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TRAVELLING JEWELS

When we think of travel, we immediately connect with the idea of a movement from place to place, that is, making a journey. we might also bear in mind the meaning, obsolete since the nineteenth century, of tormenting, wearying, putting to work and labouring as in a woman giving birth. in English this survives as 'travail' i would like to keep in play both these meanings. Moving from place to place may seem simple -something we do all the time unthinkingly as we will our muscles into action. Travelling, especially in our age of global communication is made to appear both desirable and effortless. A canadian journalist and entrepreneur named Tyler Brule writes a weekly column in the *Financial Times* titled 'The Fast Lane' in which he recounts the vertiginous itineraries he has followed, always first-class, never delayed, and invariably impeccably and appropriately dressed. However, if we are not physically fit, travelling as far as the nearest shop might prove problematic -in short a travail or travel as labour- and trying to travel across the world when a volcano has erupted in Iceland, spewing ash into the stratosphere, may turn out to be travel as arrested movement. In short, there is a disconnect between our aspiration and the reality of what it means for humans to move from place to place. Moreover, a teleology is at work that persuades us that the world we live in is more readily travelled than at any previous time.

When in 1704 the Duke of Marlborough led his troops to decisive victory against the French in the war of the Spanish succession, he famously sent a note to his wife Sarah back in London (on a scrap of paper it read 'I have no time to say more but to beg you will give my duty to the Queen, and let her know her army has had a glorious victory'). This was duly delivered after a messenger rode for eight days across Europe from Hochstadt on the Danube to London, a distance of 828 kilometres. This was remarkably fast considering it included a channel crossing. Today covering that distance would take an hour in an airbus or four hours and eight minutes in a Cessna light aircraft but much time would be spent getting to and from

an airport, were there one, and being processed¹. The English politician Robert Harley who was stuck in London during long sittings of parliament 1688-1691 regularly sent his wife perishable foods like oranges and lemons to their country house in Herefordshire, a distance of 269 kilometres². The aristocratic owners of English country houses lived in London during the fashionable season but their dining tables were supplied from their country estates: the steward's account book 1762-92 for the Harewood Estate in the north of England, country seat of Earl Lascelles and his family, demonstrates that seasonal produce was daily sent by coach to London, taking two days to get there³. By the early years of the nineteenth century cross-channel tourism had been greatly facilitated. An 1822 advertisement in *The Times* alerted would-be travellers to France of a twice-weekly service by steam packet from the Thames by Tower Bridge to Calais. Passengers could take their own carriages on board and were allowed one hundred weight of luggage -about fifty-one kilos⁴. The journey took 12 hours. Not quite Eurostar but not inconvenient either. Measuring travel by the amount of time taken to get from A to B is only one possible measure.

It is not only people who travel, it is also *things*. A whole category of commodities has the adjective 'travel' attached to them: travel clock, travel bag, travel adaptor, travel pillow. In the past all the chattels that made life comfortable for the elite, physically and spiritually, were adapted for the road. Some have survived in museums: portable altars, canteens of cutlery, and above all the necessaire that contained items for personal grooming like scissors and tweezers as well as spaces for papers and jewels (fig. 1). These are material things that accompany people on their travels. Sometimes things are themselves instrumental in the travelling that is taking place. Things have a capacity to generate and communicate attachment across distances of time and space. So in writing about 'travelling jewels' I intend to suggest not only jewels which travel with their owners (or indeed with those who may have stolen

1. Frances Harris, *A Passion for Government: the Life of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough*, (Oxford 1991), p. 110;

<http://www.entfernungsrechner.net/en/distance/city/2903012/city/2643743>

2. For the correspondence between Harley and his wife in Brampton-Bryan see Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665-1800*, (Oxford 1997), ch. 1.

3. Yorkshire County Record Office, Harewood Estate Papers, Steward's letter book 1762-1792.

4. Pieter van der Merwe, "Calais in Twelve Hours": 'Turner's Tower of London' and the early cross-Channel steam-packets", *Turner Society News* 57 (1991), pp. 11-13.

them) but jewels that function as mnemonics, enabling those who hold them or gaze at them to travel across time and space. No one perhaps expresses better this kind of mental travelling and the labour involved in undertaking it than Proust:

it is a labour in vain to capture [our past]: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. the past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling, and it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we die⁵.

the term jewel encompasses not only precious stones but also all small-scale artefacts of high value. this 'Friendship Box' (fig. 2) made around 1740 by a german artist, Christian Frederich Zinke (1683-1767), contains four miniature portraits of intellectual women friends -so called Blue Stockings. It was commissioned by the collector, the Duchess of Portland, and features also Elizabeth Montagu (letter writer and essayist), artist Mary Delany, and probably Mary Howard, Duchess of Andover who corresponded with all three. It is a tiny object to be held in the hand. Folding into each other when the box is closed the portraits bring together four friends who are physically separated. It thus materially re-stages a reality of a non-material kind, a psychic proximity. Even though the box is static, it is so devised that these women of intellect travel in the imagination of the owner and so are brought together when they are apart. At the same time, this is an object made to travel: it is very small, its curves allow it to fit easily into a pocket, it serves the same purpose as photos of friends on a smartphone. The box may be useful, for example, as a container for pills but the images may be taken on a journey as a reminder of the originals who are far away. So travelling jewels are not only those that move from place to place with their owners -a watch on the wrist, a locket round the neck- but those that in a Proustian way have a capacity to invoke for the owner or the viewer a place and time distant from where they themselves stand. I shall return to this theme. For the moment, however, let us think about precious stones and their relationship to travel as movement across space and time. I will focus on diamonds because they are emblematic of our desire for the superlative in their unequalled light-refractive capacity and resistance -they are adamantine.

5. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. I, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, (Harmondsworth 1989), pp. 48-9.

As with other rare natural resources that are not universally available but are useful in a practical sense, precious stones are transported across the world. We are talking here about economic travel both of gem-stones and of those responsible for importing them. We are accustomed to a global market place so we rarely stop to think about the geographical origin of the constituent parts of what we perceive as essential equipment of modern life. Take the St. Gotthard rail tunnel through the Alps excavated in 1881 by drills tipped by natural diamonds from far away South Africa. Take, for example, the diamond electroplated beads -the diamonds originating in Russia or the USA- threaded onto a multi-strand steel cable and, in a technique called diamond wire cutting, carving their way relentlessly through a block of marble in the Carrara quarries of Italy. But it is in their economic exchange value that precious stones have, since Antiquity, proved most useful.

The letter books (copies of letters sent, and letters received) of seventeenth-century English diamond merchants, John and Nathaniel Cholmley reveal in detail their activities from the 1660s to the 1680s. John was based in London, and Nathaniel in India and their letters record not only the entrusting of large quantities of gold to ships' captains with instructions that it be coined in India and then used to purchase diamonds but also their arrangements with rich clients who sought to buy diamonds as ornaments and as investment. For example, John writes in 1665 to Nathaniel that the Countess of Pembroke has decided 'to venture something this year' and so he is sending £200 (detailing the exchange rate into pagodas -the Indian currency) and tells his brother to 'take care that the money be well invested and not in small petty stones or laske [badly shaped thin stones] which I understand are exceeding deare and doe not yield that profit as rough ones [i.e. uncut]' The Countess writes to you for a large ruby, which I think is cheaper here then in your parcel [i.e. packet of stones]⁶.

The French merchant, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-89) (fig. 3) who travelled through Turkey, Persia and India in the 1630s and 40s and who recorded his exploits in his popular travel book (1676) declared: 'the diamond is the most precious of all stones and it is the transaction to which I am most attached'⁷. Tavernier tells how he bought diamonds for transport back to Europe from Indians at the Golcon-

6. Rosalind Bowden, "The Letter Books of John and Nathaniel Cholmley, Diamond Merchants", *North Yorkshire County Record Office Publication 67* (2001), p. 18.

7. Gervais Clouzier-Claude Bardin (eds.), *Les Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Ecuyer Baron d'Aubonne en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes*, vol. II, (Paris 1676), ch. xv, p. 293: "*Le diamant est le plus precieuse de toutes les pierres. & cest le negoce auquel je me suis le plus attache* "

da mines who had them concealed in their clothing⁸. The travels of one of those that he purchased -a very large unusual blue stone- can be tracked with a fair degree of accuracy, something unusual in the secretive world of diamond trading.

Once back in Paris, the 112 carat blue diamond was sold by Tavernier in 1668 to Louis XIV. Louis XV had the stone reset in 1749. In 1791, Marie-Antoinette and her husband tried to flee across the French frontier at Varennes. The journey had been delayed while the Queen tried to arrange for her personal jewels to be sent in advance to the Archduchess Christine of the Low Countries: these jewels would have been needed as capital once the royal couple were safe. The delay caused by Marie-Antoinette's determination to have a new *necessaire* for her jewels aroused suspicions. In the end the monarch and his consort were apprehended and brought back to be imprisoned and subsequently guillotined⁹. The crown-jewels had already been sequestered by the revolutionary government and, in September 1792, a large quantity, including Tavernier's blue diamond, was looted from the badly protected *Garderobe* in the Tuileries. A diamond that was apparently the same (though some doubt this) reappeared in the collection of an Englishman Henry Philip Hope in 1839, though nobody knew from whom he had bought it. It was exhibited in 1851 at the Great Exhibition and eventually after many years was acquired by Harry Winston Inc., the New York diamond dealing company who in 1958 donated it to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. (fig. 4)¹⁰.

Every natural pearl is unique and therefore recognisable at least to a specialist eye, but there is no way of identifying a diamond with any degree of certitude. It can, of course, be identified by its faceting -the distinctive way it has been cut- but that can be changed very rapidly by re-cutting even though that means a reduction in size. Mythologies are woven around diamonds as they travel from owner to owner occasionally becoming visible (in the ownership of an Elizabeth Taylor for example) but often invisible in a bank vault in Switzerland. The naming of diamonds after their owners is both a form of self-advertisement on the part of the owner and a measure of just how difficult (impossible?) it is to anchor and arrest the movement of precious stones. Laurence Graff of Graff diamonds bought a pink diamond for 46 million \$US in November 2010 and immediately named it the Graff pink. Its origins, its history and its current location or ownership are unknown -having briefly emerged into the

8. Ibid, p. 299.

9. For details of this episode and the jewels involved see Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery*, (London and New Haven 2009), ch. 5.

10. <http://mineralsciences.si.edu/hope.htm>

light it has again disappeared into mystery and speculation¹¹.

On account of their characteristics -small in size and high in value- diamonds leave no trace as they travel: no emails, no record of electronic transfers, no bank documentation: nothing except a powerful image. Diamonds and other precious stones are therefore intrinsic to travel accounts from the earliest times. A popular Buddhist parable (Buddhism originated 2,500 years ago) tells the story of a poor man who travels through life unaware of the precious jewel that has been sewn into the hem of his coat by a well-meaning friend¹². Very few people travelled to the Golconda diamond mines in India (Tavernier claimed to be the first), though the terrain had been earlier described by Marco Polo:

In this kingdom [of Masulipatam], you must know, is found the diamond; there are several mountains, among which during rain, water flows with great turbulence, and through wide caverns; and when the shower ceases, men search through the ground previously inundated, and find the gems. In summer there is not a drop of water, and the heat can scarcely be endured, while fierce and venomous serpents inspire great fear; yet those who venture thither discover valuable diamonds¹³.

This description by Rustichello da Pisa, allegedly reporting the stories told him by the traveller Marco Polo who visited Asia, Persia, China and Indonesia between 1276 and 1291, is one of the earliest accounts of Golconda which was, as Tavernier asserted in the seventeenth century, the only known source of diamonds until the discovery between 1726 and 1729 of diamonds in the area of Brazil now called Minas Gerais (the name means General Mines). It is also one of the earliest descriptions of alluvial diamond mining: the retrieval of stones washed to the surface by the agency of water whether in rivers or, as happens today, by artificial flooding. While this passage rings true, it is followed immediately by a typically fanciful account of a long, deep and totally inaccessible valley of diamonds. Merchants throw down pieces of flesh, to which the diamonds adhere, whereupon eagles swoop down and seize the chunks of meat and fly away; once frightened by the shouts of onlookers, the birds drop the meat and the men then retrieve the diamonds. Even if the birds have swallowed the meat, they can be caught and the stones retrieved from their excrement.

11. <http://www.graffdiamonds.com/#/diamonds/stories/the-graff-pink/>

12. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html>.

13. Hugh Murray (ed.), *The Travels of Marco Polo*, (New York 1845), p. 265.

The instrumentality of diamonds as transforming lives both for good and for ill that we find here is a commonplace of fiction (as with James Bond in *Diamonds are Forever*) but it is in the Second Voyage of Sinbad the Sailor from the *Thousand and One Nights* (known in English as the *Arabian Nights* first English edition 1706) that Marco Polo's tale is most effectively harnessed as an exemplar of the power of diamonds as agency. Sinbad, stranded on a desert island, escapes by tying himself to a monstrous bird which then flies away and deposits him in the valley of diamonds as described by Marco Polo. 'As I walked through this valley, I perceived it was strewn with diamonds some of which were of surprising bigness. I took a great deal of pleasure to look upon them; but speedily saw at a distance such objects as very much diminished my satisfaction and which I could not look upon without terror'¹⁴. These objects were the huge serpents. Then he also notices the meat. By using his turban to tie himself to the largest piece he can find and lying on the ground face down with a bag of the biggest diamonds he has been able to collect, Sinbad is lifted out of the valley in the claws of an eagle to the astonishment of the merchants who are waiting above for their spoils.

By the eighteenth century, Golconda had become a synonym for unimaginable riches and descriptions of jewels were an established feature of travel writing. Travlogues and letters (first privately circulated and then published) by travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who, as wife of the English Ambassador, was in Constantinople 1717-1718, abound in descriptions of fabulous jewels. In a letter of 10 March 1718 to her sister Lady Mar, describing the person and domestic environment of the Sultana Hafife whom she had visited, Lady Mary lists an extraordinary array of jewels worn. She describes the Sultana's shift fastened with a great diamond, her girdle covered in diamonds, 3 chains round her neck reaching to her knees, one [string] of large pearl[s] at the bottom of which hung a huge emerald as big as a turkey egg, earrings made of two pear shaped diamonds as large as hazelnuts, and four strings of pearls, the whitest and most perfect in the world, 'at least enough to make four necklaces every one as large as the Dutchess of Marlbro's, and of the same size, fasten'd with 2 roses consisting of a large ruby for the middle stone, and round them twenty drops of clean di'monds to each'. The diamonds on her fingers are the largest Lady Mary has ever seen 'excepting Mr. Pit's'¹⁵.

14. Robert L. Mack (ed.), *Arabian Nights'Entertainments*, (Oxford 1995), p. 148.

15. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Lady Mar 10 March 1718, R. Halsband (ed.), *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. I, (Oxford 1965), p. 381.

Thomas Pitt (1653-1726) was a British merchant who, having acquired quantities of diamonds in India including, in 1701, an enormous 410 carat diamond became known as 'Diamond Pitt'; he found it difficult to dispose of a jewel of this value but the Pitt diamond was eventually sold to the French royal family and is now in the Musée du Louvre as the Regent diamond. In these accounts descriptions of jewels travel in epistolary media and become a measure for luxury as consumed and paraded in far away London. Drawing on *The Arabian Nights* precious stones were established as an essential component of fantastic travel accounts from Denis Diderot's *Les Bijoux Indiscrettes* (1748) and Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759)¹⁶ to novels by writers like Rider Haggard (*King Solomons Mines* 1885) and John Buchan (*Prester John*, 1910).

The travelling of diamonds between India or Brazil and Europe was central to early modern mercantilism: these precious stones made immense journeys from their point of origin to London or Lisbon, then on to Antwerp and Amsterdam where they were cut and polished, back to dealers in London and then returned to India or on to Persia¹⁷. In the case of stones stolen or appropriated by invaders and colonisers, the movement of a famous jewel from the mine (even if that be mythic) to the west can come to emblematised the very fact of imperial dispossession itself.

The most famous, and arguably the most instructive, case of this kind is that of the Koh-i-noor diamond.

The great diamond known as the Koh-i-noor (mountain of light) originated in the Golconda mine and is first mentioned in the *Baburama*, the memoirs of Babur (1483-1530), founder of the Mughal Empire. Thereafter it changed hands many times, travelling with warriors and rulers between India, what we now know as Pakistan, Persia and Afghanistan, in a complicated history of extortion, bribery, tribute, and theft. Its identity has been disputed but gemologists agree that it is one of the three largest diamonds ever known, the other two being what is now known as the

16. 'The prince and princess had jewels sufficient to make them rich whenever they came to a place of commerce, which, by Imlac's direction, they hid in their cloaths...' (ch. xv); 'Imlac, who understood traffick, sold part of the jewels the next day, and hired a house, which he adorned with such magnificence that he was immediately considered a merchant of great wealth' (ch.xvi), "The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia" in *Samuel Johnson: Prose and Poetry*, Mona Wilson (ed.), (London 1963). In *les Bijoux Indiscrettes* Mangogul is given a magic ring which makes women's jewels (their vaginas) tell their stories; English translation in Denis Diderot, "The Indiscreet Jewels" in *The Libertine Reader*, Michel Feher (ed.), (New York 1997).

17. For a full account see Tjil Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-century Diamond Merchants*, (London 2011).

Orlov (but which was known in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as 'the Great Moghul')¹⁸ and the so called Darya-i-Nur (or sea of light) which is presumed to be in the Iranian treasury. In the early nineteenth century, the Koh-i-noor was in the possession of Ranjit Singh, the first and last Sikh king of the Punjab¹⁹. In 1843, Dalip Singh (1838-1883), the last of Ranjit Singh's sons, then a minor, became the recognised ruler of the Punjab. During his reign the two Sikh wars were fought. The Punjab was the only Indian state not under European rule at the time. On 23 March 1849, the British flag was hoisted on the citadel of Lahore and the Punjab was proclaimed to be part of the British Empire of India.

One of the terms of the treaty of Lahore was that: 'the gem called the Koh-i-noor which was taken from Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk by Maharajah Ranjit Singh shall be surrendered by the Maharajah of Lahore to the Queen of England'²⁰. Accordingly it was ceded to the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie who, not without intense secrecy, brought it back to England aboard a ship of the Queen's navy named *Medea*. Given that the Koh-i-noor diamond already had the reputation of bringing bad luck to any man who owned it -a story that inspired Wilkie Collins in his novel *Moonstone* (1868)- one might have thought that a ship with a more auspicious name could have been found. The person responsible for actually taking the diamond out of the Lahore jewel house, Dr. Login, was also entrusted with guardianship of the eleven-year-old Maharajah Dalip Singh. The East India Company was annoyed because they wished themselves to present the diamond to the Queen as a gift but Dalhousie insisted that it was more in honour of the Queen 'that the Koh-i-noor should be surrendered directly from the hand of the conquered prince into the hands of the sovereign who was his conqueror, than that it should be presented to her as a gift -which is always a favour- by any joint stock company among her subjects'²¹. In 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations opened in Hyde Park in London. It was housed in the Crystal Palace, a proto modernist building for a modernist event celebrating manufacture. It seemed at that moment to be the epicentre of the universe and in a striking caricature (fig. 5) George Cruikshank showed the peoples of the world travelling to London. He also caricatured ethnographic types. Multiple and disparate meanings were produced around this imperial spectacle of a commodity world. Travelling the world might be unsafe and costly

18. Now in the state treasury in the Kremlin.

19. I am indebted here to Ian Balfour, *Famous Diamonds*, (London 1997), pp. 154-172.

20. Quoted *Ibid*, p. 167.

21. Lord Dalhousie to Sir George Cooper, August 1849, quoted *Ibid*, p. 168.

but for this Englishman there was no need to go far afield because the world was there to be evaluated in Hyde Park.

As India was 'pre-eminent' among Britain's colonial possessions²², 'the jewel in the Imperial crown', the Indian Court attracted attention at the Exhibition. But the most eye-catching and discussed exhibits originating in India were not in this section; they were the East India Company's display of jewels and the Koh-i-Noor diamond that belonged to Queen Victoria and which was exhibited on its own in a gilded cage. The objects in the East India Company's display represented -stood in for- the Indian rulers whose wealth had been despoiled whether as booty or as tribute:

. not a few were tributes offered on the occasion by native princes and other *magnates* of the East' ... comprising natural products, native manufactures for domestic use, Models, and a wondrous display of the richest articles of jewellery and luxury²³"

Unlike later world fairs, the Great Exhibition did not showcase living villages. Workers were effaced from the Exhibition. But there was one exception. In the Indian Court was shown a collection of 'ethnographic models' -over 150 miniature figures representing Indian trades. These figures were viewed as repulsive: one writer found himself sickened by the 'distorted bodies of the models', and another described the Indian labourers as 'a lean starved-out regiment of squalid beggars, half naked, or with scanty folds of coarsest cotton flung around their wasted limbs'²⁴.

The Koh-i-noor diamond which was set in a traditional manner to be worn as an arm-band was removed from its setting on arrival in England for display at the Great Exhibition; the setting was retained with a glass replica (fig. 6). The young Dalip Singh was tutored by devout Christians and then in 1854 sent to Britain where he was first housed at Claridges Hotel before the East India Company found a house for him in Roehampton on the outskirts of London. When he expressed a desire to return to India, he was sent on a tour of Europe instead. Queen Victoria found him exotically charming and had him portrayed by the court painter Franz Winterhalter who was 'in ecstasies at the beauty and nobility of bearing of the young

22. J. G. Strutt (ed.), *Tallis's History and Description of the Crystal Palace and the Exhibition of the World's Industry in 1851*, (London and New York 1851).

23. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

24. Edward Concannon, *Remembrances of the Great Exhibition* (London 1852), quoted by Lara Kriegel, "Narrating the subcontinent in 1851: India at the Crystal Palace" in *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, Louise Purbrick (ed.), (Manchester 2001), p. 164.

Maharajah. He was very amiable and patient²⁵. The portrait Winterhalter executed of the Maharajah (fig. 7) shows him wearing a portrait of the Queen set in diamonds. In Winterhalter's portrait the deposed and dispossessed young Indian is obliged to present himself to view for perpetuity in the artistic idiom of the conquering nation. This is not only a portrait but also an image of imperial power; within it is the second image, encircled with diamonds, referencing India in the material sense while simultaneously suggesting subjugation, a mark of ownership of the young man and of the diamonds his native country supplied to the British. The Queen is powerful (surrounded by diamonds) in inverse proportion to the miniaturisation of her image. Winterhalter painted several portraits of Queen Victoria; one executed in 1856 shows her wearing the Koh-i-noor diamond²⁶; by then it had been re-cut and thereby rendered more brilliant (it had originally been a rose cut) but also much reduced in size (it lost 43% of its weight). While the Maharajah wears *her* portrait, the Queen (who would be declared Empress of India in 1877) is depicted wearing one of the largest and most valuable Indian diamonds ever known, a jewel that, as everyone knew, had belonged to the young man. As with the brightest jewel in Queen Victoria's crown, there could be little doubt, it was remarked in 1851, of the Koh-i-noor 'remaining, what it has ever been, a brilliant token of power and ascendancy'²⁷.

How is it then, that when it was exhibited at the Great Exhibition, after a fanfare of publicity about its journey from India, the Koh-i-noor diamond disappointed the viewers who queued up to see it. For many, it epitomized that 'other, the Orient with its useless, pre-industrial, pre-technological ornamentation -the antithesis of Britain's arts of manufacture.

After all, there is but poor satisfaction to the mind, that is gifted with a ray of intelligence, in the contemplation of these glittering toys, and more especially so, when they are too bulky or precious for use. Witness the great Koh-i-Noor, imprisoned like a robber in his own iron cage; the tribute of admiration bestowed upon which was not equal to that elicited by the most trivial piece of machinery that was applicable to the use or service of man²⁸.

25. Queen Victoria's journal, quoted in C.A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*, (London 1990), p. 182.

26. The portrait is seldom reproduced but it appears on p. 50 of *The Crown Jewels* souvenir guide book published by Historic Royal Palaces (www.hrp.org) in 2010.

27. Harrison Ainsworth (ed.), "A Chapter on Diamonds", *The New Monthly Magazine and Horrist* vol. 89 (1850), p. 439.

28. *Tallis's Description*.

Others blamed the fact that the diamond did not seem to glitter on the failure of its cutting in India (though in fact a Venetian lapidary had been responsible for that). We witness here the familiar colonial discourse of the incompetent native, justifying the 'rescue' of so valuable an object for safe keeping in the West:

"Notwithstanding the enormous value at which it has been estimated ... [the Koh-i-noor] has disappointed public expectation in no ordinary degree: the ungraceful peculiarity of its shape, and the ineffective manner in which it has been cut, although more than half its weight has been wasted in the operation, having deprived it of much of the brilliancy and beauty of which no doubt the original stone would, in skilful hands, have proved susceptible; and in spite of the various costly expedients that have been resorted to for the purpose of exhibiting it to the best advantage, it is still very far from realising the anticipations that had been formed of its attractions"²⁹.

In its protective bird cage (fig. 8) the Koh-i-noor seemed much less luminous and light projecting than the glass fountain (fig. 9) that had been erected as the centre-piece of the main transept of the Crystal Palace, itself a miracle of glass. *The Times* asserted: 'after all, the diamond does not satisfy. Either from the imperfect cutting or the difficulty of placing the lights advantageously, or the immovability of the stone itself, which should be made to revolve on its axis, few catch any of the brilliant rays that it reflects when viewed at a particular angle'³⁰. Light, viewers complain, does not travel from this much-travelled gem. Accounts of the Koh-i-noor in the official guide to the Exhibition³¹ and in the newspapers, unofficial guides and in the *Illustrated London News* offer a narrative of the stone's confused history steeped in violent warfare, murderous tribal dissent, and cupidity. Alongside this is a discourse of illumination both literal and metaphorical. Thus on 17 May 1851 the *Illustrated London News* published a long article on 'Light and its Applications' ranging from electricity to daguerrotypes and then to 'the mountain of light' (Koh-i-noor) which it contrasts with other diamonds in the exhibition, like the 'Hope diamond' (now in the Smithsonian)³², admired for the way they 'almost emit light'³³. The Koh-i-noor diamond in these accounts is conflated with India: its shortcom-

29. *Illustrated London News* 23 Aug. 1851, p. 242: "A Lady's Glance at the Great Exhibition".

30. Quoted in Iradj Amin, *Koh-i-Noor Diamond*, (New Delhi 1994), p. 238.

31. *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all nations 1851: Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue*, vol. II, (London 1851), section 23 'works in precious metals, jewellery etc.

32. Pointon, *Brilliant Effects* (see above note 9).

33. *Ibid* p. 426.

ings mirror those of the unruly subcontinent, its murky failure to send forth rays of light is symptomatic of the impossibility of illuminating India which will always be rough, like an uncut diamond.

The Koh-i-noor is now set in the Maltese cross in the front of the crown that was made for Queen Elizabeth, the Queen mother -the mother of the present Queen Elizabeth II of Britain. In 1947 the government of India asked for its return and again in 1953. In 1976, the Prime Minister of Pakistan requested its return to Lahore, a request that was refused at the same time as an assurance was given that it would not be handed over to any other country (i.e. India). Subsequently Iran claimed it, asserting that it was a Persian possession. This much travelled jewel has been in Mogul possession in India for 213 years, in Afghan possession in Kandahar and Kabul for 66 years, in Sikh possession in Lahore for 36 years, and in British possession for 163 years. Unlike other claims for restitution of cultural property, it seems unlikely that this jewel will be travelling anywhere beyond the treasury in the Tower of London in the foreseeable future.

The travels of diamonds continue to be significant in international politics, mirroring power struggles, the travails of oppressed peoples, and imperial ambitions. A tiny piece of the natural world that can be exchanged for whatever you need or desire, these small pebbles with their superlative potential for exchange are unbeatable for money laundering and bribery. For this reason they have been implicated in corrupt government and civil war. Easy to put in a shoe or sew into your clothing, diamonds can travel with you virtually invisibly, crossing borders undetected, instantly redeemable for unrecorded arms, services or privileges.

Since the 1990s, as Franziska Bieri aptly puts it, to the four Cs by which diamonds have been judged since the Renaissance -carat, colour, clarity and cut- has been added a fifth C standing for conflict³⁴. Writing in 2010 Bieri assessed that four million had died in the 1990s and that between 3.7 and 20% of the total number of diamonds traded during that decade were so called 'conflict diamonds' or 'blood diamonds'. The seemingly emotive terminology relates to diamonds that are mined in war zones and used to finance insurgency or the activities of War Lords. Diamonds have fuelled wars and refugee crises in Angola, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cote d'Ivoire. In 1998-9 under intense international pressure a number of non-governmental organisations and the United Nations got together with the dia-

34. Franziska Bieri, *From Blood Diamonds to the Kimberley Process: How NGOs cleaned up the global diamond industry*, (Farnham 2010), p. 1.

mond producing states to establish a forum. A great deal of this pressure came, and continues to come, from Global Witness whose vigilance, expertise and postings aim to tackle the problem at every level. Typically, for example, on 8 February 2010 they posted a notice for Valentine's Day, exhorting those inclined to sell or purchase diamond rings on that occasion to ask the following questions: Do you know where the diamonds you sell came from? Can I see a copy of your company's policy on conflict diamonds? Can you show me a written guarantee from your suppliers that your diamonds are conflict free? How is the supply chain audited³⁵?

The history of conflict diamonds and the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS -Kimberley after the notorious South African Mine where so many lost their lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) that was endorsed initially by 37 states plus the European Commission, growing to 74 states plus the EC in 2009, is extremely complex and open to interpretation. What is clear is that KPCS requires each state to implement national legislation regulating trade in rough diamonds in accordance with the minimal standards set. Practically, this means that each KP country must devise a national chain of custody, export and import laws, and rough diamond certificates. Non-state actors are involved in the decision-making and implementation aspects of the agreement; these include non-governmental organisations such as Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada (PAC)³⁶. Canada's Arctic diamond mines in the North-West territories where modern technology allows mining during two months of the year are, like Western Australia, among many areas of the world where diamonds are mined today³⁷. The principle is that there should be what Bieri calls a 'chain of custody' that records each diamond's travels from the mine to the office where a Kimberley certificate is issued³⁸. But KPCS is a voluntary agreement and not a treaty and the degree to which it works to protect civilian populations as well as miners depends on how effective governments are at ensuring, for example, that diamonds are handled in 'tamper proof containers'³⁹.

35. <http://www.globalwitness.org/library/tainted-love-blood-diamonds-still-cast-shadow-over-valentines-day>.

36. <http://www.pacweb.org>; <http://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/conflict/conflict-diamonds>.

37. The Lupin ice road runs 350 miles from Yellowknife to the Diavik mine over 85% of lakes and 15% of land portage: http://nunalogistics.com/services/ice_roads_runways.html.

38. Franziska Bieri, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

39. *Ibid.* Bieri in ch. 4 of her book explains how KPCS works. Further information which is constantly updated, can be found on the sites listed above.

The apologists for KPCS point out that countries who do not sign up or, having signed up, do not ensure that the requirements are observed effectively, will be frozen out of the market. If you don't observe the rules we won't work with you. At time of writing PAC has four countries on its Watchlist. The first of these is the Central African Republic, one of the poorest countries in the world, where exports have been suspended since 23 May 2013 following intervention by KPCS after the government was overthrown by a rebel group that took control of diamond trade and production. There had been alarm over this region since June 2010 when rebels established control over mining areas and concerns arose that illicit diamonds were being smuggled between the Central African Republic (ranked 12th among the world's producers of rough diamonds by value)⁴⁰ and Sudan, which is not a signatory to KPCS. This perhaps illustrates both the success and the limitations of KPCS which can do little more than advise neighbouring countries and trading centres (Belgium and the United Arab Emirates) to be vigilant as to the sources of diamond imports. However, the United Arab Emirates is also on the Watchlist, as are Lebanon and Venezuela⁴¹. Global Witness, at time of writing, continues to assert that the global trade in diamonds and precious stones remains associated with conflict and human rights abuse, and to claim that concerns about these issues in countries such as Afghanistan and Zimbabwe demonstrate that existing responsible sourcing initiatives are failing fully to address the problems. In other words KPCS is not working, or at least not working adequately to protect people⁴². Much depends on the will and determination of the Chair of the organisation, an honorary post that therefore involves the post-holder's country in expense. The current chair is Chinese. The fact that internet access is denied to H.E. Wei Chuanzhong's 2014 welcome letter 'to our KP family' does not inspire confidence⁴³.

Diamonds are no more than 'dirty looking stones, as super model Naomi Campbell described the contents of the pouch delivered to her hotel room in the middle of the night after she had met Charles Taylor (former Liberian President subsequently in convicted of war crimes at the Hague International Tribunal) at a dinner in South Africa. But jewels are always on the move, from the African mine to some-

40. Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, <http://eiti.org/CentralAfricanRepublic>.

41. <http://www.pacweb.org/en/diamond-watchlist>

42. See 'The case for human rights due diligence' Global Witness' comments for tripartite meeting on responsible sourcing of precious stones 26 May 2 (<http://www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/library/PSDDbrief.pdf>).

43. <http://www.kimberleyprocess.com/>

one's pocket, from there to the dealer, from the dealer to the vault, from the vault to the cutter in Antwerp, from the cutter to the polisher, from there to the jeweller, and from the jeweller to the neck of a wealthy woman. The journeys made by diamonds track class, gender and race. Notwithstanding Naomi Campbell's involvement, until the opening up of Russian and Canadian mines in the second half of the twentieth century, diamonds were mined through the arduous labour of black men to be worn by white women on the other side of the world. Cutters and polishers prepared stones for dealers who were and still are, mainly Jewish whether in Antwerp or, since the diaspora from Antwerp immediately prior to the Second World War, in New York. All commodities travel, but the travelling of jewels offers us a prism not only into commerce and consumption but also into the way human subjects negotiate the world of material things and their attachment to them.

Not all travel is voluntary or mercantile. In diasporas, in the movement of peoples displaced by war or other forms of hardship, jewels again play a crucial role: they have exchange value and so can facilitate a new life elsewhere and they have associative value -they may work as repositories for memories of the old life or for fabricated and comforting myths. The novelist Vladimir Nabokov and his family fled the Bolshevik Revolution. In his many-times-re-written autobiography, *Speak Memory*, he tells how his family paid their living expenses in London with the 'handful of jewels which Natasha, a far-sighted old chambermaid, just before my mother's departure from St. Petersburg, had swept off a dresser into a *'necessaire* de voyage of pigskin, with "H.N" elaborately interwoven in thick silver under a similar coronet, which had been bought in 1897 for my mother's wedding trip to Florence.' Nabokov's memory of the journey by which this white Russian family escaped is evoked by this singular object. Transported from St. Petersburg to the Crimea and then to London, the *necessaire* lost to a pawnbroker around 1930 'its expensive receptacles of crystal and silver leaving empty the cunningly contrived leathern holders on the inside of the lid.' However, Nabokov tells us that this loss was amply recouped during the thirty years it then travelled with him. 'The fact that of our Russian heritage the hardest survivor is a travelling bag is both logical and emblematic' he concludes⁴⁴. The container emptied of its precious contents stands in this account for a lifetime of loss and is a figure for memory itself. We travel with luggage that contains our possessions. Nothing more pathetic than an empty suitcase, nothing sadder than being unable to remember! The family of Gary (originally Igor) Shteyngart were by contrast poor Russian Jews who emigrated to the USA in 1979.

44. V. Nabokov, *Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, (New York 1989), p. 143.

In his recent memoir (2014) Shteyngart describes how a customs agent at Leningrad airport prior to their departure takes off the child's fur hat and pokes around in the lining, looking for diamonds that his parents may have illegally stashed away⁴⁵.

The jewels that travel with their owners in times of war have to be hidden from the eyes of the oppressor, Bolshevik or Nazi. Fetishistic things, they constitute material substitutes for a complex clutch of values that cannot be seen or quantified, the loss of which signals the breakdown of what is understood as natural forms of law and order. I am referring here to the idea of generation, of family, of engendering -in short of the continuity of life itself. Nabokov the son articulates the struggle for survival through the agency of jewels that were his mother's. Human subjects are launched on journeys by events outside their control; the jewels they have with them are invested with values of trust, reliability, and above all of transformation. If they (the jewels) are 'saved, that is, not exchanged for the basic necessities of life, they will be passed down to children and grandchildren. The survival of jewels in times of war is proof that the enemy has not prevailed. It is in this spirit that the Jewish Museum in Berlin displays in a section called 'Objects of Memory' the jewellery that the family of Ludwig Simon from Bingen on the Rhine had preserved when the family emigrated to Chile in the 1930s⁴⁶. If the jewels are exchanged that also is a measure of freedom since compulsory travel deprives the traveller of the proverbial freedom to roam but jewels translated into cash may restore it.

I will conclude with two personal testimonies. Both concern diamond rings which are both emblems of, and figurations for, sexual union and therefore for generation and for continuity. As oral history they are particular narratives, they rely on memory and family myth. I offer them therefore as cultural manifestations and not as some kind of historical truth. The first is told in the interviewee's own words. She is Ann Heyno, born 1 October 1942:

"My mother, a Jewish refugee from Berlin, came to England in 1938 to escape Nazi Germany. However, shortly after becoming a British Subject, she rather unwisely decided to visit Prague, where she had a boyfriend. In March 1939, when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, it became clear that Prague was a very dangerous place for her to be and she must leave quickly. The person responsible for insuring that all British subjects left Prague safely, was the British pro consul. While making the travel arrangements, he spotted this rather beautiful woman, in a fur coat, wear-

45. Gary Shteyngart, *Little Failure: A Memoir*, (London 2014), p. 79.

46. Seen exhibited at the museum by the author 2008.

ing a large solitaire diamond ring and liked the look of her. The evening before my mother was due to leave Czechoslovakia, he invited her out to dinner and during the course of the evening, he warned her that if she wore the ring, on the train, the Nazis would certainly confiscate it. At this point, he risked his career by offering to take the ring and see that it was safely returned to her. Against all the regulations, he sent it back to England in the diplomatic bag. Back in England, the two were reunited. My mother got back her ring (which her mother had given her) and on June 11th 1940, the couple were married in Brighton and the diplomat, who risked his career for the love of a woman, became my father⁴⁷

Jewellery in this account is agency: it is a device that brings two people together across time and space, very much in the manner of jewels as triggers of recognition in Shakespeare's plays⁴⁸.

The second of my testimonies comes from the Millennium Memory Bank, an oral history project involving interviews with elderly people across the United Kingdom, organised in 2000 by the BBC and the British Library. David Solomon tells the interviewer his story. He was born in 1916 into a wealthy, strict Jewish family who owned a large furniture business in Liverpool. At the age of twenty he fell in love with Babette whom he met at the Jewish Club. He bought her an engagement ring ('similar to my mother's') with two large diamonds. The Second World War was imminent. David was about to be called up so he gave the following instructions to Babette. If it looked as though the allies were going to lose the war. She should get a jeweller to take one stone out of the ring and give that stone to a ships captain in return for passage to New York. Once in New York she should take the ring to one of the many Jewish pawn-brokers in the city and ask him to remove the other stone. With the proceeds of the sale of that stone she would be able to live; every six months she should go to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and ask for poste restante mail. That way the couple would be reunited should he survive. Happily, Babette's engagement ring remained intact. David returned to Liverpool after serving in the British Expeditionary Force in France and the couple went on to enjoy a fifty-eight year marriage⁴⁹.

47. Personal communication to the author 2013.

48. As, for example, in *Twelfth Night*.

49. David Solomon interviewed by Evelyn Draper 1998, BBC Radio Mersey, Millennium Memory Bank, British Library, C900/1009.

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Fig. 1. Nécessaire, London 1750-1770



Fig. 2. Friendship box, Christian Friedrich Zincke, ca. 1740



Fig. 3. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier ... en habit Persien, qui lui fut donnee en 1665, from *Les Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, 1676



Fig. 4. The Hope diamond on display in the Smithsonian Museum, Washington D.C.

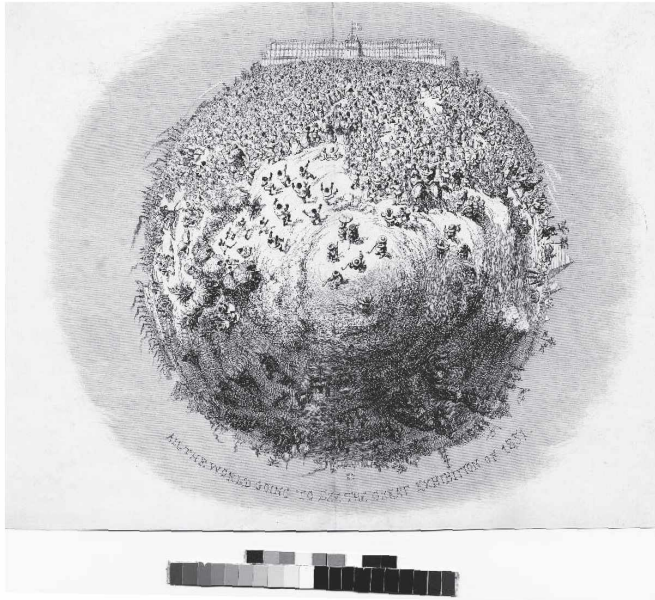


Fig. 5. George Cruikshank, *All the World Going to See the Great Exhibition of 1851*, 1851



Fig. 6. Replica of the Koh-i-noor diamond in its original setting



Fig. 7. Franz Xavier Winterhalter, *Maharaj Dalip Singh* (1838-83), 1854



Fig. 8. The Koh-i-noor diamond on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851, from the *Illustrated London News*



Fig. 9. The Glass Fountain at the Great Exhibition of 1851, *Illustrated London News*