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Bodkin Aesthetics: Small Things in the Eighteenth Century

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ABSTRACT

This essay juxtaposes extant bodkins (and their ornamental cases) with textual depictions in order to uncover the significance of scale to material fictions in the eighteenth century. I argue that the bodkin, a large needle, articulates the key role of the small (as opposed to the miniature) to the period’s cultural imagination and aesthetics. The bodkin was an ordinary tool, an accessory that was instrumental to several trades and to getting dressed. Its flexible set of functions in trade and at the dressing table made it both a useful and unstable object. The bodkin possessed the capacity to puncture textiles, paper, and skin, and to stitch materials back together again. Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) illuminates the slippery meanings and functions of the bodkin, engaging this small object’s rich literary and cultural heritage that stretches back to antiquity. I link the bodkin’s mutability to feminine violence, charting how women can transform even the smallest of things into weapons of self-defence.

Do small things matter? How substantial must an eighteenth-century object be to merit attention? This essay examines the aesthetics of the bodkin (a large needle), in material practice and print culture, in order to mark the contributions of the minute to the period’s literary imagination. People are, more often than not, drawn to the gigantic and sublime—country houses, picturesque ruins, mountains—but I contend that small, and often less expensive, items shape our understanding of the material past and the literary possibilities of scale.[[1]](#footnote-1) The gigantic catches the eye, but the small draws us in. If small objects have, in Sara Pennell’s description, remained in the “artefactual shadows” of museum collections, the bodkin’s literary record calls for attention to what material fictions articulate about form and size.[[2]](#footnote-2) Crucially, bodkins were not miniaturized versions of large objects; their small size was key to their use in a variety of activities in forests, workshops, and homes. Bodkin designs show how even scant objects make room for decorative detail and the expression of individualism. Literary treatments of the bodkin mine its dual role as tool and accessory, embracing the object’s flexible capacity as a multi-purpose object, while syncing its slippery functions to women’s bodies. In women’s hands, the bodkin demonstrates the violent application of the small and is a reminder that we ignore the minute at our peril.

In composition, shape and function, bodkins were small objects. There is no certain etymology for the word “bodkin,” but the “kin” denotes something diminutive.[[3]](#footnote-3) In her treatment of the miniature, Susan Stewart links small objects to the discipline of craft, especially to the skills and time demanded by miniature books: “Minute writing is emblematic of craft and discipline; while the materiality of the product is diminished, the labor involved multiplies, and so does the significance of the total object.”[[4]](#footnote-4) For Stewart, the miniature gains significance by placing ever more temporal and material demands on its creators and owners. The bodkin’s role as tool (whether in tailoring, hairdressing, or bookbinding) squares with Stewart’s emphasis on the ties between scale and craft. The bodkin as a material and literary object, however, differs from the praxis of the miniature, in which objects are reduced in size. Distinct from objects that fall on either side of a sliding Lilliputian or Brobdingnagian scale, bodkins are in and of themselves small. At the same time, they constitute enlarged objects that work against the miniaturizing impulse and effect. Bodkins were slightly larger (but not gigantically so) than the ubiquitous needles and pins that populated daily life in the eighteenth century.[[5]](#footnote-5) The bodkin’s larger size rendered it a flexible professional and personal tool, yet reduced its relevance to the finer arts of embroidery.

Depending on their scale and design, bodkins could be used for a range of manufacturing and domestic activities. Some bodkins were weapons, functioning as small daggers or poniards for hunting, but they were also used to pierce cloth, thread tape and ribbons, style and iron hair, and bind books. Descriptions of bodkins veer from perfunctory notes about the tool’s usefulness to concerns about how it could support women’s participation in fashion culture, thus revealing its shifting status between function and ornamentation. Its pointed end meant that it was imagined both as a neutral tool of trade and as a dangerous weapon. The bodkin could be ordinary, violent, and decorative, sometimes moving between these positions in a single scene. It did not ever fall within the category of the cute (or “sweet,” in eighteenth-century parlance, per the *OED*). For Sianne Ngai, the cute commodity conjoins the “pathos of powerlessness” with “surprisingly powerful demands.”[[6]](#footnote-6) While the bodkin was small in size, its aesthetic was neither miniature nor cute; its power resided not in the demands that it placed on its owners, but rather in how its owners might choose to manipulate such diverse functions.

As an object, the bodkin possessed competing abilities to puncture and reassemble. The holes it left behind were more often than not joined back together with threads, tapes, and ribbons that slid through its eye. In this manner, the bodkin distinguished itself from other small objects, such as scissors, that slid between the workshop and the drawing-room. Unlike scissors, bodkins could reunite what had been severed; they were tools of craft for some users and purely decorative for others. Bodkins demonstrate how even small things possess the capacity to articulate imaginative wit and the gendering of objects. In the sections that follow, I examine the bodkin’s uneasy relation to the body, living and dead, as well as to individual owners. I then turn to questions of material composition, examining how the scant surfaces of bodkins and their decorative cases found ways to participate in the period’s aesthetics. In both of these sections, bodkins connect with broader questions of human ownership, indicating that small things create room for individualism and the expression of taste. Finally, I bring these various examinations of the bodkin’s materiality to bear on the most famous literary bodkin of all: Belinda’s hairpin in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1714). Pope mines the bodkin’s doubled ability to ornament and destroy, especially when wielded by a woman. If initially Belinda’s bodkin appears as a decorative object, designed purely to highlight her hair, her actions refocus the reader’s attention on how small things enable feminine violence. The bodkin’s story warns against overlooking the invisible weapons women carry on their persons, a warning first sounded in antiquity.

*Bodkins and Bodies*

The limited scholarship on and historical traces of the bodkin might confirm its ephemeral status within eighteenth-century material culture. But the bodkin’s status as a commonplace object was coupled with its ability to produce corporeal discomfort. In the eighteenth century, the “bod” of bodkin was erroneously understood to derive from “body,” as explained by Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755–56).[[7]](#footnote-7) Johnson provides three meanings for the word, first defining it as a tool—“An instrument with a small blade, used to bore holes”—and illustrating this via a passage from book 2 of Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s* *Arcadia* (1593). In the episode to which Johnson refers, the knight Pyrocles rescues the cunning, inconstant rake Pamphilius, who is being stabbed by nine gentlewomen. The women are using their bodkins to prick Pamphilius, “so as the poor man wept and bled, cried and prayed, while they sported themselves in his pain.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Dido shares the women’s stories of betrayal with Pyrocles, who hopes that “she would in her speech leave off that sharp remembrance of her bodkin” (2:237; lines 19–20). Speech thus holds the capacity to distract Dido from the violence she has inflicted with her small tool. In his *Dictionary*, Johnson interprets the women’s bodkins here as small blades (and bodkins did appear in hunting kits), but the women’s engagement in communal pricking indicates they are using bodkin needles to revenge themselves on the “crafty tyrant” Pamphilius (2:238; line 24).[[9]](#footnote-9) Sidney’s depiction introduces the bodkin’s ability to move from domestic tool to weapon, linking such transformation to women’s violent revenge upon men.

Sidney’s example highlights how women could deploy their bodkins to rewrite the romantic betrayals of men (and ultimately how such practices require the intervention of other men), but the eighteenth-century bodkin performed as a perforating tool in a variety of masculinized professions. For instance, the bodkin was connected to bodily wounds during the preservation of corpses. As Jolene Zigarovich describes, Alexander Read’s *Chirurgorum Comes; or, The Whole Practice of Chirurgery* (1696) recommends using bodkins to prick holes incoressed themselves. Yet the ed to Johnson'meanings and functions. It was an object defined by its metamoed with the same pat in corpses to better absorb embalming fluids: his “method of pricking and soaking the body with alcohol predates intravenous techniques that later revolutionize embalming methods.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The bodkin’s capacity to inflict harm appeared across a variety of genres, including *Hocus Pocus; or, Legerdemain Curiosities* (1706), which describes how a magician stabs their forehead with a retractable bodkin, dabs some blood with a concealed sponge, and then swaps the retractable bodkin for a regular one.[[11]](#footnote-11) As in the *New Arcadia*, these examples centre on the bodkin’s ability to puncture the skin, to inflict harm, and to disorder the integrity of the body.

Bodkins also pricked inanimate materials, as tools of trade in tailoring and scientific experiments.[[12]](#footnote-12) In this 1750 satirical print of a tailor (see Figure 1), for instance, the bodkin features as one of fifteen tools (the tailor’s bodkin was sometimes called an “awl”). The tailor’s sewing needle (object 10 in the key) appears prominently on his left sleeve, apparently pierced by a large yard (object 11). The bodkin, too, is subject to sly sexual association. Instead of serving as a body part, as most of the other tools do in the satirical engraving of the tradesperson as man-machine, the tailor wears his bodkin (object 6) slung across his left shoulder, next to a ball of wax (object 7) and a “cuckold of threads” (object 4). Another name for the prickly burdock, the cuckold catches the threads, keeping them together and ready for the bodkin’s eye.[[13]](#footnote-13) The inclusion of “cuckold” brings the bodkin in line with the print’s sexual humour.

Bodkins also formed part of the collection of items and artefacts that non-tradespeople carried on their persons. Trials from the Old Bailey include examples of theft, in which bodkins feature among collections of ordinary things pinched by thieves. For instance, on 26 May 1680, the court acquitted two women (described as “gypsies” at the trial) of “Robbing of a Countrey Maid of a Silver Bodkin and some other small things.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Silver, gold, ivory, steel, and iron bodkins were stolen from houses, shops, and pockets, alongside other small items such as rings, watches, necklaces, scissors, thimbles, and spoons.[[15]](#footnote-15) On 8 July 1719, Sarah Childish failed to win her case against a male acquaintance (whose name is excised from the printed proceedings) for pickpocketing. Childish accused the man of stealing her fan and snuff-box, but his testimony described more meager possessions: “Turning out her Pocket, there was nothing in it but an Ivory Bodkin, some Farthings and two Crusts of Bread.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The bodkin marks the absence of more substantial artefacts, coin and food, in Childress’s pocket. At other trials, victims testified they could identify their lost bodkins. At the grand larceny trial of Elizabeth Young, Mary Ann Dalziel insisted her “bodkin and steel hook are very remarkable; I swear to them, and to every thing that came out of [Young’s] box.”[[17]](#footnote-17) In these trials, bodkins are large enough—and valuable enough—to be itemized and recorded as stolen goods, standing alongside unnamed “other small things.”

On the stage, such judicial accounts were revisited in dramas including William Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1695), in which Mrs Foresight presents her sister’s gold bodkin to counter her denial of visiting the World’s End tavern: “But look you here now, where did you lose this gold bodkin? Oh, sister, sister!”[[18]](#footnote-18) The scene relies on both sisters being able to identify the bodkin as belonging to Mrs Frail. Despite their small size, bodkins were individualized to their owners and their owners’ immediate family members, even though such minute decoration was likely indiscernible to the playhouse audience. These examples reveal both an intimate and ordinary connection between the bodkin and the body. The bodkin bore different types of corporeal connections that ranged from proximity (in hands and hair, in interior pockets) to the identity of individuals. This connection granted it a role in the routine practice of pocket-picking and in the less ordinary practice of stabbing a male rake. The examples above illustrate how the bodkin’s point was used to puncture and wound, but its eye gave it an equal ability to join materials together, as I will show below.

*Material Bodkins*

Bodkins featured in daily life during the period; they were carried on the person and were instrumental to getting dressed, an event that was often social in practice. The domestic bodkin was used to lace clothing and pull garments together, as well as to style hair. If the bodkin’s pointed end allowed it to puncture flesh and fabric, then its eye made possible the reverse practice of suturing. In his *Dictionary*, Johnson’s second and third definitions place the bodkin more squarely in the territory of self-adornment, fashion, and commodity culture. His second definition highlights its use in dress, as “an instrument to draw a thread or ribbon through a loop.” And his third and final definition positions the bodkin as a hairpin: “An instrument to dress the hair.” Both definitions are supported by lines from *The Rape of the Lock*, to which I turn below. In moving to the bodkin’s material appearance, I will trace the tool’s intersection with period aesthetics, as well as its variable status as both cherished keepsake and luxury good.

Normally plain objects, bodkins possessed some margin for embellishment. One late seventeenth-century silver bodkin (see Figure 2) was engraved with the initials M.E. to specify the ownership of a young Martha Edlin (1660–1725). Edlin embroidered the surfaces of a casket when she was eleven and used it to house special possessions, such as toys, pincushions, a manicure set, her samplers, a beaded jewellery box (also in her own handiwork), a purse, a locket, and her bodkin. It is unlikely Edlin used the larger bodkin to accomplish the refined needlework of the casket’s surfaces, but the engraved initials label it as an item she counted among her precious belongings. The embroidered casket and its contents were passed down over three hundred years through the female line of her family.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In contrast with Edlin’s plain (if personalized) bodkin, other examples display the instrument’s flexible purposes and its aesthetic possibilities. The bodkin point could be either sharp or somewhat blunt, which determined the types of material (fabric, paper, skin) it could prick or pierce. Some bodkins included tiny spoons at their ends, thereby performing double duty as ear scoops or cleaners, illuminating the tool’s additional role in caring for the body.[[20]](#footnote-20) A silver bodkin with ear scoop (see Figure 3) demonstrates the decorative potential of the bodkin’s surface: even such narrow slivers of metal are engraved with geometric shapes and curving lines (echoing botanical figures). This kind of ornamentation would have distinguished one bodkin from another, making lost ones recognizable to their owners, even if unmarked with initials.

Such bodkins often formed part of sewing kits that eighteenth-century women and men had frequent recourse to throughout the day. Before the advent of zippers, getting dressed (something the elite did at least twice a day) rendered people dependent on bodkins and pins, as many garments, such as stays, bodices, and gowns were assembled and adjusted on the body. Bodkins constituted part of the tool-kit to cultivate masculine appearance and care for the male body as well, as indicated by holdings at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. One unadorned steel case holds a variety of small tools inside, such as toothpicks, tweezers, a ruler, and a bodkin.[[21]](#footnote-21) As Mary C. Beaudry points out, “Bodkins were importantly and highly charged personal possessions; they were not all hairdress pins, and not all bodkins were, as a class of objects, equally suited to social display.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Not all decorated bodkins belonged to women, as men frequently owned bodkins. However, the bodkin’s role in dressing and its status as a hairpin made it a generally feminized object.[[23]](#footnote-23) Bodkins used in hairdressing were highly ornamental, as shown by one example from the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century found in the Museum of London.[[24]](#footnote-24) This bodkin has been cast in gold and topped with fourteen small stones in turquoise that evoke the shape of a shepherd’s hook; the bodkin’s shiny materials would have stood out against either dark or light hair. Bodkins like these were valuable and valued. As the story goes about James II’s flight to France in 1688, the exiled ruler took only two pieces of jewellery with him: his coronation ring and a diamond bodkin, a gift from Mary of Modena. He concealed both items in his clothes, and in later retellings of his life, James II manages to preserve the diamond bodkin from discovery by pretending it was a different tool of male grooming (including a toothpick case).[[25]](#footnote-25)

Such decorative and jewelled bodkins sit comfortably within the visual plane of luxurious nécessaires in the period. These small, portable caskets held implements for writing, sewing, or grooming.[[26]](#footnote-26) One German example illustrates how such functional tools were part of the market for luxury goods in this period. This nécessaire, found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, combines the full range of the kit’s tools: an inkwell and sand shaker, pen, pencil, clasp knife, cut-glass seal, snuff spoon, ear spoon, bodkin, tweezers, file, two-leaved ivory tablet, and patch-box.[[27]](#footnote-27) Eighteenth-century nécessaires in Europe and Britain were often embellished with luxurious metalwork, inlaid mother of pearl, semi-precious stones, and woodwork. In the German example, the bodkin is made of gold, in keeping with the other instruments in the set.

The small size of bodkins, and their ordinary functions, did not exclude these tiny objects from the market for luxury goods. The aesthetic of bodkins demonstrates that the small and perfunctory was equally deserving of decoration. This aesthetic defence is visualized most prominently in the lavishly embellished cases created to hold bodkins (a bodkin could be ornamented or plain, but all bodkins could be carried in beautiful cases). Some bodkin cases were carved from ivory (as were hair-combs), while others incorporated tortoiseshell and wood, or were cast from copper, gold, and silver. Bodkins cases were manufactured in Britain and Europe; some French examples of wooden bodkin cases are painted with tiny flora and fauna.[[28]](#footnote-28) But the majority of British eighteenth-century bodkin cases in museum collections were shaped in porcelain paste; they are sometimes called etuis, and were used also to carry toothpicks and wax seals. These objects, commonly known as “toys,” became increasingly popular after the 1750s and were often exchanged as gifts or purchased as souvenirs.[[29]](#footnote-29) Such cases contributed to broader trends in porcelain and metal toys that produced not only fanciful bodkin cases, but also cases for toothpicks, seals, and cane tops for women and men.[[30]](#footnote-30) Despite their highly decorative surfaces, little attention has been paid to bodkin cases in the literature on porcelain design. The cases tend to display typical neoclassical and pastoral designs of the kind found on other ceramic objects. Their pastel colours would have matched the hues of fashionable gowns, as well as the pastoral paintings and floral motifs of domestic interiors. As Heather McPherson has noted about small porcelain figurines, porcelain as a medium constituted a “paradoxical combination of hard glistening carapace and underlying fragility.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Moreover, as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has shown more broadly about the eighteenth-century craze for china, porcelain functioned “as an aesthetic object and as an item for everyday use.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Similar to the bodkins they held, bodkin cases possessed competing material qualities.

Bodkin cases participated in and contributed to the general fashion for classical sculpture, garlands, and friezes in interior décor of the period, sometimes incorporating dense and witty puns in their designs. One late-century example of a Chelsea Porcelain Factory case shows a birdcage on its top, with a bird behind the bars.[[33]](#footnote-33) A pattern of rosettes wraps around the rest of the white case. Birdcages figured as symbols of virginity in French Rococo paintings by François Boucher and Jean-Baptiste Greuze, the open cage indicating a woman’s attempt to free herself of sexual constraints, but not without cost.[[34]](#footnote-34) It is tempting to see the case as nodding also to the small starling in Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768); the starling is passed around the alphabetical lords, like an object, after its return to England. The user need only separate the two parts of the case to free the needle (or woman) inside, a possible reference to the tiny opening through which the imprisoned bird squeezes its head.

Some bodkin cases incorporated the body parts of women (including heads, torsos, and legs).[[35]](#footnote-35) One porcelain example shows the nymph Daphne in mid-metamorphosis (see Figure 4). The bodkin case image catches the nymph at the very moment of her plea to escape Apollo’s pursuit:

This piteous prayer scarce said, her sinews waxèd stark

And wherewithal about her breast did grow a tender bark.

Her hair was turnèd into leaves, her arms in boughs did grow;

Her feet that were erewhile so swift now rooted were as slow.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Unlike the other examples of bodkin cases with clothed women, this one shows the chaste Daphne in the nude, her legs already forming the trunks of the laurel and her head crowned with a lush headdress of leaves. The laurel’s upward progress consumes the nymph’s most private parts. The porcelain Daphne stretches her right arm upwards to hold the leaves, glancing backwards to the right. The nymph’s body is placed in service of the case’s design: her legs are joined into one trunk to form the interior space to hold the bodkin. The seam at her waist (still fleshy pink) allows the two halves of the case to open and close. Daphne’s expression of surprise and her backwards glance are fixed by the glazed surface. She remains doubly immobilized by the case’s aesthetics, fixed at the moment of metamorphosis in rigid, shimmering porcelain. The bodkin case shares an attractive vision of material metamorphosis, but one invoking the corporeal violence that lingers beneath the porcelain’s smooth surface. The case advertises the proximity of the bodkin to the body via Daphne’s pink flesh. It conveys the bodkin’s ability to accrue aesthetic and narrative significance—seemingly stretching beyond its narrow physical borders—a capacity explored by Alexander Pope.

*Literary Bodkins*

The material record demonstrates the bodkin’s varied applications as tool and ornament. The bodkin’s elasticity of function produced a range of bodkin types, some meriting porcelain cases and others rougher usage. In print culture, bookbinders used bodkins to stab-stitch, a quick way to puncture and then sew together book pages.[[37]](#footnote-37) The bodkin also contributed to print culture in more imaginative ways, as Sidney’s weapon-needles remind us. My main concern is how the bodkin’s cultural associations and literary heritage shape its role in *The Rape of the Lock* as both a decorative and dangerous small thing. The poem’s “catalogue of commodities for female consumption,” in Laura Brown’s words, have received extensive scholarly attention.[[38]](#footnote-38) Unlike many of the poem’s familiar objects (especially those on Belinda’s dressing table), the bodkin is never made miniature by the verse and, as such, it sits uneasily alongside other luxury goods. The bodkin also eludes the conditions of the distorted, hybrid things of the cave of spleen in canto 4. Helen Deutsch describes the poem as “tiny” in comparison with the scale of the epics it engages, a satirical process she links to its commercial sensibility: “Pope contains the heroic past by commodifying it.”[[39]](#footnote-39) But the bodkin evades such commodifying forces. Even when it appears as an ornamental hairpin in canto 5, it quickly assumes a pragmatic role in Belinda’s self-defence.

Whereas Belinda’s combs, perfumes, and jewels—and her other “Unumbere’d Treasures”—have received extensive commentary, the same cannot be said for her bodkin, which tends to earn a passing reference in scholarship on the poem.[[40]](#footnote-40) Perhaps its very size has made it appear as negligible or commonplace alongside Belinda’s glittering cross or her laden dressing table. Yet the bodkin’s status as hairpin brings it into close proximity with the titular item of the poem: Belinda’s lock. The bodkin reinforces the poem’s investment in material culture, but also highlights the metamorphic potential of small objects. Similar to Belinda’s tresses which eventually become part of the cosmos, the bodkin slips between states and definitions across the poem. Pope mines the bodkin’s mutable functions and applications delineated above, indicating its potential to combine and recombine forms of violence and ornamentation.

Bodkins appear three times in *The Rape of the Lock* before the detailed account of Belinda’s bodkin-hairpin in canto 5. Pope first references the bodkin in canto 2, when Ariel rallies his fellow sylphs to protect their charges. Over several zeugmas, Ariel warns of punishments that await neglectful sylphs, including being “wedg’d whole Ages in a *Bodkin*’s Eye” (2.128). Johnson employs this line to illustrate his dictionary’s second definition for the term; the line’s meaning and humour hinge on scale, and echo Jesus Christ’s claim about the camel, the king, and the eye of a needle.[[41]](#footnote-41) Sylphs must be small enough to fit through a bodkin’s eye (making them too large for the biblical needle), but substantial enough to become stuck.[[42]](#footnote-42) The bodkin threatens to immobilize the airy sylphs for “whole Ages,” a severe punishment for beings defined by flight. After the cutting of the lock, Pope shows the sylphs wielding their bodkins in response to Thalestris’s call to arms: “Propt on their Bodkin Spears, the Sprights survey / The growing Combat, or assist the Fray” (5.55–56). Bodkins here function as military weapons, evoking their role as small blades and daggers. They constitute essential spears for the sylphs, as opposed to the bodkin-hairpin’s role as luxurious accessory.

At the same time, the sylph bodkin-weapons anticipate Belinda’s own turn to her ornamental bodkin, only thirty lines later in canto 5. Dwight Codr points out that Belinda’s bodkin has been “traditionally read as keeping with the poem’s more general preoccupation with metamorphosis.”[[43]](#footnote-43) In my reading, the bodkin tells a different story about the metamorphic capacity of objects when used by women. Pope delivers the bodkin’s metamorphosis parenthetically over eight lines during the canto 5 battle scene. The bodkin’s tale follows one of the few moments that Belinda speaks in the poem. The parenthetical digression simultaneously diverts focus from Belinda’s words and aligns the bodkin with her individualism in its attention to personal history:

Now meet thy Fate, incens’d Belinda cry’d,

And drew a deadly Bodkin from her Side.

(The same, his ancient Personage to deck,

Her great great Grandsire wore about his Neck

In three Seal-Rings which after, melted down,

Form’d a vast Buckle for his Widow’s Gown:

Her infant Grandame’s Whistle next it grew,

The Bells she gingled, and the Whistle blew;

Then in a Bodkin grac’d her Mother’s Hairs,

Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)

(5.87–96).

In a note to these lines, Pope claims they were composed in imitation of Homer’s description of Agamemnon’s sceptre in book 2 of the *Iliad*. The sceptre was originally forged by Vulcan for Jove, and was subsequently passed among various warriors until Thyestes gifted it to Agamemnon. In the *Iliad*, the sceptre represents sacred inheritance: its owners may change, but the sceptre itself remains a stable material form. In *The Rape of the Lock*, inheritance invokes material metamorphosis: succession keeps the object in the family, but the object changes its physical form as it descends through the generations.

The bodkin’s prior lives suggest that the hairpin Belinda inherits from her mother must have been quite substantial (if still small). Barbara Benedict identifies the bodkin’s familial symbols, arguing that it “constitutes a kind of memento, a relic redolent of Belinda’s mother’s hair, and thus Belinda own’s lineage.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Others have noted how the bodkin’s metamorphosis introduces a change from masculine objects to feminized ones.[[45]](#footnote-45) The bodkin’s impressive lineage is signalled by its prior status as three seal rings. In the eighteenth century, such seals remained twinned with bodkins, as both were stored in nécessaires and etuis. The gender gaps between the seal ring and bodkin prove less substantial than the object’s subsequent iterations as buckle and infant whistle. At the same time this change marks a shift from tradition (of family name) and literacy to less verbal forms of accessories (a shift highlighted most prominently by the infant’s whistle). The bodkin’s materials delineate a movement from writing to the culture of appearances, from formal seals to ornamentation. The passing of the hairpin from mother to daughter distances the bodkin from fashion cycles, stabilizing its status against annual and seasonal changes in trends (which affected accessories more than, for example, textile designs). The bodkin occupies a curious place in relation to the poem’s other fashionable objects, an heirloom suspended in a dizzying world of foreign commodities and hybrid material forms.

What seems most astonishing is the bodkin’s real-time transformation from hairpin to weapon, a metamorphosis not of form but of intention. The bodkin’s history identifies it as a hairpin. This is reinforced by Thalestris’s speech from canto 4, in which she uses the bodkin as evidence of Belinda’s attention to appearances: “Was it for this you took such constant Care / The Bodkin, Comb, and Essence to prepare;” (4.97–98). (Johnson uses these lines to illustrate his third definition of the object.) Yet Belinda draws the bodkin from her side and not from her hair. In the moment of battle, the bodkin appears detached from Belinda’s locks, separated from its ornamental role as accessory. Why is she carrying her mother’s hairpin in her pocket? Or did she remove it from her hair in preparation for revenge? Despite the initial identification of this bodkin as a hairpin, Pope is clearly drawn to the slippage between bodkins and weapons. Lacking the masculine privilege to carry a sword on her person, Belinda marshals the small objects available to her. She is neither the first nor last literary woman to do so.

Pope’s emphasis on the bodkin as instrument of both beauty and violence likely derives from classical associations surrounding Dorian fashions, as detailed by Herodotus in his *Histories*. Pope knew Herodotus (he owned a copy of the *Histories* in translation) and was probably familiar with his version of the Battle of Aegina against the Athenians.[[46]](#footnote-46) Herodotus describes how after the battle, the wives of Athenian soldiers attacked the lone survivor: “They surrounded him, grabbed hold of him, and stabbed him to death with the brooches which fastened their clothes.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Women’s brooches since antiquity had been associated with both self-adornment and death.[[48]](#footnote-48) According to Herodotus, the Athenian women were forced to relinquish the *peplos* for the *chiton* (a draping garment that was sewn together rather than fastened with a *fibula*—a brooch—in the style of the *peplos*). In Herodotus’s telling, the Athenian women lose their ability to follow their own fashions, a punishment that eliminates feminine choice over individual appearance. Similar to the Athenian women, Belinda demonstrates the potential violence of accessories, highlighting the urgency and power made possible by the transformation of hairpin into dagger. If the porcelain bodkin case traps Daphne at mid-metamorphosis, then Pope’s poem demonstrates a countermovement of how women hold the power of metamorphosis over small things. In Belinda’s hands, the bodkin proves far more threatening than the mock-heroic levity of the sylph’s dagger. The Baron recognizes the bodkin’s potential to inflict harm upon his body: “Rather than so, ah let me still survive, / And burn in Cupid's flames—but burn alive” (5.101­–2). Belinda stops short of carrying out her physical threat; yet the baron’s plea registers her authority—perhaps he, too, knows how the story ends for Pamphilius and the lone Athenian soldier.

The Baron’s fearful response to Belinda’s bodkin finds further reinforcement from the engravings by Claude Du Bosc, after illustrations by Louis Du Guernier. Louis Du Guernier created six scenes for *The Rape of the Lock* (a frontispiece and one for each canto) that Pope included in the 1714 edition published by Bernard Lintot.[[49]](#footnote-49) For his illustration to canto 5 (see Figure 5), Du Guernier shows Belinda wielding her bodkin, positioning her and the Baron at the centre of the composition.[[50]](#footnote-50) Belinda stands over the prostrate Baron; her massive left arm grips the Baron’s right shoulder, implying that she has pushed him onto the floor. The Baron’s body appears as a tangle of awkward limbs: his left leg bends at a precarious angle, and his right hand extends upwards to Belinda in a gesture of surprise. This posture of supplication and fear is reinforced by the Baron’s overturned tricorn hat on the floor. The Baron grasps Belinda’s forearm, attempting to halt the bodkin’s point, as Belinda aims directly at his heart. Du Guernier interprets the hairpin as an actual dagger, depicting its post-metamorphic state of small poniard. His engraving grants Belinda physical and hierarchical agency over the Baron, who cowers below her. Their postures convey that Belinda holds the power of life over her foe, a position supported by the bodkin’s enhanced length, which has grown to just over half the size of Belinda’s forearm.[[51]](#footnote-51) Du Guernier amplifies the bodkin’s scale, placing it at the centre of a busy, action-filled scene. The illustration resists the reading of the bodkin as ornamental hairpin and instead shows its ability to assume a physical agency that exceeds its scant material form. Of course, this agency depends on Belinda’s ability to transform the bodkin’s function, repurposing this small thing into threatening weapon. In this action, Belinda assumes the power of the bodkin’s penetrative point to revenge herself against the central “rape” of the poem.

Other literary examples repeat Pope’s depiction of the hairpin’s potential to serve as a dagger. In Penelope Aubin’s *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont* (1723), for instance, the bodkin staves off rape. Aubin heightens the stakes of self-defence by introducing actual sexual assault as opposed to the figurative scissor-rape of Pope’s poem. Her eponymous heroine fends off an attack by a French pirate captain (disguised as her beau): “Taking a sharp Bodkin out of her Hair, [she] stab’d him in the Belly so dangerously, that he fell senseless on the Bed.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Charlotta transforms an ordinary hairpin into a weapon so vicious that the pirate captain lies “almost senseless, and in great danger of death” (22). She pursues the bodkin’s capacity for violence to its end-point—an action that Belinda only threatens—demonstrating successful strategies for women who lack access to weapons. Both poem and novel reframe the bodkin as a necessary tool for women. Belinda and Charlotta respond to pseudo-rape and attempted rape by reversing the penetrative threats of their male attackers, seeking revenge and self-protection via the bodkin’s invasive point.[[53]](#footnote-53) Carried in their hair or pockets, women had ready access to bodkins, in comparison to larger, masculinized weapons, such as swords and pistols. In contrast to Herodotus’s women, who lose authority because of their appearance, Belinda’s and Charlotta’s turns to violence meet no such punishments. Rather, Belinda follows her physical threat with the cry to “*Restore the Lock!*” (5.103), a chant echoed by the women and men around her.

I return to the question at the heart of this essay: Do small things matter? For bodkins, the only answer is yes. The bodkin illuminates the deadly potential of small things; it warns against ignoring the possibilities of the minute. This is, ultimately, a woman’s story. While both women and men used bodkins in the eighteenth century, the literary examples above feminize the bodkin’s mutability, drawing on early modern and classical traditions to do so. The bodkin’s small size enables a slippery set of functions, as it shifts from professional tool to ordinary domestic object and luxury accessory, and then back again. The gigantic may attract attention out of sheer dimension and bulk, but it also lacks the flexibility and portability of the small. The bodkin supported particular—even opposing—functions: its pointed end could pierce, prick, cinch, and gather severed materials back together. This small object supported different uses that, in turn, shaped its cultural meanings. The bodkin’s flexibility rested not in the malleability of its shape or substance, but was enabled by literary imagination. As an object, the bodkin became embroiled in a range of material fictions. Literary depictions insist on the bodkin’s elastic possibilities in human hands, especially those of women. Bodkins, while small, take on a literary life larger than their measure.

Figures

Figure 1. *A Taylor*, George Bickham the Younger, satirical print, 1750, 2001,0930.32, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Figure 2. Bodkin, England, Pierced silver, with initials M. E., Martha Edlin (1660-1725), 1670-80, Length 9 cm, Width 0.4 cm maximum, Depth 0.1 cm, T.453-1990. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 3. Silver bodkin with engraved decoration, seventeenth century, Length 139 mm, A21345. Photograph © Museum of London.

Figure 4. Etui or bodkin case and cover, Porcelain with gold mounts, Chelsea Porcelain Factory, ca. 1755-56, Height 13.3 cm, Diameter 2.2 cm, 414:263/&A-1885. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 5. Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, 4th ed. (London: Bernard Lintott, 1714), canto 5, ill. Louis Du Guernier, engr. Claude Du Bosc. This image is in the public domain. Reproduction courtesy of McMaster University William Ready Research Collections.

1. On giants and largeness in fiction, see Mark McGurl, “Gigantic Realism: The Rise of the Novel and the Comedy of Scale,” *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (2017): 403–43, https://doi.org/10.1086/689661. See also Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 117–19. A draft of this article was presented at the Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture Research Seminar, University of Oxford. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sara Pennell, “Mundane Materiality, or Should Small Things Still Be Forgotten? Material Culture, Micro-Histories and the Problem of Scale,” in *History and Material Culture: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 177. As Pennell points out, James Deetz’s classic study *In Small Things Forgotten* focuses on quite large objects, such as houses, with small signalling the commonplace and familiar, rather than indicating scale (175). Deetz’s title cites a 1658 probate inventory from Plymouth, Massachusetts, in which the appraiser’s last line item reads: “In small things forgotten, eight shillings six-pence.” Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (1977; New York: Doubleday, 1996), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the word’s etymology is unknown, even if the second syllable “kin” refers to something small. *OED Online*, s.v. “bodkin (*n*.),” http://www.oed.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Susan Stewart, *On Longing****:****Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 38. Eighteenth-century scholars have addressed the rich meanings of miniatures, yet the focus remains on objects that scale down more substantial originals. See, for example, Barbara Benedict, “Material Ideas: Things and Collections in *Gulliver’s Travels*,” in *Reading Swift: Papers from The Sixth Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Kirsten Juhas, Hermann J. Real, and Sandra Simon (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013), 461–81; Melinda Alliker Rabb, “Johnson, Lilliput, and Eighteenth-Century Miniature,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 281–98, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2013.0013; and Chi-ming Yang, “Culture in Miniature: Toy Dogs and Object Life,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 25, no. 1 (2012): 139–74, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2012.0042. incoressed themselves. Yet the ed to Johnson'meanings and functions. It was an object defined by its metamoed with the same pat [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. # The bodkin’s invention dates to Roman times. See Mary C. Beaudry,*Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 46.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 64. In the period, a bodkin case was sometimes called an “etui,” a term shortened to “twee.” However, the *OED* cites “sweet” as the source for the more recent meaning of “twee” as cutely precious. *OED Online*, s.v. “twee (*adj*.),” definition 3, http://www.oed.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Samuel Johnson’s etymology in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755–56), s.v. “bodkin,” Eighteenth Century Collections Online. References are to this edition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* disputes Johnson’s etymology. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, ed. Victor Skretkowicz (1590; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), book 2, p. 236, lines 34–35. References are to this edition, cited by book, page, and line numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kathryn DeZur also reads the women’s bodkins as either hairpins or sewing needles (as opposed to Johnson’s description of them as small daggers) in *Gender, Interpretation, and Political Rule in Sidney’s Arcadia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jolene Zigarovich, “Preserved Remains: Embalming Practices in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 33, no. 3 (2009): 81, http://muse.jhu.edu/article/315592. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Hocus Pocus; or, Legerdemain Curiosities* (London, 1706), 8. *Hocus Pocus* was reprinted throughout the century, and the bodkin trick also appears in *The Conjuror’s Repository; or, The Whole Art and Mystery of Magic Displayed* (London, 1795), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In his experiments with electricity, Benjamin Franklin used a tapered bodkin to conduct electrical currents. Trent A. Mitchell, “The Politics of Experiment in the Eighteenth Century: The Pursuit of Audience and the Manipulation of Consensus in the Debate over Lightning Rods,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 3 (1998): 309, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.1998.0020. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *OED Online*, s.v. “cuckold (*n*.),” definition 2, http://www.oed.com. My thanks to Kathleen Lubey for our conversation about this print. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (version 7.2) (*OBP*), May 1680, Trial of Two Women (t16800526-10). https://www.oldbaileyonline.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, *OBP*, February 1687, trial of Jonathan Cooper (t16870223-4); and *OBP*, February 1696, trial of Margaret Poole (t16960227-42), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *OBP*, July 1719, trial of (t17190708-44), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *OBP*, April 1790, trial of Elizabeth Young (t17900424-17), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. William Congreve, *Love for Love* (London, 1695), act 2, scene 9, line 29. On the dialogue’s legal implications, see Lauren Caldwell, “‘Drink up all the Water in the Sea’: Contracting Relationships in Congreve’s *Love for Love* and the *Way of the World*,” *ELH* 82, no. 1 (2015): 190, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2015.0009. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For this unusual provenance and further details about Edlin’s casket, see “Curatorial Notes,” accessed 4 July 2017, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11041/bodkin-unknown/. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See, at the Museum of London, two copper alloy bodkins, seventeenth century: A25593, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/119049.html; and A1772, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/119047.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Etui, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, OBJ0184, accessed 7 March 2018, http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/61287.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Beaudry, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As Beaudry points out, the bodkin case was larger than the needle case, and “until the end of the eighteenth century, the terms were used interchangeably and could refer either to a small case holding only a few needles intended for feminine use or to a case holding a bodkin” (79). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bodkin (hairpin), late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, gold with 14 turquoise stones, Museum of London, A14123, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/119545.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See, for instance, James-Stanier Clarke, *The Life of James II, King of England* (London, 1816), 2:253–54. Versions of this story appeared also in coronation anecdotes and periodicals. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For more on the nécessaire’s relation to luxury and the body, see Alden Cavanaugh, “The Queen’s Nécessaire,” in *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*, ed. Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 119–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “Curatorial Notes,” Nécessaire, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 38.50.1a–r, accessed 8 May 2017, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/198046. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See, for instance, at the Bowes Museum the following examples of two different bodkin cases, France, ca. 1775–1800: X.4882, http://bowes.adlibhosting.com/Details/collect/19042; and X.4888, http://bowes.adlibhosting.com/Details/collect/19056. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Yvonne Hackenbroch, “Chelsea Porcelain: Some Recent Additions to the Irwin Untermyer Collection,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, new series 29, no. 10 (1971): 411; Ariane Fennetaux, “Toying with Novelty: Toys, Consumption, and Novelty in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe (1650–1900)*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart, and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 17–28, https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SEUH-EB.5.106337. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See, for example, the neoclassical toothpick case (which may have been a bodkin case) owned by Horace Walpole, a gift from Diana Beauclerk, who created designs for Josiah Wedgewood: Toothpick Case, London, ca. 1780, enameled gold, “A Present from Lady Diana Beauclerk to Sir Horace Walpole,” V&A Museum, M.7:1, 2-1998, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O12169/bodkin-case-unknown/. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Heather McPherson, “Marketing Celebrity: Porcelain and Theatrical Display,” in *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Etui, or bodkin case and cover, London, ca. 1775, Chelsea Porcelain Factory, V&A Museum 414:268/&A-1885, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O180918/etui-or-bodkin-chelsea-porcelain-factory/. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Kevin Chua, “Dead Birds, or the Miseducation of the Greuze Girl,” in *Performing the “Everyday”: The Culture of Genre in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Alden Cavanaugh (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 75–91. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. I have discussed elsewhere how such cases positioned the female body as ornamental covers for ordinary domestic tools. Chloe Wigston Smith, “Gender and the Material Turn,” in *Women’s Writing 1660–1830: Feminisms and Futures*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (London: Palgrave, 2016), 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeleine Foray (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1:671–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stab-stitching was less costly (paper wrappers could be used in place of sturdier covers), but as Aaron T. Pratt has uncovered, seventeenth-century bookbinders applied stab-stitching not only to cheap playbooks and pamphlets, but to many shorter texts: “Stab-stitching was the everyday way of doing things for books across forms and genres.” Pratt, “Stab-Stitching and the Status of Early English Playbooks as Literature,” *Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 16, no. 3 (2015): 328, http://muse.jhu.edu/article/593493. The technique made the bodkin’s role in bookbinding visible, since the tool left holes in the gutter (bookbinders could position the holes of sewn books much closer into the spine) (Pratt, 315). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 113. On Belinda’s toilette table and other products, see Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 123; and Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132–39. The bodkin is one of many objects that produces, in Stewart Crehan’s interpretation, “a poem in which things, not people, are the heroes.” Crehan, “*The Rape of the Lock* and the Economy of ‘Trivial Things,’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 1 (1997): 47, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.1997.0051. My thanks to Jennie Batchelor for our exchange about objects in *The Rape of the Lock*. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Helen Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), canto 1, line 129. References are to this edition, cited by canto and line numbers. Colin Manlove’s brief mention of bodkins is typical in “Parts and Wholes: Pope and Poetic Structure,” in *Alexander Pope: Essays for the Tercentenary*, ed. Colin Nicholson (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See also *OED Online*, s.v. “bodkin (*n1*.),” definition 4, http://www.oed.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The association between bodkins and wedging produces the idiomatic expression “to ride or sit bodkin,” where one person squeezes in between two people (as in a coach). *OED Online*, s.v. “bodkin (*n1*.),” definition 6, http://www.oed.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Dwight Codr, “‘Hairs less in sight’: Meteors, Sneezes, and the Problem of Meaning in *The Rape of the Lock*,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 45 (2016): 180, https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2016.0007. See also Ralph Cohen’s argument that “this passage functions both as a parody of Homer’s long descriptions of weapons and as a comment on contemporary man’s diminished stature,” in “The Reversal of Gender in *The Rape of the Lock*,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 37, no. 4 (1972): 57, https://doi.org/10.2307/3197366. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Barbara Benedict, “Death and the Object: The Abuse of Things in *The Rape of the Lock*,” in *Anniversary Essays on Alexander Pope’s* “*The Rape of the Lock,”* ed. Donald W. Nichol (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 138. See also Crehan on the bodkin’s inversion of family inheritance: “Belinda’s own genealogy is merely the backdrop for the genealogy of her bodkin” (51). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cohen, for example, pauses on the gendering of its material manifestations (57). Felicity Nussbaum underscores its transformation as “turning the patriarchal legacy into a maternal one.” Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Maynard Mack, “‘Books and the Man’: Pope’s Library,” in *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982), 1:315. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, ed. Carolyn Dewald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5:87. For more on dress pins in ancient Greece and Herodotus’s reading of them, see Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 101–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See also Julie Donovan’s linking of the bodkin with the brooch in “Text and Textile in Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl*,” *Éire-Ireland* 43, nos. 3–4 (2008): 53, https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.0.0020. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. For more on the poem’s illustrations, see Robert Halsband, *“The Rape of the Lock”* *and Its Illustrations, 1714–1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and Allison Muri, “Of Words and Things: Image, Page, Text, and *The Rape of the Lock*,” in *Anniversary Essays*, 167–217. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Later editions of the poem also include the bodkin in their illustrations. See the frontispiece to the 1797 Leipsig edition, *Der Lockenraub* (Halsband, plate 61); and Aubrey Beardsley’s “The Battle of the Beaux and Belles” (1896) (Halsband, plate 54). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Du Guernier does not show the bodkin’s end, but its tip measures 4 cm (starting from Belinda’s extended right thumb); her forearm (measured from elbow to wrist) comes in at 7 cm. These measurements were taken from the 1728 octavo edition of the poem at the Bodleian Library. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Penelope Aubin, *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont* (London, 1723), 21. References are to this edition. Treacherous bodkins appear in many religious pamphlets. Other texts that refer to bodkins used (or potentially used) as daggers include George Etherege, *She Would If She Could* (1668); Edward Howard, *The Women’s Conquest* (1671); Thomas Randolph, *The Muses Looking-Glass* (1706); Colley Cibber, *The Rival Fools* (1709); Richard Steele, *Spectator* no. 508 (1712); and James Sterling, *The Rival Generals* (1722). Bodkins were also associated with the assassination of Julius Caesar: Joseph C. Walker references both *The Rape of the Lock* and Julius Caesar, when he muses: “Whether or not the Irish Ladies, like those of neighbouring nations ... employed their Bodkins as weapons offensive and defensive, neither tradition nor history informs us.” Walker, *An Historical Essay on the Dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish* (Dublin, 1788), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On the imminent threat of rape in the eighteenth century, see Kathleen Lubey, “Sexual Remembrance in *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 29, no. 2 (2016–17): 154, https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.29.2.151. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)