. a fund for loans, to prevent the use of pawn-brokers' shops, and a *Bank for earnings of poor children*.

(“Art. VI” 97)

The same article contains a longer quotation by “Mrs. Wakefield”, in which she explains the idea behind the penny bank for children in the following words:

Children of either sex, [. . .] or whatever age, whether belonging to a member or not, are permitted to bring any sum above one penny, to the monthly meeting of the stewardess, to be laid up in the funds of the society; where their small earnings may accumulate in security, until wanted for an apprentice fee, clothing on going to service, or some other important purpose.

(97)

Wakefield created an institutional framework for mitigating social problems through a long-term economic strategy. Children of the labouring classes accumulated a small stock of capital that they could later invest in their vocational training. The third, related philanthropic project Wakefield co-initiated in Tottenham was, as the

article in the *Quarterly Review* explains, prompted by the success of the previous institutions: a Charitable Bank founded in 1804. Its aim was again to protect the property of the labouring classes and instil in them long-term saving habits: "Any sum above one shilling was to be received, and, to encourage perseverance, interest at the rate of five per cent was to be allowed for every twenty shillings, which should remain a year with the trustees" ("Art. VI" 99; see also Shteir). The bank's trustees were men, but its books "were at first kept by a lady" – although the article does not specify whether the lady in question was Wakefield.

With the savings banks she co-founded in Tottenham, Wakefield was putting into practice what political economists of her time were recommending in theory, both before and after she launched her projects. In 1797, Jeremy Bentham had submitted "A Plan for a System of Frugality Banks"; he stressed that a major merit of its mode of operation would be that, for labourers depositing their savings, "the future will rise in its value in its comparison with the present [. . .] and whatever is taken from the distant future to be given to immediate comfort, will be invested in articles of durable use, rather than lavished upon the short-lived instruments of momentary gratification" ("Outline" 410). Thomas Robert Malthus also saw the banks as securing the financial future of the working population. He writes in the third edition of the *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1806): "To facilitate the saving of small sums of money for this purpose [of purchasing a cow], and encourage young laborers to economize their earnings with a view to a provision for marriage, it might be extremely useful to have country banks, where the smallest sums would be received, and a fair interest paid for them" (474). Wakefield was apparently familiar with theoretical texts on the subject, because in a published contribution of 1804 she evokes "that branch of political economy, which relates to increasing the comforts, and improving the morals of the inferior classes of society" ("Extract from an Account" 207). Explaining the reasoning behind the Tottenham Charitable Bank, she asserts that "[i]t is not sufficient to stimulate the poor to industry, unless they can be persuaded to adopt habits of frugality" (208). Wakefield shared with Bentham and Malthus their concern for practical and sustainable economic solutions as well as the conviction that the poor ought to be 'managed'. Both aspects resurface in her discussion of women's paid work in *Reflections*.

Wakefield's numerous endeavours corresponded, on the one hand, to gendered notions of female work: caring duties within the family; penning moral and educational books; supporting charities and philanthropic projects aimed at those groups that according to bourgeois ideology fell into the feminine sphere, namely, women, children, and the poor. On the other, in all these realms, Wakefield displayed energy and endurance, attesting to women's acumen, resourcefulness, and economic knowledgeability. In a diary entry unearthed and transcribed by Janine McVeagh, Wakefield took stock of her numerous achievements in 1798 with the words:

Upon reviewing the transactions of last year I find that I have enjoyed 8 weeks and 4 days of my daughter's company, have devoted considerable time

to my father whilst confined on account of his eyes. I have published my *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* and the 2nd volume of the *Juvenile Anecdotes*. But the undertaking which affords most pleasure in the retrospection is the successful establishment of a Female Benefit Club, a work that has engrossed a considerable portion of my time, which I do not lament as I trust that many will reap the benefit of it when I am no longer remembered. As time elapses, it is pleasant to look back and see what has been produced – may it stimulate to fresh diligence – that not even an hour wasted but that every day should be spent in usefulness and innocent pleasures.

(*Wakefield, Diaries*;  
also *qtd. in Roodman, "Diary Entries"*)

Those few lines capture a pattern that is typical of women's relationship to work. Throughout the year, Wakefield was engaging in several time-consuming occupations, different in nature and only sometimes producing a monetary reward: she cared for her sick father, published two new texts – one for adults, one for children – and established a philanthropic institution. Her wording clearly conveys the pleasure she derived from work outside the domestic sphere. Her diary records a personal experience that also shapes Wakefield's economic thought in *Reflections*: the awareness that a woman's work is versatile, that it can be a source of pride and satisfaction, and that at its best, it contributes to "usefulness" and communal welfare.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Women's economic functions within a static social order***

Although *Reflections* raises proto-feminist concerns, and although it was published by Joseph Johnson, the press that issued works by Wollstonecraft and Hays, it is in comparison a less radical and by the standards of its times less controversial treatise. Wakefield defends women's right to paid work and higher wages from a conservative position. Her conservatism manifests itself in her conception of society: a relatively static system, within which sex and class predetermine the position and responsibilities of each individual. She presupposes the existence of four social classes and holds that within each, men and women have distinct duties. This would mean that society consists of eight subgroups. In *Reflections*, as the full title conveys, she is concerned with the present conditions of the *female* sex; accordingly, she systematically comments on the work, the desirable education, and acceptable paid employments of the four social subgroups made up by women. (Tables 1–4 at the end of this chapter sum up her outlines of and recommendations for the four social classes.) Wakefield's rigid understanding of class, sex, and gender is worth exploring in more detail, as it lays the foundation for her observations on women's opportunities to engage in paid work, the lack of which she presents not only as an individual plight, but as a social problem and a threat to national stability, prosperity, and happiness.



Concerning social class, Wakefield claims that

[s]ociety may be resolved into four classes or degrees; the first comprehends the nobility, and all those who, either by the influence of high offices, or extensive hereditary possessions, rival them in power; the second contains those, who by the application of their talents to learning, commerce, manufactures or agriculture, procure a respectable subsistence approaching to opulence; to the third may be referred those, whose honest and useful industry raises them above want, without procuring for them the means of splendid or luxurious gratification: The fourth is composed of the labouring poor [. . .].  
(63)

Wakefield sees the gradations as emanating from a quasi-natural and therefore undisputable order: the classes “are separated, insensibly as it were, from the other divisions towards which they approximate” (141). It is likely that the developments in revolutionary France, of which she was sceptical, strengthened her conviction that social mobility inevitably leads to social unrest and therefore should be discouraged. In *Reflections*, she singles out education as a means of achieving this end. Not only does it convey useful skills to members of society, it can also inculcate in pupils a sense of their ‘proper’, that is class- and sex-determined, socio-economic role. Using education as an instrument of social mobility is, by contrast, explicitly discouraged: “There cannot be a more mistaken tenderness than to give an education to our children disproportioned to the rank they are likely to fill in society” (57). Learning does not have an emancipatory but a conservative purpose, namely, that of stabilising the social order. On these grounds, Wakefield suggests a reform of the extant system of schooling. That schools teach girls and boys separately, she takes for granted. But she proposes class as an additional segregating factor:

a considerable improvement upon the present plan might be effected, by the appropriation of schools to the different classes of society. At present, there is scarcely any discrimination between the daughters of noblemen and those of tradesmen, they are both educated upon nearly the same system, without any reference to their future destination in life.  
(54)

Wakefield does not subscribe to meritocracy but to a rigid system reminiscent of feudal arrangements and bordering on a hereditary economy, in which a person's position and duties in society chiefly result from the class and sex into which he or she was born.

Surprisingly perhaps for an author formulating proto-feminist demands, Wakefield's notion of gender roles is likewise conservative and rather static, although she is more ambivalent on this topic than on class. On the one hand, like Hays and Robinson, she promotes what in contemporary parlance would qualify as a variant of difference feminism, which emphasises equality-in-difference: “laying

aside the invidious terms of superiority and inferiority, the perfection of mind in man and in woman, consists in a power to maintain the distinguishing characteristics of excellence in each" (4). On the other, she seems to accept women's relational and subordinate status with regard to men. For instance, Wakefield's list of the duties of a wife places the husband at the centre of her endeavours: she is "the consoler of his sorrows", "his stimulator", "his partner", "the faithful and oeconomical manager of his affairs", "the affectionate mother of his children", "the preserver of his honour", etc. (31–32). A mother should educate her children but may be exonerated from this task in case of "a husband's disapprobation" (43). Wakefield recommends submissiveness also for women who do not marry and remain in their father's house: "cheerfulness, good temper, and an obliging resignation of her will to that of others, will be there equally her duty and her interest" (36–37).

Based on this conception of femininity, *Reflections* identifies the primary work duties of women. For all four classes, they are congruent with the doctrine of separate spheres and conservative ideals. Preferably, they should be fulfilled within marriage, which for Wakefield is "the most solemn of the social contracts" (30). A wife's work involves: assisting her husband both practically and emotionally; taking care of and superintending household duties, including the responsibility for administering the domestic budget; the bearing, rearing, and educating of children; charity and assisting needy members of the community. It is obvious for Wakefield that these are socially vital tasks which, though they do not yield an income, are hard work. Concerning the education of children, for example, she stresses that "very few have even an idea of the severe sacrifices which the undertaking requires, if it is properly performed" (47). To be able to take up these responsibilities, women must receive adequate instruction. This is why Wakefield, like most female intellectuals of her time, decries the fashion for feminine accomplishments. Instead, she encourages a practical education of women, appropriated to each class, which recognises their existence as rational human beings and prepares them for the fulfilment of their respective class- and sex-determined socio-economic duties. Wakefield's proposed reforms of female education are not geared towards violating notions of gendered propriety and upsetting the sexual division of labour. She makes this clear towards the beginning of her treatise when she says of women:

Whatever obliges them to mix in the public haunts of men, or places the young in too familiar a situation with the other sex; whatever is obnoxious to the delicacy and reserve of the female character, or destructive, in the smallest degree, to the strictest moral purity, is inadmissible. The sphere of feminine action is contracted by numberless difficulties, that are no impediments to masculine exertions. Domestic privacy is the only sure asylum for the juvenile part of the sex; nor can the grave matron step far beyond that boundary with propriety. Unfitted, by their relative situation in society, for many honourable and lucrative employments, those only are suitable for

them, which can be pursued without endangering their virtue, or corrupting their manners.

(9–10)

As can be expected, Wakefield's overall adherence to gendered spheres of social and economic activity shapes her proposed solutions for ameliorating women's economic situation.

Engaging in independent waged work is for Wakefield not a woman's primary and mandatory task but a secondary economic one. It becomes unavoidable if the family needs additional means of subsistence (the likelihood of this event increases the lower the social rank) and if a woman cannot rely on a male breadwinner. The latter point, according to Wakefield, has not yet been sufficiently addressed in contemporary debates about the status of women: "Their rights and their duties have lately occupied the pens of writers of eminence; the employments which may properly exercise their faculties, and fill up their time in a useful manner, without encroaching upon those professions, which are appropriate to men, remain to be defined" (8). Indeed, Wakefield's seems to be the first published systematic investigation into this topic of the 1790s. She explains that it is necessary, because contrary to general assumptions, not every woman can expect that a man will provide for her and her children. Yet their lot is obscured by "custom" – in this case the inability or unwillingness to consider women's economic situation independently of a man:

The necessity of directing the attention of females to some certain occupation is not so apparent, because custom has rendered them dependant upon their fathers and husbands for support; but as some of every class experience the loss of those relations, without inheriting an adequate resource, there would be great propriety in preparing each of them, by an education of energy and useful attainments, to meet such disasters and to be able, under such circumstances, to procure an independence for themselves.

(65–66)

For Wakefield, then, woman's waged work and financial independence are not a default economic option; preparing a woman for potentially engaging in waged work, however, is a desirable means of insuring her against the vicissitudes of life. Wakefield does not champion employment opportunities for all women but for those who – through no fault of their own – do not have enough financial stability to confine themselves solely to their primary economic roles.

### ***Utilitarian arguments in favour of women's right to paid work***

Wakefield seems to be aware that her demand for practical education and employment opportunities for women needs further justification, as it, in parts, contradicts

cultural norms. The “reasonable precaution against the accidents of life” which she endorses “is resisted by prejudice, which rises like an insurmountable barrier against a woman, of any degree above the vulgar, employing her time and her abilities, towards the maintenance of herself and her family: degradation of rank immediately follows the virtuous attempt” (67–68). To demonstrate the nonsensicality of social contempt towards working women, Wakefield develops several arguments supporting her appeal, which revolve around a utilitarian proposition, namely, that women’s access to paid employments would be useful and contribute to general happiness: “Were it easier for women to find employment, or were they brought up more capable of earning a maintenance, the good effects of such a practice would not be confined to themselves alone, but would extend to the whole community [. . .]” (166).

“Useful” is a recurrent attribute in the text, with the author advocating, among others, “useful objects” (4), “useful manner” (8), “useful occupations” (9), “useful exertions of female talents” (10), “useful industry” (63), “useful attainments” (65), “useful institutions” (83), “useful needlework” (144), and “useful qualities of a housewife” (148). Wakefield seems to define individual usefulness as moral behaviour that redounds to general happiness. This bears traces of the rich version of utilitarianism as developed by Jeremy Bentham, but she explicitly references Adam Smith in this context (1). Camilla Leach and Joyce Goodman have traced Wakefield’s utilitarianism to her Quaker beliefs, which stressed “the responsibility of each individual to contribute to the good of society as a whole” (168). Although Wakefield’s resulting conviction that a woman “lives, not for herself only, but to contribute to the happiness of others” (Wakefield 36) seems to uphold a conservative and relational ideal of femininity, it at the same time helps her develop a weighty argument in favour of women’s right to paid work: preventing them from becoming industrious members of society diminishes their occasions to be useful and thus reduces the welfare of the entire community, that is women *and* men. Under certain circumstances, a woman’s paid work becomes the prerequisite without which she cannot perform her primary economic functions indispensable for society. Wakefield therefore does not derive her feminist demands from a liberal emphasis on individual rights but from her concern with duties, usefulness, and public welfare.

Aligning her analysis with the discourse of political economy, Wakefield explicitly evokes the authority of Adam Smith to present women’s economic activity as socially beneficial. The first sentences of *Reflections* read:

It is asserted by Doctor Adam Smith, that every individual is a burthen upon the society to which he belongs, who does not contribute his share of productive labour for the good of the whole. The Doctor, when he lays down this principle, speaks in general terms of man, as a being capable of forming a social compact for mutual defence, and the advantage of the community at large. He does not absolutely specify, that both sexes, in order to render themselves beneficial members of society, are equally required to comply

with these terms; but since the female sex is included in the idea of the species, and as women possess the same qualities as men, though perhaps in a different degree, their sex cannot free them from the claim of the public for their proportion of usefulness.

(1–2)

Wakefield's attitude to Smith is ambivalent. While on the one hand, she pays tribute to his thoughts, on the other, she draws attention to the absence of women in Smith's observations. *Reflections* thereby becomes an attempt to fill in a lacuna within political economy by examining what productive labour and usefulness actually mean for women. Economist Robert W. Dimand has argued that Wakefield's understanding of the first term is more inclusive than Smith's. While for Smith, "reproductive labour in the household [. . .] would not be productive labour, as it produced services rather than goods and was not sold outside the household", Wakefield, by contrast, assumes "that all useful labour was productive labour, and that the labour of women, whether within the household or in the market sphere, was useful and productive" ("An Eighteenth-Century" 196). The initial reference to Smith allows Wakefield therefore to make two implicit statements with regard to women and work: that domestic 'women's work' is productive because it is useful for society, and that in order to be useful, women can lay claim to the type of productive labour that would fall into Smith's narrow definition of the term, namely waged work sold outside of the household.

Another argument Wakefield brings forward in favour of women's paid employment is that it would eradicate the economic incentives for prostitution and thus improve social morals:

it would be a powerful means of reducing the number of those miserable women, who support a precarious existence by the wages of prostitution, and who, in their turn, become the seducers of the inexperienced youth of the other sex. [. . .] In the present state of things, if a poor frail unthinking girl yields to the ardent solicitations of the man who has won her affections, and he be so villainous as to abandon her, she is lost without resource, especially if she be qualified for no occupation but service; deprived of character, no person will take her into their family; the wants of nature must be satisfied, even at the price which produces utter destruction; and the forlorn deserted one is compelled to betake herself to that course, which presently terminates all hope of restoration to the esteem of others, or to her own approbation.

(166–67)

Wakefield clearly points to the economic and thus systemic underpinnings of prostitution, thereby contradicting the frequent opinion that it stemmed from individual depravity and vice. Despite her tendency to adopt a moralising and supercilious tone – she notes, for example, that the "misery of the poor, like that of other ranks, chiefly originates in their vices" (180) – Wakefield does

not condemn 'fallen women' but presents them as victims of an unjust socio-economic system. Society fails them in numerous ways: it refuses them a proper education, it does not provide a sufficient number of socially accepted paid employments, and it makes a woman's social and economic status depend entirely on the behaviour of the man with whom she becomes intimate. In the case of prostitutes, Wakefield takes a materialist stance: "the wants of nature must be satisfied", meaning that faced with the possibility of either starving or taking recourse to prostitution in order to survive, a woman will naturally choose the latter. In this, she is not a wilful sinner deserving social contempt, but bowing to economic pressure, as one of "many destitute women, whom a dreadful necessity drives to the business of prostitution" (164). Wakefield stresses that this scenario is detrimental not only to the affected woman, but also to the morals of men and the wider community. Again, then, her demand to ameliorate the economic situation of individual women is grounded in a concern for moral integrity and general welfare.

While the arguments summed up so far have social utility in view, Wakefield also confronts potential criticism which could see her propositions as leading to an eradication of the prevailing gender hierarchy. To this, Wakefield retorts that reforming women's education and allowing them to enter the waged workforce more numerous will have no negative repercussions for the extant socio-economic order but, on the contrary, strengthen it:

Another general argument may still be urged to remove the jealous apprehension of men, lest, that by teaching women too much, and by rendering them too useful, they should become independent of them: That as a more rational education prevails, women will be better acquainted with their relative situation, and [. . .] they will perceive, that there can be but one head or chief in every family; nature and reason, as well as custom, have established this power in the hands of the men [. . .].

(108)

Her argument is strategically smart (and also used by Hays and Robinson), as it assures men that they will not lose their privileged status. Yet it is not a ruse: like Hannah More, Wakefield appears to genuinely believe that given the choice, the vast majority of women would willingly embrace the role ascribed to them by conservative ideology.

### ***Wakefield's suggestions for improving women's economic status***

The solutions Wakefield proposes for ameliorating the economic situation of women are a mix of cultural and economic measures: changed social attitudes, practical education for women, intensified occupational segregation, female economic solidarity including positive discrimination, and equal pay. From a

twenty-first-century point of view, some of these propositions are remarkably topical, even if they reflect Wakefield's belief in the superiority of a static socio-economic order.

Concerning social attitudes, Wakefield stresses that constrictive ideals of feminine passivity are promulgated by society, transmitted through a narrow education, and have consequently been internalised by women, so that "the energies, of which they are capable" have been "concealed, not only from others, but from themselves" (5). For women to become more active and useful members of society, a change on all three levels – social norms, education, and women's self-perception – is essential:

Some alteration in the general turn of thinking among young women, must take place before they can be persuaded to render themselves capable of these useful exertions; and that can be produced only by the early impressions they imbibe; the manner in which they are received in society, after such application; and their finding no impediment arise from it to their settlement in marriage.

(70)

Wakefield's reference to marriage underlines the prominent status it holds within a woman's personal economic calculation: as it remains her most likely path into social acceptance and economic security, she will be reluctant to engage in activities such as waged work, which reduce her chances of attracting a husband. Wakefield advocates a transformation of social mores, which would make paid work and marriage – two likely options for a (middle-class) woman to maintain herself – not mutually exclusive. She points out that the social opprobrium faced by women openly engaging in trade, resulting in their decreased chances of matrimony, runs counter to the commercial spirit of Britain:

Can it be accounted for on any other ground than that of prejudice, in a country like England, where commerce forms one of the principal sinews of national strength, where the character of the merchant is honourable, and no obstacle to a favourable reception in the highest circles, that degradation should attend the female who engages in the concerns of commerce, and that she whose good sense and resolution enable her to support herself, is banished from that line of company, of which she had perhaps previously formed a distinguished ornament? One of the effects of this ill-directed pride, is to deter young men of liberal prospects, from demeaning themselves, as it is erroneously termed, by marrying a girl who has been trained up to any profitable employment.

(71–72)

By emphasising that it is "prejudice" which prevents women from contributing their share to "national strength", this passage illustrates that Wakefield is aware

of the economic effects of culture, which is why she urges reforms not only on a purely economic level but also on an ideological one.

Wakefield's proposed changes to the mode of educating women have two goals: that of altering their self-perception and that of teaching them skills required not for the short-lived economic strategy of attracting a husband but the long-term strategy of making them knowledgeable and (economically) resourceful. Preparing women for potentially engaging in paid work is for Wakefield a sustainable form of investing in their future and therefore a "far more valuable gift than a moderate dowry, which, when once consumed, is irrecoverable, whilst a talent, that can be resumed at discretion, is like a bank, to which application may always be made" (157). Contributing to the larger debate on female education of the 1790s, Wakefield devotes a significant part of *Reflections* to the topic. She reiterates two interrelated points: education ought to depend on the social rank of the pupil and teach her practical skills that will be useful to her – and make her useful – both during marriage and/or singlehood. The necessity of implementing these two aspects springs from a concern with women's ability to contribute to a class- and sex-based economy: "it cannot be supposed that a butcher's wife will serve her husband's customers, or a moderate farmer's daughter manage the dairy or the poultry-yard with more adroitness, for knowing how to walk a minuet, or to play upon the harpsichord. In order therefore to fit every one for their station, schools should be established adapted to the different descriptions of children" (62). Proceeding from this assumption, Wakefield devotes a chapter to women from each class, in which she identifies their respective primary work duties, the suitable means of educating them, and the paid employments they can engage in within the bounds set by their sex, class, and codes of gentility (see Tables 1–4). In one sense, then, *Reflections* is modern and progressive, as it promotes an early form of vocational training for women as a means of making them socially more useful, more productive, and economically independent in case they cannot count on the support of a man. In another, *Reflections* can be characterised as antiquated and conservative in its opposition to social mobility and its insistence that economic roles are determined by inherited identity markers.

This ambivalence also marks Wakefield's endorsement of occupational segregation. She accepts that gendered rules of propriety limit the types of economic activity that are congruent with ideals of femininity. Yet this is precisely why she promotes that the few remaining activities should be accessible to women only. She indicts men who "monopolize not only the most advantageous employments, and such as exclude women from the exercise of them, by the publicity of their nature, or the extensive knowledge they require, but even many of those, which are consistent with the female character" (150–51). In demanding that access to professions should be based on sex, Wakefield, in her understanding, does not encourage a revolution of the extant system but, on the contrary, requests that its premises ought to be applied more rigorously: if decorum and gentility dictate that some tasks, by exposing women to the public or placing them in a close proximity to men, are incompatible with respected femininity, then society should no longer



tolerate economic activities by men which are immoral by the exact same criteria. The prevailing double standard outrages Wakefield: both sexes ought to abide by cultural norms, and this, in consequence, calls for the exclusion of men from paid professions that bring them into close contact with the bodies of (young) women.

For modern readers, the solutions Wakefield formulates based on this reasoning might seem amusing or overly prudish. She doubts, for example, that it is "compatible with propriety or decency, that the persons of girls advancing towards maturity, should be exposed to the wanton eye of a dancing-master". As a countermeasure, "[w]omen only [. . .] should be permitted to instruct the [female] sex in these seductive arts" (51–52) and other subjects. Establishing female colleges where girls are taught by an all-female staff would have the advantage of "affording a respectable subsistence to great numbers of young women, who are reduced to misery through want of employment, by enabling them to teach those sciences, which are [now] exclusively taught by masters, an evil that calls loudly for redress" (51). Wakefield's ideas do not extend to the by then already strongly feminised teaching profession alone. She posits further that "[e]very undertaker should employ women, for the express purpose of supplying the female dead, with those things which are requisite. How shocking is the idea of our persons being exposed, even after death, to the observation of a parcel of undertaker's men" (165–66). Women can moreover engage in "opening a vein [. . .] for those of her own sex at least" (168) and serve female customers as haberdashers, perfumers, milliners, or assistants for trying on gloves and shoes (164–65).

Wakefield thus partially transfers the doctrine of separate spheres onto the labour market. This has consequences for both sexes, as it requires that

[t]he serving of retail shops, which deal in articles of female consumption, should be exclusively appropriated to women. For were the multitudes of men [. . .] to withdraw, they might benefit the community, by exchanging such frivolous avocations for something more worthy of the masculine character, and by this measure afford an opportunity of gaining a creditable livelihood to many destitute women, whom a dreadful necessity drives to the business of prostitution.

(164)

Not only does Wakefield present prostitution as an economic problem resulting from men taking away women's jobs. Her apparent condescension for men who engage in work that is 'unmanly' exposes that gender ideology can cut both ways regarding notions of acceptable economic activity (a fact that Radcliffe's *The Female Advocate*, published one year after Wakefield's pamphlet, evinces even more strongly). Wakefield condemns "male intruders" (158) into feminine professions and clearly questions their masculinity by terming them "effeminate beings in the garb of men" (153). In doing so, she inadvertently turns the tables on the patriarchal economy and exposes a flaw in its logic: she thinks its premises through to the end and concludes that just as certain types of work render women 'masculine',

so do others render men 'feminine'. Both are socially unacceptable. Therefore, occupational segregation has, for Wakefield, the advantage of serving two purposes at once: culturally, it conforms to extant gender norms and reduces potentially sexualised and thus immoral interactions between men and women. Economically, it creates employment opportunities for women.

A progressive – and depressingly topical – demand of Wakefield's is that women should receive equal pay as men for the same kind of work. She indicts what today goes under the name of the gender pay gap: "Another heavy discouragement to the industry of women, is the inequality of the reward of their labour, compared with that of men, an injustice which pervades every species of employment performed by both sexes" (151). She substantiates her claim with a footnote quoting the respective annual wages of male and female domestic servants: a footman earns 2.5 times as much as a cook-maid, "though her office is laborious, unwholesome, and requires a much greater degree of skill than that of a valet" (151). The stress on physical labour involved in the cook-maid's work implies that Wakefield subscribes to a variant of the labour theory of value. She justifies higher wages where more bodily exertion is required. On the basis of differences in corporeal strength, she also seems to accept gender-related differences in income, as men can generally perform more physical labour (and are hence more productive) than women: "In employments which depend upon bodily strength the distinction [in wages] is just, for it cannot be pretended that the generality of women can earn as much as men, where the produce of their labour is the result of corporeal exertion" (152). Wakefield argues that "the generality of women" cannot earn as much as the collective of men, because wages reflect "corporeal exertion", which in the case of women will in sum be always lesser than that of men's total bodily exertion. In this respect, she sees women's status again as justifiably subordinate. Yet while women's lower *aggregate* pay is reasonable, paying women less on an *individual* basis is not, if she performs the same amount of bodily labour as a man:

[I]t is a subject of great regret, that this inequality [in wages] should prevail, even where an equal share of application are exerted. Male-stay-makers, mantua-makers, and hair dressers are better paid than female artists of the same professions; but surely it will never be urged as an apology for this disproportion, that women are not as capable of making stays, gowns, dressing hair, and similar arts, as men.

(152)

That women fail to earn the same amount of money in these professions is, for Wakefield, due to gender discrimination: "they sink under the mortification of being regarded as artizans of inferior estimation, whilst the men, who supplant them, receive all the encouragement of large profits and full employment, which is ensured to them by the folly of fashion" (153). Again, culture has manifest economic consequences. And as "the prices they receive for their labour are not

sufficient to repay them for the expence of qualifying themselves for their business" (152), women and their parents lack economic incentives to invest in an apprenticeship.

From a contemporary perspective, Wakefield's explanation of the gender pay gap is only partially accurate. As Hill affirms (263), apprenticeship – the completion of which required the payment of a premium – indeed became a risky investment that did not necessarily pay off at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet the reason for this was not, as Wakefield thought, that men and women were competing for the same trades but that women did in the overstocked feminised trades of millinery, mantua-making, or sewing. The oversupply depressed wage levels and was additionally exacerbated by the growing number of unapprenticed women ready to take up work at any price. Increased occupational segregation at the end of the eighteenth century was therefore actually one of the reasons behind female underemployment and low pay and not, as Wakefield believed, a solution to it.

It does not appear that Wakefield expected state regulation to bring about the desired improvement of women's economic situation. While Chapone or Hays explicitly named men and (male) legislature as the addressees of their appeals, Wakefield seems to rely on the self-healing powers of a rational society – "the example of a few might influence others, and extend like a drop of oil spread upon the surface of the water" (73) – and the formative influence of its upper echelons. She particularly singles out women of the nobility and gentry as being able to ameliorate Britain's occupational structure in an act of female solidarity, both as cultural role models and in their economic functions as employers and consumers of goods:

[S]ympathy with their humble sisters should direct them to [. . .] every incitement to the industry of their own sex. [. . .] women of rank and fortune [. . .] should determine to employ women only, wherever they can be employed; they should procure female instructors for their children; they should frequent no shops that are not served by women; they should wear no clothes that are not made by them; they should reward them as liberally as they do the men who have hitherto supplanted them. [. . .] For once let fashion be guided by reason, and let the mode sanction a preference to women in every profession, to which their pretensions are equal with those of the other sex. This is a patronage which the necessitous have a right to expect from the right and powerful, whether they are poor by birth, or are unfortunately become so by that mutability of fortune to which every rank is liable.

(153–55)

In effect, what Wakefield champions as "patronage" amounts in modern vocabulary to a form of self-organised positive discrimination or affirmative action. It is noteworthy that Wakefield stresses the import of her suggestion by phrasing it in a language reminiscent of a sermon. The parallel sentence structure starting with repetitions of "they should" and bathetic evocations of what she deems an ideal state ("let fashion be guided by reason", "let the mode sanction a preference to

women”) rhetorically build up pressure for (economically) correct and just behaviour on the part of the addressees. Yet the latter are tellingly not men in positions of power, but “right and powerful” women from the nobility and gentry. Wakefield’s tone in this passage suggests that she felt more confident and authorised to ‘preach to’ women – even those above her rank – than to influential men, which again reflects her greater adherence to established gender norms.

Wakefield’s endorsement of positive discrimination and female self-help also becomes apparent when she applauds the business venture of a Mrs Cooper, who has established a “mart for the sale of the labours of those [women], whom a sense of former propriety, conceals from the eye of observation” (115). Wakefield explains the functioning of the shop in a footnote: “The repository for fine works, is an institution for the reception and disposal of any production, from a pair of knit garters, to the most elegant works of ingenuity. The price of each article, and a number, are affixed to it, by which the name of the owner is concealed” (115). Wakefield praises this example of female solidarity, which aids women to improve their economic status without jeopardising the social one. Yet the argumentation throughout *Reflections* suggests that she would wish that (middle-class) women who sell their work on the market do not have to conceal their identity behind anonymous numbers. As such, she argues for the right of women to visibly engage in paid work in the public realm. To contemporary readers, the machinations Mrs Cooper resorted to in her shop prove that cultural norms did constrict the ability of at least some women to openly earn money.

### ***Evaluating Wakefield’s contribution***

Wakefield’s *Reflections* attests that economic thought by women around 1800 was not the sole domain of radical writers. As the relatively few critics to discuss her work have observed, Wakefield combines conservative with progressive ideas. Dimand, for instance, concludes that Wakefield uses “the conservative language of the duties and obligations of women to argue for a radical alteration of women’s education and opportunities” (“An Eighteenth-Century” 201), and Gina Luria calls *Reflections* “a curious marriage of the innovative content of Wollstonecraft’s polemic with the high moral seriousness of [. . .] Hannah More” (6). That Wakefield explicitly recommends More’s and Trimmer’s writings (Wakefield, *Reflections* 115), but never mentions Wollstonecraft, is an indication that she aligned herself with conservative feminism. She does not wish to subvert the extant socio-economic order but, on the contrary, to reinforce its premises by segregating economic activities, ranging from education to domestic and paid work, even more scrupulously according to class and sex. Her progressive and astoundingly modern demands – which include women’s right to paid work, equal pay, vocational training for girls, and the acknowledgement that prostitution has economic underpinnings – thus paradoxically spring from a desire to maintain an inflexible, quasi-hereditary economy, which, if really implemented with the rigour *Reflections* campaigns for, would arguably stifle the commercial spirit of capitalist Britain that Wakefield keeps praising.

If modern readers might reject Wakefield's economic thought as too conservative, some of her contemporaries believed it was not conservative enough. The *Critical Review*, though on the whole appreciative, was doubtful regarding Wakefield's suggestions for women's paid employments: "Several ingenious occupations mentioned by Mrs. Wakefield, are, if we mistake not, already pursued with success by a considerable number of the sex; some others which are proposed are perhaps of a nature repugnant to that delicacy, which, in our opinion, ought to be preserved even among indigent women" ("*Reflections*" 455). The review inadvertently confirms a point that Wakefield consistently raises, namely, that women's restricted access to paid work is not only the result of economic processes, but also – perhaps even more so – of ideology. According to the *Critical Review*, women ought to abstain from certain occupations not because of market logic, but to protect their "delicacy" and femininity. Preserving the latter is apparently at least as important as escaping want. This example confirms that women's (and men's) work ought to be studied, as Wakefield does in *Reflections*, as an outcome of both economic and cultural processes.

Commenting on the afterlife of Wakefield's text, Dimand notes that despite her references to Adam Smith, Sir Josiah Child's *Discourse about Trade* (1690), and Sir Frederic Morton Eden's *Condition of the Poor* (1797), *Reflections* failed to make an impression on later economists: "No trace of an influence [. . .] can be discerned in one work of political economy where it might be expected, the extensive commentary in her grandson's four volume edition of *The Wealth of Nations* [. . .]" ("*An Eighteenth-Century*" 202). It is worth noting that Wakefield's contemporaries, by contrast, explicitly recognised *Reflections* as a contribution to political economy, which raises the question to what extent the subsequent obscurity of Wakefield's economic thought is due to exclusionary mechanisms that are of a more recent date than 1800. Notwithstanding a few reservations, the *Critical Review* applauded Wakefield's cause and conservative, rational stance, comparing *Reflections* favourably to radical feminist interventions:

We are not fond of the amazonian innovations which pretend to consult the dignity of the female sex at the expence of its delicacy and softness. There are physical distinctions and moral considerations peculiarly relative to women; and the system-mongers, who confound or overlook them, deserve perhaps something more than contempt. A practical plan, not liable to any such objection, for the amelioration of the female condition, is, on the contrary, entitled to praise, as a valuable addition to the science of political economy – a respectable portion of this praise we do not hesitate to bestow on Mrs. Wakefield's *Reflections*.

("*Reflections*" 456)

Contrary to Wollstonecraft, Hays, or Robinson, Wakefield was indeed not a conscious "system-monger"; she was, however, a resolute system-improver who examined the labour market from the perspective of women and argued that women's

**TABLE 6.1** Priscilla Wakefield's Outline of and Recommendations for the First Class of Society

<i>Class members*</i>	<i>Women's primary work duties</i>	<i>Recommended practical skills to be taught to girls</i>	<i>Recommended paid occupations for women</i>
<p>“the nobility, and all those who, either by the influence of high offices, or extensive hereditary possessions, rival them in power” (63)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the indispensable duties of wives, mothers, and heads of families” (81)</li> <li>• overseeing the household</li> <li>• overseeing “that part of their husband's revenue, which is consumed by the family” (81)</li> <li>• religious and moral education of their children</li> <li>• moral education of female domestic servants</li> <li>• helping the poor in the neighbourhood, in particular the “super-intendence of the poor of their own sex”, “patronage and management of useful institutions”, “inspection of workhouses, schools of industry, and cottages” (83)</li> <li>• practical support and moral guidance of female apprentices</li> <li>• “the gradual and almost imperceptible, though certain influence of forming the opinions, and improving the manners of their countrywomen” (96)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “languages, simple mathematics, astronomy, natural and experimental philosophy, with history and criticism” (90)</li> <li>• “poetry, music, painting, and statuary” (91)</li> <li>• “customs and manners of different nations, geography, chemistry, electricity, botany, [study of] animals, gardening, turning, and works of ingenuity” (91-92)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, occupations that “require the exercise of intellectual, rather than bodily powers” (125) and are not “of a sordid menial kind” (124). They must be “neither laborious nor servile, and they must of course be productive, without requiring capital” (125).</li> <li>• authorship (126)</li> <li>• painting, especially historical paintings, miniature portraits, painting in enamel</li> <li>• drawing, decorating shop windows</li> <li>• sketches for frontispieces of books</li> <li>• colouring of prints, maps, and globes</li> <li>• illustrations for books on natural history</li> <li>• “designs for needle-work, and ornamental works of all kinds” (132)</li> <li>• design and embellishing of lockets</li> <li>• engraving</li> <li>• statuary and modelling</li> <li>• music</li> <li>• for women who “are able to raise a capital” (137): particular forms of ornamental gardening, such as tending to shrubs, flowers, and pleasure grounds</li> <li>• “presiding over seminaries for female education” (138)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Men's (paid) occupations</i></p> <p>“independent property” allows them to fill up “the highest offices in the different departments of the state”, for example, as high-ranking politicians and lawyers (64)</p>			

\* The social rank of a woman is “determined by the accident of their birth, or their connections in marriage” (63).

TABLE 6.2: Priscilla Wakefield's Outline of and Recommendations for the Second Class of Society

<i>Class members</i>	<i>Women's primary work duties</i>	<i>Recommended practical skills to be taught to girls</i>	<i>Recommended paid occupations for women</i>
<p>“those, who by the application of their talents to learning, commerce, manufactures or agriculture, procure a respectable subsistence approaching to opulence” (63)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the indispensable duties of wives, mothers, and heads of families” (81)</li> <li>• “exercising a well-ordered [domestic] oeconomy” (100) and managing the household budget</li> <li>• discharging in person domestic duties</li> <li>• acting as house-keeper</li> <li>• “oeconomising and rendering all kinds of food as palatable as possible” (101), cooking</li> <li>• “domestic medicine” and “management of a sick chamber” (102)</li> <li>• assisting their husbands in their occupations, restraining their “boldness of speculation” through “temperate views” (107)</li> <li>• helping the poor financially (where possible) and by offering advice and sympathy</li> <li>• taking poor girls in as domestic servants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in general: “those studies, which require the smallest consumption of time, and which are likely to contribute to usefulness” (117)</li> <li>• “knowledge of the value of all necessary articles consumed in a family, whether for the table or the wardrobe, as well as the quantities of each which are requisite for respective uses” (101)</li> <li>• “a judicious application of money” (101)</li> <li>• “skill in preparing broths and other things for the sick” (102)</li> <li>• “the most rational system of bringing up infants” (103)</li> <li>• “a grammatical knowledge of the English language, and an intimate acquaintance with the best authors, who have excelled in history, biography, poetry, and morality” (118)</li> <li>• “simple mathematics”, “arithmetic” and “the knowledge of book-keeping” (118)</li> <li>• drawing</li> </ul>	<p>the same as for the first class</p>
<p><i>Men's (paid) occupations</i></p>	<p>“learned professions”,  “lucrative and respectable avocations of commercial life” (64)</p>		

**TABLE 6.3** Priscilla Wakefield's Outline of and Recommendations for the Third Class of Society

<i>Class members</i>	<i>Women's primary work duties</i>	<i>Recommended practical skills to be taught to girls</i>	<i>Recommended paid occupations for women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “those, whose honest and useful industry raises them above want, without procuring for them the means of splendid or luxurious gratification” (63)</li> <li>• “includes several gradations, involving [...] every species of tradesmen below the merchant, and above the meaner mechanic” (140)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not specified beyond the “indispensable duties of wives, mothers, and heads of families” (81)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “reading fluently, and spelling correctly” (142)</li> <li>• “acquaintance with the practical parts of scripture” (142)</li> <li>• basic knowledge of geography and English history</li> <li>• “useful needlework”, including “complete skill in cutting out and making every article of female dress” (144)</li> <li>• arithmetic, basic geometry</li> <li>• “acquaintance with figures and a methodical system of book-keeping” (145), as these skills are useful in trade</li> <li>• “apprenticing girls of this rank to some trade [. . .], whether they marry or live single” (150)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• domestic service</li> <li>• stay-making</li> <li>• mantua-making</li> <li>• hairdressing</li> <li>• millinery</li> <li>• haberdashery</li> <li>• perfumery</li> <li>• “serving of retail shops, which deal in articles of female consumption” (164)</li> <li>• assisting undertakers</li> <li>• “many parts of the business of a stationer, particularly ruling account books or making pens” (168)</li> <li>• “compounding of medicines in an apothecary’s shop” (168)</li> <li>• opening a vein on a female patient, cupping</li> <li>• pastry and confectionary</li> <li>• light turnery</li> <li>• toy-making</li> <li>• “instruction of youth in all its various departments” (155), for example, as governess, teacher, or “manager of a public seminary” (155)</li> <li>• teaching all subjects to girls in female colleges</li> <li>• for “widows of publicans” and “women of a certain age” (170): keeping public inns</li> <li>• farming</li> <li>• further (not specified) occupations suitable to women in “a commercial and manufacturing country” (172)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “farmers, tradesmen and artificers”; they “attain the knowledge of some peculiar art, or branch of commerce, by which they are enabled to gain a competent support” (65)</li> </ul>			
<i>Men's (paid) occupations</i>			



**TABLE 6.4** Priscilla Wakefield's Outline of and Recommendations for the Fourth Class of Society

<i>Class members</i>	<i>Women's primary work duties</i>	<i>Recommended practical skills to be taught to girls</i>	<i>Recommended paid occupations for women</i>
<p>"the labouring poor" (63)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "the indispensable duties of wives, mothers, and heads of families" (81)</li> <li>• "oeconomy, cleanliness, industry, and, above all these, good temper" (177)</li> <li>• "good management" (177) of the household budget</li> <li>• upholding "neatness and industry" (178) and assisting their husbands in their work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• girls "should be instructed with plainness and simplicity in the doctrines of Christianity" (184), yet not burdened with "abstruse theological doctrines" (185)</li> <li>• reading</li> <li>• "as much skill in writing, as will enable them to set down the articles of their expenture, or to write a receipt" (188)</li> <li>• "plain-work, knitting, marking, cutting out, and mending linen" (188)</li> <li>• "washing, ironing, and cleaning house" (188)</li> <li>• "the addition of money" (188)</li> <li>• knowledge of the multiplication table and the pence table</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in general, "the labour of the female poor should be moderated, by the consideration of their inferiority of strength" (176)</li> <li>• service</li> <li>• agricultural work, but only if women do not "mix indiscriminately with men of good and bad character" (192)</li> <li>• work in manufactories, but preferably in "separate apartments allotted to men and women, where each may work without communication with the other" (193)</li> <li>• employments (not specified) "which can be carried on separately at their own house" (193)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Men's (paid) occupations</i></p>	<p>"The manner in which the labouring poor should pass their time, requires but few observations; for their lot dooms them, even in those countries where their situation is most favourable, to incessant toil, as a necessary means of subsistence" (176)</p>		

access to paid work was a prerequisite for social stability and prosperity. In hindsight, it is evident that she and her reviewers underestimated the cultural and economic effects of her proposed reforms: increased access to education and economic independence have given many women the means to challenge precisely the static order based on class and sex that Wakefield wanted to preserve.

### **“Let then the claim to these female occupations be developed”: Mary Ann Radcliffe’s *The Female Advocate* (1799)**

#### ***Radcliffe’s eccentricities***

A year after Wakefield’s *Reflections*, another female writer made public her thoughts on women’s limited access to paid work: Mary Ann Radcliffe in *The Female Advocate; or An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation*. Radcliffe’s c. 175–pages-strong pamphlet in some respects reads like a postscript to Wakefield’s contribution: it draws attention to the economically precarious situation of women who are not provided for by a man; it insists on occupational segregation as a solution, effectively arguing for women’s monopoly over certain ‘female occupations’; and it sees prostitution as a social evil springing from economic necessity rather than the moral depravity of individual women. Radcliffe’s is, however, a less orderly contribution to women’s economic thought. Yet despite – or maybe because – of its stylistic eccentricity, *The Female Advocate* merits closer attention. Its thematic similarity to *Reflections* suggests that women around 1800 faced limited options for making a living and in consequence were developing similar arguments and suggesting similar solutions. But Radcliffe also adds novel ideas to the debate: her proposal for an institution offering work to unemployed middle-class women, for example, amounts to a publicly funded job-creating measure. What is more, whereas Wakefield adopts a rather comprehensive view by considering all four classes of society, Radcliffe zooms in on a situation she was most familiar with, namely that of a middle-class woman whom circumstances forced to earn an income for herself and her family. Together with Radcliffe’s *Memoirs* (1810), *The Female Advocate* represents a woman’s attempt to confront the culturally unscripted economic role of a female breadwinner.

Mary Ann Radcliffe (née Clayton) is not to be confused with her contemporary and namesake Ann Radcliffe (née Ward), acclaimed author of Gothic novels. Mary Ann is certainly the more obscure figure of the two. Her *Memoirs of Mrs Mary Ann Radcliffe; in Familiar Letters to Her Female Friend*, which she self-published through subscription in 1810, remain the most detailed source relating to her life, but since they are a subjective and somewhat irregular account, they obviously have to be taken with a grain of salt. According to the *Orlando* database, Mary Ann was baptised on 18 June 1746 in a church at Nottingham and died shortly before 6 August 1818 in Edinburgh (Brown et al., “Mary Ann Radcliffe: Life”). The *ODNB* is considerably vaguer and cites “c. 1746” and “in or after

1810" as her dates of birth and death (Grundy). Radcliffe's biography is marked by her physical and metaphorical mobility in several important ways: she was born and raised a Roman Catholic but eventually converted to Protestantism. She was English but spent a considerable portion of her life in Scotland. She was the sole surviving child of a well-to-do merchant family, inherited her father's landed property in England, and married into the gentry but died an impoverished and invalid woman. It is certain that she authored at least two texts: *The Female Advocate* and *Memoirs*. Regarding the first publication, Radcliffe states in her autobiography that her original intention was to publish it anonymously under the title *An Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain*. Yet her publishers, Vernor and Hood, prevailed on her to change the title and to capitalise on the similarity of her name to that of Ann Radcliffe, the novelist (*Memoirs* 387). This similarity has also led to the attribution of several Minerva Gothic novels to Mary Ann, but it remains doubtful. The novels do not display one coherent style, and Mary Ann does not mention any of them in *Memoirs*, although her various income-earning occupations are at the centre of her autobiography.

In the introduction to *The Female Advocate*, Radcliffe avers that "amidst the abundant shew of publications which are daily ushered into the world, I have not seen one on a subject similar to this" (xiii). When *The Female Advocate* was published, Wakefield's contribution was already available. Yet Radcliffe claims to have composed her text seven years earlier (iii), that is around 1792, when Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* appeared. This would make *The Female Advocate* indeed the first piece to address in detail the question of (middle-class) female unemployment. Wollstonecraft's manifesto and, above all, Radcliffe's personal experience of financial struggle seem to have prompted her to put pen to paper, although she professes – rightly so – that hers is a less radical intervention: "All women possess not the Amazonian spirit of a Wolstonecraft [*sic*]. But indeed, unremitted oppression is sometimes a sufficient apology for their throwing off the gentle garb of a female, and assuming some more masculine appearance" (xi).

Retracing Radcliffe's argumentation in *The Female Advocate* is challenging because she does not develop it in a systematic way – a tendency that already her contemporary reviewers rebuked. The *Lady's Monthly Museum* opined that "here we have ideas sufficiently just and natural, but carelessly and imperfectly expressed" (*Lady's Monthly*, "The Female" 404), while the *Monthly Catalogue* pronounced that "if the subject were not deeply interesting, the feeble and declamatory style in which it is treated would have very little effect in stimulating those feelings which it is the view of the authoress to excite" (*Monthly Catalogue*, "The Female" 479). Radcliffe's "feeble" style is repetitive, at times contradictory, and it vacillates between a detached, scholarly voice on the one hand and exclamatory, melodramatic, hyperbolised passages on the other. In such manner, she writes, for example, about the necessity of investigating into the subject of middle-class women's unemployment:

when once begun, doubtless others will as quickly join in the grand cause, and from a serious survey, discover some mode of regulating this complex

business, which carries such a vast train of grievances after it, and which is deeply interwoven with the happiness of the greatest part of the people, connected with the whole, will manifest itself to every serious enquirer, and shall be more fully enlarged upon, as we explore the dreary scene. But I can never force myself to a belief, that woman, the mother of all mankind, was ever intended by Divine Providence to become a butt, or mark, to receive so many piercing darts from the sons of her bosom, as her only reward for all that maternal affection and kindness which the helpless state of infancy and childhood render so necessary; independently, does it not seem a social interest in nature, to give aid and succour to one another?

(26)

Here, as elsewhere, Radcliffe's two rhetorical strategies – rational argumentation and emotional appeal – intermingle, as if she was torn between what she terms “masculine appearance” (xi) and the language of feelings and sensibility suitable for “helpless, injured females” who deserve “the pity of the world” (53). She is aware of this tension and puts it down to her personality and the subject at hand: “should my zeal in the cause of happiness lead into an eccentric mode of writing, be it remembered it is an eccentric cause” (47).

The stylistic eccentricity also shows in the combination of various literary genres that make up *The Female Advocate*. Her expository comments on women and paid work are interspersed with poems, partially of her own invention: thus, stanzas on “Truth and Reason: An Imitation from Horace” (60) eventually merge into a digression on inflation and its effects on the real value of wages (66–67). The last 40 pages of *The Female Advocate* consist of the fictional “Story of Fidelia”. Radcliffe had it previously published and includes it again “as a kind of back-ground” (130) to her preceding observations, although paid work is not a relevant theme in young Fidelia's sorrowful tale of seduction, socio-economic degradation, attempted suicide, and subsequent redemption through Christian faith. Radcliffe would reissue older alongside new work in 1810, when she annexed *The Female Advocate* (without Fidelia's story) to her *Memoirs*, “in order to remind the friends of humanity, and the friends of the community in general, of the great necessity there is for speedily setting on foot some institution for the protection of poor unfortunate females” (*Memoirs* 389).

Radcliffe's ideas on women's paid work are therefore conveyed haphazardly, across genres, and in a tone which frequently departs from an even, expository mode of expression. She oscillates between the public and the private, the general and the personal, the accusatory and the conciliatory, the defiant and the compliant, the rational and the emotional, the academic and the literary. But the peculiar style of writing arguably reflects more than just her personality. It mirrors a challenge that underlies most feminist (and revisionist) projects: how to find a voice that renders the (emotional) experience of marginalisation and is simultaneously legible in the discursive centre. Radcliffe touches upon this predicament in *The Female Advocate*: “It is impossible to impart to others the internal feelings, except

by words; and when people are predetermined to disbelieve every syllable you urge in your own justification, how are you to effect your own exculpation?" (112). Her contradictoriness and her avowed tendency to adopt "a zigzag rout" (*Memoirs* 388) are therefore, as Mike Sanders has argued, representative of a wider and enduring predicament of women speaking up in the public: Radcliffe's "problems [. . .] of finding space within existing discourses on the nature and position of women, of finding ways to legitimise both her criticisms and her solutions, and of finding an appropriate 'tone' in which to express herself, remained constant problems for women throughout the nineteenth century and beyond" (6–7). Thomas Campbell identifies and expounds on a similar conflict "of private and public selves" (71) in Radcliffe's *Memoirs*. Her, as she terms it, "eccentric mode of writing" is hence to some degree related to her attempt to re-centre and make visible the economically marginalised group that she represents. It also shows yet again what I claim throughout this book, namely, that with regard to (historical) texts by women, genre is not a helpful category for identifying contributions to economic thought.

That Radcliffe feels that she is writing from an ex-centric socio-economic position is palpable in both her texts. Her sentiment, however, does not stem from a wish to establish equality between men and women. Quite the opposite: she readily accepts women's subordinate role. The logical consequence of the extant gender hierarchy is, for her, that men have the obligation to protect women, which includes maintaining them and their children. Radcliffe therefore concurs with the reasoning behind coverture regulations: "women seem formed by nature to seek protection from men" (19), and every woman can deem herself lucky whom "a kind Providence hath placed under the immediate care of a tender father, or an affectionate and kind husband; or, *by chance*, a friend, or brother" (18). The problem, as Radcliffe's wording already indicates, is that the economic situation of a woman depends on "Providence" and "chance": should she find herself without a (capable) male guardian, she is left "unprotected" (28, 138, 261) and lacks the economic stability that a man is meant to guarantee. The condition of this ex-centric group – middle-class women unprovided for by a man – is at the centre of *The Female Advocate*.

Radcliffe makes especially clear that this group consists of not only widows and single women but also wives whose husbands fall short of their breadwinning duties:

How far the wife was intended to be the slave to her husband, I know not, but certain we are, she was designed to be his friend, his companion, and united part; or, according to the gentlemen's phrase, his better part; and yet how often do we see her sinking under the burden of a household load, whilst the unfeeling husband is lavishing away the substance which ought to be for the comfort and support of a family?

(95)

In drawing attention to the situation of wives, *The Female Advocate* connects feminist analyses of the economics of marriage to economic thought on women and

paid work. In the previous passage, Radcliffe evokes the tropes of the spendthrift husband and of wives as slaves. She moreover revisits a major claim of Chapone's, Wollstonecraft's, Hays's, and Robinson's: for a woman, marriage is an economic risk. But Radcliffe directs her gaze towards middle-class women for whom the potential danger of ending up with an economically incompetent husband has already become a reality and who consequently find themselves in a situation which in theory is not meant to exist: as a genteel wife (and mother) forced to make a living. *The Female Advocate* thereby lays open and confronts a blind spot within conventional conceptions of the economics of marriage.

Radcliffe's subsequently published *Memoirs* make plain that *The Female Advocate* is a response to her own experience: as a 15-year-old girl, she eloped with the 35-year-old Joseph Radcliffe and, defying the attempts of her male guardians to protect her assets through equity (she was the sole heiress to her father's property), she let him dispose of her fortune. The ensuing developments led up to that constellation feminist economists of marriage warned against: the decision of uniting herself to Joseph and trusting him with her money literally cost Mary Ann dearly, if her account in *Memoirs* is to be trusted. Joseph seems to have used his wife's money to pay off his debts and incurred new ones after unsuccessfully investing her capital in a sugar-refining business. Nor was he able to maintain the growing family (the Radcliffes had eight children) through work, as Mary Ann maintains in *Memoirs*:

his want of resolution or exertion hath been the cause, I must say, of all the misfortunes I have experienced to the present day; [. . .] a very short time elapsed after our union, before, young as I was, I felt the dreadful effects of my beloved partner's easy indifference to the wants of his family – To the wants of his family, did I say? But that I ought to retract, for no man could wish more to see his family comfortable and happy – but could not either by economy, method or industry, give the smallest aid [. . .].

(143)

As a consequence, the responsibility for maintaining herself and her children, even after they reached adulthood, to a large extent devolved on Mary Ann – a role that she was not keen on having and felt badly equipped for.

The whole of Radcliffe's *Memoirs* documents her struggle with this impossible role. It is the economic autobiography of a woman who with all means resists the progress of social and financial descent. Her "chequered life" (*Memoirs* 542) follows a similar "zigzag rout" (388) as her writing. Moving back and forth between London and Scotland, Radcliffe tries out an impressive array of income-earning activities, only some of which are a monetary success: she runs a coffee-house together with her husband (62), works as a lady's companion (78), takes in lodgers and boarders (81, 177), sews (104), tries to enter the dress-making business (138, 519), is a governess to two families (108, 200), sells patent medicines (325, 516), lets premises (329), exhibits in a shoe-shop (370–71), owns "The Ladies Cheap

Shoe Ware-House" (374), establishes a boarding school together with her daughter (385, 519), is housekeeper and companion to an elderly gentleman (496), runs a confectionary shop (526), teaches (550), and writes her *Memoirs*, in the hope that it would attract the patronage of affluent readers (542). None of her numerous occupations proves lasting: "my every labour seemed like Penelope's web – no sooner put together but as quickly undone again" (527).

Radcliffe describes in vivid detail how she sells off her land, literally strips out the family silver, and fails to find employment by inserting in the London papers. The numerous advertisements of women looking for work are, to her, "columns of female wants", "horrors of which no one can feel, who hath not had the experience", and a "*Magna Charta* of female wretchedness" (261). The status society declares most desirable and secure for a woman – that of a wife – proves an obstacle to her entering service, because few employers "would knowingly admit a married woman, lest her family should become troublesome" (102). This makes Radcliffe quip that "*a widowed wife*" – that is a wife let down by her husband – "hath many more sloughs to wade through than a *real widow* hath" (258). To make ends meet, Radcliffe resorts to all kinds of "manoeuvring" (180, 190, 248): she pretends that she is a widow and conceals the full extent of her financial difficulties from her genteel acquaintances and her prospective son-in-law, lest they should spurn her and thus further destabilise her already precarious socio-economic position. At one point, the strains bring Radcliffe to the brink of physical and mental illness, yet she is afraid to openly admit that she cannot afford a nurse (219). In her 60s, she depends on the sporadic charity of acquaintances and their "pure unalloyed philanthropy, in a corporeal as well as spiritual sense" (529). She concludes her *Memoirs* with a gloomy summary of her downward social mobility, which underlines that *The Female Advocate* grew out of Radcliffe's personal predicament:

Although I was born to an inheritance, which laying in three different countries, entitled my husband (had he not been a Roman Catholic) to an equal number of suffrages in each Returning Parliament; yet, at this day I have reason to believe it is not in my power to claim a privilege in any one institution or society in Great Britain [. . .], unless in a common charity work-house, where, although, I might conform to the diet, I am doubtful if I could to the society.

(538)

It is not surprising that Radcliffe avows at the close of her autobiography that her "animal spirits at this moment seems [*sic*] scarcely two degrees above *freezing point*" (543), although she hastens to add that she will write a second volume of *Memoirs*, should the first turn out a (financial) success – which, it appears, it did not.

The experience of work emerging from Radcliffe's *Memoirs* is therefore diametrically opposed to what Wakefield's seems to have been: whereas the latter derived a sense of purpose and pleasure from contributing to the family budget through her income as an author, for the former, work was a harrowing, existential

challenge that took a toll on her health and wellbeing. Yet throughout her ordeals, Radcliffe does not attack conventional gender roles. As she expounds in *The Female Advocate*, individual and collective happiness depends on men and women fulfilling their respective economic functions: the family is “blessed with a rising progeny, which, in course becomes the mother’s care, whilst the father, attentive to the interest of his family, endeavours to extend his trade for the mutual advantage of all” (100). A husband who does not provide for and protect his wife is consequently an anomaly, an insult to masculinity, and a threat to social stability. This is also true of men who engage in female occupations: they are “effeminate” (50, 56, 59, 76, 122) violators of the principles of a gendered economy. Hence, when Radcliffe demands: “Let then the claim to these female occupations be developed” (71), she does not envisage women’s right to work as a source of self-fulfilment or economic independence from husbands but as a fall-back option for those who are forced to work through the condemnable economic irresponsibility of men. Female occupations are one means of re-centring their ex-centric economic position.

### **Radcliffe’s suggestions for improving women’s economic status**

*The Female Advocate* aligns with women’s economic thought around 1800 when it denounces the theory of marriage and norms of gentility which assume that for (middle-class) women the role of the breadwinner does not exist; as a result, girls, in contrast to boys, do not receive an education that prepares them for the eventuality that became Radcliffe’s lot. But although Radcliffe encourages vocational training for middle-class girls (*Advocate* 89–90), it is, to her, a less vital point than for Wakefield or Wollstonecraft. Instead, she still longs for and expects protection, either by a man or the elevated social ranks whom she terms “the exalted” (*Memoirs* 261; *Advocate* v). This translates into her solutions for the problem of female unemployment: while Wakefield believes in self-help and individual agency, Radcliffe wants the state and the upper classes to step in with protective measures. She thus never questions coverture’s tenet that women need protection but extends its applicability from the micro level of the family to the macro level of society. She develops her claims for women’s rights not in opposition to but as a logical consequence of extant gender norms.

The establishment of institutions where middle-class women lacking male support can find shelter and work is Radcliffe’s favoured protective measure. She sees precedents in the Asylum for the Protection of Orphan Girls (78) and the Magdalen Charities for prostitutes (81). Exactly how such charities would be organised and managed is not specified, but Radcliffe insists that they be separated along class lines: “were there a capacious establishment for industry, built upon such a basis as would form a discrimination between the well-bred female [. . .] and the very poor and abject, [. . .] what crouds [*sic*] of unprovided women would flock to the standard!” (83). The focus on the concerns of her own class characterises her overall perspective: although Radcliffe professes to have the collective good in mind,



*The Female Advocate* is a particularistic, rather than a genuinely social analysis. All economic texts analysed in this book have a strong middle-class bias, but it is especially pronounced in Radcliffe's case. She writes of middle-class women looking for employment that there is no "other set of beings under the heavens, who stand in greater need of consolation" (54). The situation of the labouring poor, by contrast, is, to her, less stringent because in contrast to genteel women, they receive an education that, allegedly, prepares them for and reconciles to a harsh working life:

The very poor, who are born in an abject state, are taught from their infancy to struggle through life in the same manner they see their needy connections; bread must be had, and all the instructions they can possibly get, is in what way to obtain it. Consequently, if by labour and industry, they can acquire a sufficiency to exist upon, they are perfectly at ease, without bestowing a single thought upon to-morrow.

(72)

Radcliffe moreover considers the cause of the marginalised group she represents more pressing than that of slaves. She appears to take issue with the fact that abolitionists have made slavery a public concern, while the condition of unemployed women remains unaddressed. While her wish for recognition is understandable, she justifies her position with a crudely imperialist logic:

The slave is little acquainted with the severe pangs a virtuous mind labours under, when driven to the extreme necessity of forfeiting their virtue for bread. The slave cannot feel pain at the loss of reputation, a term of which they never heard, and much less know the meaning. What are the untutored, wild imaginations of a slave, when put in the balance with the distressing sensations of a British female, who has received a refined, if not a classical, education, and is capable of the finest feelings the human heart is susceptible of. A slave, through want of education, has little more refinement than cattle in the field; nor can they know the want of what they never enjoyed, or were taught to expect; but a poor female, who has received the best instruction, and is endowed with a good understanding, what must not she feel in mind, independent of her corporeal wants, after the adversity of fate has set her up as a mark, for the ridicule, the censure, and contempt of the world?

(126–27)

Radcliffe argues again on the basis of, not in opposition to, conventional hierarchies of her times: white, middle-class men are superior to white, middle-class women, but white British women are superior to slaves, and middle-class women are superior to the working classes. Because she deems the truthfulness of these hierarchies self-evident, Radcliffe expects their rigorous implementation, which to her 'logically' translates into middle-class women's superior claim to society's protection through charitable institutions. She neither takes the step of questioning

extant hierarchies nor of considering that the three groups whose interests she offsets – women, slaves, and the labouring poor – are functionally related and occupy a vulnerable position within a patriarchal, capitalist economy.

As long as charities for unemployed women do not exist, men, according to Radcliffe, ought to retract from female occupations. She formulates arguments Wakefield had also developed in *Reflections*, which extend gendered notions of appropriate behaviour onto the labour market: “What can be said in favour of men-milliners, men-mantua-makers, and men stay-makers? Besides all the numerous train of other professions, such as hair-dressers, &c. &c.; all of which occupations are much more calculated for women than men” (20). To achieve occupational segregation based on sex Radcliffe contemplates, if only in passing, a female boycott of premises employing men: “every lady, that has a wish to support the general character of her sex, will retire with indignation, when offered to be served by any of these authors of female destruction” (59). Similarly half-serious and brief is her hint that premises run by men ought to be taxed (21). Given that she claims later that “[n]othing [. . .] can be more reasonable and just, than that those who deprive others of subsistence should contribute to their support” (68), it is possible that she envisages the tax as a source of revenue for funding the proposed charitable institutions.

*The Female Advocate* emphasises that society would profit if it implemented either of the two solutions favoured by Radcliffe. One of her main arguments is strictly economic and hinges on the assumption that lowering female unemployment decreases crime rates, which in turn reduces public expenditure. Prostitution is a threat to national morals and prosperity – its baneful influence spreads “through cities, towns, and whole countries, to the utter destruction of families of all descriptions” (42). Yet it does not arise out of women’s moral depravity, but “through misfortunes and a want of employment” (84). Like Wakefield’s *Reflections*, then, *The Female Advocate* avers that the root cause of prostitution and its pernicious effects lies in men, not women. Because they restrict women’s access to the labour market, “they are thereby encouraging vice to predominate, and holding virtue in fetters” (55). In this instance, despite her overall acceptance of the prevalent gendered order, Radcliffe attacks the foundations of an economy built on men’s economic and sexual privilege. A review in the *British Critic* implies that she touched a raw nerve. Although it approves of her overall cause, it rejects her explanation of prostitution and reaffirms women’s individual responsibility. Increased employment opportunities might deter some women from prostitution, but “nothing can be more certain, or, in many situations, more evident, than that a great multitude of females, not unprovided with honest means of subsistence, fall into the same walk of misery, merely by their own imprudence” (“Art. 51” 686). For Radcliffe, however, prostitution is above all a structural, not an individual, problem.

According to Radcliffe, prostitution harms society as a whole – morally and economically. She reasons that since female prostitutes, beggars, and thieves are a threat to public safety, the maintenance of which must be paid for by

the public, they create additional costs for every member of society, men and women alike:

[T]hese poor unhappy women are always ready to benumb and drown their reflections with intoxicating liquors, the effects of which must lead them, with their wretched associates, into every excess of sin and wickedness, to the utter demolition of public happiness and safety, as well as incurring a heavy burden of expences upon the inhabitants. It is said the city of London alone pays upwards of twenty thousand pounds annually to patrons, beadles, and watchmen; and it may be a much greater sum; yet, that of itself seems a vast sum indeed, to be raised by levy, in which the honest trader must unavoidably contribute a large share.

(46)

Radcliffe speculates that there is also a connection between the “vast numbers of convicts having been sent abroad, to the great expence of the nation” (49) and the “necessitous women” (49) whose cause she pleads. Consequently, it would cost society less to set up institutions offering work to unemployed women than keep raising taxes for the maintenance of public safety. In other words, investing in job-creating measures for women is a sensible, because cheaper, economic decision for the state: “Would not that contribution [in taxes] answer a much better purpose in providing for the necessitous poor [women. . .]? Yet, so long as there continues a prohibition against women having an employment, it is to be feared, double the sum already raised by the inhabitants will be found inef-ficacious” (46–47).

Radcliffe broaches the terrain of liberal political philosophy when she confronts the question of whether it is legitimate to infringe on the right of men to engage in a profession of their choosing. She concludes that men's individual freedom stands in opposition to the public good, and when private and public interests are weighed up, the latter ought to take precedence. Suggestively, Radcliffe establishes a parallel between men's right to choose a profession and their right to own property, thus underlining the equivalence of these two ways of legitimately securing an income:

How many repeated instances have we seen of men, and even bodies of men, who, by certain obligations, have been obliged to give up public or private property, when a general good could not be otherwise obtained? Then, why is there any distinction to be made between relinquishing property and privilege [i.e. the right to choose an occupation], when the public good requires it, which in all exigencies must confessedly be just? [. . .] [T]he only real plea these oppressive traders can make, being that of private interest, as I before observed, it has at all times been judiciously ordered to be given up for a public good.

(121–23).

For Radcliffe, a curtailment of the rights of men and the consequent expansion of the rights of women is justified when it benefits society as a whole. Crucially, she thereby declares the economic security of women to be “a public good” and moves it away from a private arrangement within marriage towards a public obligation.

Radcliffe derives women’s rights from within patriarchal ideology. She does not question cultural ideals of proper femininity and masculinity but demands their more consequent implementation. Excluding men from female professions would not deprive them entirely of means of providing for themselves and their families, because they have many other, and more ‘manly’, occupations at their disposal. They can, for example, work as soldiers, sailors, or labourers in manufactories (69). Like Wakefield, then, Radcliffe resorts to established gender ideology to buttress her demands. This occurs again when she maintains that the premise that the weak woman deserves more protection than the strong man should likewise apply on a competitive labour market:

if there is not employment for the whole, and some must feel the inconveniences, are not men much better calculated to bear hardships than women? at least, is it not always supposed and considered by men, that women are not equal to any thing great, then surely they may be permitted to fill some inferior department in life, whereby, at least, they may be prevented from becoming burdensome, or pining away for want of real necessaries?

(108–09)

The remark exposes a disparity between ideological assumptions about men and women on the one hand and the reality of their economic lives on the other. Mary Robinson’s *Letter to the Women of England* attacks the same discrepancy:

If woman be the *weaker* creature, why is she employed in laborious avocations? why compelled to endure the fatigue of household drudgery; to scrub, to scower, to labour, both late and early, while the powdered lacquey only waits at the chair, or behind the carriage of his employer? Why are women, in many parts of the kingdom, permitted to follow the plough; to perform the laborious business of the dairy; to work in our manufactories; to wash, to brew, and to bake, while men are employed in measuring lace and ribands; folding gauzes; composing artificial bouquets; fancying feathers, and mixing cosmetics for the preservation of beauty? I have seen [. . .] strong Welsh girls carrying on their heads strawberries, and other fruits from the vicinity of London to Covent-Garden market, in heavy loads which they repeat three, four, and five times, daily, for a very small pittance; while the *male* domesticks of our nobility are revelling in luxury, to which even their lords are strangers. Are women thus compelled to labour, because they are of the WEAKER SEX? In my travels some years since through France and Germany, I often remember having seen stout girls, from the age of seventeen to twenty-five, employed in the most fatiguing and laborious avocations; such

as husbandry, watering horses, and sweeping the public streets. Were they so devoted to toil, because they were the *weaker* creatures? and would not a modern *petit maître* have fainted beneath the powerful grasp of one of these rustic or domestic amazons?

(136)

Robinson's contrasting of the bodily hardships of working-class women and the light and 'effeminate' duties of men is obviously skewed, because it ignores the harsh working conditions of labouring men. Her goal, however, is the same as Wakefield's, namely, to criticise a double standard in the logic of a patriarchal economy which works to women's disadvantage. Yet while Robinson infers in *Letter* that since women perform hard work, they are *not* weaker and hence must not be divested of rights, Radcliffe concludes in *The Female Advocate* that since women *are* weaker, they should not be exposed to economic hardships: it is the duty of men – and the state run by men – to protect women, not only at home, but also on the macro scale of the labour market.

### ***Evaluating Radcliffe's contribution***

The right of men to engage in female occupations is, according to Radcliffe, not a legitimate but an usurped right, "a destructive custom, which permits men to enjoy a privilege, which nature never assigned them" (55). They ought to 'return' this privilege to women – hence the subtitle of *The Female Advocate*. Mike Sanders believes that such a phrasing is a rhetorical ruse, an ostensibly "'conservative' appeal" aiming at "the restoration of 'lost' historical rights", and "a strategy of seeming to operate within existing discourses, of claiming no more than has been previously allowed" (4). This would suggest that Radcliffe saw through the ideology of her times and only pretended to abide by it in an act of mimicry. There is, however, as Jonathan Wordsworth notes, an "innocence" (n. pag.) to her writing, which makes the reader doubt to what extent she consciously subverted extant discourses. Her overall adherence to conservative views on gender and class appears genuine, and it is on their basis that she brings forward her suggestions for improving women's economic status. Her contemporaries did not consider her proposals radical. The reviews in the *British Critic*, *Lady's Monthly Museum*, *Monthly Mirror*, and *Monthly Catalogue* agreed that the situation of unemployed middle-class women ought to be improved and commented favourably on Radcliffe's idea for an institution dedicated to this purpose. Her demand for occupational segregation based on sex met with even stronger approval. The *British Critic* declared that "much benefit would be probably produced, by the removal from our shops of numbers, who, though they have the names, certainly do not follow the occupations, of men" ("*The Female*" 686), and the *Lady's Monthly Museum* proclaimed that Radcliffe's "animadversions on men-milliners, and all that effeminate tribe who monopolize occupations that were better appropriated to the weaker sex, have [. . .] our entire approbation" ("*The Female*" 405).

Radcliffe's *Female Advocate* and the reactions it provoked thus suggest that the transferral of the sexual division of labour onto the labour market was deemed a viable solution to female unemployment. Clearly, this solution operated within established gender ideology by extending notions of men's and women's appropriate spheres and duties onto the realm of paid work. Economic solutions were hence developed within a framework dictated by culture, which underlines again the interdependence between cultural and economic processes. Crucially, the economisation of gender ideology cut both ways, as ideals of femininity and masculinity reduced the range of acceptable economic behaviour for both sexes – hence the universal and latently homophobic disapprobation for 'effeminate' men whose work was characterised by a close proximity to 'feminine' concerns, such as beauty and fashion. No author on women's paid work had the audacity to imagine what, from a modern perspective, may seem like the obvious solution: all professions could be open to both sexes. Increased occupational segregation was urged instead, which, however, would not prove as beneficial to women as expected because the work they 'monopolised' continued to yield a lower income and less social prestige. The claim to female occupations did not destabilise the patriarchal economy.

What makes *The Female Advocate* stand out, besides its promotion of public job-creating measures for unemployed women, is Radcliffe's materialist attitude, which foregrounds that women cannot subsist by morals and a virtuous mind alone, but have basic bodily needs which in strained circumstances will take precedence: "For the opulent, and those in power, to suppose they have done their part, in helping to relieve [women's] spiritual wants only, is a mistake; so long as the soul and body act in unison, provision must be made for their temporal necessities also" (86). If "those in power" fail to recognise the needs of women's bodies, their "corporeal wants" (127), they encourage the spread of immorality and social destabilisation because without a man's support and employment opportunities, "there is no other alternative for these poor women, but beggary or vice" (29).

Radcliffe's evocation of "beggary or vice" calls to mind a major tenet of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published a year prior to *The Female Advocate*. For Malthus, "[a]ll the checks to population may be resolved into misery or vice" (1st ed. 1798, 35). Like Radcliffe, he recognises the relevance of bodily needs for an economic analysis and avers at the outset of the *Essay*:

I think I may fairly make two postulata.

First, That food is necessary to the existence of man.

Secondly, That the passion between the sexes is necessary, and will remain nearly in its present state. These two laws, ever since we have had any knowledge of mankind, appear to have been fixed laws of our nature [. . .].

(12–13)

According to Malthus, hunger and sexual desire are bodily drives which cannot be ignored, because frequently, "the corporal propensities of man [. . .] act very

powerfully as disturbing forces" (104) in his decisions. The examples he lists underscore that he speaks from a male perspective:

The cravings of hunger, the love of liquor, the desire of possessing a beautiful woman, will urge men to actions, of the fatal consequences of which, to the general interests of society, they are perfectly well convinced, even at the very time they commit them. Remove their bodily cravings, and they would not hesitate a moment in determining against such actions. [. . .] But in their own case, and under all the circumstances of their situation with these bodily cravings, the decision of the compound being is different from the conviction of the rational being.

(104–05)

Radcliffe never mentions Malthus, which is not surprising, given that she wrote (though not published) her text several years earlier. But *The Female Advocate* describes the principle described by Malthus from a woman's perspective: a woman, too, is what Malthus calls a "compound being", and her bodily cravings can likewise lead her to actions which as a "rational" being she condemns. Radcliffe imagines a prostitute saying: "I sought not redress in vice, till urged to it by self-defence, in order to support an existence, which, though I no longer covet, it is my duty to preserve [. . .]" (39). *The Female Advocate* thus exposes how Malthus's two postulates work from a female point of view. Cultural norms prevent female bodies from legitimately obtaining the means to satisfy their need for food. To satisfy this need, women often have to trade on the second need identified by Malthus – the (male) need for sex. To preserve their bodies in one way, women give them up in another. In contrast to men, then, sexual acts are, for many women, not a direct but an indirect means of satisfying a bodily craving.

Radcliffe's insistence on the needs of female bodies and their relation to (male) sexuality is arguably the most radical, though not immediately visible, aspect of her contribution. She explicitly recognises that (middle-class) women have bodies, comes close to the tabooed subject of women's sexuality, and calls for the acknowledgment of women's bodily needs in an institutional framework: "How can charity be better employed than in taking care of the soul as well as the body?" (82). Perhaps it was the corporeality of Radcliffe's argument and its implicit revolutionary potential which incited a reviewer in the *Lady's Monthly Museum* to quench her systemic and materialist approach. The reviewer recommended instead that individuals mitigate want through attitude adjustment: "One thing, however, seems not to be taken into the account by our fair author, – that there are few or no situations, even in this wretched life, where a mind, really innocent, contentment will not make happy" (405). Radcliffe *had* taken this submissive attitude into account in her story of Fidelia, which she wrote prior to and republished with *The Female Advocate*. After much struggle, Fidelia chooses religion as an antidote to the anguish caused by her economic and social marginalisation, which reconciles her to her precarious situation and stifles any threat she might have posed to the extant order.

Fidelia duly affirms at the end of her first-person narration: “Thus, without any change for the better in my outward circumstances, I find myself changed from a distracted, poor, despairing wretch, to a contented, happy, grateful being; thankful for, and pleased with my present state of existence; yet exulting in the hope of quitting it for endless glory and happiness” (173). The salutary change occurs within the individual and after death – not within the extant socio-economic system. One reason why Fidelia’s story sits so oddly with the expository passages of *The Female Advocate* is that in the latter, the author refuses to accept that women ought to resolve their economic marginalisation by themselves, through religion, resilience, and resignation. Mary Ann Radcliffe learned by living the culturally unscripted role of a female breadwinner that innocence and moral purity alone do not guarantee survival. A “change for the better” in women’s “outward circumstances” calls for systemic, institutional, state-driven solutions that acknowledge women’s psychological and bodily needs.

## Notes

- 1 In her entry for Mary Lamb in the *ODNB*, Jane Aaron suggests that Mary’s personal experience of having to combine paid with domestic and care work took a heavy toll on her mental health, with dramatic consequences: in 1796, Mary Lamb stabbed and killed her mother. Aaron asserts: “the accumulated strain of nursing a senile father and a bedridden mother, while also maintaining the family through her needlework, had exacerbated a psychological disorder subsequently categorized by her brother’s [Charles Lamb’s] twentieth-century biographers as a manic-depressive illness”. Incidentally, it is revealing that the *ODNB* classifies Mary Lamb only as “children’s writer”, but not as mantua-maker or needlewoman, despite the fact that, as Lamb explains in her letter to the *Lady’s Magazine*, she engaged in the latter profession for 11 years (257). Characterising Mary Lamb as “mantua-maker and children’s writer” would therefore be a more accurate description; the seemingly odd combination of these two professions would moreover point to the realities of women’s experience of work.
- 2 The two classical accounts of English women’s historical experience of work are Alice Clark’s *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919) and Ivy Pinchbeck’s *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850* (1930). Subsequent analyses with a focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries include the following monographs, edited volumes, and articles: Isabelle Baudino, Jacques Carré, and Cécile Révauger, eds. *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women’s Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2005); Joyce Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain* (2008); Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson, eds., *Women and Work Culture: Britain c. 1850–1950* (2005); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987); Amy Louise Erickson, “Married Women’s Occupations in Eighteenth-Century London” (2008); Bridget Hill, *Women, Work & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989); Katrina Honeyman, *Women, Gender, and Industrialization in England, 1700–1870* (2000); Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby, and Janette Rutherford, eds. *Women and Their Money 1700–1950: Essays on Women and Finance* (2009); Katherine Mullin, “Feminism and Women’s Work, 1776–1928” (2016); Nicola Phillips, *Women in Business, 1700–1850* (2006); Pamela Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1750–1850* (1996).
- 3 Up to this day, women are over-proportionately employed in the care-work sector, which continues to yield lower incomes than traditionally masculine occupations. Nelson traces this discrepancy to the androcentric bias of mainstream economics: “A male-centered



viewpoint tends to make it easy to see skills in traditionally male-associated types of work – for example, machine use or mathematics – as specialized skills worthy of high reward. But it makes one less likely to recognize relational skills – such as those used in childcare, teaching, counseling, or care of patients – as important. The ability to correctly recognize and appropriately address a variety of human problems, needs, emotions, and critical situations seems to often be assumed to arise ‘naturally’ and abundantly, when in fact specialized talent, experience, knowledge, and expertise are involved” (“Male is a Gender, Too” 1374).

- 4 Mary Ann Radcliffe touches upon this development in *The Female Advocate*: “[I]n those days, when manufacturers and commerce were not so extensive, every situation and scene in life were in a more concentrated state, and while the father and the brother were employed in trade, the mother and daughters were employed in the domestic concerns of the household. In fact, they were then the manufacturers also, and consequently were never at a loss for employment; they found enough to do in spinning, knitting, and preparing necessaries for the use of the family, which, being common, was not looked upon as any degradation” (64).
- 5 These and other texts are reprinted in Candida Ann Lacey’s anthology *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (1986).
- 6 The entries for Wakefield in the *ODNB* and the *Orlando* database give this date of birth. Dimand, by contrast, names 31 January 1751 (“Priscilla Wakefield”), which is also mentioned in an article on her life in *The Lady’s Monthly Museum* of August 1818.
- 7 For a more detailed account of Wakefield’s relevance for the history of savings banks, see Chapter 3 in David Roodman’s *Due Dilligence* and his blog entries for the Centre for Global Development (“Priscilla Wakefield” and “Diary Entries”).
- 8 It is worth noting, however, that in her diary, Wakefield sometimes describes typically feminine household work as a burden preventing her from pursuing her literary career. On 9 July 1798, for example, she summed up her day with the words: “Starching – When shall I be completely settled to resume my writing[?]”; on 15 October she complained: “The whole day cast away upon mantua making – thus one necessary work presses on another and leaves scarcely any time for writing – how happy that I have some other dependence” (Wakefield, *Diaries*).

# 7

## MORAL ECONOMICS

### Revaluing Jane Austen: economic novels versus novel economics

The last economic writer I shall consider is at a first glance perhaps an unlikely candidate since she is chiefly known as a novelist: Jane Austen. Yet it is fitting to conclude my analysis of selected contributions to the history of economic thought by English women with an exploration of Austen's moral economics because it unites two major concerns of the writers introduced in the preceding chapters: economics of marriage and women's economic agency and knowledgeability. Poet W.H. Auden famously commented on Jane Austen's perceptiveness in monetary and economic questions as early as 1937, by way of a humorous remark which hardly any critic paying attention to the economic dimensions of Austen's writings fails to ignore. In his "Letter to Lord Byron", Auden exhorts the deceased Romantic poet to

[. . .] tell Jane Austen, that is if you dare,  
How much her novels are beloved down here.  
She wrote them for posterity, she said;  
'Twas rash, but by posterity she's read.

You could not shock her more than she shocks me;  
Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.  
It makes me most uncomfortable to see  
An English spinster of the middle-class  
Describe the amorous effects of 'brass',  
Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety  
The economic basis of society.

(171)

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Jane Austen's frank and sober analysis of the "economic basis of society", particularly of its gendered and moral implications, forms the focus of this chapter.

I am not the first scholar of English to explore the role of the economy in Austen's oeuvre. Mona Scheuermann observed more than twenty years ago that "[a]ll critics of Austen have noted that the novels are about marriage, and many have realized that that means the novels are about money" (*Her Bread* 200). John Mullan's investigation of *What Matters in Jane Austen? Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved* (2012) identified money as one of the eponymous 20 riddles worthy of scrutiny. *Wealth or Poverty: Jane Austen's Novels Explored* (2017) by Stephen Mahony highlights the relevance of money in her oeuvre through a modern-history approach: Mahony contextualises the socio-economic position of Austen's characters by relating it to the economic background of the day. Sheryl Craig, in *Jane Austen and the State of the Nation* (2017), has similarly argued that "[a]n appreciation of the political controversies, debates, and economic problems of Jane Austen's era opens up a new way to read her novels, or more correctly, the old way of reading her novels, with the understanding that there is more at stake for Austen's characters, and her readers, than Mr. Darcy's pound per annum" (19). Craig elucidates the connections between selected novels and contemporaneous politico-economic events, such as the Poor Law Reform or the Restriction Act, to argue that Austen promotes a liberal Tory political agenda. In *Jane Austen: The Banker's Sister* (2017), E.J. Clery has delineated how economic and monetary concerns – both on the microscale of the family and the macroscale of the national economy – affected Austen's life and writing through her closeness to and partial financial dependence on her banker brother, Henry. Her study, which concentrates on "the banker's sister rather than the novelist's brother" (313), makes apparent what I also put forward in this chapter, namely, that much can be gained from changing the lens through which Jane Austen is looked at. Apart from these single-authored books on her relation to the economy, chapters on "Money" (Copeland), "Class" (McMaster), "Consumer Goods" (Selwyn), or "Luxury" (Saglia) have become an integral part of most scholarly companions to Austen's writing. They variously elucidate and buttress Edward Copeland's claim that

[t]he Austen fictional economy draws on a real economy in a state of rapid and unsettling transition: an expanding commercial sector, a rapidly developing consumer culture, an economy tied to the ups and downs of foreign wars, high taxes, scarce capital, inadequate banking and credit systems and large sums of money to be made and spent by those who never had it before. (*"Money"*, *Cambridge Edition* 317).

Given this flourishing and productive interest by literary scholars in Austen's stance on economics the question arises of what my chapter adds to extant research. I include Austen in this study, because the perceptive economic analyses of her writing have not added up (yet) to the conclusion that I submit here: Austen was

a female moral economist, not only an accomplished novelist. Elsie B. Michie has pointed out that

Austen does address the historical and economic issues that fascinated Adam Smith through figures, neither pretty nor little, whose embodiment links them to the material engrossment that so troubled political economists of the period [. . .]. But critics have found it surprisingly difficult to consider the import of these figures, in part because of the way Austen has been enshrined in the critical tradition.

(62)

The critical tradition evoked by Michie – which lives on in today’s popular perception of Austen, to which I return in the coda to this chapter – has for a long time associated Austen primarily “with delicacy” (62), with cheerful marriage plots, with a witty and ironic portrayal of the English gentry, and, perhaps most momentously of all, with the genre of the novel, be it the realistic novel, the romantic novel, or the novel of manners. As a consequence, outside of a specific circle of Austen scholars, the crass material tangibility of Austen’s fictional world still tends to be viewed as subservient or even incidental to the exigencies of her literary pursuit. ‘Austen the novelist’ regularly overshadows ‘Austen the economist’ (see also the Section “Limitations of Genre in Practice: The Example of Jane Austen”). I want to reverse this hierarchy here, thereby carving out a space for Austen’s moral economics within the history of economic thought. In my subsequent discussion of *Sense and Sensibility*, I repeat the method I applied with regard to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Woman* and read Austen’s text as economic thought first and as fiction second, that is not primarily as an economic novel but as novel economics.

There already exists a notable example of prioritising ‘Austen the theorist’ over ‘Austen the novelist’: in *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* (2013), economist Michael Suk-Young Chwe views Austen’s texts in terms of a systematic exploration of what would be labelled game theory some 150 years later. Chwe does not see Austen’s theory as subsidiary to but at least as on a par with the fictional and aesthetic dimensions of her writing:

Given the breadth and ambition of her discussion, I argue that exploring strategic thinking, theoretically and not just for practical advantage, is Austen’s explicit intention. Austen is a theoretician of strategic thinking, in her own words, an “imagineist”. Austen’s novels do not simply provide “case material” for the game theorist to analyze, but are themselves an ambitious theoretical project, with insights not yet superseded by modern social science. [. . .] my stronger claim is that Austen herself is a game theorist, who in her novels explores decision-making and strategic thinking systematically and theoretically.

(1, 9)

It is also noteworthy that Austen appears in economist Thomas Piketty's acclaimed *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013). Piketty seems to accord an in-between-status to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature: not-quite economic thought, but more than just fiction. For him,

the novels of Jane Austen and Honoré de Balzac paint striking portraits of the distribution of wealth in Britain and France between 1790 and 1830. Both novelists were intimately acquainted with the hierarchy of wealth and its inevitable implications for the lives of men and women, including their marital strategies and personal hopes and disappointments. These and other novelists depicted the effects of inequality with a verisimilitude and evocative power that no statistical or theoretical analysis can match.

(2)

It might seem surprising that two economists so liberally attribute economic significance to literary texts that clearly depart from the mathematical, model-oriented codes of expression usually associated with (neoclassical) economics. Yet it is perhaps precisely their position as outsiders vis-à-vis the discipline of literary studies which facilitates their perception of Austen's texts as more than accomplished novels.

Sums and spend-ability are not only relevant in Austen's oeuvre, but were so in her life. She was born on 16 December 1775 in Steventon (midway between London and Southampton), the seventh child and second daughter of George and Cassandra Austen. Both parents came from respectable families but did not belong to their wealthy branches. Jane's father earned a modest income as a rector, which he later supplemented by preparing boys for university and taking them on as boarders. The family was not poor but, notwithstanding occasional inheritances, lacked the financial ease of some of their relatives. As Jane mixed with them, she became attuned to the fine gradations of rank and income and to her own position on the social ladder. Money matters were a regular topic in the family, not least because Henry, one of the elder brothers, was a banker. The most important person in Jane's life seems to have been her older sister Cassandra: their attachment was arguably intensified by the fact that both women remained unmarried. In 1802, Jane cancelled what appears to have been her only engagement. Her decision, made in the span of just one day, had manifest economic consequences for herself and her family, as Marilyn Butler reminds us:

If she had gone through with a marriage to this stuttering, awkward man, six years younger than herself, Jane Austen at twenty-seven could have housed and provided for her parents, who were facing a fairly straitened old age in lodgings at Bath, and Cassandra too if she wished it. [. . . The proposal was] bearing not only on Jane's future but on Cassandra's too. At some point the sisters must have seriously debated the possibility of a marriage of convenience rather than love, that is, a 'comfortable' establishment for one of them, which might [. . .] provide a secure future for the other.

In the end, none of the sisters married for love or convenience, which meant that the financial responsibility for them remained with their father. His death in 1805 put the widowed Mrs Austen, Cassandra, and Jane in a situation described by women economic writers around 1800, including Austen herself, namely, “in the familiar trap for dependent women of the professional classes when they lost the male breadwinner” (Butler). Luckily, the three women could rely on Jane’s brothers, who duly stepped up to their cultural obligation, even if they could not provide the means for more than a modest lifestyle. The situation grew worse in 1816, a year before Jane’s death on 18 July 1817, when Henry’s bank went bust, endangering the financial position of those family members who had banked with him.

In 1809, Jane’s brother Edward arranged for the three Austen women and another female relative to move into a house in Chawton, some thirty miles from Steventon. This period of stability allowed Jane to devote most of her time to writing – an activity she had pursued from an early age. In 1811, *Sense and Sensibility*, a draft of which she had begun in the 1790s, was the first novel to be published; five completed novels followed. It must be noted that Jane’s family supported her aspirations: her brothers, above all Henry, participated in transactions with publishers and advised her (Clery, *Banker’s*), and the three women with whom she lived generously managed the household while she wrote (Butler). Her career as a published author benefitted therefore from a combination of her skill and determination together with favourable material and personal circumstances. In recent years, Austen scholars (e.g. Butler, Clery, Copeland, Fergus, Johnson, Todd) have challenged the tradition of casting Jane as a respectable, reticent, and pious author for whom writing was a private affair. They have highlighted that although she published anonymously, when it came to her novels, Jane had a vision of what she wanted to achieve literarily and financially. She corresponded with her two publishers and tried out different arrangements for publishing her work, even if the choices she made together with her brothers did not always turn out to be the most profitable ones. Surviving letters indicate that Austen was an author and a businesswoman who took evident pleasure in earning money through her work. In 1813, for example, she informed her brother Frank: “You will be glad to hear that every Copy of S[ense] & S[ensibility] is sold & that it has brought me £140 [. . .]. I have now therefore written myself into £250 – which only makes me long for more” (qtd. in Fergus 1). Similar observations in her correspondence imply what Austen’s novels likewise demonstrate, namely, her longstanding attentiveness to economic concerns.

In what follows, instead of providing an overview of Austen’s entire oeuvre, I opt for a close reading of one text, namely, *Sense and Sensibility*. This is not to suggest that only this novel can be productively read as economic writing. In fact, extant critical analyses exploring financial and material concerns in Austen’s correspondence, juvenilia, and other novels hint at the fruitfulness of such an approach, although they shy away from classifying the texts under scrutiny as economic(s). A comprehensive survey of Austen’s entire fiction would have the advantage of delineating if and how her economic philosophy changes over time. Edward

Copeland works along similar lines in his synoptic analysis of Austen's fiction with a focus on the role of consumption (*Women* 89–115). His discussion on the one hand yields informative results, yet on the other cannot do justice to the intricacies of individual texts. A close reading of only one novel, by contrast, enables me to highlight the density of economic detail Austen provides and to uncover the systematic nature of her approach. It moreover allows me to explore the significance of minor characters, who have a crucial role in the formulation of Austen's economic theses (see Hall, *Women*).

Scholars of English agree that the economy is central to *Sense and Sensibility*. Rebecca Stephens Duncan notes that “[t]wentieth-century scholars of a number of ideological persuasions acknowledge Austen's focus on money and property in *Sense and Sensibility*” (“Critical” 25). John Mullan observes that “Austen is always careful with her sums of money and particularly so in *Sense and Sensibility*, which has more talk of money than any other of her novels” (197). Diego Saglia writes: “Although ubiquitous in Austen's canon, consumption is at its showiest in *Sense & Sensibility* [. . .]” (357). Thomas Keymer suggests that it “is a novel about exploitation, and exploitation in a variety of senses, emotional and social as well as economic” (“*Northanger*” 35–36). Shannon Chamberlain regards “*Sense and Sensibility* as its own self-contained economy, a world created and governed according to the nascent rules of a discipline only just established in Austen's youth” (158). Clery dubs *Sense and Sensibility* “Jane Austen's ‘austerity novel’” (*Banker's* 139) and reads it against the background of the Bullionist Controversy of the 1790s. She observes that Austen's male figures “are like bullion. Their value seems to rise regardless of their innate worth.” Women, by contrast, “like banknotes, are liable to depreciation. [. . .] Women's value is external, skin deep, paper thin” (141).

Despite the apparent consensus as to the prominent role of the economy in *Sense and Sensibility*, the text has not yet been analysed as a systematic treatise on moral economics. I consider my reading of *Sense and Sensibility* in that light as representative of Austen's writings as a whole in so far as the novel evinces a thorough engagement with social and economic matters, like her entire oeuvre; conversely, I do not suggest that all economic propositions developed in this text reappear in Austen's subsequent publications. In fact, my in-depth engagement with *Sense and Sensibility* is meant to encourage a revisiting of Austen's remaining fiction, yet not as (economic) novels but as novel economics. This would foster a fuller understanding of Austen's contribution to economic thought in the Romantic Age.

## **The benefits of balance: Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)**

### ***Moral economics: Austen versus Adam Smith***

*Sense and Sensibility* consistently deals with sums and pays particular attention to the question of who is entitled and knowledgeable enough to dispose of them in such a way as to ensure personal happiness and the reader's moral approbation. This is a

concern addressed in Austen's entire oeuvre which, as Barbara Benedict observes, "explores consumption as the interplay between materialism and morality in which people's most cherished ways of valuing themselves and others rest not only on ideas, but on their uses and ideas of things" (353). What sets *Sense and Sensibility* apart from other novels by Austen and constitutes an aspect that has been largely overlooked by critics is the extent of financial potency attributed to women: there is a substantial number of female characters wielding notable economic power, which belies the historical reality of most women in Austen's times. One aim of the novel is thus arguably to demonstrate that women are perfectly capable of understanding and purposefully managing financial affairs, which puts into question legal and cultural impediments that prevent them from exerting economic autonomy on a daily basis.

At the same time, *Sense and Sensibility's* muted economic utopia for women is manifestly held in check by Austen's management of the readers' sympathies, which links economic to moral considerations and thereby adds a normative dimension to her economic reflections. The exploration of various forms of female economic activity is combined with the formulation of what Edward Copeland has termed (albeit only in passing without explicating the term) Austen's "moral economics" (*Women* 94). Both parts of this composite term are of equal weight: 'moral' is not more important than or separable from 'economics', nor does it render the economic dimension any less relevant because of its normative thrust. Moral philosopher Adam Smith was likewise engaging in 'moral economics' when authoring the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. In fact, certain moral economic concerns raised by Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* are reminiscent of issues that preoccupied Smith. By drawing attention to some of these parallels here, I am not, however, putting forward that Austen was consciously taking up and developing Smith's theory. Although at a first glance this would valorise Austen's contribution, the valorisation would corroborate an epistemological gender bias which attributes a higher legitimacy to the claims and theories developed by Smith over and against Austen's own thoughts. But Austen is not 'Adam Smith's daughter': parallels between their moral philosophy do not suggest that Austen's moral economic propositions are derivative but that she was partaking in a wider social debate and employing those means and modes of expression that, as a woman, she had access to. As Michie puts it:

Austen uses the tools of fiction – the structure of the plot, the development of character, the evocation of emotion – to work through the problem key to moral philosophers of that period: the question of what attitudes and values might make it possible to resist the attractions of wealth, attractions that were unavoidable given the expansion of a commercial culture that Smith and his contemporaries endorsed but also feared.

(27)

The systematic exploration and evaluation of possible attitudes and values as regards wealth is a key concern of *Sense and Sensibility*. Minor characters play a significant



role in this regard, as they allow Austen to exemplify and probe various instances of commendable and faulty economic behaviour, particularly in women. Austen's text acquires thereby an analytical but also a didactic dimension, probing and presenting to readers the benefits of balance. Writing in a different context, Tony Tanner avers that "Jane Austen clearly saw balance as a prime virtue to be aimed at" (375). I propose that, for Austen, balance is also a crucial virtue with regard to a domain that Tanner has not taken into consideration, namely, the economy. Austen's moral economics relies on the perpetual negotiation and calibration of conflicting needs and impulses.

Austen addresses a fundamental problem to which economist Nancy Folbre would return some 200 years later in her study *Greed, Lust & Gender: A History of Economic Ideas* (2009). One of the premises of Folbre's account is that "[a]ll societies face a problem that is *simultaneously moral and economic*: how to balance individual interests against those of family, friends, and other beings" (xxi–ii, my emphasis). *Sense and Sensibility* offers a thorough investigation of precisely this problem. In this, it explores a fundamental tension between conflicting forces within individuals also identified by Adam Smith: selfishness on the one hand versus sociability and sympathy on the other. Smith claims in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that "[e]very man is, no doubt, by nature, first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so" (46). This credo is famously taken up in the *Wealth of Nations*, which identifies egoism as one of the driving forces behind economic exchange and prosperity:

Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

(100)

At the same time, Smith accentuates in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that despite his natural and understandable egoism, "man [. . .] can subsist only in society" (47), and that

[n]ature, accordingly, has endowed him, not only with a desire of being approved of, but with a desire of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men. [. . .] The all-wise Author of Nature has, in this manner, taught man to respect the sentiments and judgments of his brethren; to be more or less pleased when they approve of his conduct, and to be more or less hurt when they disapprove of it.

(57–58)

Human beings are thus torn between self-love and the need to be loved and accepted by others. The impartial spectator – a self-disciplinary force which Smith describes as “reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct” (61) – helps to balance the two conflicting impulses:

If [man] would act so as that the impartial spectator may enter into the principles of his conduct, which is what of all things he has the greatest desire to do, he must, upon this, as upon all other occasions, humble the arrogance of his self-love, and bring it down to something which other men can go along with. They will indulge it so far as to allow him to be more anxious about, and to pursue with more earnest assiduity, his own happiness than that of any other person.

(47)

Like Adam Smith, Jane Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* also explores the tensions between and the need to balance the opposing forces of egoism and altruism. What distinguishes her moral economics from Smith’s, however, is that it centres on women and – perhaps in consequence of this perspective – is less optimistic. Smith’s view of society is essentially benevolent and harmonious. According to Austen, by contrast, a disquieting number of persons, regardless of their sex, are not endowed with an impartial spectator who would establish a wholesome balance between sympathy and egoism: self-seeking characters are and remain self-seeking. Austen’s (economic) stance, for all her happy endings, appears more pessimistic and glum than Smith’s, although she certainly encourages readers to adopt the perspective of the impartial spectator that so many of her characters are devoid of. In that sense, reading *Sense and Sensibility* and passing judgement on its panoply of characters becomes a comprehensive exercise in moral economics.

### ***Minor female characters as specimens of im/moral economic balancing acts***

Focusing mainly on the relationship between and the development of the novel’s two female protagonists, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, most critics have not done full justice to its minor characters. (Even Lynda A. Hall comments only on Lucy Steele.) Yet already *Sense and Sensibility*’s exposition, which describes the gendered economic mechanisms that have led to its heroines’ financial precariousness, demonstrates that Austen relies on minor characters to systematically carve out the outlines of her moral economics. Through its detailed observations on primogeniture and the entailment of Norland Park, the opening paragraphs introduce three propositions that the rest of the novel explores in greater detail: firstly, women are on the one hand financially and legally vulnerable, but on the other have the intellectual resources to figure as more than passive recipients of economic decisions made by men. Secondly, men are not by nature capable of living up to the

role of the rational and just providers they are assumed to be. From this follows, thirdly, that if the soundness of economic decisions does not rely on sex, other standards of behaviour that is both economically *and* morally desirable need to be formulated. Reaching a state of balance emerges as paramount in this regard. In the further course of the novel, minor characters serve as specimens of im/moral economic balancing acts, which allows Austen to refine the contours of her moral economics.

Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen represents and discusses various economic positions middle-class and lower-gentry women can assume. Elinor and Marianne are representatives of a position which is generally deemed most typical of Austen's writing: that of the dependant, unmarried, and not affluent single female. (Emma Woodhouse is the only protagonist to be rich from the outset.) But Austen's economic microcosm is more diverse. Financially vulnerable women form just one group within it, and even this group is not homogenous. Another equally important, but hitherto largely overlooked, cluster of female characters in *Sense and Sensibility* brings home that women have the skill to strategically employ material resources, regardless of whether they dispose of them as *feme sole* or as *feme covert*. Claudia L. Johnson is one of few critics to allude to this group: "Austen has not omitted to provide us with some tenuous alternatives [to patriarchy], impressive despite their failures. *Sense and Sensibility* is also a novel of 'matriarchs': widows, sometimes with, sometimes without money, who exert influence over the gentlemen who wreak so much harm" (*Jane Austen* 70). Another critic to take note of them is Susan C. Greenfield, but she tellingly sees them as an exception to the rule of female vulnerability: "[L]egally most women in Austen's period were the property of fathers or husbands. The Dashwood sisters are temporarily free of male owners, but they are, of course, destined to marry (and besides, only wealthy widows and maiden aunts like Mrs Ferrars, Mrs Jennings, and Mrs Smith have any self-sufficiency)" (95). To fully appreciate *Sense and Sensibility's* systematic economic agenda, it is imperative to collapse the parenthesis around "wealthy widows and maiden aunts" and to recognise them as more than just one-dimensional helpmates or antagonists of the impoverished heroines.

One of the most blatant examples of female economic dexterity occurs as early as the second chapter of *Sense and Sensibility*, where Fanny convinces her husband John Dashwood to abstain from any financial support to his widowed step-mother and his three unmarried half-sisters, disregarding a contrary promise he had given to his dying father. This scene has been variously commented on by critics: for Michie, "[w]hile the initial chapters [. . .] may feel like comic set pieces that could be cut without changing the import of the novel's romantic plot, in fact, those scenes provide a baseline that allowed contemporary readers to identify the social and psychological stances that the behavior of Austen's heroines is designed to counter" (29). For Piketty, too, "the kernel of the plot (financial as well as psychological) is established in the first ten pages in the appalling dialogue between John Dashwood and his wife, Fanny. [. . .] John Dashwood forces Elinor and Marianne to live mediocre and humiliating lives. Their fate is entirely sealed by the appalling

dialogue at the beginning of the book” (413–14). All this is true, but what goes unnoticed is that the memorable dialogue contains a powerful, if ambivalent, display of female economic agency. Contrary to what Piketty claims, it is not John, but Fanny Dashwood who orchestrates the heroines’ economic precariousness. Fanny, whom most critics simply discard as an “odious” (Piketty 414) or “wealthy but greedy” (Stephens Duncan, “Critical” 25) minor character, displays economic and strategic skill, which is rendered in some detail. Austen does not stop short at merely informing the readers in a sentence or two that John’s initially generous impulse was restrained by the selfish advice of his wife. Instead, she devotes an entire chapter to minutely retracing the financial negotiation between husband and wife in which the woman ultimately prevails, thus subverting the traditional gender hierarchy. After all, in legal terms, Fanny Dashwood is a *feme covert* so that her husband is entitled to manage most of their property as he sees fit. But John Dashwood emerges as a weak man whose understanding of financial matters clearly falls below that of his wife.

To get an idea of Fanny’s economic knowledgeableability, it is instructive to follow the negotiation at length. John Dashwood’s initial idea of giving £1,000 to each sister is countered by Fanny with the argument that “when the money is once parted with, it never can return” (11). His ensuing suggestion of reducing the sum by half leads his wife to a detailed calculation of his half-sisters’ expected financial situation. Fanny is specific when it comes to naming sums and estimating the likely yearly interest: “They will have ten thousand pounds divided amongst them. If they marry, they will be sure of doing well, and if they do not, they may all live very comfortably together on the interest of ten thousand pounds” (12). Convinced again by his wife’s arguments, John ponders the possibility of bestowing a yearly annuity of £100 on his step-mother. Unsurprisingly, Fanny disapproves also of this solution and accuses her husband of downright economic ignorance, which she contrasts with her own expertise:

An annuity is a very serious business; it comes over and over every year, and there is no getting rid of it. You are not aware of what you are doing. I have known a great deal of the trouble of annuities; for my mother was clogged with the payment of three to old superannuated servants by my father’s will, and it is amazing how disagreeable she found it. [. . .] I would not bind myself to allow them any thing yearly. It may be very inconvenient some years to spare a hundred, or even fifty pounds from our own expenses.

(12–13)

Fanny thus evokes concrete practical reasons and sums to dissuade John, proving that her knowledge of the implications of annuities is superior to that of his husband. She moreover refers to the experience of her mother, a female figure of economic authority. The evocation of her mother’s dissatisfaction with an “income [which] was not her own” (12) due to the stipulations of her father’s will gestures towards a crucial tenet of *Sense and Sensibility*, namely, the importance of economic

independence for women's personal happiness (which is not necessarily equivalent with their moral virtue).

The logical finale of the transaction is Fanny's reckoning that her husband's female relatives do not need any monetary assistance whatsoever. The passage testifies again to the precision of Fanny's knowledge regarding the interest rates of incomes and the projected expenditure of a household:

Do but consider, my dear Mr. Dashwood, how excessively comfortable your mother-in-law and her daughters may live on the interest of seven thousand pounds, besides the thousand pounds belonging to each of the girls, which brings them in fifty pounds a year a-piece, and, of course, they will pay their mother for their board out of it. Altogether, they will have five hundred a year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want for more than that?

(13–14)

Confronted with such numbers and arguments, John Dashwood capitulates, admitting willingly that his wife is “perfectly right” (14). Readers, by contrast, are meant to understand that Fanny is perfectly wrong, as her economics blatantly contradicts what would appear morally praiseworthy behaviour. Her fault consists in a reductionist take on economics, which disregards its moral and social dimension. Fanny admonishes her husband that “we are not to think of their [i.e. the Dashwood women's] expectations: the question is, what you can afford to do” (12). She thus sets social obligations against economic feasibility and individual necessity. The narration, which introduces Fanny as “narrow-minded and selfish” (7), makes clear that she fails to correctly balance the needs of the self and the needs of others. At the same time, Fanny remains a representative of several other women in the novel who have precise economic knowledge and strategic skills to impose their financial aims over and against men.

A second woman who is financially potent and, to all appearances, knowledgeable, is Fanny's mother, Mrs Ferrars. She is a widow, which, as Maggie Lane observes in her article “Merry, Mercenary, or Mean” on widows populating Austen's universe, was a special position for a woman at that time. A widow was “independent or unprotected, according to her financial circumstances, but either way, much more of an autonomous being than her married or maiden sisters” (71). In accordance with Lane's observation, Mrs Ferrars manages her late husband's substantial property as *feme sole*, and her power of the purse has implications for the fates of many characters in *Sense and Sensibility*. She is the grey eminence dispensing and withholding financial favours – a privilege which she ruthlessly exerts, as becomes particularly visible in the case of Edward Ferrars. Edward is Mrs Ferrars's first-born son, Elinor Dashwood's love interest, and in economic terms the opposite of the affluent and independent male heroes in other Austen novels, such as Mr Darcy, Mr Knightley, or Captain Wentworth. In keeping with the notable extent of female (financial) power over men which marks Austen's first

novel, Edward's access to money is limited because "except for a trifling sum, the whole of his fortune depended on the will of his mother" (17). That his mother is resolved on having her will prevail regardless of the preferences of her oldest son, and that she considers money a prime instrument to achieve this goal, becomes evident when she desires Edward to marry the affluent Miss Morton, instead of the upstart Lucy Steele. Mrs Ferrars attempts to persuade Edward not through an emotional appeal, but through a strictly financial negotiation, as John Dashwood's subsequent report evinces:

[Edward's] mother explained to him her liberal designs, in case of his marrying Miss Morton; told him she would settle on him the Norfolk estate, which, clear of land-tax, brings in a good thousand a-year; offered even, when matters grew desperate, to make it twelve hundred; and in opposition to this, if he still persisted in this low connection, represented to him the certain penury that must attend the match. His own two thousand pounds she protested should be his all; she would never see him again; and so far would she be from affording him the smallest assistance, that if he were to enter into any profession with a view of better support, she would do all in her power to prevent him advancing in it.

(248–49)

Mrs Ferrars is evidently undaunted by the management of a large fortune and to all appearances has "power" as well as precise economic knowledge: she knows what the land-tax is and can calculate the estate's net rent. (MacDonagh tellingly attributes this calculation to John Dashwood [cf. 60], although this is not unequivocally supported by the quotation above.) She threatens Edward with financial sanctions should he decline her 'offer' and subsequently puts her threat into practice by devolving most of her property on her second-born son, Robert. She thereby turns Edward "into a younger son (at least economically speaking)" (McMaster 116). A forceful female character who translates her judgement of people and their behaviour into concrete sums, Mrs Ferrars is thus even capable of subverting the patriarchal hierarchy prescribed by primogeniture. But, just like in the case of her daughter Fanny, the readers are expected and find it easy to censure her behaviour. Mrs Ferrars is at all times, as the narrator ironically puts it, safe from "incurring the reproach of being too amiable" (347), because, like Fanny, she disregards the needs and wishes of other people.

The examples of Fanny Dashwood and Mrs Ferrars might suggest that *Sense and Sensibility* sees financial potency in women as detrimental to their morals. This, however, is not the case, not only because financial potency in men is presented as just as problematic but also because the novel features more positive examples of affluent women. Of particular importance in this context is another widow, Mrs Jennings, who acts as a surrogate mother to the two heroines during their stay in London. Austen, as usual, provides information on the financial situation of the character shortly after introducing her into the plot: "Mrs. Jennings was a widow,

with an ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and she had now therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world" (38). Both sentences, despite the ironic ring of the second, evoke an economic context, because having one's daughters respectably married is a vital economic achievement. Mrs Jennings comprehends very well that the marriage market is in many ways precisely that – a market. She has been a fairly successful and shrewd businesswoman on it by advantageously 'selling' her daughters, although they are, as she knows herself, far from perfect 'goods'. With her usual mixture of humour and straightforwardness that touches on the "vulgar" (36) but nevertheless makes her likeable, she brazenly informs the husband of her somewhat foolish younger daughter: "you have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again. So there I have the whip hand of you" (109). Reversing the usual gender perspective on marriage, Mrs Jennings has trapped Mr Palmer into a legal and economic bargain which – as the biting portrayal of his wife suggests – is more to his than his wife's or his mother-in-law's detriment.

Mrs Jennings epitomises a professional woman in the tough business of marriage, along the lines pithily described in Cicely Hamilton's 1909 pamphlet *Marriage as a Trade*:

It is because women, consciously or unconsciously, recognise the commercial nature of the undertaking [of marriage] that they interest themselves so strongly in the business of matchmaking, other than their own. Men have admitted that interest, of course – the thing is too self-evident to be denied – and, as their manner is, attributed it to an exuberant sexuality which overflows on its surroundings; steadfastly declining to take into account the 'professional' element in its composition, since that would necessarily imply the existence of an esprit de corps amongst women. I myself cannot doubt that there does exist a spirit of practical, if largely unconscious, trade unionism engaged in a class engaged in extracting, under many difficulties and by devious ways, its livelihood from the employer, man. [. . .] [W]omen in general recognise the economic necessity of marriage for each other, and in a spirit of instinctive comradeship seek to forward it by every means in their power.

(38–39)

It is therefore logical that, like Fanny Dashwood and Mrs Ferrars, Mrs Jennings is minutely informed about the financial situation of other people. The value of Colonel Brandon's property, for instance, is introduced into the text by her and not by a male character (71). Slightly later in the narrative, Mrs Jennings translates this property into a correspondent standard of living for Marianne, should the latter choose to marry the Colonel (186). Although Mrs Jennings is at times presented as a laughable figure, she nonetheless clearly possesses the key economic skill every woman 'professional' in the matchmaking trade should have, which is to realistically gauge the financial situation of potential couples. For instance, the

standard of living Edward Ferrars and Lucy Steele could expect from his modest earnings as a curate is summed up by her in what the narrator approvingly terms a “natural remark”:

we all know how *that* will end: – they will wait a twelvemonth, and finding no good comes of it, will set down upon a curacy of fifty pounds a-year, with the interest of his two thousand pounds, and what little matter Mr. Steele and Mr. Pratt can give her. Then they will have a child every year! And Lord help’em! How poor they will be! – I must see what I can give them towards furnishing their house. Two maids and two men, indeed! – as I talked of t’other day. No, no, they must get a stout girl of all works.

(259)

The last part of Mrs Jennings’s almost Malthusian analysis refers to an earlier estimate she had made (243) that she now sees as requiring readjustment given a significant change in external factors (Edward’s lower earnings). For all her bustling and emotional effusion that at times verge on the absurd, Mrs Jennings is a resolute and realistic businesswoman, teaching Austen’s (female) readers the basics of calculating a living.

Besides revealing an element of trade unionism in the ‘marriage trade’, the depiction of Mrs Jennings moreover helps to elucidate further the moral dimension of Austen’s economics. Two aspects in particular seem to set her off from her dislikeable female counterparts, who likewise know how to deal with money but fail in moral terms. Firstly, it is mentioned twice that the money in Mrs Jennings’s possession was not inherited but earned by her husband, who “had traded with success in a less elegant part of the town” (146). Money from trade being less respectable than that from landed property, the likes of John Dashwood initially view Mrs Jennings with suspicion as “the widow of a man who had got all his money in a low way” (215). But the self-made fortune of the Jennings in fact hints at a noteworthy economic proposition of *Sense and Sensibility* which partially runs against Austen’s usual deference to the landed gentry: the beneficial effects of having to make money through one’s efforts instead of being ‘spoilt’ by simply owning it qua birth. The novel lacks a Captain Wentworth who earns an impressive self-earned fortune of c. £25,000 in *Persuasion* (1818), yet it is nevertheless conspicuous that the few appealing figures in the novel – in particular Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, Edward Ferrars, and Colonel Brandon – all at some point make the experience of not having a huge amount of money at their free disposal. Temporal relative material constriction is apparently conducive to the virtues of sympathy and moderation (though not in everyone – Lucy Steele is the exception to this rule), which ensure a personally fulfilling and morally righteous existence. This implication echoes Smith’s assertion in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that “[h]e is happiest who advances more gradually to greatness, whom the public destines to every step of his preferment long before he arrives at it, in whom, upon that account, when it comes, it can excite no extravagant joy, and with regard to whom it cannot reasonably create



either any jealousy in those he overtakes, or any envy in those he leaves behind" (29). The praise of advancing "gradually" to wealth and of avoiding "extravagant joy" points towards a philosophy of moderation which also lies at the heart of *Sense and Sensibility's* moral economics.

In fact, moderation and benevolence are the second factor to positively distinguish Mrs Jennings. Although she is perfectly aware of the significance of sums for personal happiness, she sees the ability to curb one's material desires as an essential counterforce. In contrast to Fanny or Mrs Ferrars, she is an advocate of balancing egoistic impulses with social obligations. This becomes obvious in her outrage with John Willoughby, who first courts Marianne Dashwood, but then abandons her in favour of a woman who tempts him with

[f]ifty thousand pounds! And by all accounts, it won't come before it's wanted; for they say he is all to pieces. No wonder! Dashing about with his curricule and hunters! Well, it don't signify talking; but when a young man, be who he will, comes and makes love to a pretty girl, and promises marriage, he has no business to fly off from his word only because he grows poor, and a richer girl is ready to have him. Why don't he, in such a case, sell his horses, let his house, turn off his servants, and make a thorough reform at once?

(184)

Importantly, Mrs Jennings argues here on a moral as well as on an economic level. She does not simply censure Willoughby for breaking Marianne's heart but puts forward concrete suggestions for cutting down his expenditure, which he could have adopted to combine moral with economic requirements. A similar approach of reconciling social obligations with economic resourcefulness characterises Mrs Jennings's earlier assessment of the situation Edward and Lucy would face if they married in spite of Mrs Ferrars's opposition to their union:

There is no reason on earth why Mr. Edward and Lucy should not marry; for I am sure Mrs. Ferrars may afford to do very well by her son, and though Lucy has next to nothing herself, she knows better than any body how to make the most of every thing; I dare say, if Mrs. Ferrars would only allow him five hundred a-year, she would make as good an appearance with it as any body else would with eight.

(243)

Tellingly, in imagining financially acceptable conditions for the couple, Mrs Jennings relies on women: Mrs Ferrars's grudging pecuniary gift and Lucy's economic skills. Edward is virtually excluded from this vision of managing a future.

A fourth, though less prominent, female character who represents female economic potency and partakes in the moral economics of *Sense and Sensibility* is Mrs Smith, "an elderly lady of very good character" (42). She is the widowed and childless proprietor of Allenham, "an ancient respectable looking mansion" (42).

The spendthrift John Willoughby largely relies on her for his income; it is more-over expected, although by no means certain, that he will one day inherit her estate. Mrs Smith can be read as a foil to Mrs Ferrars (see also Johnson, *Jane Austen* 70). Much like the latter, Mrs Smith uses her economic power to influence and sanction the behaviour of a young man, yet in this case with the narrator's approval. Whereas Mrs Ferrars dismisses Edward for rejecting a marriage with Miss Morton, Mrs Smith dismisses Willoughby "from her favour and her house" (Austen, *Sense* 301) when he refuses to marry Eliza Williams, a young woman whom he had seduced, impregnated, and abandoned. The difference between the two dismissals – and the judgements the reader is to pass on them – is that between economics pure and simple and *moral* economics: while Mrs Ferrars sanctions Edward solely for his refusal to increase family property, Mrs Smith punishes Willoughby for his lack of moderation and his breach of moral and social codes.

Mrs Smith's power to translate moral reprobation into a literal fine re-emerges at the end of the narrative when she penalises Willoughby for choosing a rich woman over the virtuous Marianne: "his punishment was soon afterwards complete in the voluntary forgiveness of Mrs Smith, who, by stating his marriage with a woman of character, as the source of her clemency, gave him reason for believing that had he behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich" (352). Money – crucially, money dispensed by a woman – functions here as the means of delivering poetic justice. Willoughby's punishment is severe indeed, as being "happy and rich" is one of the highest rewards bestowed by Austen, even if it is surpassed by the yet rarer combination of being "happy and rich" *and* morally commendable. The latter combination, however, can paradoxically only be attained by those who, unlike Willoughby, do not make riches their sole stated aim.

The depiction of yet another female character, Elinor Dashwood's scheming antagonist Lucy Steele, confirms this principle. Lucy's career is rather impressive: she and her sister Anne start out as the poorest single females in *Sense and Sensibility's* microcosm, being, as Elinor speculates, "undoubtedly inferior in connections, and probably inferior in fortune to herself" (134). By the end of the narrative, however, Lucy is lucratively married to Mrs Ferrars's son Robert and enjoys material comfort as well as personal satisfaction. Thanks to her perseverance and strategic skill, she makes the largest financial leap out of all of *Sense and Sensibility's* characters. But she is not presented as a role model: both the likeable Elinor, whose point of view readers are invited to share, and the narrator consistently criticise Lucy's behaviour (see also Hall, *Women* 128–38).

The reason behind this disapproval is that Lucy prevails in terms of economics alone, but fails in terms of moral economics, which rely on balancing self-interest with obligations towards other people. In this regard, Lucy is egoism personified, although only few characters are perceptive enough to see behind her façade of fake solicitude. When Lucy refuses to dissolve her engagement with Edward Ferrars, falsely pledging her unremitting affection for him, Elinor muses that "self-interest alone could induce a woman to keep a man to an engagement, of which she seemed so thoroughly aware that he was weary" (145). Lucy's egoistic and

materialistic stance is underscored again when Colonel Brandon offers the Delaford living to Edward, which would provide some – albeit very limited – financial resources to the couple: “As for Colonel Brandon, she was not only ready to worship him as a saint, but was moreover truly anxious that he should be treated as one in all worldly concerns; anxious that his tythes should be raised to the utmost; and scarcely resolved to avail herself, at Delaford, as far as she possibly could, of his servants, his carriage, his cows, and his poultry” (275). Such and other examples lead Elinor to see in Lucy “the active, contriving manager, uniting at once a desire of smart appearance with the utmost frugality, and ashamed to be suspected of half her economical practices; – *pursuing her own interest* in every thought, courting the favour of Colonel Brandon, of Mrs Jennings, and of every wealthy friend” (332–33, my emphasis). Lucy does not even refrain from stealing the meagre savings of her older sister (345), thereby giving a telling ring to her last name of Steele (see also Cery, *Banker's* 144). Her selfishness, but also her resourcefulness, climax when she unexpectedly and secretly marries Edward's younger brother Robert, thereby breaking her word to her first fiancé. In this, she puts the Ferrars brothers in a position that the patriarchal economy usually reserves for women: she treats them like depersonalised and interchangeable investments into her future material provision. From a purely economic vantage point, Robert, who by virtue of Mrs Ferrars's decision has moved up from the status of a second- to a first-born son, surely is the better asset. Lucy thus resembles female characters such as Fanny Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars, or Mrs Jennings, who understand the economic rationale behind the society they live in and skilfully attempt at making the most out of it. The ladies in question are rational experts in individual utility maximisation.

Yet Austen, again, clearly draws a line between a solely economic and a moral economic achievement. Lucy's success story indicates that it is possible to achieve the former but fail in terms of the latter:

The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience.

(349–50)

The quotation captures in a nutshell the premise of Austen's moral economics that is based on the assumption of similar conflicting forces as those identified by Smith. Lucy has “an unceasing attention to self-interest”, that is a ruthless drive to attain material and personal wellbeing. Her moral fault consists in not counterbalancing the pursuit of self-interest with the requirements of “conscience” that would open her eyes to the needs of others. The difference between Austen and Smith seems to be that the latter more humanely assumed that such an imbalance would lead to censure by other members of society, thus rendering the self-centred person unhappy, which in turn would make him or her curb his or her selfishness. Smith

notes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “For as to be the object of hatred and indignation gives more pain than all the evil which a brave man can fear from his enemies; so there is a satisfaction in the consciousness of being beloved, which, to a person of delicacy and sensibility, is of more importance to happiness, than all the advantage which he can expect to derive from it” (27). Austen appears more pessimistic in this regard: an egoist might simply find himself or herself a community of like-minded radical maximisers of self-interest, and the impulse to change their attitude along the lines depicted by Smith will be cut short. While one might deplore the moral standards of the egoists’ way of living, this will not prevent them from attaining a considerable degree of personal satisfaction.

The examples of female minor characters discussed until now suggest two things: firstly, that women are capable of managing substantial properties and of acting strategically to reach their personal and financial aims, to the point of subverting the cultural, legal, and economic hegemony of men. This runs against the perception of Austen as focusing on the victims of patriarchy, as well as against the characterisation of her stance as conservative. Secondly, the characters discussed so far, regardless of whether they act morally or not, seem to have attained a palpable degree of personal satisfaction. Mrs Jennings, for instance, is introduced as a “good humoured, merry” person who “seemed very happy” (36) – a characterisation consolidated throughout the plot. The description of Fanny Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars, and Lucy Steele in the last chapter likewise implies that although to the reader, their way of life may seem contemptible, based as it is on egoism and greed, for the characters in question “nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together” (351). The cold-hearted Lady Middleton and the foolish Charlotte Palmer likewise seem thoroughly contented. It would appear, then, that affluent women are generally satisfied, regardless of the contrary expectations poetic justice might raise. Does *Sense and Sensibility* posit therefore that money always makes a woman happy? This would be seemingly endorsed by Elinor and Marianne’s famed conversation on competences, in which the sensible older sister avers that “wealth has much to do with [happiness]” (90). But as is so often the case with Austen, the moral economic teachings are more complicated than that. The crucial issue on which a woman’s personal satisfaction depends seems to be less the question of her nominal property, but of her factual possibility to dispose of money according to her needs. It is not property alone that warrants a woman’s happiness but the *freedom to manage* it.

This crucial tenet is supported *ex negativo* by two characters who on the face of it are marginal to *Sense and Sensibility*’s plot but are in fact central to its moral economics: Eliza Brandon and Miss Morton. Eliza’s case illustrates how money can ruin a young and single woman. She and Colonel Brandon were mutually in love when they were young, but her property got in the way of their happiness and eventually made her end up hopeless and sick in a spunging-house for debtors. The Colonel reports in hindsight: “She was married – married against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our family estate much encumbered” (194). The imposed marriage proved a disaster and apparently involved infidelity

or other sexual trespasses on the husband's part. Wearing down by his perpetual ill-treatment and neglect, Eliza was seduced and then "s[u]nk deeper in a life of sin" (195) – a possible allusion to prostitution. In plummeting from affluence to an unhappy marriage to seduction and prostitution, and from there to a debtor's prison, Eliza becomes the victim of the patriarchal economy along similar lines as cases analysed by writers such as Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson. Colonel Brandon cites his brother's cruelty and financial stipulations as reasons for Eliza's fall: "Her legal allowance was not adequate to her fortune, nor sufficient for her comfortable maintenance, and I learnt from my brother that the power of receiving it had been made over some months before to another person" (195). Although Austen has Eliza die of consumption, thus conveniently disposing of a morally ambivalent character, Eliza's short story, as Johnson rightly remarks, does not condemn her but denounces external forces to which the young woman is subjected: "Far from being a cautionary tale about the duty of fidelity, Eliza's story, like so much of the central matter in *Sense and Sensibility*, indicts the license to coercion, corruption, and avarice available to grasping patriarchs and their eldest sons" (*Jane Austen* 56). In Eliza's case, money is the root of the evil that befalls her since without it, she arguably would not have been married off against her will. Her position of affluence surprisingly turns out to be more vulnerable than that of the impoverished Dashwood sisters. In this, Austen echoes a proposition made by Chapone in *Hardships of the English Laws*. Having described the misuses to which an adulterous husband can put his rich wife's money, Chapone concludes: "many Men make no Scruple to marry a Woman they don't Love, for the Sake of her Money; it may therefore be supposed, that Women of Fortune, are more liable to Injuries of that Kind than any other Part of the Sex" (33–34).

The reader gets even less information on Miss Morton, but this scarcity of detail concerning her person is indicative of her narrative function, which is to caution against the reduction of an individual to a mere sum, or, in the words of Barbara M. Benedict, "the depiction of people as things themselves" (353). The only facts provided about the Hon. Miss Morton are that she is the "only daughter of the late Lord Morton, with thirty thousand pounds" (212). The considerable sum is sought by the Ferrars family, little matter whether through a marriage to Edward or to Robert Ferrars. As Elinor accurately and bitingly observes, "[t]he lady [. . .] has no choice in the affair" (278).

Even if on the face of it the Hon. Miss Morton and the indebted and fallen Eliza Brandon might not have much in common, their fates illustrate an important proposition of *Sense and Sensibility*: not money itself is the guarantor of happiness for a woman but her factual ability to exert control over financial means. Eliza and Miss Morton, though technically rich, do not acquire economic agency because, unlike the women discussed previously, they are factually disallowed from managing their money: their sizeable incomes are seized by others. Precisely because of their wealth, they become the victims of a system in which, as Marianne Dashwood puts it, marriage is reduced to "a commercial exchange" (40). Susan C. Greenfield observes that many of the characters in *Sense and Sensibility* resemble

each other in significant ways and concludes that “part of the danger of resemblance is that it fosters [. . .] substitutions, making it possible for seemingly similar people to be exchanged. [. . .] Invariably, the characters at greatest risk of such substitution are those whose lack of property limits their claims to individuality” (93). Yet the fates of Miss Morton and Eliza Brandon prove that in some cases property is the very trigger of substitution and paradoxically becomes a source of constraint rather than of freedom. Miss Morton and Eliza Brandon turn into actual embodiments of their fortunes: like money itself, they are invested and circulated for the benefit of others. In this context, it is apposite that they do not utter a single word throughout the narrative: they remain mute and passive tokens shoved about by men *and* women.

### ***The moral economic significance of the female protagonists***

The hitherto discussed balancing acts of the minor female characters reveal how difficult it is for a female character to be rich, happy, *and* a positive role model to readers, that is how difficult a moral economic – in contrast to a ‘merely’ economic – achievement is. In fact, there is only one character to entirely succeed in this regard: protagonist Elinor Dashwood. Like many other women in *Sense and Sensibility*, she emblematises that women are competent financial managers and that they need money as well as the agency to dispose of it to attain personal contentment. At the same time, she is the one to most persistently practise and accept restraint – in emotional terms, as has frequently been pointed out, but also economically. Elinor employs her “strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment” (8) not only as a rational antidote to spontaneous overflows of powerful feelings but also as a safeguard against an unchecked desire to amass worldly goods – in herself and in others. Edward Copeland notes on a similar note that “[i]n the moral economics of this novel, represented by Elinor most particularly, affordable material comforts operate in a dialectical relationship with extravagant display” (Copeland, *Women* 94). In fact, in her portrayal of the Dashwood women, Austen establishes a palpable link between emotional and economic disciplinary regimes, with Elinor representing the virtues of balancing self-gratification with self-restraint. When her desired match with Edward appears impossible, “she works obsessively [. . .] at self-command, that stoical virtue which, for the great philosopher of sentimentalism Adam Smith, was a constantly needed check on the passions and feelings” (Keymer, “*Northanger*” 34). Yet Elinor’s particular ordeal consists in enforcing self-command not only on herself but even more so on her less prudent female relatives. Early in the narrative, Elinor has to prevail on her mother to scale down their family’s standard of living. Mrs Dashwood consequently sells the epitome of affluence, her carriage, “at the earnest advice of her eldest daughter. For the comfort of her children, had she consulted only her own wishes, she would have kept it; but the discretion of Elinor prevailed. *Her* wisdom too limited the number of their servants to three [. . .]” (28). Discretion is Elinor’s key trait, which positively distinguishes her from all other female characters in *Sense and Sensibility* who in different ways

fail to correctly answer Elizabeth Bennet's question in *Pride and Prejudice*: "Where does discretion end, and avarice begin?" (151).

This failure also applies to Elinor's younger sister, and the second protagonist, Marianne. She is perhaps more likeable due to her impulsivity and sincerity, but the inability to restrain herself in both emotional and economic terms is a flaw for which she is severely punished in the novel. Her rash emotional 'investment' in Willoughby is associated with her inability to foresee the financial consequences of her actions. Elinor has to convince Marianne to refuse Willoughby's gift of a horse, not only because of its impropriety but also because of the financial strain it would put on their mother: "she must buy another [horse] for the servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them" (59). Elinor's moral economic foresight is dismissed by Marianne's blithe remark that "the expence would be a trifle" (59). But her financial carelessness foreshadows her misjudgement of the price she will have to pay for a similar lack of moderation on an emotional plane.

Marianne's questionable financial insouciance is also hinted at during the conversation she has with her sister on the desirable size of a family income. On the one hand, Marianne maintains that "money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it. Beyond a competence, it can afford no real satisfaction, as far as mere self is concerned" (90). But what at first reads like a sensible manifesto of moderation soon turns out to be the result of naive misjudgement. Marianne considers £2,000 "a very moderate income", which stands in contrast to her rather ample needs: "A proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters, cannot be supported on less" (90). Her praise of modesty is at odds with the sum she names: in contrast to her older sister, she lacks the ability to perform a correct self-evaluation. Her failure to realistically assess her requirements becomes even more obvious in her implausible assertion: "I am sure I am not extravagant in my demands" (90). The point is that she *is* rather extravagant, in emotional terms, too, as it soon turns out. In her ingenuous pursuit of personal wish-fulfilment, she is, despite her sincerity and goodness of heart, reminiscent of female characters such as Fanny Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars, and Lucy Steele. She lacks an internalised impartial spectator – at least at the outset of the narrative – for whom Elinor (and via her, the reader) consequently has to step in.

Lack of economic moderation and self-discipline is what Elinor repeatedly recognises and criticises in others. She is the one to pass censure on Lucy, Fanny, or Mrs Ferrars's greed and selfishness, or to expose John Dashwood's unwitting rapacity. In contrast to her sister's disapproval, Elinor's condemnation is not just an emotional impulse of a well-meaning heart. Her judgements are passed along the lines of moral economics which seeks to reconcile social obligations with solid economic needs. This becomes particularly evident when she describes to Marianne the unhappiness her marriage to Willoughby would have entailed. Elinor's argumentation is markedly economic:

Had you married, you must have been always poor. His expensiveness is acknowledged even by himself, and his whole conduct declares that

self-denial is a word hardly understood by him. His demands and your inexperience together, on a small, very small income, must have brought on distresses which would not be the *less* grievous to you, from having been entirely unknown and unthought of before. *Your* sense of honour and honesty would have led you, I know, when aware of your situation, to attempt all the economy that would appear to you possible: and, perhaps, as long as your frugality retrenched only on your own comfort, you might have been suffered to practice it, but beyond that – and how little could the utmost of your single management do to stop the ruin which had begun before your marriage? – Beyond *that*, had you endeavoured, however reasonably, to abridge *his* enjoyments, is it not to be feared, that instead of prevailing on feelings so selfish to consent to it, you would have lessened your own influence on his heart, and made him regret the connection which had involved him in such difficulties?

(326–27)

The passage develops *ex negativo* the notion of an ideal marriage which is based on a balance between the partners' emotional and economic needs. Had Marianne married Willoughby, the responsibility for establishing such equilibrium would have entirely rested on her. Given his "expensiveness" as well as his inability to practise "self-denial", "to abridge *his* enjoyments", or to curb his "selfish" feelings, Marianne would have had to act as a counterweight: she would have had to provide "honour and honesty", "all the economy that would appear [. . .] possible", "frugality", and "single management"; she would have *nolens volens* "retrenched on [her] own comfort" in order to keep the marital economic balance intact. Yet ultimately, all of Marianne's harmonising efforts would not have prevented the couple's "ruin", as Elinor's scenario implies, because an emotionally and financially successful marriage presupposes that both partners achieve a compromise between self-gratification and self-restraint *within*, and not just *between* themselves. It is only at the unacceptable price of self-annihilation that Marianne could have compensated for Willoughby's insatiable ego. Elinor's cool assessment thus puts forward that women have emotional and financial needs of their own and for a relationship to be prosperous, these needs must not be relinquished. Hers is a subtle, yet palpable claim in favour of an emotional *and* economic equality of women within marriage.

Such equality requires that women are capable of managing financial affairs. That this is the case is, as I have argued, one of the central propositions of *Sense and Sensibility* made via its female minor characters. Unsurprisingly, Elinor, too, illustrates that women have a thorough grasp of financial matters and are thus capable of acting as equal partners in settling economic issues. She frequently discusses financial circumstances and arrangements with Mrs Jennings and Lucy but also with men such as John Dashwood and Colonel Brandon. In the conversation on competences between herself, Marianne, and Edward, she is the one to set the tone. The extent of her economic expertise is emphasised again upon her marriage to Edward, when she turns out to be better-informed as regards the management



of the Delaford curacy than her kind, but somewhat lethargic, husband: “[S]o little interest had he taken in the matter, that he owed all his knowledge of the house, garden, and glebe, extent of the parish, condition of the land, and rate of the tythes, to Elinor herself, who had heard so much of it from Colonel Brandon, and heard it with so much attention, as to be entirely mistress of the subject” (343). The novel’s conclusion thus emphasises yet again the economic proficiency of its heroine.

As I have argued, *Sense and Sensibility* posits that such economic agency is a precondition for a woman’s personal satisfaction. One may thus assume that the active part Elinor will play in managing the Delaford living is crucial for her and Edward becoming “one of the happiest couple [*sic*] in the world” (348). But *Sense and Sensibility* also stresses that in order to derive self-fulfilment from managing a property, a woman needs to have property in the first place – a credo that is already voiced in *The Watsons* by its protagonist Emma: “Female economy will do a great deal [. . .], but it cannot turn a small income into a large one” (136). Elinor and Edward’s initial relative ‘poverty’ (they are the least affluent match in the novel) allows Austen to accentuate this point. Edward is neither as flashy nor as rich as Mr Darcy or Mr Knightley, but precisely because he lacks a spectacular income (even after his mother graciously allows him a lump sum of £10,000), Austen can make explicit that both emotional *and* financial security is indispensable for a felicitous union. John Mullan writes of Austen that “[m]ost of her major characters come with income tickets attached, not so much because the novelist wants us to notice how important money and the lack of money might be, as because she wants us to see her characters noticing these things” (200). Yet this is a too immaterialist reading of Austen, who repeatedly demonstrates that a fortune coming in with marriage is not a lucky extra that may just as well be relinquished but is a basic requirement, as necessary as mutual sympathy of the partners. Hers is, in the words of Cy Frost, “an economically pragmatic view” (264) of marriage, as the following comment on Edward and Elinor underscores:

They were brought together by mutual affection, with the warmest approbation of their real friends; their intimate knowledge of each other seemed to make their happiness certain – and they only wanted something to live upon. Edward had two thousand pounds, and Elinor one, which, with Delaford living, was all that they could call their own; for it was impossible that Mrs. Dashwood should advance anything; and they were neither of them quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year would supply them with the comforts of life.

(*Austen, Sense* 343)

The passage confirms that contrary to how Austen continues to be read by many until this day, she is neither an uncompromised advocate of a union of the hearts nor a cynic describing, in W.H. Auden’s famed words, “the amorous effects of ‘brass’” (171). Austen is a romantic realist putting forward a moral economic ideal of marriage which is based on the notion of equilibrium. She persistently

emphasises that a happy marriage is a balancing act between emotional and economic needs as well as between self-gratification and self-restraint. What a happy marriage is not, is mere balancing between husband and wife, in the sense that one partner (usually the woman) is forced to make up for the extreme demands of another. Austen makes a case against reducing marriage to “a virtual life sentence to an inescapable economic and legal subjugation” (Frost 255) for a woman. If marriage is a balance sheet, then both partners must partake in credit *and* debit after entering the contract.

Commenting on the portrayal of the two Dashwood sisters, Shannon Chamberlain avers that “Elinor marries the person she was meant to marry from the very beginning, and the obstacles that they encounter have not so much to do with passing through an education in moral sentiments as with the less interesting task of removing various practical and mundane obstacles to marriage” (162). While these obstacles might be indeed “less interesting” than Marianne’s heartaches, they are central to Austen’s moral economics. If as readers (and critics) we tend to see Elinor as less captivating than Marianne, then this is due to the former being more theoretical, as it were, while the latter is, at least in the beginning, ‘novelistic’. Keymer highlights, for example, Elinor’s “robotic expression but also a certain complicity, a perverse endorsement of social codes” which he contrasts with “Marianne’s habit of causing stirs and making scenes” (“*Northanger*” 36). The reason for this contrast, I would argue, is that Elinor from the outset epitomises abstract moral economic thought, whereas Marianne embodies the difficulties in making reality adhere to it. The younger sister starts out as a likeable, yet in many respects insatiable and self-centred character: the novel’s first chapter associates her with “excess” (8), which she indulges in until she risks fully expending herself. Her subsequent change of heart triggered by Willoughby’s abandonment and her grave illness make her accept the virtues of moderation. The wording of her “plan” (323) for the future accordingly bespeaks a programmatic scaling down, cutting back, and retrenching: “my feelings shall be governed”, “my spirit is humbled”, “I can practise [. . .] the lesser duties of life”, “forbearance”, “it shall be regulated, it shall be checked” (323). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne thus learns how to be a successful moral economic manager. Austen makes clear that this lesson is a very painful one at first. In fact, it is a classic investment: an extreme, yet brief pleasure is foregone in the name of a moderately happy, yet long-lasting future, which Marianne, according to the narrator, indeed secures for herself. What is renounced and saved up at present, pays off with interest in the long run.

In the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, therefore, Marianne is successful in terms of moral economics, “entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village” (352). But revealingly, she apparently no longer satisfies in terms of a novel. Tony Tanner was one of the first critics to call Marianne’s marriage to Brandon “the weakest part of the book” (379): “Marianne does, in effect, die. Whatever the name of the automaton which submits to the plans or its relations and joins the social game it is not the real Marianne, and in the devitalized symmetry of the conclusion something valuable has been lost”

(380). Tanner is unwittingly describing Marianne's transformation from life into theory, as is underlined by his choice of words, such as "automaton" (echoing Keymer's "robotic" earlier), "plans or its relations", and "devitalized symmetry". In his wake, a number of critics have accused Austen of forcing Marianne to comply with the exigencies of a happy romantic plot.<sup>1</sup> Yet the structure Marianne finally submits to is arguably not that of the romantic novel but that of moral economics. Marianne fails as the heroine of a romantic or even realistic novel – which keeps galling readers and literary critics alike – but she succeeds as an emblem of moral economics. As (modern) readers, we overlook and cannot rejoice in this success as long as we continue to read Austen's texts as novels and novels *only*. Shannon Chamberlain observes that there are many "prominent accounts of how Marianne and Jane Austen (by extension) disappoint us" (157). But it is crucial to remark that the "us" in this sentence for the most part refers to critics and readers who are disappointed by Austen's refusal to conform to their generic expectations regarding a 'good' or 'accomplished' novel. Once the possibility is admitted that the ending of *Sense and Sensibility* concludes a study of moral economics, Austen's alleged failure exposes the readers' failure to fully appreciate the economic-theoretical import of her text.

### ***Male characters as moral economic mismanagers***

Before summing up the major moral economic premises of Austen's first published novel, brief mention should be made of the male characters in *Sense and Sensibility*. It is conspicuous that they appear rather inadequate and, in comparison to the many strong-minded and energetic women, fairly passive. The contours of Austen's moral economics are more systematically wrought in the depiction of female characters, with male figures serving to buttress her points and to disprove an assumed superiority of men over women in economic matters. *Sense and Sensibility* abounds with men who, in different ways, are moral economic mismanagers.

This becomes particularly obvious in a shopping scene in London where Elinor and Marianne meet Robert Ferrars and John Dashwood at a jeweller's shop. The short passage is fraught with moral economic symbolism. Robert is fully absorbed in ordering a toothpick case adorned with ivory, gold, and pearls (209), thus showcasing his commitment to excess and luxury as well as his privileging of expensive objects over people: he is so engrossed in his business that "he had no leisure to bestow any other attention on the two ladies, than what was comprised in three or four very broad stares" (208). John is buying a seal for his wife Fanny, and he apparently deemed this vain errand more pressing than calling upon his half-sisters. In his case, too, a costly embodiment of the ego (the seal) triumphs over obligations towards other people, thereby upsetting the moral economic balance. For Copeland, this scene proves that most male characters in the novel are "destructive consumers" (*Women* 96). For Diego Saglia, it "provides an insight into the disturbing possibility that things may take over the subject in the context of generalized luxury, commercial dynamism, and ubiquitous consumption that contemporary commentators saw as peculiar to Britain" (360). It is thus significant that Elinor's

behaviour in the shop is markedly different from that of the two men: she notices the people around her, does not engage in mindless consumerism, and she disallows the objects to take control of her. While Robert and John are wholly taken in by the luxurious goods on offer, Elinor's behaviour is focused and determined: she "was carrying on a negotiation for the exchange of a few old-fashioned jewels of her mother" (208), "lost no time in bringing her business forward", and is soon "on the point of concluding it" (209). The entire deal occurs in the efficient span of just one sentence. The scene thus echoes the opening of the novel in demonstrating that men are by no means more sensible, purposeful, and reliable than women as regards consumer behaviour and the management of financial transactions.

The male character to most flagrantly exemplify a lack of self-restraint is John Willoughby who in the novel owns the nearly exclusive right to a significant key word: Colonel Brandon terms him "expensive" (198), Elinor criticises his "expensiveness" (326), and even Willoughby himself admits to have "always been expensive" (299) and to mixing with "expensive society" (302).<sup>2</sup> If the reader (and Elinor) finds it difficult to look at Willoughby with the same disdain that one easily conjures up for John and Fanny Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars, her son Robert, or Lucy Steele, it is because Willoughby is aware of but helpless vis-à-vis his ruinous insatiability. He proves weaker than his beloved Marianne (one more woman to surpass a man) because he lacks the inner strength and foresight to invest into his future by accepting temporary material constraints. His ensuing unhappiness is both the result of his inability to save as well as of a miscalculation regarding the balancing of economic and emotional assets: "To avoid a comparative poverty, which [Marianne's] affection and her society would have deprived of all its horrors, I have, by raising myself to affluence, lost every thing that could make it a blessing" (299). Willoughby thus had a moral economic choice between two relationships: one that combined "*comparative* poverty" (my emphasis) with "affection" and one that combined "affluence" with the lack of any affection whatsoever. In other words, he had to choose between moderate financial means plus full emotions (this is also what Edward and Elinor settle for) *versus* full financial means plus no emotions. Had he done his maths correctly, Willoughby would have come to the conclusion that the first equation adds up to more. Yet because he failed to correctly estimate the value of feelings, he ended up in an unsatisfactory relationship in which "happiness is out of the question" (309). His ill-fated choice of the rich Sophia Grey over the significantly less affluent Marianne evokes a moral economic scenario that, as Michie posits, would solidify as the nineteenth-century English novel progressed:

the contrast between the rich and the poor woman opposes self-interest to disinterest. In the process it incarnates in the rich woman the fear that haunted Smith and the nineteenth-century political economists who followed him, including Thomas Robert Malthus, Walter Bagehot, John Stuart Mill, and others – the fear that England's rapid economic development would corrupt the moral sentiment.

Austen's depiction of Willoughby's predicament is thus related to – and in some ways even predates – the political economic discourse of the time, and it underscores her stance as a romantic realist.

As a seducer and heartbreaker, Willoughby is apt to be discarded as the novel's staple rake, but it is noteworthy that even the two likeable future husbands of Elinor and Marianne do not bedazzle with a great amount of money or economic resourcefulness. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy's fortune allows him to cover up and pay for Lydia's elopement with Wickham: he "made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow's debts, and got him his commission" (357). One of the touchy twists of Austen's second novel is that this act of generosity, which essentially presupposes Darcy's considerable spending power, makes Elizabeth realise the full extent of her love for him. In *Sense and Sensibility*, by contrast, the heroines' affections are never stimulated in such a way, not least because the men in question do not possess the required financial means to 'buy' them. Colonel Brandon's kind help to Edward (his presenting to him the Delaford living) is rather notable for its financial inadequacy, as Brandon himself has to admit:

I only wish it were more valuable. It is a rectory, but a small one; the late incumbent, I believe, did not make more than 200l. per annum, and though it is certainly capable of improvement, I fear, not to such an amount as to afford him a very comfortable income. [ . . . ] This little rectory *can* do no more than make Mr. Ferrars comfortable as a bachelor; it cannot enable him to marry. I am sorry to say that my patronage ends with this; and my interest is hardly more extensive.

(264–65)

Brandon's apology underlines that he is well aware of the necessity of combining marital affection with an adequate income, but his "patronage" is limited and even his naming of Edward's prospective meagre income is qualified by a hesitant "I believe".

Edward, the beneficiary of Brandon's decision, is introduced as an amiable and sensible man, whose "wishes centered in domestic comfort and the quiet of private life" (18). Regrettably, however, Edward is incapable of financially providing for the fulfilment of his needs: "It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like independence. But unfortunately my own nicety, and the nicety of my friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being" (100). Edward's faults admittedly go back to the detrimental (financial) influence of his imperious mother, but the fact remains that throughout, Elinor appears more knowledgeable and resourceful as regards economic and worldly concerns than her future husband. The remarkable extent of female economic agency that on the whole characterises *Sense and Sensibility* is thus additionally enhanced by the relative economic ineptness or impotence of the novel's male characters.

### **Evaluating Austen's contribution**

Summing up the economic insights generated by *Sense and Sensibility*, it must first be accentuated that the text abounds in specific information on incomes, interests, household expenditure, the living standards of prospective couples as well as legal and economic stipulations that grant or restrict economic agency. To claim, as has frequently been the case, that this is background information, coincidence, or reflective of Jane Austen's personal preoccupation with money, inhibits the plausible conclusion that she was using fiction to partake in the economic discourse of her time and pass on economic deliberations to her readers. Edward Copeland proposes that women's fiction around 1800

takes on a specifically didactic function for its readers, especially for young women with only beginning notions of incomes, as it explores for women from novel to novel the implications of consumable yearly incomes. [. . .] *Sense and Sensibility* simply extends and amends a familiar financial plot shared across the whole span of contemporary women's fiction.

(*Women* 24)

I argue that as a contribution to economic thought, *Sense and Sensibility* goes beyond the mere exploration of consumer behaviour and the significance of yearly incomes. Critics so far have not sufficiently appreciated the many economically active female characters who exemplify that women are perfectly capable of rationally managing financial affairs, and often even more successfully than men. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen thus gives prominence to the figure a *femina oeconomica* – the female equivalent to economic man. She challenges the gendered legal and economic regulations of her time, which were based on the assumption of a natural inferiority of women and therefore curtailed their agency and justified both coverture and the exclusion of (middle-class) women from most paid professions. Major and minor characters in *Sense and Sensibility* illustrate time and again a fundamental economic tenet, namely that sex does not automatically translate into economic knowledge, rationality, and resourcefulness. The text, just as many novels by Austen's female contemporaries, thus constitutes a palpable “effort to empower women economically [. . .]: a concentrated effort to codify a position of economic responsibility for women, a redefining of gender roles, and a thoroughgoing condemnation of those economic traditions that enfeeble women” (Copeland, *Women* 87). Related to this is a further economic proposition of Austen's first published text, namely that, for women, the factual possibility to dispose of money is conducive to their personal happiness. It is not property on paper but actual economic agency that is relevant for a woman. Here, Austen's stance ties in with that of writers on feminist economics of marriage.

*Sense and Sensibility* moreover contains a systematic investigation of moral economics, which is based on the notion of moderation and balance. This notion is reminiscent of Adam Smith's moral philosophy, not least because Smith, too,

argued that it is “mediocrity [. . .] in which the point of propriety consists” (*TMS* 23). Austen offers an original, complex, and above all women-focused analysis of the various balancing acts that are necessary to make individual behaviour not only economically sensible but also morally commendable. She draws a clear distinction between ‘merely’ economic success and *moral* economic success. The latter recognises the social dimensions of (economic) behaviour and presupposes an equilibrium between the justified and plausible wish to (materially) satisfy the self on the one hand and a self-disciplinary impulse that recognises one’s communal obligations on the other. To be praiseworthy from a moral economic vantage point, an individual ought to strive for balance between self-gratification and self-denial, although this is an arduous task that many fail to accomplish.

In suggesting that only few are fully endowed with an internalised impartial spectator who helps them reconcile selfish with social needs, Austen is less optimistic than Adam Smith. But *Sense and Sensibility* in so far aligns with Smith’s moral philosophy as it encourages the reader to adopt the stance of an *external* impartial spectator who evaluates the characters’ behaviour according to moral economic principles put forth by the narrator and the novel’s model heroine, Elinor. For this reason, the panoply of side characters must not be reduced to an amusing backdrop of the literary romantic plot but be seen as a systematic study as well as an exercise in moral economic thought. The numerous characters populating Austen’s microcosm function as didactic specimens of how people should (not) act in moral economic terms, which explains why they so often, so thoroughly, and so variously concern themselves with money.

Finally, *Sense and Sensibility* develops a moral economic ideal of marriage. Balance is here again a pivotal virtue: a happy union between husband and wife presupposes that their economic and emotional needs are taken into consideration. As such, both money and mutual attachment have a very concrete value that a skilled moral economist should assess and appreciate accordingly. Marriage to Austen is very much a matter of making a rational choice, with the important proviso that feelings, too, must be literally taken into account. *Sense and Sensibility* moreover argues for relative equality between man and woman as regards the scope of their economic agency. Austen is evidently not as outspoken and radical as the feminist economists discussed in Chapter 5, yet the major thrust of her argument points in the same direction: she illustrates that marriage *per se* guarantees neither a woman’s financial security nor her personal happiness (the case of Eliza Brandon). By virtue of their practical and economic skills, which often surpass that of men, women are entitled to expect a significant share in the actual management of marital affairs.

That the moral economics of Austen is not entirely devoid of occasional contradictions and exceptions is not a proof of her failure as an economic writer. Chwe notes in an analogous context that “Austen’s commitment to game-theoretic explanation is delightfully undogmatic [because s]he generously allows for the importance of alternative explanations” (5). Austen disregards neither the complexities of the real world nor, as her portrayal of Marianne shows, the gap between theory and practice. While for some, this makes *Sense and Sensibility* “the first

English realistic novel” (MacDonagh 65), it is also an argument in favour of Austen’s complex engagement with the pressing issues of her times. Because she developed her economic thoughts in a genre of writing that has come to be seen over time as almost the antithesis of ‘serious’ economic writing, the full purport of the moral economic thought as projected in *Sense and Sensibility* has remained hidden from view. It is tempting to imagine the shape that political economy and later economics would have taken had Austen’s economic propositions been recognised and taken seriously.

### Coda: Billing Jane Austen in the 21st century

In 2013, Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, announced that, from 2017 onwards, the Bank would issue a newly designed £10 note: Charles Darwin would be replaced by Jane Austen (Clery, *Banker’s* 1). The Bank’s choice was preceded by a public campaign initiated by the feminist activist and writer Caroline Criado-Perez in favour of having women appear on English banknotes to render visible their contributions to British history. The launching of the note, the note’s design, as well as the debates that both preceded and followed it, provide a pertinent coda to this chapter, as they touch upon women’s relationship to economics and expose the one-sided afterlife of Jane Austen.

In his analysis of “Visual Credit: The Britannia Vignette on the Notes of the Bank of England”, Michael Hutter shows that at least from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, two sources “charge[d] the meaning of the paper slip. One is the legal language that formulates the contract between the Bank and its creditor. The other is the visual language of the vignette” (26). The design of a banknote is up to this day strongly related to “the image of a nation’s identity” (31) and carries a cultural message. Aware of this circumstance, Mark Carney duly emphasised in his speech that “[t]he Bank of England has, through its banknotes, a unique and rare opportunity to promote awareness of Britain’s history and to acknowledge the life and work of its greatest citizens. [ . . . ] We believe that our notes should celebrate the full diversity of great British historical figures and their contributions in a wide range of fields” (Carney). Given Austen’s persistent commitment to monetary issues, one would expect that her economic expertise was one reason for making her appear on the new note. But the Bank’s governor explained in his brief speech that

[s]he merits her place in this select group as one of the greatest writers in English literature. Her novels have an enduring, timeless and universal appeal – they have never been out of print since first being published, have inspired numerous modern adaptations and are loved by people around the world. Austen’s combination of sharp wit, engaging narrative, knowing satire and social commentary has ensured her place among the country’s favourite authors.

(Carney)



Carney's only mention of Austen's relation to British pounds does not evoke her own writing but the busted bank briefly run by her brother Henry. Apparently, even when figuring on a banknote 'Austen the female novelist' overshadows the economist in Austen.

This impression is corroborated by the design that the Bank of England has chosen for the back of the Austen note (Figure 7.1). Money being a quotidian medium circulating among a great number of people, it makes sense to imagine first what this design might suggest to an average user who beholds the note without having access to background information on the note's visual features. In this context, four visual elements emerge as the most conspicuous: (a) the portrait on the right; (b) the caption below the portrait; (c) the drawing of a woman sitting at a writing desk on the top left; (d) the representation of a landed estate on the bottom left. What do these four elements imply? Which connotations do they evoke?



FIGURE 7.1 Back of the Jane Austen £10 note

Source: © Bank of England



FIGURE 7.2 Back of the Winston Churchill £5 note

Source: © Bank of England

The portrait shows a rather pleasing-looking woman with delicate, symmetrical features. Judging from the signature below it, one is led to assume that it represents Jane Austen. The obligatory bonnet evokes the fashion of a bygone period, which some contemporary observers may be familiar with from, for example, heritage films. The quotation below the portrait – “I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading” – is likely to be attributed to Austen herself. It suggests that she was an advocate of reading, which she perceived as a source of “enjoyment”. This presents Austen as the author of a kind of literature which predominantly provides a pleasant pastime. As regards the drawing of the young woman sitting at a desk, it is not exactly clear whether she is reading or writing, but as both activities are suggestive of an author, one might assume that it depicts Austen herself in the act of producing her fiction. The scene appears intimate, private, and secluded, to which the woman’s delicate silhouette and her plain dress give additional weight. The estate depicted in the nether left corner carries diverse associations. It may be a place where Austen used to live, but it might also be an illustration of one of the many estates figuring in her fiction: Norland Park, Pemberley, Highbury. The manor and the carriage passing in front of it moreover call to mind a nostalgic vision of a pastoral England. The house is sizeable but rather secluded and surrounded by mellow and pleasant countryside. It is not a public place, which ties in with the intimacy of the desk scene. In sum, the design of the £10 note places Austen in the context of pleasant literature, feminine delicacy, heritage nostalgia, and enjoyable, private activities.

The visual representation of the banknote thus not only fails to allude to the social import of Austen’s writing but also reiterates a problematic gender dichotomy, which associates femininity with things private and light, while reserving the public and active domain to men. This modern variant of the separate-spheres doctrine becomes evident when the design of the Austen note is set against the new £5 note (Figure 7.2), which features Winston Churchill (who has replaced the prison reformer Elizabeth Fry). Churchill’s stern face appears next to the Houses of Parliament: a compelling visual sign of political power and influence, situated at the heart of the British capital. Underneath the portrait is a quotation from one of his famous political speeches that reads: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat”. While the grim man on the fiver asks his compatriots to make sacrifices for Britain in an hour of need, the delicate woman on the tenner smiles timidly and proposes a pleasant outing into the countryside or a quiet retreat into “enjoyment” and “reading”.

The design of the £10 note continues a tradition of representing Austen which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, was popularised by nineteenth- and twentieth-century male authors such as Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Rudyard Kipling, and D.H. Lawrence. Just like the twenty-first-century banknote, they, too, paid a double-edged tribute to “their heroine”, which transformed her into, but also limited her scope to, “a nostalgic symbol of order, culture, England, in an apocalyptic world where all the old gods have failed or disappeared” (111). In addition to that, although the note is meant to celebrate Austen’s contributions to English literature,

the Churchill note demonstrates that he succeeded in that realm, too, as it contains an illustration of the Nobel Prize for Literature that he received in 1953. Churchill is usually not associated with literature but with politics. The banknote thus draws attention to a side of his that commonly eludes public perception. Arguably, the same could have been done with Austen – but was not. The point in comparing the two notes is not to diminish Churchill's achievements but to highlight that gender binaries continue to circulate, both metaphorically and literally, in the public realm. The two notes show that men are up to this day more likely to be associated with things public, active, brave, powerful, and political, while women connote personal charm, timidity, pleasure, harmlessness, picturesque nature, and domesticity. That the Churchill note is blue and the Austen one pinkish-orange confirms the impression of (unconscious) gender stereotyping further.

So far, my close reading of the Austen note has not taken into consideration the information provided by the Bank of England regarding the actual sources and meaning of the graphic elements. Now, the question arises of whether the inclusion of background information would help revise the problematic implications of the design. According to the Bank of England, the Austen note features the following elements:

- Portrait of Jane Austen. Commissioned by James Edward Austen Leigh (Jane Austen's nephew) in 1870 [ . . . ]
- The quote – “I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!” from *Pride and Prejudice* (Miss Bingley, Chapter XI) [ . . . ]
- An illustration of Miss Elizabeth Bennet undertaking “The examination of all the letters which Jane had written to her” – from a drawing by Isabel Bishop (1902–1988), who illustrated E. P. Dutton & Company's 1976 edition of *Pride and Prejudice* [ . . . ]
- The image of Godmersham Park. Godmersham was home of Edward Austen Knight, Jane Austen's brother. Jane Austen visited the house often and it is believed that it was the inspiration for a number of her novels [ . . . ]
- Jane Austen's writing table [ . . . ]

*(Bank of England, “News Release”)*

Is this information conducive to a less stereotypical reading of the Austen note than the one I have suggested? Hardly. Starting with the young lady patiently working at a desk, it turns out that this is not Austen but Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*. While illustrating a particular scene from a text by Austen is in itself unproblematic, it is not at all clear why exactly this drawing was chosen as particularly representative of Austen's entire oeuvre. Is it because it depicts a pretty and delicate female immersed in a private act of writing/reading? Considerably more worrying is the source of the quotation. Users of the banknote are likely to attribute the words to Austen, thinking of it as a catchphrase to characterise the historical figure in question, as is the case with Churchill. Yet it turns out that the words were not only uttered by a fictional character, namely,

Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, but on top of that by a character whom Austen clearly represented as dislikeable, shallow, and foolish. If Charles Dickens was to appear on a banknote, it is doubtful that his caption would consist in a statement by the cold-hearted Mr Bounderby of *Hard Times* or the stingy Ebenezer Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol*. If the banknote's makers wanted a quotation by the historical Jane Austen, they could have consulted her surviving correspondence. But, apparently, having Austen stand for the "enjoyment" of reading was deemed a priority. It is as if Austen, the historical figure, has been made captive of a specific and narrow tradition of reading her fiction as pleasant, romantic, feminine, private, and benign. In this context, it is also fitting that the portrait of Austen on the banknote is a nineteenth-century version of an original drawing by Austen's sister Cassandra. The original, produced during Austen's lifetime, shows her without the faint smile and with less regular features ("NPG 3630"). This putatively unattractive, though possibly more accurate version of Jane Austen would, however, spoil the airbrushed atmosphere that the general design of the note brings across.

Overall, the new £10 note perpetuates a conflation of the historical Jane Austen with the fictional world evoked in her novels – a trend reinforced by the heritage industry and films such as *Becoming Jane* (2007), which has Austen feature as the imagined heroine of a romantic plot deemed typical of her writing. I have argued throughout that 'Austen the economist' is regularly dwarfed by 'Austen the novelist' in academic writing. In popular culture, it seems, the situation is even worse: 'Austen the novelist' is triumphed over by 'Austen, the heroine of a putatively typical Austen novel'. It is not the case, I assume, that the Bank of England has deliberately and consciously chosen visual elements corroborating a neo-Victorian gender dichotomy. The choice is rather a sobering reflection of a cultural subconscious which still offers to women a limited public, and thus also economic, space.

The in/visibility of Austen is related to the in/visibility of banknotes more generally. Poovey contends that as a medium, money, albeit we touch, read, and use it every day, has largely become invisible to us in terms of its representational function:

For the very fact that we no longer notice that money consists of various kinds or that its function depends on writing means that money has been *naturalized*: [. . .] money has become so familiar that its writing has seemed to disappear and it has seemed to lose its history as (various forms of) writing. In being taken for granted, the writing that makes money serve its primary social function has passed beneath the horizon of cultural visibility. As a result of naturalization, money has come to seem simply like an instrument instead of something that was made to be used, in some ways and not others, as part of institutional practices that naturalization also tends to mask.

(Genres 3–4)

In the context of Poovey's observation, the choice of Jane Austen for the £10 note marked a noteworthy cultural moment: through the controversies it stimulated

regarding the implications of banknote design, it literally made money visible again for a brief span of time and revealed that money as a material and visual object is steeped in fundamental cultural concerns, such as the underrepresentation of women in public life, the relationship between national identity and historical figures, and the transparency of decision-making processes within public institutions. Unfortunately, it has also made visible the predominant tradition of seeing Austen as a delicate female novelist catering enjoyment, romance, and nostalgia to her readers. Paradoxically and frustratingly, of all things a banknote has become the means of obscuring Austen's serious and complex engagement with the economic concerns of her time. Acknowledging more widely Jane Austen's contributions to economic thought and reflecting this through a different banknote design would, by contrast, make her appearance on the £10 note a thoroughly conclusive affair. Not only does the 'middling' tenner fit Austen's moral economics of moderation; on top of that, the bill would be consciously billing a female moral economist.

## Notes

- 1 Interpreting the differences between the two sisters from a feminist perspective, Gilbert and Gubar write: "*Sense and Sensibility* is an especially painful novel to read because Austen herself seems caught between her attraction to Marianne's severity and spontaneity, while at the same [time] identifying with the civil falsehoods and the reserved, polite silences of Elinor, whose art is fittingly portrayed as the painting of screens" (157).
- 2 For a reading of John Willoughby as a "luxury good" in the context of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, see Shannon Chamberlain.

# 8

## CONCLUSION

### The patriarchal economy

#### *Principles of the patriarchal economy*

The aim of this book has been twofold: to present and analyse the economic thought of English women of the Romantic Age and to develop a methodology for identifying and examining women's historical contributions to economic thought. As regards the first aim, my major result is, firstly, that women have developed original economic observations and that contemporary histories of economic thought must be adapted to include and make known their contributions. The second major result is that throughout its preoccupation with marriage, work, and morality, women's economic thought of the Romantic Age is gender sensitive and engages with what I have termed the patriarchal economy.

The main pillars of the patriarchal economy as it shows up in women's economic thought around 1800 are: coverture and the wives' lack of property rights, which ultimately institutionalise what in modern parlance goes under the name of economic violence; insufficient legal and economic protection of (married) women; sexual double standards to excuse men's economic privileges; lack of appropriate acknowledgement of women's domestic and care work; women's restricted access to paid work; unequal wages for men and women performing the same tasks; insufficient education buttressing women's cultural and economic dependence and marginalisation; cultural norms inhibiting women's economic agency; stereotypes of financially incapable and irresponsible women; women's political disenfranchisement. The texts featured in this book analyse and variously challenge these principles of the patriarchal economy. They moreover expose their systemic interdependence and suggest how to ameliorate women's – but also society's – material, political, and moral conditions. In this regard, the authors can be seen as precursors of twentieth- and twenty-first century feminist economists.

Marriage is a central, if not the most important, topic in English women's economic thought in the Romantic Age. This is not surprising given that the socio-economic organisation of the period had a woman's material provision rely on securing a husband, and that he obtained significant economic prerogatives after the wedding thanks to the legal principle of coverture. Women writers' focus on marriage stems therefore from their awareness of an economic arrangement that determined much of a woman's life and by extension the functioning of families and communities. Hence, it must not be downplayed as a feminine tendency to indulge in romantic scenarios that are less weighty than, for example, taxes or inflation. Sarah Chapone, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Mary Robinson, whom I have termed feminist economists of marriage, perform risk-benefit assessments from a woman's point of view. They conclude that contrary to what legal doctrine maintains matrimony under coverture constitutes a palpable risk for women's material, physical, and emotional wellbeing. The lack of viable alternatives to sustain themselves *de facto* forces women to take that risk and enter into a discriminatory and potentially harmful economic relation.

According to women economists, what coverture and its justifications truly cover is the extent of women's systematic subjugation and disempowerment. By institutionalising their economic disenfranchisement, coverture sanctions the dehumanising treatment of women as commodities and resources, factually annuls many of their rights, and opens the door for economic violence and physical cruelty against wives. Men can legally exploit women's property, bodies, procreative functions, and work. According to women economists, this renders the position of wives comparable to that of slaves, in so far that both are at the mercy of their owner and cannot freely dispose of their persons. This recurring (and from a postcolonial viewpoint problematic) parallel, however, does not lead to a systematic engagement with slavery. In fact, some authors (e.g. Mary Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith) even display overt complicity with the imperial economy and ideology. But Mary Wollstonecraft seems to suggest that the asymmetry of power in marriage is a micro-scale reflection of and precondition for analogous asymmetries that pervade society on a macro scale to the benefit of narrow elites determined by gender, property, class, and race.

Women economic authors around 1800 display an awareness of the fact that they develop their thoughts from within a gendered epistemological field that denies them authority in economic matters on a par with men. One message that unites all writers in this book is their insistence that women are capable of managing economic and financial affairs – even if the authors in parts disagree on the exact kind of economic activities suitable for their sex. Their pamphlets, memoirs, and novels abound with examples of female economic agency and knowledgeability, which disprove ideological claims that women were less capable than men in these matters and therefore legitimately under men's tutelage. The authors develop a figure that can be termed *femina oeconomica* – a rational, female counterpart to the *homo oeconomicus*. The presence of such resourceful and capable women in the texts alongside recurrent examples of financially incompetent men

constitutes an economic proposition and a challenge to the extant socio-economic system because it invalidates the patriarchal dogma that women are best-served by being kept away from property.

Women's economic thought suggests that the pervasiveness of this dogma forced female authors to position themselves with regard to it. Whether it is Sarah Chapone, Mary Wollstonecraft, or Jane Austen, they all at some point engage with specimens of the childish, spoiled, spendthrift woman. They condemn such women – presumably because their bad example impedes the cause of female (economic) emancipation – but emphasise that not all women behave in this irresponsible manner and that those who do act not on their nature but due to a faulty education. In other words: one is not born an economic fool – one is made one. But in a self-affirming logic typical of what today we would call a hegemony, this outcome is used to justify women's subordinate role, and women are made responsible for faults whose root cause lies not with them but with patriarchy. As Chapone puts it: “If we are accidentally disqualified by a foolish trifling Education, where does that Imputation revert, but upon those Persons under whose Direction and Authority we are so educated?” (35). As a countermeasure, some of the texts presented here attempt to educate women economically: Chapone's *Hardships*, Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs*, Robinson's *Letter*, Wakefield's *Reflections*, and Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

Marriage and education are also relevant concerns in discussions of women's paid work. The cultural assumption that a (middle-class) woman will marry and thus not need to earn money results in an impractical, superficial, marriage-oriented education of girls. This in turn increases the economic precariousness of women who remain single, are widowed, or whose husbands or other family members are unable or unwilling to provide for them. In general, women economists around 1800 do not appear to champion the right to work for all women; they rather concentrate on those for whom work becomes a necessity. In this context, they attack cultural norms (which they often term “custom” or “prejudice”) that deem only particular professions acceptable and stigmatise others as ‘unfeminine’, thus effectively monopolising large sectors of the labour market for men. This confronts women who need to make a living for themselves (and potentially their children) with unattractive choices: entering a profession that pays little money due to overcrowding; entering a profession that is below their socio-economic status and thus liable to social stigma; applying for money with relatives and friends, which leaves them in a state of financial dependence and insecurity. A fourth alternative which authors on women's access to paid work mention, but do not recommend, is prostitution, which they see as a structural consequence of the patriarchal economy – not as an individual moral failing. Faced with limited options to sustain their lives, many women decide to trade in on men's sexual pleasure, which comes at the price of their social degradation and seals their precarity. Out of necessity, women thus become accomplices of the system that oppresses them. The fact that women working in the same professions as men (dressmaking, hat-making, teaching, etc.) generally earn less,



is another contributing factor and one that women economic authors unanimously criticise.

Women's domestic and care work is a further recurrent topic in women's economic thought of the Romantic Age. All authors seem to agree that such tasks legitimately fall to women. Wollstonecraft, Robinson, and Mary Lamb, however, draw attention to their arduousness and their distinct value that ought to meet with sufficient recompense, materially and/or by granting women more property rights. In addition, the three authors, but also Wakefield and Radcliffe, implicitly demand the acknowledgment of domestic and care work *as* work. According to them, the patriarchal economy effectively makes women perform such work under compulsion, thereby divesting them of their dignity and devaluing their labour. Wakefield and Wollstonecraft insist that to perform their domestic and parenting functions well, women should receive adequate training. This underlines that activities such as caring for the sick, nurturing and teaching children, making clothes, preparing food, or managing the family budget and household do not stem from 'natural' or inborn feminine competencies but are acquired skills. Women's economic thought around 1800 here again paves the way for twentieth- and twenty-first-century debates on the value of what still is often considered 'women's work'. But in contrast to present-day positions, none of the Romantic authors proposes that men take part in women's domestic and care work. On this point, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women economists do not step out of the ideology of separate spheres. Instead, as is frequently the case in their texts, they adopt a stance reminiscent of what today is referred to as difference feminism: they acknowledge the differences between the sexes that rightfully translate into a sexual division of labour. But they insist that the different contributions have equal value and therefore do not justify the stark hierarchy between men and women on which the patriarchal economy rests.

Overall, the analyses by female authors disclose to what extent the economy of their times relies on a continuous and systemic disenfranchisement and exploitation of women. Since there is no alternative to the patriarchal economy, women must participate in it to secure their self-preservation and satisfy basic needs. Yet this coercive mechanism is concealed at the level of official discourse. As women economists expose, the patriarchal economy maintains that it protects women; in practice, it on principle prevents them from acquiring economic autonomy and puts them in a risky and dependent position: when they marry, they are at the mercy of their husbands; when they don't, they face precariousness and social opprobrium. Despite evocations of women's ostensible worth, the socio-economic system factually sanctions the abuse of their property, their labour (domestic, emotional, and waged), their bodies, their sexuality, and their psyche. It facilitates the treatment of women – whose status it nominally defends – as commodities and resources. This contradiction relates to double standards and paradoxes that, according to female thinkers, pervade the entire patriarchal economy: though woman is allegedly the 'weaker' sex, she is subjected to more economic hardships; though morality is deemed vital for both sexes, women are punished more harshly (also in economic

terms) than men for trespasses; women's behaviour that is the outcome of their economic disenfranchisement is turned into a cause and a justification for keeping them dependent. The patriarchal economy is thus not only unjust but also illogical and hypocritical. What keeps it running are inbuilt and masked discrepancies of power.

### ***Women economists' proposed solutions and demands***

According to women authors around 1800, the economic system of Britain is disproportionately skewed to men's advantage, so it is consistent that the major demand suffusing their writing is the establishment of a just balance between the sexes by empowering women. The authors differ, however, on the shape that an ideal balance should take. Radical thinkers, such as Wollstonecraft, Robinson, and Hays, seem to ponder, though not fully endorse, a state of near-equality that includes some sort of political representation for women. More conservative economists (Chapone, Wakefield, Radcliffe) tend to single out particular areas – for example, education, coverture regulations, access to professions – as needy of reform. Austen's entire moral economics rests on the notion of balancing acts. She promotes women's freedom to dispose of property within and outside of marriage as a necessary counterpart and corrective to the same right bestowed on men. Her philosophy of moderation as a whole, however, is not solely concerned with the relation between the sexes but also with a balance between self-interest and social obligations as well as between economic and moral exigencies.

The authors propose different solutions for achieving a satisfactory balance, all of which put reforms over a disruptive socio-economic revolution. Their propositions can be subdivided into three main groups with points of overlap: state-driven measures, social and cultural changes, and self-help. Women economists do not distinguish between the three levels explicitly, but they point to them by stating their intended audiences: they variously address male lawmakers, Britain's political elite, men generally, British society as a whole, women generally, women of higher ranks, mothers, and unmarried women.

The principal state-driven solution is a reform of laws on coverture. This demand is palpable in the writings of Chapone, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Radcliffe but also – if implicitly – in Robinson and Austen. None of the authors spells out what a reform should look like exactly: their emphasis lies more on elucidating the negative effects of coverture on women than on devising concrete countermeasures. But Chapone, Wollstonecraft, and Hays underscore that lawmakers ought to consult women when passing respective laws. It is evident that at a time that saw the vindication of individual liberty and rights, women used their (in the 1790s relatively ample) freedom of expression and their genres of writing to demand for their sex what male liberal thinkers – including male liberal economists – were propagating, namely, the right to own and dispose of private property.

Mary Ann Radcliffe is the only author to plea for the creation of an institution that would financially support and offer shelter to middle-class women not

provided for by their husbands or other male relatives. From her description, it appears that this institution could be funded through taxes and/or donations. She seems to promote state interventions into the labour market, in particular, regulations that would prohibit men from engaging in 'feminine' professions (e.g. dressmaking, mantua-making, hair-dressing), so as to leave more employment opportunities for women. Out of all economists discussed in this book, she places the biggest emphasis on women's rightful claim to material provisioning and protection and expects the state and the public to step in when a husband or a father is unable to secure them. Similarly to Priscilla Wakefield, Radcliffe extends the ideology suffusing coverture and the separate-spheres doctrine from the micro level of the family to the macro level of the labour market. In this regard, both authors comply with dominant cultural norms of their times. Yet this does not prevent them from promoting the amelioration of women's economic status and developing progressive thoughts.

Regarding social and cultural changes, the main proposition is a reform of women's education to remove the mental preconditions for their subordination. All authors decry the fashion for so-called feminine accomplishments and assert instead that girls must be taught practical skills and rational thought. This would have the benefit of making them less dependent on matrimony and, in case they do marry, more capable of usefully assisting a husband and their family. It would additionally improve their position on the labour market should circumstances force them to earn a living for themselves and their families. In *Reflections*, Priscilla Wakefield, herself the author of several educational books on other than economic topics, provides the most concrete and class-specific enumeration of the skills that young girls should acquire. Women economists' attention to education amounts to a claim to women's innate rationality – visible also in the figure of the *femina oeconomica* – that the patriarchal economy negates to a large degree. It constitutes a meeting point with other, often conservative, female authors of the Romantic period, such as Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, or Jane Marcet, who produced popular educational literature for girls. Notably, Marcet set out to teach young women the principles of political economy in her well-received educational publication *Conversations on the Nature of Political Economy* of 1816 (see e.g. Polkinghorn; Rostek, "Female Authority").

Changes in "custom" and the reduction of "prejudices" are related to social and cultural shifts that women economists endorse. This testifies to their awareness that culture and the economy are indissolubly related. In practice, society should recognise that women are not by nature economically incompetent and irrational. It should lay aside prejudices against middle-class working women and not punish them with social opprobrium. Marriage and paid work ought no longer to constitute mutually exclusive economic options for women (again, particularly for those from the middle classes). Those who deserve social contempt, by contrast, are men engaged in 'feminine' professions. This assertion (expressed by Hays, Radcliffe, Wakefield, and to some extent Robinson)

is another instance of how women economists in parts adhere to dominant gender norms, particularly when it suits their overall purpose. In this case, they subscribe to the latently homophobic concept of ‘economic virility’ that informs the patriarchal economy to wrench income-earning opportunities for women from allegedly ‘effeminate’ and ‘usurping’ men. This brings home that the ideology behind the patriarchal economy had normative implications for both women and men.

In terms of self-help measures, female thinkers promote what in today’s parlance goes under the name of consciousness-raising, which all texts discussed in this book to some degree set out to do: informing women about their economic status and legal situation, warning them against early or imprudent matrimony, sharing other women’s economic stories and experiences, encouraging them and their parents to take protective measures (e.g. practical education, delayed marriage, using equity regulations that allow wives to safeguard their property). Solidarity – above all among women – also plays a noteworthy role. Wakefield encourages what in modern vocabulary is called positive discrimination or affirmative action: where possible, women, in particular of higher ranks, should, given the choice, use their influence to employ female staff and buy services and goods from women, to create and support work opportunities for members of their own sex. Like Radcliffe, she encourages a partial boycott of premises where men work in ‘feminine’ domains. In Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs*, female solidarity across social classes contributes to mitigating female suffering: a ‘family’ of women becomes a substitute for the heteronormative family unit, disrupting a social entity on which the patriarchal economy rests. In Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, women help – but also compete against – each other to successfully navigate the patriarchal economy and the marriage market.

The demands and solutions are women-focused and aim primarily at ameliorating the situation of middle-class women. This does not mean that women from the labouring classes do not feature at all in the texts, but when they do, they are for the most part approached from a position of superiority, as persons deserving the generous help of the middle classes. Social mobility between the classes is not encouraged, and some authors, such as Wakefield and Radcliffe, declare it harmful for socio-economic stability. The recurrent parallelisation of the position of wives with that of slaves does not merge into a thorough investigation or critique of imperialism. It is therefore not the case that the emancipatory claims of women economists automatically extend to other underprivileged groups. (Wollstonecraft comes closest to such a comprehensive perspective.) By and large, the thinkers focus on how the economy perpetuates and thrives on imbalances of power between men and women. They neglect their complicity in and sometimes even overtly promote the existence of co-related hegemonic structures built around other markers of identity, such as class, race, or nationality. In contemporary terms, their analyses are not intersectional, and in this regard, they depart from twentieth- and twenty-first century feminist economics.

### *Women economists' discursive strategies*

Women's economic thought of the Romantic Age analyses and explains the functioning of economic processes and aims at socio-economic change. It is therefore descriptive, analytical, and *political*. The authors combine several discursive strategies to convince their audiences of the appropriateness and legitimacy of their interventions in the hope that this will lead to concrete actions. These strategies are informed by the writers' awareness of cultural ideals of femininity that reward particular forms of behaviour and expression in women while sanctioning trespasses. Women economists know that these ideals also apply to them and affect what they can say and how. In some instances, they uphold, promote, and comply with gender norms; in others, they challenge and criticise them.

This ambivalence results from the authors' personal convictions but also relates to the general question of how marginalised groups can transform a system that functionally relies on their subordination. The economists presented here are conscious that, to bring about the desired changes, they will need the support of those vested with power, namely, men. But because men generally profit from the patriarchal economy, they have little incentive to reform it. As a consequence, women economists, conservative and radical alike, tread on thin ice between criticising too little (which would not make enough of an impact to stimulate reform) and criticising too much (which would delegitimise their claims as too drastic, dangerous, and unworthy of further attention, besides potentially inducing personal sanctions). Both stances carry the risk of ultimately solidifying the present system.

When examining women's economic thought, it is hence essential to bear in mind the specific cultural and social position from which it is articulated: women economists are circumscribed by, attacking, and at the same time reliant on patriarchal power. To improve their status, they need the backing of those whose privileges they seek to remove. This constrained and conflicted position manifests itself in tensions, ambivalences, and contradictions that characterise women's economic thought around 1800. It also explains the occasional oscillations of tone between modesty and self-confidence, between emotional and rational appeals, between lament, anger, and self-composure, between a private and a public voice.

How, then, do women economists buttress the legitimacy of their claims and demands? In general, they variously attempt to prove that the suggested changes are congruent with at least one culturally influential and accepted system: the patriarchal economy itself, notions of social good, morals, the Bible, rational thought, liberal ideals, conservative ideals, or the self-image of the British nation. A dominant strategy is to maintain that the desired reforms will have no negative impact on those in power. Hays, Robinson, and Wakefield, for example, assert that wives would continue to perform their domestic and care functions, even after obtaining more property rights and ampler education. They reassure (male) readers that the only difference would be that women would take up this kind of work voluntarily and with pleasure rather than, as is presently the case, out of compulsion. It is up to

debate whether in these cases women economists underestimated the social import of their proposed reforms out of actual conviction or for strategic purposes.

Most authors at some point bring forward utilitarian arguments and insist that their propositions would redound to public good in the shape of increased happiness of women and men alike. The patriarchal economy is presented as detrimental to both sexes and thus worthy of modification. At the end of *Appeal*, for example, Hays tells British men, to whom she explicitly addresses her publication, that they would profit from granting women more rights because happy, autonomous wives make for better partners. Wollstonecraft, Robinson, Wakefield, and Austen pursue the same kind of reasoning. For Wollstonecraft, Hays, Wakefield, and Radcliffe, changes to the patriarchal economy would moreover reduce prostitution, thereby ameliorating public morals and protecting men from depraved behaviour. (Whether men really desired such ‘protection’ is a different matter.) Wakefield puts forward that the state could additionally save money, above all by lowering prostitution-induced costs for maintaining public safety.

As the case of prostitution shows, appeals to moral values are another strategy with which women economists reinforce their demands. Authors who mention prostitution take for granted that all measures contributing to its eradication are praiseworthy on moral grounds. Texts indicting coverture highlight that it frequently condones immoral behaviour in husbands, ranging from abusing their wives and children to sexual misdemeanours. Writers on women’s access to paid work, particularly Wakefield, aver that the intensification of occupational segregation is conducive to morality, as it reduces situations in which men are in close contact with (the bodies of) women: hence the need for female dancing teachers, nurses, dressmakers, or undertakers. The indissoluble link between morals and the economy is the premise of Austen’s moral economics. Strategically, evoking morality allows the authors to present proposed changes to the patriarchal economy as changes to the morals of society. In such a way, women economists, ostensibly at least, remain in ‘their’ sphere, as it was the task of women to uphold moral values. At the same time, they put into question the distinction between private and public realms. Rhetorically, appeals to morality sometimes go hand in hand with passages that adopt the tone and argumentation of sermons.

Chapone and Hays explicitly engage with arguments from the Bible. They thus seek to prove that their observations are congruent with God’s will. In this context, it is important to recall that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the myth of the original sin as described in the Old Testament was still widely accepted as a validation of women’s inferior position: since Eve precipitated the fall of man, women were justly carrying a portion of her punishment. No economic text discussed here attacks this logic. Chapone, Hays, Wakefield, and Radcliffe even explicitly accept men’s superior status. But Chapone and Hays explicate that the patriarchal economy contradicts divine intention by institutionalising a far greater amount of female submission than scripture warrants. Chapone moreover refers to the prelapsarian state of nature, in which women, she claims, were equal with men.

Women economists draw on and combine further philosophical and rhetorical traditions. To varying degrees, they provide proofs for their claims, support their observations through examples, use enumerations, quote other texts (by women and men), and sum up their results. This mode of reasoning and writing, as well as their emphasis on women's – and their own – rationality aligns their thought with Enlightenment philosophy. Conversely, passages that involve the readers emotionally and evoke their sympathy, indignation, and compassion by rhetorical means are informed by eighteenth-century sentimentalism. The authors' comments on freedom and responsibility, the injustice of oppression, and the right to private property show an indebtedness to liberal philosophy. In addition to that, the writers build on national and nationalistic discourses, when they conjure up the British nation, its spirit of freedom and commerce, and its function as a model of civilisation for other countries to emulate.

In sum, women economists blend several discursive strategies at the level of argumentation, rhetoric, and genres of writing. This hybridity relates to the marginalised position from which they articulate themselves and their inevitable enmeshment in gender norms: they write as women who make observations and demand changes within 'male' domains. Partially due to their own blind spots, and partially to be politically effective, they engage in the paradoxical act of combining protest with conformity. They simultaneously adhere to and put into question the notion of separate spheres as well as ideals of femininity and masculinity. Throughout, they self-confidently draw on dominant philosophical and rhetorical traditions of their times, thereby demonstrating (to themselves, the readers, and political decision-makers) women's inherent capacity to be rational and responsible subjects within the body politic and the economy. But they do not mimic masculine discourse; they show that they are intellectually capable of entering into a dialogue with it and of developing an equally valuable feminine discourse. They mark gender equality and gender difference at the same time. To some extent, then, the distinct character of women's economic thought as regards its content, form, and discursive strategies is a result of their marginalisation and is reactive to patriarchy. At the same time, however, it is proactive in that it constitutes an original and important mode of social theorising that sets its own standards.

### ***Implications for further research on women's economic thought***

As regards the second, methodological and theoretical, aim of this book and with a view to further research on economic writings by women as well as other marginalised groups, my main conclusions are as follows:

- 1 *Women's economic thought has been transgeneric. It is therefore necessary to expand the corpus of considered texts by including a wide range of genres of writing.*

For historical reasons, economic thought by women spreads across different genres of writing – at least until their admittance to official, academic

economic discourse in the twentieth century. Women's economic thought is to be found in fictional and non-fictional, in what today we consider 'literary' and 'theoretical' texts alike. To do justice to the transgeneric nature of women's writing, it is indispensable to displace genre as the primary criterion for classifying a text as economic: it is content that matters. This requires the careful study of individual texts across genres – pamphlets, essays, travelogues, educational texts, novels, plays, poetry, letters, memoirs, etc. – and imbuing them with epistemological value.

- 2 *An androcentric definition of the economy and of 'the economic' has obscured the extent of women's contributions to economic thought. It is therefore necessary to adopt a gender-sensitive definition of the economy.*

Women economists have repeatedly addressed topics connected to their experience of life: marriage, the family, maternity, emotional and care work, domestic work, sexuality, morality, education, and patriarchy. But until recently, standard definitions of 'the economy' considered these concerns, which often revolve around the micro level of interpersonal and private relations, as lying outside of its core. In future research, 'women's topics' need to be acknowledged as just as relevant for the functioning of the economy – and hence for the discipline of economics – as traditional and more abstract macro-economic phenomena, such as inflation or state finances. A definition of the economy must not unthinkingly replicate the separate-spheres distinction between domestic and public realms. Once gender-sensitive conceptualisations of the economy replace androcentric notions, the economic content of women's texts comes into view. For literary and cultural studies, gender-sensitive definitions of the economy can help remove the unconscious androcentric bias that still suffuses much of economic criticism.

- 3 *In the framework of patriarchy, women have developed economic thought from a dependent position. It is necessary to take into account power relations when analysing their economic thought.*

It is essential to bear in mind that, historically, women's material provisioning and security required a complicity with patriarchy. Consequently, women economists who criticised the premises of what I have termed the patriarchal economy found themselves in an asymmetrical and conflicted situation: they attacked and at the same time needed the support of a power on which they depended. This circumstance has narrowed down their scope of articulation and left a trace on their economic thought in the form of discursive tightrope walks between conformity and contestation. Contradictions, tensions, and ambivalences in women's economic writing should therefore not be automatically interpreted as logical fallacies; they can result from their dependent position. Paying attention to power asymmetries moreover allows addressing cases in which women economists consciously or unconsciously upheld exploitative structures built on class, race, and other markers of identity.



- 4 *Ideology and the economy have been interdependent. It is therefore necessary to study economic thought and its history within broader cultural and normative contexts.*

Women's analyses of the (patriarchal) economy during the Romantic period make plain what applies to other periods as well, namely, the co-dependence of ideological and economic factors. Around 1800, cultural norms surrounding propriety, gentility, femininity, domesticity, family, education, and marriage were interrelated, mutually reinforcing each other, and triggering economic effects. In view of such multi-layered processes, it is impossible to locate the root cause of economic outcomes, including the situation of women, either in market logic or in culture. Research should reflect that cultural practices, ideologies, and the economy are linked in a myriad of ways in interconnected, complex feedback loops. Untangling them calls for the inclusion of transdisciplinary approaches, which recognise that social developments eschew disciplinary divides.

- 5 *Women's economic thought has been transdisciplinary and exceeds contemporary academic mapping. It is therefore necessary to examine it through a transdisciplinary methodology.*

Women's economic thought, particularly of a feminist bent, has often addressed phenomena from various social realms in the span of one text. Gender relations inform the organisation of the economy but also of the law, politics, education, religion, social institutions, and morality. For this reason, many historical contributions by women can be considered inter- or transdisciplinary: they combine economic with legal, sociological, political, pedagogical, religious, and other analysis. The history of economic thought needs to distil the economic contents of these transdisciplinary texts, while recognising its relation to the other realms.

Furthermore, economic thought by women evades the barriers of contemporary academic mapping. To retrieve it, a transdisciplinary methodology that incorporates economics, history, gender studies, cultural studies, and literary studies is paramount. Economists, economic historians, and historians of economic thought have the largest expertise on economic concepts, models, and theories, their interrelations and transformations. But since it is essential to study economic phenomena and economic theories within wider cultural contexts, insights by cultural and social historians as well as historians of thought need to be considered. To do justice to normative frameworks and power relations that have shaped women's economic thought, it is vital to draw on gender studies and cultural studies, in particular as regards their findings on the functioning of patriarchy and other ideologies and hegemonic structures. Literary scholars and historically oriented cultural scholars can significantly broaden the corpus of considered texts because of their familiarity with various genres of women's writing. The expertise of literary studies moreover helps to decode textual forms and literary techniques (e.g. rhetorical, narratological, dramatic) in terms of their potential economic content.

- 6 *Women have made original contributions to economic thought. The history of economic thought must not reproduce a patriarchal hierarchy in which men provide the unmarked standard against which women are measured.*

The fact that many women authors have made economic observations against the background of patriarchy does not mean that it *must* be studied alongside or in relation to economic thought by men. It is possible to study economic thought by women on its own, without comparing it to economic thought by men. Comparative approaches can certainly be fruitful and are legitimate, but only as an option – just as it is possible to study economic thought by men without relating it to women’s theories. Moreover, referring to ‘women’s economic writing’ makes sense in research for which gender has an analytical function (as in this book). In these cases, theories developed by men ought to be analogously termed ‘men’s economic writing’ – not just ‘economic writing’.<sup>1</sup> For other research contexts, such a specification is not necessary: theories by women and men, regardless of whether they adopt a gender-sensitive perspective or not, are then simply ‘economic thought’.

- 7 *A herstory of economic thought is likely to reveal different temporal and thematic demarcations than men’s economic thought.*

Women’s economic writing displays a century-long concern for gender relations and a recurrence of similar topics, such as the economics of marriage, women’s position on the labour market, or domestic and care work. But it has also evolved methodologically (e.g. the inclusion of intersectionality in recent economic feminism) and in response to legal and political developments that had an impact on women (e.g. women’s property acts, divorce and custody regulations, equal-pay laws, laws on abortion). A comprehensive history of women’s economic thought is therefore likely to reveal patterns of continuity and change that would point to alternative caesuras and timeframes than those suggested in standard histories of economic thought, which are still predominantly based on categorising men’s economic writing.

- 8 *The history of economic thought by women remains under-researched and incomplete. For an adequate account of the history of (women’s) economic thought, further research is needed.*

Despite notable efforts by a few scholars, much is yet to be done for a fuller picture of women’s economic theorising. Even this book cannot pretend to present a complete account of women’s economic thought in the Romantic Age. It offers a first step on which others can build – by examining additional writers (e.g. Joanna Baillie, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer, Ann Yearsley), additional genres (e.g. drama, poetry, educational literature), and additional topics (e.g. philanthropy, household economy, slavery and abolitionism, maternity). The history of women’s economic thought should moreover attempt to diminish its prioritising of white and middle-class authors, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Euro- and Anglocentrism.

- 9 *The transdisciplinary methodology for a herstory of economic thought developed in this book can be modified and applied to the analysis of economic thought by other marginalised groups.*

Women have been one group to experience systemic economic marginalisation. But the history of economic thought would significantly profit from retrieving insights by other groups that have been oppressed and exploited within economic frameworks. The methodological considerations presented in this book can be adapted for this purpose.

Recuperating silenced voices is a matter of justice but also makes for better scientific practice. The inclusion of novel, different, competing, critical perspectives exposes blind spots within the epistemological mainstream, fosters the creation of new paradigms, and enlarges our understanding of the world, past and present. Revisionist projects are challenging because they put into question and risk conflict with the status quo. They require patience and perseverance, strategic skill, courage, and a dose of luck. English women economists of the Romantic Age knew this. Commenting on her proposed measures, Mary Ann Radcliffe wrote to the addressee of her *Memoirs*, a woman friend:

Not, my dear Madam, that I expect either you or I can move in this grand scheme of preservation; for I am sensible great changes are never brought about without much opposition, and prejudices deeply rooted are not easy to eradicate, which it would be madness in two old women to attempt. No, my dear friend, I consider our feeble voices like the small bells in a parish church, which (however unharmonious) by repeatedly tinkling, may still proclaim the call.

(390–91)

Given the topicality of the subjects raised by Romantic women economists, one could conclude that their call has not been loud enough: two centuries later, women on average still earn less than men; do more household and care work; face more material disadvantages when they have children; are more prone to experience economic and sexual violence; and are underrepresented in leading economic, political, and academic positions. Yet it is also true that women in the West have gained rights that Romantic authors were vindicating: the right to own and dispose of their property and money, the right to choose and divorce a spouse, the right to choose and practise a profession, the right to vote, the right to custody, sexual rights, the right to education, and the right to participate in academia. The patriarchal economy has morphed and persists. At the same time, progress has been made. To keep it going, this book adds another small bell to the century-spanning tinkling chain.

## Note

- 1 Queer economic writing would be one possible category for analyses transcending gender binaries.

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