

Magical Objects in Victorian Literature:
Enchantment, Narrative Imagination, and the Power of Things

By

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For lao-ye, who taught me how to learn

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE VICTORIAN MAGICAL OBJECTS?

In his 2014 bestseller *Enchanted Objects: Design, Human Desire, and the Internet of Things*, David Rose proposes a class of technology that we will soon see in our future. These are pill bottles that would glow as a reminder to take medicine or an umbrella that tells its owner to take it along on rainy days. For Rose, these enchanted objects are enhanced by technology but inspired by the “objects of fantasy and folklore” (7), so much so that he contacted Jack Zipes, the foremost expert in fairy tale studies, who provided him with a list of magical objects:

The wishing wand or ring that fulfills any desire in an instant.
The flying carpet that swiftly transports us.
The bottomless purse that never runs out of money.
The superspyglass through which we can see thousands of miles.
Magic boots that enable us to walk miles in one stride.
The horn or whistle with which we can summon help.
The crystal ball that enables us to know the future.
The invisibility cloak or shield that hides us from danger.
The endless table that feeds hundreds with a bountiful feast. (10)

These objects seem to exist only in the fabulous realm of fairy tales and folklore, able to gain traction in the real world only because of ultramodern technology that, as Rose’s book attests to, mostly has yet to be invented. Yet the lack of realizing potential never stopped these magical objects from taking hold in our imagination, exerting their power on and enchanting our everyday world.

This dissertation examines how magical objects exerted a similar enchantment in the Victorian period by flourishing in the world of writing. The Victorian world was one stuffed to the brim with objects. Its relationship to objects is emblemized by the Great Exhibition of 1851, which claimed to contain almost every type of object on earth, from raw materials like iron

and cotton that comprise British industry to sophisticated products, both domestic and imported, like soaps, carpets, and statues. Elsewhere, in the parlors, department stores, and even trash heaps, the Victorians engaged in a relation of excessive care, if not excess itself, with their possessions. They indulged in their things, as Deborah Cohen has argued, to the point of making their possessions stand for every facet of their character and morality. This indulgence shone through the literature of the period—especially fiction—through which one can see, as John Plotz has commented, “One universally acknowledged truth about the Victorians is that they loved their things” (1). Objects in Victorian fiction stand for a great many things: a lost handkerchief can expose a lost genealogy, a piano some sentimental and romantic attachment. Sometimes the meaning of objects needs to be excavated, as Elaine Freedgood does in *The Ideas in Things*: a stray piece of mahogany furniture and a pinch of tobacco actually contain long and oftentimes indicting histories of slavery and imperialism. Suffice it to say that, in the Victorian novel, it is almost rare for an object to hold no signification.

In this dissertation, I argue that magical objects populate Victorian writing just like mundane objects do; moreover, that magical objects held cultural meaning just like mundane objects do. They, too, became analogues for imperialism, gender and familial relations, and industry and commerce. They also become an arena for arguments about the enchantment of the world, which the scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, and writers were actively contesting. I contend that the Victorian period was enchanted by the circulation of magical objects in the literary world. Moreover, I argue that the very magic of these objects allowed authors to think through the processes of novel-writing, an act that depended on the fantastical histories that recur and compound through other writing. Accordingly, my dissertation spans a variety of genres, from periodical pieces to poetry, from scientific tracts to historical records. I trace magical

objects from these diverse genres into the novels of the period, which also span from the nonsensical writing of Lewis Carroll, through the romance genres of Wilkie Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Henry Rider Haggard, to the more realistic works of Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot. Ultimately, I show that the appearance of magical objects in literature was not a minor event constrained to the fairy tale but a persistent and pervasive motif that conjured a world of enchantment in the Victorian literary imagination.

This dissertation brings together the critical issues of enchantment, object-status, and imaginative fantasy in writing in the figure of the magical object. Though I use terms like “enchanted objects,” “fantastical objects,” and “magical objects” interchangeably throughout the chapters, I emphasize *magic* as the primary way in which objects are invested with enchantment and literary fantasy is engendered. My focus on magic serves two purposes. First, magic denotes specificity in causation, power, and agency, as I will elaborate upon below; it describes an active bespelling by the writer’s pen, after which the object continues to exert its magical power within the text. Second, despite the recent critical interest in enchantment, which the next section explores, magic and the magical remain more or less devalued terms in these studies, which give priority to a vague, nonagentive understanding of enchantment. I contend that, during the Victorian period, if not still in our own time, there exists a devotion to the magic of things that cannot be wholly encompassed under the umbrella of enchantment. The scholars I address below, while keen on resuscitating enchantment in our modern age, are yet reluctant to consider magic in their desire to prioritize critical detachment. Even Simon During, who comes closest, uses the term “secular magic” in order to distinguish his brand of stage magic from the “magic of witches or Siberian shamans ... ‘real and potent magic’” (1). In our own critical preference for enchantment rather than magic, we risk replicating the Victorian anthropological effort to

relegate the belief in the agency of objects to primitive cultures. In this secularist view, we are willing to be passively enchanted by an object but unwilling to recognize the active power of that object.

Instead, we need to see the agentic magic of objects as contributing to but not eclipsed by the enchantment of the modern world. The writers in this dissertation were actively countering the disenchanted version of Victorian Britain by interweaving their texts with objects that could speak, feel, transform, and transport. They were invested in these objects' power to inform some of the most serious questions of the time, including gender and class relations, national and imperial identity, and the mimetic and transformative potential of literature. While some of these objects came out of fairy tales and folklore, their existence was not confined to childish fantasy; while others came out of exotic locales, their existence was not confined to primitive belief. These objects were able to exert their real and potent power through the medium of literary imagination without being exorcised in the name of secularism. In the next section, I will examine the ontological belief in enchantment that makes possible this mediated belief in the agentic character of objects, while the following sections will define more specifically the forms and functions of magical objects.

The Enchantment of the Victorian World

Victorian enchantment has been a contested issue in the critical and theoretical realm, and this contention stems from the long-standing vision of the post-Enlightenment West as a space of disenchantment. Max Weber first commented on the “disenchantment of the world” in 1917; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno delved more deeply into the disenchantment of the West in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), stating that “Enlightenment’s program was the

disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge” (1). According to them, Enlightenment ideology, especially the emphasis on empiricism and technology, has extirpated much of animistic thought, creating instead an almost inescapable worldview in which nature is subjected by knowledge and reason, arranged in such a way as to be mastered. This worldview is a totalizing one, involving not only the scientific and philosophical arenas but the commercial-industrial complex, cultural entertainment, and human behavior at large; moreover, disenchantment makes a mythology of itself, making it ever more difficult to demystify and step outside it.

While Horkheimer and Adorno’s arguments deal most explicitly with twentieth century modernism, it is easy to see how the Victorian period gave birth to these ideologies of disenchantment. After all, this was the era of scientific, social, and imperial advancement, most of which relied on epistemological mastery as their *modus operandi*. The works of a few influential figures radically shifted the popular ideologies of the period. In the scientific sphere, Charles Darwin’s 1859 *On the Origin of Species* incited a great debate between creationist theology and evolutionary theory, which contributed to the Victorian crisis of faith and which persists to this day. Karl Marx’s *Capital* (1867) revolutionized political economy by demystifying the labor and class relations of capitalist production. And E. B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871) concretized an evolutionary theory of races and cultures by identifying as more primitive those that prioritized animism and religion over science. Tylor’s ideas fell in line with Britain’s imperial drive, which classified peoples, objects, and ideas of different cultures like never before, taking place not only in the newly formed field of anthropology and the great surveys of India and Africa but in domestic exhibitions, especially the Great Exhibition, that arranged booths by nationality. It is almost no wonder that Weber saw fit to characterize the

world as disenchanted in 1917, as if to hammer home its culmination at the end of the nineteenth century.

The disenchantment of the world is, however, a difficult pill to swallow. As Weber and Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, it does seem to be a totalizing aspect of the modern world and does not leave much space for anything more fantastical. Michael Saler, in *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, explains how the critical arguments about disenchantment have made it difficult to recuperate enchantment as such. He lays out the binary and dialectical models of disenchantment. The binary model, which has become most prevalent since the Enlightenment used reason to escape the delusions of superstition, posits enchantment and disenchantment in opposition to each other; disenchantment becomes the norm of modernity, while enchantment hides “underground,” becoming the outlooks of the “other” like “‘primitives,’ children, women, and the lower classes” (9). In the dialectical model, which Horkheimer and Adorno espouse, disenchantment is in itself a mythic construct, inherently irrational, “no less enchanted than the myths it sought to overcome” (10). Saler proposes a third model, which he calls the ironic imagination: a strategy of “embracing illusions while acknowledging their artificial status, of turning to the ‘as if’”; enchantment, in this sense, becomes a state “in which one could be ‘delighted’ without being ‘deluded’” (12).

While Saler takes his idea of enchantment to the realm of virtual reality, we can see his notion of ironic imagination echo throughout other recent scholarship on enchantment. Jane Bennett, in *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, for example, posits enchantment as a mood rather than an epistemology; she sees enchantment as an “affective attachment to the world,” a “state of wonder...the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement” (3, 5). For Bennett, being enchanted does not entail completely foregoing

human reason but instead these brief suspensions and surrenders of power that allows for the acknowledgment of others, as well as a stance of generosity towards them. For Simon During, enchantment has a more concrete basis in the elements of everyday culture. In *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, During sees enchantment in things like children's stories, stage magic, and illusions, as opposed to the supernatural elements of religious belief. For During, too, enchantment entails both reason and fantasy, a "secular magic" that appears to remain in the realm of fiction (even the "fiction" of stage magic) but nevertheless holds real effect over readers and audiences.

Whether we call it ironic imagination, secular magic, or the suspension of disbelief, this mode of the "both/and" is the sort of enchantment I want to pursue in Victorian texts and their treatment of magical objects. While the texts I analyze vary in genre, including prominent examples from nonfiction, fiction, realism, and fantasy, their authors make use of and indulge in magical objects without believing in their existence in reality; if anything, the admission that magical objects are fantastical make them useful in a way wholly different from the realistic depiction of objects. We might think of this kind of enchantment as the position taken on by the Victorian anthropologists, supposedly the party most interested in disenchanting the "advanced" cultures of Western Europe. Even as, for example, Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) sought to displace magic and animism onto peasants, children, and the racial other, he is nevertheless invested in the cultural power of these elements and understands the draw of their magic.

The Enchantment of Objects

Tylor's *Primitive Culture* hangs the status of Western enchantment on the status of objects. For Tylor, the belief in animism—on which he spends much of his two-volume tome—is one of the main ways in which “primitive” cultures can be distinguished from the more advanced civilizations of the West. Tylor defines animism as the extension of spirit, *mana*, or magical essence into nature and objects, according them the same *animus* that enlivens human beings. Animistic belief is one of Tylor's main concerns partly because, even as he remains insistent about separating the developed cultures of the West from the primitive ones of Africa and Asia, he cannot exorcise animism completely from Western belief. He sets out the difference in belief clearly at points: “Certain high savage races distinctly hold ... a theory of separable and surviving souls or spirits belonging to stocks and stones, weapons, boats, food, clothes, ornaments, and other objects which to us are not merely soulless but lifeless” (61). On the other hand, he acknowledges that objects are not always “soulless and lifeless” to his Western audience: our understanding of the “primitive, childlike conception” of animated objects relies on “the memory of our own childish days. He who recollects when there was still personality to him in posts and sticks, chairs, and toys, may well understand how the infant philosophy of mankind could extend the notion of vitality to what modern science only recognizes as lifeless things” (62). The state of childhood, in which fantasy flourishes, can provide a link that bridges the wide gulf between animism and the adult, rational world of soulless objects.

Tylor's attempts to hold the West and the primitive other separate by the belief in the soullessness and lifelessness of things does not hold water for long. Critics like William Pietz and Peter Logan have already unraveled this geographical distinction in the idea of the fetish, which is a specific kind of animism. While Pietz argues that fetishism arose only in the

intersection of Western travellers to the African continent, Logan goes further to contend that, in fact, the nineteenth century idea of fetishism “was always a European artifact, rather than an African condition; it was a projection of European assumptions onto African social practices” (7). Tylor himself establishes the “survivals” of primitive animism in the advanced cultures of the West; but even before that, Marx noted what he called “commodity fetishism” in the West, or the idea that people assigned human-like relations onto commodities while ignoring the actual causal relations of human labor.

While fetishism is a particular subset of object-relations that has haunted critical minds, other sorts of magical objects certainly pervaded the nineteenth century, including the dolls and mirrors that are the subjects of this dissertation. All of this begs the question: if we know that magical objects are not merely a product of childish or primitive minds, why was Tylor so anxious to characterize them as such? What do magical objects do that presents such a threat to “modern science,” developed culture, and rational thought? Horkheimer and Adorno present one solution: humankind has barely been able to extricate itself from nature, and a powerful nature threatens to undermine human agency; thus “the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature ... has been belittled as animistic superstition” (24). In other words, the problem has always been the battle for power: if objects could behave in a way that indicates their liveliness, humans would no longer be able to keep their title as the masters of the universe. In the end, what we are talking about is not so much the ontology of objects as their behavior and action. Fetishes (at least anthropological ones) are powerful because they can make seemingly unrelated events happen elsewhere; Aladdin’s lamp is powerful because it can make wishes come true. Enchanted objects

have the power to destabilize the hierarchy of human-object relations, which in turn opens the door for an ethical and sympathetic understanding the world.¹

I have been using “enchanted objects” as a general term, but enchantment can take on many forms. I see a spectrum of enchanted objects that extends from, on the one end, the gothic or occult object and, on the other end, the sentimental object. By gothic object I mean the branches that tap on the window or the wardrobes that go bump in the night; they are things that earn their enchanted status by troubling the concept of possession and elude human understanding. Barbara M. Benedict, reading the gothic fiction of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, sees these objects as having the “power to erode personal and social control” by appearing possessed by unknown spirits or poltergeists and in turn haunt, rather than be possessed, by their human owners (31). These objects elude straightforward human interaction and instead inspire fear, surprise, and uncanny discomfort. Put another way, they are the close kinsmen of the objects of twenty-first century theories: both Bill Brown’s “thing theory” and Jane Bennett’s radical materialism theorize a kind of thingness that is beyond human conception. Brown gives the term “thingness” to that which is “not quite apprehended” and “beyond the field of intelligibility” (5), whereas Bennett names a “vitality” of things, or “the capacity of things ... not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii).² The examples they name

¹ While this project is primarily interested in the particular relationship between enchantment, object, and narrative, we can see the ethical imperative behind the complication of the status of objects in other fields. The study of slavery is one such field, in which the status of objects must necessarily be complicated, and perhaps enlivened, because human beings are turned into chattel property. Ecocriticism is another such field, including studies about the deep time of the earth: in an era of ecological crisis, we have become more and more interested in how to consider the causations and effects of the environment as having an impact on human life, and vice versa.

² Brown and Bennett’s theories, while provoked by this extra-human thingness, are nevertheless distinct from each other. While Brown titled his piece “thing theory,” he pushes for a deeper theorization of things rather than provides a concrete theory of his own. This theoretical elasticity is fully in line with his proposition that the things themselves are more than elastic; they “exceed their mere materiality” and have a force as “a sensual presence or as a metaphysical presence,” which is both simultaneous to and outside of the perceived material object (5). Bennett, on

are intrusive ones: the toy one trips over, the drill that stops working, the dead rat in a storm drain. They are things that “provoke affect” like repulsion and dismay (Bennett 4); they are things that lay “claims on your attention and on your action” (Brown 9). In other words, this thingness is the record of a direction of affect from the thing to the human; the thing comes from outside human perception into it in dramatic and unexpected ways, instilling fear, consternation, and, on the rare occasion, joy.

On the other end of that spectrum is the sentimental object, which represents affect travelling in the other direction, from the human to the thing. In this case, their owners become attached to their possessions, which seem to be a reflection of their personal identity and character. They are, as Deidre Lynch argues, “particularly valued because they are the surrogates for particular persons” (63), entering into a sort of animistic relationship in which the person’s spirit becomes part of the object. John Plotz, reading Mrs. Tulliver’s love for her monogrammed linens in *The Mill on the Floss*, even goes so far as to theorize an overattachment that turns those linens into “household gods” that then foreclose the sentimental transportability that are portrayed elsewhere in Victorian novels. Unavailable to Mrs. Tulliver, there is “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” (12), like how strawberries might evoke Englishness even when encountered on the other side of the world. The projection of sentiment goes in the opposite direction of the thingly affect; the object is sentimentalized, imparted onto, and made into receptors of attachment. The distance between the gothic object

the other hand, she develops an actor-network theory of objects; she names “assemblage” as the network of objects, like electric grids or cells in the body, that act at a level unrecognized by humans. A different set of object theories have come out of the works of Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Ian Bogost; Object-Oriented Ontology seeks, as Morton puts forth in *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, to theorize the relationship between objects themselves and to see the aesthetics created in that space of object-object interaction. However, my project does not concern the relationship between things but rather the relationship between person and thing, between the artist and his or her object.

and the sentimental object is, however, not very far; one might easily imagine an object that, enlivened by sentiment, suddenly wreaks vengeance (cursed objects like locketts or rings often straddle the line). The spectrum, then, is more like a circle, the whole of which gives us a sense of a world in which objects function as more than the sober, mundane things that they would seem to be. I think it is no coincidence that the rise in the theoretical and material study of objects since the turn of the last century coincides with the rise in the study of enchantment, or that Jane Bennett wrote *Vibrant Matter* directly after *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. Like the Victorians, we see the status of enchantment as inextricable from the status of objects, and drawing out the enchantment of objects is one of the main ways in which to unravel the purported disenchantment of modernity.

While enchanted objects encompass a variety of objects that have unexpected power to elicit affect, I focus on magical objects as a distinct class of enchanted objects that yet share some characteristics with the objects I describe above. On the one hand, they are actively supernatural without being a surprise or harassment to the people around them; if anything, they are possessions prized precisely for their magical and supernatural qualities. On the other hand, the attachment between these objects and their owners often fail, and fail catastrophically, while the objects maintain their magic. They take on the active potential of Bennett's thing-power, but they do so while being cherished and pursued, maintaining an immensely personal attachment much like sentimental objects. More than anything, they are magical objects because they are the product of magic, which gets us back to the literal definition of enchant: to cast a spell. For the Victorians, magic—both the supernatural kind studied by anthropologists and the secular kind that is Simon Düring's subject—is the result of a magician's hand, and the cause and effect of magic seems inappropriate because it lies outside of the realm of rational, observable causal

relationships. As James Frazer concludes in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), magic is a “misapplication of the association of ideas,” in which the magician produces an effect on his object through similarity or contiguity rather than any direct application of scientifically proper causation.³ For the supernatural magician, this association happens through mystic spirits and powers, while for the stage conjurer, this association happens physically but that procedure is obscured on purpose. We will return to what Frazer calls “sympathetic magic” in the next section, but suffice it to say for now that once the spell is cast, the object retains its magic and can continue to exert that magic; there is, in the magical object, a battle of wills between the magician and the object.

We see this give-and-take in Goethe’s poem “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (1797), which describes a relationship between humans and magical objects popularized by Disney’s *Fantasia* but recurring in stories like H. G. Wells’s “The Man Who Could Work Miracles” (1898) and W. W. Jacobs’s “The Monkey’s Paw” (1902). In “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” the apprentice casts spells on a broom to do his work for him but loses control over the magic broom, which continues to fetch water until the room floods. The magical objects I analyze function in a similar way. They have gained magical agency from being literarily enchanted by writers of both fiction and nonfiction. They retain this magic throughout various genres and areas of writing; in spite of the division of the two cultures and the rise of different disciplines in the nineteenth century, my tracing of magical objects actually reveals how their presence conjured a world of enchantment across written genres, from the scientific to the anthropological to the historical to the fictional. And finally, they exert their magic—whether it be their transformative quality, their liveliness, or their agentive causality—within each novel I study, sometimes escaping the control

³ Frazer and contemporary anthropologists—Andrew Lang and Marcel Mauss—all tended to agree on this definition of magic as sympathetic, something I will engage with again in Chapter 3 on diamonds.

of their author, narrator, or characters. These objects are fantastical, existing in the realm of literary texts and cultural imagination instead of “the real world.”⁴ And when they present themselves in imaginative writing, they elicit an aura of enchantment that departs from mimetic or realistic depiction. I am talking not about whether the Victorians actually believed in magic or the supernatural, but about how magical objects were presented and how they functioned in Victorian writing.⁵

Magical Objects as Elements of Fictionality

Until twenty-first century technology provided the potential for fairy tale objects to become real—at least according to David Rose—magical objects existed only in the realm of fiction. In fact, even technological magic—to which the Victorians, experiencing the “magic” of the telegraph or the phonograph, were also attuned—is of the secular variety, in which the science behind the enchanted object is capable of being traced yet difficult to understand or remember. Things like flying carpets and wishing caps, on the other hand, are ostensibly magical in a way that cannot be scientifically explained, and thus (as far as we know) do not exist in actuality. The realm of fiction provides the space in which these magical objects can exist and even thrive. It remains, then, to examine the concept of fiction itself. Catherine Gallagher, in “The Rise of Fictionality,” argues that the concept of fiction, which was born in the eighteenth century and came to full maturity in the nineteenth, embodies a couple of imperatives: on the one hand, it must be patently not real, but, on the other hand, and at least in the novel with which fiction has become synonymous, it must be believable. The eighteenth-century novels that

⁴ Of course, stage magic might be an exception—but, as Simon During has argued, rarely anyone who looks at stage magic actually believes in the magic of the object. Instead, their participation in the enchantment of the stage relies on the suspension of disbelief.

⁵ For writing on the actual beliefs and practices of spiritualism and the occult at the fin-de-siècle, see Alex Owen’s *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*.

purported to be autobiographies of real persons, as well as the nineteenth-century novels that insisted on their verisimilitude or realism, demonstrate the contentious nature of these seemingly opposing claims. The novel, and all “honest fictions,” can be recognized as such precisely because it contains “believable stories that did not solicit belief” (340) and is set apart both from the real and from patent lies. Gallagher’s definition of fiction should, by now, sound familiar; fiction shares its doubleness relative to reality with enchantment. Both require “suspended disbelief” (348), and if the status of objects is the testing ground for enchantment, fiction is both the mechanism and the record of that test.

At the same time, there is something about the magical objects of this project that, at first, sets them apart from plausible yet unreal referentiality of the novel. Gallagher, too, sets the novel apart from “stories that do not make referential truth claims, such as fables and fairy tales” (337); if a story contains “talking animals [or] flying carpets,” it sits outside of the realm of suspended disbelief (339). Indeed, even studies of fairy tales like Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment* do not make any claims for the plausible nature of fairy tales; for these scholars, they are useful insofar as the talking animals and flying carpets stand as allegories for psychological development or social relations.⁶ Yet, as we know, despite the dominance of the realist novel in the Victorian period, fantasy and the supernatural were never absent. If they were not engaging in plausible referentiality, they must have been doing something else. Scholars of Victorian fantasy and supernatural genres tend to see them as a version of the return of the repressed, similar to Saler’s binary model of enchantment in which enchantment, thrust aside by modern disenchantment, fights back where it can. Stephen Prickett, for example, notes how magical stories were attacked by “such diverse authorities as Rousseau, Mrs. Trimmer, and Mr.

⁶ Bettelheim’s work is one of the most looked to texts in the study of fairy tales. Other scholars, like Jack Zipes and Ruth Bottigheimer, see fairy tales as social and historical allegory.

Gradgrind” and Carlyle, who saw the Victorian period (though not happily) as a “‘mechanical’ and ‘prudential’ age” (9). Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell argue in *The Victorian Supernatural* that the supernatural was “both fearful and terrible and ardently desired,” a “haunting” underside to Victorian culture but one that nevertheless pervaded almost all its spheres (1). Pervasive as it was, we tend to think of outright fantasy as contradictory to the spirit of the age, for which the realist novel was the champion.

In this dissertation, I argue that, on the contrary, fantasy—in the form of magical objects—is an integral part of the Victorian novel, even the realist novel. Magical objects were not the physical emblems of repressed enchantment but instead make up the very structural formation of fictionality, that which separates it from reality. I begin with a chapter on it-narratives and fairy tales, two genres that are the epitome of unreality, both of which reveal how Victorian writers were conceptualizing their world as rife with magical objects despite the supposed disenchantment of the period. In each of the subsequent chapters, I take one specific object—the doll, the diamond, and the mirror—to show how it became magical and then exerted its magic in the space of the novel. Somewhat surprisingly, these objects accrued magic not only in fairy tales but in nonfictional genres, especially historical accounts of these objects, that nevertheless accorded them particular powers. In a way, my project provides the counterpoint to the material-historical study of Victorian literary objects forged by Elaine Freedgood’s *The Ideas in Things*. If Freedgood’s volume excavated the unmentioned and somewhat forgotten social, commercial, and political archives of “the things of realism that have been so little or so lightly read” (2), I provide the fantastical archives of those things. Yet the magical objects of my study function differently from the objects of Freedgood’s book, which are powerful precisely because they have referents in the real world. Instead, the very *unreality* of magical objects is what allows

them to fulfill their functions, to generate the elements of fictionality, such as character, plot, and setting, that comprise the novel.

The specific ways in which magical objects come to fulfill those roles brings us back to the concept of magic. James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, argues that all magic is sympathetic magic, which functions by principles of similarity and contiguity. In the magician's worldview, an effect is achieved "through a supposed resemblance of qualities," and an object that has taken on that magic can continue to exert that influence elsewhere (11). I propose that this kind of sympathetic magic lies at the base of literature and is being performed both at the level of the sentence and at the level of the work as a whole. What are those rhetorical practices most familiar to us—metaphor and simile, metonymy and synecdoche—but the bringing together of similar or contiguous ideas in the description of things? When J. M. Barrie writes of Mrs. Darling that "Her romantic mind was like the tiny boxes, one within the other, that come from the puzzling East" (2), for example, he is practicing literary magic: by enchanting the puzzle boxes, he accords Mrs. Darling's romantic mind with the characteristics of those boxes. These metaphors and metonymies—not to mention those more clearly enchanting devices like personification, apostrophe, prosopopoeia, and anthropomorphism, that Barbara Johnson has argued "confer on things some properties of persons" (23)—are the evidence of narrative imagination and authorial magic. They pepper Victorian writing, from the most fantastical fairy tales like *Peter Pan* to the most austere works of nonfiction prose. In the novel, they mirror the structure of the work on a grander level: the novel brings together disparate persons, things, and places, and our faith in the continuity of the story relies on the sympathetic magic that holds them together. When the authors I study use dolls to animate characters, diamonds to activate plots, and mirrors to enter into the world of their novel, they bring to the surface the narrative

magic that happens, by tacit understanding, almost everywhere in Victorian literature. And while the majority of this dissertation focuses on the Victorian novel, I propose that Victorian writing in general engages in this kind of sympathetic magic. The writer, wielding the pen as one would a fairy wand, transforms the visible world into the imagined world of the book. That is the essence of the Victorian magical object.

* * *

The first chapter of this dissertation, “Circulating Narratives and Narratives of Circulation: Magical Objects in It-Narratives, Fairy Tales, and Beyond,” lays the groundwork for the re-enchantment of the Victorian period through two genres: the it-narrative and the fairy tale. Douglas Jerrod’s *The Story of a Feather* (1844), which is the record of a sentient and sentimental feather’s journeys, departs from the conventions of the it-narrative genre by demonstrating a Victorian novelistic sensibility that is different from the usually picaresque nature of the it-narrative. The feather, already an apt allegory for the act of writing, makes transparent Jerrod’s hand in the structure and narration of his book. Moreover, he reveals how his world is populated by other objects that have stories to tell. Andrew Lang’s *Prince Prigio* (1889) takes up this last point by painting a world adjacent to, but in communication with, England, in which magical objects like flying carpets and wishing caps actually do exist, but their existence is refuted by the ever-rational Queen. Lang, both an anthropologist and a folklorist, allegorizes the disenchantment of objects in the Victorian period by providing this alternate kingdom in which magical objects win out in the end. Finally, this chapter traces the actual circulation of a magical object—Aladdin’s lamp—through different kinds of texts, including political cartoons, periodical writing, and Richard Francis Burton’s not-for-children translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1885-8). While Burton’s translation and footnotes display tensions about the status of

magical objects, the lamp is unapologetically magical, and therefore a potent metaphor, elsewhere in print.

Each of the next three chapters investigates a particular object and its relationship to a particular element of fiction. “Acting Like a Living Creature: Magic Dolls and Victorian Character” takes up the figure of the doll through fairy tales, it-narratives, and canonical novels. Taking seriously Thackeray’s introduction to *Vanity Fair*, in which he describes his characters as puppets, this chapter analyzes the advantages and limits of dolls as characters. While certain stories, like E. T. A. Hoffman’s *The Sandman*, present a feminist critique of dolls that exist only to parrot and acquiesce to the men around them, other stories, especially it-narratives, present the doll as powerful secret-keepers and witnesses. The two central novels of this chapter, Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-3) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), both begin with the protagonist’s special relationship to a doll: an actual doll for Esther Summerson, and the unearthly doll-like Polly for Lucy Snowe. While the protagonists seem to have in common their childhood relationship to dolls, Dickens and Brontë use these dolls to signal their very different approaches to persons and objects in the novel. Esther Summerson’s burial of Dolly foretells the radical objectification of persons in the dehumanizing industrial world that is London, especially of the orphan Jo, whose inability to participate in the social systems around him is signaled by his description as “stone blind and dumb.” Yet Dickens finds redemptive potential in the objects of his world that, like the doll it-narrator, can become silent witnesses to the events around them. On the other hand, Lucy Snowe lives a life already half-buried, causing her to make into her surrogates the doll-like characters around her. Her dolls are most powerful when they escape out of her control and take on lives of their own. Despite these opposing anxieties, both novels have unreliable first-person narrators who test the narrative potential of both dolls and characters.

Chapter three, “Needing a Dark History: Magic Diamonds and Plots of Imperialism,” begins by looking at historical accounts of diamonds, as well as the texts surrounding the famed Koh-i-noor diamond, to see how diamonds were invested with immense powers to motivate desire, especially in the context of imperial acquisition. I distinguish this aspect of the diamond from their fiscal and sentimental values; the powerful diamonds of this chapter are eternally pursued but never in hand and therefore can never be realized as personal effects. Their fiscal value, which is always imagined as immense or priceless, is never actuated as fungible money. I follow this aspect of diamonds into novels of the romantic genres: the sensation novel that is Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), the detective novel that is Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of the Four* (1890), and the adventure novel that is H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885). In each of these novels, diamonds are the foremost objects of desire that drive the characters to action, yet they never quite appear throughout the course of the stories, which keeps that desire in perpetual motion. In *The Moonstone*, the search for the missing diamond reveals the problems underlying Victorian class and gender relations. In *The Sign of the Four*, Sherlock Holmes’s and John Watson’s pursuit of the Great Agra diamonds attest to the childhood fantasies that are the driving forces behind the imperial conquest of India and of its treasures. Such imperial conquest comes to the foreground of *King Solomon’s Mines*, in which the adventurers eventually acquire their diamonds but find themselves unable to dispose of them in market. In all three novels, lore about the diamonds generate perpetual desire that paradoxically allows them to forever evade the despotic ownership that humans wish upon their possessions, an evasion that in turn drives the plot of the story.

The last chapter, “Through the Looking-Glass: Magic Mirrors as Narrative Portals,” sees mirrors as magical objects that provide visions of and entrance into imaginary worlds. I look at a

variety of texts that characterize mirrors as illusory devices. Folkloric stories like “Snow White” and Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” (1833) present magic mirrors that reflect shadowy truths of the world, while Sir David Brewster’s *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832) and Oliver Wendell Holmes’s writings on photography describe the secular magic behind mirrors in stage-illusions and the “mirror with a memory” that is the photograph. These texts, along with other stories about magic mirrors—including the didactic magic mirror story, a minor genre—construct the mirror as capable of two seemingly contradictory abilities: one, to reflect reality, in the sense of art holding up a mirror to nature; and the other, to reflect the deeper truths that goes beyond accurate surfaces. This dual nature allows the mirror to be the prominent device for entering into the world of the narrative in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) and George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859). In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice practices the act of narration by describing Looking-Glass World before stepping into it; the world on the other side of the mirror, although it abides by the reflective logic that Carroll as mathematician was known for, ultimately demonstrates the potency of Carroll’s, the narrator’s, and Alice’s imaginations. The mirror, although seemingly transcriptive, yet requires the eyes and pen of the gazer to function. This relationship between the gazing narrator, the mirror, and the world within the mirror sets up Eliot’s conceit in *Adam Bede*. The narrator begins the novel by gazing into a drop of ink, which he later analogizes to his “mind’s mirror.” The conceit of the mirror reveals how, even for an author who is considered one of the most realistic of the genre, the world-building within a realist novel relies on an imaginative gaze and a transformative object.

As these chapters will demonstrate, the relationship between Victorian authorship and magical objects is both cyclical and generative. Writers of both fiction and nonfiction, like our contemporary thing-theorists, recognize the enchanting potential of objects but, through their

language, elevate that enchantment to the level of magic. In the novel in particular, authors, narrators, and characters compound their fascination with these magical objects by wielding them to great effect. The objects of this dissertation contain great narrative, agentive, and transformative potential; their writers coach their readers on how to revel in and use such potential without being overwhelmed by or demonizing the magic of things. In this way, Victorian writers anticipate our desire, in the twenty-first century, to have a more enchanting and less antagonistic relationship with the objects around us.

CHAPTER I

CIRCULATING NARRATIVES AND NARRATIVES OF CIRCULATION: MAGICAL OBJECTS IN IT-NARRATIVES, FAIRY TALES, AND BEYOND



Figure 1. John Tenniel, "New Crowns for Old Ones," for *Punch* (15 April 1876): 146. Courtesy of *The Victorian Web*

The story of Aladdin—of his wish-granting lamp, exquisite jewels, and sumptuous palace—pervaded the Victorian imagination. In one memorable instance, in an 1876 *Punch* cartoon, John Tenniel alludes to *Aladdin* in order to satirize Queen Victoria's new official title of "Empress of India" (Figure 1). In the drawing, Victoria holds out her easily recognizable British crown to exchange for a stylized Indian crown, proffered by a turbaned, Orientalized Disraeli. The caption reads, "New crowns for old ones! (Aladdin adapted)," referring to the moment in

the *Arabian Nights* tale in which Aladdin's new bride unknowingly exchanges his powerful but shabby-looking lamp for a shiny new one with no magic. The fantastical objects of *Aladdin* were used not only as metaphor for the British crown, as in the cartoon, but to launch debate on other issues from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to the Great Exhibition of 1851. These instances reveal not only how the Victorians were invested in magical objects, but how magical objects—even imported from the Orient—could stand for elements of British politics and culture.

Magical objects exist throughout nineteenth-century writing. This chapter focuses on two genres that deal most with the circulation of magical objects in Victorian literature. I begin with the it-narrative, which is literally a novel of circulation, in which a sentient, speaking object is passed from hand to hand within the plot of the story. The it-narrative, though mainly an eighteenth-century genre, makes its way into the Victorian period in interesting ways that reveal its kinship with the genres of fantasy and realism; more importantly, the narrator of Douglas Jerrold's *The Story of a Feather* (1844), the main it-narrative of my study, creates a vision of London in which objects are just as much a part of social relations as humans. Similarly, the two fairy tales of this chapter present England as populated by magical objects. Andrew Lang's *Prince Prigio* (1889) constructs an England-adjacent Fairyland in which the status of things like flying carpets and wishing caps are the main bones of contention. Meanwhile, Aladdin's lamp from the *Arabian Nights* story moves beyond its fairy tale boundaries and becomes a recurrent trope in periodicals, both in nonfiction prose and in cartoons. These stories present very different versions of magical objects: some are sentient without being active, while others contain the ability to activate magical spells but have no personality. Some are objects that originate in distant continents of Africa and Arabia but have come to be naturalized as British objects; others have their origins in the native fairy tales and folklores of Britain but are under threat of expulsion in a nation that prizes rationality. Despite these differences, the texts I analyze are all explicitly interested in the circulation of magical objects, whether or not that circulation is presented anxiously. From these stories, we can see a vision of Victorian literary Britain in which different magical objects not only existed but travelled between remote locales and disparate texts.

The Anxiety of Objects: It-Narrative, Circulation, and Authorship

The it-narrative came into being in 1709, with Charles Gildon's *The Golden Spy*. As Liz Bellamy has argued through her extensive cataloguing of eighteenth and nineteenth century it-narratives, the genre has two identifying characteristics: first, that the narrator, "whether animal, vegetable, or manufactured object, lacks independent agency"; the second, that the stories are "a particular kind of panoramic miscellany" that comes from the "transference of the narrator or protagonist between otherwise unconnected characters" (121).⁷ The latter and more definitive characteristic gives the genre another name—the novel of circulation—which describes how, as Christopher Flint has argued, the circulation of the object-narrator within the novel mirrors the circulation of print culture, speaking to the anxieties surrounding the commerce of both objects and books.⁸ Accordingly, the eighteenth-century it-narrative often features items that have the most opportunities for movement: coins, coaches, and shoes. Of these, coins are most emblematic of movement because they are not only exchanged but comprise the actual mechanisms of exchange, which the it-narrators themselves highlight. In Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal; or, the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), for example, Chrysal identifies itself as the embodiment of the spirit of "TRAFFIC" (38). It-narratives, in their circulation as well as the magic of their narrators, provided an apt outlet for writers' desires and fears about the book market.

The magic of the eighteenth-century it-narrator is often mediated in one or more ways. There is usually a human interlocutor who takes care of the actual writing of the narrative, as

⁷ Bellamy's essay "It-Narrators and Circulation: Defining a Subgenre" in Mark Blackwell's *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, presents not only a working definition of the it-narrative genre but a catalogue of it-narratives from both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that numbers in the hundreds.

⁸ Flint's "Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction" also comes from Blackwell's essay collection; while Flint does not confine his argument to the it-narrative, he sees the genre as one of the main ones that encapsulate a larger concern in the eighteenth century about the authorship, circulation, and commerce surrounding the newly developing genre of the novel.

well as a rational—if not scientific—explanation of the origin of the object’s ability to speak. The narrator of *The Golden Spy*, for example, begins by whispering to the human frame-narrator. This human narrator expresses his utter astonishment at hearing a low murmur come from the coins by his bedside. He had been thinking, as he lay in bed, of “what noble and diverting Discoveries might be made, could any of the *Louis d’Ore’s* or *Guineas* reveal by discourse what Affairs they have negotiated, and those secret Intrigues, which have produc’d strange and terrible Effects in Kingdoms, and Families” (3). The immediate succession of the humming noise seems to him “an *agreeable* surprise” (3, my emphasis). The narrator thus describes a scene of wish-fulfillment, a trope often found in folklore and mythology—a connection only strengthened by his subsequent, and unnecessarily protesting, avowal that he “was so far from imagining this to be any Ghost, Hobgoblin, or Fantasm of the night” (3). At the same time, the coin also explains his genesis from “that famous *Golden Show’r*, disguised in which *Jupiter* penetrated the strong Brazen Tower, to possess the Charms of the beautiful *Danae*” (8). This origin story, coupled with the human frame narrator, provides a mediated version of the magically speaking object: the speaking power of the coins is subsumed into the human actor’s imaginative desires.

In the nineteenth century, it-narratives entered into a slightly different relationship with both mediation and genre. While, for the most part, the human frame narrator disappears, the stories themselves become literature for children that do not require any mediation for fantastical objects to exist. As Lynn Festa argues, “the world of satiric disenchantment described in earlier object narratives [was] transformed into the enchanted province of childhood”:

If the talking coaches, chatty pens, and long-winded waistcoats of the eighteenth century primarily solicit adult readers with their scandalous histories of human misconduct, nineteenth-century tales told by things turn from the quasi-public domain of the eighteenth-century novel of circulation to address themselves to the private world of children, creating a pedagogical wonderland in which animated objects and talking animals delight and instruct humans. (309)

Such, at least, is the wish for the child's relationship to the thing; the idea of enchantment necessitates a construction of the rosy picture of the nursery, a "wonderland," "stronghold," and "refuge" in which a child's "communion with his or her beloved possessions" (309) can be delightful, kind, gentle, loving, and longing. A closer inspection of actual magical things in nineteenth-century it-narratives, however, reveals the fact that that longing is presented, more often than not, in terms of loss; the human-object relationship represented in children's story is no less destructive than in their satirical predecessors. Elaine Freedgood, using C. B. MacPherson's concept of possessive individualism, explains this emphasis on the state of the object-narrator in nineteenth century it-narratives allows these stories to explore the relationship between subject and object and between the subject with him or herself. In possessive individualism, an individual participated in modern liberal society by alienating, then selling, certain aspects of themselves like labor and time; nineteenth-century object-narrators, like their human counterparts, were negotiating between ideas of the inalienable self and the alienation and commodification thereof (85).

While Freedgood continues into deeper analyses of the objects' subjecthood and self-possession, I want to dwell for a moment on the affective register of these children's it-narratives. While the objects' concern with their bodies and their destruction speaks to ideas about possessive individualism, these children's stories also shift the tonal register of the it-narrative from satirical to sentimental. This is most apparent in the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. It needs to be said that Andersen introduces a particular sadness into his fairy tales; however, in the world of Victorian fairy tales, he also stands out as the most invested in the thing that comes alive, as opposed to merely enchanted and be-spelled objects. The sentient, speaking object, for Andersen, is necessarily one full of woe. Andersen wrote over 150 fairy tales between

the 1820s and the 1870s, and a large minority of these stories features the living thing: plant matter, pens, toys, and coins all speak and narrate their own lives. These narratives inevitably deal with the thing's own death at the end of the story, but this death is described with particular attention to sentimental feeling. The fir-tree in "The Fir Tree" is called "ugly" at the end of his life by a child who "tread[s] on the branches until they crackled under his boots"; then, "a lad came and chopped the tree into small pieces, until a large bundle lay in a heap on the ground. The pieces were placed in a fire under the copper, and they quickly blazed up brightly, while the tree sighed so deeply that each sigh was like a pistol-shot" (5). The brave tin soldier in "The Brave Tin Soldier" ends up in a stove, "melted down into a lump...in the shape of a little tin heart" (15). The flax seed in "The Flax" is turned into linen, then paper, then finally burned. He and his fellow seeds rise out of the flames and ashes as "little invisible beings," who declare, "The song is never ended; the most beautiful is yet to come" (158). An omniscient narrator intervenes, however, and the story ends: "But the children could neither hear nor understand this, nor should they; for children must not know everything" (158).

These sad endings reveal that, for Andersen, at least—and for his wide-ranging audience—the thing speaking speaks of its own inevitable destruction, and that destruction involves the destruction of a sympathetic being as told by a sympathetic narrator. The tree's sighs, the tin soldier's heart, and the angelic passing of the flax seeds contribute to a sentimental relationship to objects, even if that relationship is brought into sharp relief by the objects' destruction. Moreover, at the moment of their death, the speaking object and the narrator can no longer be conflated; the reader is roughly thrust outside of the object's consciousness, only to watch helplessly as an omniscient third-person narrator, even if a sympathetic one, describes the utter devastation of the once speaking object. What these stories ultimately demonstrate is the

very constructedness of childlike enchantment and the fact that children's loving and longing relationship to objects is mere fantasy. Just as often as children have communion with their beloved possessions, they forget, lose, or abuse their possessions; the flax seeds' angelic songs go unheard by the children around them. But the child's lack of sympathy for their precious possessions provides an empty space in which the narrator can step in to take on the loving mourning of those possessions.

In Douglas Jerrold's *The Story of a Feather*, the it-narrator remains the sole narrator of the story; while the feather is sometimes anxious about his soiling, his overriding characteristic is a sentimental sympathy toward the main human characters of his story. *The Story of a Feather* is a nineteenth century it-narrative that is clearly meant for adult consumption in its complexity and size of print; I argue that the it-narrator's sentimentality, combined with his attention to the craft of narration, creates a bridge between the it-narrative and the Victorian novel. In its outward appearance—the circulating narrating object, the criticism of human greed and vanity—*The Story of a Feather* looks very much like its eighteenth century predecessors. However, if the eighteenth century it-narrative was concerned first and foremost with circulation, *The Story of a Feather* is concerned first with narrative organization and construction. The problem of circulation is turned into the problem of plot construction. Indeed, the plot of the story reflects craftsmanship equal to a Dickens novel. While the characters appear as if randomly, and while the plot, at first, seems to emulate the picaresque, the story gradually reveals the interconnected web of plot and character, which come together and fall apart under the gaze of the feather. Moreover, the story has a clear human protagonist, Patty Butler, a poor feather-dresser for whom the feather has much sympathy. Patty's life mirrors that of any number of Victorian novels

featuring female protagonists: her story begins with the death of her mother and ends in her marriage.



Figure 2. George Du Maurier, illustration for *The Story of a Feather*, xi. Courtesy of Google Books.

The participation in the trope of the marriage plot is one way in which the Jerrold signals his heavy hand in the novel-writing process. Although, like earlier it-narratives, his use of the feather-narrator seems to allow for randomness in the object’s observation and circulation, he is transparent about the constructedness of his fiction. Alongside adherence to novelistic plots, he imbues in the feather a consciousness of the process of authorship and the construction of stories; the feather

takes on the role of both narrator and author. The illustrations, provided by George du Maurier, make the feather’s transparent authorship clear from the very beginning: the introduction shows an ostrich, from which the feather comes, holding aloft a book toward the audience, even as an arrow pierces its body to rob it of its precious feathers (Figure 2). Du Maurier’s drawing illustrates the sacrifices made for the sake of authorship and an author who does not very much regret those sacrifices. The ostrich does not look particularly depressed, either, and the feather does not too much mourn his parent. Indeed, he chides the ostrich for “thrust[ing] his head into a bush, believing, as it was too plain he did, that because he could see nobody, nobody could see him,—I do confess, despite of filial love, I felt a fluttering of indignation, not unalloyed—may I be pardoned the sin!—with contempt” (xi). To make up for the ostrich’s death and his own unkind judgment, the feather takes it upon himself to “champion [the ostrich] against the supercilious sneers of the world” and “vindicate his memory from the ignorant slander of

mankind” (xi). In the battle between life and death, it is writing that comes out on top; all might be forgiven as long as the author makes something of it. The prominence of authorship is bookended by du Maurier’s second and his final illustration; in the second, the feather, having just been trimmed by a walking pocket-knife, is pictured beginning his writing in a mostly blank book (Figure 3). In the last, the feather is anthropomorphized with what looks like balding hair and a pair of glasses; the aged, worn feather is shown concluding his book that his parent earlier held open, just having punctuated the declarative “FINIS!” (Figure 4). The choice of object—a feather, rather than a coin—provokes the allegory for an author’s own hand. This is not the case of a coin whispering to an amanuensis, but actually a disembodied pen writing his story.

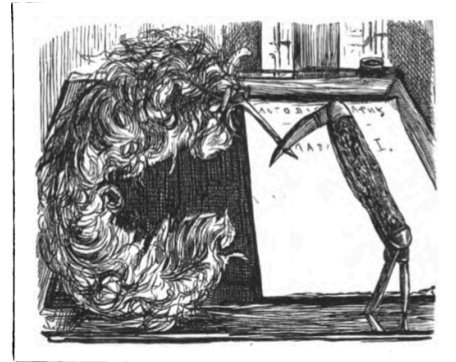


Figure 3. George Du Maurier, illustration for *The Story of a Feather*, xv. Courtesy of Google Books.



Figure 4. George Du Maurier, illustration for *The Story of a Feather*, 256. Courtesy of Google Books.

In the story itself, the feather is a lively and sophisticated narrator. He is aware of a complex variety of issues dealing with race, gender, and consumer relations. Having roots on the African savanna, he finds himself surprised by his reluctance to be dyed black and “degraded to the negro” so that no more dirt would show (145); yet he is all the while aware of the nature of man that sinks into deeper sins once the first is committed, just as “after the first dip and dye in inky guiltiness, do after-spots go with them for nothing” (146). He is sympathetic to how husbands and wives might have no love for each other but are instead “chained by a golden manacle, made at the Mint” (139), and he feels immense sorrow for the upper-class woman,

calling her “a white slave—a Christian slave—a bondwoman bought in a St. James’s drawing-room, albeit wedded after at St. James’s Church” (69). But more than anything, he is aware of the objectifying forces that come from commodity culture, especially one in which people rely on pride and vanity to make their fortunes. He develops a sort of proto-Marxist understanding of the relationship between humans and commodities under capitalism: commodities come alive and become worshipped, while humans become mere objects. There is magic in commodity production and exchange: Mr. Cramps, a card-maker, is “haunted by all the kings and Queens he ever passed across his counter.... [and] bitten all over by the Jack of clubs” (123) because he provided the tools for upper-class gambling. Meanwhile, a Jewish trader, Shadrach Jacobs, swindles the feather from the trader who brought the feather from Africa by showing him a variety of other wares, like a gold watch, “as though he held a magic mirror to dazzle and confound the beholder’s senses” (8). While Mr. Cramps has no control over the liveliness of his wares and becomes haunted by them, Shadrach Jacob capitalizes on that liveliness by wielding his wares like magical objects.

This ontological reversal in the humans and things that participate in commodity culture, especially of products of vanity products, is portrayed through some minor characters. Mr. Flamingo is an appropriately named feather-vendor to the upper class. Flamingo, who takes great pride in his feathers, becomes exactly what he sells; his movements are “raised upon the wings, or winglets, of his self-conceit, half-fly, half-walk” (14). He thinks so much of his wares that he objectifies his clients, too: as the feather, who decorates the baby Prince of Wales’s head, recounts, Flamingo looks “as if he felt the soul of the Prince was there in the white plumes, and nowhere else” (50). Flamingo engages in a strange sort of animism, which not only imparts the prince’s soul onto an object but transfers it wholly; the prince might as well be a corpse or an

inanimate object in his esteem. The feather later describes Countess Blushrose, who takes so much care in her appearance that she is a “most beautiful statue” rather than a woman. This beautiful statue, however, yet has some supernatural powers; her husband is “frozen into matrimony by the spells of a sorceress” (47). When she smiles, “magical was [her lips’] effect upon the housekeeper; for Mrs. Pillow wiped her face which, on the instant, was smooth, passionless and glossy, as a face of ornamental china” (66); she kisses her child “as a nun would kiss her beads” (66); and when she does not want to argue, she “[holds] forth a forth a fairy palm”; her husband sighs and “[takes] his wife’s hand as he would have taken a thistle” (71). The Countess, who steals the feather from the Prince to appease her vanity, is presented as a curious double-figure. The feather, even as he characterizes her as a witch or fairy, demonstrates the objectifying effect of her magic upon those around her and ultimately herself. Like any Dickens narrator, the feather is expert at ascribing object-like characteristics to the persons in the novel: a Lady Dinah is sold to her husband, “vended to the winter-stricken peer, like any peach in January”; after his death she would “continually show her broken heart to her friends and acquaintances, as other women would show their china” (72). Her second husband, Lord Huntingtopper, is “a well-formed, well-painted lamp, but with no light in it” (74). The feather, who himself blurs the line between persons and things, is adept at commingling aspects of both in his descriptions.

In addition to the metaphors and similes about people and objects, the feather-narrator makes transparent the material conditions of his storytelling. He makes comparisons to the actual paper pages of his book, describing an incident as taking “less time than a leaf of this small history could be turned” (108). At another moment, he “[requests] that the printer will set in different letters” some dialogue in whisper (105). These moments, coupled with du Maurier’s

illustrations, not only insist on the feather's awareness of his status as author but makes the magic that has made him into a writer seem accessible to the readers, who might imagine the feather has really guided the pages and typeset of the book in their hands. As well, the feather shows his hand in the structure of his story, which does not always unfold as events occur chronologically. At one point, on telling a story illustrative of Mr. Flamingo's character, he declares, "It was some time after I had passed from the hands of the feather-merchant, that I heard [this] story.... As, however, I may not find a fitter place than the present for the story, I will here narrate it" (15). Of another incident, he states, "All this, I afterwards discovered; but as I hate mystery, I lay the case at once before the reader" (153). He makes clear through these asides that he engages in chronological manipulation for the sake of smooth narration.

The feather further reveals himself as a sympathetic and imaginative narrator, not only sentient but capable of sentiment. He indicates that Patty Butler is the protagonist of his story by highlighting his feeling that, despite having seen the richest and most royal eyes upon him, "I have never felt such deep emotion as when gazed upon by the poor feather-dresser—the girl of fifteen years—the drudge of a garret in a pestilent and fever-breathing alley.... [whose] sensibility that sent its riches to her eyes, glittering for a moment there, beyond all worth of diamonds" (20). Patty's sensibility sets her apart from the wealthier characters in the story, who act as satires of a materialistic society. Only in the character of Patty does the feather engage in such sentimental description; furthermore, unlike his comparisons earlier of objects and their wealthy owners, Patty here has a quality that makes her incomparable even to "all worth of diamonds." Elsewhere, the feather shows himself capable of the imagination, that faculty most reserved for the human mind: having listened to a character from behind a door, the feather is surprised by that character's physical appearance; he "then noted, what I have since a thousand

times remarked, the difference—even to extremes—between a man in his reality and a man as we may, in our imagination, have painted him” (99). In the switch to first-person plural, the feather appropriates the faculties of the human readers who comprise the “we”; he becomes not only an object that records the incidents as they happen to them, but one that can imagine, project, and theorize.

The feather’s demonstration of his human—and authorial—qualities extends liveliness to other objects in this novel. Not only do the characters in the story come together at various points, the objects do, as well: the watch that Shadrach Jacobs sold to the adventurer-trader returns as the object by which Patty Butler is wrongfully accused of theft. The various dresses and shoes that he first befriends in the consignment store of Mrs. Spanneu become his companions again when all end up in the costume room of a Drury Lane theater. The reappearance of these objects make them into characters in the story, a transformation doubled by these objects’ own abilities to think and speak. These objects participate in the lives of their owners with a singular vengeance—as if they are Marx’s commodity fetishes gone berserk. They have their own divisions in rank by material and construction; they have their own circles of gossip. The feather, upon first encountering these objects in Mrs. Spanneu’s shop, warns his readers:

Never, gentle reader, as long as you have a stitch about your anatomy, believe yourself alone. If thoughtless people could only know what their left-off clothes say about them, sure I am, that they would resolve upon one of two things: either to reform their lives, or go naked. (86)

The feather’s warning, along with animating these other objects, serves another function: he gives narrative prowess to each and every one of these other objects equal to the narrative prowess he himself has revealed in his story. Indeed, these objects fulfill their narrator role: *The Story of a Feather* contains two shorter tales: one is a fairy tale about fairy-gifted, magically

growing shoes, told by a single scarlet heel (the only remnant of those magic shoes), who the feather admits is known for inventing her stories (87); the other is of poor little Fanny Davis, an aspiring actress, told by a melancholy bodice (206). These stories-within-a-story extend the world of it-narrators everywhere, presenting the possibility of observant, eavesdropping clothing on our very own bodies in our own world.

At the same time, the story is bounded by realism, which becomes most clear when the feather is feeling most sympathetic to the human characters around him. In these situations, he wishes himself into a magical object. True, there are times when he calls “magical” the events around him, citing the “magic breath of beauty” (20) or the “magic touch of humor” (33) that have the power to shift the direction of events and to enchant people. But he is at his most earnest when he senses the limits of his role as an inanimate (even if sentient) object. Feeling sorry for the “doomed, fragile dolls” that are the Queen’s Maids of Honour (45), he ruminates, “Had I been a fairy wand, I would have changed them straight; have bestowed upon them the paradise of a three-legged stool, with a cow to milk beneath the odour-breathing hawthorn” (46). His desire to be a fairy wand is aligned with his desire to transform those “dolls” into actual objects that would not experience the indignation and violence of social objectification—an ironic wish, consider his awareness that objects are very much capable of feeling. Later, when he encounters Patty Butler, ill and seemingly on her death bed, he cries,

How I wished myself in the hand of some good fairy! Some beneficent sprite, piteous of human wrong and human suffering! Then, I thought, should this dark, dim garret pass away! Then should rise a small, quiet nook of a place, nestled among trees, and carpeted with green around. And there a brook should murmur with a voice of out-door happiness—and a little garden brimming over with flowers should mark the days, and weeks, and months with buds and blossom; and the worst injuries of time be fallen leaves. (125-6)

Here, as above, the feather desires a fairy hand that would turn him into an actual magical object, capable not only of speech but of spells. For Patty, he wants not any objectifying enchantment but a transporting one that would change the dirty, muddy London he has thus far described into an idyllic fairyland. The feather, then, is bounded, like the characters he describes, by the realities of his circumstance.

Alas, the feather does not turn into those magical objects at the end of the book; in fact, the feather does not turn into much of anything. He is unceremoniously dropped, then unceremoniously “carried into the kitchen, where [he] remained long enough to learn the happiness of Patty” (257); no other record of his status exists beyond this moment. Unlike the children’s it-narrator, who is more or less concerned with his own safety or destruction, the feather makes his status secondary to the appropriate closure of the plot. Patty’s story ends happily and appropriately with a marriage to a kind clergyman; we learn this much, but we never learn what happens to the feather itself. Indeed, du Maurier’s depiction of the feather as a pen in his illustrations turns out to be a fantastical construction that has no basis in the story itself. Yet we might read the feather’s transformation into a pen as the sort of magical transformation he wishes at the hand of a fairy; as an author, he has the potential write into effect the happiness of his characters.

In *The Story of a Feather*, we have seen a narrator self-consciously practice writerly authority and imaginative narrative techniques. As an object that circulates through London, he can apply this narrative imagination to the various characters he meets; moreover, that very circulation is structured around Patty’s events, opening and closing around the plot of her life. As well, the feather has conjured a world in which almost all of the objects he meets are accorded the magic to feel and speak. In the fairy tales in the second half of this chapter, objects have the

magic not to speak but to act; they are like the fairy wand that the feather wishes himself to be but never becomes. Like the feathers and shoes of *The Story of a Feather*, the flying carpets, wishing caps, and magic lamps of the following stories populate a British landscape, and the incongruence between their magic and the idea of Britain as a rational, demystified country forces us to revise our notions about the status of enchantment in Victorian England. Like the feather that came from Africa, these objects were oftentimes exotic. Nevertheless, they negotiated their exotic background with their status within Britain, and their stories present Anglicizing of magical objects that go on to stand for Britishness itself. Their proliferation and circulation construct an alternate vision of Britain in which fairy magic is alive and well.

A Nation of Magical Objects: Fairy Tales and the Negotiation of British Enchantment

I turn now to *Prince Prigio*, a fairy tale by Andrew Lang, as an explicit concretization of these uses of magical objects for a nationalistic purpose. Lang was a writer who consciously bridged the gap between anthropology and fairy tales. Known best for his colored fairy tale book series, in which he collected the most popular fairy tales from around the world, Lang also composed anthropological texts in which he described various cultures and their religious and mythological practices. The earliest of these were *Custom and Myth* (1884) and *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1887), both of which cited the earlier works of Comte, Max Müller, and Tylor; in these volumes, Lang traced not only the mythological origins of diverse cultures, but the history of the anthropological field itself. In addition to collecting folklore and mythology, Lang also composed fairy tales of his own. The most popular of these—*Prince Prigio* (1889)—was not only intensely domestic but consciously interested in the role of magical objects in the construction of a nation. *Prince Prigio* is highly allusive, almost indiscriminately combining

Greek, Roman, African, Arabian, and British mythologies with popular fairy tales; these references arise most often in the service of royal lineage. Lang played on the fact that some of the most nationalistic symbols of a realm—the royal family, for example—are imported from foreign lands. In the preface, in describing the history of Pantouflia, the realm ruled by Prigio’s father, Lang comments: “Just as England has had a Norman, Scottish, and, at present, a line of German monarchs, so the kings of Pantouflia are descended from an old Greek family, the Hypnotidae, who came to Pantouflia during the Crusades” (x). Lang reshapes the ancestor prince of this family into a St. George of sorts, setting forth to conquer a dragon who turned out to be a princess—whom, of course, he then married. Even this reference to St. George and the dragon speaks to fantastical reconstructions of history: as Edward Gibbon writes in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89), St. George derives from a George of Cappadocia, who accumulated wealth “by the basest arts of fraud and corruption” and by selling bacon to the Roman army, then was executed for it. This George, “disguising every circumstance of time and place...[was] transformed into the renowned St. George of England, the patron of arms, of chivalry, and of the garter” (ii. 391). Thus, in the preface of his fairy tale, Andrew Lang not only reenacts a medievalism that cites the origin of his royal family to St. George and the Crusades, but points out the always-already hybrid and transformed nature of those origin myths.

In addition, Lang analogizes these British origin myths to fairy tales in the course of the story itself. *The History of the Royal Family*, the narrator of *Prince Prigio* tells, was full of stories about fairies, and the royal summer parlor is replete with portraits of “royal ancestors,” including Cinderella, the Marquis de Carabas (of Puss in Boots fame), and Sleeping Beauty. With such a move, Lang relegates British national myths of George, the Crusades, and chivalric knights to the status of fairy tales, but he also raises fairy tales to the status of history; in fact,

Lang traces here an alternate history of England, one that cites not historical figures but the various fairy tale characters that circulate in children's stories. In fact, Lang cites another Victorian fairy tale character as the ancestor for his: Prince Prigio, we learn, is the great-great-grandson of Giglio, the main character of William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* (1855). Thackeray's story features magical objects, as well—the rose and the ring, both of which make their bearers seem more attractive than they are—but ultimately concludes with the main hero and heroine falling in love without the use of these objects.⁹ Lang's tale, coming almost half a century later, reveals an entirely different reliance on magical objects, one that deals with protecting and ruling the nation instead of romantic relationships.

Prince Prigio is a satirical story that mocks, among other things, intellectualism, aestheticism, and martialism.¹⁰ The ideal most satirized, however, is one of rationalism—in this case, the unwillingness to believe in anything magical or fantastical. Prigio's mother steadfastly refuses to believe in magical objects through the entirety of the story, even though she comes into direct contact with them. When Prigio was christened, he was gifted with numerous magical objects by fairies his mother neglected to invite because she did not believe in them:

One offered a purse which could never be empty; and one a pair of seven-leagued boots; and another a cap of darkness, that nobody might see the prince when he put it on; and another a wishing-cap; and another a carpet, on which, when he sat, he was carried wherever he wished to find himself. (9)

All these and more—including a sword of sharpness that could cut through anything—the Queen promptly locked into a dark lumber-room, “for, of course, she thought that they were *all nonsense*, and merely old rubbish out of books, or pantomime ‘properties’” (9). These

⁹ Thackeray's story was also a fictionalization of actual places: the two kingdoms at war are named after the territories of Crim Tartary and Paphlagonia, both of which were on contested space during the Crimean war. Lang—whether purposefully or accidentally—changes Paphlagonia into Pantouflia, a place that does not exist at all.

¹⁰ Prince Prigio and each of his two brothers stands for one of these traits, none of which serves them well: Prigio was cursed by a fairy with being “too clever”; Alphonso is described as so fond of fighting that he has a full suit of armor at the ready, as well as a war-cry; and Enrico writes terrible rhyming poetry to his betrothed before he is willing to depart on a quest.

pantomime properties come from myths across cultures; Lang makes explicit references to the magical objects' places of origin. The purse that could never be empty is Fortunatus's purse, from a 15th century popular German tale; the flying carpet is the famous one which "Prince Hussein bought long ago, in the market at Bisnagar" in *The Arabian Nights* (40). Not only does Lang import these objects from other fairy tales, these imported objects already speak of exoticism in their original stories. According to Lang's own retelling of the story in *The Grey Fairy Book*, Fortunatus, who comes from Cyprus, is given the purse by Dame Fortune in the woods of Brittany. Meanwhile, the flying carpet, as well as an ivory spy-glass Prigio also uses later, come from "Prince Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banu," in which Prince Hussein and his brothers set out to exotic lands to acquire the "rarest of curiosities" (Burton, *Supplemental Nights*, vol 13). These objects are thus exotic twice-over: procured from distant lands in their original stories, then imported from those stories into *Prince Prigio*. Lang toes a curious line, however, between giving the objects' origins yet eliding their provenance; the magical objects come to Prigio through his fairy gift-givers, appearing in the castle literally by magic. Once Prigio acquires these gifts, moreover, he makes no distinctions between those more familiar and those more exotic: the objects from European fairy tales and those from *The Arabian Nights* are tossed together indiscriminately, and ultimately domesticated. When he goes to a ball, for example, he tosses both the cap of invisibility and the magic carpet into a "portmanteau, and [leaves] it in the cloak-room, receiving a numbered ticket in exchange" (40). The juxtaposition of magic objects with a mundane one—a numbered ticket at the cloak-room—speaks to the apparent interchangeability between magical and mundane objects in the story: the magical objects lie alongside those objects familiar to Victorian society—cloaks and numbered tickets—in the portmanteau of the fairy tale.

In the plot of the story, however, these magical objects are anything but incidental; they play a crucial role in the rescuing and ruling of the land of Pantouflia. As the story opens, Pantouflia is threatened by a Firedrake: a creature, as Lang tells in the preface, derived from a South African mythology (2), comprised entirely of fire and metal and almost impossible to conquer. Prigio, following in the footsteps of his anti-magical mother, believes the Firedrake to be nothing but a “fabulous animal which does not exist,” like “the siren, the fairy, and so forth” (17-8). He has no desire to conquer the creature until he falls in love—which, the narrator tells us only half-ironically, suddenly makes him believe in magical objects:

In one instant... He believed in fairies and fairy gifts, and understood that his cap was the cap of darkness, and his shoes the seven-league boots, and his purse the purse of Fortunatus! He had read about those things in historical books: but now he believed in them. (37)

Aside from the melodramatic mediation on the power of love, this sudden understanding is curious for its construction of Prigio’s world. It is a world in which fairy tale objects, just like fairy tale characters, exist in the realm of “historical books” rather than in fantasy. Despite the ostensible factuality of these objects as history, Prigio refuses to believe in them until this moment. Moreover, unlike his mother, who turns a blind eye to magic and pretends that magical people and objects do not exist, Prigio’s beliefs are more complicated. Before this moment, he already understands the nature of these objects—having been trampled upon, for example, because he had unknowingly put on the cap of darkness. The importance of this instantaneous understanding comes from his ability to place these objects intertextually, to understand that they are not merely magical objects, but the actual magical objects from other fairy tales. Thus the history of these objects does have the utmost importance: Prigio is not the typical fairy tale hero who unknowingly stumbles onto a magical object; rather, he is a magician who is confidently aware of each magical object and how it functions. Such knowledge allows Prigio to conquer the

Firedrake and restore his kingdom. He uses the flying carpet to travel, the ivory spyglass to search for the Firedrake, the cap of darkness to move about invisibly, and the sword of sharpness to cut off horns and tail as trophies. In fact, the use of these magical objects and the acquisition of these trophies are exactly what allows him to become the future king of Pantouflia: his father, in an effort to remove Prigio from the position of crown prince, had decreed that he who conquers the Firedrake will inherit the throne. Prigio's ability to use the fairy gifts in his possession allow him not only to protect his kingdom but to maintain the line of nobility in the house of the king.

In case this history of the magical objects of Pantouflia appears too metaphorical, Lang makes an even more obvious push for the political usefulness of these objects in the sequel to *Prince Prigio*. In *Prince Ricardo of Pantouflia*, Lang writes about the adventures of Prigio's son Ricardo, more commonly known as "Dick." Unlike Prigio, Ricardo was born with the belief in magical objects and has become too dependent on them for his father's liking. In one episode in the story, Prigio has non-magical facsimiles made of all of their magical objects—the sword of darkness, the wishing-cap, even the magic carpet. Ricardo sets off on a mission to restore Bonnie Prince Charlie to the English throne with non-magical objects. Unaware of their imposter nature, Ricardo's faith in his magical objects is absolute. "Nothing simpler," he exclaims, than restoring Charles to the throne of England: "I just take my Seven-league Boots, run over to Rome, pick up Prince Charles, put him on the magic carpet, fly to London, clap the Cap of Darkness on him so that nobody can see him, set him down on the throne of his fathers...and the trick is done" (158). Unbeknownst to him, these objects are magic-less facsimiles, so Ricardo could not fulfill his promises to Charles. However, Ricardo does present him with "a ring which makes all men faithful to the wearer," and while "Ricardo never interfered in foreign affairs again...his ring

proved very useful to Prince Charles, as you may have read in history” (170). Lang attributes to a magic ring the fact that Charles later became an idealized, romantic tragic hero. By returning to England’s very recent past, Lang insists that these magical objects are entwined with British history, not merely “pantomime” products of fairies.

While Lang’s fairy tales insist on the historical consequence of magical objects, especially their contribution to the national pasts of both Pantouflia and England, texts about Aladdin’s lamp reveal the actual suffusion of magical objects in British culture. While the writers who use the trope of the lamp do not actively believe in the magic of the lamp, it nevertheless took on great metaphorical and allegorical potential. The lamp, as a textual trope rather than a magical object in and of itself, allowed Victorian writers to negotiate their ideas of British rationalism, industry, art, and imperialism through the lens of a magical object. In the following section, I look at Richard Francis Burton’s translation of “Aladdin,” as well as the works of Charles Knight, Charles Dickens, and John Tenniel. Burton’s translation of and footnotes to the text, like Lang’s fairy tales, reveal an intense negotiation of the status of magical objects; moreover, in presenting “Aladdin” as a story for adults, he encapsulates how enchanted objects and their magic was not reserved for children in the Victorian period. Finally, the appearances of the lamp in the periodical works of Knight, Dickens, and Tenniel show exactly how this magical object was mobilized in these Victorian writers’ conceptualization of their nation.

Aladdin’s lamp was one of the most widely circulating imaginary objects in nineteenth-century Britain. First making its appearance in Europe through Antoine Galland’s 1704 French translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the story of Aladdin had largely disappeared from proper translations during the Victorian period due to doubts about its authenticity. Called an

“orphan tale” because it had no proper place in the sequence of nights, it instead became mostly anthologized in collections of children’s stories, mixed with other fairy tales like “Cinderella” and “Snow White.” Nevertheless, the story of the ne’er-do-well’s meteoric rise to Sultanhood, marriage to the princess, and victory over the evil magician—all with the help of a Jinni in a lamp—was endlessly fascinating to the Victorians, child and adult alike.¹¹ However, it was not until Richard Francis Burton’s 1888 translation of “Alaeddin; or, The Wonderful Lamp” that the story was re-translated specifically for an adult readership in the Victorian period. Burton used his expertise as an explorer, ethnologist, and orientalist in translating *The Thousand and One Nights*, aiming to provide his readers with an unexpurgated edition that revealed to the full extent the sexual mores of “the oriental.” His descriptions were so explicit that, as Colette Colligan notes in *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley*, his *Nights* incited “the *first* public literary debates about ‘pornography’ in England” (57, emphasis original). Through the explicit and sexual nature of his comments and the multitude of footnotes describing the cultural practices of the East, Burton turned his translation of *The Nights* into a comparative folkloric study in the vein of Andrew Lang. Coupled with archaic language, this anthropological drive made it clear that stories like “Aladdin” were no longer in the realm of children’s fairy tales but were more proper for an adult readership.

In “Aladdin,” Burton attempts to reconcile his classifying, scholarly work with the magic of the story, especially of objects; the tension between the two is worked out largely in the footnotes to the story. At first glance, Burton’s ideas fall in line with those of the anthropologists: he classifies any mention of magical objects as “oriental” and irrational. Often, when an object is

¹¹ Though it is technically the Jinni of the lamp who wields the magic, the lamp is the guiding structure of that magic; which is to say, the lamp retains its enchanted associations even without the Jinni, but the Jinni can never be free of the lamp. Although it exceeds the scope of this essay, the status of the Jinni as the “familiar” or the “slave” of the lamp could provide fascinating metaphors for ideas of slavery and subjugation in the Victorian period.

personified or addressed, his footnotes particularize those linguistic turns to the oriental tale. For example, he comments at one point, “This address to an inanimate object (here a window) [sic] is highly idiomatic and must be cultivated by the practical Arabist” (1026). Elsewhere, an invocation of the moon is “true Orientalism, a personification or incarnation which Galland did not think proper to translate” (1026). His footnotes were a way, as Edward Said has argued, for Burton to demonstrate “his victory over the sometimes scandalous system of Oriental knowledge, a system he had mastered by himself” (196). In the lamp’s case, the mastery is the mastery over things. The personification of inanimate objects—dangerous because it could easily slip into irrational belief in magic—is rendered less problematic for Burton and his Western audience when he can think of them as an idiosyncrasy of the oriental tale, which he can then “cultivate.”

Yet (like Tylor, to whom we will turn shortly) Burton cannot help but draw comparisons to the West. In this way, Burton appears inconsistent about objects. When discussing personification and apostrophe to windows and moons—which are, after all, common to English literature—he seems insistent on drawing a line between the rational West and the idiosyncratic East. When it comes to actual magical objects, however—rings and lamps that contain Jinnis and grant wishes—his divisions break down. When the magician, unaware of its magic, gifts Aladdin with a ring, Burton comments that “the magician evidently had mistaken the powers of the Ring. This is against all probability and possibility, but on such abnormal traits are [all] tales and novels founded” (1016). When the magician gains control of the lamp, later in the story, because Aladdin had carelessly left it lying about, Burton says again that “Nothing can be more improbable than this detail, but upon such abnormal situations, even our most modern ‘society novels’ depend” (1027). Burton sees the appearance of magical objects across East and West,

featuring in both the oriental tale and the “modern ‘society novels’” of England. Moreover, these connections arise at moments when characters in the story fail to maintain control over their possessions. In both comments, Burton indulges in a linguistic slippage: the “this” that gets described as “abnormal” and “improbable” does not so much indicate the actual magic of the lamp and the ring, but the main characters’ ignorance and carelessness. Burton’s anxieties, then, seem to lie not in the existence of the magical objects, but in the characters’ failure to hold on to them. These anxieties reveal how Western self-conception is dependent on the ability to master things; however, contrary to the notion that the British master their surroundings through enlightened science and rational classification, Burton’s characters are marrying logic and fantasy. In order for them to act within the realm of probability, they must be able to engage with unlikely objects and to exercise their will over both the mundane and the magical.

When depicting his protagonist and his interactions with objects, Burton exhibits two tendencies. On the one hand, he codes Aladdin as a Western character—a chivalrous knight—in order to emphasize the West’s ability to handle magical objects. On the other hand, this knight is a folkloric, medieval archetype, so that Burton can still displace the belief in magical objects onto the past. Thus Burton can at once claim a Western character’s power to control magical objects and distance modern England from the era of the magical object. The knightly resonances become most apparent when Aladdin engages with one particular object: a sword. In other versions of the story—for example, Jonathan Scott’s 1811 translation—this sword is called “sabre”; by turning the sabre, with its exotic connotations, into the sword, Burton links it to the native Anglican tradition of chivalry. Beginning some decades before Burton published his *Nights*, the medieval revival catapulted stories about King Arthur and his knights into the Victorian literary imagination. Arthur’s sword—Excalibur, or the sword in the stone—was a

particularly fascinating item for Victorian writers, inspiring poems like Sallie Bridges's "Excalibur" (1864) and Thomas Westwood's "The Sword of Kingship" (1866).¹² While much has been written about Victorian medievalism, only recently have scholars noted the fascination Excalibur seems to have held for the Victorians.¹³ Burton's inclusion of swords in "Aladdin," always accompanied by tropes of chivalry and knighthood, aligns the Arabian tale with medieval England and participates in the temporal appropriations of the medieval revivalist movement.

The sword first appears when the princess marries the vizier's son. Aladdin, unhappy about this development, orders the Jinni to carry the newly wedded couple, marriage bed and all, to Aladdin's home. There, Aladdin shuts the vizier's son in the water-closet and climbs into bed with the princess. Once in bed, however, Aladdin makes no move to consummate relations with the princess; instead, he lies next to her with "a drawn sword separating man and maid" (1022), effectively preserving her virtue both from the vizier's son and from himself. In his footnotes, Burton refers to this act as "an old knightly practice" (1022). The preservation of virtue here is particularly noticeable since Burton's *Nights* is infamous for being sexually explicit. Burton seems to have gone out of his way to emphasize Aladdin's chivalry, at the expense of his penchant for documenting sexual practices. The sword makes its second appearance in the story's climax, where Burton invents an entire plot sequence. After Aladdin marries the princess and begins his life as heir to the throne, the magician returns to wreak havoc by stealing away

¹² Although there exist two separate swords in the Arthurian legends—the sword that young Arthur pulls out of the stone and the one given him by the Lady of the Lake (technically called Excalibur)—the two became conflated during the Victorian period. For example, Sallie Bridges's poem, entitled "Excalibur," is actually about the moment Arthur pulls out of the stone the sword that identifies him as England's rightful king. Such conflation adds to the mysticism of the sword.

¹³ Both Stephanie Barczewski and Inga Bryden have discussed the Victorian idolization of Arthur both as a mythical hero figure, embodying the chivalrous ideals, and as a real historical figure who provides the Anglo-Saxon race its origin. In this context, Excalibur is mentioned either as "a symbol of justice and patriotism as British soldiers prepare for military action" in the Afghan, Zulu, and Anglo-Boer wars (Bryden 31) or not at all. Other critics—for example, Michael Hancock in "The Stones in the Sword: Tennyson's Crown Jewels" and Jeffrey Jackson in "The Once and Future Sword: Excalibur and the Poetics of Imperial Heroism in *Idylls of the King*"—are mostly interested in how the hordes of jewels Tennyson gives to the sword symbolize a kind of anti-imperial, anti-expansion poetics.

Aladdin's palace, complete with all the servants and the princess inside. Aladdin, of course, comes to the rescue, but Burton changes a major aspect of this scene from Galland's original French translation, the English chapbook version of which was still the standard one read by most Britons. In Galland's version, Aladdin convinces the princess to poison the magician's drink. Burton, however, has his Aladdin "[unsheath] his sword and [slay] the villain" (782), reinscribing both masculine violence and feminine helplessness in the story. In his footnotes, Burton justifies this revision by commenting, "Galland makes the Princess poison the Maghrabi [the magician], which is not gallant" (1029). The clever wordplay—the ungallant Galland—places especial emphasis on the notion of gallantry, again tying Burton's Aladdin to medieval knighthood. Thus Burton distinguishes his translation from previous ones by reconceptualizing Aladdin as a British chivalric fantasy. His Aladdin is not an exotic Arab wielding a sabre, but a knight using a sword to protect a maiden's virtue. He subscribes to a set of medieval ideals, central among which is patriarchal dominance. Both through allusion and in ideology surrounding the sword, then, Burton characterizes his protagonist as an idyllic Western figure from Britain's folkloric past.

While he uses Aladdin's sword—a non-magical object—as a nexus for idyllic nostalgia, Burton depicts the magical objects of the story, especially the palace conjured from the lamp, to reflect Victorian progress. Per Aladdin's command, the Jinni of the lamp creates an elaborate palace overnight from nothing. In every other version before 1885, Aladdin structures his demand for the palace explicitly and matter-of-factly, but without too much ornamentation. For example, in Jonathan Scott's 1811 version, Aladdin tells the Jinni to build him a palace, naming only certain materials specifically: "porphyry, jasper, agate, lapis lazuli, or the finest marble of various colours," "massive gold and silver," and "diamonds, rubies, and emeralds" (373).

Burton's version, however, reworks this passage so that Aladdin has no say in the details of the palace. His version of the palace also includes both exotic treasures and mundane domestic wares, which Aladdin can only consume visually as a spectator. Aladdin is led through the structure by the Jinni, who shows him

jasper and alabaster, Sumaki-marble and mosaic-work. Then the Slave [of the lamp] led him into the treasury which was full of all manner of gold and silver and costly gems, not to be counted or computed, priced or estimated. Thence to another place, where Alaeddin saw all requisites for the table, plates and dishes, spoons and ladles, basins and covers, cups and tasses, the whole of precious metal: thence to the kitchen, where they found the kitcheners provided with their needs and cooking batteries, likewise golden and silver; thence to a warehouse piled up with chests full-packed of royal raiment, stuffs that captured the reason, such as gold-wrought brocades from India and China and kimcobs or orfrayed cloths; thence to many apartments replete with appointments which beggar description; thence to the stables containing coursers whose like was not to be met with amongst the kings of the universe; and lastly, they went to the harness-rooms all hung with housings, costly saddles and other furniture, everywhere studded with pearls and precious stones. (756-7)

Burton's passage embodies both specificity and vagueness. On the one hand, so much of the palace is "not to be counted or computed, priced or estimated," making the objects inside the palace retain their enchanted quality. We are to understand that, unlike its counterparts in previous versions of the story, this palace *cannot* be built to specification. On the other hand, the objects that *are* described are located in both place and history, some of which Burton supplies in his footnotes. On "Sumaki-marble," he writes, "'Marmar Sumaki' [is] porphyry of which ancient Egypt supplied the finest specimens" (1024); on "kimcob," "*i.e.* velvets with gold embroidery" often found in religious vestments (1024). He provides us with the origins of the "gold-wrought brocades" as India and China. These objects would have been available for the Victorians, if not to purchase, then to gawk at in exhibitions. Moreover, his palace is incongruously domesticated with mundane English wares: there are "plates and dishes, spoons and ladles" that could be bought at a London department store rather than conjured by the Jinni of the lamp. Through

describing both specific exotic wares and domestic commodities, Burton makes his palace reflect Britain's powerful industry and trade. His depiction of the magical palace blends together the products of East and West and casts a fantastic patina over real Victorian objects.

The visual spectacle of Aladdin's palace invites comparison to another palace in the Victorian era—the Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Exhibition collected, in some fourteen thousand booths, raw materials and commodities from all parts of the globe, including artworks, fabrics and textiles, machines, ceramics, and gadgets of all kinds. These objects were fascinating to visitors ranging from poor country folk to the Queen, and the Crystal Palace itself was a structure so marvelous that it seemed to the Victorians to be “a purely magical object, a building begotten, not made” (Richards 23). Rather than a strong-willed prince ordering materials for the palace's construction, Aladdin becomes akin to the millions of wide-eyed visitors to the Crystal Palace, who also saw its wares as dazzling and inestimable.¹⁴ Burton, by juxtaposing domestic and exotic wares and by making Aladdin observe the palace with awe instead of specifying its contents, has revised the relationship between Aladdin and his palace. In doing so, Burton domesticates Aladdin's magical palace by analogizing it to an already enchanting nationalistic event.

Victorian critics were very much attuned to the magical quality of the Crystal Palace, as well as to the similarities between it and Aladdin's palace. In a *Household Words* article published just after the Exhibition opened, Charles Knight comments on the construction of the Crystal Palace:

When Aladdin raised a palace in one night, whose walls were formed, not of layers of bricks, but of gold and silver, and whose hall, with four-and-twenty

¹⁴ The magical quality of the Great Exhibition's wares was heightened by the fact that none of the objects, even though they represented the great industrial and commercial prowess of many parts of the world, was priced to be sold. For more on the variety of ideations of objects in the Crystal Palace and the kinds of gazes they drew—from the expert to the erotic—see Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye* 64-100.

windows, was adorned with the riches of the world, he accomplished this wonder by the agency of the Slaves of the lamp.

Let us consider how many Slaves of the lamp have been employed in constructing the Palace of Industry.... (121)

In this comparison, Knight glorifies the wonderful nature of the Crystal Palace by opposing its glass and steel to the “layers of bricks,” the more common building material of Londoners.¹⁵ At the same time, he reveals anxieties about this seeming wonder through the commentary about the Slaves of the lamp: Is there a danger to buildings being raised so very quickly? What poor unnamed workers had been coerced into the construction? At what expense to the people around them had these magical buildings been built? In choosing the lamp as his metaphor, Knight brings magical objects home to England, revealing that, in fact, the English have their own “magic.” At the same time, he is participating in a conservative critical trend that sees industrial and mechanical progress as inhumane in its drive toward faster and more elaborate production. The once-exotic story of Aladdin is so naturalized as to function as a part of English self-criticism.

Aladdin’s lamp could be all things for all Victorians; while Knight used it to criticize the human cost of industrial progress, Charles Dickens uses it to criticize lack of progress in the realm of art. In an 1851 *Household Words* article, “Old Lamps for New Ones,” Dickens bemoans what he considered the artistic regression of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood through an allusion to “Aladdin.” The essay begins,

The Magician in “Aladdin” may possibly have neglected the study of men, for the study of alchemical books; but it is certain that in spite of his profession he was no conjuror. He knew nothing of human nature, or the everlasting set of the current of human affairs. If, when he fraudulently sought to obtain possession of the wonderful lamp, and went up and down, disguised, before the flying palace, crying New Lamps for Old Ones, he had reversed his cry, and made it Old Lamps

¹⁵ This juxtaposition is also in reference to the original design for the Crystal Palace. The design committee, after rejecting hundreds of submissions, eventually came up with a brick design that was widely ridiculed; eventually they accepted Joseph Paxton’s greenhouse design (“History of the Crystal Palace (Part 1)”).

for New Ones, he would have been so far before his time as to have projected himself into the nineteenth century of our Christian Era. (1)

True to the era of consumer culture, Dickens is attuned to the buyers' desires rather than the seller's. He casts his fellow men as the Magician's customers, frivolously buying old lamps—that is, paintings in the style before Raphael—by giving up their new lamps—that is, modern culture after centuries of progress. However, “Aladdin” actually depends on just that move, for the Magician, knowing the magical powers of the old lamp, trades it away for a new one to the amusement of the princess. Dickens may be mocking the desire for the past, but he is nevertheless attuned to a longing for primitive enchantment that movements like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood epitomized during the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Indeed, he emphasizes this longing by creating the fictitious Pre-Henry-the-Seventh Brotherhood, engaged in “cancelling all the advances of nearly four hundred years and reverting to one of the most disagreeable periods of English History, when the Nation was yet very slowly emerging from barbarism” (12). Even though Dickens satirically criticizes such a nostalgic look back to the past, his use of Aladdin's lamp as the vehicle of his criticism speaks to the immediacy with which the lamp conveys desire. In his analogy, new lamps *should* hold as much power and attraction as old ones. Thus Aladdin's lamp—even a new, fake one—could symbolize Victorian artistic progress.

Alongside these commentaries about industry and art, conversations about the British nation and monarchy also made use of the lamp. Tenniel's cartoon at the beginning of this essay is perhaps the best example (Figure 1). Like Dickens, Tenniel focuses on the moment in “Aladdin” when the magician swindles the magic lamp away from the princess. Though Disraeli is in exotic garb, the setting of the cartoon is ultimately domestic, depicting a street vendor

¹⁶ The Young England movement, which sought to revive some aspects of England's idealized feudal past, also exemplified such nostalgic desires; as well, as Deborah Cohen has described in *Household Gods*, the Victorians were the first people to be so utterly enamored with collecting antiques.

offering his wares to a rather drab, middle-class looking Victoria. Our eyes are drawn to the Indian crown that dominates the top center of the picture. Disraeli presents it not only to Victoria but to us, and the crown's brightness, as well as its attachment to an exotic, magical person dressed in a turban and a robe with alchemical symbols, makes it seem like the most enchanted object of all. But Tenniel depicts the Indian crown in such a way to suggest that the homely and unexotic object—Victoria's original English crown—is what holds the magic in the scene. He, along with many contemporary critics, questioned Victoria's choice to take what they saw as the glittering yet empty title of "Empress of India," which overshadowed the much less novel but nevertheless more powerful title of the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. In the metaphor of the cartoon, the British crown that Victoria proffers hesitatingly, in shadows and almost hidden behind her skirt, is the old Lamp that contains the powerful Jinni. Victoria's British crown holds all the power of imperial expansion, while the Indian crown merely signifies the conquered. Aladdin's lamp thus became a powerful icon in Victorian culture, symbolizing not only the strength of the British nation but the power of Victoria to rule over nation and empire through certain symbolic objects.

In this chapter, I have described the variety of ways in which magical objects circulated in Victorian England. Douglas Jerrold's it-narrative brought the eighteenth-century novel of circulation into the Victorian period in a way that highlighted the working relationship between narrative imagination and speaking objects. While the feather has the magic of narration but not of action, his London is one full of circulating it-narrators; as well, he exhibits a desire for active, spell-casting sorts of magical objects, which Andrew Lang's fairy tales take to the logical extreme. In *Prince Prigio* and its sequel, Lang paints a fairyland that comes into historical contact with England in which, as in Victorian England, magical objects fought to overturn the

demystifying, disenchanting work of those who represented England as a rational culture. And in the circulation of Aladdin's lamp between the works of Burton, Knight, Dickens, and Tenniel, we saw how a magical object can circulate and exert its power within the mediated world of the text. While this chapter contained a wide variety of magical objects, the following three chapters will each focus on one object that, like the lamp, became magical by circulating between various texts: the doll, personified yet never fully human, imparted its marginal status onto first-person female narrators; the diamond, desired yet never fully possessed, exerted its energy in driving the romantic plots of popular genres; and the mirror, visionary yet never fully reflective, provided writers entrée into the imagined worlds of their narrative.

CHAPTER II

ACTING LIKE A LIVING CREATURE: MAGIC DOLLS AND VICTORIAN CHARACTER

Pollock's Toy Museum in London is a treasure trove of antique toys. The row-house, with labyrinthine staircases and semi-hidden back rooms, features everything from toy soldiers to board games to a variety of Pollock's Toy Theaters, the paper cut-out theaters of popular pantomimes and plays that were invented by Benjamin Pollock in the Victorian period. But by far the most numerous items in the museum are the dolls. Eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth wooden, wax, and cloth dolls make up an



Figure 5. Photograph of the dolls room inside Pollock's Toy Museum in London, England.

entire room, while dollhouses take up an adjoining room. The various shelves with their neatly placed and labeled dolls are interesting in themselves: they show, for example, the difference between an expensive, well-modeled set of wax dolls accompanied by “full sets of underclothes and a print and silk dress each, also pearl necklace” and some “cheap sorts of wax doll” which have neither the artistic finesse nor the costumes to compare. Yet somehow, for the museum curators, these finely organized shelves were not enough to demonstrate the number and variety of dolls in their possession. Across from these shelves sits an entire room of dolls behind Plexiglas, all of whom stare eerily at the hapless visitor who stumbles across their path (Figure

5). The room of dolls is surely some ingenious curator's way to exhibit all the excess dolls in the museum's possession without having to meticulously categorize them, especially since some of them probably have little to no information attached. As well, the room—with its floral wallpaper, the mahogany mantelpiece-and-mirror, and the threadbare oriental carpet—is surely meant to reconstruct the Victorian nursery in its full glory. At the same time, the sheer proliferation of dolls, which populate just about every surface in the room, down to the little heads on the mantelpiece, create a scene that is undoubtedly uncanny.

This uncanniness is part of what make dolls such symbolically rich and potentially magical objects. Their anthropomorphism—particularly their not-quite-blank faces that hold their staring eyes—seems just on the verge of coming alive. As such, they occupy an ontologically liminal place between humans and objects. The dolls at the museum are certainly not alive, but, looking at their all-too-human figures, it is difficult to consider them absolutely lifeless.¹⁷ This partial animation makes dolls into powerful magical objects in the Victorian period; writers oscillate between designing fantastical realms in which dolls can come alive, speak, and move, and conceding to a sad recognition that these apparently lively dolls are in fact lifeless. This chapter traces the partial liveliness of dolls in order to theorize novelistic characterization, especially of female narrators. I begin by looking at the fairy tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann and Mary de Morgan, who created moving, talking dolls that were nevertheless soulless in order to criticize the nineteenth-century idealization of a limpid, nonagentive femininity. Then, I look at Victorian doll it-narratives, in which dolls are sentient and

¹⁷ The doll's liveliness is both an enchanting and a frightening prospect in our contemporary culture, as can be attested to by Movies like *Child's Play* (1988) and *Annabelle* (2014), in which evil spirits haunt and animate dolls who go on murderous rampages. And while my chapter does not rely on the precise verisimilitude of dolls to determine their aptitude for coming alive, there has been theorization on that matter: in 1970, Masahiro Mori, a robotics professor, coined the term “uncanny valley” to describe the phenomenon in which extremely humanlike entities, like dolls or androids, cease to generate sympathy from their anthropomorphism and instead elicit a sense of unease because they are too like humans yet are missing some crucial sense of humanity. Past a certain point, the closer an object comes to being humanlike, the less sympathy and more discomfort it elicits.

sentimental creatures who are self-reflexive about their narrative ability, but who cannot move and therefore cannot change their fates. I follow these two kinds of partial liveliness into the novels of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë. *Bleak House* (1852-3) and *Villette* (1853) both occupy a liminal position with regards to genre: they are purportedly works of realism that are yet woven through with sensational and uncanny moments. In these not-quite-realist novels, dolls occupy a liminal position, as well: the protagonists of the novels must constantly negotiate their need to see the doll as a living and loving companion and as a mundane object.¹⁸ Despite these similarities, Dickens and Brontë in fact have very different stakes in the liveliness of their dolls. For Dickens, the doll as mundane object speaks to the objectifying institutional forces that can be witnessed throughout London, while the doll's potential life, even as a silent witness, can be a minor form of redemption. For Brontë, the doll's partial liveliness represents Lucy Snowe's self-assessment as a person who is living a partial life; she must negotiate her desire to live through other doll-like characters and her desire for fulfillment and self-possession.

The doll had a number of significations in the Victorian period. It stood as a certain kind of intermediary between interpersonal relationships between adults and children, between men and women, and between women themselves. A doll in writing often characterized, sometimes satirically, the ideal woman, whose status as the angel of the house necessitated her demureness, passivity, and silence. In practice, however, as Sharon Marcus has demonstrated, doll-play actually allowed for a more complex trafficking of desire that did not always equate women with powerless dolls. In analyzing both fashion dolls and toy dolls in *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, Marcus sees the doll as providing women with the ability to become the actively desiring party. The fashion doll, on which clothing was modeled,

¹⁸ In his Preface to *Bleak House*, Dickens acknowledges the liminal status of the novel when he declares that his novel will dwell on the "romantic side of familiar things." For a discussion that links the novel's what Donald Fanger called "romantic realism" to the uncanny, see Robert Newsome.

was a way for women to eroticize the female body just as much as men did; it allowed them a spectacular power in “objectifying women and entertain[ing] active, aggressive impulses toward femininity” (112). In her discussion of doll stories, Marcus notes that the doll has the potential to “[extend] the girl’s moral capacity to imagine the feelings and thought of infants, animals and the poor.... Just as novels paradoxically taught readers to sympathize with fictional characters who did not really exist, doll tales showed that girls could and should imagine the feelings of entities who were only apparently mute and immobile” (158-9). While Marcus returns to her larger focus on the eroticization of the feminine doll figure, her insights alert us to the fact that dolls, by their very nature, ruptured the boundary between fantasy and reality. Dolls were apt figures for the child’s imaginative play: even Queen Victoria, as Marina Warner describes in *Queen Victoria’s Sketchbook*, played with dolls, modeled both after real persons—especially actors and ballet dancers—and imaginary ones. As Laura Starr says in *The Doll Book* (1908), Queen Victoria’s dolls are “rich in sentiment and memories as they were dressed by her own hand” (91); sentiment and imaginative play seem to go hand in hand. Moreover, as Marcus’s analysis makes clear, the dolls’ ability to inspire imaginative play arises from their liminal status between animate persons and inanimate objects. As this chapter will demonstrate, Victorian writers used the figure of the doll to think through the ontological ambiguity of quasi-alive beings, both the dolls themselves and the characters in their books.

The imaginative play with dolls paves the way for the animation of dolls, which has been an important notion in both psychology and anthropology. Granville Stanley Hall and Alexander Caswell Ellis’s *A Study of Dolls* (1897), a survey of hundreds of children, discovered that the following “psychic qualities are ascribed to dolls”: good, cold, jealous, bad, angry, naughty, loving, tired, crying, feels pain, clean, feels warm, sleepy, and a variety of other moral and

emotional projections. Victorian anthropologists who were writing about fetishes equated this childish quality to animate objects with the “childlike” beliefs of the so-called primitive cultures of Africa, the Americas, and parts of Asia. Auguste Comte’s *Cours de philosophie* (1830-42), E. B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), and other ethnological and anthropological texts after them took up the idea of the fetish in distinguishing the civilized, rational societies of the West from those on the margins: children, peasants, and, of course, the racial other. At the same time, both anthropologists and other writers of the period understood that fetishistic belief was not absent from their own culture: we have already seen Tylor’s theory of “survivals,” in which the rational Western person could still see vestiges of fetishes around him. Karl Marx demonstrated the prevalence of fetishistic thinking in the world of commodity exchange by naming “commodity fetishes” that, to the human mind, “appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race” (165); and Sigmund Freud, after him, called a sexual fetish a misdirected investment of sexual energy. Meanwhile, George Eliot brought fetishism to the heart of English provincial life in *Mill on the Floss*, in which she depicts Maggie attempting to hurt her aunt by severely punishing her headless, limbless “Fetish” doll that has been “entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering” (78). As Laura Starr concludes in 1908, “Fetishism is by no means confined to barbarous tribes; [one] sees the evidence of its practice every day, even among our own enlightened people” (156).

As Maggie Tulliver’s punishment of her Fetish demonstrates, the fetish doll involves two kinds of magic. On the one hand, the doll is meant to feel certain things, whether pleasure or pain, as a vicarious substitute; in Hall and Ellis’s psychological survey, we can see how dolls, not even necessarily fetish dolls, are invested with the ability to feel emotions as well as physical

affect. On the other hand, that doll is meant to be active, to be able to transfer these emotions and affects onto a different target. Drawing on Alfred Binet's ideas, Laura Starr explains this latter ability in her chapter on Fetish dolls:

The fetish is not necessarily the symbol of a deity; it is simply supposed to be a vehicle through which it acts, and any object, whether natural or artificial, animate or inanimate may become a fetish.... Some one is induced to believe that a supernatural power exercises influence in his destiny through a pebble or perhaps a feather, but more often through some grotesque image of a human creature—then he worships it. (155)

The proper fetish, then, must both be receptive to an action, then be able to pass on the effect of that action to the intended target. While I am less interested in the particularities of fetishism, distinguishing the two parts of this process allows us to pursue how each functions in Victorian literature. In animating or almost animating dolls, Victorian writers engage in one or both kinds of magic. A doll may become sentient without being animated, which is the attribution of human qualities onto the object; this is what we will see in the various it-narratives featuring doll narrators. A doll may become animated without being sentient, which is its enacting that magical attribution to affect the world beyond itself; this is what we will see in the uncanny fairy tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann and Mary de Morgan. And the limits of both animation and sentience are explored in the novels of Dickens and Brontë, who both represent heroines constrained by the ideals of Victorian femininity neither to act too boldly nor to feel too strongly.

In the early nineteenth century, two inventions made the dolls more humanlike and uncanny than ever before. Using a weight and bellows system, a doll was made to speak for the first time, albeit only simple words like "mama"; in addition, the first doll whose eyes could be opened and closed was constructed (Starr 166). Though most dolls would not have had these bells and whistles, their invention presented two faculties through which a doll's liveliness was negotiated. The eyes could alternately make dolls into active witnesses or reveal their

soullessness through blank stares; the voice box could give way to a doll's narration of its history and sentiments or merely allow them to parrot meaningless phrases. E. T. A. Hoffman's gothic story "The Sandman" (1816), though it features an automaton that is so humanlike that she fools the protagonist Nathanael into thinking that she is a real human being, yet represents the automaton as a soulless doll that is animated yet lacks true human spirit. In the story, Nathanael, who has pledged himself to Clara, falls in love instead with Olympia, whom he does not recognize as an automaton. Much of the story deals with how the eyes, as the "windows to the soul," are the most difficult to emulate. Nathanael has grown up being fearful of the Sandman, who a nurse tells him "comes to little children when they won't go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody" (176). The Sandman turns out to be a real being—Coppelius, or Giuseppe Coppola—who supplies eyes to Professor Spalanzani so that he can construct Olympia. In his first glimpse of Olympia, Nathanael does find her eyes problematic: "She did not appear to notice me, and there was moreover a strangely fixed look about her eyes, I might almost say they appeared as if they had no power of vision; I thought she was sleeping with her eyes open" (190). We learn later that, in fact, Olympia's eyes are the only human parts about her. When Nathanael finally sees Olympia for the "inanimate puppet" that she is, Spalanzani confesses that, while he constructed her "clock-work—speech—[and] movement," Coppola supplied her with "a pair of bloody eyes" (216).

For the other characters in the story, Olympia's lifeless eyes couple with her other features to make her into "Miss Wax-face—[a] wooden doll"; Nathanael's friends judge her as "singularly statuesque and soulless. Her figure is regular, and so are her features, that can't be gainsaid; and if her eyes were not so utterly devoid of life...of the power of vision, she might pass for a beauty," but, as such, she seems to be "only acting *like* a living creature" (212). But for

Nathanael, her inanimate qualities fall to the wayside when he converses with her. If the human eyes ironically make her seem lifeless, her speech reanimates her. Spalanzani comments that Nathanael has had “an extraordinarily animated conversation with [her]” (210), and the conversation seems animated indeed:

“Do you love me? Do you love me, Olimpia? Only one little word—Do you love me?” whispered Nathanael, but she only sighed, “Ach! Ach!” as she rose to her feet. “Yes, you are my lovely, glorious star of love,” said Nathanael, “and will shine for ever, purifying and ennobling my heart.” “Ach! Ach!” replied Olimpia, as she moved along. (210)

The satirical depiction of this conversation reveals the dire state of a certain kind of gender relations. Nathanael, who had earlier rejected Clara’s thoughtful, but oftentimes contradictory conversation as the words of a “damned lifeless automaton” (200), is much more attracted to a woman who spits out meaningless sounds that he can interpret as agreement. Nathanael, as much as he considers himself a sensitive, poetic soul, nevertheless falls into the trap of thinking that feminine sighs are the pinnacle of feminine conversation. Though he is driven crazy by the discovery that Olimpia had been an automaton all along, his love for her lively conversational skills reveals that he never desired anything other than a sighing doll.

Mary de Morgan’s 1877 fairy tale “A Toy Princess” reprises the same moral, albeit with a different outcome for the doll. The story is set “more than a thousand years ago, in a country quite on the other side of the world” (165), but the fairy tale is very clearly a thinly veiled critique launched at polite British society. In this faraway country, “people all grew so very polite that they hardly ever spoke to each other. And they never said more than was quite necessary, as ‘Just so,’ ‘Yes indeed,’ ‘Thank you,’ and ‘If you please.’” (165). Such a country is difficult for the little Princess Ursula, who wants to play and shout like a real child, so her fairy godmother purchases a toy princess to take her place. The fairy visits a “queer sort of shop” that

sells magical objects: “the sugar was magic sugar, which transformed any liquid into which it was put; the dresses each had some special charm, and the hats were wishing-caps” (166). There, she negotiates for a toy princess that will look and grow like a human princess but only say, “‘If you please,’ ‘No, thank you,’ ‘Certainly,’ and ‘Just so’” (167). If Fairyland is a thinly veiled analogy for Britain, the fairy godmother’s protracted and minute price negotiations, made with fishes’ screams and swans’ songs instead of pounds and pence, further Anglicize the story, giving the exchange a resemblance to the haggling done at a London high street shop. The toy princess purchased here is sent to the palace to take the place of Ursula, who is allowed to live out a happy life with a family of fishermen on the coast. At the end of the story, when the princess comes of age, her fairy godmother returns to the kingdom to reinstate her as the true princess. She reveals to the king that his supposed daughter had been “only a *sham*” (172, emphasis original), and she takes Ursula back to the palace where she belongs. However, Ursula’s all-too-human qualities—her desire to kiss and hug her father, for example—elicit great discomfort for the King and his courtiers, who, in the end, vote to retain the toy princess for her pleasing and non-disruptive demeanor. While Ursula gets a happily ever after with her fishermen family, the story contains a surprising outcome for the automaton. Even as de Morgan critiques the constraints of proper feminine behavior, the toy princess who embodies that behavior receives and maintains her role as a ruling member of society. In de Morgan’s fairy tale, the proper doll-like woman who seems animated yet soulless can still rise to a position of great power and responsibility.

The various it-narratives of the nineteenth century characterize dolls as having the opposite problem from these fairy tale dolls. Their narrators are fully conscious and fully capable of thinking, feeling, and loving those around them; at the same time, that sentience is secret and

invisible to the humans, and they are fully immobile, powerless to prevent any of the events that befall them. The doll it-narrative, moreover, is a fully nineteenth-century phenomenon. As Liz Bellamy's extensive survey of it-narratives shows, although the genre was born in 1709, the first narrative of a doll did not come about until 1816. That first book, Mary Mister's *The Adventures of a Doll*, is intricately tied to the technological advancements of the doll: the narrator says, "I believe I was the first doll of my race, whose eyes had been taught to open and shut" (2). The technological development of the eyes is what allows, for the first time ever, a doll to participate in the narration of its own story; and, unlike other it-narrators, the doll relies on its humanlike faculties of vision and speech in order to become narrators in the first place. For the most part, doll it-narratives appeared like morality tales or parables. Like it-narratives in general, they were novels of circulation and allowed the reader to peek into various societies, high and low. The doll it-narrative, however, has a particular interest in the sinking from high *to* low. The doll, because it is so humanlike, easily becomes the allegory for a human, especially a woman; they begin their lives being interested in the quality and bounty of their dresses and accessories, and they always suffer a fall, oftentimes a literal one. In Richard Hengist Horne's *Memoirs of a London Doll, Written by Herself* (1846), for example, Maria Poppet falls from the window of her wealthy owner's house and is picked up by a poor puppeteer. The fall in status coincides with the dirtying or ruining of the doll's clothing; in an extreme case, Lady Arabella in Julia Pardoe's *Lady Arabella: Or, the Adventures of a Doll* (1856) actually loses one eye, one arm, and one leg below the knee, and suffers from a fracture in her head and a broken nose. Lady Arabella seems to well deserve her fall, since she is one of the vainest dolls ever; she admits, "I'm afraid that I glanced very disdainfully over the mute companions which were collected upon me.... [and] I can assure you that as I reflected on my own attractions, and the admiration which I was certain

to excite, I could not help blushing at their degradation” (7). Even Maria Poppet, a much more amiable doll, confesses that she “had been very vain and conceited” before encountering fancier dolls than herself (Horne 55). In this way, the doll it-narrative allegorizes their literary cousins, those realist novels that feature a prideful heroine who inevitably falls from grace.

At the same time, there is a very big difference between the it-narrative doll and the realist heroines: no matter how much the dolls seem to “deserve” their fall, they are nevertheless non-acting, non-moving beings who cannot make events happen. Things happen *to* them, which they can only bear with silent indignation. Because the plot of their life-stories is based on the fact that they are circulated objects, the only way in which these dolls can gain some sort of agency is through the faculties of observation and narration. Indeed, this is how the dolls become magical: they observe their surroundings, and they narrate them back with judgment and sentiment. Maria Poppet, for example, decries the fact that, though her first mistress read “all sorts of pretty books” aloud to her sister, she “never heard any stories about dolls, and what they thought, or what happened to them! This rather disappointed me” (Horne 11). Her entire memoir is an effort to rectify that lack, and she does so especially by periodically recounting her life until that moment:

How much I had to recollect! There was the doll-shop in Holborn—and little Emmy, who used to read little books in the backroom ... and my life in Hanover square, during which I saw so many great places in great London, and had been taught by Lady Flora’s governess to write, and had fallen headlong from a box at the Opera, into a gentleman’s hat; and where, after having beautiful ball-dresses made, my little lady mamma and I had both caught fire; and, lastly, there was my tumble over the wall into the passage, where the Newfoundland dog had fancied I was a broiled bone, and caught me up in his mouth. Here was a biography to recollect.... (87-8)

Maria Poppet periodically recounts her biography in the manner of this passage as if, by narrating her life over and over again, she could come closer to the status of a human being.

Indeed, she calls her story a “biography,” which is (excepting the it-narratives) a term largely reserved for human lives.¹⁹ Yet her recollections are based on things happening *to* her, which reveals just how little agency she has in the actual context of her story. Lady Arabella, on the other hand, seems to possess some form of actual magic at the beginning of her biography; decrepit as she is, she calls over a human child, Mary Lawson, and engages in a conversation with her. Even this narrative agency is robbed from her at the end of her tale, however; Mary Lawson wakes up and realizes, “so it wasn’t true after all that a doll could talk, and see, and feel pain when her arms were torn off, and her eyes put out! It was nothing but a foolish dream” (Pardoe 87)—doing one final injustice to an already broken down doll.

Despite this reining in of the doll’s magical animation, both *Lady Arabella* and *Memoirs of a Doll* demonstrate intense fantasies surrounding the doll’s potential for narration. These stories show how a doll, which by all rights should be a nonsentient object, can open their eyes in observation and speak what they see. The doll-narrator’s ability to tell their own stories can be aligned with the ability of first-person characters to tell their own stories; if the doll is an object made animated, the character is an imaginary object that has to be animated even more vigorously. In the second half of this chapter, I propose that some Victorian writers—especially Dickens and Brontë—wrote novels that were very much self-reflexive about their first-person narrators. This self-reflexivity about narration arises from these heroines’ curious relationships with their dolls, whom they animate just as their authors animated them. In fact, the strange animating relationships between writer, character, narrator, and doll were anticipated by William Makepeace Thackeray, who in *Vanity Fair* (1847-8) made an explicit analogy between dolls and

¹⁹ Of course, as Arjun Appadurai has argued, objects could have a form of biography, a “cultural biography”; this is the documentation of a specific objects’ movements through history and space, in contrast to a “social history,” which is the history of an entire class of objects.

the characters of his book. In the preface, Thackeray draws an elaborate conceit about the novel and a puppet-show:

He [the Manager of the Performance] is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the very best company in this empire. The famous little Becky Puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints, and lively on the wire; the Amelia Doll, though it has had a smaller circle of admirers, has yet been carved and dressed with the greatest care by the artist; the Dobbin Figure, though apparently clumsy, yet dances in a very amusing and natural manner; the Little Boy's Dance has been liked by some; and please to remark the richly dressed figure of the Wicked Nobleman, on which no expense has been spared, and which Old Nick will fetch away at the end of this singular performance. (x)

Thackeray—or “the Manager of the Performance”—envisions his novel not only as a play but specifically a puppet-show in the manner of Punch and Judy. On the one hand, we might see this as a form of distancing from the characters: instead of thinking of them as real people, the characters are reduced not only to actors in a play but to mere objects.²⁰ At the same time as he reveals the construction of the characters, Thackeray also places emphasis on his artistic excellence in making these dolls ever more humanlike: he points out, for example, how “lively” and “flexible” the Becky Puppet is, or how “natural” the Dobbin Figure is, as well as the great care placed on their costumes—something with which the characters themselves also take great care in the course of the novel. Thus *Vanity Fair*, though a major example of the realist genre, can be seen as a novel of enchantment: under the writer cum puppet-master’s magical prowess, the doll becomes a mechanism of fiction itself.

Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-3) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) both replicate and complicate this notion of doll-as-character. As Robert Newsom suggests in “*Villette* and *Bleak House*: Authorizing Women,” the two novels’ concurrent publication gave them “the

²⁰ This is the exact opposite tack that George Eliot takes in *Adam Bede*, which will be discussed in Chapter 4; in *Adam Bede*, Eliot’s narrator attempts to make the characters into real, historical figures when he reveals that he had conversations with Adam Bede.

unusual position of having been able to influence one another” (54). While Newsom does not insist on any actual influence, he sees the two novels as having some surprising similarities in their treatment of gender roles and institutional evils. Both Esther Summerson and Lucy Snowe are redundant women who are kept apart from idealized romantic entanglement: Esther cannot participate in the romance between Ada and Richard, while Lucy cannot take possession of the romance between Polly and Graham. As well, both novels point out the oppressive qualities of institutions, the legal one of Chancery Court in *Bleak House* and the religious one of the Catholic Church in *Villette*. While Newsom’s comparisons focus on interpersonal and institutional relationships, I suggest that the two novels also have in common a fraught definition of objects. Published right after the Great Exhibition of 1851, the two novels deal in different ways with the sheer abundance of things that the Exhibition showed England to contain: while *Bleak House* languished in the detritus and dead matter that were the inevitable products of the commodity market in London, Lucy Snowe escapes to the Continent, only to have British objects follow her out there. Moreover, both narratives contain originary moments with dolls: Esther with Dolly, an actual doll whom she buries at the end of childhood, and Lucy with the doll-like Polly, who departs quietly at the end of Lucy’s childhood. I argue that the instability of objects’, especially dolls’, ontological statuses, rather than being just another aspect of these novels, actually guides the treatment of the larger concerns that Newsom outlined. In *Bleak House*, Dickens uses the figure of the doll to generate anxiety about the objectified and silenced humans that are the inevitable by-products of oppressive institutions. In *Villette*, Brontë portrays the agentive potential in the possibility that doll-like humans will not stay objectified and silent, and this potential becomes a way for Lucy to deal with her own half-alive status as a redundant woman.

Staring at Nothing: Dumb Witnesses in *Bleak House*

The figure of the doll haunts many of Dickens's major and minor works; we can never forget, for example, the great but diminutive dollmaker Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*. In his fairy tale "The Magic Fishbone" (1868), the doll is a bosom friend of Sharon Marcus's description, a companion that the girl heroine can bring to life to impart sympathy. Little Alicia, called a princess though she actually belongs to a lower class, is given a fishbone that makes wishes come true. She tells all her secrets to

a most particularly confidential friend of hers, who was a Duchess. People did suppose her to be a doll, but she was really a Duchess, though nobody knew it except the Princess.... The Princess kneeled down by the bed on which the Duchess was lying, full dressed and wide-awake, and whispered the secret to her. The Duchess smiled and nodded. People might have supposed that she never smiled and nodded, but she often did, though nobody knew it except the Princess. (109-110)

In this single passage, Dickens explores the difficulties, even in a fairy tale, of animating a doll. At first sight, the narrator presents a tongue-in-cheek version of children's private fantasies: Alicia indulges in make-believe about her doll, which is alive to nobody but herself. At the same time, there is something of a plea in this description, a longing for others to participate in the fantasy and a protest against those too "adult" to do so—a participation that is important, of course, to the livelihood of a fiction writer. The doll's liveliness plays out in a curious way, too: though the Duchess smiles and nods, she does not speak back; indeed, what makes her such a good confidant is the very fact that she is, at heart, a non-speaking object who cannot reveal secrets.

The relationship between observation and narration, between the eyes and the faculties of speech, is highlighted in a different way in *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845). *The Cricket on the Hearth*, like *A Christmas Story*, features a spirit that shows visions; in this case, the various

“Presence,” “Household Spirits,” and “Fairies” gather around one John Peerybingle (whose very name connotes a vision problem) to reinforce his trust in his wife by “suggesting his reflections by [their] power, and presenting them before him, as in a glass or a picture” (211). Curiously, the visionary magic of the Household Spirits does not extend to all the characters. Instead, Caleb Plummer the dollmaker and his blind daughter Bertha must operate by a different kind of magic: “the only magic art that still remains to us, the magic of devoted, deathless love” (182). Each time Caleb receives a shipment of doll’s eyes, he wishes profoundly that it was instead “her own sight in a box” (173). This wish never comes true and, instead, Caleb must make up for Bertha’s missing vision by becoming, as she calls him, “[her] patient, willing eyes” (189). He does this through the art of narration. We learn, upon meeting Bertha for the first time, that while Caleb resides in a dwelling house for which “its demolition [would be] a vast improvement,” Bertha lives “somewhere else—in an enchanted home of Caleb’s furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not, and trouble never entered” (182). Within a subplot of the story, Dickens rehearses a variation of narrative enchantment. Bertha, who can neither see nor tell what she sees, must try on a series of surrogate narrators; since she cannot take on the dolls eyes as her own, she must take on the imaginative faculties of her doll-maker father.

In these two short pieces, we see dolls functioning in similar ways: they are accorded with a narrative potential that, for one reason or another, they cannot actually fulfill. As sentimentally attached as Alicia is to the Duchess, the Duchess is incapable of repeating what is told to her—a failing that becomes positive in the act of secret-keeping. And as much as the Plummers, in a reversal of *The Sandman*, desire doll eyes for a real human, the dolls are in the end not magical, and magic has to be supplied from a different source. This back-and-forth between the doll’s potential liveliness and ultimate disenchantment is something Dickens

pursues in a more extended way in *Bleak House*. The long history of criticism on *Bleak House* has largely focused on the many ways in which Dickens engages in social criticism. Both Edgar Johnson in “*Bleak House: The Anatomy of Society*” and Robert Garis in *The Dickens Theater* point out how the various characters in the novel metonymically stand for the institutions of which they are a part, in a “gallery of exhibits of human behavior” (Garis 88). The Dedlocks, for example, represent a rigid class system that disallows the illegitimate Esther from being one of their class; meanwhile, Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby are part of a “telescopic philanthropy” that only see the troubles of the Africans or American Indians but fail to see troubles in their own homes or on their front steps. J. Hillis Miller argues that the various institutions in *Bleak House*—but most especially Chancery—are so insidious that they have become cyclical; the very act of interpreting signs, in which both the characters and the reader engage, serves to “assimilate the particular into a system,” granting more power to that system (24-5).

Dickens criticism has only recently turned to explicit focus on objects in the novel. Elaine Auyoung’s “Standing outside *Bleak House*,” for example, asserts that the many lists and catalogues in the novel not only generate a more holistic vision of the novel’s world but allows the reader to participate, by spatially arranging the objects in the list, in filling in the outline of that world. Esther’s doll receives more dedicated attention in Robyn Schiffman’s “Wax-Work, Clock-Work, and Puppet Shews: *Bleak House* and the Uncanny.” Following Freud’s ideas about the uncanny closely, Schiffman points out the uncanny moments, especially of double and multiple characters, in Esther’s narrative arising primarily from Esther’s originary maternal lack—a lack that, as we shall see below in Carolyn Dever’s criticism, guides Esther’s actions with her doll. While, as Schiffman points out, the doll is always already an uncanny figure, the actual presentation of the doll is especially ambivalent about the relationship between the doll,

observation, and narration. I pursue this relationship between the ontological status of the doll and the narrative potential of both humans and objects through the rest of this section.

Esther Summerson is the first-person narrator of half of *Bleak House*, the other half supplied by a third-person omniscient narrator. While the omniscient narrator speaks in the present tense, Esther is requested by the legal suit she is a part of, Jarndyce v Jarndyce, to write her own recollection of the events of the novel. As such, Esther's narrative is a retelling of the past, which for a brief moment she imagines to be a fairy tale: "I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother" (28). Esther's appeal to a fairy story takes us into a world of enchantment, which the rest of the novel fails to sustain: the orphan Esther soon loses her godmother, as well, and is hired by John Jarndyce as a companion to Ada Clare. Ada and her lover Richard are of a high class, but their wealth is caught up in the Chancery suit; at the end of the novel, they marry, but Richard dies, and Esther marries the kind doctor Woodcourt who had attended Richard's illness. Esther's narrative, which begins with the third chapter of the novel, immediately sets up the doll:

When I was a very little girl indeed, I use to say to my doll when we were alone together, "Now, Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!" And so she used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing—while I busily stitched away and told her every one of my secrets. (27-8)

Young Esther speaks to her doll, and that address constitutes the doll as a living being, one who can listen, who "knows" things about Esther, and who has the capacity for patience and presumably sympathy. Yet Esther's own narration puts a hiccup in the fabric of enchantment. Her description is interrupted both metaphorically and literally by the statement between the dashes: "not so much at me, I think, as at nothing." The segregated admission that her doll may

have been staring at nothing creates two worlds, a world in which dolls can come alive and a world in which they are mundane objects. These two worlds—one in which objects, enchanted, can take on the sentience and agency of humans, and the other in which both humans and objects are relentlessly beat down, deanimated, and objectified—are constantly engaged in battle in the novel. Esther's parenthetical admission represents the force of the latter; when the doll "stares at nothing," both the doll and Esther are reduced to this "nothingness." And in this admission, Esther's first-person narrator mirrors the third-person omniscient narrator of the other chapters, as well as Dickens's own understanding of the world about which he writes. As much as the London of *Bleak House* can become enchanted to the point of a Megalosaurus wandering through its streets, the dinosaur is conjured by the overwhelming mud, smoke, and ash that covers the entire city. The humans and things of the novel can become magical to a certain extent, but that magic seems always to be limited by the interpolating systems like the Court of Chancery, sanitary reform, slum clearance, and orphans' schools that, as J. Hillis Miller has pointed out, alienates a person from himself.

Esther's relationship with her doll presents in microcosm how the animistic imagination can, at least in some small ways, ameliorate that dehumanization. At the beginning of the story, Esther's narrative is not yet about institutional harassment but about her personal misfortune. Orphaned early in life, Esther is sent to live with her godmother, who is hardly a maternal substitute; this godmother tells her, "Your mother... is your disgrace, and you were hers" (30), further robbing Esther of even a good mother in her fantasy. Esther's privation of maternal love—or of any kind of loving human contact—makes her turn toward her doll; Even knowing that "[she] was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to [her]," Esther could ameliorate what feels like a loveless life by pouring love out to her doll. The doll becomes, in this way, the

triangulating figure between girl and mother that could refigure the channeling of love, a fetish substitute through which to access her presumed-dead mother.

Esther deals in aggression as much as she does in love. At the death of her godmother and the end of her childhood, she recounts, “I had wrapped the dear old doll in her own shawl and quietly laid her—I am half ashamed to tell it—in the garden-earth under the tree that shaded my old window” (36). This burial signifies several things at once. It is the burial of a mother she had never known, whom she will have to bury again in person at the end of the novel. It is the burial of a godmother who had been nothing but unkind to her, and thus an act of surrogated aggression much like Maggie Tulliver with her fetish doll. It is an admission to the inevitability of the doll’s death, a loss of Dolly’s liveliness even as that liveliness is affirmed by the ability to die. And it is, as Carolyn Dever has argued in *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud*, Esther’s burial of herself: “From birth, Esther has been the unwitting participant in a fiction in which she played the role of a corpse, a dead baby, as well as an alternative fiction (the one reported in the text) in which she played an orphan” (85). Esther’s alternative understanding of herself as a dead baby buried by Lady Dedlock is reflected in her frequent humble and self-denying statements about the writing of her story: “It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now” (40). While this humbleness has sometimes been read as insincere, I suggest that the way Esther draws narrative attention away from herself can be read sincerely as serving a subversive function.²¹ Since she has buried Dolly, she must now take on the role of Dolly herself, becoming the one to whom she tells her secrets. This relationship, rather than being solipsistic, allows Esther to take on the ability of the doll to be a silent witness that, at the same

²¹ Robert Newsom, for example, suggests that readers tend to distrust Esther’s “restraint, coyness, and manipulation of those around her,” including the readers themselves (69).

time, maintains the bond of secret communion and unconditional love. Esther's delayed revelations—about her temporary blindness and permanent disfiguration, as well as about her romantic entanglement with Mr. Woodcourt (“And now I must part with the little secret I have thus far tried to keep” [570])—can be read after this manner as her attempt to save her feelings and longings from the slings and arrows of a dangerously unkind world.

That world is very frequently a dehumanizing one, which the third-person narrator reports with gusto. Indeed, when the figure of the doll pops up again, it serves to relay the dehumanizing disenchantment that the Smallweeds, a set of minor characters, both encourage and suffer from. The house of Smallweed “discountenanced all story-books, fairy-tales, fictions, and fables” (333); granddaughter Judy “never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game” (335). Instead, they worship the god of Compound Interest, and they have become the victims of the very economic system they seek to be a part of. That economic system turns them into objects. Mr. Smallweed, debilitated by a lifetime of cantankerousness, seems like a puppet who is unable to manage his own body; he must ask others to “shake [him] up a little,” which process consists of “agitating him violently enough to make his head roll like a harlequin’s” and then “dragging him upright in his chair as easily as if he were a doll” (345). Mrs. Smallweed, on the other hand, becomes the sort of speaking doll who can only parrot certain things; her speech consists entirely of turning numbers into pound notes. As much as we readers might find their dehumanization justified by their greed, they are yet victims to the spirit of capitalism that haunted so much of Victorian England.

While the violence done upon the Smallweeds is satirical and humorous, dehumanization elsewhere occurs with solemnity. The third-person narrator characterizes Jo, the poor street-sweep, with somber sympathy. Jo—the lowest of the lowly beings in London—is marginalized

in just about every way. He cannot participate in the capitalist economy that bombards him with advertisements; he has no family and few friends. The only way in which he might have some power at all is by becoming the pathetic and peripatetic inhabitant of Tom-All-Alone's, "propagat[ing] infection and contagion everywhere" and thus allowing Tom to "have his revenge" (710); even there, the agency is accorded to Tom-All-Alone's rather than Jo, its human vector. Jo's utter abjection is rehearsed throughout the novel. The narrator imagines that "it must be a strange state to be like Jo!":

To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb! (257)

Jo cannot ever appreciate language, and he becomes reduced to a stone in his blindness and dumbness. Jo's situation is ironic: in a progressive society that constantly reduces humans to objects through industrialization and commercialization (topics that Dickens certainly addressed in his other novels), the most abject, objectified human being is blind to the very language that constitutes commercial society. Jo cannot read the advertisements on the streets and in the store windows; and if he did, he could not purchase any of the products advertised. In his illiteracy and abjection, Jo is denied absolutely any agentive participation in the market structure of society.

Jo's potential educator, Mr. Chadband, drives his objectification home in a pompous speech. Chadband tells Jo,

It is because you know nothing that you are to us a gem and a jewel. For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. O glorious to be a human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar. (313)

Chadband fervently believes in the wonders of receiving others' ideas; he has been known to describe himself, "both verbally and in writing, as a vessel" (303)—although, the narrator comments, others know him as, a "gorging vessel" (303-4). Chadband's ecstatic exclamations to Jo are ironic, however, because he calls "gloriously human" the ability to receive wisdom like an empty vessel; Jo's perpetual exclamation that he does not know "nothink" (257) becomes particularly salient here, since Jo is expected to be a no-thinking vessel, no different than the stick, staff, stock, and stone that Chadband decries. Even more ironic is the fact that Chadband, in his praise of Jo's humanness, reduces Jo to "a gem and a jewel"—still a set of objects, albeit somewhat more valuable.

As the narrator relays to us, Jo himself intimately feels his own dehumanization. Constantly made "to be hustled, and jostled, and moved on," Jo must really exist "in a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human...but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle go by me and to know that in ignorance I belong to them and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend!" (257-8). The narrator voices Jo's internal turmoil, engaging in a kind of prosopopeia that both objectifies him further—by robbing him of his ability to speak his own pain—and gives him back some modicum of humanity by making him into a thinking, feeling object. We might see Jo, in this moment, as akin to Esther's doll: patently forced to exist in a state of objecthood, yet enchanted by the narrator to contain, at least to an active imagination, unspoken thoughts and emotions. Jo's poignant death scene serves as a reminder of his ontological uncertainty: if repeating the Lord's prayer in his final rites could send him to heaven as a human child, Jo cannot manage the prayer in its entirety before his last breath. The third-person narrator's final words only serve to highlight the wide gulf between Jo and a desirable sort of humanness: "Dead, your Majesty.

Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts” (734). The structural repetition here not only reiterates Jo’s distance from what comes after the comma but lays out the charge against the persons who have reduced him to his sad state and ultimate death; we readers, “born with Heavenly compassion in our hearts,” are not exempt from this charge.

The status of actual objects in *Bleak House* is complicated and curious, as well. Written immediately after the Great Exhibition, the novel is at least partially a response to the overwhelming number of things displayed at the Crystal Palace. As John Butt has noted, Dickens could not “escape being aware of the Great Exhibition, [but] he “regarded it with distaste”; *Bleak House* was meant to “temper the mood of self-satisfaction which the Exhibition engendered” (1-2). This mood of self-satisfaction was created largely by the dazzling number of objects that were placed on display in the Crystal Palace, generating, as Thomas Richards has argued, a new kind of commodity culture based on advertising.²² The dazzling display of commodities in the Exhibition is sharply juxtaposed with the display of detritus in *Bleak House*, which comprise both the counterpart to and the liminal spaces of bourgeois commodity culture. The novel opens onto a muddy, smoky, and ashy London. It depicts in glorious detail the corpses—shot, frozen, and spontaneously combusted—and the infection, contagion, and pollution of sites like Tom-All-Alone’s. It stuffs useless bits of paper in every nook and crevice of every scene. It shows us Krook’s rag-and-bottle shop, full of trash and cast-offs that fill every nook and crevice. Krook’s shop is most often juxtaposed with the Crystal Palace: Thomas Richards sees the shop as standing for the very opposite of the Crystal Palace, in which everything is illuminated and

²² Thomas Richards’ *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* contains a largely Marxist argument about the Great Exhibition in its focus on the fetishizing commodities; it is the aspect which Dickens seems most to be criticizing through Krook’s house, but certainly not the only way to read the Exhibition. Dickens himself wrote an article in *Household Words* about the imperialism represented at the Exhibition (“The Great Exhibition and the Little One”).

magical; commodities are “without light” and “relegated to the dark corners” of the shop (32). If the Crystal Palace shows its inhabitants the diamonds and furs they long to consume but cannot, *Bleak House* shows its readers the detritus they cannot help but produce. In the Crystal Palace, consumer culture produces magic; in *Bleak House*, it produces excrement.²³

Krook’s rag and bottle shop, like the Great Exhibition, collects everything and, as Esther comments, seems to sell nothing.²⁴ Among its wares are: “quantities of dirty bottles—blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles”; shabby volumes of law books; second-hand bags; parchment scrolls and law-papers; rusty keys; rags; lastly, and most disturbingly, bones “picked clean,” which are joked to be bones of clients (67-8). In Krook’s shop we can find all the cast-offs of commodity culture: not only the bottles and bags that other things come in, but the detritus of humans—their clothing become rags, their bones picked clean. In these objects we might read the unfortunate fate of most of the objects of nineteenth-century consumer culture: if not outright thrown out to end up in the dust-heaps of *Our Mutual Friend*, they are relegated to the likes of Krook’s shop or, like the papers of Chancery Court, simply carried outside and dumped on the streets. While there is a sort of enchantment to be seen from the overflow of stuff, certainly nothing in Krook’s shop is so lovingly invested with magic like Esther’s doll.²⁵ If any of the bottles or rags could speak, they might even wish to be tenderly wrapped and buried like Dolly. The closest these objects will

²³ Michael Steig and Robert Lougy have variously taken the excrement in *Bleak House* as a metaphor for destructive forces. Steig, for example, finds an “excremental vision” to *Bleak House*, one that takes anality—both its blockage and its explosive potential—as one of the guiding symbols of the novel. The overwhelming presence of excrement, Steig argues, functions as criticism not only of commodity culture but of the rising field of statistics—and all the paper that piles up in it—and the horrifying sanitary conditions of London. To these criticisms, Robert Lougy adds a Freudian one: the sticky, wet filth in *Bleak House* represents a marginalized yet dangerous feminine sexuality that Esther must keep away from herself. While these are both powerful readings of the novel, they focus on the metaphorical, not the actual, nature of detritus.

²⁴ From all the signs advertising things bought—bones, kitchen-stuff, old iron, wastepaper, wardrobes—Esther concludes, “Everything seems to be bought and nothing to be sold there” (67).

²⁵ See, for example, Maurizia Boscagli’s *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism*, which sees “hoards,” both in life and in art as potentially alluring.

come to regaining sentimental human contact is when Krook's spontaneously combusted body oozes over them.

Not all persons and things in *Bleak House* are doomed to the fate of Jo or these bottles, however; Dickens allows for redemption when objects, like Esther's doll, can be imagined to have narrative potential. He conjures a number of quasi-speaking objects in the lawyer Tulkinghorn's surroundings. As Tulkinghorn walks home on the last night of his life, the third person narrator engages in some of the most radically fantastic ejaculations of the novel. As Tulkinghorn passes by the "splendid clock upon the staircase" of the Dedlock's London house, he enquires of it, "And what do *you* say"—checking his own watch against it for accuracy. The narrator continues,

If it said now, "Don't go home"! What a famous clock, hereafter, if it said to-night of all the nights that it has counted off, to this old man of the young and old men who have ever stood before it, "Don't go home"!... [Tulkinghorn] passes out into the streets, and walks on, with his hands behind him, under the shadow of the lofty houses, many of whose mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds, are treasured up within his old black satin waistcoat. He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, "Don't go home"! (747)

Throughout the novel, Tulkinghorn has taken on an object-like status. On the one hand, he knows so many secrets of so many homes that he becomes like the walls and windows in his highly observant nature. On the other hand, he mimics objecthood in his refusal to speak those secrets, becoming as silent as the staring shutters. As such, he has a sort of ontological sympathy with the objects around him, to the point that he is "in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar" and "the high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him." But this ontological sympathy fails at the moment when Tulkinghorn, in contrast to Jo, is rehumanized because of his imminent death; the bricks and mortar and chimney-stacks are incapable of becoming human

alongside him. The unfulfilled narrative potential of objects comes into play again: by rhapsodizing about their whispering and saying, “Don’t go home,” the narrator supposes the ability of objects to speak; yet the objects, in the end, cannot speak and cannot radically alter the plot of the novel. And so Tulkinghorn, betrayed by the very objects that he had made to speak to him of their secrets, marches on to his death.

The painted Allegory on his ceiling becomes one of the more expressive objects of the novel, but even his expression is immensely complicated. When Tulkinghorn is shot, the Roman Allegory seems to point at his body. “For many years,” the narrator tells us, “the persistent Roman has been pointing, with no particular meaning, from that ceiling. It is not likely that he has any new meaning in him tonight” (750). Yet a “new meaning” can be assigned through the faculty of the imagination:

An excited imagination might suppose that there was something in [the other objects of the room] so terrific, as to drive the rest of the composition...stark mad. It happens surely, that everyone who comes into the darkened room and looks at these things, looks up at the Roman, and that he is invested in all eyes with mystery and awe, as if he were a paralysed dumb witness. (751-2)

The painted Roman is like Esther’s doll: it is as if he knows the secret of Tulkinghorn’s death, as if he could speak the secret. As Esther does with Dolly, the narrator gives Allegory the most humanlike qualities—to see and to speak—only to take them away. But here, what the narrator reinforces is not the object-nature of Allegory, but the objectification of the personification of Allegory: the Roman is not only a painted thing on the ceiling, but a “paralysed dumb witness,” a humanlike object that has lost its ability to move and speak. In such a move, Allegory becomes the allegory for narrative imagination: that is, if the objects are not actually personified or magical, they can still occupy the space of formal or narrative magic; if they cannot, in actuality, perform their own humanity, they can still be humanlike in the narrative and readerly

imagination. And being humanlike allows them to engage with humans in a particular way, providing sympathy for even the most unsympathetic characters like Tulkinghorn.

Bleak House, then, contains a series of harsh indictments of the objectifying and dehumanizing forces of the world, mitigated by the redemptive qualities of an imagination that can, if only partially, animate both humans and objects by providing them with the potential to narrate their feelings. Such an imagination must be fostered by paying very close attention to the mechanisms of enchantment inherent in fantasy and fairy tales. Dickens explicitly argues for the power of such enchantment in his *Household Words* article “Frauds on the Fairies,” in which he states, “a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun” (97). He gives Esther the ability, at the end of her narrative, to enter fully into this world by taking up residence in a dollhouse. Esther first comments on the wonderfully solicitous place that is the first Bleak House, saying, “If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand, and I had been a princess and her favoured god-child, I could not have been more considered in it” (571). Dickens, the good fairy, waved his wand so that Esther could end happily-ever-after in the “rustic cottage of doll’s rooms” that is the second Bleak House (962). In this dollhouse, Esther can occupy a space in which persons and things are unambiguously alive, recusing herself from the dehumanizing forces outside. While *Bleak House* extends the ambiguous status of dolls across the entire spectrum of humans and objects within the novel, *Villette*, as we will see in the next section, turns this ontological query ever inward through Lucy Snowe’s self-assessment. If the doll is half-dead in *Bleak House*, it is powerful for being half-alive in *Villette*.

Ghostly Dolls: Unearthly Surrogates in *Villette*

Charlotte Brontë's literature is full of uncanny dolls, as well. Her first great heroine, Jane Eyre, grows up with a doll with whom she has much of the same relationship as Esther Summerson with Dolly. The young orphan Jane has no one who loves her and no one she loves; the doll becomes a surrogate for a maternal, emotional relationship. She describes how, at her aunt's house, after the nurse leaves the nursery, she would turn to the doll as a safety mechanism and a companion:

I then sat with my doll on my knee till the fire got low, glancing round occasionally to make sure that nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room; and when the embers sank to a dull red, I undressed hastily, tugging at knots and strings as best as I might, and sought shelter from cold and darkness in my crib. To this crib I always took my doll; human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. It puzzles me now to remember with what absurd sincerity I doated on this little toy, half fancying it alive and capable of sensation. I could not sleep unless it was folded in my night-gown; and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise. (24)

Already we sense a complicated relationship between her and the doll. Like Esther, she cannot completely indulge in fantasy; as much as she pours her love into the doll, she could only "half fancy" its liveliness and ability to return the affection. At the same time, this half-fancying creates a muddled space where other things have the potential to come alive; Jane must make sure that "nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room," an anxiety that returns tenfold when later, at Thornfield Hall, the mysterious Bertha would haunt the attic.

In *Villette*, her last novel, Brontë revises the Cinderella-esque fairy tale that is *Jane Eyre*; rather than a governess who marries the master of the house, we have here a companion-turned-governess-turned teacher who was never a consideration for the hero of the novel, John Graham Bretton, and whose eventual love interest, M. Paul Emanuel, dies at sea. Lucy Snowe travels

from England to Labassecoeur, where she becomes witness to the lives of others, including Polly Home, her childhood companion, and Ginevra Fanshawe, her student. Lucy Snowe is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, “from first to last a woman *without*—outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health—and her story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written” (400). Drawing on their sense of Lucy as living a “buried life,” they find her to be constantly fighting against this deprivation: at times further withdrawing into herself, at times indulging in the voyeurism of those more fortunate.²⁶ Other critics have focused on her untrustworthiness as a narrator: that she will assert her self-control yet harshly and jealously judge others; that she will insist on her clear-headed-ness yet be consistently haunted by spirits and ghosts.²⁷ For the most part, criticism on *Villette* sees her complexity as a feminist effort to record a redundant woman struggling to find her place in a world that does not allow space for her; as Robert Newsom argues, “readers today tend to like Lucy’s anger and rebelliousness and distrust Esther’s restraint, coyness, and manipulation of those around her. Thus Brontë is traditionally regarded as a feminist heroine, while Dickens is usually thought of as celebrating the bourgeois family, an idea that many men as well as women have considered intrinsically oppressive to women” (69). While I see the validity of this distinction between Brontë and Dickens, and while *Villette* is certainly a most feminist work, I find much more alignment between *Bleak House* and *Villette* when we consider the figure of the doll, particularly the subject-object relationship that the doll symbolizes. The difference lies in span: while Dickens points out the objectifying tendencies of

²⁶ “The buried life” comes from a Matthew Arnold poem by that title, in which Arnold “laments the falseness of an existence divorced from the hidden self” (Gilbert and Gubar 401). Lucy, on the other hand, has no choice *but* to bury her life and keep it half-hidden, since she must repress herself in response to “a society cruelly indifferent to women” (401).

²⁷ See, for example, Joseph Litvak, who attributes Lucy’s perversity in narration to the material conditions of femininity, in which women must battle each other “in a game of silence and indirection” (474). Both Karen Lawrence and Ivan Kreilkamp also comment on Lucy’s inadequate disclosures and withheld utterances.

British institutions on just about every entity, human or object, Brontë focalizes on the objectification felt by Lucy Snowe herself, in her particular situation. And while Dickens demonstrates the potential narrative sympathies between his wide variety of objects, Brontë restricts narrative sympathy to that fostered by Lucy's personal imagination. Thus, while *Bleak House* demonstrates a teleology toward objectification, *Villette* recognizes an innate, potentially dangerous animation that the overactive imagination can instill in its objects.

In *Villette*, Brontë rewrites *Jane Eyre*'s relationship between the girl and her doll with a fundamental difference: there is no actual doll but instead a flesh-and-blood child, Polly. At the beginning of the story, Lucy Snowe is, like Jane Eyre and Esther Summerson, in a space of emotional and familial vulnerability. Lucy is undoubtedly orphaned or in a similar state, having no parents but some "kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence" (4). Every so often, she is taken in by Mrs. Bretton, her kindly godmother. There, she encounters little Paulina Home, or Polly, who appears to her like nothing so much as a doll. Polly, whose appearance is already ambiguous ("a person like a nurse-girl"), appears to Lucy thus:

The child advanced promptly. Relieved of her wrapping, she appeared exceedingly tiny; but was a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight, and straight. Seated on my godmother's ample lap, she looked a mere doll; her neck, delicate as wax, her head of silky curls, increased, I thought, the resemblance. (6)

Though she herself has no idea of her doll-like qualities, Polly seems to fight it from the start; she refuses to be held much longer in Mrs. Bretton's lap but instead insists on seating herself in a corner. Yet, despite this show of self-assurance and agency, Lucy reduces her back to a doll through her narration: "I observed her draw a square inch or two of pocket-handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt, and then I heard her weep" (6). Polly and Lucy seem to be

engaged in a curious battle of the wills; Polly insists on self-governance and the ability to be a “real” woman, but Lucy has the luxury of a first-person narration on her side.

And yet Polly’s doll-like nature does not signal her submission to an immobile, object-like status; if anything, she seems to be fulfilling Jane Eyre’s wish for her doll that it was “alive and capable of sensation.” She demonstrates, however, how a doll come alive is yet not the same thing as a human being. To Lucy, she embodies an in-between state:

She was not exactly naughty or willful: she was far from disobedient; but an object less conducive to comfort—to tranquility even—than she presented, it was scarcely possible to have before one’s eyes.... She seemed to be growing old and unearthly. I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination; but whenever, opening a door, I found her seated in a corner alone, her head in her pigmy hand, that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted. (10)

Polly’s behavior reveals her status not as a willful child but instead an intractable object. This object “haunts” the rooms, bringing forth the relationship between the uncanny doll and the ghost. Both occupy a similar position: as Barbara M. Benedict explains in “The Spirit of Things,” “Things and ghosts seem opposites: the first all material form, the second all immaterial spirit. Both things and ghosts, however, lie on the margins of form and formlessness, materiality and meaning” (19). In *Villette*, the natures of the doll and of the ghost are intermingled: Polly is a haunting doll, while later, as we will see, the figure of the nun provides a material ghost; both haunt in the corner of the eye or the room, and both remind Lucy of her own marginal position. Yet this combination of the material form and the immaterial spirit do not, surprisingly, make a whole human being; just so, Lucy can find herself a forgotten object at points and an invisible spirit at points, but no recourse from either.

Instead, she finds recourse in setting loose her idea of the ghost-doll, which *can* act in ways that Lucy herself finds impossible. If, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, Lucy has “bought

survival at the price of never existing” (400), she can more fully exist by animating other half-life creatures as her surrogates. She conjures the image of the ghostly doll in little Polly, who she then turns into a surrogate for herself. She watches as Polly enters into a romantic relationship with Graham that she herself cannot. Rather than expressing either her jealousy—not necessarily of Graham himself, but of not being considered a viable romantic partner—she turns Polly into a doll and therefore appropriates Polly’s fortune as her own. She treats Polly much as she would a regular doll: picking her up and carrying her around, speaking for her to Graham Bretton and his mother. Yet her attachment to Polly is not simply a vicarious appropriation of the more fortunate. Polly experiences, too, the difficulties that a tender soul faces in the world; if Lucy Snowe is unwilling to voice her own fears and dissatisfactions, she can express them in sympathy toward Polly. On Polly’s last night in the Bretton household, she sleeps in bed with Lucy, just as Jane Eyre sleeps with her doll, albeit Polly comes “like a small ghost gliding over the carpet” (30). Lucy holds little Polly in her arms: “She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. Thus tranquilized and cherished she at last slumbered” (30). As Polly sleeps, Lucy muses, “How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason, tell me are prepared for all flesh?” (30). These are the questions that Lucy might have been and should have been asking of herself. As a woman in the period, and as an orphan already reduced to shuttling between distant relatives, Lucy was already battling with life. Yet, even in her question, she is unwilling to admit to experiencing weakness or misfortune. She finds the “shocks and repulses, humiliations and desolations” through “books, and my own reason,” rather than through experience. And by warming, soothing, and cherishing Polly, she can give Polly the love that she herself so sorely lacks.

Thus, by the faculty of the imagination and of sympathetic projection, Lucy can, through the figure of Polly-as-doll, be in touch with her own displaced anxieties and sorrows. Moreover, she admits to Polly's ability to act and to feel pain, despite the dollness that presumably reduces her to an object. As Lucy watches Polly embroider, for example, she gives the following description:

When I say child I use an inappropriate and undescriptive term—a term suggesting any picture rather than that of the demure little person in a mourning frock and white chemisette, that might just have fitted a good-sized doll—perched now on a high chair beside a stand, whereon was her toy work-box of white varnished wood, and holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem, and at which she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon—swerving from her control—inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly. (13)

In this passage, we see the tensions surrounding the figure of the doll I addressed earlier in the chapter. Like the automaton in “The Sandman” or de Morgan’s toy princess, Polly as doll fulfills the “womanly” qualities of demureness and domesticity inherent in the figure of the doll. At the same time, like the dolls of the *it*-narrative, her thingness does not foreclose her ability to be sensitive to pain, even if that pain is somewhat self-inflicted. The image of the “perverse weapon...inflicting a deeper stab than usual” might well mirror the various dropping, tearing, burning, and cracking that the *it*-narrative dolls experience. Polly as doll is able to take on the affective dimensions that Lucy cannot. Gilbert and Gubar conclude that, although Lucy is often silent, “when she does speak out, her voice retreats from the perils of self-definition behind sarcasm and irony” (418), pointing to the moment in the novel when Lucy claims, “But if I feel, may I *never* express? ... Never!” (216). Whereas Gilbert and Gubar calls Lucy a voyeur with other characters (418), I see her relationship to Polly as one of surrogacy or ventriloquism. Rather than watching Polly and internalizing her actions and emotions, Lucy projects her own

affect onto her. She does so by making Polly into a ghostly doll. She has the ability to do so by virtue of her untrustworthy first-person narration, which allows her to practice imaginative agency.

Indeed, Lucy's imagination is one of the main bones of contention in her self-identity. When she first identifies Polly as an unearthly, haunting spirit, she claims to be free of an "overheated and discursive imagination," yet mentions of spirits, ghosts, and fairies pepper her narrative. Lucy is constantly negotiating with her imagination, adjusting her impressions with an eye toward rationality. She travels to the village of Villette in Labassecour in order to find a position and is hired by Mme Beck's school. When Mme Beck suddenly appears at her elbow, Lucy recollects, "No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, a wrapping-gown, and a clean, trim nightcap" (58-9). Though she quickly dispenses with the image of the ghost, it is the first impression in the reader's mind; moreover, her declaration of "no ghost" would come back to haunt her in several ways: Mme Beck and her cousin and fellow-teacher Paul Emanuel engage in surveillance, silent as ghosts, which Lucy herself emulates at the school; moreover, she is haunted by a nun's ghost. If anything, Lucy has an overactive imagination, which helps her to be able to fabricate a narrative that allows for the overanimation of things that, like dolls and ghosts, should remain dead.

One such moment arises when, after a serious illness, Lucy awakes to find herself in the home of the Brettons, who had also moved to Labassecour. At the beginning of her illness, she sees the beds in the dormitory as "spectres—the coronal of each became a death's head, huge and sun-bleached—dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eyeholes" (148-9). After she wanders outside the school and faints outside a church, she

awakes in what appears to be “the drawing-room of [her] godmother’s house at Bretton.” She imagines herself to be “Bedreddin Hassan, transported in his sleep from Cairo to the gates of Damascus” and questions, “Had a genius stooped his dark wing down the storm to whose stress I had succumbed, and gathering me from the church-steps, and ‘rising high into the air,’ as the eastern tale said, had he borne me over land and ocean, and laid me quietly down beside a hearth of Old England?” (157) The story of Bedreddin Hassan from *The Arabian Nights* tells of Hassan, a beautiful youth, who is carried by a genie and a fairy to the arms of a beautiful princess, who was doomed to marry an ugly, crippled man. After Hassan and the Princess fall in love with each other, Hassan is carried away from the princess to the gates of Damascus. Lucy’s allusion to this story at this moment speaks not only to her surprise at waking up in a strange land, but also to a tacit desire that she might be carried back to Bretton to become the deserving mate of Graham. At the same time, the story makes her conscious of humans as merely the toy play-things of genies, fairies, and fate itself—an idea that comes back in force at the end of the novel, when her lover is indeed carried away to his death by a storm.

The exotic *Arabian Nights* fantasy is coupled with a deeply domestic one. As Lucy looks around the room, she sees all the familiar objects of her godmother’s house at Bretton. She is “obliged to know” and “compelled to recognize and hail” the chairs, mirrors, drapery, porcelain, and other furniture and decorations of her childhood. To Lucy, these objects “could not be real, solid arm-chairs, looking-glasses, and washstands—they must be the ghosts of such articles” (158) that have exited their physical bodies and come to haunt her in spectral form. The ghosts of things find kinship with Lucy’s understanding of her own separable soul; she muses that, during her illness, her own soul must have traveled elsewhere:

Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night she kept her own secret;

never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling imagination by an indissoluble silence. . . . I know she re-entered her prison with pain, with reluctance, with a moan and a long shiver. The divorced mates, Spirit and Substance, were hard to re-unite: they greeted each other, not in an embrace, but a racking sort of struggle. (155)

Like the dolls of *it*-narratives, like Esther's Dolly, Lucy's soul keeps "her own secret" of what she witnesses. Moreover, the soul keeps secret its narrative from Lucy herself, describing the limits of what can be accessed from the projected other; if a girl can imagine the doll knows unspoken things, she must also come to terms with the fact that the doll will not share those things. Like Esther, Lucy keeps secrets from the reader, but her secrets are entwined with an echoing series of secrets, not all her own. While she keeps her knowledge that Dr. John is in fact Graham Bretton from the reader for a full nine chapters, she receives the same treatment from Polly, who had recognized Lucy for weeks before she revealed her identity. Moreover, Polly, who had been cast as a doll at the beginning of her story, adamantly maintains this characterization when she returns: she has not grown much in stature, and she reminds Esther of their doll-play: "you have forgotten then that I have sat on your knee, been lifted in your arms, even shared your pillow?" (258). Polly's uncanny return, as well as her secret recognition of Esther, speaks to the lasting power of the imagination. Where once Lucy had projected onto Polly by turning her into an unearthly doll, that doll, like the dolls of the *it*-narratives, can go on to have its own adventure. This adventure, moreover—Polly's rise in class and romantic marriage plot—is a fairy tale that Esther can fantasize about but cannot, ultimately, make her own.

The happy domestic life of Polly, like the happy domestic life at the end of Esther Summerson's story, provides a sharp counterpoint to Lucy's dark and powerful dissatisfactions. Kept apart from Polly's fairy tale narrative, Lucy engages in a darker fantasy; in this version, it is

no longer the unearthly doll that is Polly who will become her surrogate actor, but the unearthly ghost that is the nun. Like the sorcerer's apprentice who loses control of the broom he himself enchanted, Lucy must negotiate her summoning of the ghost with the ghost's harmful potential. At first, Lucy opens herself up to be haunted, despite denying an overactive, discursive imagination. She explains at her arrival at Mme Beck's pensionnat that the dormitories had once been nuns' cells (62). A bit later, she describes how the house has "[inherited] a ghost-story. A vague tale went of a black and white nun, sometimes, on some night or nights of the year, seen in some part of this vicinage" (98). Lucy's situation prevents her from inheriting any real property, so she must take part in the inheritance of a ghost story—even if vicariously, for she has no real right to that inheritance, either. But more and more, this summoned ghost nun keeps Lucy apart from whatever little joys that actually belong to her. The nun comes, for example, when Lucy receives a letter from Graham that, to her, is a "fairy gift" (226); it comes again when she buries Graham's letters, at once renouncing her romantic interest and keeping that interest her particular secret. The ghost comes for a third time when she walks with M. Paul Emanuel intimately in the garden groves. Like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, the ghost appears both to be a projection of Lucy's internal struggles and a horrific intrusion that keeps her away from her heart's desires.

What would otherwise remain a ghost story that signifies repressed feelings in the gothic genre turns into a dark fairy tale when Lucy discovers the tale of the real dead nun, Justine Marie. She learns that Justine Marie had been the love interest of M. Paul, before circumstances ripped them apart, causing Justine Marie to enter into a convent until her untimely death. The events and descriptions surrounding Lucy's discovery of these facts are recast as a series of fairy tales. Like Little Red Riding Hood she is tasked with taking a basket of food to Madame

Walravens, who is Justine Marie's grandmother. As she lays eyes on Madame Walravens for the first time, Lucy recounts,

Hoar enchantment here prevailed; a spell had opened for me elf-land—that cell-like room, that vanishing picture, that arch and passage, and stairs of stone, were all parts of a fairy tale. Distincter even than these scenic details stood the chief figure—Cunegonde, the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy. (366)

Here, Lucy experiences a dark reversal from the beginning of her narrative. Her own cheery godmother, Mrs. Bretton, is replaced by the evil fairy; unearthly, ghostly little Polly is taken over by the ghostly nun that is Justine Marie. While she is barred from a romantic ending with Graham by the reappearance of Polly, here the nun threatens to cut her off from M. Paul. Unbeknownst to her, the nun she sees in the pensionnat is not Justine Marie's ghost but Alfred de Hamal, Ginevra Fanshawe's suitor who dresses "as trim as a doll" and whom Lucy had once denounced to Graham as "The doll—the puppet—the manikin—the poor inferior creature!" (136-7). While, presumably, Lucy herself does not know this until the very end of the novel, these connections allow us again to align the fairy story of the ghostly doll and the fairy story of the ghostly nun.

Lucy must navigate between doll-surrogacy and ghost-haunting, between a bright fairy tale to which she has no access and a dark fairy tale that seems to foretell her doomed future. She does so, I argue, in the opium-induced sleepwalking scene at the end of the novel. Mme Beck doses her with opium in order to keep her away from the festival, but this opium has an effect opposite from what was intended: "Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought—to reverie peculiar in colouring" (422). Having lived for so long through the dolls and ghosts that were other women, Lucy, under the spell of opium, becomes a doll infused with life and a ghost returned to life: "I became alive." While she still cannot possess herself nor govern her fate entirely, she can momentarily become a living doll; the "magic" of the festival takes her

to “a land of enchantment” (424), where such an ontological state is possible. Here, she sees the “endearment of Dr. John and Paulina” (438) and finally renounces Graham; she learns that Justine Marie is alive, still entangled romantically with M. Paul, and therefore “certainly not my nun” (435). Powered by her a drugged excitement that makes the world into a fairy tale, Lucy even “defie[s] spectra” (440): she sees the nun once again in her bed and shakes her loose, back into her material composition of garments, and destroys the possibility of that ghost. In this sequence, Lucy’s series of renunciations, by process of elimination, finally allows her to become a surrogate for herself: in a strange twist on possessive individualism, she becomes possessed of her own self, albeit a self that is defined by her renunciations. She can delight in the “Freedom and Renovation which I won on the fête-night” (448) in this process.

If, for Esther Summerson, a happily-ever-after inside a dollhouse signifies the resolution of her familial and romantic plots, Lucy ends in a dollhouse where the ultimate lack of resolution is kept at bay. Here, she can remain in a mode of suspended animation. Elisha Cohn, in “Still Life: Suspended Animation in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*,” has argued that a state of suspended animation allows Lucy to take a stand against the modes of engagement that Victorian moral philosophers put forth. For Cohn, however, suspended animation means a lack of attention that paradoxically allows for the passing of social scenes before her eyes. I propose that Lucy engages in a different mode of suspended animation, one that comes close to the dolls of it-narrators; Lucy does pay attention and is deeply, emotionally involved with the others around her, to the point of living her life partially through theirs. The suspension of her animation is a literal one: though she can animate things imaginatively in her own mind, she cannot actively participate in the actualities of the world in front of her eyes. When, at the end of her story, she takes up residence in the school of tiny rooms filled with a “diminutive” set of earthenware and a

little stove and oven, all of which is “very tiny ... but very pretty” (453-4), she enters into a world where the pseudo-animation of her buried life can be kept in their paces. Thus, though plot-wise, her ending seems much less of a resolution than Esther’s, the two share in their doll houses the enchantment of things that do battle against the constraints of the outside world.

In this chapter, I have traced the pseudo-animation of dolls through a variety of genres. The fairy tales of Hoffmann and de Morgan, somewhat paradoxically, limit the doll figure by turning them into satires of ideal femininity; these dolls, while they could talk and move, did not contain any spark of the soul that would make them into real humans. Conversely, the physically powerless dolls of the it-narrative genre are accorded a great animating spirit in their ability to feel love and pain and to narrate those feelings. These two modes of animating dolls come to a head in the novels of Dickens and Brontë, in which the first-person narrators fight the dehumanizing forces of the world by animating their dolls and, by proxy, themselves. *Bleak House* extends this ontological conflict outward to generate sympathy in the dehumanized and inactive persons and things everywhere, while *Villette* turns it inward to allow Lucy Snowe to navigate how to live her own half-animated life. The figure of the doll, always already anthropomorphic, provides an apt object to think through characters and their narratives. In the next chapter, we will turn to diamonds, which are magical in a wholly different way. While dolls are personified but often powerless, diamonds are never anthropomorphized but always dangerously powerful.

CHAPTER III

NEEDING A DARK HISTORY: MAGIC DIAMONDS AND PLOTS OF IMPERIALISM

The British Crown Jewels inside the Tower of London displays a myriad of ceremonial objects collected since the fourteenth century. One walks into a darkened entryway lined in purple and velvet before pacing through room after room of glittering scepters, robes, plates, and jewelry. In the very last room sit the most precious items of the collection, including Queen Elizabeth II's crown—and at the



Figure 6. The Koh-i-Noor Diamond. Courtesy of the Official Website of the British Monarchy.

center of it, the Koh-i-Noor diamond, or “the Mountain of Light” (Figure 6). The Koh-i-Noor, one of the largest diamonds in the world when it entered British possession the middle of the nineteenth century, is still one of Britain's most famous and most precious diamonds. Its presentation in the room is curious, however: unlike the objects in previous rooms, the Koh-i-Noor and the crown are set beside a moving walkway, presumably to prevent visitors from stopping in their tracks to gaze at it and crowding the exhibition space. The moving walkway radically alters the visitor's experience of the Koh-i-Noor, diametrically opposing its first presentation to the British public at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Then, visitors could and did congregate around the diamond to gaze upon it, enough to become—as I will discuss later—somewhat disappointed in its appearance. Our modern moving walkway, on the other hand, creates an unending enchantment with the Koh-i-Noor that could never be disappointed. By physically and spatially preventing visitors from stopping to gaze at the diamond, the walkway

makes an assumption that the diamond could, and would, entrance its viewers. The visitor moves past the diamond again and again, unable to be fascinated to the point of immobility, yet always with the idea that that fascination is the untested potential of the diamond. In other words, by installing a moving walkway—which itself was the kind of technological magic the Victorians loved—the designers behind the Crown Jewels collection reveal our persistent investment in the enchanting quality of diamonds.²⁸

In this chapter, I trace that enchantment through texts about treasure diamonds, both real and fictional. The Koh-i-Noor's history, from its Indian origin to its entry into the British Empire in 1849 and beyond, typifies a specific kind of narrative about the diamond: as a treasure, immensely desired yet unable to be mastered, the diamond accrues agency in its perpetual movement, one that the Crown Jewels' moving walkway replicates, albeit in reverse. The Koh-i-Noor is what we might call a "treasure diamond," and treasure diamonds differ from ordinary jewelry diamonds. Ordinary diamonds that might be used as jewelry have a sentimental and fiscal value, one that might be the telos of the treasure diamond, but which the treasure diamond can never fulfill. By contrast, the treasure diamond incites desires for discovery, ownership, and fungibility, but these desires can only be fulfilled by illegitimate circulation, like plunder and theft. The treasure diamond becomes a sort of idol that requires homage of great sacrifice and spilled blood. While their worship resulted in large part from their rarity, the discovery of the diamond mines in Kimberley in 1866 threatened to make diamonds into commodities both common and mundane. I argue that subsequent literature of the romantic genres—Wilkie Collins's 1868 sensation novel *The Moonstone*, Arthur Conan Doyle's 1890 detective novel *The Sign of the Four*, and Henry Rider Haggard's 1885 imperial romance *King Solomon's Mines*—

²⁸ In fact, the moving walkway around the Koh-i-Noor replicates some great Victorian technological fantasies. Joseph Paxton, who designed the Crystal Palace, also envisioned what he called "The Great Victorian Way," which was a glass-covered loop of streets, railways, shops, and houses around London ("Minutes of Evidence").

were responding to this anxiety about the mundane, common by making the diamond the primary activators of plot. The story of each novel is motivated and pushed forward by the diamond's power to inspire an unfulfillable desire.

The fact that diamonds stand for aspects of plot has been recognized by other critics of Victorian literature. Stephanie Markovits, in "Form Things: Looking at Genre through Victorian Diamonds," for example, argues that, in *The Moonstone*, "the geographical movements of the Moonstone dictate the arc of plot" (606). Markovits' larger argument deals with the materiality of the diamond and how its multifaceted crystalline form enables it to represent different facets of literature, both plot and character, both lyric and prose. My argument, on the other hand, explores how the movement of the diamond drives the movement of the plot. I contend that diamonds, although beautiful and glittering objects on their own, acquire less tangible qualities on the basis of its rarity. Before the discovery of the South African mines, diamonds came primarily from India in very low quantities, a fact that Victorian scholars of diamonds, as I will show below, were well aware of. As such, the diamonds that were circulating throughout the first half of the nineteenth century were for the most part known quantities that had long histories rather than new materials freshly unearthed. Their desirability, then, possessed a tautological quality: stories were told about them because they were rare objects, and they were made even rarer, more desirable objects because of the stories told about them. This tautological desire is one that is practiced over and over again in the texts of this chapter, even—and especially—after the discovery of the South African mines, a recurrence that speaks to the great hold that diamonds had on the imagination. As well, the drive to narrate the history of diamonds arises from the desire for enchantment, for folkloric storytelling that is capable of making objects both special and magical. In the diamond history books, the rhetoric surrounding the Koh-i-Noor, and

the novels I analyze, the diamonds are rarely desirable in and of themselves; they are almost always accompanied by an oftentimes-mythical history. In addition, the novels of this chapter present British folklore alongside the diamond's often exotic past, implying the origin of their characters' fascination with diamonds not as an importation of the exotic but as participating in a native, British enchanted imagination.

The treasure diamond represents an entirely different drive from the jewelry diamond that appears in the realist novels of the period. As John Plotz and Jean Arnold have pointed out, the jewelry diamonds in Victorian literature are, more often than not, representational rather than narrational. Arnold, in *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture*, sets out her goal as gaining “insights into values, attitudes, and beliefs circulating in the culture” that can be gleaned from the practice of wearing jewelry (4). Plotz, in *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008), notes that the diamond in Victorian literature encapsulates the division between “pure sentiment” and “pure cash” but ultimately embodies both (31-2). In the hands of realist heroines, from Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* to Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* to Lizzie Eustace in *The Eustace Diamonds*, the diamond functions as cash value—representing class, wealth, and social systems—and as sentimental value—representing vanity, morality, and interpersonal relationships, especially within families and marriages.²⁹ While, as in the case of *The Eustace Diamonds*, the threat of the loss of the diamonds arises throughout the novel, the battle over the diamonds speaks to the property rights of a widow and therefore the larger institutions of marriage and gender relations.

²⁹ In *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen is forced to wear diamonds that Grandcourt had previously given to his mistress Lydia. There are diamonds all over *Vanity Fair*, signifying the wealth of the upper-class characters; Becky Sharp must steal hers, hiding their source from her husband, in order to be among the rich women she envies. And in *The Eustace Diamonds*, Lizzie Eustace fights to keep a diamond necklace, which she claims to have been a gift from her late husband but in which she only has a life interest.

The diamonds in this chapter—the Moonstone, the great Agra treasure, and the diamonds in King Solomon’s mine—are of a different breed. Their *raison d’être* is not the realist representation of character but rather the romance plotting of their movement. This active potential of treasure diamonds is not always divorced from the sentimental potential of jewelry diamonds; in *The Moonstone*, for example, the gemstone is possessed and worn for one brief moment by Rachel Verinder, the heroine of the story. On Rachel’s breast, the diamond can stand for her eroticized body and her imminent entry into the marriage market, but elsewhere in the novel, the diamond conjures a dark, insatiable desire; the split identity of the diamond speaks to the liminal position that the sensation novel holds between realism and romance. For the (mostly male) characters who participate in the romantic plots of the novel—adventure, detection, treasure-hunting—the diamond never arrives in hand, or on breast, to become the sentimental valuables that they are in the realist novel. What fuels these other plots, then, is not the owning or wearing of these diamonds, but the inexhaustible desire that comes from perpetually keeping acquisition at bay. In this way, these diamonds’ movement becomes, in Arjun Appadurai’s words, a sort of “tournament of value.” In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai explains the tournament of value as “complex period of events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life” (21), during which persons battle for things using value systems other than purchasing power. The ways in which treasure diamonds are said to exchange hands, time again, take them away from the commodity market: they are not bought and sold, but gifted, stolen, plundered, and discovered. Because they disrupt straightforward economic possession, the terms of their ownership are short and shaky at best. The moving walkway next to the Koh-i-Noor becomes an ingenious representation of this kind of shaky possession: each visitor can, for the briefest of moments, stand directly in front of the

diamond and imagine himself as the sole possessor, but he does so with the knowledge that the walkway is an inexorable current that will never let this moment stand.

At the same time, these diamonds are not set apart from the economics of fiscal value. However, that value is imbricated with their mythical narratives rather than the actual market of commodities. They are treasures from the first, to be plundered and stolen, never to be a part of the legal or economic systems of England. And as treasures, their value is absolutely inseparable from their monetary worth, for the characters cannot help but meditate on the great value of their treasure trove. In other words, what makes the treasure diamond so desirable is precisely its cash value, the sum of which makes its bearer imagine that the diamond can grant all his wishes. Yet the diamond seems enchanted only insofar as it retains this potential liquidity, not when it fulfills that potential; the gem itself is much more glorious than its cash value, translated into so many pieces of coin or bread in the hand. Thus the diamond, like Aladdin's lamp, contains the potential for massive wealth but, unlike Aladdin's lamp, cannot realize that wealth. We see this interplay in H. G. Wells's short story "The Diamond Maker" (1894), in which a scientist, who has devised a way to make his own diamonds by an explosive apparatus, finds difficulty selling off his home-made gems. The narrator runs into the scientist, whom he assumes to be a pauper at first, panhandling a diamond as large as his thumb for only a hundred pounds. "A diamond that size," the narrator recalls, "conjured up a vision of many thousands of pounds. Then, thought I, such a stone could scarcely exist without being mentioned in every book on gems" (128). The key here is the diamond's ability to "conjure" visions of immense wealth, like a magician or a genie. Considering the diamond's intrinsic uselessness—it is not malleable like gold, and its only use is to cut other, less adamant materials like glass—the gemstone's ability to conjure wealth does indeed seem magical. Moreover, it is not any diamond that can equal the wealth it conjures;

the scientist's diamonds are absolutely worthless because he cannot situate them in the "books on gems," analogous to the South African diamonds that, while plentiful, also had no history. A true diamond, Wells's story implies, requires a narrative around it, like a certification of its provenance. The diamond's great value must be rhetorically established in literary texts and in these "books on gems."

Even within these books, the diamond's worth is inherited historically, since it accrues by citing older narratives. A great number of volumes were published in the second half of the nineteenth century about jewels in general and diamonds in particular. The majority of these volumes inevitably trace the history of gemstones, individually and collectively, back to "the ancients." In *The Great Diamonds of the World* (1882), for example, Edwin Streeter begins with a chapter on "the diamond in history," starting with the Greek etymology of the diamond as "untamable" (25). The rest of the chapter names the various diamond collectors throughout the ages, from Indian princes to Portuguese sovereigns, as if to reaffirm the diamond's desirability through time. John Murray's *A Memoir on the Diamond: Including Its Economical and Political History* (1831) begins by asserting that "the diamond seems to have been known from the most remote period of antiquity" (13). Similarly, Harry Emanuel's *Diamonds and Precious Stones* (1865) claims that "the origin of the taste for gems is lost in the most remote ages" (21), naming almost all of the ancient civilizations, from the Egyptians to the Incas. These volumes include quantitative accounts of the diamonds, of their weight, shape, and clarity. But these quantitative descriptions are not enough to establish *why* those diamonds were so expensive. Rather, the diamonds in these texts gain much of their worth through the "romantic element" about them, the "strange intrigues and disastrous wars" that engineer their mystique (Emanuel 31-2).

The diamonds of these books are interesting because of their bloody history; Victorian writers also came to reverse that causation, ascribing mystical powers to diamonds to inspire war, plunder, murder, and theft. In other words, diamond narratives, by virtue of recounting the various illegitimate transactions that surrounded the diamond, made the diamond itself seem responsible for these transactions. In “The Diamond Necklace” (1833), in which he recounts the events surrounding a necklace commissioned for Marie Antoinette, Thomas Carlyle wonders about the histories of the various stones in the necklace: “How they had... by fortune of war and theft, been knocked out; and exchanged among camp-suttlers for a little spirituous liquor, and bought by Jews, and worn as signets on the fingers of tawny or white majesties; and again been lost, with the fingers too, and perhaps life ... in old-forgotten glorious victories” (92). In *Great Diamonds of the World*, Streeter turns this “fortune of war and theft” into the power of the diamond itself:

A symbol of power, the diamond has been a talisman of not less influence in the East than the very gods whose temples it has adorned. It has been a factor in tragedies innumerable, supplying the motives of war and rapine, setting father against son, blurring the fair image of virtue, making life a curse where it had been a blessing, and adding new terrors to death... It is as if the diamond needed, even in history, a dark background to show up its strangely fascinating hues. (ix-x)

Streeter, a preeminent dealer in jewelry, is wholly invested in the diamond’s curse-like nature. He recognizes the exceptional nature of the diamond in “supplying the motives” for all manner of bloody historical events, and attributes this power to the diamond’s needs; the diamond appears as a vain and vengeful entity, manufacturing dark history to better show off its own glory.

Such romanticized notions of the diamonds’ power came to have real political signification in the case of one particular gem. The Koh-i-Noor diamond became part of

Victoria's crown in 1853, nested among more than two thousand smaller diamonds. Its large size and long history made it even more special. As Streeter tells his readers, "Diamonds of large size have always been extremely rare, even in India itself" (28); the Koh-i-Noor, when it entered England, just about doubled the weight of the largest stones in circulation in Europe (29). Moreover, the Indian princes "seem in all ages to have either reserved to themselves, or at least prohibited the exportation of stones beyond a certain weight" (27). It was doubly important for the sake of British imperial rule, then, to recount the Koh-i-Noor's long history, since Britain, by its plunder of the gemstone, could at once override the Indian princes' withholding of large diamonds and announce its superiority over all the other plundered (and plundering) cultures in the diamond's history. By the time India officially became a part of the British Empire, the Koh-i-Noor had been in British possession for almost a decade. Streeter recounts its long and tortuous path to England. Since 1304, it had been the plunder or tribute of one empire or another, and "history seems never to have lost sight of this stone of fate from the days when Ala-ed-din took it from the Rajah of Malwa, five centuries and a half ago, to the day when it became a crown jewel of England" (119). For Streeter, his narration of these events is just as important as the diamond that is his subject; in a footnote to his chapter on the Koh-i-noor, he lets the reader know that Queen Victoria had read his manuscript, and while "This does not, of course, pledge Her Majesty to an endorsement of the facts ... it is, to some extent, an added guarantee of the correctness of our researches, and it gives a lustre to our work, for which we are loyally grateful" (116). The "lustre" of Streeter's history reflects the brilliance of the diamond itself, further reinforcing the need that the "Great Diamond of history and romance" (116) has for the narration of this history and romance. The diamond and the text mutually constitute the luster of each other.

That history, which involves a series of conquests, gives the Koh-i-Noor its powerful lore. As Ian Balfour summarizes in *Famous Diamonds* (1968), “It has been said that whoever owned the Koh-i-Noor ruled the world” (164). When Lord Dalhousie, then Governor-General of India, first presented the diamond to Victoria in 1850, he gave this legend of power to her alongside it. In a letter telling her of the provenance of the Koh-i-Noor, Dalhousie recounts the narrative of Fugueer-ood-deen, who had taken the gem from Shah Sooja, the ruler of Persia. When the Shah is asked of the diamond’s value, he replies that it was “good fortune; for whoever possessed it had conquered their enemies” (ii. 287). The Shah’s reply here assigns magic to the Koh-i-Noor; because the diamond has a history of being confiscated along with conquered land, it now has the power of those conquerors and becomes a talisman for the conquering and ruling of land. The magic of the diamond is crystallized in Dalhousie’s letter when he transfers those powers unto Victoria via the diamond. In the last line of his letter, Dalhousie “very respectfully and earnestly trusts that your Majesty, in your possession of the Koh-i-Noor, may ever continue to realize its value as estimated by Shah Sooja” (Benson and Esher ii. 287). Even though Dalhousie’s words are ceremonial and courteous—hardly meant to be taken literally—they suggest the symbolic value of the gift. The Koh-i-Noor is valuable because of the “‘uncannie’ powers [sic]” (Streeter 135) it seems to possess.

Even after the initial presentation of the Koh-i-Noor, its status among Victoria’s possession and its power-to-rule were reiterated whenever a major event changed India’s status within the British Empire. In 1876, when Victoria officially became Empress of India—though it had already been mounted on her crown for over two decades—the Koh-i-Noor was formally re-presented to her, affirming “by her possession of the jewel, her sovereignty over India”

(Rappaport 231).³⁰ Earlier, in 1858, when India officially became part of the British Empire in the wake of the uprising of 1857, Victoria's own rhetoric hints at the ever-present, ever-powerful nature of the jewel. In describing India to Viscount Canning, then Governor-General, Victoria calls India "so bright a jewel of her Crown" (iii. 389). Whether she was consciously thinking of the largest diamond on her tiara or not, the now-familiar epithet nevertheless conjures images of the Koh-i-noor. Moreover, Victoria's phrase unwittingly echoes the diamond's own personified desire in an 1851 *Punch* satire to be "regularly installed as the brightest jewel of the British Crown" ("A Voice" 254). The diamond becomes a much more integral part of Victoria's imperial reign when we recognize the alignment of three rhetorical systems around it: the literal placement of the diamond in the crown, the symbolic retellings of the diamond's conquering magic, and the metaphorical description of India as "the brightest jewel" in the British empire.

As Wells's short story suggests, however, a diamond, in and of itself—without such rhetoric surrounding it—risks not being very valuable. Indeed, when most people encountered the Koh-i-Noor, they saw it merely as "a bit of glass" (Smith, qtd in Howarth 129) and hardly as big as "o bo o coblur's wax ur o kidney potato" (Howarth 140-1). Most of the visitors to the Crystal Palace, where the diamond was presented as the centerpiece of the British section, were fairly disappointed with the appearance of the diamond. Richard Hengist Horne confesses in a *Household Words* article that, "like everybody else, I was strikingly disappointed by the appearance of the Koh-i-Noor. My imagination had portrayed something a million times more dazzling" (437). Horne's sentiments echo those of many visitors to the Crystal Palace, who had

³⁰ Rappaport's encyclopedic account gives but short descriptions of the diamond in Victoria's possession. The rest of the entry on the diamond exquisitely narrates the other side of the story: Duleep Singh, the "boy-king of the Sikhs" who had surrendered the diamond to the British, had a curiously familial yet combative relationship with Victoria, torn between personal attachment and anger about his lost empire (229-30).

conjured up a glorious gem in their minds to which the real object failed to live up.³¹ His narrative foregrounds the role of the imagination in the diamond's circulation, for the diamond's enchanting qualities could exist only in the imaginative realm. Indeed, in one *Punch* story, it is only by reinserting the diamond into a fantastical narrative—*The Arabian Nights*—that a character could envision her relationship to it. In a letter to her bosom friend about “hunting” Prince Albert at the Exhibition, Mrs. Fitzpuss of Baker Street writes,

ever since the 1st of May, I've driven directly after early breakfast to the Palace of that great Jin [sic], Paxton, in Hyde Park, where for hours I've done nothing but think myself a great Princess of the Arabian Nights, with the Koh-i-noor my own property, whenever I liked to wear it. (XX: 222)

Only by surrounding it with a set of fairy tales about jinns and princesses can the diamond become such an object of desire for Mrs. Fitzpuss. The diamond's worth can only be reinforced rhetorically, like the Emperor's new clothes. As we saw in the first chapter, *The Arabian Nights* presented an opportunity for people to magically take possession of objects around them: as Tenniel's cartoon represented Victoria's possession of India by way of the Indian crown, so Mrs. Fitzpuss can imagine her possession of a royal status by way of the Koh-i-noor.

The gendered side of diamond possession comes into play when we recognize that Mrs. Fitzpuss's greatest desire is to wear the diamond instead of merely owning it. While some men did wear small items like tiepins and rings in the Victorian period, jewelry was considered a woman's fashion item (Hinks 73). When a woman wears a piece of jewelry, as Georg Simmel has argued in *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, the gemstone “carries the social significance of adornment—the being-for-the-other that returns to it as an expansion of the subject's sphere of significance” (335). In other words, a piece of diamond on a woman's breast carries within it all the ideas about standing and style agreed upon by society. Thus a

³¹ The 1851 volumes of *Punch* magazine magnify the diamond's dullness, including a number of articles that call it “a hoax,” an “enormous sham,” and “the grea'est humbug going” (XX: 254, XXI: 57, 94).

female character's struggles with possessing diamonds tend to work within and against social conventions rather than outside of it. For example, Lizzie Eustace's struggle to hold on to her diamonds activates a specifically gendered question of a widow's right to property, "in conflict with the nineteenth-century legal convention concerning married women and involving the principle of *couverture*, in which the husband owns and controls all of a married couple's property" (Arnold 128). The fantasy plots of this chapter would function very differently had Rachel Verinder or Mary Morstan retained ownership of their jewels. As it is, I focus on the diamond as treasure, which is largely a masculine object of desire. This representation of diamonds exists largely in plot-heavy, adventure-based genres, which tend to feature male protagonists, whereas the realist novels dealing with diamonds tend to put them in the hands of female protagonists. Much of the literature about treasure, especially Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, deals with the adventure story as a boy's narrative. Citing critics from Henry James to G. K. Chesterton, Hayden Ward reiterates how *Treasure Island* is "a boy's story, told with a constant eye on a boy's imagination and desires" (Daiches, qtd. in Ward 304). When authors like Henry Rider Haggard and Arthur Conan Doyle wrote their adventure novels featuring adult male protagonists, they nevertheless tapped into "an ideal of boyishness that never faded," an ideal that embodies imperial discovery and conquest (Deane 689-90).³² Broadly speaking, we might describe the diamond of the realist genre as feminine jewelry, to be worn to in order to represent character traits, and the diamond of the romantic genre as masculine treasure, to be pursued to in order to activate plot elements.

Moreover, these treasures remain outside of both legal and economic systems until they are taken possession of by the male protagonists, which is a rare occurrence in the novels I

³² Both Haggard and Conan Doyle read and admired *Treasure Island*; they and Kipling, another of the great adventure romance writers, all *literally* belonged to the "boy's club," the Savile (Fraser 1).

discuss. Certainly, at least in the characters' imaginations, their treasure diamonds do participate in the system of economic valuation. They have monetary values attached to them from the outset: the Moonstone is worth twenty thousand pounds, the great Agra treasure a few hundred thousands, and the diamonds in Solomon's mines, millions. It is tempting to see these diamonds as commodity fetishes, because they seem to be the reified apparitions of their value.³³ In *Diamonds and Precious Stones* (1867), Harry Emanuel even understands the various jewels in the British empire as an "immense amount of capital...all representing a money value" (xi). But the novelistic diamonds I engage with are not normal commodities, insofar as they are not objects of regular exchange that form the basis of commodity culture. They have all the outward appearances of their commodity cousins—the jewels that do appear in real stores and realist novels—by virtue of the monetary value assigned to them, which originate from the same market. But as soon as we begin to trace their path in earnest, these treasure diamonds begin to deviate from the commodity market. Their provenance is theft and plunder, by which their authors—especially Wilkie Collins—have been credited with criticizing the British imperial project. Even apart from that, these treasure diamonds are absent from the market because they are, in fact, absent from the novels altogether. Each of the treasures appears for the span of a few pages, if at all. Most of their power comes precisely from drawing the characters to want to find them by virtue of their absence.

The desire for discovery necessitates that the diamond remain an invisible and imaginary item for most of the plot. In fact, only in *The Moonstone* does the diamond appear for a brief moment before disappearing for the rest of the story. In both *The Sign of the Four* and *King*

³³ In his section on the commodity fetish in *Capital, Vol. 1*, Karl Marx defines commodity fetishism as the "definite social relation between men [assuming] the fantastic form of a relation between things" (165). Thus the relative value of the diamond (appearing as so many pounds), which in actuality is determined by labor relations—the work of the miners, traders, carriers, sellers, etc. in exchange for some other commodity's set of labor—becomes mystified as an intrinsic value of the diamond.

Solomon's Mines, the characters have more hope than knowledge that diamonds exist somewhere, awaiting their discovery. And because the diamond is mostly an imaginary thing, the characters can invest it with all sorts of fantasies: that it will allow them to be wealthy beyond belief or, in the case of *The Moonstone*, that its discovery will reconcile them with their lovers. Most importantly, the diamond's absence allows the characters to imbue it with a fantasy of stable—or rising—value, a fantasy that cannot be real if all the diamonds they desired were actually discovered, flooding the market. As an 1885 *Academy* review of *King Solomon's Mines* opines, “It seems a mistake to make the treasure consist of diamonds...for any precious stones in such abundance as here implied would inevitably fall to the value of painted glass” (304). The reviewer was responding not merely to the imaginary diamonds in Haggard's novel, but to the real diamonds mined in South Africa; as Martin Meredith documents in *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The Making of South Africa* (2007), massive outputs from the mines caused several collapses in diamond prices in British markets throughout the 1870s (19, 37, 51). Thus the diamond is only useful as an imaginary potential of wealth, not as an actualization of that wealth and liquidated in the British market.

The three novels in this chapter imbue imaginary diamonds with potentials of wealth and power in various ways. Each of them introduces the diamonds carrying mythical, “primitive” histories, but, rather than simply appropriating the diamond's foreign superstitions, the characters must come to grips with their own fantasy-filled valuation of the gemstones. In *The Moonstone*, the servant Gabriel Betteredge injects an English backstory—*Robinson Crusoe*—into his desire for the diamond. In *The Sign of the Four*, the monetary potential of the great Agra treasure becomes problematic for Watson, who sees the potential wealth as a block for his marriage. And in *King Solomon's Mines*, Allan Quartermain must navigate the impossibility of actualizing his

treasure's worth. In the end, the diamonds all remain mere potential. And unlike the realist novels in which the diamonds enter into the stories as the reflection of characters, the diamonds' potential is the main motivator and activator of plot in these novels.

"A devilish Indian diamond": Fantasies of Social Mobility in *The Moonstone*

The Moonstone, from the eponymous novel by Wilkie Collins, is arguably the most famous fictional diamond in the Victorian period. Published in 1868, *The Moonstone* tells of a cursed diamond. It was first plundered in India by John Herncastle, who gifted to Rachel Verinder, the novel's heroine. The diamond is then immediately stolen from her. The rest of the novel, presented as a collection of eyewitness reports, narrates the eventual discovery of the culprit, Godfrey Abelwhite, by the winner of Rachel's hand, Franklin Blake. Much of the criticism on the novel focuses on its genre as both a sensation and a detective novel. Winifred Hughes, in *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (1980), categorizes *The Moonstone* as one of the great sensation novels of the period, in which Collins focuses more on the sensations of mystery than the absolute truths behind it (163). Meanwhile, D. A. Miller dissects it as a novel of detection, in which the various eyewitness reports and affidavits engender a culture of surveillance, which spans from the actual police and detectives down to the servants, like the butler Gabriel Betteredge, from whose viewpoint the first half of the novel is narrated. Jean Arnold and John Plotz meditate on the diamond itself as carrying Indian culture into England: Plotz speaks to the portability of culture in how the diamond can "bear the essence of India" (44); Arnold, who focuses on how Collins modeled the Moonstone on the Koh-i-noor diamond, sees the various thefts of the Moonstone as replicating the imperial looting done on behalf of the Koh-i-noor and thereby alternately validating and condemning imperial practices.

The diamond does stand for a tense relationship between England and its imperial conquest and appropriation of India and its culture. The novel's characters present this version of the diamond, albeit in terms of invasion rather than appropriation. In his narrative, Gabriel Betteredge meditates,

here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian diamond—bring after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. Who ever heard the like of it—in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? (67)

Betteredge, like the nonfiction writers of diamond books, gives the diamond agency. The various intrigues surrounding the diamond—the conspiracy and vengeance of those who possessed the Moonstone before it made its way into the Verinder household—are part and parcel of the diamond itself, which contains the power to undermine the rationality of the “age of progress” through its romantic history. In my analysis, I focus less on how the diamond stands for this Indian cultural invasion than the way in which its superstitious power is cultivated through the structure of the narrative. The novel's prologue, which recounts the plunder of the diamond from India in 1799, coupled with Gabriel Betteredge's recollections, constructs the diamond's magical ability to fulfill desires for power and social mobility, as well as its ability to fascinate and enchant its beholders.

The novel's prologue falls in line with the nonfictional descriptions of diamonds; the mythical history of the Moonstone is retold as the very first characteristic of the gem. In the “[extract] from a family paper,” the unnamed cousin of John Herncastle, who stole the diamond at the Storming of Seringapatam in 1799, promises, “what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth” (33). Yet he departs from factuality almost immediately, stating that,

In order that the circumstances may be clearly understood, I must revert for a moment to the period before the assault, and to the stories current in our camp of the treasure in jewels and gold stored up in the Palace of Seringapatam (33).

These “stories” are “wild,” coming from the “traditions” and “native annals” of India. They describe the earliest known narrative about the Moonstone, which adorned “the forehead of the four-handed Indian god who typifies the Moon” (33). The diamond inspired a “superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity whom it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon” (33). Since then, like the Koh-i-noor, it has been subject to much plunder, first by the Mogul empire, then “one lawless Mohammedan...to another,” then the Sultan of Seringapatam (33-4), always “carrying its curse with it” that “predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem” (34). The stone’s supernatural element—the curse laid upon it—exists because of its plunder, suggesting that the very desire men hold for the stone is exactly what makes it so dangerous to own. This portion of the prologue foreshadows the British plunder that is imminently at hand, placing Herncastle’s thieving of and murdering for the diamond in line with its long history of plunder. As well, the prologue casts a pall of superstition over the rest of the novel, making the events of the rest of the novel merely a part of the Moonstone’s curse. In this way, the main narrative of the story, dealing with nineteenth-century British upper class, appears unexceptional: the diamond is what activates the sensational plot of the story, and the misfortunes of the Verinder family merely one in a long history of “certain disaster” that befalls those who “lay hands on the sacred gem.”

The first chapters present a marked shift in the tone of the novel. Whereas the prologue presented an exotic scene involving great battles between the British and the Indian, Betteredge’s chapter opens on an intensely domestic house in Yorkshire. Betteredge begins with a quote from

Robinson Crusoe: “Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it” (39). Although *Robinson Crusoe* also recounts imperial trade and expansion, as well as Crusoe’s conquest of an African island, Betteredge looks to it as he would a religious tract. For Betteredge, *Robinson Crusoe* seems to be less about the actual geography of Crusoe’s travels than about self-improvement, as well as a fairy tale of achieving that self-improvement through the acquisition of objects; after all, Crusoe manages to become lord of his island through rebuilding the paraphernalia of English life, from cooking utensils to umbrellas. Despite his disclaimer that he is “not superstitious,” Betteredge, at the beginning of his narrative, grants the novel with the power of “prophecy” and tells of how he takes a turn with the novel—by opening a random page, as one does with the Bible—whenever his spirits are low or he needs advice (41). His opinion of *Robinson Crusoe* is so high that he declares, “such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again” (41). After such a paean to the novel, Betteredge apologizes to his readers that “this doesn’t look much like starting the story of the Diamond—does it?” (41), yet his investment in *Robinson Crusoe* is, in a way, the story of the diamond.

For Crusoe also fantasizes about diamonds, and this fantasy is deeply entwined with his fantasy of social mobility. We learn from the beginning of *Robinson Crusoe* that the Crusoe family are foreigners from Bremen who settled in York; Robinson himself is “the third son of the family and not bred to any trade” (27), which was why he began to sail in the first place. Crusoe’s desires are those of the merchant class of England: to become “old money,” landed and titled as any of the peers of the country. Indeed, some days into his stay on the island, Crusoe indulges in these desires. Coming upon a valley, he tells,

I . . . survey[ed] it with a secret kind of pleasure, though mixed with my other afflicting thoughts, to think that this was all my own; that I was king and lord of

all this country indefensibly, and had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in inheritance as completely as any lord of a manor in England. (113-4)

Crusoe's desire for land is intertwined with his desire for legitimacy; it is not enough for him to be the lord of any land, but for that lordship not to be disputed and to be written into legal status. Moreover, his fantasy is a particularly British one involving a manor house, as if, even on an exotic island, Crusoe could not imagine himself outside of English social structure. His pursuit of settling on the island, of constructing his own manor-system, conjures visions of diamonds, as well. When he explores a cave—which he would subsequently make his home base—he wonders whether the glittering walls are full of “diamonds or any other precious stones, or gold” (184). Even after bemoaning the uselessness of gems, he still cannot help but fantasize about an abundance of diamonds; the fantasy is that they would legitimate him in English society in a way he never could be without them.

Betteredge's dependence on *Robinson Crusoe* as a book of prophecy uncovers the fact that he, too, longs to be part of the class of landed gentry that he serves. At first, this desire is transmuted into Betteredge's adoration of Lady Verinder. In the second chapter of his narrative, Betteredge relays with some pleasure the various honors Lady Verinder has conferred onto him. She informed her husband that she “can't do without Gabriel Betteredge” (42); she made Betteredge the bailiff, then the steward of the house because she was worried for his health (42, 44); she gives him various presents, including “a beautiful waistcoat of wool that she had worked herself” and a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* (44). Though these events are fairly innocuous, Betteredge dwells on them, revealing how much he cares about his personal relationship with Lady Verinder and his being in “a position of trust and honour” (42). He raises himself to an even higher position of honor when later, at the servants' table on Rachel Verinder's birthday,

Betteredge gives his customary speech. “I follow the plan,” he tells us, “adopted by the Queen in opening Parliament—namely, the plan of saying much the same thing regularly every year. Before it is delivered, my speech (like the Queen’s) is looked for as eagerly as if nothing of the kind had ever been heard before” (93). Betteredge indulges himself in the power he has atop the hierarchies of servants by comparing himself to the Queen. Moreover, Betteredge fancies himself a specific Queen (Victoria) who possesses a specific diamond (the Koh-i-noor). In this way, Betteredge overrides Rachel’s status as “queen of the day” (100) by assuming the role of *the* Queen long before he admits that it is Rachel’s birthday. Coupled with his doting on Lady Verinder, the comparison to a queen hints at an undercurrent of fantasy. On some level, Betteredge fancies himself a Cinderella or a Jane Eyre, who can rise to the level of the master of the house instead of merely its steward. Indeed, when Lady Verinder dies and the family is scattered—that is, until Franklin Blake solves the mystery, marries Rachel, and moves back in—Betteredge does become de facto master of the estate. When, at the end of the second chapter of the narrative, Betteredge confesses, “I am asked to tell the story of the Diamond and, instead of that, I have been telling the story of my own self” (45), we recognize that the story of Betteredge *is* the story of the Diamond; which is to say, the Diamond allows Betteredge to indulge in the fantasy of social mobility. Betteredge’s two seemingly-false starts to “the story of the Diamond”—his telling, instead, first of *Robinson Crusoe*, then of himself—in fact reveal the layering of fantasies on top of the Diamond. His fantasies about the diamond thus make him into a participant in the long history of the enchantment of the stone.

Betteredge is the narrator who establishes the power of the Moonstone to enchant its beholders. Unlike the Koh-i-noor, which disappointed nearly everyone who saw it, the Moonstone manages to fascinate almost everyone who gazes upon it:

There stood Miss Rachel at the table, like a person fascinated, with the Colonel's unlucky Diamond in her hand. There, on either side of her, knelt the two Bounders [the Miss Ablewhites], devouring the jewel with their eyes, and screaming with ecstasy every time it flashed on them in a new light. There, at the opposite side of the table, stood Mr. Godfrey, clapping his hands like a large child, and singing out softly, "Exquisite! exquisite!" (96)

The Moonstone has drawn all parties into its light, and each of the guests becomes a refraction of the diamond. Rather than describing the diamond at first, Betteredge gives a glimpse of Rachel and each of the Ablewhites in a tableau, frozen in their reactions to the gemstone. When he does look at the Diamond, Betteredge himself becomes drawn into the jewel:

Lord bless us! It WAS a Diamond! As large, or nearly, as plover's egg! The light that streamed from it was like the light of the harvest moon. When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that they saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark. No wonder Miss Rachel was fascinated: no wonder her cousins screamed. The Diamond laid such a hold on ME that I burst out with as large an "O" as the Bouncers themselves. (96-7)

Here, Betteredge emphasizes the unfathomable nature of the diamond, by which he himself is fascinated. Here is where the novel's sensation comes into play: the diamond literally has the power to lay hold on the people who look upon it and to inspire uncontrollable bodily reactions, both Rachel's fascinated immobility and the Miss Ablewhites' bouncing vibrations.

Betteredge's construction of the diamond's affective potential, I argue, actually serves to justify one of the biggest revelations of the novel: though Franklin Blake is not part of the tableau here, we discover that he, too, with the help of a large dose of opium administered by Godfrey Ablewhite, is conjured into a bodily response to the diamond. Franklin's theft of the diamond from Rachel's room is arguably *the* mystery of the novel, the solution of which would allow for the resolution of the novel in the marriage of Franklin to Rachel Verinder. Yet the

solution of this mystery is less than satisfactory. What had happened on that night can never be proven; instead, with the help of Ezra Jennings, a physician's assistant, Franklin and Betteredge engage in an elaborate reconstruction of the night of the theft, including dosing Franklin with another batch of opium and providing a "fake Diamond" of crystal (473). The explanation of Franklin's theft exonerates him by giving agency to the Moonstone: Ezra Jennings explains to Franklin that,

Under the stimulating influence [of opium], the latest and most vivid impressions left on your mind—namely, the impressions relating to the Diamond—would be likely, in your morbidly sensitive nervous condition, to become intensified in your brain. (442)

It is the impressions the diamond leaves on Franklin's brain—the need for its protection and preservation, and therefore the need for taking it and hiding it—that motivate Franklin's sleepwalking. And the impressions of the diamond might not be quite as believable without Betteredge's narrative, which has already inscribed the diamond's enchanting abilities into the reader's mind. For Betteredge, then, Franklin's innocence is not proven by medical science, but by magic; he considers the reconstruction "a conjuring trick" (453), one that depends as much on the diamond's enchanting nature as it does on the bottle of laudanum.

Betteredge's earlier description of the diamond also gives it two seemingly oppositional powers: on the one hand, to refract light so well that it seems to glow like the moon; on the other hand, to actually contain nothing so much within it, to draw in the gaze by virtue of the emptiness and endlessness of its depths; one moves outward, the other inward. In his fascinated descriptions of the diamond, Betteredge points us to the diamond's formal functions within the novel. In the actions of Franklin Blake, we have seen how the diamond draws him into and through the fathomless depth of his opium-induced state. The diamond lies at the dark, fathomless center of Franklin's psychology, just like it lies at the dark center of the novel's

mysteries. For Franklin, as for the novel itself, the diamond is nonexistent, leaving behind only the signs and tokens—like the crystal imitation—of its passage. We see this empty center at the end of the novel, when the characters believe they have discovered the Moonstone with Godfrey Abelwhite, who had been murdered by the Indian priests in pursuit of the diamond. Next to his body, they discover

A little wooden box, open, and empty. On one side of the box lay some jewellers' cotton. On the other side, was a torn sheet of white paper, with a seal on it, partly destroyed, and with an inscription in writing, which was perfectly legible. The inscription was in these words:

“Deposited with Messrs. Bushe, Lysaught, and Bushe, by Mr. Septimus Luker, of Middlesex Place, Lambeth, a small wooden box, sealed up in this envelope, and containing a valuable of great price.” (501)

The characters track down the Diamond only to find it already gone; we only find bits of information that establish the shadow of the gemstone. Even those pieces of information are not absolute; the piece of paper, meant to be a receipt from the pawn shop for the diamond, never actually indicates what was once inside the wooden box, only that whatever was inside was “a valuable of great price.” The diamond thus maintains the absence that drives the detective plot of the novel.

The diamond can refract other things, like the light of the moon, even as it intrigues viewers with the lacuna at its depth. In this way, the diamond becomes a metaphorical link for other desires. For Rachel Verinder, who wears it briefly as a brooch, it represents her erotic body on the marriage market, as well as her love for and protection of Franklin Blake, whom she knows had taken the diamond at first. For Franklin Blake, the rediscovery of the diamond would enable him to regain his honor and gain Rachel's hand. For Godfrey Abelwhite, the villain of the novel, the diamond represents solvency and escape from his mountain of debt. And for Gabriel Betteredge, the diamond crystallizes his fantasies about social mobility. The characters desires,

then, are both for the diamond and not for the diamond; accordingly, although the missing diamond drives the plot of the novel, the characters remain ambivalent toward the actual gemstone. Rachel does not want its discovery, for fear that her beloved Franklin would be prosecuted as the thief; Franklin has no personal investment in the diamond, only in proving his innocence to Rachel. Godfrey Abelwhite only wants the diamond for its monetary value, and not even that of the Moonstone as such; he is believed, before his death, to be on his way to cut up the diamond into smaller pieces—which, as the characters learn earlier in the novel, would “actually fetch more than the Diamond as now” (72). Gabriel Betteredge might be the only character that recognizes the Moonstone as such, for he is the one who constructs the narratives about the diamond’s powers; however, as his fantasy of social mobility indicates, his position will never allow him to have real, legitimate possession of the diamond, and that fantasy must remain merely a fantasy.

The Moonstone, then, aptly blurs the boundary between detective fiction and sensation novel. As a work of sensation, it capitalizes on the physically enchanting powers of the diamond, whereas its detective plot relies on the diamond’s ability to inspire great and terrible events. At the same time, the novel also contains aspects of the diamond romance, similar to the historical diamond books of the period; the prologue and Betteredge’s narrative repeatedly narrativize the diamond’s draw by characterizing it as a powerful and agentive object. We will see this romantic narrative be reiterated in *The Sign of the Four*, in the villain Jonathan Small’s confession. *The Sign of the Four*, however, more adamantly expels the diamond from the scope of the novel. Whereas *The Moonstone* ends with the diamond’s apparent return to the India whence it came, *The Sign of the Four* buries its diamonds in the mud and sludge of River Thames, as dead as any of the human bodies in its depths.

The Great Agra Treasure: Childhood Fantasies in *The Sign of the Four*

In *The Sign of the Four*, Arthur Conan Doyle does not conjure an imaginary diamond for his tale but fictionalizes a story of a real stone that, as far as we know, was never in urban London in the 1880s. The story tells of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, who are commissioned by Mary Morstan to discover the secrets behind the mysterious pearls that have been sent to her. The detective's efforts reveal that the pearls are part of the great Agra treasure, which Mary's father and his accomplices, including Jonathan Small, had plundered during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The great Agra treasure is a veritable hoard of gemstones, including the Great Mogul diamond, which was a real jewel. Unlike the Koh-i-noor or the Moonstone, the Great Mogul suffered that worst of fates for a diamond: it was lost to history, presumed by some, like Edwin Streeter, to have been broken into pieces and to have "ceased to exist as such" (78).³⁴ Its apparent disappearance from written history not only adds more intrigue to its story but makes it an appropriate item for a Sherlock Holmes story. Couching the real stone in a detective story gives the reader some hope that they, too, could "detect" the location of the legendary diamond, increasing its desirability by positing the possibility of its recovery.

Detective fiction as a genre relies on its interactions with its readers. It presents all of the clues to its readers, daring them to solve the crime alongside the detective—though, more often than not, only a trained semi-professional like Sherlock Holmes is equal to the task. The nature of clues is integral to its potential solvability: clues rely on metonymy, which, as Charles Rzepka points out in *Detective Fiction* (2005), is "the basic figure governing the creation and interpretation of *clues*. Metonymic clues ... are taken to be interpretable by all observers sharing a common point of view, knowledge base, and powers of thought" (18). Yet the metonymic

³⁴ Although, according to Streeter's and others' accounts, there may be some confusion as to whether the Great Mogul diamond *was* the Koh-i-noor the entire time.

nature of clues is also what makes them a special set of objects. While Sherlock Holmes's entire methodology seems to be one of scientific deduction, it actually relies on a theory of contingency more akin to magic than to science. His analysis of clues has less to do with the classifying of objects and more to do with establishing the connection between persons and things. It is true that Holmes prides himself in knowing all the different varieties, for example, of tobacco ashes; he has written a monograph enumerating "a hundred and forty forms of cigar-, cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with colored plates illustrating the difference in the ash" (52). But such differentiation is ultimately in service of discovering *who* has left the ash. "It is difficult," Holmes has stated, "for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it" (54). Such a principle assumes that objects retain and reflect the sentimental fingerprint of their owners, establishing the fantasy that we leave indelible traces on the things around us just like they do on us. More specifically, it is, in a way, a replaying of the principles of sympathetic magic laid out by anthropologists like Tylor, James Frazer, and Marcel Mauss. Mauss, in *A General Theory of Magic* (1902), contends that magic abides by a "law of contiguity," by which "everything which comes into close contact with the person—clothes, footprints, the imprint of the body on grass or in bed, the bed, the chair, everyday objects of use, toys and other things, all are likened to different parts of the body" (80). Thus an air of magical contiguity already pervades the detective novel, almost as if all clues are a contemporary form of ethnography's fetish; the clue, which appears to the untrained eye a cold, meaningless object, is recast by the detective as traces of the human body.

For Rzepka, this "puzzle element" in which the reader is invited to trace the metonymic links between clues, is mostly missing from *The Sign of the Four* (131). This is because, for the

most part, *The Sign of the Four*, like *The Moonstone*, is an amalgamation of genres rather than a straightforward work of detective fiction. Jon Thompson, in *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (1993), argues that Doyle's novel draws together "conventions from adventure fiction, detective fiction, and sensational literature" (72); the adventure relies on the dark and mysterious depiction of London, as well as the caper-style chases of Holmes and Watson after Jonathan Small. In *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2004), Stephen Knight makes a similar argument about how the novel does not "make much of a puzzle of the culprits," while adding that Doyle drew on *The Moonstone* for his story (58). While many of the same exotic elements are present—a treasure stolen from India, chased by an exotic personage in the form of Small's accomplice, the pygmy Tonga—Knight argues that Doyle has simplified Collins's imperial critique, offering "little of Collins's implied criticism of English attitudes to race, class and conventional morality" (58). Instead, as Thompson claims, *The Sign of the Four* presents a fairly straightforward narrative of how Holmes, by his rational detection, "symbolically vanquishes the exotic but violent elements of the Orient within Victorian England by his unemotional empiricism" (72). Jonathan Small, figuring a "most un-English barbarism" (72), manages to penetrate England but is in the end contained by the prison cell, a symbol of Britain's disciplinary institutions.

I would argue instead that the character of Jonathan Small, while it seems to represent the barbaric and un-English elements of the novel, actually has more in common with Gabriel Betteredge than at first glance. It is true that Small seems to have taken on the savagery of the Indian Mutiny; his sun-burned "mahogany features" (127) make him almost as dark as the "black fiends" (136) he calls the Indians. But he is in fact a native Englishman who, like Betteredge, dreams of social mobility through the acquisition of treasures. Betteredge and Small share a faith

in something like possessive individualism, or the idea that man has total ownership of his own liberties, which is represented by his unequivocal possession of his person, his time and labor, and his property.³⁵ Whereas Betteredge, the butler, cannot quite escape his ties of servitude to the upper class, Small radically severs his responsibilities to his society, especially the British army, by becoming a criminal. Both imagine their personal freedoms to be dependent upon achieving a high status through the acquisition of wealth. Therefore, although Betteredge seems to come down against the invasion of the mysterious Indian element and Small seems to represent that very element, they serve a similar novelistic function in their imaginative narration that characterizes the diamonds they pursue as magical, powerful, and agentive.

The great Agra treasure never physically appears in the story at all; the only place in which its sumptuous gems are recounted is in the narrative of Jonathan Small, who has the power, from the very start of his story, to characterize the treasure to his liking. His description of the treasure is sumptuous:

The light of the lantern gleamed upon a collection of gems such as I have read of and thought about when I was a little lad at Pershore. It was blinding to look upon them. When we had feasted our eyes we took them out and made a list of them. There were one hundred and forty-three diamonds of the first water, including one which has been called, I believe, "The Great Mogul" and is said to be the second largest stone in existence. Then there were ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one hundred and seventy rubies, some of which, however, were small. There were forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates, and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cats'-eyes, turquoises, and other stones, the very names of which I did not know at the time, though I have become more familiar with them since. Besides this, there were nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in a gold coronet. (145)

³⁵ As discussed in Chapter 1, C. B. MacPherson's idea of possessive individualism has to do with a possessive attitude in modern liberal society. Betteredge's and Small's ideas are like possessive individualism but not exactly so. They believe in the power of the treasures to make them rise in class, to the point of no longer being a poor person whose time is partially owned by a master or a lord. In this way, their desires for social mobility still operates in the feudal system; like Robinson Crusoe, who dreams of being the lord of an English manor, they want to be masters instead of servants. For MacPherson, however, possessive individualism is a common faith across the board in a modern society, in which individuals have ownership of their time and labor and can sell these, but do not owe these in any way to his superiors.

Here, not only does Small give a description rivaling Burton's narration of Aladdin's palace, he hints at the fantastical nature of this treasure. He refers to the treasures he had "read of and thought about when [he] was a little lad," signaling how the very idea of the hoard of gems comes out of primitive fantasies and adventure stories for children—like *Treasure Island*, which Doyle himself read and admired (Fraser 1-2). And while he makes diamonds the first items he accounts for, the entire hoard actually contains all manner of other gemstones and jewelry that must have been carefully collected. Small's treasure differs in this way from the Moonstone, which by its singular and religious nature already held an aura of superstition. For Small to characterize his treasure in the same powerfully inspiring manner, he needs to draw out a particularly fanciful narrative.

This narrative contains elements of fantasy and romance, through which Small turns his life into an adventure story of which he is the hero. The romantic element of *The Sign of the Four* has been pointed out by Charles Rzepka, who considers the companionship of the men of the novel, including Holmes and Watson, to embody Arthurian knighthood, especially the roundtable. The Sign of the Four is an agreement made by Small and his Indian conspirators not to betray one another; meanwhile, Holmes and Watson are revisions of Galahad and Lancelot, the former interested in a pure-hearted "quest of the Holy Grail of detection, the Truth" (133), while the latter is interested in the romantic quest for Guinevere, or Mary Morstan (134). I find Rzepka's comparison convincing, but propose that Small has envisioned for himself a different version of folklore: not the Arthurian stories that foregrounds loyalty and brotherhood, but rather an individualist adventure story in which the hero, having imagined fabulous riches from childhood, chases after that treasure. In addition to reading and thinking about great collection of gems as a lad in Pershore, Small returns to his childhood fantasies throughout his stint in India.

When stealing the treasure is first proposed to him, he recalls meditating upon the murders he will have to commit in the process:

In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all around you and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when they saw their ne'er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. (142)

In this statement are encompassed the motivations behind every adventurer, including Robinson Crusoe. At the heart of India, deeply embroiled in a battle against the racial other, Small nevertheless recasts the acquisition of treasure in the terms of his arduously European fantasy. Even the money he would trade the jewels for is not the pounds and shillings of nineteenth century Britain, but “moidores,” the Portuguese gold coins that was current in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when Atlantic adventurers still sailed the high seas. Small localizes his rags-to-riches fantasy in the places and stories of his childhood, from Worcestershire to the early Atlantic conquerors. That he finds his treasure in India seems exotic but incidental; if he could have found the gems on Crusoe’s island or in Aladdin’s cave, the nature of his fantasy would have been unchanged.

As it is, though, the treasures are in India and do belong rightly to the Indians. In order to justify his theft, Small must characterize the jewels as cursed and powerfully inspiring, just like Betteredge did to justify Franklin Blake’s actions. Echoing the narrative surrounding the Moonstone, Small ejaculates, “It was an evil day for me when I first clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it” (128). The treasure’s curse is perhaps more pronounced here, in part because *The Sign of the Four* is a much shorter work than *The Moonstone*. Unlike

John Herncastle, whose actual crimes are shrouded in mystery and a glaring hole in the story—his cousin witnesses only the aftermath of murder (Collins 7)—Jonathan Small confesses to all of his crimes. In the process, he narrates the treasure’s force on him repeatedly. When facing a bodyguard of the merchant Achmet, Small narrates, “It gave me the chills to think of killing him, but I thought of the treasure, and my heart set as hard as a flint within me” (143). Again, when about to kill the merchant himself, Small says, “my heart softened to him, but again the thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter” (144). In these statements, the treasure becomes shorthand for all of Small’s fantasies and excuses, including his justifications for taking even more lives; as such, Small can then assign agency to the treasure instead of himself. Thus he can comment on the treasure’s “curse” as that which brought bad luck upon him, rather than take responsibility for the crimes committed by him and by others in service of British imperial expansion. So in this way, the curse becomes part of the fantasy of the displacement of responsibilities and guilt.

The major difference between *The Moonstone* and *The Sign of the Four* is that, while Betteredge’s narrative fantasy about the diamond sets up and encompasses the entire novel, Small’s fantasy is constrained by the larger focus of the novel as provided by John Watson’s narration. Small’s adventure romance, as well as the powerful curse of the Agra treasure, becomes buried like the gems themselves are by the mud of the Thames. The real heroes of the novel—Sherlock Holmes and John Watson—actively negate the desire for the treasures. Holmes achieves his goal by the discovery of the truth, and the loss of the treasure does not contradict his mastery of the facts of the case. Meanwhile, Watson has from the very first substituted his desire for Mary Morstan for any desire for riches. Watson understands that, if the treasure is recovered, Mary would become a rich heiress beyond his reach; for him, “this Agra treasure intervened like

an impassable barrier between [them]” (91). And when the treasure chest is finally revealed to be empty, Watson declares,

A great shadow seemed to pass from my soul. I did not know how this Agra treasure had weighed me down, until now that it was finally removed. It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realize nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us. (131)

Watson’s vision of the treasure as a “golden barrier” makes us realize that, in order for the story to have a happy ending—which is to say, in order for the marriage plot to come to fruition—the treasure can never be recovered. Rather, the treasure must be displaced into other things; in Watson’s case, the jewels are replaced by Mary. As he draws Mary, who also apparently seems happy about the loss of the treasure, to his side, Watson says, “Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one” (132). The fact that his gaining Mary as a treasure means her loss of financial and personal independence is quickly done away with under the umbrella of the romantic ending. Yet the romantic ending, like so many in other Victorian novels, inevitably objectifies the woman, making her into a prized, but powerless, possession of her husband.

Watson’s and Mary’s relationship, like Franklin Blake’s and Rachel Verinder’s, embodies the inherent contradiction of the treasure diamond fantasy. While the search for the treasure presumably drives the plot of the novel, the acquisition of the treasure does not comprise the resolution of that plot. In both *The Moonstone* and *The Sign of the Four*, it is the lower-class character who will never have rightful access to the treasure that construct the agentive power of the diamonds, and the perpetuation of the romance of the diamonds requires their elusion from actual possession. The ambivalent desire for diamonds in these novels is a response to the actual rarity of the Indian diamond; the protagonists of these novels must necessarily foreclose the possibility of diamond ownership, because history dictates that great and powerful gems like the Koh-i-noor and the Mogul diamond can be owned only by the highest conquerors and royalty,

the Queen herself—and, as we have seen, even her possession of the Koh-i-noor is mired in contentious negotiations about the power of the British empire.

“We had got them”: Fantasies of Value in *King Solomon’s Mines*

Unlike *The Moonstone* and *The Sign of the Four*, Henry Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* is set in Africa instead of India. Like the British conception of the African continent, the diamond mines in South Africa presented a new, dark frontier for the imperial acquisition of land and the personal acquisition of immense wealth. At the same time, the great potential for diamond ownership also necessitated a delicate balance between the attempts to keep diamonds desirable and the attempts to convert the diamonds into fungible wealth, which would flood the market and, in turn, make them less valuable. Anxieties about the flooding of the diamond market was keenly felt by the Victorians, as we have observed in the review of *King Solomon’s Mines* in *The Academy*. The reviewer was responding not merely to the imaginary diamonds in Haggard’s novel, but to the real diamonds mined in South Africa, which did cause several collapses to the diamond market. *King Solomon’s Mines*, then, had the tricky task of preserving the diamond’s desirability as treasures, making the possession of these treasures seem possible, yet keeping at bay the anxieties about the diamond’s value that would be the inevitable fall-out of that possession.

This task is manageable because the novel is a work of adventure romance set in a fantasy land in the heart of Africa. The genre and the setting of *King Solomon’s Mines* allows it to be unconstrained by the realities of Victorian England, as well as the pseudo-realism of the detective and sensation genres. Indeed, as Laura Chrisman argues in *Rereading the Imperial*

Romance, the African setting generates different kinds of desire that the novel then fulfills.

Citing an “enthusiastic” review in *The Spectator*, Chrisman writes,

The author’s [of *The Spectator*] description equivocates between the yearning for “sufficient” and for “permanent” astonishment; or, in other words, between the notion of a finite, fulfillable desire and an infinite desire in which the stimulation is, in effect, the fulfillment. (27)

Chrisman goes on to say that the finite desire of discovering and acquiring the diamond safely diverts the reader’s desire for larger, more insatiable desires for wonder; the acquisition of the diamonds presents a possible, if improbable yearning, whereas the enchantment of the novel’s setting represents a yearning that can only be satisfied by the novel’s representation of that fantastical site. The novel’s construction of the desire for the diamonds is one and the same as its construction for the desire for geographical enchantment. The desire for the diamond, too, is satisfied through the narrative construction of that desire and fulfilled only in the space of foreign adventure. Gabriel Betteredge’s and Jonathan Small’s fantasies of the treasure diamond’s power expands to the whole of the novel in *King Solomon’s Mines*; its setting in the heart of Africa, always already marked as a dark and mysterious continent, provides the dark background upon which the diamond can momentarily shine.

The novel that had launched Rider Haggard into the literary scene was *King Solomon’s Mines*, the first of the series of adventure novels featuring Allan Quartermain, a hunter of some renown. The novel collects together myriad tropes of the adventure genre: Quartermain is recruited to travel to the interior of the African continent in order to find a man lost in the search for a treasure; along the way, he and his English companions help return a lost king, Ignosi, to the throne of a lost tribe. What motivates Quartermain to join his compatriots, Sir Henry and Captain Good, in their venture is the legend of the diamond hoard in King Solomon’s mines. We learn from the first that Quartermain was trained in imperial ventures: “At an age when other

boys are at school I was earning my living as a trader in the old Colony. I have been trading, hunting, fighting, or mining ever since” (9). Though so trained in these moneymaking professions, Quartermain has yet to make his “pile” at the beginning of the story; his fortune-seeking instinct drives him to venture into Africa once more.

The dark continent hosts a magical land in its center, in which objects are enchanted in various ways. After a long journey into the interior of the continent from Durban, South Africa, the trio of adventurers, plus their hired hand Umbopa (later discovered to be the lost prince Ignosi), wander into a lost paradise; the “magic of the place” (82) becomes an apt setting for the magical objects that soon enter the story. At first, however, these objects are still problematically magical: for example, Captain Good has a set of false teeth that appear magical to the native Kukuanas, who ambush the trio and threaten to kill them. Captain Good, “as was his way when perplexed,”

Put his hand to his false teeth, dragging the top set down and allowing them to fly back to his jaw with a snap. It was a most fortunate move, for next second the dignified crowd of Kukuanas uttered a simultaneous yell of horror, and bolted back some yards.... [They ask,] “How is it, O strangers... that this fat man (pointing to Good, who was clad in nothing but boots and a flannel shirt, and had only half finished his shaving), whose body is clothed, and whose legs are bare, who grows hair on one side of his sickly face and hot on the other, and who wears one shining and transparent eye—how is it...that he has teeth which move of themselves, coming away from the jaws and returning of their own will?” (85-6)

In this moment, Good becomes frozen as an idol; as Quartermain and Sir Henry tell him, he must continue to remain half-dressed and half-shaved in order to inspire the same sort of fear and wonder in the Kukuanas. What’s more, what had only been his quirky characterizations—his false teeth and “glass eye,” or monocle—become enchanted, taking on unimaginable magic to the tribespeople.³⁶ The travellers are deemed “spirits” to be honored rather than intruders to be

³⁶ Captain Good’s teeth and false eye become detached from his characterization and powerful in the eyes of a different culture. This detachment presents an enchantment opposite from, for example, Miss Havisham’s wedding

killed. Quartermain's manipulation of the tribespeople's beliefs presents a complicated relationship between him and magical things. On the one hand, here is an oft-repeated trope of the conquerors appearing magical or god-like to unsophisticated natives, presenting their modern contraptions as magic to their naïve audience. This is a trope that the novel hammers home: later, Quartermain introduces his rifle as a "magic tube that speaks," able to kill an animal at a distance "with a noise" (87). And when the travellers reach the home of the Kukuanas, Quartermain consults an almanac to predict a total lunar eclipse, pretending to be a magician that can extinguish the light in the sky. If we trace these technological objects through the novel, we might find indeed that Haggard indulges in the age-old notions about the civilized Europeans and the primitive natives.

While such a representation is not inaccurate, I propose that a closer look at the protagonists' obsession with diamonds reveals their enchantment of the gemstones. This enchantment is different than the beliefs of the Kukuanas, who are characterized as confused and astonished by, rather than creating and sustaining the magic of objects. At the same time, the characters' passion for the diamonds, including their belief in their agentive magic, follows the enchantment of diamonds we have already seen in the history books, *The Moonstone*, and *The Sign of the Four*. Quartermain narratively constructs a fantasy about diamonds by indulging in the same fondness for a certain kind of British folklore that Gabriel Betteredge does with *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Small does with his childhood stories from Worcester. Quartermain's folklore of choice is *The Ingoldsby Legends*, to which he admits he is devoted (9). He has a "pocket copy" of *The Ingoldsby Legends* (64) that he reads from time to time, and lines from it run through his head at various points in the novel (136, 164). The *Legends* is a collection

dress, which is enchanted because it takes over her entire character, pushing the object's metonymic function to its full potential.

of myths and ghost stories by Richard Barham, first serialized in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837 but republished throughout the nineteenth century. One of its most popular stories is about the Hand of Glory, a magical object known throughout European history as having the power to unlock doors and put people to sleep. In Barham's version, the Hand of Glory is bespelled by an androgynous witch ("then—My Gracious!—her beard!" [54]) with a hanged man's hair and "the grease and the fat/ Of a black Tom Cat" (55). In the course of the poem, the hand is used to steal a miser's "shining store/ Of glittering ore,/ The fair Rose-Noble, the bright Moidore,/ And the broad Double-Joe from beyond the sea" (57). Quartermain's reliance on *The Ingoldsby Legends* alerts us to the fact that he is well-versed in the lore of magical objects, not of the African witch-doctor but of the witch of the British moors. Moreover, he is no stranger to the notion that the path to a treasure hoard must involve the use of magical objects—an idea that becomes true for his own journey to King Solomon's mines.

From the onset, the treasure hoard in the mines contains a curse: all treasure-hunters before Quartermain, including the Portuguese trader José da Silvestra and Sir Henry's lost brother, are presumed to have come to terrible ends in their quest. When the trio finally arrive in the mines, accompanied by the Kukuanas' own witch-doctor Gagool, they assume they are the lucky ones who have managed to successfully gain the treasure. They discover "three stone chests" containing "millions of pounds' worth of diamonds" (204), around which they "[stand] still with pale faces and [stare] at each other," fairly entranced by their sudden windfall (204). Almost immediately, though, Quartermain recognizes the illegitimacy of their presence. He feels "as though we were conspirators about to commit a crime, instead of being, as we thought, the most fortunate men on earth" (204). This criminal element actually gives him a thrill, reinforcing the treasure diamond's power to inspire bloody historical events, as well as highlighting its often

illegitimate movements. For Quartermain, it is as if a treasure is not a treasure if acquired legitimately at a jewelry merchant's counter. Quartermain thus vests the diamonds with as much dark agency as Edwin Streeter, who actually was a jewelry merchant, did when he romanticized the diamond's requirement for the dark background of history.

Almost immediately after this, Quartermain begins to weave a fantastical myth of the diamonds for himself. He imagines that millennia of history have been distilled into the diamonds, which present that history only to these three white men. "The gems...were ours," he ruminates,

[they] had been found for *us* thousands of years ago by the patient delvers in the great hole yonder, and stored for *us* by Solomon's long-dead overseer, whose name, perchance, was written in the characters stamped on the faded wax that yet adhered to the lids of the chest. Solomon never got them, nor David, or Da Silvestra, nor anybody else. *We* had got them. (204, emphasis original)

Woven into this fantasy of the diamonds being somehow fated for Quartermain's troupe is, again, the fantasy of perpetuity. Only diamonds, being the hardy gems that they are, can stay the great treasures that they are without wear or tear, without depreciation. These diamonds, in particular, have evaded any other human contact for thousands of years, having caused their previous seekers to have "evil [befall] them" (186). In actuality, though, the diamonds refuse Quartermain's desire to be the chosen one; if they cursed the previous treasure-hunters, Quartermain could not hope to escape that curse. Indeed, moments after this discovery, Gagool traps the men in the caves, and Quartermain eventually escapes with only a fraction of the hoard he sees before him.

Even without the curse, the diamonds cannot possibly fulfill the wondrous expectations that Quartermain imagines. The three men's reactions to the diamonds spell out how self-contradictory the process of treasure-hunting, especially of diamonds, really is:

“We are the richest men in the world,” I [Quartermain] said...
“We shall flood the market with diamonds,” said Good.
“Got to get them there first,” suggested Sir Henry. (203)

Quartermain and Good’s statements cannot coexist: if the market becomes flooded with diamonds, then surely these diamonds cannot continue to be worth quite as much as Quartermain imagines. *The Atlantic* reviewer’s prediction that the amount of diamonds presented in the novel would make them no more valuable than “painted glass” looms as a threat to the three men, making clear that these “millions of pounds’ worth of diamonds” could only be worth that much if they remain where they are, inside the caves of Solomon’s mines and never in the diamond market outside. Like the Moonstone and the Agra treasure, these diamonds necessarily activate the same plot, escaping from the protagonists’ hands and disappearing from sight, in order to maintain their potential of value and the desire they incite.

Once Gagool traps the men, Quartermain must again confront the incongruity of the diamonds’ fungibility, albeit in a different way. Gagool mocks the men, cackling the words, “There are the bright stones ye love, white men, as many as ye will; take them, run them through your fingers, *eat* of them, *hee! hee! drink* of them, *ha! ha!*” (204, emphasis original). Though the idea of eating and drinking diamonds seems at first “so ridiculous” to Quartermain, he soon realizes the consequences of the inedible nature of diamonds. As they sit trapped in the cave, the men recognize their fate of “slowly perishing of thirst and hunger in the company of the treasure they had coveted” (207). Quartermain’s subsequent meditation is even more dire:

The irony of the situation forced itself upon me. There around us lay treasures enough to pay off a moderate national debt, or to build a fleet of ironclads, and yet we would have bartered them all gladly for the faintest chance of escape. Soon, doubtless, we should be rejoiced to exchange them for a bit of food or a cup of water, and, after that, even for the privilege of a speedy close to our sufferings. Truly wealth, which men spend their lives acquiring, is a valueless thing at the last. (209-10)

Quartermain is forced to recognize just how incommensurable the lust for treasure is with the actuality of daily life. As much as they are worth, these diamonds cannot sustain the men, and even their imaginary value fails to fulfill their immediate needs; Quartermain sees the diamonds as “paying off a moderate national debt” or “building a fleet of ironclads” rather than, for example, feeding an entire continent. Yet his desire for them never abates. His thought that the men “should be rejoiced to exchange them for a bit of food” remains merely a future potential, to happen “soon” but not at present. Indeed, even as they are desperately searching for an exit, Quartermain fills his pockets with some stones, claiming a lifetime habit “never to leave anything worth having behind if there was the slightest chance of my being able to carry it away” (214). What he manages to take away, though, is a mere fraction of all the treasure left behind, is enough to grant him a comfortable life but nowhere near enough to make him “the richest man in the world.” Like Wells’s diamond maker, the men have difficulty selling even this small amount. They visit Streeter’s—a real business belonging to Edwin Streeter—where they are told to “sell by degrees, over a period of years indeed, for fear lest we should flood the market” (232). The rest of the treasure lies sealed in the mines forever, reinforced in their inaccessibility by Ignosi’s subsequent proclamation, “Cursed for your sake be the white stones, and cursed he who seeks them” (222). But because the diamonds, as treasure diamonds, have been cursed all along, such a curse merely incites the next set of adventurers to think themselves exceptional and to come seeking the treasure, fuelling a desire that has thus far been both metaphorically and literally insatiable.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how treasure diamonds gained a magical agency that allowed them to be the primary activators of plot in Victorian popular fiction. The historical circumstances surrounding the acquisition of diamonds—extremely rare from India, then all too

common from Africa—compounded with nonfictional books about diamonds to set these gems at the center of dark and bloody histories. In these narratives, diamonds become the catalysts for the events that set them apart from the sentimental representations of jewelry diamonds in realist novels. Tense negotiations about the treasure diamond's worth keep them perpetually in this state of being desired but never acquired, which is reflected in the novels of Collins and Doyle, in which the treasure diamonds are the primary objects for detection but remain lost to the detectives. In *The Moonstone*, Gabriel Betteredge's narrative establishes a framework of sensational and folkloric desire for the Moonstone, which is mirrored in Jonathan Small's confession in *The Sign of the Four*; while the former reinforces an appropriate desire by explaining away the diamond's theft, the latter must remain the thief's desire, contained by John Watson's appropriate lack of desire for the Great Agra Treasure. Finally, in *King Solomon's Mines*, that folkloric desire becomes the entirety of the novel, which presents a magical land in which the diamond can at once remain valuable and be possessed by the protagonists of the story. In the next chapter, I turn to the figure of the mirror, which is not a central object of fantasy but a medium through which to narrate and enter into fantasy.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS: MAGIC MIRRORS AS NARRATIVE PORTALS

In 1825, “Snow White” was translated into English. The Grimms Brothers fairy tale—in which the evil step-mother Queen memorably asks, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, am I most beautiful of all” (188)—became one of the most popular tales in the Victorian period, making its way into countless collections of children’s stories, as well as pantomimes and operettas.³⁷ The popularity of the fairy tale coincided with great technological advances in the world of mirror-making. As Mark Pendergrast argues in *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (2003), mirror makers had been developing new techniques of grinding and backing in order to make the mirror give off clearer reflections; this culminated in 1850, when a new way to deposit silver onto glass dramatically improved the mirror’s clarity (248). It would seem, at first sight, that these two developments represent opposite conceptions of the mirror’s purpose and power. The Queen’s mirror in “Snow White” reveals what is not there; modern refinements in mirror-making improve the power of the glass to reflect reality without distortion. The magical mirror in “Snow White” is a tool for scrying or divination. By contrast, the technological development of a clearer mirror drives it to reflect ever more accurately the world as it is. The fact that both kinds of mirrors were being developed—one in print culture, the other in manufacture—would appear to represent the contrary tendencies of enchantment and demystification that I outlined in the introduction of this book.

³⁷ While these appearances of “Snow White” are far too numerous to name, a few examples include: Andrew Lang’s *Red Fairy Book* (1890), Dinah Maria Mulock Craik’s *The Fairy Book: The Best Popular Fairy Stories Selected and Rendered Anew* (1868), and Kate Freiligrath-Kroecker’s *Alice and Other Fairy Plays for Children* (1880).

For Victorian writers, however, these functions are not easily separable in the figure of the mirror. It would seem that realist and nonfictional writers presented their work as holding a mirror up to nature, aiming for a verisimilitude that allows them to better represent the realities of the world around them. Meanwhile, writers of fantasies, romances, and gothic stories use the trope of the mirror to reflect things that cannot be seen in real life: another world in which metamorphosis, inversion, doubling, and prophecy overtake accuracy of representation. The former group would say the mirror reflects reality; the latter, a truth that reality itself is not capable of representing. For the writers of the various genres I discuss, the mirror became a magical object by virtue of bringing these seemingly contradictory reflections together. By wielding their narrative magic, these writers enchanted mirrors so that they could ripple the mirror's surface, distorting its hard, mathematically accurate reflections. But in these distorted mirrors, authors could seek both verisimilitude and a blurrier, less embodied truth. In both pursuits, the mirror acts as a portal through which to enter into the world of narrative imagination.

In this chapter, I study the relationship between magic mirrors and narrative. In particular, I look at how certain enchanted mirrors in both fictional and non-fictional works allow authors entrée into the worlds of their narrative description. Though these mirrors, for the most part, do not literally speak back like the Queen's mirror, they have in common the quality of being indispensable to the narrative. At the same time, they are enchanted in very different ways: some, as in fairy tales and other children's fiction, are actually called "magic mirrors" for their ability to show fantasy scenes to the protagonists of the stories. Others, as in David Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* and Oliver Wendell Holmes's essays on photographs, are light-handedly enchanted for the optical illusions they provide. The two novels of focus are

Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and they represent two extremes of the novelistic genre. *Through the Looking-Glass* is a work of nonsense purportedly for children, in which Alice steps through the looking-glass to find a world that, by any estimation, has exploded the rules of real life. Objects, from flowers to insects to chess pieces, are unambiguously alive, and they function by an internal, distorted logic that is reversed in the mirror image. *Adam Bede*, on the other hand, is the first novel of one of the most emblematically realist writers of the period, who states in the novel itself her desire to give as faithful an account as possible of her mind's mirror, in which her characters are reflected. These works represent the two different uses of the mirror: the looking-glass in Carroll's novel presents an entirely otherworldly space driven almost entirely by fantasy; the mirror in Eliot's novel reflects, as accurately as possible, the mostly somber life of a group of landowners and tenant-farmers in a small English village. Upon closer inspection, however, these two novels have some significant commonalities, and their juxtaposition provides us with surprising insights into the relationship between mirrors and narration. Both present mirrors as portals into their story-worlds, and both sets of mirrors provide the space in which negotiations are made between fantasy and reality, between nonsense and logic. The very different genres in which these mirrors exist have in common an authorial fascination with the mirror as a narrative technology, a way for writers to demonstrate their adeptness at manipulating the formal resources of narrative

In order to see why such an understanding of mirrors is key for the study of literature, we need first to fast forward to the twentieth century. In 1979, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar published the landmark *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. In the first chapter, entitled "The Queen's Looking Glass," they give an impassioned feminist reading of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale. In "Snow White," Gilbert and

Gubar argue, the evil queen is nothing if not trapped by the very mirror through which she seeks to aesthetically dominate the world. By choosing beautiful wife after beautiful wife, the barely-present king, standing in for patriarchy, has established an overbearing, normative male gaze that would thenceforth entrap the female body and its reflections:

His, surely, is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the Queen's—and every woman's—self evaluation.... [He] need no longer appear in the story because, having assimilated the meaning of her own sexuality ... the woman has internalized the King's rules: his voice resides now in her own mirror, her own mind. (39)

Gilbert and Gubar build their argument on a long history of psychoanalytic and feminist readings of the mirror. Beginning in the 1930s, Lacan developed his theory of the mirror stage, in which an infant learns—in very fraught ways—to recognize himself in the reflection in front of him. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975) provided a reading of the queen's mirror in “Snow White” as supremely narcissistic, a concept that Freud named after the myth of the Greek figure who fell in love with his own image mirrored in a pond. Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, speaks to women mirroring male desire and self-assurance, serving as “specular duplication” for men (53). These psychoanalytic readings are so convincing that we are often seduced by their representations of the mirror. Yet the mirror, in these readings, exists only as the incidental tool of reflection, at hand yet always invisible.³⁸ The mirror may stand for the voice of patriarchy, but that voice is already so internalized that the queen does not need the mirror at all.

While the symbolic nature of the mirror in these psychoanalytic and feminist readings are powerful, the prevalence of mirrors as a literary trope demands a consideration of the mirror in

³⁸ The invisibility of a good mirror is yet another reason why making woman into the mirror of man carries such violence; the woman's self disappears, and she becomes invisible as long as she does a good job of reflecting male genius back onto himself. Martin Danahay has argued that the woman-as-mirror trope is very much present in Victorian poetry, especially in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who also recognize the instability of these “mirrors” when they come alive and threaten to stop their perfect reflection.

and of itself, and of the process of reflection rather than just the figures in the reflection. Only more recently, with the rise in the study of material culture in literature, has the mirror come into its own as an object worthy of inquiry. This delay is at least partly due to the fact that mirrors are, by their very nature, hard to conceptualize materially. The paradox of the mirror is that, the better a mirror is, the more invisible it becomes. Isobel Armstrong, in *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (2008) where she traces the material and historical importance of glass and mirrors, eloquently summarizes the problem of studying the material of mirrors: “Reflections are ideal images hosted by matter but not of it” (96). The disjunction between the image in the mirror and the matter of the mirror very much plagued the Victorians; yet this disjunction between an ephemeral image and an invisible material was precisely what made mirrors seem so magical to some Victorians, as we shall see later in Oliver Wendell Holmes’s meditations on photography. Moreover, the mirror’s ability to host images but not trap or flatten them made them a perfect metaphor for the art of storytelling; only it could provide the space for lively, action-driven narratives and still maintain separation between it and the “real world” on the other side.

Which is not to say, however, that Victorians writers were uninterested in the psychological facets of reflections inside the mirror. Indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, some of the most popular novels relied on the mirror as a trope that created uncanny doubles and signified repressed interiority. In Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859), for example, Laura Fairlie comments that Anne Catherick’s face, so similar to her own that the two become indistinguishable to their relatives, is so startling because it seems like “the sight of [her]

own face in the glass after a long illness” (277).³⁹ In Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), the narrator comes upon Jekyll’s cheval-glass “with an involuntary horror,” accurately speculating that “this glass has seen some strange things” (46). Indeed, Jekyll moved the cheval-glass into his laboratory with the specific purpose of looking into it to see when he had transformed into Hyde; the mirror always contains the reflection of his dark, repressed double, the “ugly idol in the glass” (58). And in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the mirror serves the exact opposite function: Dorian Gray looks into it to make sure that his actual face is not marred by the lines of cruelty that he sees in his portrait, which to him seems “the most magical of mirrors” (165). At the same time that Wilde was interested in the psychological interiority of his characters, his aesthetic sensibility also led him to pay attention to the material objects around him. In a short poem in prose, written just a few years after *Dorian Gray*, Wilde turns the story of Narcissus on its head in order to personify the mirror: in “The Disciple” (1893), after Narcissus has drowned in the pool of his desire, the pool comments, “But I loved Narcissus because, as he lay on my banks and looked down at me, in the mirror of his own eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored” (246). Wilde’s pool sounds like a liquid version of Lord Henry: ironic, irreverent, selfish, and truly narcissistic. Yet here is also a mirror that refuses to stay invisible and incidental. As sinister an object as it is in reducing Narcissus down to nothing but a pair of eyes—subjecting Narcissus, indeed, to the terrible fate of becoming an invisible mirror—the pool becomes personified and gains sympathy in its need to draw attention to itself, to its own form and its own beauty.

Wilde’s pool is not the only Victorian literary mirror that refused to host images. Edith Nesbit’s “A Looking-Glass Story” (1887) provides another instance of a magic mirror that, by

³⁹ In a reversal of this moment in *Woman in White*, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* has her looking-glass taken away after her illness because her friends fear that she will see the scarred image of herself. Esther’s scarred face actually undoes the uncanny doubling in the novel, since she will no longer look like her mother, Lady Dedlock.

making the gazer's body disappear, draws attention to itself and shifts the relationship between the person and the mirror. At the beginning of the story, the narrator recalls how, when he was fifteen, his elder sister convinced him that he could see "the face of [his] future" (156) by sitting in front of a mirror, combing his hair, and eating an apple. The comb and the apple—both objects that the evil queen poisoned in order to murder Snow White—give a fairy tale quality to the gothic story. The narrator seems to want to recuperate mirror-gazing for men, or at least subject men to the same mirror that judges women: though his sister tells him "that this charm was only meant for girls, and that it was absurd for a boy to sit down before a glass and comb his hair," he himself argues there is "no special absurdity" in such an act (156).⁴⁰ But instead of his body becoming too embodied by the judgment of patriarchy, he suffers the disembodying fate of Narcissus in Wilde's story. At first, he feels a sort of dismemberment: his hand, "mechanically" combing his hair, "[suggests] some other hand reaching over [his] head for some other purpose" (157). Then, something even stranger happens:

I grew sick and faint, and closed my eyes. On the instant I opened them again, and looked through the glass for their reflexion. *It was not there.* I was facing a blank space, closed in my looking-glass frame.

The black space was presently broken by a point of light—a star. Another, and another, and another, and it seemed as though I were looking through a window at the midnight sky.... Far before me stretched pointed roofs, churches, trees in avenues, open spaces with masses of foliage.... (157, emphasis original)

Instead of his face—or even his eyes—he begins to see the pinpoint lights of the starry sky and then a fruit tree in full bloom. The most jarring part of this process is the disappearance of his body, and this uncanny feeling returns to haunt the narrator later in the story. When he visits a barber as an adult, even an accidental glimpse into the mirror activates, quite uninvited and

⁴⁰ Men gazing into mirrors (that is, mirrors that were not women) was indeed a contentious act in the Victorian period. The act implied a gender-reversal, a vanity inappropriate to those of a certain class who did not want to be considered a fop or a dandy. As Sarah Rose Cole has argued, however, Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* "continually invokes the figure of the mirror-gazing man...in order to shock his readers into acknowledging the artificial and performative nature of their own class personae" (139).

unwanted, the same spectral magic: “An icy thrill ran right through me, and I sat quite still gazing—as once before I had gazed—into a mirror which did not reflect my own face” (162).

For the anonymous narrator in Nesbit’s story, the dissolution of the body in the mirror is just as frightful as being trapped in it; but even more frightful is the mirror’s insistence on its own presence, forcefully interjecting itself into an otherwise uneventful scene, and erasing the narrator’s body in the process of proclaiming its own agency.

In this way, the magic mirror distances itself from the function of mirrors in optical illusions suggested by Jonathan Crary. In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Crary argues that optical toys like the kaleidoscope and the phenakitoscope actually further corporealized vision in the Victorian period; they led to studies in optics that construct a “subjective vision, a vision that had been taken out of the incorporeal relations of the camera obscura and relocated in the human body” (16). As Wilde’s and Nesbit’s stories suggest, magic mirrors in Victorian literature tended to go in the other direction, dematerializing the body instead of reinforcing it. Crary’s larger argument, however, takes this corporealization of the body to the place of modernist abstraction. Because vision is now no longer an incorporeal ideal, and because it is now located in the body, it becomes a fallible faculty: the eye can be tricked, the body fooled, as we shall see in the discussion of Sir David Brewster below. For Crary, these tricks and illusions speak to a modernist sense of uncertainty and the dismantling of absolute truth, which has its telos in abstract modernism. For certain Victorian writers, however, both the decorporealization of the body and the tricks and illusions played on the corporeal body can work to suggest enchantment rather than uncertainty. The removal of an ideal, optical truth does not leave a lacuna, but in fact provides the space in which the imagination can supply fantastical visions.

We see this in Nesbit's story, which aligns mirrors with seeing into other worlds. The disappearance of the narrator's body physically makes available his extraordinary vision of the entire sky, as well as the wide space below him of "pointed roofs, churches, trees in avenues, open spaces with masses of foliage"; only when the body ceases to be the point of focus in the mirror can the world behind the mirror become available. In providing her narrator with such vision, Nesbit alludes to the spiritual revival movement that was reaching its height in the late nineteenth century. In *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004), Alex Owen enumerates all the ways in which the Victorians engaged with spiritualism in the fin-de-siècle, including mediums who looked into glasses in order to tell the future. Specifically, Owen mentions a popular "magician," Aleister Crowley, who used a golden topaz as a "magical shew-stone," making it play "a part not unlike that of the looking-glass in the case of *Alice*" (197). Owen's argument, on the whole, is that late nineteenth-century occultism was actually not in contrast to the modernity of the fin-de-siècle moment because it, too, was concerned with new ways of conceptualizing the self and subjectivity. While I am less interested in seeing the Victorians as modern, and while my readings of the mirror focus less on the gazing self and more on the process of narrative scrying, I might suggest that this latter process is modern in that it engages with an almost deconstructive idea of mediation and artifice. Nesbit's mirror and Crowley's shew-stone, like the mirrors I present in the rest of the chapter, are media that draw attention to themselves as facilitators or disruptors of vision.

The idea of the scrying mirror is present much earlier in the century, in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott." Perhaps the most famous example of scrying mirror magic in Victorian literature, the poem was written in 1833 but substantially revised in 1842. In the 1833 version, Tennyson merely has "the fairy Lady of Shalott" looking into a mirror that reflects the

outside world: “Before her hangs a mirror clear/ Reflecting towered Camelot./ And, as the mazy web she whirls,/ She sees the surly village-churls,/ And the red cloaks of market girls,/ Pass onward from Shalott.” In the 1842 version, however, Tennyson changes the wording slightly to give a magical quality to this mirror: “And moving thro’ a mirror clear/ That hangs before her all the year,/ Shadows of the world appear.” Gone is the language of reflection; instead, Tennyson describes the mirror with words of conjuration, for the “shadows of the world appear” as if they had been summoned by the expert magic of the fairy Lady. As her curse forbids her from looking directly down at Camelot, her mirror must become her sole medium of vision.⁴¹ Moreover, the mirror becomes a narrative device for Tennyson, who can give a lyrical description of Camelot—of its “river eddy,” “surly village churls,” and “red cloaks of market girls”—to which neither his readers nor the Lady of Shalott have direct access. Indeed, the shadow-visions in the mirror becomes the only safe way in which the Lady can indulge in her curiosity and desire for the world outside, for she must, by her curse, float down the river to die as soon as she turns around to look at the lovely Lancelot through the window. The Lady is at her safest when she sits, looking at the shadow-images in the mirror and renarrating these images by weaving them into a tapestry, like Arachne of the old Greek tales.

We can align Owen’s occult mirror, Nesbit’s mirror, and the Lady of Shalott’s mirrors in their reflection of an alternate world. These alternate worlds, more often than not, served to represent a more truthful version of the world. As Owen contends, fin-de-siècle spiritualist practices are underpinned by “an implicit acceptance of the idea that reality as we are taught to understand it accounts for only a fraction of the ultimate reality which lies just beyond our

⁴¹ Critics of the poem, including Gerhard Joseph and Geoffrey Hartman, have placed more emphasis on the Lady’s turn away from the mirror to the window as her desire for unmediated contact with the world. While this is true, Tennyson seems to take as much pleasure in giving narrative description through the mediation of the mirror as he does in depicting the Lady’s subsequent unmediated journey to her death.

immediate senses [to which] the psychic, medium, or magician claims ... access” (19). In other words, for these spiritualists, the magic mirror has the express purpose of revealing a version of the world inaccessible to the naked eye. We see this kind of mirror in “Snow White”: the queen seeks the truth about the most beautiful woman in the world, which her talking mirror provides. We see this kind of mirror, too, in the looking-glass story, which has been a minor genre since the Renaissance period. Looking-glass stories have been traditionally written as morality tales; with titles like *A Looking Glass for Children* (1673) or *The Looking-Glass for the Mind* (1792), these stories use the metaphor of the mirror to reflect the “follies and improper pursuits of the youthful breast” (Reichertz 54).⁴² For the large part, the “looking-glass” suggested by these titles remain merely metaphorical; *The Looking-Glass for the Mind; or, Intellectual Mirror*, for example, contains no actual mirrors but instead a series of instructional stories featuring boys and girls who learn their lessons. In the Victorian period, the looking-glass story certainly remained in circulation, but the reinfusion of fantasy and fairy tales back into children’s literature turned the looking-glass story into a fantastical genre, as well. The fantastical nature of these stories meant that their titular mirrors often became actual objects in the stories, literalizing the metaphor of the looking-glass. These mirrors continue not to reflect the world “as is” but instead show some deeper moral truth. For example, Madeline Bonavia Hunt’s short story “The Magic Mirror” (1880) has little Ellice wake up and “[find] beyond a doubt that she had become possessed of a magic mirror” (2). This magic mirror shows Ellice a series of “visions” of herself and her classmates, which prompt her to become more generous and kind-hearted. Christina N. Simpson’s *The Prince’s Box; or, the Magic Mirror* (1879) is a much more fantastical version,

⁴² For more on looking-glass stories in earlier English literature, see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle-Ages and English Renaissance*. Ronald Reichertz’s *The Making of the Alice Books: Lewis Carroll’s Uses of Earlier Children’s Literature* draws a relationship between the didacticism of the looking-glass story and Lewis Carroll’s more absurdly *Through the Looking-Glass*, arguing that Carroll’s novel combined such didacticism with imaginative play.

telling of a fairy mirror that the Prince receives upon his birth; this mirror, which hangs around the Prince's neck, turns darker and darker with each morally reprehensible action the Prince takes. In these stories, the mirror is meant to reflect the "truth" of moral rectitude, yet the only way in which to do so—because society itself is imperfect—is for it to activate a transformative magic.

While these stories gave the mirror the ultimate moral say, other stories complicated the relationship between an accurate vision of the world and a more truthful one. William Gilbert's *The Magic Mirror* (1866) best exemplifies these entangled forces. *The Magic Mirror* is not only a non-canonical work but one difficult to categorize. On the surface, it seems like a fairy story with a set of morals, the most prominent of which is "Be careful what you wish for"; it gives episodic accounts of various villagers in Renaissance London who wish through a mirror for extravagance or indulgence with humorously unintended and regrettable consequences. Yet the story is clearly not aimed at children; there is ribald humor and descriptions of sexual affairs, all of which make it resemble *The Decameron* more than an educational volume for the youth. More interestingly, *The Magic Mirror* turns the mirror from a gentle but stern guide of moral justice to an inscrutable object, half didactic and half sinister. At the beginning of the story, an Italian Count gifts an English merchant a Venetian glass mirror, of a superior quality than any of the metal mirrors common to England at the time. Unbeknownst to the merchant or any of the numerous visitors who gaze upon it, the mirror actually grants the wishes of any who looks into it. So, for example, the merchant wishes he had business acumen as clear as the glass of the mirror:

What a singular faculty to possess, that of having everything reflected truthfully upon it! To it there is no deception. The old may paint their wrinkles, but the mirror sees them. To it the beautiful are beautiful, and the deformed, deformed. If

a man could only possess a faculty of this kind, of what immense service it would be to him! (20)

Inherent in this wish is the idealization of the mirror, along with a bit of a paradox. The merchant admires the Venetian mirror because it gives off a clearer, more accurate reflection of the world, but he projects onto it the characteristic of a magical mirror, which gives off a truthful reflection of the world. In other words, he idealizes the mirror as showing the truth beneath the surface, all the while admiring it because, as a better mirror, it gives a clearer version of that surface. From his wish we might gather the irony inherent in the didactic magic-mirror story: the mirror's clarity in accurate reflection is coopted for the purpose of getting at a better version of the world, which is anything but realistic.

The curious thing about Gilbert's magic mirror is that, while it drives the various plots in the story, and while it acts on the desires of the characters who look into it, the two are cognitively dissociated for the characters. The mirror is certainly the guiding structure of the novel: each chapter features one character—"Giles the Swineherd," "The Mercer's Apprentice," or "The Sacristan of St. Botolph"—who happens to wish for something in front of the mirror and suffers the unforeseen consequences of his desires. Giles, for example, wishes he would never have to work and will always have food provided for him, and he turns into so corpulent a figure that he literally cannot walk out of his front door. However, none of the characters—including the merchant himself—has any idea that it is the mirror granting their wishes. In this way, the mirror becomes less an object of gentle warning and more of a sinister fairy or genie, playing with the characters' fates for its own amusement. In addition, the characters' initially innocuous desires quickly get out of hand. The merchant suffers in the strangest way from the consequences of his desire to take on the mirror's clear-sightedness, which becomes dangerously literalized. He

becomes increasingly moody and cold toward his daughter Bertha, until he finally confesses to her that he has “lately felt as if [his] brain were made of glass” (47):

In the first place, my head is so heavy I can hardly support it. In the second, it is exceedingly cold. Thirdly, I see everything clearly before me. I succeed in consequence in everything I attempt, and nobody can deceive me. Lastly, I have lost all sensation of sorrow, excitement, or pleasure. I am no more capable of feeling than a mass of rock crystal. (47)

The merchant’s plot emblemizes the dangers of wishing for what one did not earn, but there is also something more jarring at play. The relationship between the merchant and the mirror is one of ontological transfer. He plays with the boundary between person and thing, and learns just how dangerous it was to desire object-status as a person. The merchant’s projection of cold clearness onto the mirror had the active potential of reflecting that coldness back on himself, and Gilbert’s story presents the intertwined danger of desirous projection and a mirror’s reflective potential. The fact of the mirror’s increase in accuracy and the desire of the merchant for it to reflect truth compound this ontological tension in the story.

The development of finer mirrors in optical and scientific instruments, too, hold the tension between ever more accurate reflection and the desire to see truths invisible to the naked eye. Indeed, scientific mirrors in telescopes and microscopes are meant to aid our vision in seeing the remotest planets or the most miniscule cells, none of which would be available otherwise. Victorian science and magic become aligned in this pursuit, despite science’s ostensible drive to demystify magic.⁴³ Sir David Brewster, inventor of the lenticular stereoscope, best exemplifies the interplay between science, magic, and visions of reality in his *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832). The *Letters* would appear to be a grand treatise demystifying so-called

⁴³ The connection between technology and magic has been made by a number of critics, including Pamela Thurschwell in *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking*, 1880-1920. Though Thurschwell focuses on technologies of communication—such as the telegraph and the telephone—instead of technologies of seeing, her work aligns the occult with the scientific discourses of the day, arguing that the former infused the latter despite being often dismissed as a pseudo-science.

magic as mere auditory and optical illusions; Brewster asserts that, in fact, these illusions were “the means by which [governments] maintained their influence over the human mind. . . . [which] is at all times fond of the marvellous” (14). The ancient priests and sorcerers were all engaging in “natural magic” to fool their audiences, but, for Brewster, their magic is actually the primitive understanding of the scientific principles behind sound and light. Even as he explains away these illusions, however, Brewster cannot help but revel in their enchanting quality. On microscopes and telescopes, he writes, “The power of bringing the remotest objects within the very grasp of the observer, and of swelling into gigantic magnitude the almost invisible bodies of the material world, never fails to inspire with astonishment even those who understand the means by which these prodigies are accomplished” (16-7). He devotes an entire chapter to mirror illusions (while all other illusions are grouped into a miscellaneous chapter), which he enumerates with particular glee; there is “the specula which, when put in a particular place, gave no images of objects, but, when carried to another place, recovered their property of reflection” (61-2), and the double-mirror trick that would make a person feel “[great] astonishment. . . at seeing him transformed into another person, or into any living animal” (63). Brewster’s ostensibly scientific text does not discount the enchantment that such secular magic, as Simon During would call it, inspires. As I have discussed in the introduction, secular magic, or the magic used by stage conjurors, necessitates a suspension of disbelief that is not antithetical to the scientific understanding of the principles of the conjuror’s tricks. Brewster’s account does not diminish the enchantment of mirror magic, even as he reveals the mirror’s optical manipulations.

We can see another account of secular magic in the rhetoric surrounding photography, in which writers often resorted to the language of enchantment to describe the photograph, which is often analogized to a magic mirror. For example, Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his famous essays

on stereoscopes and photography, alludes to both ancient Greece and *The Arabian Nights* in order to talk about photography. In “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” (1859), Holmes is interested in exceptionalizing the marvel of the photograph, so that we would not “forget its miraculous nature” as “an inconceivable wonder” (738). The photograph is a wonder because it has created a magic mirror:

[The Daguerreotype] has fixed the most fleeting of our illusions, that which the apostle and the philosopher and the poet have alike used as the type of instability and reality. The photograph has completed the triumph, by making a sheet of paper reflect images like a mirror and hold them as a picture. (738)

The mirror that revolts against its ephemeral nature and holds an image would have been inconceivable to Democritus, Holmes ruminates, despite Democritus having theorized films coming off of bodies like images. And yet, the photograph has become so commonplace that it seems less wonderful than “the railroad-car, the telegraph, and the apple-flavored chloroform” that might have come directly from *The Arabian Nights* (739). Holmes is so enamored with the photograph that he engages in a double-move with regards to temporality. On the one hand, he wants his readers to recognize the photograph as one of the modern marvels by showing how inconceivable it would have been to the persons of the ancient world; at the same time, he wants to re-enchant the photograph by putting the reader into the mindset of the ancient man. Holmes appeals to some version of sun-worship in describing the photograph as a “sun-picture”: “The sun, then, is a master of *chiaroscuro* and, if he has a living petal for his pallet, is the first of colorists” (739-40). In addition, the impermanence of its mirror predecessors makes Holmes want to pin down the precisely why the photograph is such a miracle: unlike the mirror, it can hold an image; it is “the mirror with a memory” (739).

As we have already gathered from Brewster, the mirror does not merely reflect reality, and so the photograph is not merely capturing reality. Certainly, it was used to this purpose

often: Holmes himself describes “one infinite charm of the photographic delineation,” which is that the photograph would capture everything that the fallible human eye—even the artist’s eye—would miss (744). However, alongside this idea that photographs were to provide ever more realistic depictions of people and landscapes existed the idea that such realism was generated by, and further generates, the imaginative potential of the medium. We can certainly see this imaginative potential in the playful photography of Lady Eastlake, who dressed her servants up as literary characters, or of Lewis Carroll, who dressed little Alice Liddell up in costumes of beggar-girls and other races. But even without actively altering reality through costume-play, the photograph is enchanted in the very fidelity to reality that it presents to its viewers. In “Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture; With a Stereoscopic Trip across the Atlantic” (1861), for example, Holmes extolls the “fidelity” that photography itself creates; when made into a stereoscopic picture, “To this charm of fidelity in the minutest details the stereoscope adds its astonishing illusion of solidity, and thus completes the effect which so entrances the imagination” (14). Thus, the more “real” an object gets—the more minute its depiction, the more solid its form—the more the imagination can come into play by transporting viewers to the scene. This quality is precisely what allows Holmes to take his readers on the “stereoscopic trip” all around Europe, telling them, “Let us...closing our eyes for an instant, open them in London” (18).

The Victorian magic mirror is thus characterized by a longing to see what cannot be seen by the naked eye. Edith Nesbit’s short story gives us a mirror that shows the viewer a different world, akin to the divination practices of fin-de-siècle spiritualists. This other world is meant to represent a deeper truth about reality that seemingly contradicts the surface accuracy of well-made mirrors, as can be seen in the ontological tensions in William Gilbert’s *The Magic Mirror*.

Meanwhile, the nonfiction writings of Brewster and Holmes reveal that accurate reflection, imaginative play, and enchantment come together in the stage magician's mirror and in photography as a "mirror with a memory." And, lastly, the stereoscopic photo allows for not only enchantment but transportation, by which the viewer can, through the photograph, enter into the world represented within these memory-mirrors. In the second half of this chapter, I pursue these various abilities of the magic mirror in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and Eliot's *Adam Bede*. These novels are separated by a wide gulf of generic differences. *Through the Looking-Glass* is a fully fantastical work filled with nonsense, focalized through the viewpoint of Alice as a little girl. *Adam Bede*, meanwhile, is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator who is very much an adult and very much self-aware. Both Carroll and Eliot, however, present magic mirrors as narrative portals that not only show an imagined world but through which readers and characters can enter into that world. Moreover, these mirrors become the concentrated figures through which mimetic reality and an augmented truth can both clash and commingle. The outright magic looking-glass and nonsensical nature of *Through the Looking-Glass* belies the logical structure and tight narrative control in the novel, while the ostensibly faithfully mimetic mirror in *Adam Bede* becomes refracted into reflections elsewhere that foster magic and fantasy.

Looking-Glass World: Logic and Nonsense in *Through the Looking-Glass*

Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There (1871) is the second half of Lewis Carroll's Alice books. The titular looking-glass functions both as an actual magical object, through which Alice can enter into Looking-Glass World, and as a narrative framework through which the reader, too, can step into Carroll's imaginative world. As the less famous sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, however, *Through the Looking-Glass* has received less

critical attention than its predecessor. In “Improvising Spaces: Victorian Photography, Carrollian Narrative, and Modern Collage,” Christopher Hollingsworth makes an appealing analogy between the creative and surprising elements of the photographic collage and the haphazard sequence of events in *Wonderland*, but comments that “*Looking-Glass*, by dint of its more formulaic nature, is a slight but telling falling off” (94). More generously, Franz Meier, in “Photographic Wonderland: Intermediality and Identity in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Books*,” proposes the various inversions and distortions of bodies in *Looking-Glass* as signs that “a camera is similar to a mirror so the latter can be seen as one more aspect of photographic space as well” (122). Nancy Armstrong, in *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, provides a more extended analysis of Victorian photographs of criminals and prostitutes, Carroll’s photographs of Alice Liddell, and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. These critics demonstrate the surprising and wondrous arguments that can arise from comparing the still images of photographs and a set of novel that are full of strange juxtapositions, movements, and transformations.

Armstrong’s book provides perhaps the most surprising links between photography, realism, and the genres of fantasy. Her larger argument aligns photography with literary realism in their simultaneous attempts to create a world that relies on visual information that is both reliably real and “infinitely reproducible” (7). In other words, both photographs and the realist novel set up a kind of visual epistemology in which the visualization of persons and objects suggested a realist knowing, and novels strove for this kind of pictorial representation that emulated the photographable object. *Alice in Wonderland*, although on the opposite end of the spectrum from the realist novel, yet participates in this pictorial turn by providing a “photographable” landscape, albeit of fantastical and nonsensical objects. Armstrong’s chapter on *Alice* focuses on Alice’s body as one of these photographable objects, aligning her bodily

incontinence—the constant growing and shrinking—with the supposed incontinence of the Victorian criminal underclass. While *Alice in Wonderland* certainly provides much fodder for this analysis about the female body, Armstrong's and other critics' comparisons between the Alice books and photography suggest an alternate avenue of analysis. If, as Holmes's writing suggests, the photograph itself is a self-reflexive medium that can be analogized to a mirror with a memory, the looming looking-glass in *Through the Looking-Glass* must also be a self-reflexive medium through which to consider the complexities of representation and narration.

This is not to say that Alice's body does not merit analysis in *Through the Looking-Glass*; however, in this latter work, her body becomes much more dematerialized. While, in *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice literally feels the weight of her body when she falls down the rabbit hole, her entrance into Looking-Glass World requires a decorporealization like the one we have seen in Edith Nesbit's "A Looking-Glass Story." When Alice steps through the looking-glass, which is "beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist" (143), she does not run into her shadow-self trying to come out to the other side; both she and the mirror must, if only for an instant, become formless and matterless, in order that the shift may occur. The world on the other side is one that both embodies and resists the pictorial turn. While the geography of Looking-Glass World presents an easily visualizable landscape full of photographable objects, these objects and the landscape begin immediately to function in nonsensical ways. In fact, their function is less nonsensical than one that abides by mirror logic. While Alice herself cannot make much of her surroundings—she comments on multiple occasions, "That would be nonsense" or "I know they're talking nonsense" (162, 189)—Carroll has created a world in which reversals and reflections reign supreme. The reversals in *Through the Looking-Glass* has been commented on by various critics: Martin Gardner explains the inversions through Carroll's

mathematical background; Alexander Taylor sees Carroll's use of reversals as providing an adult seriousness to what would otherwise be simply a children's book; and Stephen Prickett and Eric Rabkin see that reversal as the very structuring of the fantastic genre. These critics point to, for example, the poem "Jabberwocky," which is first presented in reverse mirror-writing, and Tweedledee and Tweedledee who are "mirror-image forms of each other" (Gardner 182) as evidence of the interweaving of reflections and inversions throughout the novel.

While I also see the novel as functioning by reflection and inversion, I would like to make two formulations about the objects in the mirror and the mirror itself. First, the objects in the mirror are not as they appear: which is to say, the objects are not only inverted but utterly transformed, their sudden liveliness being one of the foremost effects of that transformation. As soon as Alice steps inside the mirror, she sees the chess pieces come to life; the chess-pieces are jumping about, falling down, and speaking. Throughout the rest of the novel, Alice will continue to encounter lively things, from giant talking flowers in the garden to glass insects flying beside

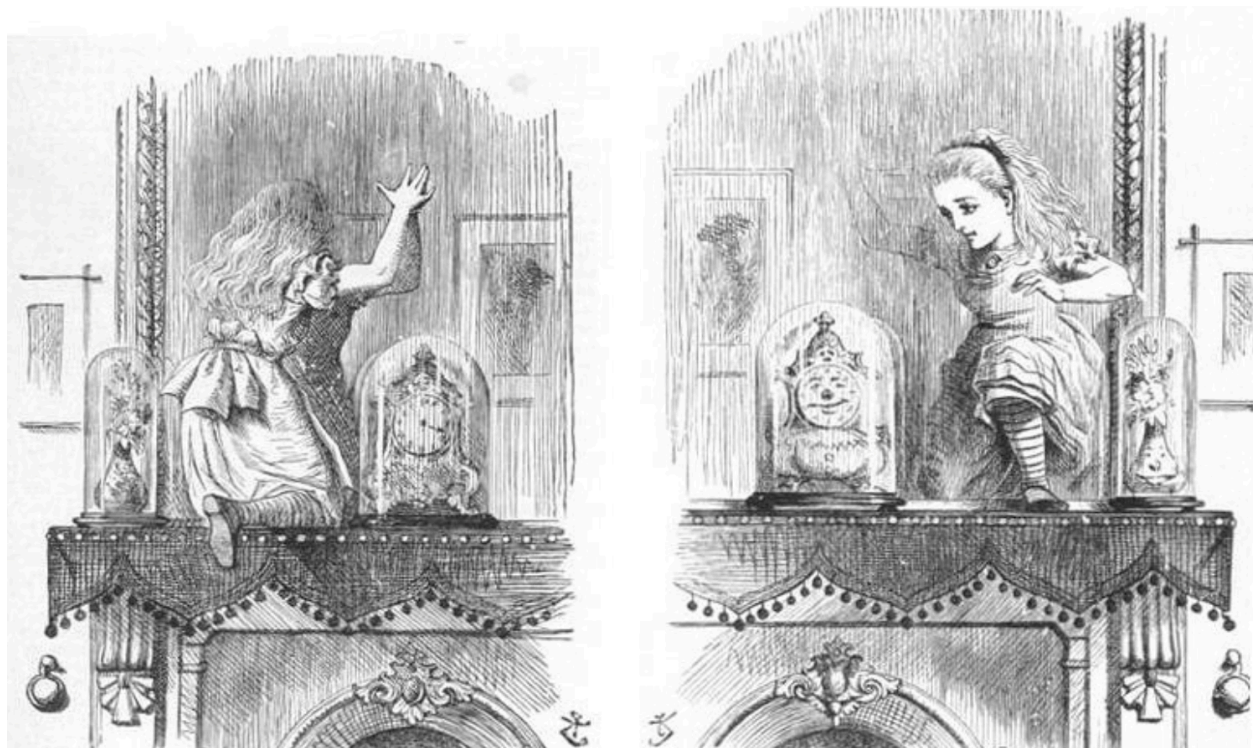


Figure 7. John Tenniel, illustration for *Through the Looking-Glass*. Courtesy of Google Books.

a train. John Tenniel's illustrations of Alice moving through the mirror serve as a visual representation of these transformations: in the first scene, we see Alice going into the mirror, surrounded by a normal clock and vase; in the opposing leaf, as Alice comes out of the mirror, both the clock and the vase are personified with smiling faces (Figure 7). The various personifications within Looking-Glass World demonstrate the magic of the looking-glass, which is capable of revealing a world utterly incongruent to our own. My second formulation is that the objects in the mirror are anything but stable, and their instability disrupts the faculty of vision. In a shop that she comes upon, Alice is struck by a strangeness in her vision:

The shop seemed to be full of all manner of curious things—but the oddest part of it all was that, whenever she looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly what it had on it, that particular shelf was always quite empty, though the others round it were crowded as full as they could hold.... (201)

These objects refuse to remain pinned under Alice's gaze and continually escape her attention. They function as converses of objects in photographs, which may lead the eye from one to another but certainly do not escape the eye altogether. This wild, uncontrollable movement of objects, as well as their escapist tendencies, reinforces the mirror's tendency to host immaterial images that disappear as soon as one shifts angles. In this way, *Through the Looking-Glass* shows itself to be radically distinct from *Alice in Wonderland*, or at least Armstrong's analysis of it. The novel insists that a mirror is absolutely unlike a photograph; while the photograph pins down visual objects and presents them in a packaged, circulating manner, the mirror, while providing the space for visual imagination and fantasy, does not host that fantasy in any stable way. If the photograph is a "mirror with a memory," the looking-glass in Carroll's story is a mirror that deconstructs the very idea of memory; as the White Queen quips, "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (196).

At the same time, the mirror works like the photographs of Holmes's description in that it is a narrative device for the entry into another world. Just like Holmes begins his stereoscopic tour by asking his readers to close their eyes and reopen them in London, the narrator invites us along on a tour of Looking-Glass World by following Alice through the mirror. Moreover, that act of entering Looking-Glass World through narration is one overtly rehearsed by Alice herself, who momentarily takes over the role of narrator. Holding her misbehaving Kitty up to the mirror, Alice threatens to thrust it into the other world; as she does this, however, she begins to tell Kitty about what she imagines Looking-Glass World to be:

Now, if you'll only attend, Kitty, and not talk so much, I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House. First, there's the room you can see through the glass—that's just the same as our drawing room, only the things go the other way. I can see all of it when I get upon a chair—all but the bit behind the fireplace. Oh! I do so wish I could see THAT bit! I want so much to know whether they've a fire in the winter: you never CAN tell, you know, unless the fire smokes, and then the smoke comes up in that room too—but that may be only pretense, just to make it look as if they had a fire. Well, then, the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way; I know that, because I've held up one of our books to the glass, and then they hold up one in the other room. (7)

Kitty becomes the "dear reader" of the realist novel, on whom Alice practices her techniques of narration. These techniques, though tentative, nevertheless establish Alice, the mirror-gazer, as practicing a sort of scrying magic. However, this mirror magic is not an outrageously fantastical one as the novel's genre would suggest. What Alice describes is not the nonsensical world she would experience on the other side of the mirror, but the reflected space of her living room that she can already see. She longs to see into the corners and behind the fireplace; she longs to know whether the other fireplace has a fire in the winter. Alice's narration, then, is not really about her imagination but about using the mirror to get a fuller sense of her reality. In this way, her looking-glass functions very much like the mirror in Gilbert's *The Magic Mirror*, in that it

dissociates from mimetic reality only so that it can provide a deeper, more truthful vision of reality.

In the same vein, the narrator of the novel provides a sobering restraint to what might otherwise be an overwhelmingly fantastical world. At the start of the story, when Alice begins her pretend-play with Kitty, the narrator interrupts her speech to insert his own commentary:

“Kitty, dear, let’s pretend—” And here I wish I could tell you half the things Alice used to say, beginning with her favourite phrase “Let’s pretend.” She had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before.... And once she had really frightened her old nurse.... But this is taking us away from Alice’s speech to the kitten. (141)

Here, the narrator, while pleasantly recounting Alice’s imaginative play, nevertheless undermines that imaginative play by providing a vaguely didactic anecdote about how her pretense has gotten her in trouble with her sister and nurse. The narrator’s apparent indulgence for pretense does not stop him from taking the reader’s attention, if only for a moment, away from Alice. Later in the novel, the narrator engages in a similar sobering interruption: when Alice encounters the White Knight, the narrator recounts:

Of all the strange things Alice saw in her journey Through the Looking-Glass, this was the one she always remembered more clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday—the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight—the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light that quite dazzled her—the horse quietly moving about, with the reins hanging loose on his neck, cropping the grass at her feet—and the black shadows of the forest behind—all this she took in like a picture. (243-4)

This passage is one of the only times when we as readers are jarred out of Alice’s perspective, through which her entire journey had thus far been focalized. Here, the narrator gives us an adult Alice, who no doubt no longer says “Let’s Pretend” and can have only the memory of her journey. This temporal interruption works to give an air of realism to Alice’s journey, as something that she remembers rather than imagines; as well, it brings us back to the photograph,

for Alice remembers this moment “like a picture,” literally through the mirror with a memory. While Alice herself seeks to practice her narrative ability through seeking a grander vision of her living room in the mirror, the narrator provides us a grander vision of Alice’s life beyond Looking-Glass World.

Through the Looking-Glass, then, gives different versions of the mirror. On the one hand, it provides us with glimpses of Looking-Glass World, in which objects have been multiplied, transfigured, and personified, all of which serve to highlight the mirror’s magical ability to generate a radically different world. On the other hand, that world follows its own logic and is surprisingly sensical. Both Alice and the narrator, moreover, practice a form of imaginative storytelling that tends toward realism more than it does toward fantasy. In the next section, as we shall see, the narrator in *Adam Bede* tells us that he desires this proximity to realistic representation in his mirrors; surprisingly for a realist novel, the mirrors in *Adam Bede* also act as facilitators of fantasy and outright sorcery.

The Egyptian Sorcerer’s Ink: Realism and Fantasy in *Adam Bede*

George Eliot uses the figure of the mirror as both the mode and the medium through which the imagination seeks realization in the form of the novel. We see this in the way she theorizes mirrors in her fiction: rather than her realist works merely holding up a mirror to nature, her mirrors are imaginative, selective, and the converting portal for both her narrators and her characters. In the famous “parable” in *Middlemarch* (1871-2), for example, she plays with the anthropocentric quality of a reflective surface:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be 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. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent.... (258)

In illuminating this strange optical illusion, Eliot draws on the sorts of “natural magic” described by Sir David Brewster. She demonstrates the magical quality of optical science; what could be characterized through particles and angles become instead little moments of domestic illusion, something that would enchant the reader who would understand, but not be overcome by, the rational logic behind it. More importantly, Eliot’s narrator makes clear in this passage that the mirror is oftentimes an unreliable reflector, prone to reflect the self-centered-ness inherent in any personified narrator. In this way, the narrator herself is never unbiased, but chooses to describe clusters of events rather than any bird’s-eye overview of the entire world of the novel. Thus, even in a novel like *Middlemarch* where the narrator is supposedly giving us a cross-section of middling, provincial life, the mirror-like nature of narration indicates subjective selection rather than objective reflection.

While the mirror in *Middlemarch* sets out relativism as one of the governing ideas of the novel, *Adam Bede* (1859) is much more explicitly interested in the imaginative and fantastical qualities of the mirror. Indeed, in *Adam Bede*, Eliot sees mirrors as magical visionary portals.

She begins the novel with one:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder, in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799.
(7)

The fact that *Adam Bede* begins with a scene of outright sorcery seems radically incongruent with the rest of the novel, which falls squarely into the realist genre. However, the criticism on

Adam Bede is already quite contentious around the topic of the novel's realism. Some, like George Levine, sees Eliot as trying to get at a closer representation of the real despite the problem of language as mediation. On the other hand, Dorothy Van Ghent, Harry E. Shaw, and Ian Adam see Eliot not as struggling to represent the real but rather, through her movements and distortions through time and space, creating a sense of concreteness married with universalism. *Adam Bede*, then, seems to confound our expectations of the mimetic verisimilitude of the realist genre: the scenes and figures are represented with detail and specificity, yet the narrator constantly pulls the reader's attention elsewhere, switching between global and local events, and this narrative play disrupts the idea of realist representation by making the narrator's hand too obvious.

Based on what we have seen of magic mirrors thus far, I suggest that the scrying mirror of the Egyptian sorcerer's ink provides precisely the right object through which Eliot can negotiate the ostensibly opposite pulls of the narrator's imaginative agency and the novel's realistic depiction. In fact, I argue that, by having the key moments of the novel revolve around the figure of the mirror, Eliot actually frames the battle, which in *Middlemarch* would be between narratorial relativism and the realistic depiction, as an explicitly imaginative guiding structure that does not present fantasy and reality as contradictory pulls. In other words, like Holmes's stereoscope, the magic mirror in *Adam Bede* allows Eliot to create a world that is at once imaginary and realistic, made more realistic by the very faculty of the imagination. Like her other early novels, *Adam Bede* undertakes to show a slice of provincial life, which contributes to its place in the realist genre. The novel revolves around a set of characters whose most dramatic moments are comprised of a series of romantic and antagonistic interactions. Hetty Sorrel, a poor relation of a tenant farmer, is charmed by Arthur Donnithorne, heir to the estate. He breaks off

their affair, she decides to marry Adam Bede—a carpenter in her own class—but discovers her pregnancy and runs away to catastrophic ends. To begin with an Egyptian sorcerer, however, frames the novel in enchantment and uses magic to enter into a work that might otherwise easily be seen as simply realistic.⁴⁴ Because it works magically, the drop of ink can expand to contain an entire world within its miniscule frame. The shift in size multiplies the enchantment already inherent in the sorcery of the drop of ink. Eliot’s allusion to the near-Eastern sorcerer actually preempts another such memorable moment of clairvoyance: in *The Moonstone*, written a decade later, Wilkie Collins has his main characters besieged by a trio of Indian priests, who ply their magic in order to gain an audience with Franklin Blake. They pour out some “black stuff, like ink,” into a boy’s hand, and the boy moves into a trance-like state to answer questions (50). While, to many of the characters of *The Moonstone*—especially Gabriel Betteredge—this act seems like Indian superstition, the potential existence of clairvoyance through an inky mirror haunts the rest of the novel. Integral here is the fact that the Indians have taken along a “little delicate-looking light-haired English boy” with psychic abilities to do their reading (49), almost perfectly reversing the diamond’s movement of bringing exotic magic into England and, instead, showing England itself as home of the supernatural. While the narrator in *Adam Bede* seems to appropriate the magic of the Egyptian sorcerer, we can read the same Anglicizing shift here: it is really the British realist narrator *par excellence* who shows off his magical prowess in his narrative ability. Rather than considering this start to *Adam Bede* as a momentary misstep of an otherwise realistic author, we can take this drop of ink seriously as Eliot’s way of announcing

⁴⁴ Lest we think *Adam Bede* is a standout case for its reference to supernatural vision, we must note that Eliot wrote “The Lifted Veil” in the same year, in which the protagonist, after a protracted illness, becomes gifted with extraordinary clairvoyance with which he could both see into the future and beneath the surface of those around him. “The Lifted Veil,” although it contains no mirrors, is an interesting work to consider in relation to nineteenth-century visual technology. The narrator sees the pretense of those around him “as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts” (295); as well, his future visions take on a photographic quality, remaining “a dark image on the retina” (304).

her particular brand of realism through magical imagination. Eliot opens her novelistic opus through a magic looking-glass. Not only does the narrator practice mirror-vision, he has Hetty rehearse it within the novel.⁴⁵ After Hetty commits her first indiscretion with Arthur Donnithorne, she becomes distracted at bedtime, and decides to play dress-up with the “old-fashioned looking-glass” in her room. At first, the narration seems to be focalized through the mirror; while the mirror is not personified, per se, the narrator almost defensively extolls the mirror’s genteel history and material conveniences:

A queer old looking-glass! Hetty got into an ill temper with it almost every time she dressed. It had been considered a handsome glass in its day, and had probably been bought into the Poyser family a quarter of a century before, at a sale of genteel household furniture. Even now an auctioneer could say something for it: it had a great deal of tarnished gilding about it; it had a firm mahogany base, well supplied with drawers, which opened with a decided jerk and sent the contents leaping out from the farthest corners, without giving you the trouble of reaching them; above all, it had a brass candle-socket on each side, which would give it an aristocratic air to the very last. (148)

The mirror is established as an indicator of the shabby gentility, which Hetty, being a poor relation to a tenant farmer, could never be. Even more of an indicator that she will never be able to rise in station is that she cannot see the material qualities of the mirror, cannot identify the elements—the mahogany, the brass candle-sockets—that would allow her to indulge in the high life she so desperately desires. Instead, Hetty bemoans the fact that there were blotches in the mirror and its annoying fixedness, so Hetty cannot properly admire herself in it. But, as the narrator says, “devout worshippers never allow inconveniences to prevent them from performing their religious rites, and Hetty this evening was more bent on her peculiar form of worship than usual” (148). So Hetty brings out a “small red-framed looking-glass, without blotches” (149) in order to see herself clearly. In the end, after Hetty has brushed her hair and posed for herself,

⁴⁵ Following the tradition in *Adam Bede* scholarship, I use the male pronoun to describe the novel’s narrator; as K. M. Newton has concluded, while almost all readers tend to identify Eliot’s narrators with Eliot herself, “In *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* the narrator is clearly seen to be male” (98).

“even the old mottled glass [of the large mirror] couldn’t help sending back a lovely image” (149).

Hetty’s worship of her own image in the mirror resonates with Ludwig Feuerbach’s ideas *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), which Eliot herself had translated in 1854. The volume was influential for theorists of materialism like Marx and Engels, but also for fiction writers. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach, among other things, concludes that God is merely an anthropocentric projection of man:

Man makes to himself an image of God, *i.e.*, he converts the abstract being of the reason, the being of the thinking power, into an object of sense or imagination. But he places this image in God himself, because his want would not be satisfied if he did not regard this image as an objective reality, separate from God,—a mere figment devised by man. And it is in fact no devised, no arbitrary image; for it expresses the necessity of the imagination, the necessity of affirming the imagination as a divine power. (107-8)

While Feuerbach attacks the dogmatic principles of Christianity, he yet affirms the essential nature of the imagination; in fact, Jesus Christ, by being a reflection of God the image, is actually “the reflected splendour of the imagination” (108). Hetty’s participation in the ritual of vanity and her worship of her own image, then, is akin to the very foundation of Christianity in Feuerbach’s theories. Hetty’s actions here might all too easily be downplayed as those of a simple-minded, naïve, and vain girl. However, when we consider Eliot’s translation of Feuerbach shortly before composing *Adam Bede*, Hetty’s worship takes on a universal quality: we, too, are wont to worship ourselves in the projected images of our own imagination. Moreover, this splendid faculty of the imagination wants constantly to express itself: the image is intimately related to the word, for “Man has not only an instinct, an internal necessity, which impels him to think, to perceive, to imagine; he has also the impulse to speak, to utter, impart his thoughts”

(111). The trope of the mirror, for Eliot, becomes the vehicle through which that imagination can be uttered.

Just as the narrator looks into the Egyptian sorcerer's mirror to begin his story, Hetty tells herself an imaginative story while looking into the mirror. As she continues to gaze into the mirror, Hetty's world begins to expand. She imagines what Arthur would like to do for her, how he would care for her... and eventually, this turns into a fully realized dream for her future:

Perhaps some day she should be a grand lady, and ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair, and her dress sweeping the ground, like Miss Lydia and Lady Dacey, when she saw them going into the dining-room one evening as she peeped through the little round window in the lobby; only she should be...very pretty, with her hair done in a great many different ways, and sometimes in a pink dress, and sometimes in a white one—she didn't know which she liked best. (150-1)

As she engages in this world—a world she creates for us just as much as the narrator has created all of Hayslope, possible yet improbable—Hetty crashes her small hand mirror, without blotches, to the ground. That clear glass, which gives the more accurate reflection of herself, no longer suffices to contain her imagination. Instead, Hetty, for whom everything in her imagination is practically the decided future, transports herself into that future through the vanity mirror, as if the blotches create that alternate reality by their presence. We might see this moment as the narrator's misogynistic mockery of Hetty's vanity; indeed, some critics, like Dorothea Barrett, have argued that the narrator lacks sympathy for Hetty.⁴⁶ However, not only does the narrator use the figure of the mirror to enter into Hetty's interiority and thereby making her a fuller character, the scene makes the narrator and Hetty into parallel figures that practice mirror magic. Though Hetty's vision of the future never comes true, we readers can, in this moment, enter into and take sensual pleasure in her fantasy world just as we do the novel itself. At the same time,

⁴⁶ Barrett argues that, paradoxically, the narrator generates readerly sympathy for Hetty by presenting her without any of his own sympathy.

Hetty's mirror-gazing, unlike the narrator's, is deeply egotistical and irresponsible, providing a dark reflection to the narrator's desire to use the power of the imagination to see deeper truths. Eliot provides these contrasting mirror fantasies—instructive and pleasurable, useful and fickle—to suggest that, in our tendency to fantasize, we look into the mirror to seek both universal truth and selfish pleasure.

The trope of the mirror arises in one other place in the novel; by now, chapter seventeen, “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” has become a canonical place for critics to point out the inconsistencies between Eliot's desire to present a realistic version of the world and her awareness that fiction, even realist fiction, can only be an illusion or reconstruction of the real. At the beginning of the chapter, Eliot's narrator declares that he would avoid an “arbitrary picture” and give

a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. (177)

The criticism about this scene tends to take the narrator at his word. George Levine, even as he admits that “No major Victorian novelists were deluded into believing that they were in fact offering an unmediated reality” sees the defective mirror as a “trap,” the “knowledge of [her] own subjectivity” that Eliot was trying to break out of (8, 44). Dorothy Van Ghent looks more kindly toward the mirror of the mind that “shapes what it sees,” adding that “a spoon would have been a better [analogy], where...we see our head compressed and a half-moon scooped out of it on top as if it were a dime-store flowerpot for our viney hair” (28). Rather than seeing the mirror as disturbing or distorting reflections, however, Victorian writers themselves, I argue, saw it as an imaginative portal in addition to a reflective surface. In this way, the realistic depiction

becomes more adamantly a product of art and fantasy, which are also real inside the world of the novel. Van Ghent's own description capitalizes on the power of such fantastical description: the easiest way for her to make us understand the distortion of a spoon is to put a dime-store flowerpot on our heads.

As in the world of Lewis Carroll, then, reflections can take us to a world where absurd comparisons are nevertheless logical and true. And just like *Through the Looking-Glass*, mirrors in *Adam Bede* function in two ways: both as a scrying tool in which to see this other world and a portal through which to travel to the other world. In the same chapter where the narrator pauses to declare his mirror defective, he reveals himself as an actual character in the world of his narration. As he defends the realistic nature of one of the characters, he recalls a conversation he had had with Adam Bede "to whom [he] talked of these matters in his old age" (181). This is a jarring moment for readers who are accustomed to Eliot's third-person omniscient narration; even though her narrators are often seen as intrusive and moralistic, they would seem rarely to interact with the characters in the story. As K. M. Newton has pointed out, however, the narrators' references to characters they know personally actually occurs in Eliot's other novels, though nowhere more clearly than in *Adam Bede*. For Newton, however, this historicizing of the narrator is a way for Eliot to "overcome some of the problems which faced her as a realistic novelist":

The form of the novel, its shaping of the reality it is dealing with, does not mirror an order which is immanent in the world, but is rather the narrator's own ordering, in the form of a narrative, of a reality which is real for him, which he is looking back on and interpreting from his own point of view. It is this narrator who is part of the fiction who chooses to begin at a certain point, shapes the narrative into the form of a novel, and decides where to end.... Thus this use of a fictional narrator who is apparently writing an historical novel about real people is an extremely logical solution to the problem of how the form a narrative imposes on reality is to be justified in a realistic novel. (100)

Newton uses mirroring as the analogy for some sort of absolute reflection of reality; as we have already seen, however, the mirror of literature for Eliot is always mottled and defective, if not outright an object of fantasy and sorcery. In Carroll's writing, the narrator's intrusion focuses on Alice's mature self and therefore serves to pull Alice, if momentarily, out of Looking-Glass World. Here, in Eliot's writing, it is the reverse. For a brief moment, the narrator shows himself as part of the set of characters with whom we have already grown familiar and seen through the various mirrors of the novel. Rather than reading this moment as the narrator's desperate attempts to pull the characters into the real world, we might consider it as the narrator's moving, through the looking-glass, into the world of the novel. As it was in the Alice stories, the shaping of the fictional world becomes something desirable, a way to ply the trade of imaginative narrative technology. If the beings on the other side appear a little strange or a little distorted, they nevertheless have powerful appeals to sympathy in their liveliness.

In this chapter, I have traced the various ways magic mirrors functioned in surprising and different ways across a broad spectrum of Victorian literature. In the nonfictional works of Brewster and Holmes, the mirror is an object of delightful enchantment conjuring illusions for the pleasures of astonishment and wonder. In the more fantastical works of Nesbit and Gilbert, the mirror presents a more sinister side of itself, radically displacing the gazer's body and sense of self with its own agenda. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the mirror-world is where the nature and static behavior of objects are questioned, while in *Adam Bede*, the mirror suffuses realism with productive acts of fantasy and sorcery. While each text uses the mirror in its own way, the narrative function of the magic mirror links them all together by providing a narrator with a key technology for taking the reader into the text. These writers all counter the notion that there is any sort of straightforward reflection of the world at large; mirrors become activators of fantasy

and desire, both for characters within stories and for the narrators of those stories, by creating magical worlds for us to enter into, which are not banished dark places but the very foundations of experience.

CONCLUSION:

FREUD, HARRY POTTER, AND THE AFTERLIVES OF MAGICAL OBJECTS

At the Wizarding World of Harry Potter inside Universal Studios Orlando, you can buy a wand at Ollivander's shop. An interactive wand, costing just a bit more than a regular wand, comes equipped with an infrared emitter; at various locations inside the park, a partially hidden IR receptor makes certain wand motions "cast a spell": you can raise books in the air, make umbrellas rain, and, my personal favorite, make an entire gallery of lanterns light up. While the entirety of Harry Potter World is meant to be an immersive experience—you have to step behind a brick wall to enter into the area, separating it from the rest of Universal Studios—the park does not seem to be too intent on avoiding demystification. If you fail at a certain spell, a cast member dressed in wizarding robes will enthusiastically point out the receptor at which the wand motion needs to be aimed. Despite that, and despite the Gringotts ride that ground to a halt once every hour due to mechanical failure and the clearly holographic nature of the magical sparks inside Hogwarts Castle, I, and I imagine my fellow travellers, felt an unavoidable thrill during our stay.

This thrill is generated by a combination of factors: enchantment from being immersed in a fictional, fantastical world that had previously only been available on the page or on the screen; a visual spectacle that includes a marble dragon breathing real fire every few minutes; a surrender to the flagrant commodity fetishism in shops selling everything from potions and candies to brooms and robes; and perhaps not least a stubborn insistence on having fun after paying for tickets that cost as much as a fairly decent laptop per person. For me, nothing epitomized the sheer marketing brilliance of Harry Potter World more than the interactive wand. The wand says to the visitor that she is not only welcome inside this fantasy world, but that this

fantasy world will put magic literally in the palm of her hand. Unlike any old remote controller, the wand has the express purpose of simulating magic: there is the magical symbolism, the wood materials and carved grooves that differ from wand to wand; there is the magical gesture, a shape that one must draw with the wand; there is magic result, a gallery of lights that serve not to illuminate but to strike the senses. The wand satisfies something deep inside of us—a longing for extraordinary power contained in a deeply eroticized and fetishized magical object.

Throughout my dissertation, I have analyzed the mechanisms through which magical objects were conjured in Victorian texts, and how the functions of those objects were part and parcel of the very acts of writing and world building. In the conclusion, I want to meditate briefly on that seemingly innate longing, the “why” of magical objects. There are, of course, reasons behind the desire for magical objects that are specific to the Victorian period: in an age of unprecedented political and commercial expansion, the superstitious beliefs of the racial other compounded with their natively British counterparts arising from folklore. These beliefs about the power of objects collided with a highly sentimental relationship the Victorians had to their possessions. And so magical objects flourished despite scientific and technological advances. In our current time, too, magical objects persist; perhaps more radically, the scientific and technological advances in our age have been coopted to make objects *more* magical. We have the Harry Potter wand and David Rose’s enchanted umbrellas and pill bottles. We have made smart phones so personified as to be fallen in love with, as attested to in Spike Jonze’s 2013 movie *Her*. Labs around the world have invented “invisibility cloaks” and “flying carpets.”⁴⁷ The front-facing camera made magic mirrors into reality; advancement in robotics, living dolls. And, as if

⁴⁷ The Institute of Optics at the University of Rochester has created a cloaking device that can do “three-dimensional, continuously multidirectional cloaking” by bending light through a variety of lenses (Barnstone); in Japan, researchers use LEDs and a camera to make a car “invisible” (Staedter). Meanwhile, a group at Princeton have created a plastic sheet that flies by “ripple power,” or waves of electrical current driving air underneath (Pease).

to emphasize just how much we still believe in magic, eBay in 2012 explicitly banned the sale of curses, hexes, and magical potions—which means that, up until three years ago, people around the world were using the Internet to buy and sell magical objects (“eBay”).

Clearly, in our current moment, Arthur C. Clarke’s third law of science fiction seems to stand true: “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (*Profiles of Future*). A magical aura envelops ages of great technological advancement, including the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries. If we allow for a shift in paradigm, magic, rather than the progress of technology, appears to be constant force that powers history; each invention gets us closer to what was previously achievable only through magic. The two are literally combined in the Harry Potter wand: the desire to make magic instigated technological innovation, if only in small part. Just as in the Victorian period, great technological and commercial innovations have generated greater participation in animistic beliefs, and magic goes hand in hand with the ever-expanding, technology-fueled commodity market. Just as steel and glass engineering made possible the Crystal Palace in which to gaze at objects in loving and desirous wonderment, so our information technology has made markets like Amazon and eBay the new digital Great Exhibition.

Thus there seems to be collusion between technological innovation, commercial expansion, and the return to the magic of objects. At the same time, to call the latter a “return” belies the fact that our belief in magical objects never diminished or disappeared. The anthropological treatises of Tylor, Lang, and Frazer were not so much describing the primitive nature of animistic beliefs but ascribing a false temporality to those beliefs. In other words, the idea that belief in magical objects belong only to the provinces of primitive cultures or of children is a problematic one, but one in which we are nevertheless invested. Each time the

subject of magical objects arise in critical writing, the author engages in the same careful dance: first, to insist that such objects belong to the child, the peasant, or the primitive man; then, to acknowledge that such objects still enter into the daily life of the rational adult. We see this in Tylor's talk of primitive culture and its survivals in Victorian England and in Freud's work on animism from *Totem and Taboo* in which he replicates Tylor, Frazer, and Lang's ideas on the primitive man, then speaks to "how much of it can still be demonstrated in the life of today" (867). We can see it in Bill Brown's allusions to Dr. Seuss when he writes about Thing Theory, in Barbara Johnson using Barbie dolls as examples of personification in *Persons and Things*, and in Jane Bennett's argument, in *Vibrant Matter*, that "*Thing-power*...has the rhetorical advantage of calling to mind a childhood sense of the world as filled with all sorts of animated beings, some human, some not, some organic, some not" (20).

I am not arguing that we should stop referring to scenes of childhood or the exoticism of the primitive man when we talk about magical objects; rather, we should recognize the pastness of magical objects, even if constructed after the fact, as part and parcel of the enchantment of magical objects. Which is to say, that enchantment relies in no small part on the idea that magical objects are rarefied things that remain invisible to the uninitiated and that need to be uncovered or rescued by the critical mind. In this way, our critical work on enchantment and magic becomes a form of practicing magic—of conjuring up, as if by sleight of hand, the vibrant state of the mundane objects around us. Perhaps a rather appropriate analogy for this kind of critical sorcery comes from Susanna Clarke's 2004 best-selling novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. In the novel, nineteenth-century Britain is long believed, by the scholars of magic, to be a place in which practical magic no longer exists. Mr Norrell, in order to disprove this, casts a spell that makes all of the gargoyles, saints, and stone carvings around a cathedral come alive

and speak. He does not create living creatures out of thin air; each gargoyle has its own story to tell, and has been barred from doing so by the unfortunate fact of being made out of stone. The scholar of enchanted objects is often accused of projecting the liveliness of things onto them; the scholar would retort that he is merely showing a different vision of the world that has always already existed, because we always already interact with the world as if it is full of magical objects.

If we concede that we always relate to the things around us as magical, then we must revise the notion that magical objects return to the cultural imagination only during periods of technological or commercial advancement. And if magical objects are always present in our daily lives, they must serve a function that a historical approach cannot quite comprehend. Psychoanalysis and cognitive science present some fascinating accounts for the importance of magical objects. Freud, writing about animism, equates magic with what he terms the “omnipotence of thought,” or the “over-estimation of psychic processes as opposed to reality” that governs the neurotic patient’s affective life (874). The omnipotence of thought ameliorates anxieties about loss of control or the inability to master nature, which Horkheimer and Adorno also found true about the disenchantment of the world. If we follow Freud’s psychoanalytic approach rather than Horkheimer and Adorno’s social one, magic, not science, is how humans overcome their surroundings; if anything, as Freud argues, “in the scientific attitude towards life there is no longer any room for man’s omnipotence” (875), against which magic provides recourse. As well, for Freud, animism is the outward projection of the confluence of memory and perception that exists in the human mind. The animation of the object is the “faculty of remembering and representing the object, after he or it has been withdrawn from conscious

perception” (879). In other words, any time we think of an object, we are participating in a form of animism.

Matthew Hutson, drawing on cognitive science and neuroscience (while being ambivalent about evolutionary psychology), presents more practical approaches to magical objects. In his 2012 book *The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking: How Irrational Beliefs Keep Us Happy, Healthy, and Sane*, Hutson analyzes the souls and essences of objects from John Lennon’s piano to the Roomba vacuum. Blessing or cursing an object or thinking that it carries another person’s essence is a way for humans to express intimacy through a mediating party; the physical world can “glow with meaning and connect us to other people and to history.... [The universe feels] less inert, less sterile, less lonely” (36). We animate the animals and objects around us, from pets to cars to robots, as another form of social surrogacy; that animation also helps us to better control our environment by identifying agents and predicting their behavior. More than anything, anthropomorphism allows us to battle against the overwhelming forces of dehumanization in human history.

While Hutson, Freud, Thing Theory critics, and the architects of Harry Potter World come from radically different perspectives, their convergence on magical objects hammers home how integral a part of our psychic and social lives these objects are—a fact that the Victorian writers of this dissertation explored deeply in their works. We enchant objects not only for the sake of enchantment itself, but in order to encounter the world, both personally and historically, in a different way. Magical objects provide refuge against the forces of dehumanization or disenchantment because they allow us to engage more humanely with the objectified other, to assign power to the powerless, to allow our imagination to flourish. By now, the question is no

longer whether or not magical objects exist; that's beside the point. The question is how we can use magical objects—and I say this without an ounce of irony—to make the world a better place.

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