

THE WALRUS THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS: MODERN, DYNAMIC BOUNDARIES
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S WRITING

by

HOLLY ELIZABETH FLING

(Under the Direction of TRICIA LOOTENS)

ABSTRACT

In countless passages of nineteenth-century literature, nonhuman matter is lively and energetic, bodies lose animacy, and the world transforms into an unfamiliar place. But these are the passages that we tend to pass over when we read. Perhaps, we dismiss these moments as too fantastic for nineteenth-century realism. These passages, however, are vital to a clearer perception of realism, as they reveal matter's vibrancy and disrupt false human-centric narratives about the world. This project, "The Walrus Through the Looking-Glass: Modern, Dynamic Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing," is a new materialist examination of lively matter in literature written by women during the long nineteenth-century. The six chapters in this dissertation are case studies that focus on nonhuman matter in six texts: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Years*. Examples of the matter with which this dissertation is concerned include the Bertrams' profile portraits in Fanny's East room, Helen's locks of hair and slips of paper that haunt Lucy's new life as Lady Audley, and the miniature of Will's grandmother that hangs in Dorothea's boudoir.

This dissertation, then, is an experiment in how nineteenth-century literature can open up in new ways when we read counterintuitively. By taking a new approach to materiality and by drawing on the challenges posed by new materialisms, we can begin to conceive of the material objects in nineteenth-century literature as having lives of their own. Of course, opening our minds to this new perception of the world is difficult, because it challenges the narratives that structure our own lives and our understanding of the world. But accepting the challenge to do so opens up new possibilities for the texts we read and teach, for our students and ourselves, and for the material world.

INDEX WORDS: New Materialisms, Vibrant Matter, Agentic Realism, Nineteenth-Century Realism, Subject-Object, Body-Thing, Space-Time, Austen, Brontë, Barrett Browning, Braddon, Eliot, Woolf, Thing Theory

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is in memory of my professors and mentors who left this universe too soon. But if, as Muriel Rukeyser, in “The Speed of Darkness,” writes, “The universe is made of stories, not of atoms,” then Michele Mitchell, Larry Stephens, Alanna Preussner, David Bradshaw, and Christy Desmet will live on through the stories they told, read, and lived.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MIRROR, MIRROR, OFF THE WALL: THE DIFFRACTION OF THE
WALRUS AND THE LOOKING-GLASS

And then we wake. None of the transitions in Alice in Wonderland is quite so queer. For we wake to find—is it the Rev. C. L. Dodgson? Is it Lewis Carroll? Or is it both combined? This conglomerate object intends to produce an extra-Bowdlerised edition of Shakespeare for the use of British maidens; implores them to think of death when they go to the play; and always, always to realise that “the true object of life is the development of character...” Is there, then, even in 1293 pages, any such thing as “completeness”?

—Virginia Woolf, “Lewis Carroll,” 211

What can a “children’s book” like Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-glass and What Alice Found There* tell us about well-known literature from the long nineteenth century? We know Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, and Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*. We know the things in these texts—Fanny’s things in the East room, the things that haunt Lucy’s new life as Lady Audley, the miniature of Will’s grandmother that hangs in Dorothea’s boudoir—so what could Alice’s trip through the looking-glass possibly tell us about them? For that matter, what can a feminist high-theory like new materialism possibly have to offer to readings of these texts? Thinking about how texts might look differently

through Alice's looking-glass has been one of my main inspirations as this project has taken shape.

When Alice steps through the looking-glass, she enters a world in which objects come to life. When she discovers chessmen in the cinders, "walking about, two and two!" (130), Alice mistakenly believes that these toys cannot hear or see her, which makes her "invisible" (130). The human-centered perspective of the old room is soon to be turned upside down not only by the destruction of Alice's sense of invisibility among lively objects but also by her experience of perceiving herself through the anthropomorphized flowers' perspective. When, for example, Alice spots a tiger lily and wishes aloud that it could talk, it is Alice herself who is struck silent by the lily's response. Alice's reaction to the lily's unexpected expression evokes countless passages in nineteenth-century texts in which nonhuman matter is lively and energetic, passages in which bodies seem to lose animacy, and passages that turn the world into an unfamiliar place. But these are the passages that we tend to pass over when we read. Perhaps we dismiss these moments as too fantastic for nineteenth-century realism. These passages, however, are vital to a clearer perception of realism, as they reveal matter's vibrancy and disrupt false human-centric narratives about the world. Alice's discoveries on the other side of the looking-glass offer a point at which to begin thinking about materiality in the nineteenth century. But to think about materiality, we need to illuminate materiality, which is what this dissertation, through a feminist new materialist perspective, aims to do.

This project, "The Walrus Through the Looking-Glass: Modern, Dynamic Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing," is a new materialist examination of lively matter in literature written by women during the long nineteenth-century, but it would be impossible to trace the ways that this dissertation is entangled with the reading, writing, and experiences of all

of those who came before me. For simplicity's sake, then, I will begin this narrative with my enrollment in the first course I took as a Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia, Tricia Lootens' Woolf and the Victorians class. Without having taken this class, it is unlikely that the walrus would have made its way into this project, and without the walrus, well, this project would be quite different.

My enrollment in Woolf and the Victorians, then, was what Karen Barad, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, would call an "agential cut" (140). Barad describes these "cuts" as temporary divisions that create the illusion of separability despite an inherent inseparability to which she refers as "entanglement" (140). In other words, every particle that makes up the phenomena of the universe—matter and meaning, nature and culture, subjects and objects, bodies and things, time and space—is entangled at the atomic level. Because, as Barad argues, there is not an "independent, self-contained existence," entanglements are more than an intertwining of "separate entities" (ix). My enrollment was a choice through which the books I read in this class became determinate in my writing, and it was a decision that excluded the books that I would have read in the other classes that were offered that term. Most significantly for this project, it was in this class that I first read Virginia Woolf's *The Years*, in which a walrus-shaped pen-nib wipe repeatedly emerges throughout the text. The walrus's recurrent appearance throughout Woolf's novel seemed to indicate a significance beyond its shape and usefulness as a material object; though, at the time, I was uncertain of its meaning. The walrus emerges five times, and, because its meaning changes as it travels through the years (and through *The Years*), it is always becoming something different, and it always holds secrets that the text itself conceals.

The walrus only began to make sense to me when I encountered Karen Barad's work on agential realism in Tricia Lootens' advanced feminist theory course. Because Barad's concepts are rooted not only in feminist theory but also stem from her work in new materialism and quantum physics, I found this reading to be difficult and the ideas even more so. Though I was fascinated by Barad's theory, I thought her concepts were too complicated for me to use in my dissertation. Elizabeth St. Pierre was offering a course on new materialism, but I was scheduled to take my comprehensive exams that semester. I decided, then, that I would write my dissertation about time and space and satisfy my curiosity about Barad and new materialism by reading on the side. However, Barad and the walrus, which were already entangled in the world's becoming, had emerged together as a single phenomenon that was burrowing not only under my skin but also into my writing. Of course, because existence, in Barad's terms, "is not an individual affair" (ix), my skin was never actually a barrier among her work, the walrus, and me:

individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (ix)

Barad's work was always already entangled with my work on time and space, even if those connections were implicit. However, these connections became explicit when her work "intra-acted" with mine. For Barad, interaction implies an encounter between two separate entities, whereas "intra-action" indicates a recognition that these entities are never distinct agencies but

come into being through an activity that is always in process (33). So, though our work was already entangled, the “intra-action” between Barad’s writing and my own brought this project into being.

Donna Haraway, like Barad, argues in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” that bodies do not “end at the skin” (178). Her claim implies that bodily boundaries are transitory and fluctuating. Haraway’s ideas about the fluidity of bodily boundaries, which she develops through her concept of the cyborg, seem to derive from late twentieth-century posthuman thinking. However, related notions appear in Charlotte Brontë’s and Walter Pater’s work a century before. Of course, I could not see these melting lines in Brontë’s work until I looked back at it through Woolf’s writing. My readings of Woolf facilitated my attentiveness to the idea that bodies and things can be reciprocal and interchangeable, and to the way different perspectives affect how we perceive the slipperiness of bodies as both part of and distinct from things. While my Woolfian framework might seem odd, like something I fell into, the more I read Woolf’s work, the livelier I perceived the materiality in nineteenth-century texts. Readings of Woolf, then, not only impacted my own writing but they might also help to ground new developments in nineteenth-century criticism.

As Katharina Boehm argues, despite increasing attention to matter in nineteenth-century studies, “the implications of thing theory have not been addressed with a critical force that matches ... the intense debate about thing theory in the field of eighteenth-century literature and culture” (4-5). While I agree with Boehm, I would add that we also need to open up the theoretical angle to encompass other new materialisms besides thing theory, especially Barad’s agential realism and Bennett’s theories on vibrant matter, and that we need Woolf, who, in her

blurring of boundaries, seems to turn back to these nineteenth-century texts on material grounds that nineteenth-century studies itself is only now beginning to register.

My fascination with the way texts entangle and shape one another through Barad's "intra-activity," in spite of our investment in chronology, drives this project. For example, I am interested in how a reading of Pater can influence a reading of Brontë and in what happens when their writing "intra-acts." This entanglement of texts is like Julia Kristeva's intertextuality or M.M. Bakhtin's dialogism in that resonance flows in multiple directions. However, with entanglement, all texts are inseparable not only from one another but from the world's becoming. Texts are never stable. They are always changing as the world changes. Entanglement, then, demands fluidity between bodies and things, and this fluidity in women's writing emerges as an uncanny representation of what should be familiar. In *Vibrant Matter*, for example, Jane Bennett considers "the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks, when the subject experiences the object as uncanny" (2). This dissertation is a collection of case studies that demonstrate how the nuances of lively things become explicit through a looking-glass lens. This looking-glass is my theoretical angle, and it came into being through an "intra-action" of texts, including my readings on new materialism and thing theory.

Ideas overlap between new materialism and thing theory; in fact, in many ways, the theories that emerged from my readings are all new materialisms. New materialisms are a reworking of the materialist philosophy of the nineteenth century. The editors of *New Materialisms*, Dianna Coole and Samantha Frost, find that during the nineteenth century, work by Marx, Freud, and others became important for this philosophy, which dismisses the spirit or consciousness with the idea that all things are composed of matter and all phenomena are

products of material interactions (5). Woolf, in her 1919 essay “Modern Fiction,”¹ pushes back against this materialist philosophy by criticizing H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy’s concern “not with the spirit but with the body” (7). Woolf’s efforts to undermine this philosophy reveal the impact of scientific advances during the twentieth century, after which, as Coole and Frost point out, it became “impossible to understand matter any longer in ways that were inspired by classical science” (5). Materialist philosophy, along with science, evolved: new theories in physics revealed matter to be less definable and tangible than it was previously understood to be (Coole and Frost 5). Materialism fell out of favor in the 1970s, which was coincidentally (or not) about the same time that feminist theories began to emerge.

Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti coined the term *new materialism* in the 1990s (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 48). But to be clear, as Elizabeth St. Pierre, Alecia Y. Jackson, and Lisa A. Mazzei stress in “New Empiricisms and New Materialisms,” the *new* in new materialism is less about new ideas and more about new ways of thinking (100). New Materialism is, as Coole and Frost define it, a reworking of the notion of matter as unchanging and passive to show how inseparable it is from human experience (4). To put it in Baradian terms, when matter and meaning meet, neither is left intact and unchanged, as they become entangled with one another in an inseparable part of the world’s becoming. Even while the new materialisms with which I am working have points of commonality, each theory influences my project in diverse ways.

According to Bill Brown, the creator of thing theory, “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution,

¹ Though Woolf wrote this essay in 1919, she did not publish it until 1921.

consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things,” he continues, “is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4). For example, when dirt prevents us from seeing *through* a window, instead of experiencing the window’s transparency, we see the window itself. At this point, the window is no longer an object, because it has lost its intended purpose; it is now a thing. If, however, we were to wash the window, it would cease to be a thing and would become an object again. From Brown’s thing theory, then, I take my understanding of *object* as distinct from *thing*. Things effect order by helping us to understand or even reconstruct the past, and my work uses the subject-object relation in thing theory to study how new materialisms, including agential realism and even affect theory, reveal the ordering of our minds through our relationships with things. For Jane Bennett, matter is animated and agential, and affect is not specific to humans. This is not to say that objects have emotions; affect is about pre-emotional states of being, and, since states of being are usually nonlinguistic, affect theory disrupts our common understanding of power as rooted in language and prompts us to be open to other possibilities, as well. A footstool, for example, does not *feel* an emotion such as anguish, yet by reading objects the way we read texts, a footstool *can* present a state of being, such as distress. I explore this idea more in Chapter Two, “Through the Topaz Cross: Curating Home in *Mansfield Park*,” as Fanny’s things *seem* to feel, and they order Fanny’s mind through their expression of feeling.

In turning back to women’s writing from the nineteenth century, I sought to uncover patterns, such as Fanny’s feeling things, to better understand how women might have perceived materiality. Of course, I knew that these perceptions would differ among the writers and that any patterns that did emerge would shift over the course of the century. I perceived the importance of

beginning with people who were oppressed. While I am very interested in men's portrayals of women's experiences and knowledge, for example, in the work of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Anthony Trollope, and Thomas Hardy, this dissertation is the result of a different "cut." I chose to focus here on women writers, because, as feminist standpoint theory shows, those who are oppressed can see certain aspects of the world more clearly than those who dominate. In a sense, by beginning with women's experiences, my dissertation turns toward a defamiliarization of the world. This project is concerned with the way narratives get repressed—women's narratives, narratives about the world's dynamism, and narratives about matter's agency.

Barad's practice of diffraction, the act of "reading diffractively for patterns of differences that make a difference" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 49), offered a means of not only uncovering patterns but also these repressed narratives. Diffraction is "a methodology for treating theories and texts not as preexisting entities, but as intra-action, as forces from which other texts come into existence" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 57). Barad's agential realism is a product of this practice of diffraction, as she explains that it came into being through her act of reading of feminist theory and quantum theory's insights through one another (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 61-62). For me, diffraction was a way of reading nineteenth-century women's writing through Woolf's work. I not only read each text through Woolf but also through one another as a way to map out patterns.

My reading for this project began to come together in the summer of 2016. Following my exams, I joined my colleague and friend Holly Gallagher on what we termed our "Grand Tour." Over the course of seventeen days, we traveled through Italy—to Sorrento, Pompeii, Naples, Rome, and Florence—and then across Europe—to Lake Geneva in Switzerland and on to Paris

before ending our Grand Tour in Oxford, where we spent the next six weeks working for the UGA at Oxford Program. While at Oxford, I spent most of my mornings reading at the Bodleian Library and my afternoons reading (and eating cookies and drinking tea) beneath John Henry Newman's portrait in the dining hall at Trinity College. Once a week, I met with my tutor, Stefano Evangelista, to discuss these readings. Because the art, objects, and places I saw on the Grand Tour were still fresh in my mind, when I read Elaine Freedgood's *The Idea in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* and Deborah Lutz's *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects*, I became excited about the way that objects travel through time and space. I began, then, to conceive of a project that would bring together my interests in material culture, time, and space. After all, what are time and space without material objects to move through them, to *measure* them, as Barad might say? I imagined myself thinking about how novels written by women during the long nineteenth century unfold through the material objects within the text and how the shaping of matter affects the characters. When I talked about these books with Stefano, he suggested Boehm's edited collection of essays, *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*. These three texts began to influence my reading, my writing, and my thinking, particularly my thinking about Woolf's walrus, which seemed to haunt me. Twice in the novel, for example, Woolf's main character, Eleanor Pargiter, refers to the walrus pen-wiper as a "solid object." What did she mean by a "solid object?" I wondered. Did she mean that it was patriarchal? At the end of this summer term, I talked with David Bradshaw about my interest in Woolf's walrus, and he emailed me a list of his articles that he thought I would find helpful. Indeed, in his notes to *The Years* I found his claim that "solid objects" are "Woolf's favourite shorthand for Victorian things and attitudes" (312). This helped, but I still wondered whether Woolf perceived the walrus as patriarchal. Although I did not get the opportunity to talk with

David again—he passed away shortly after my return to Oxford in the fall—I found a letter dated 28 December 1927 in which Woolf writes, “I dined with Arnold Bennett the other night. Do you know him? He is a kind old walrus, who suddenly shuts his eyes like a dead fish and waits three minutes before he can finish his sentence” (*Letters* 445).² It seems likely, then, that Woolf perceived walrus as shorthand for outdated and tired bodies, things, and ideas. So, walrus are not always patriarchal in Woolf’s writing, and the patriarchy is only sometimes a walrus, but a walrus is always a “solid object.”

That fall, I again met with Stefano once a week, and I continued to read and to revise my prospectus. I also returned to Barad that fall. In addition to reading her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, I read articles by her and interviews with her. My fascination grew, but I still worried. Could I understand Barad’s concepts enough to write about them? The answer, I knew, was a resounding *no*. There were too many gaps. This was science, and I was a humanities student. I loved my undergraduate chemistry and biology classes, but they had not prepared me to for this kind of thinking. However, my training as a humanities Ph.D. student had taught me how to learn. So, I began to fill the gaps. I read, for example, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin’s *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, David Bohm and F. David Peat’s *Science, Order, and Creativity*, and Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, which, in turn, took me to Grusin’s essay collection, *The Nonhuman Turn* and Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, which led me to Bill Brown’s *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of*

² See Woolf’s essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” for an understanding of her disagreement with Bennett’s traditional literary style and character.

American Literature. From all of my reading that fall, I began to get a sense of where Barad was coming from and what she was saying, but my project grew larger than Barad. It was constantly changing, *always becoming*, as Barad might put it, into something different.

With Oxford as my base, the generous help of a Willson Center Graduate Travel Award enabled me to go to Chawton to see Jane Austen's House Museum and Chawton House, to Haworth to visit the Brontë Parsonage Museum, and to Beverley, where Mary Elizabeth Braddon began her writing career, to see an exhibit and attend a lecture. The reading I had been doing—Freedgood, Lutz, Bennett—*entangled* with the things I saw, including Austen's topaz cross pendant, which inspired Fanny's amber cross in *Mansfield Park*, and the cabinet with the twelve apostles' faces on the doors that makes its way into Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Back in Oxford, Barbara Bradshaw loaned me stacks of David's copies of Woolf's diaries and letters. Reading Woolf's writing alongside David's notes was an experience that, even now, seems indescribable. The timeliness of these readings was especially important for my project. With the topaz cross and the apostles' cabinet fresh in my mind, I began to perceive Woolf's work as a looking-glass through which I was able to notice nuances that had escaped me in my previous readings of nineteenth-century women's writing.

Looking-glass imagery appears frequently in Woolf's work, especially in the decade leading up to and including her work on *The Years*. In *A Room of One's Own*, which was first published in October 1929, she expresses frustration with men's perception of women as looking-glasses through which their own image is enlarged. Woolf responds to men's claim that feminism encroaches on their power:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that

power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle.... For if she [woman] begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgement, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? (36)

Woolf's argument suggests that patriarchal power is derived through the objectification of women and through the stories men tell about themselves and the world. By objectifying women, men strip them of their agency, because objects cannot speak, act, or influence the subjects who interact with them. Or can they?

Only two months after the publication of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf published "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection," a short story in which she suggests that a traditional looking-glass reflects materiality—furnishings, bodies, nature—but not interiority.³ As Shuli Barzilai notes, however, the story offers "two versions of external reality" from a single focal point, the sofa in the drawing-room (205). The narrator not only describes the interior of the room and its furnishings as vibrating with "nocturnal" life but also indicates through images of "curtains blowing" and the "petals falling" that the boundaries of this space are permeable—she refers to this moving matter as "shy creatures" (63). In contrast to the movement within the room, the narrator describes the looking-glass as reflecting the stillness of the entrance hall and expanse of garden, until the narrator's view is limited by the mirror's frame—"slicing off an

³ Kimberly Lamm reads "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" as Woolf's commentary on the social punishment of women who refuse to serve as looking-glasses by rejecting their roles as wife and mother (12).

angle, the gold rim cut it off” (63). The violent description of slicing and cutting suggests that the fixed border of the mirror inhibits life. When the reflected stillness is broken by the delivery of the post, this disruption is sudden and violent. Woolf describes Isabella’s reflection in the looking-glass as startling, a description which defamiliarizes the familiarity in reflection. As Isabella nears the house, her reflection grows larger, gradually taking over the frame until she stops “dead” and “perfectly empty with “no thoughts ... no friends” and caring “for nobody” (68). Resonating with the image of men’s growing reflections, Woolf’s emphasis on the emptiness of a reflection in this scene suggests that men’s act of using women as looking-glasses is dehumanizing, and regardless of how large men or women appear in a looking-glass, the human reflection is always empty of meaning within spaces paralyzed by rigid boundaries.

Woolf juxtaposes this violent imagery with fantastic images of furnishings that come alive when no one is looking. The “nocturnal creatures” that fill the “rugs and stone chimney pieces” and the “sunken book-cases and red and gold lacquer cabinets” come “pirouetting across the floor, stepping delicately with high-lifted feet and spread tails and pecking allusive beaks as if they” are “cranes or flocks of elegant flamingoes whose pink” is “faded, or peacocks whose trains” are “veined with silver” (63). This is a room in which things move and feel in ways that seem quite human. The room, as Woolf writes, has “passions and rages and envies and sorrows ... like a human being,” and, as such, nothing stays “the same for two seconds together” (63). This liveliness in Woolf’s writing is what makes her walrus in *The Years* seem so fascinating to me. It, like these “pirouetting” pieces in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass,” comes to life. Of course, this is a vibrancy that emerges in so much of her writing, for example in her 1939 essay, “Lewis Carroll”: “Without any conscious effort dreams come,” she writes, “the white rabbit, the walrus, and the carpenter, one after another, turning and changing one into the other, they come

skipping and leaping across the mind” (210). Woolf’s furnishings in this story and her walrus in *The Years*, like her description of Carroll’s walrus in this essay, evade boundaries; through their vitality, they are always becoming something different. By noticing Woolf’s technique of making animate nonanimated matter, I was able to look back through her work and see the nineteenth-century women writers making parallel turns toward the nonhuman world. Through Woolf, I was able to see, for example, the vibrancy of Brontë’s apostles’ cabinet and Eliot’s miniature.

When I returned to the States in December of 2016, I used the remaining funds from my Willson Center Award to travel to New York City, where I saw a Brontë exhibit at the Morgan Library and read Woolf’s galley proofs for *The Years* at the New York Public Library. My research as a student had always been grounded in texts, but as I traveled to libraries and museums, taking pictures and writing notes, I no longer felt like a student; I began to feel like a scholar. When I finally submitted my prospectus in the spring, then, I felt passionate and excited about the project I had proposed, one that was grounded by a new Baradian framework, which had emerged from my fascination with matter. The current conversations about animated matter are new, fascinating, and exciting to me, because lively matter is something in which I believe. All of my life, I have perceived matter as vibrant. From the television in my parents’ living room to photographs of family members and friends, to vehicles—especially my father’s old grain truck whose front end appeared to me like a terrifying face—I have always sensed things as lively, and it excited me to point to vital things in novels, and to work through the ways our things never forget us, to think about how they become a part of us and we a part of them. As Woolf puts it in “A Sketch of the Past,” strong emotion leaves traces; thus, it might be possible “that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds” (67).

Indeed, the conversations, the theories, and the language that have lately emerged about lively and agentic things make this project possible in ways it would have never before been conceivable.

I've always wondered, why, of all things, did Woolf select a walrus? A number of Victorian animal-shaped pen-wipers still exist; however, I have yet to find a walrus-shaped wipe. Did one ever even exist? Though I have nearly given up on finding a walrus-shaped pen-nib wipe, it does seem likely that Woolf might have encountered a walrus pen wiper at some point, because walruses are entangled with Britain's past. As we know, even well before the Victorian period, the British collected souvenirs from other cultures and relics from the natural world. For early-modern British sailors, to return from the Arctic Sea with a walrus, or even a part of a walrus, would have been evidence of a successful exploration.⁴ In fact, in Peter Hunt's notes to the 2009 edition of Carroll's two *Alice* novels, he cites Roger Lancelyn Green's 1971 notes, in which Green claims that Carroll modeled his walrus after the stuffed walrus from the Sunderland Museum walrus; Carroll, he suggests, had known of this walrus since his childhood (285 n161). The Sunderland Museum walrus probably made Captain Wiggins' Arctic exploration the most successful of all time, in terms of literary fandom, that is; however, according to the Sunderland City Council, the museum did not acquire the walrus until after Carroll published "The Walrus and the Carpenter" in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* ("Mowbray Park"). London's Horniman Museum Walrus is another, and perhaps even more famous,

⁴ In Captain William Edward Parry's journal entry from 3 April 1822, he writes that he was able "to obtain a perfect head and tusks of one of" the two walruses killed by a group of indigenous people.

Victorian walrus. When James Henry Hubbard brought this walrus back to Britain from his c1890 trip to Hudson Bay, he sold it to Frederick Horniman. This stuffed walrus hardly looks realistic, though, as its carcass was overstuffed by a Victorian taxidermist (Colley 106), making it appear as if it has feasted on too many oysters. Of course, this taxidermist can scarcely be held accountable for such a mistake. As walruses have mostly vanished from the waters around the British Isles over the past thousand years, few Victorians would have been familiar with them, aside from the deceptive character that consumes a group of juvenile oysters in Lewis Carroll's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter."

The following chapters are not arranged chronologically. In a project that argues for non-linear time, it did not make sense for me to work chronologically through the long nineteenth century. My readings of *Alice* also shaped my vision of this project's organization, with Woolf's writings on walruses serving as the looking-glass lens through which to diffractively read novels by nineteenth-century women writers. Thus, I have arranged the chapters in the way I read them. Looking at Woolf's foremothers' work through Woolf's work is an act of remediation that questions the ideas of linearity and chronology through a dialogical relationship among the texts. As Bolter and Grusin argue, "Newer media do not necessarily supersede older media because the process of reform and refashioning is mutual" (59). Does it make sense to understand a dialogical relationship among texts through a chronological order, then? Might it make more sense to perceive these texts as entangled and enfolded through one another? If, as Bolter and Grusin suggest, media are a network of mediums that reveal resonance (65), then not only representations of material objects but also representations of other mediums within novels—paintings, poems, songs—might lead to important discoveries about the texts in which these things appear. Woolf's *The Years* will come first then, because her work is the looking-glass

through which I look back at the other texts. Next will come, in the following order, Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Eliot's *Middlemarch*. My work on Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* is the coda. While this project has evolved over time—the chapters reveal how my thinking changed, my ideas became clearer, my writing became better, and, inevitably, my interests shifted somewhat—I have lost many of my original intentions. The one goal that seems to have remained intact throughout is to make the case that literary theory, feminist studies, and new materialisms need one another. Literary theory needs new materialism, because new materialism can offer a new and enriching way to read the texts we think we know so well, and feminist studies needs literary theory as a means of putting the difficult new materialist readings into practice.

Chapter Two, “The Walrus Through *The Years*,” is structured by Woolf's walrus's appearances, which I show as occurring during “moments of being.” I connect these moments to the diffraction of light. Woolf's phrase, “The lamps were being lit,” seems to be, like her walrus, a form of shorthand. The phrase signals an opening into an unfamiliar facet of reality in which things are vibrant and agentic. This chapter weaves together letters, diary entries, galley proofs, and excerpts of other texts to make the argument that Woolf's things' vibrancy is intentional. Indeed, the most fascinating portrayal of the walrus is that which Woolf cuts from the galley proofs and replaces with a less vibrant description. Woolf's decision to do so may have been due to her fear that she had let things go too far. In any case, her decision is a cut—literally but also a Baradian “cut”—that changed the novel. This change, though, was not without its marks, as the galley proofs continue to exist in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library.

When Eleanor tosses out the walrus, as it turns out during Queen Victoria's burial, she also tosses out many of the conventions with which she has been raised. But Crosby, in saving the walrus from the waste-paper basket, rescues these unwanted traditions. On Crosby's mantel-piece, things that have been discarded over the years by the Pargiters continue to live on. The walrus joins an assemblage of lively things that sit askew, such as portraits that show the Pargiters wearing traditional wigs and gowns, military uniforms, and wedding dresses, as well as Indian elephants that represent the Empire. When Crosby arranges these things together, she maintains the traditions that gave her purpose.

Chapter Three, "Through the Topaz Cross: Curating Home in *Mansfield Park*," picks up the walrus and other relics of the Pargiter family from Crosby's mantel-piece in *The Years* and connects them to the Bertrams' things in Fanny's East room. When Fanny takes occupancy of the East room, she also takes on the objects that the family has abandoned there: Julia's footstool, the transparencies, and the portrait profiles. I understand Fanny as a curator of these objects. As Fanny cares for these things and listens to what they have to say, they begin to take on vitality and new meaning. She is an ideal confidant, because she, like these discarded things, is often neglected and forgotten. Fanny gains a new perception from her encounters with these dynamic things and agency through her curation of these things into an exhibit of stability, which gives her a sense of permanence, of home and family, because these things that make up Fanny's home in the East room become her connections to others. When Fanny's brother William gifts her an amber cross, and Edmund buys her a chain on which to wear the cross, Fanny comes to perceive herself as she does the things in the East room, as alive and wanted. Reading these things through Fanny's amber cross, which was inspired by Austen's topaz cross, helps me to reconceive the boundaries between people and things. In this chapter, as in the others, I ask my

readers to accept that things are not always as they seem; thus, here, I argue that Fanny's things are differently alive than we have imagined.

Chapter Four, "Jane's Things Through the Looking-Glass," examines Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through the diffraction of light, like the diffractive pattern that emerges in Woolf's *The Waves*. Through diffraction, objects lose their everyday usefulness and become lively things, and subjects become unfamiliar and transform into thing-like bodies. Of course, Brontë may have simply filled *Jane Eyre* with culturally-familiar objects—books, a china plate decorated with painted birds, a cabinet with the twelve apostles' faces—as a means to erase the medium of her writing, to encourage her contemporary readers to use their imaginations to suspend belief and to step into an immediacy that felt like a tangible whole through the illusion of immersion. As Oliver Betts argues, "Beyond their value for research, objects are gateways into stories for the general public, keys to a Victorian past tantalizingly just out of reach" (190). But, even if Brontë only intended for these objects to be props for her novel, like anything else, the novel is a never-finished product. For readers in the twenty-first century, nineteenth-century novels are more than texts: they are portable museums, or portals to a past, filled with dynamic bodies and things that come to life.

Chapter Five, "The Nonhuman Secret in Lady Audley's Looking-Glass Rooms," is a case study of how the novel disrupts assumptions about artificial divisions. Once more, I look at how lively things, such as those that Lucy brings to Audley Court, take on animacy and how bodies behave like inanimate things. For Jane Bennett, writing in "The Force of Things," the idea of "thing-power materialism ... emphasizes those occasions in ordinary life when the us and the it slip into each other, for one moral of this materialist tale is that we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world" (349). Indeed, this is precisely what happens in

Braddon's novel. Lucy, as I argue, becomes entangled with her things to a level that her humanity is difficult to separate from her things' vitality. As Bennett describes it, "the line between inert matter and vital energy, between animate and inanimate, is permeable—and where all things, to some degree or other, live on both sides" ("Force" 352). Lady Audley is called back into Helen's identity by the things with which she refuses to part. These things hold memories, and their social memories link Lucy to Helen. This chapter emphasizes Lucy as a hoarder of Helen's things, and as such, links her to Crosby and Fanny. The things she hoards, however, are not the only things that spill her secrets. In addition to the things she conceals in her rooms at Audley Court, other things that Helen has touched wait for Robert in George's trunks and at Mrs. Vincent's lodgings at Acacia Cottage. Lady Audley's portrait, however, is the most lively of all of her things. As W.J.T. Mitchell puts it, in an uncanny moment, "the object becomes the Other" (156). Indeed, at the end of the novel, the heroine has been replaced by her own image. This portrait is, in Mitchell's terms, "the shadowy likeness of a once-living individual" and, like its subject, it "demands to be noticed" (73)

This new materialist analysis of Braddon's work is an argument for a new way to read value into sensation fiction. Because sensation fiction engages the senses, which are, in turn, conducive to reading things as lively, bringing a sensation novel into this conversation seems more than appropriate—it seems necessary. In recent years, critics have worked toward recovering forgotten sensation fiction and imagining new ways to read a genre that was once derogatorily deemed "kitchen literature" and forgotten, much like many of the lively things in nineteenth-century novels that this dissertation uncovers.

Chapter Six, "Through the *Middlemarch* Pier-Glass and What Dorothea Learned There,"

opens with a reading of three different representations of George Eliot: a fiberglass figure, a marble sculpture, and a brass statue. These pieces of art set up the scene for a passage in *Middlemarch* in which Dorothea, with the sunlight streaming through the window, stands beside the *Sleeping Ariadne* in the Vatican Museum and seems to turn into a statue herself. This passage in *Middlemarch* haunts a scene in Woolf's *The Years*, in which the reflection and diffraction of light combines with the influence of wine to affect Edward's perception. As he studies *Antigone* in his room at Oxford, the effect of the outdoor lamps further contributes to his perception; thus, his image of Kitty mixes with Antigone.⁵ This *Middlemarch* passage, in which Dorothea becomes consubstantial with the statue of Ariadne, strikingly parallels Woolf's later passage in which Kitty and Antigone come together as a multidimensional being.

Eliot's pier-glass is, like the looking-glass lens, a way of perceiving connections. *Middlemarch*, then, is inherently diffractive, which makes reading Dorothea through Rosamond a fruitful exercise. While Rosamond, whose head is described as a flower blossom, embraces her own objectification, and, in doing so, nearly loses her own identity along with her things, Dorothea shuns materiality, because she perceives ideas as holding more value. In the end, she realizes that she needs both materiality and ideas to be happy.

Chapter Seven, "Double-Visions in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," is a coda that takes the ideas in my dissertation in a slightly different direction. The text itself is

⁶ A passage in Woolf's essay "Lewis Carroll" invokes the dissolving boundaries in *The Years*: And then we wake. None of the transitions in Alice in Wonderland is quite so queer. For we wake to find—is it the Rev. C. L. Dodgson? Is it Lewis Carroll? Or is it both combined? ... Is there, then, even in 1293 pages, any such thing as "completeness"? (211).

different, because it is not a novel but a novel-poem. However, the hybridity of the text brings the project full circle, back to Woolf's *The Years*. In a now-famous diary entry from Tuesday, 20 January 1931, Woolf describes the moment of conception for a new project: "I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book—a sequel to a *Room of Ones Own*—about the sexual life of women: to be called *Professions for Women* perhaps—Lord how exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read to Pippa's society" (6). This notion was the beginning of a project that would attempt to transcend boundaries by taking its form through an entanglement of novel chapters with essays. Woolf aptly thought of this hybrid genre as a "novel-essay," a hyphenated term that, in her mind, would emphasize the inseparability of what are typically understood to be separate genres. She hoped that, by bringing fiction and nonfiction together into a single genre, she could reveal how her creative and analytical faculties worked together; however, Woolf eventually abandoned her unfinished "novel-essay" manuscript. In cutting the fiction from the polemic in her project, Woolf created two separate yet entangled publications: *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Mitchell A. Leaska posthumously published her abandoned text as *The Pargiters*; thus, it, too, remains an inseparable part of project that Woolf intended to be a hybrid text, much like Barrett Browning's novel-poem.

The other way that this chapter is different is in its content. In this chapter, I trace Barrett Browning's interest in "mixtures," to Emanuel Swedenborg's work, and then I argue that we need Barad to fully understand how Swedenborg and Barrett Browning were both seeking inseparable *wholeness*, but that they were both held back by language. By approaching *Aurora Leigh* through Barad's agential realism, we can better understand their intentions.

This dissertation is an experiment in how nineteenth-century literature can open up in new ways when we read counterintuitively. By taking a new approach to materiality and drawing

on the challenges posed by new materialisms, we can begin to conceive of the things in nineteenth-century literature as having lives of their own. Opening our minds to this new perception of the world is difficult, because it challenges the narratives that structure our lives and our understanding of the world. But it always opens up new possibilities, not only for the texts we know and love, but for ourselves, as well.

CHAPTER 2
THE WALRUS THROUGH *THE YEARS*

*“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”*

—Lewis Carroll, “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” lines 61-66⁶

“I have had servants,” said Mrs. Ambrose, concentrating her gaze. “At this moment I have a nurse. She’s a good woman as they go, but she’s determined to make my children pray. So far, owing to great care on my part, they think of God as a kind of walrus; but now that my back’s turned—Ridley,” she demanded, swinging round upon her husband, “what shall we do if we find them saying the Lord’s Prayer when we get home again?”

—Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p. 23

⁶ Carroll’s poem was originally published in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.

Swaying and opening programmes, with a few words of greeting to friends, we settle down, like walruses stranded on rocks, like heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea, hoping for a wave to lift us, but we are too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies between us and the sea.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 133

Alison Booth, writing in *Greatness Engendered*, argues that Virginia Woolf in *The Years*, like George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, uses imagery to show the passage of time, “though with a new skepticism toward metaphor and symbol”: “sometimes a walrus-brush is just a walrus brush,” she argues (206). Perhaps Booth is right: maybe sometimes an object *is* just an object. After all, some novels, especially those written during the nineteenth century, list so many objects that it seems implausible that the author could have infused them all with meaning. Even Virginia Woolf’s *The Years* skips over many of the objects it names; on the first page alone, Woolf mentions umbrellas, parcels, dresses, bustles, frock-coats, canes, carnations, hats, caps, aprons, teapots, and tables (3). But in a 400-page novel that is full of objects, why does Booth land on a walrus brush? There must be a reason why, of all the objects in the novel, she picks this one. Perhaps it calls to her, resonates with her, haunts her—as it does me. I have to disagree with Booth’s claim, then, especially as it pertains to the walrus-shaped pen-nib wipe in *The Years*. As Woolf’s walrus marches through the novel, period-by-period, it makes five appearances, each of which is significant to the text, because it emerges during “moments of being.”

In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf defines “moments of being” as one of two levels of being that structure our lives: “moments of being” are the conscious experiences of the significance of life, whereas “non-being” encompasses the more typical days and events of life

that we experience less consciously (70). These are moments, then, in which the diffraction of light—indicated by Woolf’s refrain in *The Years*, “The lamps were being lit”—facilitates a glimpse into an unfamiliar aspect of reality in which inanimate matter comes alive in fascinating ways. Woolf’s walrus brush, then, is not *just* a walrus brush, but a vibrant, dynamic thing: as it only appears during these “moments of being,” it is agentic, it is meaningful, and it is intentional.

The walrus is entangled not only with the characters in *The Years* but also with the “universe” that, as Ann Banfield points out in *The Phantom Table*, Woolf creates across her writings (1). As Banfield explains, this is a “universe ... whose plurality of possible worlds includes private points of space and time unobserved, unoccupied by any subject” (1). Walruses materialize across genres in Woolf’s writing, as well, in for example, her novels *The Voyage Out* and *The Waves* (see epilogues above), and in her diary and letters. In a letter to Ethel Smyth, dated 22 December 1932, for example, Woolf describes “taking a few days holiday” from writing *The Pargiters*—later retitled *The Years*—and notes the oddity of how the world continues to carry on when she is too busy writing to notice it (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 5: 1932-1935, 137). She asks Smyth:

Do you find that when you’re writing—the world goes out, except for the precise part of it you want for your writing, which becomes indeed indecently clear. I’m reading 20 books at once—masses of books—and feel like a walrus taking to the sea—so vast, so calm, so indifferent, with the whole Atlantic to wallow in—but that’s an illusion because the Keynes’s will be over: then the Gages; then the Bells: and the poor Walrus will climb onto its rock and bark—How is your cold? What are you working at? Oh do tell me all about your suffrage life one of these days. (137)

In the novel, as here in this letter, the walrus is infused with nineteenth-century traditions to the point that its weight becomes oppressive. So, it seems, too, to be metaphorical or symbolic, even if Woolf is “skeptical” of such devices. The walrus is Woolf’s shorthand, if not a metaphor, for patriarchal traditions, particularly the binary dualisms that support and maintain traditions. Woolf, of course, realizes the irony that women who have access to twenty books at once, time to entertain friends and family, and energy to work for suffrage are able to do so *because* they benefit from the institution of patriarchy. This knowledge manifests as tension in Woolf’s writing, and this tension becomes particularly explicit in *The Year*’s chapters in which the walrus surfaces and the text pretends to ignore the walrus’s presence.

The Walrus first appears in the 1880 chapter,⁷ in which Mrs. Pargiter’s imminent passing elicits tension, not only between life and death but also between genders and classes, and times and spaces. Delia stands watching at the drawing-room window as dusk falls and the streetlamps are lit (18). Crosby’s act of drawing the curtains and carrying into the room “two silk-shaded lamps” cues Delia’s ascent to her mother’s room (19-20). The diffracting light follows her up the stairs, where she takes a moment before entering the “borderland between life and death” to look through the window with her “dazzled” eyes at “flamingo-coloured curls of cloud lying on a pale-blue sky” (20-21). Beside Mrs. Pargiter’s bed hangs a “long narrow glass” that reflects “a section of the sky,” which, like Delia’s eyes, is “dazzled at the moment with red light” (21). The light illuminates the dressing-table, striking “on silver bottles and on glass bottles, all set out in

⁷ Alison Booth reads *The Years* as a feminist political novel that is “in effect ... a sequel” to George Eliot’s *Felix Holt*; in fact, as she points out in *Greatness Engendered*, *The Years* opens in 1880, which is also the year of George Eliot’s death (205).

the perfect order of things that are not used,” and makes everything appear “unreal” (21). Delia, with “nothing to do but look,” floats from this borderland into life, where she lands on a public platform alongside Irish political leader Charles Parnell, throws “out her hands,” and begins to speak “in the cause of Liberty” (22). Delia’s escape into this dreamlike world fuels her with lively energy. But Delia is quickly jerked back to this borderland, where death seems closer than life. As Mrs. Pargiter cries out, “Where am I?” (22), Delia, too, is disoriented—“Where was she?”⁸ Mrs. Pargiter then looks out the window, where the sight of the “lamps ... being lit” seems to pull her back toward life, as she goes in and out of thoughts (23). Fragments of thought filter through her mind—“Uncle Digby’s birthday,” the expense of “a clean table-cloth,” “the day the engagement was announced,” “all of us in the garden,” “there came a letter ... a letter” (23-24)—but she is unable to grasp onto anything that will ground her in life. As Delia rises and leaves the room, she, too, questions, “Where am I?” (24). This question, “Where am I?” indicates a loss of the familiar. Death, in the static space of this borderland, casts a cloak over life, darkening its vibrancy and making it seem unfamiliar and inconsequential. As Delia stands outside of her mother’s room, she, too, is caught in this borderland: as she stares at a “white jug stained pink by the setting sun,” she repeats the question, “Where am I?” (24). This is not a question of location but a question of being. As Delia ponders her existence, the “pink jug” appears “strange” (24-25). She is suddenly called out of this “moment of being” and back to her

⁸ Jane Eyre asks this question, too, as she kneels before the fire for Rochester under the guise of gypsy to read her countenance: “Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman’s voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all, were familiar to me as my own face in a glass—as the speech of my own tongue” (202).

everyday reality by sounds of “non-being,” that of “water rushing and feet thudding on the floor above” (25).

Woolf, in the same way that she uses her essays to work out her concept of “moments of being” and “non-being,” uses short fiction as spaces in which to work through the larger ideas in her novels. In her 1930 essay “Street Haunting: A London Adventure,” for example, she works through the effects of unfamiliarity that Delia and Mrs. Pargiter experience:

It is, in fact, on the stroke of six; it is a winter’s evening; we are walking to the Strand to buy a pencil. How, then, are we also on a balcony, wearing pearls in June? What could be more absurd? Yet it is nature’s folly, not ours. When she set about her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of one thing only. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each one of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture; the colours have run. Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience’ sake a man must be a whole. (182-83)

“Am I here, or am I there?” is a question that echoes throughout *The Years*: at different times, Delia, Mrs Pargiter, and Eleanor all ask, “Where am I?” As space and time are always shifting, bodies and things are always transforming. Characters’ identities, then, are never stable, and their uneasy questions are a result of this unpredictable ontology. Unpredictability, though anxiety-

producing, is what makes these moments productive enough to make a difference, even in the spaces where patriarchal traditions are most deep-seated, such as imperialism and war.

While Delia dreams of a vibrant activist life in which she fights for the oppressed, Rose imagines herself to be an officer going into battle for Britain. Rose escapes the nursery by pretext of leaving her work-box downstairs in order to sneak down the street to buy toy ducks at Lamley's store. A nineteenth-century work-box is, of course, a metonym for the stereotypical Victorian woman, so for Rose to use her work-box as an excuse is ironic in light of what comes next. She slips out of the house and into an "adventure" in the street with Nurse's latchkey and her own purse, hat, and coat. For Woolf, London's streets were spaces in which people could escape the constraints of their everyday lives; as David Bradshaw argues in his Introduction to *Selected Essays*, wandering through London's streets allowed Woolf, like her character Mrs. Dalloway in the 1925 novel, "to shed the restrictive harness of her gender and the handicap of her class" (xix). Indeed, as Rose interacts with these things, the boundary around her upper-middle-class body take on the shape of a war hero, and these things transcend their shapes to become "ammunition and provisions"—"her pistol and her shot" (25-26). Rose's domestic objects transform into things that are associated with men's agency and power. Because Rose lives in London, it is possible that she has never even seen a government-regulated firearm and ammunition, but she has heard her father's stories about the power and respect that these weapons demand. To accommodate this transformation of subject and objects into body and things, the time and space of 1880 Abercorn Terrace dissolves into a stretch of desert that Rose

must cross to reach the central tower.⁹ She is, possibly for the first time in her life, unrestricted by the walls of her home, her family's expectations, and her gender. Rose, as she makes her way down the street, is far from being a little girl on her way to purchase toy ducks. She is agentic, meaningful, and intentional.

As Rose, "flourishing her hand," exclaims, "I am Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse ... riding to the rescue!" (26), she comes alive in this unfamiliar dimension:

She was riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison, she told herself. She had a secret message—she clenched her fist on her purse—to deliver to the General in person. All their lives depended upon it. The British flag was still flying on the central tower—Lamley's shop was the central tower; the General was standing on the roof of Lamley's shop with his telescope to his eye. All their lives depended upon her riding to them through the enemy's country. Here she was galloping across the desert. She began to trot. It was growing dark. The street lamps were being lit. The lamplighter was poking his stick up into the little trap-door; the trees in the front gardens made a wavering network of shadow on the pavement; the pavement stretched before her broad and dark. Then there was the crossing; and then there was Lamley's shop on the little island of shops opposite. She had only to cross the desert, to ford the river, and she was safe.

⁹ In Eleanor McNees' notes to the Harvest edition of *The Years*, she suggests this imaginary event is an allusion to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (420). McNees notes, too, that "In *The Pargiters*, Woolf states of Rose, 'Her head was full of her father's old stories of the Indian Mutiny'" (420).

Flourishing the arm that held the pistol, she clapped spurs to her horse and galloped down Melrose Avenue. (26-27)

As Rose runs past the pillar-box, however, a man's figure emerges beneath the gas lamp. As Rose is still caught up in her imagination, she perceives the man to be her enemy and visualizes herself "pulling the trigger of her pistol" (27). This exhibition of such uninhibited confidence becomes possible through Rose's escape from her home and the compulsory gendered performance that is expected of her there.

But Rose suddenly becomes a little girl again when the man reaches out as if to grab her, and she realizes that she is quite alone and in danger. She is, in one moment, full of confidence and power, with others' lives dependent on her ability to push past the enemy and deliver the secret message to the General; in the next moment, however, she is yanked backward through the looking-glass, stripped of agency, and once again conscious of her limitations. Rose's replacement of gendered performance, which is, of course, based on exterior bodily boundaries, with her performance of interiority empowers a confidence that is otherwise prohibited to young girls. When she is forced back into that compulsory performance, however, her confidence vanishes—rock, paper, scissors: "The game" is "over" (27).

Patriarchy may have won this battle, but Rose becomes determined that it will not win the war. She attempts to reenter this "moment of being" in which she can be more than a little girl in a pink frock. Still, the man's appearance has killed the moment's magic. When she passes the gas lamp again on her way home, the man reappears, and this time, he is "unbuttoning his clothes" (28), an act that transforms his body into a weapon. This image is a very real threat for a young girl whose pistol and shot have melted back into a key, hat, purse, and coat. As this passage unfolds through changing matter, time, and space, it reveals movement between reality

and fantasy, but reality and fantasy are not oppositions here; they are part of the same whole and they entangle Rose and the man into a single narrative. While Rose's power to transform into an officer with a gun and ammunition comes from her own imagination and the vitality of the things she carries, this man's threat does not depend on anything more than his act of exposing himself, as by doing so, he becomes a danger to Rose: to her reputation, her body, and her mind.

While the toy ducks provide an excuse for Rose to escape into a world in which she can be something more than a young girl, this man's patriarchal authority overtakes the lamplight and coerces Rose back into darkness, back to the structure of the Victorian home, and back to the business of womanhood. Rose's resistance to womanhood is, in fact, what physically saves her from the man under the gas lamp. Eleanor expresses concern in *The Pargiters*, the unfinished and posthumously-published text that Woolf later divided into *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, because Rose is "a sturdy little girl" who eats and grows "enormously" and is "a worse tomboy" than Bobby, whose name becomes Martin in *The Years* (47). Eleanor knows that it will "be a good thing when Bobby" goes "to his boarding school," because then Rose will be able to "settle down ... in her business" (47). The "business" to which Eleanor refers is that of the sort of stereotyped womanhood to which her family expects her to conform: a woman who is delicate as opposed to sturdy, whose body does not require an enormous appetite, and whose behavior is feminine rather than tomboyish. The exercise Rose's body undergoes from playing with boys, along with the amount of food she consumes as a result of calories burnt during play, builds a body that is capable of running away, of escaping a man whose actions suggest physical and sexual danger. This man, then, is a manifestation of the harmful effects of the patriarchal structures—ideologies, binary dualisms, institutions—that give men access to and control over women's bodies, a manifestation that will continue to haunt Rose over the course of the novel.

As Rose slips back into the house, no one hears her, but she can hear Eleanor and Milly's voices coming from the drawing-room. Eleanor suddenly remembers that she is supposed to write to Edward, who is studying at Oxford. As Eleanor crosses to her mother's writing-table, she thinks to herself, "It'll be my table now" (33). Eleanor will inherit not only the table, though; she will also inherit an assemblage of things that sit on the desk's surface: "the silver candle-stick, the miniature of her grandfather," and "the tradesmen's books," one of which has "a gilt cow stamped on it," and, of course, "the spotted walrus with a brush in its back that Martin had given to his mother on her last birthday" (33). This assemblage is part of an oppressive narrative in which Eleanor is at risk of becoming wedged. The silver candle-stick, for example, implies money, but this is money to which women have no real access, as indicated by the gilt cow imprinted on the accounting books—the image may appear to be gold, but it holds no real substance.¹⁰ While the woman is tasked with the adding of figures, her work is invisible and excluded from view, like the absence (or silence?) of Eleanor's grandmother's portrait beside that of her grandfather. The text pretends to ignore the walrus's significance, but the walrus, in its place among these other things, represents outdated traditions. When Eleanor inherits the desk and these things, then, she becomes part of the assemblage. Though she uses the walrus for writing, she writes at her father's bidding, for example, figuring the accounts in the ledger book whose cover bears the image of a gilt cow.

¹⁰ This cow also calls to mind the character of Mrs. Ramsey in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsey, who is based on Woolf's own mother, Julia Stephen, is concerned with dairy sanitation and charity work.

For Martin to be the character who gives this walrus to Mrs. Pargiter invokes “Arthur’s Education Fund”—or “A.E.F.,” as it is “figured in the household ledgers”; Woolf describes “A.E.F.” in *Three Guineas* as the sacrifices made by a family, especially daughters, to educate sons (7). Indeed, earlier in this chapter, the sound of school books being “slapped down on the hall table” indicates the arrival of twelve-year-old Martin, who has come home in time for tea (10). As the family eats, Colonel Pargiter asks the children about their day: Eleanor has not yet returned from her volunteer work, but Delia has been to her music lesson, Milly has been to Whiteley’s—not to spend money as her father assumes but to work out an incorrect sheet delivery—and Martin has risen to the top of his class. While the Colonel is dismissive of his daughters’ activities, he rewards Martin with a sixpence (12-13). Not only does the Colonel sacrifice his daughters’ education to pay for his sons’ education—Edward and Morris’s, in addition to Martin’s—but in doing so, he denies his daughters the chance to earn his approval and respect.

Still, Martin is oppressed by the Colonel’s patriarchal stance, too. Though his father gives him this sixpence for his good performance, he must pay for his advantages by serving as a mock soldier in his father’s private empire. Colonel Pargiter, who is retired from and disabled by his service to the British Empire, maintains his sense of self-worth by exerting control over others. But his domineering attitude toward Martin serves two purposes: as a nineteenth-century father, the Colonel does his duty to show Martin what it means to be a man—to govern others—and as a Colonel, he enjoys dictating, even to bark trivial orders, and having a young and impressionable son gives him the opportunity to do just that. While the family is eating, for example, Martin is reaching toward his plate when the Colonel commands, “Now, my boy, take yourself off and get on with your prep” (15). Martin withdraws his hand, but his response is not quick enough for

Colonel Pargiter who imperiously demands, “Cut along” (15). The Colonel then stands with the declaration that he “must be off too,” and he positions himself “very erect among them,” as if he wants “to give some order,” but cannot “at the moment think of any order to give” (15). The colonel does not, in fact, see a reason to give his daughters orders because he does not hold the same expectations for them as he holds for his sons. He simply expects that the older girls will take care of the house and their younger siblings. Of course, the brunt of this responsibility falls on Eleanor as the oldest daughter. When Eleanor, late for tea, enters the room, she carries “a pile of little mottled books” (14), but these books contrast sharply with Martin’s books. While Martin’s books are educational schoolbooks—“perhaps ... Greek, perhaps ... Latin” (17), Eleanor’s books turn out to be account books, which she struggles to balance with her limited education: “What’s eight times eight?” she asks aloud (18). Eleanor, as the oldest sister, has few choices; she could, of course, sacrifice her younger sisters, but with her mother’s death inevitable, she feels a responsibility to take on the role of Mrs. Pargiter’s substitute.¹¹

Stepping into Mrs. Pargiter’s position demands more than math skills, however. Eleanor is also pressed to become a mother figure for her younger siblings, especially for Rose. When Rose has a nightmare about the man she encountered on the street, she cannot bring herself to tell Eleanor about it, because she has “a profound feeling of guilt” (39). Because Eleanor has no idea

¹¹ Woolf, in “A Sketch of the Past,” recalls how “Stella ... bore the brunt” of their mother’s death, as she “grew whiter and whiter in her unbroken black dress” while sitting at her table “answering letters of sympathy” (94). And in “Reminiscences,” she notes that Stella married two years after their mother’s death, and then she herself died three months after her marriage: “It was now Vanessa’s turn to be her father’s ‘angel in the house,’” Woolf writes (26).

that Rose has even been out of the house, she cannot imagine anything that would be worse for Rose than fighting with Martin or chasing cats, but Eleanor knows that whatever is bothering Rose is more serious because there is “something queer about the way she” twitches (40). Rose tries to tell Eleanor about the man, but all she can say is, “I saw... I saw...” (41). “I saw, ... I saw...” Eleanor repeats to herself as she shuts the nursery door: “What had she seen? Something horrible, something hidden. But what?” Eleanor, looking past the candlelight, suddenly falls into that other world, and there it is, “hidden behind her strained eyes” (41). The candle she is holding is “slightly slanting in her hand,” causing drops of wax to drip from the taper before she realizes and straightens the candle and begins to descend the stairs” (41). With only the diffracting light of this candle to guide Eleanor, her surroundings flicker and change:

A blankness came over her. Where am I? she asked herself, staring at a heavy frame. What is that? She seemed to be alone in the midst of nothingness; yet must descend, must carry her burden—she raised her arms slightly, as if she were carrying a pitcher, an earthenware pitcher on her head. Again she stopped. The rim of a bowl outlined itself upon her eyeballs; there was water in it; and something yellow. It was the dog’s bowl, she realized; that was the sulphur in the dog’s bowl; the dog was lying curled up at the bottom of the stairs. She stepped carefully over the body of the sleeping dog and went into the drawing-room. (42)

Where is she, indeed! Though the space that surrounds her is familiar, her position in the space has changed, defamiliarizing the familiar. She seems to have fallen into Rose’s world, where subject and object boundaries dissolve to create new meaning. But Eleanor’s imagination no longer works creatively like that of a child. She does not feel the possibility that Rose, for example, is able to experience; instead, she feels the pressure of adulthood and of responsibility,

the tension of being caught between her own desires and her family's expectation that she will sacrifice her life so that they can live theirs. Where Rose can see the potential for ammunition and provisions in a latchkey, purse, hat and coat, Eleanor only sees the unknown in this "heavy frame." Up to this moment, Eleanor has thought of her mothering role as temporary; however, she now realizes that her mother's certain death means her own certain confinement. This image of Eleanor carrying the pitcher on her head implies regression. While the rest of the world, her siblings included, continue moving forward, Eleanor turns back. She carries her burden, not to her bedroom, but straight to the drawing-room, a significant destination because the drawing-room is known for its association with the angel in the house. Eleanor accepts full responsibility for her mother's burden, despite the loss of her own future, and she will carry this burden alone, encouraging her sisters to move forward.

In "Beneath the Waves," Bradshaw points to this passage to argue that "Woolf associated a woman with a pitcher on her head with the burdensomeness of patriarchy" (331). He ends the essay with a gesture to "A Sketch of the Past," in which he quotes Woolf's claim that a woman "cannot move without dislodging the weight of centuries" (338). Bradshaw's point is productive for my own reading, as the imagery of Eleanor carrying the pitcher on her head is certainly symbolic of women, such as Rebekah and Rachel, who serve others at the well in biblical stories.¹² And, that the pitcher is figurative rather than literal only enhances its significance in Bradshaw's reading, because all objects moving through space and time are

¹² In *Jane Eyre*, as Rochester and his guests play charades, Miss Ingram raises one of her arms "in the act of supporting a pitcher, poised gracefully on her head" (183). Brontë's passage anticipates Woolf's image of Eleanor.

unstable, always in the act of becoming. Even as they take on new meaning, they remain multifaceted relics, always retaining some sense of meaning from their past. An object such as the pitcher, then, has a longer past than an object of everyday use; thus, the pitcher holds more complex meaning with its more complex connection to various histories, and an object that holds more complex meaning might also hold more potential to reanimate the past, even when it is a product of the imagination.

The image of Woolf's pitcher is riveting, and Bradshaw's reading of this passage is so compelling that the dog bowl could easily pass unnoticed. But doing so would be a mistake, because, as Guglielmo Feis and Jacopo Tagliabue point out, we do not create objects with our minds; we select them (1044). It is fascinating, then, to consider Woolf's source for and implications of the dog bowl. Woolf, writing in "A Sketch of the Past" in 1940, describes her childhood home, "22 Hyde Park Gate—as it was in July 1897" (116). She recalls a "twisting staircase" that "led to the hall" where "lay a dog, beside him a bowl of water with a chunk of yellow sulphur in it" (117). In both texts, the dog bowl is fact and fiction. She did not write the memoir until after she published the novel. Thus, her description in the novel is taken from a memory, but, because all memories are to some degree false, the image with which she begins is not completely fact. And Woolf is an artist; thus, she likely gave this impression a fresh coat of paint for the novel. The image of the dog's bowl would have retained these colors, so that later, when she wrote her memoir piece, the fact of the bowl would have been quite fictional. If, as Paul Barolsky and other critics argue, Woolf's work is influenced by Walter Pater's writing (55), then that influence is certainly at play here, not only in the way that Woolf swirls together fact and fiction but also in the porous line between the animate and inanimate.

As the edges of the dog's water bowl are impressed upon Eleanor's eyes, the water and sulphur contained by the bowl's rim become inseparable from the water and sulphur in Eleanor's body. The bowl, as a container for these life-essential elements, becomes dynamic and unfamiliar in Eleanor's perception, and this unfamiliarity has the power to halt Eleanor's motion, to hold her immobile while she and the water bowl engage in an energetic dance in which, in Jane Bennett's terms, they "shift or vibrate between different states of being" ("Force" 354), until they become one, a fluid whole. This is a form of dance that makes moments, places, subjects, and objects seem different, that makes the familiar seem unfamiliar. For Eleanor, this dance between animate and inanimate matter occurs upon the staircase, and it quickens the vibration in her sense of being so that she is no longer familiar to herself. Through this sense of unfamiliarity, Eleanor can perceive objects anew; however, the switch from recognizable to foreign causes Eleanor to feel unbalanced, to be unable to locate herself in her own body: "Where am I?" she asks (42). In this "moment of being," Eleanor's inner self seems to divide from her outer self, and her uncertainty is a manifestation of vertigo triggered by defamiliarization. Though Eleanor's experience here exhibits her sense of insecurity, it also offers simultaneous and multiple perspectives of the world.

Edward, too, experiences an uncanny entanglement of perspectives as he studies *Antigone* in his rooms at Oxford. As he sits before the window reading and drinking port, the lamps are "being lit" outside his windows (47). When he looks up and sees his cousin Kitty, her form blends together with his mental image of Antigone:

He turned again to the Antigone. He read; then he sipped; then he read; then he sipped again. A soft glow spread over his spine at the nape of his neck. The wine seemed to press open little dividing doors in his brain. And whether it was the wine or the words or

both, a luminous shell formed, a purple fume, from which out stepped a Greek girl; yet she was English. There she stood among the marble and the asphodel, yet there she was among the Morris wall-papers and the cabinets—his cousin Kitty, as he had seen her last time he dined at the lodge. She was both of them—Antigone and Kitty; here in the book; there in the room. (49-50)

Here, Antigone does not become Kitty, and Kitty does not become Antigone. For Edward, the image of the girl is both Antigone and Kitty, both Greek and English, both wave and particle. Time, space, and matter, in the diffracting light of these lamps, can escape even the tradition and stability of Oxford. Though these images are entangled into a whole complex being, the “little dividing doors” in Edward’s brain only allow him to see one form at a time (50), despite his conviction that they both exist within this one being; thus, Antigone emerges, and then she changes into Kitty, before melting back into Antigone, and so forth. Kitty’s form, then, defamiliarizes Antigone’s form, which, in turn, makes Kitty’s form appear strange. The effect defamiliarizes Edward’s experiences of the text and his reality as it exists in Oxford.

Kitty herself also has a defamiliarizing experience as she returns to Oxford following tea with a friend’s family. As she discusses the Yorkshire moors with this family, she temporarily escapes Oxford’s oppressive patriarchal traditions—the gowns, the buildings, the divisions. While she walks home, the sunlight diffracts off of the familiarity of Oxford’s spire- and dome-lined streets and the structured space dissolves into the wild moors:

As she stood still for a second at a crossing, she too seemed to be tossed aloft out of her usual surroundings. She forgot where she was. The sky, blown into a blue open space, seemed to be looking down not here upon streets and houses, but upon open country, where the wind brushed the moors, and sheep, with grey fleeces ruffled, sheltered under

stone walls. She could almost see the moors brighten and darken as the clouds passed over them.

But then in two strides the unfamiliar street became the street she had always known. Here she was again in the paved alley; there were the old curiosity shops with their blue china and their brass warming-pans; and next moment she was out in the famous crooked street with all the domes and steeples. The sun lay in broad stripes across it. There were the cabs and the awnings and the book-shops; the old men in black gowns billowing; the young women in pink and blue dresses flowing; and the young men in straw hats carrying cushions under their arms. But for a moment all seemed to her obsolete, frivolous, inane. The usual undergraduate in cap and gown with books under his arm looked silly. And the portentous old men with their exaggerated features, looked like gargoyles, carved, mediaeval, unreal. They were all like people dressed up and acting parts, she thought. (71-72)

Through Kitty's simultaneous perception of Oxford and the moors, she comes to see Oxford in a new light. Kitty, as she grows up within the Oxford University and meets with her tutor, Miss Craddock, does not seem to recognize the divide between Oxford's town and gown. Her visit with people who are from a tradition than is defined by neither the gown nor the town distances her from the gowns that monopolize the part of Oxford with which she is most familiar; thus, when she returns to the city, it no longer seems quite so familiar, quite so stable. Indeed, the tea-table conversation transports Kitty from arbitrary Oxford traditions into the natural space of the Yorkshire moors, where she is able to realize the absurdity of valuing traditional manmade structures and institutions that practice ceremonies and rituals over natural environment and authentic experiences.

As Kitty enters her home at St. Katherine's College,¹³ Oxford tradition comes to life through the furnishings and objects in the dining room:

It was too big when they were alone, but they always sat there. The pictures seemed to be looking down at the empty chairs, and the empty chairs seemed to be looking up at the pictures. The old gentleman who had ruled the college over a hundred years ago seemed to vanish in the daytime, but he came back when the lamps were lit. The face was placid, solid and smiling, and singularly like Dr. Malone, who, had a frame been set round him, might have hung over the fireplace too. (74)

In this college room, danger lurks in stasis, and these objects associated with ancient traditions wait, motionless, watching for an opportunity to capture the living within a heavy frame, to render human life immobile. This impression of a former college president, who disappears during the day, only to return in the evening lamplight, hints at the vampirism of patriarchal traditions and behaviors.

The walrus, like these furnishings in Kitty's home, is first described in the 1936 galley proofs with a vibrancy that seems quite humanlike. In fact, the walrus in this cut section of the proofs appears even more lively than it does in the published novel. Whereas, in the published text, the walrus first raises its head when Eleanor approaches Mrs. Pargiter's writing-table to write to Edward about their mother's decline, in the galley proofs, the walrus does not appear until after Mrs. Pargiter's death, and then it does so with an uncanny vitality. In this unpublished

¹³ Kitty's home at St. Katherine's College, Oxford, should not be confused with St. Catherine's (Catz), Oxford. St. Catz was not founded until 1962.

passage, Morris and Eleanor, following Mrs. Pargiter's funeral, deliberate on what they can give their cousin in memory of their mother:

“We must find a book to give cousin James,” said Morris. He looked vaguely at the bookcase where there were bound copies of standard works.

“Or perhaps something that Mama had used?” said Eleanor. She glanced at the writing-table. Martin's Walrus met her eye. She looked away. (58)

The walrus eerily transforms into a lively thing here. When Eleanor looks at it, it looks back. It turns around the gaze and makes its desires known. That Eleanor looks away from the walrus's gaze indicates her discomfort. Indeed, this passage was initially intended to appear at the beginning of the novel, at a point at which Eleanor would certainly have felt apprehension if not guilt for her desire to give away a token of her mother as well as a representation of the patriarchal ideologies in which her family's lives are entrenched. To confront the walrus's gaze and to give it away would be a rejection of her family's lifestyle, a rejection of her very upbringing. And so, she looks away. She backs down from the walrus's gaze, because she is not yet ready to take such a stand.

This encounter with the walrus is uncanny. The pen-wipe, already an animate form in the shape of a walrus, takes on animate behavior when it gazes back at Eleanor. Its gaze calls into question whether the lifeless object might, in fact, be alive. In a sense, the walrus is a lively thing in that it is aquiver with vibrating atoms and vibrant energy. As Eleanor, in the novel, later wonders, though atoms, like in a dance, group together and spring a part, how do they “compose what people” call “a life?” (348). It seems likely, from my research of other pen-nib wipers in comparison to Woolf's description of the walrus pen-wiper, that, like most other animal-shaped wipers from the era, Eleanor's walrus is made of bronze, which is an alloy made up of different

metals. As Jane Bennett finds, in *Vibrant Matter*, because of flaws in the composition of metal objects, these things are always moving and thus full of vitality: as she explains, “the crystalline structure of metal is full of holes,” and atoms quiver around these “vacancies,” creating a “metallic vitality” (59). To be sure, the walrus, despite all the human meanings it embodies, also possesses its own agenda and the power to animate and make things happen. A walrus-brush is not always just a walrus-brush, then. If Woolf had left this passage in the final manuscript, *The Years* would be quite a different novel.

As it is, however, Eleanor’s “moments of being” in the published 1880 chapter facilitate her later ability to see and think about things in a different light. Indeed, as the 1891 chapter of the novel opens, eleven years have passed since Mrs. Pargiter’s death, and, though the walrus remains on the writing-table at which Eleanor now sits, things are beginning to shift, and this movement produces a tension between the past and present:

It’s awfully queer, she thought, touching the ink-corroded patch of bristle on the back of Martin’s walrus with the point of her pen, that *that* should have gone on all these years. That solid object might survive them all. If she threw it away it would still exist somewhere or other. But she never had thrown it away because it was a part of older things—her mother for example ... (88)

Eleanor, over time, gains confidence and authority in her position. As she sits at her table figuring the accounts, she “decidedly” says, “three times eight ... is twenty-four” (88). While Eleanor does not receive a formal education like her brothers, she learns through experience. When she carries her account books to her father’s study to collect a check for the bills, he calls out, “Here’s the housekeeper!” (86). While the title of “housekeeper” may seem ironic,

especially because the position is likely an unpaid one, it does denote the independence of employment.

Eleanor's independence carries her about London, from committee meetings, where she shows her modernity by pulling "herself together" and giving "her opinion" (93), to the courtroom to see Morris, who looks "unfamiliar" in his robe and "odd" in his wig (105). As she leaves the conventional space of the courtroom and heads toward Trafalgar Square, she feels "vaguely that something" is "happening" (109). Bits of news float to her: "paper-boys ... dealing out papers with unusual rapidity," "a placard ... crumpled across a boy's legs," "'Death' ... in very large black letters," and then the crumpled placard reveals "another word: 'Parnell'" (109). For Eleanor, everything stops: "the whole scene" freezes "into immobility. A man" is "joined to a pillar; a lion" is "joined to a man; they" seem to be "stilled, connected, as if they" will "never move again" (109). This stasis and connection indicate Eleanor's thoughts. She is caught in a moment, but this moment is connected to another moment, and that moment is connected to another. As she moves closer to Trafalgar Square, the lamps are "being lit," and the paper-boys are "crying, Parnell ... Parnell" (110). This combination of the lamplight and the news of Parnell's death, along with the tension between past traditions and modern experiences, provokes a "moment of being," in which Eleanor is "conscious" of "two worlds; one flowing in wide sweeps overhead, the other tip-tapping circumscribed upon the pavement" (110). These two worlds recall the 1880 chapter's tension between life and death. Here, Eleanor, with the sound of death floating in the air around her is carried back to Delia's dream—"What a dream ... what a dream" (109). These two worlds circle one another and collide in loss.

The tension that Eleanor feels in 1891 propels the novel forward to the 1908 chapter. In 1908, Eleanor still lives at Abercorn Terrace with her father, who retains memories of the past by

hoarding newspaper clippings (143), and with Crosby, who “doesn’t hold with new inventions” and “won’t trust herself in the Tube” (145). Things have changed for Eleanor, despite living amidst so many ties to the past. When she glances at her writing-table, for example, the “walrus, with a worn patch in its bristles,” is no longer there (149). The walrus’s appearance has changed over the years, from “spotted” to “corroded,” and now “worn,” but its absence is most intriguing in light of its last appearance, when Eleanor claimed that even if she were to toss it out, it would continue to exist. If, as Merry M. Pawlowski argues, Woolf inserts “fault lines” between the chapters as a means of challenging linear time and, in turn, resisting the male-controlled “unfolding of history” through multiple perspectives that balance global experiences with everyday experiences (76), then it seems likely that the gap in which the walrus disappears is intentional on Woolf’s part. The walrus’s disappearance during one of these gaps is a reminder of other missing moments—global and national events; births, weddings, and deaths; and “moments of being” and “non-being”—the moments that structure the characters’ lives and lead to change. Woolf, by not showing the disappearance, also drives home Eleanor’s point about the walrus’s persistence. For Eleanor, it persists here even in its physical absence.

Colonel Pargiter, of course, as a British officer who has served all over the British Empire—“India, Africa, Egypt” (4)—represents the version of *history* that represses the stories of others. By 1913, however, the Colonel is dead. Crosby has moved from Abercorn Terrace, because Eleanor plans to sell the home. But in Crosby’s rooms on the top floor of a small house, she has created “a look of Abercorn Terrace” through an assemblage of things that she hoarded throughout her years of employment with the family:

Indian elephants, silver vases, the walrus that she had found in the waste-paper basket one morning, when the guns were firing for the old Queen’s funeral—there they all were.

She arranged them askew on the mantelpiece, and when she had hung the portraits of the family—some in wedding-dress, some in wigs and gowns, and Mr Martin in his uniform in the middle because he was her favourite—it was quite like home. (208)

Here, Woolf confirms Eleanor's assertion about Mrs. Pargiter's walrus—now Crosby's walrus. The walrus does, in fact, continue to exist, and it does so on two levels. First, the walrus, as a lively thing, persists in its physical state. And when Crosby dies, the walrus might be repurposed, recycled, or reused, but it will still continue to exist in some form. Even if no one rescues it from the waste-paper basket following Crosby's death, it will continue to exist somewhere. Second, if the walrus is shorthand for patriarchal power, then for Crosby to rescue it from the waste-paper basket as the guns are firing for Queen Victoria's burial indicates that Eleanor tosses out the walrus on 4 February 1901, which, in turn, implies a rejection of those traditional Victorian values that infuse the walrus. When Eleanor throws out the walrus, then, she rejects the fatality of her possible future. Indeed, Pawlowski's point that "stasis is death" (84), is significant in terms of Eleanor's removal of something that, in 1891, she retains as "a part of older things" (88), because her willingness to let go of the past, to what is dead, implies an embrace of the future and of life.

Crosby's act of taking the walrus from the waste-paper basket and arranging it on her mantelpiece, on the other hand, indicates an older generation's yearning to hold on to the conservative values that have defined not only the nation but also their lives. This passage in which Crosby recovers the walrus as Queen Victoria is buried resonates with a passage in H.G. Wells' 1917 novel *The Soul of a Bishop*: "His thoughts were of a sort not uncommon in those days. The world was strangely restless. Since the passing of Victoria the Great there had been an accumulating uneasiness in the national life. It was as if some compact and dignified paper-

weight had been lifted from people's ideas, and as if at once they had begun to blow about anyhow" (26). The walrus is, metaphorically—maybe literally, too—as heavy as a paperweight; thus, when Eleanor tosses out the walrus, she also discards Victorianism and the conservative, subjugated conventions associated with it; she attempts to “make it new,” as Woolf's modernist contemporaries would later exclaim. But Crosby, like Wells' characters, feels uneasy with the idea of losing that weight, so in reclaiming the walrus, Crosby ensures that these traditions will continue to be upheld, if only on her mantel-piece. However, the askew positioning of these things suggests liveliness, as if these relics' energy inhibits pretense. If Eleanor's act is, indeed, a yearning for a more modern society, then to toss out the walrus at the turn of the century when fountain pens were being used more widely and dip pens less so, also suggests that the walrus, as a pen nib wipe, has lost its usefulness for Eleanor. As a lively thing, however, it will always become something else, something more, without ever losing the past that infuses it: it will always be a relic of a child's love for his mother, a young woman's memento of her lost mother, and an elderly servant woman's souvenir of a family that she perceived as her own, even when they thought of her as an outsider.

While the walrus, at the beginning of the novel, is part of an assemblage of lively things on Mrs. Pargiter's writing-table, here, in the middle of the novel, it becomes part of a larger narrative on Crosby's mantelpiece. The walrus moves locations and it joins different objects, yet the narrative remains strikingly similar. In “Phases of Fiction,” Woolf suggests that “solid objects” are patriarchal tools for constructing a sense of stability. Woolf, echoing a line in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* that asserts poets to be “the only truth-tellers now left to God, / The only speakers of essential truth” (1.859-60), ironically labels writers such as Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, and Anthony Trollope the “great truth-tellers” (“Phases of

Fiction” 58). For Woolf, these male writers stress “the very facts that most reassure us of stability in real life, upon money, furniture, food, until we seem wedged among solid objects in a solid universe” (“Phases of Fiction” 58). Eleanor refuses to be wedged into this narrative any longer. She is unable to live fully in an era in which men—her father and her brothers—control her life, which may, in part, indicate her reasons for not marrying the “old white walrus with the whiskers,” as North and Peggy refer to Sir William Whatney (375). When the walrus pen-nib wipe moves from Eleanor’s inherited writing-desk to Crosby’s mantelpiece, it joins a new assemblage in which Crosby recreates the time and space of nineteenth-century Abercorn Terrace, because this is a world in which she is comfortable.

Crosby knows and understands this traditional narrative of the past. It is a *history* in which importance is signified by uniforms,¹⁴ and one in which women are always behind the scenes as wives and mothers. Indeed, here on Crosby’s mantelpiece, the portraits of family members in wigs and gowns, military uniforms, and even wedding dresses reveal an investment in patriarchal traditions. Because patriarchy is always entangled with capitalism and technology, like the silver candlestick from Mrs Pargiter’s writing-desk, Crosby’s silver vases could be practical objects intended to hold candles and flowers, but in these assemblages, they point to money made through the British Empire, which, in turn, points to the Indian elephants. That Eleanor throws away the walrus in 1901, at the end of what we perceive as the Victorian era, points to her embrace of modernism: out with the old. In displaying these things together,

¹⁴ As Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*, the elaborate dress of men in certain professions—law, religion, military, academics—represents a link to patriarchy, which is but a step away from fascism, and fascism leads to war (23-27).

however, Crosby restores the time and space in which she, as the Pargiter's longtime servant is needed and valued, and, in doing so, also reestablishes outdated nineteenth-century traditions, because it was a time in which, like the walrus-shaped pen-nib wipe, she had a purpose; she was needed.

While the "Present Day" chapter, full of flashbacks, seems to collapse the time that has passed since Crosby was needed, time, as Woolf reveals, is not linear but emerges as a pattern. Here at the end of the novel, for example, Woolf varies her phrase "lamps were being lit" to "lights were being lit" (311). This shift preserves the pattern that is established throughout the novel, but the slight change is an indication of progress, which people tend to read as forward movement. Of course, we only perceive time as moving forward because we have agreed to accept that it does so. However, in this final chapter, Eleanor begins to perceive time's linearity as a fabrication:

He was looking at the lady. She seemed upheld by their gaze; vibrating under it. And suddenly it seemed to Eleanor that it had all happened before. So a girl had come in that night in the restaurant: had stood, vibrating, in the door. She knew exactly what he was going to say. He had said it before, in the restaurant. He is going to say, She is like a ball on the top of a fishmonger's fountain. As she thought it, he said it. Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought. (351)

Through the entire novel, Woolf has been working up to this moment. Through her technique of diffractive writing, the past becomes the present. As Peggy, listening earlier as Eleanor begins stories that she does not finish, thinks, “Another door had been opened. Old age must have endless avenues, stretching away and away down its darkness ... and now one door opened and then another” (315).

If Eleanor is able to open doors, then Rose can surely shut doors. Woolf’s diffraction, then, allows Rose to evict the terrifying man from her memories, to shut him out. While certainly her experience with this man beneath the gas lamp is traumatizing, Rose’s childhood perspective facilitates a memory of the incident that transforms her from a little girl in a pink frock to a heroine. Rose resists the walrus’s attempt to consume her youthful life and instead embraces her own transformation from a subject-object to an agentic body-thing. Though Colonel Pargiter, not Rose, fights during the Mutiny, Rose, who makes “an odd angle with her head thrown back ... as if she were a military man” (340), opens the doors through which emerges a past that was never present, a past in which she is a powerful and heroic—and, of course, imperial—British officer on a mission. Rose’s memories are moments of becoming, as she remakes the past through memory, but they are also “moments of being.” Boundaries are never a matter of black and white, but rather a flow of colors: “Nothing” is “fixed; nothing” is “known” (363).

Indeed, things, such as the walrus, are neither fixed nor known, and neither are bodies. Just before Eleanor recalls the walrus for the last time, she wonders, “But where” is “she? In what room? in which of the innumerable rooms?” (405). She seems to have wandered into Abercorn Terrace’s drawing-room in 1891, and her musings on the walrus from the 1891 chapter reemerge here in the Present Day chapter. The 1891 appearance of the walrus is the first of the two times in the text that Eleanor refers to it as a “solid object,” one that “might survive them

all” (88), and the second instance comes here in the Present Day, as she is “suffused with a feeling of happiness” when she realizes that “the solid object, the “ink-corroded walrus,” has “vanished” (405). These two appearances should be discussed together in light of both Woolf’s diffraction and Bradshaw’s notes to *The Years*, in which he finds “solid objects” to be “Woolf’s favourite shorthand for Victorian things and attitudes” (312). In the 1891 passage, the walrus is physically present and will continue to exist even after the family is gone; even if Eleanor were to throw it away, it would still exist somewhere and in some form. Though the walrus, in this Present Day passage, has “vanished” from Eleanor’s sight, as she anticipates in this first passage, the walrus continues to exist, reemerging in the 1913 chapter after disappearing in the 1908 chapter.

Things change, then, but they also stay the same. In “Street Haunting: A London Adventure,” Woolf suggests that things “enforce the memories of our own experience” (177). Indeed, this idea proves to be true throughout *The Years*. For Eleanor, the walrus, even in its absence, becomes a touchstone through which Eleanor grounds her experience. If time is not just linear but also emerges through other patterns, then things offer the more dependable markers of time. At the end of the novel, Eleanor wants “to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present, and the future, until it” shines, “whole, bright, deep with understanding” (406). Eleanor, from her interactions with the walrus, knows that stasis is always a danger to what is at stake if patriarchal traditions are allowed to repress other vibrant narratives. But through the patterns that Eleanor uncovers, she perceives progress. “Does everything then come over again a little differently?” she asks (351). The answer, of course, is yes. As Woolf puts it in *Three Guineas*, “The years change things” (39). She would, I think, be pleased to know that *The Years* changes things, too.

CHAPTER 3

THROUGH THE TOPAZ CROSS: CURATING HOME IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

“Not for the world, not for the world. A cross is the last thing I would wear as a trinket.”

Dorothea shuddered slightly.

–George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 12

Life, it seems, is not so easily defined. And ‘things,’ even those that are totally inorganic and undeniably inanimate, sometimes behave as though they were alive, on occasion even sentient.

–Lyall Watson, *The Nature of Things: The Secret Life of Inanimate Objects*, p.11

During my 2016 visit to Jane Austen’s House Museum in Chawton, Hampshire, I wandered through the home in which Austen had lived and wrote. I stood where she once stood and gazed down into the garden below her bedroom window. I studied a mourning brooch that contained a lock of her hair. And I stood in awe over the small table on which she wrote some of the most celebrated novels in English literature. But I was most drawn to a small exhibit that held a Greek-shaped cross pendant (see fig. 1). Displayed simply between a pane of glass and a dark backdrop, the cross was composed of five topaz stones. Like the gaps in our ever-shifting knowledge of Austen, this piece of jewelry is a bit of an enigma. At the time of my visit, a

curatorial note identified this piece as the cross given to Jane Austen in 1801 by her brother Charles, who purchased it along with other jewelry for his two sisters, with Royal Navy prize money that he received for his part in capturing a French ship (*Topaz Cross*).¹⁵



Figure 1: This image of the topaz cross, taken 23 October 2016, is printed with permission of Jane Austen's House Museum.

¹⁵ The second topaz pendant—a Latin-shaped cross—was not on display at the time of my visit. According to Sue Dell in the Collections Department, it was being conserved. Now, it is back on display. Dell verifies that, based on a daguerreotype of a family member, the Greek cross was mistakenly identified as belonging to Jane. Since the time of my visit, however, that belief has been disproved: there is currently no evidence to indicate which cross belonged to which sister.

As soon as I noticed the topaz cross, I connected it—as any close reader of *Mansfield Park* likely would have done—to the amber one William gives Fanny in the novel, especially since the cross appeared to hang from a simple gold chain that resembled the novel’s description of the necklace that Edmund Bertram purchases for Fanny to wear with *her* cross. And, indeed, the second part of the curator’s note confirmed that this cross *did* serve as Austen’s inspiration for William’s gift. But what about the chain that was displayed with the topaz cross? In a letter written to her sister Cassandra between the 26th and 27th of May 1801, Austen mentions that Charles had also purchased chains for his sisters to wear with their topaz crosses: she writes, “He has received 30£ for his share of the privateer & expects 10£ more—but of what avail is it to take prizes if he lays out the produce in presents to his Sisters. He has been buying Gold chains & Topaze Crosses for us” (*Jane Austen’s Letters* 95). It seemed puzzling to me that, although this chain and cross were displayed together, the curator’s text made no mention of the chain. From Dell, I learned that this chain had been donated, along with the crosses, by Charles Beecher Hogan: according to a letter written by Hogan and dated 15 October 1966, he had purchased the chain and crosses together as a wedding gift for his wife, and, at the same time, he also acquired the letter in which Jane mentions Charles’s procurement of the crosses and chains. Dell notes that Hogan, in his letter, recalls securing all of these items from a bookseller who had obtained them from a member of the Austen family. Hence, while there is currently no *known* evidence to confirm that this chain is, in fact, one of the same chains purchased by Charles, Dell points to the likelihood that it is one of the originals based on these clues.

When I leaned in for a closer look at this chain, I noticed a small gap between it and the topaz cross: the chain was not attached to the cross—likely for preservation reasons. Here, this gap might serve, too, as a disconnect that reminds us of how objects, like this cross, can traverse

the space between the literal and the literary. These objects, then, may act as metaphorical looking-glasses through which we are able to reconceive the impossible as possible. Indeed, reading *Mansfield Park* through this topaz cross calls attention to Fanny's increasing agency through her curation of bodies and objects—or “things.” For objects become “things” when they transcend their intended purpose to become something different, something more. As Brown, the creator of thing theory, explains, “thingness” happens when objects stop performing their intended purpose, when our relationship with them changes from a separate subject and object to a “subject-object relation” (4). Prior to Fanny's residence in the former school room, which, now vacated by her cousins, is known as the East room, objects were abandoned and buried under a mass of other unwanted and forgotten belongings.¹⁶ But, through Fanny's care, these objects take on vitality and new meaning: they become *things*. Like the links of a chain, Fanny's connections to others manifest through these things in the East Room. And, through her esteem and care for

¹⁶ In *Jane and Me: My Austen Heritage*, Caroline Jane Knight, one of the last Knights to live at Chawton House, describes a space at Chawton that seems strikingly similar to the East room in *Mansfield Park*: “The wide unused corridor, originally built for servants to move around the first floor without the need to go through the family's bedroom chambers, was crammed with unused and broken furniture, dusty boxes, picture frames, books, riding boots, coats and ornaments—decades of family possessions stored with good intentions for later use or disposal” (28). While it seems unlikely that the servants' corridor would have been filled with discarded objects during Austen's time, it may be that they objects had moved from another space over the years. Austen, then, could have based the objects in Fanny's East room on similar forgotten objects at Chawton House.

these things and their human counterparts, Fanny's value to and agency within the Bertram family increase, as she, like the center stone of the topaz cross, comes to occupy a central point in two intersecting families.

What if, rather than conceiving of the gems on Austen's necklace as a Greek cross, we were to perceive the ornament as a collision of two perpendicular lines, the center stone made agentic through its position at the point of contact where it binds the two lines into one inseparable form? What if we were then to apply that understanding to Fanny and her family? Buttressed by four oval gemstones, the center stone of Austen's cross is a bit rounder than the other stones. Fanny's character, too, is shaped a bit differently than those of her family members—where she is well-rounded, the Bertrams and the Prices are narrowminded and self-absorbed—even Edmund. The stones, then, reflect these forms, as Fanny's character is rounded by the opposing forces of her nuclear and extended families, while those of the Bertram and Price family members are less unrestricted by outside forces. As Caroline Levine suggests in *Forms*, things take their orders from forms (10), and, when forms collide, they produce agency (149). While it may seem that Fanny's position at the intersection of these two families would be one of weakness, since, as Levine explains, bodies and things are linked with ideas through continuously “unfolding networks” (130), Fanny herself actively creates vitality when she curates these dynamic networks, giving objects new or different meanings as things. As Gail Marshall puts it in “Curating the Victorians,” the act of curation not only preserves but also creates (164-165); indeed, through Fanny's curation of things that stand in for the members of these intersecting families, she becomes agentic as a central figure who binds and supports the two families.

The root of *curator* is the Latin *cura*, which means *care*, so *curator* essentially means *caretaker*. Although we usually think of curatorial work as that which takes place in museums, in *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, David Balzer clarifies that curation does not only take place in the art world; curators are found in unexpected places (16). Through Fanny's curation, the things in the East room become something more than what they were intended to be; in a sense, they become subjects, as each thing is either Fanny's "friend" and prompts her to think of a friend (119). Within this space, Fanny is able to escape "the pains of tyranny, of ridicule, and neglect," because, at the sight of these friendly things, bad dissolves into good, and "the whole" blends "together, so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction" has its "charm" (119-20). Outside of the East room, Fanny's importance lies with what she can do for the Bertrams, but within the East room, she forms the center of all relations. To put Fanny's position into a theoretical perspective, consider material culture theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's point that objects have power not only to place people in social hierarchies but also to symbolize their places within a network of valued relationships (23). In perceiving the objects in the East room as indicative of the Bertrams' affection for her, Fanny does not passively fail to recognize that each gift is either an unwanted and discarded object or a tool that is intended by the giver to distinguish Fanny's place within—or rather *outside of*—the Bertram family dynamics; she actively *refuses* to perceive these gifts as such.

Gifts such as work-boxes and netting-boxes are, Eileen Cleere suggests, a reminder that Fanny works within the household to pay for her keep (117). Fanny, however, never acknowledges that, though Tom gives her many of these boxes under the guise of gifts, *he* directly benefits each time *she* uses the tools within these boxes to mend his clothing. Instead, Fanny sees *herself* in debt for these "kind remembrances" (120), because she insists on

perceiving these objects as true gifts—gifts given freely, without anticipating compensation, with intent to make the recipient feel important. To others, Fanny’s objects are not true gifts; they are things acquired when their initial owners no longer want them, or because the presenters mean to profit from their “generosity.” But through Fanny’s resolve and belief, these unwanted objects become true gifts to her, part of a curated collection that represents the Bertrams’ kindness, even as they incorporate symbols of Fanny’s insider-outsider status. Although the family gives Fanny more than they would give to a servant, she receives less than what she might expect as a more intimate family member. Still, instead of reinforcing Fanny’s position as an outsider, her relationship with and curation of these gifts centralizes her position within the family, thus destabilizing its hierarchy.

Fanny’s inferior position within in the Bertram’s home is reinforced by her impoverished younger years with her birth family, and her experiences in both homes shape the way she perceives the world as an adult. Even before her arrival at Mansfield Park, Aunt Norris recommends putting Fanny in the attic:

“I suppose, sister, you will put the child in the little white attic, near the old nurseries. It will be much the best place for her, so near Miss Lee, and not far from the girls, and close by the housemaids, who could either of them help dress her you know, and take care of her clothes, for I suppose you would not think it fair to expect Ellis to wait on her as well as the others. Indeed, I do not see that you could possibly place her any where else.” (8)

In dispatching her to the attic, Mrs. Norris makes clear that Fanny’s position in the Bertram family is not one of a social equal; she is, like Miss Lee, the governess, caught in a space somewhere between servant and family. As it is, Maria and Julia consider Fanny to be “cheap,” when they find she has “but two sashes” and has “never learnt French”; thus, when Fanny does

not appear to be impressed by their duet, Maria and Julia dismiss her with “a generous present of some of their least valued toys” (11). Thus, Mrs. Norris needn’t have worried, as Maria and Julia’s opinions coincide with her own. By offering Fanny their unwanted toys in place of human compassion, they establish a pattern that is to continue through the years and throughout the novel.

Ironically, Mrs. Norris does Fanny the greatest of favors when she relegates her to the attic. After all, as Gaston Bachelard notes in *The Poetics of Space*, attic stairs tend to be “steeper and more primitive” than other stairs (47). Certainly, Fanny’s attic’s crude entry would discourage most of the Bertrams from visiting. The ten-year-old Fanny who has just arrived from Portsmouth would not, however, consider these stairs as crude; in fact, she likely would have thought them quite roomy in comparison to the stairway at Portsmouth. When Fanny returns to Portsmouth as an adult, she is struck “beyond her imagination” at the “smallness of the rooms above and below ... and the narrowness of the passage and staircase” (304). Hence, while the isolated location of Fanny’s attic does not offer her the same comforts that the other children enjoy, it not only provides her with much-needed space of her own, which will become vital to her developing understanding of the world, but what seems primitive to the Bertrams must seem quite spacious to Fanny. And, once the schoolroom is vacated by the family and becomes known as the East room, Fanny quietly claims access to this space, as well. The space resonates with the Bertrams’ unwanted objects, as Mrs. Norris is resigned to Fanny’s “having the use of what nobody else” wants—but only so long as the room is not made too comfortable with a fire (119). After living so many years in the attic, a space too small for her books and likely too dark for her plants, the East room, though cold, is spacious enough to offer Fanny physical relief from her cramped quarters and a transformation of her position as an insider-outsider.

Since Austen's narrator only takes us into the East room when Fanny is present, the space seems akin to what Balzer describes as a "Cabinet of Curiosities": royalty, aristocrats, and people of the upper classes often built "cabinets"—or rooms—and filled them with important objects, with "the curator ... positioned importantly within the cabinet" (35).¹⁷ Enclosed with these things in the East room, Fanny gains confidence by creating a safe haven not only for herself but also for the things that she considers her friends. By perceiving objects as friends, Fanny humanizes them so that they appear to need her support as much as she needs their friendship. Writing about the ways the world takes shape through orientations, Sarah Ahmed argues that proximity matters: "we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken" (234). By bringing these objects into her space, Fanny constructs gateways into the world and to the people beyond the East room. As Ahmed puts it, "The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the 'here' of the body and the 'where' of its dwelling" (236). Fanny's world can unfold in various possible directions; which direction it unfolds, then, always depends on which object she bestows her attention.

Fanny, sensitive to what the objects in the East room have to say, becomes their confidante; she listens and empathizes with these things that, like her, have been neglected and forgotten, and, through her encounters with these dynamic things, Fanny becomes more perceptive than the Bertram siblings. Separated from her cousins by mere walls, Fanny experiences her connections to them through temporal and spatial negotiation. They may be

¹⁷ See, too, "Fanny Price's Domestic Assemblages in Austen's *Mansfield Park*," in which Henna Marian Messina argues that Fanny's interactions with these objects within the space of the East room can provide an understanding of her subjectivity.

spatially proximate, but they seem distant, almost as though they occupy a different temporal dimension than Fanny. Fanny finds stimulation in the space between past and present, and, here, she curates her objects into a vibrant display of stability, so that she always feels secure in the East room, despite her disengagement from the family. While a home offers a sense of stability, the things that fill a home are always reminders of relationships to others; thus, Fanny cultivates a home in the East room and, through the liveliness of her things, fills it with feelings that represent the intimacy of family.

For Fanny, having claim to the East room means having space for the Bertrams' refuse to take refuge in her care. When the Bertrams discard their belongings, they also reject their memories and traces of themselves. But, through the act of curation, Fanny rescues not only the matter, but also the meaning: she curates a treasure house of memories and relics of the Bertrams' lives. Fanny's act of curation is both vengeful and loving: where the Bertrams objectify Fanny by perceiving her as merely another unwanted object in the East room, she reveals her preference for these other unwanted objects by substituting them for the Bertrams. At the same time, in collecting and displaying objects that reveal the Bertrams' faults—objects and faults that the family, of course, wishes to remain hidden—she orders them so as to allow them to transform into valuable things: objects on exhibit in her museum of the Bertrams' better selves. And in caring for these objects, Fanny comes to care for the Bertrams.

Balzer defines curators to be those who claim value regardless of whether value exists (32). Through Fanny's selective curatorial work, however, she also uncovers value that *already* exists, value that has been suppressed by those who do not understand its meaning. Because the Bertrams factitiously place value on costlier items, viewing value through a social filter, they deem Fanny's things worthless. For Fanny, on the other hand, the value of something lies in its

connections to people and to her own memories. Through her care and arrangement, and through her esteem for those who have left their marks on these pieces, she reveals new meaning and, as a result, value.

The “faded footstool of Julia’s work” (119), for example, reveals traces of Julia’s character and retains remnants of her physical body. And, in this stool, Fanny treasures what Julia cannot—her own material person and the traces of her material past as a second daughter—as well as the connection that Fanny feels to Julia but cannot express. Even when Julia, like Fanny, is neglected after she bows out of the family’s performance of *Lovers’ Vows* in defiance of Maria’s flirtatious behavior toward Henry, she fails to see herself linked to Fanny: with “no outward fellowship between them,” Julia makes “no communication,” and Fanny takes “no liberties”—they are “two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny’s consciousness” (128). While it may occasionally seem that Fanny reads too much into her own misery, this point, at which she empathizes with Julia, but Julia never thinks of her, suggests Julia’s self-absorption as she struggles to contain her feelings. Aimee E. Newell compares “women who left their stories in stitches” to “women who kept traditional diaries” (142). Much as a diary page might indicate emotion through changes in penmanship, or even with the mark of dried tearstains, so Julia’s footstool, in being “too ill done for the drawing-room” (119), reflects her struggles as a second daughter who is always competing with and losing to her older sister, Maria. Her frustration must come out in one way or another; when she cannot voice it, and when she cannot grasp how it might connect her to others, including Fanny, it seems to come out in her behavior.

Indeed, since young women did not usually undertake the embroidery of footstools until they had demonstrated expertise on their samplers, for Julia’s work to be consigned to the East room suggests that either her work was spoiled by impatience or temper, or that Maria’s

footstool simply looked nicer and thus took the place of honor in the drawing room. While Julia stitched her experience and character into this footstool, she also sewed vestiges of her physical body into the upholstery. As she handled the strands of colored thread, they would have absorbed oils from her fingers, and the needles would have pressed her skin cells into the fiber, leaving traces of her younger self in her childhood home long after she ceases to live there, perhaps even after she ceases to be.

Julia is not the only person to leave her mark on the East room. The space is also haunted by the memories and corporeal remnants of past artists, those whose relics reside in the three transparencies and the glass panes to which they are affixed. Though Jane Stabler describes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century transparencies as “pictures drawn on transparent material to be hung in windows and illuminated by daylight” (406), the fact is, light could stream through the transparencies in multiple directions. After dark, for example, anyone standing outside of the window would be able to see the images if they were backlit by candlelight, because, as Isobel Armstrong explains in *Victorian Glassworlds*, glass creates “an aura of glamour and duplicity—a ‘double lustre’—in the two-way passage of vision. Gazing out, or gazing in, experience is invisibly shaped from both sides of the film of glass” (27). Anyone who faces the windows from within the room at night, on the other hand, will have a wholly different experience, as glass takes on a mirroring effect. As readers, we are always outsiders looking in at Fanny, our perception colored by the things in the East room. Through the phenomenon of her reflection, though, Fanny can simultaneously be inside and outside: when Fanny faces the window at night, as she presumably does, with her image transposed as part of the scenes, she is concurrently placed within and outside of Mansfield Park, both here and there, near and far. Fanny is a “gazer from within” (27), to borrow Armstrong’s term, as she claims not only the space within the East

room and the view outside the glass, but also her own reflection, changing the way Fanny views the world and her position within it.

As an outsider in the Bertram family, Fanny perceives the amateurly-colored transparencies in this room to be as valuable as the Bertrams perceive the many paintings that likely decorate the walls downstairs. Unlike most paintings,¹⁸ though, the scenes on transparencies come to life when light waves stream through the images. Armstrong notes, “In the nineteenth century glass became a third or middle term: it interposed an almost invisible layer of matter between the seer and the seen—the sheen of a window, the silver glaze of the mirror, the convexity or concavity of the lens” (23). With these transparent images pasted to the see-through panes, images on and through the glass are layered, but so are the remnants of the artists. As Armstrong suggests, “To look through glass in the ... nineteenth century was most likely to look through and by means of the breath of an unknown artisan. The congealed residues of somebody else’s breath remained in the window, ... traces of the workman’s body ... annealed in the substance he worked” (24). And much the same can be said of these three transparencies. That is, neither the glass nor the transparencies are purely transparent: they each contain fingerprints, scratches, and corporeal traces.

Transparencies were produced by accomplished young ladies in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Those interested in transparencies could either purchase a kit or draw their own image on a transparent material, which they could then paint and hang in their windows.

¹⁸ Holman Hunt’s original copy of *The Light of the World* (1851-53), displayed in the Chapel at Keble College, Oxford, is one exception to this claim. Viewers can access a switch to turn on a light behind the painting. The effect fills the image with vitality.

Presumably, Maria, Julia, and possibly even Fanny painted, if not fully crafted, these scenes during their school days, and as they worked with their heads bent close to the material, wet paint would have arrested vestiges of their bodies within these works, for example particles of their breath as their lungs expelled air and specks of saliva that flew from their lips during spurts of laughter or fits of coughing and sneezing. When Fanny looks at the East room transparencies, then, remnants of schoolgirl artists come together with those embedded in the glass by other unknown artisans to merge with not only the painted image and the outside view but also with Fanny's memories, thus creating a reflective experience. In some sense, her experience here exceeds, even as it invokes, Wordsworth's spots of time, because this convergence of images, memories, emotion, and reflection is also a celebration of matter's vitality.

As many critics have noted, the selection and arrangement of these three Wordsworthian images—a cave in Italy; Tintern Abbey, whose ruins are located in Eastern Wales; and the moonlight reflecting off water in the Lake District of northwest England—speak to Fanny's Romantic ideals.¹⁹ But for Fanny to *choose* to display these three transparencies, and to arrange them together, suggests a sense of cosmopolitanism that these other critics have not acknowledged. Though these sites are all located far from Mansfield Park—and two of them in different countries—Fanny's appreciation for and familiarity with the scenes paint her a citizen of the world. Though it is true that the cosmopolitan figure is often depicted as someone who travels and interacts with other cultures, nineteenth-century homebound women could

¹⁹ For more on Fanny and the Romantics, see William Deresiewicz's *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* and Isobel Armstrong's "Bodily Things and Thingly Bodies: Circumventing the Subject-Object Binary."

demonstrate cosmopolitanism through expressions of sympathy, by putting themselves in the position of another and by feeling that person's emotion and response to the world.²⁰ Fanny's cosmopolitanism works in tandem with her tendency toward the curatorial, as she shows a sensitivity toward each object that she has selected for the East room.

To enter the East room when the rising sun is streaming through these transparent scenes is to be transported to a mystical space, a space in which Fanny's familiarity with and memories of the East room blend with the transparent images of places she knows only in her imagination. Objects in the East room come alive for Fanny with the vibrancy of transparent colors in the morning light. Affected by the sun's intensity as it pours through the transparencies and spills into the room, Fanny's things take on a semblance of life and become vibrant manifestations of her perceptions and feelings, as she can "scarcely see an object in that room" that does not have "an interesting remembrance connected with it" (119).

Fanny's penchant for connecting material objects to memories, and memories to friends, leads her to perceive things as friends, and these friendly things incite pleasant memories for Fanny, so that she only thinks of the Bertrams' goodness when she is surrounded by their gifts and hand-me-downs. However, her perception of things as friends eventually leads to an increased sense of guilt when she goes against the Bertrams' request that she perform a part in their performance of *Lovers' Vows*. With her denial, this guilt intensifies to the point that she perceives herself as becoming less important than even a play prop. As her cousins, along with the Crawfords, bustle about in preparation for their performance, only Fanny is "sad and

²⁰ For more on women and cosmopolitanism during the Romantic period, see Anne K. Mellor's "Embodied Cosmopolitanism and the British Romantic Woman Writer."

insignificant,” as she also has “no share in any thing; she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the East room, without being seen or missed,” and she thinks that she would prefer “almost ... any thing ... to this” (125). Up until this point, the East room has always been, for Fanny, a place to retreat and find comfort among her things. Now, however, she is made vulnerable by her associations between these things and her cousins.

To Fanny, the things in the East room are mementos of a shared past and tokens of love and affection; thus, she perceives them as entitling the Bertrams to her support. This time, then, when Fanny, feeling “agitated” and “doubting” (120), escapes to the East room, her things seem to turn on her. Instead of finding comfort among friends, she feels “undecided as to what she *ought to do*,” and her “doubts” increase as she walks “round the room” (120). No other room in the house has this same effect on Fanny’s conscience, not even the drawing room when it is occupied by the Bertrams themselves, but here, in the East room, the sight of her friendly things, including “present upon present ... from them” (120), provokes Fanny to question her own motives and righteousness:

Was she *right* in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for? what might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature—selfishness—and a fear of exposing herself? And would Edmund’s judgment, would his persuasion of Sir Thomas’s disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a determined denial in spite of all the rest? (120).

Fanny is aware that Sir Thomas would disapprove of his family becoming actors and transforming Mansfield Park into a theatre in his absence, yet her shame persists until his unexpected return puts an end to the play performance.

To grasp why Fanny's determination not to fall prey to her cousins' insistence wavers in the vibrancy of the East room, consider the mantel-piece, with its "collection of family profiles thought unworthy of being anywhere else" (120). Their arrangement is like a curiosity cabinet, as for Fanny to display them here asserts their importance to her and forces their visibility on anyone else who enters the room. Fanny's exhibit is, then, an assertion of value. Melissa Edmundson argues that, in displaying these profile portraits in the East room, Fanny sees the personality faults that the Bertrams attempt to hide. But if the Bertrams' silhouettes dehumanize the family in either character or form, Fanny has the power to rehumanize them. For that matter, she creates a confidant by anthropomorphizing Edmund's profile portrait: when she is agitated, she looks at it to see if she can "catch any of his counsel" (120). And, indeed, as Kirstyn Leuner points out, when Fanny, distressed over the *Lovers' Vows* performance, retreats to her room to beg advice from Edmund's profile, it is almost as if she conjures him up, as he suddenly appears at the East room door to discuss the very same topic with her (55). Although Edmund claims he has come "to consult" and to get Fanny's "opinion," his real intention is to convince Fanny that he has no choice but to act the part of Anhalt to Mary Crawford's Amelia (121). In claiming that he does not *want* to act but that he has no other options, he positions himself to appear selfless and justified rather than jealous of the stranger who would otherwise take the part of Mary's lover. Edmund's profile, then, turns out to be more consistent and truer than Edmund himself.

Even if Fanny does not consciously analyze and judge the Bertrams' silhouettes, however, her perception is colored by the nineteenth-century investment in phrenology and

physiognomy. Indeed, Fanny's focus on Edmund's profile intimates her search for phrenological evidence of benevolence in his silhouette. Edmund, of course, has his faults, just as the others do, but, over the years, he has gained Fanny's trust and devotion through his actions as "her champion and her friend"—he has "supported her cause, or explained her meaning, ... told her not to cry, or ... given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful" (119).

Whether Fanny takes her cue from pseudo-scientific readings of the Bertrams' profiles or relies on her own insight and understanding of their characters, she sympathizes, accepts, and loves her adopted family, not in spite of, but *because* of, their humanizing faults.

The Bertrams conceal their profiles in the East room to prevent them from exposing the family's faults, but Fanny hangs them in a privileged spot next to "a small sketch of a ship... with H.M.S. Antwerp at the bottom, in letters as tall as the main-mast," that was drawn by her brother William four years earlier (119). Together, the Bertrams' profiles and William's sketch create an effect of familial connections. William's drawing, however, stands out on its own terms, evoking an increasing sense of the nationalism that pervaded Britain in the nineteenth century. If, as Don Leggett suggests in exploring how a new historiography increases our understanding of naval history during the nineteenth century, the navy is "a socio-cultural force shaping the formation of identities and their representation, whether (variously) of the navy, sailors, the nation, the British Empire or masculinity" (152), then William's decision to send Fanny a drawing of his ship, like her act of hanging it next to the family profiles, reveals an act of artistic consciousness as well as an expression of his self-identity. William does not see himself as an individual but as an inseparable part of this ship, and from his letters to her, as well as her early years growing up in Portsmouth, a port city and naval base, Fanny would understand his self-perception to be a common mindset among sailors. If, as Csikszentmihalyi claims, an

object's most important role is to "stabilize and order the mind" (22), then William's drawing of the H.M.S. Antwerp asserts not only inner stability but also a steadiness that is perceptible to others. As a reflection of his home, career, nationality, masculinity, and personality, the image tells us who and what William Price is and values. Rather than perceiving himself foremost as William Price, he identifies himself as a loyal British sailor on one of Her Majesty's ships. And when William is promoted to second lieutenant of H.M.S. Thrush, he wishes for Fanny to see his new uniform, because it represents a change in his identity. In Csikszentmihalyi's terms, "the self is a fragile construction of the mind" (22); thus, to know William is to understand the fluidity of his identity as a naval man through the value he places on what he does as a caretaker for his family and his country. In giving Fanny something that is dear to him—a sketch of the ship he loves—and that he shaped with his hand and infused with his touch, William gives Fanny a real gift, a piece of himself. Curating this treasured gift next to the Bertram family profiles serves as a token of remembrance of William, as a fellow curator, a brother, and a friend on whom Fanny can always depend.

Sir Thomas, like William, becomes a caretaker of Fanny once he learns from Edmund of Fanny's loyalty to him and to Mansfield Park. To his father, Edmund reports, "We have all been more or less to blame ... every one of us, excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who judged rightly throughout who has been consistent. *Her* feelings have been steadily against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you. You will find Fanny every *thing* you could wish" (147, second emphasis is mine). Sir Thomas's return is key to Fanny's transformation, as Edmund's recommendation leads Sir Thomas to reconsider Fanny, and, indeed, as Edmund later reports to her, Sir Thomas now finds Fanny to be "very pretty" (154). This new opinion of Fanny's appearance—her "improved" complexion, countenance, and figure

(155)—transforms Fanny from an *object* to be cared for to a lively *thing* to be cared about. Even Henry Crawford finds, ““But I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price’s heart”” (179). And, while Mary recognizes that Henry’s fascination with Fanny is the result of Fanny’s indifference to Henry, she agrees that a “*little* love perhaps may animate and do her good”” (180). Mary’s remark is more accurate than she realizes; as Fanny has long known, when objects are perceived as treasures, they can come alive in new ways.

When William returns to England for a short break from his naval duties, he brings her an amber cross pendant from Sicily. If, as Joan Evans notes, during the early nineteenth century, amber was associated with *grisettes* (172), that is, with young working-class women, then this ornament is an appropriate piece for a young woman in Fanny’s position. Certainly, it is well-suited to her personality: Linda Young explains, nineteenth-century cross pendants, whether they were plain or ornate, expressed “piety and modesty” (170). Fanny, though, does not care for the cross for its monetary value; she treasures William’s gift for its sentimental meaning, for its connection to a much-loved and often-absent brother.

Fanny’s curatorial skills are challenged, of course, when William finds “a gold chain ... beyond his means” (199). At first, she strings a ribbon through the pendant and ties it around her neck, but as she prepares for a ball, she realizes that a ribbon will not do for such a formal occasion. When Mary Crawford re-gifts Fanny a gold chain that her own brother had given her, Fanny cannot conceive of this readiness to part with what she understands to be a treasured gift: she thinks, “To take what had been the gift of another person—of a brother too—impossible!—it must not be!” (203). As the narrator has previously pointed out, Mary is “very unlike” Fanny, as Mary, whose attention is “all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively,” perceives “nature, *inanimate nature*, with little observation (64; emphasis is mine). ““I have such

innumerable presents from him that it is quite impossible for me to value, or for him to remember half,” she assures Fanny. ““And as for this necklace, I do not suppose I have worn it six times; it is very pretty—but I never think of it”” (203).

Even after Fanny is persuaded that, to Mary, the necklace is just one chain out of a dozen, she remains reluctant to take it, because she is hesitant to be beholden to the woman Edmund loves. “But,” Fanny tells herself, this is “an unworthy feeling,” because Mary “anticipated her wants with a kindness” that identifies her as “a real friend” (203). With her acceptance, Fanny intends to place Mary’s necklace with her other treasures “in some favourite box in the East room” (204), and, in doing so, she will couple the necklace’s materiality with new meaning—for Fanny, to accept Mary’s necklace is to reluctantly accept Mary and, by extension, her brother.

As Fanny enters the East room, Mary’s generosity is overshadowed by the sight of “her cousin Edmund there writing at the table!” (204). He has hastily scribbled an unfinished note asking her to accept “this little trifle—a chain for William’s cross” (204). With Mary’s chain momentarily forgotten, Fanny exclaims, this chain is “the very *thing*, precisely what I wished for! this is the only ornament I have ever had a desire to possess. It will exactly suit my cross. They must and shall be worn together” (205; emphasis is mine). With Edmund’s gift in hand, Fanny realizes that wearing William’s cross on Mary’s necklace would result in a mismatched and confused display. Through Fanny’s understanding of value as an entanglement of people and matter, she feels compelled to create a manifestation of her unity with William and Edmund by attaching William’s cross to the never-ending links of Edmund’s chain and encircling herself so that the cross rests upon her heart. Fate seems to intervene, then, when Edmund’s chain fits perfectly while Mary’s necklace turns out to be too large to “go through the ring of the cross” (212). As a curator, Fanny senses that she has created the perfect arrangement, that which will

bring the greatest pleasure to William's cross and Edmund's chain, as when she wears them together, she sees and feels that they are "full of William and Edmund" (212). With these pieces in place, Fanny is then "able, without an effort, to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford's necklace too" (212). Through Fanny's curation, these ornaments become more than objects on display—they become inseparable parts of a whole. Creating something new and meaningful through arrangement, Fanny touches the things in her care, ordering them into different configurations, and forming engaging representations of people at their best.

As thrilled as Fanny is with Edmund's chain, his unfinished note endears her to him even more, because the note is unique to him. That is, anyone could have given Fanny this specific necklace, even Mary, if she had had it in her possession and, like Edmund, "endeavoured to consult the simplicity" of Fanny's "taste" (204). But only Edmund could have written this exact note:

... she seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing to her, as a treasure beyond all her hopes, and reading with the tenderest emotion these words, 'My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept'—locked it up with the chain, as the dearest part of the gift. It was the only thing approaching to a letter which she had ever received from him; she might never receive another; it was impossible that she ever should receive another so perfectly gratifying in the occasion and the style. Two lines more prized had never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author—never more completely blessed the researches of the fondest biographer. The enthusiasm of a woman's love is even beyond the biographer's. To her, the hand-writing itself, independent of any thing it may convey, is a blessedness. Never were such characters cut by any other human being, as Edmund's commonest hand-writing gave! This specimen, written in haste as it was,

had not a fault; and there was a felicity in the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of ‘My very dear Fanny,’ which she could have looked at for ever. (207-8)

Written by Edmund’s hand, this paper bears the mark of his bodily movement, and while he sits at Fanny’s desk, in her space, touching this slip of paper and forming these characters, he thinks only of her. Edmund’s pen is an extension of both his physical body and his mind, and this handwritten letter is a channel to his heart and feelings.

Handwritten letters have the power to unlock emotions. Time after time, Edmund verbally refers to his cousin as “my dear Fanny,” but only in this message does she become his “*very dear Fanny*.” Even when a note, like this one, has been hastily written, the physical act of writing by hand allows time for memories to emerge and to become material. And the memories that filter through Edmund’s mind while he writes have the power to endear Fanny to him even more than if they were speaking face-to-face, because the act of writing engages Edmund’s eyes with the page and directs his imagination toward the recipient.

While Edmund refers to his chain as “a token of the love” of one of Fanny’s “oldest friends” (205), as Csikszentmihalyi points out, the value of most tokens of love lies in the giver’s voluntary effort (28). The object that becomes the most meaningful memento in Fanny’s curated collection is not Edmund’s chain but rather his seemingly trivial note, freely written for her alone. Because of Fanny’s interruption, the letter’s incompleteness injects this relic of Edmund’s labor with the memory of their meeting while his hand still touched the page. For Fanny, then, this letter becomes a souvenir of Edmund’s corporeality, of his act of gifting the necklace, *and* of this moment in which he writes his “very dear Fanny” into existence in the East room, just as she had invoked him when she stood before his profile beseeching it for answers. In writing this letter, Edmund creates an object; in reading it, Fanny transforms that object into a thing that is

infused with his liveliness. As long as the letter as a memento remains entangled with the meaning of these memories, it will bring the stability of Edmund's vibrancy to Fanny's collection.

Even if the claim that dead objects are stabilized by vitality seems hyperbolic, it is not at all an exaggeration; this vitality is not inherent to the materiality but is rather the result of Fanny's curation. The curation of objects is an ideal calling for Fanny, who has been trained through her upbringing to serve and care for others while remaining an invisible object herself. Curatorial work is never the focus, Balzer asserts: a curator's job is to emphasize the objects they curate; thus, curators are subservient "to institutions, objects, artists, audiences, [and] markets" (33). Fanny does habitually perform such subservience, as she melts into the background in the presence of the Bertrams or the Crawfords. Still, her act of curation is never passive. Curation is an active process that requires discipline, and this distinction is important for an understanding of Fanny's character. Not quite an orphan, not quite a servant, and not quite a member of the family, Fanny seeks to negotiate her position through her curation of objects. In doing so, she actively curates herself, and, because her objective in curating these exhibits is always to bring out the best in people, she brings out the best in herself, too. As Fanny gains visibility through self-curation, the Bertrams and the Crawfords begin to take notice of her and to perceive her value.

First, Henry's interest in Fanny leads him to visit Sir Thomas's room "to declare himself the lover of Fanny, make decided proposals for her, and intreat the sanction of the uncle" (245). In turn, Henry's request brings Sir Thomas to Fanny's East room, where he discovers her sitting in the cold (244). This moment is the turning point in the text, as, influenced by Henry's notice of Fanny, Sir Thomas actively becomes Fanny's caretaker. Despite his frustration over her

refusal to marry Henry, he orders the comfort of a daily fire in East room (252), and then he begins work on a plan to persuade Fanny. Sir Thomas truly believes a marriage to Henry would be in Fanny's best interest, because Henry has "every thing to recommend him," such as a "situation in life, fortune, and character" (247); however, Fanny does not want *anything* from Henry, much less "*every thing*." In fact, Fanny is appalled when she becomes aware that Henry had not only known of Mary's gifted necklace beforehand but had actually orchestrated the entire scheme: "'And had I had an idea of it,'" she insists, "'nothing should have induced me to accept the necklace'" (284). Edmund, who comes closer than anyone else to understanding Fanny, steps in on her behalf.

Edmund is persuaded that Henry must "unfasten" Fanny's heart "from all the holds upon things animate *and inanimate*" (273; emphasis is mine), and he is convinced that she can "tolerate nothing that" she is "not used to" (277). Edmund, then, recommends that Sir Thomas leave Henry and Fanny to work out their relationship without interference (279). Though Edmund's opinion ignores the critical point that Fanny does not approve of Henry's former behavior toward Maria and Julia, he accurately identifies the nature of Fanny's connection to Mansfield Park. Edmund and Sir Thomas imagine that a visit to her family in Portsmouth will produce the desired effect: Fanny's heart will release its hold of the things at Mansfield Park and "incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort" that Henry offers (289). As it turns out, though, absence only makes Fanny's heart grow fonder for Mansfield Park.

William is the first to recognize Fanny's ability to curate orderliness, and he begins to imagine her effect on their family home in Portsmouth. As he tells her, "I do not know how it is, ... but we seem to want some of your nice ways and orderliness at my father's. The house is

always in confusion” (292). To be sure, following her arrival, Fanny is observing the “various bustles” around the house when Mr. Price enters, “his own loud voice preceding him,” and, “with something of the oath kind” he kicks “away his son’s portmanteau, and his daughter’s band-box in the passage” (298). And, later, when William leaves Fanny at their parents’ home, she finds it to be, “in almost every respect, the very reverse” of what she wishes, as it is “the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety, with no one “in their right place” and “nothing ... done as it ought to be” (305). The Price family and their servants not only refuse organization; they embody disorder, and Fanny is disappointed when, even after three months at Portsmouth, she has had little effect on the household’s order. Fanny has neither the time nor the energy to undertake the impossible task of organizing a household that is “in full contrast” to Mansfield Park (308), especially when her father, her brothers, and her mother have no inclination for order, as she must realize when her eyes “wander from the walls marked by her father’s head, to the table cut and notched by her brothers,” and to “the tea-board never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca’s hands ... first produced it” (345). Part of the problem is that Fanny and the Prices have been “long divided” and “differently situated”; thus, “the ties of blood” have become “little more than nothing” (336). Fanny feels no connection to these walls, this table, or the tea things, because her link to this family is only biological and not at all social.

However, Fanny’s efforts are not completely without merit: she does connect with her sister Susan. Austen’s other sisterly bonds—such as those between Elizabeth and Jane Bennet or Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, for example—are deeply embedded in a shared past. Since Fanny and Susan do not share memories of growing up, Fanny constructs a relationship with her

sister based on her association between the small upstairs room they share at Portsmouth and her memories of the East room. Although the rooms differ in “space, light, furniture, and prospect,” as she and Susan sit “without a fire,” Fanny suffers “the less because reminded by it of the East room” (313). From Fanny’s memories of the East room with its “books and boxes, and various comforts,” her attachment grows to this small, cold Portsmouth room and then extends to Susan, who becomes the object of Fanny’s care during her stay at Portsmouth.

As her sister’s caretaker, Fanny sets out to improve Susan’s welfare by preparing her to leave Portsmouth and to accompany Fanny back to “elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony—and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield” (308). Part of this improvement involves an education, and, since Susan has read “nothing” (313), Fanny begins her guidance by subscribing to a circulating library and selecting books of biography, poetry, essays, and history for Susan to read. Fanny is “amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chuser of books,” shows agency (313). Fanny’s recognition of her own abilities prompts her to see herself as an expert in “the ways of Mansfield Park.” To Susan, she describes “the people, the manners, [and] the amusements” that take place there (329), and she trains her on the use of “silver forks, napkins, and finger-glasses” (351). Through Fanny’s authority and guidance, she readies Susan for a world in which objects become meaningful things, because Fanny recognizes that such an understanding must precede Susan’s ability to perceive matter’s contribution to a home’s peace and tranquility. While Csikszentmihalyi argues that a home offers its inhabitants a sense of familiarity and order through the material things it contains (25), Fanny’s departure from Mansfield Park and her trip to Portsmouth reveal to her that a home involves an affective attachment to both material objects and people. Of course, Susan demonstrates that she is already predisposed to Fanny’s teachings through her reaction when Betsey takes the silver knife that

“little sister Mary” left “upon her death-bed” to Susan (303). Susan’s heated response indicates that she will be a model pupil at Mansfield Park. Hence, just as Fanny’s Aunt Bertram and Aunt Norris reordered the Price and Bertram families through their removal and improvement of the then ten-year-old Fanny, Fanny reorders the families once again by training Susan to follow in her own footsteps, to cross from their chaotic family’s household in Portsmouth to the orderly East room at Mansfield Park, where, like Fanny, Susan will learn to curate the true meaning of *home*.

In fact, Fanny’s understanding of home seems to begin before she even leaves for Portsmouth. Aside from Edmund, Fanny often appears more comfortable with the objects in the East room than she does with the Bertrams, and, as she prepares to leave Mansfield Park, the narrator privileges Fanny’s sadness at leaving the house’s materiality over her regret at leaving the Bertrams yet, at the same time, emphasizes Fanny’s tears for the family members themselves: she has “tears for every room in the house, much more for every beloved inhabitant” (293). These tears tell the story of a changed heart; for when the ten-old-year Fanny first arrives at Mansfield Park, she is amazed by its “grandeur,” but finds the rooms “too large for her to move in with ease,” as she fear she will “injure” the Bertrams’ things (12). Over time, however, we can see her love grow for Mansfield Park; for example, with Mr. Norris’s death occurring five years after her arrival, Fanny is devastated to learn that she may be expected to leave Mansfield Park to live with Aunt Norris in the parsonage. Speaking with Edmund of this potential move, Fanny protests, ““If I could suppose my aunt really to care for me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to any body!—*Here*, I know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well”” (22). Mansfield Park seems to love Fanny, as well: while her perception of liveliness transforms the house into a warmhearted home, it orders her mind into a sense of permanence and security.

Unsurprisingly, then, such a threat to her comfort provokes Fanny's acknowledgement of her bond to Mansfield Park, if not to the Bertrams themselves.

Fanny, only after her return to Portsmouth, comprehends that Mansfield Park is her home and the Bertrams her family. During Fanny's long absence from Portsmouth, her Romantic sensibilities lead her to imagine her connection with her birth home and family at Portsmouth to be more intimate than her relationship to Mansfield Park and the Bertrams. However, Fanny is disillusioned once she arrives at her birth home, as she finally recognizes her conviction to be rooted in nostalgia rather than experience: "When she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. *That*" is "now the home. Portsmouth," Fanny realizes is "Portsmouth; Mansfield," on the other hand, is "home" (338). Portsmouth, as it turns out, is as confusing for Fanny as Alice finds Looking-glass Room: "like a riddle with no answer!" (Carroll 229). Alice, upon waking and finding that the candles with plates for wings and "forks for legs" had merely been a dream (237), is confused in the absence of material evidence for her strange memories and unable to determine "who it was that dreamed it all" (244). But Fanny eventually comes to understand that the meaning of home is derived from an "entanglement of matter and meaning," to borrow from Barad's title. Home, then, as she comes to see, is about a love that encompasses the matter that matters, and this includes people as well as things.

As Fanny's memories of her home at Mansfield Park sustain her through the disheartening months she spends at the house where she once lived in Portsmouth, Mansfield Park feels Fanny's absence, too: the household becomes increasingly disordered with Tom's illness, Aunt Bertram's anxiety, Maria and Julia's sins against social expectations, and Edmund's

disillusion and heartache over Mary. Thus, Fanny's return to Mansfield Park reinforces her position as the stable center. First, she becomes Edmund's "only sister," his "only comfort" (349). Then, Aunt Bertram declares that she can be "comfortable" now that Fanny is home (351). And, by the time Fanny marries Edmund, she further underpins the bond between the Bertram and Price families by preparing Susan to take her place as Aunt Bertram's "stationary niece" (371). Fanny's ultimate victory, however, lies within her married home "of affection and comfort," as Dr. Grant's death occurs just as she and Edmund discover that they are expecting their first child. It seems as though Mansfield Park makes room for Edmund and Fanny to return just at the point at which they "want an increase of income" and "feel their distance from the paternal abode an inconvenience" (372). Fanny, then, comes home as the ultimate caretaker, an expectant mother, bringing the novel to a happy ending, as her baby embodies the cross of two bloodlines.

To some readers, Fanny may be Austen's most disliked character,²¹ but by reading her actions through Austen's topaz cross, she emerges as a caretaker who curates bodies and things

²¹ In the Introduction to the 1998 Norton edition of the novel, Claudia L. Johnson notes that while Austen believed her readers would dislike Emma, "posterity has found it far harder to like Fanny Price, with all her self-doubt and modesty" (xii). Lionel Trilling suggests in *The Opposing Self* that no one "has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*" (212). According to Nina Auerbach in "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm," Fanny is "silent" and "stubborn," and she "appeals less than any of Austen's heroines" (446); Auerbach goes on to compare Fanny to monsters and describes her as a "killjoy, a blighter of ceremonies, and divider

into more meaningful arrangements. Today, we think of curators as orderers, or organizers, but in Austen's time, curatorial work was less about arranging and more about safeguarding: in fact, as Balzer recounts, even when the British Museum was finally ordered, following Waterloo, it remained "unlabelled and cluttered" (36). Only in the modern era does Balzer find curators organizing and arranging rather than merely maintaining (46). As a curator, then, Fanny Prince is ahead of her time when she crosses family lines to relabel herself as Fanny Bertram.

Metaphorically speaking, in marrying Edmund and creating a family with him, Fanny rearranges the Bertram family profiles into a less cluttered order, one in which she is not only included; she is a central and inseparable part of the family, of *her* family.

of families" (448). In fact, Auerbach points out that even Austen's mother found Fanny "insipid" (445).

CHAPTER 4

JANE'S THINGS THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

Both her cast of form and feature, her complexion and her general air, suggested the idea of some Israelitish princess of the patriarchal days; and such was doubtless the character she intended to represent.

She approached the basin, and bent over it as if to fill her pitcher; she again lifted it to her head. The personage on the well-brink now seemed to accost her; to make some request:—"She hastened, let down her pitcher on her hand and gave him to drink." From the bosom of his robe, he then produced a casket, opened it and showed magnificent bracelets and ear rings; she acted astonishment and admiration; kneeling, he laid the treasure at her feet; incredulity and delight were expressed by her looks and gestures; the stranger fastened the bracelets on her arms, and the rings in her ears. It was Eliezer and Rebecca: the camels only were wanting.

—Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 183

Miss Bronte ... we fear, will soon cease to find readers.

—George Henry Lewes, "The Novels of Jane Austen," p. 100

I have read Jane Eyre, and shall be glad to know what you admire in it. All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass. However, the book is interesting; only I wish the characters would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports.

—George Eliot on *Jane Eyre* in a letter to Chas. Bray, printed in John Walter Cross's *George Eliot's Life, as Related in Her Letters and Journals*, p. 191.

What is the whole physical life ... but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But these elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them—the passage of the blood, the wasting and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain by every ray of light and sound—processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us; it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven by many forces; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resulting combinations. That clear perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

--Walter Pater, Conclusion, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p.118

Katharina Boehm begins with the contemporary philosophy of matter in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, and then she traces the fluid boundaries she discovers between the human and nonhuman worlds back to Walter Pater's conclusion of *The Renaissance*, in which he intimates a permeability between the human body and the material world. Boehm is interested in the way he conflates agency that is usually attributed to humans with nonhuman matter. The fluidity that draws Boehm to Pater is that of a world that is, as Karen Barad argues in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, always in process, always changing and becoming something new and different (150). Because the world—bodies, things, nature—is materially entangled, and because, in Barad's theory of agential realism, matter is entangled with meaning (3), then feeling and emotion are inseparable from the material world. Indeed, Pater then describes the "inward world of thought and feeling" with the imagery of a swiftly swirling whirlpool or an "eager and devouring flame" (Pater 118). As he writes:

There it is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye and fading of colour from the wall,—the movement of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest,—but the race of the mid-stream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought. At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer. (118-19)

Of course, Pater was not the first to perceive the world as an entanglement of human and nonhuman matter and meaning. Giles Whiteley, in examining Pater's possible influences and

sources, connects this conclusion to Pater's reading of German philosopher F.W.J. Schelling's work (128). Whiteley finds Pater's published references to Schelling to be "sparse and rarely complimentary" (128); however, he discovers a link between the imagery in *The Renaissance's* conclusion and Pater's translation of one of Schelling's footnotes in the 1799 *First Outline of a System of Philosophy*. Pater translates as follows:

A stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance—a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized; it is rather something constantly transforming—but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product of nature is *fixed*, but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire. (qtd. in Whiteley 129)

Pater, in his conclusion to *The Renaissance*, transforms Schelling's streams and whirlpools into an image of the inward world, "not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them" (119). Pater's portrayal of porous boundaries between human bodies and nonhuman matter and his discussion of unstable objects reveal ideas that are surely shaped by Schelling's description.

Charlotte Brontë's writing in *Jane Eyre*, like Pater's writing here, dissolves the lines around and between bodies and things and makes inanimate objects animate. She, too, looks to the imagery of nature—of streams and whirlpools—in her writing. But how likely is it that Brontë read Schelling's work? While influence relies on linear time and vector space, what Brontë read in a world that is always becoming and never fixed might be less important than the patterns that emerge when her work resonates with other literature. While influence is

constrained by temporal limits, resonance reveals patterns of a shared materiality and demonstrates the instability of both real and fictional matter.

Just around the corner and downhill from the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, England, a locally owned gift shop offers pens, cufflinks, and letter openers crafted out of wood reclaimed from the schoolroom and the old Haworth Church under which Charlotte and Emily Brontë were buried (see fig. 1).²² These handcrafted articles illustrate matter's ability to adapt and change over time and across space and to become infused with ideas, emotions, and subjectivity. Here, in this shop, temporal and spatial boundaries seem to melt away, and the lines dividing subjects and objects appear to blur, making it difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. The effect is prismatic, dynamic, and uncanny, and it is a phenomenon that haunts Charlotte Brontë's first published novel, *Jane Eyre*.²³ Brontë does in *Jane Eyre* what

²² The name of the gift shop is Number 71 (<http://www.number71haworth.co.uk>). The old church from which the wood was taken no longer stands, but a new church has been erected in its place.

²³ Brontë began writing *Jane Eyre* while caring for her father following his cataract surgery in Manchester during the fall of 1846 (Barker 155). In *Jane Eyre*, textual moments in which light reveals the conflation of the human and nonhuman may have emerged from the time Brontë spent with her father during his deteriorating vision before his cataract surgery and during the hours he spent in darkness as he slowly recovered his sight. In January 1847, he recorded his experience in the margins of his copy of Graham's *Domestic Medicine*: "I was confined on my back – a month in a dark room, with bandages over my eyes for the greater part of the time," and "after a year of nearly total blindness – I was so far restored to sight, as to be able to read, and write, and find my way, without a guide" (Barker 155). The experience of writing *Jane Eyre*



Figure 2: Display of items made from wood taken from the Brontë church at the Number 71 Gift Shop in Haworth, UK. Image taken 26 October 2016 and printed with permission of Number 71.

Lewis Carroll later does in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*—she tips sideways the “normal” human-centered worldview to offer a world in which *objects* transform

while attending her father, with his inability to discern light and dark at the forefront of her mind, must have influenced Brontë’s thoughts, especially since she, too, suffered from poor eyesight, and may have shaped the images that forced their way from her mind to fill the empty pages before her.

into lively *things*, to borrow Bill Brown's term, and these things defy our usual representations of reality.²⁴ To read the novel "through the looking-glass" brings to the surface these moments in *Jane Eyre* that make the novel seem, in a sense, as if it were out of its time. To be sure, the novel turns in ways that we might not expect of a mid-nineteenth-century text. Reading *Jane Eyre* through the looking-glass reconceives Brontë's uncanny and supernatural moments in terms of lively things.

Thing is a vague word, though; thus, its 547 appearances in *Jane Eyre* are likely to have some effect on the ambiguity of the text. Prepubescent Jane is regarded as "an underhanded little thing" by Miss Abbot (12), and Bessie calls her "a little roving, solitary thing," a "shy little thing" (39), and a "little sharp thing" (40). For Jane, being labeled a *thing* so early in life seems to influence her self-perception. As she explains the relationship between herself and her aunt and cousins at Gateshead Hall, "They were not bound to regard with affection a *thing* that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous *thing*, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless *thing*, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious *thing*, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment" (15-16; emphasis is mine). It is no wonder, then, that Jane, even in adulthood, perceives herself as a thing. Significantly, for Jane, things are powerful and agentic. Thus, when Rochester refers to her as a "strange ... almost unearthly thing" (255), and then simply a "thing" (262), she responds, "I had rather be a *thing* than an angel" (262; emphasis in original). Things, as Jane seems to recognize, have purpose, intention, and substance: *things are alive*.

²⁴ Elaine Freedgood makes the point that literary criticism has historically ignored the things in literature (1). She argues, however, that these things hold cultural archives of meaning (1).

In Brontë's novel, things come alive in the moments when the uncanny converges with the scientific. The effects of these "intra-actions," in Baradian terms (33), invoke Jane Bennett's move in *Vibrant Matter* in which she turns "the figures of 'life' and 'matter' around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange," creating a space in which, "a *vital materiality* can start to take shape" (vii). For Sarah Posman et al., the contemporary philosophical "fascination with 'vibrant matter'" is indebted to the artists and writers who, in the early twentieth century, were fascinated by "chair caning that is oil cloth, a urinal that might really be a fountain, a treacherous pipe, or a spool called Odradek" (3). I agree with their claim, but I would add that, because the modernists, in an entangled world, are inseparable from those who came before them (and even those who are yet to come), Bennett and other philosophers who work on matter's vibrancy are indebted not only to the modernists but also to the nineteenth-century writers whose texts are filled with lively things and thing-like bodies. Indeed, from the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, material objects transform into lively things, and bodies seem to change shape and to take on new identities.

Jane, locked in the red-room at Gateshead Hall and affected by the color scheme of the red carpet and curtains and white bedding and chair cushions, senses a numinous energy infused in the furnishings. The dark mahogany bed, for example, is "hung with curtains of deep red damask," which appear to Jane "like a tabernacle" (13), and the chair and footstool sit by the

bed's head "like a pale throne" (14).²⁵ The bed is likely modeled after Patrick Brontë's bed (see fig. 2), which no longer survives; however, a reproduction—complete with red curtains—based on Branwell's parodic sketch (see fig. 3) is now on display at the Brontë Parsonage Museum. Because Jane associates the wardrobe with a "spell" that makes the room "lonely in spite of its grandeur," this piece of furniture might be the most mysterious of the room's furnishings. Indeed, the wardrobe, with its secret drawer that holds papers, jewels, and a miniature of Jane's deceased uncle, who "breathed his last" in this room, is shrine-like (14). The "spell" with which Jane associates the wardrobe seems to be connected to the miniature that is concealed within the cupboard's secret depths like a saint's relic. For Jane, this piece of furniture seems to transform into a casket, and the red-room, whose "great looking-glass" that hangs between the "muffled windows" echoes the "vacant majesty of the bed and room" (14). This description makes the room's appearance seem catacombic, as if this room were only one of many connected tombs.

From where Jane sits in this silent vault whose vacancy seems to tunnel through the looking-glass, the wardrobe's "subdued broken reflections" alter "the gloss of its panels" (14). As she watches the light reflect from the looking-glass and diffract off of the wardrobe, she rises and moves across the room, and with her gaze drawn to the "depth ... revealed" by the looking-glass, she notices an unfamiliarity not only in the room but also in her own image (14):

All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality; and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering

²⁵ Sally Shuttleworth's note in the 2008 Oxford UP edition of *Jane Eyre* points to Arthur Pollard's suggestion that Brontë's description of the throne here alludes to the "great white throne in Revelation 20: 11" (461).



Figure 3: The image shows a reproduction of Patrick Brontë's bed, which is on display at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, UK. Image taken 26 October 2016.



Figure 4: The reproduction of Patrick Brontë's bed, shown in the above image, was based on a drawing by Branwell Brontë. This image shows a reproduction of that drawing. Image taken 26 October 2016.

eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers. (14)²⁶

When Jane perceives her reflection in the looking-glass, the reality of her embodied presence in the room dissolves into a mystical being who watches Jane with fear, and Jane herself changes into the traveler before whose eyes this spirit appears. Through this uncanny shift, Jane is neither the traveler nor the imp, yet she is also simultaneously both, a being of otherworldliness. Jane, in this odd moment, makes her own position appear strange. Her reaction to her reflection is an effect of her encounter with her deceased uncle's things, which appear unfamiliar without her uncle's physical presence. Yet, at the same time, they also seem to conjure his spiritual being. Through his things, he is both absent and present.

Jane's uncle's presence begins to weigh more heavily than his absence when the light begins to "forsake the red-room" (16). As Jane turns "a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror" and begins to mull over what she has heard "of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed," she begins to fear that "Mr. Reed's spirit ... might quit its abode—whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed" and come to her "in this chamber" (16-

²⁶ Jane's resemblance to a fairy foreshadows her renaming as Janet by Rochester. As other critics have pointed out, Brontë works aspects of fairytales into her novel. Notably, Janet is often the heroine of "Tam Lin," a Scottish-border tale. For more on *Jane Eyre* and "Tam Lin," see Lauren Lepow's "'They That Wad Their True-Love Win': 'Tam Lin' and *Jane Eyre*."

17). Indeed, this anxiety over Mr. Reed's conceivable re-embodiment seems to invoke a ghostly and luminous manifestation of his spirit (17):

Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred: while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by some one across the lawn; but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down—I uttered a wild involuntary cry—I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. (17)

Jane's later rationalization of this moment—"I can now conjecture..."—suggests that she tries to rationalize the moment, but doing so does not erase her unnerving experience in the red-room. Her experience *matters* in real ways. That is, the movement of physical light particles from the wall to the ceiling elicits Jane's awareness of her own body. As if her body has turned inside out, her heart, her head, and her ears become inseparable from the red-room; the sounds and sensations of her form—the "thick" beat of her heart, the heat that radiates from her head, and the "rushing" in her ears—entangle with the cold silence of the room and fill it with a sudden burst of vivacity. The effect of the light's materialization is both sensorial and corporeal. The idea that this light is not merely a reflection but also substantive and lively matter shakes Jane to her core.

This early passage refracts through subsequent passages, for example, during Jane's tour of Thornfield Hall and in her first encounter with Rochester. As Mrs. Fairfax leads Jane around

the house, she points to “a wide arch corresponding to the window” (104). Jane climbs “two broad steps” to peer into the drawing-room:

I thought I caught a glimpse of a fairy place, so bright to my novice-eyes appeared the view beyond. Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing-room, and within it a boudoir, both spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantelpiece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire. (104)

While the windows, mirror, and red and white color scheme evoke Jane’s experience in the red-room, here, the mirror reflects a “fairy place” rather than a “half fairy, half imp.” This difference of reflection suggests a matter of perspective. At Gateshead, Jane is quickly forced into the red-room, and the door is locked behind her. At Thornfield, however, she sees the space from a distance and approaches it on her own terms. Her different perspectives, then, are produced through her own movement. As Jane moves to and through rooms, light reflects, refracts, and diffracts, seemingly changing the boundaries of subjects and objects so that they appear to lose stability and to transform into something different.

Along with the light’s effect on Jane’s vision, memories of Bessie’s fairytales further heighten her sensual perception, especially during Jane and Rochester’s first meeting in Hay Lane, which occurs while daylight remains despite the moon “waxing bright” (113). Their encounter recalls Jane’s transformation into the “belated traveller” in the red-room at Gateshead. She hears Rochester’s approach before she sees him, and the beating of a horse’s hooves reminds her of “Bessie’s tales wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a Gytrash; which, in the

form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming” (112). Indeed, just then, a sound beneath the hedge joins with the “tramp, tramp” of hooves, and there appears “a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees” (112). Bessie’s tales come to life in this being, “a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head” (112). That this “spell” is broken once Rochester’s human form comes into view might indicate that Jane is caught somewhere between childhood and adulthood (112), but it also suggests a perspective in which flux and stasis are collaborative, space and time are bendable, and bodies and things are malleable and transitory. As happens frequently in *Jane Eyre*, objects and subjects transcend their boundaries to become lively, dynamic things.

Woolf, during a visit to the Brontë Museum and the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth, which were, at that time, separate entities, had an experience that was similar to Jane’s reaction to her uncle’s lively things in the red-room. As Woolf writes about this experience in “Haworth, 1904,” she first calls the Brontë Museum “a pallid and inanimate collection of objects” (123). But these inanimate objects appear to have an effect on Woolf, as she then argues that an “effort ought to be made to keep things out of these mausoleums” (123). However, as she decides, because the “choice often lies between them and destruction,” then “we must be grateful for the care which has preserved much that is, under any circumstances, of deep interest” (123). Woolf finally recognizes that these objects might not be so “inanimate” after all, especially when they “intra-act,” as they do here. Brontë, through this assemblage of vibrant things at Haworth, comes alive for Woolf, as she describes in this passage:

Here are many autograph letters, pencil drawings, and other documents. But the most touching case – so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one’s gaze – is that which



Figure 5: This image shows Charlotte Brontë's dress on display at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, UK. Image taken 26 October 2016.

contains the little personal relics, the dresses and shoes of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and her thin muslin dress have outlived her. (123)

A dress with a torso but no head and shoes without feet underscore absence as much as they remind Woolf of Brontë's once-living body. But the vital materiality of Brontë's dress continues to be shaped not only by a headless, handless sewing form but also by visitors' desire for Brontë to come alive in their presence. If these things bring Brontë back to life for Woolf, then they cannot be "inanimate" objects. From Woolf's response, these objects materialize into lively things, into a lively body, indeed, into Brontë herself.

When I stood in what was once Brontë's bedroom at the Parsonage Museum, surrounded by her things—sketches and paintings, wedding veil, shoes and dresses (see figs. 4 and 5)—I, too, felt Brontë's vibrancy like an energetic charge. With small spotlights strategically placed about the room, her dress and shawl transformed their mannequin



Figure 6: Another of Brontë's dresses was on display at a temporary exhibit, Charlotte Brontë: An Independent Will, at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City. Image taken 9 December 2016.

into Brontë's small body, whose figure I could imagine walking down the hill that I had just climbed, parasol in hand, to conduct her business about Haworth. Stories about Brontë paraphernalia echo throughout this museum, which was, of course, once the Brontë home. Resounding through these rooms are, for example, stories of the Brontë children, whose imaginations brought to life a box of wooden toy soldiers that Patrick Brontë gave to Branwell on his birthday, and through these inanimate-objects-made-animate, the siblings created the Wonderland-like worlds in which their juvenilia are set. Brontë tells the story of these toy soldiers in "The History of the Year": "Papa bought Branwell some soldiers at Leeds," she writes, and, because the children were in bed when he returned, it was the next morning before Branwell brought the box to Charlotte, Emily, and Anne (5). Charlotte immediately grabbed the soldier she describes as "the prettiest of the whole and perfect in every part" and named it after the Duke of Wellington (6).

While Christine Alexander suggests that these stories that the Brontë children wrote about Branwell's soldiers, to which they referred as "The Young Men" or "The Twelves," "provided a source of literary inspiration for the next twenty years" (xiv), I would take her suggestion a step further to argue that these soldiers were more than inspiration for Brontë. These stories also reverberate throughout *Jane Eyre*. Indeed, "The Twelves" come alive in *Jane Eyre* as the twelve apostles whose heads are painted onto the doors of a cabinet on the third story of Thornfield Hall (see fig. 6). When Jane first tours Thornfield Hall, the "imperfect light" of the third story reveals the out-of-fashion furnishings that have moved upstairs over the years. As these pieces have moved through the house, they have affected and changed the spaces that they have occupied, and these spaces have changed the pieces, as well, which helps to explain why the furnishings on the third story give Jane the impression of "a shrine of memory" (105-06). Not

only did these things belong to Rochester's ancestors but Rochester's ancestors also belonged to these things. In this strange space, bodies and things cannot be separated, and time seems to have stopped moving. Of course, time does not actually move forward as we understand it to do; in fact, these relics on the third story reveal how our understanding of time only makes sense in context. Jane, for example, finds stools "on whose cushioned tops were yet apparent traces of half effaced embroideries, wrought by fingers that for two generations had been coffin-dust" (105). These samples of decorative needlework leave more than traces of their embellishment; they are the traces and the remnants of the fully-effaced bodies that made them. Jane, standing in these familial archives on her first day at Thornfield Hall, thinks that she would never want to spend a night up here surrounded by "old English hangings ... portraying effigies of strange flowers, and stranger birds, and strangest human beings,—all of which would have looked strange, indeed, by the pallid gleam of moonlight" (106). Jane is distrustful of this space, because, as she seems to recognize, these objects, like those in the red-room, have the power to come alive at night with the materiality of the moon's light reflecting through the windows and diffracting off of the furnishings.

Despite feeling leery of the third story, Jane is inexplicably drawn to it. It is here, in the corridor, that Jane's body, "agitated to pain," becomes a physical manifestation of a tale, and thus makes this narrative vibrant:

Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never

ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (109)

That Jane finds her “sole relief” in this space suggests that she gains agency from her proximity to the many dynamic things that live on this floor. In this agentic transfiguration, Jane’s mind lights up with visions, her heart expands with life, and her ears resound with narrative voices. Here, surrounded by liveliness, Jane absorbs the “life,” “fire,” and “feeling” necessary to pour out the tale that is painfully trapped in her mind.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was fascinated by Brontë’s perception of the world, but she recognizes that the world in which Brontë lived and that which she creates in *Jane Eyre* are drastically different. Indeed, Braddon, following her visit to Haworth in 1906—only two years after Woolf’s visit—wrote “At the Shrine of *Jane Eyre*,” in which she remarks upon her astonishment over the novel’s brightness:

But the more one sees of the factories and chimneys, the long uniform streets climbing uphill, the monotonous sequence of stone cottages, rarely beautified by shrub or flower, all of the same uncompromising pattern, the more wonderful seems Charlotte’s genius and the rich vivid colouring of *Jane Eyre*. Where did she get those bright colours in her life of gloom – gloom at Haworth, gloom at Brussels, despondency, parting, death? (176)

These brilliant colors that captivate Braddon do seem to emerge from within Brontë herself. In *Charlotte Brontë: A Fiery Heart*, Claire Harman finds, “Several of the Roe Head fragments were written during class, one while Miss Wooler was in the room and two pupils either side of Charlotte were silently ‘staring, gaping’ because their teacher was apparently writing something—in minuscule characters—with *her eyes shut*” (103; emphasis in original). Harman notes the oddity of Brontë, in a position as teacher, writing in “an unreadably tiny script, with her

eyes closed, about an ‘unseen land’—enough to make the girls gape indeed, as if she were hypnotized, or receiving spirit messages” (103). As a fictional character, Jane can avoid others by climbing to the third story, but, as a teacher, Brontë could only escape her students by closing her eyes and inviting the visions that would transport her to another world, an “unseen land.”

With her eyes closed, an inner light seems to reveal stories that flash across her mind as if projected by a magic lantern. In her journal at Roe Head on Friday, 11 August 1836, for example, Brontë writes of escaping to the bedroom to claim a moment to herself: “The stream of thought, checked all day, came flowing free & calm along its channel. My ideas were too shattered to form any defined picture, as they would have done in such circumstances at home, but detached thoughts soothingly flitted round me, & unconnected scenes occurred and then vanished, producing an effect certainly strange but, to me, very pleasing” (“The Roe Head Journal,” 163). Brontë, following these broken visions of acting figures whose names she “knew by intuition” (164), writes, “At last I became aware of a feeling like a heavy weight laid across me. I knew I was wide awake & that it was dark, & that, moreover, the ladies were now come into the room to get their curl-papers. . . . I wanted to speak, to rise—it was impossible” (165). There is something quite spiritual and mystical about these visions that overtook Brontë’s mind and suppressed her bodily control.

Jane, too, experiences visions that seem to take over her body; however, Rochester perceives her as quite calm and quiet, because she hides her emotions and strangely powerful visions from him. Rochester, in his misunderstanding of Jane, narcissistically believes that she would not understand the pain he has experienced in life. After he discloses his story of Adèle’s mother’s betrayal, for example, he asks:

“You never felt jealousy, did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not ask you; because you never felt love. You have both sentiments yet to experience: your soul sleeps; the shock is yet to be given which shall waken it. You think all existence lapses in as quiet a flow as that in which your youth has hitherto slid away. Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears, you neither see the rocks bristling not far off in the bed of the flood, nor hear the breakers boil at their base. But I tell you—and you may mark my words—you will come some day to a craggy pass of the channel, where the whole of life’s stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag-points, or lifted up and borne on by some master wave into a calmer current—as I am now.” (141)

For Rochester, rapids produce danger, chaos, and insecurity, just as jealousy and love make life risky and confusing. Avoidance carries its own perils, though: “Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears” may be a means of repressing the feelings that can bring pain, but it is always better to face threats head on, because to evade fears is to deny life. Though Jane, regardless of Rochester’s belief, has experienced more than her share of pain, as life has tossed her into whirling and tumultuous waters time and again, she has learned to face head-on the unknown and unfamiliar.

Jane is “a good deal interested and excited” when Rochester disguises himself as an old gipsy woman who has come to read fortunes (195). As Rochester in his masquerade stirs the fire, it comes alive, as “a ripple of light” breaks “from the disturbed coal,” darkening his countenance and brightening Jane’s face (197). Coal, formed from decaying plants, retains the vitality of once-living matter, and this liveliness manifests in the vibrantly burning embers whose flame “flickers in the eye” and “intra-acts” with Rochester’s “jargon” to hypnotize Jane (200). Indeed,

when he suddenly tires of his game and orders her to leave, Jane wonders, “Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman’s voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all, were familiar to me as my own face in a glass—as the speech of my own tongue” (201-02).²⁷ Jane’s acceptance of Rochester’s trick recalls her defamiliarization of her own image in the red room’s mirror. These moments point to matter’s ability to change shape and to transcend into something different.

Indeed, when Jane is called to the third floor in the middle of the night, she experiences what is perhaps the novel’s clearest example of matter’s changing nature. As Jane awakens to find the moon looking in at her “through the unveiled panes” (205), a cry resounds throughout the house, and Rochester summons Jane upstairs to nurse Bertha’s victim and brother, Mr. Mason, while he goes for the doctor. As Jane sponges away the blood that trickles from Mr. Mason’s wounds, she notices her dwindling candle flame deepening the shadows on the tapestries that surround the bed. The flame quivers “strangely over the doors of a great cabinet opposite”; the front of this cabinet depicts “the heads of the twelve apostles, each enclosed in its separate panel as in a frame” (210). As Jane watches the play of darkening shadows and flickering candlelight, these twelve apostles’ faces begin to change and transform into other faces: she sees “now the bearded physician, Luke, that” bends “his brow; now St. John’s long hair that” waves; “and anon the devilish face of Judas, that” grows “out of the panel” (210). The

²⁷ Jane’s disorientation anticipates a refrain in Woolf’s *The Years*: for example, Mrs. Pargiter awakes from a dream to cry, “Where am I?” (22); Delia, leaving her mother’s room, asks the same question (24); and Eleanor, first while mothering Rose, and then while walking down the stairs, asks, “Where am I?” (42).

cabinet, under Jane's gaze, becomes an unfamiliar form. Of course, if Jane were to shift to a different position, the light would behave in different ways; thus, the cabinet might once more become familiar, or it might change into another unfamiliar form. Jane, however, is unable to move. Though she is not locked in this space as she once was in the red-room, here, she is temporarily trapped in her position where she bends over Mr. Mason.²⁸ These metamorphoses disrupt the narrative's sense of time and space, as Luke, though a physician, was not one of the original twelve apostles, and that Rochester has gone for the surgeon Carter blurs the line between past and present. And that St. John was one of Jesus's twelve apostles, but that he shares a name with Jane's yet unknown cousin St. John Rivers conflates the present with the future. The effect of Jane's candle on these painted faces is disorienting and eerie.

This apostles' cabinet might seem even more dislocated in time and space for visitors to the Brontë Parsonage Museum than it does in this passage, as its presence in this unexpected location pushes the boundaries between the literal and the literary. A curatorial note describes the cabinet as having belonged to Thomas Eyre in 1847, the year in which Brontë saw it during her visit to Eyre's Derbyshire home with Ellen Nussey. I saw the cabinet in 2016 when I visited Brontë's home in Haworth. As this cabinet has moved through time and space, its life has extended beyond the lives of its caretakers, and it has transformed from a material object into a lively thing with a life of its own. For Thomas Eyre, the cabinet with the apostles' faces may have been a useful piece of furniture, even as it holds artistic and religious significance. For

²⁸ While the art movement of Cubism allows artists to conflate multiple perspectives into one image, literature can only reveal multiple vantage points through textual experimentation, for example, through shifts of subject-object to body-thing or during shifts of time and space.



Figure 7: The Apostles' Cupboard, which belonged to Thomas Eyre when Brontë visited his home with Ellen Nussey in 1845, is now on display at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, UK. Image taken 26 October 2016.

Brontë, the cabinet was as a vehicle through which she could transport the magic of her juvenilia into her adult work. And for the twenty-first-century fans and scholars, like myself, who visit the Brontë Parsonage Museum, the cabinet, as an entanglement of reality and fiction, is a channel both to *Jane Eyre* and to Brontë herself.

Deborah Lutz, who describes seeing this cabinet during her own visit to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, is interested in the ways we shape our belongings: our things are “nicked with incident, warmed with wearing,” she writes (xxi). Although Brontë never lived with this cabinet, “nicked” it, used it, or even intended for her readers to know that it was not purely imaginative, through her writing, she “intra-acted” with the cabinet the moment she saw it, and she and this cabinet continue to “intra-act” today, as its presence in the Parsonage is always an invocation of that initial encounter in Thomas Eyre’s home. When Brontë saw and wrote about this cabinet, she could not have known that it would someday come to live in her own home, but here it is, living in the Brontë Parsonage, which is now a museum, among the other things with which she “intra-acted”: her dress, which is now arranged on a sewing form and appears to retain the shape of her body, the couch on which her sister Emily passed away, and the dining room table at which she and Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* and whose surface bears marks of their bodies, from scuffs and ink blots to a carved letter “E” (see fig. 7). This “E” is generally accepted to stand for Emily, but could it actually stand for Eyre? The table’s story, like that of the apostle’s cabinet, is one of travel across time and space. As the curator’s note explains, in 1861, following Patrick Brontë’s death, this table, “one of the most significant literary artefacts of the nineteenth century ... was sold at the sale of household effects.” However, in 2015, the table returned home. The table and the cabinet, then, like many other pieces in Brontë’s home and in her fiction, are lively things that tell stories and blur the lines

between fact and fiction. That the Brontë's things continue to make their way home to the Parsonage after nearly two centuries suggests a liveliness that belies our usual perception of materiality.



Figure 8: The dining room table, at which Charlotte and Emily Brontë wrote two of the most celebrated British novels from the nineteenth-century, once again lives at the Parsonage after a long period of absence. Image taken 26 October 2016.

Rochester and Jane, like these things in the parsonage, are indissolubly bound to one another—as Jane tells Rochester, “it is my spirit that addresses your spirit” (253), and Rochester asks her to be his “second self” (254). They are entangled to the extent that one’s behavior affects the other’s state. Just prior to Rochester’s proposal to Jane, he explains:

I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And

if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. (252)

Jane, superstitious even about attaching to her trunk the address labels with the name Mrs. Rochester before that person exists, shuts the closet door so that she cannot see the clothing that has replaced her own—"the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil, pendent from the usurped portmanteau" (275). To Jane, these articles appear to be "strange, wraith-like apparel," and in the late hour, they emit "a most ghostly shimmer" (275). Jane, however, awakens during the night to the dazzling "gleam" of candlelight and sees that the closet is now open (283). What's more, the form of an unknown woman, dressed in white, is standing before the wedding garments (283). When the woman, with Jane's veil over her head, turns to face the mirror, Jane sees "the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass" (283). As Jane describes, Bertha has "a discoloured . . . savage face" with red rolling eyes and "blackened inflation of the lineaments" (283). Bertha, confined to the third story, bears the marks of an unloved and unwanted thing, much like the other discarded things on that floor. Under Jane's gaze, however, with the moon's light reflecting and diffracting, Bertha comes to life, and, full of vitality and fury, she rips the veil into "two parts, and flinging both on the floor," tramples the pieces (284). Rochester, upon hearing Jane's tale, protects himself by dehumanizing Bertha as the "creature of an over-stimulated brain" (284). Only the torn and trampled veil—the material object that takes on a "wraith-like" appearance in Jane's candlelit room—discloses the truth.

As a number of critics have noted, Bertha is Jane's uncanny double.²⁹ Certainly, I do not dispute this compelling argument; however, in the arguably most famous passage in *Jane Eyre*, and the one with which I will close my reading, the supernatural/supersonic moment in which Jane hears Rochester call to her and is magnetically drawn home to him,³⁰ these two characters appear to be more than doppelgängers: Jane and Rochester behave like entangled atoms. As Jane sits in the dying candlelight but with the moonlight pervading the room at Moor House, she experiences a strange sensation (419):

I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry—

“Jane! Jane! Jane!”—nothing more.

“O God! what is it?” I gasped.

I might have said, “Where is it?” for it did not seem in the room—nor in the house—nor in the garden; it did not come out of the air—nor from under the earth—nor from overhead. I had heard it—where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently. (419-20)

²⁹ For more on the uncanny doubling in *Jane Eyre*, see “A Dialogue of Self and Soul,” in which Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that Bertha is “Jane’s truest and darkest double” (360). Also see Morteza Jafari’s “Freud’s Uncanny: The Role of the Double in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.”

³⁰ Though Jane imagines Rochester at Thornfield Hall, she is unaware that the home has been destroyed by fire and that Rochester is now living at Ferndean.

At this same moment, far away at Ferndean, Rochester also calls to her. As he later recounts, “As I exclaimed ‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’ a voice—I cannot tell whence the voice came, but I know whose voice it was—replied, ‘I am coming: wait for me;’ and a moment after, went whispering on the wind the words—‘Where are you?’” (447). When Rochester calls Jane’s name with “frantic energy,” she responds with every fiber of her being (447):

My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock, but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor, from which they were now summoned and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh quivered on my bones. (419)

This passage seems Gothically supernatural, but Jane and Rochester’s exchange also reveals a shared materiality between two souls. The scene resonates with that in the red-room in the way that Jane becomes aware of the matter that makes up her own body. Just as at Gateshead Hall, where Jane’s bodily sounds and sensations become inseparable from the red-room, here, her heart’s beat, throbbing “fast and thick” within her chest, the stimulating sense that shoots from her heart to her head, fingers, and toes, and her physical trembling are reactions to Rochester’s “frantic energy.” This connection between their spirits anticipates the early-twentieth-century discoveries of quantum physics, which, of course, are inseparable from Barad’s theory of agential realism. Still, there remains something Gothic and uncanny about quantum physics, especially in the idea of quantum entanglement; in fact, Einstein famously called it “spook action at a distance” (Barad 315), because once two particles become entangled, they can remain

entangled regardless of an increase in distance between them. That is, one particle can affect the state of the other particle despite any spatial distance from one another.

Thus, Jane's distance from Rochester notwithstanding, the two behave as a single whole, as if Rochester's "cord of communion" does indeed bind them together. This passage, then, implies that boundaries—even bodily boundaries—are fluid.³¹ A synergic elasticity facilitates their relationship as a fluid yet stable whole here at the end of the novel, as Jane opens her last chapter with what is arguably the most frequently quoted phrase in the book: "Reader, I married him" (448).³² Marriage is, of course, a legal binding, but the real power of Rochester and Jane's attachment is far more prevailing. Indeed, the moments that seem supernatural—when Jane's connection to Rochester proves more powerful than distance, when Bessie's fairytales come to life, and when boundaries shift, transforming subjects and objects into dynamic bodies and

³¹ As in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, when Catherine Earnshaw asserts, "I *am* Heathcliff" (82), here, Jane *is* Rochester, and Rochester *is* Jane. To borrow Kenneth Burke's term, this conflation of identity is an example of "consubstantiality." While Jane is not identical to Rochester any more than Catherine is identical to Heathcliff, Jane identifies with Rochester and he with her. For Jane to identify with Rochester, then, makes her both "substantially one" with him and unique to herself, "an individual locus of motives" (21). She is, then, "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (21). For more on Burke's understanding of consubstantiality, see p. 21 in "The Range of Rhetoric."

³² While Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship in *Wuthering Heights* is perhaps the most notorious example of synergy in the physiological sense of the word, Jane and Rochester may be an even more strongly-connected whole.

things—are an uncanny effect not of supernaturalism but can be understood through Barad’s agential realism: light, as it reflects, diffracts, refracts, and bends in fascinating ways, reveals a world in which subjects and objects prismatically transform into vibrant bodies and things.

CHAPTER 5

THE NONHUMAN SECRET IN LADY AUDLEY'S LOOKING-GLASS ROOMS

We were introduced to the little engine which was to drag us along the rails. She (for they make these curious little fire-horses all mares) consisted of a boiler, a stove, a small platform, a bench, and behind the bench a barrel containing enough water to prevent her being thirsty for fifteen miles ... She goes upon two wheels, which are her feet, and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons; these are propelled by steam, and in proportion as more steam is applied to the upper extremities (the hip-joints, I suppose) of these pistons, the faster they move the wheels ... The reins, bit, and bridle of this wonderful beast is a small steel handle ... The coals, which are its oats, were under the bench, and there was a small glass tube ... which indicates by its fulness or emptiness when the creature wants water ... This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pat, was then harnessed to our carriage, and ... we started at about ten miles an hour.

—Frances Ann Kemble on her first train excursion, 25 August 1830, pp. 160-61³³

³³ Fanny Kemble, in a letter written on 26 August 1830 to “My Dear H—,” describes her first train excursion, which had taken place on the previous day between Liverpool and Manchester, UK.

Time was when the stereotyped phrase, “a fair young English girl,” meant the ideal of womanhood; to us, at least, of home birth and breeding. It meant a creature generous, capable, and modest ... a girl who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband’s friend and companion, but never his rival; one who would consider their interests identical, and not hold him as just so much fair game for spoil; who would make his house his true home and place of rest, not a mere passage-place for vanity and ostentation to go through; a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress.

...

The girl of the period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion; whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury; and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses. Her main endeavour in this is to outvie her neighbors in the extravagance of fashion.

—Eliza Lynn Linton, “The Girl of the Period,” p. 356

Mary Elizabeth Braddon opens *Lady Audley’s Secret* with a chapter titled “Lucy.” That chapter begins, not with the subject, *Lucy*, but with an object, *It*: “It lay low down in a hollow, rich with fine old timber and luxuriant pastures” (7). *It*, of course, refers to Audley Court, but these adjectives—*rich*, *fine*, and *luxuriant*—could also describe Lucy, who has “the most wonderful curls in the world—soft and feathery, always floating away from her face, and making

a pale halo round her head when the sunlight” shines “through them” (13). From this opening, Braddon moves from Audley Court to Lucy’s body and things, invoking a sense of inseparability and calling into question the defining lines between subjects and objects. In doing so, Braddon offers a fuller understanding of Lucy as entangled with her home, Audley Court, with its one-handed clock, which, like Lucy herself, is “always in extremes” (7), and its secret passages, which reflect the things that Lucy carries from *her* secret past life as Helen Talboys. These secret passages at Audley Court are fashioned by “that good old builder—Time, who adding a room one year, and knocking down a room another year,” eventually constructs “a house in which no one room” *appears* to have “any sympathy with another” (8). Lucy, in a like vein, mistakenly believes that “every trace of the old life” as Helen has “melted away—every clue to identity buried and forgotten—except these, except these,” the mementos of her life as Helen that she fastens to a black ribbon around her neck and conceals beneath her dress (16). The artificial divides here—those between subject and object and between Audley Court’s rooms and Lucy’s past and present—assume that human subjects hold power over matter, that subjects are agentic, and that matter is passive. Throughout this novel, though, the heroine becomes a thing-like body and her things take on an animacy that rejects this assumption. Indeed, the heroine’s identities are entangled with her things to the extent that it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish her humanity from her belongings’ vibrancy. The traces people leave on their belongings never fully disappear; thus, when the artificial boundary between the human and nonhuman dissolves, objects turn out to be as agentic as humans, albeit in different ways.

Of course, Lucy, as it turns out, is actually Helen, who has escaped her father’s poverty by marrying George, and then after George’s abandonment, by changing her identity to that of an unwed woman so that she can work as a governess. When she, like George, takes advantage of

an opportunity to get ahead, she is forced to play the role of a child-like woman. She maintains some sense of authenticity by holding on to a few objects from her past as Helen. However, the construction of Lucy's identity on top of Helen's conflates a past that *was* with a past that *was not*. This construction traps the heroine in a destructive double identity. These things from Helen's past doom Lucy's future, as her new husband's nephew Robert is only able to uncover the truth of Helen's identity because Lucy clings to these reminders of Helen's life. Her refusal to let go gives these things power over her identity. Helen's keepsakes—the ring, the shoe, the lock of hair—are far more than inanimate objects; they are dynamic, agentic things that Lucy treasures in place of her family. Lucy's care for these tokens of Helen's family members parallels Fanny's curation of the Bertrams' things in the East room. Lucy's things, unlike Fanny's, though, conceal secrets, and they are willing to share them.

As Elaine Freedgood has demonstrated with *The Ideas in Things*, the scenes we know so well in Victorian novels are full of things that have their own stories to tell. Indeed, the Audley clock appears in many of the passages in which the heroine's secrets are in jeopardy. The heroine's actions, caught between Helen's desperation and Lucy's virtue, mirror the movement of the old clock, which is itself caught between the agricultural era and mechanical and technical time. Nicholas Daly, in *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000*, has already taught us to notice the clock in *Lady Audley's Secret*. He focuses on technical time, specifically the railway and the telegraph, which was, of course, a derivative of the railway (48-49). Still, there is more to be said. I am interested in what happens if we extend and transform Daly's ideas to uncover the significance of a clock whose hand so often points to the heroine's secrets. The Audley clock survives from an earlier period during which time was not regulated as it is in the nineteenth century; thus, it is described as "stupid" and "bewildering," as it has "only one hand"

and jumps “straight from one hour to the next” (7). The clock, then, like the heroine, is “always in extremes” (7). The clock’s extreme movement, as we later learn, prefigures the heroine’s movement. For Lucy, like the clock, had made an unexpected jump: between 16 and 18 August 1854, Helen boarded a train at Wildernsea, Yorkshire, and Lucy arrived at Mrs. Vincent’s school at Brompton (214). Helen Talboys, like this clock hand, which suddenly jumps to the next hour, has thus vanished from one spot, and Lucy Graham has materialized in another spot.

The narrative, beginning *in medias res*, initially only tells the backstory of how the governess Lucy Graham comes to be Lady Audley. The title of the book, named after Lady Audley herself, and the title of the first chapter, “Lucy,” ask the reader to believe the story begins only a little more than a year before, at the point when Lucy Graham marries Sir Michael. The Audley villagers do not seem to know much about Lucy, only that she has come from London, with only a single reference, in answer to a *Times* advertisement for a governess position (10). Lucy offers Sir Michael a few details about knowing nothing but poverty from her “very babyhood” (15). Her father, as she tells him, “was a gentleman; clever, accomplished, generous, handsome—but poor,” and she refuses to speak of her mother (15).³⁴ It does not seem surprising, then, that when Sir Michael, a generous and wealthy man, falls in love, he wants to give Lucy “fairy-like” rooms full of dresses and a casket “as full as it can be of diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds” (30-31). If, as Ian W. Brown argues, we rarely recognize the power of objects

³⁴ What Lucy had reportedly told Sir Michael about her family life changes during her confession to “a very brief story of an early orphanage, and a long quiet, colourless youth spent in the conventual seclusion of an English boarding-school” (297).

(141), then when Sir Michael constructs these rooms for Lucy, he does not realize that keepsakes from her secret past will come to overshadow the objects he purchases, including Lucy herself.

The intention of Lucy's rooms, with their "pictures and gilding, and great looking-glasses that stretch from the ceiling to the floor," and with their painted ceilings "that cost hundreds of pounds" (29), seems to reflect that of the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles (see fig. 1). Prior to the French Revolution, the Hall of Mirrors would have reflected not only the sun's light from the windows overlooking the gardens but also the glow from thousands of tapers and a multitude of jewels worn by the royal family and their courtiers. Indeed, as the narrator later describes, Lucy Audley's "looking-glasses, cunningly placed at angles and opposite corners by an artistic upholsterer, multiplied my lady's image, and in that image reflected the most beautiful *object* in the enchanted chamber" (250; emphasis is mine). With each of her angles multiplied like the facets of a gem, and with the glint of countless candles glancing off her form, in these mirrored rooms, Lady Audley is objectified as the brightest and most sparkling jewel in the box. Of course, not all jewels are authentic, and these mirrors in Lucy's rooms reflect her identity's uncertain authenticity. Mirrors, such as those at Versailles and at Audley Court, were intended to further enrich what was already rich and to raise opulence to new heights, but a mirror can only reflect a one-dimensional image. Even multiple mirrors cannot bring a three-dimensional form fully into existence; instead, multiple mirrors merely result in multiple one-dimensional reflections. But, because the mirrors also reflect one another, they give the illusion of three-dimensional spaces, subjects, and objects. These deceptive reflections are as misleading as the heroine's character.

During the nineteenth century, mirrors, especially large mirrors, were costly and heavy; thus, while Sir Michael has the means by which to construct such a room for his wife, as well as

the financial stability to feel confident that he can remain at Audley Court for as long as he wishes to do so, most homes would not have contained such an extravagance. Compare, for example, Lucy's mirrored rooms to Mrs. Vincent's small mirror, which Robert notices during his visit to Acacia Cottage later in the novel. Robert perceives how the cottage bears "in every scrap of ornament, in every article of furniture, the unmistakable stamp of that species of poverty which is most comfortless, because it is never stationary" (198). The "tiny looking-glass" that hangs on Mrs. Vincent's wall indicates her lack of both financial support and permanency (198).



Figure 9: The Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, France. Image taken 22 June 2016.

Lucy's mirrored rooms, in contrast, are neither portable nor cheap. In fact, they seem to be fashioned after what were, in the late eighteenth century, known as "cabinets."



Figure 10: Mirrored Room, c1780, exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Image Taken 3 March 2018



Figure 11: Ceiling of Mirrored Room exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Image Taken 3 March 2018.

At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the curatorial note for a Mirrored Room exhibit explains, “Palaces and noble houses usually included one or more small rooms, often known as ‘cabinets.’ They were frequently decorated in a single material, such as lacquer, porcelain or mirrors, to create a jewel-like effect. ... The rich, gilded decoration would have sparkled in the light of candelabra set on the tables and been reflected in the mirrored panels” (see figs. 2 and 3). To build such a room, then, is an investment in a beautiful object that Sir Michael himself can enjoy but also show off to others. Sir Michael invests the money to construct dressing-rooms in this style for Lucy, and in turn, he expects that she will use this space to make herself look beautiful. Phœbe’s remark, that Sir Michael is “not jealous ... only proud to see her so much admired” (29), reveals his pleasure in knowing that others envy him in his possession of Lucy.

Of course, Sir Michael knows that Audley Court is “a dreary place enough, even in all its rustic beauty, for so bright a creature as the late Miss Lucy Graham”; thus, to persuade her to live there, the “generous baronet” transforms “the interior of the grey old mansion into a little palace for his young wife” (49). Indeed, Lady Audley, in her new home, seems “as happy as a child surrounded by new and costly toys” (49). Still, the heroine is an actress playing her part. To her maid, she later complains, “It is a dull place, Phœbe ... though it doesn’t do to say so to my dear old husband. Though I am the wife of one of the most influential men in the county, I don’t know that I wasn’t nearly as well off at Mr. Dawson’s; and yet it’s something to wear sables that cost sixty guineas, and have a thousand pounds spent on the decoration of one’s apartments” (95). If, as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in “Why We Need Things,” argues, “Dresses, ornaments, jewelry, furs, silver, china, domestic appliances, and fine furniture witness to a woman’s ability to control energy (often meaning the psychic energy of men) and hence the importance of her

self” (24), then, to be sure, Lucy is willing to act her part, because doing so increases her sense of power over and significance to Sir Michael and Robert. In fact, an earlier scene shows how her position as Lady Audley gives her the right to request that Robert “secure her a set of sables” during his trip to St. Petersburg, without consideration of cost, “but to be sure that they are the handsomest that can be obtained” (46). Lucy’s request shows her assertion of power on multiple levels: first, her purchase of sable fur is inseparable from human dominance over nature, as the sable is hunted exclusively for its fur; second, Lucy’s request is presumptuous, as she expects Robert to tie up his money in her purchase of a luxury good until he can return to England to be reimbursed, which means that she has the comfort of not having to consider from where this money will come; and third, her request demonstrates audacity, as she gives her instructions without awaiting his answer—that is, she assumes that he will do her bidding. And she is not wrong. Robert returns from Russia with her sables. It seems that Robert, like Sir Michael, is eager to make Lady Audley happy, because he, like most people Lucy encounters, finds her “very childishness” to be charming (50). Indeed, she looks as if she has “but just left the nursery” as she sits “with her jewel box beside her, upon the satin cushions, and Sir Michael’s presents spread out on her lap, while she counts and admires “her treasures” (50).

Lucy’s behavior here, as she is encircled by her expensive things and pressed to act like a child, makes her herself appear toy-like. It is no wonder, then, that Alicia describes her as a “wax-dollish young person . . . with flaxen ringlets and a perpetual giggle” (33). In fact, Alicia pronounces her step-mother to be a wax-doll three additional times in the text: when she accuses Robert of only admiring “wax-dolls” (53), when she thinks that Robert is in love with Lady Audley’s “wax-doll beauty” (225), and, right after this thought, when she turns away from Robert and Lady Audley and thinks that “nothing but a blue-eyed wax-doll can set” his heart

“going” (225). For many of Braddon’s readers, Alicia’s description might have seemed like an allusion to Madame Tussauds, a popular wax museum in London, and a space in which the human and nonhuman are visibly identical and equivalent. These readers, especially those who read the Saturday, 19 August 1865 edition of *The Times*, might have connected Lady Audley to Constance Kent, whose wax figure was advertised in the classifieds that day. Most editions of *The Times* only feature one classified advertisement for Madame Tussauds, but three advertisements appear in this edition, one after the other: the first is an announcement that Madame Tussauds will be closed this day due to the death of Mr. Joseph Tussaud³⁵; the second proclaims the exhibition “re-imbellished” for the season; and the third broadcasts the presentation of several new additions, namely Dr. E.W. Pritchard, John Wilkes Booth, and Miss Constance Kent (1), who confessed to murdering her younger brother, whose body was recovered from a privy on his father’s property at the end of June 1860. As Kate Summerscale points out in *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*, the first installment of *Lady Audley’s Secret* was published in *Robin Goodfellow Magazine* only a year after Saville Kent was found murdered (217). While Kent’s waxwork was intended for display along with Pritchard and Wilkes Booth’s waxworks, according to Summerscale, the figure was not exhibited until after Kent’s father’s death and was only on display in Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors from 1873 to 1877 (253-54).

Lucy, much like Kent’s wax figure, is so often objectified that it hardly seems surprising when her self-objectification overcomes her subjecthood. As George recounts while aboard the *Argus*, when he first meets Helen, her father is ready to sell her “to the highest bidder” (22). As

³⁵ Joseph Tussaud was Madame Tussaud’s son.

George happens to be “the highest bidder,” it is no wonder that he makes her feel like a beautiful but replaceable object: as she later exclaims, “Dear me! . . . I thought that one pretty face was as good as another pretty face . . . and that when number one with blue eyes and fair hair died, they had only to look out for number two with black eyes and hair, by way of variety” (77). George’s perception of Helen as an infantilized object is substantiated by a letter to his sister Clara in which he writes, “My childish little wife is watching me as I write this—Ah! how I wish you could see her, Clara! Her eyes are as blue and as clear as the skies on a bright summer’s day, and her hair falls about her face like the pale golden halo you see round the head of a Madonna in an Italian picture” (223). Of course, the heroine’s childish behavior is a performance; she is quite capable. In fact, she seems overqualified for her position as a governess in the Dawson family:

Her accomplishments were so brilliant and numerous, that it seemed strange that she should have answered an advertisement offering such very moderate terms of remuneration as those named by Mr. Dawson: but Miss Graham seemed perfectly well satisfied with her situation, and she taught the girls to play sonatas by Beethoven, and to paint from Nature after Creswick, and walked through a dull, out-of-the-way village to the humble little church three times every Sunday, as contentedly as if she had no higher aspiration in the world than to do so all the rest of her life. (11)

After marrying Sir Michael, however, Lucy reverts to playing the role of the childish little wife, because she recognizes that this behavior is expected, and she knows that women who conform to their husbands’ wishes are provided for generously.

While most of the characters buy into the heroine’s performance as beautiful and innocent, Alicia and Robert come to perceive in Lucy a darker “fatal beauty” (186), which is made explicit in her pre-Raphaelite portrait. According to Miss Tonks, Mrs. Vincent, too,

perceives Lucy as “only ornamental; a person to be shown off to visitors, and to play fantasias on the drawing-room piano” (202). That the heroine is perpetually objectified helps to explain her decision to marry Sir Michael despite her uncertainty about George’s whereabouts. If her father, her husband, and her teacher all perceive her as a thing to be bought, sold, and displayed, then why should she not also benefit from her thingness?

Lucy’s thingness is, however, inseparable from her things’ liveliness. In a narrative flashback to Sir Michael’s proposal, Lucy wears an unspecified ornament—“a locket or a cross, or a miniature, perhaps”—concealed within a folded piece of paper on a black ribbon beneath her dress (14). The trinket is later found to be “neither a locket, a miniature, nor a cross” but “a ring wrapped in an oblong piece of paper—the paper partly printed, partly written, yellow with age, and crumpled with much folding” (17). Presumably, this ring is from Helen’s marriage to George, as Lucy’s act of wrapping it within what is likely George’s farewell note casts a shadow over his later account of leaving Helen “asleep, with her baby in her arms, and with nothing but a few blotted lines to tell her why her faithful husband had deserted her” (21). Together, then, these two passages suggest that Lucy is using the note left for Helen by George as a wrapping to cover the ring. If so, Lucy’s concealment of Helen’s ring within George’s note indicates an inner struggle. If the ring were wrapped in a plain piece of paper, Lucy’s concealment might indicate her desire to keep George’s ring close to her heart, despite the Victorian expectations that prevented married women from working as governesses. But the ring is not wrapped in plain paper. If this paper is, in fact, George’s note, then Lucy’s behavior expresses Helen’s pain and anger, as the circle that is meant to symbolize eternal unity is wrapped within evidence of his abandonment.

The narrative's interest with what seems, at least here at the beginning of the novel, to be an insignificant slip of paper is noteworthy, because, throughout the novel, paper holds the most explicit clues to the heroine's identity: paper, from telegrams and newspapers to labels on bonnet boxes, and from inscriptions in books to handwritten letters, is inseparable from the objects it conceals and from the information it discloses. This note, then, which is created in the act of George's desertion, serves as a material barrier to prevent the ring itself from physically touching Lucy's body; thus, for Lucy to wear the ring around her neck implies her determination to remember his abandonment rather than his love. Such a reminder is especially important when Sir Michael offers marriage. Here, Lucy shows "agitation" and "passionate vehemence," as she clutches "at the black ribbon about her throat, as if it" is "strangling her" (16). For Lucy, this note-wrapped ring is both a reminder that she is already married to George and a cue that she is justified in pursuing a new life for herself, as George has not only abandoned her, but it seems likely that he is dead. Certainly, she has good reason to believe him dead, and the black color of the ribbon on which Lucy wears the ring implies her participation in Victorian mourning rituals. Because Lucy, as a Victorian woman, is unable to defy the social rules that expect women to sartorially demonstrate loss, she is fully unable to separate herself from Helen, and so she continues to bear the weight of George's absence around her neck.

Helen's things, then, move, along with Lucy, to Audley Court, where the setting sun glints off of "the broad face of the old clock over that ivy-covered archway which leads into the gardens" (26). Lucy's maid Phœbe's entrance to the gardens just as the clock strikes eight (26), forewarns of these things' willingness to divulge the heroine's secrets. As Phœbe and her cousin and fiancé Luke examine the heroine's jewelry, Luke pushes "a brass knob in the framework of the box," and "a secret drawer, lined with purple velvet," springs "out of the casket" (31). The

drawer conceals a “baby’s little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and a tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby’s head” (32). Luke, who is more interested in the jewels than in the baby’s shoe and lock of hair, does not see any reason for Lady Audley to hide such “queer rubbish” in the secret drawer, but Phoebe immediately recognizes that these hidden items are worth more than “the diamond bracelet” that Luke wants “to take” (32); in fact, she suspects that Lucy’s concealment of these mementos of motherhood implies a secret, and that their value lies in Lucy’s desire to keep that secret from becoming known. To be sure, Lucy, in hiding these things within the jewel casket, conceals a past life whose details would certainly threaten her new life as Lady Audley.

For Lucy to keep these things that have the power to endanger her position is curious, but for her to conceal them with her most expensive treasures reveals more than a desire to keep a secret; her act of burying these keepsakes deep within her treasure chest suggests a tenderness of heart, a mother’s love that matches neither Helen’s pre-narrative act of leaving her son nor Lady Audley’s late-narrative confession that she does “not love the child” (300). In fact, from Lucy’s confession, she seems to conflate her fear of inheriting her mother’s madness with her anger at George and projects those feelings onto the child, as she explains that after the baby’s birth, she escapes her mother’s “crisis” of insanity but becomes “more irritable,” so that George leaves her when, one day, she rebukes him “for his cruelty in having allied a helpless girl to poverty and misery” (300). Braddon invites us to imagine a story that the heroine’s things tell and that Lucy denies. This is a story in which Helen does not leave her son because she does not love him. She leaves because she is battling what we now know as postpartum depression, which only worsens when she is unable to provide for little Georgey. Helen’s financial standing as Lady Audley, however, allows her to conceal within the hidden drawer this shoe and hair. That she can afford

to hide these objects, rather than her most valuable jewels, in this secretive spot infers her high position. As Csikszentmihalyi notes, artifacts reveal their owners' power through social position, show self-continuity over time through indications of present activity, vestiges of the past, and indications of future ambitions, and they confirm their owners' places within social networks (23). While higher positions are usually associated with more power, Lucy's hidden artifacts are reminders that she has not always had power, and that she has jettisoned—or has tried to jettison—her power to mother Georgey. These things are also reminders that the power she currently holds is conditional and will certainly end if her secret husband and child become known to Sir Michael. Though Lucy cannot take chances by visiting Georgey, she can cherish these items that represent the relationship between herself and her child. Thus, even if she cannot openly express her love for Georgey, her attachment to these things belies her words.

While the shoe and lock of hair imply a sense of love for little Georgey, they are also sentimental mementos from another life. As Kate Hill points out, locks of hair can collapse the difference between the past and the present (164). For Lucy to keep this lock of hair along with the paper-wrapped shoe, then, is to erase the time elapsed between being Helen and becoming Lady Audley. To be Helen is to be a mother, and a biological mother is always materially inseparable from her children in that they are the physical products of her body, so to keep this lock of hair is to maintain a material reminder of the physical body from which this hair was taken. Sarah Ahmed perceives the materialization of bodies as inseparable from objects (248-49). Indeed, just as the lock of hair calls to mind the child's physical body, the shoe, molded to the shape of Little Georgey's foot, becomes a lively substitute for an absent child. Shoes and locks of hair can be hidden in ways that real, secret children cannot. As it turns out, then, Lucy does

believe the secret uncovered by Phœbe and Luke to be worth keeping; in fact, the secret is worth the price of a public house for Luke.

Lucy understands that things are capable of telling stories, so she uses Helen's belongings to play on the emotions fueled by George's loss. When George and Robert travel to Helen's father's house, George notices "a picture over the mantel-piece": "his own portrait" (40), but he quickly notes the absence of Helen's portrait, which used to hang beside his own. Lucy knows, of course, that Helen's portrait must remain hidden to prevent Robert's realization that she and Helen are one and the same. But she leaves George's portrait in its place, likely because she also knows that, for George, the presence of his portrait will call more attention to the absence of Helen's portrait. George, she knows, will read the absence of her portrait as an indication that Helen's father wants to avoid such a detailed image of his lost daughter, which will, in turn, play on George's emotions.

However, Lucy fills the room with other more neutral mementos of George and Helen's life together, which, though less personal, still have the presumably intentional effect of making George feel nostalgic and melancholy. Indeed, George roams "restlessly about, looking at and sometimes touching the knickknacks [*sic*] lying here and there": "Her work box, with an unfinished piece of work; her album, full of extracts from Byron and Moore, written in his own scrawling hand;³⁶ some books which he had given her, and a bunch of withered flowers in a vase

³⁶ While returning to England aboard the *Argus*, George meets a governess, who attempts a discussion with him about "fashionable literature," including Shelley and Byron, but George laughs "in her face, as if poetry were a joke" (18). The narrator explains, "Mr. Talboys was by no

they had bought in Italy” (40).³⁷ Helen’s incomplete work and the wilted flowers call to mind the shortness of life’s span, and the books and vase recall happier times for George. The album, which holds George’s handwritten extracts is especially significant, though, as, while returning to England aboard the *Argus*, George meets a governess, who attempts a discussion with him about “fashionable literature,” including Shelley and Byron, but George laughs “in her face, as if poetry were a joke” (18). The narrator explains, “Mr. Talboys was by no means too learned a gentleman” (18), but this later passage reveals that George knows more of Byron, at least, than even he may realize. As we all know, of course, the act of transcribing literature is never passive, because the process of handwriting is linked to memory; thus, for George to see these excerpts that he once wrote out by hand brings the past to life in the present moment, as he recalls memories and emotions connected to Helen. While this is a house in which the “real” Helen Talboys never resided, Lucy has staged Helen’s belongings to suggest her recent touch, yet the portrait of Helen that has always hung beside George’s portrait is excluded, because it is the one piece of evidence that will physically connect Helen to Robert’s new aunt, Lady Audley.

While Captain Maldon has clearly taken careful measures to work with Helen to conceal the secret behind her identity, Mrs. Plowson is not so crafty. Still, when Robert first learns of

means too learned a gentleman,” but this later passage reveals that he knows more of Byron and Shelley.

³⁷ This passage calls to mind the passage in *Middlemarch* in which Ned Plymdale shares with Rosamond Lady Blessington’s “Keepsake” annual (253), as well as later passages in which Rosamond’s investment in her own belongings after her marriage to Lydgate result from her perception of these things as central to her identity.

Helen's death, he is unsuspecting of the truth, so he accepts Mrs. Plowson's explanation that hair "changes in illness" when she passes off a lock of Matilda's "smooth and straight" hair as a substitute for Helen's "rippling" curls (41). Despite this lock of hair being so very unlike the hair he had taken from Helen in life and continues to keep within the pages of a book in his trunk, holding this physical lock of recently cut hair offers George a sense of closure as well as a sense of closeness. As Deborah Lutz points out in *The Brontë Cabinet*, during the nineteenth century, many believed that a "lock of hair taken from a corpse connected the living ... to an afterlife where the dead resided" (xxi). The sentimentality of Mrs. Plowson's description of how Helen, abandoned by her husband, "sunk under the fatal malady," also increases George's sympathy (for himself as well as for Helen!) and makes him want to believe that this hair was cut from Helen's head as she "lay in her coffin" (41).

Portraits, like locks of hair, were another way to remember the dead during the nineteenth century. In Lucy's case, however, the portrait that she is in the process of having painted is an indication of her continued life and vitality. Just as Robert and George make their way to Audley Court to "ask Alicia to take them over the house" (60),³⁸ the narrator calls attention to the "stupid

³⁸ Lucy, threatened by George's visit to Audley Court, has contrived a means of being absent from home by employing Phœbe to send a fabricated "telegraphic message" to Audley Court from Mrs. Vincent. The message asks Lucy to come to her at once. When the message arrives in Volume One, Chapter Seven, Sir Michael says, "Put on your bonnet, Lucy; We shall be in time to catch the express" (59). Lucy's later allusion to this trip, in Volume Three, Chapter Three, however, reveals a textual inconsistency. Lucy confesses using Mrs. Vincent's name as "an excuse for this hurried journey ... with no other escort than Phœbe Marks, whom" she leaves at

clock” (61). The clock’s extremes, like the heroine’s identity, which is always threatened by the past, resist nuanced progress. The clock, for example, knows “no middle course”—it skips “from one hour to the other”: the clock’s hand points to seven as the two men pass beneath the archway, “but, for all that, it was nearer eight” (61). What seems, in the moment, to be an aside is, then, an indication that the heroine’s secret is in jeopardy, as George is unknowingly making his way closer to Lady Audley’s unfinished portrait. Because Lady Audley is aware that her portrait is a danger to her secret, she is careful to keep her rooms locked. To access her rooms, and thus the portrait, then, George and Robert must make their way through what seems like a rabbit hole. When they rise from a secret passageway into “the elegant disorder of Lady Audley’s dressing-room,” George finds himself looking at “the whole of her glittering toilet apparatus ... on the marble dressing-table” (63). The scene is an uncanny parallel of the earlier passage in which George wanders about the staged room in Helen’s father’s home, looking at and sometimes touching Helen’s belongings. Here, George finds the “atmosphere of the room ... almost oppressive,” which the narrator attributes to “the rich odours of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced” (63). Because George is not yet aware that Lady Audley and Helen are one and the same, and because he does not recognize any of these belongings, he

the hotel while she goes to her father’s house (355). This trip is when Lady Audley supposedly arranges her deceptive plan in which Helen Talboys’ name is buried with Matilda Plowson’s body. Without this unnarrated scene, the plot of the novel seems to fall apart, because if Sir Michael insists on traveling with Lady Audley, then how and when does she engineer such a complicated design?

does not consider the possibility that this oppressiveness might be a physiological reaction to being among his wife's things.

Still, her presence is everywhere, and his eyes pass over the things that she has recently touched and used: a "bunch of hothouse flowers ... withering upon a tiny writing table," some "handsome dresses ... in a heap upon the ground," and the jewelry, the "ivory-back hairbrushes" and the "exquisite china," all of which is "scattered here and there about the apartment" (63). It seems significant that no one has sorted out her mess. Even George, standing here among his wife's things, does not recognize the mess she has made. In fact, the presence of Lady Audley's hairbrushes implies that George is in proximity to loose strands of Helen's golden curls, but the unfamiliarity of these things is distracting, especially when he sees himself reflected, "among these womanly luxuries," in Lady Audley's "cheval-glass" (63-64). Although the things, then, are Lucy's—and thus Helen's—they do not trigger George's memories. Anything that he might connect to Helen is, naturally, hidden and locked away. Of course, Lady Audley believes her unfinished portrait to be safely locked away, as well, but, then, she appears to be unaware of this rabbit hole that leads to her rooms.

George, upon seeing this work, immediately discerns that Lady Audley resembles his wife Helen; in fact, the resemblance is so strong that there can be no other explanation: the subject of the painting *is* Helen. It is as if the missing portrait of Helen that used to hang above her father's mantle beside George's portrait has transformed and reemerged before him in this new form. The assumed pre-Raphaelite artist has not only "painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown" but has also "exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes" and fixed upon the subject's

“pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait” (65). The painting reveals the heroine’s extremes. The feathery locks evoke images of angel wings and halos and support Lucy’s reputation at the beginning of the novel as “the sweetest girl that ever lived” (11). Even though the heroine leaves her son and father behind to make a new life for herself, as she later tells Robert during her confession, “I found out my father’s address and sent him large sums of money, anonymously, for I did not wish him to discover what had become of me” (301-02). If she were actually as cold-hearted as she is made out to be by other characters and the artist of this painting, she would not use her new wealth and position for “acts of kindness and benevolence” (301). However, as the painting suggests with its “sinister” eyes and “almost wicked” mouth (65), Lucy is not always all that is sweet and calm. There is certainly something devilish about Lucy, as George and Robert will both learn.

Still, this painting emits a sense of evil, as if Lucy is intrinsically wicked. The folds of her crimson dress, for example, resemble “flames,” and her head is described as “peeping out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace” (65). George, like Sir Michael, has only ever perceived the heroine’s angelic features, but through this painting that, like a mirror image, is “so like and yet so unlike,” George now distinguishes in her face new lines and new expressions” (65). Until this point, George has believed his wife to be childlike, but he now recognizes that she is a more complex and vibrant being than he has ever realized. This realization as he comes face-to-face with an image of his wife as Lady Audley shocks George into stunned silence and paralysis.

For George, the painting captures and swirls together multiple contradictions: Helen, Lucy, the past, the present. The effect is a disjoining of time and space. In “Rhetoric of the Image,” Roland Barthes argues that an image is a “re-presentation,” and, as such, it is a

“resurrection” (32). Indeed, for a man who has believed his wife to be dead, this painting brings to life a rereading of her form in an inanimate and revelatory object. But the painting’s uncanny vitality also provokes a disorienting experience for George as a disconnect or disruption of his perception of time and space. He must at first wonder why Helen’s image is in Lady Audley’s rooms. The last time George saw Helen, he was kissing her and little Georgey goodbye as they slept in Wildernsea, Yorkshire.³⁹ Now, a year after purchasing her tombstone, he is immobilized by the sight of an in-process portrait of Sir Michael’s wife, Lady Audley, because this representation is, at the same time, an image and a revelation of his own wife, Helen Talboys.

George sits before this painting “for about a quarter of an hour without uttering a word—only staring blankly at the painted canvas, with the candlestick grasped in his strong right hand, and his left arm hanging loosely by his side” (65). From George’s statue-like pose, it seems that he, too, transforms into a work of art.⁴⁰ As W.J.T. Mitchell, writing in *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, suggests, some pictures desire “a kind of mastery over the beholder” (36). And some pictures, perhaps this painting, wish “to change places with the beholder, to transfix or paralyze the beholder, turning him or her into an image for the gaze of the picture in what might be called ‘the Medusa effect’” (Mitchell 36). Indeed, until Robert finally prompts a response from George, there seems to be a sense of ambiguity surrounding the

³⁹ In the wall text for an exhibit entitled *Theatre, Crime and Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Yorkshire* Janine Hatter suggests that Braddon renames “Withernsea ‘Wildernsea’ to increase its sinister associations in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.”

⁴⁰ This passage parallels another passage in *Middlemarch*, that in which Will seems to become a statue as he and Dorothea stare at one another (511).

subject, George, and the object, this painting of Lady Audley: which is the original and which is the representation?

In its unfinished state, the portrait also denotes a moment of uncertainty for the subject's identity. The woman who stares out of the canvas is not quite Helen, but neither is she entirely Lucy; the subject almost seems to have taken on a third identity, another unknown life. Mitchell discusses "the peculiar tendency of images to absorb and be absorbed by human subjects in processes that look suspiciously like those of living things" (2). He explains, "We have an incorrigible tendency to lapse into vitalistic and animalistic ways of speaking when we talk about images. It's not just a question of their producing 'imitations of life' (as the saying goes), but that the imitations seem to take on 'lives of their own'" (2). What is especially terrifying here is the way that the woman in this painting emanates a sense of malevolence, as if the life she lives behind the subject is one of wickedness. Through this possible third identity, the image comes alive to disclose the subject's secret. Within this painting, then, the line that distinguishes subject from object dissolves, as does George's belief in Helen's childish and angelic qualities.

As George, with this knowledge, prepares to follow Robert from Audley Court, the "one hand of the stupid old clock" jumps to nine, and before they can pass beneath the arch, Sir Michael and Lady Audley arrive (66). Although the text does not offer a description of what takes place next, it hardly matters whether or not Lady Audley is yet again able to avoid making George's acquaintance, because George already knows her, quite well, in fact. Sir Michael's comment on the weather, however, does offer a clue as to what the next day will hold: "I think the storm will hold off to-night ... but we shall certainly have it to-morrow" (66). The storm to which Sir Michael refers is, of course, that night's thunderstorm, to which both George and Lady Audley react with fear, but the textual implication alludes to an unnarrated meeting, which takes

between these two characters in the lime-walk on the following day and ends in George's disappearance.

Despite Helen's careful planning and Lucy's careful lying, once Robert becomes suspicious that Lady Audley has something to do with George's disappearance, he begins to intimidate her and to drive her closer to desperation in his search for clues:

Indeed, he knows that he only needs circumstantial evidence to prove Lucy guilty:

A scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt; the fragment of a letter; the shutting or opening of a door; a shadow on a window-blind; the accuracy of a moment; a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer. (107)

Despite Lucy's best efforts—for example, sending herself telegrams via Phoebe and stealing the letters that Helen had sent to George and that George, in turn, stores in his trunks in Robert's rooms (55-56, 134)—she is unable to suppress all the objects that are waiting to spill their secrets, especially those that contain her unique handwriting. When Alicia first shows Robert a sample of Lady Audley's handwriting, he expresses his certainty that, even if he had never seen Lady Audley, he “should know what she is like by this slip of paper”: “Yes, here it all is ... the feathery, gold-shot, flaxen curls, the pencilled eyebrows, the tiny straight nose, the winning childish smile, all to be guessed in these few graceful up-strokes and down-strokes” (60). When Robert later searches George's trunks for clues, he discovers a book that holds not only an earlier example of these up and down strokes but also material evidence of Helen's presence (134-37).

While the objects with which we interact always hold some sign of that contact, as Lutz explains, “Books especially bear the leavings of inky, soiled, or oily fingertips and palms,” and

some readers, like the Brontës, even “scribbled, doodled, and inscribed in their books—stuck plants, drawings, visiting cards in them—making their presence manifest” (xxi-xxii). Of course, we should not forget that *Lady Audley’s Secret* is itself a book that was first serialized and later published in three-volume form.⁴¹ Though the book was consumed across classes, it was labeled “kitchen literature”; thus, some readers’ copies surely bore the marks of being stuffed beneath and behind furniture and crammed into boxes and closets.⁴²

Robert finds the most explicit intimations of Helen’s bodily presence within an 1845 annual with a gilt and crimson cover: the book contains a “bright ring of golden hair, of that glittering hue which is so rarely seen except upon the head of a child,—a sunny lock which curled as naturally as the tendril of a vine” (136), and a three-part inscription, each written in different handwriting, the third of which, in familiar “graceful strokes,” bequeaths the book to George from Helen (136-37). This book serves as a container for the evidence Robert needs to connect Lady Audley’s handwriting and golden ringlets with Helen’s hand and hair. For George,

⁴¹ First, *Lady Audley’s Secret* was partially serialized in *Robin Goodfellow Magazine*, but the magazine failed in September 1861. Beginning in January 1862, the novel began serialization in the *Sixpenny Magazine*. And in October 1862, the novel was published in three volumes (Pykett xi). For more on the novel’s publication history, see Lyn Pykett’s Introduction to *Lady Audley’s Secret*.

⁴² Indeed, my own copy of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, like George’s books, is physically marked by my relationship to the text; for example, it contains notes from multiple readings, traces of meals that I have eaten while working, hundreds of orange sticky flags protruding from the page edges, and a rather worn cover from being crammed into bookbags, suitcases, and bookcases.

however, the book is meaningful for other reasons, specifically as a physical link to Helen, as the act of gifting a book leaves bodily traces imprinted within the pages. As Victoria Mills writes, Oscar Wilde distributed his books himself: “Touched by him,” she claims, “the books retained traces of his corporeal presence and their gifting suggests a notion of inheritance and transmission based on bodily connection” (135). That George’s book embraces matter from Helen’s body between its covers, then, may help to explain why he would have kept an annual with “copper-plate engravings of lovely ladies, who had flourished in that day,” but which were now “yellow and spotted with mildew; the costumes grotesque and outlandish; the simpering beauties faded and commonplace” (136). This book, though certainly outdated and not George’s style, has touched Helen’s hands, it brings together her name with his inside the cover, and it hugs a lock of her hair between its pages. This book, with binding the colors of Helen’s red blood and golden curls, is an embodiment of Helen herself; thus, to hold this book is a means for George to recover his proximity to her, to figuratively hold the hand that inscribed the book.

Robert, even with this evidence of Helen’s inscription written in a hand that mirrors Lady Audley’s writing, and even while Helen’s lock of hair matches Lady Audley’s curls, is determined to collect more evidence before he confronts Lucy. He finds his additional evidence in “a dilapidated paper-covered bonnet-box” on which are pasted “scraps of railway labels and addresses” (203). These labels hold the clue that tie Lucy Audley to Helen Talboys, as the “only direction” that is not “defaced or torn away” is the label “with the name of Miss Graham, passenger to London,” which is pasted over another on which is written Helen Talboys’ name (203). Robert’s discovery seems surprising, not only because he is characteristically lazy at the beginning of the novel, but because Lucy is usually so careful to cover her tracks.

But is she really? Helen could have easily changed her appearance along with her identity. Lady Audley obviously has knowledge of beauty products, as she points out the likeness between herself and Phœbe. All Phœbe needs, Lady Audley informs her, is color:

My hair is pale yellow shot with gold, and yours is drab; my eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown, and yours are almost—I scarcely like to say it, but they're almost white, my dear Phœbe; your complexion is sallow, and mine is pink and rosy. Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phœbe. (54-55)

The products that Lady Audley uses, however, are intended to enhance rather than to obscure her beauty, as the narrator twice comments on her “pencilled eyebrows” (60, 72). With eyebrows and lashes that are darker than her hair color, Helen might have easily darkened her hair when she changed her identity, but she is too proud of her curls “shot with gold” to artificially change their color. Ironically, then, if Lady Audley had only taken her own advice to Phœbe, the connection between Helen and Lucy would not be as discernible to Robert. Beauty, though, is Lady Audley’s greatest downfall: Helen’s beauty is the one remnant of the past that Lucy refuses to hide.

Lady Audley not only refuses to alter her image; she strives to enhance it by surrounding herself with objects that indicate accomplishment. Her rooms at Audley Court, for example, are staged with “evidence of womanly refinement” (250):

My lady’s piano was open, covered with scattered sheets of music and exquisitely-bound collections of scenas and fantasias which no master need have disdained to study. My lady’s easel stood near the window, bearing witness to my lady’s artistic talent, in the shape of a water-colored sketch of the Court and gardens. My lady’s fairy-like

embroideries of lace and muslin, rainbow-hued silks, and delicately-tinted wools littered the luxurious apartment. (250)

These things—the piano, the easel and painting, and the fancy work—are all marks of class and education, and together they form a narrative. The open piano and sheet music, the watercolor that still rests on the easel as if it is not yet dry, and the fancy work that is strewn throughout the rooms suggest an industry within the home that would contradict any counter-narrative that labels Lady Audley the culprit of a crime. Because industry and beauty are so often associated with goodness, Lady Audley hopes her performance and beauty will be her protection. Her beauty especially reinforces the childish and angelic image she strives to create; for, no one would believe a childlike angel would ever engage in the actions Lady Audley seeks to conceal. To be sure, as the narrator points out, “If Mr. Holman Hunt could have peeped into the pretty boudoir, I think the picture would have been photographed upon his brain to be reproduced by-and-by upon a bishop’s half-length for the glorification of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood”:

My lady in that half-recumbent attitude, with her elbow resting on one knee, and her perfect chin supported by her hand, the rich folds of drapery falling away in long undulating lines from the exquisite outline of her figure, and the luminous, rose-colored firelight enveloping her in a soft haze, only broken by the golden glitter of her yellow hair—beautiful in herself, but made bewilderingly beautiful by the gorgeous surroundings which adorn the shrine of her loveliness. (251)

Lady Audley’s beauty and performance are, of course, dependent on the things with which she surrounds herself. But Lady Audley finds that the deeper she sinks into wickedness, the less comforting these things become.

Indeed, Lucy and her things are so entangled that when she is unhappy, her things seem

to lose their vibrancy. When Lucy, in despair, looks around her rooms, “the luxurious chamber” appears “as if the Sèvres and bronze, the buhl and ormolu,” are “the mouldering adornments of some ruined castle” and as though “every object about her, and all outer things” take “their color” from her “weary inner life” and “secret anguish” (255). And when her things appear less vibrant, her own vivaciousness turns violent. When, for example, she realizes that she has “strayed ... into a desolate labyrinth of guilt and treachery, terror and crime,” she believes that her treasures can give her “no pleasure but one, the pleasure of flinging them into a heap beneath her feet, and trampling upon them and destroying them in cruel despair” (252). Because Lucy’s self-worth is intertwined with these things, her desire to demolish them reveals a wish to destroy herself. The effect is both Dorian Gray like and cyclical, as the longer she sits in her room dwelling on her self-hatred and fear, the more her things suffer, and the darker these things appear, the more distraught she feels. Lucy’s stability, then, is not merely intertwined with her belongings; her belongings are a part of her.

When Phoebe brings Lucy a threatening letter from Robert, who is staying at the Castle Inn, Lucy recognizes the immediate danger Robert poses. He seems to push her into a corner. She tells herself, “He will do it ... he will do it, unless I get him into a lunatic asylum first; or unless—” (264). The thought—“He will do it, unless some strange calamity befalls him and silences him for ever” (264)—which leads to Lucy’s unfinished sentence is what pushes her over the edge and into a world in which her humanity seems to dissolve. Even Lucy’s physiological patterns change, as “some new and unnatural pulse in her heart” seems to “beat out each separate syllable against her breast” (264). Lucy, petrified by the turn her mind has taken, transforms into an inanimate form. First, she loses all color, as her blood rushes to her face “with as sudden and transient a blaze as the flickering flame of a fire” before it dies “as suddenly away, leaving her

more pale than winter snow” (264). Next, she seems to lose control over her bodily motion. “Her hands,” for example, “which had before been locked convulsively together” fall apart and drop “heavily at her sides,” and she suddenly stops “her rapid pacing to and fro” (264). And then she undergoes a transformation, as “with every pulse slackening,” and “with every drop of blood congealing in her veins,” she begins “the terrible process that was to transform her from a woman into a statue” (264). Lucy remains “for about five minutes” in this “strangely statuesque attitude, her head erect, her eyes staring straight before her—staring far beyond the narrow boundary of her chamber wall, into dark distances of peril and horror,” but she breaks from her rigidity “almost as abruptly as she had fallen into it” (264). Though she remains “very pale” with her lips “firmly locked,” there are no other traces “of agitation visible in her girlish face” (264). That Lucy “might command her eyes,” but that she is unable to “control the muscles of her mouth” (264), is suggestive of the way that Lucy is losing control over her own actions.

In fact, as the end approaches, the clock, not her belongings, demands Lady Audley’s attention. On the morning after the Castle Inn fire, for example, Lady Audley awaits the news of Robert’s death. When she notices that the “solitary hand of the clock over the archway” is “midway between one and two,” she remarks upon the slowness of time: “Shall I grow old like this, I wonder, with every minute of my life seeming like an hour?” (285). The Audley Court clock tells more than the time here, however. Until this point, the clock’s movement has been, like Lucy’s movement: “extreme.” Here, though, Lucy’s movement is confined to her rooms, and the clock’s movement becomes less erratic and more predictable. Time seems to slow down because Lady Audley’s anticipation induces her anxiety more than the “dreaded intelligence”; it seems “as if the intolerable day” will “never come to an end” (289). The narrator calls attention

to Lady Audley's awareness of the time three more times before she finally hears footsteps, *Robert's* footsteps.

After Robert forces Lady Audley to confess to Sir Michael, he calls in a doctor rather than the police, because, in an upper-class, patriarchal society, a man's name is one of his most valuable assets. To protect the "stainless name" of Audley "from degradation and shame" (322), Robert uses his patriarchal power to have the heroine diagnosed as insane rather than criminal: the institutionalization of a woman can be concealed, but the criminalization of a woman cannot. The doctor arrives in Audley via train at "half past ten o'clock, and at five minutes before eleven, Richards, the grave servant," announces the arrivals of "Dr. Alwyn Mosgrave" (318). Dr. Mosgrave is on a strict schedule; thus, he has only twenty minutes to spare (322), and he is hyperaware of the time, as indicated by the more technological and modern chronometer that he carries in his pocket (319). Despite his rush, however, the doctor feels confident in his diagnosis and commits the heroine to an isolated *maison de santé* in Belgium (324).

As Robert prepares to leave Lucy in the asylum at the end of the novel, she asks, "Has my beauty brought me to *this*?" (333). The descriptive imagery from the asylum evokes Lady Audley's rooms at Audley Court: "a single wax-candle ... glimmered everywhere about the rooms; in the shadowy depths of the polished floors and wainscot, or the window-panes, in the looking-glasses, or in those great expanses of glimmering something which adorned the rooms, and which my lady mistook for costly mirrors, but which were in reality wretched mockeries of burnished tin" (331). The rooms at the asylum are, like Lady Audley's portrait, both like and unlike the rooms that Sir Michael prepares for her at Audley Court. Lady Audley seems to recognize the difference between the original and the replica, as she claims that the asylum will be her "grave" (333). She knows, that is, that she is unlikely to ever leave this place; thus, her

beauty will be wasted here. With this realization, she pulls at her “feathery golden curls” as if to tear them “from her head,” as her curls have “served her so little after all, that gloriously, glittering hair; that beautiful nimbus of yellow light that” contrasts “so exquisitely with the melting azure of her eyes” (333). Here, at the end of the novel, Lady Audley hates “herself and her beauty” (333); she resents her body, because it, like her other things—the baby’s shoe and hair, locks of her own hair and notes written in her own hand, and her portrait—betrays her. In fact, her body, which bears her inheritance from her mother, betrays her into madness itself. Lucy, as hard as she works to control her things, learns that her things have their own agenda, and despite her impressions, they have never been under her control.

To be sure, Lucy’s belongings turn on her, spill her secrets, and betray her without her realization, because her love and fascination for her things, and these things’ connections to Helen and Helen’s lost love, overtake even her own self-love and drain her subjectivity, thus transforming her body into an object to be admired as the painted representation of Lady Audley. When Audley Court is “shut up” and evacuated by the family, a “curtain hangs before the pre-Raphaelite portrait” of Lady Audley (379). This image seems strikingly similar to the painting in Robert Browning’s poem, “My Last Duchess.” In Browning’s poem, the curtain is intended to prevent the Duchess from smiling at anyone but the Duke. Sir Michael, in contrast to the Duke, has no desire to ever again look upon his wife’s image; in fact, it is his “earnest wish never again to hear that person’s name” (339). Though the heroine’s name may not be mentioned in Sir Michael’s presence, within his house, the painting continues to demand notice by objectifying Lady Audley’s body and by making it the focus of others’ gazes: “The house is often shown to inquisitive visitors, though the baronet is not informed of that fact, and people admire my lady’s rooms, and ask many questions about the pretty, fair-haired woman who died abroad” (379).

This painting is not only a remnant of Lady Audley's vitality and an example of the vibrancy of her things but also a reminder that subjects are inseparable from objects. The lively woman in the painting anticipates Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Parallel to Hyde's disabling of Jekyll and the painted subject's absorption of Dorian's subjectivity, this representation of Lady Audley slowly engulfs the heroine's vitality.

CHAPTER 6

THROUGH THE *MIDDLEMARCH* PIER-GLASS AND WHAT DOROTHEA LEARNED

THERE

“And you can't go in for an exam without drinking,” said Edward. He hesitated; he held the glass to the light in imitation of his father. Then he sipped. He set the glass on the table in front of him. He turned again to the Antigone. He read; then he sipped; then he read; then he sipped again. A soft glow spread over his spine at the nape of his neck. The wine seemed to press open little dividing doors in his brain. And whether it was the wine or the words or both, a luminous shell formed, a purple fume, from which out stepped a Greek girl; yet she was English. There she stood among the marble and the asphodel, yet there she was among the Morris wall-papers and the cabinets—his cousin Kitty, as he had seen her last time he dined at the lodge. She was both of them—Antigone and Kitty; here in the book; there in the room; lit up, risen, like a purple flower. No, he exclaimed, not in the least like a flower! For if ever a girl held herself upright, lived, laughed and breathed, it was Kitty, in the white and blue dress that she had worn last time he dined at the Lodge. He crossed to the window. Red squares showed through the trees. There was a party at the Lodge. Who was she talking to? What was she saying? He went back to the table.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, 47

*Pygmalion had seen these women spend
Their days in wickedness, and horrified
At all the countless vices nature gives
To womankind lived celibate and long
Lacked the companionship of married love.
Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
With marvellous triumphant artistry
And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
Than ever woman born. His masterwork
Fired him with love. It seemed to be alive,
Its face to be a real girl's, a girl
Who wished to move—but modesty forbade.*

...

*She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!
And then indeed in words that overflowed
He poured his thanks to Venus, and at last
His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
Her eyes to his and saw the world and him.*

—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X: 240-296

With a copy of *The London Times* in her lap, a fiberglass representation of George Eliot sits in her reconstructed drawing-room at the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery (see fig. 1). George Henry Lewes leans over the back of her chair, while John Cross faces the couple from across the room. For Nancy Marck Cantwell, a sense of lifelessness surrounds this exhibit, as she describes “three garishly dressed mannequins, stiffly posed in a staged Victorian drawing room” (249). But what if we were to imagine these *things*, to borrow Bill Brown’s term, as already full of vitality? To conceive of these things as lively might seem counterintuitive, but is it? Why do we love this stuff? Might it be that we can feel a connection to Eliot when we are surrounded by her things? While some aspects of this exhibit are reconstructions—Eliot’s dress and the wallpaper, for example—other components lend even greater authenticity to the scene. According to the curatorial text, the side table, the round wall mirror, a drawing of Dante, and the footstool upon which Cross rests his feet all belonged to Eliot during her lifetime; although the chair in which she sits has since been reupholstered, it is one that she often used during her visits to Charles and Caroline Bray’s home; and, not long after Eliot’s death, the wooden hinged screen was constructed from the pew her family used at Chilver’s Coton Church. That Eliot touched many of the things in this room brings them to life, not only because she used them—with her physical body, she wore down the fabric and padding, scuffed the wood, and smudged the glass—but also because, in touching these material objects, her deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) was transferred to the inanimate matter through perspiration and skin cells. Because DNA is the fundamental part of a living body, through her touch, Eliot’s living body became entangled with these things, and, in turn, the remnants of her touch continue to exude vibrancy into these figures, bringing them to life for viewers. To articulate an awareness of this energy is to defy our understanding of the laws of nature. Still, the museum staff, recognizing that we want the

museum to be alive, makes occasional changes to this exhibit, as indicated by differences in both Cantwell and Rebecca Mead’s published descriptions of the set, which differ from each other as well as from my own observations.⁴³ These differences imply animation: the figures move about the room when our backs are turned.



Figure 12: George Eliot Room Set at the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery, Nuneaton, UK. Image taken 23 February 2018.

⁴³ For more on Cantwell’s and Mead’s visits to the Eliot exhibit, see Cantwell’s chapter, “‘A Woman Whom Men Could More Than Love’: Transfiguring the Unlovely in George Eliot (1819–1880),” and Mead’s article, “Middlemarch And Me: What George Eliot Teaches Us.”

On the wall opposite this exhibit is a marble sculpture of what is believed to be Eliot's left hand, made from a cast taken shortly after her death on 22 December 1880 (see fig. 2). Three rings adorn these sculptured fingers, which partially cover a marble flower and rest upon an ornamented pillow that has been carved into the stone. The curator's note identifies this sculpture as an example of "the Victorian tradition of remembering the dead through artwork, jewellery, and photography." Indeed, if the museum's conjecture is correct, and this sculpture is, in fact, a marble carving of Eliot's hand, then, it blurs the lines between life and death and between Eliot's human body and inanimate representations of her, even more so than the fiberglass figure. White marble sculptures made from casts of the human body, like this one of Eliot's hand, are lifelike



Figure 13: Sculpture of what is believed to be George Eliot's left hand on display at the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery, Nuneaton, UK. Image taken 23 February 2018.

both in the translucent appearance that is produced when light penetrates and refracts through the polished stone and in their exactness of the original. To create a marble sculpture from a cast captures nuances of the human body in ways that later fiberglass representations would have been unable to realize: the exact shape of Eliot's nails, the length of her fingers, the circumference of her wrist, the pattern made by the raised veins on the back of her hand, and even the creases and scars that marked her skin.



Figure 14: Bronze Statue of George Eliot in Newdegate Square, Nuneaton, UK. Image taken 23 February 2018.

Another representation of Eliot appears contemplative as she looks down at the pavement with her torso bending forward and twisting slightly to her right, as if she were about to rise from the low wall on which she sits, this time in the midst of Nuneaton's busy city center (see fig. 3). Here, sunlight diffracts off curves of carved bronze, lending an illusion of movement to the figure whose skirt folds and drapes gracefully around her feet; however, this figure of Eliot is caught motionless in this moment with her right hand resting on a book at her side.⁴⁴ According to Kathleen Adams's description, at the unveiling of this statue on 22 March 1986, the sculptor, John Letts, declared this book at Eliot's side to be a copy of *Middlemarch* (Burton).

Here, let us turn to *Middlemarch* itself to consider an experiment in reading the novel diffractively. Of course, in a project that focuses in part on diffraction and entanglement, a turn to *Middlemarch* must invoke Eliot's famous pier-glass "parable," through which she illustrates the misperception of disconnection by revealing the pier-glass to be more expansive than what can be illuminated by a single candle flame (see figs. 4 and 5) (248). Each time the candle moves to a different spot on the pier-glass, the scratches in the glass seem to reorganize themselves around the light; however, if the flame were large enough to illuminate the entire glass at once, we would perceive the multitudinous connections that lie outside of the smaller light. As the narrator explains:

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be

⁴⁴ For more on the erection of Eliot's statue, see John Burton's "30 Years of the Statue: Looking Back on the 30th Anniversary of the Unveiling" on *The George Eliot Fellowship* website.

minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. (248)



Figure 15: Pier-table (1740-60) and mirror (1735-40) exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image taken 3 March 2018.



Figure 16: Pier-glass (1770-71) exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image taken 3 March 201

N. N. Feltes argues that the “eminent philosopher” to whom Eliot refers is not only Herbert Spenser, as commonly believed, but also John Ruskin (70-71). Ruskin, Feltes explains, described “his analysis of the effects of light and shade on water” in an 1844 letter that was later published, and Feltes also finds that Spenser perhaps not so coincidentally “described the same ‘optical delusion’” in his 1873 *The Study of Sociology* (69). The difference between Ruskin and Spenser’s descriptions, according to Feltes, is that while “Ruskin was concerned simply with the factors which account for the illusion itself, the position of the observer and the position of the reflecting waves, Spenser uses the whole phenomenon as a metaphor for the ‘objective difficulties’ which a sociological inquirer must overcome” (70). Jonathan H. Turner, Leonard Beeghley, and Charles H. Powers explain Spenser’s “objective difficulties” as the biases that can distort data: personal position; popular opinion’s predisposition; personal, organizational, and bureaucratic influences; empiricism; and temporal and spatial constraints (74). Spenser, then, insisted on the necessity of collecting data from multiple sources and at various times and places in order to battle these objective biases (Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 74). With her pier-glass “parable,” Eliot demonstrates the folly of Spenser’s “optical delusions”: an inability to perceive something, she shows, is not necessarily evidence of nonexistence. By explicitly dissolving the boundary between the living and nonliving realms, Eliot uncovers a “web” of relations, including the entangled connections between women and men, and those between women and the material world. Rosamond’s inseparability from the props through which she understands her own identity and Dorothea’s increasing agency as an effect of her entanglement with the Vatican Museum’s *Sleeping Ariadne* statue demonstrate Eliot’s understanding of matter and meaning as indivisibly connected. This experiment in reading diffractively, then, is already inherent in Eliot’s most famous material object in *Middlemarch*, the pier-glass.

At the beginning of the novel, Rosamond, whose “flower-like head on its white stem” is “seen in perfection” (108), embraces her objectification, because she believes it will get her what she wants: the expensive objects she needs to reinforce her image as the “flower of Middlemarch” (275). Rosamond recognizes that flowers are more likely to be planted in large houses filled with beautiful objects and showered with gifts of clothing and jewels. She is, it seems, correct; for Lydgate admits to himself that he is “descending a little in relation to Rosamond’s family,” but he is able to justify his marriage since “that exquisite creature herself” also suffers “in the same sort of way,” and, through their marriage, he can “give her a much-needed transplantation” (328). Though Lydgate has no money to speak of, his uncle is titled. In marrying Rosamond, then, he believes that he is offering her an advantage by removing her from her manufacturing family and planting her in soil that has, at least, richer connections. To be sure, social mobility would not have been seen as advantageous by all. For example, in the 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which was published approximately eighty years before Eliot published *Middlemarch* and forty years prior to the novel’s setting, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that, “like flowers which are planted in too *rich* a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity” (71; emphasis is mine).⁴⁵ That Rosamond strives to be the flower that Lydgate and Middlemarch society believe her to be, then, indicates not only that she has yet to reach maturity but also that

⁴⁵ In relation to *Middlemarch*, it seems remarkable that seven of Wollstonecraft’s nine uses of *flower* metaphorically describe women.

her training and education inhibit any development that would encourage her to care less about her appearance and more about the growth of intelligence and sensibility.

Rosa mundi is Latin for Rosamond, and, as her name implies, she is certain that her perfect performance will be rewarded in upward mobility: the flower of Middlemarch will become the flower of the world. Rosamond, as “the flower of Mrs Lemon’s school” (89), learns how “to get in and out of a carriage” (89); she learns to turn “her long neck a little, and put up her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits” (149-50); and she learns to play the piano so that a “hidden soul” flows from fingers on the keys (150). Rosamond’s education and experiences shape her recognition of how others perceive her body, her awareness of her own body as an object, and her desire for material objects. To maintain her status as the “flower of Middlemarch,” Rosamond reads other characters’ responses to her words and actions, and then she uses that knowledge to negotiate and reconstitute her image. In Karen Barad’s terms, “Beyond the issue of how the body is positioned and situated in the world is the matter of how bodies are constituted along with the world, or rather as ‘part’ of the world” (160). Matter, it seems, shapes both Rosamond’s manners and her behavior: Mrs. Lemon has prepared Rosamond, a manufacturer’s daughter, for social mobility by training her to perform the deportment and accomplishments of upper-class women: music, art, and fancy work.

While Doreen Thierauf rightly argues that Rosamond’s education at Mrs. Lemon’s school is “misdirected” in its inadequacy to the goal of financially-based marriages (481), Rosamond, as the narrator points out, only thinks of money “as something necessary which other people would always provide” (252). In fact, Rosamond’s parents teach her to value objects but not money: her father has “expensive Middlemarch habits,” as he spends his money “on coursing, on his cellar, and on dinner-giving,” and her mother keeps “running accounts with tradespeople, which give a

cheerful sense of getting everything one wants without any question of payment” (216).

Rosamond’s parents’ attitude toward money affects her understanding of housekeeping. As the narrator explains, because Rosamond has been “accustomed from her childhood to an extravagant household,” by the time she herself becomes a wife, she believes that “good housekeeping” is “simply ... ordering the best of everything” (552). Rosamond, then, refuses to perceive her marriage as financially-based; for her, a marriage is built on materiality.

So, while her education at Mrs. Lemon’s school does teach her how to catch a husband and how to perform as a blossoming, flourishing flower on display in her proper place, both her education and her upbringing fail to teach her how to be what Middlemarch society considers a successful wife and homemaker.

Had Rosamond learned to manage a home from her parents, her education would not have been quite so failed, and she and Lydgate might have been more effective money handlers. When they do get into financial trouble, though, Rosamond displays no sense of responsibility toward the problem; in fact, she distances herself not only from the debt but also from Lydgate, whom she sees as the problem. Indeed, Rosamond builds her identity on “that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness” (252). In this constructed identity, Rosamond is always correct and thus in the position to criticize others and to turn down marriage proposals; in fact, has already turned down “two excellent offers,” because she intends “to live as she please[s]” (278), and she has already determined marriage to be “a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people, and perhaps at least associate with relatives quite equal to the county people who

looked down on the Middlemarchers” (156). Her options are limited, though; no Middlemarch men can meet Rosamond’s standards until Lydgate arrives on the scene.

Even before they formally meet, Rosamond develops a romantic interest in Lydgate based on a rumor that “he is of excellent family—his relations quite county people” (93). Despite her brother Fred’s early warning that “rich men may have very poor devils for second cousins,” she insists, “It always makes a difference, though, to be of good family” (93). Rosamond misunderstands Lydgate’s situation when, without asking, she assumes his connection to a titled uncle indicates financial security as well as access to social position. And, after meeting Lydgate briefly at Featherstone’s house, Rosamond is certain that he is her “ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections” that offer “vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank” (110). By the time Rosamond is on her way home from Featherstone’s, then, she has already begun to image herself floating heavenward as Mrs. Lydgate. In this staged performance as Lydgate’s wife, she pictures herself surrounded by expensive material props:

Rosamond, whose basis for her structures had the usual airy slightness, was of remarkably detailed and realistic imagination when the foundation had been once presupposed; and before they had ridden a mile she was far on in the costume and introductions of her wedded life, having determined on her house in Middlemarch, and foreseen the visits she would pay to her husband’s high-bred relatives at a distance, whose finished manners she could appropriate as thoroughly as she had done her school accomplishments, preparing herself thus for vaguer elevations which might ultimately come. There was nothing financial, still less sordid, in her previsions: she cared about

what were considered refinements, and not about the money that was to pay for them.

(110)

For Rosamond, matter leads to manners, and her manners are always at the center of her performance and full of meaning. Because her performance is entangled with the objects she associates with refinement, her body is inseparable from props that denote accomplishment. The material objects with which she surrounds herself, then—for example, her piano, her bonnets, and, after marriage, her household furnishings—create temporary boundaries that hold different meanings, and Rosamond carefully makes each selection to produce a desired effect on her act. Rosamond's performance has demonstrated results, as it leads her first to courtship and then to marriage to Lydgate. Since, prior to the opening narrative, Lydgate unsuccessfully pursues an actress whose acting is “no better than it should be” (142), it is ironic that he unknowingly marries an actress whose acting is so natural that he does not even recognize her to be an actress. As the narrator describes, though, Rosamond is “by nature an actress of parts” who so effortlessly “acts her own character” that she does not even “know it to be precisely her own” (109). As “an actress of parts,” or a woman of many talents, Rosamond is skilled in selecting the correct props with which to create the image she associates with her identity. As we have seen, for Mihály Csikszentmihályi, owners, through their belongings, assert their power and social position, demonstrate their own self-continuity over time by possessing vestiges of the past, objects that signal future ambitions, and, of course, things that confirm their rightful place within current social networks (23). Certainly, then, for Rosamond to lose the objects that she believes define her would be to lose her identity; for how can Rosamond know her character to be her own if Lydgate removes the props?

Of course, Rosamond's aunt, Harriet Bulstrode, has always objected to Rosamond's upbringing and education, and, for that reason, she foresees trouble in a marriage between her niece and Lydgate. Harriet knows that Rosamond has been "brought up in luxury—in too worldly a way" to survive on Lydgate's "small income" (325), because her own drastically different upbringing has better prepared her to understand the importance of money. In contrast, for Rosamond and Mrs. Vincy, material objects not only hold more meaning than money, but even mentioning money shows poor etiquette. Rosamond, in fact, expresses her distaste when Lydgate and Will mention money in her presence: "I cannot conceive why money should have been referred to" (439). And when Mrs. Vincy does discuss money, she often does so indirectly and condescendingly; for example, she points out that women such as Mrs. Garth and Mary must work for their "bread" (218, 380), suggesting an inherent class difference between those who have to work for their daily bread, like the Garths, and those, such as Rosamond with her heavenly aspirations, for whom God provides. Mrs. Vincy's twisting of the Lord's Prayer is an anxious response to the volatility of financial wealth, as the Garths had once been prosperous but had since fallen in society. By pointing to the "bread" the Garths earn rather than the money they no longer have, then, Mrs. Vincy draws a clear distinction between the modest Garths and the more genteel Vincys. Mary's work provides food; Rosamond's work results in higher-value rewards. Indeed, Rosamond is rewarded through her marriage to Lydgate, which leads to material returns with significant meanings: dinner parties, wedding-clothes to wear on her honeymoon visit to Sir Godwin Lydgate's home, and a homecoming to what used to be Mrs. Bretton's very large house.

When, after their marriage, Lydgate approaches Rosamond for help in reducing their debt, she begins to distance herself from him, so that they may as well be "creatures of different

species and opposing interests” (560). Still, up to this point, he has not identified himself with her, either. He has merely treated her as an object. In fact, as a “housewife” in all senses of the word, Rosamond relates more to the objects in their home than she does to Lydgate. Working against her husband in her desperation to retain her home and belongings, Rosamond admits that “if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him” (559-60). The behavior to which she refers has less to do with how Lydgate financially overextends himself and more to do with his public solution to the overextension, as he suggests returning some of the plate and allowing “a man ... come to make an inventory of the furniture” (558-60). Rosamond knows that to lose the furniture—her props—will mean losing face and losing a part of herself, because her entire identity is built on their home and belongings. In other words, to lose the matter is to lose the meaning.

Rosamond is caught in a spiritual conflict. She wants to be good, but the world always seems to move against her. Though she can only conceive of herself through things, the material self of which she does conceive is a heavenly self whose earthly body is clothed in expensive garments and jewels, just as in the Bible: “I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. ... You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty” (Ezek. 16.11-13). Of course, Lydgate is not as rich as God. In fact, he nearly asks her to return “some purple amethysts costing thirty pounds,” which he had given her as a wedding gift (554).

That Rosamond can conceive of herself only through and among things highlights the novel’s 549 appearances of the word *thing*. Mary Garth is described as an “ugly thing” (104),

and her sister Letty as a “silly thing” (230), while Dorothea and Harriet Bulstrode are both referred to as a “poor thing” (508, 700). But only one character is repeatedly labeled a “thing”; *six times* throughout the novel, Rosamond is identified as a “poor thing” (535, 610, 698, 711, 725, 734), and she literally is a “poor thing,” since, as the narrator explains, “The poor *thing*” perceives that the world is “not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate” is, of course, “part of that world” (610; emphasis is mine). Though Rosamond wants to maintain fixed relations with her material objects, she neither has money nor wants any connection to what she perceives as money’s vulgarity, but she cannot understand that, without money, keeping these objects is impossible. Rosamond *is* a “poor thing,” because, in threatening to take away Rosamond’s objects, Lydgate threatens to take away her sense of self, leaving her with only a sense of thingness without value.

In Rosamond’s eyes, Lydgate’s behavior makes him the most recalcitrant object of all. Of course, Lydgate only intends to decrease expenses when he suggests, “We can do with only one servant, and live on very little ... and I shall manage with one horse” (609). Rosamond, perceiving his suggestion as a personal attack, argues, “Of course you can dismiss the other two servants, if you like ... but I should have thought it would be very injurious to your position for us to live in a poor way” (609). While Rosamond is likely correct about Middlemarchers’ attitude toward a doctor whose financial situation is in peril, she is more worried about her own social position without the objects that define her. Indeed, Lydgate’s financial and social instabilities are a risk to Rosamond’s inanimate belongings—her jewels, dinnerware, piano, and home. As long as his credit remains in good standing, he plays his part in Rosamond’s intention to join the ranks of the aristocracy. But for Rosamond, who arranges “all objects around her with ... nicety” (725), Lydgate’s behavior is out of order and potentially fatal. Rosamond, frantic to

protect her appearance as a flower whose blooming face turns gracefully on her long stem of a neck, argues that Lydgate, who is working to reform medicine, “should be more careful not to offend people, and ... should send out medicines as the others do” (610). Flowers, she knows, flourish with plenty of warm sunshine, and Lydgate’s actions cast a cloud over Middlemarch.

Wollstonecraft attributes women’s “barren blooming” to “a false system of education” (71), as women, she argues throughout the text, cannot be expected to see reason if they are not trained to do so. Indeed, Lydgate, though livid over Rosamond’s suggestion, quickly checks his anger, because he understands that Rosamond has no conception of the world outside of what is illuminated by her candleflame against the pier-glass. But rather than educating her, he perpetuates her ignorance. Rosamond’s education, or *lack* of education, echoes Wollstonecraft’s critique of how “all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society” (87). Of course, Eliot was well-acquainted with Wollstonecraft’s work; in fact, in 1855, she published a review essay in *The Leader* comparing Wollstonecraft’s 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, which Fuller had originally published in 1843 as *The Great Lawsuit*. A reading of Rosamond’s education at Mrs. Lemon’s school through Eliot’s awareness of Wollstonecraft’s text underscores Rosamond’s character by calling attention to how Rosamond has been trained to perform indifferently when faced with any problem she does not understand. Her act of apathy, in turn, prevents further education by barring her comprehension of Lydgate’s and her financial situation, and such behavior is suggestive of a weak and artificial character.

But, as Lydgate learns, not all aspects of Rosamond's character are weak. Because Rosamond, like the matter in Lydgate's late-night medical experiments, has always behaved as he expects, when he proposes letting go of the house and most of the furniture (611), he is blindsided by what he sees as irrational behavior. Only here does he discover that Rosamond is not the impassive object that he has always believed her to be:

There was gathering within him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond. His superior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he had imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on every practical question. He had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was—what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent. No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests: she had seen clearly Lydgate's preeminence in Middlemarch society, and could go on imaginatively tracing still more agreeable social effects when his talent should have advanced him; but for her, his professional and scientific ambition had no other relation to these desirable effects than if they had been the fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil. And that oil apart, with which she had nothing to do, of course she believed in her own opinion more than she did in his. Lydgate was astounded to find in numberless trifling matters ... that affection did not make her compliant. (549-50)

Lydgate cannot imagine the “flower of Middlemarch” to be anything but sweet and docile, so, until this moment, he has assumed Rosamond is content in her sanctuary under his authority. For Rosamond, however, their home is less a shrine to his superiority than a stage on which she is the star performer; thus, to maintain her position, she will “do everything it *becomes* [her] to do”

(561; emphasis is mine). In fact, Rosamond intends to do whatever it takes to become *Rosa Mundi*, that is, the flower of the world. Lydgate's misguided confidence in the passivity of flowers and women indicates that he is too focused on corporeal matter to appreciate the nuances of matter's vitality. Lydgate fails to recognize that Rosamond, while beautiful, is also a thinking, sentient being with an agenda of her own. In his world, the world of medical research and experimentation, matter does what he expects it to do based on his past experience. However, not even the marble flower that is pinned to the ornamented pillow beneath Eliot's sculpted fingers at the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery is passive, because it, like organic flowers, is composed of energetic and lively matter. Rosamond, then, undermines Lydgate's authority by questioning his motives and refusing to obey his commands. And what might be even more astonishing to Lydgate than his realization that Rosamond has her own ideas, is that she also has agency and power. All the while he has believed himself to be in control, she has been manipulating situations behind his back.

Although Rosamond is often portrayed as a bird of paradise in her beautiful cage, in the final chapter, the narrator recalls that Lydgate "once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (782). Lydgate's description of a man-eating plant who feasts on the dead alludes to John Keats's 1820 poem "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil," which Keats based on the fifth story of the fourth day in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (810). While Keats's "Isabella" does not appear on Avrom Fleischman's chronological list of what Eliot read throughout her lifetime, other poems written by Keats do appear, as does *The Decameron*. Moreover, as William Holman Hunt's 1868 painting *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* is not only based on Keats's poem but even shares its title, it seems unlikely that Eliot, who was widely read, could have been unaware of

Keats's "Isabella," in which a basil plant not only prevails despite obstacles, but flourishes, dominant and powerful. And her probable knowledge of this poem instills this depiction of Rosamond as a basil plant with significant meaning. Indeed, Rosamond has flourished by the Finale: having married a wealthy physician following Lydgate's death, she makes "a very pretty show with her daughters, driving out in her carriage" (782).

While Rosamond surrounds herself with material objects and orders them to her liking, Dorothea "likes giving up" even the objects she wants, unless, that is, she feels that not "giving up" contributes to her spirituality or benefits others (17). In fact, the opening scene in which Dorothea and Celia divide their mother's jewels foreshadows Dorothea's eventual understanding of matter and meaning's entanglement. Dorothea only allows herself to keep the emerald and diamond ring and bracelet that captivate her when she can "justify her delight in the colors by merging them in her mystic religious joy" (13). Still, the narrative never mentions Dorothea wearing these coveted jewels.

The jewels' absence throughout the remainder of the novel seems pointed. Even later in the text, when she is married to Casaubon, Dorothea does not have "a single ornament on her besides her wedding-ring, as if she were under a vow to be different from all other women" (341). From the beginning, she strives to be different from other women, because she seems to believe that to be like other women would mean being objectified and dehumanized. Dorothea wants to be something more than what Middlemarch society generally approves women to be; thus, in her yearning for something greater, she rejects society's expectations for young women's behavior, as well as the matters with which women are rewarded for demonstrating such behavior, namely material objects and babies:

But perhaps no persons then living—certainly none in the neighborhood of Tipton—would have had a sympathetic understanding for the dreams of a girl whose notions about marriage took their colour entirely from an exalted enthusiasm about the ends of life, an enthusiasm which was lit chiefly by its own fire, and included neither the niceties of the trousseau, the pattern of plate, nor even the honours and sweet joys of the blooming matron. (26)

Dorothea does not merely disregard the material objects that others perceive to make life comfortable and pleasurable; she openly rejects them. Even Casaubon offers to make alterations to the rooms Dorothea will use for her personal use at Lowick (68), and even *he* hopes their marriage will result in the creation of a material “copy of himself” (261). But, though imbued with the idealism of youth, Dorothea is not yet ready to be a “blooming matron” (26); she is too consumed by her thirst for knowledge to be occupied with the sort of matters expected of women in her position.

Dorothea, rather than holding matronly aspirations, is consumed with her perception of marriage as “that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it” (10). Dorothea presumably recognizes that, if she were to become a mother, she would not have time to learn Hebrew, even if she did wish it; thus, through marriage to an older scholar, such as Casaubon, she will gain “a guide who” will “take her along the grandest path” (27). As she says to herself:

I should learn everything then ... It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great work. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know

what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England. (27)

Dorothea is initially drawn to Casaubon for his prioritizing of knowledge over money and material objects, and, indeed, as the narrator later points out, “If he ever felt keenly any question of money it was through the medium of another passion than the love of material property” (414). At this early point in the novel, however, Dorothea is not yet aware of any other medium of passion. She only knows her own desire “to be wise” (59), and the path to wisdom, she believes, lies in her choice of a husband. Her marriage to Casaubon, then, is an indication that Dorothea imagines that he will desire her for her mind rather than for her body. So, when Casaubon falls ill, Middlemarch society considers Dorothea saintly for her continued care for a husband who sacrificed her young body.

Readers and critics alike have pitted the “selfish” Rosamond against the “generous” Dorothea, but when these two characters meet face-to-face for the first time, Eliot’s narrator points, not to their personalities, but to their material differences:

Let those who know, tell us exactly what stuff it was that Dorothea wore in those days of mild autumn—that thin white woollen stuff soft to the touch and soft to the eye. It always seemed to have been lately washed, and to smell of the sweet hedges—was always in the shape of a pelisse with sleeves hanging all out of the fashion. ... the grace and dignity were in her limbs and neck; and about her simply parted hair and candid eyes the large round poke which was then in the fate of woman, seemed no more odd as a head-dress than the gold trencher we call a halo.

...

They were both tall, and their eyes were on a level; but imagine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hair-plaits, with her pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know the price of, her small hands duly set off with rings, and that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity. (406-07)

Dorothea's expensive yet simple white wool emphasizes her beauty, but it also highlights her open personality and virtue. Will, who is present at Dorothea and Rosamond's first meeting, can feel confident, then, that he knows the true Dorothea. However, the description of Rosamond's dress and behavior as expensive commodities suggests that she consciously and selectively chooses her clothing as she does her other props, all of which allow others to know the character she performs but not the authentic Rosamond. Throughout the novel, Rosamond remains a collector of material things—dresses, collars, rings—things that draw attention to her body, and so she is accustomed to Will's attention as she plays the piano. In fact, as Mrs. Cadwallader reports, no one ever goes to the Lydgates' house "without finding this young gentleman lying on the rug or warbling at the piano" with Rosamond (590). But, here, Rosamond suddenly fails to hold his attention. Will is "too much occupied with the presence of the one woman to reflect on the contrast between the two" (406). That he has eyes only for Dorothea despite being in the company of Rosamond, whose form usually receives all attention, echoes an earlier passage in which he is transfixed by Dorothea even as she stands beside the famous *Sleeping Ariadne* statue in the Vatican.

In this earlier scene, Dorothea, encouraged by Casaubon to see all the objects in Rome that are deemed worth seeing, such as the frescos and paintings, the ruins, and the museums, is

on her walk through the Vatican, lost in melancholy thought, when she happens to pause beside the *Sleeping Ariadne*. She appears to be completely unaware of the statue, however, as, instead of admiring its form, she stares at a band of sunlight that crosses the floor. Naumann, perceiving artistic potential in Dorothea's form and pose, beckons Will:

Quickness was ready at the call, and the two figures passed lightly along by the Meleager, towards the hall where the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness. They were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. She was not looking at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor. (177)

Dorothea's dreamlike pose in this scene could be mistaken for an otherworldly escape into a classical past, since she appears to transform into a marble statue herself; however, as the narrator later discloses, she has, instead, time traveled into the future. Dorothea does not "see the streak of sunlight on the floor" any more than she sees the statues that line the room; instead, she is "inwardly seeing the light of years to come in her own home and over the English fields and elms and hedge-bordered highroads" (190).

While the Italian sunlight streaming into the Vatican enters Dorothea's state of consciousness and transforms into English sunlight, it outwardly affects Will's perception of Dorothea as she stands next to the *Sleeping Ariadne*. As the light streams into the room, it bends

in waves that allow for the emergence of new forms of time, space, and matter. The light waves highlight and cast shadows on the woman and illuminate the marble through refraction, transforming and animating these human and nonhuman bodies. And with the stone and human bodies frozen in similar poses and both draped in folds of cloth, it seems difficult for us to know which is the subject and which is the object. In this moment, Dorothea and Ariadne are both subject *and* object, both body *and* thing. Dorothea's vitality, like Ariadne's, is seemingly suspended: both are caught in the act of waiting, the act of sleeping, and seemingly unconscious of the outer world. Captured here by the light, Dorothea and Ariadne become an inseparable whole, and they remain entangled throughout the novel. We can understand their connection through subsequent passages when Dorothea is uncannily described in terms of sculpture. This metamorphic scene from the Vatican haunts each of these ensuing passages, as Dorothea, portrayed as outwardly marble and inwardly lively, gains the agency needed to break free of Casaubon's control and to learn to live her own life.

One of the first key moments of metamorphic haunting occurs when Lydgate explains Casaubon's illness to Dorothea. She sits as though she has "turned to marble, though the life within her" is "so intense that her mind" has "never before swept in brief time over an equal range of scenes and motives" (271). Dorothea appears immobilized, but as in the *Sleeping Ariadne* scene, she is inwardly lively and full of energy. The *Sleeping Ariadne* haunts Dorothea's vitality here, because it, too, appears both immobile and constantly moving based on its components. Lyall Watson compares stone with microchips, suggesting that both are "capable of storing energies and, given the right circumstances, playing these back later" (32). Eliot, who was well-read in geology, would have certainly been familiar with stone's agentic properties, as she would have known that marble is created during limestone's metamorphosis and moves to

the surface when the earth shifts during continental collision. As a product of the earth's becoming and an inseparable part of its energy, marble emerges from the earth yet retains its sense of movement. Dorothea's seemingly supernatural entanglement with the *Sleeping Ariadne*, then, resembles marble's movement in that it allows her to thereafter defy the stasis that surrounds Casaubon, to absorb the marble's resiliency and its fluid and slowly changing character. Because of her abilities, she is caught in an inseparable opposite movement with her new husband: as Casaubon's body and mind weaken, Dorothea's grow stronger.

Casaubon perceives the danger in Dorothea's increasing self-control when he makes his last request of her, that, in the event of his death, she will promise to "avoid doing what" he "should deprecate, and apply" herself to do what he "should desire" (449). Casaubon, parallel to Lydgate in his misreading of Rosamond's character, has hitherto perceived Dorothea to be under his control, so when she hesitates to promise without knowing his intentions, he charges her with taking control of her own actions, of attempting to live her own life: "But you would use your own judgment; I ask you to obey mine," he insists (449). Casaubon feels threatened by Dorothea's emerging agency; in fact, he sees himself as having already taken precautions to prevent Will, in the event of Casaubon's death, from preying on Dorothea's "affectionate ardour or her Quixotic enthusiasm" (394). With Will now rejecting financial support, Casaubon has no control over him, making control over Dorothea even more crucial. To Casaubon, Dorothea's liveliness is an expression of defiance, which is "dangerous," to put it in W.J.T. Mitchell's terms. In *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Mitchell claims, "The dangerous moment is always the moment of animation, when the sculpted object takes on 'a life of its own'" (246). Indeed, Casaubon intends to curb Dorothea's independence. By this point, she is no longer "the young creature who had worshipped" Casaubon "with perfect trust"; in his mind,

Dorothea has “quickly turned into the critical wife” (392). Here, toward the end of Casaubon’s life and hence the end of Dorothea’s married life with him, she has reached her limit with his jealous distrust and control. But the ending of Casaubon’s life marks a vivacious beginning for Dorothea, as she begins to transform into a more agentic being in preparation to take on a life of her own.

Throughout the novel, Dorothea’s character grows and changes, but she experiences her greatest transformation in the moments when her character is described in marble-like terms, for example, following Casaubon’s death, when Celia informs her of his codicil and the blot it risks leaving on her young life:

Dorothea by this time had turned cold again, and now threw herself back helplessly in her chair. She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband’s conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them—and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. *Her world was in a state of convulsive change*; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he could, under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the sudden revelation that another had thought of him in that light—that perhaps he himself had been conscious

of such a possibility,—and this with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting conditions, and questions not soon to be solved. (461; emphasis is mine)

Celia expects her news to be a “violent shock,” but its intensity has more to do with Dorothea’s inner metamorphosis, this “convulsive change,” than with any concern with the opinions of Middlemarch society. When Dorothea throws “herself helplessly back in her chair” at the beginning of this passage, she assumes a pose that is similar to the *Ariadne*’s recline, calling attention to how mythological stories of Ariadne continue to refract through Eliot’s novel.⁴⁶ Each time Dorothea seems to enter a statue-like trance, she reemerges seeming as though she can perceive the world anew.⁴⁷ Here, in this reclining position, she appears as motionless as

⁴⁶ In the way that Casaubon leaves Dorothea near the Vatican’s *Sleeping Ariadne* to be discovered by Will, in Book VIII of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, Ariadne is abandoned by Theseus as she sleeps on the Greek island of Naxos, where she is later discovered by Bacchus (158-86). Casaubon’s mind is described like a maze, recalling the Minotaur, and, indeed, after finding Dorothea in the Vatican, Will says, ““You have been brought up in some of those horrible notions that choose the sweetest women to devour—like Minotaurs. And now you will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive. It makes me savage to think of it!”” (206). Of course, parallel to Dorothea’s second chance at love with Will, Ariadne is transfigured through Bacchus’s love.

⁴⁷ Dorothea’s new vision resonates with Eliot’s own experience of touring Rome. In *George Eliot and Italy: Literary, Cultural and Political Influences from Dante to the Risorgimento*, Andrew Thompson finds that Eliot was unimpressed upon her arrival in Rome but gradually came to perceive the beauty of the city with its mix of ancient and modern architecture (43).

Casaubon in death, while within her mind and body she vibrates with the possibility of new life. At this moment, Lydgate enters and finds Dorothea's hand to be "of marble coldness" (461). Rather than signifying weakness or death, like Casaubon's dead hand, this emphasis on Dorothea's cold hand resonates with Ariadne's marble strength in the Vatican and with the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery's vibrant sculpture of Eliot's hand, the hand which brought Dorothea into being. Each of these hands point to Dorothea's increasing strength and resolve to live life for herself instead of for her late husband.

As Dorothea returns to Lowick following Casaubon's funeral, she receives Will as a visitor in a drawing-room whose description resembles the opulence of the marble statue-lined spaces of the Vatican: "The drawing-room was the most neutral room in the house to her—the one least associated with the trials of her married life: the damask matched the wood-work, which was all white and gold; there were two tall mirrors and tables with nothing on them—in brief, it was a room where you had no reason for sitting in one place rather than in another" (508). Without personal effects, the space of the drawing-room is museum-like; it seems so un-lived in that even a "winged visitor" makes a difference (509). Though Dorothea and Will have seen each other a number of times since their first encounter, when Dorothea enters the room, the narrator remarks upon the dissimilarity in their feeling between this meeting and "that first meeting in Rome, when Will had been embarrassed, and Dorothea calm" (509). Now, Will is "miserable but determined," while Dorothea is unable to conceal her "agitation" (509). This remark sets up the scene as an inverse of their encounter in Rome, as if, like Alice, they stepped through the two tall mirrors to enter the room. Now, Dorothea, infused with Ariadne's marbled strength, is not the only object of the gaze; while Will watches Dorothea, she intently watches him back. For Will, they are "like two creatures slowly turning to marble in each other's

presence, while their hearts” are “conscious and their eyes” are “yearning” (511). They realize that there is “no help for it” (511): they must part. But, in this inverted scene, Dorothea and Will only part on a somatic level; metaphysically, they become as inseparably linked as if they were carved from a single block of marble.

Dorothea, shortly thereafter, is “leaning against a statue in the entrance-hall” of her uncle’s home when she learns that Will is also in her uncle’s house (591). Reclining against this statue prepares Dorothea to enter a state of lively stasis when Will, frustrated with the situation and believing that he and Dorothea can never be together, departs in irritation. She, on the other hand, sits “like a statue, while images and emotions” are “hurrying upon her” (596). The spirit of the *Ariadne* is evocative in Dorothea’s outward transformation into a statue-like figure, whilst the energy of life surges and beats within her. To Dorothea, it does not seem crucial that she and Will cannot be physically together, because they are united in something greater: love. While Dorothea has always privileged ideas over matter, she has yet to learn what Will already knows: matter and meaning are entangled; thus, her love for Will is entangled with his physical presence.

Over Dorothea’s periods of transformation, she finally comes to realize that, like Will, she needs matter as well as meaning; she needs his abstract love, but she needs his loving, physical body, too. In his corporeal absence, she finds solace in a material object: the miniature of his grandmother, which hangs in her boudoir. This image has been Dorothea’s companion since her return from her honeymoon, disillusioned with her marriage to Casaubon. Since then, it has become a vivacious stand-in onto which she can project her love for Will. Indeed, this miniature of Will’s grandmother, whose face resembles his, seems to grow and to become animated rather than “withering and shrinking away” like the other things in her boudoir (258).

Dorothea's experience with the miniature in her boudoir is reminiscent of Fanny Price's relationship with her lively, friendly things in the East room in *Mansfield Park*, especially her behavior toward Edmund's portrait profile, which hangs above the mantel-piece. Dorothea, like Fanny with Edmund's portrait, talks to the miniature of Will's grandmother as a way of working through her own feelings. In fact, this miniature is her first explicitly treasured possession since her sudden desire to keep her mother's emeralds. And as Dorothea speaks with the miniature, watches it, thinks about it, and feels about it, she finally begins to perceive the significance of matter and meaning's inseparability:

Dorothea could fancy that it was alive now—the delicate woman's face which yet had a headstrong look, a peculiarity difficult to interpret. Was it only her friends who thought her marriage unfortunate? or did she herself find it out to be a mistake, and taste the salt bitterness of her tears in the merciful silence of the night? What breadths of experience Dorothea seemed to have passed over since she first looked at this miniature! She felt a new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it. Here was a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage. Nay, the colors deepened, the lips and chin seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light, the face was masculine and beamed on her with that full gaze which tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted. The vivid presentation came like a pleasant glow to Dorothea: she felt herself smiling, and turning from the miniature sat down and looked up as if she were again talking to a figure in front of her. (258)

For Dorothea, this miniature of Will's grandmother is not a prop but an entanglement of matter and meaning through which she learns to love on all levels. When the image transforms into

Will, and, like Will, responds to Dorothea, she watches it, thinks about it, and feels toward it. Where Casaubon has no time for Dorothea, this face within the miniature has eyes and ears only for her. And, unlike the “rayless” Casaubon, this image shines with Will’s “sunny brightness”: light emanates from the hair and eyes just as how Will’s hair seems “to shake out light” (196). Before Dorothea’s very eyes, the painted features grow and change, just as Will’s “very features” change in “form”: “his jaw” is “sometimes large and sometimes small; and the little ripple in his nose” is “a preparation for metamorphosis” (196). Will’s grandmother’s miniature displays a dynamism like that of the lively stasis presented by the Dorothea-Ariadne marble, as the image refuses to remain still within its frame. It shifts and flickers, calling out to Dorothea. Where it hangs on the wall, Dorothea must go to it for comfort, as she can only feel its response to her when she is physically proximate to the image.

Finally, however, Dorothea removes the miniature from the wall and keeps “it before her, liking to *blend* the woman who had been too hardly judged with the grandson” (514; emphasis is mine). That a miniature painting appears to come to life in a nineteenth-century realist novel does not seem odd here. In fact, the miniature’s vibrancy recalls a history in which miniature portraits were painted on vellum and ivory, materials that were once part of living beings, which imbues miniatures with a greater sense of vitality. Thus, painting representations of human faces on a canvas made from animal skin or tusks humanizes the no longer living animals whose bodies provide the structure of an absent loved one, and even those loved ones who have passed on take on a sense of liveliness from the once animate background. What is odd here is Dorothea’s response to the miniature’s liveliness. Indeed, for a woman who claims not to understand art, it seems curious that Dorothea’s imagination is capable of blending these two faces together, as if they were a pair of stereoscopic images. That she does learn to do so, though,

suggests this scene to be a turning point in the novel. Here, at last, Dorothea understands the entanglement of matter and meaning. Her love for Will produces an agentic interaction between her and the vibrant thing that reminds her of him. The imagery produced when she places “the little oval picture in her palm and” makes “a bed for it there, and” leans “her cheek upon it” (514), evokes an image of Ariadne and Dorothea’s poses in the Vatican, their hands “pillowing” their cheeks, but it also reveals how the greatness of ideas alone no longer satisfies Dorothea. Her increasing need for materiality is made explicit when the power of love becomes too much for Dorothea to keep locked away inside of herself. She gravitates to the thing whose form in its complexity and multiplicity most closely resembles Will.

Although Dorothea at first embraces ideas over objects, she eventually learns that she needs both to find happiness, that she must “learn what everything costs” (762). If she is to give up the estate she inherited from Casaubon to marry Will, a man “with no property, and not well-born” (784), then, she must give up some of the time she usually spends on ideas to learn housekeeping skills such as budgeting and shopping, as she may no longer be able to afford to pay for a housekeeper. To gain Will’s love, she must give up her model of higher notions. Through such “giving up,” Dorothea comes to realize that, for women, including herself, to reach their full potential, “there must be a systole and diastole in all inquiry,” and that “a [wo]man’s mind must be continually expanding and shrinking between the whole human horizon and the horizon of an object-glass” (602), as these connections always persist, even when they are repressed and concealed. Dorothea’s eventual recognition of her own place in the world is a corollary of matter and meaning’s inseparability. Dorothea reconceives materiality, as Barad might put it, “in terms of the shift in ontology from things to phenomena” (336), that is, to an entanglement of matter and meaning.

Dorothea comes to understand her position in the material world through three famous consecutive scenes: when she walks in on what appears to be a private moment between Will and Rosamond; when she spends the night sobbing on the floor; and when she wakes with a clearer understanding of the world. From these moments, Dorothea realizes that an ethical life depends on both a systole and diastole view of the world:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labor and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (741)

Life, for Dorothea, materializes in this scene, as she realizes that its greatness is about more than ideas; life is also about people and their physical struggles, about nature, from the top of the curving sky down to the crops that grow in the field. Dorothea's newfound systole and diastole vision acknowledges the ways that the animate and inanimate world are entangled in a fluid whole, and she comes to see her own place in this material world. While it is impossible to visually or even mentally encompass everyone and everything in the world and thus also impossible to escape exclusions, it *is* possible to see different sections of the world through our own movement. Throughout her night of sobbing, Dorothea can only see her own misery, but when she applies her new understanding of the world's entanglement to the scene between Will and Rosamond, she is forced to ask, "Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only?" (741).

These questions lead her to realize that her pain is not hers alone. If her heart were to remain paralyzed in the systole phase, it would die. It only continues to beat because it contracts *and* expands—it requires both the systole *and* the diastole. And like the physical matter of her heart, Dorothea’s love also needs both contraction and expansion. Her life and happiness are bound up with Will, Rosamond, and Lydgate’s lives and happiness, and Dorothea reaches the pinnacle of happiness when her love expands to encompass these lives that touch her own.

Dorothea’s understanding that her body more fully enables her to love and to bring happiness to Will as well as to others allows her to embrace matter, but she becomes invested in her own material body. With Will’s indirect profession of his love for Dorothea, the narrator describes her, like Rosamond, in flower-like terms. As she expresses her approval at Will’s rejection of Bulstrode’s guilt money to maintain the goodness of his character in her eyes, her head becomes “a little more erect on its beautiful stem” (759). In the Prelude, Eliot writes, “Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed” (4). The novel then begins with Dorothea striving for a saintly, “epic life” (3). By the final page of the novel, “her full nature” is described “like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth” (785). But all running water holds power, and even the smallest stream can quickly grow into a raging river capable of sweeping away the landscape with its force. While Dorothea’s force may be broken, then, it does continue to flow and to hold the potential for greatness.

Rosamond knows throughout the novel what Dorothea takes so long to learn—that matter and meaning are entangled—but Rosamond takes this understanding too far by objectifying herself to the point that a loss of material objects threatens her own sense of self. Dorothea, on

the other hand, rejects matter in her privileging of ideas, until, late in the novel, when she realizes that she needs both matter and meaning to achieve happiness. Indeed, through depictions of Rosamond as a flower or plant and evocations of statues in relation to Dorothea, Eliot rejects the unnatural dichotomies—matter/meaning, animate/inanimate, living/nonliving—that may help us navigate the world, but which are also misleading and exclusionary. Binary thinking skews our sense of realism. While *Middlemarch* may be a nineteenth-century realist novel, Eliot's candle flame against the pier-glass reveals realism to be only one possibility. The world, like the novel, is woven together from strands of history, mythology, fact, and fiction. Like Dorothea and Rosamond's disparate goals, the world is constituted of both matter and meaning, and it encompasses both the living and nonliving realms. As Dorothea eventually learns and demonstrates in her behavior toward Rosamond, regardless of whether the connections are explicit, the world is a web through which all extremes are linked. Dorothea's new understanding of the material world, in which marble moves yet looks still and miniatures shift and flicker, is suggestive of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's argument in *The Statesman's Manual*: "like two strangers that have fled to the same shelter from the same storm, not seldom do Despair and Hope meet for the first time in the porch of Death! All extremes meet" (xxi). Though Rosamond may seem to be Dorothea's opposite, Eliot reveals the threads that weave together humans and nature with animate and seemingly inanimate objects into one vibrant material world.

CHAPTER 7

DOUBLE-VISIONS IN ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING'S *AURORA LEIGH*

*But poets should
Exert a double vision; should have eyes
To see near things as comprehensively
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep,
As if they touched them.*

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 5.183-88

[Emanuel Swedenborg's 1794 *Conjugial Love*] was probably read by both Blake and Coleridge and was certainly read by Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning early in their marriage. Its influence can be traced in Elizabeth's monumental *Aurora Leigh*, in poems in Robert's *Men and Women* and in some of the poems that he wrote after her death. Coventry Patmore's once hugely popular poem *The Angel in the House* was directly inspired by Swedenborg's book, as were poems in his later, more subtle, volume *The Unknown Eros*.

—Richard Lines, Secretary of The Swedenborg Society, in a letter published 29 September 2006 in *The Times*.

But fate has not been kind to Mrs. Browning as a writer. Nobody reads her, nobody discusses her, nobody troubles to put her in her place. One has only to compare her reputation with Christina Rossetti's to trace her decline. Christina Rossetti mounts irresistibly to the first place among English women poets. Elizabeth, so much more loudly applauded during her lifetime, falls farther and farther behind. The primers dismiss her with contumely. Her importance, they say, "has now become merely historical. Neither education nor association with her husband ever succeeded in teaching her the value of words and a sense of form." In short, the only place in the mansion of literature that is assigned her is downstairs in the servants' quarters, where, in company with Mrs. Hemans, Eliza Cook, Jean Ingelow, Alexander Smith, Edwin Arnold, and Robert Montgomery, she bangs the crockery about and eats vast handfuls of peas on the point of her knife.

–Virginia Woolf, "Aurora Leigh," *The Second Common Reader*, pp. 202-03

In late 1853, Elizabeth Barrett Browning sent a letter to Isa Blagden, in which referenced Emanuel Swedenborg's work:⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I am far from the first to write about the Swedenborgian influence on Barrett Browning, and I do so through a Baradian lens. For a more cohesive understanding of Barrett Browning's interest in Swedenborg's ideas and how they shaped her writing, see Nathan Camp's "The Christian Poetics of *Aurora Leigh* (with Considerable Help from Emmanuel Swedenborg)," Linda M.

I shall get at Swedenborg in Rome, and get on with my readings. There are deep truths, in him, I cannot doubt, though I can't receive everything, which may be my fault. I would fain speak with a wise humility. We will talk on these things and the spirits. How that last subject attracts me! It strikes me that we are on the verge of great developments of the spiritual nature, and that in a philosophical point of view (apart from ulterior ends) the facts are worthy of all admiration and meditation. If a spiritual influx, it is mixed—good and evil together. (146)

Barrett Browning's use of the word "mixed" might suggest that she perceives Swedenborg's philosophy as a synthesis of different ideas. But as Ralph Waldo Emerson, after reading Swedenborg's *Animal Kingdom*, writes, Swedenborg's concern lies in "analysis, and not synthesis" (40). One possible reason why Barrett Browning's understanding of Swedenborg seems cloudy might be due to a twenty-first-century perspective. When Swedenborg and Barrett Browning express an interest in *mixtures*, both seem to seek an inseparable *wholeness*, a dynamic entanglement of parts—something akin to the "analysis" of which Emerson writes. While Swedenborg and Barrett Browning seem to understand a *mixture* as an analytic wholeness, more than a century and a half have passed since Barrett Browning wrote this letter, and Swedenborg's writing dates back another century before Barrett Browning's. Language is, of course, slippery, always changing in meaning with new words emerging and old ones falling out of use and disappearing. Thus, Barrett Browning's understanding of Swedenborg and our understanding of

Lewis's "Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Poet's Quest for Ultimate Reality," and Richard Lines' "Swedenborgian Ideas in the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning."

Barrett Browning's use of Swedenborgian ideas to create her "double-vision" in *Aurora Leigh* might be better approached through Karen Barad's agential realism.

While Barad's ideas reflect late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century advancements, they cannot be separated from early quantum physics—which emerged in the decade before Barrett Browning began to work on *Aurora Leigh*—or even from Swedenborg, as he approaches spirituality through materiality. In fact, Swedenborg's "Law of Correspondences" brings together religion with modern science, positing "an exact correlation between the phenomenal plane and the spiritual plane of existence" (Edwards 434). If, as Barad argues, mattering is an entanglement of matter and meaning (3), then we can understand Swedenborg's spirituality as the meaning that entangles with his materiality. By drawing on Barad, then, we can bring Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* into a new light as an entanglement of bodies, things, and ideas.

Is Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* a novel or a poem? The answer to this question lies within the text itself. That is, it is an entanglement of verse and narrative—with character inseparable from narrator and structured through temporal shifts—that emerges as a new genre. Like Virginia Woolf, whose novel *The Years* began as a hybrid "novel-essay," Barrett Browning was intrigued by the idea of entangled genres. In a letter to Robert Browning, dated 27 February 1845, nearly three months prior to their first meeting, she writes, "But my chief *intention* just now is the writing of a sort of novel-poem" (Browning and Barrett Browning 53; emphasis in original). This entanglement of genres in a single work was important for Barrett Browning, because it pushed back, politically and personally, against divisions that center on sex. As Margaret Forster notes in the introduction to *Selected Poems*, Barrett Browning "attempted every kind of form—lyrics, blank verse, ballads and sonnets—refusing to believe that women should be restricted to those forms thought most suitable" (xviii). Thanks, in part, to Barrett Browning's

refusal to be confined by the gendering of genre, men “could no longer assume women to be limited to certain kinds of ‘easy’ verse” (xviii). Thus, Barrett Browning’s writing not only advanced her own position as a woman writer, but it also destabilized the constraints that attempted to hold back women from achieving the same sort of success men were capable of realizing.

Barrett Browning’s refusal to force *Aurora Leigh* into any one category undermined the binary oppositions through which men define women against themselves and as a weaker sex. In entangling these genres into a single work, Barrett Browning pushed back against the exclusion of women and demonstrated that generic categories are not as distinct as they had been made to appear. In *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning uses these ideas to “unfold” manifold deceptive categories and to rework space, time, and matter (here, matter will refer to bodies, things, and ideas) as inseparably entangled rather than in contrast to one another.

The seemingly contradictory ideas in *Aurora Leigh*—the individual against the universe, Italy or England, the body in contrast to the soul, a poet instead of a wife, the practical versus the ideal, and the clash between the material and the spiritual—are, of course, the underpinnings for the questions that Aurora must work through before she can find love with Romney and a vision for her future art. Barrett Browning, from the opening of the text, emphasizes relations over divisions. Her speaker, Aurora Leigh, begins her narrative poem as a

story for my better self

As when you paint your portrait for a friend,

Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it

Long after he has ceased to love you, just

To hold together what he was and is.⁴⁹ (1.4-8)

From these opening sentences, Barrett Browning reveals the marks we leave upon one another's lives. Though we may be individual beings, we connect to one another, and even when these connections are temporary, they leave lasting marks. Every relationship, then, changes us in ways that matter. Aurora is Aurora not only because she, "Aurora Leigh, was born" (1.45), but because of her relationships with others. Of course, the impacts of these relationships vary. If, for example, her mother's "kiss / Had left a longer weight upon" her "lips / It might have steadied the uneasy breath" (1.35-37). Aurora's mother, however, is "weak and frail" and unable to "bear the joy of giving life"; thus, she dies of the "mother's rapture" (1.35).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Barrett Browning's use of the term a "better self" here invokes the quote from Dante's *La Vita Nuova* that Browning wrote in her Bible after her death: "I believe and I declare—Certain am I— from this life I pass into a better, there where that lady lives of whom enamoured was my soul" (qtd. in Lines, "Swedenborgian Ideas," 30). Is the "better self" the self that is made who in heaven when two people join together in "Conjugal Love"? The "better self" might also be the true self, as Aurora says, "Some call the idea,—better called the real" (7.783).

⁵⁰ In an 1886 edition of *The Medical Bulletin: A Monthly Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, Volume 8, T.M. Dolan, et al. in "Obstetrical Experiences with Observations," quote this line from *Aurora Leigh* to corroborate their claim that, in many cases, "the weight of maternity is too great"; thus, while it is possible to "reduce our mortality ... we cannot overcome qualities inherent in the mother" (316). As women's bodies have always been, and still continue to be, described as problematic, as a barrier between the doctor and the baby, we may be able to read Barrett Browning's line as ironic.

Aurora, as the child of an Italian mother and an English father, imagines her conception as a harmonious composition. Her parents meet in Florence during a communion ceremony:

A face flashed like a cymbal on his face
 And shook with silent clangour brain and heart,
 Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,
 He too received his sacramental gift
 With Eucharistic meanings; for he loved. (1.87-91)

As Margaret Reynolds points out in her notes to *Aurora Leigh*, the body and spirit are both encompassed in the practice of communion as well as the “discovery of sexual love” (8). Rather than simply a doubling effect, though, this is an act of entanglement. Religion and sexual love are entangled in countless ways—through moral issues, patriarchal control, ethical matters, and legal connections, just to name a few of these ways—and, while both religion and sexual love are abstract ideas, they are both made tangible through concrete images. In the way that religion’s gravity is often understood through symbolism—communion, for example—a pounding heart can be a sign of physical attraction, if not love. In the first line of this excerpt, the cymbal does not make a sound, as we might expect; instead, it *flashes*. As 1 Corinthians says, “If I speak in human and angelic tongue but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal” (13:1). For the cymbal to *flash* rather than *clash*, then, suggests a story of true love, a story of love at first sight.

Cymbals usually work as a pair to produce sound—unless a single cymbal is struck with a beater—but in this line, only a solitary, silent cymbal appears, seemingly looking for its mate as it flashes on Aurora’s father’s face. This first cymbal is a metaphor for Aurora’s mother, as, in the next two lines, her father’s body figuratively becomes the second cymbal, shaking with a

clang. Movement and sound here indicate a coming together of the two cymbals, of the man and woman, both in sexual action and emotional love. With their entanglement, Aurora's father is transfigured into music. To transfigure is usually to outwardly change the appearance of something or someone, and, indeed, his body physically changes here to create harmony with Aurora's mother: their bodies come together spiritually and physically, possibly even *composing* Aurora in the harmony of their love. The sacramental gift he receives is her body, as her symbolic taking of Christ's body becomes entangled with his sexual taking of her body. She both *takes* the offering and *is* the offering. The wafer and wine, which are meant to represent Christ's body and blood, become one with her marriage—both a religious and a sexual union—to Aurora's father.

Like one of the stories attributed to Sappho's jump, here is both a leap and a fall. The act of leaping is entangled with the act of falling: to experience the "rapture" of motherhood, Aurora's mother sacrifices her own life, and Aurora's father cannot love her mother without experiencing this devastating loss, cannot lose her without first loving her. Here, then is life in death and love in loss. Aurora's father, overcome by these experiences of life and love through death and loss, is left to be the lone parent of four-year-old Aurora; hence, he becomes both father *and* mother:

And thus beloved, she died. I've heard it said
 That but to see him in the first surprise
 Of widower and father, nursing me,
 Unmothered little child of four years old,
 His large man's hands afraid to touch my curls,
 As if the gold would tarnish, - his grave lips

Contriving such a miserable smile

As if he knew needs must, or I should die. (1.92-99)

The stereotypical gendered separation of middle-class public and private spheres divides men's work from women's work; consequently, for a man to do what is perceived as a woman's work during the nineteenth century could have risked his masculinity. Sally Mitchell argues, during the Victorian period, "Fathers were typically distant and reserved" (147), but, while a *mother* must always be a woman, *mothering* is a verb—it is an act that anyone can do. By placing Aurora's father in the position of either losing his perceived masculinity by learning to mother or losing his masculinity by letting his child die, Barrett Browning challenges the stereotype about masculinity and mothering. She re-envisioned the parent as an inseparable whole, as both a mother and a father, but also as a whole of separations, of love and grief, and of joy and pain. This double-visioned parent is a whole that comes into being through an entanglement of life and death.

Despite Aurora's mother's death, she is not absent from the novel-poem. She is embodied through her portrait, which hangs on the wall in Aurora's childhood home, and "made alive" by the illumination of every "sudden flame ... from the firewood" (1.125-26). Aurora describes this portrait as a compilation of bodies, things, and ideas:

by turns

Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,

A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,

A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,

A still Medusa with mild milky brows

All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes

Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or anon
 Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
 Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first
 Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked
 And shuddering wriggled down to the unclean;
 Or my own mother, leaving her last smile,
 In her last kiss upon the baby-mouth
 My father pushed down on the bed for that—
 Or my dead mother, without smile or kiss,
 Buried at Florence. All which images,
 Concentred on the picture, glassed themselves
 Before my meditative childhood, as
 The incoherencies of change and death
 Are represented fully, mixed and merged,
 in the smooth fair mystery of perpetual Life. (l. 153-73)

The portrait of Aurora's mother portrays "Life" as a dynamic entanglement of poetry, histories, moments, places, ideas—life itself, love, death—and beings. Of course, for the image to represent, "by turns / Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite," suggests that Aurora herself is part of this compilation. The picture, entangled with her own being, is always becoming something different because Aurora is always changing. Though the picture is created from physical materials, and though we assume material to be static, material's entanglement with outside forces disrupts this assumption. The picture is never at rest, because it is part of a larger network that includes the decision to hang the portrait in this room, the flames that flicker

against the canvas, Aurora's father's stories, Aurora's memories, and Aurora's experiences. Aurora's mother, then, is never dead, because to be dead implies stasis, and there is certainly nothing static about this image. Even the fibers slowly break down over time and become molded to one another, thus strengthening their bond and changing the physical composition of the portrait.

Thus, when Aurora's father, too, dies, she describes him as "a stone-dead father" (1.210). Stones, as part of a living world, are hardly dead, at least not in the inert sense; thus, for Aurora's father to be "stone-dead" means that he will continue to live through the marks he leaves on this living world, particularly through Aurora. So, when "Life" strikes "sharp on death" (1.210), that is to say that life challenges assumptions of death, because even in death, there is life.

Aurora, following her father's death, goes to live with her aunt in England, where she has

a little chamber in the house,

As green as any privet-hedge a bird

Might choose to build in, though the nest itself

Could show but dead-brown sticks and straws; the walls

Were green, the carpet was pure green, the straight

Small bed was curtained greenly, and the folds

Hung green about the window which let in

The out-door world with all its greenery. (1.567-74)

Aurora's room is inseparable from the English landscape, which is, in turn, entangled with the "the mountains above Pelago" (1.111). The room, then, is a portal through which Aurora's father is always with her and always alive through nature. Aurora, calling back to Percy Shelley's perception of books as connected to nature, writes, "we had books among the hills, / Strong

words of counselling souls confederate / With vocal pines and waters” (1.187-9). Here, she extends Shelley’s belief in nature’s ability to *teach* into its ability to *comfort*, as well. As Aurora discovers through her voracious reading, “the world of books is still the world” (1.748).

The books that Aurora reads are material things, but when the ideas they contain entangle with the greenery of her “little chamber” they invoke memories of “reading books among the hills” in Italy with her father. In a sense, through reading, Aurora is able to recreate the past, to maintain her connection to her father.

Books then, are the vehicle to this world. Aurora recounts, “I read books bad and good – some bad and good / At once,” and “And merry books, which set you weeping when / the sun shines,” as well as “melancholy books, / Which make you laugh that anyone should weep”

(1.779-80, 1.788-90). Her realization that “good” books are not entirely “good” and that “bad” books are not exclusively “bad” moves Aurora closer to truth, and thus closer to poetry. Finally, as she describes, “At last because the time was ripe, / I chanced upon the poets” (1.844-5).

Aurora’s remark indicates a perception of time as linear, as if she has only found poetry because the stars have aligned. A Baradian reading of Aurora’s discovery, on the other hand, reveals how the world of books, which is, of course, “still the world,” is dynamic and always changing. Her discovery, then, reinforces Barrett Browning’s awareness that poetry and novels are not dichotomies; certainly, they exhibit differences that matter, but these differences do not set them in opposition. Poetry, for Aurora, “means life in life” (1.916), as she learns to create a sense of life through her poetry and to step into the life she creates. Through this creation, this book she writes and within which she comes to live, she finds her way back to the moment of possibility at which point she can take on a different past. Of course, as a Baradian reading suggests, the choices that Aurora has made have left marks: these are the marks of a past that has happened

and cannot be erased. Aurora cannot, for example, return to the moment in which Romney Leigh asks her to be his wife, because to do so would mean a loss of all she has worked to achieve: success, experience, and wisdom. However, this is not *the* past but *a* past, and Aurora's past is entangled with the histories of other people and other nations.

When Tricia Lootens, in *The Political Poetess*, asks, What “of patriotism? What of slavery?” (46), she calls attention to different ideas in *Aurora Leigh* that might be less explicit but are not less influential. To make her point, she quotes from Aurora and Romney's clash over “sanctified national liberation” (46):

Who has time,
 An hour's time ... think!—to sit upon a bank
 And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?
 When Egypt's slain, I say, let Miriam sing!—
 Before—where's Moses? (2.68-72)

Romney's comparison between current issues and the Israelites' slavery in Egypt invokes Barrett Browning's earlier poem, “Hiram Powers' ‘Greek Slave.’” Barrett Browning met Hiram Powers soon after her arrival in Florence in 1847; in fact, as Richard Lines notes in “Swedenborgian Ideas in the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning,” she saw *The Greek Slave* at Powers' studio, which was not far from Casa Guidi (26). Because Powers himself was a Swedenborg follower, his intention was, as Donald M. Reynolds confirms, “to create sculpture with a spiritual content and meaning” (394). This reminder of “Hiram Powers' ‘Greek Slave,’” then, not only turns us back to the Swedenborgian ideas at play in *Aurora Leigh* but also turns us forward to Barad's theory of agential realism, in which matter and meaning are always already entangled. While Reynolds points out that Powers' *Greek Slave* is both an “unveiled soul” as

well as “a very tangible, touchable body” (394), a Baradian reading of the statue sees these points as inseparable and always becoming. Of course, this act of always becoming leaves marks that matter, for example, the whiteness of a marble statue created by an American artist who lived and worked in Florence during the nineteenth-century, that is, during the period leading up to the American Civil War. Race, geography, and politics are all entangled with the marble’s materiality and its creative process. The meaning of the marble’s matter, then, is always in flux as racial, geographical, and political borders are redrawn over time.

The concept of time, though, is a complicated one. To grasp the idea that nothing exists until it comes into being is difficult. Perhaps it is simpler to think about time as coming into existence through measurement. After all, what is time? Time, as we understand it, is an interval between events—the beginning of the world up to the present moment, the sixty-three years, seven months, and two days of Queen Victoria’s rule, the seventy-five minutes between the beginning and ending of a class. But while the sun, the moon, and the seasons are on schedules that shape our ideas about temporality, official linear time is a human concept. Time, from a Baradian understanding, is discursive; it is always coming into being along with the world. Thus, the entanglement of race, geography, and politics—or, more generally, matter and meaning—is always already entangled with time and space. That is, time, space, and matter emerge together as, in Barad’s term, “spacetime-matter” (*Meeting* 177). As *The Greek Slave*’s “spacetime-matter” enfolds into itself, then, it is dynamic and always changing. This dynamism refigures matter and meaning, but it also reworks time and space. In Barad’s words, “the “past” is open to change”

(Dolphijn and van der Tuin 67).⁵¹ But what does that mean? And, more importantly for this chapter, what does that mean for *Aurora Leigh*? Let us here return to the text with Aurora's response to Romney's comparison:

Ah, exactly that.

Where's Moses?—is a Moses to be found?

You'll seek him vainly in the bulrushes,

While I in vain touch cymbals. Yet concede,

Such sounding brass has done some actual good

(The application in a woman's hand,

If that were credible, being scarcely spoilt)

In colonising beehives. (2.168-78)

Here, Aurora and Romney are enfolded into a biblical past in which God, from a burning bush, calls on Moses to deliver the “children of Israel” from the oppression of the Egyptians to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:2-10). The timbrel, or cymbal, becomes a shorthand for the enfolding of spacetime-matter, as its crash echoes through the pages that represent Aurora's life, from her conception, to her parents' deaths, to this moment in which she rejects Romney. Her depiction of herself as Miriam, who, in the Bible, celebrates the Israelites' freedom by taking “the timbrel in her hand” and leading the other women in song and dance asserts the inseparability of the song's meaning from the matter of the Israelite's emancipation (Exod. 15:20), as well as the entanglement of Aurora herself from the matter of these political meanings.

⁵¹ Barad's reimagining of space, time, and matter as one word rejects the artificiality of divisions and, instead, emphasizes inseparability by focusing on relations rather than their differences.

Barrett Browning's work, of course, became increasingly political over time. By the time she wrote *Aurora Leigh*, her politics had become explicit in her writing, and the novel-poem itself becomes more explicitly political over the course of its Books. As Forster notes, in *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning is "both personal and political, subjective as well as objective, in parts lyrical and in others declamatory" (xviii). Even what at first appears to be personal in *Aurora Leigh* is actually, in terms of power relations, quite political, to borrow from Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay title, "The Personal is Political."⁵² Barrett Browning, as a challenge to her speaker, presents a set of dualistic categories—body and spirit, mother and father, masculine and feminine—that, rooted in power relations, could pose a threat, but through the course of the poem, Barrett Browning destabilizes their authority by demonstrating that these dichotomies are not actually in opposition but rather parts of a greater whole and thus indivisible.

One of the more openly political passages is that in which Aurora argues that Marian's son does not need a *man* in his life to have a father and a mother. Because, from her own father's love and care, Aurora has learned that it is possible to be both mother *and* father, this is a role she is prepared to take on when she finds Marian and her baby in Paris. She persuades Marian that she wants to provide a home for both of them and to be a second parent to Marian's son:

"Come with me, sweetest sister," I returned,

⁵² As Hanisch notes, she "did not give the paper its title, 'The Personal Is Political.'" As she explains, "As far as I know, that was done by *Notes from the Second Year* editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt after Kathie Sarachild brought it to their attention as a possible paper to be printed in that early collection." To access a copy of the essay that includes Hanisch's 2006 introduction, see her website.

“And sit within my house and do me good
 From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own
 From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,
 And thou art lonely, and the child is half
 An orphan. Come, - and henceforth thou and I
 Being still together will not miss a friend,
 Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
 Make that up to him.” (7.117-25)

In taking on the role of a second parent for the illegitimate child of a rape victim, Aurora not only breaks the silence concerning fallen women and places value on Marian and the child's lives but through her act of claiming Marian as her “sister,” she also strengthens her connections to Romney. By taking Marian into her home, she also takes a part of Romney into her heart and moves even closer to truth. As she declares, “From mixing with the world's prosperities; / That so, in gravity and holy calm, / We two may live on toward the truer life” (7.130-2). Her point is that society is an entanglement of pure and impure actions and thoughts, but patriarchal groupings repress this truth. Society, then, constructs false divisions between groups on which they can affix labels: good, evil, moral, immoral. By openly taking into her home the “fallen” Marian and her child, not as servant but as friend and sister, Aurora moves closer to truth, to a more realistic understanding of the world. She has become a poet, and, as she asserts earlier in the novel-poem, poets are “the only truth-tellers now left to God, / The only speakers of essential truth” (1.859-60).

Barrett Browning always strove for truth in her writing, but as Linda M. Lewis reminds us, one of the ways that she did that was by working for “the very people that the fictional

Romney tries to save”: child workers, enslaved people, people of oppressed nations, and “the poor, homeless, and helpless” (16). Written in verse yet telling a story, *Aurora Leigh* is never simply a poem, and it is always more than a novel. In fact, her intention to write a “novel-poem” is twice realized in her finished text, as she writes a novel-poem about a poet who writes a novel-poem. Though Margaret Reynolds labels “one and the same thing” these books that Barrett Browning and *Aurora Leigh* each write (x), it might be more fruitful to think about their differences, because an investment in their sameness can deceptively lead to their interpretation as static. One of the primary differences between Barrett Browning and *Aurora Leigh* is in their experiences of and responses to life through books. As Woolf writes of Barrett Browning’s life before her marriage and publication of *Aurora Leigh*:

Books were to her not an end in themselves but a substitute for living. She raced through folios because she was forbidden to scamper on the grass. She wrestled with Aeschylus and Plato because it was out of the question that she should argue about politics with live men and women. Her favorite reading as an invalid was Balzac and George Sand and other “immortal improprieties” because [as Barrett Browning explains,] “they kept the color in my life to some degree.” (207)

Of course, Woolf is famous for her creative nonfiction; thus, her depiction of Barrett Browning is likely romanticized at least to some extent. However, for Barrett Browning, writing and books *were* an important part of her life. Through books, she experienced movement, the performance of human behavior, and acts against social rules. The result was an expanded mind entangled with a weakened body that gained strength when, as Woolf puts it, “at last she broke the prison bars” and “flung herself into the life of the moment” (207).

By the time Aurora's book begins, on the other hand, she has loved Romney for years, albeit most of those years from a distance. Romney's early belief that it is his duty to dissuade Aurora from poetry and to steer her toward what he thinks women are capable of—"wifehood" (2.356)—goes against everything Aurora believes is true about men and women. While he wants Aurora at his side while he works to rationally fix the world's problems, Aurora insists, "I too have my vocation, - work to do" (2.455). Romney works to save bodies, but Aurora works for the soul, and she becomes a Byronic heroine in her quest for truth: as Romney points out, "The sadness of your greatness fits you well" (8.473). The irony is that her sadness comes from the emptiness she feels in denying her love for Romney; she does not tell the truth in her poetry, yet only by reading her book does he finally come to understand that, although he has worked all these years to save bodies, those bodies cannot be separated from their spiritual beings. Through Aurora's art, then, Romney discovers, "The soul's the way. Not even Christ Himself / Can save man else than He holds man's soul; / And therefore did he come into our flesh" (8.543-6). Romney, that is, finally perceives how people, objects, and ideas are entangled with each other and with the rest of the universe. Aurora, however, already knows this, as she confirms that "there's no need to speak; / The universe shall henceforth speak for you" (8.838-9), by which she means that if he stops building false boundaries through language, the universe will show him the truth of its unity.

Romney's perceived differences between men and women keep him apart from Aurora through most of the novel-poem, but those differences fade with a realization that their souls are entangled, and, since souls are inseparable from bodies, the two become one in an act that seems an invocation of the past, of the moment in which Aurora's parents come together like two cymbals, spiritually and physically. Here:

Did I drop against his breast,
 Or did his arms constrain me? Were my cheeks
 Hot, overflowed, with my tears, or his?
 And which of our two large explosive hearts
 So shook me? That, I know not. (9.715-9)

Physically, Romney and Aurora's bodies are pressed so closely together that one body's movement causes the other body to move; their love is "conjugal" in the Swedenborgian sense, in that it is a spiritual love that will persist after death (Lines 25), but in a Baradian sense, their bodies and souls also entangle into one being, a single whole that is, at the same time, always inseparable from the world. Romney's new perception is, in part, enabled by his blindness. As a sighted person, he can only see politics through the perception of Christian socialism. The inability to recognize other possibilities, to see bodies, things, and ideas as entangled, prevents him from really seeing the world at all. Only through his loss of sight does Romney gain a vision that comes closer to the truth, closer to Aurora's poetic "double vision" (5.184). Thus, Romney's blindness does not mean a loss of *all* sight. Aurora, in a key Swedenborgian passage, explains that "every natural flower which grows on earth / Implies a flower upon the spiritual side" (7.840-1). Romney can no longer see the physical flowers that grow on earth, but he can now see how they are entangled with a meaning that he senses through his spirit. He exclaims, "Thank God, who made me blind, to make me see! / Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls, / Which rul'st for evermore both day and night!" (9.830-2). Aurora, whose name means *dawn* or *light*, produces the dawning of a new perception for Romney. From a Baradian standpoint, Romney is able to perceive how nature's matter and meaning are always becoming. The flower's new life always emerges from its death. From this entanglement between Romney and Aurora, then,

emerges a new “double vision.” Nathan Camp argues in “The Christian Poetics of *Aurora Leigh* (with Considerable Help from Emanuel Swedenborg)” that “Aurora is herself *especially* within marriage” (70; emphasis in original). While Camp’s argument stems from his Swedenborgian reading of Aurora and Romney’s “conjugal love,” a Baradian reading of this Swedenborgian reading suggests that their “conjugal love” is an entanglement through which Aurora and Romney are always changing and always becoming better selves.

Reading Barrett Browning’s novel-poem through Baradian entanglements is a helpful technique for understanding how she used Swedenborgian ideas to challenge uncompromising perceptions of the world, because it offers a new look at the poem through a “double vision.” A Baradian reading can offer the language through which twenty-first-century readers might more easily access both Barrett Browning’s intentions and the novel-poem overall. As Aurora continues to move closer to truth with her new understanding that “Art is much, but love is more,” and that “Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God / And makes heaven” (9.656, 9.658-9), she becomes inseparable from Art, Heaven, God, and Love, and this is an act of always becoming that, like all others, leaves a mark in the entangled form of a novel-poem. Barrett Browning could not have made her point through a single form. And Swedenborg’s ideas offered a new approach, a way to bring together two genres to create her now-famous novel-poem. In creating the novel-poem as a genre that entangles what were once perceived separately as *women’s books* and *men’s forms*, then, Barrett Browning realizes her “intentions”—the materialization of a “double vision.”

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