Introduction
The "Delectable Valleys" of Things

Préambule

> No more than a century ago, Provençal archaeologists would go out on Sunday excursions, as they'd call them. Entering into "delectable valleys" (*vallées délicieuses*), they'd follow the "fanciful curves" (*sinuosités capricieuses*) of river beds in search of prehistoric artifacts: whatever those "archaic societies" (*antiques populations*) might have left in way of vestige.[1]

This epigraph from Gustave Sobin captures one of the primary aims of *Embodied Experience in British and French Literature, 1778–1814*: to enter into the *vallées délicieuses* of things that, while they are only two hundred or so years old, often might as well be prehistoric artifacts, given that contemporary readers rarely notice or understand them. How do we listen, connect, and *belong with* those forgotten things that are the "resonance and celebration of Sound," but which are "never pronounced, but *cast*, *diffused*, *exuded*."[2] This book studies the connections and separations between humans and nonhumans in a select group of French and English eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts to show how these cross-cultural works explore women's relationship to materiality. Finding human–nonhuman alliances decisive for sustaining personal, social, ecological, and political integrity, *Embodied Experience* affirms that to disconnect these is to relinquish justice for both people and objects.[3] Throughout

[1] Gustav Sobin, "Archeological Rhetoric," in *Luminous Debris: Reflecting on Vestige in Provence and Languedoc* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 38. Sobin quotes Hector Nicolas, *Une excursion à Bonnieux et à Buoux: Mémoires de l'Académie de Vaucluse* (Avignon: Académie de Vaucluse, 1886), pp. 214–223, 38, and Didier Binder, *Le Néolithique ancien provençal: Typologie et technologie des outillages lithiques* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1987).

[2] Sobin, "Notes on Sound, Speech, Speech-Crystals and the Celestial Echo," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Esther Sobin, et al. (Greenfield, MA: Talisman House, 2010), p. 25.

[3] I use the words objects, nonhuman, and things interchangeably and thus do not differentiate between things and objects, as Bill Brown does, wherein the latter, once emancipated into things through "misuse" become refreshed in unpredictable ways. Instead, I see human-nonhuman

the book, I sift through the political and gendered ramifications that arise when literary texts resuscitate women's relationship to things: the *Venus de' Medici*, the Uffizi's Tribuna, hats, diamonds, Roman monuments, the book *Paul et Virginie* and the *objets d'art* crafted to honor it.[4] In concert with literary characters, these things, I argue, embody and interrogate prismatically and often paradoxically many of the most crucial events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – war and peace, colonial power and domesticity, and gender and ecological imbalance.[5] Each chapter charts how an experience of what I call *belonging with*[6] follows when literature illuminates a character's connection to things, a process that constitutes an active ethical practice, for characters belong with the nonhuman as surely as it belongs with them.

The concept of the "*vallées délicieuses*," particularly apt for my work, emphasizes that juncture where female characters and things convene, where the slope of one meets that of the other. This is indeed a "delicious" thought – that these varying kinds of material existences could belong together. To flesh out that thought, I draw on six keywords: movement, listening, radiance, resuscitating, restoring, and recycling, all of which emphasize the energetic intersections and divergences between thing–human and thing–thing communications. These keywords help me explore how certain female characters turn to objects to secure rights that laws do not ensure and how they attempt to reembody themselves in cultures that debase matter and female physicality. Although these words are familiar, I bring them together for the first time to structure this book,

connections rendering both volatile. *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 51. Further, while I do not dispute that humans are also things, I do not assert the ontological argument that all matter is "flat"; certainly, different registers of consciousness exist. See Christopher N. Gamble, Joshua S. Hanan, and Thomas Nail, "What Is New Materialism?" *Angelaki, Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24.6 (2017): 111–134, p. 123.

[4] The objects thing-theory scholars choose vary as much as the authors themselves. For example, Crystal Lake fruitfully studies "the nameless," – coins and grave goods – "the small bits and bobs whose origins or backstories were unknown and whose worth or meaning was not self-evident." *Artifacts: How We Think and Write about Found Objects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), p. 4. In contrast, most of my objects, apart from the discussion of food in Chapter 4, are both valuable and named, their creation arising from well-known histories of fashion, art, and literature.

[5] Many scholars have influenced and inspired *Embodied Experience in British and French Literature*. My biggest debt is to Bill Brown's work, which has helped shape this book, and I share with him and with Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), an investment in studies of things and thing–human connections that yield deep social and political meanings. Conversely, my focus on things as material entities differs from the more language-centered approach that Larry Peer discusses in his "Introduction: Romanticizing the Object," in *Romanticism and the Object*, ed. Peer (New York and London: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 1–7. I cite other scholars and philosophers throughout the book.

[6] When I use "belonging with" as a noun rather than a verb phrase, I italicize it.

but also because they, and the relationships among them, emerge organically from the interweaving of texts I analyze. As I will explain, each work I address flexibly conceptualizes its own theory of connecting with things: This involves a transit through varying channels wherein characters and things, longing to relate, move toward and listen to each other; when this occurs, what I call a "radiant" moment ensues that opens possibilities for *belonging with*, which, in turn, supports human–nonhuman resuscitation, restoration, and recycling. These literary examples, however, never follow this process rigidly or schematically, but rather rearrange the steps along this living journey.

As this book breaks down binaries between human and nonhuman, matter and spirit, and women and virtue, so does it elide national boundaries by interpreting French and British works. A comparatist approach motivates me to underscore how these writers were mutually influencing and inspiring each other, as well as responding to many of the same world historical events. Most specifically, these texts move toward the other nation's culture and things. As I will unearth more thoroughly in this Introduction, seeing French and British literature from a thing-theory vantage point further enriches each one while showing how these novels and poems impact one another. The fit is well tailored, since comparatism, feminism, and thing theory together intensify their complementary projects: to think inclusively, to examine connections and differences as fruitful, to consider the consequences of binaries between subjects and objects, and to watch the exchanges between cultures. The French-English link also offers a productive field study of the materialist issues I take on, since I interweave literary interrelations, feminist comparatism, thing theory, and history with the conundrum France and England faced before, during, and after the Revolution: to wit, how radical ideals concerning the "rights of man" too often remained abstractions. Given that this era's British and French authors influenced each other's writings, and because many English travelers ventured across the channel before the Revolution, during the Peace of Amiens, and after Waterloo, considering these relative to each other helps meet what I perceive to be a need for more critical attention to their cultural intersections, especially regarding theories of materiality.[7]

[7] "Ideally," for Catherine Brown, "comparatists bring together works" in conversations "worth overhearing for what" they "revea[l] … about themselves and/or the topic." "What Is 'Comparative' Literature?" *Comparative Critical Studies* 10.1 (2013): 67–88, p. 83.

I.1 Gender and the Nonhuman

Embodied Experience renders connections between gender and materiality its nerve center, revealing forgotten histories that fire or extinguish transmissions between women and things and women and their bodies.[8] Literary studies often address feminist and thing-theory methodologies separately, but here I bring them together, investigating the ways women interact with their belongings and with the things in their environment.[9] I reason against a fixed constellation of prejudices which deleteriously conjoin the nonhuman with insignificance, that bind women with matter (allegedly pernicious), and that tether consumption and women to lassitude, luxury, and lust.[10] While I acknowledge that extravagance can lead characters to ignore nature or to create alienating labor conditions – and that such "feasting" can shatter whole populations and the environment, the materialist ethics I identify spotlight how fictional women's relationships to expenditure and in general to nonhuman things can be

[8] Many critics incorporate thing theory with feminism. For example, see Katherine Behar, "An Introduction to OOF," in *Object-Oriented Feminism*, ed. Behar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Susan Hekman, *The Material of Knowledge: Feminist Disclosures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, eds., *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a "New Materialism" through the Arts* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Cecilia Åsberg, Kathrin Thiele, and Iris van der Tuin, "Speculative before the Turn: Reintroducing Feminist and Materialism Performativity," *Cultural Studies Review* 21.2 (2015): 145–172; Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012); and Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). In Grusin, see Rebekah Sheldon's "Form / Matter / Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism," where she argues for "choratic reading" of literature and matter (p. 216).

[9] Like Laura Gray-Rosendale and Gil Harootunian I bring together multiple feminist "positions . . . simultaneously"; for example, "conviction in the critical cultural and social value of women's work, words, and cultures" and "assistance for cultural, ideological, structural, and linguistic modifications that will enhance women's productive growth and development," in "Introduction," *Fractured Feminisms*, eds. Gray-Rosendale and Harootunian (Albany: SUNY University Press, 2003), pp. 2, 7.

[10] Victoria de Grazia argues against this eighteenth-century tendency to link "mother/mater with vile or fertile matter" and to couple femininity and "treacherous inconstancy and change." "Changing Consumption Regimes," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed., de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 13. In the same volume see Jennifer Jones's "*Coquettes* and *Grisettes*: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Régime Paris" (p. 36). Maxine Berg explores associations made between women's sexual and material proclivities in "Luxury, the Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth: A Global Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 181. Erin Mackie demonstrates the eighteenth-century fear that an "indulgence of consuming passions may mean enslavement to the market." *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in* The Tatler *and* The Spectator (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 71.

constructive.[11] The encounters I study frequently transcend mere acts of superfluous consumption and diversion, becoming a way to survive and flourish: If a woman with no other property could own and sell her diamonds, she could evade the intensive control political bodies use to try to manage her power.[12] Women's sororalizing with the nonhuman further reveals that they can counter covenants endemic to colonial and ecological alienation; these connections are what I would call, after Sobin, "unpredictable curves" (*sinuosités capricieuses*) toward an ethical position. As Frank Trentmann claims, consumption represents not just "the withering of imagination and spontaneity" but "an active, creative, and authentic practice."[13] Accordingly, consumption is "social, relational, and active, rather than private, atomic, or passive," and commodities, like people, "have social lives" and "life histories," ones with "very complex social forms and distributions of knowledge."[14] Thus, in discussing things' provenance and women's exchanges with them, I dispute the period's mainstream concerns that women were merely superficial and thoughtless consumers devoted to idle spending.

Situating thing theory alongside eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women characters constitutes a feminist intervention: Texts challenging binaries between humans and things break down the negative associations between women and matter, a change that also undermines conservative divisions between a woman's reason and her body, between "female virtues" – that is, behaviors such as passivity, dependence, and coquetry – and actual ethical beliefs and independence.[15] Stacy Alaimo claims that it

[11] In this sense, I do not focus only on what Julie Park describes as "spectacles of humans transformed into commodified and consumable objects," such as dolls, but also turn to women's ability to transform themselves from commodified objects into subjects with rights. See *The Self & It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. xv.

[12] Sometimes, however, a wife was forced to return her husband's family jewels. As Hannah Grieg states in *Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), "shared consumption" was not "necessarily equated to shared ownership"; she further offers instances of diamonds' mobility: Women lent them to others, either out of friendship or from political motives (pp. 57, 60).

[13] "Introduction," *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, pp. 10, 11. He quotes Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 94.

[14] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 31, 3, 17, 41.

[15] On consciousness and the mind–body / subject–object conundrum, see Colin Jager who returns to the "hard problem" of mind–body connections, claiming that some scholars find that "it is solvable [but] only through an appeal to some form of dualism. Mind-body dualism is largely out of fashion now." "Can We Talk about Consciousness Again? (Emergence, Natural Piety, Wordsworth)," in *Romantic Frictions*, ed. Theresa M. Kelley, *Romantic Circles* (September 2011,

is "productive for feminist theory to undertake the transformation of gendered dualisms . . . that have been cultivated to denigrate and silence certain groups of human as well as nonhuman life."[16] Texts such as *Corinne ou l'Italie*, *Belinda*, and *The Wanderer* bring a hearty and sometimes "profane" materiality to their female characters as they seek to mend binaries between the human and nonhuman. From a feminist perspective this move reconnects women's corporeality, reason, spirit, and sexuality, rendering these cooperating, rather than sparring, bodies. Studying the dualism inflicted on women and things reminds us, as Sean Silver remarks, that "[d]ualism has a history – and it is entangled with the rise of the discourse justifying the modern marketplace";[17] to this, I would add that dualism's history is also enmeshed in and rationalizes the marketing of women.

Binaries between human and nonhuman, women and reason, and spirituality and sexuality, of course, too often remain intractable; thus, I acknowledge the paradox dualism instantiates, one "founded on a . . . profound entanglement. The very distinction between subject and object, self and property, is elaborated in and through the embeddedness of intellect in its material surroundings."[18] Nevertheless, I puzzle out the aftermaths of binary thinking and the benefits of trying to transcend such inelastic structures, especially regarding the impact on female characters' lives. Thus, I concentrate on feminist ramifications of human–nonhuman reunions and dispersings rather than on "the cognitive life of things."[19] In more general terms, Marjorie Levinson reminds us that it is fundamental to "probe" in "serious and collaborative" ways "the deep binaries that still support many of our readings (e.g., mind/matter; part/whole; cause/effect, entity/environment, individual/group)"; if this is "supplemented by efforts to acquaint ourselves with philosophical materialisms available to the writers we study," such probing "might reveal points of identity and

para. 6). https://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20220831125402/https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/frictions/HTML/praxis.2011.jager.html

[16] *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 5. Critiquing dualism, Barbara M. Benedict observes that "objects have rarely been understood separately from their human and cultural contexts." See "Encounters with the Object: Advertisements, Time, and Literary Discourse in the Early Eighteenth-Century Thing-Poem," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40.2 (2007): 193–205, p. 193.

[17] *The Mind Is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 247.

[18] Silver, p. 15.

[19] Silver, p. 134; quoting John Sutton, "Porous Memory and the Cognitive Life of Things," in *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*, ed. Darren Tofts, Annemarie Jonson, and Alessio Cavallaro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 130–141.

difference across the materialist board, so to speak, effectively enlarging the common ground and improving the quality of the conversation that takes place there."[20] Levinson here speaks to the benefits of a nondualist stance for interpreting literature and for sharpening materialist methodologies. This constitutes an intervention into late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies. For me it further underscores the value of linking "points of identity and difference" across the material-*feminist* "board." I reiterate throughout *Embodied Experience* that from both feminist and ecological perspectives, diminishing women and objects is a related activity. Obviously, not all literary works or characters therein objectify women; neither do they ignore nor denigrate all nonhuman things; nevertheless, supple notions of gender politics emerge when we study literature's rich relationship to things and vice versa. Each work I include envisions contiguities among women, materiality, and embodiment – whether these involve the *Venus de' Medici* and her viewers, a female improvisatrice and her Roman monuments, an alienated socialite and her battered body, a young girl exiled from physical fulfillment, or women seeking to hide their faces and bodies from abuse. Each chapter investigates how human–nonhuman belonging can champion greater potential for women and for our social and environmental collectives.

I.2 On Connection and on Belonging

While we intuitively understand the meaning of "connecting" and "connection" (as well as some of its attendant synonyms: joining, assembling, and linking), the *OED* offers several definitions relevant here. For example, "[t]he action of connecting or joining together"[21] makes things stronger, one of my central points. We see this when Benjamin Franklin writes, "[a]t present [this colony] is like the separate filaments of flax before the thread is formed, without strength, because without connexion" (n.1.a.). A further denotation, "[r]elationship by family ties, as marriage or distant consanguinity" (n.6.), appeals given that a "distant consanguinity" exists between humans and nonhumans. "The condition of being related to something else by a bond of interdependence" (n.3.) conveys the ecological and eco-social resonances this book gathers. And the meaning, "[t]he linking up of electric current by contact" (n.1.c.) applies since it captures

[20] "A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza," *Studies in Romanticism* 46.4 (2007): 367–408, p. 372.
[21] "Connection, n.1.a." *OED* Online. December 2021. Oxford University Press.

the radiating light and heat sparking when readers or characters brightly link themselves to objects and to objects' histories and contexts. When we connect to the nonhuman we can, in these varying ways, recognize and relish our interdependence with it, thereby creating strong, mutually supporting "immune" systems.[22]

In this book, the word belonging provides a visual, theoretical, and methodological structure for understanding what a connection with the nonhuman offers; it refers to a process in which things can be heard, seen, respected, and shared: that is, the word helps describe the ethical materialism some eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature evinces. I ask broadly how things belong in novels and poems, and how readers belong with them, which leads me to think seriously about this word's constituent parts. How might the "on" in belonging refer to the time and space of the movement toward connection with the nonhuman? How does the "longing" to belong and the longing for belonging in books help characters, narratives, and plots "be"? Central to this is the question of who and what entities – both human and nonhuman – "deserve" to belong in ecological and social arrangements.[23] Be*long*ing's "long" invites us to think about how our relationship to the nonhuman is important in the environmental and historical "long run." Further, regarding the literary-critical "long run," what constitutes a "be"-ing if characters, readers, and things are understood as productive units rather than as dualistically engineered into separate groups?[24] Readers often miss how literary belongings *belong with* multiple worlds and multiple individuals, simultaneously having lives inside the text and often personal existences outside of it that transcend whatever intentions may be imposed upon them. Embedded in literature, they exceed their singular existence by forming relations with meaningful systems. Belonging also suggests something concrete, especially concerning the subject of human rights: Can rights "be" if they are

[22] Wendy Wheeler discusses how healthy interconnections between human and natural ecosystems secure the immune strength of both. See *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics, and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), especially pp. 116–127.

[23] James Lilley uses "belonging" to make a case for loosening up definitions of genre; although he does not discuss thing theory, I agree that "[b]eing-in-common" gets performed "as an open and fugitive process that is enacted on the level of the verb rather than collected on the level of the noun," see *Common Things: Romance and the Aesthetics of Belonging in Atlantic Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 13.

[24] As Karen Barad argues: "To write matter and meaning into separate categories" and "to divide complex phenomena into one balkanized enclave or the other is to elide certain crucial aspects by design." See *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 25.

only abstractions, "longed" for, but not yet embodied, either by law or social codes?

In exploring how parts relate to the whole and how "be" associates with "longing" and with a belonging contrasting to possession, which constricts, I draw on one strand of Jean-Luc Nancy's thought.[25] To reconceive how communities could more justly function, he advocates a move from a reliance on the subject and individualism to what he calls the singular plural, where beings find meaning in relationship *with* others. As he says, "[t]here is no meaning if meaning is not shared. . . . *[M]eaning is itself the sharing of Being*," and "Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another" (*BSP*, pp. 2, 3; emphasis original). When we acknowledge and practice this, we can escape a hierarchical relationship where the subject dominates. Indeed, to search for meaning solely within the self or solely from an individual point of view, as if "I" were prior to "we,"[26] would be an act of violence. Adapting this idea to materialist ethics renders clearer how resisting interdependence with this world's things bolsters human antagonism toward the nonhuman and vice versa.

What attracts me, then, as I conceive of the longing to belong is Nancy's idea that "at the heart of a connection, [is] the *inter*lacing [l'*entre*croisment] of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot" (*BSP*, p. 5; emphasis original). For my purposes, then, each human and each thing has its own singular distinctiveness – or strand – but that distinctiveness cannot be acknowledged except in relation. Nancy maintains that being-with "operates in the same ways as a collective [*collégial*] power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective [*collège*] nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collective [*collégialité*] as such" (*BSP*, p. 30). That is, "[t]hinking in the singular-plural . . . is at once an ethos and a praxis" which "attends simultaneously to their specificity and their relationality," warranting "an openness to the inexhaustibility and open-endedness of meaning and signification."[27] With this in mind, I see *belonging with* occurring when humans and nonhumans are linked to and rely upon each other for nutrients and energy;[28] thus even if a belonging is legally owned, it is

[25] Although I do not include Nancy's theories of sense and touch, I find appealing his idea that they are "mode[s] of relation" in which each, being singular plural, enact "both a transcendence and an immanence, a 'transimmanence.'" See Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 216.

[26] Nancy, *BSP*, cover copy. [27] James, p. 112.

[28] To clarify, Nancy would not see the singular plural in terms of belonging – coming to aid of others. Though in his overall schema, singular-plural existences do lead ultimately to a thinking, operative

not a possession, since the latter can be mistreated simply because of property laws. The difference I emphasize is simple: For one to "have" belongings and to experience belonging, one must actively cooperate with other humans and nonhumans. This constitutes a dynamic, conscious realization that existing is coexisting: "The co-implication of existing [*l'exister*] is the sharing of the world" (*BSP*, p. 29). I ask which characters can or cannot "share" their lives with the nonhuman – whether that is the Pantheon or a diamond – and the sometimes tragic outcomes arising when those characters see themselves as independent from these objects.

As I analyze these literary works, I search for when and if the characters can belong and collaborate with the nonhuman, which happiness and indeed existence require. Thus, although Timothy Morton has especially stimulated *Embodied Experience*, I rotate away from his conviction that objects remain withdrawn, as well as from Jonathan Lamb's premise that things are "obstinately solitary," able "to communicate directly only with themselves."[29] Belongings are important in their own right, but also as part of an "eco-lit-system": with "lit" signifying both literature and things lighted up.[30] Each text creates its own delicate latticing with individual parts which simultaneously join a larger complex, as each network on the planet is inexorably linked with all others. Jane Bennett, for example, argues that "in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself."[31] And Morton urges us to "open the concept *Earth* to full amplitude," where "anthropocentric distinctions" such as "*here* versus *there*, *person* versus *thing*, *individual* versus *group*, *conscious* versus *unconscious* . . . *part* versus *whole* . . . cease to be thin and rigid."[32] Recognizing the nonhuman as having its own "being" and having its own longing to belong thus involves an isometrical relation that can open readers' and characters' awareness to transformation and sustainability. The implications are considerable. Material attentiveness

community. He carefully distinguishes between a "'being-with'" of "singularities" versus "a collection of individual subjects who bind themselves together on the basis of a shared identity" (James, *Fragmentary Demand*, p. 177).

[29] For example, see Morton's "All Objects Are Deviant: Feminism and Ecological Intimacy," *Object-Oriented Feminism*, ed. Behar, p. 65, and Lamb's *The Things Things Say* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. xi.

[30] "ReLit," the charitable Foundation for bibliotherapy Paula Byrne and Jonathan Bate created, inspired this sentence.

[31] *Vibrant Matter* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 13.

[32] *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 24, 32; emphases original.

offers a broader view of history, literature, and the quotidian relations between humans and nonhumans.

Literary belongings, whether biotic or abiotic, become more emphatically themselves when allowed to belong with characters and readers. In this state, they generate supererogatory significance that can remind humans of the potential joy in the universe, and they can manifest prismatic connections that offer greater knowledge than one could learn from just one of these entities. Elizabeth Grosz observes that "Nietzsche elaborates a small space of excess that functions outside of natural selection, where life does not simply fulfill itself in surviving in its given milieu successfully enough to reproduce, but where it actively seeks to transform itself, where it refuses reproduction and instead seeks transformation."[33] This transformative space releases surplus implications: These can embody history's lesions or offer ameliorative gifts, as when Greek statues are seen to heal grief. This is excess because it provokes freedom from a dominating subjectivity and entry into a creative moment when the human and nonhuman can open, or fold into the other – though not symbiotically.[34] Sometimes the *belonging with* occurs when authors interweave concepts normally distinct (diamond and marriage markets). Such instances unveil how events and characters, prismatically interdependent, disclose significant and surprising – indeed excess – information, as when, in *Belinda*, the Pigot Diamond generates bonds among the East India Company, money-made-marriages, gambling, and the Irish Union. What W. J. T. Mitchell observes is crucial for my argument: A thing's "value and life . . . becomes more interesting" when it emerges "as the center of a social crisis. . . . Use-values may keep us alive and nourished, but it is the surplus value of images that makes history, creates revolutions, migrations, and wars. And surplus value is, as Marx showed long ago, only explicable in terms of a logic of animated images."[35] As I study the radiant overflow arising from belonging, I uncover a relationship between value and connection versus the lack arising from possession.[36] Decrying this latter state, Christoph Asendorf observes "the ancient leitmotiv that the possession of something is possible

[33] *In the Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 11.

[34] Nancy sees "excess as a site of creation or birth." See James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 233.

[35] *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 94.

[36] The intellectual presence of Marx's notion of commodities lurks in my project; however, although I study material culture, I do not depend upon familiar categories of reification and ideological manipulation. Similarly, Potkay argues that

only at the cost of the soul, shadow, heart, or whatever might otherwise be the figuration of the self."[37]

I reflect, then, on the differential tones of how *belonging with*, versus possession of, can have regenerative impacts. Each chapter explores characters who strive to exist companionably with the nonhuman energies whose orbits they share. For example, belonging with the diamond in *Belinda* and with a stone in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* stimulates characters to mirror the former as a paradigm for seeing prismatically, especially fueling them to perceive the joint ways women and these sparkling entities are mistreated; in *Paul et Virginie* this state of being protects the survival of communities by ensuring women's right to a materiality that can accommodate virtue; and in Burney's novels, belonging with the hat fortifies women's just claim to privacy and thus self-protection. In each of these cases, *belonging with* becomes an ethical way to preserve the human and nonhuman.

Lamb, discussing possessions and being possessed by them, insists that "emergencies" develop when one tries "to fix property contractually beyond the faintest likelihood of truancy, . . . a sure method to make it delinquent."[38] While I agree with that, I do not go as far as he does in his claim that "[t]hings gain independence when their owners desire to possess them uncontrollably" and, when, contrarily, in doing so "possession itself is redefined as transport, not what you own but what possesses you, and passion is experienced as the impression of the sense of things, the irresistible 'power of some external cause compared with our own.'"[39] I contend, instead, that things can only be independent when they exist in relationship with the plural. Thus, for me, "transport" – my term is radiance – does occur, but only when humans and nonhumans connect, a point I develop in Section I.3 on keywords. Conversely, when humans alienate themselves from things, both are estranged, for, as I see it, outside of *belonging with*, humans live in dearth. Accordingly, while Lamb determines the "difference between property and that [which] is no longer

Marx addresses [the] tide of materialization with his concepts of reification (when human activities turn into alien, fungible things) and commodity fetishism (when made things become our new masters). Yet these industrial-era developments did not foreclose a more encompassing sense of things, one that persists to this day in ordinary locutions such as *the way things go* and *thinking about* things. "Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things." PMLA 123.2 (2008): 390–404, p. 40; emphasis original.

[37] *Batteries of Life*: *On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 10.

[38] Lamb, p. 4.

[39] Lamb, p. 78; he quotes Spinoza's *Ethics*, trans. Andrew Boyle and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 146.

owned or ownable, and how the unowned thing finds itself idolized as a subaltern deity of Fortune," I explore how these literary texts suggest a co-being with property that neither has to be "ownable" nor an "unowned" idol; for me, it is not "violence that liberate[s] [things] from ownership,"[40] but belonging – that is, cooperation and alliance. For example, characters in *Paul et Virginie*, *Corinne*, and *Desmond*, identifying with abstractions and forcing separations between the human and nonhuman, perpetuate "emergencies,"[41] propelling ruthless acts, where they will sacrifice anything or anyone for supposed security. I argue, then, that fearing scarcity and withdrawing from connection sends humans fleeing from matter and from each other.

In *Fiction without Humanity*, Lynn Festa crucially asks: "What happens to our understanding of Enlightenment humanity when we recognize that person and thing, human and animal, are intertwined rather than opposed?"[42] And although I do not examine, as she does, the definition of what is human, her question is absolutely vital for me. In fascinating and persuasive ways, Festa scrutinizes how "anthropomorphized animals and personified things" can reveal "humanity's own creaturely and thinglike nature, offering estranging descriptions of the world from perspectives that are not (necessarily) lodged in human beings."[43] While estranging perspectives open our mind, and while I concur that "these nonhuman viewpoints" craft "a greater awareness of what a human viewpoint might be," I center on how human–nonhuman belonging must exist before either can experience the fulfillment of justice (a topic I will return to).[44] Thus, I reveal the consequences, as literary authors conceive them, of such connection and its relationship to women's rights. Indeed, for me, neither human nor nonhuman identity can be known outside of the relationships they share together.[45]

[40] Lamb, pp. xxix, 29.

[41] "Emergency" is Lamb's term, which he uses to describe circumstances that lead humans to idolize things (p. 4).

[42] Lynn Festa, *Fiction without Humanity: Person, Animal, Thing in Early Enlightenment Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 1. Hereafter cited as *Fiction*.

[43] *Fiction*, p. 2.

[44] *Fiction*, p. 8. To anticipate what might seem like a contradiction, I do discuss in Chapter 2 how *Corinne*'s thing theory embraces defamiliarization insofar as seeing things anew can lead to love for and companionship with them.

[45] As Festa shrewdly argues, acknowledging "[t]he close relation of persons and things . . . calls into question the conventional understanding of identity as the manifestation of an interior life and psychological depth that individuals de facto possess" (*Fiction*, p. 4).

Section I.3, addressing my keywords, shows how the energies these terms generate together help make connecting and thus *belonging with* and justice possible. And though these human–nonhuman networks require "consciousness" or what we often call awareness – an intuitive, a cognitive, and physical proprioception that galvanizes us to read and experience our environment[46] – mysteries remain as to how this happens from the perspective of nonhuman energies in relation to humans. As I address these keywords, readers familiar with Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, Bennett, and Karen Barad will see traces of their ideas. Each reconsiders the nature of matter and champions its agency in inspirational ways, delving into the moral benefits of these findings.[47] Their pulsating language – "matter's immanent vitality," its "emergent, generative powers," its "vibrating strands of energy," the "self-transformative, practical aspects of corporeality";[48] "conatus," the "vitality of matter," "shi," and "*élan vital*"[49] – rouses the mind to reject an inert or dualistically posited matter, what Barad calls those "well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism."[50] Though this language and these fresh theories influence my book, which charts nonhuman agency, unlike these scholars I do not take on the question of *why* matter can act; rather, I explore *how* its agency manifests and *how* humans can belong with it in literary works. Like the scholars I quote throughout this paragraph, I spotlight the ethical costs of diminishing matter's clout, but as a literary critic and not a philosopher, scientist, or social scientist, I focus on how belonging with things – not just "thing-power"[51] – emerges in British and French literature.

[46] Jager observes that "the historicism that has dominated Romantic studies for the past-quarter century has . . . had little patience with consciousness talk" (para. 2).

[47] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Coole and Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Barad helpfully claims that "*[p]henomena* . . . are neither individual entities nor mental impressions, but entangled material agencies" (*Meeting the Universe*, p. 56).

[48] Coole and Frost, pp. 8, 9, 12, 19. [49] Bennett, pp. 2, 5, 35. [50] Barad, p. 26.

[51] Bennett, p. xvi. This seminal study influenced my work, but my book differs insofar as it is not a "philosophical project," and although I dig into the "vibrant materiality" of things and their ability to "impede" or function as "forces with trajectories . . . of their own," where Bennett focuses on the "moment of independence from and resistance to us and other bodies: a kind of thing-power," I concentrate on how the experience of belonging with matter allows for mutual power (Bennett, pp. vii, viii, 18).

I.3 Keywords

I.3.1 Movement

This first keyword, and its attendant corollaries of action, dynamism, and kinesthesia, drives this book.[52] Siegfried Giedion states that "[o]ur thinking and feeling in all their ramifications are fraught with the concept of movement."[53] I track how characters and things *move* toward and interact with each other, maintaining that this galvanic process unfolds unpredictably: Things have their own choreography; each figures disparately in different texts, but once puzzled out – as far as is possible – literary things release pulsing and often transgressive meanings as they simultaneously unearth history's wounds and deliver opportunities for intimacy between humans and nonhumans. For example, diamonds form links to horrific labor conditions, even as their dazzle tenders a model for multifaceted thinking; in the Uffizi's Galleries a statue's shoddily restored arm incites a wince but also recalls the scintillating vitality that fragments provoke. These paradoxes divulge matter's mercurial and transformative properties, ones that when recognized stimulate characters and readers' sensitivity to and insight into natural and social ecosystems. Encouraging or obstructing this sensitivity, the texts experiment with rejecting binaries and positing lively paradigms for being and belonging with society and nature. When characters strive to interconnect with things, I suggest that their crisscrossing between human and nonhuman matter and then back toward the self and community involves a movement we can call transcendence. This is not transcendence from matter, but into a state of mind and being that boosts discovery of something beyond our own subjective viewpoint.

Movement, of course, can also entail a negative exodus from things. For example, Evelina and her grandmother, finding the latter's hairpiece repulsive after it has rolled around in weeds and filth, both experience alienation from the nonhuman, separation which leads to more human

[52] Helmut Müller-Sievers impressively analyzes how nineteenth-century technology impacted movement in serialization, plot structures, and the mechanical rhythms of prose. This study is, like mine, interdisciplinary and comparative, but I focus on gender politics and on cultural and art histories, while he concentrates on machines and how their motions influence nineteenth-century French and British literature. *The Cylinder: Kinematics of the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[53] *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 14.

unhappiness.[54] Refusing to hear the human coincides with the failure to hear the nonhuman (and vice versa), leading to ruinous breakdowns, as when Paul curses Madame de la Tour for exiling her daughter, crying out, "[i]nhuman mother! Pitiless woman! May the ocean to which you expose her never return her to you" (*PV*, p. 86); indeed, nature fulfills the hero's oath, for the sea embodies his words, drowning Virginie. His execration functions as a thing-theory commentary since he accurately identifies Madame de la Tour's "inhuman" actions as arising from her disconnection from things – like her own daughter and the ocean's own force – that she should consider belongings. She thus estranges herself from both the human and the nonhuman.

In the main, however, I focus on how the characters and texts navigating through this human–nonhuman vascular system hope to subvert, as much as is possible, dualisms that restrict the flow of breath, blood, and vim through political, gendered, and social arrangements. Moving toward belonging, these fascicles of intellect, emotion, and matter can charge and recharge each other. Especially for women and the environment, such kinesthesis could (potentially) fulfill the truth that things and women do have agency, a process that could also demystify ecological breakpoints and ideological contradictions. Forging contiguities – shimmering agitation and sometimes equipoise – among empyreal, physical, material, and virtuous momenta characterizes much Romantic-era writing and certainly the texts I scrutinize. For me, the most dazzling literary things constitute the ones which generate mobile thoughts and emotions. Following things as they move through narratives, activating volatility and excess, I resuscitate the lives objects lived before their entry into and during their literary life cycles.

I.3.2 Listening

As I asked in the *préambule* to this Introduction, how do we *listen* to those forgotten things that are the "resonance and celebration of Sound," but which are "never pronounced"? Above all, characters must first move

[54] I discuss this phenomenon in *Mansfield Park* when Fanny Price observes the "bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it." *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 439. *Sense and Sensibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 152–156.

toward things "cast" aside.[55] And what is heard can shock, stop, and transport the listener down unexpected footpaths, enlightening and disrupting. Alexandra Vazquez illuminates how "music and the musical reflect – in flashes, moments, sounds . . . the colonial, racial, and geographic past and present . . . as much as [they reflect] the creative traditions that impact and impart from it."[56] Listening to the things in *Embodied Experience* similarly reveals that they sound out their cultural, generic, and political landscapes. We attend to "the voice of things," or, to use Francis Ponge's phrase, "*Le Parti pris des choses*"[57] by considering the object's provenance, its history, its placement, and its "excesses." I look for textual events where the human and nonhuman mutually *recognize and listen* to each other, thereby creating a reciprocal experience of belonging, generating potentiality out of seeming nothingness.

Listening *to things* and listening *to humans* are kindred practices, and such listening to a thing's life force can grip us ethically, as we enter into play with sound, participating in mutual conversion and transfiguration with characters and things. Here, I am especially drawn to Mary Jacobus's contemplative study, *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud*. Referring to Nancy's work, *Listening*, she explains that for him, sound "not only spreads in space but resonates internally – 'still resounding "in me," as we say.' Sound goes both ways: 'To sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself,' to emit sounds as a sonorous body, but it also refers back to itself, as interior resonance."[58] Investigating how sound unfurls spatially as it reverberates internally, I examine how listening augments interconnections. *If* characters and viewers *listen*, they hear the voice of things: the swish of air as the *Venus de' Medici* moves through space; Corinne's beating heart beckoning her back to Italy; women's bijoux and *Belinda*'s diamonds becoming mouths that speak; Virginie's white muslin ringing out danger, and the sound of a hand adjusting a hat's brim. Listening to things helps characters exceed possession and surpass their own subjectivity, for this practice enables them to render things belongings. In turn this activates readers

[55] Sobin, "Notes on Sound, Speech, Speech-Crystals and the Celestial Echo" (p. 25).
[56] *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 4.
[57] *The Voice of Things* is the English title the translator, Beth Archer, gives to Francis Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).
[58] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 162. Jacobus brilliantly articulates the "expressivity of the nonhuman and inanimate and the ways in which the material and technological world act on the human, as well as being acted upon by it" (p. 5). She quotes Nancy's *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 6.

to think vigorously about their interactions with the world and the world of literature.

I.3.3 The Radiant

My third keyword captures the connective energy transfer I find when the human–nonhuman literary nexus *works* – when they travel toward each other, thereby illuminating matter in texts and interactions across the character–thing network. I chose this term because it connotes heat exchanged between systems. And because temperature determines how much force a thing will radiate, more movement between the human and nonhuman means more fire. Doubtless, certain literary things that radiate the most significant data are "hotter" than others, and these drive characters more intensely toward them. To create a conceit, as the thing's "temperature" rises – because of its significance and centrality to a text or character – and its "molecules" start vibrating, it increases the flow of meanings between these exchanges. Moving toward the nonhuman and recognizing the degree to which it prompts flux or germinates excess meaning provides an entry into *belonging with*. Thus, because radiance flashes out when humans and nonhumans listen and connect, interdependence is possible regardless of a thing's size, value, or utility. I underscore this since the dowdiest of straw hats and the most magnificent of glittering diamonds participate in a world of matter that matters, for as these texts show, even the lowliest can belong. In these radiant moments, literature, readers, and characters, responding to nonhuman energy, can learn from it. Sometimes these interlacings better resemble a conduction between systems since they occur via physical contact, such as stroking a statue or wearing a hat; at other times, a thing remains untouched, and yet matter still agitates and cultivates implications.

I.3.4 Resuscitation and Restoration

The authors I address concern themselves varyingly with patriarchal efforts to dematerialize women and reduce the nonhuman to abstractions; others try to heal such conditions by *resuscitating* and *restoring* what has been rendered incorporeal or irrelevant. To yoke to a thing, whether human or not, its matter must matter. It must be allowed to breathe. And to rematerialize requires a full sensory commitment. Consequently, I strive to make the things I study more tangible by historically contextualizing them and highlighting their sensory aspects. Fritjof Capra's statement that

"the origin of our [current ecological] dilemma lies in our tendency to create the abstractions of separate objects"[59] rings true to me insofar as letting literary things remain abstract can lead readers to ignore the larger textual ecosystem; more generally speaking, it exemplifies a disregard for our environment and the levies we place on gender choices. From my perspective, this reinforces that the work of *belonging with* often constitutes resuscitation, for when characters commune with things which have been driven into obscurity or abstraction, characters (and correlatively readers) can hear and feel their breath, can breathe with them. The objects I discuss differ in size, portability, and cost – statues, diamonds, monuments, a book, sentimental objects, and hats – but each is either resuscitated or they themselves resuscitate characters. To quote Sobin's title again, these constitute "luminous debris."

I envision my work as participating in recovery, but also in *restoration*, which readers will find is a punning phrase, given that each chapter addresses, to some degree, the literal restoration of things or characters. *Embodied Experience*'s literary texts accomplish their own revitalizing work, for each one strives to rematerialize characters by finding them a body or generating their body anew: *Belinda*'s characters restore Lady Delacour's ethical being by restoring her physically; Corinne exercises a sacred duty in urging Oswald to connect to things and thereby restore his *élan vital*. Wordsworth's and Edgeworth's recyclings of *Paul et Virginie* reexamine the eponymous heroine's physical sacrifice, restoring her to life in their own text's alternate endings to the novel. I also examine restoration's inverse, the ruin or damage to fictional female bodies manipulated and refashioned for profit rather than independence and love. When *Belinda* invokes the *Venus de' Medici*, it restores the ideal female body not as one perfectly proportioned, but as fragmentary and mixed: as more "Romantic" than Neoclassical, as more in-motion than flawlessly static, as more rational and virtuous than that kind of woman Mary Wollstonecraft contemptuously calls a "fair defect in nature" (*VRW*, p. 65). Crystal Lake insightfully claims that "fragmented objects . . . lead us to believe that we can complete their shapes, reconstruct their histories, and determine their meanings"; indeed humans often desire such a finale and artifacts "always keep us guessing and second-guessing about what they are . . . and why they matter."[60] I focus, however, less on artifacts'

[59] *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), p. 295.
[60] *Artifacts*, p. 193.

playful intransigence than on the belief that neither human nor nonhuman can even try to complete the other unless some fundamental sense of *belonging with* exists between the two. For example, Chapter 1 anatomizes how restorations of the *Venus de' Medici* and the *Venus Belvedere* fail since fashion and politics external to the statues' desires – styles particular cultures long to replicate – decree those refurbishments.[61] Thus, human–nonhuman restoration simultaneously requires connection and distance (I return to this calibration in Chapter 4), since symbiosis between restorer and statue is not only impossible, but undesirable, since it would deaden the relationship between them.

I.3.5 Recycling

My last keyword, one that tangibly connects things, is *recycling*, a term that can overlap with those of restoration and resuscitation. Ariane Fennetaux, Amélie Junqua, and Sophie Vasset's *The Afterlife of Used Things: Recycling in the Eighteenth Century* reminds readers that most eighteenth-century historians have emphasized innovations – the "'industrial revolution,' [the] 'consumer revolution,' [the] 'new science,' and the 'new print culture'; however, to understand the era in less "piecemeal" ways, one must turn to another "fundamentally relevant operative process": recycling.[62] They see recycling as "central to consumption envisioned in its entirety" and as a "cyclical process of valuation, devaluation, and re-evaluation," one that not only "asks economic questions but opens up social, aesthetic, political, and moral interrogations."[63] Indeed, such "interrogations" shore up my claims, given that every object I contemplate is recycled, as when novels and tourist accounts repurpose the *Venus de' Medici* into a sign of female modesty or *un cri de coeur* for liberty; or, when a diamond meant for revenge is re-intentioned into social and ecological atonement; and when artisans recycle Bernardin's drowned Virginie into kaleidoscopic representations – statues, paintings, bedspreads, and fans.

[61] Lake argues in *Artifacts* that "[w]e should reserve the term artifact, therefore, for naming those objects that either have a troubling tendency to keep changing their story or to stop talking at the moments when we need them to say more" (p. 6). I agree that no object can be thoroughly mined, but for my purposes, all things, not just artifacts, do share that "troubling tendency" to transform and withhold information.

[62] "Introduction: The Many Lives of Recycling," in *The Afterlife of Used Things*, ed. Fennetaux, Junqua, and Vasset (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p. 1. Many of these essays analyze how things are literally recycled – for example, how ceramics were repaired.

[63] "Introduction: The Many Lives of Recycling," pp. 2, 3, 4.

Recycling has further implications for *Embodied Experience*: For example, its positive capacity to save resources has analogous consequences for literary composition and for women's ability to thrive. Concerning the first, rewriting an earlier novel might be said to prevent waste, as recycling glass does, insofar as each time an author resuscitates *Paul et Virginie*, it prolongs its lifespan, and within the new literary context boosts readers to rethink a novel which has not "aged" well and no longer has the impact it did when first published. I extend this conceit as well to female lives, since as many authors contended, women should experience embodiment fully instead of regarding their bodies as warring with their spirits or their virtue battling with their sexuality – such militarized zones leave women useless and broken, entities that can never have a full life and that are then discarded. I reconnoiter how, in literature, recycling's ecology renews things and storylines as it tries to return an affirmative and restorative materiality to women that gender constructions have proscribed. Specifically, textual recyclings resist Bernardin's transformation of Virginie into "virtuous waste" when they let her virtuously live. This relates to Wollstonecraft's recycling metaphors, as when young women, considered "ephemeron triflers," are prized only for one use – their youthful, pleasing charms (*VRW*, pp. 36, 45). Accordingly, keeping women uneducated and passive demands tossing out resources necessary for the health of individuals, families, and nations. The recyclings of Bernardin's novel into something more hopeful contrasts to those *Frankenstein* performs, wherein Victor tears parts from other bodies to create something supposedly perfect. I suggest a feminist–environmentalist version of recycling that restores the alliance of the female body and mind and the coalition of the human and nonhuman.

Those who study material culture often begin with political aims, primarily environmental, as in our world we watch "stuff" accruing exponentially – and being discarded just as fast. Stacy Alaimo suggests that

> imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.' . . . [B]y underscoring that *trans* indicates movement across different sites, trans-corporeality also opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors.[64]

[64] *Bodily Natures*, p. 2.

Thing theorists abjure the inability or failure to pay attention to this crisis; they reject the insistent exploitation of the nonhuman existing at this catastrophe's root. And though I espouse this viewpoint, if an outright environmental agenda seems opaque in this book or does not shimmer on its surface, that does not mean that it is not propelling my thoughts, for, really, our mistreatment of the nonhuman is the issue that thrust me into this project. Thus, as these literary texts disclose the penalties of overlooking things or treating them contemptuously, they compel readers to exercise the idea that we can learn from *belonging with* how to be better subjects: how better to respect the environment and the people around us, how better to inhabit the material world, how better to realign our thinking holistically.

I.4 Linking Thing Theory, History, and British and French Literature

Many conceptual and tangible rewards result from studying British and French literature in conjunction with human–nonhuman embodiment and *belonging with*. To begin, comparatism itself beneficially sets a "home tradition in a differential frame," thereby "offering us the provisional freedom to imagine our world, and ourselves, differently."[65] Comparatism additionally encourages opportunities to think about the wider topics of gender and politics outside of purely national concerns. For example, Margaret Higonnet's *Borderwork* centers on "the meeting points of comparative literature and feminist criticism"; and as Catherine Brown argues, "[a]t a political level, the willingness to compare one thing or oneself with an other or others undermines absolutism,"[66] undermining, most specifically for my purposes, tyranny over objects and women. Further moving through this reticulation, I believe that comparatism and thing theory form a useful combination. Damrosch observes that "[a]lmost by definition, comparatists are people blessed, or afflicted, with double vision."[67] This book implements not only the double sight of two nations, but also a third: a theory of materiality that develops the possibility of humans and nonhumans belonging together. These three, conjoined, reveal that each enhances the others; to offer one example, comparatism puts pressure on any tendency in thing theory to see such interactions only

[65] David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 341.
[66] Higonnet, p. 4; Brown, p. 86. [67] Damrosch, p. 63.

within a nationalist or even a universalist grid.[68] Thus, as I advance a feminist comparatism, theories of thing–human relations become my fulcrum, one which lifts into a brighter vista the female characters who accept their own physicality, cooperate with material objects, and work with and in the material world, either through environmental restitution or creative assertions of human rights.[69]

Thus, as I journey into both English and French texts and objects, I draw on historical context and employ varying kinds of philosophies of things as my vantage point, such as Spinoza's, in addition to those theories which the literary authors themselves devise. This allows me to link catastrophic splits between human and nonhuman in literary texts to their equally catastrophic historical backdrops, since politics, individuals, and social groups, stimulated by events between 1763 and 1814, all struggled with questions of embodiment. In rethinking relations among humans, nonhumans, and history, I join other recent scholars (Silver, Lake, Rabb, and Festa) of material culture,[70] and, like them, explore ways that objects unwrap and radiate social and political narratives. I do not rely on the same anchors as they do (Robert Hooke or Thomas Hobbes, for example), but instead first contextualize my analyses within the frameworks of events such as the Treaty of Paris, the French Revolution, and Napoleonic rule, and second in relation to the female characters from primarily women-authored texts. Along these historical lines, Spinoza, whose philosophy undergirds the radical enlightenment, has also stimulated my thinking. And though this is not a thoroughly integrated study

[68] As Higonnet argues, "many comparatists … weave together multiple disciplines in a reading practice that may be called *métissage*, a practice which recognizes that representation cuts across the boundaries of juridical, political, anthropological, and artistic discourses." See "Introduction," *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*, ed. Higonnet (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 2, and *Comparing the Literatures*: "the different strands of comparison that we find today have long been intertwined, including philologically based close reading, literary theory, colonial/postcolonial studies, and the study of world literature" (p. 337).

[69] Brown's "What Is 'Comparative' Literature?" discusses how such fulcrums in comparative work have long led to greater understanding; for example, Auerbach "uses *Ansatzpunkt* to denote a point of vantage from which different cultural objects may be simultaneously viewed" (p. 81).

[70] Silver will "do intellectual history through material history, and vice versa," charting "the ways in which an idea might repeatedly turn up in an object, or an object (or range of objects) might repeatedly constitute an idea" (p. 18). Lake claims, "[t]hroughout the long eighteenth century, an artifact could vindicate or undercut a range of political claims, from those that asserted a sovereign's divine right to those that pleaded for radical democracy, because it could also corroborate competing theories of matter" (p. 5, 12). My work differs from Melinda Rabb's important *Miniature and the English Imagination: Literature, Cognition, and Small-Scale Culture, 1650–1765* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), in that she draws on "recent work in the interdisciplinary fields of cognitive cultural or cognitive literary studies" to "'understand the evolving relationship between … the human mind and cultural artifacts'" (p. 5). Rabb quotes Lisa Zunshine, ed., *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 3.

of that philosopher and the literature I have chosen,[71] I keep present his conviction that "the mind and the body are one and the same thing" (*Ethics*, IIIP2s). Readers will further see that his links among virtue (power), joy, action, and beneficence inspire my feminist ethics since *belonging with* involves all of these; thus, I draw from him that the strongest desires are those "which aris[e] from joy," that joy arises from self-preservation, and that "the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's being" (*Ethics*, IVP18; IVP18si).[72] As Elizabeth Grosz eloquently explains: "For Spinoza, ethics is a movement oriented by encounters with others, other humans and human institutions, other living beings, and the non-living material order that constitutes the whole of nature, an ethics not based on autonomy and self-containment, ... but through engagements that enhance or deplete one's powers."[73] The eco-social implications of Spinoza's theories also impact my study, especially his sense that all beings "should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all" (*Ethics*, IVP18siii). For Spinoza these are virtuous acts since "the more each one strives, and is able, ... to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue" (*Ethics*, IVP20). Thus, especially for women, such striving is a virtuous act, one motivating their life force and consequently their desire for happiness; women like Bernardin's Virginie, who abandon this *élan vital* for hollow notions of "female virtue" choose death.

Of course, neither I nor these other scholars presume that a comprehensive knowledge of things and their histories can be gleaned. I take heed when Judith Pascoe claims that "romantic histories" themselves "dwell upon their own fragmentariness, on the impossibility of capturing an intact history."[74] Nevertheless, using theories of materiality, I flesh out these literary objects (as much as possible) as beings with their own histories. These entities – "left in way of vestige," by those authors of "*antique populations*"[75] (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

[71] For example, see Marjorie Levinson's *Thinking through Poetry: Field Reports on Romantic Lyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), which investigates Spinoza's importance to Romantic studies (esp. chapter 5).

[72] For essays on feminist theory and Spinoza's writings, see the excellent volume, *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. Moira Gatens (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

[73] *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 56.

[74] *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 24. I am indebted to this exquisite scholarly work.

[75] Sobin, *Luminous*, p. 38.

that is) – create links between literary texts and cultural and historical events and personages. In doing so, they enter into startling relationships which revise our reading of literature. For example, when *Desmond* introduces a hat, circa 1763 and linked to the Treaty of Paris, as intertwined with the French events of 1792, the object demands some explanation for its presence. Because French and British literary texts embody, through things, both history's events and theories of materiality, these belong together.

All eras, no doubt, concern themselves with the question of embodiment, but 1789 and the post-revolutionary epoch provide an especially rich laboratory for trying to corporealize abstract issues such as human rights and the relationship between property and citizenship. That a revolution is not the only way to embody ideals goes without saying, but the fact that uprisings occurred in multiple European countries as well as in South America and the Caribbean between roughly 1750 and 1810 suggests that manifesting, not just speculating on, large-scale transformation enthralled many minds. Jonathan Israel contends that it was earthquakes, especially the Lisbon one in 1755 – matter cracking, rumbling, falling, firing, and destroying – that helped intensify debates concerning interlacings among nature, divine intervention, and science.[76] Indeed, he continues, materialist philosophies are the origin of and become the Revolution's cornerstone: "Basic human rights defined as individual liberty, equality, freedom of thought and expression and democracy were inextricably linked to radically monist philosophical positions during the Enlightenment era."[77] Conservatives, for example, spurned the *encyclopédistes* as *matérialistes* inspired by Spinoza, "who, attaching the faculty of thinking to all beings, plants and stones included, perceive little difference between men and animals and conflate body and mind into one."[78] These revolutionary emphases and Chaumeix's critique, sounding out their anticipation of contemporary thing theory, provide one way to understand the priority these literary texts I examine place on incarnating nonhuman and human rights. This is not to say, however, that these novelists and poets would have accepted the d'Holbachian exclusion of the

[76] *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 39–41. Voltaire famously addresses this topic in *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne.* See https://gallica.bnf.fr/essentiels/anthologie/poeme-desastre-lisbonne

[77] Israel, pp. 20–21.

[78] Israel, p. 76. Here Israel refers to the conservative Abraham-Joseph Chaumeix, *Préjugés légitimes et réfutation de l'Encyclopédie avec un examen critique du livre de l'esprit* ("Bruxelles," 1758–1759), vol. 1, pp. 200–202, 209.

transcendent, since their characters' elastic movements toward matter offer radiant examples of how they connect to something larger than their individual selves – sometimes spiritual union, sometimes more secular deifications like nature or social alliances. Regardless of that larger something, however, this "uplift," as I said earlier, remains anchored to the material. In Section I.4, I gesture to this wide historical context to parse how my chosen texts examine the embodiment of rights and the right to belong.

I maintain that the political need to incarnate ideals and forge authentic bonds between theory and praxis overlaps subject-object explorations during this revolutionary era. In suggesting links between French and British literature and political questions of how principles and prerogatives find physical form, I begin and remain on very general grounds – I do not rehearse mind–body debates or the *philosophes*' conversations and conflicts concerning materialist versus providential epistemologies. However, addressing both nations is crucial for my argument because such a reality-shifting event as the French Revolution leads both nations to inquire into abstractions and incarnations. Diderot links body and psyche, asserting that "*la révolution . . . s'est faite dans les esprits*" ("the revolution was realized in mind and soul"),[79] and as Israel shows, "[a]mong nations just as among individuals . . . [p]hysical needs and philosophical ideas are ultimately inseparable": thus, "revolutionary social change must ultimately be viewed as inseparable parts of a single process," since "*le people entraîne les philosophes, et les philosophes mènent le people*" ("the people inspire the philosophers, and the philosophers lead the people").[80]

Spinoza, whose ideas provided a spine for revolutionary movements and influenced British and French Romantic writers, also delivers one of the vertebrae that thing theories often claim: "in Nature there exists only one substance"; indeed, he states that "I do not know why matter would be unworthy of the divine nature" (*Ethics*, IP15s.vi), a strong argument indeed for a nondualist stance, and one particularly suitable for refuting that matter – and thus women – are inherently sullied.

[79] Quoted in Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, p. 943, He does not offer a citation for this source. My translation.

[80] Israel, p. 943. He cites Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique de etablissemens* [sic] *et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 10 vols. (Geneva: Jean-Leonard Pellet, 1780), vol. 10, p. 437. My translations.

My concern here is with women's enactment of rights.[81] Peter de Bolla outlines how this era varyingly conceived of and articulated (to use his central term) the "concept," of human rights, though he acknowledges a "play" between definitions. As he shows, most "eighteenth-century persons" would not have understood the "*rights of man*" as "designating universal human rights"; rather they would have thought of them as specifiable and concretely valid in individual instances.[82] Indeed, de Bolla reasons against "the slippage" that arises when one assumes that "'rights of man' are identical to the period's sense of the rights of mankind."[83] His distinctions help me elucidate my own use of the word "rights." The specific texts I include and the specific instances of characters striving to secure "rights" for the nonhuman or justice for themselves via things concern themselves more with the first definition and less with the abstract concept of how "the claim to universality" had "its basis in the essence of the human," though many would have thought this correct, and certainly correct for more than just the "species."[84] I am not stipulating that women characters who seek out rights come to *possess* them, but rather that in approaching things and finding ways that those things help them enact those rights, they potentially enter a state of belonging with the nonhuman where they can manifest self-protection and embodiment.

For Jacques Rancière, "the Rights of Man are the rights of those who make something of" the visible, written "configuration" of them; these are the people "who decide not only to 'use' their rights but also to build . . . a case" for validating that "inscription."[85] Applying this idea, Festa argues that the art and literature she addresses "make humanity a performative enactment, constituted processually."[86] Likewise, I see the movement between humans and things toward each other as a process necessarily and continually reenacted. My more specific point asserts that in doing so, they thereby enjoy privileges that legal systems have either barred from them or authorized, but not delivered – and both are the case during this

[81] Vis-à-vis more recent assessments of the Enlightenment movement, I agree that it was not just one thing and that though calling rights universal, it did not address the rights of all, as Siep Stuurman eloquently in *The Invention of Humanity: Equality and Cultural Difference in World History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), especially see chapter 6, "Global Equality and Inequality in Enlightenment Thought."

[82] *The Architecture of Concepts: The Historical Formation of Human Rights* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 119; emphasis original.

[83] De Bolla, p. 208. [84] De Bolla, p. 208.

[85] "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2/3 (2004): 297–310, p. 303. I am grateful to Lynn Festa for alerting me to this article.

[86] *Fiction*, p. 33.

era for women and much of any population, including the nonhuman one. I show throughout *Embodied Experience* that women built into their lives justices they did not even have, rights written nowhere. As Rancière states eloquently, women "could demonstrate that they were deprived of the rights that they had, thanks to the Declaration of Rights. And they could demonstrate, through their public action, that they had the rights that the constitution denied to them, that they could enact those rights."[87] Corporealizing these privileges may lead to a fleeting or inconsistent recompense (as *The Wanderer* evinces), and this activity may have to be physically enacted repeatedly, but in that spatial-temporal zone, women can achieve some liberty and agency. For example, as I explain in Chapter 3, if diamonds and women belong together, the rights they exert promise that the gem avoids being abused and the woman circumvents being objectified; as long as the *Venus* keeps turning, she retains the privilege of experiencing multiplicity and vitality, thereby preventing viewers from limiting her to one "motivation"; conversely, when Corinne and Virginie stop coursing toward the nonhuman and their own materiality, they abdicate their personal prerogative to experience a joyful and abundant embodiment. Further, if humans exploit things, taking away their right to "be" and to belong, those things enter a state of harm, but so too, in the *long* run do the humans perpetuating this.

As Siep Stuurman identifies, inequality of all kinds arose out of Enlightenment notions of equality.[88] Thus, justice very often remained an abstraction for many categories of humans and nonhumans. Lynn Hunt shows that although most thinkers employing the axiom, "the rights of man," articulated these "as if they were . . . self-evident," they were not; for example, "[t]he French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen claimed to safeguard individual freedoms, but it did not prevent the emergence of a French government that repressed rights (known as the Terror)."[89] If liberties that were supposed to be clear and palpable remained ambiguous and intangible, who did they include, and how were they to be enacted? In other words, which humans, which nonhumans, and which rights *belonged* together? Hunt asserts that it was emotional righteousness itself that made those truths indisputable:

[87] "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" p. 304.

[88] Stuurman speaks of these as languages of "political economy," "biopsychological theories of gender," "racial classification," and a "spaciotemporal matrix of more and less 'advanced' stages of human development," pp. 259, 260.

[89] *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), pp. 25, 18.

> Human rights are difficult to pin down because their definition, indeed their very existence, *depends* on emotions as much as on reason. . . . Moreover, we are most certain that a human right is at issue when we feel horrified by its violation. . . . The history of human rights shows that rights are best defended in the end by the feelings, convictions, and actions of multitudes of individuals, who demand responses that accord with their inner sense of outrage.[90]

Although I agree that "emotion" helps secure the existence of human rights, my book contends that to be effectual, they must also "*depend*" upon embodiment[91] and upon things themselves, which sometimes become surrogates when laws do not exist, as when a hat enables a woman to secure rights the legal system does not ensure. For example, in a story Aristotle recounts (one I will return to) King Mitys's statue commits homicide (though perhaps not suicide) by purposely falling on the person who had murdered the King himself, thereby attaining justice that apparently law could not.[92] The statue, enacting justice physically, makes the King's rights matter. Raymond Williams underscores this idea: He emphasizes how the changes before and during the Revolution were far from abstractions, given that they "were experienced, in these years, on the senses . . .. The pattern of change was not background, as we may now be inclined to study it; it was, rather, the mould in which general experience was cast."[93] And following from the physical tremors of, for example, hunger, there were, certainly, concrete attempts to put into practice privileges that would rectify such injustices. And yet, as Israel says, "the partial successes of radical thought in the 1780s and 1790s" arose from "the almost total failure of the moderate Enlightenment to deliver reforms that much of . . . society had for decades been pressing for"[94] – that is, it arose from the failure to *embody* those reforms that remained ephemeral. After Robespierre's death, Wordsworth writes in the 1805 *Prelude* that the now "eternal justice" is "thus / Made manifest," and that his and his followers' "madness is declared and visible."[95] How necessary such an

[90] *Inventing Human Rights*, pp. 26, 213, emphasis added.
[91] For example, in the US today a person may have a legal driving license and thus the right to drive, but, depending on their race, they may not be able to embody that right without being wrongfully arrested.
[92] "On the Art of Poetry," *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 45.
[93] *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 31.
[94] *Democratic Enlightenment*, p. 14.
[95] *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton Critical Edition, 1979), book 10, ll. 540–541, 550.

appeal to material embodiment – to justice "made manifest" and insanity made "visible" – must have been when ideals were not incarnated.

I bring together French and British literature and things to examine embodiment and abstraction specifically regarding women, who, alongside their male counterparts, sometimes willingly evacuate those rights, while others attempt, through a coupling with the nonhuman, to make those things and their own bodies fleshly "righteous," so to speak. Gender definitions carve out the conflicts between women and materiality in high relief. The French Revolution initially fosters female emancipation, only to retract that; influenced by that nation's radical reforms, some English women writers – most obviously Wollstonecraft – advocated for women developing both intellectual and physical strengths, but British cultural resistance to this empowerment led, as is a matter of record, to models forbidding women this privilege. Hunt, for example, charts how "the turning point in republican images of women" – occurring "between the suppression of women's clubs in October 1793 and the Festival of the Supreme Being in June 1794" – allotted females to the domestic sphere and led them, "[w]hen represented publicly," to be "increasingly relegated to distinctly motherly roles."[96] A concentration on embodiment and dematerialization within this historical context reveals how pressing the incentives were for governments, communities, writers, and individuals who wanted to see these new claims corporealized, for these fractures between female spirit, body, and virtue echo the separation between revolutionary ideals and the embodiment of them.

In discovering where women's rights incarnate in these literary texts, I engage in more than "*archaeological rhetoric*" (Sobin) by delving into a true "dig" as I explore how nonhuman things come to embody justice that remains missing or abstract. Chapter 1 probes whether connoisseurs have the license to accuse the *Venus de' Medici* of seducing them and whether she has the authority to elude their attempts to pigeonhole her identity and intentions. Exploring *Belinda*'s invocation of this statue, I show how it/she obliquely restores the right for Lady Delacour to protect her body and to invoke nonperfection and nonconformity as a just privilege. Chapter 2 turns to some Roman monuments and statues that embody the prerogative to life and happiness Oswald denies himself. Chapter 3, beginning with a *préambule* analyzing *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, emphasizes how conceptual ideas can transcend national borders, for in both Diderot's and Edgeworth's

[96] *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 153, 154.

novels the "mouths" of diamonds speak of women's right to be human, that is, truthful, fragmented, joyful, and stained. Chapter 4 first demonstrates how a book, *Paul et Virginie*, offers the springboard for later books and art objects to investigate a woman's entitlement to virtuous sexuality and, second, explains how *Bélinde*, *conte moral de Maria Edgeworth* (1802) – Octave Ségur's translation of *Belinda* – pivots from its source novel by embracing *politesse* and excising the original's link between nonhuman and women's rights, and thus, from my perspective, dimming the radiance Edgeworth claims for women when they are permitted both to welcome physicality and remain honorable. Chapter 5 observes Burney embracing what could be called revolutionary hope while simultaneously chronicling what can transpire when rights are absent or remain abstractions.[97]

I.5 Cross-Channel Connections

There are a few other central ways that these French and British texts and things have led me to believe that they belong together and belong with theories of materiality. Above all, they, themselves, participate in transnational fertilizations which they connect to women's material relationships. The works I address are comparative in that at micro, and almost always at meta levels, each bespeaks conflicts and communications between the two nations. For instance, allusions to France and the language itself saturate *Belinda*,[98] providing a stimulating cosmopolitanism that fractures British insularism and creates a character in Lady Delacour that reflects a diversely infused identity, one thinking and living a life characterized by linguistic *métissage* (intermixing languages).[99] Chapter 1 elucidates how this character's mental flexibility ultimately steers her toward a happiness one could perhaps call conventional, while also nurturing her formidable creativity, one decidedly heterodox. Her ability to

[97] I link Burney to Israel's "package of basic human rights," which comprised "equality, democracy, freedom of the individual, freedom of thought and expression, and a comprehensive religious toleration." See *Democratic Enlightenment*, p. 12.

[98] Many French women writers influenced Edgeworth. See Christina Colvin, *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, ed. Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and Isabelle Bour, "What Maria Learned: Maria Edgeworth and Continental Fiction," *Women's Writing* 18.1 (2011): 34–49. Of *Corinne*, Edgeworth reveals that "I am dazzled by the genius, provoked by the absurdities, and in admiration of the taste and critical judgment of Italian literature displayed through the whole work. . . . I almost broke my foolish heart over the end of the third volume." *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Augustus J. C. Hare (London: Edward Arnold, 1894), vol. 1, p. 165.

[99] *Belinda* incorporates over sixty-two references in French.

embrace this seeming paradox arises from transnational influence, for she often expresses her wit in French, and she has imbibed from that nation the intellectually commanding conversational powers of Paris's most acclaimed salons.

Like *Belinda*, *Corinne* provokes friction between French and English cultures, and both novels simultaneously proffer pluralistic cultural energies by showing these nations' mutual influences, though Staël complicates this mix by adding an Italian setting and half-Italian heroine. Corinne initially encapsulates – and nurtures in her lover, Oswald – the ability to notice, from a cosmopolitan perspective, local and international society, while not collapsing all national differences into one conglomerate. Such *belonging with* promises emotional and political health. Burney's *The Wanderer* and *Evelina*, Chapter 5's focal points, both interweave French fashions and political conflicts into British domestic life. In the former, Juliet's body becomes an ever-fluctuating barometer gauging threats both from her supposed husband, a *commissaire* working for the Terror, and from the English who assume she is French. To survive these international hostilities, Juliet draws on hats for protection from both revolutionary and English alarm. *Evelina* includes the infamous Madame Duval, not to criticize the French, but instead to spotlight how that character cannot coexist with either nation – let alone both. She remains vulgar while trying to eschew her "vulgar" English origins and pretends to be French, while rejecting that nation's emphasis on decorousness and "grace of expression" (*G*, p. 70).[100] And finally, the *Venus de' Medici* is intimately connected to France, Italy, and England, for the statue becomes a political icon that speaks a cosmopolitan language, allied as she is to classical Greek and Roman culture, but also to the Florentine. The texts and their things also permit cross-channel connections since travel often propels their plots, vitalizing national and international networks. Transit between England and France and life in the latter country during the Revolution galvanize *Desmond*, and *The Wanderer* begins with its heroine's escape from France to Britain; English values transferred to Scotland dominate *Corinne*'s plot, and Oswald and the heroine separately journey between these nations. Even the *Venus de' Medici* treks from Florence to Palermo to Paris and then back to her "home" city, Florence. As Edgeworth says of the statue, anticipating its arrival in Paris, "she has been long upon the road."[101]

[100] Staël urges the Germans to be more like the French by being "less irritable in little circumstances" and by learning "not to confound obstinacy with energy" (p. 89).

[101] *Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, pp. 50–51.

I further find contacts among theories of materiality and French and British literature compelling from the perspective of genre and gender. After the first flush of insurgency, France restricted women's participation in emancipation: In Staël's words, "ever since the Revolution men have deemed it politically and morally useful to reduce women to a state of the most absurd mediocrity."[102] And the English, terrified of powerful French female revolutionaries, attempted to dematerialize even more intensely their British "fair." Women became the specimens on whom these gender binaries were tested, though the French texts, for multiple reasons (one is Rousseau's influential biases) present this conflict as more difficult to resolve. Dissimilarly, British novels, such as *Belinda*, have the convenient strategy of the marriage plot to settle this. However, as I argue throughout, these texts reveal that plot's vulnerability insofar as it, in fact, *depends* on embodiment of women (their realization as physical, intellectual, and virtuous beings) and on material things (statues, monuments, diamonds, character "recyclings," miniature paintings, and hats) to make those felicitous unions succeed. For example, *Belinda*'s embrace of female embodiment prompts two happy marriages, while *Corinne* and *Paul et Virginie*'s tragic separations arise partly because the characters, themselves, have chosen to dislodge from their own materiality, their own belonging with their bodies, and with other humans and nonhumans.

In closing, I note that in accord with my keywords, which all connote lively attentiveness, the book is organized in ways that mirror the movements toward connection. First, my chapters themselves intertwine. Indeed, inherent entanglements among texts and among their literary things have led me to explore how they belong together. For example, *Belinda* links itself to the *Venus de' Medici*, which Chapter 2 then conjures when Corinne tours the Uffizi. Chapter 3 reintroduces *Belinda*, now paired anew with Diderot, as both authors draw on diamonds to disable conventional gender expectations. Chapter 4 considers *Paul et Virginie*, and then subsequently reinstates *Belinda*, now in company with Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage*, both of which recycle Bernardin's novel. Additionally, hats play roles in *Corinne*, in two Burney novels, and in Smith's *Desmond* (Chapter 5). In a second way, these texts' literary things perform energetically, making themselves known to characters and readers somatically – a sound, a breath, a touch, a light, a gesture, a paralysis. *Corinne* reveals that diamonds stop sparkling when a lover is unfaithful, and statues petrify viewers; in Bernardin's novel, a miniature

[102] *De la literature* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), Part II, Ch. IV, p. 335.

portrait influences an unborn child's appearance. Things rustle up recognition, disclosing pivotal information. In a third method, I follow these texts' tendencies: While I am an active thing theorist attentive to what an object's history might reveal about a culture or a novel, I have avidly listened to how literary works themselves create their own thing theories. Such a practicum has high stakes: preservation of life and liberty. Cognizant of these prehistories of twentieth- and twenty-first-century thing theories, I strive to upset binaries between the literary critic, the author, and the literary object of scrutiny.[103]

Finally, as a way of reinforcing these intertwinings, I include brief introductions, or forwards, if you will, to each chapter, which I entitle *préambules*. This, the French word for "preamble," carries, like the English, the connotation of movement. As I "amble" through these brief preludes, I occasionally introduce seemingly disparate literary works outside my principal texts' time frame or national contours: For example, this introduction begins with Sobin, and an Elizabeth Bishop poem (1979) precedes Chapter 5, which addresses eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hats. These inclusions, though sometimes anachronistic, interweave with my focal subjects, thereby suggesting wide-ranging connections and illuminating how such a mélange refreshes thinking about alliances among thing theory, feminism, and comparatism. Thus, I follow as these literary belongings amble between and among their temporal, national, and disciplinary borders, asking how they stimulate characters and authors, and how in this "neighborhood" – though it may involve different sorts of "traumatic proximity"[104] – British and French writers and their characters experience an embodied world of things.

[103] Mary Helen McMurran, referring to the work of Bennett and of Coole and Frost, observes that "[t]he 'new materialism' has not always fully recognized the historical complexity of active materiality." See "Introduction," *Mind, Body, Motion, Matter: Eighteenth-Century British and French Literary Perspectives*, ed. McMurran and Alison Conway (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 17, note 17, and Evan Gottlieb: "Wordsworth's early poetry and poetics anticipate ... a recent philosophical movement: object-oriented philosophy." See *Romantic Realities: Speculative Realism and British Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 16.

[104] Kenneth Reinhard, "Kant with Sade, Lacan with Levinas," *MLN* 110.4 (1995): 785–808, p. 804. My Chapter 1 returns to this idea. Reinhard advocates for a "comparative literature otherwise than comparison ... , a mode of reading logically and ethically prior to similitude, a reading in which texts are not so much grouped into 'families' defined by similarity and difference, as into 'neighborhoods' determined by accidental contiguity, genealogical isolation, and ethical encounter" (p. 785).