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John Plotz: Portable Property

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INTRODUCTION

The Global, the Local, and the Portable

ONE UNIVERSALLY acknowledged truth about the Victorians is that they loved their things.¹ Deborah Cohen has recently argued that in nineteenth-century England moral uplift came for the first time to be associated with the accumulation and harmonious arrangement of possessions; home-decoration turned into a saintly affair.² The objects that pack Victorian parlors—aquaria, terraria, globes, books, and beetle collections among them—might seem to make bourgeois life into a collector's paradise, an alternative to ever quitting the home.³ However, the titles of popular works such as Friedrich Ernst's *The Portable Gymnasium*, John Bartholomew's *Portable Atlas*, and Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica, or The Portable Flower Garden* prompt us to tell the story slightly differently.⁴ So, too, does a revealing fact: when possessions fill Victorian novels—so copiously that later readers describe themselves as swaddled by, drowning in, or suffocating under their weight—they generally serve not as static deadweights, but as moving messengers. Aquaria or collector's cabinets might be the Victorian repositories of choice, but the objects that fill them—bugs, mourning rings, or precious letters—acquire meaning primarily from their earlier peregrinations.

These are a few of their favorite things: Shakespeare's complete plays; an Indian pearl necklace sold to buy a copy of Samuel Johnson's *Works*; some unlabelled beetles bound for the British Museum; a monogrammed silver teapot; an Indian diamond with a "moony glow"; a Kashmiri shawl; a grandfather's chest of documents in various languages; a ruby ring, its provenance carved upon it in Farsi; an embroidered handkerchief in a silver box.⁵ My argument is that Victorian novels made much of such objects, returned to them repeatedly, and interrogated their significance in a variety of puzzling ways, because of the novel's own status as an exemplary portable property. Themselves sentimentalized items, endowed with a fiscal and a transcendent value at once, English novels from the 1830s onwards took on the project of making sense of resonant but potentially marketable objects.⁶

They did so because so much of the novel's own cultural importance derived from its status as a text caught between fungibility and irreplaceability. In this introduction, I offer brief readings from novels by Eliot, Gaskell, and Oliphant, so as to explore three distinct ways that novels

represent the curiously double nature of resonant pieces of portable property. The commonality I discern forms the basis for a claim that portability has significant features in common with, but is ultimately distinct from, both fungibility and from fetishism (that is, from an attachment to singular objects so profound, so willing to ascribe transcendent powers to a free-standing thing, that it resists conceiving of meaning as built up out of association and resonance). From those readings, I go on to ask why an England defined by both “Industry and Empire” was the logical breeding ground for a heightened attention to the problems of property’s portability. My answer is that the problem of “staying English” within the wider realm that Dilke in 1868 called “Greater Britain” is addressed in novelistic representations of implicitly and explicitly *national* portable property. It is the existence of Greater Britain that requires not just a notion of portable cultural objects, but also of *asymmetry* in portability, so that the flow of culture-bearing objects from core to periphery is not counterbalanced or interrupted by a flow in the opposite direction. The capacity of an imperium to sustain that kind of asymmetry is a crucial component of its power.

It is vital to begin with a sense of the novelty of the developments that make Deborah Cohen call the Victorian English “the first people to be so closely identified with their belongings.”⁷ What Cohen calls “identification” arises, I am arguing, because certain belongings come to seem dually endowed: they are at once products of a cash market and, potentially, the rare fruits of a highly sentimentalized realm of value both domestic and spiritual, a realm defined by being anything but marketable. The best pieces of portable property can become, in effect, their own opposites. If the oddity of that development—the emergent rivalry between schemes of value being played out in single objects—is not immediately obvious, recall that in the eighteenth century, objects located front and center in novels belonged to a realm that might bear the name of sentiment or of exchange, but was in any case characterized by free, rapid, unproblematic circulation.⁸

The talking guinea at the center of Charles Johnston’s 1765 *Chrysal*, for instance, is a hypostatization of the spirit of circulation itself. *Chrysal* accordingly calls forth formally congruent revelations about each character who holds him: each character’s desire for the exchange value embodied within him is boundless, and effectively identical. Even the animated corkscrew in *The Adventure of a Corkscrew* boasts to readers neither of bottles opened nor bygone feasts, but its own price on the open market.⁹ And objects endowed with putatively sentimental value may fare no better. As late as 1815, Jane Austen is caricaturing bathos, not sympathizing with pathos, when she has Harriet Smith lachrymously catalogue her

“*Most precious treasures:*” a leadless pencil-end and a sticking-plaster she associates with the Reverend Elton.¹⁰ When Harriet packages pencil and plaster in a cotton-lined “pretty little Tunbridge-ware box,” itself wrapped in an “abundance of silver paper” and deposited in a larger parcel, she is as ridiculous as Elton himself, who is found cooing over “a precious deposit” Emma has given him.¹¹

By 1830 (the chronology is explored in chapter 1, below), however, resonant objects began to appear in English novels in new ways. To understand why, it may help to notice that the word “portable” itself began to take on a new set of meanings and associations. Starting around 1830 both “portable” and “portability” begin to be used in increasingly abstract ways. Although there are at least two hundred book titles containing the word “portable” before 1833 (including a Psalter from 1600),¹² the first title to use the word metaphorically seems to be Joseph Gurney’s 1833 *Hints on the Portable Evidence of Christianity*.

Gurney’s preoccupation with portability’s ambiguity sheds a great deal of light on the waxing importance of the concept to the intersection between economic and noneconomic valuation.¹³ *Hints* begins:

“Every man who reads the Bible with attention, and observes the value and excellence of the book—every man who compares what it says of mankind with his own experience, and marks the fitness of its mighty scheme of doctrine to his own spiritual need as a sinner in the sight of God—is furnished with practical proof of the divine origin of our religion. I love this evidence; I call it the PORTABLE evidence of Christianity.” . . . The Bible is a portable book, and the Christian, whether at home or on a journey, ought always to keep it within his reach, and make use of it as his daily companion. Again—whatsoever be our place or circumstances, we all carry within us a knowledge of our own experience.¹⁴

But which sort of portability matters most: the physical portability (no quotation marks needed) of the Bible as a material book; or its metaphorical “portability,” which depends on the applicability of its moral dicta in a potentially infinite variety of situations? Gurney refers to the Bible’s physical advantages as a bearer of the good Word repeatedly throughout his tract, but those advantages are almost always linked immediately to a much less tangible sort of portability: the ease with which the Bible’s lessons can be applied to the natural world, to moments of moral doubt, to cases of cognitive confusion, and so on.

Even at his most decisive, Gurney describes the Bible as simultaneously physical object and Word of God incarnate, permanently suspended between material and spiritual form: “Were that sacred volume more of a daily companion and intimate friend to us—did the words which it con-

tains dwell in our hearts—did we ‘bind’ them ‘for a sign’ upon our hands, and as ‘frontlets’ between our eyes—our lingering doubts respecting Christianity and its doctrines, would soon fade away.”¹⁵ This may seem to be an injunction to physicalize one’s relationship with the Bible, to make it ever more tangible in one’s daily life. Yet the quotation marks around the various words that describe the Jewish ritual of wrapping tefillin underscore the distinction between making the Bible physically portable on one’s person, and making it spiritually portable by taking it with one as a metaphysical passenger. The conventional distinction between the Old Testament “Word” and the New Testament “Spirit” is here reconfigured, via the quotation marks, as a distinction between merely carrying a book (Jewish literalism), and effectively internalizing the Bible’s teachings (Christian spirituality).

If the best sort of metaphysical portaging of the Bible’s ideas is to “bind” those ideas to readers, Gurney still imagines them as attached to that reader not as frontlets plain and simple, but as “frontlets,” set off by quotation marks. Gurney’s indecision is suggestive of the significant cultural transformation taking place around him: it is now the duality of any given piece of portable property that is the phenomenon that most bears remarking, and the parameters of that duality are what demand attention. And of all the places that such preoccupation comes to the fore, none is more striking than the lengthy and involved meditations on portability’s dual aspect that come to define the Victorian novel.

LITERARY MATERIALS

The Victorian aesthetic practices that are shaped by the logic of portability are by no means limited to the novel, so a focus on how novels unpack these questions might initially appear arbitrary. The oft-noted Victorian predilection for quotation, for instance, derives partially from the sense that literary texts are designed to travel widely and hence ought to be useful in settings both congruous and incongruous.¹⁶ Quotation, then, is one preeminent example of how literary texts can travel across historical, authorial, national and, not least, generic boundaries. Quotations might (or might not) come with generic markers attached to them but their diffusion hinges on their capacity to lodge in texts of any genre.¹⁷

Quotation, though, is far from the only way literary works are understood as attaining a kind of global mobility in the Victorian era; movement into other texts is not by itself success. Henry James, for instance, proposes that a successful novel has a curious untouchability derived not from its being quoted, but from its continuing ineradicable existence in readers’ minds everywhere. Half-complaining, half-praising, James writes

of Dinah Mulock Craik's 1856 *John Halifax, Gentleman*, that "we know of no scales that will hold [John Halifax], and of no unit of length with which to compare him. He is infinite; he outlasts time; he is enshrined in a million innocent breasts; and before his awful perfection and his eternal durability we respectfully lower our lance."¹⁸ It is the content of other readers' heads, then, that makes a novel into a piece of properly portable property: its success depends on the knowledge that others will feel about the protagonist just as one does oneself.

Yet if such relentless generalizability—a Halifax in every head—was one side of the novel's nineteenth-century appeal, there was a converse, as well. How can such generality be reconciled with the realist novel's oft-applauded power to be local—locodescriptive, yes, but also particular, singular, individualized? Penny Fielding argues that Robert Burns's poetry is fractured by the implicit double burden of being at once extremely local and entirely detachable.¹⁹ We might call this inherent paradox that of "absent presence." The more successful a text is at rendering a place palpable, the more it delocalizes the locale on which the representation is founded.

This particularity might seem irreconcilable with the attractive generality ascribed to literature. Portability, though, can solve the paradox—that literature is both locodescriptive and entirely separable from any given place—by providing a mechanism for inserting local mementoes into global circulation without detaching them from their original locale. Indeed, this sort of global mobility of local color might even be described as the forerunner of the fin-de-siècle international allure of American local color fiction that Brad Evans has recently described as "local chic."²⁰

There is another crucial set of reasons why novels lie at the heart of Victorian reflections on portability. It was novel circulation that profited most from the triumphant explosion of book and periodical production and consumption that in so many ways shaped Victorian England. The novel profited especially from its association with new forms of rapid transit: some argue that the rise of railways, and concomitant emergence of W. H. Smith's stalls (Euston Station's was the first, in 1848), was the primary reason "sales of books and periodicals reached unprecedented levels in the 1850s."²¹ The Smith stalls were prime distributors for Routledge's "Railway Library reprints," and also proved "instrumental . . . in devising the yellowback reprint of popular novels . . . forerunners of the twentieth-century paperback"; there were 35 Smith railway stalls by 1851, and 1,242 by 1902.²² If the pious W.H. Smith II ("Old Morality") insisted on the installation of chained Bibles in every terminal, the commercial success of the Smith operation in truth depended on a profoundly mobile

readership, for whom travel was an occasion for, rather than an impediment to, immersion in printed matter.²³

What was true for the shortest of train trips was equally true for shipboard odysseys. Cargo allowances were miniscule for poor emigrants, and Bibles, prayer-books, and *Pilgrim's Progress* were likely the only books that poorer emigrants brought on Australia-bound ships. Still, Bill Bell notes that emigrant-oriented journals (*Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, for instance) relentlessly praised books and periodicals not simply as “a continued flow of valuable and correct information” but also (as David McKenzie put it in 1851) as a means to “improve your heart and mind.”²⁴ Bell argues that “the thousands of books, tracts, letters and newspapers that made their way to the colonies in the nineteenth century provided vital connections with familiar social values, serving for many to organize an otherwise unpredictable environment into recognizable patterns under strange skies.”²⁵ Altick's and Bell's accounts are crucial in reminding us of how unashamedly attached Victorian readers could be to what Carlyle calls the “vesture” of the book—that is, its simply material shape.²⁶

When Carlyle himself declared that “the thing we called ‘bits of paper with traces of black ink’ is the *purest* embodiment a Thought of man can have,” he was finishing off a comparison between a book and a brick, a comparison that is quantitatively but not qualitatively to the book's advantage: both books and bricks are a mixture, in varying proportions, of the common stuff of earth and the ethereal stuff that flows through men's minds.²⁷ In fact, this focus on the material existence of a novel as book is one way of distinguishing debates about the portability of novels from Victorian debates on the status of other genres. Indeed, the rising tide of questions about what is “portaged” in a novel's portability is one of the indicators of the novel's centrality in Victorian debates on cultural mobility—a centrality that accords with what James Buzard has recently described as the novel's authority in demarcating national identity from the 1850s onward. Poetry, by contrast, seems at the time to have provoked fewer debates about the relationship between material embodiment and higher meaning, and hence to have been much less involved in the unfolding debates about literature's potential portability.²⁸

Next to the arguments for focusing on novels as material objects, though, lies a complementary set of claims about the significance of Victorian novels as exemplary *texts*. The material realities of Victorian publishing and its enormous scale notwithstanding, hyperawareness of a printed page's material existence does not dominate the Victorian conceptions of reading, at least not in the ways that obsessions with the letter as material object might be said to shape the avant-garde works of the modernist era.²⁹ Novels were assemblages of signs, understood not as embodying a truth but telling a tale: the railway novel's lasting allure had (as Henry

James's remark about John Halifax suggests) more to do with the various other readers who might be imagined for it than with the object's own appeal. Moreover, the variety of forms in which a single novel might appear—serial, triple-decker, cheap reprint, and so forth—assured the impossibility of any single object being taken as metonymically representative of the sum of a text's potential.

A novel is no amulet, to be valued for some specific, nontransferable power that its actual physical possession confers. It is rather a curious combination of its material and its textual properties, readily assimilable neither to the world of commodities nor to the sublime realm of poetic experience. The necessity of occupying that contested middle ground is what both endangers and empowers novels in their effort to make sense of the ever-widening register of Victorian portable properties.

HOUSEHOLD GODS: THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

The English novel between 1830 and 1870 was defined by its obsession with objects represented as problematically endowed with sentimental and fiscal value simultaneously (as I argue in chapter 4, the triumphant acme of the “provincial novel” in England at this period is linked to this object-obsession, as well). The phenomenon is so widespread that it is worth beginning with an exclusionary example: what happens when George Eliot sets out a limit case, an object that fails to possess the kind of double portability that novels themselves do seem to possess? In *The Mill on The Floss* (1860) George Eliot's ruthless anatomy of Mrs Tulliver's attachment to irreplaceable familial artifacts perfectly exemplifies the work required to make a physically portable object seem culturally portable, as well.

After Mr Tulliver's bankruptcy and stroke, Maggie defends her father vehemently, and her brother Tom avows himself the inheritor of his father's beliefs, as well as his debts. Their mother, though, is discovered clinging, as a chapter title puts it, to “Mrs Tulliver's Teraphim, or Household Gods.” Her husband's impending bankruptcy makes all her goods liable for auction, precipitating this impassioned monologue:

“To think o' these cloths as I spun myself. . . . And the pattern as I chose myself—and bleached so beautiful, and I marked 'em so as nobody ever saw such marking—they must cut the cloth to get it out, for it's a particular stitch. And they're all to be sold—and go into strange people's houses, and perhaps be cut with the knives, and wore out before I'm dead. You'll never have one of 'em, my boy,” she said, looking up at Tom with her eyes full of tears.³⁰

Mrs Tulliver is haunted by her identifying “marking,” doomed to be “cut” out of the cloth, or (telling repetition) “cut” by some stranger’s knife in passing.

Maggie’s memorable “Fetish” doll, which she passionately hammers at moments of rage, is a surprisingly flexible little object: it can represent any and all of Maggie’s perceived tormentors. Rather than seeming a God incarnate, this fetish is a loyal accomplice to Maggie’s remarkable emotional fluidity, capable of accompanying her, as a truly portable object should, through the outbursts that leave her “sobbing all the while with a passion that expelled every other form of consciousness—even the memory of the grievance that had caused it.”³¹ Mrs Tulliver, by contrast, has a resolutely unmetaphorical relationship to her things. Any object monogrammed with her initials or her family name seems an almost physically attached extension of herself. Her despair arises from realizing that she has had the bad fortune to find herself psychically enshrined in objects that can, as fiscal currents dictate, fly away.

Mrs Tulliver wants protection for her things and her name—she hopes to avoid seeing them enter into common circulation by selling them within the family. The irony is that her intense attachment is precisely what deters sympathy. Even her sisters feel disinclined to help her, since their own attachments lie elsewhere than those particular teapots:

“Ah, dear, dear!” said aunt Pullet, shaking her head with deep sadness, “it’s very bad—to think o’ the family initials going about everywhere—it niver was so before: you’re a very unlucky sister, Bessy. But what’s the use o’ buying the teapot, when there’s the linen and spoons and everything to go, and some of ’em with your full name—and when it’s got that straight spout, too.”³²

By Eliot’s account, it is not Mrs Tulliver’s teapots but her plight that might, properly handled, move both her relatives and her readers. Mrs Tulliver, though, cannot get her mind beyond the thing itself. Her primitive attachment to her property is so tenaciously complete there is no space for sympathy, either from her sisters or from the reader. In that sense, she is peculiarly ill-equipped, Eliot implies, to thrive in a world that requires at least formal protestations of affective commonality to act—the world, that is, of a Victorian novel.

This is unmistakably an exclusion marked by class status. Education’s capacity to teach advancement-via-detachment threatens in time to teach Maggie (like Mary Garth or Dinah Morris) the flexibility that in the Victorian novel so often seems the necessary complement to capital’s rhythm of accumulation and disbursement. Working-class primitive accumulation, though, is not the only class position spurned by portable property; the aristocracy, too, frequently seems hampered by a similarly primitive at-

tachment to its outmoded, merely material possessions (in chapter 1, below, I examine how Trollope navigates between aristocratic and ascendant bourgeois passions for property). Lessons in having, letting go, and generating sympathy from others for one's act of renunciation are unmistakably part of the Victorian novel's intimate, if vexed, relationship to the process of bourgeois subjectivation.³³

I am arguing that we ought to investigate ways in which cultural value is imagined circulating, in objects, practices, even in persons—even imagined as precisely inhering in that capacity to circulate, rather than in any detail of those two categories so beloved of economists, production and consumption. So why begin analysis here with a failure, a markedly sub-bourgeois version of primitive adhesion on Mrs Tulliver's part, leading to the dissolution of shared meaning in a welter of misunderstandings and commodification? Because by Eliot's account, Mrs Tulliver's downfall is her incapacity to see the doubleness of the portable property around her, the way that it can be simultaneously physical memento and metaphor for pathos. Recall that Gurney refuses to commit himself as to whether the "portable evidence" for Christianity consists of that palpable book called the Bible, or of the lessons that the book teaches. By contrast, Mrs Tulliver has plumped for the object, and nothing but the object, and accordingly found herself with nothing but her own objects to console her.

Eliot offers the hint of an alternative reading that would restore to Mrs Tulliver's possessions a kind of higher aesthetic resonance. That is, readers might be inclined to sense the poignancy of a female inscriber like Mrs Tulliver (or like the author herself) working so hard to leave such minimal traces on unrewarding material—the worked handkerchief, the engraved silver teapot.³⁴ Eliot is clear, though, that Mrs Tulliver does not participate in such imaginative extensions of the loss of her objects. Eliot's moral finding, then, is that a character (or a reader, or an author) who perceives only the physical mobility of a resonant object is missing the metaphorical possibilities inherent in its alienability, its sentimental transferability. Borrowing Gurney's language, we might say that because she is focused on the loss of her own personal set of well-beloved frontlets, Mrs. Tulliver cannot add the quotation marks: she does not see what it would take to make others think about their own "frontlets."

Eliot is not, however, proposing that property be detached from the body so as simply to be repudiated entirely. Mrs Tulliver's too-solid possessions do not constitute a plea for pure dematerialization. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876; I will analyze this work more closely in chapter 3, below), the shame associated with Gwendolen's sordid transaction with her emerald necklace is related to the problems that arise when personal possessions are treated neither as heirlooms nor as relics, but simply as alienable bits of potential cash. Gwendolen's pawning may not prostitute her out-

right, but is intimately tied to the very absence that the narrator is soon lamenting: that Gwendolen has no homestead from which to look up at the stars and imagine them as her own. Deprived of an imaginary grounding for her identity, Gwendolen begins her career potentially adrift in liquidity. Daniel's response to her action (tailing her, and returning the "redeemed" necklace) is, to Gwendolen, less a rescue than it is a rebuke for having misunderstood the delicate laws that mandate holding on to potentially disburseable valuables.³⁵ The balancing-act explored by Eliot leaves the best objects in a kind of Victorian analogy to Milton's Adam and Eve, "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." Pawning, then, epitomizes the most grievous sort of fall out of portability that a semidetached possession can undergo.

INTERMITTENT PERSONALIZATION: CRANFORD

These Eliot examples pertain to objects that fail when they lapse into simple singleness, becoming a mere fetish (teapot) or mere fungible (necklace). A properly doubled object in a Victorian novel, though, looks quite different. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851–53), for example, we find a novel defined by a virtual armory of objects moving readily between and among rival schemes of value, objects whose status as both commodities and inalienable possessions marked them out not as spoiled hybrids, but as ideal sites of sentiment. Two questions shape *Cranford*: first, what sort of possessions are endowed with the most sentimental meaning? Second, what relationship do such objects have to the dangerous world of promiscuous circulation? Gaskell's quaint domestic appurtenances—the sucked oranges, the old lace eaten by a cat, the newspaper laid down to shield rugs from sunshine—have, as Andrew Miller warns, "often been misread as sentimental and nostalgic affection for the trivial details of the past."³⁶ In fact, the most telling bit of personal property in this highly domesticated novel is not domestic but international: the letter that the narrator writes to Miss Matty's brother Peter, in the hopes of fetching him home from India.

The crucial detail about this letter is that it is written to "the Aga Jenkins" without certain knowledge that he actually is Mattie's brother Peter. Mary Smith, therefore, must carefully design "a letter which should affect him if he were Peter, and yet seem a mere statement of dry facts if he were a stranger."³⁷ The letter (like the novel itself) is capable of navigating Cranford's curious half-private, half-public world. Mary's letter simultaneously circulates as a piece of depersonalized freight in a worldwide postal system, and as a singular plea to the one who will feel the sentiment intended. It is as if the letter could be written in two entirely different

alphabets, one saying “I am an impersonal plea from afar,” and the other, “Your sister is in need of you.”

The letter helps us discern the existence of a wide range of such doubly marked objects in *Cranford*: from the pearl necklace that the returning Peter liquefies into presents for Cranford ladies, to the nice, dry, grease-free tea that Miss Mattie deals in her double role as lady and merchant, to the worthless five-pound note that Miss Mattie redeems from a poor farmer (the note comes from “her” bank, so that she takes the failure personally). All these objects are capable of circulating as mere reified value, and yet simultaneously are endowed with a kind of sentimental energy that allows them to mean something particular, often even inarticulable, to individuals.

Cranford's treatment of Samuel Johnson illuminates the laudable duality attached to the best sorts of portable culture. Johnson's works represent, in *Cranford*, the boring bromides of an era before such properly enthralling novels as *Pickwick*. The ponderous apothegms of Johnson circulate in a boring because impersonal public sphere that is also associated with such mere fungibles as cash. Like cash and its (male) masters, Johnson fails to distinguish personalities in his “extensive view” of humanity, and supposes that individual variation can, or even ought to be, dispensed with.³⁸ Yet Mattie Jenkyns's gift of the collected works of Dr. Johnson to the narrator is the quintessence of poignancy, since it is done not out of any public motive, but to call to mind Mattie's deceased sister, who adored Johnson. As a gift, it has aura by association, and is more moving unopened than read.

The alignment offered between Peter's letter, the works of Johnson, and Gaskell's own novel does not mean that *Cranford* itself bids to become part of a universal realm of sentiment, through which the feelings of any afflicted reader for the sorrows of the Jenkyns family can flow. On the contrary, the claim to connection must be routed through at least a pretense to exclusivity, a space of domestic singularity whereby something that circulates with absolute abandon through a universal medium like the post is reimagined as circulating so that it reaches only its intended addressee: you, the singular reader. Think of Jane Eyre's passionate attachment to her singularized addressee—the “dear reader” is the only person as dear to her as Rochester.

Cranford, then, is a striking example of the Victorian novel's success in producing a public form of portable privacy. It postulates ties activated precisely because they are *my* ties of affection and no others. Many Victorian novels work to produce the feeling that the reader has a personal connection with characters that is denied to a hypothetical unsympathetic mass audience—to whom the novel would be, in *Cranford*'s terms, a “mere statement of dry facts.”³⁹ And yet one is comforted in one's knowl-

edge of shared sensation neither by the sense that the novel is merely singular nor simply that it is (as Benedict Anderson's notion of "parallel readerships" would have it) merely multiple, circulating through that big world of reified exchange in as many copies as the evening paper.⁴⁰ Rather, it is at once singular and multiple, private and public, sentimentally particularized and fungible. The sentimentalization of the works of Johnson, like the personalization of the five-pound note or the letter for Peter, provides a kind of security in sentimental objects, a way that beloved objects can partake in the best sort of circulation while remaining tied to the perceiving subject. Mrs Tulliver's teapots fail to evoke fellow feeling, in kin and readers alike, because this felt doubleness eludes her.

Conceptualizing the double life of property in this way helps to reveal what might be called the "intermittent personalization" of objects as a recurrent motif in Victorian novels. In *Great Expectations* (1861), this affects not just the mourning rings that Wemmick acquires as "portable property," but also the legacy paid out to Pip, cold cash warmed by his (mistaken, and yet foundational) belief that it is given him by Miss Havisham, and that it marks him out for Estella. And it transforms the chest of documents, "beautifully incised with Arabic lettering," that Daniel Deronda receives as a deferred gift from his grandfather. Deronda's notion of "separateness with communication" is perfectly figured in those documents, which allow him to be aligned with a great world borne in upon him by the documents, yet also encourage him to choose his learning because the documents seem to be family property.⁴¹ In Victorian novels, almost all truly valuable objects come to be endowed with this double meaning, the appeal of which resides precisely in the disjunction that arises between the broadly shared, interchangeable, impersonal meaning and the poignantly personal aspect, which coexists with the former invisibly, or in ways accessible only to those who are already attuned to the sort of resonances that such personal associations produce.⁴²

HAUNTED BY EXCHANGE: KIRSTEEN

The gold thread that should run through all the years.

—Oliphant, *Kirsteen*

The Victorian novel from Dickens to Conrad is permeated and defined by the sentiment that can be stored in redolent objects or practices moving through the ordinary coils of public (and often fiscal) circulation. By century's end, certain writers had begun to signal a mounting unease with the paradigmatic assumptions of portability. In chapter 3, below, for example, I argue that *Daniel Deronda* (1876) experiments with installing

cultural knowledge deep within an individual's body, signaling that the provincial novel can no longer serve flawlessly as a vessel for the guiding assumptions of cultural portability. I also make the case in chapters 5 and 6, below, that an overtly antiportable logic pervades both the localism of Thomas Hardy's prose (and poetry) and the utopianism of William Morris's late novels.

Still, portable property's assumptions continue to structure a vast realm of mainstream fiction in the last third of the nineteenth century—for example, in Margaret Oliphant's (now nearly forgotten) *Kirsteen: The Story of a Scotch Family Seventy Years Ago* (1890).⁴³ *Kirsteen* is an evident response to the novels of Walter Scott: indeed, the title's echo of *Waverly, or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* is confirmed by a staged reading of that novel midway through. Oliphant's preoccupation with the role played by information-laden trinkets certainly brings to mind Scott's battery of revelatory amulets, talismans, and broken necklaces. Yet there is a significant conceptual difference between the novelists. Scott's *aides-de-memoire* are portable properties in a very straightforward and decidedly unsentimental sense. Such amulets bear with them vital information rather than accumulating psychological weight: the heir to the estates in *Guy Mannering* (1815), for example, learns of his provenance by way of the locket worn around his neck.

Kirsteen, by contrast, springs to life with three linked items of portable property: a handkerchief monogrammed with Kirsteen's hair, a Bible with her initials written in it by her departed beloved, and a packet of money given her to make the trip to London. Each of these three items is initially endowed with value—use, ritual, and exchange value, respectively. It quickly becomes clear, however, that the initial valuation matters far less than the sentimental associations these properties gradually accrue. The gold hair/thread that Kirsteen uses to decorate a handkerchief with her lover's initials, for example, quickly becomes a transferable essence: her lover's parting words to her in turn become “the gold thread that should run through all the years.”⁴⁴

It is not surprising that such immediate metaphorization of the sentiment embodied in portable objects occurs with the signifying handkerchief. That a gift Bible should also be quickly sentimentalized—that is, valued for a lover's knot inscribed in it, but never opened otherwise—is mildly shocking, since the sacred value of the Testament is so quickly annihilated. The real marker of portable sentiment's importance to the novel, though, comes when cash gets reworked and metaphorized. The process is twofold: first, bank-notes are turned into “relic” objects like any other, so that their exchange value seems to be destroyed. Following that erasure, the cash is revived by being made part of the new emotional economy that redefines it as a token of love. There is, for example,

a loving bond between the loyal household retainer, Margaret, and her sister Jean, who had sent her cash so Margaret could travel from Scotland to London. Then Margaret gives that cash—and with it the force of the original sisterly love—to her beloved Kirsteen, who uses the money to serve its original purpose of financing a trip to London to see Jean.

Marg'ret came back after a few minutes with a work-box in her hand. All kinds of things had come out of that box in the experience of the children at Drumcarro, things good and evil, little packets of powders for childish maladies, sweeties to be taken after the nauseous mouthful, needles and thimbles and scissors when these needful implements had all been lost, as happened periodically, even a ribbon or a pair of gloves in times of direst need. . . . [Margaret tells Kirsteen that her sister Jean] “sent me what would do for my chairges [to travel to London]. It was never touched by me. It took me a great deal of trouble to get Scotch notes for it, and here it is at the bottom of my box with many an auld relic on top of it.” . . . She took from the bottom a little parcel in an old letter, folded closely and written closely to the very edge of the seal.⁴⁵

Although all the signs point toward a sacrosanct relic—close-written words and a seal are mentioned—it is crucial that Margaret has already opened the letter, and changed the money that was enclosed into Scotch notes, after which she has reinserted those new notes into the letter.

This metamorphosis might simply read as a mere extension of the logic of finance, whereby cash that can buy one trip is used—as part of a fiscally minded gift exchange—to buy another instead (same ticket to London, different body traveling with it). That reading would link the novel to the interconvertibility of persons, types, and topoi that Deidre Lynch has shown to be central to the economy of character in the eighteenth-century novel. Every formal move described above, however, endows the logic of transference, metonymical association, and sentimental exchange with a kind of complicated, composite power that is deliberately opposed to the logic of fiscal exchange.

Kirsteen, forgotten though it may be, perfectly exemplifies the logic of Victorian portability (still going strong in 1890), because it showcases the ways in which the possibility of properly sentimental portability remains always haunted, like Margaret's work-box, by the specter of mere fungibility. At the bottom of the box, with “many an auld relic” on top of it, lie not the notes that Jean had sent Margaret but the Scotch notes that she had, with great trouble, exchanged for them. Objects that stage partial emergencies from mere exchangeability, and incomplete translations into the realm of pure feeling, end up becoming become logical touchstones for novels (themselves instances of such divided value) seeking not a realm

cut off from all fiscal logic, but a realm in which fiscal logic can be partially translated, imagined as contributor to a different sort of enduring value.⁴⁶ Such meditations are a powerful signal that even at century's end a logic that ties both national and sentimental identity to portable properties still thrives in mainstream Victorian fiction.

THEORIZING PORTABILITY

What each of these literary examples suggests is the inherent instability, in the Victorian age, of the opposition between fungible and relic object—an instability that is especially visible in novels, because of the precarious and yet prestigious middle ground they occupy. Understanding what it means for cultural properties to become portable may help generate a general account of which particular aspects of any given culture lend themselves to transmission, generalization, or replication in an age of worldwide mobility. That connection, which I explore in more detail in this book's conclusion, below, seems worth spelling out here, in order to clarify both the theoretical background of my study, and its potential implications for those studying similar problems in other disciplines.

One way to gain perspective on Victorian novels' representations of an in-between object comes from the vocabulary that anthropology has developed, after Mauss, for making sense of the relationship between gift and exchange.⁴⁷ Annette Weiner, for instance, moves away from Maussian insistence on networks of strict exchange reciprocity by positing a sort of property she intriguingly labels “inalienable possessions.” Those possessions lie at the heart of the paradox of “keeping while giving”; namely, that “some things, like most commodities, are easy to give. But there are other possessions that are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners which are not easy to give away. . . . The loss of such an inalienable possession diminishes the self and, by extension, the group to which the person belongs.”⁴⁸ On the one hand, Weiner's model seems very helpful in understanding the centrality of the process of discrimination—distinguishing, say, fungible Irish potatoes from valuable English flowers—to Victorian novels. On the other, her insistence on the rigid distinction between ordinary trade goods and inalienable property works less well. Weiner even insists that “transfer” (within a family or other “group”) is categorically distinct from exchange. In Victorian novels, though, objects like the Eustace Diamonds (see chapter 1, below) or precious English books Emily Eden reads in India (see chapter 2, below) or even a carefully preserved chest of Jewish documents in *Daniel Deronda* (see chapter 3, below) are valuable and narratable because they can seem ineffable and fungible simultaneously.

In a response to Weiner, Maurice Godelier emphasizes the fluidity of boundaries between various states of exchange, arguing that “alienable” or “inalienable” status attaches to particular objects only at certain times, and the particular relationship of any given object to exchange is potentially debatable. Godelier argues for

the juxtaposition or even the addition of the alienable and the inalienable, for society is brought into existence and sustained by the union, by the interdependence of these two spheres, and by their differences, their relative autonomy. The formula for maintaining the social sphere is therefore not *keeping-while-giving* [Weiner’s phrase], but *keeping-for-giving and giving-for-keeping*.⁴⁹

This formula sheds real light on a persistent Victorian novelistic suspension of valued objects between the twin imperatives of currency and inalterability: this has also been described as the ability of “inalienable commodities” to exist within “rival schemes of value.”⁵⁰ The quintessential Victorian portable properties—novels, diamonds, family letters—are not, as Weiner’s model demands, marked off as sacrosanct. Rather their difference is always tinted with potential sameness: were they not also potentially implicated in the ordinary flow of exchange, they never would have become portable repositories of meaning.⁵¹

Despite the subtlety of recent work such as Weiner’s and Godelier’s on the suggestively dual status of possessions, though, dominant social-scientific paradigms for treating worldwide circulation of culture and its objects often remain tied to a dualism that simplifies culture-bearing objects out of all recognition.⁵² An unwieldy binary distinction between the local (or authentic) artifact, and the purely capitalized global commodity has, for example, profoundly shaped discussions focused on “things” or “objects” in the two decades following the provocative delineation of that field of study in Arjun Appadurai’s edited collection, *The Social Life of Things*. Appadurai recently reaffirmed the basic binary that he sees differentiating global commodities and local authentic “things” (here, Indian):

Things in India never lose some of the magic of their human makers, owners, or handlers. . . . [By contrast] the United States is the ultimate consumer, market, affluent, or image society . . . a peculiar veil of abstraction governs over the material life of societies like the United States. Abstraction in this context has several dimensions. The first is that no object or thing in this type of society is fully enjoyed for its sheer materiality. . . . No object is truly priceless, and indeed pricing the apparently priceless continues to be a deep American obsession.⁵³

Even though Appadurai finds “India . . . a society whose material life is in the throes of deep change,”⁵⁴ he does not offer any way out of the

binary he so violently denounces. Rather, he pins his hopes on the side of the binary that he has already classed as archaic. “In India, and in societies where the rule of the market is as yet incomplete, there is a certain chaotic materiality in the world of things that resists the global tendency to make all things instruments of representation, and thus of abstraction and commodification.”⁵⁵ The continuing dependence on the simple distinction between a world of cultureless abstraction and an archaic material world leaves Appadurai here making the untenable claim that an unspecifiable resistance to abstraction and representation itself is the only way to fight an absorptive and evil market logic.

Adding “portable property” as a third term between “abstract commodity” and “autochthonous thing” may clarify the situation Appadurai is describing. Models of succession (relics succeeded by fungibles, or good Third-World materiality overwhelmed by evil First-World liquidity) necessarily understate the true complexity of simultaneous developments in the ways that objects are regarded. Despite Appadurai’s argument (and Mauss’s before him), the durability of sentiment, gift-giving, and memento culture in successful capitalist societies is *not* a residue of an archaic gift impulse lingering in a reified world. Rather, the account of portable properties I am proposing suggests ways in which the portaging of sentiment in beloved objects is a predictable, even a necessary, development in a world of increasingly successful commodity flow.⁵⁶ The more global such trade becomes, the faster the exchange of items between different regions becomes, the more need to develop auratic—or even somatic—forms of storing personal or familial memories.

PORTABLE HOMELANDS

The Jews carried [the Bible] with them in exile like a portable fatherland.

—Heinrich Heine, “Geständnisse”

Far from their retaining archaic objecthood in a deracinated world, the seemingly preextant “thingness” of the portable properties that Appadurai singles out for praise is as much a product of the modern world of global exchange as any software network or Coca-Cola franchise.⁵⁷ The really interesting questions about the legacy of European empires, then, have little to do with recovering authentic relationships with archaic things, and everything to do with making sense of the systems that for more than a century were able to represent English culture as a dominant form of *translatio imperii* that moved across the world in an unbroken wave, which suffered neither interruption nor undertow.

My argument about the centrality of portable properties to the logic of the novel, and the consequent centrality of the novel to the Victorian conception of what portable properties were, has up to this point centered mainly on the question of reconciling economic and sentimental value. But there are also some interesting implications for the cultural logic of Victorian empire-formation. Gauri Viswanathan has initiated a very productive line of inquiry by pinpointing “the irony that English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before [that is, in the 1820s] it was institutionalized in the home country.” *Masks of Conquest* also “examine[d] the ways in which [the administrative and political imperatives of British rule] charged [literature] with a radically altered significance, enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and indeed even support education for social and political control.”⁵⁸ While Viswanathan is interested in how literature was taught to Indians and other colonial subjects, I am concerned with contemporaneous English efforts to sequester the pleasures and powers of English literature and nationalize them, to make access to them as restricted as membership in Anglo-Indian clubs.

Such literary “clubability” was not always sustainable and its collapse (as Priya Joshi’s work on the Indian circulation of English melodramas suggests) might result in a blurring of the lines between colonizer and colonized: such diffusion presents a powerful alternative to any model that posited a seamlessly successful portability of Englishness into an uncontaminated hinterland.⁵⁹ Regardless of its eventual success as a form of sequestration, however, recreating home had become a nearly sacred injunction for English émigrés by the middle of the nineteenth century. It was in the Victorian era that Jane Austen and William Shakespeare alike become reassuring embodiments of “dear old England” for nostalgic expatriates, and that afternoon tea on a foreign verandah came to stand in for England—although the tea might be Indian, and the cups Chinese willow-ware.⁶⁰ Victorian Greater Britons evidently valued objects (a trinket), locales (an “English” garden), and even practices (midday walks) that could in some way serve as a direct conduit back to a place nostalgically construed as an alma mater. A piano becomes the “shadow of a rock in a dusty land”; an Anglo-Indian girl picks the first fruits from “the first strawberry plant that ever grew in India” because they embody her distant homeland.⁶¹

Portability’s efficacy as a mechanism of imperial expansion required the blessed dream of a distant redemptive locale. This accords well with Benedict Anderson’s argument that successfully producing a sense of belonging at an empire’s far-flung margin necessitated a retrospective reconstruction of national identity “back home.”⁶² It is also compatible with recent work arguing that (following Linda Colley’s magisterial *Britons*)

life overseas for Scottish and Irish subalterns was bolstered by looking backward to an hypostatized unity described both as “British” and as “English”: it is significant, for instance, that within the first two paragraphs of Kipling’s *Kim*, its protagonist is described as English, white, and Irish.⁶³

What advantages does portable culture offer in protecting or producing a sense of group cohesion or individual identity on the move? The idea of portable property works as an alternative both to fluid cultural forms, which adapt themselves with chameleonic ease to every new setting, and to purely immobile bits of local life. Imagine, for instance, a late Victorian expatriate making a choice between three pastimes as repositories for national pride: football (that is, soccer), cricket, and Morris dancing.

To choose football means embracing the “global modernity” that Lafranchi and Taylor suggest is perfectly symbolized by that sport’s rapid adaptation all over Europe and Latin America. Along with simplicity and the ready transferability of knowledge and personnel comes the capacity for regions or nations to develop their own “local styles”—but always within the confines of the same fundamentally simple sport.⁶⁴ Adopting football as a source of pride, though, is as risky as pinning your faith in a commodity like cotton: someone else might become a better manufacturer or player than you.⁶⁵ An innovator’s own worst enemy can be success so complete that originator and imitator become indistinguishable.⁶⁶ In fact, once a practice has passed out of its originators’ control, the temptation toward what might be called a “cultural sulk” arises; for instance, England’s 1904 refusal to be a cofounder of the International Football Federation (FIFA), and its shunning participation in the World Cup until 1950.

Still, what if the only alternatives to having one’s cultural markers voraciously globalized were to define one’s identity by what is most inimitable, or simply unimitated?⁶⁷ Choose Morris dancing, for instance, and you align yourself with the quintessentially local, something as unlikely to be taken overseas as a ruin or a soil-specific crop. With only Morris dancing (or samphire eating, or pole climbing) to fall back on, it might prove hard to forsake football—or cotton, or Wedgwood china, or Fry’s chocolate bars (invented 1847)—despite that ominous universalizability.

Enter cricket, a seeming compromise that is actually a third way. Cricket remains markedly English overseas: think of accessories like pads, whites, and the tea break; of argot like *wickets*, *googly*, *silly mid-on*, and *howzat*.⁶⁸ Yet cricket is also capable, like football but unlike Morris dancing, of a global journey as successful as that of Shakespeare, whom Carlyle describes as embodying England everywhere he goes.⁶⁹ It is reportable worldwide—there are two memorable Englishmen always desperate for radio or newspaper cricket scores in Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lady Van-*

ishes (1938)—yet always inescapably English. And even if England’s dominance wanes, colonials (“Black Britons” or “Brown Sahibs”) who adopt the game often understand themselves to be donning English garb and imbibing English mores.⁷⁰ It says a great deal about the patriotic force still ascribed to cricket as a metonymic piece of portable Englishness that the Bank of England in 1993 issued a ten-pound note inscribed with a picture of Charles Dickens gazing benignly down on “The Cricket Match Dingley Dell Against All Muggleton.”

James Buzard’s recent account of imperial autoethnography—that is, the scrupulous examination of one’s own culture, performed by English writers at the height of British dominance—argues that dominant cultures are not just cataloguers of vanquished cultures, but also of their own ascendant national essence. His argument is that novelistic national introspection turns folkways into what might then be labeled “culture” (a process that, as his chosen example of *Bleak House* suggests, is rarely purely triumphalist).⁷¹ This sort of homeland-based ethnographic introspection has historically struck scholars as incompatible with the Victorian notion of stage-by-stage cultural progress, which would seem to entail British dominance gradually exporting an admirable form of civilization that itself need not be interrogated as the mores of “lesser breeds” are. If imperialism succeeds by creating a reassuringly homogeneous space, an undemarcated realm where universalizing integration can follow a British model, then what reason would there be to examine English folkways?⁷²

Brad Evans has recently charted early anthropological struggles to reconcile “particularist” and “diffusionist” accounts of cultural circulation. Even Boas, who is now remembered for advocating a homogeneous and stable “culture” as the basis for all evaluations of human society, early in his career advanced diffusionist hypotheses (derived from such Victorian scholars of tale-migration as Theodore Benfey) to explain how particular tropes, stories, and culture-bearing objects might move across seemingly impervious ethnic boundaries.⁷³ Such fin-de-siècle fluidity in theorizing the emerging concept of culture suggests that any monolithic notion of what makes a “people,” a “tribe,” or even a “culture” into a unit is perpetually “challenged by the circulation of the people and things they supposedly delimited across their conceptual borders.”⁷⁴

The flow of objects outward from England played a crucial role in exporting a restrictive, distinctive sort of Englishness through a world that stayed distinctively non-English.⁷⁵ The cultural value attached to markedly English portable property emphasizes the exceptional power (power potentially restricted only to English émigrés) that discrete objects can come to possess overseas. These pieces of property are meaningful not because they are capable of abetting the civilizing process, but precisely because they *do not civilize*; instead, they embody English culture,

in its most particularist and nonteleological sense. Such objects can thus produce a sense of identity that travels without decaying, and also without spreading out, that is successfully exportable and yet potentially not diffusionist.⁷⁶

My account of how particular objects come to be endowed with cultural value can, I hope, offer a valuable perspective on this object-by-object process. Because pieces of portable property can be examined separately for their capacity to move from space to space unchanged, my account can help to assess the significance of certain objects (novels central among them) in terms of those objects' ever-shifting relationship to the nature of cultural portability itself.

PORTABILITY IN EXCESS AND IN REVERSE

J. R. Seeley, in his 1883 *The Expansion of England*, complains that his contemporaries “do not perceive that . . . the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia.”⁷⁷ It might seem hard to credit that at any point in the Victorian era the English could have seemed to have “conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.”⁷⁸ The developing logic of portability in the Victorian cultural realm, though, suggests that so long as the aesthetic objects through which identity was constituted and solidified could both represent and engender a sense of seamless identity on the move, the “absence of mind” that allowed a culture to finesse or ignore its immersion into global circulation could continue.

Failure, in fact, is one of the most important available clues about portability. I earlier mentioned Irish potatoes as a kind of *ne plus ultra* of nonportability, the item that marks the limits of cultural portability by refusing to signify anything. Such noncompeting objects, though, are not the only counterpoint to successfully British portable property. More troubling to the economy of unidirectional cultural flow (typified by the enormous success that Wedgwood boasted with his blocky, distinctively English porcelain, sold to Anglo-Indians eager to set their tables with decidedly “domestic” plates)⁷⁹ is the possibility of counterflow: objects shipped from colonies to motherland with their colonial character still very much attached.

It is not hard to see why such objects are both problematic and likely. The very success of English-dominated global flow engenders a set of problems for the victors. How can distinctively English culture be passed along the waves of trade, if trade is constituted precisely by the interchangeability of items, their exchange value trumping all use?⁸⁰ Moreover, even granting its preservability in a marketplace of fungibles, how can

“culture”—or national essence defined in any way other than racially—travel unchanged from the core to the periphery of the empire?

A notional portability that protects Englishness but forecloses on other national transmission mechanisms, then, is implicitly, and at times even explicitly, committed to pure asymmetry. If in the best of times portability is the mechanism ensuring that British culture survives unaltered overseas, at the worst of times the process can also go into reverse, sending from the edges of empire to its core artifacts still freighted with foreign meaning. Scholars have lately stressed the potent allure of such elements of foreignness incorporated into British culture.⁸¹ There is some evidence as well, though, for contempt and for dread associated with the flow of objects from abroad to England (sometimes called “imperial panic”). Could such objects refuse to become commodities, and instead keep their “native” cultural essence about them?⁸² In Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868; discussed in chapter 1, below), that essence takes the form of three dedicated killer priests who will do anything necessary to repatriate the diamond in question.⁸³ And if the threat of reverse portability looms large, equally troubling is the specter of an English portability that works so well that it becomes simply diffusion (English culture as football, that is, rather than as cricket). Charles Dilke describes seeing, in Bombay, a play billed as “The Indian Romeo and Juliet.” “The play had no Friar Lawrence, no apothecary, and no nurse; it was nothing but a simple Maratta love-tale, followed by some religious tableaux. In the first piece an Englishman was introduced, and represented as kicking every native that crossed his path with the exclamation of ‘damned fool.’”⁸⁴ Dilke (about whom more will be said in chapter 2, below) is relieved that the Indian audience, having gotten England’s notion of power so right (in the form of that native-kicker), at least manage to get its literary touchstone so wrong. Dilke is capable of waxing poetic for three paragraphs on the virtues of the English housefly and its capacity to beat New Zealand flies as thoroughly as English settlers have beaten the Maori.⁸⁵ Shakespeare, however, is global in a different way: he travels well *with* us, but let us not be too quick to wish him well among the natives.⁸⁶

Philip Fisher has made the case that a desire like Dilke’s—to keep the national culture national even as it becomes global—is more likely to be realized if that culture is stored in words than if it is embodied in artworks collectible and enjoyable without translation. By Fisher’s account, literature’s physical mobility does not allow it, like paintings, to move worldwide with cosmopolitan ease. Instead, like a ruin or an architectural tradition, literature assumes the ossifying role of embodying a national cultural heritage: if paintings are more like football, literature is more like cricket.⁸⁷ This helps explain the increasingly strident nationalism of the latter nineteenth century, and the emergence of a vehement and highly

elaborated insistence upon racial difference among prominent English writers from the 1860s onwards,⁸⁸ correlated with the increasing focus upon a *written* aesthetic heritage as grounding English pride, and indeed English identity as a whole.⁸⁹

Fisher's hypothesis may help explain the importance of portability not simply as a general description of transmissible culture in Victorian Greater Britain, but as a particularly vital structuring logic for literary texts.⁹⁰ It also bears stressing, though, that novels, no matter how nationalized, possessed another kind of doubleness that made them, as Benedict Anderson has recently argued, agents both of group formation and of disruptive anonymity, of a dissident solidarity tending to unsettle fixed divisions (in Anderson's terms, novels are sites of both "bound" and "unbound seriality"). If they were associated with their incarnation (in newspaper, journal, part, or volume) in ways that made them resonant, collectible, and endowable with personal or familial associations, their existence as texts is certified by their capacity to move across boundaries with a potentially unsecured, even unsecurable, diffusion.

Because novels were themselves defined by their uncertain status as portable properties, they became in the Victorian era a ground-zero for a wide-ranging exploration of what it meant for an object to travel simultaneously with ineradicably particular meanings, even national ones, attached, and simultaneously to stand for the potentially limitless fluidity of the marketplace. One implication was that novels could, as in the case of Jane Austen's works among the "Janeites," even travel with forms of meaning generated primarily in the process of circulation itself. It is such complicated results of simple initial impulses that I have tried to explore and explain in the chapters that follow.