

Religious Violence without Religion: Bleak Secular Stasis in Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*

RUTH M. MCADAMS

CHARLES Dickens's historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) strangely depicts the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780 as motivated by opportunism and score-settling rather than zealotry or anti-Catholic sentiment. Accordingly, scholarship on the novel has also sidelined religious conflict. This paper analyzes the novel's erasure of religion in the context of debates over nineteenth-century transformations of religion and secularization. Max Weber's and Karl Marx's traditional secularization hypotheses imagine, as Charles Taylor glosses, that "'modernity' (in some sense) tends to repress or reduce 'religion' (in some sense)."¹ More recently, historians, sociologists, and religious studies scholars, including Taylor himself, theorize instead the ongoing mutual reconstitution of the religious and the secular, endeavoring, as Gauri Viswanathan puts it, "to

Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 79, No. 4, pp. 243–269, ISSN: 0891–9356, online ISSN: 1067–8352, © 2025 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://online.ucpress.edu/journals/pages/reprintspermissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2025.79.4.243>.

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), p. 429.

rethink western secularism, not as a linear successor to religious culture but as its necessary complement within the same time frame.”²

Situating *Barnaby Rudge* within this discourse is challenging. It is certainly tempting to read the novel—which banishes or assimilates its Catholic characters at the end—as contributing to the Victorian literary theorization of a secularization narrative identified by Michael W. Kaufmann or William R. McKelvy.³ Yet the novel represents not only anti-Catholicism but also Catholicism as functionally nonexistent from the outset. This sense that secularity has already arrived accords with scholars’ accounts of the novel’s representation of time as non-linear, uncannily repetitive, parodic, atavistic, or recurrent.⁴ Indeed, *Barnaby Rudge* has long been understood to depart from the historical fiction tradition inaugurated by Walter Scott and theorized by Georg Lukács, which dramatizes paradigmatic structural changes in society, often suggesting a progress narrative.⁵ Yet little attention has been paid to the relationship between *Barnaby Rudge*’s non-linear temporality and its treatment of religion, or to how its distinctive vision of

² Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), p. xv. See also Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993); Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000); Michael W. Kaufmann, “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession,” *New Literary History*, 38 (2007), 607–628; David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (New York: Ashgate, 2005); and Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

³ See Kaufmann, “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies,” and William R. McKelvy, “Children of the Sixties: Post-Secular Victorian Studies and Victorian Secularization Theory,” *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 39 (2012), 17–32.

⁴ Although Avrom Fleishman argued that the novel reflects a Victorian historiography of liberal progress (see *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971], pp. 107–108), subsequent scholarship has rejected this view (see Patrick Brantlinger, “Did Dickens Have a Philosophy of History? The Case of *Barnaby Rudge*,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 30 [2001], 59; and Sophia Hsu, “*Barnaby Rudge*, Liberal History, and the Narrative Function of the Crowd,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 52 [2021], 218). See also John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), p. 174; Carolyn Williams, “Stupidity and Stupefaction: *Barnaby Rudge* and the Mute Figure of Melodrama,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 46 (2015), 358; and Susan Cook, “*Barnaby Rudge*, True Crime Style,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 51 (2020), 267.

⁵ See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983).

secularity anticipates modern critiques of progress on the political right.

In what follows, I argue that the novel reflects a non-triumphalist vision of secularity characterized by a bleak conservative ideal. The novel rejects both the traditional secularization narrative of religion's gradually diminishing importance and the contrary narrative of religiosity's renegotiation in response to state expansion. Instead of a progressive process of secularization, the novel envisions a completed secularity. This completed secularity strangely resembles the temporal stasis of the militant Protestantism the novel apparently critiques. In real life, eighteenth-century militant Protestants appealed to Reformation-era histories of sectarian violence in order to justify continued sectarian violence, whereas cooler heads advocated religious toleration as an element of social progress. Despite critiquing the rioters, the novel repeatedly undercuts any progress narrative of religious toleration. In depicting British Catholic identity as both involuntary and inconsequential, the novel does not just provide a portable model for the imperial encounter with religious, racial, and cultural alterity, as Viswanathan argues. It also theorizes the impossibility of progress, because if Catholicism and Protestantism are already indistinguishable, then no shift over time is possible toward greater toleration, mutual understanding, or respect for difference. In this novel's view, secular modernity is not presently arriving; it had already arrived in 1775 when the novel begins. Crucially, however, secular modernity is defined not only by the absence of religion but also by the evergreen presence of violence that is religious only in name. Vincent P. Pecora observes that secularization is a mixed development whose

consequences can be understood to include both an enlightened liberation from dogma and an opening up of certain collective possibilities—redemptive revolution, nationalism, imperialism, racism—that could not have attained their full and often destructive potential otherwise.⁶

⁶ Vincent P. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 22.

Rather than anticipate the negative half of this picture, *Barnaby Rudge* instead imagines secularization in which the liberation from dogma does nothing to stem the originary destructive potential of sectarianism. My analysis highlights an instance in which the Victorian historical novel rejects progressive time and instead uses the case of religious difference to illustrate the historical constancy of immanent violence.

In the first section, I establish how the novel departs from the historical record in depicting the riots as divorced from anti-Catholicism. The novel's Catholic characters, Geoffrey Haredale and his niece Emma, are hailed as Catholics through the experience or threat of violence, yet the anti-Catholicism of this violence is repeatedly short-circuited. I then observe that, whether conceived as private belief, ritual worship, community membership, or cultural difference, Catholicism plays a negligible role in their lives, and in fact, the Haredales appear equivalent to the Protestant majority in nearly every way. If their Catholicism means anything, it serves to veil a commitment to traditional class hierarchies. Despite the tepid treatment of the Haredales, the novel nonetheless shares their view that social hierarchy provides a bulwark against persistent brutal violence. I then discuss how the novel redeploys standard anti-Catholic tropes to discredit militant Protestant anti-Catholics themselves. Though one could interpret this reversal generously as a critique of anti-Catholicism, I understand it to leave those tropes intact, reflecting the novel's deep anti-Catholic bias despite its respect for what it construes as Catholic hierarchy. Moreover, the novel does not dramatize the erasure of Catholics but rather depicts a world in which they have already been erased. Ultimately, *Barnaby Rudge* theorizes a distinctive kind of secularity defined by religious violence without religion.



A sprawling novel that has never enjoyed critical approval or sustained scholarly attention, *Barnaby Rudge* defies easy summary. It begins twenty-two years after Reuben Haredale's unsolved murder, which left Reuben's brother

Geoffrey Haredale to raise Reuben's daughter Emma at the family's grand house, the Warren, on a large but dwindling estate that includes the nearby Maypole Inn. At the novel's outset, things are shaken up by a mysterious stranger's arrival at the Maypole and by the engagement of Emma and Edward Chester. Edward is the son of John Chester, Haredale's long-standing personal enemy, but the old foes unite to prevent the marriage. Five years later, capital-H History erupts with the arrival of Lord George Gordon and his entourage, who are organizing militant Protestant opposition to the 1778 Catholic Relief Act. Both Gothic and historical plots climax in the Gordon riots, which sweep up our wide cast of characters. As the Warren burns, Haredale apprehends the mysterious stranger, Reuben's former steward Rudge, the murderer. Haredale ultimately withdraws his opposition to Emma and Edward's engagement and finally kills John Chester before fleeing to a monastery abroad.

The largest urban riots in British history, the Gordon riots were a backlash to the 1778 Catholic Relief Act, "a modest measure" that "fell far short of . . . introducing complete toleration."⁷ By 1778, William III's sweeping Act against Popery was "already virtually a dead letter," though most of the law remained in place until Catholic Emancipation in 1829 (Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 10).⁸ Both the Relief Act and Catholic Emancipation were motivated by the pressing need to integrate Catholics into the British state as the empire expanded, and thus they helped establish a certain conception of religious tolerance as a liberal Protestant value.⁹

⁷ John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 10; Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993), p. 204.

⁸ Thomas Holcroft describes the Act as "exceedingly oppressive" (*A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots, London*, ed. Garland Garvey Smith [1780; rpt. Atlanta: Emory Univ. Library, 1944], p. 17).

⁹ In *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), Linda Colley influentially argues that "Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible," forging connections between England, Scotland, and Wales in the eighteenth century (p. 54). Correspondingly, in British and American contexts, Catholicism is often understood as "dangerous because it is a religion without a country; indeed, a religion inimical to nationhood" (Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004], p. 4). Yet the

In Parliament, Sir George Savile argued that the Act sought “to vindicate the honour and assert the principles of the Protestant religion, to which all persecution was, or ought to be totally averse” (Holcroft, *A Plain and Succinct Narrative*, p. 16).

Savile’s qualification—“or ought to be”—anticipates that despite the Act’s modest aims, a violent backlash began in Scotland that forced the government to change course.¹⁰ A Protestant Association formed under Lord George Gordon, a polarizing and charismatic leader, in an attempt to repeal the law in England and Wales.¹¹ On Friday, 2 June 1780, Gordon presented a massive petition at Westminster while a crowd of thousands gathered outside. When the petition failed, protesters stormed the Houses of Parliament, resulting in a melee. Rioting continued for a week, resulting in more property damage in London than the French Revolution later caused in Paris. Several hundred people were killed. With the caveat that the “motives, methods and outcomes” of the riots have “provoked a lasting debate,” historians generally uphold the surface explanation that the riots were motivated by the hatred of a religious minority, albeit filtered through political and geopolitical factors, with a limited influence of class resentment (Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*, p. 6).¹²

discursive formulation of Protestantism as a coherent category and its association with British nationalism are not exactly intuitive, given that it too is international and quintessentially fractious.

¹⁰ See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, p. 339; John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700–1832* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 94; and Ian Haywood and John Seed, ed., Introduction to *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), p. 2.

¹¹ Historians have described Gordon as “certainly . . . unbalanced, irresponsible, and dangerous” (Colin Haydon, “Gordon, Lord George (1751–1793), political and religious agitator,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 3 Jan 2008], available online at <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11040>>) or alternately as a source of “ideological stability in a world turned upside down” (Dominic Green, “George Gordon: A Biographical Reassessment,” in *The Gordon Riots*, ed. Haywood and Seed, p. 246).

¹² George Rudé’s influential 1956 thesis that the Gordon Riots were an instance of radical social protest against economic elites has been largely rejected by subsequent scholars (see George F.E. Rudé, “The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and their Victims,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 [1956], 93–114). Stevenson (*Popular Disturbances in England*), Wolfe (*The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain*), and Haydon (*Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*) have understood the Gordon

Dickens's novel takes a very different view, downplaying sectarianism's role and thus avoiding any meaningful engagement with the history or ongoing project of religious toleration. Dickens depicts the Gordon rioters as an irrational mob—a “vast throng, sprinkled doubtless here and there with honest zealots, but composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of London”—that is cravenly manipulated by petty avengers.¹³ Scholars of the novel have established, as Alison Case observes, that “the riots come to seem an effect, rather than a cause, of the entanglements of the private plot.”¹⁴ For that matter, the novel also undercuts poverty as a motivator and does not support an easy parallel between the Gordon rioters and the Chartists.¹⁵ Whereas Sir George Savile argues that

Riots instead within a long tradition of anti-Catholic violence of an “essentially reactionary and defensive” nature (*Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 224). While Diane Long Hoeveler understands economic privilege to associate with any apparent rise in religious toleration or a positive construction of Catholicism in this period, Wolffe observes that “anti-Catholic arguments were promoted as much by members of the ‘elite’ as by the populace” (see Diane Long Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780–1880* [Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2014], pp. 11, 4; and Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain*, p. 12). Political and geopolitical factors also played a complex role, as militant Protestantism could be aligned with anti-French, pro-American, or anti-imperial sentiment (see Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, p. 23; Jeremy Carnes, “Let Religion Not be Named between Us”: Catholic Struggle and the Religious Context of Feminism in *A Simple Story*,” *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 9 [2012], 206; Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*, pp. 206–207; Dana Rabin, “Imperial Disruptions: City, Nation, and Empire in the Gordon Riots,” in *The Gordon Riots*, ed. Haywood and Seed, p. 94). Most recently, Haywood and Seed partially defend the Rudé thesis.

¹³ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge; A Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty*, ed. John Bowen (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 407. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

¹⁴ Alison Case, “Against Scott: The Antihistory of Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*,” *Clio*, 19 (1990), 131. See also Williams, “Stupidity and Stupefaction,” 368; Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832–1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), p. 64; Mizuki Tsutsui, “Disguise and Deception in *Barnaby Rudge*,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 51 (2020), 7; Hsu, “*Barnaby Rudge*, Liberal History, and the Narrative Function of the Crowd,” 227; and Toni Wein, *Monstrous Fellowship: “Pagan, Turk and Jew” in English Popular Culture, 1780–1845* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), p. 265.

¹⁵ Literary scholars often either lament the novel's elision of the rioters' potential radicalism or critique its sublimation of class conflict through the unflattering implied parallel between the Gordon Riots and Chartist activism or trade unionism. See Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832–1867* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 95; Williams, “Stupidity and Stupefaction,” 369; and Hsu, “*Barnaby Rudge*, Liberal History, and the Narrative Function of the Crowd,”

anti-Catholicism *should* be averse to Protestant values, Dickens's preface explains the historical reality of anti-Catholicism among the populace by concluding that they were not truly Protestant:

What we falsely call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion, and who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of right and wrong; that it is begotten of intolerance and persecution; that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate, and unmerciful. (*Barnaby Rudge*, p. 3)

As this passage suggests, the novel depicts the rioters not as misguided zealots but rather as men of "no religion." It theorizes religious toleration as Protestant rather than secular, and anti-Catholic violence as secular rather than Protestant.

In the novel itself, the narrator emphasizes this point repeatedly. For example:

Many of those who were banded together to support the religion of their country, even unto death, had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their lives. But these fellows having for the most part strong lungs, and being naturally fond of singing, chanted any ribaldry or nonsense that occurred to them, feeling pretty certain that it would not be detected in the general chorus, and not caring very much if it were. Many of these voluntaries were sung under the very nose of Lord George Gordon, who, quite unconscious of their burden, passed on with his usual stiff and solemn deportment, very much edified and delighted by the pious conduct of his followers. (*Barnaby Rudge*, p. 402)

This critique of the rioters' hypocrisy—the way their aggressive display of religiosity betrays its true absence—reflects Dickens's liberal conception, traceable to John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), that "true and saving religion consists in an

220. Yet historians do not generally support the reading of the underlying events as radical, and the assumption that we should even read Dickens's Gordon rioters as commenting on Chartism seems at least debatable given the sharply contrasting politics of these movements.

inward conviction of the mind.”¹⁶ Although modern historians, sociologists, or religious studies scholars might debate whether this singing has a religious character, Dickens’s narrator sets up a straightforward contrast between Gordon’s mistaken impression and the reader’s greater knowledge.

By denying that this violence was anti-Catholic in the first place, the novel does not just reject a progress narrative in which past religious violence gives way to present harmonious toleration; it also eschews what could be a compelling cyclical account grounded in the observation that the setting—1780—and the moment of writing—1841—arguably occupy similar points along an oscillating pattern of anti-Catholicism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ An 1841 historical novel might have warned that the anti-Catholicism that led to the Gordon riots was on the rise again. Yet beyond the shifting legal and social status of Catholics, the period also notably witnessed the revitalization of British Protestantism through the evangelical movement. As Dominic Erdozain puts it, in eighteenth-century religious culture, the “spiritual or transcendent aspects of the faith had fallen into desuetude,” only to be renewed later by nineteenth-century evangelicalism.¹⁸ Callum G. Brown similarly emphasizes that secularization discourse itself arose in early nineteenth-century Britain as a galvanizing spur to evangelism, reflecting that the period was decidedly *not* secularizing but instead characterized by a “discursive Christianity” “defined as the people’s subscription to protocols of personal

¹⁶ John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Locke on Toleration*, ed. Richard Vernon, trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), p. 8.

¹⁷ In 1780, British Catholics were a small minority living under legal and social discrimination that erupted but was then dispelled by the riots (Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain*, p. 13). By 1841, legal discrimination had ended but anti-Catholic feeling had revived in response to Irish immigration, and British Catholic assimilation had become a contested model for the integration of non-Protestant colonial subjects into a secular national subjectivity. See Monika Mazurek, *The Unknown Relatives: The Catholic as the Other in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 7; Maria LaMonaca, *Masked Atheism: Catholicism and the Secular Victorian Home* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 16–17; Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, *Victorian Reformations: Historical Fiction and Religious Controversy, 1820–1904* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2014), p. 194; and Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation, and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 27.

identity which they derive from Christian expectations, or discourses, evident in their own time and place.”¹⁹ Notwithstanding Dickens’s hostility toward the evangelical movement, the novel’s association of the rioters with secularism rather than Protestantism might seem to imply an evangelical progress narrative from eighteenth-century lassitude to nineteenth-century piety.

A sense of progress does creep in around the edges of the novel. As is typical of historical fiction, the narrator frequently marks the passage of time when referring to the urban landscape and civic infrastructure, observing that “the roads even within twelve miles of London were at that time ill paved, seldom repaired, and very badly made,” or that “though only six-and-sixty years ago, a very large part of what is London now had no existence,” or that the streets “were, one and all, from the broadest and best to the narrowest and least frequented, very dark” (*Barnaby Rudge*, pp. 22, 38, 137). Yet such a distinction between past and present figures nowhere in the account of religion, which reflects instead a sense of historical stasis. When characters talk about religion, the narrator’s historical commentary disappears. As we saw in the novel’s preface, the tendency toward religious hypocrisy is a recurrent problem in the present tense: “what we falsely call a religious cry *is easily raised* by men who have no religion.”

Just as *Barnaby Rudge* denies the role of anti-Catholicism in the Gordon riots, the private plot is similarly driven by virulent and opaque interpersonal tensions thinly veiled by sectarian hostility. Yet the visibility of this spurious and extraneous consideration suggests a greater significance for religion than the novel appears to allow. To some extent, the novel’s elision of structural factors reflects the individualist ideology and conventions that lead nineteenth-century fiction to tell personal rather than collective stories. Yet it is particularly striking that this novel presents religious discrimination—an easily novelized experience—as epiphenomenal of a personal grudge. The Haredales’ Catholicism is first belatedly introduced as an afterthought during the conversation in which Chester and

¹⁹ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 12.

Haredale conspire to prevent a marriage between Chester's son Edward and Haredale's niece Emma. Chester tells Haredale, "independently of any dislike that you and I might have to being related to each other, and independently of the religious differences between us—and damn it, that's important—I couldn't afford a match of this description" (p. 105). Sandwiched between the characters' respective real motivations, religious difference barely registers, Chester's appositive oath ironically indicating its unimportance. Personal grievance animates Haredale, who asks: "do you think that, loving her, I would have her fling her heart away on any man who had your blood in his veins?" (p. 105).

Chester thinks only of money. Later, he explains to his son that despite appearances, their economic "circumstances . . . are desperate" and that Edward must "marry well" in order to pay the family debts and support Chester's lifestyle (pp. 136, 135). Emma's financial resources are apparently insufficient. Chester explains:

In a religious point of view alone, how could you ever think of uniting yourself to a catholic, unless she was amazingly rich? You who ought to be so very Protestant, coming of such a Protestant family as you do. Let us be moral, Ned, or we are nothing. Even if one could set that objection aside, which is impossible, we come to another which is quite conclusive. The very idea of marrying a girl whose father was killed, like meat! Good God, Ned, how disagreeable! (p. 136)

This characteristically slippery language reveals Chester's insincerity in invoking putative Protestant morality—the qualification "unless she was amazingly rich" is telling. Comparing the murdered man's body to meat alludes to religious difference, introducing a redundant and nonsensical additional argument against the marriage. The status of the eucharist is a foundational theological split, with Catholics believing it to be the literal transubstantiation of the body of Christ, whereas Protestants believed it only a representation. Militant Protestantism long connected the Catholic eucharist to the cannibalism imputed to distant societies. Thus, Chester implies that

Reuben Haredale—once the eater of human flesh—became the eaten, and that this fate somehow indicates the marital unsuitability of Reuben's Catholic daughter for his Protestant son. Yet this passage's reference to meat evokes not only the theological debate over the eucharist but also animal husbandry practices. Like livestock, Reuben Haredale was murdered for profit, and thus the meat reference accurately reflects that Chester's financial considerations are the sole driver here. At the same time, this passage's religious language remains conspicuous and suggestive.

Even as Chester recruits Mrs. Varden to oppose Edward and Emma's marriage, religious difference remains just one of many factors. As the only character with an authentic, if unintelligent, concern over the Catholic threat, Mrs. Varden alone imagines Protestantism as a coherent ideology. Chester beautifully manipulates her by echoing her sentiments:

"Let us be sincere, my dear madam—"
 "—and Protestant," murmured Mrs. Varden.
 "—and Protestant above all things." (p. 227)

Mrs. Varden is the exception that proves the novel's rule that Protestant religious identity is chosen only strategically, and even then, only flickeringly. Chester continues to gild the lily with the additional lie of Edward's inconstancy and previous engagement to someone else: "he's of a roving nature, ma'am—from flower to flower—from sweet to sweet" (p. 227). Despite the brief allusion to Protestant values, the religious barrier to the match is redundant of the other barriers: "There are grave and weighty reasons, pressing family considerations, and apart even from these, points of religious difference, which interpose themselves, and render their union impossible; utterly im-possible" (p. 230). Even Chester's entirely opportunistic appeal to anti-Catholic feeling is relatively understated. In other words, the novel depicts anti-Catholicism as, at most, a fig leaf for naked self-interest or rabid personal hostility, yet a fig leaf that draws attention to itself, upstaging its instrumental role.



Chester's glaring insincerity and the broader erasure of anti-Catholicism in the personal and historical plots can distract readers from the subtler but perhaps more consequential effacement of Catholicism's significance as a set of beliefs or practices, or a source of meaning or identity. That is, the novel theorizes not secularization, a process, but rather *secularity*, a state in which the process is complete. With respect to Catholic difference, the novel adopts two stances that Mark Knight associates with the secularizing gaze of some scholarship. Knight observes, "with notable exceptions, literary scholars often end up marginalizing the importance of religion, failing to see its complexity and/or translating theology into a critical language (gender, race, economics, etc.) with which they are more familiar."²⁰ What scholars sometimes do unthinkingly, *Barnaby Rudge* does deliberately, not only by marginalizing religion, as I'll discuss in this section, but also by identifying a commitment to class hierarchy as the only appreciable Catholic value, as I'll discuss in the following section.

The novel defies Victorian tropes insofar as Catholics are neither "hyperbolically different," as Maureen Moran calls them, nor "deceptively similar" and thus threatening to the Protestant majority, as Mazurek suggests (*Unknown Relatives*, p. 10).²¹ In other words, notwithstanding the novel's Gothic elements, the depiction of Catholic characters accords with realist conventions and may also reflect that real eighteenth-century British Catholics had to keep a low profile to survive under heavy legal discrimination. With their privileged social position and large property, the Haredales seem well-integrated into the social fabric. Insofar as the novel says nothing about a family history of conversion or immigration, we assume that they are recusants—descendants of English families who never converted during the Reformation. In this way,

²⁰ Mark Knight, *Good Words: Evangelicalism and the Victorian Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2019), p. 4.

²¹ Maureen Moran, *Catholic Sensationalism and Victorian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2007), p. 17.

they represent a long continuity with the English past, or even the sameness of past and present. Readers do not see the Haredales perform Catholic worship (which was illegal, though practiced privately) or associate with other Catholics. We hear nothing about their faith or its meaning in their lives. If *Barnaby Rudge* were advocating an individualized, felt form of religious tolerance, it might call upon the Protestant reader to sympathize with Catholic characters, yet these characters remain both relatively unsympathetic and unmarked by religious difference.

The Haredales thus unsettle Locke's liberal secularist view of religion as a matter of free personal choice, unrelated to innate factors like race, ethnicity, or nation. On the one hand, the ancient connection to Britain, a high level of social belonging, and the private maintenance of a disfavored faith under state pressure render eighteenth-century English recusant Catholics particularly conducive to Locke's theory. Yet in the Haredales' case, the issue is moot, since their Catholicism is not just private but also apparently inconsequential. According to Sebastian Lecourt, "Victorian secularization stories . . . describe not the disappearance of religion but instead religion's liberation from priestly control and its enshrinement in the individual conscience."²² Yet in *Barnaby Rudge*, neither priestly control nor individual conscience is ever involved. In the *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), William Paley postulates that

if popery, for instance, and Protestantism were permitted to dwell quietly together, papists might not become protestants (for the name is commonly the last thing that is changed), but they would become more enlightened and informed; they would little by little incorporate into their creed many of the tenets of Protestantism, as well as imbibe a portion of its spirit and moderation.²³

Notwithstanding that neither Protestant nor Catholic characters evince the spirit of enlightened, informed moderation that Paley imagines, *Barnaby Rudge* nonetheless presents the two groups as already merged in disposition and ideology, with

²² Sebastian Lecourt, "Secular," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 51 (2023), 502.

²³ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), p. 413.

a shared disinterest in religion. That is, the novel depicts what Charles Taylor calls “secularity 2,” the decline of belief and practice, as an already completed process (*A Secular Age*, p. 2).

On the other hand, Catholicism marks the Haredales as different in a way that transcends any inward belief and is plainly grounded in an innate (albeit conceptually elusive) cultural or social apartness. Thus, the novel’s account of Catholicism anticipates the way religion becomes a form of inheritance for late nineteenth-century liberal thinkers, as Lecourt traces, or the way imperial expansion stabilizes religion as an identity category and not simply a belief system, as Viswanathan argues.²⁴ The Haredales’ nominal Catholic identity becomes highly relevant during an eruption of religious violence emphatically inconsistent with what Taylor calls “secularity 1,” the removal of God from public spaces (*A Secular Age*, pp. 1–2). Thus, in the novel’s milieu, religion is a distinction without a difference; it has no personal spiritual meaning, but powerful political consequences. In this paradoxical secularity, religious belief has disappeared, but religious violence persists.

The novel gives minimal attention to the eighteenth-century British Catholic experience of legal discrimination prior to the riots. It briefly acknowledges discrimination when Haredale encounters two former schoolmates outside the Halls of Westminster on the morning that Lord George Gordon’s unsuccessful petition to block the Catholic Relief Act leads to the riots. Readers learn that Haredale was educated in France at St. Omer, a Jesuit College linked to the Gunpowder Plot, but alongside his countrymen Gashford, a fellow Catholic, and Chester.²⁵ Haredale complains that his former classmates have allied with anti-Catholics who are

at this moment leagued in yonder building, to prevent our having the surpassing and unheard-of privilege of teaching our children to read and write—here—in this land, where

²⁴ See Sebastian Lecourt, *Cultivating Belief: Victorian Anthropology, Liberal Aesthetics, and the Secular Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018) and Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*.

²⁵ See Judith Wilt, “Masques of the English in *Barnaby Rudge*,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, 30 (2001), 79.

thousands of us enter your service every year, and to
 preserve the freedom of which, we die in bloody battles
 abroad, in heaps. (p. 359)

Like the novel itself, Haredale emphasizes the sameness of British Catholics with their Protestant countrymen, drawing upon shared military experience, despite calling it “*your* service.” Haredale thus evokes arguments about the need for Catholic military service that informed both the Catholic Relief Act and Catholic Emancipation (Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, p. 333). Miriam Burstein calls Haredale “the plot’s most vocal critic of anti-Catholic practices,” which he is, though this reveals his and the novel’s lack of interest in anti-Catholicism, as he speaks so rarely on the topic (*Victorian Reformations*, p. 184). For example, Haredale only once alludes that he “must hold [his] property, such as it is, by a trick at which the state connives because of these hard laws”—that is, his tenuous ownership of the Warren and the Maypole depends on the fact that no distant Protestant relative has yet claimed the property (*Barnaby Rudge*, p. 362).

Furthermore, Haredale’s considerable personal problems appear to stem from his imperious and resentful character rather than his religion, though they ultimately exceed our understanding. The novel never adequately explains his hatred for Chester—one of many plot lacunae. We know only that it originated years earlier over a woman, and that Chester has moved on (p. 249). Haredale nurses a similarly one-sided hatred of the admittedly villainous Gashford. In a rare sympathetic moment, Gashford initially attempts to avoid the confrontation outside the Halls of Westminster, then reaches to shake Haredale’s hand and is ostentatiously refused (p. 357). Haredale refers contemptuously to Gashford’s recent conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism: “you have left the darkness for the light, sir, and hate those whose opinions you formerly held, with all the bitterness of a renegade. You are an honour, sir, to any cause. I wish the one you espouse at present, much joy in the acquisition it has made” (p. 357). Although Haredale might understandably resent Gashford’s abandonment of their shared faith, he notably describes the

conversion in non-religious terms as a matter of “darkness” and “light,” “opinions,” or a “cause.” Furthermore, the novel establishes that Haredale’s animosity long predates Gashford’s conversion and is grounded in a litany of obscure childhood conflicts. Haredale also alienates the vengeful narcoleptic stableboy Hugh by refusing to allow him to enter an inner chamber at the Warren; Hugh avenges the insult later when he leads the anti-Catholic mob to destroy the house. Although Hugh’s exclusion might be read in terms of class or race (he is the son of a Roma woman seduced or raped by Chester), his resentment is part of a Haredale-centered constellation of personal grudges to which religious difference pales in comparison. At the same time, the inadequacy of the existing explanations for Haredale’s social isolation leaves room to wonder whether religious hostility could be involved.



Yet while the novel’s Catholicism has no spiritual meaning and limited personal implications, it is defined by class privilege and a commitment to traditional hierarchies—a relatively subtle stereotype associating Catholicism with an older social order. In this way, then, the novel imagines the culmination of Marx’s secularization narrative in which religion is revealed to be a symptom of alienation that masks economic forces.²⁶ In the novel, however, this unmasking lacks the liberatory consequences Marx envisions, and instead only reinscribes a violent world bulwarked by hierarchy. As also with Paley, social transformations imagined as future progress appear in highly negative form in *Barnaby Rudge*, and moreover as completed processes. In observing Catholicism’s alignment with a positive form of class hierarchy, my reading departs from Chris R. Vanden Bossche’s argument that the novel critiques a dissipated aristocracy embodied by Chester. This account overlooks Haredale’s advocacy for the social responsibilities of class privilege. Linda Colley has influentially

²⁶ Karl Marx, “Toward A Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon, trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 28.

observed Protestantism's role in uniting eighteenth-century Britons across class lines. The novel, however, figures activist Protestantism's subversion of class hierarchy as a social problem rather than a key to national flourishing. Haredale confronts Lord George Gordon after the latter whips up the anger of the anti-Catholic protesters gathered outside the Halls of Westminster: "I hope there is but one gentleman in England who, addressing an ignorant and excited throng, would speak of a large body of his fellow-subjects in such injurious language as I heard this moment. For shame, my lord, for shame!" (*Barnaby Rudge*, p. 361). Haredale argues that Gordon has abnegated the responsibilities of his social class: "you disgrace your station" (p. 361). Gordon's dismissive response avoids engaging Haredale's critique: "I don't hear you, sir" (p. 361). The novel's sympathies are with Haredale as he criticizes militant Protestantism's cross-class networks in which the wealthy recruit the poor to do their dirty work.

Even during the riots, Haredale ignores the religious context of his hardships, preoccupied instead with personal vendettas. Admittedly, the riots are overshadowed by the discovery of his brother's murderer, Rudge, distracting Haredale from the destruction of his home and Emma's unknown whereabouts. Transporting Rudge to London, Haredale sees

more than one poor catholic family who, terrified by the threats and warnings of their neighbours, were quitting the city on foot, and who told them they could hire no cart or horse for the removal of their goods, and had been compelled to leave them behind, at the mercy of the crowd. (p. 506)

This single fleeting encounter with poor Catholics reminds us that the novel's Catholic characters are prominent property owners. Just as the 1778 Relief Act benefitted only wealthy Catholics, the novel also imagines Catholics as wealthy. The poor Catholic families depart the stage immediately after they arrive, and Catholic alterity is reduced to class privilege that is denied commensurate legal privilege.

At the Lord Mayor's house, Haredale meets a Catholic historical figure, Thomas Langdale (1714–90). In real life, the destruction of Langdale's large distillery resulted in a "blaze [that] illuminated most of central London, while burning gin ran down the pavements" (Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*, p. 6). In the novel, Langdale implores the Lord Mayor for protection: "Am I a citizen of England? Am I to have the benefit of the laws? Am I to have any return for the King's Taxes?" (*Barnaby Rudge*, pp. 507–508). Like the similarly-named Haredale's earlier complaint about the unjust denial of education to a group that performs military service, Langdale's brief testimony appeals by necessity to the ideology of liberal secularism. That is, he emphasizes the civic belonging of British Catholics rather than their dubious right to religious difference. Burstein observes that within the novel's world, "the two men deserve protection solely because they are English taxpayers in good standing. For this purpose alone, religion no longer counts" (*Victorian Reformations*, p. 199). On one level, it is hard to identify ways that religion *does* count in this novel, since it is neither a force in the characters' lives nor the true motive for the violence that tears them apart. On another level, however, religious violence remains rooted in society, even though it has become independent of religion and now lacks any ostensibly religious motivation.

Haredale's arrival truncates this scene's brief consideration of anti-Catholic injustice. Despite appearing on a straightforward matter of law and order—the imprisonment of a murderer—Haredale too is denied assistance and departs immediately to try elsewhere, rejecting Langdale's kind overtures. "We are in a common cause," Langdale says, the word "cause" emphasizing again their shared appeal to law and order rather than their shared religion or shared experience of religious discrimination (p. 509). Alison Case observes that Dickens's generous depiction of Langdale as an "honest vintner" rather than a gin distiller and wholesaler matches the novel's account of the riots as devoid of social protest ("Against Scott," p. 135). Nonetheless, this moment's brevity reflects that despite criticizing the rioters, the novel does not particularly sympathize with the victims. Viswanathan comments that the

novel feels “no special empathy for the plight of Catholics” and Burstein likewise observes its “all-around disdain” for all contending parties (*Outside the Fold*, p. 25; *Victorian Reformations*, p. 184).

After finally securing Rudge’s imprisonment, Haredale begins to grasp the severity of the rioting. Yet even then, he focuses not on its sectarian character but its suspension of his class privilege. The narrator describes him as “tortured by anxiety for those he had left at home; and that home itself was but another bead in the long rosary of his regrets” (p. 510). With the rosary, whose contemplative ethos contrasts with Haredale’s panic, the narrator reminds readers of Haredale’s Catholicism at a moment when he himself is strikingly inattentive to its implications, even perhaps suggesting that he is a bad Catholic. Haredale is forgiving when denied custom at a hotel:

He saw that his faint and worn appearance attracted the attention of the landlord and his waiters; and thinking that they might suppose him to be penniless, took out his purse, and laid it on the table. It was not that, the landlord said, in a faltering voice. If he were one of those who had suffered by the rioters, he durst not give him entertainment. He had a family of children, and had been twice warned to be careful in receiving guests. He heartily prayed his forgiveness, but what could he do?

Nothing. No man felt that, more sincerely than Mr. Haredale. He told the man as much, and left the house. (p. 548)

Haredale’s initial assumption about his haggard appearance indicates his strong identification as a gentleman. The landlord’s alternative identification of Haredale as “one of those who had suffered by the rioters” reflects that Catholicism and poverty have been rendered temporarily indistinguishable—the roundabout phrasing is also symptomatic of the novel’s rhetorical circumnavigation of sectarian violence. But before Haredale can consider further this experience of religious discrimination, he is distracted again by the news that Newgate, where he has recently deposited Rudge, is on fire.

In the end, Haredale never comes to understand his Catholicism as a factor in the destruction of his home and the

threats to his safety, remaining convinced of Chester's culpability. In their final confrontation, Haredale rants:

You urged and stimulated to do your work a fit agent [Chester's illegitimate son, Hugh], but one who in his nature—in the very essence of his being—is a traitor, and who has been false to you, despite the sympathy you two should have together, as he has been to all others. With hints, and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you set on Gashford to this work—this work before us now. With these same hints, and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you urged him on to gratify the deadly hate he owes me—I have earned it, I thank Heaven—by the abduction and dishonour of my niece. You did.” (pp. 677–678)

In this passage, Haredale credits to Chester alone what the novel represents as a concatenation of interpersonal grudges that lead to the burning of the Warren. Historical fiction from *Waverley* (1814) onward often depicts characters whose personal preoccupations limit their awareness of the structural historical events unfolding around them. Haredale's account strains credulity, his bitter rage pushing him off the moral high ground he occasionally occupies earlier in the novel. Yet the critical distance between character and narration is narrow in this case. As we saw earlier, neither Haredale *nor* the novel acknowledge anti-Catholicism's role in the riots or the private plot. Whereas to understand Lord George Gordon as the mastermind of the riots already reflects an individualistic understanding of historical causality that arguably downplays the pervasiveness of anti-Catholicism, the novel goes even further by deflecting causality from Gordon, an uncalculating zealot, toward the fictional Chester, a pure opportunist. The novel represents the Gordon riots as so disconnected from anti-Catholicism that even the most paranoid Catholic holds an idiosyncratic alternative explanation and remains steadfastly unconcerned with religious discrimination. The novel and all its characters are certain that Catholicism is no longer relevant, yet the fictional world only makes sense if it still is.



Thus far, I have argued that *Barnaby Rudge* takes seriously neither religious difference nor religious belief, always sidelining them in favor of other issues or reducing them to other terms. Opportunistic and insincere anti-Catholic rioters confront apathetic Catholics who are most sympathetic when their religious identity manifests as a commitment to stable class hierarchy. I turn now to the way the novel retains and redeploys anti-Catholic tropes rather than rejecting sectarianism in depicting the rioters and their instigators. Thus, the novel ironically aligns itself with the anti-Catholicism it appears to critique. When Haredale encounters Chester and Gashford outside the Halls of Westminster, the novel establishes that all three were educated together at the same French Jesuit college. Chester claims that “being a promising young Protestant at that time, [he] was sent to learn the French Tongue” (p. 359). Judith Wilt argues that this puzzling detail reflects the novel’s depiction of Chester as a scheming Jesuit, and Toni Wein likewise points out that Protestants were not educated at St. Omer’s except in rare circumstances (“Masques of the English,” 79; *Monstrous Fellowship*, p. 267). Yet this news is overshadowed by the larger revelation that Gashford, Gordon’s personal secretary and henchman, is an ex-Catholic who converted to Protestantism only the year before.

The novel’s redeployment of anti-Catholic tropes shapes the depiction of Gashford as an ex- or crypto-Catholic. On a basic level, the suggestion that a scheming and duplicitous ex-Catholic orchestrated the riots reflects stereotypes of Catholic clandestine subversion of the political and social order (Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 9–10). The circumstances of legal discrimination cast inherent doubt on the sincerity of Gashford’s recent conversion, even as they render insincerity understandable. Furthermore, Gashford persists in Catholic modes of thought, particularly in relation to Gordon: the submission to charismatic individual authority figures prominently in Protestant conceptions of Catholic idolatry. The account of Gashford’s conversion emphasizes Gordon’s causal role: “Does

my lord ask *me*,' whined Gashford... 'who, stricken by the magic of his eloquence in Scotland but a year ago, abjured the errors of the Romish church, and clung to him as one whose timely hand had plucked me from a pit?' (p. 297). The "magic" of Gordon's speech effects Gashford's conversion. The metaphor of plucking from the pit alludes to Calvinist predestination, but, in an idolatrous Catholic manner, Gashford places Gordon in the role of God. Watching Gordon sleep, Gashford muses: "He seems to be asleep. Pray Heaven he is! Too much watching, too much care, too much thought—ah! Lord preserve him for a martyr! He is a saint, if ever saint drew breath on this bad earth" (p. 300). Although the concept of martyrdom cuts across faith traditions, sainthood is specifically Catholic, and thus Gashford's language reflects Catholic ideology more explicitly than anything the Haredales say. With the qualification "*if* ever saint drew breath," Gashford also equivocates—a strategy of resistance to religious persecution. By emphasizing his incomplete conversion, the novel also suggests a static vision of time in which Gashford, once a Catholic, is always a Catholic.

Moreover, the novel hints that Gashford may not be an ex-Catholic whose thought still reflects his background, but actually a crypto-Catholic, who secretly still believes; the novel thus plays to fears of disguised Catholics. When Emma and her beautiful Protestant friend Dolly Varden are abducted during the riots, we learn that Gashford has already claimed Emma, despite the universal admiration for Dolly (p. 499). The two friends are taken captive together, reflecting that Emma's gender, rather than her Catholicism, is targeted (p. 461). Nonetheless, Emma's and Gashford's shared Catholic backgrounds seem relevant through an obscure logic, since he has renounced Catholicism. Attempting to persuade Emma to flee with him, Gashford describes himself as Catholic, appealing to "our creed" (p. 594). Although the riots provide Emma ample cause for terror, Gashford exaggerates: "The people have risen, to a man, against us; the streets are filled with soldiers, who support them and do their bidding. We have no protection but from above, and no safety but in flight" (p. 594). Gashford lies and clearly has sexual conquest in mind. Citing Haredeale's later

accusation, Vanden Bossche asserts that Gashford intends not to marry Emma but to render her unmarriageable through rape or the suspicion of sex (*Reform Acts*, p. 67). But there is room for skepticism about Haredale's assessment of Gashford's intentions. His choice of Emma and the real persecution of avowed Catholics suggest that Gashford *could* be a crypto-Catholic trying to escape a horrible situation he helped create. Regardless, the novel communicates Gashford's villainy partially through his vestigial Catholic ideology and his pretended or perhaps sincere and secret Catholicism.

The case of Gashford reveals that despite having evacuated Catholicism of any spiritual meaning beyond the association with salubrious social hierarchy, the novel remains anti-Catholic. It aligns not only Gashford but also other rioters with Catholic attributes and practices. Plotting revenge on Haredale, Hugh resolves: "There are talkers enough among us; I'll be one of the doers," alluding to the theological split between Catholicism and Protestantism over the status of words and deeds and associating Hugh with the Catholic idea that actions can secure salvation (p. 335). Similarly, the looting of Catholic churches takes on a notably Catholic flavor: "the spoils they bore as trophies . . . were easily recognizable for the vestments of priests, and rich fragments of altar furniture" (p. 419). This scene perhaps critiques or parodies the dissolution of the monasteries, which saw a state-sanctioned redistribution of wealth from the Church to the aristocracy. Yet here, Dickens emphasizes the Protestant rioters' distinctively Catholic commitment to the talismanic power of the object. As the mob ransacks the house of Lord Mansfield, a Protestant judge whose rulings supported religious freedom, someone finds "a child's doll—a poor toy—which he exhibited at the window to the mob below, as the image of some unholy saint which the late occupants had worshipped" (pp. 552–554). Again, the rioters, not their targets, worship idols and attack Protestants. After the riots, the novel's only reference to the Church of England reminds readers that the Archbishop of Canterbury excommunicated Gordon, a rare action more typical of Catholic centralized ecclesiastical authority. Thus, the legal move to tolerate Catholicism prompts a violent anti-Catholic response (the Gordon

riots) that the novel reveals as somewhat Catholic in nature; this anti-Catholicism then prompts an anti-anti-Catholic response (the excommunication of Gordon) that is also somewhat Catholic. Emphasizing that Catholicism informs every response to itself, including violence, the novel ultimately blames Catholicism for the suffering of Catholics.



Barnaby Rudge appears to end with a model for the assimilation of former Catholics into modern, Protestant Britain, yet the group this process would erase has been erased all along. When Haredale flees the country for a monastery, he acts out a feminized trajectory of becoming a cloistered celibate. But Haredale has always been unmarried and childless, uninvolved in romantic pursuits since the youthful incident when, as Chester explains, Haredale “could not keep his mistress when he had won her, and threw me in her way to carry off the prize” (p. 249). Vanden Bossche glosses this backstory as a “sexual rivalry with Sir John [Chester], who used religion to thwart his companionate union,” though the passage does not mention religion (*Reform Acts*, p. 63). Wilt elaborates that Chester “sapped Haredale’s manhood to the point where he shrank away from the woman he loved, helpless to impede her enthralled passage toward Chester’s bed” (“Masques,” 86). Yet the passage is cryptic. That Haredale “could not keep” a mistress he “had won” may suggest financial rather than sexual inadequacy, and even Chester affords Haredale the agency of “throwing” him toward her. Rather than losing the competition over a woman, Haredale may choose to reject heterosexuality and reproductive futurity—a rejection associated with Catholicism in the first place and extended further in his retreat to the monastery.

Scholars typically read Emma’s ending as achieving the result of the historical process in which Catholics are incorporated into a secular-Protestant British nation. Emma’s assimilation contrasts with the fate of the Jewish heroine Rebecca from Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), who leaves England with her father for the relative religious tolerance of medieval Spain. When Emma

marries Edward, religious difference evanesces; the wedding can occur because Haredale relents, and his objection was never religious (p. 658). Early in the novel, Edward tells Haredale, “your niece has plighted her faith to me, and I have plighted mine to her” (p. 126). Edward thus likens religious and romantic commitments and suggests the mutuality of the relationship, although Emma was presumably required to convert to the Church of England (the novel glosses over the details). After the marriage, Emma and Edward emigrate to the West Indies, where they have several children; when they return to England a few years later, her Catholic background has been laundered. Whereas any children born to Scott’s Rebecca would be Jewish, Emma’s children easily surrender their religious alterity. Along these lines, Viswanathan characterizes Emma’s marriage and emigration as “two events . . . that assimilate Emma at once to Protestant and colonial culture” (*Outside the Fold*, p. 26). Burstein argues that at the novel’s end “all believers have agreed, apparently, to remain silent” (*Victorian Reformations*, p. 201). Yet again, the novel effaces Catholic difference from the beginning, when the Haredales were already well assimilated into Protestant culture and already silent on any religious belief. Instead of depicting believers who agree to remain silent for personal or political reasons, the novel imagines only non-believers who are uninterested in religion, despite occasionally perpetrating or experiencing religious violence. With respect to religious belief or practice, the novel ends with the same paradox with which it began.

Barnaby Rudge may appear to advise moving on from a violent past to forge a better future. Burstein understands the novel to advocate “forgetting about the legacy of the Reformation past” because, as Alison Case likewise remarks, all “consciousness of the past” is retrogressive (*Victorian Reformations*, p. 201; “Against Scott,” p. 142). Yet something else emerges when we consider how the novel theorizes religious violence that already operates independently of the defunct religious belief or identity that may once have inspired it. In understanding secularization as complete rather than ongoing, the novel strangely resembles Callum Brown’s argument that, contra gradualist narratives, secularization occurred rapidly

after the 1960s. Although Brown sees the nineteenth century, by contrast, as highly religious, *Barnaby Rudge* shares Brown's sense that the "the destiny-shaping turning point—has already passed" (*Death of Christian Britain*, p. 7). The persistence of religious violence long after that point, however, may embody what Charles LaPorte identifies as an "internal critique" of secularization even in the Victorian texts that seem to index it.²⁷ The novel envisions past, present, and future as functionally identical and characterized by the evergreen possibility of apparently sectarian violence. And it construes that violence not as injustice, but rather as evidence that religion is meaningless and positive change over time impossible. For all the justified critique of Victorian liberalism, it is vital also to analyze how Victorian texts theorize the impossibility of progress and then accept that reality with a shrug.

Skidmore College

ABSTRACT

Ruth M. McAdams, "Religious Violence without Religion: Bleak Secular Stasis in Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*" (pp. 243–269)

This article analyzes the erasure of religion in Charles Dickens's historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). The novel strangely depicts the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780 as motivated by opportunism and score-settling rather than zealotry or anti-Catholic sentiment, effacing both the anti-Catholicism of the rioters and the Catholicism of those targeted. I argue that the novel rejects both the traditional secularization narratives that would follow the social integration of British Catholics as a process and the contrary narrative in which religiosity is renegotiated in response to state expansion. Instead, *Barnaby Rudge* envisions secularity as already complete, though secular modernity is defined not only by the absence of religion but also by the evergreen presence of violence that is religious only in name. The novel's bleak secularity shares a sense of temporal stasis with the militant Protestantism it appears to critique. My analysis highlights an instance in which the Victorian historical novel resists progressive time and instead uses the case of religious difference to illustrate the historical constancy of immanent violence.

Keywords: *Barnaby Rudge*; religion; secularism; historical novel; temporality

²⁷ Charles LaPorte, "Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization," *Literature Compass*, 10 (2013), 268.