Title of Paper: **Burning Down the House: Serialization, Domesticity, and Dickens's Rejection of Scott's Influence in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841)**

Author: Dr. Jeffrey E. Jackson

Affiliation: Monmouth University

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Abstract:

*Barnaby Rudge*, Charles Dickens's historical novel set during the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, gains momentum as it reaches the riots themselves, the fiery devastation that claims no fewer than 72 London houses. I argue that Dickens’s aggressive erasure of these spaces reflects his need to define himself by rejecting a model of domesticity established by historical novelist Sir Walter Scott, Dickens’s powerful precursor in fiction, an idea of private life codified in the three-volume *Waverley* Novels and embodied in Abbotsford, Scott’s iconic home. Serialization, I argue, is the material expression of Dickens’s break from Scott’s influence. I discuss how in *Barnaby Rudge* Dickens recasts the domestic spaces that comprised Scott’s vision of private life as menacing, claustrophobic, and oppressively masculine so as to establish his own model of domesticity, the vision that Catherine Waters describes as the “characterization of the home as an enclave of family warmth and harmony and its superintendence by a woman who embodies the domestic ideal” (121). This idea of domesticity sees its material realization in serialization.

Keywords: *Barnaby Rudge* (1841); book history; Dickens, Charles (1812-1870); domesticity in literature; *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839); Oedipal complex in literature; Scott, Sir Walter (1771-1832); serialization; three-volume novels; *Waverley* Novels, The.

Author Bio: Dr Jeffrey E. Jackson is assistant professor of nineteenth-century British literature at Monmouth University. His interests include book history, the material cultures of the Scottish Enlightenment, and film-literature adaptations. His publications include work on Alfred Tennyson, Elizabeth Gaskell, teaching film-literature adaptation, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens’s *Sketches by Boz* (1836).

Author email: jejackso@monmouth.edu
INTRODUCTION: DICKENS, SCOTT, HOUSES

I wrote four slips last night [and] should get on like a house on fire this forenoon.
—Dickens, on Writing *Barnaby Rudge* (House and Storey 1:490-491, 491)

It has become something of a truism to regard *Barnaby Rudge*, Charles Dickens’s historical novel of the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, as a sustained, deeply anxious engagement with historical novelist Sir Walter Scott, Dickens’s powerful precursor in fiction.1 In one noticeable passage, the narrator designates *Barnaby Rudge*’s time period as “only six-and-sixty years ago” (75), an explicit allusion to “‘Tis Sixty Years Since,” the famous subtitle of *Waverley* (1814), Scott’s first, immediately popular novel. I am interested in the remainder of the passage, describing the London suburb of Clerkenwell, where heroic locksmith Gabriel Varden lives with his family: “each tenement [was] quietly vegetating like an ancient citizen who long ago retired from business, and [was] dozing on in its infirmity until in course of time it tumbles down, and is replaced by some extravagant young heir, flaunting in stucco and ornamental work, and all the vanities of modern days” (75, emphasis added). It is significant that—in the same passage where he evokes and rewrites Scott—Dickens should make domestic living quarters—houses—the focus for an intergenerational agon, an Oedipal struggle between “ancient citizen[s]” and “young heir[s].” Throughout the excessively protracted development of *Barnaby Rudge*, a work of historical fiction initially intended and contracted for three volumes, Scott and houses were very much on Dickens’s mind, central terms, I maintain, in a cluster of associations involving authorship, domesticity, and publication formats. *Barnaby Rudge*, of course, gains momentum as it builds toward the apocalyptic devastations of the Gordon Riots themselves, the mob violence and fiery devastation that, indicatively, claims 72 London houses. I argue that this aggressive erasure reflects Dickens’s need to define himself by rejecting what I have come to think of as Scott’s material culture of domesticity, a certain idea of private life embodied in Abbotsford, Scott’s iconic home, and codified in the format of the three-volume novel. In *Barnaby Rudge*, serialization is the material expression of Dickens’s violent break from Scott’s influence.

In her study of Dickens’s early career, Kathryn Chittick writes, “Scott is always to be found at the centre of early nineteenth century literary life: to understand Dickens’s ambitions in his early manhood is to come round inevitably to Scott” (18). As early as May of 1836, we find Dickens entering into an agreement with his

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1 For a representative Oedipal reading of *Barnaby Rudge* in relation to Sir Walter Scott, a reading indebted to Harold Bloom’s notion of the “anxiety of influence,” see Kim Ann Michasiw, who notes, *Barnaby Rudge* is obsessed with the violence done by fathers to sons, by the past to the present, and by anterior texts to originality. In *Rudge* the tyrannical threatening father has many avatars: John Willet, innkeeper and keeper in; John, later Sir John, Chester, archpupil to the letter-writing Lord Chesterfield; Gabriel Vardon [sic], locksmith of (or to) London; Geoffrey Haredale, gothicized guardian to his neice [sic], and the paternal Rudge, supposed victim and actual murder who stalks the text as a ghost. (577) Michasiw goes on to consider such fathers’ “relations to their mutilated children … after considering … *Barnaby Rudge*’s ties to the textual father: Walter, later Sir Walter, Scott” (577).
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publisher John Macrone for “Gabriel Vardon [sic], the Locksmith of London” in “Three Volumes of the usual size” (To John Macrone. 9 May 1836. House and Storey 1:150). The publication specifics situate the novel eventually entitled Barnaby Rudge within the material format made paradigmatic by the Waverley Novels: the three-volume novel or “triple decker.” Uniform in size and consistently priced at 31 s. 10 d., the three-volume novel maintained its status as “the foundation stone” of nineteenth-century publishing in part through being “demanded by the circulating libraries” (Sutherland, Victorian Novelists and Publishers 15), which employed a “volume-subscription system” (15). John Sutherland called its ascension to “fiction’s standard form” until roughly 1894 “[a]rguably … the most important single development in the history of the nineteenth-century novel” (Victorian Novelists and Publishers 12). Gabriel Vardon’s projected subtitle alludes to a memorable incident from the historic Gordon Riots, i.e., a locksmith’s brave refusal to unlock the entrance of Newgate for a mob of rioters bent on destroying the prison. In addition to promising a vivid, historical set-piece to rival the famous razing of the Tolbooth in Scott’s The Heart of Midlothian (1818), the germinal scene suggests an epic struggle between stable containment and the leveling forces of anarchy: a theme well-suited to be encased within what Guinevere L. Griest has called the “comforting bulk” (qtd. in Feltes 26) of the three-volume novel. The triple decker’s balanced, formulaic tripartite structure made it the format of happy endings, restorations of order, and unproblematic closure, the format where, to quote the immortal Miss Prism (who, after all, wrote a three-volume novel “in earlier days”), “The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means” (Wilde 41). As a “commercially safe” (Sutherland, Victorian Novelists and Publishers 15) proposition, the three-volume novel’s study dominance earned it comparisons to what Sutherland calls “the other great durables of the British Empire—the Queen, the Constitution and the Navy” (Victorian Novelists and Publishers 13). Reasonably costly at a guinea-and-a-half, the triple decker assumed a readership snug in a certain level of leisurely comforts and the attendant class-ideologies, what Thomas Carlyle spoke of snidely as “the reader on a sofa”

2 As Troy J. Bassett explains, the chief circulating libraries (i.e., Mudie’s Select Library and W. H. Smith) in collusion with the major publishers, insisted on new fiction published in three volumes at 31 s. 10 d. … This peculiar system mutually benefited nearly everyone: publishers had a stable market for new novels, libraries had a near monopoly in distribution, and readers had access to unlimited books [at the libraries] for the modest subscription of one guinea a year. (73)

3 Bassett notes that “the format was abandoned in 1894” (73). That year, as John Sutherland notes, Charles Edward Mudie (founder of Mudie’s Select Library) banned the format from his circulating libraries, calling it “unacceptable’ at any price” (Victorian Novelists and Publishers 12).

4 See also N. N. Feltes, who calls “the articulation of high price, lending library, and the three-decker format” a “hegemonic structure of market control, creating and sustaining a particular kind of readership, as it produced a particular kind of commodity with its own specific ideology” (24).

Guinevere L. Griest, in her study of Mudie’s Select Library, similarly notes that “the middle- or upper-middle-class reader who exchanged his volume regularly under Mudie’s dome received, besides entertainment, confirmation or definition of many of his beliefs” (qtd. in Feltes 27). Such beliefs, Feltes notes, “were distinct from those of the consumer of the serialized or part-issue commodity text” (27). See also Basset, who writes, “[A]s many authors and readers observed over the years, the purchasing
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(qtd. in Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* 12). Indeed, with *Waverley*, Scott used three volumes to trace Edward Waverley’s renunciation of the Jacobite cause and his retreat from the stage of history to domestic retirement with Rose Bradwardine and the bibliophilic pleasures of his private library, its shelves of “the rarest and most valuable volumes” (Scott 266). The Manchester-born publisher Macrone, meanwhile, had published Dickens’s first book: in issuing his collected periodical essays, short stories, and assorted journalistic ephemera as 1836’s *Sketches by Boz*, Macrone helped effect Dickens’s development toward one of those paragons later celebrated at Mrs. Leo Hunter’s déjeune in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37): “real authors, who had written whole books, and printed them afterwards” (Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* 182). This soon after his first appearance in volume form with *Sketches*, Dickens, in 1836, looked to “a three-volume historical novel in the mode of Sir Walter Scott” as the “work that was to have made his reputation as a successful author” (Chittick, Preface ix).

Five years later, in 1841, Dickens, now a famous author, would receive what Ian Duncan has called his “official ceremony of succession” (190) to Scott’s status as “master of a national reading public” (187). Shortly after Francis Jeffrey, the formidable *Edinburgh Review* critic and a friend and contemporary of Scott’s, was publicly received in London, Dickens began planning his own trip to Scotland. (He had learned that Jeffrey deemed Little Nell’s death in *The Old Curiosity Shop* [1840-1841] a tragedy rivaling Cordelia’s demise in *King Lear*) (Dickens to John Forster. 18 March 1841. House and Storey 2:238–9, 238). Dickens’s trip, as John Forster notes in *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1876), was “to be initiated by the splendid welcome of a public dinner in Edinburgh” (1–2:252). The Edinburgh reception confirmed Dickens’s popularity in Scott’s homeland and reinforced the sense that the latter’s mantle had in fact been passed down to Dickens. The event was to have been presided over by Jeffrey himself, whose recent illness prevented his attendance.

Master-of-ceremony duties fell on John Wilson, Edinburgh professor of moral philosophy, who (with John G. Lockhart, Scott’s son-in-law and biographer) co-founded *Blackwood’s* as the Tory answer to the Whiggish *Edinburgh Review* and contributed to its pages as “Christopher North.” The event was ultimately attended by over 250 eminent Scots, many of them from Scott’s circle. Dickens would later tell Forster, “I felt it was very remarkable to see such a number of grey-headed men gathered about my brown flowing locks” (Dickens to Forster. [30 June 1841]. House and Storey 2:313–8, 315), a vivid description that sees Dickens’s ascension to Scott’s stature in terms of an “extravagant young heir” versus “ancient citizen[s].” At the banquet, the advocate Peter Robertson “proposed the health of Scott” and mused aloud on “with what delight and cordiality would the author of *Waverley* have hailed the advent of the author of the *Pickwick Papers*” and went on to imagine a fanciful, friendly meeting between the characters Barnaby Rudge and *Waverley*’s Davie Gellatley and—rather less probably—Scott’s Dominie Sampson (from *Guy Mannering* [1815]) and Dickens’s Wackford Squeers (House and Storey 2:308n1).

power of the libraries exerted control well beyond the physical format of the novel by imposing a strict code of middle-class values on authors and publishers” (73).
In the five years that had elapsed since the initial agreement with Macrone, Dickens’s attitudes toward Scott—and Scott’s model of domestic retirement instantiated in the three-volume novel—may understandably have altered. At the time of the Edinburgh public reception, of course, Dickens was the renowned author of the serialized fictions *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* (1837–39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a literary celebrity in a print culture indelibly transformed by *Pickwick’s* serial run. Meanwhile, *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens’s “own, long-mediated imitation of the Scott historical romance” (Duncan 190), was—finally—well underway, but it was appearing in weekly parts for Dickens’s short-lived magazine *Master Humphrey’s Clock* (1840-1841) and publishers Chapman and Hall, not in the solidity of Macrone’s projected three volumes. It is, indeed, entirely apt that the new novel is ultimately named after Barnaby Rudge—a wayward son, and one who joins the ranks of the rioters—and not, as planned, for Gabriel Varden—the steadfast, gatekeeping paterfamilias standing Abdiel-like athwart Newgate’s sturdy, containing walls.

In the summer of 1841, Dickens encountered a Scotland that was Scott-haunted. In a letter to Forster, he describes Wilson as a quintessential Scottish figure, “*if you could divest your mind of the actual Scott*” (Dickens to Forster. [23 June 1841]. House and Storey 2:307–9, 308, emphasis added). For Dickens at this time, the figure of Scott was ambivalent and dualistic; his influence at once ennobling and stifling. Functioning as example and cautionary tale alike, Scott, the Laird of Abbotsford, represented to the young author, simultaneously, the leisurely comforts of private life (i.e., the preconditions and rewards of authorship) and crippling confinement. Thus, shortly before his departure, Dickens received a letter from Jeffrey giving him writerly advice, urging him, “[S]ecure as near as you can, a full independence” (qtd. in House and Storey 2:320n2). Such advice, from the friend of Scott and early champion of *Waverley*, reaffirmed for Dickens the conventional association between domestic stability—a room of one’s own—and the gentlemanly leisure necessary for writing a three-volume novel⁵—though Dickens was aware (as, no doubt, was Jeffrey) that Scott did not enjoy such comforts for long. Once in Scotland, Dickens’s letters pay particular attention to Scott’s own various homes. In one letter from the tour, Dickens boasts to Forster how he “breakfasted . . . in the house where Scott lived seven-and-twenty years” (qtd. in Forster 1-2:261). Later in the trip, he takes the requisite pilgrimage to Abbotsford, designating “a whole day for Scott’s house and tomb” (qtd. in Forster 1-2:267).

The new/old hybrid of Abbotsford, of course, is the material emblem of Scott’s fame and fall: it is both house and tomb. Its effect on Dickens was powerful and unsettling: as he would later remark to Richard Henry Dana (during his American

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⁵ Kathryn Chittick notes that Dickens “never had the leisure to write a *Walter Lorraine* [Arthur Pendennis’s debut novel in *Pendennis* (1848–50), William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Bildungsroman* set in the literary scene of the 1830s]—or any three-volume novel” (7). Chittick maintains that it was Dickens’s necessary involvement in multiple, remunerative serial projects early in his career that deprived him of such leisure.
tour), “And to think of a man’s killing himself for such a miserable place as Abbotsford” (qtd. in Duncan 198). In the same letter recording the trip to Scott’s unhomely home, Dickens takes note of the scenery:

I don’t bore you with accounts of Ben this and that, and Lochs of all sorts of names, but this is a wonderful region. The way the mists were stalking about to-day, and the clouds lying down upon the hills; the deep glens, the high rocks, the rushing waterfalls, and the roaring rivers down in deep gulfs below; were all stupendous. (Dickens to Forster. [5 July 1841]. House and Storey 2:322–3, 323)

(Here, he conventionally copes with an unreadably alien landscape – “Ben this and that” – through the familiar language of aesthetic appreciation.) Summarizing his time spent in “Rob Roy’s country” (qtd. in Forster 1-2:251) (a metonymic Scott allusion), Dickens, interestingly, concludes, “The moral of all this is, that there is no place like home” (qtd. in Forster 1-2:260). The cultural commonplace anticipates the Dickens remembered culturally as “the purveyor of cozy domestic bliss” (Waters 120): the author who, through the democratizing format of serialization, “earned the right to sit on the hobs of thousands of households,” whose “books have promoted the value of cozy fireside activities, including of course the reading of his books” (Armstrong 44).

A riposte to the foreign and unfamiliar, Dickens’s idea of home is an alternative to the compromised, sepulchral space of Abbotsford. Ian Duncan has read Dickens’s career arc as a domestic, generically English rewriting of Scott’s, one with a happier outcome: “In contrast to the example of the Author of Waverley, wasting his substance on fantastic romance-ancestral estates . . . Dickens would rehearse a simple democratic fable of the conquest of class boundaries: the author buys the big house his father showed him when he was a little boy” (198-199). Accordingly, Barnaby Rudge, Dickens’s conscious engagement with the formidable presence of Scott, depicts an at-times violent antipathy for Abbotsford-like sites of domestic retirement, a critique that can be extended to the three-volume novel.

DISMANTLING SCOTT’S HOUSE OF FICTION

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored . . .

Houses live and die: there is a time for building
And a time for living and for generation[.]

—T. S. Eliot (lines 1-10)

Dickens’s correspondence during the composition of Barnaby Rudge reveals an intriguing dualism in his idea of domestic spaces. A letter of November 1839 attests to his concerns with his own domestic stability. Referring to one of the many

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6 As Robert L. Patten notes, with serialization, “[f]iction became, not a luxury item, but a household one” (“Publishing in Parts” 19).
interruptions that dogged the work, he writes, “Barnaby [i.e., the novel] has suffered so much from the house hunting” (Dickens to Forster. [? November 1839]. House and Storey 1:598). This letter reconfirms the novel’s intended place in Dickens’s early career: his first explicit foray into the Scott mode would accompany his settling into a house of his own. An additional letter describing his progress on Barnaby Rudge is more revealingly worded: “I wrote four slips last night [and] . . . should get on like a house on fire this forenoon” (Dickens to Forster. [4 January 1839]. House and Storey 1: 490–1, 491, emphasis added). The cliché becomes significant here, applied to a novel where London—72 of its houses—keeps going up in flames. It cannot help but suggest that for Dickens the disintegration of houses was a vital source of his creativity. In his discussion of Dickens’s early career, Robert L. Patten notes that—right around the time of the serial run of Nicholas Nickleby—Dickens’s imaginative impulses “centered around homes—figured as economic as well as domestic centers—and their breaking up” (“From Sketches to Nickleby” 26, emphasis added). Such impulses are at the heart of Dickens’s efforts to locate himself within a literary market formerly dominated by Scott: they represent the singular insights of a serial novelist.

In a significant letter written toward the conclusion of Nicholas Nickleby in 1839, Dickens tells Forster, “I have now only to break up Dotheboys Hall and the book together. I have had a good notion for Barnaby, of which more anon” (Dickens to Forster. [18 September 1839]. House and Storey 1:581–2, 581). Dickens’s remarks express the productive tensions between containment and liberation, closings and openings that underlie his serial fiction. Dickens’s conceit here concludes less with an appeal to architectural fixity than with an image of entropy—the vigorous disintegration of Dotheboys Hall, the Squeers’ oppressive institution. Nickleby’s projected conclusion captures the porousness conventionally ascribed to serial fiction when compared to volume publication. Indeed, in Nicholas Nickleby’s libratory ending is a new beginning in more than one sense: according to the letter, after all, the novel’s winding down begets “a good notion for Barnaby.”

An oft-quoted bit from William Makepeace Thackeray’s The Newcomes (1853–55) finds one character declaring, “You gentlemen who write books . . . and stop at the third volume, know very well that the real story often begins afterwards” (286). With the breaking up of Dotheboys Hall, indeed, the prevailing impression is of a fecund, chaotic proliferation of new narratives freed from confinement. The action leaves the “neighbouring country . . . overrun with boys,” of whom some (who had known “no other home” than Dotheboys “and had formed for it a sort of attachment”) (Nicholas Nickleby 773) “were found crying under hedges and in such places, frightened at the solitude” (774). Of these, one “had a dead bird in a little cage; he had wandered nearly twenty miles, and when his poor favourite died, lost courage, and lay down beside him” (774). Yet another “was discovered in a yard hard by the school, sleeping with a dog, who bit at those who came to remove him, and licked the sleeping child’s pale face” (774). These fugitives, we learn, “were taken back” while still others “were claimed” or else “lost again” (774). The prose gestures widely toward multiple possibilities, any one of which might furnish a future, Oliver Twist-like account of a foundling’s progress.
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The breaking up of the Yorkshire school is, among other things, a comedic/parodic recasting of the sort of Tolbooth-style set-piece that inspired Dickens’s initial conception of his first historical novel. Nicholas Nickleby and John Browdie—acting on the latter’s hunch that news of Wackford Squeers’s impending transportation for possession of a stolen will may inspire “sike a revolution and rebel [sic]” (770) at Dotheboys—travel to the school to find that “the rebellion had just broken out” (772). Finding the schoolroom locked from the inside, they hear a “tremendous noise and riot . . . from within” (770). Inside, it “was one of the brimstone-and-treacle mornings,” and the rioters force Mrs. Squeers to drink her own foul concoction after repeatedly dunking young Wackford’s head in it. The scene is a burlesque of Scott, one that dissipates The Heart of Midlothian’s apocalyptic force into slapstick. It occurs within a material format that attests to how the real story occurs outside the endpoints of the three-volume novel. In sum, it attests to how in Dickens’s handling serialization was a material format poised to dismantle Scott’s house of fiction.

In Dickens’s description of the “best apartment” (128) at the Maypole Inn, a tavern near Epping Forest that figures prominently in Barnaby Rudge from its first number, we detect, at once, shades of Scott and Dickens’s criticism of Scott’s model of private life. We are told that the room was spacious enough in all conscience, occupying the whole depth of the house, and having at either end a great bay window, as large as many modern rooms; in which some few panes of stained glass emblazoned with fragments of armorial bearings, though cracked, and patched, and shattered, yet remained; attesting, by their presence, that the former owner had made the very light subservient to his state, and pressed the sun itself into his list of flatterers; bidding it, when it shone into his chamber, reflect the badges of his ancient family, and take new hues and colours from their pride. (128)

The passage hearkens back to Waverley-Honour from Scott’s first novel, which is similarly illuminated by stained-glass windows: “[Sir Everard Waverley] looked at the attorney with some desire to issue his fiat, when the sun, emerging from behind a cloud, poured at once its chequered light through the stained window of the gloomy cabinet in which they were seated” (Scott 9). Thus, Dickens invokes the many architectural monuments to heraldry and pedigree that populate the Waverley Novels (themselves emblems of the time when Scott fairly pressed the sun into his list of flatterers), as in the following passage, also from Waverley: “[Sir Everard] examined the tree of his genealogy, which, emblazoned with many an emblematic mark of honour and heroic achievement, hung upon the well-varnished wainscot of the hall” (8). (Indeed, Dickens’s description of the Maypole may reflect his then-recent visit to Abbotsford. As Sutherland notes in his biography of Scott, “In the hall of Abbotsford (the room where [Scott] was brought to die) Scott had emblazoned the ceiling with the heraldic devices of every house or clan to which he could claim familial connection”) (The Life of Sir Walter Scott 3). In the succeeding paragraph, Dickens’s high style gives way to sober critique:

But those were old days, and now every little ray came and went as it would; telling the plain, bare, searching truth. Although the best room of the inn, it had the melancholy aspect of grandeur in decay, and was much too vast for
comfort. Rich rustling hangings, waving on the walls; and, better far, the rustling of youth and beauty’s dress; the light of women’s eyes, outshining the tapers and their own rich jewels; the sound of gentle tongues, and music, and the tread of maiden feet, had once been there, and filled it with delight. But they were gone, and with them all its gladness. It was no longer a home; children were never born and bred there; the fireside had become mercenary—a something to be bought and sold—a very courtezan: let who would die, or sit beside, or leave it, it was still the same—it missed nobody, cared for nobody, had equal warmth and smiles for all. God help the man whose heart ever changes with the world, as an old mansion when it becomes an inn. (128)

In Dickens’s description of a space “too vast for comfort” and bereft of women and children alike, we see his efforts to situate his own emerging model of domesticity. In his lament for an old mansion that has become an inn—“It was no longer a home”—we see, perhaps, a lament for the similarly hybridized, unheimliche space of Abbotsford—that sinister amalgamation of ancestral seat, bourgeois home, museum, and tourist trap that stood for Victorian writers as the ultimate monument to “grandeur in decay.”

Throughout Barnaby Rudge, the material spaces that comprised Scott’s vision of private life are recast as menacing, claustrophobic, and oppressively masculine. Dickens typically achieves this through his use of The Warren, the diminished but still imposing family seat of the Haredales and the site of the Chigwell murder of the 1750s that figures prominently in the first half of the novel. The Warren is a space devoid of the conventional—and, eventually, Dickensian—pleasures of home: “It would have been difficult to imagine a bright fire blazing in the dull and darkened rooms, or to picture any gaiety of heart or revelry that the frowning walls shut in” (154). Bereft of domestic charms, it is a space both hollow and confining—“the very ghost of a house, haunting the old spot in its old outward form” (154). Our first exposure to The Warren’s interior comes when Edward Chester enters to visit his beloved Emma Haredale, currently unaware that her uncle and guardian is newly devoted to preventing their union. Chester, we learn, hurried along the terrace-walk, and darted up a flight of broad steps leading into an old and gloomy hall, whose walls were ornamented with rusty suits of armour, antlers, weapons of the chase, and suchlike garniture. Here he paused, but not long; for as he looked round . . . a lovely girl appeared, whose dark hair next moment rested on his breast. Almost at the same instant a heavy hand was laid upon her arm. (163)

Armor, a disembodied hand, a trapped and menaced woman: the passage could be a distillation of The Castle of Otranto (1764), the originary Gothic by Horace Walpole (whose own Strawberry Hill anticipated Scott’s Abbotsford as an unruly domestic space).

Dickens’s handling of The Warren’s library, in particular, emerges as a critique of Scott’s model of private life. As Waverley’s motif of Edward in his library makes clear, the private library for Scott functions as an emblem of domestic retirement—even as private life in his novels is marked by the private consumption of literature, Carlyle’s “reader on a sofa,” the consumer of three-volume novels. When Barnaby and his mother Mary Rudge go to visit Geoffrey Haredale, the latter’s library
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is described as the very epitome of the murder-haunted mansion: “hard by the very chamber where the act was done,” the library itself is “dull, dark, and sombre; heavy with worm-eaten books” and wearing “beyond all others [i.e., rooms] in the house, a ghostly, gloomy air” (254). Solely accessible by a private staircase, the room’s solitude amounts to a cramped claustrophobia; we learn that it is “deadened and shut in by faded hangings, muffling every sound; shadowed mournfully by trees whose rustling boughs gave ever and anon a spectral knocking at the glass” (254). In this scene, Dickens playfully uses Grip the raven, Barnaby’s pet, to mark the library as a Gothic space: “the very raven . . . had hopped upon the table and with the air of some old necromancer appeared to be profoundly studying a great folio volume that lay open on a desk . . . and looked like the embodied spirit of evil biding his time of mischief” (254). In another instance, Dickens uses the library in a manner that exposes Scott’s model of domestic retirement as a drearily masculinist one. When Dolly Varden, a friend of Emma’s and a frequent guest at The Warren, is visiting, her freedom and ease at the manor do not extend to the library: “holding her breath and walking on tiptoe as she passed the library door, she went straight to Emma’s room as a privileged visitor” (210). This latter feminized space stands in marked contrast to the library:

It was the liveliest room in the building. The chamber was sombre like the rest for the matter of that, but the presence of youth and beauty would make a prison cheerful (saving alas! that confinement withers them), and lend some charms of their own to the gloomiest scene. Birds, flowers, books, drawings, music, and a hundred such graceful tokens of feminine loves and cares, filled it with more of life and human sympathy than the whole house besides seemed made to hold. (211)

Throughout the novel, Dickens troubles the sites of private reading, finding in the act of solitary retirement a neurotic, potentially dangerous compulsion. Haredale—to the amazement of just about everyone—selects for his personal study the very room where his brother Reuben was murdered in 1753, a room reportedly marked by a bloody stain that resists all efforts to remove it. In Solomon Daisy’s breathless account at the Maypole’s hearth, “Mr Geoffrey made that room his study, and sits there, always, with his foot (as I have heard) upon [the stain]; and he believes, through thinking of it long and very much, that it will never fade until he finds the man who did the deed” (142). The study becomes a shrine to anti-social obsessiveness, a place for nursing old grievances and where old wounds never heal. Haredale makes of the Rudges’ abandoned London home a similar space. Convinced

7 The scene is a reminder of the novel’s oft-mentioned influence on “The Raven” (1845), by Edgar Allan Poe, who reviewed the American edition of Barnaby Rudge. Poe’s poem, like Dickens’s novel, makes of the site of private reading an unsettling, Gothic one, here through its solitary, masculine narrator, the insomniac obsessive who, grieving for “lost Lenore,” turns “vainly” to his books for “surcease of sorrow” (lines 3-4).
Barnaby and Mary’s strange disappearance and their visits from “the Maypole highwayman” (395) may be clues for the apprehension of his brother’s killer, Haredale embarks on a series of sinister vigils: “haggard and careworn, listening in the solitary house to every sound that stirred, with the taper shining through the chinks until the day should turn it pale and end his lonely watching” (398). On these occasions he is armed with a sword and two pistols; moreover, “[h]e usually had a book with him” (399). For Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*, the solitary reader is a vengeful monomaniac.

Indeed, with his slain brother Reuben and the haunted, desperate Rudge, Sr., Haredale is part of a triad bound by a cord of furtive violence: victim, killer, and avenger. Their bond, indicatively, is marked by reading. Reuben Haredale, we learn, “had been sitting up reading in his own room” on the night he was murdered (58). The narrative, then, takes pains early on to establish that Rudge, Sr., the Maypole highwayman, can, in fact, read. When Gabriel Varden is surprised at Rudge Sr.’s knowing the former’s name, the latter declares, “I have not gained the information from any confidence of yours, but from the inscription on your cart which tells it to all the town” (64). Rudge Sr.’s literacy—which seems to come as something of a surprise to Varden—becomes a mark of distinction in a time when, as *Barnaby Rudge*’s opening paragraph declares, “a vast number both of travellers and stay-at-homes” “could neither read nor write” (and relied on ash maypoles and wooden keys to locate, respectively, a pub or a locksmith) (43). Rudge Sr.’s literacy is an emblem of estrangement, of a piece with his general alienation from human society, even among some of the more criminal denizens of the city, where he is “a something in the midst of their revelry and riot that chilled and haunted them” (180). (Indeed, reading distinguishes him from the novel’s two other characters that are also at a remove from human society, the mentally adrift Barnaby and the animal-like hosteler Hugh. In both cases, the text takes pains to stress their illiteracy.) Hence the mystery plot in Dickens’s self-conscious Scott pastiche is dominated by a triad of male readers, a triad bookended by two spectral figures that, ghost-like, haunt houses.

In pointedly revising Scott’s private reading spaces, Dickens, in *Barnaby Rudge*, is in the process of defining an early version of his own model of domesticity, the vision that Catherine Waters describes as the “characterization of the home as an enclave of family warmth and harmony and its superintendence by a woman who embodies the domestic ideal” (121). Serialization, I maintain, is very much a part of Dickens’s critique of the earlier Scott tradition, the material expression of a rejection of structures of containment. Serial publication, by its very nature, has conventionally been discussed as a riposte to the fixity of volume publication, the fixity that, for Scott, so accorded with his notion of private life as sequestered retreat. Thus, Duncan writes, “Rather than the bound volume of a book, [serial] fiction is a fluid circulation of affective energies” (196). Similarly, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund note that with serialization “[r]eaders did not occur in an enclosed realm of contemplation possible with a single-volume text” (8). Serialization takes reading out of the private libraries of a Haredale or a Waverley. It was the material vehicle for what could be a fitting encapsulation of Dickens’s, eventual, mission: “to domesticate a Victorian audience, creating a family by the hearth stretching across all England” (Hughes and Lund 58). As a format that can uniquely “extend, augment, and influence the
perception of domestic themes” (Hughes and Lund 18), serialization can instantiate an idea of domesticity that is both provisional and dynamic, one that potentially resists rigid categorization or being collapsed into an a priori definition. Hughes and Lund have described the correspondence between “the virtues that sustain a home and the traits required of serial readers” (16). The implication is that serialization can reveal domesticity as an active process, one unfolding across time.

A HOUSE DIVIDED?

[T]he man led a mob.

—G. K. Chesterton on Dickens (79)

Conceived as Dickens’s first novel (and second book) and appearing five years after his debut in volume form, Barnaby Rudge is an early, liminal work. As such, it depicts to a rare degree a Dickens divided against himself. The eventual novel, a result of its lengthy gestation, sees Dickens’s imaginative loyalties torn between lock-building Gabriel and house-burning Barnaby. If in the riot scenes themselves, arguably the artistic high point of the novel, Dickens positively thrills to the rioters’ anarchic devastation, he takes equal, problematic glee in the brutal, bloody restoration of order at the novel’s climax, as military reinforcements fire upon the (largely unarmed) rioters. For my purposes, Barnaby Rudge reveals a fundamental ambiguity in Dickens’s efforts to craft, through serialization, an alternative to Scott’s model of masculine domestic retirement. This has, as I see it, two main implications, both affecting Dickens’s rendering of domesticity and relevant to his awareness of the novel’s publication format: first, the novel’s dialectic between containment and porousness, a dialectic centered, again, on Barnaby Rudge’s domestic spaces, is often a fraught one; second, the novel—as if irrevocably marked by the Oedipal struggle with Scott—reveals a Dickens reluctant or unable to fully reject Scott’s peculiarly masculinist domesticity.

In turning increasingly to London and the Gordon Riots, Barnaby Rudge finds Dickens almost questioning the far-reaching, demotic format of serialization—his material vehicle for a fluid, free-floating model of domesticity. In the novel’s fifth weekly number, Dickens celebrates the singular benefits of the serial novelist prior to limning the Varden home: “Chroniclers are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go through keyholes, to ride upon the wind, to overcome, in their soarings up and down, all obstacles of distance, time, and place” (119). The presumption is that of the domestic writer who, as a monthly or weekly visitor, “has earned the right to sit on the hobs of thousands of households” (Armstrong 44). In its evocation of a narrative perspective both godlike and intimate, it anticipates Dombey and Son’s (1846–48) famous yearning “for a good spirit who would take the housetops off” (738). In Barnaby Rudge, however, the chronicler’s keyhole-peeking privilege is uncomfortably akin to Simon Tappertit’s sinister vision for the ’Prentice Knights.

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8 An oft-quoted letter from when he was composing the riot scenes sees Dickens proclaiming, as if in solidarity with the rioters, “I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burnt down Lord Mansfield’s, and played the very devil … I feel quite sooty when I am at work” (Dickens to Forster. 18 September 1841. House and Storey 2:385).
Varden’s malcontent apprentice, we learn, has fashioned “secret door-keys for the whole society” before dispatching them back to “their several homes” (118): a whole substratum of British houses threatened with exposure and infiltration.

Throughout the novel, Dickens confronts the possibility of a domestic sphere grown dangerously porous. After encountering the Maypole stranger (i.e., Rudge, Sr.) at the Rudges’ house, Gabriel questions Mary Rudge about the “ill-favoured man” who “haunt[s] this house, whispering through chinks and crevices” (92, emphasis added). When John Chester, snug in his residence in the Temple Bar, muses contentedly on the plot he has devised for separating his son Edward from Emma Haredale, he is interrupted by “a strange voice” “at the outer door” (280). Opening the door reveals no one: was this the stranger, whispering at crevices? Or the chronicler, claiming his right and prerogative? (As the conclusion to the weekly number, the moment is even more dramatic and meaningful.) As the riots gain momentum, domestic space is even more compromised. When the anti-Catholic mobs’ first public assembly is repulsed by nearby Life Guards, the rioters “proceeded to giving Protestant knocks at the doors of private homes” (410). (The mobs’ civilian opponents, the Royal East London Volunteers, are little better: after one of their marches, a few “un-soldierlike” corporals “broke several windows with their bayonets”) (393). A high point of the mob’s devastation comes with the razing of The Warren, a cataclysmic action marked particularly by “the exposure to the coarse, common gaze of every little nook which usages of home had made a sacred place” (507). The Warren’s imposing thresholds are thus violated, and the novel’s chief emblem of Scott-like domestic seclusion is forcibly erased. Indicatively, one of the mob’s other noteworthy actions involves the (historically accurate) destruction of Chief Justice Mansfield’s house in Bloomsbury, including “the rarest collection of manuscripts ever possessed by any one private person in the world” and the judge’s “great Law Library, on almost every page of which were notes in [his] own hand, of inestimable value,—being the results of the study and experience of his whole life” (599). The apocalyptic assault on a library—one owned by an antiquarian bibliophile with legal training—amounts to the violent desecration of an Abbotsford-like version of private life.

_Barnaby Rudge_ connects the escalating mob violence to the proliferation and distribution of ephemeral, piecemeal texts within a modern print culture. These texts themselves, we are told, threaten the very sanctity of the private home: the cheap, mass-produced invitations to join Lord Gordon’s Great Protestant Association are “thrust under the house-doors [and] tossed in at windows” (348). These handbills are part of the same print networks responsible for the weekly paper _The Thunderer_ (a “pamphlet . . . which espoused [the rioters’] own opinions, and was supposed at that time to emanate directly from the Association”) and are figured throughout as a fast-spreading, incendiary contagion (“a dread fever . . . an infectious madness”) (371): readers of each pamphlet are encouraged to pass it on to someone else, making the handbills largely responsible for the “moral plague [that] ran through the city” (484).

Such passages see Dickens leveling a provocative critique of the print culture in which his serial fictions attained their popularity. Discussing the growing mob activity and the pernicious allure of the Great Protestant Association, _Barnaby Rudge_’s narrator remarks, “Curiosity is, and has been from the creation of the world,
a master-passion. To awaken it, to gratify it by slight degrees, and yet leave something always in suspense, is to establish the surest hold that can be had, in wrong, on the unthinking portion of mankind” (347). In certain ways, we have a generally accurate description of serial fiction at its most rudimentary—interest awakened and maintained by the gradual gratification of curiosity, even as “something” remains “always in suspense.” We might have sensation novelist Wilkie Collins’s famous (and cynical) formula for serial fiction: “Make ’em laugh, make ’em cry, make ’em wait” (qtd. in Allingham). The corrosive elitism against the “unthinking portion of mankind,” however, points to a deep divide in the early Dickens; he associates his serial readership with the mob—the destroyer of houses.

In *Barnaby Rudge*, we see a complicated ambivalence toward structures of containment. Typical of Dickens’s formative years as an author, this ambivalence expresses the tensions between volume and serial publication; it is inscribed within the components of the novel’s germinal story—Gabriel Varden’s refusal (as locksmith of London) to open the portal of Newgate for Gordon’s riotous followers. Indeed, Varden, the novel’s once-eponymous hero, seems to embody the complications and contradictions in Dickens’s efforts to develop an alternative to Scott’s three-volume model of privatized insularity. In a typical passage celebrating Varden, he is toiling away, busily yet merrily, in his workshop, and we are told:

> The very locks that hung around had something jovial in their rust, and seemed like gouty gentlemen of hearty natures, disposed to joke on their infirmities. There was nothing surly or severe in the whole scene. It seemed impossible that any one of the innumerable keys could fit a churlish strong-box or a prison-door. Cellars of beer and wine, rooms where there were fires, books, gossip, and cheering laughter—these were their proper sphere of action. Places of distrust and cruelty, and restraint, they would have left quadruple-locked for ever. (382).

We recognize here Dickens’s vision of hearty, convivial domesticity, one purged of menace or claustrophobia. (Books, significantly, are made the companions of the hearthside, gossip, and laughter; they are freed from the library.) At the same time, the central conceit—*happy locks*—expresses the difficulty of the project before him: even happy locks, that is, work through confinement.

Varden, throughout the novel, is a staunch defender of the structural integrity of the home—but also of the prison. When a group of rioters led by Hugh goes to Clerkenwell to press Varden into service, he polices the “threshold of his house,” resting his gun on a shoulder said to be “as steady as the house itself” (570). As a stalwart member of the Royal East London Volunteers, he is clearly willing to use violence to protect domestic space—literal or idealized—from outside contagion. He tells his Gordon-sympathetic wife that his volunteering is “done to defend you and all the other women, and our own fireside and everybody else’s, in case of need”: “Which would be most unchristian, Martha,” he asks, “to sit quietly down and let our houses be sacked by a foreign army, or to turn out like men and drive ’em off?” (383).

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9 See also Paul Stigant and Peter Widdowson, who see Varden as pointing to “a very real split in the novel” in terms of Dickens’s views as well as “certain elements in the book which cross and complicate its pattern internally and therefore affect its significance as a complete statement” (23).
The Victorian

(Indicatively, in this same scene he discourages his daughter Dolly’s queries about Haredale’s recent mysterious behavior with a pointed recommendation to “[r]ead Blue Beard”—the ur-Gothic text of masculine secrecy, domestic containment, and confined and endangered femininity) (386). At the same time, however, Varden steadfastly refuses to resort to the measures Simon Tappertit presses on him for keeping the house safe: chalking “No Popery” on the outside of the house, a sinister mock-Passover gesture of Protestant solidarity, or accepting a letter signed by Lord Gordon vouching that “the proprietor of this house is a staunch and worthy friend to the cause” (471). In his rejection, Varden frankly invites the violent dissolution of his house: “Let them come and pull the roof about our ears; let them burn us out of house and home” (474). He goes on to mark his utter defiance of the Great Protestant Association with an equally significant gesture: seizing Martha’s donation box for the cause (which is “painted in imitation of a very red-brick dwelling-house, with a yellow roof; having at top a real chimney”), “he dropped the red-brick dwelling-house on the floor, and setting his heel upon it, crushed it into pieces. The halfpence, and sixpences, and other voluntary contributions, rolled about in all directions” (474). Here, Dickens seems to be confronting the possibility that his task, as a post-Scott serial novelist, lies not in attempting to make happy locks, but perhaps in scattering the dwelling-house.

With Newgate prison, of course, we get the novel’s chief signifier of confinement, and it becomes, in Dickens’s handling here, a focal point for Barnaby Rudge’s heightened tension between containment and porousness. The London prison often interfaces with the private home in interesting ways. Thus, Varden’s securing of the “threshold of his house” against the mob is immediately followed by his similar defiance at the very walls of Newgate. Such walls, we are told, are fronted by the “governor’s house” (576), a literalization of Dickens’s conceit throughout that the home can be a confining prison. This home is claimed in the flames that ultimately engulf the prison, fires that “shone upon the opposite houses, and lighted up not only the pale and wondering faces at the windows, but the inmost corners of each habitation”: once again, the mob’s actions make private space public. This Newgate is razed in the destruction that ultimately claims five other prisons and 72 houses, an apocalyptic pattern of aggression aimed at structures of containment. In the destruction of Newgate, we see the ambivalence of Dickens’s position at this point in his career, torn between the claustrophobia of Scott’s model of domestic retirement and a vision of free-floating—“houseless” (195)—anarchy.

The second major corollary of Dickens’s liminality in Barnaby Rudge is his curious reluctance to fully relinquish Scott’s pattern of a highly masculine domesticity. Put simply, the author often considered the laureate of an idealized home “suitably superintended by an Angel in the House” (Waters 124) cannot—in the Varden household, the novel’s center of bourgeois family life—depict a positive model of domesticity that is also female-dominated. For the tolerantly suffering Gabriel, jointly dominated by Martha and Miggs (the Vardens’ “single domestic servant”), the Clerkenwell home is oppressive and confining—a “mantrap,” to adapt the term Martha employs to derogate the Maypole tavern. Indeed, on his occasional, work-related trips to Epping Forest, Gabriel is tempted, against his wife’s shrewish prohibitions, to patronize the Maypole: he—like the Dickens of 1841?—is drawn
back to an earlier, rural world of male sociability. In *Barnaby Rudge*, the female-oriented home and hearth is not a cheerful picture of domesticity. (For the 1868 “Charles Dickens” edition of the novel, Dickens added the ironic running title “Domestic Bliss” to the page that finds Martha and Miggs chiding Gabriel for his late return from the Rudges’.)

In his depiction of the Varden household, we can again see Dickens arguing in favor of an open-ended, provisional domesticity and away from a static, confining sense of the term: a movement toward a serialized notion of the domestic and away from a bookish model. Indicatively, Martha’s guide for moral conduct and household management is the venerable “Protestant Manual in two volumes post octavo” (85). (As a sign of her narrow, bigoted religiosity, her reliance on this book is of a piece with her later cash donations to the Great Protestant Association, stored in her house-shaped bank, the latter an emblem of jealously guarded domestic and cultural insularity.) When Sir John Chester, his plotting underway, pays a visit to the Varden home, he approvingly brandishes the Protestant Manual (“My favourite book”) as he praises the household for its “tokens of female care and superintendence” (268, 271). It is worth remembering that Chester, like Martha, is a disciple of a book as well, the two volumes of Lord Chesterfield’s letters to his son. For Dickens, the implication seems to be that “by-the-book” domesticity, whether feminized or masculinized, is mere form and observance, as hollow as Chester’s praise or Martha’s bank.

Over the course of the novel’s serial run, we see the Varden home transformed into a happy one—of which even spoilsport Miggs can declare, “[H]ere’s blessedness among relations, sir! Here’s forgiveness of injuries, here’s amicableness!” (717). By the story’s end, the Vardens’ has been, for one, blessedly purged of the threatening, subversive energies of Tappertit and Miggs, both mired in what Judith Wilt calls their shared “sex-class frustration” (89). In Tappertit’s case, his final expulsion from the novel’s site of domesticity is marked by the grisly, emasculating destruction of “his perfect legs” (647), the grotesquely phallic emblems portentously called “these twin invaders of domestic peace” (111, emphasis added). In the case of Miggs, expelled alike from the Vardens’ and her sister’s residence at Golden Lion Court, she finds a new outlet for her feminine-carceral tendencies: as “female turnkey for the County Bridewell” (734). More importantly, we learn that by the novel’s conclusion, Martha is “quite an altered woman” (648). This, and the improvement of the Varden home more generally, is a process that must unfold over time, all part of the novel’s faith that “[a]ll good ends can be worked out by good means” (708), a profoundly temporal philosophy, one particularly suited to the serial medium. In *Barnaby Rudge’s* formulation, the Gordon Riots themselves “had done that good,” i.e., had effected that change in Martha and her home (648). Early on, it is predicted of Martha that “a tumble down some half-dozen rounds in the world’s ladder—such as the breaking of the bank in which her husband kept his money, or some little fall of that kind—would be the making of her, and could hardly fail to render her one of the most agreeable companions in existence” (102, emphasis added). Here, the “breaking of the bank” anticipates Gabriel’s destruction of the house-shaped cash box, as he fairly invites the rioters to demolish his home. The implication is that a home is, in fact, improved when its fixity is challenged, when it is made porous, piecemeal, and recyclable. As peace is restored to London, we are told that the Varden house “had been pulled down
by the rioters, and roughly trampled under foot. But, now, it was hoisted up again in all the glory of a new coat of paint, and shewed more bravely even than in days of yore” (705). Here, the rebuilt, newly happy Varden home can join the other “extravagant” houses of Clerkenwell (i.e., the “young heir[s]”), “flaunting in stucco and ornamental work” (75), the homes that are supplanting the more venerable houses of “six-and-sixty years ago” (i.e., the “ancient citizen[s]”)—just as Dickens’s serial novels were reshaping the literary landscape.

And yet, the full account of the Vardens’ domestic restoration is bound to make us uneasy. The new and improved home leaves Gabriel free to assume his place as “the rosiest, coziest, merriest, heartiest, best-contented old buck, in Great Britain or out of it” (714). Alpha and omega, he keeps Martha informed “on everything that had happened, was happening, or about to happen, within the sphere of their domestic concern” (714). Among the house’s denizens and facets, he is “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” (714). Even within the delimited space of domestic concerns, it would appear, the women of Barnaby Rudge are subordinated. Has Dickens, at this early point in his career, been so decisively marked by his Oedipal engagement with Scott that he is unable to fully engage with the lives of his female characters, forced to depict (with dreary repetitiousness) father-son conflict, elevated, here, to what Duncan calls “the inevitability of a universal psychic structure” (225)? In the Clerkenwell scenes, Dickens seems destined to repeat—in urban, middle-class terms—a Scott-like vision of masculine domestic contentment that can only be threatened or undermined by women. Dickens, like Barnaby himself, seems fated to assume and repeat the negative tendencies of his forefather. History—his story?—repeats itself. In this pivotal work of Dickens’s early career, the Angel in the House is named Gabriel.

Works Cited


