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The Ownership of Cultural Objects: Means, Mechanics, and Masteries

by

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Introduction

The issues surrounding cultural objects and their ownership have risen to greater prominence in the recent past. Consider the Elgin Marbles, to take a well-known and hotly debated example. They were taken from the Parthenon by Lord Elgin when Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire, and as soon as Greece gained its independence, it demanded their return. Even this relatively simple case raises questions about cultural objects and ownership. To whom do cultural objects belong? Why? What effect do the changing circumstances brought about by the passage of time have on ownership? And the Elgin Marbles are only one case among many. Not only that, even a cursory examination of literature or film that deals with cultural objects reveals more questions, some of them even more basic, some of them far more complex.

I believe it is appropriate to examine such questions through literature and film. Often, it is through such forms – whether they represent “high” art or “low” or “pop” art – that a culture thinks about questions like those that surround cultural objects and ownership. They are usually far more accessible to the average person than the sort of philosophical tracts that also commonly examine such questions, so more people can participate in the discussion they generate around cultural objects. The same might be true of art, but art is more constrained in the sheer volume of information it can convey than literature or film – in effect, a painting can convey the same amount of information as a single frame of a film. Therefore, its ability to examine such complex issues is more limited. Of course, philosophy and art, and other forms as well, also have an important place in this discussion. However, I feel that literature and film are a good place to begin. In choosing the works that I examine in this paper, I endeavored to include a variety of perspectives. The works include both high art and low, both fiction and nonfiction, and they represent diverse nationalities and cultures. All of them, however, are preoccupied with

cultural objects and their ownership in some fashion. The varying directions from which they approach the issue allow a definition of the basic concepts involved in the ownership of cultural objects. What are the ways in which cultural objects can be owned? How does ownership work? What can ownership accomplish? All of the works I have selected deal with these questions, though each, of course, also has its own individual focuses. Taken together, however, they outline a picture of ownership that suggests a new relationship between cultural objects, society, and the real.

Since I examine so many disparate works, I will give a brief description of each for clarity. *On Beauty* is a novel by the British author Zadie Smith. It follows two very different families, the Kippses and the Belseys. The fathers are rival art history professors at a small liberal arts college in Massachusetts. Their children also interact, sometimes amicably and sometimes not, with both each other and the parents of the two families; both daughters attend classes at the college. The mothers become friends despite the tensions between the families, sharing a love for a particular painting, whose ownership later becomes disputed. One of the book's primary interests is in defining the different ways cultural objects can be owned and which are preferable. It is also concerned with determining what rights and obligations ownership confers.

The Moor's Last Sigh, by Salman Rushdie, follows an Indian family over four generations. However, most of the book is about the final two generations, particularly the narrator, nicknamed Moor, and his mother, Aurora. Aurora is a painter, as is her good friend Vasco Miranda, and she paints a lengthy series of portraits of Moor along with a great many

other works. Much of the book, therefore, is concerned with the creation of cultural objects – what they capture of the world and what they change, as well as the role of the artist.

In an Antique Land, which proclaims itself “history in the guise of a travelogue” on its cover, is a nonfiction work written by Indian anthropologist Amitav Ghosh. In it, two narratives intertwine. One is Ghosh’s studies of modern rural Egypt and the Cairo Geniza, a cache of documents from an Egyptian synagogue going back to before 1000 C.E. Within these documents unfolds the second narrative, the story of a medieval Jewish merchant and his journeys with his household through the Middle East, northeast Africa, and eastern India. Ghosh focuses heavily on the writing and re-writing of history that often occurs around cultural objects as well as the interaction between cultural objects, history, and identity.

My Name is Red is a Turkish novel set at the end of the sixteenth century, written by Orhan Pamuk and translated by Erdağ Gökner. In it, one of the Sultan’s miniaturists has been murdered, and three others are suspects. All four had been working in secret on a manuscript commissioned in the Frankish, rather than Ottoman, style. Style is one of the most important issues in the book; bound up with it is the miniaturists’ ownership or lack of ownership of their paintings as well as who defines style itself, which defines the future.

V for Vendetta is both a British graphic novel and an American movie. The graphic novel was written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd; the movie was directed by James McTeigue. I reference both in this paper. The work takes place in a near-future, fascist England in which one man, known only as V, plans to bring down the government by blowing up Parliament, among other things. A young woman named Evey Hammond gets caught up in his schemes, initially by accident. On the surface, *V for Vendetta* seems to have little to do with cultural objects, and it is true that its main focus is elsewhere. However, much of V’s campaign

to undermine the government revolves around cultural objects, including the Houses of Parliament and the Old Bailey. Also, V is almost always surrounded by cultural objects. His home is full of art of all descriptions, and when he is elsewhere, he commonly quotes Shakespeare, for instance, or plays well-known classical music. The importance of cultural objects in this revolution brings up important questions about the power and utility of cultural objects.

Raiders of the Lost Ark is an American movie directed by Steven Spielberg. In it, Indiana Jones, an archaeology professor-cum-relic-hunter, gets a tip about the location of the Ark of the Covenant and has to race Nazi archaeologists to secure it. The movie, of course, focuses largely on entertainment, but its topic allows an exploration of the assumptions American culture, and perhaps others as well, makes about cultural objects.

Pollock is a biographical film about the famous American painter Jackson Pollock. Unsurprisingly, it focuses largely on the artist, the creator of cultural objects. Particularly, it examines the relationship between creator and object and the effects of ownership on the creator of a cultural object.

“Everyday Use” is a short story by Alice Walker about a poor black woman in the American South, who narrates the story, and her two daughters. One of them, Maggie, stayed at home in the community with her mother, and the other, Dee, went to school and left her family and past behind while “discovering her heritage.” When Dee comes back to visit, a conflict arises because Dee wants to take some old hand-made family quilts the narrator had promised to Maggie. The story raises questions about who has the right to own cultural objects and who can define what they mean.

Finally, I examine “Ozymandias,” Percy Bysshe Shelley’s famous poem about the monumental statue of a king lying broken in the desert. The main focus of the poem, of course, is a warning against hubris, and it is interesting to analyze the poem itself as a cultural object. However, the story of the statue within the poem also brings up questions about who can define the meaning of cultural objects and how time affects them.

Definitions

Simply put, a cultural object is an object to which society attaches meaning beyond its purely physical or utilitarian properties. For example, an ancient Greek statue of Athena is a cultural object; an umbrella is not. Physically, the statue is a piece of stone shaped like a mythical woman, and its purpose, at least in the present day, is decorative or perhaps educational. The umbrella is a semi-spherical folding canopy with a pole in the center of it, and its purpose is to keep the holder dry. The statue, however, has further meanings attached to it; even its purposes point at such. A viewer might connect it to art or Art, beauty or Beauty, a golden age, civilization, ignorance or misguidedness, history, tradition, labor, or worship, to name only a few. In this way, cultural objects are as much symbols as they are physical entities: they point to many ideas to which they are not tangibly connected. Of course, the meanings individuals attach to a particular cultural object will vary to some degree across society because of personal beliefs. A person who is deeply religious is more likely to associate a statue of Athena with ignorance or misguidedness than with worship, for instance. However, for a given object to be labeled a cultural object, the majority of society must, at minimum, attach some extra-physical meaning to it, however mixed, and as a rule much of society will share similar associations with the object. For example, many viewers will likely associate the statue with

both ignorance and worship, and even viewers who link it with only one or the other are likely to consider it art. In addition, those viewers who emphasize worship over ignorance, for instance, will still likely be aware that others emphasize ignorance more, or emphasize them equally.

Of course, this definition of a cultural object assumes that meaning is socially constructed, but that is not a new idea. Stanley Fish, to take one example, repeatedly asserts that an object's meaning is a function of the interpretive community – society – in which the observer takes part (322). Since society's role in attaching meaning to objects is so important, however, I would like to define more precisely what I mean by "society." For the purposes of this paper, I have found the American Heritage Dictionary's definition useful: "A group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interests, participation in characteristic relationships, shared institutions, and a common culture." Thus, a society might consist of a group as large as all those who participate significantly in Western culture or as small as a modest town in rural Georgia, or somewhere in between, like the sum of historians in the United States. Also, everyone is a member of multiple societies; hypothetically, a person could belong to all three societies I just listed. It is important to note that what comprises "society" in any given situation is variable because an object's meaning can change based on the society of the viewer (Fish 308). Consequently, a particular object might be a cultural object in one society and not in another. The modest town in rural Georgia might include a manor house that is a cultural object in the town or even in the surrounding region but that is utterly unknown outside of that region. Not only that, but the definition of a cultural object given above is broad and could include not only antiquities and folk art along with "fine" art, but also arguably items that are not objects at all, like famous individuals, or even intangible items, like words. The literary works and films I will be drawing on are certainly cultural objects, but they are not objects in the usual sense of the

word. Books and DVDs are simply storage; few would argue that my printed and bound “copy” of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is the actual cultural object – though Rushdie’s manuscript copy is. For these reasons, what exactly qualifies as a cultural object is potentially uncertain. In this paper I will endeavor when possible to use commonly-accepted examples; most of the literature I am drawing on refers to visual art like paintings and sculptures, and much of the rest refer to antiquities or other items more or less widely accepted as cultural objects.

Means: Types of Ownership

There are many different types of ownership; more than I can address here. I intend to focus on the four types of ownership with which the literature I have studied is most preoccupied: what I call physical, intellectual, affective, and creative ownership. In addition, I feel compelled to address briefly two types of ownership which are commonly brought up in modern legal and political discourse on cultural objects but which rarely appear in the literature. These are ownership of humanity and ownership of heritage.

Physical ownership is the type of ownership most people will likely think of if the topic arises. It is legal ownership; it involves various rights to the tangible presence of an object, from the right to display it in one’s study to the right to destroy it. Of course, as owning a cultural object is not the same as owning an ordinary object, sometimes the rights conferred by legal ownership are curtailed, especially if the cultural object has a particularly heavy freight of meaning attached to it. Many nations maintain laws that forbid the export of cultural objects, for instance (Merryman 361). Physical ownership must also be validated by one’s peers, formally the local government in most cases. If one’s physical ownership is not validated, one is at the very least in possession of stolen goods, if not an actual thief. *On Beauty* contains a good

example of the workings of physical ownership in the drama surrounding the Maîtresse Erzulie painting. The painting at first belongs to Carlene Kipps; it hangs in the library in her home. She wishes it to be given to Kiki Belsey on her death, but her family refuses. Kiki's son Levi later steals the painting, claiming that it belongs to the Haitian people and that Carlene never should have had it in the first place. At the end of the novel, Monty Kipps is embroiled in a court battle with Kiki over who will obtain legal validation for their ownership of the painting. All of these adventures are encompassed in physical ownership.

Intellectual ownership, on the surface, has more to do with meaning than physical ownership. When a person claims to know the significance of a cultural object, describes its aesthetics or mechanics, or makes a judgment on its value or quality, that person is taking intellectual ownership. Intellectual ownership is most commonly associated with academia, but in fact anyone can take it. In *On Beauty*, Howard Belsey's father, Harold, calls the Mona Lisa a "lovely" painting (Smith 299). Simple as it is, this statement is as much intellectual ownership as a dissertation on the painting. Of course, intellectual ownership must be validated by one's peers, similarly to physical ownership. The difference is that the peer group for intellectual ownership may vary, much the way the society that defines whether or not a particular item is a cultural object in the first place may vary. The act of definition involved in intellectual ownership is relatively common in everyday discourse, but the need for validation is, I think, less commonly addressed. Both, however, are common in literature. A good example is Howard Belsey's ownership of Rembrandt's works in *On Beauty*. In a lecture on *Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Demonstrating the Anatomy of the Arm*, he claims that Rembrandt "was neither a rule breaker nor an original but rather a conformist" (Smith 155). This is, first of all, an analytic evaluation of the work, which establishes his attempt at intellectual ownership. The passage also makes

clear the importance of the peer group or society's validation of ownership. Howard is obviously disputing the conventional view of Rembrandt's paintings, the view that is already validated. It is unclear to what exact extent Howard's ownership has been validated by the large part of the art history community. Despite the fact that he has a teaching position at a small university, which suggests that some people think his views are at least passable, he spends much of the novel seeming to struggle to gain wider approval for his views, and though he is eligible to receive tenure, it is uncertain whether he will. Regardless, he demonstrates the two components important to the outer workings of intellectual ownership: the act of definition (or re-definition) and the need for validation by one's peers.

Frequently, intellectual ownership goes hand in hand with affective ownership, the third type of ownership I examine. Affective ownership essentially consists of an emotional attachment to a cultural object, making it, by itself, a somewhat simpler form of ownership than the first two. However, affective ownership rarely occurs by itself; it is usually connected to intellectual ownership. Although I cannot say with certainty exactly why this is so, I would suggest that there are a couple of reasons. The first is simply that it is difficult to say that one likes a piece of art without saying why, which is slipping into intellectual ownership because it will more than likely involve value judgments. Conversely, when one makes a value judgment in taking intellectual ownership, the value judgment is likely to have some emotional freight that will affect the owner. Not only that, but if one commits the time and energy (however much or little) to take intellectual ownership, one will probably become invested in the ownership and thus in the object itself. Because of these, it is often difficult to separate intellectual and affective ownership, and many examples I give below of one or the other will include a bit of both. The main point distinguishing the two is that affective ownership requires no validation

from others, though it may be shared. However, even this line can become blurry when affective ownership combines with intellectual ownership, especially when the affect is shared by many. Pure affective ownership remains elusive.

The other important point to note about affective ownership is that it can be negative as well as positive. A persistent hatred of a cultural object is just as much affective ownership as a passionate love of one. This may seem odd at first, but the attachment is there regardless of its valence. While people with negative affective ownership may wish to distance themselves from the objects of their dislike, they cannot prevent the objects from getting under their skin and thus cannot truly detach themselves from them. Of course, some do not wish to; they prefer to relish their disgust. Raman “Mainduck” Fielding of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* shows this well. He attacks a painting of a kiss between a famous cricket player and a fan as “a pornographic representation of a sexual assault by a Muslim ‘sportsman’ on an innocent Hindu maiden” and intends to lead a march in protest against the gallery displaying it (Rushdie 232). Mainduck exhibits negative affective ownership here; he despises the painting. He also takes intellectual ownership of it by making value judgments, as well as connecting it to a larger cultural phenomenon – the conservative nativist movement against Muslims. It is difficult to say which type of ownership is the more important here, but it is a powerful example of affective ownership in any case.

The last major type of ownership I have observed is creative ownership. This is the ownership of an object that the artist or creator maintains. The creator conceived and fashioned the object; it is a product of their mind. Some might say that cultural objects like artwork or antiquities are a piece of the creator given physical form. *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, for instance, suggests repeatedly that artwork can capture the true nature or self of the artist, for instance (e.g., Rushdie 174). Therefore, the product will in some fashion always belong to the creator. This is

why we refer to “Michelangelo’s *David*” or “Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.” Creative ownership, however, varies by culture – it is not universally recognized. In *My Name is Red*, in fact, it is systematically prevented, or at least discouraged. The miniaturists of sixteenth century Turkey are trained to give no evidence of their own style, to paint in exactly the same way as everyone else. (Of course, ideas about style in *My Name is Red* are complex and often conflicting – Bizhad, one of the most admired miniaturists of the past, is commonly referred to as having a style to be imitated – but in theory at least the present miniaturists are supposed to see style as a flaw in art.) Not only that, but they frequently collaborate on paintings, each one contributing a single tree or horse, with the result that none of them can claim the final painting. Still, this situation was the exception rather than the norm, and elsewhere creative ownership appeared regularly.

Finally, there are two types of ownership, ownership of humanity and ownership of heritage, that people frequently raise when debating the physical ownership of cultural objects. Because they are commonly discussed together, I will likewise examine them together. Ownership of humanity, on one hand, is the idea that cultural objects belong to all mankind. It asserts that since all cultural objects are products of the human mind or heart, and the human mind and heart are essentially the same across all cultures, all human beings share a connection with cultural objects. Ownership of heritage, on the other hand, contends that cultural objects form part of the history, culture, and identity of the region or people that originally produced them, so those people or their descendents have a stronger connection to the cultural objects. Many people will be at least passingly familiar with these ideas, having encountered them in one of the many disputes over such objects as the Elgin marbles. However, I see difficulties with labeling these as separate ownerships. Each essentially claims an attachment to cultural objects

on the part of individuals. This is the province of affective ownership. Of course, the particular reasons for individuals' attachment in these two potential ownerships are far more specific than they are for affective ownership in general, but that does not mean that these two do not simply represent more specific types of affective ownership. I would suggest that they consist of subsets within the broader category.

Consider V of *V for Vendetta*. He clearly believes in and claims ownership of humanity. In both the movie and the book, he holds a vast art collection. In the movie, the Shadow Gallery houses everything from a carven-wood head of Buddha to a late medieval European painting to what look like old show posters, along with objects less immediately identifiable (*V for Vendetta* scene 7). In the book, he has Motown on the jukebox and the *Arabian Nights* resting beside *Faust* on the bookshelf (Moore 18). When Evey asks him in the movie where he acquired all of this, he tells her he “reclaimed” it from the censorious government, which had no right to hide it away (*V for Vendetta* scene 7). This statement implies that art belongs to the people; the immense variety in his art collection shows that none of it belongs to the people of just one culture. This is how one would expect ownership of humanity to appear. However, looked at another way, one could just as easily see V demonstrating the close combination of intellectual and affective ownership I described above. Personal ideologies lead him to attach a particular significance to cultural objects and to feel a connection with them. Given this, it seems likely that V's supposed ownership of humanity simply represents an example of a pattern within affective ownership instead of an entirely separate category.

The situation is similar for ownership of heritage. “Everyday Use,” for instance, provides what would likely be considered an excellent example of ownership of heritage in the person of Maggie and her attachment to the quilts. She is part of the living tradition that produced the

quilts: her mother, the narrator, helped Maggie's aunt to sew them together after her grandmother pieced them, and it was this aunt and grandmother that originally taught Maggie to quilt. She intends to use the quilts on her bed after she marries (Walker 32-4). For all these reasons, it makes sense that her family's quilts would form an important part of her identity, as ownership of heritage claims. On the other hand, the story also makes it easy to argue that Maggie's ownership of the quilts is in fact affective. She is emotionally attached to them because they remind her of beloved family members and happy memories of learning to quilt; dropping something in the kitchen and then slamming the door certainly sounds like an emotional reaction to her sister's attempt to seize something she values (Walker 32). Thus, it appears impossible to positively state that ownership of heritage is not an example of affective ownership. Similarly to ownership of humanity, it more likely represents a subcategory within the larger type of ownership.

However, these are instances of an individual claiming ownership of humanity or ownership of heritage. Often, as in the case of the Elgin marbles, one of these two types of ownership is claimed for an entire group of people. In such cases, they become more problematic. How can one claim that an entire people, or even a majority of them, feel a connection to a particular cultural object? It may be true in isolated cases, but it is simply unbelievable that even a majority of people feel a connection to most of the cultural objects their culture has produced over time, let alone every cultural object that any culture has ever produced. When someone claims a collective ownership of humanity or heritage, the claim seems to become a discourse rather than an ownership. Addendums to the above definitions appear: all human beings share a connection with cultural objects – so they have a right to physical ownership; the people that originally produced the cultural object have a stronger

connection to it – so they have a stronger claim to physical ownership. Claims of ownership for a collective are often made on the behalf of people who may or may not know anything about them, or care. At this point, such claims become empty, more excuse than fact. Generally speaking, supposed collective ownership of origin or humanity is as likely to be discourse as actual ownership.

True, most of the literature and films I have examined are relatively disinterested in the question of collective ownership, regardless of the type. However, in his work Ghosh repeatedly makes claims for physical ownership based on ownership of heritage. For him, cultural objects like the Geniza documents he writes about are a matter of history, which in turn comes back to identity, the crucial idea for ownership of heritage. Imam Ibrahim demonstrates what happens in Ghosh's mind when physical ownership is denied to native people. The Imam has been cut off from the past, from traditional ways of life, and it has utterly destroyed his life. He was once revered, but now the up-and-coming leaders and wise men of the town at best regard him as a relic and dismiss him, and many laugh (Ghosh 119, 141-2). Ghosh finds his story tragic. That is why it is so important to Ghosh that native peoples retain their cultural objects and thus their history. The theft of the Geniza documents, and more especially the presumptuous manner of it, plainly angers him. He states that “the interests of the powerful defined necessity, while the demands of the poor appeared as greed” and contends that, contrary to what was commonly suggested, the community that preserved the Geniza documents knew their value and were forced to give them away anyway (Ghosh 94, 92). Thus, throughout the book Ghosh argues for physical ownership based on ownership of heritage, or using the discourse of heritage. However, Ghosh's arguments are problematic. For one, he says that in the Geniza's home country, “no one took the slightest notice of its dispersal” (95). He clearly believes this to be a tragedy, but his

belief that the Geniza *should* form an important part of the identities of the Egyptians of the time does not make it so. And if it was not an important part of their identities, Ghosh's claims of heritage fall from ownership to mere discourse, grounds for physical ownership.

It is possible for most of a community to feel a strong connection to a cultural object or group of cultural objects such as the Geniza was or is. The case of Picasso's *Guernica* clearly shows this. Spain's republican government commissioned the painting shortly before the bombing of the town of Guernica by German Luftwaffe allied with Francisco Franco's fascist rebellion, and Picasso chose to commemorate the bombing in his painting. In his will, he dictated that the painting not be returned to Spain until the country was once more a democracy. Consequently, *Guernica* became a symbol of Spanish freedom as well as suffering, and Spaniards are deeply attached to the painting because of this – so much so that in an exhibition celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its return to Spain, the painting was kept behind a guardrail as well as defended by guards (Byrne 11). The near-universal connection Spaniards feel to *Guernica* demonstrates that collective ownership is possible. However, even if it is possible, it is clearly not always present. Therefore, claims of collective ownership of heritage, or the particular type of affective ownership called ownership of heritage, are uncertain at best, and claims for collective ownership of humanity must be even more so. Collective ownership is a difficult question and one not much addressed by the various works I have studied; consequently, I will hereafter limit my observations mostly to individual ownerships. However, since I can find no evidence that the individual ownerships of humanity and heritage are not subcategories of affective ownership, I will consider them as such.

The four major types of ownership, then, are physical, intellectual, affective, and creative ownership. These four types are the most common and most widely-recognized ways of owning

cultural objects, and in some ways they are unique to cultural objects. Owning a cultural object is unlike owning anything else; one cannot detach them from the sometimes vast weight of meaning behind them. Because of this, applying these four types of ownership to cultural objects is mechanically different from applying them to other varieties of objects.

Mechanics: How Ownership Operates

What distinguishes a cultural object from an ordinary object is the load of meaning attached to it, its nature as a symbol as well as a physical entity. Therefore, it makes sense to discuss ownership in terms of meaning. What goes above is the way various ownerships are commonly viewed or described, if in more detail than usual; this section will describe, so far as I can discover, how ownership actually functions in relationship to meaning, since that is the defining characteristic of cultural objects. Each of the different types of ownership, of course, interacts differently with attached meanings.

Physical ownership appropriates meaning to the owner. Simply put, that is, it changes the way others perceive the owner. Mechanically speaking, physical ownership is more directly a social venture than the others; it affects people's social relationships based on the meanings appropriated to the owner. Sometimes people take physical ownership of art or antiquities specifically for this effect – they want to demonstrate to others their culture and sophistication through ownership (Mackenzie 201). What meaning becomes attached to the owner varies, of course, depending on the cultural object. It can also be of varying closeness to the meanings attached to the cultural object. Take, for instance, the Maîtresse Erzulie painting of *On Beauty*. The Vodou goddess Erzulie, its subject, symbolizes a great deal by herself, including “love, beauty, purity, the ideal female and the moon ... and she's the *mystère* of jealousy, vengeance

and discord, *and*, on the other hand, of love, perpetual help, goodwill, health, beauty, and fortune” (Smith 175, her italics). The painting itself includes in the novel such meanings as strange culture, native artist, high art, and monetary value. Only some of these are applicable to the people who own the painting through the course of the novel, and, interestingly, what meanings adhere to the owner change with the owner. While Carlene Kipps owns it, it brings a sense of passion and cosmopolitanism to her that had not previously been evident. These come, respectively, from the many meanings of Erzulie herself and from the meanings of strange culture and native artist attached to the painting. To appreciate (and therefore want to own) a painting of Erzulie with all her significations, Carlene must be passionate; to appreciate a Haitian painting, she must be cosmopolitan. These are the judgments an acquaintance or reader will make based on her physical ownership, and thus do the meanings attached to her change. When her widower Monty takes possession of the painting, however, the meanings that adhere to him consist rather of sophistication, good taste, and wealth, from the painting’s connotations of high art and monetary value. These qualities were already associated with Monty Kipps, though; in this case, ownership has reinforced old meanings rather than added new ones. The difference between the acquired meanings of husband and wife shows that what an observer had previously known about the owner does influence the meanings physical ownership of a cultural object couple to an owner. It also emphasizes the social nature of the workings of physical ownership as it fixes new meanings to or strengthens old meanings of the owner.

One particular type of meaning, however, repeatedly attaches to people who physically own cultural objects: power. It appeared again and again in the literature. Sometimes the cultural object simply gives the owner an extra puissance without that potency necessarily being used; the observer has an impression of might held in check but capable at any moment of rolling

down over whatever is in its path. This is especially true in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Hitler wants the Ark of the Covenant for the power it will bring him and his armies, and the idea of him controlling it induces an unsettling feeling of impending doom. The ominous music that surrounds the merest mention of the Ark only heightens this, of course. In the movie, it is unclear whether Hitler believes in the more direct powers the Ark demonstrates or whether he simply desires it for its psychological effects. After all, the Ark of the Covenant is arguably one of the most potent cultural objects on the planet, and the psychological effects on anyone interacting with its owner would be considerable. Hitler never controls it, of course, but if he had, his ownership would have bestowed on him much increased power in social and political interactions. Granted, the Ark represents a somewhat extreme example, but other, similar cases also exist. V's vast art collection, for instance, heightens the sense of personal power that surrounds him in *V for Vendetta*. The power that physical ownership confers is, like the other meanings that adhere to the owner, essentially social; it grants greater relative power to owners in the eyes of observers. Interestingly, it seems possible to achieve the same effect using some immaterial cultural objects. For instance, V constantly recites and sometimes explicates various snippets of famous literature; early in both the movie and the graphic novel he quotes several lines from *Macbeth* (Act I, Scene II) while calmly beating a group of thugs threatening Evey (Moore 11-2, *V for Vendetta* scene 2). The recitation surrounds him with the same sense of power that his ownership of material cultural objects does.

The first essay of *Ways of Seeing* illuminates at least part of the reason for this power. It states that museums, which store and display many cultural objects, remind people of churches, presumably because they experience similar feelings in museums to those they do when in churches (Berger et al. 23). At least in some cases, cultural objects bear similar powerful

connotations to religious objects. The Ark of the Covenant, which appears in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, actually is a religious object, of course, but it is also true that the artifact Indy pursues at the beginning of the movie is presented with religious imagery: it sits in splendid isolation in the center of a circular dais, and it seems to radiate its own warm light. It is even called “the idol” (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* scene 3). The religious imagery in *V for Vendetta* is less overt, but it is still discernable. In the movie, Evey looks around with an expression resembling awe when she first enters the museum-like Shadow Gallery (*V for Vendetta* scene 7). In the graphic novel, V runs his fingers over the spines of his books in much the same way as one might run fingers over pews in a church, taking reassurance in the physical solidity of them (Moore 18). All of this does support the idea that our culture views cultural objects in a pseudo-religious light. Since physical ownership attaches further meanings to the owner, it makes sense that some of the power of religion could become associated with physical owners, and that certainly explains the sense of greater power surrounding them.

However, that explanation is more compelling when applied to the examples above, in which the power of the owner is not exercised. When power associated with ownership is exercised, the religious connotations of power seem to sink and the issue of temporal power becomes more important. What goes above might be termed the passive mode of the power-meaning; the active mode functions differently. It is, simply, an overt reminder of the owner’s ownership and thus power in the perception of another person, whether or not the owner intends it to be so. After all, one cannot always choose the meanings ownership attaches to one because meaning is socially constructed; when V. V. Nandy commissions his statue of Nandi in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, he might hope for some of the more positive meanings of “the great bull of Hindu mythology” to become associated with him, but he might just as well be labeled a

grasping phony (Rushdie 242). In any case, the active mode of the power meaning does not require any intent on the part of the owner, though it often does involve intent anyway. In it, the cultural object's owner more or less holds the cultural object over another person's head, metaphorically, in much the same way an adult would hold a desired prize above the reach of a child's arms. There are many, many examples of the active mode. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Belloq repeatedly delights in taking away the artifacts Indy has uncovered; in "Everyday Use" Dee steps back to keep her mother from touching the quilts she has claimed; in *My Name is Red*, Black and Osman are allowed into the Sultan's treasury only to see beautiful and even legendary manuscripts scribbled on and abandoned; at the end of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Vasco taunts Moor with his inability to recover Aurora's paintings. It appears again and again. This must be at least in part because whether the power-meaning is active or not is established by observers, and they could misperceive intent, but in over half the examples listed above, the owners deliberately flaunt their possession. All of the observers in the above examples have some type of ownership of the cultural objects being denied them, but physical ownership seems to trump the others. In some fashion, it is more powerful.

This fact, however, does explain the existence of the discourses of humanity and heritage. Since people privilege physical ownership so much, it makes sense that they would try to take it – and since physical ownership requires validation, it makes sense that they try to justify themselves. Of course, there are cases where the rightful owner is unclear. In fact, the example given above of the discourses of humanity and heritage, the Elgin marbles, also demonstrates this ambiguity. While some individuals firmly believe that Greece has the right to them, and some firmly believe that the UK does, many are uncertain, and there is no consensus. This confusion, however, does show that the two discourses are effective; it arises from the fact that people see

both claims as valid. In any case, people commonly claim physical ownership based on other types of ownership, real or invented. Aside from these two discourses, individuals often justify or claim physical ownership through intellectual or affective ownership. They declare that they have the right to own an object because they understand it better or love it more than others. For instance, collectors or dealers of (often illicit) antiquities frequently claim that they understand the significance of the objects they collect better than others or that they feel a powerful emotional attachment to the objects (e.g., Mackenzie 201-2, 196-7). These arguments and similar ones are advanced to claim physical ownership because of its privileged status in most cultures.

The other types of ownership are still powerful, however, each in its way. Intellectual ownership, for instance, can alter the meanings attached to owners through physical ownership. This is because unlike physical ownership, intellectual ownership affects the meanings of the cultural object itself. It is intellectual ownership that shapes the meanings attached to a cultural object. An individual forms an interpretation of a cultural object, wishes to fix certain meanings to it; a society of peers hears the interpretation; if a large segment of society agrees with the interpretation, the meanings it contains adhere to the cultural object, at least for that society. Individuals from that society can spread the new meaning further. This is part of V's project in the movie *V for Vendetta*: he wants to alter the meanings of the Parliament building to include primarily "oppressive government." He presents his interpretation to the people of London in his news broadcast, and they validate it (*V for Vendetta* scene 5). On November 5, homes and bars are empty as they all stream to meet him at Parliament, changing the meaning of the building in the eyes of themselves and the entire country (*V for Vendetta* scene 32). Thus, V takes intellectual ownership. Granted, intellectual ownership does not usually include physical

destruction, which is what follows on affirmation of V's ownership. However, up until then the sequence of events illustrates the process of intellectual ownership well. The process is not always so overt, but it does occur. Of course, V's scheme might not have worked; sometimes an attempt at intellectual ownership is not validated, and then the process grinds to a halt. When it does, the new meaning is simply not linked to the cultural object. However, attaching new meanings to a cultural object through intellectual ownership is done through this process.

Sometimes the process is less involved. People take intellectual ownership on a regular basis without having to undergo the full validation routine. When Howard Belsey's father, Harold, calls the *Mona Lisa* "lovely," he is, in a small way, taking intellectual ownership, but he does not have to get his ownership confirmed (Smith 299). This is because confirmation is a foregone conclusion; the *Mona Lisa* already holds like meanings. Harold merely repeats them. Reiteration like his is the most common form of intellectual ownership. In such a case, in which a particular interpretation of a given cultural object is substantially similar to another, that instance of intellectual ownership simply reinforces the link between the cultural object and a particular meaning. Well-known cultural objects commonly accumulate meaning in this fashion. The more people reiterate a particular intellectual ownership, the more strongly a particular meaning is cemented to the cultural object, making it more difficult to change or remove. Not impossible, of course – Duchamp's mustachioed *Mona Lisa* in L.H.O.O.Q. certainly affects the meanings of the original, for instance – but certainly more difficult.

That makes V's case of intellectual ownership is unusual in that he manages to radically alter the meanings attached to a cultural object. Sometimes intellectual ownership does change meanings, but usually, it simply adds to them. It is rare that one interpretation of a cultural object can completely or even mostly eradicate and replace another as V's "oppressive

government” replaces “security and order.” Instead, multiple meanings will exist side by side, even if they contradict each other, and cement their content to the load of meaning the cultural object carries. In *Pollock*, people basically hold two interpretations of Pollock’s later work (for which he is now better known): it is brilliant and groundbreaking, or it is incomprehensible and absurd. Early on, people call his work “a mop of tangled hair, a child’s contour map of the battle of Gettysburg... [or] baked macaroni” (*Pollock* scene 18). Later, however, some also describe it as “an impregnable language of image, beautiful and subtle patterns of pure form” (*Pollock* scene 20). Neither of these views ever replaces the other in the film; all of these adjectives and meanings attach themselves to his work. Both interpretations linger today, if, through intellectual ownership, somewhat revised. If one of these intellectual ownerships had overwhelmed and replaced the other – if a greater part of society had held it, that is – the meanings attached to a Pollock painting would be entirely different today.

This brings up an important point about intellectual ownership. In *My Name is Red*, Black asks, “Did a painting become legendary for what it was or for what was said about it?” (Pamuk, 266) The question is much-debated, but common sense suggests that inherent aesthetics in the human perception can only be taken so far. Besides, many cultural objects, like the Geniza documents, are not necessarily beautiful, but they remain cultural objects. When he says this, Black seems to be leaning towards the belief that cultural objects become legend for what they are, but at the same moment, he puts his finger on what actually creates cultural objects: what is said about them, which is to say, intellectual ownership. The definition I have arrived at depends on the majority of society attaching meaning to an object, usually many meanings. Intellectual ownership is the mechanism by which meaning is attached to a cultural object, and it requires the agreement of a significant portion of society to function. Thus, it is intellectual ownership that

creates the very cultural objects it owns. This can be rather spectacularly proven by the experiment Stanley Fish conducted with/on his students: the class attached meanings, and a list of linguists became a poem (Fish 323). As he comments, “Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them” (327).

The mechanics of affective ownership are more elusive. It is a more private form of ownership than either physical or intellectual ownership; it requires no validation, involves no presentation of ownership to others. Therefore, it is less observable than other types of ownership. Affective ownership clearly relates to the meanings of the owner rather than of the object, like physical ownership, but the exact difference between them is difficult to pin down. The attachment of meaning that occurs through physical ownership has to do with social relations, whereas affective ownership seems to relate more to the owner’s personal identity. Mechanically, though, quantifying this is difficult. A point to begin appears in the fact that physical ownership’s attachment of meaning to an owner never takes place without an observer, even if that observer is the reader or viewer of a work. Affective ownership, on the other hand, can take place just as easily in solitude. Even when taking affective ownership in solitude, characters are not necessarily physically alone, but they are often isolated nevertheless. In *My Name is Red*, Black is with Master Osman when Osman examines Enishte’s manuscript, but he has withdrawn into himself, “exhausted by fear, crying and the ruse of torture” (Pamuk 249). Black is not observing Master Osman in any way, and Osman has clearly dismissed Black from his mind for the moment. Consequently, Osman is effectively alone when he examines the manuscript and the “violent disgust and hatred” it arouses in him (249). This is the key that unravels the difference between affective ownership and physical ownership: the latter requires an observer, while the former does not. In physical ownership, it is the third party who attaches

meaning to the owner. In affective ownership, owners attach meaning to themselves. Enishte says that deep love of a painting “chang[es] the landscape of our minds” (Pamuk 161). Our loves and hates define us – when we meet someone new, one of the first questions we ask is what they like. Thus, affective ownership essentially consists of self-definition. This mechanical definition of affective ownership can also encompass the ownerships of humanity and heritage, confirming their nature as subsets of it. Through affective ownership and its subsets, people can alter their own meanings.

This makes affective ownership very different from physical and intellectual ownership because social interaction must not necessarily enter into it at all. On the other hand, affective ownership is commonly tied to intellectual ownership, as I stated in an earlier section. I do not know if or how this connection might alter the operations of either form of ownership, but it would ensure that social interaction at least touched on affective ownership. However, it would be difficult to disconnect the two from each other entirely, even if they were not already connected by intellectual ownership, simply because it would be difficult to disconnect the owner from social interaction. Other individuals cannot change affective ownership directly, but they can influence the owner. One wonders, for instance, if Harold Belsey loves the *Mona Lisa* and thinks it is lovely for what it is or because he feels he ought to, since so many other people believe it is beautiful. When an attachment is already in place, people are quick to judge as well. For example, Master Osman repeatedly derides Enishte for his fascination with the Frankish painting style, calling him a “fool” and a “clown” with a “barren mind,” among other things (Pamuk 249, 250). This sort of pressure could push owners to change their ownerships. At that point, one has to ask: who is owning what and changing the meanings of what? Is it the owner changing his/her own meanings? Are other individuals changing the meanings of the owner?

Does that make the owner an improbable cultural object somehow? With these questions, affective ownership becomes obscure, and it requires more definition than I can provide here.

Creative ownership, the last form of ownership, superficially resembles affective ownership more than physical or intellectual ownership. However, mechanically it more closely mirrors intellectual ownership in that it relates to the meanings of the cultural object rather than those of the owner. Creative ownership allows the owner/creator to define the original meaning of a cultural object. For instance, in the poem “Ozymandias,” the sculptor focuses on the “frown / And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command,” which suggest arrogance and indifference or even cruelty (Shelley 4-5). Ozymandias himself, who presumably commissioned the statue, seems to want the its sheer size to intimidate others. However, Ozymandias is only the physical owner of the statue, so he cannot dictate its meaning; it is the original owner, the sculptor, who can do that, and it is the sculptor’s meaning that endures at the end of the poem, when the giant statue lies shattered in the middle of a wasteland. Of course, intellectual ownership means that the meanings of the artist do not always persist. The uproar in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* over the cricket kiss painting proves that. For Aurora, the artist, the painting was a product of fancy and whim (Rushdie 234). However, the public saw it as “pornographic” and “socially irresponsib[le],” and the many people reinforcing those meanings overwhelmed Aurora’s simple play (232, 234). The creator of a cultural object is only one person; if much of society agrees with the meanings s/he attaches to a cultural object, those meanings will remain, but if society does not, the creator’s original meanings will likely be overrun and buried. This is especially true because intellectual ownership can carry on for as long as a cultural object is known, but creative ownership can only continue until the artist’s death. Thus, while the ability to define the

original meanings of a cultural object does make creative ownership powerful, in the long run its limitations often make it weaker than intellectual ownership.

It is also true that creators need not take creative ownership in the first place, at least not overtly. That is, they must not necessarily describe any particular meaning which they associate with their creations. In *Pollock*, Jackson Pollock rarely does, for example. The movie portrays him as a singularly inarticulate artist; he is always uncomfortable ascribing any definitive meaning to his art. He even outright rejects it sometimes. At one point in the movie, Lee Krasner comes into his studio while he is painting. She pushes him to attach meaning to his work in progress and tries to do so herself, until finally in frustration he bursts out, “I’m just painting!” (*Pollock* scene 8) Pollock continually refuses to take creative ownership, and on the rare occasions on which he does, it appears forced and awkward, as if he is reading lines someone else has given him (e.g., *Pollock* scene 20). The kind of vacuum his reticence creates begs to be filled. When a creator is unforthcoming about an object’s meaning, others will frequently rush to fill the gap. Lee Krasner certainly does so often in *Pollock* – she commonly explains his artwork to others in front of Pollock himself, in fact (e.g., *Pollock* scene 9). The narrator and Maggie face a similar problem in “Everyday Use.” They never articulated the meanings of their quilts; they never had a reason to do so. However, that omission leaves an opening for Dee. She believes that they do not attach meaning to the quilts in any important way and affixes her own meaning to them: essentially, that they are priceless relics, to be hung on the wall and appreciated (Walker 33). Thus, while creators do not have to publicly take creative ownership of their works, failure to do so tends to result in others brushing aside their unarticulated meanings. Of course, the reverse situation also arises: sometimes, creators are unwilling to give up ownership of their works. Frank Lloyd Wright was famous for this, for

example. However, as I stated above, creative ownership can only last until the creator's death; ultimately, it must reach a limit, and the creator must relinquish ownership.

Masteries: Tomorrow, the World!

The mechanics of ownership are impressive enough; to be able to alter the meanings of a cultural object the way intellectual ownership allows one to, for instance, seems remarkable. However, ownership regularly goes even farther. Owning a cultural object can change the creator, other individuals, society as a whole, and even past and present events. Sometimes, accepting a particular meaning for a cultural object requires that the meanings of something else also be changed. To return to the example of the ancient Greek statue of Athena, for example, attaching the meaning of "ignorance" to the statue inescapably necessitates that one attach a similar meaning to the people who created or worshipped at the statue in the first place. Thus, owning a cultural object changes the meanings of a society, albeit one long gone. Of course, only intellectual or creative ownership can accomplish this alteration. Modifying the meanings of anything aside from the owner or the cultural object itself must be done through changing the meanings of the cultural object, and only intellectual or creative ownership can accomplish that.

The possibility of changing the meanings of society is perhaps the most intuitive of the four. For one, art is often thought of as reflecting society or making some commentary on it. For another, society is the ultimate arbiter of what meanings become or remain attached to a cultural object. Therefore, when it accepts a meaning for a cultural object that impacts its own meanings, it is in a way choosing to change its own meanings similarly to the way individuals do when they take affective ownership. Consider "Ozymandias." In the guise of making a statement on a particular individual, it makes a statement on an entire group of people –

essentially, that those who consider themselves powerful or important ought not to put too much stock in themselves, for power and importance pass away. It attaches a meaning to Ozymandias: pride. By extension, it appends that same meaning to the society of the time, Britain in the early nineteenth century, at the time one of the most powerful nations in the world. Now, as mentioned above, it is possible for society to overwhelm creative ownership, and Shelley's nineteenth-century British readers could have done so with his poem. They could have ignored the implications of the poem, or said they were wrong, or even buried the poem all together as worthless. Obviously, these things have not occurred, and thus Shelley's creative ownership attaches meanings to society through the poem he created.

Of course, since my primary sources are literary works and films, sometimes creative ownership and intellectual ownership, and even affective ownership through its attachment to intellectual ownership, become confused. This is most common with poetry and nonfiction works, in which the speaker and the creator often become intertwined to one degree or another. It happens, for instance, in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*. At one point, Ghosh speaks of the writers of Judæo-Arabic's attempt at "elegant usage," saying, "Eight centuries later, those odd solecisms have an awkward, endearingly human grace, where the correct form would seem merely formal or stilted" (103). Here, Ghosh is interpreting, evaluating, which is essentially an act of intellectual ownership. But this act of intellectual ownership is presented within a creative work, a cultural object in its own right. In addition, the most important type of ownership for Ghosh at this point is clearly affective. Thus, in circumstances like these, how exactly the meanings of the article in question are altered is a little muddled. The results, however, are the same regardless; readers of Ghosh's work will attach particular meanings to the society he is discussing. This example also brings up another important point to note about altering the

meanings of a society through a cultural object: the society which attaches the meaning does not need to be the society to which meaning is attached. The Jewish community whose documents Ghosh is examining are long gone, like the ancient Greeks who created the statue of Athena, and it is a present-day society of readers that attaches meaning to them. This type of instance of the meanings of a society changing with the meanings of a cultural object is perhaps less intuitive than the one cited above, but it occurs as well.

How a creator's meanings might be changed through alteration of their works' meaning is also fairly intuitive. Often, judgments on a creator's work imply judgments on the creator as well. If a work demonstrates technical expertise, the creator is skillful; if a work portrays women in subtly negative ways, the creator is likely an unconscious misogynist, perhaps through no personal fault influenced by misogynistic surroundings; and so forth. When Aurora's critics called her painting pornographic, they implied a negative statement on her morality and/or taste. Sometimes changing the meanings of a creator is in fact the primary goal of intellectual ownership, rather than simply changing the meanings of the cultural object that is ostensibly being owned. When Howard Belsey gives his lecture on *Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Demonstrating the Anatomy of the Arm*, for instance, he is more interested in recasting Rembrandt than in his intellectual ownership of the actual painting. He calls Rembrandt a conformist, "a merely competent artisan who painted whatever his wealthy patrons requested" (Smith, 155). Also, Aurora often ridicules Vasco through his paintings in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Similarly, changing the meanings of a creator through a cultural object is relatively common in literary criticism, and likely in other forms of cultural criticism as well. Well-known creators can become almost as loaded with meaning as their works, and so become cultural objects in their own right. Shakespeare, to take one of the more spectacular examples, is more a symbol than a person in

present society. When one thinks of him, one tends to think of genius or literary greatness or perhaps pretentiousness first and think of a man only second, if at all. That may be why the premises of works like *Shakespeare in Love* are so interesting: it is unusual to think of Shakespeare as a person rather than as a symbol. In any case, intellectual ownership regularly changes the meanings attached to creators through changing the meanings attached to their works.

Creative ownership can change the meanings attached to creators as well, if they shape self-portraits in their chosen mediums. Aurora's diptychs in her Late Moor series provide a good example of this. They include numerous self-portraits, which Moor describes as "appallingly unguarded" (Rushdie 303). In them, Aurora portrays herself as "hard, even stony," but she also displays a horror of some unnamed terrible knowledge (Rushdie 304). These portraits may not be positive, but they do certainly alter Aurora's meanings for anyone who sees them. She becomes both a tyrant and a victim, both cruel and anguished. Some might have attached these meanings to her already, but not many, and likely not all of them. Thus, creative ownership allows her to alter her own meanings in the eyes of others.

Creative ownership can also change the meanings of other individuals, of course. When creators portray others in their works, they can choose what meanings to attach to them. Vasco Miranda certainly alters the infant Ina's meanings, for instance, when he paints her as simply an emptiness in Aurora's arms (Rushdie 158). Despite her family's vehement denials, they cannot separate this idea of absence from her thereafter, and so Vasco successfully alters her meanings through his painting. Of course, outside of literature the exact outcome is not usually so clear. In his work *In an Antique Land*, for instance, Amitav Ghosh repeatedly depicts the various Westerners who plundered the third world as ignorant, arrogant, grasping, destructive, and more.

He says of one Jewish collector that he was “merely practising [sic] on his co-religionists the methods that Western scholarship used, as a normal part of its functioning, throughout the colonized world,” deceptively mild words that contain a harsh judgment (Ghosh 84). Through his work, Ghosh attempts to alter the meanings of particular Western scholars and collectors and by extension much of Western scholarship. However, amid a sea of other works and ideas on these individuals, discerning the effects of Ghosh’s work on any but specific readers is difficult. Thus, while it is clear that creative ownership can affect how people see other individuals, as well as the groups of which they are part, how much is uncertain.

Cultural objects changing meanings in this fashion – altering the meanings of a specific person, object, or group – is relatively common. However, sometimes creative ownership seems able to directly alter the reader or viewer of a work. This comes up often in *My Name is Red*. At one point, Master Osman says, “If you begin to draw...differently, you begin to see the world differently” (Pamuk 266). The old masters have passed on their style, their way of seeing the world, to the present generation through their paintings. However, Frankish paintings, and therefore the Frankish painters’ style, are beginning to intrude. By radically altering the way the Turks look at the world, the Frankish painters are in some sense directly altering those who view their works, causing much turmoil in their society. Similar alterations occur in modern times, if with less culture shock from other sources. New movements in the arts rise and change what people look at in the world and how, as Jackson Pollock, for example, surely did with his revolutionary painting technique and the unheard-of works it engendered. Creative ownership, then, can alter the meanings not only of the people a cultural object depicts, but also on occasion the people who experience a cultural object.

Intellectual ownership can also change the meanings of individuals aside from the creator, though this is less intuitive than many of the possibilities discussed above. Generally, it works through implication, similarly to the way alteration of the creator's meaning works. Even so simple a judgment as whether a work of art is good or bad has implications for others who have judged the same piece. If they agree, they are knowledgeable or intelligent or such; if they disagree, the reverse is true. This effect of intellectual ownership appears often in the academian setting of *On Beauty*. When Monty Kipps lists contemptuously and then dismisses several of the philosophers his daughter has been studying, he cannot help attaching the idea of ignorance or even foolishness to her (Smith 113). The novel also introduces Howard's ongoing intellectual rivalry with Monty Kipps early on. They are jousting over Rembrandt, each trying to pin similar meanings of ignorance or such to each other through stronger intellectual ownership of Rembrandt's paintings (Smith 28-9). Of course, the meanings attached to another individual in this fashion need not be negative. Ghosh, for instance, repeatedly compliments one Professor S. D. Goitein's work on the Geniza documents and in other areas (e.g., Ghosh 18, 100). Nor does this effect of intellectual ownership necessarily have to be deliberate. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, for instance, Indy's behavior in the map room of Tanis indicates that he is absorbed in his own intellectual pursuits, not trying to denigrate anyone else's. Nevertheless, his brief note of the hole in which his rivals placed the staff and his subsequent choice of another hole dismiss all of his rivals' study and scholarship in a breath (*Raiders* scene 16). Thus, intellectual ownership often alters the meanings of other individuals, whether the owner intends it or not.

Intellectual ownership can also indirectly modify the meanings of the owner. This effect operates by implication as well, similarly to the way intellectual ownership affects the meanings of other individuals, but it also resembles the workings of physical ownership in that it is

generally an observer who ascribes the meaning to the owner. Most commonly, the meanings involve intelligence and knowledge; occasionally, they also involve power. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indy's continual mastery of esoterica while under pressure, as in the map room, certainly makes him seem both more intelligent and more powerful in the viewer's eyes. Sometimes an owner will deliberately take advantage of this effect for an ego boost. Zora, a fundamentally insecure character of *On Beauty*, does so frequently. Her intellectual ownership is aggressive – as her TA says, “Whatever she gits [sic] in front of her she rips apart,” commonly including others' arguments (Smith 145). Despite this, Zora is not attached to her intellectual ownerships, no matter how viciously she seems to argue them at times; instead, she simply uses them (successfully) to build an image of herself (Smith 209-10). This is not necessarily the primary intention of intellectual owners most of the time, of course, but intellectual ownership does effectively alter the meanings of the owner as well as other individuals, if indirectly.

Finally, of course, altering the meanings of cultural objects can alter the meaning of events. Through creative ownership, this works the same way as changing the meanings of other individuals or of society: creators get to define the meaning of events portrayed in their works. Take Aurora's painting of her uncle Aires and Prince Henry the Navigator, for example. It portrays Aires's meeting with his lover on his wedding night, with Aires in his new bride's wedding dress. The narrator of *The Moor's Last Sigh* suggests that the painting, in which Aires “sits primly” in his “moonlit dress,” may in part be attempting to make the event (and the lengthy affair of which it was a part) less scandalous, less sordid, by giving it its own beauty and gallantry (Rushdie 13-4). This is a clear case of creative ownership changing the meaning of an event. Theoretically, intellectual ownership can accomplish the same, through the same route of implication by which it alters the meanings of individuals and society. However, most of the

works I studied did not represent this method of changing meaning. Of course, Raman Fielding's remarkable allegations of "a sexual assault by a Muslim 'sportsman' on an innocent Hindu maiden" could be seen as an example (Rushdie 232). This intellectual ownership of a painting does change the meaning of the event the painting portrays, but it is made a bit murky, perhaps, by the fact that this interpretation would not have been possible had Aurora not already altered the meaning of the event through creative ownership. On the other hand, alterations piled on alterations represent the norm for cultural objects, and many of those interpretations likely build on previous ones. Given that, it is perhaps less difficult to imagine that the same could be the case for events whose meanings change through intellectual ownership. Even if this were not the case, however, the meanings of events can still be changed through creative ownership and likely through other instances of intellectual ownership as well.

Conclusions

Changing the meanings of cultural objects can change the meanings of any number of other things, frequently in multiple, complex ways, as elaborated above. Not only that, but the objects I have discussed here whose meanings are susceptible to alteration may be only the beginning, in the same way as there are more types of ownership than those I have principally focused on. Ghosh, for instance, repeatedly asserts that ownership of the past allows ownership of the future (e.g., 340). Or, to take a more down-to-earth example, Wal-Mart. It is neither a society nor a person nor an event, but it is still an object with meanings that can be changed. With all its myriad forms and consequences, including those yet unexplored, ownership represents a powerful force for meaning-making. Granted, it sometimes seems as if the modern incarnations of the sorts of objects we are used to thinking of as cultural objects – great

paintings, great literature, etc. – do not have as great an impact on as many people as earlier works did. Robert Hughes, for instance, asserts that the idea that artists can change the public discourse through their works has gone; there has not been a *Guernica* for some time (111). This may, in part, be true. However, the numerous laws, institutions, and people invested in cultural objects suggests that their influence still exists – and in a world that nearly everyone agrees is changing at breakneck speeds, it is more than possible that emphasis is shifting to new, as yet less explored types of cultural objects, like the television broadcasts that have so much impact in *V for Vendetta*. The ability of ownership to change meanings, even on a small scale, is still potent.

Much of our daily realities is made up of items which are not cultural objects or even touched by cultural objects, which have no particular meanings beyond their physical properties. Much of our daily realities is simply there, inarguable. Walls are usually solid and unambiguous – usually. But much of our daily realities is made up of items which are not solid or unambiguous, whose meanings are mutable, negotiable. What does “Ozymandias” mean? What are the meanings of George W. Bush? Of the university? Of Wal-Mart? Some of these are small things, some large; all of them are part of the fabric of reality. When one takes ownership of a cultural object, one changes meaning – of oneself, of the cultural object, of a potential myriad of other objects. This is the power of owning a cultural object: when one takes ownership, when one alters meaning, no matter in how small a way, one alters reality. The pen, along with the paintbrush and all the other means of ownership, is indeed mighty.

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