Meeting Schedule

2020-2021 Book of the Year: 
Barnaby Rudge
Meetings, free and open to all admirers of Charles Dickens, begin at 7:00 pm. To ensure entry, try to activate your link on time.
We will meet via Zoom until the library allows meetings. Please watch your email for the link to a specific meeting, or the good news that we can meet at the library.

Thurs. Sept. 10. Zoom. An overview: Kathy Broz explains what was happening in Dickens’s life as he was writing Barnaby Rudge.

Thurs. Oct. 8. Zoom (or Richmond Library). Gretta Ryan explores the Gordon Riots central to events in BR.


Book of the Year for 2020-2021: 
Barnaby Rudge
Barnaby Rudge: Finn’s 2003 Intro

Barnaby is something of a stepchild among Dickens’s output -- little read today and dismissed by many critics as a cut or two below CD at his best. I do not agree with this verdict, and hope to make a few converts as our year goes on.

Barnaby is Dickens's "other" historical novel, far outdistanced in popularity by Tale of Two Cities. It is interesting that both novels have episodes of mob violence at their dramatic centers—the French Revolution and the storming of the Bastille in TTC; the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780 and the assault on Newgate Prison in Rudge. Dickens's fascination with prisons is thus at the forefront in both works. Interestingly, Lord George Gordon in BR is the only actual historical figure involved in either book.

There are other themes in Barnaby Rudge that might give us fodder for discussion during this year. The bitter division between Protestants and Catholics at the time of the riots is a major element in the story. Dickens was himself a sort of generic liberal Protestant—Dr. Arthur Adrian used to say that of the modern Protestant denominations, he came closest to Unitarianism.

He was no admirer of Catholicism. In a preface he wrote for the volume of Master Humphrey’s Clock that contained Rudge, he was severely critical of the "shameful tumults" of the Gordon riots, but went on to say that he had tried to paint them "impartially," as one "who has no sympathies with the Romish Church, although he acknowledges, as most men do, some esteemed friends among the followers of its creed." Dickens's attitude toward religion in general as reflected in this book might be a subject for fruitful discussion.

Find stills on YouTube from British silent Barnaby Rudge, 1915. Can you name those below?

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For mail changes call Beth at 216.381.6507, email her at bbliss67@msn.com, or write to her address on page 4. Articles may be emailed to k.schuerger@outlook.com
It’s not Dickens, but… courtesy of your editors, here’s a tip on a collection that ranks U.S. presidents from best to worst and features expert biographical essays—yardsticks to help you measure presidential candidates before you vote. —K. S.

The Presidents: Noted Historians Rank America’s Best and Worst Chief Executives.

Brian Lamb, Susan Swain and C-Span (available either on C-Span or Amazon, Kindle for $1.99.) This is a very interesting book. One of the purposes of the book is the ranking of the Presidents. Of course, this has been done many times and over many years. A brief history of the science of rankings and what is counted in a ranking is given. The list of Presidents is divided in this manner: The Top Ten, the Men in the Middle, and all the rest. A six to ten-page biography is written by the original biographers for each man. Lots of information and some surprises are to be found. If you want to know where your favorite or least favorite President stands, this is the place to find it. —Beth Bliss

Some biographers and subjects:
Harold Holzer on Abraham Lincoln.
Ron Chernow on George Washington
Doris Kearns Goodwin on FDR
Douglas Brinkley on Teddy Roosevelt
William I. Hitchcock on Ike
Aida D. Donald on Harry Truman

Roger Jerome opines on Dickens vs Thackeray

It's well accepted that Dickens's behavior was frequently questionable. In defending him, as the genius he was, I usually cite Beethoven and JMW Turner—geniuses but, to be polite, pains in the neck. Compared to his fellow Victorian writer, William Makepeace Thackeray (WMT), our Sparkler often acted badly.
And even as a writer, the prolific WMT ranks higher in some respects than our CD. Vanity Fair is a powerful book whose heroine, Becky Sharp, has a complexity and impact unmatched by CD. His leading ladies tend to be relatively one-dimensional, colorless and undeveloped, e.g. Agnes Wickfield. CD is fantastic in creating unforgettable, gothic women, like Sarah Gamp, or silly shallow ones, like Dora Spenlow, but a great central feminine figure eluded him.

In travel books, I admire CD's American Notes (1842), using it in my solo acting activities, but his Pictures from Italy (1846) is minor. Compare them both with WMT's rollicking and empathetic Irish Sketch Book (1843) which is little known. This book shows another of WMT's skills - illustrating. (See below.)

He drew for several of his own books, e.g. The Rose and The Ring (1855).
A close contemporary of CD (1812-1870), WMT (1811-1863) was an on again/off again friend of Boz. He died sadly early. Their daughters were lifelong friends. The trips to America; the absurd Garrick Club argument and its resolution; CD weeping into WMT's grave...these are all well reported. WMT, a giant in stature as well as in achievement, was a tireless editor of several literary publications. His own other major works are impressive. Barry Lyndon (1844) is a terrific extended monologue by an Irish rascal who outwits people across Europe. Its tone is engaging and genuine. The Newcomes (1855) and The Virginians (1857-9) had American settings and structures that CD—a notoriously competitive writer—never addressed or attempted. Henry Esmond (1852) was rated by Anthony Trollope, who knew both CD and WMT, as "the greatest novel in the English language."
A friend recently said to me "I agree about Becky Sharp but Thackeray never created a male character to match those of Dickens." With Pip, David Copperfield and scores of others, I think he's right. But WMT scores many points.

(Ed's note: Roger Jerome, a British-trained actor and Dickensian, lives in Columbus and seldom braves the trip to Cleveland. Our loss is Columbus’s Aldus Society’s gain.)

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Chapter 1: *Barnaby Rudge* opens with the Maypole Inn and John Willett

Steven Marcus (*Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey*, 1965) calls it “the lost idyllic vision brought back to life.” In Chapter 1, there it is—Merrie Olde England. Marcus calls its famous bar “an Eden in which man feels at home again….” According to CD, its fire represents the “warmth and light of civilized life.”

Yet, at its heart, we find John Willet, slow, stupid, dictatorial in his ignorance. Now, what is Dickens saying about Merrie Olde England? And how does it fare at the hands of the mob? And how does CD account for the rioters in “civilized” England? —K. S.

(Right: Willet, manager of the Maypole, after being visited by the rioters.)

The Maypole Inn painted by Mark Thompson, 1812-1875, renowned for his landscapes and iconic buildings.

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Pay dues to be counted, to stay connected and, maybe, to get together in June 2021 for dinner.

Treasurer **Beth Bliss** reels off the expenses she meets for our branch: postage, printing, and, for our Memorial Dinner in a Covid-free June, a speaker, wine for toasting, and a cake. The amount we pay per person dining doesn’t cut it.

We’ll discuss *Barnaby Rudge* with Zoom until the library welcomes us back to their meeting rooms. We’ll stay in touch with one another through our newsletters, *A Twist of Dickens* and *etwist*, and our website, clevelanddickensfellowship.org

**Kathy Broz** will let London Headquarters know we’re still here.

Please stand up and be counted.

Send $35, your 2020-2021 dues, to Beth Bliss, 772 Quilliams, Cleveland Hts. OH 44121.