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SPECIAL ISSUE: EXTENDING FAMILIES



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FORUM: RECOUNTING THE FAMILY



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
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Chemistry versus Biology: Dickens, Malthus, and the Familiarized Doppelgänger

MATTHEW INGLEBY



A QUEER VICTORIAN FAMILY CHRISTMAS

AS HOLLY Furneaux demonstrated in her groundbreaking *Queer Dickens* (2010), we are not obliged to remain straightforwardly antithetical to the Victorian family. It is possible instead to secure a different perspective from which to re-envision an institution that has hitherto been cast only in a conservative role, to showcase the plurality of unconventional familial relationships that can be found in nineteenth-century culture, despite the presence of the much-discussed but rarely manifest oppressive ideal. In taking this fresh approach, Furneaux's work has done much to show how Charles Dickens depicted the shifting and permeable actuality of the Victorian family, emphasizing the way his narratives persistently recognize the familial status of networks of chosen relationships, based on elective affinities rather than on biology alone. Indeed, as she shows, Dickens's novels frequently endorse the messy reality of extended families over the limited ideal of normative ones, revealing that the nuclear family unit is usually affectively insufficient, if not harmful. In so doing, Dickens encourages his readers to reconceive their idea of family. Dickens invites us, Furneaux insists, to consider families afresh, to revalue them, and to enquire of what they may consist and of whom they may include.

This article's focus is also Dickens. It shall, however, explore a text not discussed by Furneaux, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), the novelist's last annual Christmas book in the series of five that began with *A Christmas Carol* (1843), the plot of which resembles that of the latter text in many ways. The most famous of the Christmas books does not feature greatly in Furneaux's argument either; when we consider the familial aspects of its plot, which are only rather ambivalently "queer," it is perhaps easy to see why. Ebenezer Scrooge is, promisingly, a bachelor, but the retrospective spectral visions he suffers lead him to regret rather than to celebrate his bachelordom, unlike Pickwick or the other happily unmarried men from Dickens's oeuvre whom Furneaux persuasively assembles. The miser is reinserted into an extended family at the end of the novella, but it is a blood relation (Fred, his nephew) with whom he spends Christmas Day, rather than

with, say, the Cratchits, a counter-factual occasion that would have been a much more radical familial development. Even if the Cratchits' prize turkey has been supplied by a benevolent bachelor adopting the role of patriarch, in *A Christmas Carol*, everyone eats their festive dinners with their own family (by blood or conjugal tie). Thus, a form of biological determinism might be said to have the final word.

Though it is in many ways a sibling to *A Christmas Carol*, *The Haunted Man* is much less orthodox in the way it rethinks the Victorian family, and is indeed highly susceptible to the kinds of queer familial readings Furneaux has initiated, as a brief analysis of the story can show. The Scrooge figure, Redlaw, an unmarried chemistry lecturer, suffers from a severe depression originating in a traumatic social episode from his youth, when his fiancée eloped with his best friend, who was in turn betrothed to Redlaw's sister. (This scenario suggests what we might call "quadrangular desire," in that it includes but also goes further than René Girard's three-way dynamic, involving in addition the complication of the implicit quasi-incestuous mimetic desire of the sister for her brother's object of homoerotic affection [Girard 1–52]). Entering into an apparently Faustian pact with a doppelgänger phantom, who offers to relieve him permanently of the memories that persistently refresh his sorrow, Redlaw agrees to pass on to all with whom he comes into contact this supernatural power of forgetting. Immediately upon the phantom's disappearance, Redlaw meets and feels an inexplicable and mutually undesired connection with an abandoned street child, who displays immunity to the chemist's new "gift," which the two of them subsequently "diffuse" around the city.

Rather than bringing peaceful oblivion to the various families Redlaw encounters, however, the power of forgetting sours the normative consanguineous and heterosexual relationships in which he intervenes: wives turn against husbands, sons against fathers, and so on. Before these relationships deteriorate any further, an antidote materializes in the form of a childless woman, Milly Swidger, whose interaction with the adversely affected characters returns their memories to them and, in turn, restores the affective bonds that had so suddenly been torn asunder. In the final pages, the bachelor Redlaw is reconciled with the Edward Longford, the son of his once-friend and once-fiancee—becoming a benevolent figure by agreeing to support the young man financially so that he can marry and by paying for Edward's father's transportation to the colonies, which is presented as a second chance rather than a punishment, *per se*. The street urchin, meanwhile, is adopted by Milly, and the closing scene imagines a Christmas dinner—which Sally Ledger calls "a Bacchanalian feast of plenty" (Dickens 122)—at which all of the characters commingle, regardless of class distinction, family bonds, or blood ties. The new families that are constructed towards the end of the novella are barely permitted to settle before they are recombined in a single, transfamilial communal entity. The close of the text presents a series of

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familial adjustments that resituate the nuclear family within a constellation of relationships that are based on mutuality and reciprocity rather than on biological determinism. The end of the novel, although it announces itself as a reversal, does not return us to the state of society in which the story began. Rather, it imagines a newly configured social order, metonymized in a utopian meal during which all of the characters of the story sit together, liberated from the spatial and social constraints of society and the nuclear family home. Unlike *A Christmas Carol*, this ending moves quite clearly away from the insufficiencies of the nuclear family, to an endlessly expanding chain of human association.

In its spotlight on science, discussed below, and elaborate plot machinery, for instance, *The Haunted Man* can be seen as a precursor of speculative fiction, a genre in which philosophical ideas are explored through being enacted in an allegorical manner within what only appears to be a realist narrative form. As John Bowen says, this text's allegorical character has led some readers to find it intellectually contrived, over-ambitious, and confusedly didactic, from the time of its first publication onwards (76–77). Dickens's supernatural conceit of a contagious "gift" of memory-oblivion, after all, only just lubricates what is an abrupt and potentially unconvincing shift from the "real" world, grounded in sympathetic memory, to a distorted fantasy world, in which relationships suddenly sour as they come loose from the binding, affective ties of the past. But the structure of Dickens's text looks rather more sophisticated if we recognize its purpose in implying at least as much about the nature of family relationships as it bluntly states about the role of memory. Might not the dissatisfaction that mars the lives of the Tetterbys in the middle section of the novella be, in this light, the eruption of social realism within fantasy rather than the reverse? For example, Mrs. Tetterby announces at one point, while under the influence of the "gift," that she might have had a more attractive husband and fewer children (fantasies that might well have originated not through her supernatural forgetting but from an everyday sense of dissatisfaction). If we accept that the passage from realism to fantasy within the novel may be reversible, the text's relationship to the family appears to be queer indeed.

On the surface, then, the text's social parable suggests that memory is the source of affection within society, but *The Haunted Man* also implies a radical position on the nature of family relationships, mounting a covert attack on the essentializing notion of instinctive blood and conjugal affinity. While the central section of the book enacts a social experiment in which the memories of the participants are partially erased, it also might be said to demonstrate that blood is not thicker than water, entertaining a perception of the contemporary nuclear family as a living hell. Dickens's allegory asserts that the binds that tie us within families are socially mediated rather than fixed in nature and are maintained by active emotional attention, in both the present and the past. Thus *The Haunted Man* demonstrates—in the

manner of a reversible chemical experiment—the fragility of familial relations, the arbitrariness and therefore instability of consanguineous ties, and it hints at the alternative fates their oppressive presence often occludes. While Dickens's story shows that we all need a family, in so doing, it reconfigures that institution, stressing that the strength of familial ties inheres not in their biological ontology but in the social practices that constitute them. The text implicitly repudiates the idea of the nuclear family's sufficiency, showing instead that familial ties are entirely contingent on social relations and cannot supersede them. Blood and sex alone will not suffice to keep a family together. It is no coincidence, meanwhile, that Milly and Redlaw, the two most powerful human agents within the novella, are childless. Throughout this text, Dickens indicates the potentiality of human relations beyond the nuclear family by demonstrating the social impact of those who, whether by choice or by fate, are excluded from natural reproduction.

Mobilizing nostalgia for a time before the industrial revolution and mass-urbanization, when kinship circles extended far beyond the nuclear unit, but also gesturing implicitly to an emancipated society that is yet to come, the text's evident dissatisfaction with the insufficiencies of the familial present might be said to look backwards as well as forwards. Appropriating residual familial models, Dickens revises the Victorian family so as to suggest its utopian potential. In so doing, as we shall explore in the remainder of this article, Dickens opposes the biological determinism that characterizes the norms of the doppelgänger subgenre in which *The Haunted Man* uneasily participates. It also, relatedly, engages critically with the pessimism of Malthusian population theory.

DICKENS'S FAMILIARIZED DOPPELGÄNGER

The doppelgänger motif in fiction that was popularized by E.T.A. Hoffmann conventionally entails a tragic end for the percipient; this is a trajectory adhered to in all of its most famous subsequent incarnations.¹ By contrast, Dickens's appropriation of the trope unusually inscribes a comic conclusion. Rather than imprisonment or suicide, Redlaw is granted, like Scrooge, a second chance; he is resocialized and, moreover, re-familiarized: placed back within a network of quasi-familial relationships that direct his thoughts away from the self-destructive, narcissistic end the appearance of the double conventionally portends. If one ignores the radical revisionism of the "family" into which Redlaw is integrated, this might appear to be a rather conservative move, effecting a retraction from the Gothic into an epistemologically stable and morally decidable mode of domestic writing. The absolute neglect of this text by scholars of the doppelgänger trope must in part be accounted for by their identification of the comic subplot and finale as a disqualification from what has been recognized as a definitively "uncanny" subgenre (Royle 187–202). Though, as Bowen has recently claimed, it is "one of the more remarkable explorations of the theme of the psychic

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double in nineteenth-century fiction" (76), in their discussion of duality in Dickens, Susan K. Gillman and Robert L. Patten neglect the representation of the double in *The Haunted Man* entirely, referencing the text only when comparing its treatment of memory with that of *Little Dorrit* (447). Karl Miller, Paul Coates, John Herdman, and Dmitri Vardoulakis do not mention *The Haunted Man* in their accounts of doppelgänger literature at all.² It would seem that for these critics, a doppelgänger story with a happy ending is no doppelgänger story at all.

But *The Haunted Man* is not an artistic compromise, unsuccessfully grafting a Gothic trope onto a didactic romance about the importance of memory and sympathy with the poor. Rather, Dickens's appropriation of the doppelgänger motif, which retrieves the isolated percipient from the brink of individual tragedy and resituates him within fundamentally reconceived quasi-familial relationships, draws out and reflects upon an anxiety about reproduction in modernity that is implicit in all stories about the double. Dickens's comic conclusion and persistent focus on the family in this text's subplot is no mere distraction from or dilution of the Gothic isolation critics have tended to prize in the doppelgänger narrative. Rather, in its overt interest in children and its problematization of natural reproduction, the text critically interrogates the biological determinism that underlies the doppelgänger motif as it appears in the tales of Hoffmann and his literary successors, finding a social remedy for Redlaw's disorder where other writers would have prescribed only suicide or incarceration. Dickens's doppelgänger, then, is familiarized not in order to render the *unheimlich heimlich* but to suggest alternatives beyond the perpetuation of the nuclear family and death. By familiarizing the doppelgänger, by drawing him into familial social networks, *The Haunted Man* may appear to blunt the double's Gothic edginess, but at the same time, the text enacts a rupture in the nuclear family. The doppelgänger may be familiarized by his connection with family, but the family is thereby made strange.

While Dickens's treatment of the double associates doubling with natural reproduction by embedding it within a story that is elsewhere preoccupied with children, most stories about the doppelgänger tend to occlude the figure of the child, being nonetheless cryptically engaged with family. It is no coincidence that the lion's share of critical material regarding the cultural representation of the doppelgänger stems from the psychoanalytic tradition, which, through a hermeneutics of suspicion, interrogates the role of inter-familial relationships in the construction of individual psychology. Otto Rank, a colleague and friend of Sigmund Freud's, was the first to bring the doppelgänger into the field of psychoanalytical inquiry when he published a study on the figure in 1914. Freud cites this study when he develops the theme in his famous essay "The Uncanny" (1919). Both psychoanalysts recognized in the double the residue of a more primitive age, characterized by unrestrained narcissism, in which the self replicates itself as "insurance" against extinction. Just a few years earlier, Rank had published the first account of

narcissism, which at its simplest libidinal level is the auto-erotic desire of the self for the self. It is not difficult to appreciate the relevance of this concept to understanding the self-reflexive literary phenomenon of the doppelgänger. For the early twentieth century Viennese school of psychoanalysis, the motif of the double became associated in modernity with death, implicitly because of its root relation to unproductive narcissistic auto-eroticism.

A number of cultural studies of the doppelgänger are alert to the narcissistic, and therefore abnormally erotic, energies sublimated in its literary representations. For instance, in his discussion of the double in German literature, Andrew Webber quibbles with Robert Alter's designation of the doppelgänger "host" (or percipient) as sexless, arguing instead that the conventional doppelgänger's bachelor status evinces a pronounced form of "duplicitous" sexuality, which may not be expressed in sexual acts but is always disturbingly present:

It is in this sense that many of the *Doppelgänger* hosts might indeed be called sex-less, even as they are racked by sexuality. The *Doppelgänger* represents, but also appropriates and diverts, subjective desire. The *Doppelgänger* hero recurrently plays host to a sexual impostor. (Webber 13)

Whether or not we want to claim the doppelgänger myth as a site of queer sexual desire, a commensurable interpretation of the percipient's marital status can certainly be found in his childlessness. In foregrounding the idea of absolute replication, narratives about the appearance of exact doubles can be seen to announce an anxiety about the biological process of natural reproduction. The appearance of the double, then, may stand not only for quasi-narcissistic sexual desire but also for a fantasy about alternative reproduction. For Freud, the parent's affection towards his or her children, and therefore also the psychic *raison d'être* for reproductive desire, is itself "a revival and reproduction of their own narcissism, which they have long since abandoned" (Freud 91). If parenting thus involves a "revival" of the narcissism that is a crucial stage of child development but lies dormant in adulthood, and if the child's resemblance to its parents spurs them to nurture and protect it, does not the doppelgänger enact a fantasy of a form of more absolute replication than that which can be attained through biological reproduction? The tragedy that accompanies the appearance of the double in the bulk of its literary representations conservatively transforms the fantasy into a nightmare, however. In most cultural representations of the double, tragic mortality foils any utopia in which the narcissistic percipient is exempt from sexual reproduction. Not so in Dickens. While the doppelgänger tends to condemn its victims to death, Dickens squarely rejects this biological determinism both by letting the childless Redlaw survive and by granting him a new non-biological family.

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highlighting the odd role of an "intermediary" in *The Haunted Man*, Steven Connor puts his finger on one of the most intriguing ways in which the tale departs from the conventions of the doppelgänger mythos: its sociality (5). Here, haunting is contagious, because even though *The Haunted Man* is thoroughly concerned with the processes of the mind, it is very much a social parable and not purely a psychological one. While in most stories about such a phenomenon, the appearance of the double to the percipient initiates a period of ever-greater isolation from other human beings, ending in death or incarceration, in this tale, Dickens immediately confronts Redlaw with social interaction. Indeed, the phantom presents itself immediately to the "haunted man," demanding attention and distracting his thoughts from himself. Indeed, the text orchestrates the appearance of what might be read as a second (quasi-)doppelgänger to Redlaw in the form of the stray child who materializes at the very point the ghost leaves, and who functions as the text's primary site of moral (and implicitly political) anxiety. As Ledger asserts, the child is a confrontational figure within the text, and through him, the reader is "blamed for the toleration of a social environment which permits children to be neglected in this way" ("Christmas" 183). When the phantom disappears, leaving Redlaw looking "confusedly upon his [own] hands and limbs, as if to be assured of his identity" (344), he hears a "shrill cry" that replaces the words of the spectre still echoing in his head, a cry that belongs to a creature the chemist discovers behind a curtain in the lecture theatre in which he teaches:

A bundle of tatters, held together by a hand, in size and form almost an infant's, but, in its greedy, desperate little clutch, a bad old man's. A face rounded and smoothed by some half-dozen years, but pinched and twisted by the experiences of a life. Bright eyes, but not youthful. Naked feet, beautiful in their childish delicacy,—ugly in the blood and dirt that cracked upon them. A baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who, within, would live and perish a mere beast. (345)

A monster from the Malthusian imaginary, the child strikes fear into Redlaw's bosom not because of its otherness to him but because of its similitude. When the "savage" accompanies Redlaw in his distribution of the "gift," Redlaw repeatedly glances at its face and flinches at the emotional (if not physiognomic) resemblance to himself, a similitude that is surely meant to echo the earlier, more exact "appalling copy" (339) of the doppelgänger.³ In announcing a "terrible companionship" (387) between Redlaw and the abandoned child, Dickens appropriates the doppelgänger motif of self-reflection and moves beyond its narcissism by forcing the percipient to acknowledge his kinship not with one who looks exactly like him but with one who is repugnant and at first glance entirely other: the Malthusian

surplus child. Through his connection to the child, the doppelgänger of Dickens's tale unusually proves to be not so much an agent of death as a prophet, a vessel for moral enlightenment, like the ghosts of past, present, and future in *A Christmas Carol*.

THE MALTHUSIAN UNCANNY

Malthus, who has recently begun to attract a great deal of critical attention in the field of nineteenth-century literary studies, has long been recognized by critics as a key bogeyman within Dickens's Christmas books, works which are held to oppose outright a Malthusian attitude to the children of the poor, exposing it as nothing more than a rationalization of heartlessness.⁴ Classically, the unredeemed Scrooge's chilling reference to the "surplus population" outs him as a reader of the second edition of the *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1803). As Ledger implies in her summative interpretation of the Christmas books, pointing to the similarities between *A Christmas Carol* and the lesser-known *The Haunted Man*, the latter in many ways echoes the former's anti-Malthusian sentiment ("Christmas" 182). At the final moment before the reversal of Redlaw's nightmarish "gift," after all, the Tetterbys seem to have converted to Malthusianism, announcing that "Poor people . . . ought not to have children at all. They give us no pleasure" (394). This confession appears, symbolically, to be the threshold of familial dissociation, the point at which the parents themselves have internalized the political economist's message. Their deliverance from the poison of the "gift" is, most fundamentally, the reversal of a calamitous Malthusian drift in their thinking.

Though in a very broad sense, this summary of the novella's underlying anti-Malthusianism holds, it does not account for the more ambiguous role of overpopulation anxiety in *The Haunted Man*. As we shall explore, this 1848 Christmas book engages with the Malthusian dilemma far less dismissively than has yet been appreciated, and indeed, appears to concede much to the economist, though Dickens finally imagines an alternative solution to the "problem" of the overproduction of children. While the ending of Dickens's novella, contra-Malthus, imagines social (and technological) escape routes from the destructive cycle of familial expansion and implosion the economist prophesizes, *The Haunted Man* is nonetheless suffused with Malthusian anxiety. The novel begins, after all, with Malthusian geographical commentary, dwelling upon the baldest proof of population expansion, the sprawl of the physical city itself, which surrounds the vault-like college in which Redlaw lives. Built initially in open space, the place is now "squeezed in on every side by the over-growing of the great city" (326), while inside, the shadows "released" by twilight gather "like mustering swarms of ghosts," taking "full possession of unoccupied apartments" (328) in a spectral shadow overpopulation.

The Haunted Man is more pervasively haunted by the ghost of Malthus through its figuration of the ever-expanding Tetterby family. While, on the surface the

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depiction of a large, Cratchit-like family acts as a comic counterweight to the story of Redlaw's misery, Dickens's treatment of the Tetterbys also persistently evinces the physical and emotional costs that attend reproductive excess. As is so often the case in Dickens's texts, the sentimental or comic is shadowed by the Gothic or tragic in the texture of the writing as much as in the plot. When, for instance, Mr. Tetterby "seem[s] to dislike" his wife's "figure of speech," after she casually invokes the idea of "a child unborn" (355-56), we can read this as a kind of homage of sensitivity paid to those who have lost a child (like Milly Swidger), but we can also discern an anxiety that she may be pregnant again, and the repetitive and seemingly endless expansion of his family horrifies the over-burdened father. Indeed, even the present children are figured as surplus to requirements, as the father's indictment of their raucous behaviour suggests:

"Isn't it enough that your dear mother has provided you with that sweet sister?" indicating Moloch; "isn't it enough that you were seven boys before without a ray of gal, and that your dear mother went through what she *did* go through, on purpose that you might all of you have a little sister, but must you so behave yourself as to make my head swim?" (351)

Surely, the "seven boys" whose raucousness so plagues their mother when she returns from shopping may themselves have been what Mrs. Tetterby "went through" in order to produce what she really wanted: a girl. The boys, Dickens suggests, may never have been objects of parental desire, unlike their sister, Sally, but were only a means to an end.

Sally's nickname is, tellingly, "Moloch," which recalls the appellation of both a Miltonic demon and a bloodthirsty biblical king who becomes associated in the popular imagination with the sacrifice of infants (D. Miller 140-45). The onomastic analogy here is subversively Malthusian, a complication critics have failed to address sufficiently. When Josephine McDonagh briefly touches on the way this text participates in a cultural discourse about overpopulation, she notices but does not account for the contrariness of the name-play, remarking in a footnote that Dickens "curiously inverts the usual motif in radical literature of the time, that of the sacrifice of infants to the Moloch of industry or capital, making the baby itself Moloch" (McDonagh, "Murder in George Eliot" 230). The mock equation of a child with a child killer would be a curious inversion indeed for a straightforwardly anti-Malthusian text that was entirely dismissive of the overpopulation dilemma, as the implication of its rhetoric is surely that the child is, in some sense, a perpetrator of social crime through unproductive over-consumption—symbolized in the text by the child's eternal teething, which has been described as a kind of "dental haunting" (Connor 1). This final child, the first "ray of gal" to grace her parents' previously ungilded and over-burdened life, might, after all, be seen as a kind of ruthless monarch to the seemingly surplus boys whom she

joins. One of her brothers, her chief baby-sitter, Johnny, though devoted like a cult-member to his task, does appear to be being sacrificed on the "insatiate altar" of his little sister, as he is forced to attend to her constantly, like a slave:

Wherever childhood congregated to play, there was little Moloch making Johnny fag and toil. Wherever Johnny desired to stay, little Moloch became fractious, and would not remain. Whenever Johnny wanted to go out, Moloch was asleep, and must be watched. Whenever Johnny wanted to stay at home, Moloch was awake, and must be taken out. (349)

Though the logic of his narrative finally rejects the negativity invested in the figure of the child by overpopulation theory, Dickens is in the characterization of Moloch nonetheless making a dark Malthusian joke. Without endorsing the Puritanical pessimism of Malthus's political economy, Dickens acknowledges that in over-large families, the extra child becomes a figure of doom, acting like a slave-driver to the rest of the family, demanding constant attention from the other children in the house, and indeed, driving out to work brothers and sisters that are not a great deal older than they are.⁵ At one point, Mrs. Tetterby chides her son Johnny, warning him that he might drop his little sister on her head and thus kill her: "Johnny, don't look at me, but look at her, or she'll fall out of your lap and be killed, and then you'll die in agonies of a broken heart, and serve you right" (356). Mrs. Tetterby's melodramatic injunction, though comic in its ostensible function, nonetheless moots a fantasy of contagious infant mortality well before the "gift" leads her and her husband to the brink of Malthusianism. Far from the Malthusian dilemma being anterior or Other to the imaginative world of the ever-extending nuclear family, it lies just beneath the surface of the everyday Tetterby family scene. Malthus is not introduced supernaturally into the family circle through the artificial diffusion of the "gift" of Redlaw; rather, he has been there all along.

REDLAW AND THE LAW OF NATURE

Dickens proposes two solutions to the Malthusian dilemma, one being an explicit social solution, and the other, an implicit technological one. If the figure of Malthus can be said to haunt the text through the implicit rejection experienced by the abandoned child-monster, the seven Tetterby non-girls, and Philip Swidger, superfluous because he is eighty-seven years old, Dickens counters the economist's ideas most strongly by demonstrating that a number of characters have more affection to give than their nuclear family alone can absorb. Milly, for instance, acknowledges palpable absences in her emotional life and admits to an excess of affection to bestow as a result of mourning the "little dead child that [she] had built such hopes upon, and that never breathed the breath of life" (406). When she adopts the abandoned child at the end of the novella, the novel endorses a redistributive economics of family

relations, in which the affective deficit of the apparently surplus child can be addressed through the social technology of surrogacy, or non-biological parenting, which itself cancels out the affective surplus of the childless would-be parent. The surplus of unnecessary children is thus revealed to be an illusion, the product of an incomplete perspective, as it can be easily neutralized by the surplus of affection that overflows from those who have an insufficiently small family or none at all. It is no coincidence that when the phantom doppelgänger delivers to Redlaw his final prophetic message, that "open and unpunished murder" (387) in the city's streets would be more tolerable than the neglect of the children, he repeatedly invokes the image of the "barren wilderness." For Dickens, the prospect of an empty world is far more terrifying than one characterized by overpopulation, and the barrenness of being without affective obligations (be they parental or, more broadly, social) is at least as much a cause for concern as the abstract possibility of a planet full of Tetterbys.

While Milly's adoption of the street urchin does allow her to bypass biological maternity, it might be argued that when she becomes his surrogate mother, Dickens affirms less a reconfiguration of family relations than a normative representation of the neediness and incompleteness of childless women. But this view implicitly renders Milly's childlessness more socially debilitating than the narrative itself allows and plays down the enormous power for good that Milly wields over all the other characters. In that unnecessarily suspicious reading, moreover, the motivation of Milly's adoption of the stray child becomes more relevant than the action of her acceptance of the boy, which seems to me to reverse the relevant hierarchy of critical interest. By contrast, to my mind, Dickens chooses not to emphasize the adoption as a kind of imperfect substitution of the biologically for the socially parented child but instead celebrates the insertion of a surplus child into a childless family as an affective exchange that magics away what seemed an insoluble problem in an instant.

While Milly's adoption of the abandoned child is radical, more so is Redlaw's decision to take responsibility for the welfare of Edmund Longford, the child of his treacherous once-friend and the woman who jilted him. In paying the "very little money" required for the latter's transportation and "remov[ing] him to some distant place, where he might live and do no wrong, and make such atonement as is left within his power for the wrong he has done" (404), the childless Redlaw actively appropriates for himself a son whose own blood relations have disappointed him. In this interventionist act of surrogacy, the text goes beyond the redistributive affective economics of Milly's adoption of an apparently relation-less child and suggests that biological familial relations can in some cases be superseded by stronger non-biological ones. Edmund's biological father is removed to make way for a new non-biological paternal figure, forging in the process a relationship that will be as mutually beneficial as the previous one was mutually unsatisfying.

In the adoptions that occur towards the end of the novella, Dickens gestures towards a society in which sympathy has been liberated from its confines within blood and sexual relationships, a gesture that is concretized in the utopian Christmas dinner with which the text concludes. The scene draws liberally on nostalgia for a pre-urbanized, pre-industrialized era before the putative ascendancy of the nuclear unit, rendering Malthusian anxieties completely absent. Here, previously separated individuals and families are mingled and merged in a communal, transfamilial festive site in which the surplus population becomes reconceptualized as a boon. An excess of people is treated as cause for unmitigated celebration, the only worry about counting the numbers being that they might seem to the reader too large to be believed: "There were so many Swiggers there, grown up and with children, that an attempt to state them in round numbers might engender doubts, in the distrustful, of the veracity of this history" (407). Gathering together so many extras, to whom we have not been introduced in the story, extends the family so as to effect its metamorphosis in both quantitative and qualitative terms. No longer exclusively centred upon the core relationships of the nuclear family, the attention of these guests can be channelled for perhaps the first time towards the other friends or strangers who are there convened. Appropriating the Malthusian position before repudiating it, Dickens's text imaginatively attends to anxieties about overpopulation by demonstrating that the "problem of the surplus" is no problem at all, but is rather an invitation to reinvent the family as a more flexible and capacious institution than Malthus envisages.

Dickens's "social" solution to Malthus's dilemma of overpopulation—the sharing or redistribution of affective labour and duties of care—is more or less figured explicitly in the text, but another more latent rebuttal is concealed in the symbolic associations of Redlaw's career as a chemist. While we can easily see the social amelioration of the end of the Dickens novella as a challenge to the pessimistic biological determinism of Malthus's model, the text's more blatant concern with a different scientific discipline, chemistry, also engages less obviously with the "problem" of overpopulation. Redlaw's specialism as a chemist has been insufficiently addressed by critics, a striking critical blind spot given the prominence of the figure of the chemist or alchemist in other doppelgänger narratives, notably Hoffmann's "The Sandman" and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*.⁶ Bowen's recent interpretation of Redlaw's theories of material conservation as an analogy for theories of consciousness within nineteenth-century psychology is a partial exception in this regard (Bowen 79–81). But rather than seeing the chemist's scientific vocation as a metaphor for something else, like Bowen, might we not contextualize it more literally by situating Redlaw's activities in the laboratory within the field of 1840s chemistry itself?

The 1840s was a decade in which chemistry was continually in the public eye and at the centre of debates about overpopulation. This is in large part

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due to the practical strides being accomplished in agricultural science, which challenged pessimistic predictions of resource finitude by promising vastly increased crop yields. The discoveries of the most famous chemist of his time, Justus Von Liebig, about the oxygen-carbon cycle and the impact of the mineral content of soil on plant growth were well publicized and discussed. In paving the way for the development of artificial fertilizers, which ameliorated food scarcity and therefore prevented population depletion, the scientific work of Liebig countered Malthusian logic at least as effectively as the writings of a number of more obviously anti-Malthusian figures in the public sphere. Indeed, Liebig was himself very much aware of the political-economic role of his endeavours in the field of chemistry. According to Wolfgang Khron and Wolf Schäfer, Liebig's turn towards agricultural chemistry was explicitly motivated by a desire to disprove the necessity of the destructive "moral hazard" of Malthus's model (27–52). It is no surprise, in light of this shared scepticism about the population theorist's deterministic pessimism, that Dickens and Liebig were aware of each other and admired each other's work. A note Dickens sent to Doctor Sheridan Muspratt on 24 August 1851 reveals that he admired the chemist and desired to know him: "I wish I could be there to meet Baron Liebig, one of the greatest men in Europe, and in whom I am (as who is not?) most strongly interested" (*Letters* 471).

Though Liebig, as the leader of progressive science at the time, was in Dickens's eyes one of the "greatest men in Europe," he was not the only chemist of note at the time, and indeed, Britain was in the 1840s a centre of innovation at least as significant as Germany. As Folke Dovring says, "Around 1840 ... Boussingault in France, von Liebig in Germany, and [John Bennet] Lawes in England almost simultaneously found formulas for chemical manures that started the modern fertilizer industry" (Dovring 654). Lawes, who combined scientific comprehension with an entrepreneurial mind, opened a fertilizer factory in 1843 on Deptford Creek, London, where the waste products of nearby sugar refineries could be utilized as a cheap source of phosphate, a key ingredient in the nutrient cycles (Thompson). A philanthropist and proponent of social reform, Lawes provided model villages for his workers, and it was for this rather than for his chemistry that Dickens wrote a paean to the man in *All the Year Round* entitled "The Poor Man and His Beer" (1859), which praised the chemist for his pragmatic and generous attitude toward working-class drinking. It seems reasonable to extrapolate, following Louise Henson, that Dickens saw chemists such as Lawes and Liebig as part of a liberal-progressive alliance in which he himself participated, recognizing that chemistry was engaged in resisting social theories that left no role for social (and by extension, technological) agency in the cause of human amelioration (Henson 4).

Returning to *The Haunted Man* with this in mind, we can see that Dickens might be said to undermine the Malthusian hypothesis not only with a social restructuring but also with the hint of an additional technological

solution to the problem of overpopulation. When his doppelgänger lambasts Redlaw as the "growth of man's presumption" (388), thus criticizing the myopia of his devotion to science, it is significant that the scientist does not renounce his profession, drowning his books like Prospero. Indeed, the status of the surrogate son, himself also a student of chemistry, confirms that science is part of the promising new world ushered in by the comic end of the novella rather than a negative aspect of Redlaw's past. The Christmas dinner, in the old college hall, moreover, seems to emphasize the potential sociality of the academic world, associating it with the communal pursuit of human happiness rather than the isolated narcissism of abstract intellectual endeavour. Rather than punishing Redlaw for his lone and self-aggrandizing alchemical project, as Stevenson might be said to do in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dickens instead leaves open the possibility that the chemist's redemption will include the better use of his scientific knowledge. The redeemed, re-familiarized Redlaw may indeed become something like his philanthropic near-namesake, Lawes, dedicating himself to the most socially engaged (and publically recognized) goal in chemistry at the time: discovering how to increase crop yields in order to prove Malthus's gloomy predictions wrong.

From the heavy enormity of Moloch to the diminutive size of Mr. Tetterby, from Milly's childlessness to Mrs. Tetterby's over-fecundity, biology is throughout the text covertly associated with restrictive determinism. Chemistry is by contrast associated with radical changeability and reversibility. When we are first introduced to Redlaw, Dickens revels in the chemist's mastery over the elements he mixes and separates at will in his isolated study:

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory,—for he was, as the world knew, far and wide, a learned man in chemistry, and a teacher on whose lips and hands a crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily,—who that had seen him there, upon a winter night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and instruments and books; the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour;—who that had seen him then, his work done, and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too? (325–26)

Countering the determinism of biology with the agency of the chemist, Dickens might be seen to draw from the latter discipline a confidence about the power to combine and recombine material elements that he then deploys

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in reimagining the family. Like atoms, he suggests, human beings are not deterministically confined within the context in which we find them but can be mobilized and redistributed, to the mutual benefit of all. Unsatisfactory biological relationships, such as that of the Longford father and son, can be superseded by newly forged non-biological ones in a form of social alchemy. Drawing out the scientific in the metaphor of "elective affinities," which Goethe first used to describe "kindred of choice," and which Furneaux has successfully revived to describe Dickens's other queer families, *The Haunted Man* deserves to be recognized as a sustained, imaginative response to the biological determinism that is both the implicit foundation of Malthusian theory and the implicit anxiety that lies behind the doppelgänger trope.

Notes

- 1 Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1817), which features strongly in most accounts of the doppelgänger, prescribes suicide for Nathaniel, the figure who perceives the identity of the double characters, Coppelius and Coppola. Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1839) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) both end in murder-cum-suicides, while Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* (1846) closes in mental collapse, and Nabokov's *Despair* (1936) finishes as the main character is about to be captured by the police, after a disastrous murderous escapade.
- 2 In their critical accounts of the double in literature, John Herdman and Paul Coates both suggest that the general craze for duality was most pronounced both during the Romantic period, at the beginning of the 1800s, and then again during the *fin de siècle*, but that it encountered a lull in the middle of the nineteenth century.
- 3 "Three times the Chemist glanced down at his face, and shuddered as it forced upon him one reflection At each of these three times, he saw with horror that, in spite of the vast intellectual distance between them, and their being unlike each other in all physical respects, the expression on the boy's face was the expression of his own . . . from that, to the child, close to him, cowering and trembling with the cold, and limping on one little foot, while he coiled the other round his leg to warm it, yet staring at all these things with that frightful likeness of expression so apparent in his face, that Redlaw started from him." (373-74) See John Chad (79-92) for a discussion of Dickens's ambivalent approach to family likeness and his emphasis on similitude of facial expression rather than facial feature.
- 4 Malthus has become a figure of increasing importance to scholars of nineteenth-century literature. Karen O'Brien, for instance, has analysed Jane Austen's treatment of widows and spinsters in terms of Malthusian surplus, and Thomas Pfau has resituated Wordsworth's *The Prelude* similarly, while Josephine McDonagh has contextualized the anxiety that surrounds the figure of the Victorian child in terms of economically mediated debates about overpopulation.
- 5 Johnny is not the only one who is being sacrificed on Moloch's altar. The oldest boy, Master Adolphus, has also been sent out to work too young, as his tendency to carry a "prismatic comforter" around him displays. The depiction of Moloch's role in inviting the quasi-parental sacrifice of her siblings' childhoods is a particularly extreme version of something Dickens returns to time and again in his fiction, from the uncomplaining Amy's motherliness to her family in *Little Dorrit* to the more vocal and resistant Caddy Jellyby in *Bleak House*.

- 6 In Hoffmann's tale, the double character, Coppelius/Coppola is an alchemist, while in Stevenson's novel, Jekyll finds a potion that enables him to split in two, that is conducted in a laboratory not unlike the spaces available to Redlaw in the college in which he resides.

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