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**Economy, Empire, Extermination: The Christmas Pudding, the Crystal Palace, and the Narrative of Capitalist Progress**

In its opening edition, which appeared at the end of March 1850, the remit of the weekly journal *Household Words* was outlined by its editor, Charles Dickens:

We seek to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less tolerant of one another, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time.<sup>1</sup>

The publication's global scope and commitment to universal progress were apparently borne out by 'A Christmas Pudding', a short story which was published anonymously in the journal in December 1850.<sup>2</sup> Grounded in a mid-nineteenth century industrial capitalist understanding of the way the world should work, the story seems to structure a straightforward and laudatory account of international commerce, offering proof of its manifold and mutual benefits. This moral is particularly significant given the publication of the tale some five months before the opening of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the world's first international display of industry, held at the purpose-built Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park. As will be discussed, the tale appears to sit comfortably with the way in which many Exhibition commentators set out the meaning and outcomes of the cosmopolitan display, working allegorically to confirm the exhibitionary conceit that global trade was distinguished by progress and peace.<sup>3</sup> However, 'A Christmas Pudding' is not straightforward; the formal dialogue through which it explicates industrial capitalism and its impact upon the world is dialogical, rendering problematic the moral which is offered by the tale. Consequently, the story can be understood to problematise a

mid-nineteenth century narrative of capitalist progress which was bound up with the Great Exhibition, and which fed into the conceptualisation of rational, modernising, and peaceful English mission to make sense of the way the world the worked.<sup>4</sup> Seen in this light, the proof of the pudding undercuts the stated remit of *Household Words*, offering evidence of imperial intolerance and violence, and giving powerful reason to be ‘less faithful in the progress of mankind’.

‘A Christmas Pudding’ begins with Mr. Oldknow, the tale’s protagonist, concerned at an apparent lack of Christmas pudding prior to the household’s seasonal festivities. Voicing his anxiety to his wife, Oldknow is led into a clean and orderly kitchen, a room from which he had been ‘banished’ by ‘the refinements’ of the age, but which is nevertheless dominated by patriarchal agency in the form of an enormous Grandfather clock.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Oldknow, ‘a careful matron’, swiftly retrieves the ‘Family Receipt Book’ from a ‘polished bureau’, and proceeds to ‘read aloud, for her husband’s edification’ (p. 300). The recipe for ‘A Pound Christmas Pudding’ bears testament at once to domestic order and to the extensive span of England’s commercial connections:

One pound raisins; one pound currants; one pound suet; one-pound bread-crumbs; quarter-pound orange peel; two-ounces citron peel; one nutmeg; one teaspoonful powdered ginger; one teaspoonful powdered cinnamon; one wine-glassful brandy; seven eggs; one teaspoonful salt; quarter pound raw sugar; milk enough to liquefy the mass, if the eggs and brandy be not sufficient for this purpose. (p. 300)

The culinary lesson over, Mrs. Oldknow is able to reveal to her gratified spouse the pudding which had been prepared earlier: ‘[She] then lifted a cloth off a vast earthen pan, and behold! a rich, semi-liquefied mass, speckled throughout with plums and currants, presented itself to her husband’s view’. Left alone by his wife to smoke a cigar, Oldknow, ‘a great reader of travels [...] partly for commercial information and general views of life, and partly with an

imaginative taste for unfamiliar scenes', is drawn to contemplate the wider significance of the dish before him. As he 'mused and mused over the mercantile history of the various substances of which that pudding was composed', the kitchen undergoes a fantastic change, expanding to expose a great mirror within 'which landscapes of every clime were reflected' as 'vivid pictures' (p. 301). This expansive visual compass serves to establish a magical geography, and the ingredients of the pudding appear before Oldknow as a succession of genies, each one of which represents a peculiar combination of product, terrain, and people.<sup>6</sup>

The Genius of the Raisin is the first of the anthropomorphised ingredients to appear within the mirror. Dressed 'with the fresh vine-wreath of a Greek Bacchante on the head, and the Cashmere shawl of an Arabian Sultana round the waist', the Raisin immediately subjects Oldknow, whom he describes as the 'son of a vineless land', to a tirade of abuse for depriving the regions he represents of significant local productions:

Your ships throng my Andalusian ports [...] and they bear to your cold and cloudy land the richest gifts of our sunny south. Why come ye, every year more and more, with your linens and your woollens, your glass and your pottery, to exchange with our native fruit? Why strip ye the gardens which the Faithful planted, of the grapes which ought to be reserved for the unfermented wine which the Prophet delighted to drink? (p. 301)

To Oldknow's mind the Raisin represents Islamic irrationality and stagnation. He seizes the opportunity to articulate the progressive, rousing nature of industrial capitalist commerce, pointing out that English commodities, the result of technological advances and sophisticated industrial practices, serve as a stimulus to labour and consumption:

'Immortal child of the Arab', replied the son of the vineless land, 'your nation gave us the best element of commerce when you gave us your numerals. Your learning and your poetry, your science and your industry, no longer fructify in heaven-

favoured Andalusia. The sun which ripens your grapes and your oranges makes the people lazy and the priests rapacious. We come to your ports with the products of our looms and our furnaces, and we induce a taste for comforts that will become a habit. When our glass and our porcelain shall find its way into your peasant's hut, then will your olives be better tended and your grapes more carefully dried'. (p. 301)

Oldknow indicates that the commercial relationship between his nation and that of the Arab is not a simple symbiosis, but must be seen rather with regard to a more complex economic order. Crucial to his logic is the conviction that it is the duty of peoples and nations alike to engage in trade: 'Man only worthily labours when he labours for exchange with other labour'. This tenet serves to legitimise his delineation of the key role played by England in allowing the potential of the material world to be realised, and humankind's position on earth to be improved. Claiming the pudding as 'the emblem of our [England's] commercial eminence', he heralds the international role which it fulfils; by giving 'commercial value' to 'the raisins of Malaga and the currants of Zante – the oranges of Algarve, the cinnamon of Ceylon, and the nutmegs of the Moluccas', the pudding has 'called them into existence as effectually as the native cultivator' (p. 301). Cloistered away within such stagnant, if exotic climes, these products are devoid of real significance. They are given meaning (or 'commercial value') only once they become *ingredients* – constituent parts of an economy which serves to bind together peoples and terrains.

The encounter with the Raisin over, next to appear is the Genius of the Currant, a figure who is far more in tune with Oldknow's way of thinking. The Currant indicates that Zante and Cephalonia enter willingly into a trade relationship with England, and appreciate the global produce which such a connection realises: 'Welcome are ye with your sugar and your coffee, your rice and your cheese. Welcome are ye with your gold'. Significantly, the Currant attests to

the fact that a cosmopolitan trading scope allows the environmental differences which characterise particular regions of the world to be rendered profitable, rather than restrictive: ‘It is better to grow currants in the soil which they delight in, and buy our wheat, than plough up our little vines for bread-producing crop’ (p. 302). This statement, which spells out the logic of an international division of labour, furnishes the tale with a doctrinal mainstay. Following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and of the Navigation Acts in 1849, it was widely believed that England had set in motion a process which would see the entire world united through free trade.<sup>7</sup> In line with Adam Smith’s explication of global commerce in the *Wealth of Nations*, free trade was justified in terms of the comparative advantage which was engendered via an international division of labour.<sup>8</sup> At the heart of the *Wealth of Nations* is Smith’s account of ‘a certain propensity in human nature [...] the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’.<sup>9</sup> The process of exchange allows for humanity to work efficiently, dividing tasks or creating divisions of labour in order that self-interest is best served. The Currant’s realisation that certain nations were better suited to perform particular tasks within a global economy both gives weight to, and elaborates on, the arguments made by Oldknow in his confrontation with the Raisin. Understood in terms of the doctrine of comparative advantage, the pudding is a structure which enables the peoples of Malaga, Zante, Algarve, Ceylon, and Moluccas to rationalise their industrial activity in accordance with distinct ecological factors, thus effecting a dynamic harmonisation of global industry.

Unsurprisingly, Oldknow responds positively to the Currant’s Smithian rationale, complimenting it on its recognition of the autochthonous pattern of world-wide commerce: ‘Bravo, my little free-trader’ (p. 302). Other spirits which appear, however, do not articulate such a rational, liberal philosophy. Both the Genius of Bread and the Genius of Nutmeg voice protectionist dogma. The Genius of Bread is sternly reprimanded, whilst the Genius of Nutmeg, who represents Dutch colonialism in the Spice Islands, is forced to accept that its

commercial beliefs are erroneous. Indicating that it has ‘given up the contest against nature’, the Nutmeg is converted to the notion of a world governed according to the tenets of free trade, free labour, and the universal consumption of goods:

In Ceylon I saw your English diffusing comfort and equal laws, opening roads, encouraging industry, destroying forced labour, and selling cinnamon to all the world. I have learnt [...] that the end of commerce is [...] to diffuse all the productions of nature and art, amongst all the inhabitants of the globe. You have taught me a lesson. (p. 302)

Following this commendation of England’s commercial enterprise, Oldknow is confronted by the Genius of Sugar (a ‘freed Negro’), the Egg-Collector of Cork, a figure representing salt, and the Milky Genius. The resulting dialogue between Oldknow and the figures allows the patriarch, confident in his economic rationale, to suggest that the proper place for such products is in the pudding. However, an additional component is needed before these diverse elements can be synthesised. Representative of both hard work and industrial sophistication is ‘a brisk *power-loom weaver*’ who steps forth, ‘with pudding cloth in hand’: “‘The water boils”, said he; “the ingredients are mixed. Be it mine to bind them together!”” (p. 303). The figure of the power-loom weaver is crucial; in line with the arguments made by Oldknow to the Genius of the Raisin, it foregrounds the need for global commerce to maximise the potential afforded it by the industrial advances and technological sophistication of certain European powers, particularly England. Key to the conceptualisation of an international division of labour which allowed the world to work together was the notion that it was the role of certain nations to produce raw materials, whilst other countries should be left to manufacture goods. In recognition of this fact, Oldknow had observed to the Raisin that the world should thank not only the seamen of London and Liverpool, but also the artisan of Birmingham and Manchester (p. 301). The power-loom weaver stands for assiduity and technological progress, two joists upon which rested the efficient, rational organisation of world-wide industry, and the

continuation of English commercial sovereignty. The weaver would thus seem to assure the metropolitan reader of both the legitimacy and the necessity of England's dominant (and profitable) role in a global economy. With this sanction in place, Oldknow proclaims the lesson which can be drawn from this culinary enterprise is that the products, peoples, and nations of the world are united by free trade industrial capitalism: 'We, in our united interests, well bound together, produce Christmas pudding'. Underlining this moral, the relationship of the pudding to the world is made clear: 'Suddenly the great-pudding bowl swelled into an enormous globe, black with plums, and odorous with steaming sauce' (p. 303).

Mrs. Oldknow had presented to her husband's view 'a rich, semi-liquefied mass'; the globular end product with which the tale concludes is far more coherent. John Barrell defines the concept of the division of labour as a model bound up with 'the institution of political economy', and associated with,

the celebration of economic expansion and industrial improvement, and with the attempt to vindicate the structure of modern commercial societies as, precisely, a structure, as something which, despite its arguably chaotic appearance, was available to be known, to be comprehended. And for political economists, of course, it was a discourse which had, for the most part, a good story to tell.<sup>10</sup>

Rendered analysable by the institution of the magical geography, the Christmas pudding becomes comprehensible in terms of an international division of labour; a productive economic order which is underpinned by England's 'commercial eminence'. Seen through Oldknow's eyes, it represents precisely that 'organic system of relations capable of holding all its elements together and of giving them a *function* and a *meaning*' which Franco Moretti has argued characterises the capitalist 'self-regulating market'.<sup>11</sup> The 'elements' held together by this 'organic system' are comprised not simply of materials, but the terrains and labour necessary to their production and mobilisation. Thus, the pudding signals the way in which

free trade industrial capitalism made perfect sense of the way the world worked; through the industrial produce of the world, the peoples and the nations of the world could be ‘bound together’ within a dynamic, mutually beneficial network of exchange. At the same time, ‘A Christmas Pudding’ draws attention to the fact that it is England which lies at the centre of this network, providing the hub around which the global economy turns. Bernard Semmel notes that from the ‘theoretical disputations of the founders of political economy’, notably Adam Smith, came the conceptualisation of an ‘Empire of Free Trade’. At the core of this model he identifies ‘the dream that England would be the Workshop of the World, the center of a cosmopolitan international economy which would constitute the basis of a Pax Britannica’.<sup>12</sup> Following his encounter with the pudding, Oldknow is moved to sing a song he remembers from his youth, a time when ‘England was threatened with invasion’. The song, in the form of a poetic quatrain, foregrounds the commercial nature of England’s imperial mission:

Britain, to peaceful arts inclined,  
 Where commerce opens all her stores,  
 In social bands shall league mankind,  
 And join the sea-divided shores. (p. 304)

To Oldknow, the pudding offered proof of just such a Pax Britannica, a world peacefully and productively united through free trade industrial capitalism.<sup>13</sup> As noted, this moral had a particular historical significance. Five months after ‘A Christmas Pudding’ was published, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was opened. As had the magical geography of the Oldknow’s kitchen, it was believed that the Crystal Palace would epitomise the industrial world in a manner which would vindicate it as a coherent structure, reducing to order an incredible profusion and variety of materials and artefacts. The ‘good story’ which was apparently offered by the tale from *Household Words* was thus an echo (and anticipation) of commentary inspired by the Great Exhibition.



In the forthcoming essay ‘The Pudding and the Palace: Labor, Print Culture and Imperial Britain in 1851’, Lara Kriegel notes a connection between ‘A Christmas Pudding’ and the Great Exhibition, commenting that the pudding and the Palace both represent ‘encapsulations of the globe’:

The Exhibition celebrated ‘progress’ as it was embodied in its display of raw materials, machinery, and manufactures. Its founders – the Prince Consort Albert and the civil servant Henry Cole -- imagined that the matchless collection would attest to the march of free trade, democratic consumption, and empire. Like the scene in Oldknow’s kitchen, the Great Exhibition ‘annihilated’ the distance between nations by containing worldly commodities within its ‘great glass case’, Joseph Paxton’s exalted and mythologized Crystal Palace.<sup>14</sup>

Recent criticism of the Great Exhibition has been concerned to point up the fact that its organisers felt to promote the event explicitly in terms of free trade was politically inexpedient. Jeffrey Auerbach comments that supporters of protectionism could be appeased by the description of the Exhibition as a festival of global peace and industrial progress, rather than a specific attempt to remove international trade barriers.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding this need for expediency, it is clear that the tenets and rhetoric of free trade established a frame of reference within which much Exhibition literature set about explaining and celebrating the display. In detailing what it was that the Great Exhibition was about, and suggesting the impact it would have upon the world, such commentary privileged the concept of a rational commercial order based around global interdependency.

A leading article from an 1849 edition of the *Times* heralded England as the country of Adam Smith. It drew attention to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and claimed that ‘our return to a saner and more natural theory of interchange will no doubt ere long be imitated by

others'. With this in mind, the location of the first international exhibition of industry was of no surprise to the paper:

It is, then, natural that England, the Power which has been the first to inaugurate the change of commercial policy, should also be the first to institute a solemn commemoration of the industrial progress of the human race.<sup>16</sup>

A month earlier the same paper had reported on a meeting which had been held to promote the Great Exhibition. At the event speakers avoided making specific mention of free trade, although they made clear the context within which the forthcoming exhibition should be thought about. Typical was the speech of Mr. Dillon, who was concerned to emphasise that Smithian economics underpinned the display, rendering the event both authoritative and profitable:

All references to party must be excluded on the present occasion (hear); but he might be permitted to say that there was a high branch of political science which treated of the true sources of the *wealth of nations* – which taught us that it was for the interest of every tribe of people upon the earth, their best and true interest, to remain at peace with each other (hear, hear), to exchange the commodities of the several countries of the world for the benefit of all, to extend the knowledge and the information of every country for the improvement of all [emphasis added].<sup>17</sup>

Underlying both the article and the speech was the implication that the Exhibition would make manifest the global symmetry of 'a natural theory of interchange'. This line was echoed by a pivotal speech from Prince Albert, delivered on the occasion of a banquet to promote the Exhibition held at the Mansion House in the spring of 1850. The speech was widely reported and acclaimed both immediately after the banquet and throughout 1850 and 1851, and was printed at the beginning of the Exhibition's *Official Catalogue*. Albert began by noting that the climate of the mid-nineteenth century was characterised by change. This change was figured teleologically: 'We are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to

the accomplishment of that great end to which, indeed, all history points – the realization of the unity of mankind’. However, modernity was not characterised by a presumption which might call to mind the story of Babel. The prediction of unity was immediately qualified: ‘Not a unity which breaks down the limits, and levels the peculiar characteristics of the different nations of the earth, but rather a unity the result and product of those very national varieties and antagonistic qualities’.<sup>18</sup> This qualification tapped into the logic of an international division of labour, a structure which created harmony through difference. It was a reference which Albert expanded upon. Detailing ‘the great principle of division of labour’ as the ‘moving power of civilization’, he considered the material resources of the world in terms of a capitalist self-regulating market:

The products of all quarters of the globe are placed at our disposal, and we have only to chose which is the best and cheapest for our purposes, and the powers of production are entrusted to the stimulus of competition and capital.<sup>19</sup>

Allied to these ‘powers of production’ were the ‘achievements of modern invention’; achievements which meant that the ‘distances which separated the different nations’ were ‘gradually vanishing’. Without making explicit mention of free trade, Albert made clear that commerce should be structured around an international division of labour based upon the industrial and communicational technologies of modernity. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was defined as ‘the new starting point from which all nations will be able to direct their further exertions’; it was to co-ordinate and encourage a rationalisation of global resources which would allow the world to work properly.<sup>20</sup> Albert’s was a cogent and pervasive explication. William St. Clair was moved by the speech to compose *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Poem*, a work published in 1850. Citing the bulk of the Prince’s address in the poem’s preface, St. Clair expressed confidence that Albert’s speech furnished the forthcoming Exhibition with a definitive context: ‘This is the idea, - and it may justly be called a princely one, - which will

soon cement the broken and disordered fabric of human society. O what a glorious sequel to Free Trade!’<sup>21</sup>

Representations of the Exhibition indicated that the display at Hyde Park would reveal the true nature of international economic relations, allowing the world’s industrial activity to be rationalised accordingly. Whilst proponents of free trade argued that the world should work together, the Great Exhibition was to *show* this to be the case, making manifest the commercial symmetry of an international division of labour, as well as highlighting particular goods, industrial practices, and technologies around which a modern economic order would revolve. Thus, the global scope of the display would provide visual form to a narrative of capitalist progress, a ‘good story’ which told of the peace, unity, and improvements inherent to an international division of labour. Thomas Binney’s *The Royal Exchange and the Palace of Industry; or, The Possible Future of Europe and the World*, a text which appeared just before the opening of the Great Exhibition, typified this exhibitionary conviction. Binney held that the autochthonous order underpinning an international division of labour was providential, and was in no doubt that the Great Exhibition would make this symmetry clear, paving the way for global economic interdependence.<sup>22</sup> As well as maintaining that the Palace would be distinguished by a visual narrative which made sense of the world, he also held, crucially, that the world would comprehend this story. Thus, the products gathered within the Palace would be seen to represent metonymically the peoples and nations of the world, and the international visitors to Hyde Park would confirm the existence of a global society founded upon a common understanding of humankind’s material existence:

However unable the most of them may be to understand the spoken languages of the rest, all will be able to read and to interpret what will be written everywhere on the whole scene, and to comprehend the import of the common voice that shall seem to be arising from the objects around them [...] Everything will speak of

oneness, brotherhood, - the same nature, the same faculties, the same Father, - the folly and wickedness of men *not* 'living together in unity'.<sup>23</sup>

Binney, like many Exhibition commentators, cast industrial capitalist logic in a theological light. J.C. Whish, the winner of an essay competition to establish the 'moral and religious' impact of the Exhibition, wrote on the eve of the event that it would become 'the greatest wonder of the world'.<sup>24</sup> He described the Crystal Palace as an 'enormous pantehnicon' which would promote the 'fraternity and unity [...] and the peace and prosperity of mankind', thus proving 'to our race, a kind of compensation for the Tower of Babel'.<sup>25</sup> Stating that 'God hath made of one blood all nations', and claiming that free trade was the '[Creator's] scheme of life, appointed for mankind in general', Whish mirrored Binney in highlighting the catholic nature of the Exhibition's commercial rationale, indicating that its logic would be universally accepted, not simply that it could be universally applied:

To say that the careful study and the perfect understanding of the works of art enlarges the mind, and opens the way for increased prosperity, by making known new and easier methods of supplying our wants, is only to say what must be acquiesced by all.<sup>26</sup>

The notion that humankind in its entirety would recognise and embrace global interdependency as an enhancement of its position in the world was critical to much Exhibition literature. Towards the end of the display, a commentator in the *Illustrated London News* observed,

They [the world's populace] have similar wants, and learn similar means of gratifying them [...]. Their moral nature is similar, and the external world is the same for all. These common features and intimate relationship were known before the Exhibition; but it has intensified them all [...]. It has especially made evident and palpable to all the universal prevalence of a common industry, directed to similar purposes, and guided by similar rules.<sup>27</sup>

For ‘moral nature’, one might read *economic nature*; this was a definition of humanity inscribed in the language of political economy, and grounded in the concept of exchange.

In *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain*, G.R. Searle notes that political economy ‘tended to assume the existence of a natural harmony of interests created by the free operation of the market’.<sup>28</sup> This assumption, Searle goes on to comment, revolved around a ‘functional analysis’ which, as indicated with regard to Smith’s work, understood humanity in terms of its fundamental propensity to exchange. He notes,

The ‘science’ often caused offence by implying that human nature was everywhere the same and that little notice need be taken of regional traditions and idiosyncrasies. Economic laws (and the principle of utility too) supposedly had a universal validity. Thus Ricardo’s disciple, J.R. McCulloch, could write: ‘the laws which regulate the production and distribution of wealth are the same in every country and stage of society’.<sup>29</sup>

In his *Principles of Political Economy*, the fourth edition of which appeared in 1849, McCulloch detailed the debt his work owed to the ‘beautiful and harmonious system’ which had been set out by Smith in the *Wealth of Nations*, some 75 years earlier.<sup>30</sup> Defining political economy as the ‘science of the laws which regulate the production, accumulation, distribution, and consumption of those articles or products that are necessary, useful, or agreeable to man, and at the same time possess exchangeable value’, McCulloch argued that no other science ‘comes so directly home to the every-day occupations and business of mankind’.<sup>31</sup> This was a notable conflation of the domestic and the global; the conceit of a generic home within which ‘mankind’ carried on its ‘every-day occupations and business’ allowed that an international community, bound together by a propensity to exchange those goods which they all found to be necessary or convenient to life, could be imagined.<sup>32</sup> It was just such an imagined

community with which representations of the Great Exhibition were concerned. Echoing commentary grounded in the notion of this cosmopolitan society, Louise Purbrick notes that a,

projection of the world as a free market and at peace was produced by the Great Exhibition. Participating in it, sending exhibits which were both industrial products and national objects, was premised on a mix of co-operation and competition; it was a performance of a liberal dream of international politics being based in commercial relationships, in friendly exchanges. Free trade was idealised as a form of international communication.<sup>33</sup>

The visual narrative which the Crystal Palace was held to configure through its contents bore testament to the universal nature of this form of ‘international communication’; the logic of the story it told concerning the products, peoples, and nations of the world would be, quite naturally, ‘acquiesced by all’. Timothy Mitchell notes that the Crystal Palace was ‘built to promote’ the ‘conversion of the world to modern capitalist production and exchange’.<sup>34</sup> What should be stressed is the fact that it was possible, in accordance with the teachings of political economy, and with relation to the concept of an international division of labour, to spin this conversion as a rational, mutually beneficial, and peaceful process which revolved around certain natural distinctions between the nations of the world, and which would occur as a result of humankind’s inherent capacity to recognise economic advantage and enter into exchange networks accordingly.

In the light of the above Exhibition commentary, ‘A Christmas Pudding’ can be understood as a text which works to destabilise Oldknow’s position as the voice of a pacific commercial rationale. In so doing, it upsets the conceptualisation of the Great Exhibition as a festival of peace and progress, and undermines the notion that an English empire of free trade could be built through, and operated on, the basis of mutual consent. The conceit that ‘the external world is the same for all’ was held by Exhibition literature to result in the ‘common

voice' which would emanate from the works of industry on display in the Palace. Things would speak not only of, but also for the peoples and nations of the world, evincing the same narrative of capitalist progress as was discerned by Oldknow within his kitchen. Notably, however, 'A Christmas Pudding' does not sustain the type of consensual story about the industrial world which things on show at the Great Exhibition were held to make manifest, and which allowed the transcontinental implementation of the industrial capitalist mode of production to be figured as a peaceful process. Although the moral discerned by Oldknow would suggest that a 'common voice' had distinguished the various genies who appeared before him, the confrontation with the ingredients of the pudding did not structure a univocal narrative, and Oldknow's moral is drawn in spite of, not as a result of, what the Genius of the Raisin had told him. In this way, 'A Christmas Pudding' works to undercut the notion of an international community bound together by economic reason, exposing discord in an area which exponents of political economy insisted was distinguished by consensus, and unravelling the rationale which underpinned the mid-nineteenth century dream of a Pax Britannica. The imperialist certainty that England should make sense of the way the world worked was bolstered by the conviction that such an order was precisely what the peoples and nations of the world would want. The dialogical character of the encounter within the Oldknows' kitchen refutes this conviction, demanding a different story to the one discerned by Oldknow is told about England's commercial sovereignty.

In order to illustrate the rationale of an international division of labour, McCulloch cited Sir Dudley North, who had written in his *Discourses of Trade* (1691) that 'the world as to trade is but one nation or people, and therein nations are as persons'.<sup>35</sup> Content both to produce and to consume the products which are proper to the market within which it finds itself, the Genius of the Currant gives dramatic form to North's observation. An embodiment of the type of abstraction which political economy was inclined to make, it understands its place in the



world with regard to market-driven criteria of supply and demand. To this extent, the Currant appears as political economy's imperial fantasy. It represents a fecund terrain and a rational people, a part of the earth which is ready and willing to accept the economic identity which industrial capitalism would bestow upon it. Set against this fantasy stands the Genius of the Raisin. The Raisin evinces precisely the kind of 'regional traditions and idiosyncracies' which, as Searle recognises, political economy was prone to disregard in its explication of global commerce. Scornful of the goods it receives from Britain, the Raisin also asserts a relationship with its material environment which refuses the logic of an international division of labour. The 'child of the Arab' does not understand the produce of its land in terms of the world's ecological distinctions and the resultant potential for economic interdependency; it makes manifest the fact that 'the external is not the same for all'. Rather, in claiming that grapes have a specific religious significance, the Raisin indicates that the demands of the market are overridden by the direction of the 'Prophet'. Importantly, therefore, it remains unmoved by Oldknow's commercial reasoning. Having made clear to the Raisin that free trade constitutes an entirely natural, inherently dynamic, and mutually beneficial system, Oldknow exclaims, 'Child of the Arab civiliser, be grateful'. He is not rewarded with the compliance he might expect: 'Mr. Oldknow looked for an approving answer; but the Genius of the Raisin had fled' (p. 301).

The Raisin's unwillingness to engage in a linguistic exchange with Oldknow might be understood as representing its disinclination to enter into a relationship of commodity exchange. Far from ceding to the position which free trade economics, given voice by Oldknow, held to be natural, the Raisin attempts to flee from its given place within the global market; it accepts neither the 'function' nor the 'meaning' which the pudding provides for it. If the Genius of the Currant appears as an imperial fantasy, then the Raisin is an imperial problem, bringing home to the metropolis the fact that different peoples were not inherently

predisposed to think rationally about the world. Through the ‘child of the Arab’, ‘A Christmas Pudding’ exposes the limited character of the universalist assumptions which underpinned conceptualisations of free trade and an international division of labour. In making clear that cultural peculiarities might interfere with commercial reason, the tale registers that to order the world in accordance with the logic and demands of the market was a coercive exercise. Whilst the Raisin could refuse Oldknow’s rationale, it is significant that the fruit could not escape its designation as an ingredient of the pudding. Bound by the pudding cloth and boiled in the pudding bowl, the Raisin is reduced to order through a process which can be understood to represent the coercion and violence of industrial capitalist expansion.

The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) detailed that the bourgeoisie was driven ‘over the whole surface of the globe’: ‘It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere’.<sup>36</sup> The *Manifesto* emphasised that industrial capitalist expansion was a forceful, brutal process which,

compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.<sup>37</sup>

With the figure of Oldknow and the image of the pudding, the story from *Household Words* works to reveal the way in which free trade industrial capitalism made sense of the way the world worked, promoting global unity, dynamism and prosperity. At the same time, however, the moral drawn by Oldknow is upset by the Genius of the Raisin, a figure which signals that the implementation of a modern, progressive industrial order was characterised by an element of coercion and violence. Whilst Oldknow’s song framed England’s imperial mission in pacific terms, the notion that such interaction revolved around ‘peaceful arts’ is undermined by the fate of the Raisin. Through the Raisin, ‘A Christmas Pudding’ exposes the fact that a

metropolitan agenda to create a rational world was an endeavour driven to incorporate terrains irrespective of the opinions voiced by their inhabitants. Its failure to dramatise an international meeting of economic minds gives the lie to the conceptualisation of commerce which allowed industrial capitalist expansion to be figured with Oldknow's missionary zeal. As a result, the tale calls into question the claim that the Great Exhibition would make manifest an economic order which would be at once comprehended and welcomed by the peoples and nations of the world, paving the way for the peaceful rationalisation of production and exchange. William Forster, author of *The Closing of the Great Exhibition; or, England's Mission to All Nations*, maintained that the Crystal Palace was 'essentially an embodiment of free-trade and universal-peace ideas'. Stressing that the display served as a blueprint to a mutually beneficial and peaceful world order, he indicated that England 'designed to labour to raise other nations in the scale of social order, not only because it was benevolent, but prudent'. It was England's God-given duty 'to interpret national interests, to forward national objects, and to make other peoples feel we consider their prosperity ours, and that what will benefit them cannot be injurious to us'.<sup>38</sup> Bound and boiled within the pudding bowl, the Raisin undermines the validity of such an imperial mission statement, indicating instead that what benefits 'us' might well prove injurious to 'them'. Understood on the basis of analogy with the Christmas pudding, the Crystal Palace could be identified as a technology of England's violent imperial oppression, not an instrument of England's peaceful imperial mission.

'A Christmas Pudding' provides no obvious clue as to the nature or extent of the violence which might have been visited upon the peoples represented by the Raisin. However, an article entitled 'Some Moral Aspects of the Great Exhibition' published in the *Economist*, the journal founded in 1843 to promote free trade, furnishes this paper with an historically acute if chilling conclusion. Despite the politics of the publication, and the suggestive nature of its title, the piece evinced little faith in the all-embracing nature of developmental

economics, and rejected the opportunity to echo Forster's articulation of 'England's mission to all nations'. The article announced, 'When we have savages for our neighbours as in Caffreland, we seem to have no other alternative than to keep them at bay or to exterminate them. They have nothing to give us in exchange for our commodities, and we can get nothing from them'.<sup>39</sup> The international community imagined by proponents of free trade, about which the mid-nineteenth century narrative of capitalist progress was spun, had no place for relationships which did not revolve around exchange. Yet industrial capitalism was impelled by the need to open up new terrains and forge new commercial connections. Whether this conversion of the world included or excluded the peoples inhabiting these terrains did not interfere with the expansionist imperative itself. The people represented by the 'child of the Arab' might be compelled, 'on pain of extinction', to enter into a network of exchange, or they might be 'exterminated', freeing up the terrain for incorporation within an international commercial order. Either way, by giving voice to the Raisin, 'A Christmas Pudding' reveals the gap which existed between the material realities of commercial expansion and the story which was told about this process. In so doing, it registers the breakdown of the peaceful imperial mission, or Pax Britannica, posing in its place a metropolitan agenda characterised by greed, coercion, and violence.

## <sup>1</sup>Notes

I am grateful to Tony Crowley and Terry Eagleton, who offered me support and advice in the writing of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> ‘A Preliminary Word’, *Household Words*, 30 March 1850, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Lohrli indicates that the author of the tale was Charles Knight (1791-1873), Dickens’ long-time friend and collaborator. See Lohrli, *Household Words. A Weekly Journal 1850-1859. Conducted by Charles Dickens. Table of Contents List, Contributors and their Contributions* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 71 and 333.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Greenhalgh, *Emphemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> My choice of the words ‘English’ or ‘England’, and not ‘British’ or ‘Britain’, is brought about in part by the fact that throughout ‘A Christmas Pudding’ it is the former term which is employed - bar the interesting exception of the song with which the tale concludes. The other mid-nineteenth century texts addressed by the essay are typically inconsistent in their use of ‘England’ or ‘Britain’, although the former is notably favoured by William Forster. In addition, whilst the concept of a ‘Pax *Britannica*’ is key, ‘England’ is a term which seems more pertinent to the essay’s concern to emphasise a metropolitan centre at the heart of a global network of exchange.

<sup>5</sup> ‘A Christmas Pudding’, *Household Words*, 21 December 1850, pp. 300-304 (p. 301). The page numbers for all subsequent quotations from this story will appear in brackets in the main text.

<sup>6</sup> Though she does not draw attention to the Greek etymology of the word *economy* (meaning management of a household), Anne McClintock, in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London, 1995), has argued that by the mid-nineteenth century the domestic realm had become ‘an indispensable arena for the creation, nurturance, and embodiment’ of the capitalist values bound up with the ‘rational market’; she posits that ‘the cult of industrial rationality and the cult of domesticity formed a crucial but concealed alliance’ (p. 168). It is notable, then, that ‘A Christmas Pudding’ makes manifest this alliance. The Oldknows’ kitchen, an environment distinguished by industrial regulation, order, and productivity, and comprehensible in terms of a familial division of labour, furnishes an appropriate locus within which to reveal the rationale of free trade economics.

<sup>7</sup> See Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Tribe notes that in nineteenth-century Britain, Adam Smith was held to be ‘the founder of a new science of political economy’, and that his major economic work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, became ‘the gospel of free trade and economic liberalism’ (Tribe, ‘Natural Liberty and *Laissez-faire*: How Adam Smith Became a Free Trade Ideologue’, in *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland, (Manchester, 1995), pp. 23-44 (pp. 24 and 23)). The predominant nineteenth-century view of Smith’s work was both simplistic and overly optimistic; he was held to have exploded the myths of protectionism

and to have provided the theoretical foundations upon which could be built a progressive, internationalist commercial era. Whilst this understanding was a crude reading, it was not a misreading of Smith's work. Richard Teichgraeber remarks that despite the vastness and complexity of the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith set out in his introduction that he intended 'to outline a plan for a world economy whose principal object was growth ... at times he spoke of that plan as an "obvious and simple system of natural liberty"' (Teichgraeber, 'Adam Smith and Tradition: The *Wealth of Nations* Before Malthus', in *Economy, Polity, and Society: British Intellectual History 1750-1950*, ed. by Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 85-104 (p. 90)). In order to delineate a model for unrestricted international economic relations, Smith highlighted a tailor, a shoemaker, and a farmer who profited via a local division of labour. There was, he held, no substantive difference between the manner in which these three 'neighbours' organised industrial activity and the way in which nations should set about structuring their economic affairs:

What is prudence in the conduct of every private family, can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom. If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage. (Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (1776), ed. by Roy Campbell and Andrew Skinner, 2 vols (Oxford, 1976) I, 456-57)

<sup>9</sup> Smith, I, 25.

<sup>10</sup> John Barrell, 'Visualising the Division of Labour: William Pyne's Microcosm' in *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London, 1992), pp. 89-118 (p. 89).

<sup>11</sup> Franco Moretti, 'The Long Goodbye: *Ulysses* and the End of Liberal Capitalism' in *Signs Taken For Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. by Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller, rev. edn. (London, 1988), (p. 183).

<sup>12</sup> Semmel, pp. 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), Terry Eagleton draws links between an emergent middle class and the late eighteenth century discourse of aesthetics. Eagleton points to a conceptualisation of the aesthetic artefact as autonomous structure which contains multiplicity; it is an entity characterised by the 'fusion' or 'organic interpenetration' of distinct elements, one which realises the 'unity-in-variety' of its self-regulating and self-determining parts (p. 15). He proposes that the aesthetic offers the emergent bourgeois order 'a dream of reconciliation -

of individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity, of an abstract totality suffused with all the flesh-and-blood reality of the individual being. As Hegel writes of classical art in his *Philosophy of Fine Art*: "Though no violence is done ... to any feature of expression, any part of the whole, and every member appears in its independence, and rejoices in its own existence, yet each and all is content at the same time to be only an aspect in the total evolved presentation.'" (p. 25)

This essay considers the Christmas pudding in terms of an understanding of the world which was generated by the science of political economy. However, Eagleton's work on the discourse of the aesthetic draws attention to the parallels which exist between Oldknow's interpretation of the pudding and a bourgeois conceptualisation of the work of art. Indicating that the pudding does not compromise the meaning of each individual ingredient, but instead structures harmony through particularity, Oldknow understands the 'enormous globe' which appears before him at the end of the tale in terms of precisely that 'unity-in-variety' held to characterise the aesthetic artefact. Set against such an interpretation, this essay is concerned to make clear that the pudding is not an 'assembly of autonomous, self-governing particulars working in spontaneous reciprocal harmony' (Eagleton, p. 21), but rather a coercive structure which imposes upon and subjugates its constituent parts, enforcing an external (imperial) law.

<sup>14</sup> Lara Kriegel, 'The Pudding and the Palace: Labour, Print Culture and Imperial Britain in 1851' in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham, North Carolina, forthcoming [2003]).

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, 1999), pp. 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 16 November 1849, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 18 October 1849, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Royal Commission of 1851. *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851*, 4 vols (London, 1851), I, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Official Catalogue*, I, 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Official Catalogue*, I, 4.

<sup>21</sup> William St. Clair, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Poem* (London, 1850), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> 'It was God who appropriated to different climes their diversified productions; - who hid beneath the surface of various countries mineral varieties [...] who made exchange of productions a mutual want, necessity or convenience; - and who thus established the law of commercial intercourse'. (Thomas Binney, *The Royal Exchange and the Palace of Industry; or, The Possible Future of Europe and the World*, (London, 1851), p. 27)

<sup>23</sup> Binney, pp. 96-97.

<sup>24</sup> J.C. Whish, *The Great Exhibition Prize Essay*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London, 1852) pp. vii and 1.

<sup>25</sup> Whish, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Whish, pp. 44, 23 and 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 06 September 1851, Vol. 19 (London, 1851), p. 290.

<sup>28</sup> G.R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Searle, pp. 31-33.

<sup>30</sup> J.R. McCulloch, *The Principles of Political Economy: With Some Inquiries Respecting their Application, and a Sketch of the Rise and the Progress of the Science*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London, 1849), p. 54. McCulloch's edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1828, appeared throughout the nineteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> McCulloch, pp. 1 and 16.

<sup>32</sup> The concept of an 'imagined community' is set out in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London, 1991). Key to this account is Anderson's contention that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined' (p. 6).

<sup>33</sup> Louise Purbrick, 'Introduction' to *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Louise Purbrick (Manchester, 2001), pp. 1-25 (pp. 8-9).

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> McCulloch, 41.

<sup>36</sup> David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford, 1977), p. 224.

<sup>37</sup> McLellan, p. 225. It is important to note that whilst this was figured as a violent process by Marx and Engels, it was also a necessary step towards the realisation of a socialist destiny. This point is made forcefully by Marx's writings on Britain's 'mission' in India (see 'The British Rule in India' and 'The Future Results of British Rule in India' in Shlomo Avineri, *Karl Marx on Colonisation and Modernization: His Despatches [sic] and other Writings on China, India, Mexico, the Middle East and North Africa* (Garden City, N.Y., 1968) pp. 83-86, 125-131). Avineri notes that 'since Marx postulates the ultimate victory of socialism on the prior universalization of capitalism, he necessarily arrives at the position of having to endorse European colonial expansion as a brutal but necessary step toward the victory of socialism' (p. 12).

<sup>38</sup> William Forster, *The Closing of the Great Exhibition; or, England's Mission to All Nations: A Discourse*. (London, [1851?]), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> 'Some Moral Aspects of the Great Exhibition', *The Economist, Weekly Commercial Times, Bankers' Gazette, and Railway Monitor: A Political, Literary, and General Newspaper*, 17 May 1851, Vol. 9 (London, 1852) p. 532. This complete breakdown in commitment to the notion of an imperial mission is echoed by Kurtz's exclamation, 'Exterminate all the brutes!' in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1989), p. 87.