

## ANIMATING HOUSEHOLD GODS: VALUE, TOTEMS, AND KINSHIP IN VICTORIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND DICKENS'S *DOMBEY AND SON*

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AT THE HEART OF DICKENS'S *Dombey and Son* (1846–48) is a woman who is both the central problem that the narrative seeks to manage and its solution to that problem. Florence's position as heiress to Dombey and Son enables her entry into the marketplace as an independently wealthy woman who disrupts the patriarchal transmission of property and money. *Dombey and Son* diverts attention from Florence's position as heiress by providing a sentimental lesson on the economic importance of the domestic woman, who grounds intrinsic value and is essential to the reproduction of the patriarchal family and economy.<sup>1</sup> Dombey's domestic and financial failures, the novel would have us believe, stem from his initial devaluation of Florence and overvaluation of Paul. Hence, at the novel's close, Dombey learns that the foundation of the family and firm is not a son but "a Daughter after all."<sup>2</sup> Dickens thus presents Florence's intrinsic value and inalienability as the resolution to the very problem of alienability and unstable values that her position as heiress encodes.<sup>3</sup> Yet this lesson regarding Florence's value conceals the novel's central anxiety, what Robert Clark refers to as "the arbitrary taboo on women's participation in the economic order" (73). If the novel accords insubstitutable value to the domestic woman as the keystone of the family and economy, it does so to dramatize the threat posed to patriarchal structures of kinship, property, and capitalist expansion if all women were to enter the marketplace and become, in a sense, heiresses.

To raise the specter of the heiress is to raise the problem of women's alienability and what this problem conceals – that women could not just be objects of exchange but also agents of exchange. Critics of *Dombey and Son* have largely approached this issue through the homology that the novel constructs between the sexual and economic realms.<sup>4</sup> In an argument that is central to this approach, Jeff Nunokawa claims in *The Afterlife of Property* that Victorian novels like *Dombey and Son* configure women's economic value as man's "inalienable treasure" (11) and thus contrast the "zone of possession," in which women are held as secure estate, from the "zone of circulation" where women travel the circuits of

capital like money or commodities (12). While Nunokawa's reading of *Dombey and Son* exposes how women's inalienability responds to the anxiety that all property is alienable in the age of capital, his reading is typical of much criticism on *Dombey and Son*. Dickens is either seen as critiquing heterosexual romance as an exploitative transaction in which women are exchanged between men or as prescribing Dombey's lesson on the economic value of women as the lesson that all middle-class men should learn lest the ills of the marketplace spoil the home.<sup>5</sup>

Much as I agree with these readings of Florence's economic value, I want to revise our understanding of how the novel establishes her inalienability. In examining how the forces of commodification lead to the interpenetration of the sexual and economic, critics have overlooked the secondary plot that the novel constructs around Florence's relationship to things and its centrality to conveying her inalienability. This secondary plot, I argue, forges a symbolic connection between Florence, the sacred, and things as a way to stabilize economic value, kinship, and property – all of which Florence's position as heiress unsettles. In making this claim, I am suggesting that one way the novel responds to the impact of capitalism on women's economic and political equality is through the relationship Dickens choreographs between Florence, the sacred, and things.<sup>6</sup> As the embodiment of intrinsic value and the sacred in the novel, Florence stands distinguished from the fluid values of the marketplace and practices a redemptive fetishism that resignifies commodities as markers of intrinsic value by sacralizing them as inalienable "household gods." Florence's sacralization of commodities as household gods not only stabilizes value, but also symbolizes the family's economic and sexual reproduction that only possession of Florence and her household gods can stimulate. *Dombey and Son* thus suggests that Florence's entry into the marketplace would render her another variable within the circuit of commodity exchange and jeopardize the economic and sexual reproduction of the family and economy – economic operations that hinge on the patriarchal conscription of Florence and her household gods.

My reading of women and sacred things in Dickens's mid-century novel can help us understand why, decades later, Victorian anthropologists became obsessed with the phenomenon of totemism. The possible economic and legal equality that haunts Dickens's novel had, by the 1880s and 90s, become a greater political reality. Yet what connects Dickens's novel to Victorian anthropologies of totemism is not just that they participate in a continuum of nineteenth-century discursive engagements with the effects of capitalism on women's rights, but that they both grapple with these effects by constructing a particular relationship between women and sacred things. In imaginatively deploying women and sacred things as a way to commute between and thus stabilize the fluid categories of value, kinship, and property, *Dombey and Son* exemplifies a Victorian strategy that recurs in late-nineteenth century anthropologies of totemism. Moreover, by linking the instability of value, property, and kinship to the movement of women and sacred things, *Dombey and Son* supplies the rationale – missing from Victorian anthropology – as to why totemism entails a necessary conjunction of disparate elements such as the sacred, women, things, kinship, and property despite evidence to the contrary. In Victorian anthropology as well, women and their totems carry a value intrinsic to the family's economic and sexual reproduction that, if rendered a variable within a system of relations, would jeopardize the teleological narrative on the rise of private property, patriarchy, and capitalist exchange. In order to avoid this consequence, both Dickens and Victorian anthropology make women the foundation of the economy and family and present their egress from the patriarchal organization of the family as preempting

its dissolution, a dissolution that they narrate through the itinerant paths taken by women and sacred things.

*The Loss of Household Gods and the Fall of Dombey and Son*

THE TRANSFORMATION OF EVERYDAY COMMODITIES into proverbial “household gods” is not peculiar to Dickens but indicates, as Deborah Cohen argues, a prevalent strategy among middle-class Victorians, who invested commodities with spiritual and moral attributes in order to justify their consumerism (xi, 12–13). That commodities could connote the forces of consumer capitalism and yet embody the sacred reflects the flexible relationship that Victorians had with things. Such flexibility has led critics in the ever-enlarging field of “thing theory” to question the historical and conceptual limitations of commodity fetishism, which has so dominated our understanding of the aesthetic and ideological function of objects within literary works.<sup>7</sup> In Bill Brown’s phenomenological analysis of “things,” for example, “things” emerge when objects defy categorization and trouble the boundaries between materiality and immateriality, the functional and symbolic. At stake is not the inherent material properties of any given object; rather, as Brown writes, the moment objects step forward as things “names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (“Thing” 4). John Plotz and Elaine Freedgood’s examination of things in Victorian literature have given to such undecidability a historical context. Freedgood claims that Victorian “thing culture,” which she states both “preceded” and “survives” commodity culture, encapsulates an array of social relations and demonstrates the historical richness that things carried for Victorians (8). Similarly, Plotz underscores “the double life of property” during the nineteenth century (12), which allows it to appear both fungible and transcendent at once (15). It is precisely this “doubleness,” Brown reminds us, that commodity fetishism erases (*Sense* 28).

In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens renders such doubleness serviceable to a larger argument about the relationship between women, marriage, and capital: whether or not things maintain their doubleness or are hardened into the singular value of the commodity fetish depends on the domestic system and the “subject-object relation” it instantiates. Dickens’s use of “household gods” is here strategic. It is difficult to hear the phrase and not be reminded of the Victorian cult of domesticity, particularly Ruskin’s deification of the home in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) as “a sacred place . . . a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods” (18: 22).<sup>8</sup> The association between household gods, domesticity, and women’s sacred influence was echoed even by sociologists such as Auguste Comte, who instructed women to practice a form of domestic worship that results in “the adoration . . . of our personal patrons, our guardian angels or household gods” (100–01). *Dombey and Son* draws on such associations to demonstrate the intrinsic value of women and to establish two contrasting models of the family in which the domestic and economic are interwoven – two contrasting models that correspond to two differing types of object relations.<sup>9</sup> Whereas *Dombey*’s devaluation of Florence and possessive individualism ushers in the contaminating forces of commodification and fluid values that lead to the loss of his family, firm, and household gods, Florence’s sacred influence stabilizes value and resignifies commodities as household gods that symbolize the reproduction of the patriarchal family, economy, and social order. In what follows, I want first to address how the novel links the instability of economic value to that of the sacred and profane before turning to how Dickens’s contrasting models of family either fail or succeed to manage such instabilities.

As various critics have noted, *Dombey and Son* responds to historical concerns regarding the abstract nature of economic value in an era shifting from traditional forms of wealth, such as landed property, to one guided by speculative capital, credit, and free trade.<sup>10</sup> Direct references to the modern financial system, however, are rare in a novel that primarily turns to the sea as a recurring motif for both the liquidities of capitalist speculation and its predication on imperialist trade. In the famous passage where Paul asks his father “Papa! what’s money?” (152; ch. 8), Paul’s question about money is syntactically homologous to the one he later poses to his sister, “Floy . . . where’s India?” (171), a homology that points to the direct relationship the novel positions between the opacity of money and empire. If, as Dombey tells Paul, “[m]oney . . . can do anything” (152) and is “a very potent spirit” (153), the effects of its fetishized powers remain unclear. Through the homology drawn between the unknown effects of empire and money, Dickens suggests that the sea that enables trade can also be a conduit for contamination when individuals mismanage money’s fetishized powers.

The symbolic connections that the novel advances between money and the contaminating effects of trade stem from its tendency to link, as Nunokawa and Claudia Klaver state, the taint of commodification with the Orient (Nunokawa 42, 73; Klaver 105–07). Dickens figures Dombey, in particular, as an agent of contamination through orientalized descriptions of Dombey as “Caliph Haroun Alraschid” and “Sultan” (237, 238; ch. 13). Despite such associations between Dombey, the Orient, and trade, the novel ultimately suggests that it is not money or capital’s connection to the Orient that contaminates. Rather, it is specific domestic arrangements that determine whether money’s fetishized powers contaminate the English home. After questioning whether Dombey’s desire to exert “his proprietorship” (736; ch. 47) over Edith represents “an unnatural characteristic” (737), the narrative abruptly shifts to a polemic on the unnatural forces of pollution that “spread contagion” in British homes and the globe (738). “Then should we see how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals and lazar-houses, inundate the jails, and make the convict-ships swim deep, and roll across the seas, and over-run vast continents with crime” (738). Dickens implies that contamination not only enters Britain from the colonies, but that Dombey’s possessive hoarding of Fanny, Edith, and Paul constitutes an “unnatural” organization of the family that contaminates the British domestic space and travels the circuits of imperial finance.

In making the contaminating forces of money and trade contingent on the family’s domestic order, Dickens’s novel exploits the ambiguous status of money itself as a tabooed object. Drawing on Frazer’s 1878 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on “Taboo,” Christopher Herbert claims that Frazer’s discussion of taboo directs Victorians to the contradictory attitude evangelicals expressed toward money as an object invested with divine powers and yet a filthy contaminant (186–95). Frazer’s entry on taboo highlights the contingency of the sacred and the double process that renders objects like money either sacred or profane. Frazer defines the taboo as something made sacred either by bringing it into “a connexion with the gods” or separating it from its “ordinary purposes” (“Taboo” 15). After identifying the contingency of the sacred, Frazer goes on to describe the mutual implication of the sacred and accursed: “The opposition of sacred and accursed, clean and unclean . . . did in fact arise by differentiation from the single root idea of taboo, which includes and reconciles them both” (16–17). The instability of the sacred clarifies how *Dombey and Son* can conceive of money and commodities as either sacred or profane depending on specific domestic relations.

The novel’s manipulation of tabooed objects counters critical assessments that it presents a polarized vision of the private and public spheres.<sup>11</sup> *Dombey and Son* implicitly

acknowledges that traces from the public sphere inhabit the home even as it seems to endorse a binary that segregates the domestic and economic. Rather than conceiving the economic as a threat to the putative domestic haven, *Dombey and Son* presents the negative or positive effects of any interpenetration of the domestic and economic as conditioned by specific familial arrangements. Dombey's model of the family fails to manage the doubleness of the taboo because the strategies Dombey deploys in bridging marriage and market neither transform money and commodities into markers of intrinsic value nor purify them of their imperial associations.

Dombey considers marriage as both a system of alliance that emphasizes family lineage and social status and a sexual contract that facilitates capitalist expansion. These two forms of marriage appear interfused in the opening scenes of the novel where Fanny has just given birth to Paul. Dombey perceives his marriage with Fanny as "a matrimonial alliance" that confers honor on her through the privilege of "giving birth to a new partner in such a House" (50; ch. 1), but in the very next sentence the marriage assumes the form of a sexual contract: "Mrs. Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station" (51). Dombey's synthesis of alliance and contract results in a possessive individualism that, rather than reforming accursed things such as money and commodities into the sacred, allows money's accursed powers to reify personal relations. On the impending death of Fanny, for example, Dombey begins to regard her as "something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions" (54). Similarly, Edith's position as symbolic capital quickly transforms into the language of sexual contract and exchange. As Edith herself acknowledges to her mother, "You know he has bought me. . . . He has considered of his bargain. . . . There is no slave in a market . . . so shown and offered and examined and paraded . . . as I have been, for ten shameful years" (472–73; ch. 27).

Drawing on Foucault, Clark argues that Dombey's synthesis of marriage as alliance and sexual contract is what catalyzes the family's (and firm's) disintegration. Dombey, he argues, needs both to reproduce the social structure through the "deployment of alliance" and expand the economic base through the "deployment of sexuality" (78). In privileging alliance over sexuality, Dombey fails to conserve the family as well as extend the economic base of the firm.<sup>12</sup> Yet as Dickens makes clear in the alternative family and economy he structures around Florence, Dombey's error lies not in conjoining alliance with sexuality but in identifying the reproduction of the family and firm with Paul rather than Florence. Dombey's bankruptcy, the death of little Paul and Fanny, as well as his failed marriage to Edith, participate in a causal chain that the novel traces to Dombey's alienated relationship with his daughter Florence. Dombey could have avoided the ruin of his business and family if, as Florence's governess Susan Nipper surmises, "he knew her value right" (704; ch. 44). Contrasting the traffic of women that Edith and Alice epitomize with Florence's inalienability (Nunokawa 13), Dickens makes possession of her the precondition for capitalist expansion and sexual reproduction. Dombey's rejection of Florence as "base coin that couldn't be invested – a bad Boy – nothing more" reveals his ignorance of the domestic ideology that underwrites the expansion of capital: it is Florence, not Paul, who guarantees the company and family's reproduction (51; ch. 1).

In failing to organize the reproduction and expansion of family and firm around Florence, Dombey initiates the contaminating effects of capital and money that result in the loss of the family's household gods. *Dombey and Son* stages this loss by intertwining Dombey's

marriage to Edith and the pre-nuptial renovations to the Dombey house. Prior to these renovations, Florence's spirit animates the objects around her and grants "to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder" (394; ch. 23). Once the renovations to the house begin, "the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it" (500; ch. 30). While Dickens seemingly posits a causal link between the entry of the working world and the loss of Florence's "enchanted house," it is less the intrusion of the market into the domestic than the self-interested values represented in Dombey's marriage to Edith that leaves the newly renovated home bereft of its household gods. Shortly before their marriage, Dombey takes pride in "this proud and stately woman doing the honours of his house" (509; ch. 30). Dickens quickly ironizes Dombey's pride in marrying a woman of status by drawing a parallel between his materialism and the exploits of empire. Dombey perceives no dissonance between thoughts of his fortunes and the gloomy dining room, replete with its "Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the sideboard" (509; ch. 30). Dickens is less interested in critiquing the exploitation of colonial labor than in linking Dombey's status-conscious marriage to Edith with the continuities the novel has already established between empire and money as potential contaminants. Dombey's decision to marry a "stately woman" and his general mismanagement of the family result in a new, "stately" house that contains expensive furniture but no household gods. "The saying is, that home is home, be it never so homely. If it hold good in the opposite contingency, and home is home be it never so stately, what an altar to the Household Gods is raised up here!" (580; ch. 35). Dickens's satiric use of "stately" encodes Dombey's valorization of money and status over affections. In viewing Edith and Florence as either exchangeable or worthless possessions, Dombey subjects his home to money's potent powers to transmogrify, transforming what could have been a sacred space into its accursed counterpart.

The narrative reiterates the causal link between the loss of household gods and the destructive effects of capital and empire through the specularization of household goods in Brogley's used-furniture shop and Dombey's auction.<sup>13</sup> As the final destination of possessions once bankruptcy befalls families and forces the sale of one's household gods, Brogley's shop displays furniture "in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose . . . [a] set of window curtains with no windows belonging to them, . . . while a homeless hearthrug severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind" (176–77; ch. 9). Not only does the separation of hearthrug from hearth allegorize the alienation of individuals from their natural roles in the home,<sup>14</sup> but the narrative also orientalizes these alienating effects through its allusion to the "shrewd east wind." When bankruptcy subjects Dombey's house to the liquidities of exchange, Dickens again figures the desecration of the home through an orientalized outsider, a "Mosaic Arabian" (925; ch. 59), who appraises and auctions Dombey's estate until "[t]here is not a secret place in the whole house" (928). The sea of fluid values and imperial trade floods the home, turning everything into a commodity to be appraised and sold.

*Inventing the Totem: Women, Sacred Things, and the Reproduction of Nature*

THUS FAR I HAVE DEMONSTRATED HOW *Dombey and Son* encourages us to read the interpenetration of the public and private as the contamination of the home by the forces of commodification even as it reveals how the loss of Dombey's household gods and bankruptcy has nothing to do with the inherently contaminating nature of tabooed objects like money or

commodities, but hinges instead on the specific familial arrangements that underwrite their entry into the home. Inattention to this dynamic relationship between things, women, and family structure perpetuates a common misrecognition in our readings of novels like *Dombey and Son*, where things are narrowly read as exemplifying the forces of commodity fetishism. Yet our current reevaluation of fetishism as a sufficient critical category for understanding what Freedgood has referred to as the “more extravagant form of object relations” that survived in the Victorian period in fact revisits a problem that Victorians themselves faced (8). In a landmark essay that would fuel decades of obsessive research into the significance of totems and totemism, John Ferguson McLennan published “The Worship of Plants and Animals” (1869) in the *Fortnightly Review*, a two-part essay in which he critiqued his contemporaries (much like current thing theory) for a fundamental misrecognition which regarded the worship of all sacred objects in primitive culture as fetishism. In opposition to this tendency, McLennan introduced a new category, totemism. Totemism yoked three separate sociological phenomena into a unitary and universal stage of religious and social organization: the division of communities into clans, the clan’s worship of a plant or animal from which it descends and after which it is named, and the kinship rules of exogamy and matriarchy.<sup>15</sup> Victorian anthropologists, I argue, invent this new category as an alternative to the narrower category of fetishism in order to posit a symbolic relationship between women, sacred totems, and sexual and economic reproduction. This new category, as we will see, names and theorizes a set of relations that had already been deployed in fictional works like *Dombey and Son* decades before totemism emerged as an object of disciplinary inquiry.

In defining totemism as a universal stage of religious belief and social organization, Victorian anthropologists such as McLennan, Frazer, and William Robertson Smith drew upon eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel accounts. Pierre-Francois-Xavier de Charlevoix and John Long remarked how the plants and animals, or totems, after which Native American tribes were named, embodied the tribe’s sacred ancestor, while Sir George Grey noted that among Western Australians family names and totems were passed on by the mother and prohibited marriage between those with the same name (Jones 13–15). It was not until McLennan’s essay, however, that these features were synthesized into a definition of totemism as a system of social organization related to, but distinct from, fetishism.

Fetichism thus resembles Totemism; which, indeed, is Fetichism *plus* certain peculiarities. These peculiarities are, (1) the appropriation of a special Fetich to the tribe, (2) its hereditary transmission through mothers, and (3) its connection with the *jus connubii*. Our own belief is that the accompaniments of Fetichism have not been well observed, and that it will yet be found that in many cases the Fetich *is* the Totem. (McLennan “Worship” 422–23)

McLennan’s essay reiterates previous accounts of the totem as “some vegetable or animal” that the tribe worships as a divine ancestor (409). Unlike previous findings, however, McLennan distinguishes totemism from fetishism because the former inextricably links the communal worship of a sacred object with the kinship rules of matrilineage and exogamy (408).<sup>16</sup> McLennan’s point here is that the totem is indeed a fetish since it too embodies a divinized spirit, but when the worship of a fetish carries the additional functions and characteristics listed above, that fetish now functions as a totem.

Frazer would largely reiterate McLennan’s definition of the totem, alluding to the connection between totemism and the social rules of matrilineage and exogamy, as well

as the difference between a fetish and a totem. “As distinguished from a fetich, a totem is never an isolated individual, but always a class of objects, generally a species of animals or of plants, more rarely a class of inanimate natural objects, very rarely a class of artificial objects” (Frazer, *Totemism* 4). Frazer’s claim that the totem belongs to a “class of . . . objects” indicates a level of abstraction that is not theorized as present in fetishism. Peter Melville Logan writes that because the fetish is a union of object and divinity, signifier and signified, it is “antithetical to representation” (10); the fetish’s singularity and irreducible materiality “disappears when the object is understood instead as merely one instance of a general class of objects” (37). This is the reverse of the totem, which cannot be understood in its singularity, but only as a class of objects that simultaneously signifies a type of religious worship and principle of social organization.

Additionally, unlike artificial or inanimate objects that may serve as fetishes, Frazer privileges the totem’s organic materiality because it is essential to the totem’s social function and origin. If the totem regulates the laws of marriage and descent, it does so in part through its natural connection to fertility and reproduction: “it appears probable that the tendency of totemism to preserve certain species of plants and animals must have largely influenced the organic life of the countries where it has prevailed” (Frazer, *Totemism* 87). This thesis, underdeveloped in *Totemism* (1887), is one that *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) repeatedly explores. Whether considering the myth of Demeter and Persephone or agricultural rites of English peasants, Frazer consistently sought to explicate how both primitives and moderns combined utilitarian logic and magical thinking in their efforts to control fertility, the food supply, and the process of birth, death, and regeneration through worship of the totem (*Golden* 488–96).<sup>17</sup> The various taboos that bar members of the tribe from consuming, killing, or even touching their sacred totems serve ultimately as a practical measure designed to conserve and reproduce nature (Frazer, *Totemism* 9). As Catherine Gallagher argues, McLennan’s organization of sexuality and Frazer’s analysis of agricultural rites of sacrifice incorporate Malthusian links between sexuality and the food supply (169). Control over fertility and sexual reproduction is identified with the economic reproduction of natural resources.

Perceiving totemism to constitute a religious and social system that regulates marriage, kinship, and an ample food supply, McLennan and Frazer deem the unnatural, artificial object to be an untenable catalyst for the reproduction of nature, whether agricultural or sexual. The classification of the totem as an object whose materiality symbolically regulates the family and economy reveals the contradictory relationship Victorian anthropologists had to the totem’s thingness. If things defy classification and surpass their materiality or functionality by signifying “what is excessive in objects” (Brown, “Thing” 5), the discourse on totemism points to an additional operation in which the very supplementary values that instantiated the totem’s thingness became essential to reclassifying it as a discrete category of objects whose social function, paradoxically, hinged on its materiality. The totem serves this symbolic function only insofar as it ultimately refers back to women, who transmit the totem from generation to generation and whose bodies are the basis of sexual and economic reproduction.

#### *Florence and the Regeneration of Household Gods*

ALMOST TWENTY YEARS BEFORE MCLENNAN would theorize such connections in relation to primitive matrilineage, Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* would plot a similar relationship between



women, sacred things, and kinship through the family and economy Florence engenders. In contrast to the failed patriarchal rule of Dombey, Dickens constructs an alternative family and economy around Florence, who distances money and commodities from their associations with empire by sacralizing them as household gods. These acts of sacralization, however, exploit the very contagion that threatens the economy and domestic space: unstable values. If, as Frazer suggests, the tabooed object becomes sacred either by coming into relation with a god or by being removed from its everyday usages, Dickens sacralizes money and commodities by bringing them into relation with Florence. Hence, although David Ellison claims that “Dickens questions the capacity of angels to hold the house together in a space where new forms of sexual and technological shock reverberate” (108), Dickens in fact depicts Florence’s sanctifying presence as the very resolution to the destabilizing effects of modernity and capital on the domestic interior. Florence’s connection to the sacred regenerates the Dombey family and economy – a regeneration the novel symbolizes through her sacralization of commodities into household gods.

In *Dombey and Son*, these processes of sacralization and the constitution of a new family primarily unfold within the space of Sol Gills’s shop the Wooden Midshipman, which names both Sol’s shop and the wooden figurine that stands mounted outside beside the door.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Dombey’s counting house, the Wooden Midshipman harmoniously integrates domestic and business spaces, placing the parlor with its fireside behind the shop and the bedroom upstairs.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the spatial proximity of work and home, Dickens locates Sol’s shop in the vicinity of Dombey’s firm, the Royal Exchange, the Bank of England, and the East India Co., firmly situating Sol’s shop within the watery realms of trade and economic expansion. In the Wooden Midshipman, the economy and family are reconciled and become productive once love and Florence embody intrinsic value. Cuttle, Sol, and Walter recognize Florence’s real value, equating her not with “base coin” but with her heart’s “undivided treasure” (902; ch. 57). Florence becomes, as Julian Moynahan remarks, an “object of worship” amongst those in the Wooden Midshipman (128); her haloed position facilitates the movement of money and commodities from their accursed position of instability and filth to the medium by which a new economy based on disinterest is sacralized. When Florence runs away from home to Sol’s shop, Captain Cuttle raises an altar in Sol’s bedroom where Florence can rest, providing the very “altar to the Household Gods” that Dombey’s renovated house lacked.

It was very clean already; and the Captain . . . converted the bed into a couch, by covering it all over with a clean white drapery. By a similar contrivance, the Captain converted the little dressing-table into a species of altar, on which he set forth two silver teaspoons, a flower-pot, a telescope, his celebrated watch, a pocket-comb, and a song-book, as a small collection of rarities, that made a choice appearance. (764; ch. 48)

In this act of bricolage, objects that are anything but rarities aid in the construction of a sacred altar by being brought into relation with Florence and the moral values associated with her. Cuttle’s act disrupts the everyday functionality that objects such as watches and combs perform and allows them to step forward as things that reference a “secondary functionality” through the affective values they symbolize.<sup>20</sup> Through the secondary functionality they acquire, the things in Cuttle’s altar resemble those doubled objects “whose status as both commodities and inalienable possessions marked them out not as spoiled hybrids, but as

ideal sites of sentiment” (Plotz 10). In contrast to Marx’s commodity fetishism, where the ascription of transcendent values to money and commodities conceals the social relations of production, the affective values that transform Cuttle’s watch and other items into “a species of altar” evidences the contingency of an object’s value and the sacred itself.<sup>21</sup> Cuttle’s altar epitomizes what Igor Kopytoff refers to as a process of “singularization,” whereby acts of resignification dehomogenize a commodity’s exchange value and make it a sign of the sacred (73). Dickens thus exploits the mutability of the sacred at the very moment that he reconstructs it as absolute value. He capitalizes on the itinerancy of moveables, presenting them as the subtle matter through which both he and his characters imaginatively restructure their relationship with others.

Dickens’s description of the altar Cuttle builds as “a species of altar” echoes Frazer’s description of totems as belonging to “a class of objects” – the word “species” suggesting that Cuttle’s altar is part of a distinct class of sacralized objects within the novel. This distinct class, I want to suggest, bears many of the symbolic associations that anthropologists ascribe to the totem such as the conjunction between women, kinship, and economic reproduction, though Dickens’s household gods are not the plants or animals that McLennan and Frazer privilege but the more rare instance of artificial objects. We see the conjunction between artificial objects, women, and sexual/economic reproduction most explicitly in Dickens’s depiction of the wooden Midshipman that stands mounted outside Sol’s shop.

The wooden Midshipman at the Instrument-maker’s door, like the hard-hearted little Midshipman he was, remained supremely indifferent to Walter’s going away. . . . Such a Midshipman he seemed to be, at least, in the then position of domestic affairs. Walter eyed him kindly many a time in passing in and out; and poor old Sol, when Walter was not there, would come and lean against the doorpost, resting his weary wig as near the shoe-buckles of the guardian genius of his trade and shop as he could. But no fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrot’s feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeals of its savage votaries, than was the Midshipman to these marks of attachment. (330; ch. 19)

The ironic description of the Midshipman as “indifferent” and “hard-hearted” paradoxically anthropomorphizes the object even as it distinguishes an object’s inherent properties from the fetishized powers individuals ascribe to it. Dickens tacitly suggests that all fetishized objects are, from the perspective of the inanimate thing, indifferent; the question is what symbolic matrix the object participates in for its users. In this regard, Dickens’s description of the wooden Midshipman as an “idol” and “guardian genius” contrasts the Midshipman’s indifference to the emotional associations that characters ascribe to him, emphasizing not its innate nature but the degree to which the figure mediates social relations and how characters construe their relations with others. Dickens’s use of the terms “idol” and “guardian genius” proves especially important for our discussion of household gods given McLennan’s claim that members of a tribe regard their totem as a “‘friend’ or ‘protector,’ and is thus much like the ‘genius’ of the early Italian” (“Worship” 414). The Roman concept of the lares, or household gods, refers to the protective deities of the household and family, as well as the domestic shrine before which families performed their rites of worship. Related to the lares, the “genius” is a guardian spirit that expresses the spiritual double of persons. But it is not a single person’s genius that families worship but the household genius of the *paterfamilias* depicted in the shrine of the lares (Hornblower and Spawforth 630). More

importantly, the genius represents a fertility spirit associated with the reproduction of the paternal line – an association made clear through the Latin root *gignere* (to beget) (Rives 212). When viewed as a type of lares and genius, the description of the Midshipman as an object through which characters come to terms with “the then position of domestic affairs” takes on even greater significance. As a metonym for both Sol’s business and the extended, non-biological family that assembles around Florence in Sol’s shop, Dickens configures the wooden Midshipman as a sacred object that symbolically catalyzes both sexual and economic reproduction.<sup>22</sup>

Reading the wooden Midshipman as a lares, we can understand the physical space of Sol’s shop and the kinship of its members tied by affection rather than blood as Dickens’s attempt to imagine a new and healthy family structure that effectively joins sexual and economic reproduction by demonstrating that, like the Midshipman, money and ordinary possessions can be reconstituted into something sacred through people’s affective responses and, particularly, through women like Florence. Dickens’s portrayal of the Midshipman as a genius/totem, and yet his insistence that Florence is the medium through whom objects attain their sacrosanct character, uncovers a tension in representations of the totem. In contrast to the totems found in the “primitive” communities that McLennan examines, Dickens’s portrayal of the relationship between Florence and sacred things does not focus on a specific object that a community regards as intrinsically sacred but on any object that comes into relation with her and the values, domestic and economic, that she symbolizes. By making Florence central to the nexus of familial and economic relations established within Sol’s shop, the novel’s plot and tropology metonymically link her to the wooden Midshipman, which stands not only in metonymic relation to Sol’s business but also functions as its verbal and physical synecdoche. By establishing such linkages, the novel implies that it is only once relationships are organized around Florence that the sexual and economic reproduction symbolized by the Midshipman can be fully realized. Yet, much as in *Hard Times*,<sup>23</sup> what begins as a metonymic relation gives way to a metaphoric substitution in which Florence is revealed to be the sacred, totemic object that ensures the expansion of the family and economy. Hence, Dickens presents the Midshipman as a totemic object only then to expose how woman, rather than any particular object, is what ultimately guarantees reproduction. In so doing, he makes explicit the symbolic relationship between women and totems that was submerged in McLennan: it is not the totem that clans cannot lose possession of, but woman; it is not the totem that guarantees sexual/economic reproduction, but woman.

Possession of woman and her sacred influence, Dickens suggests, is also how money and imperial goods can be divested of their contaminating effects and directed towards economically productive ends. If the novel effectively joins the “money world” with the separate “water world” through empire and catalyzes capitalist expansion by transforming foreign goods into metropolitan wealth (Perera 64), the novel can only endorse such a merger after money has been reconstituted as something sacred.<sup>24</sup> When, for example, Florence gifts her money purse to Walter before he sails to Barbados, she rinses the money of its negative connotations by predicating it on a gift-economy and asking Walter to “take it with my love” (339; ch. 19).<sup>25</sup> By connecting Florence with this transformative power, Dickens makes the gold Florin coin that her name Florence obliquely references a medium of sacred influence rather than contamination. In this manner, Florence becomes a portable possession that sacralizes whatever comes into contact with her even as she herself physically circulates. When Florence and Walter leave for China after their wedding, Walter refers to Florence

as his “sacred charge” (884; ch. 56). Dickens’s use of “charge” underscores Florence’s dual position as an object of Walter’s care and her capacity to revitalize things by merely entering her sphere of influence. In her capacity as sacred charge, Florence both feminizes the ship and ensures its prosperity: “Upon the deck, image to the roughest man on board of something that is graceful, beautiful, and harmless – something that it is good and pleasant to have there, and that should make the voyage prosperous – is Florence” (907; ch. 57). Florence’s presence on the boat effects both economic and sexual reproduction since she gives birth to another Paul at sea and Walter’s journey to China proves financially lucrative. Remarking on this transformation, Mr. Toots states “[t]hus . . . from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend” (974; ch. 62).

Unlike the first *Dombey and Son*, the moral values Florence symbolizes supply the basis for a new economy and family – one ruled by the logic of the gift, self-sacrifice, and duty. Florence’s nurse Susan Nipper summarizes the ethic of this new economy when she refuses wages and asserts that she “wouldn’t sell [her] love and duty” (882; ch. 56). Similarly, Dombey receives an anonymous “annual sum” from Carker’s brother and sister as “an act of reparation” for the bankruptcy Carker caused (971; ch. 62). Once the economy exemplifies the values of duty, affection, and mutuality, business improves as well. The *Wooden Midshipman*, which has never sold anything, begins to turn a profit and is thus rewarded for its non-participation in exchange (Jaffe 101). This new family and economy, moreover, transgresses the boundaries of race, class, and blood ties by including such characters as Captain Cuttle, Mr. Toots, the “mulattor” and “slave” Susan Nipper, all of whom are brought into connection with each other through their love for Florence. In contrast to the contagious sea and Dombey’s possessive individualism, Florence embodies the “good spirit” that shows people the destruction emanating from within their homes and that they are “creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family . . . !” (738–39; ch. 47). To toast this new family and economy, anchored in the intrinsic value of Florence, Sol brings out the last bottle of Madeira wine that he had reserved for Walter’s return and marriage – a bottle that, like Walter, “has been to the East Indies and back” and survived shipwreck (95; ch. 4). Cleansed of its exploitative origins in imperial trade through its association with Florence, the bottle of golden Madeira wine sacralizes both the new family based on mutual obligations and “lost ships, freighted with gold” (974; ch. 62). But if Florence inaugurates a new economy that converts imperial trade into sacred gold, it is an economy that must conceal its origins, never letting its readers know where Florence’s money purse comes from or how Sol Gill’s shop turns a profit.

The novel’s ending suggests that securing value not only requires a family anchored in Florence but a partial return to a patriarchal, endogamous family that ascribes sacred powers and intrinsic value to women even as it divests them of money and property. While the extended, non-biological family that Florence assembles, much as in McLennan’s analysis of totemism, may feign a matriarchal lineage, Dickens actually recreates the endogamous patriarchal family that Dombey had destroyed around Florence, who then resacralizes the household gods and reproduces the family. Dickens accomplishes this by having Florence enter into a biologically exogamous marriage with Walter that he then figuratively transforms into a set of endogamous relations. After Paul’s death, Florence tells Walter: “you’ll be a brother to me, Walter, now that he is gone” (337; ch. 19). The narrative further emphasizes Walter’s role as a surrogate Paul by placing him on a boat called the “Son and Heir.”<sup>26</sup> When Walter returns after his shipwreck, he and Florence have become adults and his position as

Paul's substitute leads to sexual tensions that cause Florence to "weep at this estrangement of her brother" (802; ch. 50). Even after their marriage, Walter and Florence's relationship continues to resemble a filial bond between brother and sister (Waters 55).

While Dickens had earlier critiqued Dombey's "domestic system" as a series of interchangeable positions (74; ch. 2), he ironically draws on the very logic of substitution and equivalence inherent to capitalist exchange to construct the novel's tropology and imagine a new Dombey family that combines economic and biological reproduction with non-capitalist motives.<sup>27</sup> Through the substitution of Walter as the surrogate brother for Paul, Florence's marriage to Walter appears, as Leila Silvana May remarks, to be "a curious mixture of endogamy and exogamy" (62). Florence and Dombey and Son thus become reincorporated into the patriarchal line of Dombey, giving birth not only to another Dombey and Son but another Florence and Paul.<sup>28</sup> Dombey no longer displaces his incestuous desire for Florence, his "blooming" daughter (501; ch. 30), onto rivals such as Edith but channels it into his granddaughter Florence and "hoards her in his heart" (975; ch. 62). Dombey hoards the very thing that he had earlier failed to see was essential to the reproduction of capital and the patriarchal family: woman. Florence regenerates the family and its household gods and, rather than disinherit the male line, will transmit it to the new Paul. As Dombey tells his grandson, the older Paul "was weak, and you are very strong" (975). Walter as the surrogate Paul will hand it down to the newer and healthier Paul to whom Florence has given birth. Florence's ability to transform commodities into household gods, her position as something sacred and untouched by the forces of capital, and yet her function as capital to be hoarded, display the contradictions and uneasy alliances that household gods and their attendant taboos seek to regulate.

#### *Women, Totems, and Kinship in McLennan's Primitive Marriage*

THE TERMS I HAVE USED TO DESCRIBE the indeterminate kinship structure that emerges in *Dombey and Son's* curious marriage-plot ending were, of course, invented by McLennan. McLennan adopts the terms "endogamy" and "exogamy" to identify "the rule which declares the union of persons of the same blood to be incest" (*Marriage* 22). Endogamy refers to those "marriages between members of the same family-group or tribe" (22) while the rule of exogamy "*prohibited marriage within the tribe*" (23). In relation to *Dombey and Son*, Dickens presents the marriage of Florence and Walter as exogamous and yet, through the doubling of Paul and Walter, also as an endogamous (potentially "incestuous") marriage that retains wealth and property within the Dombey family-group and reasserts its transmission along the male line. But if the terms "endogamy" and "exogamy" enable us to identify the kinship systems that Dickens's novel synthesizes, the relationship *Dombey and Son* plots between Florence, sacred things, and value in order to retain possession of women, property, and the economic and sexual reproduction women symbolize, brings into relief the unwritten rationale of McLennan's evolutionary theory of patriarchy and kinship in *Primitive Marriage* (1865).<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the theory of patriarchy previously advanced by Henry Sumner Maine, *Primitive Marriage* proposed that patriarchy was the modern endpoint of kinship systems rather than its archaic origin; more importantly, McLennan added primitive matrilineage as an evolutionary stage that necessarily precedes the concomitant development of private property and patriarchy. Scholars have typically interpreted McLennan's insertion of matrilineage

and his arguments on the rise of patriarchy and private property as an attempt to reassert patriarchal dominance at a time when feminist agitation and increasing capitalism had destabilized Victorian conceptions of marriage, sexuality, and inheritance.<sup>30</sup> Most recently, Kathy Alexis Psomiades has argued that McLennan normalizes a model of heterosexual marriage in which women are appropriated as the partner of one man by positing “an inherent connection between patriarchy and private property that parallels the privatization of property in women with the privatization of property in general” (107). What *Dombey and Son* makes visible is why this process of privatization requires the preceding stage of matrilineage and the particular relationship it establishes between women, totems, and exogamy. In the transition from matrilineage to patriarchy, the male who appropriates the woman and her totem also gains control over the reproduction of the family and economy; the female body that “naturally” produces and reproduces is identified with the organic totems that symbolize the community’s economic sustainability and growth. To maintain possession of women and their totems, McLennan must posit a kinship system in which, much like *Dombey and Son*, the model of exogamous, heterosexual exchange he seeks to render normative incorporates endogamous kinship relations.

McLennan presents matrilineage as an intermediary stage that lies between an original stage of primitive promiscuity, in which notions of paternity or maternity, marriage, and property are completely lacking, and the modern stage of kinship in which patriarchy and private property emerge as mutually constitutive forms of social organization. In the original state of primitive promiscuity, a shortage of women resulting from the practice of female infanticide leads to the institution of exogamy and incest prohibition—groups capture women belonging to different totemic groups and this practice initiates a transition from a stage of primitive endogamy to matrilineal exogamy.<sup>31</sup> Since “[t]hese groups would hold their women, like their other goods, in common” (*Marriage* 69), McLennan conjectures that paternity would be uncertain and, as a result, the earliest form of kinship based on blood-bonds would have to be through females, “blood-ties through females being obvious and indisputable” (64). Such a system of matrilineage and group ownership would gradually be superseded by a system of kinship in which “the mother is appropriated to a particular man as his wife, or to men of one blood as wife” (65) and “a practice of sons succeeding, as heirs direct, to the estates of fathers” (98). The appropriation of women, children, and property to one man, as well as the transmission of the totem through men rather than women, reintroduces the homogeneity associated with the original primitive endogamous tribes and “[arrests] the progress of heterogeneity” and instability associated with matriarchy since women from other totemic groups would simply be absorbed into the totemic group of the male (99). In the final stage of patriarchal endogamy, tribes establish a balance between men and women from foreign tribes so that men can both marry exogamously within the tribe and yet maintain the endogamous transmission of property and descent within the tribe by adopting the fiction of a common paternal ancestor (99–103).

McLennan’s shifting and overlapping use of endogamy and exogamy, where endogamy and exogamy can designate marriage both between and within tribes, points to a more pervasive instability in what constitutes a blood-relation, incest, and family during the nineteenth century at the very moment he sought to fix their definitions.<sup>32</sup> The shifting use of endogamy and exogamy, however, becomes understandable if we see the categories of endogamy and exogamy, as Elsie B. Michie states, “as economic rather than blood categories” that address the movement and concentration of money/property (*Vulgar* 11).

This economic approach to the categories of endogamy and exogamy is one that McLennan himself underscores since, as Mary Jean Corbett has shown, he differentiates endogamy from exogamy largely through which kinship system follows the protocols of exchange (23–24). Exogamous marriages in which one tribe “acquires” a woman from another tribe could only occur, according to McLennan, when marriage is “a subject of bargain, a matter of sale and purchase” (*Marriage* 23) and could not occur in endogamous tribes knitted together by “common interests and possessions” (22). The concluding stage of patriarchal endogamy synthesizes primitive endogamy and matrilineal exogamy in order to establish a kinship system in which women (and their totems) are possessed as inalienable property even as they are exchanged in marriage, thus securing the reproduction and expansion of the economy symbolized in women’s relation to the totem.

McLennan’s synthesis of endogamy and exogamy delimits the possibilities of female sexual agency and property rights that matrilineage encodes and, which he feared, would resurface in Britain. William Robertson Smith explicitly articulates such fears in *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1885) when he states that female ownership of property in early Arabia likely represents “a relic of such a distribution of property as goes with female kinship” (95) and that in such kinship systems “a want of fixity in the marriage tie” results in “a state of things in which divorce is so frequent” (62). Similar concerns underpin McLennan’s statement on the heiress. “The earliest violations of the rule of exogamy would appear to have been called for in the case of female heiresses” since the heiress’s exogamous marriage would carry her property into another tribe or gentes (*Marriage* 113). The propertied Victorian woman, like the heiress, signals a trace of matriarchal exogamy that destabilizes the patriarchal conjugal family unless endogamy constrains the transmission of women and property along the male line.<sup>33</sup> Thus, contrary to Robertson Smith’s claim that the triumph of patrilineal kinship was preceded by a “double system of kinship” in which patrilineal kinship and matrilineal kinship uncertainly coexisted, this “double system” becomes McLennan’s resolution to the propertied woman (*Kinship* 161).

McLennan’s “double system of kinship” suggests that we need to revise our normative assumptions about marriage as heterosexual exchange in the nineteenth century. Recently, critics such as Corbett, Michie, Psomiades, and Sharon Marcus have turned to Victorian anthropology as a way to challenge the model of exogamous, heterosexual exchange famously developed in Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women,” which has so long shaped our understanding of the relationship between marriage, property/money, and kinship in the nineteenth-century novel.<sup>34</sup> Both Michie and Corbett have shown, for example, how Victorians labored to render exogamous, heterosexual exchange normative by marginalizing endogamy as a system of marriage where women marry within the family, although endogamous unions (e.g., cousin-marriage) were prevalent. Yet the synthesis found in McLennan suggests that we need to revise, not only the model of heterosexual exchange, but also our tendency to pit this model against endogamous marriages. While Michie claims, for example, that McLennan’s example of the heiress constitutes “a break in the otherwise general social movement toward free exchange” since “she must marry endogamously and remain in the social group to which she belonged to preserve her property for the group” (“Rich” 426–27), the heiress in fact necessitates both operations. In this manner, McLennan’s argument unsettles the conception of endogamy as a system that Corbett claims “short-circuits exchange” by keeping the woman in the family rather than exchanging her for someone else (22). For McLennan, the injunction to marry within one’s group operates alongside the

injunction to exchange women. Through a synthesis of matrilineal exogamy and patriarchal endogamy, McLennan preserves the economic value of women's sexuality and fertility, but inscribes this value within the patriarchal, endogamous family where both women and their totems can be controlled by men and individuated property rights.<sup>35</sup>

*Thinking with Things in the Victorian Marriage-Plot*

JUST AS CURIOUS AS THE INTENSE fascination that Victorian anthropologists exhibited in totemism is the swiftness with which the category was later dismissed. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Frazer himself noted some ambivalence as to what constituted totemism.<sup>36</sup> While earlier he had insisted that exogamy and matrilineage formed the core of totemism, in "The Beginnings of Totemism" (1906) he asserts that exogamy "forms no part of true totemism" (*Totemism* 162) and that matrilineage need not always precede patrilineage (167). In a comment that summarized the skepticism earlier voiced by Edward Burnett Tylor, Alexander Goldenweiser, and Franz Boas,<sup>37</sup> Lévi-Strauss compared what he called the "totemic illusion" to the invention of hysteria (*Totemism* 1–2). Rather than denoting a universal system of religion and society, totems simply offered a metaphor to explore the connection between man and nature (13) and were, as such, "'good to think'" (89).<sup>38</sup>

Reading *Dombey and Son* and Victorian anthropologies of totemism together illuminates the historical contingencies that initially made household gods and totems "good to think" with and also why their metaphorical efficacy eventually eroded.<sup>39</sup> Both Dickens's domestic novel and anthropologies of totemism reveal how Victorians used things as a symbolically resonant medium to invent a necessary set of relations between value, women, the sacred, kinship, and property precisely because, historically, the logic of capitalism had rendered such interconnections arbitrary. Hence, if as Michie claims, both nineteenth-century domestic novels and anthropology construct an "imaginary anthropology" that thinks through the historical and economic pressures on marriage "by providing a symbolic form in which those pressures can be both encoded and denied" ("Rich" 425),<sup>40</sup> the passage of such laws as the 1882 Married Woman's Property Act made such anthropologies seem decidedly imaginary. In this context, unlike Freedgood's analysis of the realist novel as a "metonymic archive" in which things furnish a direct historical referent to a submerged social history (84), household gods and totems function as historical referents only insofar as they participate in a fictional narrative that novelists and anthropologists fabricate in response to very real economic and historical stresses on marriage and property.<sup>41</sup>

I want to close this essay, however, with an important caveat. While critics like Michie have argued for reading the novel and anthropology together based on their shared preoccupations, understanding the "imaginary anthropology" the two genres construct also requires that we turn a critical eye to what the genres do not share. If the domestic novel and late nineteenth-century anthropologies of kinship both "constitute an attempt to think through the relations between marriage and capital" (Psomiades 94), the generic differences between the two forms of writing allow each to illuminate an aspect of such relations latent in the other. The domestic novel, as Mary Poovey and James Thompson have demonstrated, both mediated the increasing dematerialization of value within a new credit economy and provided a model of non-economic value that distinguished itself from market value, a pattern exemplified in *Dombey and Son* through Florence.<sup>42</sup> By openly linking the contingency of value to the fluid structures of kinship through the movement of things and women, *Dombey*



and *Son* clarifies why Victorian anthropologists ascribed such systematicity to totemism despite the contingency of its elements. But whereas Dickens's domestic novel openly relates value's dematerialization to the changing economic, gender, and kinship relations within the Victorian family, the synthesis of endogamy and exogamy in McLennan clarifies how, as Ruth Perry has argued, shifts in economic systems coincide with shifts in kinship systems.<sup>43</sup> Both Dickens and Victorian anthropologists invest women with an intrinsic value that is necessary to the capitalist economic and social order and conceive their emancipation from the strictures of patriarchy as catalyzing that order's degeneration – a degeneration they symbolize through women's relationship with things. Yet it is only by examining Dickens's novel and anthropologies of totemism together, attentive to what they do and do not share, that we recognize the specific relationship they both orchestrate between women and sacred things, as well as its underlying logic. The mobility of things, their capacity to accumulate multifarious associations from context to context, provides the imaginative matter for a compelling fiction in which the fluctuating concepts of value and kinship acquire fixity by virtue of the very things that do not.

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## NOTES

1. As Poovey and Armstrong have noted, the identification of the middle-class woman's role in the domestic sphere with her intrinsic virtue transforms the home into a locale where the alienated experience of the self in the marketplace could be unified through feminine affection and self-sacrifice (Armstrong 47–48, Poovey *Uneven* 2, 76–78). For a discussion of how Florence mediates value, see Klaver's examination of the connection between the intrinsic economic value of gold and Florence's moral value. Florence, she argues, structurally symbolizes what the nation's gold reserves did for those in search of a secure basis of economic value in the 1844 Bank Charter Act (79–80).
2. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Peter Fairclough (London: Penguin, 1970) 298. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically. Auerbach's essay is the most seminal treatment of how the novel replaces the masculine world of Dombey with Florence's femininity. For similar discussions, see Marsh 405–10, Jaffe 74.
3. I borrow the term "inalienable" from Weiner and her anthropological analysis of those "inalienable possessions" in Polynesian society that groups do not allow to enter into the circuit of exchange (6–8, 33).
4. Criticism on the homology that the novel constructs between the sexual and economic overlaps with that on their feared interpenetration. Aside from Nunokawa, the most thorough treatment of this problem is by Clark, whose influential essay on *Dombey and Son* argues that the novel represents "economic exchange tangling with the sexual" (73). See also Marsh's claim that the correspondence between the worlds of the economic and sexual is central to the novel's plot (411–13). Williams claims that Dickens's reference to Dombey's counting house as "the House of Dombey" purposely plays on the affinities between house and home in order to show how Dombey's governance of house and home according to a similar logic leads to his ruin (17). This problematic confusion of family and firm is reiterated by Jaffe 80, Elfenbein 364–65, and Schor 49–50.
5. Feminist critics Auerbach and Moglen see the novel as a critique of the binary oppositions necessary for patriarchal society. Auerbach writes that *Dombey and Son* critiques separate spheres and exposes the "schism between masculinity and femininity" (128). Moglen claims that the novel plays out the

binaries of separate spheres in order to deconstruct it, but then supplants it with an essentialized femininity (159–60, 175). Waters, by contrast, argues that the novel explores the consequences that attend Dombey's failure to separate the domestic and economic (39–40). This approach is echoed by Surrige, who writes that Dombey violates the home's sanctity by making it a site of violence and fails to mitigate the alienating effects of capital through femininity (45, 67).

6. Yelin claims that *Dombey and Son*, in particular, reflects Dickens's response to the woman question and the ways in which capitalism fostered greater gender equality (297). For an examination of the propertied woman in the Victorian novel, see Dolin. On a related point, Psomiades states that the homology between the circulation of goods and women within heterosexual exchange emerges at a time when capitalism provides the enabling concept that grants women equal political and economic agency instead of conceiving them as either alienable or inalienable property (93–94). For a more general discussion of the links between capitalism and legal changes to women's property and divorce rights, see Shanley 9–14.
7. Aside from the contributions by Brown, Freedgood, and Plotz to the field of "thing theory," see Daston, Orlando, Stewart, and the numerous essays by Rey Chow, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Michael Taussig edited by Brown in *Things*. Briggs offers a densely researched catalogue of Victorian commodity culture and analyzes the material contexts of various household things and domestic architecture. For the increasing description of things in the eighteenth-century novel and its connection to shifts in perception, see Wall.
8. The connection between household gods and the hearth predates the Victorians, of course, and stems from the meaning Romans gave to their fetishes. Welsh remarks that the worship of "household gods" in Victorian novels seems pre-Christian, but became connected, especially in Dickens, with the sanctity of the domestic and affections. The religion of the domestic redeems individuals from the disaffected modern city and substitutes the home for Augustine's city of god (147–48). In addition to these associations, the phrase household gods is also connected to problems of national culture. For the connection between the phrase "household gods" and English national culture, see Buzard's discussion of Bronte's *Villette* (257), Plotz's discussion of the connection between Englishness and portable property (20–22), and McClintock's analysis of advertising campaigns for ENO's fruit salt (228–29).
9. Dickens's use of household gods was not limited to the fictional hearth represented within the novel but includes those sitting by the hearth and reading his novels. Commenting on his literary success after *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37), Dickens says that "[t]o be numbered amongst the household gods of one's distant countrymen, and associated with their homes and quiet pleasures; to be told that in each nook and corner of the world's great mass there lives one well-wisher who holds communion with one in the spirit, is a worthy fame, indeed" (qtd. in M. Dickens 71). Contemporary reviewers of Dickens invoked similar language to praise him for his "deep reverence for the household sanctities, his enthusiastic worship of the household gods." See "Charles Dickens and David Copperfield," *Fraser's Magazine*, Dec. 1850, xlii, 698–710. Reprinted in Collins 244.
10. See Klaver 79–87, Toise 11–12, Weiss 25, Clark 75–76, and Steven Marcus 283–356. For a general discussion of the dematerialization of value in the emergent credit culture, see Brantlinger (20–26).
11. See, for example, Auerbach's claim that the novel depicts "each sex moving in a solitary orbit inaccessible to the other one" (108).
12. In a slightly different vein, Toise considers the fusion of these two systems of marriage as symptomatic of Dombey's attempt to synthesize capitalist and early modern models of value, wherein the two realms were not segregated (324).
13. For a discussion of the importance of spectacle and display to the rise of commodity culture, see Richards and Miller, *Novels*.
14. For related discussions of Brogley's shop, see Weiss 106, Waters 55, and Ellison 95–96.
15. McLennan's definition represents the central features that would preoccupy later theories of totemism. In a somewhat anomalous approach, Lang (under the influence of Max Müller's theories of naming)

- claims that the naming of a clan after an animal/plant developed in order to differentiate a clan from other clans, and this is the origin of totemism. For the savage mind, he argues, names and things have “a mystic rapport” such that to name the thing is to enact a magical power (123). This origin, however, was forgotten and in order to explain the connection between persons of a clan and the animal/plant name it bears, savages invented myths that posited a spiritual identity between the blood flowing through themselves and the plant/animal with which they identify. They then instituted taboos around that object (124–25).
16. Over time, the discourse on totemism divided the practice into two aspects, the religious and the social: the religious rites and beliefs that surround the totem and the social organization of the clan. While Robertson Smith’s *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* replicates the approach McLennan took to totemism in *Primitive Marriage*, his later and best-known work, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1888–1891), focused its analysis on totemism as the primitive origin of religion. For Robertson Smith, and those following his lead such as Durkheim, totemism is a rite of kinship that establishes bonds between clansmen and intimacy with their deity (216). In totemism, the members of the totemic clan regard the totem animal as their god and, moreover, as a kin with whom they share the same flesh and blood. In this context, the sacrificial meal in which clansmen sacrifice and eat the totem binds the members socially; each conveys to the other through participation in the meal that “the only thing that is sacred is the common tribal life” and that membership consists of “reciprocal family duties to one another” (289, 30). This model of totemism as the primitive origin of religious belief and practice serves as the foundation of Durkheim’s analysis of the primitive totemic cult and his sociological theory of religion in which worship and rites surrounding the totem reveal how religion “is nothing but society hypostasized and transfigured” (257) – a representation of the social body in which members consecrate social life itself. For Durkheim, the totem god is society; once we turn to Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913), however, the totem god is, as Evans-Pritchard notes, “the father” (63).
  17. In a letter to A. C. Haddon, for example, Frazer insists that the meaning of totemism is “a cooperative system of magic designed to provide the community with the necessities of life, especially of food” (qtd. in Jones 162). Jones offers other examples from Frazer’s letters to Haddon in which Frazer interprets the *intichiuma* ceremony of the Australian aboriginal Arunta tribe as a totemic rite that seeks to increase the supply of the tribe’s totem for food (149–51). Thus while later anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski would critique Frazer’s conclusions and methods, Malinowski’s own interpretation of totemism would in fact continue, in places, Frazer’s line of thinking. In his essay “The economic aspects of the *intichiuma* ceremonies” (1912), Malinowski argues that these ceremonies, which comprise the heart of Australian totemism, are part of “a collective and regular system of labour” (209) in which the tribe performs various ceremonies at regular times of the year in order to multiply the plant/animal totem and, in so doing, increase the tribe’s food supply. In this context, these ceremonies are a system of magico-religious acts whose aim is “practical” and “economic” (210). The division of labor, collective exertion, and sacrifice of present enjoyment for future accumulation evidenced in these ceremonies are “economic virtue[s] and the prerequisite of capital” (219). While Frazer may not have stated the resemblance between these ceremonies and capitalist modes of behavior so baldly, I have shown how he sees totemism as related to a broader set of fertility rituals aiming to increase the food supply.
  18. Disparaging Dickens’s romanticized portrayal of the Wooden Midshipman, Moynahan argues that the back parlor of Sol Gills’s shop establishes “a quasi-religious society” in which Florence functions as an “object of worship” and all those who enter her purview have a good relationship with the “the quasi-sacramental element of wet” (128).
  19. For discussions of the importance of such segregated spaces as the Victorian parlor for familial intimacy and the display of things, see Davidoff and Hall 377, 380 and Thad Logan 7, 23.
  20. I borrow this idea of secondary functionality from Orlando (12). For related arguments, see Brown “Thing” 11 and Appadurai 16, 25–26.

21. Pietz claims that fetishism represents a new category in the eighteenth century, insofar as it “identified religious superstition with false causal reasoning about physical nature, making people’s relations to material objects rather than god the key question for historians of religion and mythology” (138). In this context, Marx’s argument on commodity fetishism interpreted the capitalist as a fetishist, who falsely believes that capital embodies “(*super*)natural causal powers of value formation” (141, emphasis in original). Stallybrass concisely states that “[t]he problem for Marx was thus not with fetishism as such but rather with a specific *form* of fetishism that took as its object not the animated object of human labor and love but the evacuated nonobject that was the site of exchange” (186–87).
22. The ancient Roman concept of family and household is not a nuclear family but included slaves and their children (Warrior 28–32). Maine’s *Ancient Law*, for example, examined how the “fiction of adoption” stretched the rule of *patria potestas* so as to include outsiders and assimilated them into the kinship group (110). In this context, the non-nuclear and adoptive family that Dickens assembles in *Dombey and Son*, which includes friends and “slaves” like Susan Nipper, is not so different from its ancient precursor. For criticism on the adoptive families that populate Dickens’s novels, see Helena Michie and Furneaux. Dickens’s families reflect a broader cultural instability in how Victorians defined “family.” Legal definitions of family in the nineteenth century were at variance with general practice. Behlmer notes that in 1851 a “household” frequently “sheltered individuals beyond the nuclear family core – servants, apprentices, and lodgers, not to mention distant kin” – while common law definitions of family privileged the nuclear family consisting of the husband, wife, and children (26). Chase and Levenson remark that this incoherence suggests a conflict between notions of “family” and “household,” where the latter identifies lodgers of an architecturally restricted space that conflicts with normative definitions of family as a domestic circle ruled by a male head (4–5).
23. For discussions of metonymy and metaphor in *Hard Times*, see Gallagher (*Industrial* 147–66) and Spector.
24. Several critics have discussed the motif of water in the novel. See Moynahan 125–26 and Auerbach 107–29.
25. My reference to the “gift economy” at work in the novel is, of course, indebted to Mauss and the large body of anthropological scholarship that has since emerged which examine “primitive” gift exchange as an alternative to self-interested capitalist exchange but nevertheless yields economic benefits.
26. For a discussion of the numerous surrogate relationships in the novel and patterns of substitution and repetition, see Waters 56; Schor 50, 69; Sadoff 63.
27. See, for example, Miller’s discussion of the novel’s “domestic system” as following a structuralist pattern of substitutions (*Burdens* 164).
28. My reading of the ending is in keeping with those by Elfenbein and Zwinger. Elfenbein claims that Dickens restores the “dynastic transfer of power” through Florence (381) while Zwinger states that Dickens restores patriarchal rule even as he critiques it (42). By contrast, Moglen sees the ending as a new domesticity that replaces dynastic ambitions (175–80). Cain and Auerbach also claim that the novel supplants Dombey’s patriarchal rule with Florence’s femininity, symbolized in the images of water with which the novel concludes. Cain states that Dombey succumbs to Florence’s “‘melting’ nature” (68) while Auerbach writes that “The entire world seems to melt into the feminine sphere” (127). This approach to the ending takes a more acerbic form in Moynahan, who sees the novel’s surrender to Florence’s influence as the substitution of patriarchy with matriarchy (130). Moynahan’s reading voices a fear of female autonomy/authority that, when seen in relation to my argument, resembles fears expressed by Dickens and Victorian anthropologists.
29. In what follows I will concentrate primarily on McLennan’s *Primitive Marriage* (1865) since his arguments on the developmental stages of kinship are largely recapitulated by Frazer and Robertson Smith.
30. For an extensive discussion of the historical context of McLennan’s argument, see Stocking 197–208. In a feminist reading of McLennan’s argument, Fee argues that the scandal of promiscuity, incest, and unstable family ties, which shadowed Victorian debates on marriage and family, were then

projected onto primitive stages of kinship. Victorians were thus encouraged to interpret changes to divorce and property laws as a degeneration into primitivism (86–102). Levy examines how Victorian anthropologists redefined kinship and the blood-bond in order to legitimate middle-class domestic ideology and its notions of gender difference (48–74).

31. Many of these central assumptions would later come under attack. In *The History of Human Marriage* (1891), for example, Westermarck argues that there is no evidence of primitive promiscuity or female infanticide and, quite to the contrary, there are abundant examples of monogamy and the absence of divorce (57, 311). Westermarck contests the universality of McLennan's thesis, which follows Johann Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), that matrilineage necessarily precedes patrilineage; he gives numerous examples of the coexistence of the two forms or the absence of the former in some tribes (97). Westermarck, however, accepts the thesis regarding the universal prohibition against incest, but he argues that this disgust is not, as McLennan and Morgan would have it, biologically innate; rather, there is an innate aversion to mating with those raised in close proximity and since kin are usually raised closely together it is assumed that the horror is between those of the same blood (320).
32. Recently, critics have focused on how anthropologists like McLennan try to render the conjugal family normative when the category of kinship and marriage itself was highly flexible. Sharon Marcus contends in her study of female marriage that Victorian debates on the legal institution of marriage showed that "marriage was already relatively plastic" (212). The plasticity Marcus attributes to the institution of marriage underlies notions of kinship and family as well. While Perry states that the eighteenth century witnessed a transition from consanguineal bonds to conjugal bonds that substituted a family constructed by marriage for the biological family (2), such a substitution remained incomplete even in the nineteenth century. The concept of the distinct blood-relation, according to Davidoff, did not emerge until the twentieth century (Davidoff "Stranger" 208; Wolfram 143). In fact, British notions of kinship during the nineteenth century did not clearly distinguish between consanguineal bonds and affinal bonds. The ambiguities over the basis of kinship and family coalesce in the controversy that surrounded the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act, which sought to repeal prohibitions forbidding marriage between a widowed husband and his sister-in-law (Corbett 57–85; Wolfram 35).
33. It is this concern that prompts McLennan's ambiguous temporal positioning of endogamy and exogamy within an otherwise sequential evolutionary framework. "[Tribal systems] may represent a progression from exogamy to endogamy, or from endogamy to exogamy. . . . The two types of organisation may be equally archaic" (60). McLennan's evolutionary narrative presents exogamy and endogamy as both synchronic and diachronic because their contemporaneity is necessary for their synthesis.
34. See Elsie B. Michie ("Rich" 421–23, 426–29 and *Vulgar* 3, 9–12), Corbett (1–29), Psomiades ("Heterosexual" 112–17), and Marcus (217–22, 227–55).
35. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, for example, Lévi-Strauss interprets marriage as the reciprocal exchange of women and other goods in primitive society in order to establish alliances between families and tribes. Within this schema of reciprocal exchange, he argues, women are of "essential value" in the group compared with other goods that are exchanged. Women are not only "a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant" of the very reciprocal act of exchange that transforms nature into culture (43, 62). Lévi-Strauss, like Victorian anthropologists and novelists, reveals the way in which women function both within and outside the system of exchange – the essential value that groups cannot lose control of because women represent the one possession that naturally stimulates exchange, reproduction, and social organization.
36. In his review of Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), Malinowski critiques the argument both for its sweeping generalizations and its methodology. Frazer, he contends, uses Australian totemism and the evidence compiled by Spencer and Gillen on the Arunta tribe as the paradigmatic example of totemism because it is the one example in which all the elements by which he defines totemism cohere: 1) the intimate identification with a plant, animal, or inanimate/artificial object as the ancestor of a clan; 2) the social rules of exogamy and prohibition against incest; 3) the various taboos that surround

worship of the totem, whether they be eating or killing the totem. But these elements only cohere in the Arunta tribe, which he regards as “the ‘most primitive’ of totemic peoples” (188) and do not account for the numerous examples in which these elements are not found together. Malinowski separates totemism’s religious aspects, the rites and beliefs respecting the tribe’s relationship to the totem, from the social rules (e.g., exogamy) that address the social organization of various clans within a tribe (145). Once viewed in this light, totemism as a religious phenomenon and as a set of rules governing social organization can be seen as independent of each other (145). After Malinowski separates totemism as a form of religious worship from its social functions, he then goes on to conjecture that while exogamy is biological given the innate revulsion against incest, totemism is “arbitrarily and artificially constructed by us” (187).

37. See, for example, Tylor, Goldenweiser, and Boas. The debate over totemism became so nettled that Radcliffe-Brown asked whether the term “has not outlived its usefulness” (117). Nevertheless, in “The Sociological Theory of Totemism” (1929) Radcliffe-Brown tackles the question of what totemism is by giving a more minimal schema that defines totemism as a society divided into groups that worship “one or more classes of objects that are usually natural species of animals or plants but may occasionally be artificial objects” (117). He largely follows Durkheim’s lead in regarding totemism as a practice that reaffirms the social body’s cohesion and solidarity, but unlike Durkheim, who sees the totem as a visual representation of the social body (e.g., like a flag) that it then regards as sacred, Radcliffe-Brown contends that totemism constitutes a ritual relation between a group and natural species in which the social order and the natural order are intimately tied, as seen in those clans wherein the totem is part of the food supply (128–30). This latter aspect, however, is not present in every instance where a tribe is segmented into various clans according to their worship of a natural species. At bottom, the heterogeneous elements that comprise totemism are but an example of a more universal aspect of culture, that is, totemism “provides a representation of the universe as a moral or social order” – a representation in which “external nature” is essential to “the fashioning of culture” (131).
38. After Lévi-Strauss, however, the general skepticism regarding the usefulness of totemism as an analytical category reached a broader consensus, as evidenced in the lack of discussion thereafter among anthropologists on the topic. Kuper remarks that while totemism started “fizzling out” between 1910 and 1920 (120), it retains an enduring presence in sociologies of religion because of the important role it plays in such seminal texts as Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (121).
39. Jones credits the vast discourse that surrounded totemism as a fully integrated and holistic phenomenon as coextensive with theories of social evolution. Jones thus interprets the critique of the social evolutionary paradigm as responsible for the disappearance of arguments on totemism around the 1890s (4). While my argument does not contradict Jones’s claims, I do think that nineteenth-century novels offer another perspective on why Victorian anthropologists might have been drawn to such a topic and what cultural problems they may, however unconsciously, have sought to address.
40. Michie borrows the phrase “imaginary anthropology” from Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (197).
41. Like Bill Brown, I here privilege the relationship between things and genres of narrative for the way in which narrative manifests an object’s thingness “syntactically” and “in time” (“Secret” 3), whether that temporal narrative be Dickens’s fictional marriage-plot or the marriage-plot that Victorian anthropologists embed within evolutionary stages. For a reconsideration of genre, particularly poetry, in relation to thing theory, see Markovits.
42. For Poovey’s discussion of how fiction mediated value in the nineteenth century see, for example, her discussion of Defoe in *Genres of the Credit Economy* (89–124). Thompson argues that the novel represents “an ideological regrouping of intrinsic value” in the domestic sphere and in love (21). Thompson’s argument demonstrates the connection between domestic ideology and the problem of value.
43. Perry explores the relationship between shifts in economic systems and kinship systems in the eighteenth century, prior to the emergence of anthropology, through the novel. The shift that Perry examines during the eighteenth century from a family organized by consanguineal bonds to conjugal

bonds accompanied the increased accumulation of wealth in the hands of men and thus less economic liberty for women (38–76).

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