



The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel

Elaine Freedgood

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While the Victorian novel famously describes, catalogs, and inundates the reader with things, the protocols for reading it have long enjoined readers not to interpret most of what crowds its pages. *The Ideas in Things* explores apparently inconsequential objects in popular Victorian texts to make contact with their fugitive meanings. Developing an innovative approach to analyzing nineteenth-century fiction, Elaine Freedgood here reconnects the things readers unwittingly ignore to the stories they tell.

Building her case around objects from three well-known Victorian novels—the mahogany furniture in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the calico curtains in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, and “Negro head” tobacco in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*—Freedgood argues that these things are connected to histories that the novels barely acknowledge, generating darker meanings outside the novels’ symbolic systems. A valuable contribution to the new field of object studies in the humanities, *The Ideas in Things* pushes readers’ thinking about things beyond established concepts of commodity and fetish.

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