Open access • Journal Article • DOI:10.1353/ECF.2000.0056

Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions — Source link

Deidre Lynch

Published on: 01 Jan 2000 - Nineteenth-Century Literature (University of Toronto Press)

Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions

Deidre Lynch

Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Volume 12, Number 2-3, January-April 2000, pp. 345-368 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2000.0056*

Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions

Deidre Lynch

Sentimental novels are cluttered with things. The emotional attachments that people form with possessions in these mid-eighteenth-century fictions can seem as freighted with consequence as the emotional attachments that people form with each other. Indeed, modern readers of Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* or Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* might be pardoned for finding it hard to distinguish one sort of relationship from the other—even if normal notions of the folly of fetishism predispose us to believe that the difference between, say, ownership and friendship is a difference worth preserving. The keepsakes that clutter sentimental fiction (the lockets that protagonists wear next to their hearts; the sleeve buttons or snuffboxes that pairs of characters exchange to memorialize their first meeting or last, teary-eyed parting) work instead to collapse that difference. While they instructed their readers in emotional responsiveness, sentimentalists were more than ready to make objects of this variety—objects particularly valued because they are the surrogates for particular persons—their props. This practice marks the novelists' fashion-consciousness. On the testimony of the *OED*, which dates the word *keepsake* to 1790, it was only in the eighteenth century that keepsakes came to be identified as a distinct kind of material good. The fact that by 1790 members of the propertied classes had learned to *want* to give and to receive keepsakes from one another bespeaks the reciprocal influence

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION, Volume 12, Number 2–3, January–April 2000

between eighteenth-century people's love affair with feelings, and their fascination with the new opportunities for acquisitiveness that they discovered in shops. And that new readiness to countenance superfluous expenditure that historians of this century's "consumer revolution" have recognized—people's new willingness to disregard the traditional association between luxury and vice and instead value the luxury good as a vehicle for the finer feelings—also lies behind the marketability throughout the era of a literature designed to procure for its readers the "luxury of tears."[1]

Writers such as Henry Brooke, Laurence Sterne, Henry Mackenzie, and Sarah Scott vindicated the psychology of refinement suitable to the new consumer culture not only by finding increasingly nuanced ways of discriminating human emotions, but also by exemplifying the diversity of the portable properties that humans might feel emotional with or about. Hence the clutter. Sensibility is both the capacity to feel as others do and, as one eighteenth-century definition maintains, that "peculiar ... habitude of mind, which disposes a man to be easily moved, and powerfully affected by surrounding objects."[2] The (only semi-) satiric imitator of Sterne who takes a "Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge" knows he should let nothing (no thing) "escape" him: "The traveller ... should extract reflections out of a cabbage stump." Satirists were quick to note that sentimentalism invited people to be (in the standard phrase) "tremblingly alive" to dead matter.[3]

Such satires of sentimental animism had a point. A carriage for hire that sits alone and "unpitied" in an inn yard in Calais is able to arouse in Sterne's Parson Yorick the sense of obligation he had been unable to muster in his earlier encounter with the Franciscan friar. "Much indeed was not to be said for it—but something might—and when a few words will rescue misery out of her distress, I hate the man who can be a churl of them."[4] It seems apt that Yorick's piteous words acknowledge his obligation to a *désobligeant*—that they personify a carriage that seats one person only. It is as if the communicative and emotive powers that sentimentalism

1 On sensibility and consumer culture see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

2 "Question: Ought Sensibility to be Cherished or Repressed?" *Monthly Magazine* 2 (October 1796), quoted in Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 5.

3 Thomas Hood, "A Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge," first published in the *London Magazine*, 1821; reprinted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 367.

4 Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Graham Petrie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 37. References are to this edition.

projects onto objects work not just as well but even better when they are exerted in the absence of persons with whom we might connect them. Sterne acknowledges this, as the parodists note when they register the materialism in his sentimentalism. He reveals objects and subjects as competitors. Of course, it is also the usual business of the sentimental novel to subordinate the former to the latter. These fictions often measure well-being by assessing people's ability to hold on to their prized possessions. Yorick thus opens his narrative by protesting the insecurity of property in France: we are meant to share his dismay at the prospect that should he die in France the *droits d'aubaine* would consign his "shirts and black pair of silk breeches" and even the picture of Eliza he wears round his neck (p. 27) to King Louis, even if Yorick's heir should happen to be on the spot. Sarah Scott's eponymous hero Sir George Ellison begins his career as a social reformer in a characteristic manner when, having freed the slaves on his wife's plantation, he assigns to each "a small share of peculiar property." Later, Sir George takes pains to ensure that his kinsman Sir William will, despite the lunacy that has robbed him of his legal status as a free agent, retain his right to enjoy his own fortune. In Sir George's humanitarian world view, even the mad should preserve a relation to the possessive adjective, and so Sir William is made a pet-owner—some one who, supplied with guinea pigs, birds, rabbits, and squirrels of his own, is in a position to refer to "*his* creatures."[5]

In *The Economy of Character*,[6] I outlined the shifting role that the possessive adjective plays (and along with it the exchange relations that at once underpin and problematize the category of personal property) within the history of the literary character: the history, that is, of that insubstantial, inanimate being that novelists should, or so we believe, animate and endow with a "life of its own." I set out to challenge the idea that the British novel from the start represented individual interiority. I suggested that,

5 Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 14, 142–47, emphasis added. Sir William's title to his chattels is, in a sense, presented as more secure than that of the sane: Sir George "considered Sir William as possessed of a *double* right to the enjoyment of his own fortune, first, as it solely belonged to him, a legal and natural right; for if it was not his, it was no body's; no other person could justly lay claim to it: his other title was founded in humanity, no one being so true an object of compassion; for, in his opinion, no poverty was so much to be pitied as the poverty of the understanding" (p. 146, emphasis added).

6 Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

rather than understanding character in representational terms, we might do better to elaborate a pragmatics of character and investigate how readers in the eighteenth century *used* their encounters with the beings who peopled their books to accommodate themselves to a new world of commercialized social relations—and, within that world, to apprehend and explain a marketplace filled up with novelties, to cope with the embarrassment of riches, and to make their possessions truly private. In formulating that suggestion, I had recourse to the material culture of sentimentalism: the sorts of personal effects to be found within the sentimentalists' inventories. I found sleeve buttons, lockets, and snuffboxes unexpectedly important. This essay will look more closely at the paradoxes that attend on proprietorship in sentimental fiction. My hunch is that tracking the fate of personal effects in these texts can prompt us to rethink how, over the course of the eighteenth century, characterization—indeed, notions of what might count as a character—changed.

Of course, linked as it is with familiar narratives both about the "rise of the novel" and the rise of that individualism that "the novel" is ostensibly tailor-made to reflect, the success story that frames most examinations of the history of characterization also pivots on the discovery of personal effects, although in a different sense of the term from the one I have just invoked. Ian Watt reminded his readers of the special effects in the arsenal of the Hollywood filmmaker when he made Richardson's use of the letter form the equivalent in its importance for the developing novel of "D.W. Griffith's technique of the close-up ... for the film." Watt's scheme grants precedence, that is, to "personal effects" such as Richardson's technique of writing to the moment: techniques for getting up close and personal with characters that permitted the novel to realize its potential as a "full and authentic report" of "human experience."[7] For Watt, personal effects in this sense of the term represented the motor force of the history of the novel. His discussion can be summed up accordingly: when characterization in fiction became the occasion for a more high-tech, more adequate mimesis, when characters, gaining complexity and depth, came to be more like the real individuals who read them, and when writing thereby became more personal, then the novel really came into being.

William Beatty Warner points out that the priority that *The Rise of the Novel* accorded to the representation of private subjectivity distinguished Watt's narrative of the novel's progress from earlier accounts of the mimetic capacities of novels, accounts more appreciative of the social

7 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 25, 32.

panoramas readers can also find in fiction. This concentration on personal effects (and on Richardson at the expense of Fielding) also, Warner notes, allowed Watt to tap the prestige that reliably accrues to explanations of "the birth of the modern subject." Associating eighteenth-century fiction with the "new psychological genres" that were, in the wake of James-inflected accounts of "point of view," at the forefront of critical discussion in the 1950s, and by this means retroactively psychologizing eighteenth-century writing, helped secure for *The Rise of the Novel* the remarkable currency it has enjoyed since 1957.[8] (By 1965, W.J. Harvey was able to take for granted the premise that it is the individuality of the individual characters that makes a novel a novel: in his view, novelists *must* accept their characters as "asserting their human individuality and uniqueness in the face of all ideology.")[9] Yet, at the same time, this choice of priorities also aligned Watt's account with certain romantic-period discussions in which the figure of the character had likewise served to relate the history of novels to the history of individualism: perhaps it would be possible to explain the persuasiveness of Watt's account by pointing to the way in which it managed to appear new *and* familiar at once. For instance, when, in chapter 6 of his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), William Hazlitt takes on the task of bolstering *Don Quixote*'s claim to the title of "first novel," it seems as if he had read Watt. Hazlitt emphasizes the irreducible singularity of each of Cervantes' characters, who, he writes, "are never lost in the crowd." In his view of novels, the claims of character should override those of plot, and he is therefore happy to note that the actions portrayed in *Don Quixote* arise "not out of the situation of life in which [the characters] are placed, but out of the peculiar dispositions of the persons themselves." And when Hazlitt turns in earnest to compiling a romantic-period "rise of the novel" narrative, when he moves from Spain to England (a short distance as it happens, since he regards Cervantes as a "naturalised" British subject, practically "of native English growth"), he continues to discover these seemingly autonomous, self-expressive characters. He sees them now as artifacts of England's regard for the individuality of real individuals. In the reign of George II, he explains, accounting for why the novel rose when it did, "a security of person and property ... had been established, which made every man feel of

8 William Beatty Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 38, xiv n3.

9 W.J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 25.

some consequence to himself. ... Each individual had a certain ground-plot of his own to cultivate his humours in."[10]

The terms Hazlitt uses to delineate the stage on which literary history unfolds ally the novelistic character's ideal scene of action with sentimentalism's paradise of small proprietors. They no doubt pleased Harvey, who, using literary criticism to fight the Cold War, warned in *Character and the Novel*[11] that there could be no novels under communism. But if the broad outlines of this liberal story of character's progress were and are familiar, there is some oddity in the way Hazlitt alludes to the history that John Locke's *Second Treatise* offers when it explicates the invention of property. As cultivator, Hazlitt's individual "mixes" his labour with his "humours" and, in approved Lockean fashion, makes them his property: makes them personal effects in a doubled sense of the term. By virtue of this labour they have something "annexed" to them that "excludes the common right of other men." Hazlitt is exploiting the pun on the possessive adjective that Locke also relied on as he moved from the premise that "his body" was "his" body to the conclusion that "his property" was also "his"—was private property—and in the same way. (What obliges us to term the Locke of the *Second Treatise* a punster is that in English the possessive adjective *only sometimes* implies the legal status of possession. Other languages, by making different kinds of possessive adjectives available, make it simpler to distinguish the alienable from the inalienable and distinguish the sort of relation that is implied when, for instance, one writes of Locke's *Treatise* from the relationship implied when one writes of Locke's intelligence or Locke's cultivation of his humours or Locke's mother.)[12]

Hazlitt's extended metaphor for the rise of the novel has been set up so as to make the "peculiar dispositions" that make a person or a character who he is seem as substantial, as indisputably and objectively *real*, as articles of personal property. It is not clear, however, that such an analogy makes it easier to conceive of literary characters, along the lines Hazlitt means to adumbrate, as possessed of "lives of their own"—as expressing nothing, and being like nothing, but their own, original selves. After all, the effort of ascribing quiddity to the "self" is as much undermined as it is supported by Locke's account of our property in our persons. There the claims Locke

10 William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1819), pp. 217, 242–43.

11 Harvey, p. 25.

12 John Locke, "The Second Treatise of Civil Government," *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Thomas I. Cook (New York: Hafner, 1969), p. 134. I draw here on Alan Hyde's discussion of the body as property in *Bodies of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 55, 38.

makes for *self-possession* suppose both inalienability and alienability, both ideals of integrity and autonomy *and* a "fragmented relationship in which 'a person as transactor' owns" the self as a commodity. In this respect, Hazlitt's allusion to Locke seems perfectly apt: for, as eighteenth-century Britons were well aware, at no time more so than when they thought about what characters in their books represented and what could be done with them, the metaphor of "the property body" that grounds liberal thought is, in potentially perplexing ways, "always and everywhere public and private."[13]

Indeed this very conjunction of public and private is built into the eighteenth-century understanding of the character. This is why readers and writers living under George II, during the "character's" salad days, would have been perplexed by the ways in which that later narrative of the character's progress invokes and depends on a narrative about humanity's growing tolerance of the variations that individuate private persons. (Of course, scholars of the sentimental fictions that succeed the "novels of the 1740s" are likewise put at a disadvantage by this narrative, which requires us to supply proofs that the novel's "rise" did continue, that the novels of the 1760s and 1770s contributed properly and in a timely manner to a movement towards "more complex psychological fiction": we are embarrassingly aware that, measured by Watt's criteria, the novels we study represent, in fact, the "sagging" of the erstwhile rising form.)

As I have indicated, the familiar account categorically opposes characterization to public institutions and social conventions. Yet for individuals living in the first half of the eighteenth century, *characters* was first and foremost a designation for the legible, graphic elements of writing.[14] From the Greek for a stamp or an impress, the term *characters* denoted those distinguishing marks that visibly separated one person and thing from other persons and things, and, as the material, replicable elements from which language is composed, denoted a *public agreement* about how their culture made sense. The puns many early eighteenth-century novelists elaborate—and, enthralled with letter-writing and physiognomy, they frequently arrange for one character to read another just as we read her, which is, quite literally, like a book—suggest their determination to think of characters accordingly: think of them not just as what or who they represent but also as their means of representation. In Eliza Haywood's fiction, for example, lovers' reunions are mediated by "characters"—they arise, that is, at

13 See Hyde, *Bodies of Law*, pp. 55, 28. In the first citation, Hyde is quoting Patricia J. Williams's *The Rooster's Egg* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

14 This paragraph and the next three summarize and build on *The Economy of Character*, pp. 29–47.

the moments when a lover recognizes, in an epistle or in the verses pencilled on the base of a garden statue, his beloved's "dear obliging characters." Daniel Defoe's *An Essay upon Literature* (1726) engages with characters in ways that thwart the expectations aroused by that value term "literature" (it presents literature as an object of study better suited to twentieth-century departments of communications than our departments of English). Defoe's history of characters concerns "types impressing their Forms on Paper by Punction or the Work of an Engine." He engages various alphabet systems, typefaces, the inscriptions that, stamped on coins, transform previously unembossed discs of metal into current money. He extols characters of these sorts as the means that enable communication to take place over a distance.[15] Defoe would not be disconcerted to learn that as I compose this paper I am able to command my computer to execute a "character count": for him, as for our more wired contemporaries, character designated a typographic object, a unit of information. And, for all his centrality to Watt's account of how fiction took an inward turn, Samuel Richardson likewise brought a technocratic interest (shaped in his printing-shop) to his notions of how characterization could advance the project of redesigning the social order. Touting the moral efficacy of fictional (rather than "dry") narrative, promising his readers that they too should expect to be reissued in improved editions, Richardson contends in the "Hints of Prefaces for *Clarissa*" that the "Characters sink deeper into the Mind of the Reader, and stamp there a perfect Idea of the very Turn of Thought, by which the Originals were actuated, and diversified from each other."[16]

Character belongs, in statements such as Richardson's, to the field of discourse: this is in conformity to the local intellectual conditions of early eighteenth-century England, a culture exhilarated by what it could do with moveable type. Modern readers, by contrast, think of the literary character as existing apart from and prior to the words that represent it. We think of the literary character as what the writing is written about. Eighteenth-

15 Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry*, ed. David Oakleaf (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1994), p. 75; Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Literature: Or, An Enquiry into the Antiquity and Original of Letters* (London, 1726), p. 2. On novelists' punning on "character" see also David Oakleaf, "Marks, Stamps, and Representations: Character in Eighteenth-Century Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 23 (1991), 295–311; and Patrick Coleman, "Character in an Eighteenth-Century Context," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 24 (1983), 51–63.

16 "Hints of Prefaces for *Clarissa*," *Clarissa: Preface, Hints of Prefaces, and Postscript*, introd. R.F. Brissenden (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Library and the Augustan Reprint Society, 1973), p. 12.

century commentators are able to think of the character *as* the writing.[17] Predicting a long line of nineteenth-century humanist commentators on novels, Hazlitt teaches readers to raise questions about the autonomy and authenticity of characters, to adjudicate whether, rather than being the playthings of circumstance or plot ("manners or situation"), the characters of a novel are possessed of dispositions and humours "peculiar" to themselves. But such questions about a character's intrinsic nature—about whether a character is indeed like nothing but himself, "unfellowable"[18]—are in a sense beside the point when, as with Richardson, Defoe, and Haywood, we engage writers who value characters, in the first instance, as cultural instruments for generalizing meaning, for revealing the general principles that hold a conversible society together and for socializing and redeeming particularity. The punning by early novelists on *character* as well as on a series of related terms, their habit, for instance, of pointedly directing readers' attention to the "characters" that betray the authorship of an epistle or to the "lines" that make a hero's face recognizable as his own, constitute their self-reflexive admission that their own practices of characterization must comply with recognized public conventions for making sense.

In this context, characters do not matter primarily because, as Harvey would later claim, each asserts its "uniqueness."[19] Characters matter instead in some measure because they *are* matter: because the materiality of written language, the thing-like qualities that ensure the participation of language in the phenomenal world, ensure as well that agreements and arguments that are inscribed in characters will be accessible to public scrutiny. Language embodied in written or printed characters "resists mystification from being treated as a purely private or hidden property."[20] The anti-oral biases of a print culture, geared up for the exchange, copying, and commercial circulation of information conveyed in graphic form,

17 A comparable distinction separates a modern conception of *sentiment* from that of a culture able to treat the term as a designation not just for the feeling but also for feeling's vehicle, the "epigrammatical expression ... often of the nature of a proverb" that makes it communicable and available for public consumption. See the *OED, s.v.* sentiment.

18 Jonathan Lamb takes the reply that Henry Fielding's Tom Thumb makes when asked about what the giants he has captured are like ("Like nothing but themselves") and makes this remark the starting-point for a fascinating discussion of the status of singularity for Sterne: see *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chap. 2, "Originality and the Hobbyhorse."

19 Harvey, p. 25.

20 Richard W.F. Kroll, *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 20.

help motivate the character-writers' embrace of the corporeality of language. Of course, in this period of physiognomic enthusiasms, this idea of language also intersects with an ideal of a legible, tell-tale body, one marked with characters that externalize character. It intersects as well with a homiletic tradition, originating in the Middle Ages, that compared the "character," in the sense of the word that concerns personality, to the coin. Sermons in this tradition proposed that the self might be considered the issue of God's Mint or saw in the coin imprinted with the inscription that turned it into legal tender an image of the individual separated from its originary state of innocence by the lineaments—corresponding in turn to the lines and marks to be discovered on the face—of virtues and vices. This character-coin analogy, we should note, implies a narrative. As befitted a Protestant culture nervous about cloistered virtues, and a commercial culture anxious to see the "dead stock" of bullion enlivened by financial investment, the coin was described as existing in order to circulate within the marketplace of the world. It was thought of as having been sent out from the Mint in order to be marked up by experience.

This narrative that recounts the purchase of experience organizes numerous mid-eighteenth-century novels such as Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random*, Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, or her brother Henry's *Tom Jones*. In works such as these, the universal conversation enjoyed by the protagonist, which brings him into contact with "every kind of character from the minister at his levee, to the bailiff in his spunging house; from the dutchess at her drum, to the landlady behind her bar," represents another means by which the character and the piece of current money come to be associated. These fictions can seem bent on treating their principal characters as investment capital: the vehicle empowering them to get more characters still.[21] Each text looks to be intent, too, on charting the social order to its farthest reaches, doing so by means of a peripatetic, conversible protagonist who, like current money (as described in 1757), "cherishes and invigorates the whole community."[22] Modern readers may be justified in

21 Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. Sheridan Baker (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 526. Compare John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983), chap. 3.

22 Anon., *An Essay upon Money and Coins*, part 1 (London: G. Hawkins, 1757), *A Select Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on Money*, ed. John R. McCulloch (London, 1856; rept. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), p. 402. Locke had noted earlier how money memorializes a social contract of sorts—the fact that gold and silver are by "general consent the common pledge" for all the exchanges that can take place in civil society: *Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and Raising the Value of Money* (1692), quoted in James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 57.

viewing the social context that novels elaborate as being there in order to explain the characters. But taking seriously the linkages among numismatic, physiognomic, and "characteristic" signs that so interested early and mid-eighteenth-century writers means that we should also try to think of the characters as there in order to produce the sense of a social context.

The flagrant unworldliness of many sentimental protagonists of the 1760s and 1770s—Brooke's Fool of Quality, say, or Mackenzie's Harley, who, deviating from the standard peripatetic model for mid-century protagonists, leaves home too late and returns too soon—might seem to disqualify them from this work. At the least, this unworldliness seems to suggest that by the last third of the eighteenth century the typographical emphases that had oriented the "character" towards publication, publicity, and the public had become easier to discount. In this respect, sentimental fictions do seem to know their allotted place within the familiar narratives recounting how fiction got personal and people got individual. In seeming to exemplify an intermediate stage in the development of the individuated novelistic character—in seeming to provide precursors to the style of character Hazlitt talks about, whose humours are his and his alone, or to the style of character that Watt finds in the psychologically discriminating work of Jane Austen—they appear to affirm the narrative of progress in characterization that these figures and others outline. I want not so much to challenge as to complicate this view. In order to do so, I want to return to personal effects in the first sense in which I used that term. I want to think about how often in sentimental novels we see the fungibility that is demanded of characters who participate in the exchange relations of "sentimental commerce" (Yorick's phrase) pitted against an ideal of integrity that is modelled when characters keep their keepsakes and so keep themselves to themselves. I want to think about how often sentimentalists arrange for the style of intimate, absolute proprietorship that is modelled in Locke's example of the property body to take shape against a backdrop of other, imperfect and compromised sorts of possession. What suggests that the status of the (self-possessed and self-possessing) character in sentimental fiction is more enigmatic than our critical narratives have allowed us to suppose is this paradox: that in this venue thinking about what is *personal* very often becomes intertwined with thinking about *money*.

In what remains of my essay I mean to outline how this is the case, and by doing so suggest how sentimental novelists negotiated the shift between the two notions of character—and the two ways of estimating their use and

value—that I have already outlined. Let me begin by considering the narratives that people, starting in the eighteenth century, learned to spin out of their keepsakes and souvenirs—for, as Susan Stewart has demonstrated, stories invariably accompany this species of object. The keepsake's narrative is a story of dispossession. (It is our nostalgia that makes us value it as a metonymic object, one memorializing the experience with which it was associated. But nostalgia's demands are insatiable, and so this keepsake records loss as much as preservation. It records, that is, its status as a mere substitution.) At the same time, paradoxically, it is also a story of possession of the most absolute, intimate kind. (Thus this nostalgic story in itself is the property of the possessor and not the object, for, inalienable and ungeneralizable, that story can encompass the experience of one particular person only. In this way, when a souvenir is purchased or a keepsake is bestowed upon a "significant other," the possessor is in a position to inscribe "the handwriting of the personal beneath the more uniform caption of the social.")[23] The second of the two quotations from the 1790s that the *OED* provides when it exemplifies the earliest usage of *keepsake* is from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* of Ann Radcliffe, pre-eminent poet of the memorializing impulses we bring to our personal effects. The heroine Emily's maidservant, Annette, refers to "a beautiful new sequin, which Ludovico [another servant] gave me as a keep sake," and which she "would not [part] with ... for all St. Marco's Place." Ludovico's choice of a memento to bestow upon his beloved underlines and exacerbates the paradox that I have already associated with property in general—the paradox that to call something "property" is to apprehend it as both, simultaneously, a private and a public concern. This is so because Annette's prize possession the "sequin" is (again, as the *OED* indicates) an Italian *coin*—and because money is so very odd a form of personal possession.[24]

Frequently, however, it *is* a piece of money that is at centre stage at those moments when objects occasion that artless expression of feeling which is the hallmark of sentimental fiction. I am thinking here of how Sterne and Mackenzie (following Henry Fielding's lead) arrange to convert the social instrument of money into a personal effect. A vignette common to *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* demonstrates how a coin may be converted into property so personal—property which is, quite precisely, of sentimental value—that to be parted from it would be like losing a body

23 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 135–38; quotation, p. 138.

24 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 342.

part (or as Sterne's sentimental traveller says, referring in this case to what it would mean to lose the snuffbox bestowed on him by the Franciscan friar, like losing "the instrumental parts of my religion," p. 44).[25] After Parson Yorick gives a French *fille de chambre* a crown along with a piece of his advice (the payment working to make his exhortations more endearing), she promises to set the coin aside—"En vérité, Monsieur, je mettrai cet argent apart" (p. 90)—and later re-enters his story in order to show her benefactor the purse that she has fashioned for that express purpose. She has made the little purse of green taffeta, she says, handing it to him, to "hold your crown" (p. 117). Money exists to be spent, and so Yorick's words about why she instead might keep the money in fact bring into view just what it could be exchanged for—"ribbons" (p. 90). But this coin escapes the general fate. In Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* we witness through Harley's eyes a comparable refusal to treat cash as cash. Wending his way through the London streets, Harley encounters "a fresh-looking elderly gentleman" whose physiognomy impresses him, as do his expressions of benevolence: so much so that when his new acquaintance lacks even a "farthing" of spare change and is thereby prevented from donating alms to the beggar who accosts him, Harley steps into the philanthropic breach.[26] Harley, the stranger, and a friend of Harley's new friend then make their way to a public house, where they begin a game of piquet, and where, oddly enough, the same would-be philanthropist produces ten shilling pieces to serve as markers of his score. Harley, however, is characteristically quick to put a brave face on the matter and to explain away the incongruity between the actual state of the gentleman's pocketbook and what had transpired earlier. Musing to himself, our hero observes that "inanimate things" will create affection "by a long acquaintance." He continues, "If I may judge by my own feelings, the old man would not part with one of these counters for ten times its intrinsic value; it even got the better of his benevolence! I, myself, have a pair of old brass sleeve buttons" (pp. 31–32).

When Yorick and Harley advocate or justify others' earmarking of their money (or, in the case of the not-so-benevolent old gentleman, apparent earmarking), what Sterne and Mackenzie stage is, of course, a scene of fetishism. Harley's association of the coin and the sleeve button, the latter an object that is also converted into a keepsake in Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality*, makes this point for me. Thinking about what a button and

25 I also discuss these episodes, in slightly different terms, however, in *The Economy of Character*, pp. 112–19.

26 Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, introd. Kenneth C. Slagle (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 29–30. References are to this edition.

a coin might share, we highlight their tactility and tinyness—each object asks us not only to touch it but to cup it in our palm and secrete it away.[27] (It is noteworthy, furthermore, that buttons have historically been fashioned of the same precious metals used for circulating specie. If we sometimes do end up wearing our cash, for example, sporting waistcoats adorned with "buffalo nickels" for buttons, there is reason to think, too, that in a nation chronically short of specie, especially in small denominations, eighteenth-century Britons might sometimes have ended up spending their buttons. Matthew Boulton, the commercial magnate whose lucrative button trade inaugurated Birmingham's era of industrial prosperity, for a brief period supplemented that manufactory with a contract from the Crown to mint copper twopences and pennies.)[28] The attachments to money put on view here also seem those of fetishists in so far as they overthrow "normal" criteria for value: diverted from exchange, but not receiving the sort of treatment they would get from the miser who merely suspends rather than annuls exchange relations, the talismanic shillings and crown are not being considered here *either* as "a measure of value"—valued for how they might determine and represent the worth of the commodities on offer in the marketplace—*or* "as treasure—value itself."[29] Setting objective and subjective determinations of value at variance, the vignette operates at the same time to join what, according to recent scholarship, fiction of the mid-eighteenth century supposedly sunders—public and private spheres, "the indirect relations of the commercial state" and "the direct relations of the affective community." The keepsake coin marks the point of their intersection.[30]

Credit for first devising this sentimental scenario should perhaps go to Henry Fielding, who arranges for Joseph Andrews, following an incident

27 The eponymous fool of quality, Harry Fenton, asks a poor man what he wishes in payment for the "priceless" lesson he has given him in the benefits of moderating one's anger: "plucking a button from the upper part of my coat—I will accept of this token, my darling, says he." *The Fool of Quality* (London: Macmillan, 1872), p. 256. When Thackeray gives the eighteenth-century novel a Victorian overhaul in *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852) he remembers such eighteenth-century love-affairs through and with buttons: at the end of the novel we discover that during the visit she paid Henry in prison Rachel purloined a gold sleeve button from the arm of his coat and has ever since secretly worn it next to her heart. (I owe this reference to my colleague Daniel Hack.)

28 For information on Boulton and buttons, see Neil McKendrick, "The Commercialization of Fashion," *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 69–76. On Boulton and coins, see A.E. Feaveryear, *The Pound Sterling: A History of English Money* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931), p. 175.

29 Thompson, *Models of Value*, p. 34.

30 Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 126.

in which that hero is attacked by thieves, to stubbornly refuse to cash in the little piece of broken gold that he wears fastened with a ribbon to his arm. That gold piece is the token of Joseph's love for Fanny: Fielding may intend his readers to infer that when these two pledged their troth, they broke a coin into halves between them to commemorate the compact. For this reason, despite being unable to pay the reckoning at the Dragon Inn, Joseph is resolved to keep his gold out of circulation. He has earlier refused to let it be produced in evidence against his assailants, and now, too, though it represents the sum total of Joseph's wealth, and though Mrs Tow-wouse avers, incontrovertibly, that she "never knew any Piece of Gold of more Value than as many Shillings as it would change for," this "coin" will not be spent. When so challenged, Joseph instead hugs his property "to his bosom." His gesture invites us to identify his gold piece with the strawberry mark that is imprinted over his heart and that will, at the end of his story, effect the recognition of his true identity.[31] And for this reason Joseph's gesture also invites us to remember the tradition of comparing coins to characters, of comparing the legends that are inscribed on the surfaces of coins and make metal disks into legal tender to the so-called characteristic marks that make bodies into tell-tale, self-evident transcripts of identities and enable foundlings to be identified and "owned."[32]

I am not the first to notice the high profile money enjoys in sentimental novels, which for eighteenth-century readers must in many respects have represented guidebooks to the uses of money—object lessons exemplifying the power of those who pass currency from hand to hand to assign an objective value to all sorts of actions and things. In delicate situations, money clarifies roles and sets limits on people's entitlements. Sentimental fiction taught readers to have faith in money.[33] But those vignettes in *Joseph Andrews*, *The Man of Feeling*, and *A Sentimental Journey* that render money a keepsake go out of their way to belie such instruction. In these scenes, the value of money depends on its not circulating. It depends on money's being divested of its money-like qualities. By this means the scenes reveal current money's oddity as a category of *private* property. For example,

31 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 83, 57.

32 See *The Fool of Quality*, p. 155: "If heaven should ever bless me with more children, said Mrs. Fielding, I have determined to fix some indelible mark upon them, such as that of the Jerusalem letters, that ... I may be able to discern and ascertain my own offspring from all others." A "Jerusalem letter" is the tattoo that visitors to Jerusalem sometimes wore in testimony of their visit (*OED*).

33 Compare Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue," *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 210–30 and Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, pp. 129–35.

cash, once lost, cannot necessarily be recovered with the sanction of the law: a ruling by Lord Mansfield in 1758 maintained that the "true owner" of stolen money could not claim it after it had been paid away honestly in a *bona fide* transaction. He made his judgment not simply because money "leaves no Ear-Mark" (a rationale that Mansfield mentions only to reject) but instead because of "the Currency of it."[34] (At the time of her second encounter with Yorick, the *fille de chambre*, tellingly, still refers to the contents of her little purse as his crown, not her own. Her slip suggests that in reality the coin belongs to neither.) By its very nature money suspends us between possession and exchange. If we spend "our" money, it really is no longer our property. But if we refuse that spending power and keep our keepsake coins out of circulation, this money ceases to *be* money.

As they traffic in an idea of "sentimental" value, the three scenes I have just considered emphasize money's dual nature. They underline this duality as they adjudicate between the quiddity of the coin—the set of special associations that supposedly make each one of the benevolent elderly gentleman's ten shillings irreplaceable, however much it resembles anybody else's shillings—and the abstract, impersonal qualities that allow a coin to function as (in Marx's terms) a general equivalent, a stand-in for anything that is up for sale, anytime and anywhere. In annexing a memory to a piece of money, endowing it with the wherewithal to claim a story "of its own," these scenes suspend the powers of representativeness that were supposed to make money a medium of civility.

If we recall how eighteenth-century culture associated the mechanical production processes that create money and printed texts with the ethical production processes that create *character* (that imprint the self with traits and characteristics), these scenes have a further effect. One might postulate that the dual status that money has in these scenes correlates with the two ways in which character might be conceptualized, with the two alternatives that the first half of my essay outlined. My earlier discussion turned backward from the *sui generis* particularity of the authentic literary character (the wholly individuated character whom a novel-lover such as Hazlitt can celebrate without apology) to the social conventions for which written characters stand, the same social conventions that make a character a readable artifact. Money is personalized in the sentimental scenes we have been considering—recast along asocial lines so that it no longer tells its tale of a social agreement, fetishized so that it absorbs into itself the history of the processes of mechanical reproduction (and the history of the

34 Thompson, *Models of Value*, p. 138.

people) that made it. So, in our narratives about the novel's rise, character will be personalized too, and made singular and self-referential in an analogous way. In this way, sentimental fiction accommodates, albeit with the irony that attends on all our attempts to make property an intimate article, the designs of those who like Hazlitt wish to recount the narrative of character as a success story of personal effects.

It is worth remembering that *Joseph Andrews*, *The Man of Feeling*, *A Sentimental Journey*—texts we unhesitatingly classify as novels—circulated in the mid-eighteenth-century book market alongside texts dedicated to tracing the adventures of a bank-note, adventures of a rupee, or adventures of a guinea, and so on: texts that feature non-human, exceedingly mobile protagonists who move from hand to hand and purse to purse and so make their way all over the social map. Our reluctance to call these money-centred narratives *novels* has to do with our perception that if they have main "characters" at all, those characters must certainly—literally—be flat ones.[35] And yet the protagonists of sentimental novels also plunge into the transactional universe of a market culture. In their capacity as men of feeling, George Ellison, Harry Clinton, Harley, and Yorick move, as their shillings and crowns do, from one scene of exchange to another. For in sentimental fiction even the destitute bring something to market, the stories of their suffering; all those madwomen, beggars, and slaves enable these protagonists to spend their cash and purchase the vicarious pleasures of sympathy.

This value given to currency within the text of sentiment suggests another reason to ascribe significance to the scenes that show us a coin withheld from exchange. If we align the social mobility of current money with the universal conversation and sympathy that are required of these protagonists, then what we see in those vignettes is a suspension of narrative: a hovering between plot and plotlessness. Explaining why Harley will not leave home and enable his narrative to begin, why he defers his Grand Tour, the narrator of *The Man of Feeling* speaks to the appeal such an impasse might exert:

35 Described recently as allegories of the subordination of eighteenth-century authors to market forces and their alienation from the commodities they produce, these narratives about objects with the gift of gab do demonstrate, in troubling ways, that in a commercial world objects might well be more knowing about people's interrelations than the subjects with whom they live. These narratives might also, however, have offered readers comfort of sorts, for they refute what Lord Mansfield in the judgment I cited above said about how "money cannot be followed": while one reads them, money ceases to be incognito. I discuss Thomas Bridges's *Adventures of a Bank-Note* (1770–71) and Helenus Scott's *Adventures of a Rupee* (1782) at greater length in *The Economy of Character*, pp. 95–100. See also Aileen Douglas, "Britannia's Rule and the It-Narrator," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6 (1993), 70–89. On the presentation of authorship in these texts, see Christopher Flint, "Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction," *PMLA* 113 (1998), 212–26.

"It will often happen in the velocity of a modern tour, and amidst the materials through which it is commonly made, the friction is so violent, that not only the rust, but the metal too, will be lost in the progress" (p. 4). In this quotation the character *himself* (conceived of as independent of social circumstances and pre-existing any plot) appears as the cosseted coin at centre-stage in our sentimental vignette. Furthermore, the cosseting is the condition of the character's survival, of his remaining *himself*.

Yorick suggests something similar in the episode in *A Sentimental Journey* in which, in conversation with the French aristocrat who has assisted him in his quest for identity papers, he responds candidly to the Count's request for his impressions of the French. This is the passage, from the chapter entitled "Character," in which our hero gets homesick and waxes nostalgic for the alternative to the hyper-urbanity that distinguishes his Frenchified life:

> should it ever be the case of the English, in the progress of their refinements, to arrive at the same polish which distinguishes the French ... we should ... lose that distinct variety and originality of character, which distinguishes them, not only from each other, but from all the world besides.
>
> I had a few king William's shillings as smooth as glass in my pocket; and forseeing they would be of use in illustration of my hypothesis, I had got them into my hand, when I had proceeded so far—
>
> See Monsieur le Count, said I, rising up, and laying them before him upon the table—by jingling and rubbing one against another for seventy years together in one body's pocket or another's, they are become so much alike you can scarce distinguish one shilling from another.
>
> The English, like ancient medals, kept more apart, and passing but few peoples hands, preserve the first sharpnesses which the fine hand of nature has given them—they are not so pleasant to feel—but in return, the legend is so visible, that at the first look you see whose image and superscription they bear. (p. 114)

Prior to this scene, we have watched as, using Shakespeare as the character reference who will secure his introduction to the Count, Yorick has ended up defining himself as a copy who stands in derivative relation to an "original" Yorick:[36] "I took up *Hamlet* ... I laid my finger upon YORICK, and advancing the book to the Count, with my finger all the way over the name—Me, *Voici*! said I" (p. 109). His owing his character to a character (or, as the typography emphasizes, to the six characters Y, O, R, I, C, K) means, of course, that our hero has refuted in advance his claims about English originality, but that irony merely compounds those ironies which are, as

36 See Lamb, "Originality and the Hobbyhorse."

we have seen, already at stake in this reimagining of money along asocial lines—this dramatization of the dual nature of money and of character.

Yorick's "ancient medals" may be classed with Joseph's gold, the benevolent gentleman's shillings, and the crown in the *fille de chambre*'s purse—but what about his shillings "rubbed smooth as glass" by their participation in a long series of fiscal transactions? Yorick has upped the ante with this image. I suggested above that money converted into a keepsake, made the object of a more absolute, immaculate mode of ownership, ceased to be money. In Yorick's scenario, however, when money does what money is *supposed* to do, which is to jingle and rub in one body's pocket or another, it *likewise* ceases to be money, losing the inscriptions with which it was endowed. (And indeed around 1774, when many decades had lapsed since the last sizeable coinage, the inscriptions on silver were in general so effaced that it was apparently difficult to discern whether a coin was "English" or "foreign.")[37] Diminished in their material substance, those King William's shillings leave the bearer with less to call his own; at the same time, dwindling into illegibility, they have ceased to perform their *public* function of giving material shape to the immaterial fiction of civil society. And, presumably, if the jingling and rubbing Yorick dramatizes continue, this money ceases to *be* altogether—instead it is worn away to nothingness.

With Yorick's assistance, I have spelled out what is wishful about the manner in which the sentimental text polarizes circulation and the sentimental possession of property, something it does each time it tells the story of the keepsake. The novels underline that wishfulness, in so far as they often arrange for personal effects and the impersonal medium of money to trade places. Cash is "held apart" in a sentimental novel. The same cannot be said of the articles of personal property: those things we customarily endow with sentimental value and distinguish with a "characteristic mark" (a cipher or motto) that denotes ownership. Instead, the fiction's knick-knacks—its snuffboxes and hankies—tend to be whisked out of persons' pockets and made subject to handling by all and sundry. The fate of personal property inverts that of impersonal money. Yorick's starling is a celebrated example: the bird, Yorick insists, "was my" bird and he bears it as the crest to his coat of arms—and yet the bird has been set adrift on the

37 Feaveryear, *The Pound Sterling*, p. 156.

seas of civic finance, passed to Lord A, who trades it away to Lord B, and "so on—half round the alphabet" (p. 99).[38]

What does the wishful thinking manifested in *A Sentimental Journey*'s disquisition on "character"—this attempt to put the brakes on the story of the mobility of money and character—mean for that other story to which sentimental fiction ostensibly contributes, that romantic-period success story about individuals, characters, and novels? First, if sentimentalism marks a transition in the history of characterization, perhaps that transition does not need to be understood as a passage between a less and a more perfect mimesis of a less and a more perfect individualism. In *The Economy of Character*, I propose that an alternative account of how characterization changed might take for its point of departure the modelling of sentimental possession that engrosses the sentimental novel. I suggest that rather than looking for improvements in the mimetic powers of novels, we might instead contemplate how a new way of using characters might have been engendered by an era of consumer revolution—an era that, to a limited degree, saw a democratization of consumption, and in which, more importantly, the boundaries of wealth and class appeared increasingly permeable, as luxuries that were once confined to an élite few came to seem as if they might potentially be every person's property. The result of such transformations? Imagine the novelty of a situation in which exact replicas of my favourite Wedgwood snuffbox were likely to be wending their way by packboat or wagon from Newcastle to Bangor, while another such shipment of "my" snuffboxes headed for York. As this outline for a fiction to be entitled "The Adventures of the Mass-Produced Snuffboxes" suggests, eighteenth-century Britons had increasing reason to bear in mind what was uncertain and complicated in the relation of possessive indi-

38 Miniature portraits are, as any novel reader knows, particularly prone to such wandering. In *A Sentimental Journey*, compare the fate suffered by La Fleur's gage d'amour, given by his inamorata to a footman, who gives it to a seamstress, who gives it to a fiddler (p. 130), and suffered by Tristram Shandy's handkerchief (marked with an S in the corner), which finds its way into Maria's possession (p. 139). Given how Sterne alludes in this satiric manner to the money-centred narratives of circulation his contemporaries were writing, it seems fitting that the snuffbox that Yorick received from the friar and that he preserves as he "would the instrumental part of his religion" is appropriated by the anonymous author of *The Adventures of a Hackney-Coach* (4th edition, 1781), who mentions how great a price that box would obtain—"if Yorick's heirs would dispose of it" (p. 73)—and who also begins his narrative with the pretence that "an old worn-out pen of Yorick's" has found its way into his hand ("Dedication," n.p.). Yorick failed, or so it would appear, to keep his keepsakes.

viduals to their possessions. In that era of nascent consumerism, personal effects must have seemed less personal than they had hitherto.

The idea that a character has a life (better still, an inner life) of its own—the idea that a character's identity is a matter of hidden depths and meanings that are nowhere stated in print—may itself have been serviceable for readers anxious to personalize their reading experience. At a time when books, as well as snuffboxes, were at once being cherished as keepsakes and looking more and more like mass-produced commodities, to reconceptualize the meanings of literary characters in this way may have represented a way of alleviating such pressures.[39] To cast the character's significance as an inside story aligns the character with the coin that is held apart. It separates characters from exchange relations; it decommodifies them as it detaches them from the social text. Under these arrangements, one may value one's knowledge of a character as an immaculately personal, personal effect.

The keepsake's story memorializes this desire for property that would be truly self-expressive and private. At the same time, of course, it also underlines its wishful quality. When our keepsake is our money, we have not abrogated that connection with the marketplace that compromises our pleasure in having. Instead, the market continues to figure in our story, as a defining line of self-expression. This suggests a second way in which the story of sentimental money can help us reassess the history of how characterization ostensibly improved and the novel took its inward turn: the story highlights what is wishful in that reinvention of *character* that allowed us to forget the older meanings of that term. As I have noted, in the early eighteenth century *character* directed people towards the system of linguistic and fiscal exchanges that composed the public sphere. It prompted them to think about the social infrastructure and the mechanisms of social consent that—ironically enough—ascribed meaning and value to the most personal of communications or personal effects. Our post-romantic understandings of what novels and characters do are bound up with that irony: and what indicates that this is the case is that so often in literary history, when we reflect on how characters have been redemptively set apart from the market, we acknowledge that such a luxury is "rarely

39 The literature of sensibility, we know, seemed in especially vexing ways to be too easily replicated, and by the end of the eighteenth century, it had become all the fashion to claim that sentimental expression was devalued and insipid through being too much in circulation. One reader lamented the mechanical reproducibility and marketability of these personal effects: "Yorick! indignant I behold / Such spendthrifts of thy genuine gold!" Anon., "To Sensibility," *Looker-On* 60 (23 June 1793), quoted in Ellis, p. 195.

allowed by history":[40] having sentimentalized them, the best we can hope for is to have postponed the demise of characters. Those King William's shillings that Yorick brandishes haunt the history of the history of novels, doing so precisely as ghosts of themselves.

Thus when Hippolyte Taine recounted his own version of the narrative of novelistic progress and charted the way in which in the eighteenth century "novels of adventure" came to be superseded by "novels of character," he returned in telling ways to those coins. In his *History of English Literature* Taine wrote:

> All these novels are character novels. Englishmen, more reflective than others, more inclined to the melancholy pleasure of concentrated attention and inner examination, find around them human medals more vigorously struck, less worn by friction with the world, whose uninjured face is more visible than that of others.

An elegiac undertone imbues Taine's definition of what the English novel is and renders it a description of what the English novel may imminently cease to be: it is a mere matter of time before the wear and tear of the world will take a toll on these human medals too. At its inception, the "character novel" is already in its twilight years. In *English Comic Writers*, Hazlitt, while intending as Taine does to write a story of the triumph of character, writes, instead, another story about the imminent demise of character. In his narrative the very processes of circulation and publicity by which literature is sustained undermine the possibility of literary character: "It is ... the evident tendency of all literature to generalise and *dissipate* character, by giving men the same ... point of view, and through the same reflected medium." To further suggest how literature makes itself impossible, Hazlitt too has recourse to the story of money's fate: "In proportion as we are brought ... together, and our prejudices clash one against the other, our sharp angular points wear off."[41]

In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx contemplated a coin worn down by its wanderings in the world and noted that "while other beings lose their idealism in contact with the outer world, the coin is idealized by practice, becoming gradually transformed into a mere phantom of its golden or silver body." Perhaps such ghostliness is *de rigueur* for the novelistic character too: perhaps only a ghost could bring about the

40 The phrase is Harvey's in *Character and the Novel*: after he insists that novels cannot be written in an illiberal society, he adds that liberalism "is a luxury rarely allowed by history" (p. 26). His book ascribed to the character the glamour of the soon-to-be-doomed.

41 Hippolyte Taine, *The History of English Literature*, trans. H. Van Laun, 4 vols (new ed., London: Chatto and Windus, 1877) 3:268; Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, pp. 305–6.

reconciliation between ideality and materiality that novel readers wishfully expect of their reading matter. The morbid moments of sentimental fictions might owe something to the novelists' recognition that death—the last debt to nature—conveniently resolves the difficulties characters have in calling property their own. (Richardson's Clarissa, who can only prove her entitlement to her grandfather's estate by willing it away upon her death, provides a celebrated example. Sarah Scott's George Ellison argues, analogously, that the best sort of benevolist is the dead property owner: the death of the man who wills away his property to another means that this property is the sole species of charitable gift that does not abridge the liberty of its recipient.)[42] One cannot but note, too, how often sentimental protagonists elide the boundaries between life and death—as if by positioning them liminally between presence and absence their authors are acknowledging that the characters who come alive in the pages of our novels can do so only fleetingly. That the first thing that Sterne's readers knew about Yorick was, thanks to Tristram Shandy's earlier narration, the manner of his death in 1748 makes the 1771 novel centred on him a ghost story, and it is fitting that our sentimental traveller's Shakespearean namesake entered literary history posthumously, as one dead long since. Yorick is object rather than subject (punning on "keepsake," Michael Seidel calls Yorick a "thingsake" from the grave): he is dead matter, his role in Shakespeare's drama determined by the props department rather than casting.[43] After he compares his bashful, homebody hero to a coin whose rust has not yet been rubbed off through travel, the narrator of *The Man of Feeling* observes that the typical Briton—the typical member of that nation of singular originals and real characters—does not even dare to "pen a *hic jacet* to speak out for him after his death" (p. 3). At the same time that it sets the communicative functions of written characters at variance with the self-possession

42 I owe the quotation from Marx to Susan Eilenberg's *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Literary Possession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 261n62. For George Ellison's reasoning about the right to make a will and his related argument that the best charitable gifts come, very precisely, from nobody, see *The History of Sir George Ellison*, pp. 112–13, 125. Participants in the mid-eighteenth-century debates about whether there was such a thing as literary property defined objects of property in ways that made the relations of the dead to the living crucial to their definitions, which are for this reason alone worth consulting. See for instance Mr Baron Eyre, who in 1774 argued that if "Ideas" were "convertible into Objects of Property," they "should bear some feint [sic] Similitude to other [such] objects": but in fact "They cannot pass by Descent to Heirs; they were not liable to Bequest; no Characteristic Marks remain whereby to ascertain them." *The Cases of the Appellants and Respondents in the Cause of Literary Property, The Literary Property Debate: Six Tracts, 1764–1774* (New York: Garland, 1975), p. 32.

43 Michael Seidel, "Narrative Crossings: Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*," *Genre* 18 (1985), 7; Robert L. Chibka, "The Hobby-Horse's Epitaph: *Tristram Shandy*, *Hamlet*, and the Vehicles of Memory," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3 (1991),130.

that permits the character to be himself, Mackenzie's metaphor destines the real character to an unmarked grave. In this situation of pathos we may locate the point of intersection between the history of characterization and the history of sentimentality: the character with a life of its own lives, by definition, on borrowed time.

State University of New York, Buffalo