CONCLUSION

Is Portability Portable?

Germany is overseas.
The United States is overseas.
But England is another thing.
What this other thing is, has never been clear to anyone.
—Ama Ata Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy, Or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint, 1977

All the books they had read, their whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from outside. Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang. The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada.
—George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile, 1960

VICTORIAN PORTABILITY AS “TRAVELING THEORY”

How durable was Victorian portability? I have been describing a coherent set of representational practices and aesthetic assumptions that flourished in England and Greater Britain between 1830 and 1870, then continued in various vigorous forms at least until the end of the century. A variety of economic and political forces sustained it, and its continued allure is evidenced in lacunae as much as it is by extant texts: the failure of American-style regionalism to take root in England between 1870 and 1900, I argued in chapter 4, results from the imperial requirement for representations of a coherent, uniform, and thus readily exportable England. Portability's reign is by no means uniform and absolute, but exceptions and objections during this seventy-year span lead to no radical changes. The vehement protests against the logic of portability that fundamentally shape the writing of Hardy and Morris attest ultimately to portability's continued vitality, not its demise.

It might appear tempting to read the failure of these revolts against portability as proof of its entirely diachronic vitality. Perhaps cultural portability of the "traveling-Englishness" variety is a new universal, a product of modernity that (like racial thinking) could be here to stay. Might it make sense, then, to conclude this chapter by moving away from historical specificity toward a theoretical account of cultural portability as a timeless phenomenon? Escrowing for the moment the specificities of Victorian cultural mobility, such an account might be able to offer a general account of how ideas become portable property.

Edward Said's "Traveling Theory" is one attempt at a universal theory of intellectual filiation:

First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse.

Second, there is a distance traversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions—call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances—which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full [sic] (or partly) accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place.

Said's understandable worry about the scale of his aims—"It is obvious that any satisfactorily full account of these stages would be an enormous task"—leads him to alter the essay's course midway, into a modest reading of how certain theoretical notions descend circuitously from Lukács to Foucault. In light of what historical contingencies can do to intellectual pathways, Said's diminishing of his claims strikes me as necessary, not contingent. Given how entirely notions of traveling culture changed over the mere seventy years covered by this study, any attempt to indicate the structural parameters for all such movements is certain to run up against some of the same limits on generalization that Said encountered.

It hardly seems satisfactory, though, to refuse all abstraction about cultural portability. To stick resolutely to the claim that Victorian portability is only English, and confined to the nineteenth-century, would be to overstate the force of the categories by which retrospective ordering occurs. Classifiers like "Victorian," "English," and "novel" might say as much about present-day mindsets as nineteenth-century realities. Indeed, my account of cultural portability itself suggests why this must be so: a notion of cultural portability, of Englishness capable of following trade patterns around the globe, arises precisely because the question of what defines a text's "true" identity (site of origin? race of readership? author's intent? value as trade good?) is itself perennially disputable. Studying how art objects are nationally marked in their global peregrinations perpetually reminds us that divisions between places, times, or cultures constantly change, and the identity of any one person, any one text (to whom it belongs, where it belongs), is mutable.
Victorian cultural portability evolves, in fact, precisely to redefine boundaries between places and nations that no longer seem self-evident: how else could exemplary English novels be written by the Indian-born, Vermont-dwelling Rudyard Kipling? One way that Victorian novels take this flux and flexibility of national status into account, as I argued in the chapters 2 and 3, above, is in their explorations of the blurred boundary between Englishness and Jewishness. Both Emily Eden and George Eliot create fictional characters who can be satisfactorily classified as fully Jewish or fully English—in fact, it is their possible involvement in the rules that govern cultural transmissibility in either nation (is Daniel the English because he knows his Milton, or Jewish because he recognizes the Shema?) that makes such characters worth representing.

This capacity to fracture easy boundaries—to reenact a work as belonging to a culture, a tradition, a family, or a nation that might be thousands of miles, or years, away from the site of its creation—is exactly what Victorian cultural portability ended up offering (to certain texts and certain readers) or foreclosing upon (for other, less privileged readers). All worries about overgeneralization notwithstanding, the flexibility that cultural portability itself engendered makes it seem impossible to conclude this study without at least glancing beyond the severe boundaries that I have tried to map. The logic of portability that allows Carlyle to claim Shakespeare for an English Indian Empire demands that we at least consider the possibility that Carlyle, and his contemporaries, too, might belong not to their own age, but to that age's inheritors, however conceived.

How, then, to avoid offering a problematically timeless account of “traveling theory” once the known territory of the Victorian age recedes? I initially thought of ending with a cautious glance into the early twentieth century, tracing the palpable residues of Victorian one-way traffic both in the modernism of Little England and in the emergent nationalism of British colonies overseas. Evelyn Waugh's "The Man Who Loved Dickens," for instance—in which the illiterate, dark-skinned Mr Tod captures the Englishman Tony Last, turning him into a reader of Dickens and native informant on English stories—could be juxtaposed with Nirad Chaudhuri's account of an Indian education that left him with such "English" heroes as "Napoleon, Shakespeare, and Raphael." If the danger of setting up an abstraction like "traveling theory" is that historical specifics get replaced by ungrounded generalizations, however, taking small steps as slow and steady as Darwinian gradualism.

Yet what is perpetually astonishing about Victorian notions of cultural portability is how extremely durable, pervasive, and stable they were—until violent ruptures bore them away. I have described the fiction of Morris and Hardy as a site of insurrection against portability's reign, but I have also argued that the basic apparatus for understanding Englishness as a moveable whole survived those rejections. In this conclusion, I argue that the most durable part of the Victorian notion of national cultural portability does not come under a radical assault until George Lamming's fiction of the 1950s.

Lamming's striking innovation is to anatomize, dissect, and do away with notions of cultural asymmetry—that is, that English culture can flow to the periphery, but the reverse neither should nor can occur—which is the most enduring, and damaging, legacy of Victorian portability. Until Lamming makes the case that such asymmetry is an absurdity that has blossomed into a pseudo-fact in colonized (and postcolonial) minds, imperial asymmetry remains the tail that wags portability's dog. Portability endures, that is, as the important afterlife of a Victorian idea that had (as I argue in the introduction) come into being during debates about economic fungibility, but lingered on into the late nineteenth century and beyond to shape ideas about expatriate national and racial identities.

Making proper sense of Lamming's riposte to Victorian portability requires a look back at what I have argued are the four salient features that distinguish Victorian novels from their predecessors: auratic commodities, moveable localities, quasi-materiality, and the asymmetrical flow of portable properties. It also requires recollecting the objections Hardy and Morris raise to each.

Auratic Commodities

Certain choice moveable objects are, without relinquishing their exchange value, imbued with sentiment only a few can discern: the bank notes extracted from an old ledgers; the Moonstone's irresistible "moony glow," the semiprivate letters that mean so much in both Cranford and Lorna Doone. The crucial assumption of any account of cultural portability is that moving objects can serve as a constitutive basis for a shared (but potentially bounded) community, so that Shakespeare's works bound in green cloth can have a trade value and a resonant national identity at once. What if those same works, though, possess a value to readers outside the narrowly construed community, like the diffusive works of melodrama that both Newell and Joshi have described attracting subaltern readerships, or the movement of Bunyan through Africa that Isabel Hofmeyr charts, or Vanity Fair's allure to the young C. L. R. James? That possibility, within the logic of a strictly enforced domain of cultural portability, can only be a dangerous challenge (or at best a sinister coun-
terpart) to the “bounded” circulation of nationally significant works of art: think of (in chapter 2, above) A.U.’s fear of a Christianized India.

Hardy and Morris raise distinct objections to such avaricious commodi-
ties. The inherent disarray of individual acts of perception by Thomas
Hardy’s account undercuts the notion of a shareable common culture
transmittable by way of mementoes, novels, or luggage; Hardy, that is,
disbelieves in the notion of a “culture” cohesive enough that objects could
become a basis for shared meaning. By contrast, William Morris finds the
specification of objects either as possessions or as bearers of national cul-
ture repulsive and politically oppressive, since it allows for “neighbor-
hoods” of shared sensibility that rule out not only common human sensi-
bility, but even agreement in judgment and cognition. His fantastic spaces
presume a purely universal human community, in which pipes are equally
valued by smokers and non-smokers, and a beloved’s green shoe is equally
beautiful to her lover and to an indifferent bystander. There is a poten-
tially infinite amount of uncommunicated beauty in Morris, but without
the particularizing “local” affection that figures so prominently in the
novels (Vanity Fair is one) he culminates against. Morris believes that
aesthetic apprehensions, including reactions to personal beauty, have the
force they do precisely on account of the separation between aesthetic
response and any particular fact—nation, class, beliefs, even gender—
about the reader.

Moveable Localities

Cultural portability generates definitions of “neighborhood” that have
detached from geography, so that “local space” can itself become a
portable notion. Emily Eden’s cognitive map of India, for example, is
so dominated by Anglo-Indians that she at one point complains charity is
impossible in India because there are no poor people to be found there.
Hardy, I argue in chapter 5, above, rejects the idea of such notionally
portable regions because he thinks that individuals striving to make sense
of the world possess a “locale” defined by their perceptions, not their
baggage. For the astronomer Swinburne in Tono in a Tower, any spot on
the same meridian where he can locate a telescope is essentially the same
place, while for his peasant counterpart Amos nothing makes sense be-

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rounds up to mark, not impede, the actual homology of all the Dale folk.
According to the logic of Morris’s romances, all such differences between
persons and places will eventually become nondifferences.

Quasi-materiality

This term refers to the blurring of the line between simple physical trans-
portability, and a more abstruse, or metaphorical, form of portability: for
example, Gurney’s phrase “portable evidence of Christianity,” which
comes to refer both to the physical Bible and its spiritual message. Like
novels themselves, such “properties” are half-material, half-abstraction;
that is, they are understood partially as pieces of physical property, and
partially as weightless bearers of the message that they contain. It is not
resolution but rather irresolution that such objects provide. Certain pieces
of portable property had the impact they did among Victorian readers
not because they were universally available and readily legible, but be-
because they resisted or deferred the process of making complete sense of
them (for example, those half-photographic illustrations I discuss in chap-
ter 4, above, in which a sweetly featureless Lorna Doone floats above the
photorealistic Exmoor waterfall).

Hardy’s objections to this notion of partial portability stem from his
sense that individuals carry such distinct sensations and perceptions with
them (Amos knows his fields, Swinburne the skies above) that no given object
can mandate meaning in that doubled way: in “Green Slates,” the associa-
tion between slates and a lost beloved belongs to the speaker alone. Mor-
ris’s objections are simpler still: since no depth exists in an artwork, there
can be nothing quasi-material about it. The real nature of any given ob-
ject, any given image, any given word (as the interplay between ornament-
al lineation and lettering in the Kelmscott pages discussed in the previous
chapter suggest) exists on the page’s surface at all times; significance and
substance are inextricably conjoined.

Asymmetrical Flow of Portable Properties

While English Bibles (or even containers of salad oil packed in London)
can arrive glowing overseas, there are other objects—among them Indian
cotton and Irish potatoes—that best conform to the logic of imperial por-
tability by showing up in England as nothing more than unresonant, auto-
romantic commodities. This aspect of Victorian portability—is its most im-
perial, and also, in many ways, its oddest—also seems to suggest that
without an empire, portability must come to an end. After all, if every-
thing that makes portability a distinctive and potent explanatory appara-
tus depends on an imperial asymmetry—so that only colonizers can de-
play portability, and it always involves the neglect, refusal, or annihilation of portability in reverse—what sort of portability persists when its governmental guarantee is lifted by the withdrawal of British sovereignty? But on this final question, Hardy and Morris can shed very little light. In certain ways they still write from within the belly of the whale, with no way of gauging the remarkable durability of the notion of asymmetrical flow in cultural value. Why, after all, should the belief that ideas, identities, and values are fung wallt from the metropole to its various perepheries have endured into the postcolonial late twentieth century?

I have argued that novels found themselves at an authoritative epicenter in a world where that conception of an outward-moving culture seemed desirable, or if not desirable, at least accurately descriptive of how culture flows actually worked—it is the elective affinity between novels and the notion of cultural portability, in fact, that lies behind much of the genre’s dominance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But once the British Empire disintegrated (between 1947 and 1965), many factors militated against that form of literary hegemony enduring. What exactly was the status of the objects, artworks, and signifying practices that had long been used to signify Englishness once the British governmental infrastructure departed?

This conclusion aims to make the case that George Lamming is to a certain structural ways a successor to Morris and to Hardy in their efforts to undo the basic linear and aural commodities of cultural portability. Like his predecessors, Lamming discards binding restrictions (largely racial in nature) in the imaginative notion of an endlessly reiterated and seamlessly exportable national culture. His innovation—highly racial in the sort of spatiotemporal logic present either in Morris or in Hardy—is to make the case for the impossibility of the sort of asymmetrical culture flow on which Victorian portability’s success had always implicitly depended. The final claim I will advance, then, is that George Lamming does to the notion of asymmetrical flow what Hardy and Morris had done to the notions of moveable localities and portability, respectively: he sets out to prove that it never had worked as its practitioners believed. Understanding how he does this and why can shed additional light on the Victorian predilection for cultural portability—and its surprising ongoing afterlife.

Postcolonial Portability

"Migration" was not a word I would have used to describe what I was doing when I sailed with other West Indians to England in 1950. We simply thought that we were going to

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an England which had been planted in our childhood consciousness as a heritage and a place of welcome.

—George Lamming, "Introduction," In the Castle of My Skin, 1983

Cultural portability did not die with the empire, after all. Portable British culture continues to fascinate and horrify an astounding range of African, West Indian, and South Asian writers. Every Commonwealth writer of the late twentieth century might not have grown up reading Vanity Fair on the average once every three months, but it is hard to find one whose vision of Englishness is not mediated through the simultaneously uplifting and downtreading influence of "Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang." When Salman Rushdie describes a radio as "made as England," the joke is about the capacity of residual imperial objects, after imperial retreat, to go on performing their signifying function. When he describes the Indian inheritors of English houses in Bombay rapidly falling into the habit of five o'clock gin-and-tonics on the verandah, the same joke is about the capacity of imperial subjects to do the same. Similarly, when V. S. Naipaul has a West Indian character describe a vivid childhood memory of giving his teacher an apple (even though "we had no apples on Isabella") he is reflecting on how vividly "naive men" can incorporate a distant "motherland" into their imaginations, how entirely their minds will recapitulate that motherland’s practices, its treasures, even its fruit. Both Rushdie and Naipaul (the one satirically, the other reverentially) perceive a kind of diminished residue of the colonial encounter, a force that came, conquered, and departed—leaving behind writers who both accept the logic of portability, and recognize their own distance from the centers where such portability begins.

To Barbadian George Lamming, the joke has been on colonial subjects all along. Colonialists had persisted in believing in portable British culture, despite the fact that it had never arrived and never performed any of the functions both colonizers and colonized believed it performed. Lamming does not suggest fighting against portability. Lamming suggests there is only one way out of the trap that avoids reverting to its structuring assumptions in another form: to maintain that there is nothing to fight, because there never was any such thing as transplanted English culture. The radical nature of Lamming’s critique is not obvious from his best-known nonfiction work, The Pleasures of Exile (1960), in which English imports both physical and metaphysical, from butter to Jane Austen, seem capable of transforming colonies into miniaturized versions of the colonizing country. Lamming’s first novel, though, In the Castle of My Skin (1953), depicts British objects operating in a quite different way. If the novel represents Barbados (or "Little England") as "a tense site of unrec-
organized class and racial division...in which the people [attempt] to hold onto their small shreds of misguided dignity, some spurious sense of self buried deep within the castle of the skin,” it also asks an unsettling question: What if the “England” that made and shaped these colonial bears no relation to England itself? If so, then English objects in the imperial hinterland can produce not an internalized hegemony, but an odd kind of imaginative freedom.

A debate about British pennies distributed to schoolboys at a prize-day frames the problem of imported culture. As soon as the boys get their pennies, they start debating:

Some said it was really a photograph of the king stuck on some kind of background and then coloured with copper...Could you have a penny without a face?...Some said it was a drawing of the king made with a pin while the copper was soft...It was a long and patient undertaking. But it had to be done if there was going to be any money at all, and everyone knew how important money was...[Others said] it was very silly to argue that such a job would be done by sensible people. And the English who were the only people in the world to deal with pennies were very sensible.

The challenge is to read the mind of the imperium, and the question is who can successfully ventriloquize the penny. Theories proliferate among the boys:

One penny, that is the first penny ever made, was the real penny, and all the others were made by a kind of stamp. You simply had to get the first penny and the necessary materials and thousands followed. That meant, someone asked, that you couldn’t spend the first penny. Some- one wanted to know how that first penny was made...[The penny was made and heated] and finally sent to the king who pressed it on one side of his face.

The absurdity of each theory about the penny’s origin is not merely incidental, but central to the meaning of these debates. The incredible quality of the boy’s explanations is exactly the point. Ngugi wa Thiong’o reads the explanations in this passage as moving toward a real understanding of the colonial condition. He argues that in this novel, “the yardstick is England. Everything that affects the tender minds of children is geared toward veneration of England and the British throne.” In truth, though, the yardstick here is an imaginary England, which the children have made into a monstrous but wonderful reality.

The final thesis advanced by one of the children is that the king is not responsible for that image, because “the king was never seen,” and that all images flow only from a kind of “shadow king.” That notion of an invisible but omnipotent shadow king points to Lamming’s real intent here. The wholesale importation of England to the island that knows itself as “Little England” has produced a kind of “shadow” Englishness, and that shadow’s relationship to its original is fundamentally unappallable. Just as the offspring of a “shadow king” will have no genetic relationship to the “real king,” the daydreams sparked by these shadow imports will have, Lamming supposes, no true relationship to their putative origin. Lamming conjures up a world in which the creation of a plausible past for the imported artifact is fatally compromised by the very act of imagination that is required to constitute the object as a lesson of the empire. All the meaning that seems to inhere in the object is actually conjured up by its interpreter.

Lamming’s parable of the pennies thereby turns a seeming deficit into a hidden strength. Barbados’s distance from the metropole is precisely what endows its residents with a powerful imaginative life. The West Indian imagination, by this account, is only putatively engaged in interpret- ing England’s objects. The very moment at which colonial subjects might seem most invested in their imperial antecedents is the moment at which they have already broken with that empire. It is not that the colonial objects really bring England with them, nor is it the case that they lie in seeming to do so. Rather, they offer a set of dreams anyone can imitate—but dreams that have everything to do with Barbados itself. Provincial life is staped not by imported objects, but by the illusion that life is shaped by these imported objects. Lamming’s porability from below, then, begins to look like a pure form of antiportability, as pure as Morris’s.

Nor does Lamming stop there. His most compelling account of the force of such necessary illusions comes in his last novel, Natives of My Person (1972). As titles for novels, the phrases “in the castle of my skin” and “natives of my person” might initially appear almost identical. Both assert a kind of corporate unity that underlies the apparent disaggregation of persons; each suggests that all these voices that you hear in the novel, scattered all over the social map, are in reality joined together within “my” experience. Yet the context within which the phrase “native of my person” appears in the novel suggests ways in which the corporatism of In the Castle of My Skin has been replaced by a kind of twisted or impeded solidarity that is quite a bit more difficult to parse.

At the conclusion of Natives of My Person, the wives and lovers of the novel’s three central characters, stranded somewhere in the New World, speak of the way that their lives as women are defined by submission to another’s will. Submitting is what forms their subjectivity, because their decision to make another’s life a resident part of their own means they can understand their own actions as belonging to another:
These characters, though, have been disrobed from those imagined natives of their person: unbeknownst to them, their husbands are already dead. They see themselves as the extension of others who no longer exist. Lamming maintains that in order to live, people require the impression that they are working for those persons and objects endowed with a life beyond their own. Thus even at the moment in which their connection to those others has been severed, they continue to imagine those others inhabiting them. Be the other the king's pencey or the dead husband, the form of imaginary connection is equally strong.

Finally, though, all these seeming inhabitants of one's thoughts by the mind of another, or by the imported objects that make up a world, are a productive illusion. The telling pluralization—so that one "native of my person" in the line of dialogue turns into "natives of my person" in the title—suggests that Lamming contains all of his characters as beloved natives. It also suggests, however, that his own relationship to those others whom his prose ought to contain (and even speak for) is profoundly unsettled, as illusory, and as productive, as the imagined affinity to a distant England that in In the Castle of My Skin had been mediated through pennies.

Natives of My Person fantasizes the discovery that all our imagined connections to those who hold sway over us—our husbands, our kings, our coinage, our nation—are a delusion from the beginning. Having recognized that delusion, one realizes that one was never subservient to that authority, that the force contained in those guiding British precepts and objects was all along a product of one's own mind, not inherent in the things themselves. In Natives of My Person, the seeming triumph of asserting that one contains another as a "native of one's person" is the psychological corollary to the state of colonization. Both hinge on the delusion that objects and messages can traverse the ocean unimpeded, bearing with them a perfect replica of original intent. Lamming tells the story of portable treasures that do not portage any meaning with them; he tells the story of "incorporation" founded on lies or on mistakes. In so doing, he returns to the foundational conceit of overseas colonies, and crafts a response that is devastating not because it topples an old order, but because it suggests that that old order itself had never existed.

Peter Hulme has argued that Lamming's interest in "the shaping of national consciousness" depends upon "an imaginative reassertion of the relationship between metropolis and ex-colony."22 Natives of My Per-
raphy determines who one's neighbors are, or that the sensation of living in an exiled-but-thriving diaspora tells one more about one's actual homeland than one's imaginary one—that neither pennies nor radios can be "made as England," and that the boy who dreams he gave his teacher an apple, when all he had was an orange, had only found a way to fool himself.

This conclusion—neither entirely diachronic nor comfortably Victorian—has aimed at understanding how Victorian notions of cultural portability could go on shaping people's thoughts and actions long after the material conditions (both economic and imperial) that gave that model its initial vigorous life died away. Lamming's austere refusal to see his work in terms of portable English culture can shed a great deal of light on the ways in which such portability might disappear, and even suggest, like Morris's socialist fantasies, what might be gained when portability's afterlife faded. It is impossible to avoid, though, comparing Lamming's perennially limited readership to the popularity of Naipaul, or Walcott, or the many other West Indian writers who have treated traveling English culture as an inheritance, as a garment to be worn, cast off, or publicly torn. The ongoing dream-life of portability is neither lunacy nor aberration. The terminal quality of Lamming's experiment in antiportability suggests how very portable Victorian portability continues to be.

Notes

Preface: Getting Hold of Portable Property

2. Letter to Lady Campbell, August 1835; letter to Mrs Listor, Oct. 2, 1837, both in ibid., 253, 291.
6. Lady Campbell to Eden, September 1, 1835, in ibid., 253.
10. Ibid.
generations by their truth and toil have made already a receptacle of choicest treasures, a storehouse of so much unconscious wisdom, a fit organ for expressing the subtlest distinctions, the tenderest sentiments, the largest thoughts, and the loftiest imaginations, which at any time the heart of man can conceive" (Studly, 36). To Morris, the conception of linguistic inheritance as treasure is precisely what leaves the English in thrall to history's corrosive force. In effect, Trench is configuring portability as the thing that makes a language a living household. Morris grants the principle of weighty accumulation, but denies that it serves any function other than the purely negative one of obscuring the unadorned everyday reality of what he sees in its place: egalitarian and eunuchial solidarity.

81. Most of Morris's romances were published initially in much cheaper editions, often serialized in the pages of Commonweal magazine. Morris seems not to have felt a contradiction, focused as he was in making his books available to all readers in some feasible form.


83. Morris does retain an attenuated notion of national identity, but it is striking how little real importance attaches to the ""English and Dutch blood"" of News from Nowhere, or to the difference between blonde farming folk and brunet ""Cheaping-town"" residents in The Well at the World's End. The purpose of physical distinction is not so much to racialize communities as it is to diversify the ""skin and surface"" of the earth. Morris, News, 156-62; Morris, Well, 168-16.


86. Cf. Caroline Arrscott, ""William Morris: Decoration and Materialism,"" in Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left, ed. Andrew Hemingway (London: Pluto, 2006). The artist David Mabbs, by selectively painting Mayakovsky-like white squares over Morris's wallpapers and fabrics (but not painting over one design element—for example, the primrose flower) has shown the very different aesthetic effect of isolating individual elements within Morris's works. David Mabbs, Caroline Arrscott, and Steve Edwards, William Morris (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2004).

87. I am grateful to Alex Woloch for conversation on this point.

88. By contrast, the "decorations" that Aubrey Beardsley is attaching to his work at this time—for example, the Morte D'Arthur he produced during 1893 and 1894—often work by exaggerated or elaborated borders that quite overwhelm the text they purportedly illuminate or complement. Similarly, the idea of "decoration" in Beardsley is at least partially to remind the reader that what strikes one initially as sense (words) can also be seen as simply markings on the page. Cf. Nicholas Frankel, "Aubrey Beardsley 'Embroiders' the Literary Text," in The Victorian Illustrated Book, ed. Richard Maxwell (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002).


91. The Knlmsco books are, you might say, not so much portable properties as relics, containing the world's beauty in parvo. They are in that sense kiiing cousins to the medieval painted books Morris treasured so much that (Burne Jones reports) he would have saved one rather than saved the world—since "no one can run a railway through a book." Dowling, Vulgarization, 68.

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5. James, Beyond, 17.


7. Rushdie, Midnight's Children, 305. In A Bend in the River, V.S. Naipaul is glimmer, seeing the disappearance of colonial rule as a descent into chaos, against which the durability of Western trade goods looks like a macabre joke. The perfect emblem for the diminished flow of culture is imported zinc haskins, "in demand because they were good for keeping grubs alive in, packed in damp fibres and marsh earth" (Naipaul, A Bend in the River [New York: Knopf, 1979], 40).

8. Rushdie, Midnight's Children, 90.


10. George Lamming, born in Barbados in 1927, is the author of many influential essays, especially those collected in The Pleasures of Exile (1960), as well as six novels: In the Castle of My Skin (1953); The Emigrants (1954); Of Age and Innocence (1958); Season of Adventure (1960); Water with Berries (1972); and Natives of My Person (1972). He has published no fiction (and very little nonfiction) in the last thirty-five years.

11. The reading of Lamming that follows is partially adapted from John Pezo, "One-Way Traffic: George Lamming and the Portable Empire," 308-23, in After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation, ed. Antoine Burton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).
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