**"A very Moloch of a baby": Left to be Minded in Dickens**

The Victorian baby, so ubiquitous in nineteenth-century popular culture and so notoriously sentimentalised and commodified, is a curiously little studied topic. It tends to get subsumed in overviews of Victorian child cults and children's literature. Or we find it reduced to a footnote or a brief aside in analyses of maternity. Ten years ago, Sally Shuttleworth urged in a discussion of "Victorian Childhood" that it was high "time to add age, and more specifically childhood, to the triumvirate of class, gender and race."[1] Meanwhile, Childhood Studies approaches have reinvestigated the Victorians' cultural preoccupation with the child, including its role in art and literature, yet most studies focus on older children.[2] Revisionist work on maternity has likewise constructively questioned the realities of the so-called separate spheres, successfully upending a welter of received notions about the ideologies and practices of domesticity.[3] Yet scant attention has been accorded to the actual object of mothering: the infant itself. The focus instead seems exclusively on the mother, reducing the infant to a mere accessory in her experience.[4] Although two vital developments in Victorian Studies – the influence of Childhood Studies and the revaluation of nineteenth-century discourses on maternity – are thus playing together to engender new critical interest in representations of infancy, there has hitherto been no sustained study of the Victorian baby. In this essay, I shall explore how Charles Dickens's highly influential representations of babies – and in particular his comical babies – play with and thereby transform readers' expectations of what babyhood should look like in nineteenth-century culture. His creative use of clichés makes us rethink the still prevalent association of the Victorian baby with idealised domestic bliss and an often sappy sentimentality.

Nineteenth-century representations of infancy were much more versatile and self-reflexive than standard images – largely immortalised by Pears' Soap advertisements and Christmas cards featuring royal infants – might at first sight suggest.[5] Exemplifying the ramifications of the baby's commodification in such visual media, the idealised chubby babies of patent infant food commercials, for example, also featured in rivalling childrearing manuals at an increasingly competitive market for advice books.[6] Adorable babies sold well, but increasingly, critical voices spoke up against this commodification. Considering his contribution both to the iconography surrounding infancy in Victorian culture and to its critical, often comical exposure, Dickens provides an insightful starting-point for a much-needed revaluation of the Victorians' images of babyhood. Creating memorable literary babies, Dickens importantly influenced contemporary conceptualisations of infancy and what Anthony Trollope wryly termed "baby-worship."[7] Dickens's fictional babies, I argue, offer an important corrective to how we think the Victorians tended to imagine babyhood.

As Dickens scholars have amply pointed out, "[n]o Victorian novelist was more invested than Dickens in the cult of childhood,"[8] "[n]o other novelist of the nineteenth century rivals Dickens in shaping Victorian and modern ideas about childhood,"[9] while Dickens also "more than any other Victorian writer, relished the deconstruction of this very Victorian polarity of child/adult."[10] Marah

Gubar has drawn attention to Dickens's strategic focus on children's "incompetence" – "their pathetic unfitness for the demands being made on them" and "their inability to survive in an uncaring, materialistic world" – in order to generate public criticism,[11] and Rosemarie Bodenheimer has further explored the ambiguity of Dickens's "knowing" children, who might even have "to play at being a child" to hide what they know in a society that insists on their innocence.[12] Describing his experience of reading *David Copperfield* (1850), George Orwell famously asserted in 1940 that "[n]o one, at any rate no English writer, has written better about childhood than Dickens ... no novelist has shown the same power of entering into the child's point of view."[13] But if we enter the minds of his child protagonists, reliving our own childhood, while appreciating the retrospect's significance in Dickens's narrative strategies (so that we get young David Copperfield's experience presented both through the child's immediate feelings and through the adult narrator's memories), at first sight many of Dickens's fictional infants seem to be stock figures. These literary babies, however, are specific Dickensian creations that tackle and often help to criticise the easy commodification of baby-worship.

Dickens's representation of babies significantly differs from that of his older child protagonists.[14] These fictional infants are admittedly like his wondering children in that they embody a new sensibility and a new interest in childhood. Evoking Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" before tracing Dickens's "child-as-exemplum motif" further to "bourgeois, Protestant, and New Testament" influences, Linda Lewis has gone so far as to suggest that Dickens's "infants arrive trailing clouds of glory."[15] But this does not do justice to his fascinatingly complex invocation of Victorian babyhood. It certainly fails to explain his comical, even grotesque babies. Dickens's most intriguing and individualised depictions of infants combine an often bizarrely comical element with both social criticism and a self-reflexive, tongue-in-cheek tribute to the baby's sentimentalisation in popular culture. At the same time, he continued to create suffering infants *a la* the brickmakers' babies in *Bleak House* (1853). In the wake of a large-scale scandal, Dickens also wrote angry articles on baby-farms and repeatedly exposed these controversial institutions in his fiction, while he remained ambiguous in his representation of the little understood working-class practices of "childminding." A close look at some of Dickens's fictional babies, therefore, simultaneously draws attention to an aspect of his work that has hitherto been largely overlooked and reveals how he deploys unexpected images of Victorian babyhood to dramatise conflicting attitudes towards childminding practices, in particular among the urban poor. As he explores these seldom discussed practices, he not only makes a radical point about working-class domesticity, but he also becomes increasingly more critical in his evocation of middle-class "rescue" and bourgeois adoption fantasies. Dickens's changing representation of different forms of baby-minding provides a peculiarly revealing angle to Victorian images of infancy.

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Dickens indisputably helped to create and popularise some of the most memorable and influential images of the Victorian baby. One might say he was instrumental in establishing this figure as a central aspect of the age's iconography, even as he was always keenly aware and vehemently critical of its commodification. At times, in fact, he played a double game: Little Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) is "a charming orphan" with a "crisply curling auburn head and a bluff countenance," but the elderly couple who wants to adopt him faces an orphan market in which "[t]he suddenness of an orphan's rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange," and in which illness is concealed as a source of trouble and expense that might be "standing in Our Johnny's light."[16] Yet while the Boffins' "failure to obtain the infant they desire significantly complicates the very commodification of the victimized child on which *Our Mutual Friend* capitalizes,"[17] this failure also contains a much more specific critique of adoption as a middle-class fantasy of "rescue": the charitable act of taking up a "waif" and supposedly guaranteeing his or her happiness by providing a bourgeois environment and education as both a social solution and a narrative resolution. Mrs Boffin ultimately questions her initial motivation to seek "a pretty child, and a child quite to [her] liking," deciding that instead of being "too bent upon pleasing [her]self," she will "do good ... for its own sake."[18] As Dickens strove to expose the realities of childrearing both among the poor and in the seemingly sheltered nurseries of the middle classes, he simultaneously criticised the exploitation of sentimentalised young children in popular culture and frequently poked fun at it. Dickens's most comical babies, we shall see, eschew clichés and their commodification. When Johnny is introduced "upside down and purple in the countenance,"[19] having tumbled over a makeshift child safety barrier, or when his namesake in *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848) lugs around another infant that is described as "a very Moloch of a baby,"[20] they form grotesque images of Victorian babyhood. They are distinctly Dickensian and at the same time startling within the expected paradigms of Victorian ideologies of domesticity and cults of the child.

Dickens's comical portrayal of infancy ranges from tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the perpetually nursing Micawber twins – "[o]ne of them ... always taking refreshment"[21] – and the baby Nicholas Nickleby "in his hurry … carr[ies] upside down" in a satirical rescue scene, when the little girl watching it during the Kenwigs' party sets her hair on fire,[22] to the biting exposure of such fake babies as Mrs Skewton in her second childhood: "crawl[ing] backward" into "imbecility," airing a travelling robe that was "embroidered and braided like an old baby's."[23] The famous opening paragraphs of *Oliver Twist* (1838) already capture the mix of sentiment-as-social-critique and baby-myth-dispelling that Dickens further develops throughout his writing. Newborn Oliver "breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish," yet the first and last kiss his dying mother imprints on his forehead establishes an almost preternatural connection. The baby's subsequent absorption by the workhouse system simultaneously criticises social inequality and signposts Dickens's reworking of the traditional

foundling romance: as "an excellent example of the power of dress," the naked baby "might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar," but "enveloped in the old calico robes … he was badged and ticketed."[24] Sentiment is here subordinated to social criticism, while the sneezing and screaming infant undercuts any straightforward idealisation of the foundling.[25]

Throughout Dickens's fiction, the potentially most sentimental moments are often disrupted by realist representations, curiously mixed with a sarcasm that defies Victorian baby-worship. Even Paul Dombey (arguably one of Dickens's most iconic child protagonists) is no idealised newborn. The opening of *Dombey and Son* (1848) features him as "very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotty in his general effect, as yet."[26] Subsequently, he screams during his christening, which is scripted as an unhealthy exercise and depicted as a markedly ludicrous scene:

> Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story; 'a tall figure all in white;' at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.[27]

Baby-worship, in this novel, is limited to those only pretending to have a claim to the heir. Mr Dombey's sister, the absurdly named Mrs Chick, schemes to get her friend Miss Tox the open position of little Dombey's stepmother. Their attempts to participate in the infant's hands-on care are calculative, intrusive, and therefore also slightly ridiculous:

> Miss Tox was often in the habit of assuring Mrs. Chick, that 'nothing could exceed her interest in all connected with the development of that sweet child;' .... She would preside over the innocent repasts of the young heir, with ineffable satisfaction; almost with an air of joint proprietorship with Richards [the hired nurse] in the entertainment.[28]

They are "two interlopers," and in describing how they "saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper and bed," Dickens suggests that their attempted involvement is sheer pretence: after all, they only "see" the baby being taken care of.[29] The term "proprietorship," meanwhile, is as ominous as it is comical, prefiguring Dombey's jealous fear of anybody raising a claim to his son later in the novel.[30] As Shuttleworth has similarly pointed out, "Dickens focuses initially, in striking detail, on the physical aspects of Paul's development," and hence there is a serious edge to Mrs Chick's parodied interference.[31]

Repeated rereadings, moreover, alert us to the startling change from a "fine infant" and comically cherubic baby to the ailing child who, as "he passed from babyhood to childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey ... pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse."[32] In a parody of maternal baby-worship, Miss Tox calls Baby Paul "a Cupid."[33] That he grows into an "old-fashioned," sickly child is, of course, due to his double deprivation, first, of his biological mother and, then, of his substitute mother when his father summarily dismisses the wet-nurse. But it also suggests a significant distinction among Dickens's fictional babies in his early work: delicate suffering infants and children as the subject of social criticism on the one hand and comical cherubic

babies on the other. Once Paul stops being a chubby infant, he also ceases to feature in comical scenes. Conversely, hearty babies are chiefly funny, at least in Dickens's early fiction. The enormous burdensome baby in *The Haunted Man* exemplifies this perhaps most uncompromisingly, whereas the dichotomy of the comical baby and the symbol of suffering becomes significantly revised in Little Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Taking Dickens's fictional infants as a case study of the literary and in particular the comical baby in nineteenth-century popular culture allows us to revaluate an iconography that has generally been dismissed as part of the sentimental paraphernalia of the Victorian cults of domesticity and childhood. While drawing on a range of narrative, anecdotal, visual, and non-fictional material that illustrates the various aspects of popular culture's changing use of babies, I shall take Dickens's still rarely discussed Christmas story *The Haunted Man* and the adoption subplot of *Our Mutual Friend* as particularly revealing model cases. In order to show how Dickens influentially participated in the idealisation of infancy, and yet always also played with readers' expectations, I shall start with his easily most grotesque baby: Moloch in *The Haunted Man*. Yet despite the bizarre comedy, this Christmas book ultimately celebrates emotional associations, in the process helping to consolidate mid-century attitudes to and literary representations of babies. This reaffirmation of baby-worship (to borrow Trollope's sarcastic term) indeed hinges on the simultaneity of a comical and a serious, critical portrayal of babies. In his last finished novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens perfects his redeployment of clichéd infants in denying the expected doubling of a lost child (John Harmon remembered by the Boffins as a little weeping boy) in the figure of his adoptive namesake: "a child [that] will be made brighter, and better, and happier, because of that poor sad child that day."[34] Instead, the failed rescue narrative reveals pressing issues involving childminding, adoption, and altogether, the practical realities as well as the symbolic value of babies.

**"a dead hand at a baby": comical and savage babies in *The Haunted Man***

*The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain, A Fancy for Christmas-Time* was Dickens's fifth and last Christmas book. Like the much more successful and better remembered *A Christmas Carol* (1843), it was in the tradition of the ghost stories that were commonly told around the Christmas fire. Criticised as "too incoherent and 'metaphysical,'" *The Haunted Man* was, however, praised for the depiction of Johnny and Moloch as well as of a feral streetchild.[35] As a reviewer in the *Atlas* on 23 December 1848 put it, "Dickens is a dead hand at a baby."[36] In this tale, oddly enough perhaps, Dickens does not kill off any babies. Instead he attacks the idealised baby as a figure and a cultural icon. A big baby "rov[ing] from door-step to door-step, in the arms of little Johnny Tetterby" is a vivid presence, overbearing in its exuberant health.[37] It shatters idealised images of babyhood with its normal infant behaviour. Its idolisation on the part of its brother Johnny – himself barely big enough to carry it – is ominously described as child sacrifice:

> It was a very Moloch of a baby, on whose insatiate altar the whole existence of this particular young brother was offered up a daily sacrifice. Its personality may be said to have consisted in its never being quiet, in any one place, for five consecutive minutes, and never going to sleep when required. 'Tetterby's baby' was as well known in the neighbourhood as the postman or the pot-boy. .... Yet Johnny was verily persuaded that it was a faultless baby, without its peer in the realm of England.[38]

The next image of "little Johnny Tetterby" may be chiefly comical, showing him "staggering about with it [the baby] like a very little porter with a very large parcel, which was not directed to anybody, and could never be delivered anywhere;"[39] the invocation of Moloch is chilling. It retains its ominous connotations despite the parodic tone: "Moloch chanced to be in an exacting frame of mind (which was always the case)."[40] The youngest Tetterby, Baby Sally is "that exacting idol" and her brother Johnny "the sacrifice."[41] Moloch, mentioned in the Bible as a Canaanite god, is commonly known as a deity demanding propitiatory child sacrifice. But here the baby itself is Moloch. The absurdity rests in the inversion, and yet there is a serious note in the doubling of young children. In unpacking Moloch's representation in the narrative, we reveal Dickens's multifaceted use of the baby. He shatters expectations in order to reassemble an iconography that becomes, as a result, more effective. Ultimately, the Tetterby children are collected in a circle around Milly Swidger, a caretaker's daughter-in-law, a childless woman whose memory of her stillborn baby exemplifies the power of sorrowful memories to do good.[42] Her "motherly feeling ... must and will have went [sic]," and she even reclaims a streetchild whose disturbing description as a "baby savage" and "baby-monster" further complicates Dickens's invocation of babyhood in the narrative.[43]

Childhood itself is sacrificed: "Wherever childhood congregated to play, there was little Moloch making Johnny fag and toil."[44] That this young child has to "fag and toil" identifies such informal childminding (by another child) as child labour – an identification that is underscored by the image of the undeliverable parcel. A standard arrangement among the urban poor, such childminding frequently attracted the attention of middle-class charity workers and featured in social-problems fiction, including "child victim" or "child rescue" narratives, sometimes also termed "waif fiction, a widely read genre that combined pathos with an earnest desire to improve society."[45] The depiction of working-class or destitute mothers in such narratives veers wildly between portraying them as inadequate (often due to drunkenness, a topos Deborah Morse has discussed in detail) and as "tender parents of instinctive refinement, essentially middle-class women with working-class accents."[46] As Claudia Nelson stresses, they "might well do more hands-on parenting than their wealthier counterparts."[47] Yet such hands-on parenting was frequently shared within large families, while there was a fine line between neighbourly childminding and baby-farming, as we shall see.

Dickens's representation of childminding practices needs to be considered in the context of Victorian discourses on child abuse and rescue, as conceptualised by charity workers and circulated in the publications of denominational or philanthropic societies. As Lydia Murdoch has pointed out, there was a twofold intertextual exchange as child welfare accounts took over narrative structures and

stock characters from popular fiction.[48] Reform writing drew on literary characters such as Dickens's Fagin, and O.G. Rejlander's "famous photographic interpretation of Dickens's street sweep, 'Poor Jo' (also known as 'Night in Town'; ca. 1860), was the most widely recognised image of the ragged child."[49]As artists and philanthropists reproduced or modelled their works on Rejlander's photograph, it became a powerful icon in fund-raising campaigns. However, in following "a general format that challenged poor parents' genuine affection for their children," such images "attacked the domesticity of the poor by presenting child subjects as parentless waifs."[50] The promotional strategies of child emigration promoters such as Annie Macpherson and Dr Barnardo, for example, attracted considerable controversy because the children on their photographs were falsely presented as orphans or dressed in rags that were not their own.[51] Dickens was actively involved in numerous philanthropic projects, but as influentially condemned pompous charity workers such as the "Telescopic Philanthropist" Mrs Jellyby or Chadband, the oily preacher who exploits the streetsweep Jo as a subject of his impromptu sermon, in *Bleak House*.[52] More controversially, Dickens exposed the danger that misguided philanthropy might give rise to abuse. In *Our Mutual Friend* the Boffins' plan to adopt a child brings forth "Counterfeit stock": "Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them."[53] While Dickens here satirises speculative capitalism, he also addresses a pressing problem with charity projects, a problem ironically compounded by the publications of philanthropic societies.

In contrast to its ambiguous representation of working-class parents, waif fiction presented childminding by elder siblings in a positive light, yet always with the aim to justify intervention. Popular culture productions, in fact, generally sentimentalised baby-minding children. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* sported poetic effusions such as "The Little Mother," which describes "a little maiden" darning stockings while sitting by her brother's cradle:

Mother's task to share,
While her playmates' voices
Fill the sunny air;
By-and-by she'll join them,
Shout with might and main
Play till tyrant baby
Wants his nurse again.[54]

Although the child watches a "tyrant baby," there is at least the promise of outdoor games. A more realistic depiction in the periodical *Chatterbox* is undermined by an idyllic illustration. "The Little Sister" describes "a little boy, whose whole time seems to be taken up in tending a baby" – a baby that could be Moloch: "It is a tiresome, cross kind of baby, but this little fellow never seems to be weary of drawing her about, carrying her, and talking to her." Yet even though the baby is "trying and fretful" and the boy "homely" and "sometimes rather ragged and dirty," the anecdote ends on a sentimental note. Asked if he is "never tired of minding the baby," he "looked up into my face with a smile that made his plain face almost beautiful. 'On, no, ma'am,' he said; 'she's my little sister.'"[55]

The accompanying illustration (Fig.1) capitalises on this sentimental twist – in pointed contrast, we shall see, to the plates in *The Haunted Man*.

Waif fiction redeployed sentimental associations to push a specific agenda. *Froggy's Little Brother* (1875) by "Brenda" (Mrs G. Castle Smith) contains perhaps the most tear-jerking depiction of such a sibling pair: Froggy "prepare[s] Benny's food in the little pannikin" and feeds him "with a grave frown on his brow, as if he were fully alive to the responsibilities of handling so tiny a scrap of humanity" before changing him into "his little night-shirt, which was not much larger than a pocket-handkerchief."[56] Hesba Stretton's *Lost Gip* (1873) is more confrontational in using Sandy's concern over his newborn sister's well-being to demonstrate both the worthiness and the helplessness of destitute children:

> He had a vague notion that there was someone, somewhere, who could save the new-born baby from dying ... . In the streets he had seen numbers of rich babies, who did not want for anything and whose cheeks were fat and rosy... . But how it happened, whether it was simply because they were rich, or because there was somebody who could keep them alive, and cared more for them than the poor, he could not tell.[57]

What is striking is that these young childminders of waif fiction are almost exclusively boys. This draws attention to the unexpectedly fluid role that gender plays in Victorian representations of childcare, yet as in the majority of cases that depict male characters' maternal qualities, the implied role inversion predominantly highlights a lack in the texts' women. In waif fiction, boys' attendance on infants additionally underscores maternal absence or abandonment. Such rescue narratives, in fact, assure the middle-class reader that the children are deserving objects of charity, while suggesting the incapability of the poor to look after their children. Dickens's sibling pairs among the London poor roughly fall into the same category, although he increasingly became more ambiguous in his representation of middle-class rescue.

Dickens's changing representations of adoptive relationships as well as of rescue programmes address ethical responsibility, while indisputably also engendering some of the most iconic Victorian tear-jerkers. Dickens's early writing openly promotes child rescue, whether through individual charitable impulses (such as Brownlow's at first guilt-ridden rescue of Oliver Twist) or through the large-scale charity projects Dickens helped to set up, support, and give advertising space to in the magazines he edited. Perhaps precisely because it contains some of the most memorable exposures of self-congratulatory charity, *Bleak House* also provides an alternative: an illustration of what Dickens wishes us to identify as the right way of going about it. The scene of the orphaned Necketts appears to be lifted out of typical child rescue narratives. Two tiny children are discovered in a cold, almost bare room, locked in by their thirteen-year-old sister Charley while she is "[o]ut a washing."[58] A "mite of a boy, some five or six years old, nursing and hushing a heavy child of eighteen months," Tom is a revamped version of Johnny in *The Haunted Man*, with the sense of the comical missing: "he's as good as gold ... O! in such a motherly, womanly way!"[59] This shows Dickens at his most

confrontational and closest to the didactic scenes in denominational fiction. As the Guardian, the novel's genuine philanthropist, exclaims: "Look at this! For God's sake look at this!"[60] The tear-jerking evocation leads up to a notably uncomplicated portrayal of middle-class intervention.[61] Interestingly, despite his commitment to the "romantic side of familiar things," [62] Dickens here also remains emphatically realist in the solution he offers: Charley becomes a household servant, Tom is sent to school, and Emma, the baby, is taken care of by their former neighbour (clearly being paid by the Guardian). At the end of the novel, Emma "is exactly what Charley used to be," while Tom is apprenticed to the miller whom Charley has married: "As to Tom, Charley's brother, I am really afraid to say what he did at school in cyphering [sic], but I think it was Decimals."[63] The children have been saved from destitution and perhaps starvation in a heavily realist framework that eschews idealisation or fantasies of fortuitous adoption.

Throughout his fiction, Dickens revises his representation of childminding options. Thus, *Our Mutual Friend* again revisits the trope of the working-class sibling pair. A nostalgic halo surrounds Lizzie and Charlie Hexam's memories of the way in which "a little sister that was sister and mother both" lugged around a baby "rather heavy to carry," while they "snuggled under a little shawl, and it was warm there."[64] Charlie's later rejection of Lizzie as part of a shameful past, however, ruptures the positive portrayal. I shall return to the novel's twofold reworking of typical rescue narratives, including its ambiguous representation of working-class childminding and the problems of middle-class adoption before the Adoption of Children Act of 1926. But it is vital, first, to situate the baby in *The Haunted Man* in the context of child rescue narratives (and their shifting interpolation in Dickens's novels) precisely in order to remark how its description stands out. Intended to startle the reader, its comical portrayal fulfils a catalysing role in Dickens's representation of Victorian babyhood.

Baby Moloch's dual narrative function exemplifies most clearly, almost exaggeratedly, Dickens's combination of the comical and of social criticism in his depiction of infants. It is the Dickensian baby: at once overdrawn and a very real, unidealised baby. In sharp contrast to the "baby savage" that personifies social problems,[65] Moloch is not a scrawny picture of neglect, but clearly well taken care of. Johnny is doing a great job. Dickens here builds on a familiar topos in rescue fiction, but takes it further, erasing the idea of a necessary "rescue." Neither the childcare arrangement nor the baby is depicted as lacking or in need of intervention. On the contrary, a professor's metaphysical interference among the poor is condemned precisely because it is based on a wrong premise: that "[h]e can do no harm, who brings forgetfulness" of "[s]orrow, wrong, and trouble" among the poor.[66] This would deny them the capacity for happy memories and of that much-idealised Victorian source of bliss: domestic family life.

*The Haunted Man*, therefore, eschews the paradigm of middle-class charitable intervention. Briefly, Redlow is a lonely science professor who, one Christmas Eve, muses over the past, when a

ghostly double appears and tempts him to make a bargain to "forget [his] sorrow, wrong, and trouble" by losing "the intertwisted chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections."[67] But as he passes this "gift" to those around him, he only spreads dissatisfaction. Life without such associations is simply unbearable. The panorama includes Johnny resenting his burden. After a brief encounter with Redlaw, the Tetterbys turn against each other, and Johnny's resentment of the baby forms the climax: "and even Johnny's hand – the patient, much-enduring, and devoted Johnny – rose against the baby!"[68] We then see "Mrs Tetterby, shaking the baby" and then "put the baby away in a cradle."[69] Hitherto continually carried (comically forcing Johnny to place his pudding in his pocket while eating) and the centre of domestic harmony, the baby is "put away." When Redlaw pleads with his spectral double, and Milly is granted the power to reverse his influence, the baby is yet again the most illustrative – perhaps because it is the most homely – test case: "And if ever, since the world began, a young boy took a baby from a cradle with the care of an old nurse, and hushed and soothed it tenderly, and tottered away with it cheerfully, Johnny was that boy, and Moloch was that baby, as they went out together!"[70] Well-meant intervention – in which Redlaw sees himself as a "benefactor" – has to be reversed.[71] Embodying "the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love, and domesticity," Milly is significantly a working-class character.[72] Although critics commonly remark on Milly's personification of "the domestic woman" or "domestic Angel," discussions have hitherto not sufficiently taken her class status into account, and this has obscured the radical point Dickens is making here about working-class domesticity.[73]

The Christmas tableaux with which the narrative concludes depicts all children, including the baby and the baby savage, grouped around Milly: "And they danced and trooped about her again, and clung to her, and laid their rosy faces against her dress, and kissed and fondled it, and could not fondle it, or her, enough."[74] Admittedly, the accompanying illustrations suggest that Milly is an embodiment of motherliness *despite* her class affiliation. Frank Stone's "Milly and the Children" (Fig.2) highlights the beautifying effects of blissful motherhood and offers a contrast to the decisively working-class Tetterby household. John Tenniel's illustrated double-page to chapter 2 depicts Mrs Tetterby staring blankly ahead under the spell of Redlaw's inadvertent influence, ignoring the children who are desperately hanging onto her skirts. Still, while Stone's illustration captures Milly's spiritualisation – her embodiment of "the very spirit of morning, gladness, innocence, hope, love, domesticity, etc. etc. etc. etc.," as Dickens explained in his instructions to the illustrator[75] – the picture does not idealise the children. The baby, hanging over Johnny's shoulder, even faces the opposite direction. It is not so much part of the tableaux as that it remains Johnny's burden.

The illustrations featuring Moloch simultaneously add to the baby's bizarrely comical role. They combine with Dickens's vivid descriptions in circulating comical images of babyhood. The baby's pictorial representations enlarge on its burdensome size (especially in comparison with the

other children), rendering it a hanger-on rather than a participant in family or social activities. The one exception is Leech's "The Tetterbys" (Fig.3). While the rest of the Tetterbys are almost caricatures reminiscent of sketches in *Punch*,[76] here we only see the baby from the back. Illuminated by the fire, it seems to emit a glow, and its rounded cheek is nestled against Johnny, who struggles with its long clothes. By contrast, Leech's "Johnny and Moloch" (Fig.4) is characterised by its avoidance of "conventional Victorian sentimentality, despite idealised pictures of the royal family's parade of infants and toddlers that occasionally appeared in the illustrated press of the period."[77] Philip Allingham has called the picture a "humorous sketch" and a "cartoon whimsy," in which Leech "reinforces the novelist's criticism" of the young baby-minder by investing Johnny with a "doleful facial expression."[78] Fred Barnard's illustration for the 1878 edition continues this emphasis on comic effects. In his illustration of Moloch (Fig.5), the baby's enormous head hangs over Johnny's shoulder, facing the reader, while Johnny attempts to merge into a crowd that has been said to personify overpopulation.[79] Within the resulting "mixed-media project" – as Allingham has termed the "collaborative artistic endeavour"[80] – these illustrations helped produce some of the most anti-sentimental portrayals of babies in Victorian popular culture.

In Dickens's text, Moloch forms a grotesque embodiment of infant needs that qualifies even the tale's resolution. Throughout the narrative, the baby is fractious because of the perhaps most absurdly described teething problems in Victorian literature: "It was a peculiarity of this baby to be always cutting teeth. ... Still Mrs. Tetterby always said 'it was coming through, and then the child would be herself'; and still it never did come through, and the child continued to be somebody else."[81] The Christmas tableaux clearly fails to provide a panacea for this everyday problem, as "Johnny and the baby were too late, of course, and came in all on one side, the one exhausted, the other in a supposed state of double-tooth; but that was customary, and not alarming."[82] A fondly satirised sibling pair and part and parcel of everyday life, Johnny and his baby also remain a great comic creation.

*The Haunted Man*, in fact, exemplifies both Dickens's creation of comical babies and the way he integrates these figures into a remarkably complex and multifaceted literary engagement with babyhood. The "baby savage" thereby functions as the comical baby's double. Whereas the depiction of Johnny and his baby eschews child rescue motifs, the expected plotline is transferred onto a streetchild. The startling juxtaposition of "baby" and "savage" works both ways: drawing attention to the youth and vulnerability of the "savage child" by calling him a mere baby, while deliberately rupturing associations with "baby" by terming it savage. Dickens repeatedly draws attention to the incongruity, capitalising on the positive emotional connotations of babyhood. This nameless child is introduced as a small bundle, but it is 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."[83] The feral child is the notable exception among the social panorama that illustrates Redlaw's influence: "this child alone [has] been proof against [his] influence" because it is "utterly bereft of such remembrances" and

hence has "[n]o softening memory" to lose.[84] Both an embodiment and "a recognizable slum child,"[85] it functions on a realist and an allegorical level, while qualifying the narrative's reconfiguration of symbolic babyhood in Baby Moloch.

**"The Genuine Minder": childcare business in *Our Mutual Friend***

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens welds together comical and symbolic babyhood to address childminding and adoption fantasies. If rescue through adoption promises a resolution in numerous Victorian novels, including many of Dickens's own, its failure in this novel dissects both the social realities and the fantasy itself. A close look at the Boffins' wish for a child furthermore helps us to revaluate a peculiarly tricky aspect of the novel's social commentary: the precise employment of the childminder Betty Higden. Mrs Higden systematically avoids institutionalised social services, and even as Dickens condemns the workhouse system, Betty's self-sufficiency meanwhile kills a baby in her charge, the last of her great-grandchildren. While the novel exposes a panorama of malfunctioning families (from the Wilfers to the Podsnaps) and educational facilities that turn out either ingratiates (Charlie Hexam) or overstrained murderous schoolmasters (Bradley Headstone, who might have been better off if he, "when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea"),[86] scant attention has been accorded the representation of adoption and childminding as part of this panorama. A revealing example of Dickens's shifting representation of babyhood, Little Johnny's death needs to be considered within the contested discourses on working-class childrearing and bourgeois conceptualisations of rescue.

Paid childcare among the urban poor attracted much criticism from middle-class charity workers, but was little understood by them. The terminology itself was confusing. Although largely undocumented, the most common practice remained baby-minding undertaken by older siblings, as we have seen. Similarly, neighbourly assistance was widespread, but it is impossible to gauge to what extent it was regular or paid for. Mrs Blinder, in *Bleak House*, might forgive the little Necketts their rent and "comes up now and then" to check on the two younger children, but once Mr Jarndyce arranges that the baby stays with her, "a being took such care of," she is surely paid for it.[87] To a large extent it was out of such neighbourly practices that paid childcare facilities emerged, but the distinction between childminders and the much vilified "baby-farmers" was dangerously fluid and uncertain. Nelson alerts us to class-based expectations:

> The working classes spoke of 'adoption'; the pejorative 'baby-farming' was used by muckrakers and reform organizations, who saw the practice of boarding other people's sons and daughters for pay not as a potentially workable solution to child-care needs but rather a criminal attempt to turn children into sources of profit.[88]

Although neither arrangement was legalised until well into the twentieth century, fostering and adoption were widespread practices in Victorian Britain. Such practices featured regularly in the fiction of the time, frequently with a focus on the difficulties that arose from the lack of legal regulation before the Adoption of Children Act in 1926. But while middle-class adoption either

centred on inheritance or was scripted as a form of rescue, similar arrangements among the poor became enveloped in debates on baby-farming.[89]

"Baby-farming" was a derogatory term to describe a vast range of very different childcare facilities. A close look at the newspapers of the time reveals its conflation with adoption and how baby-farmers exploited the resulting confusion. Some of the most notorious baby-farmers placed advertisements under an assumed name, claiming they were eager to "adopt" a baby and promising to provide "a good home" and "a mother's love and care" for a fee.[90] James Greenwood's chapter on this "scandalous traffic in baby flesh and blood" in *The Seven Curses of London* (1869) exposed how proprietors of "the modern and murderous institution known as 'baby-farming'" operated through advertisements of so-called 'Child-Adopters.'"[91] As Nelson has pointed out, Greenwood begins his chapter "by providing some sample advertisements placed in periodicals aimed at working-class women" and then proceeds to teach "his audience how to interpret such seemingly innocent texts: having secured their victims, and the money that accompanies them, the baby farmers will either kill the children by neglect and slow starvation, or abandon them in the street."[92] When the *British Medical Journal* commenced a full-scale campaign that was to result in the Infant Life Protection Act of 1872, it laid bare a network of "proprietresses of lying-in establishments and midwives as well as child care providers, ... associating all three with criminal practices."[93] It was a "nefarious trade," as it was put in the proceedings of the 1871 Select Committee on the Protection of Infant Life.[94] The press generally featured baby-farmers as monsters who were paid to dispose of unwanted infants, although court cases revealed that many of the parents were ignorant of their children's fate.[95] Some women handed over their babies knowing that they would be killed; others were duped. Similarly, some baby-farmers made money by taking in too many children, did not adequately care for them, and hence were indirectly responsible for their deaths. The 1872 Act stipulated that such facilities had to be monitored, although actual regulation was difficult to enforce. Meanwhile, the exposure and execution of notorious baby-farmers – convicted of murdering hundreds of infants in their care – were widely publicised;[96] such large-scale and systematic infanticide generating the most gruesome mirror-image of the iconic Victorian baby.

Public discourse surrounding the baby as a commodity that could be handed over for money reveals the variety and amorphousness of unregulated childcare in Victorian Britain. There were repeated suggestions for "public nurseries" long before Marie Hilton set up the first crèche or day nursery in East London in 1871.[97] Increasingly – as the hysteria about baby-farmers tricking desperate parents was on the rise – notices in the newspapers raised fears of child abduction and murder, while shedding an unexpected light on the little documented practices of paid baby-sitting services. A peculiar example appeared in the *British Medical Journal* under the title "Baby-Farming" in 1877, describing how a "ladylike woman, named Sophia Martha Todd, aged about 35," had been two years previously "seen with an infant, which, she explained, had been left with her by a Dr. and Mrs.

George, who had gone to an evening party and intended to call for it on their return. Next day, she was without the child, and she told [her landlady] that the parents had taken it away." Years later she left a box behind her in a different lodging and "at the bottom the body of a child was found tightly wrapped up in clothes and quite mummified." A medical examination showed "that the child's head had been crushed." Todd subsequently admitted "that she adopted the child for a premium of £10," claiming that "it died suddenly in her arms the night it came into her possession." During her arrest, another letter was found, in which she offered to adopt a baby for £30 premium. Further investigations revealed that at least five other children had been handed to her never to be heard of again, and that she had formerly been a governess, among other things, before she "commenced the 'farming' of children." Her "mode of operation" was a standard procedure among baby-farmers:

> Her mode of operation was that which we long since exposed, to insert an advertisement in the newspapers in this form: – 'Wanted by a respectable married couple, a baby to adopt; a premium expected.'[98]

Evoked as yet another typical example, this case, however, raises some interesting questions about childcare practices. Childminding for a few hours while a couple is out must have been sufficiently common to be used as an easy excuse, even as something to ward off suspicion. It seems an unusual arrangement, suggesting the absence of any live-in servants in the house of the middle-class (but in this case probably fictitious) "Dr. and Mrs. George." Ordinarily, middle-class children would have been in the charge of a more or less elaborate set of nursemaids. Clearly, there was a hitherto largely unacknowledged variety of – and flexibility within – childcare. There was a market ready to be exploited. As the press exposed the most sensational cases, many of these arrangements became lumped together as baby-farming.

Much of the confusion about such childcare arrangements arose from their sheer variety. There was a major distinction between baby-farms authorised by the workhouse and those unofficially run by anyone taking in or claiming to adopt infants and young children. But they all differed vastly in size, scale, and even focus (from laying-in hospitals and dry nursing to schools for pauper children). When a cholera epidemic broke out in Bartholomew Drouet's privately operated "establishment for 'farming' pauper children from London parishes" in Lower Tooting in 1849, baby-farms first became the subject of far-reaching public inquiry. Between January and April that year Dickens anonymously published four articles in *The Examiner*.[99] In "The Verdict for Drouet," he referred to "evidence of a peculiarly affecting kind, such as the masters of pathos have rarely excelled in fiction,"[100] and in *Bleak House* he created the servant Guster, who "was farmed or contracted for during her growing time by an amiable benefactor of his species resident at Tooting, and cannot fail to have been developed under the most favourable circumstances, [but who] 'has fits' – which the parish can't account for."[101] Dickens remained invested in such exposures, while his shifting representation of alternative baby-minding practices expressed the sustained ambiguities surrounding working-class childcare in Victorian Britain.

References to baby-farming recur throughout nineteenth-century fiction, reflecting repeated scandals, but also the practice's persistence. Inspired by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, *Oliver Twist* contains the probably best known baby-farm in fiction. An orphan born at the workhouse, Oliver is "'farmed,' or, in other words, [he is] dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day."[102] Not all such institutions were under parish control, liable to be checked by the workhouse board's "periodical pilgrimages to the farm" whenever "there was some more than usually interesting inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death."[103] Yet if this branch-workhouse stands at one end of the spectrum, the majority were unofficial institutions exempt even from such "periodical pilgrimages." The baby-farmer who receives a stolen infant and sells it to a "cadger" for five-and-sixpence, but subsequently pretends that she "placed it under the care of a good lady, who adopted it" in Wilkie Collins's *The Fallen Leaves* (1879), or the calculative Mrs Spires, with whom the young servant Esther temporarily leaves her illegitimate child in George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), are at the other end of the spectrum.[104] Both childminder and baby-farmer, Mrs Spires looks after several "little mites" while their mothers "are out washing or charing" during the day, a service for which she charges four pence per day.[105] For taking in a newborn while Esther works as a live-in wet-nurse in a bourgeois household, Mrs Spires asks six shillings. For five pounds she would "take the child off [Esther's] hands" for good, ostensibly "to give the child to someone who wants to adopt it" – an offer that makes Esther snatch up her baby and run to the workhouse instead.[106] But from the absurdly named, caricatured Mrs Mann in *Oliver Twist* to the money-minded Mrs Spires in *Esther Waters*, the proprietors of such institutions are equally vilified, part of the same discourse. In Betty Higden, Dickens creates a counter-example of paid childminding. Precisely the ambiguities in her representation clarify his criticism of such practices and the discourse surrounding them.

Mrs Higden works as a baby- or childminder. She takes in washing as well as a handful of young children for money. She does so because she "love[s] children, and Four-pence a week is Four-pence." She "can take only three, on account of the Mangle," but it remains unclear whether this is her own judgement or whether the workhouse authorities – and she clearly negotiates with its representative, the Beadle – have stipulated this limitation. At the novel's opening, there are four children: her own great-grandchild Johnny, two toddlers nicknamed Toddles and Poddles, and the overgrown foundling Sloppy. When she first describes the tiny pair as her "Minders," "Left to be Minded," and terms her hut a "Minding School,"[107] the terms are clearly new and confusing to the Boffins and their secretary, John Harmon alias Rokesmith. Whereas Toddles and Poddles seem to be living with Mrs Higden until they catch a childhood illness – "something as wos wery long for spots" – and are "sent home," she has rescued Sloppy from the workhouse: having "made interest with ... the Beadle to have him as a Minder."[108] Since she has taken this illegitimate foundling "as a minder," she

is probably at first somehow paid for him – most likely through the Beadle – although as an ungainly youngster, he turns the mangle. In making "interest with ... the Beadle," Mrs Higden has had to work through (or round) workhouse institutions. Her "Minding School" might be an alternative to "branch-workhouses," but this also makes it part of the system. The secretary might well be confused; childminding continued to be an even more slippery term than baby-farming.

"Baby-farmer" was, we remember, a derogatory term for a range of different occupations to do with childcare. Neither must we forget just how fluid the practices as well as the terminologies were. Another term for unregulated low-end facilities was "dame school," and Betty Higden's peculiar phrase "Minding School" suggests an attempt to disassociate herself from baby-minding only. However, not only is Betty barely literate, admitting that she is not "much of a hand at reading writing-hand," although she can read the "Bible and most print,"[109] her charges' ages correspond to those outlined in definitions of paid "childminders" at the time: "'Up to about what age are children generally given out to be minded? ... Three years…. Then they are packed off to little schools, or are let to play about with some child a little older."[110] Although there is evidence that some "dame schools" accepted very young children, this was the exception and chiefly featured in comical enactments. One of the popular pantomime versions of "The Babes in the Wood" included a scene in

> the school of a dame who is open also to receive infants, and we see, in front of the adults, a row of real live babies in patent 'baby minders,' jogging up and down, some sucking the thumb, some a bottle or an orange, others crowing happily, and one I noticed fast asleep. In this scene *Tommy* comes out strong, is very impudent, gets properly birched, and is put in a mammoth baby minder for punishment.[111]

The baby-minder mentioned in this review refers to a newly invented contraption to appease "cross babies," as a lengthy advertisement for a "Mechanical Baby-Minder" or "Mother's Help" puts it.[112] Though adding to the terminological confusion, this mechanical version reaffirms the usage of "baby-minder." Nevertheless, in contrast to the pejorative baby-farming, the terms baby- and childminding were relatively seldom used, and in those rare cases, "women who make a trade of baby-minding" are described as "generally a bad lot," much as baby-farmers were.[113]

Published in *The Sunday Magazine* in June 1874 as part of the series "Characters I've Met," "The Genuine Childminder" is a striking exception. This piece provides a useful reference point for Mrs Higden's ambiguous position among childcare providers. The "genuine minder" is an oddity in a system that is on the whole "incompetently and callously practiced,"[114] and still, it might be preferable to baby-minding by young children. A framestory describes an accident: "a little girl of seven years had one winter's day been left to take care of an infant scarcely a year old, and the child-nurse going too near to the unguarded grate, her clothes caught fire, and set fire to those of the baby."[115] A cobbler hears their screams and saves their lives, but when the author, self-defined as a "River-Side Visitor" "new to the district at the time," condemns such practices, he defends the hardworking mother and terms paid childcare – or being "handed over to the minders" – "a choice of evils; and bad is the best

of choice for the children."[116] The detailed definition suggests how seldom childminding was mentioned as such and how little the practice was understood even though it was widespread. Sharing the implied reader's ignorance, the district visitor "thoughtlessly" remarks on the system:

> 'Minders!' I echoed.
> 'Yes, women who make a trade of baby-minding, taking them by the day at so much a head.'
> 'Well, better put children in charge of such women, ….'
> '… If your minders acted up to their names, and were baby-minders, that would be all right; but as it is they mind themselves, and pretty well leave the infants to do the same.'[117]

The allegations are the same as in indictments of baby-farmers: money-mindedness, drunkenness, neglect, and the doping of infants with "sleeping drugs" or "quietness" "till they gradually sleep them away altogether, or else pretty well sleep away their little senses."[118] The "Genuine Minder" is an exception to the rule. Her rooms are clean; she does not accept sick children; she provides "a tolerably extensive supply of toys – a feature which had been conspicuous by its absence in the other establishments."[119] The accompanying illustration depicts the granny-like, but hearty childminder using a nursery rhyme to explain a pattern on a plate: "there could be no prettier sight than she presented when telling one of her stories with a child on either knee, three or four others clinging around her, and all gazing up in her face with widely-staring eyes."[120] She resembles Mrs Higden in declaring that the "business of child-minding" is "a trade with her … but it was also a labour of love."[121] Both Dickens and the anonymous author of "The Genuine Childminder" might have envisaged the same ideal, or perhaps there really were such counter-examples amidst the majority of abusive childminders and farmers. The first crèches, however, were symptomatically promoted as an option to handing the baby "over to the care of some woman who made a few pence by minding half a dozen babies, or rather letting them mind themselves."[122] *Our Mutual Friend* significantly engages in the conflicting discourses on unregulated childminding versus institutionalised care by posing Mrs Higden's ignorant home-nursing not just against the vilified workhouse, but also against the newly conceptualised children's hospital.

Little Johnny's death, in fact, crucially complicates Dickens's seemingly ideal childminder and his representation of middle-class intervention. The Boffins' first visit is both comical and part of their positive characterisation; their second is ironically closer to the confrontational sketches of working-class homes in rescue narratives. Marcus Stone's illustration, "Mrs Boffin discovers an Orphan" (Fig.6), highlights Johnny's cherubic qualities. In a picturesque scene, a young toddler is intent on a game of his own, hanging over the board across the open doorway, "angling for mud with a headless wooden horse and line" when he overbalances himself and "[b]eing an orphan of a chubby conformation, he then took to rolling" right into the gutter: "From the gutter he was rescued by John Rokesmith, and thus the first meeting with Mrs Higden was inaugurated by the awkward circumstance of their being in possession – one would say at first sight unlawful possession – of the orphan, upside down and purple in the countenance."[123] It is a grotesque parody of child rescue. As the secretary literally fishes a child out of the gutter, their seemingly unlawful possession of the baby is a reminder

of the unorthodox proceedings of many philanthropic societies. The satire is then modified by Mrs Boffin's down-to-earth motherliness, capped by her assurance that she "wasn't born a lady any more than you."[124]

Indeed, we must not forget that the Golden Dustman and his wife are of working-class origins. Mrs Boffin is a homely reworking of Milly Swidger, although there is a sadder logic in their initial acceptance of childlessness. Remembering the look on seven-year-old John Harmon's face when he is sent to school abroad, they anticipate the effect of their own death: "'We might both of us die,' says Mrs Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.'" [125] Precisely the memory of this little boy prompts them to adopt, however. When John Harmon is believed dead and they inherit his fortune, they search for "an adopted child … to give the name."[126] The eeriness is there from the start: Rokesmith/Harmon terms it an "omen" to revive "little John Harmon," and after Johnny's death, Mrs Boffin admits that she has "grown timid of reviving John Harmon's name" and that she should reproach herself if she "gave it to another dear child, and it proved again unlucky."[127] It is not "superstition," but "a matter of feeling,"[128] and yet it oddly suggests that well-meant intervention had something to do with the boy's death.

The chubby orphan with the auburn curls nonetheless stars in a rescue narrative that doubles up as a fund-drive for children's hospitals. Contracting a childhood illness, Johnny lies ill for some time, while Mrs Higden is afraid of contacting the child's prospective adoptive parents. The rescue scene reverses and thereby negates the positive portrayal of Higden's "Minding School." In the "dimmest and furthest corner," they find the baby dying on her lap, the result of the old woman's "instinct" to "catch up in her arms the sick child … and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration."[129] Rokesmith models the right conduct, but Johnny only reaches the hospital to die surrounded by the paraphernalia of modern (middle-class) childhood: new toys, soft blankets, and specialised doctors and nurses who "cure none but children."[130] Much has been written on Dickens's involvement with the Great Ormond Street Hospital, including his posthumous function as a figurehead.[131] But while a modern reader may balk at the idea of putting a toddler with an infectious illness – which he "took … from the Minders" – next to "the mite with the broken leg" to whom he bequeaths his toys,[132] equally chilling is the sacrifice of the baby with the bluff countenance to the hospital's promotion. A calculative narrative device, his death illustrates the power of sentimentalised babyhood in Victorian culture, while showcasing the shifting interplay of Dickens's comical and serious, socially involved portrayal of babies.

Yet even as he deploys the Victorian baby as a useful icon, Dickens criticises its easy commodification. This double game resolves a central ambiguity about childminding and rescue. On the one hand, much-needed intervention removes Johnny from the ignorance that is killing him. The suffering baby advertises the advantages of professional, specialised care over home-nursing. On the other hand, the belated rescue also forms an impulse for the Boffins to question their adoption

fantasies. After all, Dickens's angry and yet funny indictment of an "orphan market" includes Mrs Boffin's initial preference for a "pretty child." In the absence of any adoption laws, the "pursuit of that orphan" is not only compromised by "the uniform principle [of] bargain and sale," but also by criteria that disqualify "an orphan who squints quite so *much*" or cannot be kept "clean from snuff."[133] Ultimately, the Boffins undertake instead the truly charitable support of the ungainly, but deserving Sloppy by setting that youngster up in a trade. This brings the reworking of child rescue to a satisfactory conclusion, whereas a new baby is introduced in the infant borne by Bella after her marriage to Rokesmith/Harmon. Since Bella has been a member of the Boffin household, and Rokesmith stands revealed as the lost John Harmon, Mr and Mrs Boffin may well consider themselves honorary grandparents. By making the baby a girl, Dickens neatly sidesteps the revival of the unlucky name, while the adoption plot ends with the Boffins rejoicing in the "pretty and … promising picter [sic]" of Bella "with her child in her fair young arms" in the newly decorated nursery, "garnished as with rainbows."[134]

Baby Moloch in *The Haunted Man* and Our Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend* show Dickens playing with the variety of representational forms in which the Victorian baby appeared and the different narrative uses it could fulfil. Its iconography was by no means straightforward, unambiguous, or universally imbued with sentimentality. On the contrary, there were comical, sarcastic, wry, exasperated, even repulsive or resentful depictions, while reactions and attitudes to babies could usefully double up as characterisation devices. Such a bizarre figure as an infant Moloch or a satirised "orphan market" simultaneously expresses a prevailing ambivalence surrounding baby-farming and minding, adoption, and rescue narratives. While demonstrating that Dickens's most fascinating fictional babies are not limited to his indisputably powerful deployment of symbolic figures, an analysis of his comical babies paves the way for an encompassing reassessment of the Victorian baby as a still powerful, but misunderstood cultural icon.

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[1] Sally Shuttleworth, "Victorian Childhood," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9.1 (2004): 107-13, 108.

[2] These include Marah Gubar's *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (2008) and Claudia Nelson's *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (2012), as well as works specifically on Dickens such as Malcolm Andrews's *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child* (1994), Amberyl Malkovich's *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child: Romanticizing and Socializing the Imperfect Child* (2013), and *Dickens and the Imagined Child* (2015), edited by Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters. The notable exceptions are Shuttleworth's discussion of baby-shows and of scientific experiments involving infants in chapter 12 of *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (2010), and Anne Varty's "The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Stage Baby," *New Theatre Quarterly* 21 (2005): 218-29.

[3] As Ellen Rosenman and Claudia Klaver point out in the introduction to *Other Mothers: Beyond the Maternal Ideal* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008), 1-22, "[e]ven as this model of the domestic ideal as the ground for an ideology of separate sphere was established, ... it was also being complicated" (2), and since "scholarship no longer conceives of the domestic ideal as the linchpin of Victorian culture and society, then motherhood, too, can – and needs to – be reconceptualised" (3, 11).

[4] An important exception is Lyubov Gurjeva's analysis of infant food commercials, which discusses babies' objectification ("Child Health, Commerce and Family Values: The Domestic Production of the Middle Class in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Britain," *Clio Medica* 71.1 (2003): 103-125, 110).
[5] On the use of Millais's *Cherry Ripe* (1879) and *Bubbles* (1886) for Pears' Soap advertisements see Libby Brooks, *The Story of Childhood: Growing Up in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 60; Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 102-5. Compare Lyubov Gurjeva, "Everyday Bourgeois Science: The Scientific Management of Children in Britain, 1880-1914" (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1998), on the commodification of chubby babies. At the end of the century, the new "baby magazines" also tended to reproduce paintings or photographs of royal infants on the cover of their issues.
[6] Compare Gurjeva, "Child Health," 110. As Gurjeva points out, book-length infant food commercials were increasingly integrated into – or sold as – seemingly scientific childcare manuals.
[7] Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* [1857] (Bread Street Hill and Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, 1906), 123.
[8] Linda Lewis, *Dickens, His Parables, and His Reader* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2011), 23.
[9] Katharina Boehm, *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood: Popular Medicine, Child Health and Victorian Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2**.**
[10] Malcolm Andrews, Foreword. *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, eds. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), xiii-xiv, xiii.
[11] Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 152.
[12] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Dickens and the Knowing Child," *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, eds. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 13-26, 13.
[13] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 1:423-4.
[14] As Bodenheimer has pointed out, Dickens always "refers sparingly to the ages of his child characters" ("Dickens," 13). Similarly, the precise age of his fictional babies can chiefly be gleaned by inference. How many months is the initially chubby Paul Dombey when his health is first undermined in the sepulchral church in which he is christened, and at what age is he abruptly weaned at his nurse's summary dismissal? How old is Lizzie Hexam's baby brother when she lugs him around in her arms in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and what is the age of the "minders" watched by Betty Higden in the same novel? Another vexing example is Peepy in *Bleak House*, whose sturdy independence obscures his age, but who is clearly still a young toddler after several years have passed in the course of the novel. Peepy is still in petticoats and a pinafore (as young children of course were until little boys were "breached"), and what denotes his age more clearly perhaps, when we first meet him, he is still cutting his teeth. See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), 57. Esther nurses him in her arms, undresses him, and lets him sleep on her bed. In fact, Peepy's precocious independence underscores Dickens's indictment of maternal neglect.
[15] Lewis, *Dickens*, 23.
[16] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* [1865] (London: Penguin, 1997), 195-6, 321.
[17] As Tamara Wagner has pointed out, the "verbal altercation concerning the exchange of a child depicts orphans as commodities, articulating a double investment in the fiscal and the sentimental." See Tamara S. Wagner, "'We have orphans … in stock': Crime and the Consumption of Sensational Children," *Nineteenth-Century Childhood and the Rise of Consumer Culture*, ed. Dennis Denisoff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 201-215, 201.
[18] Dickens, *OMF*, 330.
[19] Dickens, *OMF*, 196.
[20] Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man*, in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Penguin, 2003), 155.
[21] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* [1850] (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), 153.
[22] Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* [1838] (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), 181. There is also the artificially preserved "infant phenomenon," who "had been ... put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall" (*NN*, 290).
[23] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* [1848] (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), 602. Compare Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 128.
[24] Dickens, *Oliver Twist* [1838] (London: Penguin, 2003), 4-5.
[25] As Galia Benziman puts it, "Dickens uses the blank child's susceptibility to alternative social labels as a powerful narrative device that allows for a series of psychological and socio-political dilemmas to rise to the

surface" ("Who Stole the Child?: Missing Babies and Blank identities in Early Dickens," *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, eds. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 27-41, 27).
[26] Dickens, *D&S*, 1.
[27] Dickens, *D&S*, 62.
[28] Dickens, *D&S*, 48.
[29] Dickens, *D&S*, 51.
[30] Compare Melisa Klimaszewski, "The Contested Site of Maternity in Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son*," *The Literary Mother: Essays on Representations of Maternity and Child Care*, ed. Susan Staub (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2007). 138-58, 138.
[31] Shuttleworth discusses how Paul's mother-substitutes are a point of contestation in the novel: "While Dombey concerns himself with controlling the emotional bonds between Paul and his nurse – she is not to become attached, nor to remember him when she leaves – Miss Tox and Mrs Chick focus on improving and controlling the supply of milk" (*Mind*, 111-2).
[32] Dickens, *D&S*, 95-6.
[33] Dickens, *D&S*, 48.
[34] Dickens, *OMF*, 105.
[35] Michael Slater, Introduction to Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), xi-xxxi, xxiii.
[36] Review of *The Haunted Man*, *Atlas*, 23 December 1848.
[37] Dickens, *HM*, 155.
[38] Dickens, *HM*, 155.
[39] Dickens, *HM*, 155.
[40] Dickens, *HM*, 206.
[41] Dickens, *HM*, 159.
[42] In "Domestic Transformation in Dickens' *The Haunted Man*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 23 (1994): 163-181, Wendy Carse suggests that Milly and her dead child create "an uncanny icon of Madonna and Child," although Dickens most likely considered it "the perfect image of permanent innocence" (172-3).
[43] Dickens, *HM*, 132, 150, 185.
[44] Dickens, *HM*, 155.
[45] Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 56. Compare also Monica Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth–Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Margot Hillel, "'She Faded and Drooped as a Flower': Constructing the Child in the Child-Rescue Literature of Late Victorian England,"*The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 146-61.
[46] Nelson, *Family*, 57. Deborah Denenholz Morse, "Unforgiven: Drunken Mothers in Hesba Stretton's Religious Tract Society and Scottish Temperance League Fiction," *Other Mothers: Beyond the Maternal Ideal*, eds. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman and Claudia C. Klaver (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008), 101-124.
[47] Nelson, *Family*, 57.
[48] Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2006), 17.
[49] Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, 20-1.
[50] Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, 15.
[51] The controversial tactics of child emigration schemes included "kidnapping children from harmful environments," advertising destitute children as orphans, and also making "little effort to ensure that the children ... had decent places to live and work" (Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* [London: Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2009], 148).
[52] Dickens remained a staunch supporter of Catherine Chisholm despite satirising her as Mrs Jellyby. Compare P.A.W. Collins, "*Bleak House* and Dickens's *Household Narrative*," *Nineteenth–Century Fiction* 14.4 (1960): 345-49).
[53] Dickens, *OMF*, 195.
[54] "The Little Mother," *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* 1 February 1871: 91.
[55] "The Little Sister," *Chatterbox* 21 April 1873: 164.
[56] Elizabeth Thiel, ed. *Jessica's First Prayer and Froggy's Little Brother* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 48.
[57] Hesba Stretton, *Lost Gip* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1873), 11.
[58] Dickens, *BH*, 225.
[59] Dickens, *BH*, 225, 227.
[60] Dickens, *BH*, 226.

[61] As Jennifer Gribble suggests, reading the passage in the context of "comparable narratives of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, appearing in the *Morning Chronicle* shortly before Dickens begins to write *Bleak House*," Dickens "creates for Jarndyce a language and a tone that are neither condescending nor prying" ("'In a state of bondage': The Children of *Bleak House*," *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, eds. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015], 57-73, 67-8).
[62] Dickens, *BH*, 6.
[63] Dickens, *BH*, 911.
[64] Dickens, *OMF*, 37.
[65] Bodenheimer terms this "unnamed savage boy" a "fictional predecessor" of Jo in *Bleak House* ("Dickens," 22).
[66] Dickens, *HM*, 188.
[67] Dickens, *HM*, 148.
[68] Dickens, *HM*, 208.
[69] Dickens, *HM*, 208-9.
[70] Dickens, *HM*, 212.
[71] Dickens, *HM*, 149.
[72] Dickens, *HM*, 214.
[73] Although Carse suggests that Milly "becomes the site where ideological tensions meet, surfacing inevitably from the story's representations of gender, class, and the supernatural," she subsequently elides class issues in identifying Milly simply as the "True Woman" ("Domestic," 164, 169). In *Dickens and Women* (London: Dent, 1983), Michael Slater briefly acknowledges that Milly displays all the "angelic refinement and exquisite sensitivity" that Dickens usually reserves for middle-class ladies (313).
[74] Dickens, *HM*, 214.
[75] Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, 1847-1849*, ed. Graham Storey and K.J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 5:448.
[76] Jane Rabb Cohen, *Charles Dickens and his Original Illustrators* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1980), 149.
[77] Philip Allingham, "Barnard's illustration of Johnny and 'Moloch' compared to those by John Leech and E. A. Abbey," *Victorian Web* http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/barnard/xmas/23.html Last modified 28 August 2012 (accessed 25 August 2015). In "The Illustrations in Dickens's *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*: Public and Private Spheres and Spaces," *Dickens Studies Annual* 36 (2005): 75-123, Allingham points out another sentimentally portrayed baby, in the "Illustrated Page to Chapter 1" by Tenniel, which features a mother and five children, including an infant on her knee, with whom she is playing. The eldest child is reading a book, suggesting that this plate "captures the textual moment six pages later": Dickens's description of unnamed "little readers of story-books" ("Illustrations," 87).
[78] Allingham, "Illustrations," 109, 111.
[79] Allingham, "Barnard's".
[80] Allingham, "Illustrations," 93.
[81] Dickens, *HM*, 206.
[82] Dickens, *HM*, 228.
[83] Dickens, *HM*, 150.
[84] Dickens, *HM*, 204.
[85] John Butt maintains that the boy is not an abstraction like "Ignorance" in *A Christmas Carol* ("Dickens's Christmas Books" [1951], *Pope, Dickens and Others: Essays and Addresses* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1969], 127-48 [147]). Michael Slater insists that the apparitions Ignorance and Want are "here made flesh (or rather skin and bone) in the person of the unnamed but unforgettable savage street-child" (Introduction to Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* [London: Penguin, 2003], xi-xxxi, xxii). I contend that the figure simultaneously operates on a realist and an allegorical level.
[86] Dickens, *OMF*, 218.
[87] Dickens, *BH*, 227, 356.
[88] Nelson, *Family*, 150-1.
[89] Nelson speaks of the "Victorian adoption novel" and proceeds to list several novels that make adoption a central theme (*Family*, 161-6).
[90] As Ruth Ellen Homrighaus has pointed out, such "arrangements were by no means unusual in the years before adoption became legal in England; childless couples often sought infants through informal channels such as newspaper advertisements," but for baby-farmers who conducted systematic infanticide like businesses, this provided a space to confuse and entrap their victims ("Wolves in Women's Clothing: Baby-Farming and the *British Medical Journal*, 1860-1872," *Journal of Family History* 26.3 [July 2001]: 350-72, 350-1).
[91] James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co, 1869), 22. Compare

[92] Nelson, *Family*, 152.
[93] Homrighaus, "Wolves," 357
[94] "Report from the Select Committee on Protection of Infant Life," *Parliamentary Papers* (1871), 7:372:3.
[95] Homrighaus, "Wolves," 351.
[96] Compare Margaret Arnot, "Infant Death, Child Care and the State: The Baby-Farming Scandal and the First Infant Life Protection Legislation of 1872," *Continuity and Change* 9.2 (1994): 290-91; Aeron Hunt, "Calculations and Concealments: Infanticide in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34.1 (2006): 71-94. Hunt stresses how baby-farming "seemed to suggest vividly the collapse of any notion of personal value distinct from market value," while the growing outrage expressed "a tension symptomatic of the period's ambivalence towards capitalism" (80).
[97] For example, "Poor People's Children," *Chambers' Journal of Popular Literature* 68 (April 1855): 244; "An English Crèche," *Times* 8 April 1868; "Babies by the Day," *Chambers' Journal of Popular Literature* 271, March 1869. Compare Homrighouse, "Wolves," 352. Hilton's system is praised and detailed in Angela Burdett-Coutts, ed. *Woman's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers* [1893] (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 83, and Florence Fenwick Miller, "Character Sketch: Mrs Hilton. (Founder of the English Crèche System)," *The Woman's Signal* 30 April 1896.
[98] "Baby-Farming," *British Medical Journal* 31 March 1877: 397.
[99] Dickens's articles in *The Examiner* were "The Paradise at Tooting," 20 January 1849; "The Tooting Farm," 27 January 1849; "A Recorder's Charge," 3 March 1849; "The Verdict for Drouet," 21 April 1849.
[100] A.W.C. Brice, and K.J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Tooting Disaster," *Victorian Studies* 12.2 (1968): 227-244 (243). Brice and Fielding also draw attention to the description of a pauper servant in "Miscarriage of Justice" (30 March 1850), who is said to have died from "falling on a fender during one of her 'giddy spells'" (244).
[101] Dickens, *BH*, 144.
[102] Dickens, *OT*, 6.
[103] Dickens, *OT*, 7.
[104] Wilkie Collins, *The Fallen Leaves* [1879] Stroud: Sutton, 2001, 132-3. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860) considers the contrasting upbringing of twins after one is thrown into the river as a newborn and rescued to be raised by the parish. The action is set in Slopperton-upon-the-Sloshy, alerting the reader that Dickens was rewriting Braddon's foundling narrative in *Our Mutual Friend*.
[105] George Moore, *Esther Waters* [1894] (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012), 117. Moore conceived the novel as a retelling of George Eliot's depiction of infanticide in *Adam Bede* (1859).
[106] Moore, *Esther Waters*, 126, 130.
[107] Dickens, *OMF*, 199.
[108] Dickens, *OMF*, 320, 200.
[109] Dickens, *OMF*, 198.
[110] "Characters I've Met: The Genuine Minder," *The Sunday Magazine* June 1874: 609-617, 614.
[111] "Before the Footlights," *The Dart: The Midland Figaro* 1 January 1886: 4.
[112] "A Cure for Cross Babies," *The Owl* 22 October 1885: 5.
[113] "Characters," 610.
[114] "Characters," 609.
[115] "Characters," 609.
[116] "Characters," 610.
[117] "Characters," 610.
[118] "Characters," 610.
[119] "Characters," 612.
[120] "Characters," 614.
[121] "Characters," 614-5.
[122] Burdett-Coutts, *Woman's Mission*, 83.
[123] Dickens, *OMF*, 196.
[124] Dickens, *OMF*, 203.
[125] Dickens, *OMF*, 96.
[126] Dickens, *OMF*, 116.
[127] Dickens, *OMF*, 116, 330.
[128] Dickens, *OMF*, 330.
[129] Dickens, *OMF*, 321-2.
[130] Dickens, *OMF*, 325. As Boehm points out, "the narratives which circulated around the children's hospital were more often than not governed by mechanisms of class regulation" (*Dickens*, 86).

[131] Dickens wrote several articles and described the hospital in *A House to Let* (1858) and *Our Mutual Friend*. Compare Jules Kosky, *Mutual Friends: Charles Dickens and the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); Boehm, *Dickens*, ch.3.
[132] Dickens, *OMF*, 319, 327.
[133] Dickens, *OMF*, 195, 109-10.
[134] Dickens, *OMF*, 757.