Conclusion
Living in a Material World

Embodied Experience in British and French Literature has folded together thing theory, history, feminism, and comparatism to analyze how travel accounts, novels, and poetry by authors such as Edgeworth, Staël, Diderot, Bernardin, Wordsworth, Bishop, Ségur, Burney, and Smith explore the possibility that binary structures which render women and matter mutually debased could be brought into the open, investigated, and even sometimes remedied in concrete ways such that literary characters and things might, in concord, salubriously manifest their physical and intellectual aspects. Since women too often are treated as things, and things, as a whole, are treated badly, I found it crucial to study these two together, and to ponder the cultural history that reinforces or tries to mend dualistic thinking. This book has affirmed that literary belongings matter, and that it matters when readers connect to the sensuous qualities of these things as well as to the knowledge that they harbor. Only such connection can enable both women and things to achieve their right to exist fully.

Given the sensory contact vital to human–nonhuman *belonging with*, each chapter has explored the necessary and fundamental role haptic, auditory, and visual experiences play for characters and readers alike, enabling them to feel and perceive each other's presence: a traveler's skin tingles as she caresses the *Venus de' Medici*'s; Juliet feels the prickling from her straw hat, which no doubt smells like Debby's hair, but also reeks of her reputation; the lava's brilliant red, liquid heat gliding from Vesuvius's mouth opens Oswald's, igniting him to speak; journeying to the cottage, the Pedlar is "beaten by Autumn winds," and Margaret feels the icy wind "ruffl[ing] [her] "tattered clothes …. Even at the side of her own fire" (ll. 435, 485–486); a diamond's glitter unseals Lady Delacour's eyes, propelling her first to violence and then to atonement, and a tart Morello cherry her gardener has nurtured will remind her of human–nonhuman companionship. Once *belonging with* awakens them, these

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things are, in Herbert Marks's words, "bleeding representations."[1] Today, however, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary belongings too often sleep, and sleep alone. Tourists now cannot enter the Tribuna, let alone measure the *Venus de' Medici*'s proportions, and visitors stand in long lines, with tickets, to enter St. Peter's rather than having the leisure to pause and then relish a slow move through the leather curtain at the basilica's portal. And it is doubtful that many women today could experience what many nineteenth-century hat wearers could: the specific kind of shade that a white chip bonnet like Juliet's offers. Opening the senses and intellect to things initiates belonging with them, rather like the Pantheon's open oculus, which enables sun, rain, and wind to illuminate and darken marble, welcoming indoors a sense of belonging outdoors.

To spotlight things contemporary readers may have missed or have no access to, I have delved into literary thing-life archaeologically, "entering into '*vallées délicieuses*'" to trace the vestiges of some literary objects to find prismatic exchanges between and among texts, characters, and readers – an approach intimated in my Introduction's opening epigraph from Gustave Sobin.[2] And such a process – finding the thing and unearthing its meanings – is much like excavating something and then tackling its riddle-properties. Here, influential scholars have inspired me in this approach. In *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance*, Daniel Tiffany detects collaborations between objects and literature, explaining how "archaeological evidence reveals that the earliest poetry in English displays an affinity for objects whose rarity and eccentricity were signaled by a peculiar verbal disposition," rendering "it possible to claim that lyric poetry first emerged in English as the enigmatic voice of certain highly wrought objects."[3] By engaging in this interpretive labor of "archaeological forensics," Charles Rzepka discovers that things "assum[e] a critical, and not just an illustrative, function."[4] And Cave's archaeological approach – the study of "pre-histories" – invites one "to return constantly to the object, to listen to it attentively and to follow its coded message right down to its inner folds ('*ses replies internes*')."[5] Digging deep, recognizing things, and then being baffled by riddles – only to begin again: This is the fluid story of *belonging with*.

[1] Gross cites this in *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, as "a letter to the author" (p. 90). Here Marks refers to statues.
[2] *Luminous Debris*, p. 38.
[3] (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), p. 35.
[4] "From Relics to Remains," n.p.
[5] *Pré-Histoires*: *Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1999), pp. 12–13. My translation.

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These literal and metaphoric excavations of unearthed things, however, rarely proceed in a clear, linear fashion. As Byron states so well, "I leave the thing a problem, like all things."[6] Of course, characters and texts must find the thing and discover at least some of what it generates before they can let it stay a problem, before, that is, they can let that thing "baffle" them; they will find, too, that doing this "real work"[7] slows down their reading process and extracts them from swift-page-turning absorption, propelling them to more questions than they can answer. For example, a pleasurable pause could lead one to ask why *Evelina* and *The Wanderer* so consistently allude to hats, while *Belinda* rarely refers to them. And yet the "problems" things spark when we listen to them reap the far greater reward of belonging with them. Engaging in this archaeological expedition to see "into the life of things,"[8] I have surveyed their histories and landscapes, excavated some, and then gathered together how those flesh out meanings-in-connection available only in companionship with those things. This book has demonstrated how certain things and certain characters in texts inspire each other to move toward and listen to each other. In these acts of connection readers palpably gain new knowledge of the ways things belong in literature.

In quarrying things, I have found Spinoza's *Ethics* beneficial, especially his idea that there is greater joy in activity than passivity and that each thing strives to live: "When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices" (*Ethics*, IIIP53). This idea has led me to explore in these literary texts the consequences of human–nonhuman separation, passivity toward the self and others, and immovable grief: ecosystems disarticulated; women disbarred from power and body; rights never levied or too often forgotten. My primary emphasis, though, has been on the ways in which moving toward the nonhuman and belonging with it creates more action, more energy, and more joy. And though this experience is sometimes fleeting, in these radiant moments, exchange becomes fruitful, and humans and things elude the proprietary "belonging to" of possession.

My archaeological journeys have highlighted three large concepts: how ornaments, plants, statues, monuments, and other things might manifest their physical and intellectual rights to expression; second, how interfusing historical, comparative, and feminist contexts uncovers the myriad ways

[6] *Don Juan*, in *Poetical Works*, XVII.13, p. 858. [7] Berry, pp. 204, 205.
[8] Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798," in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), l. 50; pp. 116–120.

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things ambulate between and among their temporal, generic, national, and disciplinary borders; and, third, how women in literature who accept that their physical bodies and mental abilities work as one poise themselves to claim the right to strive and to live – to claim the right to virtue. That is, it is a "virtue" to connect to things outside of ourselves and to acknowledge that we are part of a living ecosystem that requires such *belonging with* so that we can all persevere. In the texts I have examined, such a *belonging with* offers a potential relationship between humans and the environment that does not require transcending temporality, does not mire the subject in the material, does not abandon the individual to her own alienating subjectivity, and does not require the martyrdom of female energy and volition.

Many of the authors I address have themselves already initiated a theory and praxis of human–nonhuman camaraderie; they have embodied the radiant impact of choosing to *belong with*, and they do so in their representations. I have shown instances of where and how they do this, and I have suggested that readers should emulate them in discovering human–nonhuman interrelations. Levi Bryant warns that we must interrogate whether, in our representations, we are accessing an object "in its *reality*" or whether we are "'distort[ing]' the object."[9] While such an interrogative kind of check and balance is positive, I would say that we will inevitably "distort" the object because we are human and because we are always in the realm of mediation. Inevitably things will baffle us. But this is not all bad: "The impeded stream" after all, "is the one that sings";[10] and Morton has suggested that perhaps "humanness is encapsulated precisely in [the] attempt sensitively to attune to things that are not me."[11] In short, characters' interactions with things become more potent, more evocative, and more meaningful if we trace these objects' "recycled" histories, finding their antecedents in the pre- and post-textual realms. Humans live, quite plainly, in a material world and in material bodies, regardless of whatever kinds of transcendence they may strive for; likewise, things in books have or had physical correlatives: Recognizing such registers makes a difference in our intellectual and physical experience of what we read and attunes us ethically to listening to the things and bodies in the world we inhabit.

[9] Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Open Humanities Press, 2011), p. 14; emphasis original.
[10] Berry, p. 205.
[11] "Queer Green Sex Toys," in *Secure Sites: Empire and the Emergence of Security*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox, Jill Heydt-Stevenson, and Paul Youngquist, *ELN* 54.1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 15–25, p. 22.

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I have returned throughout *Embodied Experience* to images of and the interpretive potential of prismatic refraction. Excavated from the earth and then cut into polished facets, a diamond prismatically disperses fiery sparkles when light enters its being, driving it to brilliantly flash the colors of the spectrum. When these stones meet light and – especially – when they move, they scintillate, causing more movement. And like all things, a diamond's milieu transforms its dazzle, with candlelight or sunshine electrifying it in singular ways. Since prisms refract rather than moving through substance, as light passes through a plain, flat glass window, I have argued that steering toward and then listening to the material can spark radiant, prismatic moments wherein things glimmer out new sensations and refract new knowledge, rousing humans to experience fleetingly the astonishment of *belonging with*. And since humans and nonhumans share a distant consanguinity, this idea of turning toward, rather than advancing through things, seemed particularly apt, for neither entity can completely penetrate the other – that is, know the other completely. Yet in my explorations into literary belongings, I have found a place for optimism in discovering characters and readers who can belong with the nonhuman.

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