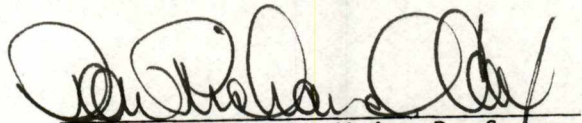
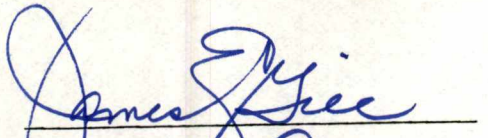
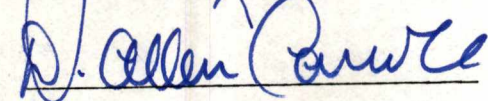


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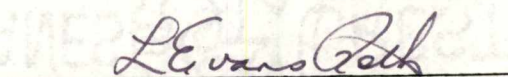
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by William Thomas Mays entitled "Dickens's Crossroads Novel: A Study of Barnaby Rudge." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.


Don Richard Cox, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

DICKENS'S CROSSROADS NOVEL: A STUDY OF BARNABY RUDGE

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

William Thomas Mays

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ABSTRACT

"Dickens's Crossroads Novel: A Study of Barnaby Rudge" presents evidence that Charles Dickens's historical novel Barnaby Rudge (1841) stands, in spite of a few minor flaws, as a well constructed and in many ways excellent work, certainly a far better piece of writing than many hostile critics have allowed. Though Barnaby Rudge does contain some weak characters, a few prosaic passages, and a smattering of improbable situations, the novel has sound unity, an abundance of well depicted and memorable characters who not only inspire great pathos and humor, but are also organically related to the major themes of the work, and a profound analysis of the dark forces behind the great Gordon Riots of 1780. Furthermore, Barnaby Rudge represents a logical and positive step in Dickens's artistic career, for in this novel he began to exhibit the careful craftsmanship and mature social analysis so characteristic of his later novels. And, remarkably, the light-hearted, optimistic spirit of Dickens's earlier improvised novels and the dark, brooding atmosphere that dominates Dickens's later novels are both present in Barnaby Rudge.

Some attention is given to the small number of important critics of Barnaby Rudge (Harold F. Folland, James K. Gottshall, John Lucas, Steven Marcus, and a few others) and their analyses of the novel's themes, structure, purpose, and worth. In addition, the great biographies of Dickens by Forster and Johnson as well as Dickens's revealing letters are used as background material on Barnaby Rudge. And there is a discussion of Barnaby Rudge's volatile history of

composition, an history marked by, among other things, acrimonious quarrels by Dickens with publishers and the first major negative response to Dickens's work.

A major portion of this thesis is given over to a discussion of how Barnaby Rudge's overall unity, which has come in for heavy criticism, especially because of the five-year-gap between the two major sections into which the novel falls, is in fact sound. For Barnaby Rudge is unified by two great themes which pervade the novel: the decay and disintegration of an entire way of life, and the humanitarian vision of man and society that Dickens sees as necessary if a new and stronger social order is to be born out of the ashes of the old.

In respect to the major points discussed in this thesis, four things are demonstrated in detail. First, that Barnaby Rudge is indeed a unified novel, one that evidences careful planning, ingenious orchestration of characters, effective development of situations, a novel with the idiot Barnaby at the very heart, both in respect to the novel's narrative action and its symbolic import. Second, that Barnaby Rudge contains a wealth of well depicted and memorable characters who rank with some of Dickens's more famous characters in other more famous novels. Third, that Barnaby Rudge's well depicted and memorable characters do not merely claim our interest and admiration; they are all organic creations which support the unity of the novel by echoing one or more of its major themes. Fourth, that Barnaby Rudge represents a logical and positive step, a favorable crossroads, as it were, in Dickens's development as a novelist. For in Barnaby Rudge a darker, sometimes brooding, but nonetheless much

wiser view of man and society arises in Dickens's work, and this view was to permeate all the novels which followed. However, though a darker side of Dickens does begin to reveal itself in Barnaby Rudge, a goodly number of the spontaneous, carefree, and hopeful elements so characteristic of Dickens's earlier novels still remain. In a sense, then, one benefits in Barnaby Rudge from the best of all the possible worlds in the Dickens cosmos: the light radiancy of the young Dickens and the brooding social consciousness of the older Dickens. Hence, Dickens was at a crossroads with Barnaby Rudge, and one can see both all that was and all that was to be in Dickens in the work. In spite of all the personal and artistic troubles Dickens had about Barnaby Rudge, he saw it through, and created a well constructed and highly imaginative novel.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the world of Charles Dickens's novels, Barnaby Rudge (1841), the first of his two historical works (his 1859 novel A Tale of Two Cities being the other), occupies an undeservedly precarious position. Although Barnaby contains a number of impressive passages, a unique kind of unity, and liberal doses of characteristic Dickens humor, the novel has seldom been listed among his best, even by the most avid Dickens readers. When one considers that the work rests, rather uncomfortably it seems, amidst such Dickens immortals as The Pickwick Papers (1836-37), Oliver Twist (1837-39), David Copperfield (1849-50), and Great Expectations (1860-61), Barnaby's inferior position in the Dickens canon and in the rich world of Victorian fiction becomes to some degree predictable, though still not merited. Barnaby is not even considered the best of Dickens's historical novels; most readers hold that the emotion-charged A Tale of Two Cities reigns supreme in this genre. Nor have critics looked much more favorably upon this "awkward stepchild," as Harold F. Folland calls it, "impossible to love and difficult to ignore"¹; most consider it to be either a failure or to have serious shortcomings.

Objections to Barnaby Rudge began early. One anonymous contributor to the Argus in 1841 caustically commented that some

¹Harold F. Folland, "The Doer and the Deed: Theme and Pattern in Barnaby Rudge," PMLA, 74 (1959), 406.

readers were dubbing Barnaby Rudge "Barnaby Rubbish."² Wilkie Collins, a friend and fellow novelist, referred to Dickens's novel as "the weakest book that Dickens ever wrote."³ Oswald Doughty mentions in his biography of Rossetti that the painter Val Prinsep on a number of occasions found William Morris engaged in, as Doughty describes it, "an apparently interminable reading aloud" of Barnaby to a "bored companion,"⁴ a model named Jane Burden. And the famed critic John Ruskin, a frequent admirer of Dickens's work, called the novel "an entirely profitless and monstrous story."⁵

Such acrimonious criticism of his work was something new to Dickens, whose meteoric rise to fame in 1836 with the publication of Sketches by Boz and the monthly serialization of The Pickwick Papers had continued undiminished through the weekly serialization of The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41) in the periodical Master Humphrey's Clock (which ran from 4 April 1840-27 November 1841). Sales of Master Humphrey's Clock, in which Barnaby Rudge was also serialized weekly from 13 February 1841 through the last issue, plummeted from a peak

²Cited by R. C. Churchill, comp. and ed., A Bibliography of Dickensian Criticism 1836-1975 (New York: Garland), 1975, p. 57.

³Cited by Frederick G. Kitton, Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings (1886; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1971), p. 77.

⁴Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 239.

⁵John Ruskin, Ariadne Florentina: Six Lectures on Wood and Metal Engraving (1872), in The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906), XXII, p. 467.

of 100,000 copies during the record-breaking run of The Old Curiosity Shop to 30,000 with the advent of Barnaby. And because Dickens's next novel, Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44), fared no better than Barnaby Rudge with either the public or the critics, Barnaby marked the first stages of a black period (whose effects lingered through the publication of Dombey and Son during 1846-48) in Dickens's reputation, the only major one he was to experience during his brilliant literary career. However, Martin Chuzzlewit experienced a revival in reputation after Dickens's death; the reputation of Barnaby Rudge, an equally fine novel, has never really risen from the ashes.

What problems with this novel caused such a negative and completely unexpected response to Barnaby Rudge? A number of factors, both personal and technical, seem to have hindered Dickens's efforts on this work. Not the least of these was the difficulties he had with the three publishers, John Macrone, Richard Bentley, and Chapman and Hall, who held at one time or another the rights to the serialization and publication of Barnaby. The issues under dispute primarily concerned Dickens's profits for Barnaby and editorial control over all his work. These problems seem to have had the effect of temporarily undermining Dickens's enthusiasm for completing Barnaby Rudge, a novel which was conceived even earlier than Oliver Twist, Dickens's second completed novel (Dickens conceived the idea for the first of the two sections into which Barnaby falls as early as 1836). In fact, many critics claim that the myriad problems involved in Dickens's composition of Barnaby colors the novel itself. Doubtless, the tempestuous atmosphere surrounding Barnaby's genesis and completion caused the

mercurical Dickens, a man who alternately weathered and brewed many storms during his literary career, a great deal of physical and emotional strain; the novel was without doubt written under less than optimum circumstances. But there is no evidence in the novel itself to indicate that Dickens's squabbles with his publishers damaged Barnaby. Rather, the reverse seems to have occurred, for the novel reveals a sure, disciplined hand, almost as if Dickens, whether out of pride, anger, or some sort of irresistible creative impulse, strove heroically to create an even stronger work in spite of the adverse circumstances. Through it all Dickens persevered, creating in the end a rich domestic and historical landscape of murder, mob madness, love, hatred, and personal and social disintegration.

Another equally thorny problem was Dickens's task of joining the interests of the first section (Chapters 1-32), which has a domestic and gothic ambience, to the much later written and much longer second section (Chapters 33-82), which is a historical romance after the tradition of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Novels. In fact, there are two different plots (or perhaps more accurately, centers of interest) in Barnaby Rudge. Thus, Dickens faced the problem of trying to blend an older plot centering upon the conflicts in the Rudge, Willet, Varden, Haredale, and Chester families, with a new one focusing on the depiction of the Gordon Riots of 1780 and its most striking event, the firing of Newgate Prison. However, instead of abandoning the earlier plot or creating two separate novels (it would not be difficult, I think, to compose two relatively coherent novels from Barnaby's material by supplying short conclusions unraveling the interests of

the first and second sections), Dickens elected to combine the two plots into one composition; the result is a unique and highly satisfactory novel. And the fact that Dickens did not discard the first section after so many years of thought and emotional turmoil suggests that he thought highly of both sections, and indeed of the novel as a whole.

From the very beginning, then, Barnaby Rudge's reception was, overall, decidedly cool. Only a few nineteenth-century critics, among them John Forster, Lord Lytton, Swinburne, Poe, and George Gissing, struck isolated notes of praise for the work. Forster, Dickens's close friend and first noteworthy biographer, wrote that Barnaby "has unusually careful writing in it, and much manly upright thinking."⁶ Both Lord Lytton and Swinburne saw the novel as a significant step in Dickens's development as an artist. And Poe, while strongly criticising what he considered to be certain inconsistencies in Barnaby's structure, nevertheless found many beauties in it. He devoted his ratiocinative powers to solving the work's Haredale murders "mystery," and was fascinated by Grip, Barnaby's raven. Indeed, many critics have pointed out various parallels between Grip and the raven in Poe's 1845 poem "The Raven." But by far the most sympathetic nineteenth-century critic of Barnaby Rudge was the novelist and noted critic George Gissing, whose perceptive and often highly complimentary discussions of the novel reflect the more comprehensive and penetrating analyses of twentieth-century critics of Barnaby. Gissing says that

⁶John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1890), I, pp. 246-47.

Barnaby Rudge is Dickens's best constructed story; and in one sense of the word, the best written. It has faults, of course; the connection between the "plot" and the public events which occupy a large part of the book is not so close as it might be; we feel something of disproportion, and, now and then, are in danger of forgetting the point from which we started. But considering Dickens's habit in this matter, there is reason to be more than satisfied with a story which, at least, is quite coherent, never violently improbable, and quite progressive to the close.⁷

But even the sympathetic voices of these men were but flickering beams; for the most part, nineteenth-century critics held Barnaby Rudge to be an insignificant Victorian novel.

Twentieth-century critics of Barnaby Rudge have been a good deal kinder to the work than their nineteenth-century predecessors. The "purpose" of the novel, which, as Philip Collins says, "was not much regarded"⁸ by early critics, now commands serious attention, and the patterns and beauties of the work have been written about in various ways. Harold F. Folland, James K. Gottshall, John Lucas, and Steven Marcus, among others, have written seminal and highly perceptive studies of different elements in Barnaby Rudge. Yet even these frequently sagacious critics have a number of grave reservations about certain qualities of the novel. Folland contends that Barnaby "is both richer and more firmly and meaningfully organized than many critics have allowed,"⁹ but at the same time he makes the following comment about the novel:

⁷George Gissing, Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 107.

⁸Philip Collins, ed., Dickens: The Critical Heritage (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), p. 92.

⁹Folland, p. 406.

Compared to Nicholas Nickleby and The Old Curiosity Shop, its predecessors, it is not remarkably rich in either comic invention or moving pathos. It does not glow with the high spirits of Pickwick or the warm, compassionate tolerance of David Copperfield: its best humor is edged with satire, and the pathos is often rather thin and forced. Nor, despite the crowds that swarm through its pages, does its world seem free and spacious: there is, for Dickens, an almost tight-lipped unwillingness to deviate from the intricate and rather grim progression of the story. . . . Whatever the reason, Barnaby Rudge is a rather forbidding and at times even arid book, disturbing rather than reassuring despite the happy ending: in feeling as in technique, it is akin to such later "dark" and comparatively unpopular novels as Hard Times and Our Mutual Friend.¹⁰

Gottshall praises Dickens's use of the idiot Barnaby as "the very Center of a lively and well integrated metaphorical structure"¹¹ in Barnaby Rudge, but he laments that the work

suffers not only from flat humor, stagey situations, and a "broken backed" plot, but also from Dickens's failure to bring his title character, Barnaby, into any organic relationship with what plot there is.¹²

Lucas calls Barnaby a "balanced, articulate and considered work"¹³; however, he also claims that the characterization of the women in the novel, plus "some hasty telescoping of the plot and the awkwardly bridged time-gap between the opening and the Riots themselves"¹⁴ constitute serious weaknesses in Barnaby. Marcus lauds Dickens's

¹⁰Folland, p. 406.

¹¹James K. Gottshall, "Devils Abroad: The Unity and Significance of Barnaby Rudge," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 16 (1961), p. 134.

¹²Gottshall, p. 133.

¹³John Lucas, The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 92.

¹⁴Lucas, p. 93.

treatment of the intricate series of often tyrannical father-son relationships in the work, but adds that

the prose of Barnaby Rudge is relatively undistinguished; except for the descriptions of the riots, it tends to be of a curiously uniform flatness. Moreover, the novel seems laboriously slow in getting up steam--more than a third of its length is apparently given over to preparation for the central action.¹⁵

The gravest objections to Barnaby Rudge, then, center upon the following: that the plot is, overall, rudely orchestrated, especially in respect to the slowness with which the novel develops and the supposed spidery interrelationship between the two sections; that the first section stands much inferior to the second; that many of the situations in the work suffer from staleness; and that too much of Barnaby's prose seems flat and unimaginative. All these criticisms of Barnaby Rudge are, I believe, much too harsh. In spite of all the adverse criticism, the novel, it seems to me, occupies a far more important place in the Dickens canon than critics have hitherto supposed. Dickens here created a coherent, sound, well orchestrated work. Nor is the criticism of the slowness with which the first section of Barnaby develops merited. The first section does indeed proceed at a leisurely pace. However, Dickens develops the interests of the first section slowly because such a pace suits the principal subject matter of the first section--domestic and gothic adventures whose tensions and effects ripen best when they unfold in a slow but timely manner. The second section, by its very fiery and volatile

¹⁵Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 169.

nature, lends itself better to a bolder narrative pace. Moreover, Barnaby Rudge is not a disjointed novel; Dickens succeeds quite admirably in Barnaby in blending together the principal concerns of the first section--the Haredale murders, the parental tyranny of John Willet, the trials of Barnaby and his family, the intrigues in the Varden household, the evil of Sir John Chester, the growing rebelliousness of Maypole Hugh and Simon Tappertit, the rumblings of public restlessness, and a number of other strands--with the account of the Gordon Riots, which constitutes the major interest in the second section, in a most harmonious fashion. Even the fact that the first section takes place five years before the second does not undermine the unity of the novel; on the contrary, the events that transpire in the first section are essential to the growth of the work, and should have been placed in a time separated from the riots by several years. Every element in the plot of Barnaby Rudge serves to further the unity of the novel. Granted, the idea of a novel having two distinct centers of interest is unusual, but Dickens commingles them in a masterly manner. Nor do the interests of the first section have to quail before the awesome power of the second; the first section has a subtle, bucolic, and yet compelling attractiveness. Furthermore, the myriad situations in the work do not suffer from staleness. Barnaby contains a profusion of gripping gothic situations, well painted and frequently amusing grotesques, effective and powerful social satire, and, contrary to the conjectures of many, a great deal of genuinely moving pathos. Finally, Barnaby Rudge's prose is neither flat nor unimaginative; some of the best constructed and most piquant lines in all of Dickens occur in Barnaby.

This thesis shall demonstrate in detail four things. First, that Barnaby Rudge is in fact a unified novel, one that evidences careful planning, ingenious orchestration of characters, effective development of situations, a novel with the idiot Barnaby at the very heart, both in respect to the novel's narrative action and its symbolic import. Second, that, as in all of Dickens's novels, a constellation of memorable and effective characters sparkles throughout Barnaby's landscape. Such creations as John Willet, Simon Tappertit, Dolly Varden, Maypole Hugh, and Ned Dennis seem to me to be every bit as well depicted as Mr. Pickwick, Daniel Quilp, Sairey Gamp, Mr. Micawber, and Uriah Heep. Third, Barnaby's memorable characters go beyond mere piquancy; they all in some way support the unity of the novel by echoing one or more of the principal themes of the work. Fourth and finally, this thesis shall demonstrate that Barnaby Rudge represents a logical and positive step in Dickens's development as a novelist. We see in Barnaby the incipience of a new vein, as it were, in Dickens-- a dark, almost brooding one. Dickens in this work becomes more and more concerned with the black evils and vices of humankind, and less and less inclined to depict the luminous rays of human sunlight of The Pickwick Papers and The Old Curiosity Shop. However, though the darker side of Dickens does begin to reveal itself in Barnaby Rudge, a goodly number of the spontaneous, carefree, and hopeful elements so characteristic of Dickens's earlier novels still remain. In a sense, then, one benefits in Barnaby Rudge from the best of all the possible worlds in the Dickens cosmos: the light radiancy of the young Dickens and the brooding social consciousness of the older Dickens. Hence,

Dickens was at a crossroads with Barnaby Rudge, and one can see both all that was and all that was to be in Dickens in the work.

Barnaby Rudge is not an easy Dickens novel to read; its most radiant beauties often lie just beneath the surface. But the novel's excellencies are just as real as the sparkling improvisations of The Pickwick Papers or the tolerance and wisdom of Great Expectations. In Barnaby a pleasantly diverse and subtly coherent world beckons, and it is a world deserving of better than a mixed critical evaluation. A. M. Lillishaw, a great admirer of the novel, comes close to capturing the curious nature of the work's reception when he says that Barnaby Rudge "still charms and claims so many admirers"¹⁶ in spite of all the adverse criticism of it. He also remarks that Barnaby Rudge exhibits

many signs of extreme care and trouble both in its plot and also in its literary style. Dickens never wrote more finely; the sentences are unusually well balanced, the diction is natural and unrestrained, the character-studies are excellent and in the case of the eccentrics not too extravagant, the various climaxes are reached naturally, while the picture of London in the late eighteenth century is convincing and graphic.¹⁷

Barnaby Rudge, then, is an infinitely better work than has previously been allowed. Indeed, the novel merits a place in the top echelon of Dickens's novels. The ambience of this little known and yet masterly Dickens novel is unlike any other in the Dickens canon, and eminently worthy of closer examination.

¹⁶A. M. Lillishaw, "The Case of Barnaby Rudge," Dickensian, 44 (1948), p. 141.

¹⁷Lillishaw, p. 141.

CHAPTER II

A VOLATILE HISTORY OF COMPOSITION

Before proceeding with the main points of this inquiry, a short review of the publication history of Barnaby Rudge is necessary, for the tempestuous circumstances surrounding the novel's composition exerted a greater than usual amount of influence on Barnaby Rudge itself. These odd circumstances also, I think, provide clues to Dickens's changing artistic consciousness at the time, and hence to the reasons for the incipience of a new, darker period in Dickens's work. Dickens in 1841, as G. K. Chesterton says, was in

an intervening period, early in his life, when there was almost too much work for his imagination, and yet not quite enough work for his housekeeping. To this period Barnaby Rudge belongs. And it is a curious tribute to the quite curious greatness of Dickens that in this period of youthful strain we do not feel the strain but feel only the youth. . . . All this period is strangely full of his own sense at once of fertility and of futility; he did work which no one else could have done, and yet he could not be certain as yet that he was anybody.¹

Dickens, then, faced after the writing of Barnaby Rudge something new and uncomfortable: the first heavy criticism of his work. His imaginative powers and, indeed, even his personal integrity came into question.

Barnaby's volatile history began in 1836, when Dickens was still a young man of twenty-four. On 9 May of that year, only three months after the publication of Sketches by Boz first placed Dickens in

¹G. K. Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens (London: J. M. Dent, 1911), pp. 65-66.

the public limelight, he contracted with John Macrone, the publisher of Sketches by Boz, to publish a novel in three volumes to be entitled Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London, for which Dickens was to be paid the sum of two hundred pounds. Under the terms of the rather ambiguous agreement, the manuscript was to be delivered on or before 30 November 1836. Dickens was also at this time engaged in writing monthly numbers of his first novel, The Pickwick Papers, for the publishers Chapman and Hall. This novel was the first of his works published in the now famous serialization form. Initially, the sales of The Pickwick Papers were disappointing, but soon the novel's sales skyrocketed, and Dickens's name became a household word virtually overnight. These successes prompted the jubilant Dickens to enter into yet more agreements with yet another publisher, Richard Bentley. On 22 August 1836, Dickens agreed to write a three volume novel for Bentley for five hundred pounds. Furthermore, on 4 November 1836, Dickens contracted with Bentley to become editor of Bentley's Miscellany, to which he was also expected to contribute fiction regularly (Oliver Twist was serialized in this magazine as part of the agreement). In addition, Dickens in his fervor unwisely committed himself to a staggering number of other writing projects for other men. All these tasks, quite predictably, began to weigh heavily on Dickens. He, as Robert L. Patten says, "had vastly overextended himself, and could no doubt see the probability of defaulting on one or more of his obligations in the near future."² Even worse, his

²Robert L. Patten, Charles Dickens and His Publishers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 34.

relations with Macrone had already begun to disintegrate. Dickens finally determined that the only way to extricate himself from this mass of commitments was to cancel his agreement to publish Gabriel Vardon for Macrone, and transfer it to Bentley in order to fulfill Bentley's requirement of a three-volume novel. Quite understandably, Macrone was unhappy, and tried to force Dickens to honor his obligations. Among other things, Macrone continued to advertise Gabriel Vardon after Dickens had said that he would not be able to write it. This action infuriated Dickens, and he resolved to break his ties with Macrone. After some bickering, a settlement was reached on 5 January 1837, whereby Macrone agreed to cancel the 9 May letter in return for his acquiring the entire copyright of the first and second series of Sketches by Boz (the second series of which Dickens was slow in completing, having agreed to write them in May 1836, but not completing them until 17 December 1836). Thus, Dickens was now free from Macrone. Dickens perhaps severed their relationship in a less than gentlemanly manner, for it can indeed be claimed that Dickens violated the spirit if not the letter of his agreement with Macrone. Furthermore, Dickens's behavior during this quarrel was too often unreasonable and occasionally even vindictive. As Edgar Johnson, Dickens's best biographer, says, "Dickens's behavior during the entire dispute is that of a man indignantly resentful of a piece of chicanery."³ But Dickens was not completely in the wrong, for Macrone did in fact profit from Dickens's work to a much greater degree than

³Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1952), p. 183.

did Dickens. And Dickens was certainly justified in his insistence on being paid in accordance with the greater sales appeal which accompanied his rising popularity. But whatever the reasons and their justification, Dickens achieved his freedom, and believed his affairs restored to a state of equipoise. Gabriel Vardon, which Dickens mentioned in a letter to Bentley on 14 July 1837 was now to be entitled Barnaby Rudge,⁴ and at the time scheduled to be Dickens's second novel, was now the concern of Dickens and Bentley. But even darker trouble was to follow.

Dickens now plunged into his obligations to Bentley. However, his satisfaction with his new publisher was also to be short-lived; within three years they too were at each other's throats. As Patten says,

Dickens's "three-year duel" with Richard Bentley repeats the pattern with Macrone: early friendship, exchanges of family news, convivial times spent at each other's homes, minor disagreements patched over but continuing to rankle, inflammatory demands resolved after long hours of conference through intermediaries, cold correctness, and finally an explosion producing total rupture.⁵

Almost from Dickens's first day as editor of Bentley's Miscellany, he had minor disagreements with Bentley, primarily over Dickens's shares in the profits of his works and in the Miscellany, and to a lesser extent over what Dickens considered to be infringements by Bentley on Dickens's editorial prerogatives in the Miscellany.

⁴The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey, Vol. I (1820-39), The Pilgrim Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 283.

⁵Patten, p. 75.

Gradually these disagreements worsened, and soon grew to include Barnaby Rudge. Numerous quarrels, negotiations, and agreements about the novel followed. Dickens was still inundated with work for Bentley and others; thus, Dickens negotiated an agreement with Bentley whereby the target date for the completion of the novel Dickens was now calling Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Great Riots was to be extended from 1 March 1838, the original date agreed upon by the two parties, to October 1838. Furthermore, Dickens's profits for Barnaby were to increase from the six hundred pounds called for in the 1 March 1838 agreement (a one-hundred-pound increase from the 22 August 1836 agreement with Bentley) to eight hundred pounds.

In short, Dickens's relations with Bentley during this period began to crumble, and the primary reason lay in continual quarrels over the two novels Dickens owed Bentley. Dickens was buried under a mountain of obligations, chiefly to Bentley and to Chapman and Hall, to the latter for the monthly serialization of the rambling Nicholas Nickleby, which ran from 31 March 1838 to 30 September 1839. And in order to ease the pressure, Dickens tried to claim that Barnaby Rudge was the second novel called for in the contract. Thus, Barnaby Rudge was now to be his third published novel. However, Bentley held to the position that Oliver Twist satisfied only the part of the agreement that called for Dickens to contribute monthly fiction to the Miscellany, and that Dickens owed him another novel (Bentley had conceded as part of an agreement with Dickens on 22 September 1838 that Barnaby would follow Oliver Twist in the Miscellany, but he angrily objected to Dickens's idea of making Barnaby serve two purposes, that of satisfying

the monthly fiction requirement in the Miscellany and of constituting the second novel called for in the 22 August 1836 agreement). Dickens chafed under these demands, and by January 1839 had barely made a start on Barnaby. On 28 January 1839 Dickens announced his intentions to give up the editorship of the Miscellany, and on 27 February 1839 an agreement was reached with Bentley which not only affirmed Dickens's resignation, but also renegotiated Barnaby Rudge. The novel, instead of appearing in the Miscellany, was once again to be published in three volumes, and was due by 1 January 1840. Dickens was to receive two, three, or four thousand pounds for Barnaby, depending on the sales the novel generated. Furthermore, Dickens agreed not to work on any projects besides Nicholas Nickleby, "Don's Annual Register and Obituary of Blue Devils," a comic Christmas tale which Dickens was supposed to write for Chapman and Hall but never completed, and The Pic Nic Papers, a collection of papers Dickens was generously editing and writing a few pieces for as a means of providing funds for the widow of Macrone (who had died on 9 September 1837).

However, Dickens was once again unable (or unwilling) to make any headway with Barnaby. Johnson writes that

nine months later, when the delivery date for Barnaby Rudge was drawing near, Dickens had no more than two chapters written. . . . He was finding it hard going, for all his disciplined powers of concentration, and his long delay in starting reinforces the suspicion that, by now, he didn't feel like writing Barnaby and was laboring against the grain. For, although he complained of the strain of writing Nicholas Nickleby, it had not taken all his time. . . . Mercenary reasons were not the cause of his delay, nor does it seem possible that Dickens, for all his prodigious energy, could have expected to finish a three-volume novel in three months.

The book's stormy history may well have built up within him an insuperable internal resistance to it. He had had

trouble about it with Macrone, before its title was changed from Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London. It had been a bone of contention through all the bitter hostilities marking his two years on the Miscellany. Deep within him, he wished to be free of Bentley altogether.⁶

Indeed, it does seem likely that Dickens's tempestuous relationship with Bentley had so far disintegrated that he dawdled with Barnaby Rudge in part to exact revenge on Bentley for the myriad injustices Dickens felt he had suffered at Bentley's hands. Dickens's resentful attitude towards Bentley by 1839 is amply revealed in the following excerpt from a famous letter concerning Barnaby that Dickens wrote to Forster on 21 January 1839:

It is no fiction to say that at present I cannot write this tale. The immense profits which Oliver has realised to its publisher, and is still realising; the paltry, wretched, miserable sum it brought to me (not equal to what is every day paid for a novel that sells fifteen hundred copies at most); . . . the recollection of this, and the consciousness that I have still the slavery and drudgery of another work on the same journeyman-terms; the consciousness that my books are enriching everybody connected with them but myself, and that I, with such a popularity as I have acquired, am struggling in old toils, and wasting my energies in the very height and freshness of my fame, and the best part of my life, to fill the pockets of others, while for those who are nearest and dearest to me I can realize little more than a genteel subsistence: all this puts me out of heart and spirits: and I cannot--cannot and will not--under such circumstances that keep me down with an iron hand, distress myself by beginning this tale until I have had time to breathe; and until the intervention of summer, and some cheerful days in the country, shall have restored me to a more genial and composed state of feeling. There--for six months Barnaby Rudge stands over. And but for you, it should stand over altogether. For I do most solemnly declare that morally, before God and man, I hold myself released from such hard bargains as these, . . . after I have done so much for those who drove them. This net that has been wound about me so chafes me, so exasperates and irritates my mind, that to break it at whatever cost--that I should care

⁶Johnson, I, p. 249.

nothing for--is my constant impulse. But I have not yielded to it. I merely declare that I must have a postponement common in all literary agreements; and for the time I have mentioned--six months from the conclusion of Oliver in the Miscellany--I wash my hands of any fresh accumulation of labour, and resolve to proceed as cheerfully as I can with that which already presses upon me.⁷

As was the case with Dickens's disputes with Macrone, no clearcut rights and wrongs may be ascertained in Dickens's quarrels with Bentley. Bentley was in the right in a strictly legal sense on virtually every point of disagreement. However, as Johnson points out,

if Dickens had no case, he did have a grievance. It was genuinely unjust that the talent which had achieved so tremendous a popularity should have profited so much less than the hands which distributed its work. The heart of their breach, however, was a clash of radically opposed temperaments.⁸

Whatever his reasons, Dickens failed to meet the 1 January 1840 deadline. He did not begin work on Barnaby Rudge in earnest until October 1839, and after a short period of composition marked at once by working and dawdling, it soon became obvious to Dickens that the novel would not be completed by January. Dickens therefore instructed his solicitors to inform Bentley that Dickens would be unable to have Barnaby ready by 1 January 1840. Bentley, already having been put off by Dickens several times before, understandably became angry, and, like Macrone, continued to advertise Barnaby as if it would appear in January even after Dickens had made it known that that would not be the case. Dickens strongly objected to this, and to Bentley's "practice," as Johnson says, "of bringing out a

⁷Letters, I, pp. 493-94.

⁸Johnson, I, p. 252.

three-volume novel for twenty-five shillings and then, while the booksellers' shelves still groaned with unsold copies, republishing it in fifteen weekly parts for a shilling each."⁹ At this point, any semblance of friendship or even co-operation between the two men had vanished, and on 17 December 1839 in a letter to Thomas Beard Dickens truculently declared that "War to the knife and with no quarter on either side, has commenced with the Burlington Street Brigand,"¹⁰ Dickens's new derogatory term for Bentley.

In the midst of all this unrest, Dickens had agreed on 15 October 1839 to become editor of Master Humphrey's Clock for Chapman and Hall, the publishing firm with whom Dickens now felt his future lay. Dickens now determined to free himself from Bentley altogether. After a protracted series of negotiations between Forster, the representative of Dickens, and the editor of the Literary Gazette, William Jerdan (who had ties to both men), the representative of Bentley, an agreement was at last signed on 2 July 1840 whereby, among other things, the copyright of Barnaby Rudge was transferred to Chapman and Hall. Dickens was now to receive three thousand pounds for the work, and it was to be published in fifteen monthly numbers or fifteen smaller ones if the publishers saw fit. Dickens was now completely free of Bentley, and Barnaby Rudge was at long last about to get off the ground.

⁹Johnson, I, pp. 249-50.

¹⁰Letters, I, p. 619.

However, even this plan proved unacceptable to Dickens, and it was eventually decided that Barnaby would follow The Old Curiosity Shop in weekly serialization in Master Humphrey's Clock. This plan did indeed come off, and Barnaby Rudge appeared in Master Humphrey's Clock in weekly numbers from 13 February to 27 November 1841. It was published in one volume instead of three in December, 1841. A Cheap Edition appeared in 1849, a Library Edition in 1858, and a "Charles Dickens" Edition in 1868. At long last, after five volatile years, a period which, interestingly enough, parallels the five-year gap between the two sections of Barnaby Rudge, the novel was done. The road was fraught with anger, frustration, indecision, and compositional problems (especially the pressures involved in weekly serialization), but Dickens saw it through.

One other aspect of the history of composition of Barnaby Rudge must also be noted. Barnaby is in part a historical novel of social unrest, violence, and riots. And Barnaby's "historicity," as Anthony O'Brien says, "is effortless and complete."¹¹ Indeed, with the exception of a few minor artistic embellishments of character and event, Dickens's account of the Gordon Riots meshes with the historical accounts. But, interestingly enough, Barnaby Rudge was itself written during a period of unrest in English history. The years 1838-49 in England saw the rise and fall of the political group known as the Chartists, who were extremely critical of the Reform Bill of 1832 and

¹¹Anthony O'Brien, "Benevolence and Insurrection: The Conflicts of Form and Purpose in Barnaby Rudge," Dickens Studies, 5 (1969), 28.

the Poor Law Amendment of 1834, legislation which they felt did little to aid the plight of the workingman in an age of rapid industrial advancement. The Chartists were in favor of, among other things, the annual election of Parliament, the abolition of property qualifications, universal male suffrage, and various electoral reforms. The members of the movement came primarily from among England's mushrooming numbers of industrial workers, and its leaders were often dangerous demagogues similar to the weak and fanatical, and yet nonetheless, according to Dickens, well-meaning Lord George Gordon who helps to unleash the violence of the Gordon Riots in Barnaby Rudge.

Many critics have pointed out that Dickens may have been trying to draw a moral parallel between the brutal and destructive Gordon Riots and the Chartist insurrections of his own time. But, as Gordon Spence says,

the problem is problematic, because of the difficulty of saying what his attitude towards Chartism was at that time. Certainly we cannot legitimately define that attitude on the sole basis of Barnaby Rudge, and outside the novel the evidence is slight.¹²

Whatever the connection, Dickens certainly was fascinated by the problems of social unrest and violence, and the agitation in his own time seems at the very least to have whetted his appetite for depicting the Gordon Riots in an historical novel.

The history of composition of Barnaby Rudge, then, reflected a time both of immense growth and intense frustration in Dickens's personal life and literary career. The problems with Macrone, Bentley,

¹²Gordon Spence, ed., Barnaby Rudge (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1973), p. 19.

and Chapman and Hall do seem to have caused Dickens periodically to question the wisdom of carrying out Barnaby. However, Dickens's misgivings about Barnaby resulted not from fears about the quality of the work itself, but rather from the volatile circumstances surrounding its composition. These circumstances doubtless added to Dickens's growing disillusionment with the world around him, and seem to be reflected in some of the darker passages in Barnaby Rudge which deal with greed and corruption. But Barnaby itself did not suffer in any aesthetic sense from Dickens's unsettled state of mind during the years when the novel was being conceived and composed. The volatile history of composition of Barnaby Rudge did exert a greater than usual amount of influence on the novel itself, but the influence was, remarkably enough, a positive one, for Barnaby exhibits an intelligent design, refined diction and syntax, and a gallery of piquant characters who are organically related to the major concerns of the novel. In fact, Dickens seems in Barnaby Rudge to have been unusually careful to create a well-conceived and tightly-constructed novel, almost as if he wanted to prove to himself and those who he felt had treated him unfairly that he could produce an artistic triumph even under the direst of circumstances.

CHAPTER III

THE UNITY

Perhaps the most controversial of all qualities of Barnaby Rudge is its unity, or as some would have it, coarse unity. Indeed, on first glance any attempt at justifying Dickens's unifying techniques in this novel seems forbidding. The first section seems given over to an insipid little gothic romance, an abortive attempt to capture the flavor of Scott novels such as The Heart of Mid-Lothian. And there is much of the cloak and dagger in Barnaby: the wind blows ominously, the nights are black and rainy, mysterious strangers appear and disappear, and a furtive (and, unfortunately, sometimes laughable) murderer lurks about the King's highways. Then there are all the sometimes too tidy little domestic relationships: John Willet's insensitive treatment of his son, Joe; the feud between the brooding Geoffrey Haredale and the villainous Sir John Chester (both a personal and a religious--Catholic versus Protestant--conflict), and the inevitable Capulet-Montague romance between their children, Emma Haredale and Edward Chester, which fans the flames; Barnaby's blighted (because of the double murder which his father committed) existence; the hearty locksmith, Gabriel Varden, sorely beset by his nagging wife, Martha; Varden's pretty but spoiled daughter, Dolly, who loves Joe, but, for some girlish reason or another, will not own up to it; Sir John Chester's loathsome evil and his tyranny over his son, Edward; the growing restlessness of Simon Tappertit and Hugh; and on and on. Seemingly standard narrative stuff this, and we can easily be led to

suspect that all the conflicts in Barnaby Rudge will be resolved in a naïvely positive way in the end; evil will be punished, and good will triumph (the good characters do indeed triumph, but many of them are scarred by the events in the novel). Then with Chapter 33 we are thrust, rather too violently, into another sphere based upon an historical event: the great Gordon Riots become the central concern of the work. Lord George Gordon, Gashford, Ned Dennis, and the savage actions of a frenzied mob dominate the action, and the self-contained gothic and domestic world which formerly held our attention seems far away. It becomes easy to feel that the novel is unwieldy, poorly unified, even unsatisfactory. But is it really?

Whatever superficial flaws Barnaby Rudge may be seen as possessing, Dickens does do a laudable, if unusual, job of unifying the two sections of the novel. Nor is the first section, while perhaps not quite as vivid or well constructed as the second section, nearly as poor a piece of work as critics have held. The first section is weakened somewhat by Dickens's failure in it to foreshadow adequately the events of the second section (although there are rumblings, perhaps serendipitous on Dickens's part, of the public violence soon to follow). For example, Lord George Gordon and Gashford, important characters in the second section, neither appear nor are even mentioned in the first section. But in spite of this minor flaw, the world of the first section is, on the whole, a languid, intimate, charming, and frequently humorous one. In addition, the mystery is, while hardly unique, and not of the sort to sustain suspense over a large number of pages, sufficiently intriguing to carry the reader's interest through the

first section. The solution to the mystery, it is true, is evident by the end of Chapter 32, if not before, but when the mystery ceases to be interesting (and Dickens seems to sense this), Barnaby Rudge moves on to new concerns which echo the themes of social disintegration and rebirth that pervade the novel. Nor is the five year hiatus in the action between Chapters 32 and 33 a flaw; rather, the passing of such a large period of time heightens the historicity of Barnaby, and gives Dickens, as it were, a sort of broad historical canvas with which to work. Furthermore, the idea that the conflicts in the first section have not been resolved in five years time underlines their seriousness. Dickens also uses this time gap to emphasize the fact that the basal causes of these private conflicts are embedded in far greater and more complex social evils which have accumulated over a great period of time. And by emphasizing this idea, Dickens gives credibility to his connection of these private conflicts with the furious riots which follow.

Dickens also does a praiseworthy job of varying the emphases within the two sections of Barnaby Rudge. The first section focuses primarily on the domestic relationships of the characters, with the gothic murder mystery, the greatest outrage in a series of private outrages, serving as the starkest example of how serious the imbalances in these relationships have or may become. In addition, an historical undercurrent runs through the first section of Barnaby. History here seems almost brooding, and there is a sense of the serene surface of English life concealing a past checkered by injustice and indifference which is bubbling ominously and threatening to burst forth violently

(which it does indeed in the second section). And as the opening images of Barnaby Rudge, in which the Maypole Inn is both personified as a drowsy, formerly grand old man and employed as a symbol of the Merrie Old England of the past indicate, English society, though there are hints of past glory and a potential for fullness and warmth in the future, seems about to pass into a stage of decay:

With its overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and discoloured like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

It was a hale and hearty age though, still: and in the summer or autumn evenings, when the glow of the setting sun fell upon the oak and chestnut trees of the adjacent forest, the old house, partaking of its lustre, seemed their fit companion, and to have many good years of life in him yet.¹

Dickens, then, in the first section of Barnaby Rudge orchestrates the domestic relationships, the gothic murder mystery, and the historical elements in such a fashion as to create a unified impression of potential decay and disintegration on a primarily private level.

The second section, on the other hand, focuses primarily on two things: decay and disintegration on a primarily public level, particularly amongst the working class, the aristocracy, and the government, and an historical account of the Gordon Riots. Dickens's almost morbid fascination with the destructive forces of history comes

¹Charles Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1973), p. 44. All future references to this work are from this edition, and will be noted parenthetically within the text.

to the fore here. History in this section seems almost to have become an evil personification which has gone mad and threatens to destroy those who unwisely made it. The following passage, in which Dickens describes the chaotic nature of the mob's actions, underscores this idea of an aberration in history which threatens to destroy an entire way of life:

from the moment of their first outbreak at Westminster, every symptom of order or preconcerted arrangement among them vanished. . . . Each party swelled as it went along, like rivers as they roll towards the sea; new leaders sprang up as they were wanted, disappeared when the necessity was over, and reappeared at the next crisis. Each tumult took shape and form from the circumstances of the moment; sober workmen, going home from their day's labour, were seen to cast down their baskets of tools and become rioters in an instant; mere boys on errands did the like. In a word, a moral plague ran through the city. . . . The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness . . . seized on new victims every hour, and society began to tremble at their ravings. (Chapter 53, p. 484)

Also significant here is Dickens's notion that moral as well as physical disintegration resulted from the riots. Of lesser importance in the second section, but nonetheless organic to it, are the domestic and gothic elements. Such events as Geoffrey Haredale's bringing Mr. Rudge to justice and his slaying of Sir John Chester in a duel are in one sense merely necessary scenes in the dénouement of Barnaby Rudge, but they also represent the re-establishment of a scarred but more sober social order after the riots.

Barnaby Rudge, then, exhibits many signs of careful design and sound orchestration. But Dickens's most effective unifying techniques in Barnaby Rudge lie in his careful tracing of several powerful themes in the work and the characters's and the imagery's functions as variations on or reflections of those themes. The first major theme

in Barnaby is that detailed by Steven Marcus, who points out that the novel centers upon the theme of "irrationality and its consequences,"² particularly as it is manifested in a series of imbalanced father-son relationships. Marcus lists five such relationships: Gabriel Varden and Simon Tappertit (a symbolic father-son relationship), John and Joe Willet, Mr. Rudge and Barnaby, and the relationships between Sir John Chester and his two sons, Edward, and the bastard, Hugh. Marcus then notes that each filial pair

suffers from a profound disorder, and in each a father and a son confront one another in a dispute over power and authority. The experience of each filial pair illuminates and modifies the others, rendering with surprising subtlety and complexity Dickens's idea of the relation as a nexus of irreconcilable conflict. Taken together these relations depict in an unusually relevant and concrete way Dickens's heightened consciousness that something has gone wrong with the values by which men live.³

Marcus goes on to point out that

in many ways Barnaby Rudge seems to pose the question of whether there may not exist in personal life and in society certain relations of conflict, injustice and suffering which are not susceptible to reconciliation. The energies that are opposed to one another and the issues they encompass are those we recognize as pertaining to the conduct of power--personal and sexual power, social and political power. In Barnaby Rudge, Dickens regards these energies as being at every point thwarted, diverted from their proper objects, and turned aside into violent and self-destroying courses.⁴

Thus, Marcus sees a clear connection in Barnaby Rudge between irreconcilable suffering and injustice on a private level and suffering and injustice on a social level. One leads to the other, and ultimately to the unleashing of man's brutal animal instincts, an event which

²Marcus, p. 194.

³Marcus, pp. 184-85.

⁴Marcus, p. 188.

heralds the end of a formerly flowering society. Marcus goes on to comment quite perceptibly that the relationship between the cold and selfish Sir John Chester and Hugh, the son he denies and eventually helps to destroy, epitomizes the decadence that pervades Barnaby's world:

In so far as Chester embodies the values of civilized society and its institutions, he also embodies the full corruption of those values. In so far as the legal authority of society is justified in creating and perpetuating the essential circumstances in Hugh's life, and in so far as its moral authority is concerned to justify the denial and outlawing of what he represents, then Chester's treatment of him follows from that justification. And when . . . society does incline to justify that behavior, and the similar behavior of other fathers and personages in authority, then, Dickens implies, something has gone wrong in the nature of society. The equilibrium of antagonistic needs and desires which it is society's vital function to maintain--since it cannot reconcile them--is shattered. Civilized authority then tends ineluctably to devolve into privileged oppression. Those energies of life which can never be civilized or fully controlled, which trouble even the best civilizations, which try to divert them, now cease to be even recognized, much less accommodated. The deep discordance of impulses which in The Old Curiosity Shop were so distressing to Dickens has become reactivated again in Barnaby Rudge, affecting all society now as well as personal life.⁵

Marcus, then, sees Barnaby Rudge as being a study of irreconcilable conflicts which result in the breakdown of a way of life, especially in respect to authority, personal identity, and morality. For Marcus, Dickens's concern with alienation and injustice in a cruel and indifferent society constitutes the central concern of the novel.

Another major theme in Barnaby Rudge is that pointed out by James K. Gottshall, who says that Barnaby himself holds together the metaphorical elements in the novel. Gottshall goes on to comment that

⁵Marcus, p. 203.

the imagery in Barnaby reflects a battle between heaven and hell for Barnaby's, and indeed for society's very soul:

Barnaby stands innocently between the devil's advocates and the forces of heaven, and the result of the contest for the idiot boy's soul is in miniature the result of the contest in this book between the "good" and the "bad."⁶

Gottshall goes on to say that the heaven-hell battle in Barnaby Rudge has

no discernible victor. Barnaby Rudge is the first of Dickens's novels in which the heavenly powers fail to triumph over the forces of darkness. In this book, more than in any of his earlier novels, we find Dickens thinking imaginatively, trying hard to come to grips with the complexities of good and evil not only through parallel and contrasting human relationships, but through a metaphorical structure which, if not quite fully formulated, at least makes clear the general direction and character of Dickens's thought. . . . We see for the first time in Barnaby that maturation of the author which, manifesting itself in a more circumspect theological and sociological probing, also has a salutary artistic effect, that of tending to eliminate the friction between plot and metaphorical structure, a weakness to be found in all his previous novels. Evil, drawn with convincing vitality, has been heretofore inevitably vanquished, at least in the action, by pallid goodness.⁷

Gotshall is, I think, quite right in his assertion that Dickens in Barnaby Rudge has realized that good and evil are complex notions, for Dickens does indeed in Barnaby carefully point out that though the violent actions of the mob cannot be condoned, neither can the corrupt society which spawned that violence by its indifference and injustice be held completely blameless.

A third major theme which helps to unify Barnaby Rudge is that traced so admirably by Harold F. Folland: the question of where the

⁶Gottshall, p. 134.

⁷Gottshall, pp. 134-35.

responsibility for the private and public actions lies. Folland perceptively points out that a major theme in Barnaby is "the deceptive and complex relationships between the doer and his deed, deeds and their consequences, and the doer's responsibility for them."⁸ Folland goes on to say that Barnaby Rudge focuses on

the evil of action divorced from responsibility; its world is one in which evil flourishes because its true connections and causes are hidden and must be gradually searched out. For if society--and by extension mankind--is by its nature an interlocking network, then by virtue of being human, of living in a human society, every man must exist in and among these relationships. . . . Barnaby Rudge deals with the unleashing of irresponsible violence, whether personal as in a mysterious murder and the connivings of Chester, or social as in capital punishments by hanging, or both at once, as in the fury of the mob, which is the abrogation of both personal and social order. And the various actions center upon the tracing of responsibility for violence and the final bringing to account of the men responsible for it. Mysteries are cleared up, hidden causes and identities are exposed, and order is restored: man's responsibility to own his actions and acknowledge his obligations is vindicated.⁹

Thus, Folland, like Marcus, sees irresponsible human violence and the responsibility of both individuals and society to control it, and indeed to move beyond it by providing a satisfying way of life for all so that another Gordon Riots will not occur, as the dominant theme in Barnaby Rudge. However, Folland and Marcus differ in their views of Dickens's faith in Barnaby Rudge in the potential of man to remedy the deepest wounds of a seemingly moribund society; Marcus sees the more serious problems as irreconcilable, while Folland holds that Dickens believed that a sense of responsibility, both on a personal and social level, is the key to a society beneficial and fulfilling for all.

⁸Folland, p. 407.

⁹Folland, p. 408.

These three themes do, I think, go far in establishing a sound thematic unity for Barnaby, for Dickens discusses them as they are manifested in private life in the first section, and as they are manifested in public life in the second, thus giving the novel a formal balance. But there are two broader, even more powerful and pervasive themes which go even further towards unifying Barnaby Rudge: Dickens's graphic depiction of the decay and disintegration of an entire way of life (which the themes pointed out by Marcus, Gottshall, and Folland reflect quite well in all its variations), and, even more important, the great humanitarian vision of man and society that Dickens sees as possible in a reborn English society strengthened by the memory of its past abuses and injustices and their terrifying consequences. There are, indeed, deeply rooted and deeply injurious conflicts which in the case of many of the characters leave permanent scars, but I do not agree with Marcus that Dickens felt that they cannot be made right. Dickens was certainly horrified (and sometimes, paradoxically, fascinated) by the vile, brutal violence of the mob, as the following passage describing the mob's looting and burning of the Warren demonstrates:

There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one drunken lad--not twenty, by his looks--who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like was. . . . But of all the howling throng not one learnt mercy from, or sickened at, these sights; nor was the fierce, besotted, senseless rage of one man glutted. (Chapter 55, p. 508)

And the Haredale murders reveal Dickens's mingled fear of and fascination with private crime. However, there is nevertheless hope for humankind, as Dickens continually emphasizes in Barnaby Rudge. Dickens holds that as bad as things have become in Barnaby's world, things may be got right if a state of balance and fullness is restored. Dickens was not a philosopher; rather, he spoke lyrically from a full, compassionate heart, and the answers to the irrationality, violence, injustice, oppression, and alienation in Barnaby Rudge are to be found, Dickens believed, in an egalitarian and Christian society in which common sense, industry, faith, compassion, responsibility, and, above all, love are not abstractions given lip service, but qualities which men live by. These virtues will, when practiced, restore society to a state of equilibrium and fullness.

Dickens primarily demonstrates what is needful in two ways. First, he shows the balanced, compassionate attitudes he sees as necessary in man and society through the characters of Gabriel Varden and, amazingly enough, Barnaby Rudge, and to a lesser and less successful extent through the characters of Joe and Dolly, Edward and Emma, and the vintner and distiller, Thomas Langdale. Gabriel Varden, whom Dickens describes as "a chirping, healthy, honest-hearted fellow, who made the best of everything, and felt kindly towards everybody" (Chapter 41, p. 381), and whose possessions are described as being in "their proper sphere of action" (Chapter 41, p. 382), epitomizes all the virtues Dickens sees as essential in man and society. Varden is a man of great toleration, compassion, wisdom, and love, and his act of rebellion in refusing to open the locked gate of Newgate Prison for

the rioters constitutes one of the few completely justified acts of rebellion in Barnaby Rudge. Near the end of the novel Varden is depicted as being in his proper place in life, among his now wiser and closer family. Varden is described as "the sun that shone upon them all: the centre of the system: the source of light, heat, life, and frank enjoyment in the bright household world" (Chapter 80, p. 714). He stands as a vivid example of a man in what Dickens sees as right relation to himself and everything which touches him, including a now revitalized society.

Barnaby Rudge's role as a symbol of hope for the future is much more ambiguous, but he nevertheless does stand as a human being who, though he has been permanently blighted by a dark past over which he had no control and though he has been used by others for evil purposes which his feeble mind cannot comprehend, also "makes the best of everything." Barnaby seems in some ways to parallel Shakespeare's fools as well as Madge Wildfire in The Heart of Mid-Lothian and Wordsworth's Idiot Boy. There is a child-like innocence about Barnaby, yet he seems at times to possess a sort of penetrating insight unattainable by the other, supposedly saner characters. And his love for Grip, his raven (whose sometimes humorous and sometimes demonic cries are both humorous and reflective of the dark evil that pervades Barnaby Rudge), and other dumb animals surpasses the love that many of his fellow men have for each other. However, Barnaby is in some ways a failure as an artistic creation: his lines often seem more fitted for Cicero, and his fear of blood is a rather convenient trait in view of his father's past deeds. Furthermore, Barnaby, as his role in the

riots reveals, is just as capable of violence as Hugh, Simon, or Dennis; this quality in Barnaby seems to me to bring a certain inconsistency into his characterization. But still, Dickens seems to say in his portrayal of Barnaby's in many ways enviable freedom, of his unbounded joy in just being alive, and of his simple faith in and love for even someone as harsh, brooding, and fallen as Hugh that there is much in this child-man to be admired, even copied, by those men supposedly superior because of their greater mental powers. Barnaby is indeed, as Gottshall says, at the center of Barnaby Rudge's metaphorical framework; he embodies at once the sins of the past and the hope for blessed rebirth in the future, the dominant themes in the novel. The couples Joe and Dolly, and Edward and Emma, and Geoffrey Haredale's friend, Langdale, also, I think, serve as symbols of virtue and hope for the future, but as symbols they are poorly developed in comparison to Varden and Barnaby.

The unifying power of Dickens's great humanitarian vision of man and society is also demonstrated by his contrasting of carefully placed and vivid images throughout both sections of Barnaby Rudge. A large number of negative images run through the novel: decay, disintegration, darkness, raging infernos, water imagery, especially images of drowning and flooding, images of human and historical juggernauts, and, as G. Robert Strange points out, that lonely image which appears later in Dickens's career in Great Expectations with such a memorable effect, "pitiless" stars,¹⁰ which, according to

¹⁰G. Robert Strange, "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens's Fable for His Time," College English, XVI (1954), p. 13.

Gottshall, Dickens also uses as a symbol of "the eyes of heaven and sometimes as heaven itself."¹¹ However, Dickens balances these disturbing images with positive images of procreation, fullness, light, warmth, harmony, balance, and growth. These images are myriad in Barnaby Rudge, and any attempt to trace all or most of them would be quite impossible, but an examination of the following negative and positive images helps, I think, to shed some light on Dickens's method of employing in Barnaby imagery which reflects his great humanitarian concern for man in all his relations. The negative images, no matter how loathsome or seemingly irreconcilable, are balanced by images which depict how things could (and can) be when they exist in right relation to each other. In the following excerpts from Chapter 64 (in which, as in Chapter 65, the most memorable and pulsating event in Barnaby Rudge, the firing of Newgate Prison by the rioters, is described with a passionate brilliance rarely approached in any of Dickens's novels), negative images leap out at the reader with terrifying force:

Although the heat was so intense that the paint on the houses over against the prison, parched and crackled up, . . . and the lead and iron on the roofs blistered the incautious hand that touched them, and the sparrows in the eaves took wing, and rendered giddy by the smoke, fell fluttering down upon the blazing pile; still the fire was tended unceasingly by busy hands. . . . They never slackened in their zeal, . . . but pressed upon the flames so hard, that those in front had much ado to save themselves from being thrust in; if one man swooned or dropped, a dozen struggled for his place, and that although they knew the pain, and thirst, and pressure to be unendurable. Those who fell down in fainting-fits, and were not crushed or burnt, were carried to an inn-yard close at hand, and dashed

¹¹Gottshall, p. 142.

with water from a pump; . . . but such was the strong desire of all to drink, and such the fighting to be first, that, for the most part, the whole contents were spilled upon the ground, without the lips of one man being moistened. (Chapter 64, pp. 581-82).

Even more horrifying is Dickens's description of the actions of two brothers who believe that they hear the voice of their father, one of the Newgate prisoners trapped and threatened with death by the very fire intended to set them free:

After wringing their hands and rushing to and fro as if they were stark mad, one mounted on the shoulders of his brother, and tried to clamber up the face of the high wall. . . . And when he fell among the crowd, he was not deterred by his bruises, but mounted up again, and fell again, and, when he found the feat impossible, began to beat the stones and tear them with his hands. . . . At last, they cleft their way among the mob about the door, though many men, a dozen times their match, had tried in vain to do so, and were seen, in--yes, in--the fire, striving to prize it down, with crowbars. (Chapter 64, p. 583)

In these excerpts, fire and water imagery predominate. The fire becomes almost an evil demon, destroying men and nature alike, or, even more horribly, driving men (and even birds) mad, a much more horrible kind of madness than Barnaby's. Furthermore, the mob madness and the raging inferno herald not only the destruction of Newgate Prison, but also the maddening of man, nature, and society. Dickens is at his imaginative best in Barnaby Rudge in passages such as these; one can almost feel the raging fury of the conflagration. Certainly Dickens was fascinated by the extreme bestiality and cruelty of the riots; indeed, some of the passages describing them border on the morbid. In addition, the image of men consumed by the fire, and unable to drink the life-giving water so tantalizingly near is also effective, for it reveals how pronounced man's impotence in a decaying society and the madness of the riot has become.

However, disturbing as pictures such as these may be, Dickens continually contrasts them with images of tranquility, harmony, and fullness. As the following passage, which precedes the rioters' ravaging of the Maypole, indicates, Dickens believed that the blessed tranquility of things in their proper order may come, for a time at least, even to someone as obstinate and morally blind as John Willet. Mr. Willet is about to awake:

How long he slept, matters not; but it was for no brief space, for when he awoke, the rich light had faded, the somber hues of night were falling fast upon the landscape, and a few bright stars were already twinkling overhead. The birds were all at roost, the daisies on the green had closed their fairy hoods, the honeysuckle twining round the porch exhaled its perfume in twofold degree, as though it lost its coyness at that silent time and loved to shed its fragrance on the night; the ivy scarcely stirred its deep green leaves. How tranquil, and how beautiful it was! (Chapter 54, p. 494)

Of course, Mr. Willet is never able to achieve any permanent sort of insight (he is, in fact, driven mad by the destruction of his way of life, and by the loss of an arm that Joe suffers), but it does seem clear that Dickens is presenting here a lyrical vision of man in his proper relation to nature. The imagery in this scene is soothing here; the light is soft, darkness and sleep are necessary events in the regeneration of man and nature, the birds here live contentedly, and the plants seem almost to smile on man and the kind of lifestyle implied by the porch image. Balance is present; things are at rest but giving rich scents. And the twining plant image, here reflected by the honeysuckle and the ivy, occurs again and again in Barnaby Rudge; the plants seem almost benevolent, and clothe and warm man. Nor are the stars pitiless here; they smile down kindly on man, nature, and society. The frequency of positive images such as these in Barnaby Rudge

indicates, I think, that Dickens, for all his growing awareness of the complexity of man, nature, society, and good and evil, still felt that redemption and a balanced, full way of life was still possible for man, in spite of all man's failings.

The following two passages also illustrate Dickens's great humanitarian vision of man through his use of negative and positive imagery. In the first, Dickens describes the Green Lanes, the seedy neighborhood in which the sadistic Ned Dennis lives:

This was a retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great heaps of ashes; stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed; broken turnstiles; and the upright posts of paling long since carried off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged and rusty nails; were the leading features of the landscape: while here and there a donkey, or a ragged horse, tethered to a stake, and cropping off a wretched meal from the coarse stunted turf, were quite in keeping with the scene, and would have suggested (if the houses had not done so, sufficiently, of themselves) how very poor the people were who lived in the crazy huts adjacent, and how foolhardy it might prove for one who carried money, or wore decent clothes, to walk that way alone, unless by daylight. (Chapter 44, p. 411)

Here seclusion is evil, and the ugliness of a nature spoiled by the castings of civilization dominates. Dickens implies that English society's indifference to some of its citizens and their squalid living conditions amounts to an aberration in both society and nature. These abominable conditions, Dickens implies, represent one of the underlying causes of the riots, which were not (as both Dickens and historians are careful to point out) really concerned with genuine religious differences, but rather arose out of mass dissatisfaction and alienation among, as Dickens says, "the very scum and refuse of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police" (Chapter 49, p. 453).

The madness of the riots is reflected in the "crazy huts," the antithesis of the soothing porch image, in animals and plants which are blighted by the diseases of man and society, in men who are not properly clothed, either by human clothes or nature, and in houses where little warmth may be found.

However, Dickens plays off images such as these against idyllic scenes, such as Barnaby's country romps:

Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, and run, and leap, till he was tired; then to lie down in the long grass, or by the growing corn, or in the shade of some tall tree, looking upward at the light clouds as they floated over the blue surface of the sky, and listening to the lark as she poured out her brilliant song. There were wild-flowers to pluck--the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell, the cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch; fish; ants; worms; hares or rabbits, as they darted across the distant pathway in the wood and so were gone: millions of living things wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory of, when they had disappeared. (Chapter 45, p. 417)

Here light, sky (and perhaps heaven), animals, plants, past, present, and future are depicted in lyrical, hopeful terms. In this environment a fertile nature achieves its greatest beauty. These images are experienced, it is true, by an idiot, but Dickens seems to suggest that if an idiot, with his imperfect but in some ways keen perceptions, can achieve such blessed contentment in a regulated nature, why not other men more favored by nature? Of course, the problems of man and society, which exist forever independent of Barnaby's world, are far too complex to be solved by mere pastoral romps, but still, Dickens seems to say in his constant presentation of these soothing images, or echoes of them, that balance and harmony can come again in a reborn, revitalized society. In addition, there are also city-country and past-present contrasts here, but Dickens is never guilty in

Barnaby Rudge of childishly longing for an overly-romanticized sort of pastoralism or of merely wishing to escape the present by means of the past. The country is not always benign; John Willet and Mr. Rudge have their roots there, the Maypole and the Warren are razed in the country, and robbers lurk about the King's highways. And the city is sometimes pictured as being a satisfying place. The Varden home in Clerkenwell is a haven of virtue and good humor. Furthermore, there are both good Protestants and good Catholics in the city (though the evil is held by Dickens to lie almost solely on the Protestant side), royalty is portrayed as sympathetic to its subjects in spite of its inability to comprehend and remedy the social unrest which caused the riots, the militia act with wisdom and compassion in quelling the riots, and even Lord George Gordon comes off as a well-meaning, if weak and vain, fanatic. Nor is the past a refuge from the present, for the problems in Barnaby Rudge were born in a dark past of suffering, degradation, and injustice. Rather, Dickens seems to say, the city and the country, the past and the present, and, most important of all, the heart of man, are all indispensable elements in the erection of a compassionate, dynamic Christian society able to care for all its citizens.

Barnaby Rudge, then, is unified in part by the three themes pointed out by Marcus, Gottshall, and Folland, and, even more important, by two broader themes: the decay and disintegration of an entire way of life (which the themes pointed out by Marcus, Gottshall, and Folland echo) and Dickens's great humanitarian vision of man and society. And Dickens does indeed, as Gottshall points out, exhibit

in Barnaby Rudge a more mature understanding of the nature of evil and its covert causes. Dickens does not place the blame for the riots solely on the mob, on individuals, on the dark past, on the indifferent present, on the aristocracy, on the government, on the churches, or on royalty. Rather, all parts of society must bear a part of the blame. But all levels of society, Dickens holds, are also capable of changing, and contributing to the creating of a new dynamic Christian society based upon common sense, industry, faith, compassion, responsibility, and, above all, love. The rebirth will not be easy, for the damage has been great. However, the final pages of Barnaby, in which the conflicts subside, and the morning is "bright and sunny" (Chapter 82, p. 738), indicate Dickens's great faith in the potential of man.

Finally, Barnaby Rudge is, in its broadest sense, a historical novel. Some critics, such as Anthony O'Brien, hold that it is not a good historical novel in comparison to the novels of Scott. O'Brien says that the reason that Barnaby is an inferior historical novel in comparison to those of Scott lies

in the domestic and personal narrative of Barnaby, which is in itself tedious, and which is only linked to the historical or public narrative by the most tenuous of circumstances. To divorce private and public worlds in this manner is to fail in the genre.¹²

And yet, as we have seen, this is not the case. Furthermore, Barnaby Rudge succeeds admirably well in fulfilling one of the most important qualities of the historical novel as outlined by Scott: moribund and nascent cultures are in conflict with each other. Barnaby is also a

¹²O'Brien, p. 28.

political novel, for it closely analyzes the nature and responsibility of all levels of government, from the cruel and incompetent country gentleman, to Westminster, to the chambers of Buckingham Palace. But even more important, Barnaby Rudge is a social novel in the spirit of Dickens's later social novel, Hard Times (1854). Dickens in Barnaby carefully contrasts, primarily through the characters and the imagery in the novel, evil and injustice with virtue and compassion, both on a private and public level. And the skillful way in which Dickens accomplishes these contrasts unifies Barnaby Rudge. But, contrary to the opinions of men such as Marcus, Dickens in Barnaby, though he does issue a stern warning about what may happen to a society unresponsive to the needs of all its members, does not see the evils of society as irreversible. If there is great degradation, injustice, and suffering in Barnaby Rudge, there is hope, also. If Barnaby is, as Joseph Gold says, "a presentation of the causes of the conditions that make riot possible as well as of the riots themselves,"¹³ it is also a vindication of the dignity and perseverance of man. But, as Johnson says, Dickens

looked upon the assumptions underlying the social order with a profoundly critical eye. He was, as he claimed to be, a radical, though he adhered to no doctrinaire faith and had no dogmatic panacea. He did not want to abolish private property. He did not wish everything to be controlled by the state. But neither did he fear state interference to correct social and economic injustices.

What Dickens did desire was that government should represent the people and that its concern should be the welfare of the people, not that of a privileged group of classes. He desired the laws of society to be better, not worse, than the law of the jungle; to cease being weighted against those who had too little and in favor of those who already had more than

¹³ Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 117.

enough. He desired to see the poor lifted out of the circumstances, not of their making, that hampered their struggles: slum surroundings, illiteracy, incredibly protracted labor under hideously unsanitary conditions for starvation wages. He desired to see an active hand of brotherhood extended to the poor and ignorant and ignored and misused.¹⁴

Indeed he did, and it is this deeply compassionate, humanitarian vision of man and English society which, even more than his depiction of the decay and disintegration of an entire way of life, unifies Barnaby Rudge. There are, it is true, weaknesses in the novel, especially a number of flat characters and passages, but Dickens's vivid and penetrating vision of the death and potential transfiguration of eighteenth-century English society nonetheless merits high praise. Nor are the characters as a whole, as the following chapter will show, either unsatisfactory or uninteresting. Rather, they both serve as variations on the important unifying themes of Barnaby Rudge and reveal that Dickens's talents as a writer of comedy had not fallen from the level he attained in earlier novels such as The Pickwick Papers and The Old Curiosity Shop.

¹⁴Johnson, I, p. 337.

CHAPTER IV

A CONSTELLATION OF MEMORABLE AND EFFECTIVE CHARACTERS

Another quality of Barnaby Rudge which merits detailed treatment, especially because, as I pointed out earlier, it serves both as another example of the overall unity of this intricate and yet balanced work and as an example of Dickens's humor at its best, is Dickens's frequently excellent techniques of characterization in the novel. The best characters in Barnaby are as well depicted as some of the more famous characters in more famous Dickens novels, and, indeed, in some ways better depicted. Like virtually all of Dickens's novels, Barnaby Rudge has a broad, panoramic, and yet unified plot, which allows Dickens sufficient room to develop a constellation of memorable characters. Well developed and lively eccentrics, grotesques, knaves, villains, and benevolent characters, not to mention a near-human raven, abound in the novel. Although a few characters, most notably the stiff Joe Willet, the lifeless Emma Haredale, and the prosaic villain Gashford (he fawns and slithers through the pages of Barnaby until he becomes wearisome) are, on the whole, unconvincing, still a wealth of memorable and effective characters await the reader. Dickens's powers of characterization in Barnaby Rudge operate, for the most part, on a very high level--one, I think, comparable to the high level he achieves in Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. The excellent characters of Barnaby Rudge are not perhaps as easily accessible as those of Mr. Pickwick, Sairey Gamp, and Pip, but they do hold their own sort

of lasting attraction for the discriminating reader. Barnaby's most compelling characters rarely immediately present their best sides before the reader; rather, they come into the sun only after a suitable period of incubation. Forster wrote that Barnaby Rudge

has not so many people eagerly adopted as of kin by everybody, as its predecessors are famous for; but it has yet a fair proportion of such as take solid form within the mind and keep hold of the memory.¹

However, even this statement may not do the characters of the novel justice, for some of the finest creations in all of Dickens appear in Barnaby. Furthermore, the characters in Barnaby Rudge all in some way further the unity and echo the major themes of the work. Unfortunately, most if not all of the novel's excellent characters have either been ignored or considered to be pale reflections of great characters in other Dickens novels. At least five (and quite likely more) excellent characters which not only help to impart to the novel a satisfying, animated quality, but also exemplify Dickens's techniques of characterization in Barnaby Rudge deserve mention in detail: John Willet and Simon Tappertit, who are representative of the abundant Dickens humor in the novel; the inviting, seductive, sensual Dolly Varden, the work's heroine; the rough-hewn, brutally evil, and yet hauntingly admirable Maypole Hugh; and the grotesque Ned Dennis the hangman.

The first two characters in Barnaby Rudge which merit a closer examination are John Willet, the old innkeeper, and Simon Tappertit, Gabriel Varden's malcontent apprentice. These characters stand, I

¹Forster, I, p. 247.

think, as fine examples of the rich vein of humor in the novel. Indeed, a great number of Barnaby's large gallery of characters, including among them both Willets, the Maypole company (Solomon Daisy, Tom Cobb, and Phil Parkes), the entire Varden household, Barnaby, Grip, Hugh, Dennis, John Grueby, the country gentleman, the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, and even the evil Sir John Chester, may, in spite of the prevailing critical opinions which insist that they be taken almost wholly seriously (that is, symbolically), be seen as at least partially comic figures. But perhaps the two most enchanting and most representative comic figures painted in Barnaby Rudge are old John Willet and Simon Tappertit. Mr. Willet is, as Marcus rightly points out, a tyrannical father whose "principal satisfaction in life consists in degrading and humiliating his son."² In the gross, then, Mr. Willet is a rather dull-witted fellow; in fact, in his exchange with Barnaby and the coldly evil Sir John Chester in Chapter 10, Mr. Willet comes off as no smarter than his two companions, an idiot and a knave. And since Dickens hints a number of times in Barnaby Rudge that Barnaby knows even less in some ways than his raven, Grip, Mr. Willet appears in some scenes to be the biggest fool of all in a landscape laden with fools and scoundrels. However, Dickens often describes Mr. Willet in an endearingly funny manner (Mr. Willet does have a bit of the eccentric in him). Consider the following passages. The first is a description of the old innkeeper:

The name of him upon whom the spirit of prophecy thus descended was John Willet, a burly, large-headed man with a fat face, which betokened obstinacy and slowness of apprehension,

²Marcus, p. 188.

combined with a very strong reliance upon his own merits. It was John Willet's ordinary boast in his more placid moods that if he were slow he was sure; which assertion could, in one sense at least, be by no means gainsaid, seeing that he was in everything unquestionably the reverse of fast, and withal one of the most dogged and positive fellows in existence. . . . (Chapter 1, p. 45)

The second treats of Mr. Willet's sleeping characteristics:

The room was so very warm, the tobacco so very good, and the fire so very soothing, that Mr. Willet by degrees began to doze; but as he had perfectly acquired, by dint of long habit, the art of smoking in his sleep, and as his breathing was pretty much the same, awake or asleep, saving that in the latter case he sometimes experienced a slight difficulty in respiration (such as a carpenter meets with when he is planing and comes to a knot), neither of his companions was aware of the circumstance, until he met with one of these impediments and was obliged to try again. (Chapter 33, p. 316)

The sort of humor employed here has a dry, wry, mock-importance quality that reminds the reader of Twain, and Dickens manipulates it like an expert puppet-master, drawing forth a considerable amount of comedy from these short vignettes. Mr. Willet does, it is true, come off in places as a dangerous fool whose brutal treatment of his son echoes society's brutal treatment of the poor and oppressed. Indeed, as Lucas says, "It is possible to see in the landlord's name the clue to his belief that he can preserve the way of life he is identified with simply by willing that it should be so."³ And it is also true, as Lucas goes on to point out, that the father-son relationships between John and Joe Willet and the other filial pairs in Barnaby Rudge stand as metaphors "rooted in social actuality, of the stupidities of the old order which prompt the new to rebellion."⁴ But Dickens also quite

³ Lucas, p. 96.

⁴ Lucas, p. 96.

charmingly depicts John Willet and many of the other characters in Barnaby Rudge in such a way that they operate at once on a symbolic and a comic level. John Willet's eccentricities and, in places, outright absurdities can amuse as well as repel; as a blustering father who, unbeknownst to himself, is the object of scorn to virtually everyone around him in the novel (and to the reader as well), Mr. Willet succeeds quite nicely. As a symbol of a moribund way of life, he does not work quite so well as Dennis, Sir John Chester, Lord George Gordon, or Gashford, all of whom are striking reminders of what can happen when a society does not select its leaders wisely. However, the comic antics and eccentricities of John Willet certainly make him a memorable character in Barnaby Rudge.

Simon Tappertit constitutes another sterling example of the effective symbolic-comic duality of many of the characters in Barnaby Rudge. Sim, as Dickens sarcastically calls him, is in part a spiteful social climber, desirous of rising above what he considers to be a demeaning and undeserved position in society, and, indeed, like the rest of the principal rioters except Barnaby, a man with an almost ghoulish love of violence and bloodshed. Additionally, insofar as Sim serves both as an apprentice locksmith to Gabriel Varden and as a "soldier" in the army of rioters, he may be viewed both as a kind of intriguing servant and as a braggart soldier. Sim is also, as John Carey points out, the "evil locksmith"⁵ of the novel; he contrasts with the benevolent Varden, the good locksmith. Furthermore, as

⁵John Carey, The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 120.

A. E. Dyson mentions, Sim's ludicrously tyrannical rule over the 'Prentice Knights' meeting in the Barbican cellar creates "a little image of anarchy near the novel's start."⁶ Thus, Sim tyrannizes over his fellow apprentices in the same way that John Willet tyrannizes over his unhappy son; both men are prophets of cruelty and stupidity. And yet even in the 'Prentice Knights meeting scene, in which Dickens's dislike of early trade unionism is evident, a comic vein is woven into the action. As Dyson says,

A comic, often facetious tone plays around the grotesquerie-- Sim's hatred towards Joe, the oaths and commitments of the new initiates, the silent menace emanating from Stagg. How seriously is this scene to be taken? Perhaps Dickens deliberately leaves this fluid.⁷

Nor are, I think, the other scenes involving Sim to be seen as being completely dominated by Dickens's concern with the darker side of Sim's character. For example, the following two passages contain as much comedy as hints of the latent evil of Sim. In the first, we see Gabriel, Dolly, and Sim at the Varden breakfast table, a favorite Dickens setting:

Sim . . . had not been wanting in such silent manifestations of astonishment, as he deemed most compatible with the favourable display of his eyes. Regarding the pause which now ensued, as a particularly advantageous opportunity for doing great execution with them upon the locksmith's daughter (who he had no doubt was looking at him in mute admiration), he began to screw and twist his face, and especially those features, into such extraordinary, hideous, and unparalleled contortions, that Gabriel, who happened to look towards him, was stricken with amazement.

"Why, what the devil's the matter with the lad?" cried the locksmith. "Is he choking?"

⁶A. E. Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens: A Reading of the Novels (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 56.

⁷Dyson, p. 56.

"Who?" demanded Sim, with some disdain.

"Who? why, you," returned his master. "What do you mean by making those horrible faces over your breakfast?"

"Faces are matters of taste, sir," said Mr. Tappertit, rather discomfited; not the less so because he saw the locksmith's daughter smiling. (Chapter 4, p. 84)

In the second, the last lines of Chapter 59, the vain Sim, hoping to steer Maypole Hugh away from his lust for Dolly (who cannot abide either one of them), magnanimously offers to give him the virago, Miggs (who is the bane of Sim's existence), to the great amusement of Hugh:

"As to you, old boy"--he turned to Hugh--"you shall have Miggs (her that I promised you, you know) within three days. Mind. I pass my word for it."

Hugh thanked him heartily; and as he did so, his laughing fit returned with such violence that he was obliged to hold his side with one hand, and to lean with the other on the shoulder of his small captain, without whose support he would certainly have rolled upon the ground. (Chapter 59, p. 546)

Simon Tappertit, a wretched, deluded, and yet humorous knave, is one of Dickens's finest creations; he is frightening and funny, ludicrous and pathetic. Sim also represents, as Hesketh Pearson says, "a comical apotheosis of the 'little man' a century before he came into his own."⁸ However, Sim, like Hugh, is not entirely to blame for the brutal fiend he has become; an unjust society which denies him an adequate living must also bear a large part of the responsibility. But in spite of the darker implications of his character, Sim's contorted expressions and "imposing" physical stature (he is actually short and scarecrow-like) and his "aristocratic" legs (they are actually extremely spindly, and Sim, ironically enough, loses them at the end of the novel) afford the

⁸Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 95.

reader almost limitless amusement as well as supplying a gruesome symbol of the decay of an entire society.

Barnaby Rudge, then, contrary to the opinions of many, is pregnant with comedy frequently of the highest order. Admittedly, some of it may be termed stock comedy, but even when Dickens employs this sort of comedy, he makes it new by infusing it with his own unique kind of satiric and yet simultaneously gently comic descriptions. And what is even more remarkable is the fact that the symbolic effectiveness of the symbolic-comic characters in Barnaby remains unimpaired even when Dickens depicts them in a primarily comic fashion. All the comic characters in the novel can be interpreted with equal facility as reflecting the decline and fall of a way of life and as uncomplicated comic figures. The light-dark quality to Dickens's comic characters in Barnaby Rudge is also characteristic of the majority of the more famous comic creations in Dickens's later novels; such figures as Mr. Krook, the greedy and conniving but nonetheless laughable old man in Bleak House, and Mr. Podsnap, the narrow-minded and yet amusingly pompous gentleman in Our Mutual Friend, must be dealt with in serious as well as comic terms. Indeed, then, I make bold to say that no decline in Dickens's comic invention occurs in Barnaby Rudge; excellent eccentrics, grotesques, and other comic figures abound in the novel. Nor was Dickens nearly as guilty in Barnaby as he was in novels such as Martin Chuzzlewit of merely spinning off lively but inorganic characters in order to save a dull weekly or monthly number (for example, Dickens never really treats in depth promising characters such as Mrs. Lupin or Major Pawkins in Martin Chuzzlewit). Even the humorous

characters of Barnaby Rudge are organic creations, for they echo Dickens's concern with unjust laws, wretched living conditions, and corruption at all levels of society. The complexity of Dickens's comic invention in Barnaby stands, I think, as one of his finest achievements.

Another distinguished piece of characterization in Barnaby Rudge lies in Dickens's depiction of Dolly Varden, the capricious beauty of the novel, and a character who enjoyed, with the possible exception of Grip, the greatest popularity during Dickens's lifetime of any character in Barnaby. Dolly does not perhaps inspire the pathos of a Nancy or have the immaculate, radiant goodness of a Rose Maylie, but she does have something new in Dickens's novels: some genuine sex appeal. As Johnson succinctly puts it, "she is alive."⁹ Dolly is a sensual, enticing, even erotic heroine. Indeed, she seems to arouse the most brutally animalistic and sexual instincts in Sim and Hugh. Grahame Smith comments on this head that there are some "unpleasantly erotic passages dealing with the threat of rape to Dolly Varden and Emma Haredale"¹⁰ in Barnaby Rudge. Dolly's appeal, then, rests primarily in Dickens's descriptions of her physical appearance. Harvey Peter Sucksmith is quite right when he says that some of Dickens's "heroines, like Dolly Varden, are liable to claim immediate approval merely because they are physically desirable."¹¹ It does seem that Dickens reveled

⁹Johnson, I, p. 332.

¹⁰Grahame Smith, Dickens, Money, and Society (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 91.

¹¹Harvey Peter Sucksmith, The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens: The Rhetoric of Sympathy and Irony in His Novels (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 251.

in depicting her as being enchanting, coquettish, and extremely desirable, as the following passage, in which Dickens describes Dolly after she has just come into a room and met her father, bears out:

How well she looked? Why, if he had exhausted every laudatory adjective in the dictionary, it wouldn't have been praise enough. When and where was there ever such a plump, rouguish, comely, bright-eyed, enticing, bewitching, captivating, maddening little puss in all this world, as Dolly! (Chapter 41, p. 384)

A number of critics have pointed out that Dolly seems to be modelled upon Mary Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law, and a woman with whom he had a very close relationship. Her tragic death in 1837 at the tender age of seventeen affected Dickens deeply. As Johnson says about the Dickens-Mary-Dolly connection, "Possibly for him the memory of her playful charm threw over even coquettish little Dolly Varden in Barnaby Rudge a hue of rose not always there for his readers"¹² And there is also perhaps a little reflection of Dickens's star-crossed love affair with Maria Beadnell in Dolly's characterization as well.

Furthermore, in some ways Dolly Varden looks ahead to later Dickens women such as Emily Peggotty and Estella Magwitch; all three hold a kind of sensual attraction for the reader. Dickens, then, in Dolly seems to have at least partially revealed the latent sexual side of his own nature, a side which he carefully kept at a distance from such idealized creations as Agnes Wickfield and Lucy Manette. And it is this very sexuality which perhaps recommended Dolly to many externally gelid and internally restive Victorians.

¹²Johnson, I, p. 203.

Dickens's portrayal of the Caliban-like Maypole Hugh, the illegitimate (and unowned) son of the selfishly hedonistic Sir John Chester and a woman convicted and hanged (by Dennis, ironically enough) for a minor offense with mitigating circumstances, constitutes another example of excellent characterization in Barnaby Rudge. Hugh is, in part, painted as brutal, almost sub-human. If Barnaby is a child of nature, Hugh is very much a raging, solitary man of nature. Sir John, in fact, calls him a centaur, and Dickens continually pictures him as a sort of human juggernaut, truculent and sexually potent. Like some unbridled animal, he prefers to sleep in barn straw or in the fields. Hugh must be seen, of course, in one sense as a robber on the King's highways, a debaucher, a cutthroat, and withal a dangerous man (as his assault on Dolly in Chapter 21 amply reveals), yet there is an admirable, defiant, even intrepid quality about him, almost as if he represents some kind of free, forbidden, violent masculinity which is forbidden to civilized men, and yet which attracts them all the same. However, Dickens holds that Hugh, like Sim, is not completely responsible for what he has become. Hugh, as Lucas says,

is allowed to live as an animal, and as a result he is quite willing to destroy the society by which he has been created and which disowns him. . . . Hugh is the final product of a way of life that has fallen into its dotage. He is a brilliantly complex and highly satisfying image by means of which Dickens can explore and present something of his concern with social decay.¹³

Additionally, there is a great deal of the genuine hero in Hugh. Dyson makes the following statement on this point:

¹³Lucas, p. 99.

Is he a Byronic hero . . . with Richardson's Lovelace among his remoter ancestors?--or a criminal hero, descended from Jonathan Wild . . . or a primitivist hero, the Natural Man rejected and victimized by the timid and weak? To the student of politics, he might seem a most dangerous working-class malcontent, whose true nature the French Terror, as well as the Gordon Riots themselves, had by the 1840s abundantly shown. . . Certainly he represents a vision of manhood which the Brontës were soon to embellish, a sexual magnet dangerous, wicked and fascinatingly alive.¹⁴

Dyson goes on to say that though Hugh is

Inarticulate or incoherent for the most part, he is far from being unintelligent; he rises to noble and convincing eloquence at his death. . . . His preference for horses and dogs to his fellow men is based on experience; he has found them more loyal and tender in their ways.¹⁵

All the possible interpretations of Hugh that Dyson describes fit, I think, this most satisfyingly ambiguous character. Hugh is at once fierce, brutal (even potentially murderous), defiantly heroic, and even tragic. The following vivid passage from Barnaby Rudge reveals, it seems to me, Hugh's ambiguous nature. Here Hugh, like some superhuman avatar, rides fearlessly among the rioters after a battle with the soldiers has begun to go against the rioters:

So surely as the smoke cleared away, so surely there was he; calling hoarsely to his companions, brandishing his axe above his head, and dashing on as though he bore a charmed life, . . . and was proof against ball and powder.

This man was Hugh; and in every part of the riot, he was seen. He . . . was here, and there, and everywhere--always foremost--always active--striking at the soldiers, cheering on the crowd, making his horse's iron music heard through all the yell and uproar: but never hurt or stopped. (Chapter 67, p. 607)

¹⁴Dyson, p. 60.

¹⁵Dyson, pp. 60-61.

Furthermore, the notion that Dickens saw Hugh as having some redeeming qualities is supported by the brief description at the end of Chapter 79 of Hugh's burial, which only his kindly half-brother, Edward Chester, and a few strangers attend. The description of Hugh's resting place is reminiscent of the description of Heathcliff's, that of a place which holds the remains of a man defiant and unredeemed to the end, and yet, somehow, darkly heroic.

Thus, Hugh stands both as an ambiguous demon-hero and as a symbol of what men may become if society fails to allow them an opportunity to become assimilated into that society. And as an ambiguous hero, Hugh seems to me to be as well painted as more famous heroes in Dickens such as Sydney Carton, the enigmatic but in the end almost too good to be true hero of A Tale of Two Cities.

The final character I shall discuss here is Ned Dennis. Mr. Dennis is a one of a kind creation in the Dickens world: a gruesome, grisly, and yet, in a morbid sort of way, humorous hangman. Dennis is perhaps the most memorable of all the characters in Barnaby Rudge, for both his symbolic import and comic effectiveness are extremely well developed. On one level, of course, Dennis must be seen as the most horrifying example of a society gone mad, punishing and rewarding without regard to wisdom or compassion. A. O. J. Cockshut says that Dennis "is a figure of cardinal importance, not only in Barnaby Rudge, but in Dickens's work as a whole. For he embodies the clash of ideas, that permanently haunted his creator, the clash of law and violence."¹⁶ Folland writes that

¹⁶A. O. J. Cockshut, The Imagination of Charles Dickens (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964), p. 75.

Dickens makes us see that Dennis, like his profession, is evil, but that his is the evil of a mere instrument; the responsible wielder of the instrument is society itself, in its function as law and order. The law . . . is so profoundly respectable that Dennis is a privileged instrument and, as hangman, can never be punished for the torment he inflicts. It is a pretty irony that he is finally hanged for participating in the riots in order to protect the established order that maintains him as hangman.

The richness of this figure, however, comes not only from the fullness with which he is realized, but also from the enormous pressure of meaning that he bears: he hardly ever makes a movement or remark, however amusing or grotesque, that does not reverberate with direct significance. For in Dennis, all that Dickens has to say in this novel as a reformer of society comes to sharp focus: although abundant and almost indiscriminate executions for petty offenses is a great evil, the source of that evil is not personal but is hidden deep in the structure of society itself.¹⁷

But symbolic though he is of the dark social forces at work in Barnaby Rudge, even Dennis can, at times, be seen as a humorous figure. The humor Dennis evokes is, of course, gallows humor, but for those who like that sort of thing, it certainly affords amusement. A great deal is made in Barnaby Rudge of the act of hanging and the fitness of people's necks for hanging, a reflection of Dickens's own fascination with crime and public executions. For example, note the following dialogue between Sir John Chester and his son and unwilling agent in evil, Hugh:

"I meant to give you no offense," said Hugh. "I don't know what to say. You catch me up so very short."

"You will be caught up much shorter, my good friend--infinitely shorter--one of these days, depend on it," replied his patron calmly. (Chapter 40, p. 377)

But the best hanging jokes in Barnaby Rudge directly involve Dennis. Dennis considers himself an "artist--a fancy workman" (Chapter 39, p. 372), and admires in a manner he considers to be artistic the perfect

¹⁷Folland, p. 413.

symmetry of the muscular Hugh's neck, a part of the body which Dennis sees as being created to facilitate the job of the hangman. The following passage, in which Hugh discovers that Mr. Dennis desires to do more than just loot and fire Mr. Willet's inn, is representative of the excellent gallows humor involving Dennis in Barnaby Rudge:

"It's all very fine talking, brother," answered Dennis, stepping towards him; "but unless--" and here he whispered in his ear--"unless we do it over the door, it can't be done at all in this here room."

"What can't?" Hugh demanded.

"What can't!" retorted Dennis. "Why, the old man can't."

"Why, you weren't going to hang him!" cried Hugh.

"No, brother?" returned the hangman with a stare. "What else?"

Hugh made no answer, but snatching the rope from his companion's hand, proceeded to bind old John himself; but his very first move was so bungling and unskilful, that Mr. Dennis entreated, almost with tears in his eyes, that he might be permitted to perform the duty. Hugh consenting, he achieved it in a twinkling. (Chapter 54, p. 499)

Of course, in some cases, such as the scene in which Dennis sadistically refuses to let the condemned men out of the burning Newgate Prison in spite of their terror-stricken entreaties because he cannot stand the idea of anyone not being hanged who has been sentenced to be hanged, Dennis's actions take on a decidedly morbid hue. However, Dennis may also, overall, be termed a light-dark character, with a tendency towards the dark. Ned Dennis deserves to be ranked among such great Dickens grotesques as the besotted and language-abusing Sairey Gamp and the naïve and improvident Mr. Micawber, for in each Dickens depicts serious flaws in human nature in such a way that we laugh wholeheartedly at them even as we recognize the grave problems which can result because of these flaws.

In Barnaby Rudge, then, an often brilliant constellation of memorable and effective characters shines before the eyes of the reader. Nor do the excellent characters of the novel suffer in comparison with the excellent characters of more highly regarded Dickens novels. John Willet ranks with Wackford Squeers and Mr. Bumble in Dickens's superb gallery of ignorant and cruel men who abuse the authority vested in them, especially in regard to the molding of young children's (the future leaders of society) minds. Simon Tappertit stands both as a memorable comic figure and as perhaps the most notable evil apprentice in Dickens, and if he is viewed as a kind of evil servant, Sim compares favorably with other notable evil servants in Dickens such as the women Rosa Dartle and Hortense. Dolly strikes me as every bit as well depicted and memorable as more highly regarded Dickens females such as Little Nell and Lucy Manette, both of whom are extremely sentimentalized and spotlessly good to the point of implausibility. Furthermore, Hugh can, in a sense, be seen as an even more tragic hero than Stephen Blackpool or Sydney Carton, for though they also suffer much, they are at least allowed a place in society, however degrading and unfulfilling it may be; Hugh is a social outcast from the moment of his birth. And Dennis, whose ghoulish desire to hang people is at once ludicrous and a manifestation of the diseased state of an entire society, merits praise as one of the great grotesques in Dickens's fiction, rivaling even Quilp and Uriah Heep, who are, like Dennis, satanic, Iago-like villains. Quilp and Uriah Heep are, admittedly, villains extraordinaire, but they do not, it seems to me carry the symbolic import that Dennis does.

There are, it is true, some weak characters in Barnaby Rudge. Mary Rudge in particular strikes me as a very unsatisfactory character; wooden and sickeningly passive, she seems only to serve as a rudely developed example of a long suffering Christian woman. However, Martha Varden, who at the beginning of Barnaby Rudge is as shrewish as the repulsive Miggs, becomes by the end of Barnaby what Mary Rudge never does in any convincing fashion: a woman who has learned from the terrifying riots that Christian tolerance, compassion, and faith must always take precedence over wealth, power, and hypocritical martyrdom. And Joe Willet, Edward Chester, and Gashford also suffer from poor development; they seem to often do little more than further the action of Barnaby in a rather mechanical way. But, overall, the techniques of characterization Dickens employed in Barnaby Rudge yielded rich fruit. Nor are the characters of Barnaby inorganic improvisations designed to salvage a dull number, such as Mrs. Lupin and Major Pawkins in Martin Chuzzlewit seem to be; rather, the characters of Barnaby Rudge represent things which have eaten away at the foundations of society and spawned a kind of historical juggernaut, the Gordon Riots. Dickens achieved in Barnaby Rudge a fullness of characterization seldom matched in his other novels.

CHAPTER V

A LOGICAL AND POSITIVE STEP

Barnaby Rudge, then, stands, in spite of a few superficial faults, as a fine Dickens novel, indeed one far better than critics have previously allowed. Barnaby has sound unity (especially in respect to the two principal themes, social disintegration and humanistic societal rebirth, which Dickens carefully traces through both sections of the novel), refined and vivid diction, and a good deal of excellent humor. Furthermore, the characters of Barnaby Rudge are not only memorable, but they also serve as organic variations on the two principal themes of the work. In addition, the symbolic import of the major characters in Barnaby is, for the most part, powerfully and masterfully developed. Barnaby Rudge is, on the whole, a subtly beautiful, carefully planned, and well executed novel whose power to interest the reader seldom fails. Whatever personal and artistic difficulties Dickens experienced in getting Barnaby Rudge to press had no negative aesthetic effects on the work; if anything, the reverse occurred, for the novel is filled with lyric beauty, moments of high comedy, penetrating social analysis, and an artistically heightened but factually accurate reconstruction of an historical event, the great Gordon Riots, an event which threatened the very foundation of eighteenth-century English society.

But even more important than the aforementioned reasons, Barnaby Rudge is a significant novel in the Dickens canon because it represents

a logical and positive step, a favorable crossroads, as it were, in Dickens's development as a novelist. For in Barnaby we begin to see definite signs of the qualities that mark later Dickens novels such as Dombey and Son (1846-48), Bleak House (1852-53), Little Dorrit (1855-57), and Our Mutual Friend: perceptive and compassionate social criticism, and a darker and yet, I think, wiser view, arrived at by hard personal experience, of man and everything that touches him. Dickens in Barnaby Rudge came of age both as a social critic and as a man; he shed the mantle of youth and moved into the shadowy, half-truth-filled world of adulthood. He was no longer the carefree and somewhat naïve young artist who in such novels as The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, and Nicholas Nickleby tended to see the world as a sentimentalized place of almost limitless possibilities with evil, though present sometimes causing tragedy, almost always overcome in the end by naïve goodness. In Barnaby Rudge, however, we see a darker vein, only present in isolated places in Dickens's earlier novels, come to the fore. No longer were there poor, wretched, orphaned Oliver Twists who found homes with generous benefactors, who suffered no permanent damage from the cruelty and injustice they experienced at an early age, and who lived happily ever after. And no longer were there Little Nell's who had no apparent weaknesses. In Barnaby Rudge, Barnaby, though he does attain contentment, remains an idiot, and Dolly Varden, though she does repent of her caprices and insensitive attitudes, is never held up, even at the end of the novel, as an example of perfection. Dickens's characters from Barnaby on through the later, extremely dark, even brooding novels Our Mutual Friend and The Mystery of Edwin Drood

(1870), no matter how good they may eventually turn out to be (or in the case of the unfinished The Mystery of Edwin Drood, could have turned out to be), now are permanently altered or scarred by the ignorance, injustice, and brutality around them. They may be wiser as the result of hard experience, but the memory of the past is always with them. No longer were Dickens's novels primarily comic or light-hearted in nature; social and moral concerns became more and more important to him, and Barnaby Rudge reflects those concerns.

Barnaby Rudge, of course, still has its comic and light-hearted moments. John Willet, Simon Tappertit, Dennis, and many of the other characters are portrayed in purely comic terms in some parts of the novel. But there is also a dark, disturbing, even horrifying side to these characters, much more dark, disturbing, and horrifying than anything implied in earlier Dickens characters such as Bumble, Squeers, and Quilp. The vices of the characters in Barnaby Rudge do not just degrade, injure, or kill individuals or families; the effects of these vices are more far-reaching, for they threaten to snowball to the point that society itself is threatened with destruction. The "dark and fateful drift toward disillusion even in the midst of universal acclaim"¹ which Johnson sees as becoming so pronounced in the latter stages of Dickens's career seems to me to become first significant in Barnaby Rudge. The ignorance, cruelty, and incompetence of minions of the government such as the country gentleman, the police, Dennis the hangman, and Sir John Chester are, while in one sense extremely

¹Johnson, I, p. vii.

funny in a morbid sort of way, every bit as ominous as the excruciatingly slow and incredibly unjust administration of what passes for justice in Bleak House or the sempiternal red tape of the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit.

There are in Barnaby Rudge, it is true, contented pastoral romps by Barnaby, Gabriel Varden finding peace and contentment in the rosy warmth of his family circle, and Joe and Dolly as well as Edward and Emma marrying, healing the wounds of the old family conflicts, and raising a bushellfull of children. All of this harkens back to the days of The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist, and reinforces the idea that Dickens, while deeply disturbed by the brutality, injustice, and violence which he so graphically depicts in Barnaby Rudge, still felt that both man and society was capable of changing its ways and creating a society responsive to the needs of all its citizens. But even so, the darker, in places almost brooding, and yet nonetheless more mature side of Dickens's imagination, which only appears here and there in Dickens's earlier novels (most notably in his depiction of the workhouse in Oliver Twist and in the hints of evil in man and society in The Old Curiosity Shop), becomes in Barnaby Rudge every bit as important as the light-hearted elements so characteristic of the youthful Dickens. The blithe, sanguine elements of Dickens's youth and the dark, brooding, even (in a few isolated places) bitter elements of Dickens's maturity are, in fact, of almost equal importance in Barnaby. These light and dark elements are not, it must be pointed out, evenly distributed throughout the novel. The first section, though the gothic murder mystery and the hints of public violence do constitute dark, foreboding

elements, shows to a greater extent than the second section the influence of Dickens's earlier novels, for much of Barnaby's best humor (with the exception of the passages involving Dennis), light-hearted moments, and, unfortunately, naive sentiments, occur here. The second section, in which Dickens's powerful descriptions of and ambiguous attitudes about the Gordon Riots dominate the novel, anticipates both the vehement protests against social injustice so characteristic of Bleak House, Hard Times, and Little Dorrit and the more mature understanding of the complexity of good and evil that distinguishes those later novels.

Dickens, then, was with Barnaby Rudge at a crossroads both in his personal life and in his artistic career. Dickens could still (and, indeed, often did) create passages which convey a distinct sense of unbridled joy and optimism, but after Barnaby Rudge he became unable to write any more novels which did not center upon concerned and sometimes even extremely bitter attacks upon the hideous injustices and dark evils of humankind. For example, Our Mutual Friend is filled with strong social protest. In Barnaby Rudge Dickens does not naively place the blame for the suffering, injustice, and violence so prevalent in the novel solely on the masses, working class, government, religion, or royalty; rather, Dickens seems to say that all are in part responsible. For Dickens, the events of the Gordon Riots dictate that man must undertake a painful but cathartic reassessment not only of himself and his beliefs, but also of his role in relation to his family (if any), friends, society, and God. And society, Dickens warns, must do likewise, or the entire framework of society may crumble and fall.

Only by suffering, reassessment, and redemption can man and society achieve anything resembling the glorious existence Dickens depicts in The Pickwick Papers. Dickens in Barnaby Rudge still believed that man was capable of great compassion, honesty, loyalty, and, above all, love. But he wisely recognized that the world is in many ways painted in gray; the good are not always saved and rewarded. Joe loses an arm, and Geoffrey Haredale, worn out after years of seeking revenge on Mr. Rudge and Sir John Chester, retires to a monastery in France and lives only a short time thereafter, dying a lonely man scarred irreparably by the events of the past. Dickens now recognized that man's existence, though often filled with moments of great joy and blessed fullness, was often stained by hardship, injustice, and, far too often, tragedy. And society was as often insensitive and cruel as it was fair and beneficial. The good characters do at last triumph in Barnaby Rudge, but they have, as all men who hope to come to any real understanding of the world must, suffered much, and will carry the scars of the Gordon Riots to their graves.

Barnaby Rudge, then, in addition to being an underrated Dickens novel, contains one quality unique in Dickens's novels: the light, playful, optimistic spirit of Dickens's early novels and the dark, brooding, sometimes bitter, but much more insightful quality that marks Dickens's later novels are both present in the work. After Barnaby Rudge, the light elements become less and less important in Dickens's novels, and the darker elements become more and more dominant. Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens's next novel, has some humor, but that humor is bitingly satirical. Dombey and Son's sparse humor is also principally

satirical. The abundant humor of David Copperfield is in some ways reminiscent of the younger Dickens, but it tends both to be overshadowed by Dickens's autobiographical musings, and to have a certain insensitivity to it. (Even the kindly and lovable Mr. Dick's imbecilities seem to be portrayed by Dickens in something of a condescending manner.) After David Copperfield, there are only scattered hints of the younger Dickens: Skimpole (modelled upon Dickens's friend, Leigh Hunt) in Bleak House, Sleary in Hard Times, John Wemmick's aged father in Great Expectations, and perhaps a few others. But the humor of Barnaby Rudge glows with the spirit of the confident virtuosity of the young Dickens. Sim is at times a dandy reminiscent of Alfred Jingle, there is much of the humorous hard-headed pragmatism of Tony Weller in old John Willet, and Gabriel Varden is every bit as good-hearted and benevolent as Mr. Brownlow. Barnaby does not, it is true, sparkle with the breathtaking if somewhat inorganic improvisations of The Pickwick Papers or The Old Curiosity Shop; no Sam Weller or Dick Swiveller graces its pages. All of the major characters of Barnaby are, while often funny, striking symbols of the major themes of the novel, and thus they are organic creations. However, the same kind of light-hearted humor which makes Dickens's earlier novels so endearing is also present in Barnaby Rudge, a fact which is all the more remarkable considering the often horrible brutality and corruption which many of the humorous characters in the work also represent. Dickens perhaps succeeds better in Barnaby than in any of his other novels in creating characters who are both light and dark, at once extremely funny and symbolic of the dark vices of man and society.

Finally, Barnaby Rudge seems to me to be a sort of looking glass in which we can see a reflection of virtually Dickens's entire personal and literary career: the exuberance of youth, excellent comedy, extremely moving lyrical expressions, admirable heroes and despicable villains, carefully planned work, fascination with suffering and crime, musings on the injustices of man, concerned and occasionally even bitter social commentary, personal strife and triumph, and a tremendous, unshakable belief in the potential of man. Dickens had indeed with Barnaby Rudge reached an important crossroads in both his personal and artistic career. The initial euphoria of success was behind him, and, having experienced the first of many serious personal and artistic conflicts and the incipience of disillusionment, Dickens collected himself and worked even harder to make his novels well conceived, well executed, and vibrant creations. With Barnaby Rudge, Dickens moved into the ambiguous world of adulthood, both personally and artistically. He was no longer the meteoric parvenu, able to turn out novels at a dizzying pace. He was now a serious, perceptive, disciplined, and yet still remarkably imaginative writer. And Barnaby Rudge, his little known but nonetheless excellent historical novel, profited at once from his newly discovered discipline and maturity and from his ever fertile imagination.

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