UNDER LOCK AND KEY:

SECURING PRIVACY AND PROPERTY IN VICTORIAN FICTION AND CULTURE

By

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To my wife, Beverly, my unfailing source of love, encouragement, and inspiration

and

To my sons, Chris and Coleman, for patience and good humor

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Introduction

In the 1850s English lock and safe manufacturers regularly held public exhibitions in which they subjected fire-proof safes to prolonged periods in bonfires and then opened them to show that the contents were unharmed. The popularity of these events increased when safe-makers raised the stakes and the drama by drilling, cutting, and blasting open competitors' safes to demonstrate publicly that they offered inadequate security. Two of the principal rivals in such contests were George Price and William Milner. During a competition in 1860, one of Milner's foremen packed the lock of one of Price's safes with gun powder and ignited it. Because the safe was an older model not constructed to withstand blasting, the explosion destroyed the lock; but the blast also shattered the safe's steel body with such force that one of the shards hurled into the crowd, piercing a young boy's skull and killing him on the spot. The coroner assigned to investigate the tragic accident declared such contests a public danger and put an end to them. Price remained in business until his death in 1887. Milner, on the other hand, retired to the Isle of Man shortly after the incident, where he established charities for impoverished fishermen. The townspeople praised Milner, whom they called "Godfather of Port Erin," for his generosity, and raised money to erect a tower memorializing his philanthropy. Upon discovering what his neighbors were doing, the retired manufacturer provided the funds necessary to finish the project. Completed in 1871, Milner's Tower, located on the

southwest coast of the island where it stands in the place of a lighthouse, remains a notable local landmark in part because of its unique shape—a giant key.[1]

Milner's Tower stands as a monumental exception to the kind of "ordinary objects" that, as Yi-Fu Tuan observes, we tend to overlook because, even though they crucially define the places in which we live, such items "are almost a part of ourselves, too close to be seen" (144). Perhaps due to their commonness and seemingly prosaic quality, their status as "ordinary objects" which renders them all but invisible, lock and key, and the field of security generally, have received little attention from literary critics and historians, despite important studies on nineteenth-century domestic privacy in recent years. "Under Lock and Key" explores this overlooked area of Victorian literature and culture, examining the social origins, material conditions, sociocultural significance, and fictional representations of security from the late eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century. For their part, the Victorians had a well-documented fixation on security. In the nineteenth-century novel, for instance, lock and key are ubiquitous fixtures, appearing more often and in more contexts than nearly any other consumer artifacts of the era (Altick, *Presence* 228).[2] The proliferation of security in Victorian fiction attests to what was in fact a cultural obsession with protecting property—and, equally important, guarding the borders of privacy. What Jonathan Harker says of Dracula's Transylvanian castle—"doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and

[1] See the article on George Price in *A Gazetteer of Lock and Key Makers* 4-6 and *Porter's Directory* 311.

[2] Aside from observing that middle-class Victorians were prosperous and thus had a lot to protect, Altick does not pursue the implications of the numerous references to security in nineteenth-century fiction.

bolted" (39)—accurately describes the Victorian home, in fact as well as in fiction.[3] While we do not mean to imply that the proverbial Englishman's castle was, like the vampire's lair, "a veritable prison," vigilant attention to securing bourgeois domestic space did transform the home into a fortress.

Such a transformation was possible largely because of the rise of the patent-lock industry in London during the early decades of the industrial revolution, which serves as the focus of chapter I. The invention and production of patent-locks, in which England led the world throughout the nineteenth century, had a pervasive social impact. The early years of modern high-security played a crucial role in efforts to create and stabilize the physical and conceptual boundaries between the separate spheres and in producing a spatial framework for the articulation of liberal individualism and an array of Victorian values, not the least of which was acquisitive morality. Certain theoretical assumptions about social space inform the argument in this chapter and throughout the study as a whole. The first chapter focuses mainly on the production and material practices of security, and in some respects on what Henri Lefebvre describes as the "production of space." Lefebvre argues that productive forces determine the ways in which we create, organize, partition, use, and therefore experience the physical environment, both practically and conceptually. He reasons: because "each mode of production has its own particular space, the shift from one mode of production to another must entail the production of new space" (46). The historical conditions in which the modern lock

[3] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that the mechanisms of security—"locked cabinets, drawers, trunks, strongboxes"—recur frequently in fiction written by women, signaling a feeling of confinement within the home (85). But references to security occur with arguably equal if not greater frequency in fiction written by men, though for different reasons, as we will see throughout this study.

industry emerged—the shift to industrial capitalism and bourgeois liberalism—bear out Lefebvre's formulation of the causal relationship between the mode of economic production and the production of space.[4] Taking the emergence of modern capitalist society as a backdrop, we attempt to reconstruct the history of the high-security industry and, in turn, the production of secure space, through readings of technical literature, industry reports, advertising, legal records, minutes of the Royal Society of Arts and the Mechanics' Institute, as well as Georgian and Victorian writing on loss-prevention and crime. This chapter thus investigates a new area within the study of material culture in an effort to develop a cultural history of lock hardware and locked-space, arguing along the way that modern high-security signified a complex range of middle-class values even as it encoded anxieties about life in an industrial-capitalist society.

Chapter I considers as well how the Victorians employed security in their representations of space, which, like the production of social space, played a vital role in the creation and maintenance of social order. Whereas "the ability to influence the production of space is an important means to augment social power" as well as social order, as David Harvey contends, "power in the realms of representation may end up being as important as power over the materiality of spatial organization itself" (233). Nigel South likewise maintains: "the symbolic defining of space (and the enforcement of definition) is clearly a major and extremely significant (if neglected) feature of the modern maintenance of social control and social order" (147). Arguing that the key was the principal trope of the English home as a castle—the locus of nineteenth-century social

[4] See Mary Poovey's discussion of spatial production in her study of cultural formation in nineteenth-century Britain. Poovey takes as a central premise the claim that "modern industrial capitalism was characterized by a new organization of space and bodies in space" (25).

stability—this chapter explores the ways in which representations of locked space enacted the symbolic ordering of society through a wide-ranging cultural discourse on security that included newspaper and periodical articles, writing on urban geography, the built environment, domestic management, and political economy—as well as fiction.

Chapter II extends our analysis of the relationship between secure space and social order. Turning to a more focused discussion of fiction, this chapter argues that Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) envisions a distinctively liberal model of social order, juxtaposing the need to secure the borders of individual sovereignty and the middle-class private sphere with the failure of public authority during the Gordon Riots of 1780. Through Gabriel Varden, the benevolent locksmith who figures as the symbolic keeper of social order, Dickens's novel critiques England's ineffective institutional reactions to crime and disorder, insisting instead that preventing crime by better securing the private sphere is vital to social reform and will do more to ensure an orderly society than conservative policies and institutional power. To develop further the analysis of the social significance of secure space as well as Dickens's ideological agenda in *Barnaby Rudge*, we also discuss Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), which represents the lockmaker as an embodiment of anarchic violence and formulates a Tory version of security and social stability.

Chapter III examines highly publicized failures of mid-Victorian security as occasions for both social crisis and cultural criticism. Private anxieties about protecting property became a matter of public alarm during the Great Exhibition when an American lock expert picked undefeated British locks in what the press dubbed the "Great Lock Controversy," which received extensive coverage during the summer of 1851. While

these defeats ultimately had more symbolic than real meaning, public interpretations of the controversy, which we read as a kind of collective narrative, focused almost exclusively on the threat to property but never reached a conclusive assessment of the controversy's significance. We find the single exception in Richard Henry Horne's short story, "A Penitent Confession," which appeared in *Household Words* in August of 1851, and which took the public's fascination with security at the Exhibition as its point of departure. Reading Horne's story within the larger narrative framework created by the reports and editorials that appeared in newspapers enables us to understand the crisis in Victorian security as a manifest threat to property and a latent threat to bourgeois identity.

Revisiting the connection between security and selfhood, chapter IV explores late-Victorian representations of lock and key as troubled markers of agency, subjectivity, and competing claims of individuality and social responsibility. The separate-spheres ideology came under increasing scrutiny as the century wore on, and genres like horror and detective fiction ceased to portray the home as an impenetrable sanctuary. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Copper Beeches" (1892), we analyze how *fin-de-siècle* fiction complicates and at times redefines security's dominant meanings by rupturing the physical and conceptual boundaries of locked space—by allowing the public to break in to the Englishman's castle.

Although the organization of chapters in this study generally alternates between the sociocultural history of security and readings of various representations of security in fiction, each chapter reads the interrelationships between a broad range of non-fictional

and fictional texts. Chapters I and III thus incorporate discussions of fiction into the social discourses of security, whereas chapters II and IV situate readings of Victorian literature within the contexts of production and consumption of the security commodity. One feature that remains consistent throughout the chapters of this study concerns what we might describe as the complex cultural semiotics of security. The lofty symbolism of Milner's Tower briefly illustrates this complexity. A key unlocks doors, provides access, and to that extent aptly symbolizes philanthropic works. But inasmuch as we tend to associate keys with securing the spaces of property and privacy against intrusions, actions often motivated by mistrust, we could interpret this towering emblem as inadvertently ironic, inscribing self-interested acquisition and the exclusion of others in the same representational space as the charitable distribution of wealth and goodwill. Indeed, closure rather than access has arguably the greater semiotic value, for society developed the mechanisms of security to create and enforce spatial barriers. Access is, as a rule, a temporary condition that interrupts the spatial integrity of such barriers.[5] If, as Richard Grassby observes, the objects of material culture are signifiers that "make visible statements about [a society's] hierarchies of value" (593), Milner's Tower, like the object it represents, encodes a double meaning in which accumulation threatens to trump philanthropy as the overriding value of a man's life and work. In the majority of texts considered in this study, the key signifies closure far more often than access, which is not surprising given the Victorians' emphasis on the sanctity of property and privacy. But we will also see that, like Milner's Tower, the semiotic value of lock and key are subject to considerable slippage in Victorian literature and culture.

[5] Gaston Bachelard notes, for instance: "a key closes more often than it opens…. And the gesture of closing is always sharper [and] firmer…than that of opening" (73).

Chapter I

A Key of One's Own:
British Patent Lockmaking and the "True Principles of Perfect Security"

In *A Rudimentary Treatise on the Construction of Locks and Keys* (1852), American lockmaker Alfred Hobbs suggested that the lock, while typically beneath the notice of many observers, is a technology laden with social and cultural meaning. "Travelers, generally speaking, do not descend to locks, or rather they do not think about them," he wrote; "otherwise they might have collected much that would have been novel . . . and, indeed, there is some ground for the assertion that a notice of the door-fastenings of all nations would reveal to us something of the social and domestic habits of the great human family" (*Rudimentary Treatise* 8). When Hobbs made this comment, he was well qualified to understand just how much meaning a nation invested in this technology and how seriously that meaning could be threatened. In 1852, he was one of the most famous locksmiths working in England, and the most controversial, though he had arrived in London from New York only a year earlier. Throughout the summer of 1851, Hobbs offended national pride and shook the propertied Englishman's sense of security when, one after another, he successfully picked the nation's most trusted patent locks—including the two mid-Victorians believed absolutely invulnerable, Joseph Bramah's Precision lock, patented in 1784, and Jeremiah Chubb's Detector lock, patented in 1818—during highly publicized challenges at the Great Exhibition, which he attended as a representative of Boston lock manufacturer Day and Newell. Between them, Bramah and Chubb had dominated the security-hardware market for more than half a century, and

whenever Victorians mentioned locks, their names inevitably came to mind (Altick, *Presence* 228). More than just household words, though, the names Bramah and Chubb carried iconic weight for the Victorians, who invoked them like articles of faith. A character in a story in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* spoke for many when he exclaimed that for securing money and valuables one only required "close-fitting boxes and Bramah locks—no humbug there!" ("My First Spec" 551). Along similar lines, an essay on national defense, also published in *Blackwood's*, opened with an image of the English home as the proverbial castle—protected by Chubb: "In the modern mansion, as in the ancient fortalice, the victualing department is always a matter of prime importance, and Chubb's patent safety locks may be accepted as a convenient substitute for the portcullis" ("Mr. Cobden" 261).

Such statements summed up contemporary attitudes about the famous patent locks, so it was not surprising that, when Hobbs defeated Britain's best security in what the press dubbed the "Great Lock Controversy," reaction ranged from indignation to dismissal to an embarrassed sense of national indebtedness. Periodical articles, letters to editors, and news accounts variously represented the American as an invader, tried to explain away his picking skills as insignificant, and commended him for exposing flaws in British lock technology, reasoning that such knowledge would lead to improvements in security. *The Builder*, for example, England's preeminent architectural journal, bemoaned the injuring of national dignity as a kind of violation: "And now comes this new 'Rape of the Lock,' not by Pope, but Hobbs, who threatens to find a key to every difficulty, and says he could not be resisted by all the wards in Chancery. And he has done it too." A locksmith writing to *The Times*, which followed closely the details of the

picking challenges, put a different spin on the controversy: "It has long been known to me, and I believe many in our trade, that the ordinary patent locks are not invulnerable. It is also known that the ordinary patent locks are sufficiently secure for general purposes. If this be doubted, let any one who has lost the key of a patent lock hunt London for a locksmith sufficiently skilful to pick it in any reasonable time." To prove his claim, the locksmith referred readers to the "Balance-Lever" and "Change" locks patented by Thomas Parsons in 1832 and 1833, respectively, for which the lockmaker offered a one-thousand-guineas reward to anyone able to pick either. As the correspondent, who signed himself "Fair Play" noted, "Many skilful persons tried for many weeks without success, and at last gave it up in despair." *The Times* itself took a more balanced view, commenting that the American had taught "the mother country a wholesome filial lesson." "The mechanical spirit…is never at rest," the paper reminded readers, "and if it is lulled into a false state of listlessness in one branch of industry, and in one part of the world, elsewhere it springs up suddenly to admonish and reproach us with our supineness." Similarly, *The Illustrated London News*, which ran a series of articles on the controversy in July, August, and September of 1851, observed: "the event is one extremely interesting to all, both in an artistic and utilitarian point of view, and will probably set our lock-makers bestirring themselves to devise some new method of security." The fact that numerous publications reported at length on Hobbs highlighted the patent lock's interest and importance for the public at large. According to *The Morning Chronicle*: "There are few circumstances connected with the Great Exhibition which have awakened more general interest than the experiments which have recently been made for the purpose of ascertaining how far ingenuity and perseverance, combined

with skilful manipulation, applied under extraordinary circumstances, could overcome the protection of property afforded by various descriptions of locks." And *Fraser's Magazine* provided perhaps the best summary statement of the controversy's publicity, recalling in November of 1852, "nobody could read any newspaper…without knowing [about] it."[1]

Although taking such comments out of context threatens to oversimplify issues that we will examine in chapter 3, the public's intensive, sustained preoccupation with the Great Lock Controversy calls attention here to the patent lock's paradigmatic social and cultural significance in the nineteenth century. The Lock Controversy tarnished England's reputation for technological genius and engineering supremacy, even as the nation displayed those claims by hosting the largest industry and trade exhibition in history. Locksmithing ranked fairly low in the hierarchy of building trades throughout much of the Georgian era, but began its transformation into a specialized industry that gradually attained the status of cultural legend, when, in 1778, Robert Barron, a London mechanic and inventor, patented the first modern high-security lock—in England or anywhere else.[2] By the mid-nineteenth century, lockmakers from London, Birmingham,

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[1] "Lock Controversy," *Builder* 558; Fair Play, *Times* 6 Sept. 1851: 7F; "The Great Exhibition," *Times* 4 September 1851: 5C; "Locks and Lock-Picking," *Illustrated London News* 275; and "Messrs. Bramah and the Lock Controversy," *Morning Chronicle* 11. *Fraser's Magazine* is quoted in Hobbs 133. All quotes from *The London Times* are from *The Times Digital Archive.*

[2] Eighteenth-century craftsmen in the building trades were ranked according to a combination of their importance, amount of overall contribution to home construction, and technical literacy and skill. The hierarchy, from most important to least, was as follows: masons, bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, plasterers, paviors, plumbers, glaziers, locksmiths, carvers, and painters (Lawrence and Chris 29). For a discussion of the inventor's cultural significance in the nineteenth century, see Pettitt 40-41.

and the twin capitals of England's lock industry, Wolverhampton and Willenhall, Staffordshire, were producing security hardware "celebrated over the greater part of the world for skilful mechanical design, beauty of workmanship, and perfect inviolability" (Hobbs 115). In a speech before the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1850, John Chubb, president of Chubb and Son, observed that English patent locks were a pervasive technology in English society, "adapted to all purposes, from the smallest cabinet, to the largest prison doors, or strong room." More importantly, he asserted that patent lockmakers designed and built their products according to "the true principles of perfect security" ("Construction" 15, 16).

The assurance of "perfect security"—a phrase manufacturers used to designate a lock fitted to a unique key that resisted picking and other forms of manipulation by thieves, including the fabrication of false keys—was essential to prosperous Victorians obsessed with protecting what they owned, especially those living in urban areas where crime rates were highest. Works like George Porter's *The Progress of the Nation* and John Store Smith's *Social Aspects*, both published in 1851, represented the middle-class home as a treasury. Smith observed, for instance, that the middle-class family "now possesses carpets and hangings, which would have excited great wonderment even at so recent a period as the American War, and not a few of our London middle-class tradesmen possess a better stock of family plate and linen than many a country squire, even of the last generation" (qtd. in Briggs, *Victorian* 20). Later in the decade, Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that the acquisition of household possessions was a fervent pursuit for the Victorian middle class. The "rich" Englishman "buys a demesne, and builds a hall," Emerson wrote in *English Traits* (1856):

> if he is in the middle condition, he spares no expense on his house. Without, it is all planted; within, it is wainscoted, carved, and curtained, hung with pictures, and filled with good furniture. 'Tis a passion which survives all others to deck and improve it. Hither he brings all that is rare and costly, and with the national tendency to sit fast in the same spot for many generations, it comes to be, in the course of time, a museum of heirlooms, gifts, and trophies of the adventures and exploits of the family. He is very fond of silver plate, and though he have no gallery of portraits of his ancestors, he has their punch bowls and porringers. Incredible amounts of plate are found in good houses, and the poorest have some spoon or saucepan, gift of a godmother, saved out of better times. (122).

Accumulation combined with the sanctity of property, which Victorians of nearly every social and political stripe held as axiomatic, elevated security to a central social and cultural issue; and patent locks played a crucial role in this elevation, providing a critical layer of meaning to the built environment through the promise of spatial inviolability. An article published in the *Banker's Magazine* in 1845 illustrates this point. After alerting readers to the tactics of thieves who developed romantic ties with servants merely to gain admission to a house so they could get at the plate and other valuables, the writer advised: "Chubb's locks placed on our sideboard and cupboards speak very distinctly to that point. Common locks and keys are no longer any safeguard" (qtd. in Currer-Briggs 8).

But the rise of the patent-security lock was not just about protecting property through superior technology. The industry's emergence coincided with significant changes in social organization. The promise of perfect security, of a key of one's own, translated into the stabilization of uniquely private space at a time when privacy became the touchstone of middle-class respectability and identity. Inviolable boundaries served as a basic premise of the English sense of self in the nineteenth century, and in that respect the modern lock industry's development corresponded with the claims of liberal individualism. According to the terms of bourgeois ideology, political economy, and

utilitarian philosophy, security was a—and at times the—basic social requirement of selfhood. In *Utilitarianism* (1861), for instance, John Stuart Mill argued that security is the bedrock of both the rights that define individuality and a coherent social structure, describing it as "to everyone's feelings the most vital of all interests." Security, Mill asserted:

> no human being can possibly do without; on it we depend for all our immunity from evil and for the whole value of all and every good, beyond the passing moment, since nothing but the gratification of the instant could be of any worth to us if we could be deprived of anything the next instant by whoever was momentarily stronger than ourselves. Now this most indispensable of all necessaries, after physical nutriment, cannot be had, unless the machinery for providing it is kept unintermittedly in active play. Our notion, therefore, of the claim we have on our fellow-creatures to join in making safe for us the very groundwork of our existence, gathers feelings around it so much more intense than those concerned in any of the more common cases of utility, that the difference in degree (as is often the case in psychology) becomes a real difference in kind. The claim assumes that character of absoluteness, that apparent infinity, and incommensurability with all other considerations, which constitute the distinction between the feeling of right and wrong and that of ordinary expediency and inexpediency. The feelings concerned are so powerful, and we count so positively on finding a responsive feeling in others (all being alike interested) that *ought* and *should* grow into *must*, and recognized indispensability becomes a moral necessity, analogous to physical, and often not inferior to it in binding force. (53)[3]

While Mill's focus throughout *Utilitarianism* suggests that he has in mind here the political, the legal, and especially the social mechanisms of security rather than security as a material practice, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century lockmaking bore a close relationship to these metaphysical categories and fell within the range of Mill's

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[3] Social philosophers and political economists who preceded Mill in addressing security's importance for selfhood and social order during the early years of middle-class formation included: David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (1742); Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776); Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789); and Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 6th edition (1826).

"machinery" for ensuring "immunity from evil." In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, Sindey Godolphin Osborne made precisely this point:

> Why do I have locks on my writing-desk, drawers, and the doors of my house? Simply because I thus do homage to the result of my own experience and that of past generations as to the insecurity of property when unprotected. Civilisation, the progress of intellectual enlightenment, has done a great deal for the world, but the improvement of bars and bolts, strongboxes, and safe locks has kept pace with it. We may be (I don't say we are) much better men than our forefathers were; it is quite certain that we are not content to trust our property to the sort of lock, &c., to which they entrusted the safe custody of their goods. Every successive generation has had forced upon it, at a very early date, that men should keep their hands from picking and stealing, and yet, as one generation passes away, it leaves the next ample demand for improvement on its own improved mechanical means to prevent man being a thief. (16 Feb. 1853: 8B)

Patent locks carried comprehensible if often overlooked meaning, especially where nineteenth-century "social and domestic habits" were concerned, to use Alfred Hobbs's phrase. We will extend this observation to explore what the Victorians regarded as a social and cultural hermeneutics of lock hardware and locked space that takes us beyond material practices into the sphere of Victorian values. This chapter argues that British patent locks encoded and to some extent helped stabilize an array of middle-class social codes and cultural imperatives. In order to test that claim, we begin with the early history of British patent lockmaking, examining the industry's origin in the chaotic social conditions during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a period that witnessed a systemic failure of security. We will then discuss the technological significance of Bramah's and Chubb's inventions, though the chapter lays emphasis as well on the social and cultural contexts of invention and the sociocultural meanings that patent locks and the spaces they secured held for lockmakers particularly, but also for the public generally, from homeowners to housebreakers. The Victorian were obsessed with security, and patent locks and keys provided them with a set of material signifiers for fundamental

middle-class values of privacy, property ownership, domestic propriety, and autonomy. In the final section of this chapter we will examine that obsession and its relation to these values through a variety of sources that include writing on loss prevention, household management, architecture, and advertising, as well as Victorian sage writing, sociology, periodical literature, and fiction.

I

England's first patent law dates from the reign of James I, but the first lock patent was not granted until 1774, to George Black, for "a latch or lock so made to raise the door over the carpet, and so made as to admit air into the room without opening the door," as the patent notice described it.[4] Black's invention provided convenience but no additional protection against robbery at a time when mounting crime reflected the expansion of industrial wealth, making greater security a pressing need from the perspective of Georgian policy-makers, social observers, and law-enforcement officials. This was especially true in London, where surges in population, unemployment, and poverty combined to create an atmosphere of lawlessness. In the mid-1740s a Parliamentary committee formed to study the problem extended the jurisdictional power of private-security services, yet the measure ultimately failed to create an effective crime-prevention force. With housebreaking and burglary steadily increasing from the 1750s to the 1790s, the situation was particularly hazardous for property-owners who had to contend with an emerging class of criminals Henry Fielding had designated as

[4] England granted its first patent in 1617 for an invention that engraved maps. Black's patent specification is quoted in Butter 116.

"professionals" when he established the Bow Street Runners at mid-century.[5] In *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751), Fielding attributed the escalation in property crimes to criminals who had "reduced Theft and Robbery into a regular System." Jonas Hanway echoed his assessment almost verbatim a quarter of a century later in *The Defects of the Police, the Cause of Immorality, and the Continual Robberies committed, particularly in and about the Metropolis* (1775): "in our days we feel such grievances the more from being more civilized. In proportion to our superior ingenuity to our forefathers, thieving is reduced to a system" (qtd. in Tobias 23, 44). By 1783, the same year that Horace Walpole lambasted England as a "robbing, wrangling, railing nation without principles," members of Parliament classified burglars' methods as a "science," and social commentators began characterizing burglary as an expert "skill." Two years later, the Solicitor-General observed that no resident of London "could feel himself unapprehensive of danger to his person or property if he walked the street after dark, nor could any man promise himself security in his bed."[6] Despite England's infamous "Bloody Code," a system of broadly applied capital statutes designed primarily to punish theft and terrify would-be criminals into obeying the law, property crime "uniformly kept pace with the increase of the riches," as London magistrate Patrick Colquhoun, one of the pioneers of crime prevention and law enforcement, put it a decade later in his *Treatise on the Police of London* (1795). Colquhoun complained that neither

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[5] Green and Farber 6; Jones 3-4; and Emsley 32, 64. According to the legal definition, burglary occurred between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., housebreaking between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (Cruikshank 12).

[6] Emsley 170. Walpole is quoted in Plumb 133. The Solicitor-General is quoted in Tobias 33.

the public nor private sectors took adequate preventive measures against burglary and housebreaking, maintaining that crime "prevention" rather than prosecution after the fact should be "the true essence of Police" and the basis for a stable society (vi, xi, 12).[7] But late eighteenth-century law enforcement was a haphazard enterprise, primarily because English policemen, almost all of whom were volunteers, were untrained, outnumbered, and unarmed. As London's population approached one million at the end of the century, the city had at most 1,000 officers and no more than twice as many watchmen.[8] At the time of Colquhoun's *Treatise*, policing was in the relatively early phases of a systemic reorganization that occurred between 1750 and 1868; and his Thames Police Force, established in 1798, received only irregular funding from officials sensitive to public fears that a centralized agency would become a pawn of the state. To address the problem, the government encouraged citizens to take matters into their own hands, a policy that produced numerous Protection and Prosecution Societies in the late eighteenth century.[9]

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[7] England had fifty capital statutes on the books in 1689; the number had nearly quadrupled by 1800. Most of these were for property crimes, as the record of punishments illustrates. For example, of the six hundred seventy-eight people sent to the gallows in London and Middlesex between 1749 and 1771, seventy-two were convicted murderers; the rest were thieves (Porter 133-37). In 1785, forty-three of the ninety-seven people executed in England were convicted on charges of burglary and housebreaking, and only one was hanged for murder. Other forms of property crime accounted for a further forty-six executions that same year (*Parliamentary Papers* 391). Housebreaking remained a hanging offence until 1832, when Parliament changed the sentence to transportation; England abolished public execution in 1868.

[8] Colquhoun, in his *Treatise on Indigence* (1806), estimated that by the early years of the nineteenth century there were 80,000 offenders, from the petty to the violent, engaged in various forms of property crime in the capital (391-94).

Against this backdrop of increasing industrial prosperity on the one hand and escalating crime, governmental inefficacy, and vigilante citizen groups on the other, the locks used almost universally during the late eighteenth century, whether of the cheap, mass-produced variety or the more decorative, expensive type, offered more ornamentation than protection, and provided little or no resistance to skilled thieves equipped with various specialized tools.[10] Addressing the "science of robbing" in his *Dissertation on the Construction of Locks* (1788), Joseph Bramah warned readers that the housebreaker's cunning was more than a match for the traditional locksmith's talent. "Modern depradation [*sic*] is reduced to a system," Bramah asserted, echoing Fielding, Hanway, government officials, and other commentators, "in which art and force are exerted with such skill and power, as to elude precaution, and to defy resistance" (2). By the lockmaker's own admission, it was not only love that laughed at locksmiths: thieves laughed too, as contemporary court records illustrated.[11] Although English lockmakers had produced some fairly sophisticated security devices since the sixteenth century, the

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[9] Porter 139-40 and Bailey 11. Not until 1829, with the passage of Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police Bill, did the state establish a professional force. Bailey points out that the threat to property was a primary motive for creating the Metropolitan Police Force. The speech in which Peel proposed the…Bill "referred only to the recent increase in the number of committals of property crime" (13).

[10] See McNeil 36-38. Competition between rival locksmiths responding to high demand often meant that quality was sacrificed to the rapid, mass production of inexpensive locks. There was a "familiar saying that if a Willenhall locksmith happens to let fall a lock in the process of manufacture he does not stay to pick it up, as he can make another in less time" (Tildesley 88). Willenhall specialized in various forms of cabinet locks, the type most in demand by Victorian consumers.

[11] A witness against Thomas Brease, for example, a housebreaker who was tried and sentenced to transportation in 1785, testified that Brease and an accomplice, using picking tools, opened the lock and "walked into the house as regular as if they had a key" (*Old Bailey Proceedings* t17850629-37).

majority of late eighteenth-century locks were simple devices constructed according to a centuries-old principle known as the "warded system."[12] Wards were fixed projections situated around the keyhole inside the lock body, arranged in patterns from the simple to the complex, and designed to obstruct the passage of any key without a matching pattern as well as prevent picking instruments from reaching the bolt. These locks could be manufactured quickly and cheaply, which made them affordable and their use widespread, so much so that they remained popular on the domestic-consumer market into the twentieth century. The problem lay in the fact that the ward, a Roman invention that Europeans had further developed and widely adopted during the medieval period, had changed little by the early decades of the industrial revolution.[13] Against the

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[12] An official record from the Elizabethan era praised West Midlands' blacksmiths as "ingenious craftsmen…well skilled in the making of locks and keys." In 1732, a Portuguese merchant visiting Wolverhampton found the local tradesmen's "curious" skills so impressive that he noted some of their inventions in his travel log. These included a lock that recorded the number of times servants entered a door, counting as many as one-thousand entries in the course of a year, as well as one that contained chimes set to a clock and sold for £ 20 (Butter 121-22). Among some of the more creative (and devious) inventions during this period were rudimentary alarm locks, as well as mechanisms designed to injure, maim, and even kill thieves who defeated the bolt but failed to operate some form of concealed safety catch (Monk 22-24). Yet locks like these, many of which were modified versions of ideas proposed by the Marquis of Worcester in *A Centurie of Invention* (1640), remained novelties, impractical to manufacture on a large scale and priced beyond the means of most consumers. Worcester's proposals included an alarm lock that would also catch the intruder's "hand as a trap doth a fox; and tho' far from maiming him, yet it leaveth such a mark behind it as will discover him if suspected; the escutcheon or lock plainly shewing what monies he hath taken out of the box to a farthing, and how many times opened since the owner had been in it" ("Marquis" 108).

[13] See Chubb 6 and Monk 27, 41. According to the nineteenth century's standard history of "primitive" locks, from the early Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century European locks were constructed "almost entirely on the warded system" (Pitt-Rivers 24). For further discussion of the warded lock's medieval qualities, see: Fenby 174; Hobbs 18; and Hogg 29-36.

ingenuity of Georgian criminals, this antiquated technology provided the user with little more than the illusion of protection. Yet the illusion captured the public's imagination. For most people—and this remained true to some extent into the Victorian era—the warded key's elaborate webbed design symbolized both an esoteric technology and at least a putative protection against the thief. As Hobbs explained, the key's "mysterious clefts" were "connected with some kind of secret mechanism in the lock," giving "warded locks a great hold on the public mind, as models of puzzlement and security" (66). William Wordsworth, for instance, demonstrated the ancient lock's appeal to the public's imagination in "Memory" (1823), drawing an analogy between the powers of the poet's pen and the mysterious design of the warded key:

> A PEN—to register; a key—
> That winds through secret wards
> Are well assigned to Memory
> By allegoric Bards. (1-4)

The warded keys' typically large size was also popularly perceived as evidence of a lock's invulnerability. Henry Holland, whose article "The Science of Garotting and Housebreaking" appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1863, reminisced: "At one time, when our houses and treasures were all protected by old-fashioned warded locks, it was thought that safety was insured if only the key was a very big one. The strong-room keys of that period were monstrous engines, tortured with complex wards of every conceivable shape; and yet neither the weight nor the complexity of these instruments was of much avail against the resources of a thief" (83).

Patent lockmakers made it a part of their mission to demystify the old technology, to strip it of its symbolic value, for two reasons. First, they had a genuine complaint with warded locks, which provided little if any security. Second, the outdated technology

offered patent holders a backdrop for introducing their inventions to the public and shaping the terms of perfect security. Bramah originated public criticism when he introduced his lock to consumers, describing warded locks as "greatly deficient in the essential properties, and very unequal to the important purpose, of an effectual security" (23)—a point he argued in striking detail, as we shall see. Well into the nineteenth century, lockmakers and commentators on domestic economy and the built environment were still sounding the same theme.[14] Thieves, on the other hand, from experts to novices, knew long before most property owners that the warded key's symbolism did not translate into actual protection and that they could defeat such locks in several ways. The most significant flaw in the overall design was the limited number of variations in keys, which meant that the likelihood of duplications of keys increased in proportion with the number of locks in use. Old keys purchased second-hand were in fact plentiful and problematic; Bramah warned, "No method of robbery is more practiced, than gaining admittance into houses by these keys; which (as is well known,) may be procured at the old iron shops, to fit almost any Lock in use" (43). Limited variations remained a serious problem for any nineteenth-century property-owners who trusted in the security of warded locks, as lockmakers typically produced these in sets of ten or twenty, each of

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[14] See, for example, Chubb 9. J. Beverly Fenby, a Birmingham lockmaker, put the matter bluntly before an audience at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers while introducing his newly patented Adytic lock (Greek for "inaccessible") in 1866: "The simple fixed-guard or warded principle is so utterly worthless for security, no matter what amount of workmanship be bestowed upon it, that it demands but short notice. It was contrived with the intention of making the passage to the bolt intricate; but it will be seen at once that this intricacy does not really offer any security" (173). *Cassell's Household Guide*, a manual on domestic economy that included how-to tips on installation, maintenance, and repair of locks for homeowners, cited verbatim passages from the technical literature and included a section on the warded lock's "imperfect security," complete with illustrations of various instruments capable of defeating it (4: 220-221).

which was operated by its own key as well as a single master key that fit them all. Sometimes manufacturers, to cut costs and expedite production, turned out warded locks in gross quantities, all working on the same key. The demand for inexpensive locks was so high throughout the Georgian and Victorian periods that these key patterns were "*constantly repeated*," according to Victorian lock and safe-maker George Price, the era's foremost authority on all things pertaining to the history and technology of security. The effect of such practices, Price warned readers of his *Treatise on Fire & Thief-Proof Depositories and Locks and Keys* (1856), was "that in every town there are sure to be a considerable number of locks *precisely the same in every respect*, and which can be opened by each other's keys." He estimated that a "set of twenty skeleton keys" of specific patterns "would probably open nearly all the outer door locks in any city or town in the kingdom" where such lock were still in use; and that "tens of thousands of warded locks are made annually, the whole of which are only duplicates of those which have been made every year for the last century" (229-30, 231).

If a warded lock contained an unusual pattern, on the other hand, one could still defeat it by impressioning. This method involved fabricating a key by applying wax, soap, or a combination of the two to the bit of a blank key, inserting it into the keyhole, exerting pressure on the wards to get an initial impression, and then filing or drilling the bit to match the pattern. Through this process, sometimes referred to as "mapping" a lock's interior, even criminals "without any extraordinary degree of genius, or mechanical skill," as Bramah observed, could produce a "perfectly fitted" key in fairly short order (12). Picking offered an even easier, quicker technique; it was only necessary that a false key or other instrument avoid the internal obstructions, engage the talon, and

retract the bolt. Most housebreakers were in fact as adept as the best locksmiths at opening warded locks with picks, hook-shaped instruments known among criminals as "betties," "twirls," and "double-enders," or with skeleton keys, all common items in the average burglar's inventory of tools.[15] To guard against such instruments, householders could leave a key inserted on the inside of the lock, effectively blocking the operation of a pick or false key. But thieves overcame this obstacle with a "key-nipper" or an "outsider," a slender pair of pliers inserted into the outer keyhole to grab the tip of the key's bit and turn it.[16] A final problem with warded locks had less to do with the housebreaker's ingenuity than the locksmith's too frequent lack thereof. Price warned readers that it remained a "very common practice" among those who continued manufacturing such locks "to cut more notches in the key than there are wards in the lock," or, as with the cheapest locks, construct them "without any wards at all" yet cut the key to look "as if wards were employed" (229).

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[15] A skeleton key, also known as "false" key, has a bit that is almost entirely cut away, allowing it to bypass a lock's wards, but leaving enough of the bit to engage and throw the bolt mechanism. Hobbs provided a detailed description of the rules for making skeleton keys in order to "at once shew [sic] how simple is the principle which renders the warded system fallacious" (29-30). Burglary tools were of course illegal, and after the Metropolitan Police Force was created officers systematically arrested anyone they suspected of possessing them (Thomas 73). By 1850, according to John Chubb, the police had confiscated "a ton weight" of false keys and other picking instruments, which they held at Scotland Yard (10). Some Victorian lock-pickers were quite skilled. The warden of the Pentonville prison told Henry Mayhew and John Binny during their tour of the prison in the early 1860s: "we are obliged to be very particular here, for the men have tools given them to work with, and therefore we make them put all such articles outside their cell-doors just before they go to bed; but when a man is a notoriously desperate prison-breaker, we don't even allow him as much as a tin can for his soup, for we know that, if we did so, he would convert the wire around the rim into a pick-lock, to open his door. Yes, sir, convicts are mostly very ingenious at such things" (124-25).

[16] See Holland 88-89 and Chesney 185.

Mid eighteenth-century English lockmakers moved a step closer to remedying the warded lock's insecurity by adding a lever, a spring-loaded metal arm that fixed the bolt in place until the proper key raised it clear.[17] The lever's theoretical advantage was that it prevented impressioning because, unlike wards, the mechanism was comparatively remote from the keyhole and more difficult to access. Locksmiths at the time confidently assumed that the new design would force burglars to undergo a laborious, trial-and-error process to create a working key. But by late in the century lever locks had yet to gain popularity over the warded type; and even when lever locks were used, thieves, with resourcefulness that equaled lockmakers', soon adapted their strategy for defeating them by carrying larger numbers of false keys cut to various shapes and sizes fitted for opening nearly every type of mechanism.[18] Indeed, between 1680 and 1799, 200 cases tried at the Old Bailey involved the possession or use of false or "picklock" keys in the commission of thefts; and over three quarters of those dated from after 1750.[19] There was also the problem—and this applied to warded locks as well—that someone might get possession

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[17] There is no record of who introduced this innovation, or when or where, only that lever locks probably originated in the Midlands (Hogg 66). Hobbs pointed out, however, that *Art du Serrurier* (1767), a treatise on French locking devices, contained "numerous examples of simple tumbler locks of ingenious construction" (43). Levers, which were called "tumblers" in America, featured two squared notches, joined by a slot or "gate," that acted as receptacles for a stud (known as a "stump") projecting from the bolt. In order to retract or throw the bolt, the stump had to be raised above the level of the notch with the proper key.

[18] See Hogg 68 and Price 245.

[19] Among the evidence against Thomas Clifton, for instance, a London burglar arrested in 1798, were the seven "pick-lock keys" discovered by the police when they searched his lodgings (*Old Bailey Proceedings* t17980418-105). The prosecution produced "about a dozen picklocks" as evidence against a couple of burglars in 1796 (t17960113-13). And when the police arrested Sarah Hall, an especially enterprising thief, in 1784, they found a knife and "thirty four picklock keys…in her pocket" (t17840915-77).

of the key, if even for a few seconds, press it into a cake of wax, and from this mould fashion a duplicate at his leisure. Describing the speed and ease of the burglar's tactics, Holland, a prison physician who acquired his information from burglars themselves, offered his readers this brief scenario involving the creation of an impression: "A mould has been taken of your house-key by some innocent-looking woman, who has got into the hall for a moment on pretended business, and the door yields instantly to the counterfeit" (90).[20]

II

In 1778, Robert Barron's Double-Acting Lever lock signaled a revolution in design and the beginning of the end of the warded era. Barron introduced a pair of spring-loaded precision levers operated by a key containing two distinct steps cut to close specifications and equipped the levers with stumps rather than notches, reversing the

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[20] An incident from the mid-nineteenth century demonstrated the plausibility of such a scenario. Two men, one impersonating a doctor, the other his servant, conned an unsuspecting evening stroller into handing over his key ring on the pretext that they were on their way to a medical emergency and had forgotten to bring along a key for the doctor's medical bag, which could probably be opened with any sort of common key. After obtaining the man's keys the false doctor briefly turned his back, pretended to work with the lock, and turned back to the man with the bag opened. In reality the men, who had been planning the scam for some time, used the ruse to create a wax impression from which they made a key that enabled them to empty the victim's safe a few days later (Thomas 249-50). The cleverness of thieves was such that if wax was unavailable, they improvised. In 1785, a thief, after turning state's evidence, testified that an accomplice "picked up a turnip and cut it and laid a piece of writing paper on it, and took off the impression of the key upon the paper." The gate key made from this template worked two weeks later when the men robbed a warehouse, as did the key, fabricated after mapping the lock's interior with a wax-covered blank, to the warehouse door—itself secured by "a very good lock," according to the thief's estimation (*Old Bailey Proceedings* t17851019-15). This method of making key impressions could also be a problem for some patent locks, though the process was far more complicated and time-consuming, and far less exact. Thieves reportedly would pay insiders as much as £5 for a wax impression (Chesney 174).

arrangement used in older locks. The levers held the bolt, which now had two corresponding notches bisecting a horizontal gate, in place until the proper key was applied. When the key lifted the levers to the correct positions, it could then engage the talon and slide the bolt freely. Unlike previous lever locks that merely needed to have the notch raised clear of the stump with no regard for precision, Barron's model required that the key lift the levers to exact levels. If they were raised too low or too high, the pair of stumps caught the bottom or top of the notches, fixing the bolt in a stationary position. Although the Double-Acting Lever lock retained wards as a first line of defense, they were not an essential point of security. By emphasizing precision and by not depending entirely on internal obstructions to protect the bolt, Barron modernized the construction of locks, finally breaking the ward's centuries-old dominance and bringing to a close the "Middle Ages" of lockmaking. Where the public wrongly thought that old locks provided security unique to individual key-holders, Barron sought to make that ideal a reality. It was not long, however, before a London locksmith, during a meeting of the Society of Arts, demonstrated a way to impression Barron's lock and produced a key that worked as well as the original. This process took time, patience, and a deft touch, but clearly demonstrated that the patent lock, while superior to all earlier models, was not foolproof, as the inventor claimed. Moreover, production, which was carried out by hand, proved difficult on a large scale because Barron lacked the equipment necessary—no such equipment then existed—to manufacture levers and keys to precise standards with sufficient accuracy.[21]

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[21] This account of Barron's invention follows descriptions in Eras 104-06; Monk 27; and Hogg 69-70.

Bramah solved both problems with the Precision lock he patented in 1784, which more than any of his other inventions would establish his name as a household word among Victorians.[22] In the autumn of 1783, after a wave of burglaries swept London, the Mechanicks Committee of the Society of Arts offered a prize for an absolutely pickproof lock. Among the several entries, a man by the name of Marshall submitted his design, the Secret Escutcheon lock, declaring it impervious to any kind of instrument.[23] At a meeting of the committee in December, a locksmith spent well over an hour unsuccessfully attempting to open Marshall's lock. Bramah, a self-described cabinetmaker and inventor from Soho, devised a couple of impromptu instruments with which he fashioned a false key and picked it in about fifteen minutes (McNeil 39). Bramah had previously studied in depth the principles of picking, accounting for the ease and speed with which he opened Marshall's lock, testing various safeguards on

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[22] Samuel Smiles, who devoted a chapter to Bramah in his *Industrial Biography* (1863), praised him as "a most prolific inventor" and "the first mechanical genius of his time" (228, 244). By the time Bramah was elected to the Society of Arts in the early autumn of 1783, he had already patented an improvement to the water closet, the first of several inventions for which he would remain famous for more than a century. His improved water closet, patented in 1778, remained the standard in English bathrooms until the 1880s. During a forty-year period of invention he was granted eighteen patents for items ranging from precision machine tools, fountain pens, and beer dispensers to hydraulic presses, fire engines, and a machine commissioned by the Bank of England for numbering bank notes in sequential order. For a full account of Bramah's career, see McNeil.

[23] An escutcheon is a cover plate that protects the keyhole; and Marshall based his design on one of Worcester's ideas for a "secret apparatus" operated by a separate letter lock (a rudimentary version of the modern combination lock) that one had to defeat before gaining access to the keyhole (Price 323). Marshall's lock, even more than Barron's, exemplified the trend toward individualized security. The owner could change the combination of the letters easily and as often as necessary. According to Worcester's proposal, "The owner, tho' a woman, may with her delicate hand vary the ways of coming to open the lock ten-millions of times, beyond the knowledge of the smith that made it, or of me who invented it" ("Marquis" 108).

prototypes of his invention, which embodied a fundamental redesign of lock construction. Abandoning the use of wards to obstruct access to the bolt, Bramah produced a mechanism far more revolutionary and modern than Barron's, effectively stripping security hardware of its medieval vestiges. One of the defining features of the Precision lock was that its remarkably small circular key, in contrast with the "monstrous engines" mentioned by Holland, had no direct contact with the bolt.[24] Instead, a revolving internal barrel, operated by the key, protected the bolt from the keyhole.[25] Since the known methods of picking and impressioning required that the thief (or the locksmith) have access to the bolt, this obstacle cut off a primary route of invasion. The barrel and other internal parts functioned according to what Bramah described as "the property of motion," and were premised on the idea that "nothing can be more opposite in principle to FIXED WARDS, than a LOCK which derives its properties, from the *motion* of all its

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[24] The small size of Bramah's key offered two advantages: it was more convenient to carry than larger warded and lever-style keys, and its smaller keyhole afforded the lock-picker much less room to work. There was also the disadvantageous fact that the small keys were easily lost. A London locksmith early in the nineteenth century advertised that he could open Bramah locks, saving those who had lost their keys the necessity of breaking open doors, drawers, etc. Although this claim was never substantiated it was probably true, since the company added a new security measure in 1817 introducing false notches into the barrel requiring that all six sliders be pushed into their correct positions simultaneously (McNeil 49-50).

[25] The revolving barrel was equipped on the inner side with stumps that operated the bolt when engaged and on the outer with notches of varying depths arranged in a circular pattern. These notches corresponded with six spring-loaded sliders (Bramah's version of the lever) that rested in uniform positions, unlike levers, which rested in positions corresponding to steps in the key, from which burglars could determine the key's pattern. This uniformity was a weak spot in Barron's design, as Bramah and others noted. The sliders were housed in a spring-loaded external cylinder that turned the barrel when depressed by the key, which was slotted to varying depths to accommodate the sliders, and hollow in the center (what was known as the "pipe") in order to fit over a central drill pin (Price 268-311).

parts" (27). Unlike the old system that presented a stationary target for the lock-picker, movable parts offered no predictable pattern or regular points of contact. One moving part worked another, which worked another, and so on. This combination of rotation and multiple spring-loaded actions, the inventor claimed, was one of the two major achievements of his revolutionary design. Bramah called the Precision lock's other great innovation the "property of transposition," which nineteenth-century lockmakers developed into a central tenet of modern security—the "doctrine of permutation." Permutation denotes the total number of variations resulting from transpositions (systematic alterations) in the positioning of levers—or, put another way, in the depth, arrangement, and/or shape of a key's steps. Given a key with six interchangeable steps of unequal lengths, Bramah calculated 720 possible transpositions.[26] When increased to six possible positions per lever and 720 possible transpositions, the number of possible variations rose to 25,920.[27] Employing additional levers increased the number of transpositions by an exponential rate: a lock with twelve levers produced 479,001,600 transpositions; and thirteen levers yielded 6,227,019,500.[28] Combining additional levers with changes in position and depth, which due to their precision could be altered by "the

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[26] The formula for this basic transposition is the multiplication of successive steps: 1x2x3x4x5x6=720 (Chubb, "Construction" 14).

[27] This figure was included the "Table of Permutations" published by Bramah and Company in 1851 (29). The basic transposition, 720, multiplied by six positions per step is 4,320, which is then multiplied by the number of steps (six in this case) to yield 25,920 variations.

[28] Day and Newell's Parautoptic lock, for example, patented in America in 1841 and in England in 1851, contained twelve levers. The company coined the term Parautoptic from the Greek for "concealed from view" because the bolt was hidden behind three movable mechanisms working in unison (Hobbs 88-91).

smallest degree," Bramah concluded that the "amount will exceed numeration; and may, therefore, be properly said to be infinite" (43-44).[29]

This scientific method of construction created virtually insurmountable problems for the lock-picker, baffling the skills of even the most accomplished thief. A person approaching the problem algorithmically at a rate of one permutation per minute for an uninterrupted period of time could test every possible variation of the basic six-lever lock of 720 transpositions within twelve hours, whereas the same approach would require close to 1,100 years to exhaust the total number of variations in a lock containing twelve levers (Hogg 83-84). Moreover, the increased product of variation obtained by adding levers provided more security than the installation of additional locks. Thomas Parsons published a table in 1832 that demonstrated the comparison: "one lock containing four levers…is equal to four locks which contain only three levers…in each; and to 12 of the best two-tumbler Barron's locks; whilst the common locks, with wards and a tumbler, which any pick-lock can remove from the bolt with ease, are worse than useless, as being only deceptive" (qtd. in Price 437-38). Extending the comparison further, Parsons calculated that one lock containing nine levers equaled the security of nine locks equipped with eight levers each, a lock with twelve levers was equivalent to 11,800 locks containing eight levers, and so on, to a lock with twenty-six levers that provided security equivalent to 10,002,268,381,116,211,200,000 eight-levered locks.[30] Charles Babbage

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[29] According to the largest calculation in the "Table of Permutations," a lock manufactured to Bramah's specifications containing eighteen levers would have 6,402,373,705,728,000 transpositions and 678,651,612,807,168,000 possible variations (29).

later observed that the level of complexity introduced by permutation connected lock-picking, which he claimed as "a favourite subject," with deciphering, both of which he categorized under the mathematical science of "combinations" (173).[31]

With the property of transposition, Bramah theoretically eliminated the problem of key duplication and in the process individualized the production and distribution of keys by employing mathematical laws of progression and variation. This new system of security meant that every homeowner and shopkeeper could have a key exclusive to his or her own lock, because Bramah, reversing the traditional method of construction, built the lock around a unique key produced according to a systematic arrangement of variations rather than fitting a key to a lock constructed according to a redundant pattern of wards. No longer could one visit the local junkshop or ironmonger and purchase a set of old keys that would work many and perhaps most of the locks in town. With this meticulously calculated approach to lockmaking Bramah sought to eradicate the possibility of chance duplications; if failures occurred, one could not lay the blame on an arbitrary assignment of changes of keys. As John Chubb asserted more than half a century later, the doctrine of permutation made it "quite practicable, to make locks for all the doors of all the houses in London, with a distinct and different key for each lock"—and with plenty of variations to spare.[32]

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[30] This was not an unrealistic projection. Parsons manufactured a version of his Balance-Lever lock in 1834 that contained twenty-six levers.

[31] Price pointed out a distinction between permutations and combinations: "the latter has no reference to the order to which the quantities are combined; whereas in the former, this order is considered, and consequently the number of permutations always exceed the number of combinations" (438).

At the same time that the properties of motion and transposition initiated lockmaking's transformation from a craft requiring some degree of specialized skill into a mechanical science with its own set of laws and systematic knowledge, these new rigors posed problems of another sort, for Bramah's vision surpassed the available production technology. The Precision lock's specifications required fabrication at tolerances so close they were largely unattainable by the manual craftsmen who built the lock in the years immediately after its introduction. Manufacturing by hand was not only imprecise; it was time-consuming and expensive. And the public, quick to recognize the security of Bramah's locks, purchased them faster than he could produce them at his London shop. To achieve the requisite level of precision—which exceeded the exactitude of Barron's double-acting levers—expedite production, lower costs, and meet consumer demand, Bramah out of necessity revolutionized lock manufacturing, inventing new machines and tools for slotting lock barrels and keys, winding steel springs, and doing specialized lathe work. According to John Farey, Bramah's friend and fellow engineer, the inventor considered his innovative machines accomplishments that overshadowed the locks they were designed to produce. Bramah's "secret workshops…contained several curious machines for forming parts of the locks, with a systematic perfection of workmanship which was at the time unknown in similar mechanical arts," Farey recalled; and he "attributed the success of his locks to the use of these machines, the invention of which had cost him more study than that of the locks" (qtd. in McNeil 41, 46, 48). These

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[32] Chubb claimed 2,592,000 variations for a Detector lock that accommodated keys of three different pipe sizes ("Construction" 15). At the time, this would have provided a unique key for nearly three quarters of the nation's houses. The Census of 1851 reported 3,278,039 inhabited and 153,494 uninhabited houses in the whole of England and Wales (Burnett 15).

inventions' only rivals for accuracy at the time were the wheel-cutting machines used by clockmakers. The lockmaker so perfected the process of precision manufacturing, in fact, that he foresaw a limit on further reducing tolerances, fearing that "rust, or dust on the key would prevent its opening the lock" ("Excerpt Minutes" 25, 29). The Precision lock lived up to its name; it also gained a reputation for the susceptibility to dust that Bramah feared.[33]

The precision fabrication required for manufacturing the new patent lock not only revolutionized lockmaking; it proved instrumental to the industrial revolution's further development and future course. Bramah was a pioneer of precision engineering as well as "the founder of a school from which proceeded some of the most distinguished mechanics" of the nineteenth century, according to Samuel Smiles (228). The illustrious alumni included Henry Maudslay, who became the most celebrated English machine-tool maker of the nineteenth century, and Joseph Clement, who also gained fame for his machine-tool inventions as well as for his collaboration with Babbage on the "Difference Engine."[34] The lockmaker's inventions, along with those of the men who trained under

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[33] Dickens, specifically, represented dust as the enemy of the Bramah lock. We will discuss this further in chapter 2.

[34] Maudslay worked for Bramah from 1789 to 1797. He was an eighteen-year-old blacksmith's apprentice in Woolwich when Bramah hired him, and before leaving Bramah's employ had risen to the position of manager at the company's Pimlico factory, where he played an important role in developing additional manufacturing tools. There is some question over who did more to develop Bramah's specialized machinery, Bramah himself or Maudslay. Smiles gave a large share of the credit to Maudslay (248-53). McNeil, on the other hand, credits Bramah, citing Farey's comment as evidence. He also notes the fact that Bramah was aggressively promoting his new lock by 1788, a year before he hired Maudslay, which he probably would not have done without being able to produce the goods in sufficient quantity. As further evidence, he points out Maudslay's youth, lack of experience, and Bramah's numerous inventions, including other precision

him at his factory in Pimlico, played a central role in the advancements of the mechanical sciences that facilitated the second phase of British industrial development in the 1780s with the practical application of steam power. James Watt's early attempts to construct the steam engine, invented in 1769, were beset with difficulties. Unsuccessful efforts to manufacture airtight cylinders out of sheets of hammered iron that were then rolled and soldered, according to Smiles, were succeeded by a cylinder that was cast and bored but had to be stuffed with material such as "paper, cork, putty, pasteboard, and old hats" to keep the steam from escaping. Watt's move from Glasgow to Birmingham to establish a partnership with Matthew Boulton did little to eliminate the problem. As Smiles put it: "notwithstanding the excellence of the invention, it could never be brought into general use because of the difficulty of getting its various parts manufactured with sufficient precision. For a long time we find Watt, in his letters, complaining to his partner of the failure of his engines through 'villanous bad workmanship'." The inventor even tried to create a class of precision manual craftsmen, limiting certain workmen to specialized tasks and then convincing them to train up their sons and grandsons to the same work. But "the manufacture of the steam-engine became a matter of comparative ease and certainty" only after the machine-tool inventions of Bramah, Maudslay, and Clement solved the problems of accurate production (223-24).[35]

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machine tools, introduced after Maudslay left his employ (43-52). Clement worked for Bramah from 1814 to 1815, running the factory during much of that time, and then for Maudslay until he founded his own engineering firm in 1817.

[35] Bramah's machine-tool inventions were also associated with some of the nineteenth century's great engineering achievements. Robert Stephenson, for instance, son of George Stephenson, the colliery and railway engineer, used one of Bramah's hydraulic presses, patented in 1795, to set in place girders weighing 1,144 tons each while constructing the Britannia Bridge in the latter half of the 1840s. I. K. Brunel also used a

Bramah's contribution to lockmaking, while predominantly technological, was not entirely a matter of motion, transposition, and precision engineering. His work also contained a sociocultural dimension. In an essay on nineteenth-century gas-light technology, Sarah Milan notes: "When gas lighting was invented, it was, like any other new product, a blank slate on which Victorian culture could inscribe itself" (99).[36] While inventions are sites of cultural inscription, the patent lock was not exactly a *tabula rasa*. Bramah's *Dissertation on the Construction of Locks*, published in 1788 to promote his invention, inscribed important sociocultural as well as technological meaning on this new mechanism even as it introduced the lock to consumers. Because the *Dissertation* contained a new philosophy of security and loss-prevention while providing a set of technical guidelines that influenced the lock industry throughout much of the next century, its contents merit closer consideration.[37]

Bramah press to launch the Great Eastern steamship in 1859 on its maiden voyage to Australia and the Orient (Smiles 234).

[36] Of course the patent lock was a pre-Victorian technology—like gas lighting, which, Milan notes, was "extensively adopted" as early as the 1820s "to light factories, streets, theatres and shops" (84). But both were associated with the Victorian period.

[37] Bramah's design inspired numerous imitators and several cases of piracy. Throughout England there were "thousands of [imitation] locks with 'BRAMAH'S PATENT—SECURE' stamped upon each" (Price 316). The *Dissertation*'s technical specifications also served as a template for legitimate innovations. The most important were the "Union" lock patented in 1816, and Edwin Cotterill's "Royal Climax-Detector," patented in 1846, one of the most popular and secure mid-Victorian locks, second in name recognition only to Bramah and Chubb. American versions included a lock patented in England in 1805 by American physician Abraham O. Stansbury, who received the first lock-patent granted in the United States in 1807, and the Yale "Quadruplex" bank lock, patented in 1844. See Hobbs 81; Eras 107; and Ashley 62.

III

Bramah opened his *Dissertation* by noting that securing life and property under lock and key was historically essential to creating and maintaining social order as well as a task to which men from earlier times devoted their mental energy and powers of invention.[38] Given the mechanical simplicity of older locks, he surmised, "the morals of former times, were much less depraved than those of the present, as the…contrivances for security were less excellent; and the progress of a disposition to rob, and defraud, may perhaps be more accurately traced in the works of art that were formerly used for security and defence, than on any other principle, or ground of reasoning" (1-2). Locks, in other words, serve as an index of a society's moral condition. That they failed to provide adequate protection against the thief evinced the depth of contemporary social depravity and the "ingenuity of wickedness." Such social conditions posed the greatest threat to the private sphere, which arbitrary forces beyond the individual's control constantly endangered. As Bramah put it, in terms that echoed the Solicitor-General's comment from the previous year: "The dread and anxiety, which every inhabitant of the metropolis and its environs, must feel in the reflection that he sleeps with no other assurance of safety, but the hope that chance, among the multitude of objects may direct the invaders of the night to some other victim, is an evil which cannot be contemplated without horror" (2-3). Expanding the scope of this argument, he insisted that building a better lock was not just a practical necessity; it was a moral imperative on humanitarian

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[38] Although Bramah did not mention the fact, lockmaking dated back some forty centuries to the Egyptians, who constructed a rudimentary version of the lever lock out of wood. Nearly every nineteenth-century pamphlet or book on the subject, as well as the papers delivered at the Society of Arts and the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and some accounts in the press, made note of the lock's ancient origins.

grounds: “it is not in humanity to behold the numberless sacrifices which are made to justice, without lamenting the ineffectual severity of the law; and earnestly wishing to reduce the number of executions, by opposing methods of prevention, to the enormities which lead to such a dreadful end” (3). After grounding his argument in an explicit if brief critique of the legal system, he next extended the moral responsibility of prevention to property owners:

> It is a maxim in morals, that no man becomes at once completely wicked. The timidity which attends the first act of dishonesty, and the remorse which it excites in the unpracticed offender, are a natural, and in general a sufficient check to the commission of very enormous crimes, till the mind is tainted by evil councils, or becomes hardened by the frequent repetition of petit offences. To remove all temptation to dishonesty, and to give as few opportunities as possible to the indulgence of evil propensities, is as much the duty of those who possess, and wish to preserve their property, as obedience to the law, which forbids to steal, is the duty of those who may be tempted to deprive them of it. For the servant, who would never have meditated an attempt upon the chest which contains his master’s treasure, may be tempted to purloin his purse if carelessly thrown in his way.

Bramah then suggested that “perfect security” would materially contribute to the realization of social order where officials had proved unsuccessful; that it would in fact prove more effective than the gallows in reducing crime and creating a more stable (and presumably more just) society. “To secrete objects of temptation, and prevent access to them by every possible security,” he reasoned, “seems therefore to promise more towards lessening the number of robberies, which bring daily disgrace to the police, and disturb the peace of the cities of London and Westminster, than the dread of any punishment, which the law of England can inflict” (4).

Throughout this section of his *Dissertation*, Bramah used the logic and language of a liberal middle-class reformer as an ideological framework for his invention. He aimed criticism at the law and the police, taking political and civil authorities to task for their

failure to confront London's spiraling crime rate. By pointing to the inefficacy of the Bloody Code, he implicitly rejected the Tory justification of the gallows as an instrument of terror that taught a severe moral lesson to would-be criminals, and thus replaced the noose with the lock as the instrument of prevention. And by calling on property-owners to take a sympathetic interest in the potential criminal rather than simply appealing to their self-interest, Bramah followed other advocates of reform in suggesting that one's sense of moral duty to (and hence identification with) others would help bring about order.[39] Relative to judicial policy of the late eighteenth century, Bramah held progressive views. The lockmaker, in terms that corresponded with the argument Colquhoun would later make in his work on law-enforcement, saw his invention as a practical attempt to prove that placing the onus on theft-prevention instead of prosecution after the fact would benefit not just individual property-owners but society as a whole. In this respect, Bramah's efforts in the workshop shared in the labor of reformers who were drafting "blueprints of social machinery" to establish social order by suppressing lawlessness and rehabilitating the criminal (Porter 140). Ideologically, the Precision lock was the conceptual product of this metaphorical "machinery," which had a profound impact on nineteenth-century middle-class society by laying, in Gertrude Himmelfarb's words, "the groundwork for Victorian values" (6).

Bramah next went to some lengths in the *Dissertation* to inform the public of its vulnerability to property-crimes, with what was at the time a shocking degree of candor.[40]

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[39] For a discussion of the function of sympathy in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century arguments for legal reform, see McGowan 313-15.

Against the "number and variety of keys, or other instruments, adapted to the purpose of picking, or opening Locks," property (and the life of the property owner), he claimed, enjoyed only "*imaginary security*" (5). The inventor repeatedly stressed this lack of protection, alerting readers to the fact that "all dependence on the *inviolable* security of Locks, even of those constructed on the best principle of any in general use—is fallacious"; that "the best constructed Locks are liable to be secretly opened with great facility"; "that the Locks *in common use* are calculated only, to induce a false confidence in their effect"; and that these locks actually invited crime by putting "temptation to dishonesty in the way of those who are acquainted with their imperfections, and know their inefficacy to the purpose of security" (6-7). To prove his point, Bramah spent almost twenty pages, nearly half of the essay, discussing in detail the ease with which locks could be defeated by picking and impressioning, the fabrication of false keys, the likelihood of key duplications, and the general uselessness of warded locks.[41] He also

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[40] Bramah's disclosures do raise ethical as well as practical questions that we will examine in chapter 3.

[41] To give one example of the explicitness of Bramah's disclosures: he provided the following description of how one would "fabricate a key which shall tally as perfectly with the wards, as if the Lock had been open to inspection," by means of impressioning, an accurate yet simple procedure:

> And this operation may not only be performed to the highest degree of certainty and exactness, but is conducted with the utmost ease. For the block or bit, which is intended to receive the impression of the wards, being fitted to the key-hole, and the shank of the key bored to a sufficient depth to receive the pipe, nothing remains but to colour the bit with a preparation, which, by a gentle pressure against the introductory ward, may receive its impression, and thus furnish a certain direction for the application of the file. The block or bit being thus prepared with a tally to the first ward, gains admission to the second, and a repetition of the means by which the first impression was obtained, enables the workman to proceed, till by the dexterous use of his file he hath effected a free passage to the bolt. And in this operation he is directed by an infallible guide: for,

devoted particular attention to Barron's invention, explaining the various reasons why the double-lever innovation "greatly increased the difficulty, but [did] not preclude the possibility of opening his Lock" (17)—why it failed, in other words, the test of perfect security. While one must of course keep in mind that Bramah wrote his *Dissertation* to promote his own invention, these were not mere scare tactics. Georgian burglars equipped themselves with sophisticated tools against which, as we have already seen, contemporary locks offered minimal security under the best circumstances.[42]

Beyond its status as the first practical work on security-technology published in England, one of the *Dissertation*'s most notable features was that a lockmaker openly confronted the public with its lack of protection, offering a detailed account of how thieves could defeat locks, from the oldest to the most recent inventions. Anticipating criticism for his revelations, Bramah defended himself on the basis that his frank diagnosis of the problem included a solution. On the one hand, he confessed that to "find out, and to disclose *irremediable* errors, in any system of art or science, which engages the confidence, and is necessary to the security, or satisfaction of mankind, is the office

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> the pipe being a fixed centre on which the key revolves without any variation, and the wards being fixed likewise, their position must be accurately described on the surface of the bit which is prepared to receive their impression. (11-12)

On the subject of wards, Hobbs pointed out that there was "little doubt" that Bramah "did not over-rate the fallacies embodied in the system of wards" (68).

[42] Evidence presented during a trial for burglary and housebreaking in 1796 illustrates the practical difference between patent locks and older mechanisms. Two men broke into the house of elderly spinsters living in London through a door fitted with both a patent lock and a "common lock." To gain entry they were forced to destroy the patent lock and damage the door, whereas "the other [lock] had been opened by means of a master key, a picklock, or some such instrument" (*Old Bailey Proceedings* t17960113-27). Although the patent lock did not prevent the robbery, the fact that the thieves had to use destructive force demonstrated that the lock baffled their picking skills. There is no record of the maker of the patent lock destroyed during the robbery.

of an invidious and unbenevolent mind" (23). On the other, he insisted that he had not "wantonly divulged their defects, without offering at the same time a certain and effectual remedy" (24). Steven Spitzer observes that the producer of a security product stimulates and channels consumers' fears of insecurity rather than their desires for the product itself. The distinction is crucial to establishing "the hegemony of the security commodity" in capitalist societies, a process that reaches completion "when the ravages of insecurity (anxiety, doubt, uncertainty, and a whole range of concrete and generalized fears) are 'only a reminder to those who have not yet bought the right product' " (54-55). Bramah was perhaps the first to employ this sort of marketing strategy by demystifying traditional locks, rousing the property owner's sense of vulnerability to the level of crisis, and then offering his invention, an embodiment of modernity and absolute reliability, as the logical alternative to the imperfect mechanisms he had so aggressively criticized. In one of the *Dissertation*'s concluding passages the lockmaker made a categorical declaration to that end: "The imperfections and defects, which are common, in some degree, to *all* other Locks, being thus remedied; and, the principle here adopted, being an infallible security, against the best directed efforts of the picklock, or any similar instrument of violation; I may, without presumption, lay claim to the credit of having brought the art of Lock-making to that perfection, which hath been long sought, but which, hitherto, hath been sought in vain" (45-46).[43]

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[43] The same year that he published his *Dissertation*, Bramah advertised his "Patent Locks without wards, which cannot possibly be picked or opened with false keys" in *The Times* ("Bramah's Original Patent," *Times* 13 June 1788: 2A). In this case, Bramah markets desire for the product without stimulating consumers' fears, perhaps because *The Times* contained enough accounts of crime to stimulate readers' fears without his assistance.

Commenting on Bramah's *Dissertation* more than a half century after its publication, Hobbs described this claim as a "remarkable" expression of the inventor's "boldness and self-relying confidence" given the early stage of patent lockmaking (65). Yet Bramah's insistence that he had perfected lockmaking coincided historically with a new understanding of progress that emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century and dominated the first half of the nineteenth—a notion of progress that served, as Tom Peters observes, as "the unquestioned driving force of the age." From the 1780s through the 1850s thinkers ceased to view progress, whether in politics or economics or technology, as a philosophical abstraction and a random product of fatalistic nature and "implacable forces." Instead, progress now suggested the realizable benefits of determined human action engaged in an "incessant struggle against internal and external obstacles and conservative forces" (26, 29).[44] For his part, Bramah exemplified this new way of thinking by claiming to have conquered the obstacle of entrenched criminal ingenuity and the forces of depredation and loss by building the perfect lock. In 1790 he backed his self-assurance by placing a four-inch challenge padlock—one built by Maudslay, as it happened—in the window of his Piccadilly showroom. Inscribed on it were the following terms: "The Artist who can make an Instrument that will pick open this Lock, shall receive 200 guineas the moment it is produced" (qtd. in McNeil 50). Whereas formerly the Society of Arts conducted such trials within the closed community of its members, Bramah opened the contest up to the public. Until Hobbs arrived from

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[44] Smiles argued along these lines in his discussion of tool-makers, where he contrasted human invention with nature and insisted, "every improvement of tools mark[s] a new step in the development of the human intellect, and a further stage in the progress of human civilization" (205).

America in 1851, no one claimed the reward, though a locksmith spent a week trying his hand at it in 1817. Because of the publicity generated by the challenge, Bramah's padlock captivated the public's imagination. *The Illustrated London News* described it as "the mysterious lock so long exhibited in the window of Mr. Bramah," and characterized it, despite its diminutive size, as an unassailable "monster" ("Locks and Lock-Picking" 142). More generally, references to the Precision lock in fiction throughout the nineteenth century evinced the popularity of Bramah's invention and its reputation for inviolability. In Sir Walter Scott's *St. Ronan's Well* (1823), for instance, Lord Etherington's dispatches, because he keeps them in a strongbox secured by a Bramah lock, "escaped all risk of being tampered with" (213).[45] Public perception of Bramah's lock as an unsolvable enigma elevated it to the status of a legendary cultural artifact.

IV

The next major development in English lockmaking occurred when Jeremiah Chubb patented his Detector lock in 1818, the same year that he founded his firm in Portsea, Hampshire.[46] The year before, burglars, using false keys, robbed a naval pay office at the Portsmouth dockyard. The Navy Board reacted by sponsoring a competition, offering a £100 award for an affordable, pickproof lock that would only work with its own unique key. Chubb, a ship's outfitter and ironmonger, submitted a working model of his design, which the government committee put to the test of several master locksmiths and mechanics. While the inventor reportedly challenged the

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[45] Other examples include works by Dickens and Trollope, discussed later in this study, and George Bernard Shaw's *An Unsocial Socialist* (1887).

[46] Between the introduction of Bramah's lock in 1784 and Chubb's in 1818, the government issued seventeen lock patents, including Bramah's renewed patent in 1798.

committee, "Do your best—or your worst!" the experts all failed to pick the lock or produce a working key. After the Navy Board awarded Chubb the premium, a convict aboard a prison ship docked at Portsmouth heard about the competition and requested permission to attempt the Detector lock. The man, a London locksmith-turned-thief who had gained notoriety in the capital for his reputed skill at picking nearly any kind of lock, claimed that he could open the Chubb lock with ease. He was given a chance to back his claim, offered a £100 reward by Chubb, and promised a pardon by Sir George Grey, head of the Navy Board, if he succeeded. The committee supplied him with all of the blank keys and tools he might need, including a second lock with which to examine the details of Chubb's design. After ten weeks of studying the lock and numerous failed attempts, the convict confessed that he was beaten. According to an account published a few years after the picking trial, the convict offered this testimonial to Chubb's invention: "at last he gave it up, saying, 'that he had used his utmost ability in his repeated attempts, and could not succeed: that these locks were the most secure he had ever met with, and that he did not think it possible for any man to pick or open them with any false instruments whatever.' " Grey and the Navy Board, convinced of the lock's inviolability, returned the convict to the hulks and Chubb kept his £100.[47]

The Detector lock got its name from a feature that, not unlike the lock Worcester proposed, allowed it to literally detect and foil an attempted entry by lock picks or false keys and then pass the information along to the legitimate key holder. It combined a much-modified version of Barron's double-action design, six regular levers in all, with an

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[47] Jeremiah Chubb is quoted in Hogg 78. The convict is quoted in "Chubb's Patent Detector Lock" 366. The other details of the picking trial are described in Chubb and Churcher 13-14 and Butter 50.

additional lever that Chubb called a "detector." The hook-shaped detector fixed the bolt in place in the event that any sort of manipulation raised one of the other six levers above a certain level. In his patent specification Chubb explained that if triggered, the detector would notify the owner of foul play: "In this state the lock is what I call detected, and the possessor of the true key has evidence that an attempt has been made to violate the lock, because the true key will not now open it" (qtd. in Chubb and Churcher 2). Once "detected," the lock remained disabled until all seven levers were reset with a special "regulating" key in the owner's possession. Because of its unique detecting feature, protection, and affordability, the Chubb Detector was soon competing with Bramah's Precision lock for the dominant market share of customers.[48] In 1865, Chubb and Son manufactured approximately 30,000 locks per year; by 1918, the firm had produced over two and a half million Detector locks since it was founded a century earlier.[49] The company moved to Wolverhampton in the summer of 1818, and Jeremiah's brother Charles, who ran a hardware store in Portsmouth, joined the firm soon after the first patent was obtained, opening a London showroom in St. Paul's Churchyard in 1820.[50]

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[48] Prices for Chubb locks ranged from 6s. to £3 each. Like the Bramah lock, the Chubb inspired cases of piracy and imitation. In 1845 Chubb filed and won a suit against a lockmaker for using its name on his locks, for which he was incarcerated in Warwick gaol (Chubb and Churcher 55). The company published a warning to the trademark violators in 1849, offering a £10 reward for information leading to the conviction of anyone stamping locks or keys with the Chubb name. Several Victorian locks employed some form of detector, but under the inventor's own name. One of the most notable was Charles Aubin's Balance-Detector lock, patented in1850 (Price 512).

[49] Tildesley 87 and Currer-Briggs 3.

[50] Charles Chubb introduced an improvement to the Detector lock, patented in 1824, which allowed the user to reset the detector with the usual operating key by turning it in reverse rather than using the special regulating key. Additional patents followed in 1833,

Chubb grew into the leading lock manufacturer in the Midlands hardware district, and by mid-century became one of the world's premier security-hardware firms, with a client list that extended across the social spectrum.[51]

The Chubbs, like Bramah, built their lock's reputation through aggressive promotion and the spectacle of public picking challenges. During the 1830s advertisements claimed, "Chubb's New Patent Detector Locks give perfect security from false keys" ("Chubb's New Patent," *Times* 16 Oct. 1839: 8C).[52] Its reputation was well-earned when, in 1832, the Chubb lock was subjected to another series of picking trials and, as it had in 1818, proved its inviolability. Thomas Hart, a well-known locksmith from Wolverhampton, spread the word that he could easily open the Detector lock, and in fact claimed that he had already done so on several occasions. In response, Charles

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1846, and 1847, with two more coming after 1851. The company introduced a line of burglar-proof safes in 1835 (Chubb and Churcher 7).

[51] In 1823 the company was awarded its first Special License by George IV, and in 1847 received from Queen Victoria the first of its many Royal Warrants. In addition to homeowners and shopkeepers, Chubb's early clientele included Prince Albert, the Duke of Wellington, the Bank of England, and Westminster Bridewell (Currer-Briggs 4). The warden of Westminster Bridewell submitted a testimonial to the Institution of Civil Engineers praising the Detector lock as "admirably adapted for every use in prisons, and wherever security is deemed an important consideration." The prison installed 1,100 Chubb locks on a single master-key system. Each lock operated with its own key; sub-master keys, which fit groups of locks; and a master key in possession of the warden ("Excerpt Minutes" 19).

[52] Most lockmakers advertised their wares with claims that rivaled those made by Bramah and Chubb. For instance: "Leadbeater's PATENT DOUBLE-ACTION COMBINATION LATCHES afford perfect security" ("Security for Street Doors," *Times* 1 March 1849: 12A). Inventor J. Lawton offered a £100 reward to anyone who could pick his "newly invented PATENT LOCK, which stands unrivalled for security against picks or false keys." The lockmaker went further: "One great advantage peculiar to itself is, that if all the keys that were ever made could be collected, not one out of the immense number would be found effectual in opening it" ("One Hundred Guineas," *Times* 14 Sept. 1822: 4A).

Chubb published a challenge in the local and national press, along with the promise of a £10 reward, for Hart or any other member of the trade to pick the lock in a public contest. All of those who accepted Chubb's offer, including Hart, failed, while a large crowd that included residents of Wolverhampton, fellow locksmiths, city officials, and members of the local gentry looked on. Based on the findings of a pair of independent arbitrators who oversaw the picking trials, *The Wolverhampton Chronicle* pronounced its verdict, declaring the lock perfectly secure by any practical measure: "The question of the security of Chubb's Patent Detector Lock, if indeed, any doubt upon the subject previously existed, must now be considered as settled to the satisfaction of every reasonable mind…. It is sufficient for the patentee to show that his lock is impervious under the ordinary circumstances to which locks are exposed…and promises such vast advantages to the persons and property of the public" (qtd. in Currer-Briggs 5). The picking challenge was a public-relations bonanza for Chubb. According to a contemporary account, he drew up a detailed statement of the contest and its outcome, which he had placarded on coaches and sent out to ironmongers and manufacturers throughout England (*Old Wolverhampton* L9). Also like Bramah, Chubb did not shy away from inciting public anxiety and then substituting the Detector lock for older technology, as this letter to the editor of *The Times* demonstrated:

> The frequent occurrence lately of large robberies in banks induces us to call the attention of bankers and merchants to the very insecure manner in which their property is sometimes kept. Most of the robberies recently committed have occurred, not so much from the superior ingenuities of the burglars, as from the very unsafe locks and iron safes in which the immense property has been deposited. To prove this, we beg to state, that we have in our possession a few skeleton keys, taken from some burglars, and presented to us by Colonel Rowan, which would open three-fourths of the iron safes and strong-rooms in London. Colonel Rowan has also kindly given to us an instrument taken by the police, called the "Jack-in-the-Box," which will force off almost any lock from an iron-

> door in 10 minutes with very little noise. We shall be glad to show this instrument—with our Improved Detector Locks and Patent Safes for preventing its application—to any banker or gentleman. (Charles Chubb, Letter, *Times* 26 Nov. 1844: 7E)[53]

As a result of Chubb's advertising blitz, the Detector lock made its way into a wider popular culture, showing up in handbills, verses of popular poetry, Victorian humor, and novels where it achieved national renown, rendering the name Chubb synonymous with perfect security.[54] It even made its way into England's pulpits. During a sermon delivered at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens in 1859, Charles Spurgeon invoked Chubb to analogize the inviolability of divine election in Calvinist theology. Spurgeon

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[53] Charles Rowan was commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Force. A Jack-in-the-Box was a small, easily portable but powerful mechanism comprised of a T-shaped iron bar that was inserted into a keyhole to act as a fulcrum, a screw-driven jack that slid onto the bar and attached to the door, and a detachable lever for working a threaded iron rod that would force the lock from the door or break the case and allow access to the bolt. Even small versions of this instrument could lift a weight of three tons. Chubb devised a break-away false plate for its locks that rendered the Jack-in-the-Box useless (Holland 84). Charles Chubb and his son, John, frequently wrote letters to the editor of *The Times*, and these were often thinly veiled efforts at promoting their products. Charles, for instance, used this method in 1849 to inform the public that the burglars of a solicitor's office in Peterborough opened several locks but broke their picks on a Chubb strongbox, which also resisted attempts to pry off the lid (Letter, *Times* 22 Jan. 1849: 9A).

[54] To cite a few examples: the conjuring tricks of a Birmingham illusionist who called himself "The Wizard of the North," included a feat advertised as "Chubb Defied! Or, the Twenty Four Electro-Magnetic Balls." The speaker in a poem entitled "Spring—A New Version," published in the mid 1840s, complained that, unlike "Iron-chested Chubb," he could not protect his lungs from the cold, damp English weather (Currer-Briggs 6). *Punch* advised anglers in 1843, "the best spot to find Chubb is near his own Detector Locks in St. Paul's Churchyard, which must be taken as they come, no picking being allowed"; in 1852 it concluded a satire of popular hair-restorers with the comment: "As to ourselves, we patronize none of these things; but if we resort to any expedient for preserving the few remaining patches of stubble on our poor old head, we shall try the effect of mixing with our own thin remnants of hair a few of Chubb's Patent Safety Locks" (Chubb and Churcher 88, 91). The serial issues of Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), and *Bleak House* (1852-1853) contained advertisements for the Detector Lock (Altick 228-29).

told his congregation: “I never knew a man yet, who had a reason to believe that he himself was chosen of God, who hated the doctrine of election. Men hate election just as thieves hate Chubb’s patent locks; because they cannot get at the treasure themselves, they therefore hate the guard which protects it” (134).

The Detector lock’s availability as a Victorian catchphrase for invincibility calls attention to the importance of cultural transmission of a technology and the values that it encodes. This process of transmission was nowhere more evident than in an untitled sonnet published in *Tait’s Magazine* (1841), which enacted the assurances of perfect security through a burglar’s paradoxical endorsement of Chubb’s invention and at the same time illustrated to property owners the signifying power of patent-lock technology:

> I met a cracksman coming down the Strand
> Who said, ‘A huge cathedral, piled of stone,
> Stands in the churchyard, near St. Martin’s le Grand,
> Where keeps St. Paul his sacerdotal throne.
> A street runs by it on the northward. There,
> For cab and ’bus, is writ “No Thoroughfare”:
> The mayor and the councilmen do so command;
> And in that street a shop, with many a box,
> Upon whose sign these fateful words I scanned:—
> “My name is Chubb, that makes the Patent Locks;
> Look on my works, ye burglars, and despair.” ’
> Here made he pause, like one who sees a blight
> Crush all his hopes, and sighed, with drooping air,
> ‘Our game is up, my covey, blow me tight!’ (qtd. in Chubb and Churcher 93-94).

Three specific historical conditions frame the poem. First, the urban unrest of the 1830s and 1840s, which middle- and upper-class observers saw as an antecedent of lower-class insurgency, generated fears that the police, a force conspicuously absent in the poem, could not effectively deal with the impending threat of crime and social instability (Bailey 12). Second, London was subject to a massive cartographic project in the first half of the nineteenth century through which officials sought to establish and enforce

clearly defined social, political, and economic boundaries in an effort to map social order onto the rapidly expanding metropolis.[55] And third, these borders were threatened by burglars who fell into one of two categories described by investigative journalist Montagu Williams later in the century as "those who dabble in the crime, breaking into houses when their funds are low; and those who make it the serious business of their lives" (93). The burglar in the sonnet is the latter sort. A "cracksman," a professional thief and safebreaker, held first rank among the criminal classes.[56] According to John Binny's account of burglars and housebreakers working in mid-century London, the number of "expert cracksmen" was vast; and many of them worked in trades as "carpenters and smiths, brass-finishers, shoemakers, mechanics, and even tailors" before turning to crime, and were professionally taught and well equipped for their illicit occupation. Binny wrote: "In a short time they learn to use their tools with great expertness; great numbers have been trained by a few leading burglars…. Tools are secretly made for them in London, Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, and other places. Some burglars keep a set of fine tools of considerable value" (369). Indeed in 1839, two years before the poem appeared in *Tait's*, the Royal Commission of the Constabulary Force issued a report warning that thieves were purchasing tools from the same craftsmen of the Midlands and the North who supplied locksmiths (Thomas 2-3). Those who did not read official reports to learn of the problem could read Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), in which the drunken Bill Sikes flourishes his "crowbar in an

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[55] See Connor 212-213 and Gagnier 400-01.

[56] The best cracksmen, according to Chesney, led more or less luxurious lives in respectable neighborhoods, kept servants, invested the profits from their trade in legitimate ventures, and in some cases started lawful businesses with their profits (169).

alarming manner," and then "in a fit of professional enthusiasm" insists "upon producing his box of housebreaking tools; which he had…stumbled in with, and opened for the purpose of explaining the nature and properties of the various instruments it contained, and the peculiar beauties of their construction" (193). Dickens's expert housebreaker represented the reality of a sophisticated criminal elite for whom nineteenth-century London was the world capital and training ground. According to an article published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1863, criminals perfected the "science" of robbery in England's capital, where one could also find the best security:

> robbery, pure and simple, has been brought to the perfection of a system with well-established rules, cunning implements, and able professors. The ablest professors of the science are doubtless to be found in England…. To study this science thoroughly…one must go to London, just as the young surgeon should study in the hospitals of Paris, or the young artist in the galleries of Rome…. London is therefore the school of the robber; and the person who wishes to guard against his performance needs to look to London for the means. (Guernsey 738)

In the context of these conditions, the poem reinforces Bramah's insistence on the protective, preventive, and socially stabilizing benefits of patent-lock technology. It does this by rewriting "Ozymandias" (1818), which describes the remnants of a monument to Ramses II, substituting strategic elements from Shelley's poem. London's carefully charted urban landscape, emblematic of civilization, progress, and modern order, replaces Egypt's "boundless and bare" desert. The poem's speaker encounters the cracksman in the Strand, one of the metropolis's major arteries, from which point the thief has literal access to London from one end to the other and symbolic access to the city's and the nation's financial, commercial, and political institutions.[57] The cracksman replaces

Shelley's "traveler from an antique land" (1), signaling his status as an outsider as well as his association with an archaic past, despite the fact that a cracksman could typically defeat (in most cases quickly and easily) a wide variety of locks and safes. And finally, Chubb, which became the Prince Consort's personal lockmaker in the same year as the poem's publication, supplants Ozymandias, the "King of Kings" (10), assuming the position of ultimate authority.[58] Of the three substitutions, spatial boundaries provide a frame of reference for understanding the significance of the cracksman's comment on Chubb particularly and patent-lock technology generally. The cracksman's speech is organized as a series of spatial encounters, juxtaposing three distinctive sites, each mandated by different types of disciplinary power. First, the sacred space of St. Paul's, a massive, fortress-like presence established by divine and ecclesiastical authority, concentrates its power in the "sacerdotal throne." Second, the public space of the city street, implicitly sanctioned by society and explicitly regulated by public officials, proclaims its power by means of a legal "command," symbolically denying right of access with the words "No Thoroughfare." And third, Chubb's London showroom embodies the absolute protection of modern security technology—a power manifested in the phrase "Patent Locks." The poem employs a specific spatial trajectory to redefine the enforcement of security and thus indicates the signal importance and signifying power of

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[57] Literally, the Strand was "one of the few direct routes linking the east and west of the city." Symbolically, it connected "the financial centers in the City of London with the commercial West End and with the government at Whitehall" (Nead 161).

[58] Chubb's authority had in fact been demonstrated by a case reported in *The Times* in 1839. A well-dressed thief brought a Chubb strongbox into the company's showroom in St. Paul's, after his own unsuccessful attempts on the box, and requested that they open it for him on the pretext that he had lost his key. The employee on duty refused to help without proof of ownership and later proved instrumental as a witness in the man's conviction ("Police").

the Victorian patent lock. As the cracksman moves through the first two sites, he disregards at least three tacit forms of prohibition against theft—religion, social custom, law—rendering the borders represented and regulated by these prohibitions permeable, and therefore annulling any claim to security. In contrast, the sight of the safes and strongboxes in Chubb's showroom, along with the "fateful words" of warning inscribed above the door, erect a boundary that stops the criminal in his tracks, momentarily reducing him to silence for the only time during his speech before he concedes defeat. The sequence suggests that the combined forces of morality, society, and law ultimately fail where the patent lock succeeds in thwarting the burglar's objective and in thus providing the only dependable means of securing borders against invasion and protecting property against theft.

The power of exclusion suggested here was paramount in legal and philosophical representations of property. Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769) defined property in terms of a "despotic dominion that one man claims and exercises over the external things in the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe" (qtd. in Bethell 19). The status of ownership ultimately rests of course on a legal foundation; but physical possession fundamentally depends on the power to prevent transgression of boundaries, to stop others from acquiring and consuming the things over which they have no legal or moral or social claim.[59] Exclusion of this kind lay at the conceptual foundation of a central Victorian social and cultural value: the sacredness of property. The sacred is, in fact, a concept etymologically related to security, suggesting inviolability or protection against invasion

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[59] See Pipes 104; Green and Farber 3; and Jones and Newburn 41.

by external forces. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines one of the senses of sacred in implicitly spatial terms, linking it to the act of forbidding intrusion: "Secured by religious sentiment, reverence, sense of justice, or the like, against violation, infringement, or encroachment."[60] According to the logic of political economy, the power of secure borders suggested by this definition was a basic premise of property's sacredness. Utilitarian economist David Ricardo identified "that principle which should ever be held sacred" as "the security of property" (57). And J. S. Mill similarly observed that where "property in moveables, and…all things the product of labour" were concerned, "over these, the owner's power both of use and exclusion should be absolute, except where positive evil to others would result from it" (*Principles* 42). After all, the moral, social, and legal rights of prohibition mean little or nothing, in practical terms, without a corresponding physical means of restricting access and thus ensuring protection.[61] The patent lock embodies this power, providing a perfectly secure barrier, as the cracksman, completing his transition from cathedral to public street to the Chubb showroom, certifies by his expert testimony. Unlike the ironic claim of Ozymandias's inscription, "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (11), discovered half buried in an otherwise desolate waste land, Chubb's warning to burglars would not have been regarded as hyperbole by *Tait's* Victorian readers, and neither would those readers have found the cracksman's

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[60] "Evil," by contrast, is etymologically rooted "in the idea of overstepping proper limits or transgressing [boundaries]" (Sack 203). On a related note, "A root meaning of the word 'bad' is 'open' " (Tuan 54).

[61] Thomas Hobbes argued along these lines nearly a century before security became a recurring theme in social and political philosophy. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes pointed out that despite the sanctions of law, the presence of public authorities, and the weight of social opinion, natural aggression, our tendency "to invade, and destroy one another," compels us to secure self and property under lock and key (Magnet 148).

admission of defeat unrealistic. As of 1841, no one had successfully picked a Detector lock; and no one would, despite numerous public attempts, until the Great Lock Controversy of 1851.

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The poem in *Tait's* enacts a spatial version of self-help unavailable to most people before the invention of patent locks. The era of modern security meant that no longer were the rights to protect oneself and one's property regarded as moral precepts recognized by law, respected by social custom, yet defended by a demonstrably deficient, medieval technology when these metaphysical boundaries failed to hold. The emergence of patent locks reinvented the technology of security, redefined it as perfect, and empowered the property owner in the process. A new approach to lockmaking based on new philosophies of lock-design created new discourses and practices of loss prevention—and, in doing so, produced what amounted to a new conception of security, of individual control over the personal spaces in one's daily life. The fact that England was home to a thriving patent-security industry by the mid-Victorian era demonstrated the public's enthusiastic implementation of this control. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1851, the government issued some seventy patents for locks. By 1865 that number had exceeded 120; and within the next fifty-five years it climbed to over 3000.[62] Labor and production figures further illustrated the industry's growth. In

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[62] Monk 35 and Tildesley 82. The yearly average on patents granted for locks ranged as follows: 4 annually from 1774-1860; 13 from 1861-1880; 52 from 1881-1900; and 63 from 1901-1920 (Butter 116). Many of the locks granted patents, while ingenious designs, never made it into production. Price complained that "nine-tenths" of the locks patented by 1856 were invented by men who had no connections with lockmaking and apparently did not understand that a lock's "simplicity of construction" ensured that it

1770 there were some 290 locksmiths established in the Midlands hardware district, most of them in Wolverhampton and Willenhall. As of 1865, approximately 450 lockmakers located in the region employed 4950 workers and produced roughly 18.6 million locks annually.[63] That same year, an essay entitled "A Few Thoughts on Keys" in the *Cornhill Magazine* noted that the English had a key for nearly every occasion, which explained "the generic tendency of all keys to spontaneous reproduction," their seeming ability to "sprout like asparagus in damp weather" and multiply "like button-mushrooms in a hot-bed" (627). Moreover, lockmakers patented and produced their goods at a historically unprecedented rate in an era when social and cultural commentators equated increased security with the advancement of civilization—particularly English civilization. Mill insisted, for example, that the one condition "which has always hitherto characterized,

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worked properly over a long period of time, as the designs were so complex as to be useless. "The diagrams annexed to some of the specifications," he noted, "are more like the drawings of a steam-engine than the illustrations of the simple piece of mechanism a lock should be" (585). The increase in patents at mid-century was due in part to the Patent Law Amendment Bill of 1852, which made patent applications more affordable, relaxed some of the previous restrictions, and generally simplified the old system of bureaucratic complexity (Pettitt 131).

[63] Lock production in the district was distributed as follows: "Pad, 24,000 dozen; cabinet, till, and chest, 3,000 dozen; rim, dead, mortice [*sic*], and drawback, 3,000 dozen; fine plate, 1,000 dozen; and secured levered locks and other descriptions, 500 dozen; being an aggregate production of 31,500 dozens of locks per week." This figure excludes shops and factories in London, for which statistics are not available. Not all of the locks produced in England were used at home. Although there are no accurate official trade records, English manufacturers began exporting locks early in the nineteenth century; and until the 1830s over half of the locks produced in the Midlands were shipped to the United States (Tildesley 88-89). By mid-century, Australia, New Zealand, India, China, Continental Europe, South America, and the Cape were major importers as well. For example, the Albion Works at Willenhall manufactured bolts, bars, and handles, along with locks, for colonial plantations in South America, India, and the Middle East. While giving a visiting lockmaker a tour of the factory in 1855, the proprietors showed him a single wholesale export order for 40,000 locks (Price 862). Ten years later, padlock makers in Walsall employed 700 "hands" producing 60,000 padlocks per week to meet the demand for colonists in India and the Levant (Franklin 127, 131).

and will assuredly continue to characterize, the progress of civilized society, is a continual increase of the security of person and property" (*Principles* 105). And in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold attributed the distinctive nature of English culture and its preservation to "a profound sense of settled order and security" (235). But some observers saw the general proliferation of security as an indication of an exaggerated siege mentality. German journalist Max Schlesinger, for instance, made particular note of the English obsession with household defense when he visited London in the early 1850s. "Every Englishman is a bit of a Vauban," he wrote, who "barricade[s] his house" and exhibits a "mania for fortification." According to Schlesinger's description, front doors, many of which had "sharp spikes protruding" as if "prepared to hook the hand of a bold invader," were located behind a layer of external barriers that suggested readiness for an impending invasion: "Every English house has its fence, its iron stockade and its doorway bridge. To observe the additional fortifications which every Englishman invents for the greater security of his house is quite amusing. It is exactly as if Louis Napoleon was expected to effect a landing daily between luncheon and dinner, while every individual Englishman is prepared to defend his household gods to the last drop of porter*"* (3-4).[64] Even though gates, fences, garden walls—easily traversable barriers for the most part—and ornamental door hardware function more as

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[64] Marquis Sebastian Le Prestre de Vauban was a seventeenth-century French military engineer known for his fortifications and siege strategies. Despite Schlesinger's humor, he did not exaggerate contemporary anxieties about threats posed by the "criminal classes." *The Times*, for instance, echoing Mayhew and others in the nascent field of urban sociology, asserted in 1870 that those whom legislators classified as "habitual criminals," "are more alien from the rest of the community than a hostile army, for they have no idea of joining the ranks of industrious labour either here or elsewhere. The civilized world is simply the carcass on which they prey, and London above all, is to them a place to sack" (qtd. in Emsley 73).

"cultural symbols of ownership" than practical deterrents against intrusion (Chapman 135), the ubiquity of such symbols further demonstrates security's central importance in nineteenth-century life.

One of the primary defensive barriers for Victorians was the wall, an inert, relatively non-penetrable boundary. In their discussion of nineteenth-century privacy, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson note that the wall enacts a kind of "social force," marking the territorial divide between home and street, transforming "free space into a series of domestic parcels," and conveying "a complex array of social meanings—legal, economic, symbolic" (143).[65] The door, on the other hand, encodes an even greater semiotic complexity. As the more ambiguous architectural element of the home's perimeter, the door fuses the possibilities of isolation and freedom, at once linking and distinguishing entrance and exit, home and street, self and external world (Simmel 172-74). The middle-class threshold, represented by the front door—"a mysterious portal of the Temple of State" (86), as Pip puts it in *Great Expectations* (1860-61)—was a powerful marker of the separate spheres. It established the dividing line between public and private space, lending stability to dichotomies that helped define the physical and conceptual parameters of everyday life and self-awareness—inside and outside, open and closed, individual and society, private and public, civilized and natural (or savage).[66]

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[65] There were exceptions to the protection offered by walls. Victorian burglars were known to cut holes into walls as a means of entry, a method portrayed by Elizabeth Gaskell in *Cranford* (140).

[66] For discussions of spatial dichotomy and nineteenth-century middle-class identity, see Davidoff and Hall xxiv-xxvii; Gay 274-79; and Hepworth 17-29. For commentary on the ways in which the physical environment and security shape the ways we perceive, define, and represent ourselves, see: Tuan 65, 159; Sack 17-25, 132; and Chapman 133-37.

And the threshold was the front line in the middle class's battle with what Charles Dickens, Jr., like so many other Victorian social observers, termed lower-class predators. The eldest son of the novelist cautioned readers of his *Dictionary of London* (1890-1891) to vigilance, warning of the dangerous characters lurking on the other side of the threshold: "Too much caution cannot be exercised in regard to the admission of strangers, especially during the absence from home of the master of the house. Every kind of thief is on the watch for a favourable moment to gain admission, and after having induced the servant to leave unprotected the hall or room, into which he contrives to be shown, to lay hands upon all the available portable property" (123).[67] To keep out strangers and other undesirables, the typical middle-class Victorian dwelling was equipped with a heavy front door that, in addition to the occasional spikes, included reinforced lower panels to prevent against attacks by kicking.[68] But the panels, because they were thinner than the

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[67] Dickens continues in this passage:

> A more dangerous class of intruder still is he who comes provided with the card of a friend or acquaintance of the family, and offers for sale lace or other light goods. This is sure to be a fraud of a most dangerous kind. The card which procures the introduction to the house has been stolen, and the object of the visit is invariably plunder. Equally annoying though perhaps not so ultimately dangerous, is the sham railway-porter or messenger. This variety of the predatory race is in the habit of watching the master or mistress clear from the house, and then calls with a bogus parcel, for the carriage of which, and sometimes for the parcel itself, he demands such sums of money as he thinks most likely to be paid without question. In no case should a parcel be taken in under these circumstances. Another well-known parcel dodge is to watch the delivery some draper's cart of a parcel, and ten minutes afterwards to call and redemand it, on the plea of some mistake having occurred in the delivery. (123)

False messages were common tactics for the thief. In 1858, for example, they accounted for more than 670 larcenies in London (Ritchie 13).

door itself, presented vulnerabilities. If thieves broke or pried open doors, they ran the risk of alerting occupants and anyone near the house, so many developed the "silent system" of housebreaking, inventing a tool called the "panel cutter" that allowed them to exploit this weakness.[69] Using this device, burglars cut circular holes in panels within minutes, through which they could either reach an arm to slide the bolts and unlock the door to gain access or admit a smaller accomplice, known as a "snakesman," who could enter through the opening and unlock the door. Once inside, they covered the hole with a sheet of paper or small piece of wood painted to match the door's color; this served as a false panel in case a passing policeman happened to glance at the door or perhaps checked to see that the lock was secure.[70] To protect against such attacks, Cruikshank recommended extreme measures, maintaining that it was "essential…the whole door should be lined with iron," as should shutters (6, 7).[71] Henry Holland, likewise, advised that the "best safeguard is to have the door lined with sheet-iron, or plaided with metal strips, or studded with nails irregularly disposed" (88).

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[68] Builders gradually replaced the six-paneled doors that were prominent early in the century with four-paneled doors after the introduction of letter slots in 1840 (Wedd 119-20).

[69] The tool fastened to the door by means of a pointed rod that penetrated the wooden panel on one end and had a double-handled lever affixed to the other, attached to which was an adjustable arm and cutting tool. See Cruikshank 4-5; Holland 87-88; and Guernsey 743-44.

[70] According to the *General Regulations, Instructions and Orders, for the Government and Guidance of the Metropolitan Police Force* (1862), constables were responsible for seeing "to the proper fastening of the doors and windows of the houses along his beat, with a view to the better security of the inmates" (qtd. in "Police and Policing" 109). For a discussion of "snakesmen," see Chesney 161.

[71] Thieves tended to avoid shutters because breaking in through them took more time than cutting through door panels (Chesney 171).

But the door, though a distinct emblem of one's territorial claim, did not guarantee an effective barrier against the external world, no matter how solidly constructed or heavily armored. One architectural historian notes that Victorian writers on the built environment saw doors, along with windows, as "necessary evils," passageways through the walls of the domestic sanctuary (qtd. in Marcus 94). The lock ultimately served as the critical last line of defense against the outer world, ensuring that an Englishman's home remained his castle. In response to thieves' seemingly inexhaustible ingenuity, Charles Dickens, Jr., urged homeowners to exercise "Great care…in the matter of fastenings to doors and windows" (123). And such vigilance extended far beyond exterior openings. With their secured cellars, cabinets, closets, cupboards, pantries, caddies, cases, chests, trunks, desks, luggage, strongboxes, and innumerable other enclosures, middle-class Victorians kept nearly every available space and object under lock and key.[72] Indeed locks were such a conspicuous technology and important commodity in everyday life that the *Cornhill* satirized the pervasiveness of mid-century England's locked spaces as well as the national obsession with security. In "A Few Thoughts on Keys," the writer made light of the angst of losing one's most valuable possession, his or her keys: "It must be a flinty heart that can read without a sympathetic throb one of those plaintive advertisements, often seen in the second column of *The Times* supplementary sheet, which offer lavish sums of comparatively valueless gold for the restoration of 'A bunch of keys, on a steel ring.' Those simple words touch a key-

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[72] To give a better sense of how far this system of security extended in daily life, Victorians even secured the tops of wine and liquor bottles. Burns's Patented Bottle Lock, distributed by Thomas Turner and Company of Wolverhampton, was patented in 1881 (Evans "Thomas Turner").

note which finds an echo in every bosom, not utterly destitute of feeling—and cupboards" ("A Few Thoughts" 623).[73] That people advertised for lost keys testified in part to the fact that locksmiths could not readily make patent keys without using the original as a template, as the locksmith claimed in his letter to *The Times* in the wake of the lock controversy.[74] The frequency of advertisements like these also indicated the Victorians' widespread use of patent locks, which were common items in most middle-class homes by mid-century, as accumulation made perfect security a basic requirement. A survey of classified sections in *The Times*, in fact, illustrates that by the early nineteenth century advertisers used the patent lock, typically a Bramah or Chubb, to appeal to buyers for everything from wardrobes, bookcases, and writing desks to carriages, office space, and houses.

Beyond the practical demands of protecting property, though, vigilant attention to security was necessary for the home to retain its meaning, to remain what geographer Robert David Sack calls a "locus of control," enabling occupants to regulate entry into and activity within the domestic sphere (13). Victorians understood such control as the home's defining characteristic. Nineteenth-century writers on architecture and urban

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[73] To cite a couple of examples, the following advertisements appeared in *The Times* in 1835 and 1854, repectively: "Keys Lost, on Friday, January 30, supposed between Westminster and the city—3 Bramah's, 3 Chubb's, and 1 or 2 small keys, on a ring"; "Lost, Two Keys (Chubb's patent), on Tuesday morning, between Baker-street and the Post-office." In both instances the owners offered ten shillings rewards for the return of their keys ("Keys Lost," *Times* 11 Feb. 1835: 3A; "Lost, Two Keys," *Times* 30 March 1854: 4A).

[74] The relative impossibility of making keys for patent locks after the original had been lost led to popular misconceptions. Among the various "Vulgar Errors in Law" cited by one writer to *Notes and Queries* in 1860, who added a further twist to the difficulty, was "That a locksmith is guilty of felony if he make a key from a pattern, unless he also has the lock." The editor dismissed the claim as false (191).

reform "defined the house as an impenetrable, self-contained structure" and "encouraged the middle classes to define privacy as 'control' by individuals over what or who entered their personal space" (Marcus 94, 237 n.24). Failure to ensure closure undermines one's power to control access, collapsing the physical and conceptual distinctions between private and public space. No Victorian writer made this point more forcefully than John Ruskin, who identified the fundamental qualities of home, the nineteenth century's quintessentially private space, in terms that repeatedly underscore an idealized inviolability. In *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) Ruskin asserted the necessity of fortifying the domestic paradise, explaining that "the trouble and ceaseless warfare of the times [have] rendered security one of the first elements of pleasantness" (591). And in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Ruskin more emphatically described the home as an impenetrable sanctuary, secure against invasion by the external world. "This is the true nature of home," he wrote, in one of his most famous passages:

> it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home: so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love . . . it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of home. (87)

We previously noted that the sacred implies spatial inviolability.[75] Ruskin's description of the home similarly stressed the sacred as a category that rested on an absolute power of

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[75] This meaning was not lost on Schlesinger, who juxtaposed the private sanctuary with public disorder. Upon crossing the threshold of a London home, he remarked: "Sacred silence surrounds us—the silence of peace, of domestic comfort, doubly agreeable after a few hours' walk with the giddy turmoil of street life" (6). Pierre Bourdieu remarks that

exclusion (regulated by an explicitly spatial marker, "the threshold"), establishing the conceptual stability, even the possibility of domesticity, within the boundaries of controlled, secured space.

Thomas Archer's *The Terrible Sights of London* (1870) represented the lower-middle-class domestic ideal in terms that reiterated Ruskin's point. Archer reminded readers that those lower on the economic ladder wanted, above all, a kind of security similar to that enjoyed by the bourgeoisie:

> let it be remembered that even these people have their ideals, and that their secret innermost cherished notion of 'home' is represented neither by the 'model dwelling,' nor by the 'two-pair;' it takes the form of a little place with four rooms and a kitchen, a strip of garden somewhere at the back, with perhaps an arbour covered with Virginia creeper, with space to smoke a pipe, and contemplate the 'missis' doing her bit of ironing in the back washhouse. It involves the old maxim, that an Englishman's house is his castle; that if a man chooses to shut his street-door, he is monarch of all he surveys within the four walls; and that if he likes to go out and put the key of that street-door in his pocket, he can do so without fear or favour, except in relation to outside depredators, who run the risk of paying a heavy penalty for housebreaking. (446)

Like the writer in *Blackwood's* who connected the modern high-security lock with the medieval portcullis, Archer drew a direct connection between the Englishman's claim to the proverbial castle and his possession of a key, formulating domestic respectability within a framework of physical security. The same principle applied to lodgers. Although less than a tenth of London's more than one thousand lodging houses at mid-century offered lodgers any kind of privacy or security, according to Henry Mayhew (112), the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes, chartered in 1845, accommodated the desire of members of the lower classes to protect themselves and what property they owned. The Old St. Pancras Road lodging

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the threshold is "a sort of sacred boundary between two spaces," marking the confrontation of "antagonistic forces" representing the internal and external worlds (130).

house erected in 1848, for example, provided tenants with "234 small meat safes, all under lock and key," and each lodger was also supplied with a secured linen locker as well as a "small larder under his own lock and key." Moreover, apartment doors in the lodging house were "secured by spring hatches of which each inmate has his own key, and no key will open the lock of any other in the same wing" (*Pictorial Handbook of London* [1854]). Such models became the theoretical norm for the arbiters of domesticity seeking to extend the principles of security beyond middle-class dwellings. *Cassell's Household Guide*, for instance, recommended that lodgers secure moveable property in a matrix of locked spaces. Not only "must [lodgers] have free ingress and egress, and…possess a latch-key or other facilities for those purposes," they "should have keys also to their rooms, cupboards, boxes, drawers, &c., and should use them, and not leave them about as a temptation" (1: 213).

The proliferation of locked spaces in working-class households and lodgings reproduced on a smaller scale the middle-class model that made interior privacy and security a requirement that rivaled the importance of exterior fortification. As the nineteenth-century family withdrew into a cloistered environment, a carefully regulated privacy became one of the defining features of middle-class life. This trend led to marked architectural changes beginning in the 1820s; and household space, subdivided and secured along class lines and according to the needs of individual family members, was increasingly oriented toward exclusion as the century progressed.[76] Privacy, as

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[76] In her study of the Victorian drawing room, Thad Logan observes that the most important feature of the Victorian domestic interior was "[d]ifferentiation of space, not the size of individual spaces, or ease of access" (27; see also 16-17). For further discussions of the spatial organization and privatization of nineteenth-century middle-

Robert Kerr, one of the nineteenth century's most influential architects, wrote in *The Gentleman's House* (1864), was the "first principle with the better classes of English people," leading a list requirements that designers and builders had to meet in order for a dwelling to pass "the test of A GENLEMAN'S HOUSE."[77] On one hand, the complex network of walls, rooms, lockable doors, and other enclosures offered the family concealment from the burgeoning class of servants. As Kerr maintained: "The family constitute one community: the servants another. Whatever may be their mutual regard and confidence as dwellers under the same roof, each class is entitled to shut its door upon the other and be alone" (68). Beyond the mutually voluntary segregation of communities, of course, the network of enclosed spaces was designed to protect family property and personal information from the hired help.[78] On the other hand, this network provided family members with areas of retreat from one another. When Hippolyte Taine visited England in 1858 and again in 1871, he saw firsthand the application of this territorial principle, noting that the demand for privacy was a primary middle-class characteristic. "Nothing is rarer…in England," Taine observed, than the kind of domestic

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class dwellings, see: Burnett 110; Daunton 211; Davidoff and Hall xxvi; and Chase and Levenson 143-155. For broader discussions of the links between spatial practices, the built environment, and culture, see Gregory, Martin, and Smith, especially the essays by Shields and McDowell.

[77] The other requirements in order of importance, according to Kerr, were "Comfort," "Convenience," "Spaciousness," "Compactness," "Light and air," "Salubrity," "Aspect and prospect," "Cheerfulness," "Elegance," "Importance," and "Ornament" (67).

[78] For a discussion of dishonest servants and of the ways in which burglars used servants as conspirators, unwitting accomplices, and as sources of inside information, see Chesney 163-68. Evidence suggests that domestics posed a risk of theft. Statistics for 1858 in London, for example, record that "1595 larcenies were committed by lodgers, 1701 by servants" (Ritchie 13).

"sociability" that enabled "two or three families [to reside] together under the same roof and [dine] at the same table," as was customary in France:

> Characters clash; each family requires to possess its independence as well as its abode. We coalesce, we hold everything in common; as for them, even when living together, they maintain distinctions, they draw lines of demarcation. Self is more powerful; each of them preserves a portion of his individuality, his own special and personal nook, a kind of forbidden field, enclosed…to enter it would be an intrusion; no one gains admission, save perhaps the beloved person, the husband, the wife, to whom all one's life is pledged. (170)

As Taine's comment indicates, dwelling practices situated the English sense of an autonomous self within a secure, personal space beyond the gaze of the public, servants, and even other members of the family. In fact, the main trope of nineteenth-century bourgeois individuality, according to Peter Gay, was a locked drawer for securing letters, diaries, and other personal items (xxviii, 253-54). Trollope makes especially effective use of this trope in his Barchester novels, where we see as well the significance of the patent lock. Archdeacon Grantly, in *The Warden* (1855), secures the attorney-general's legal opinion in his secret drawer "with all the skill of Bramah or of Chubb." When he shows the patent key to John Chadwick, the Bishop's solicitor who is anxious that no one see the document, including the Archdeacon's wife, "the careful steward…expressed himself contented" (71). Although the narrator goes on to suggest that, notwithstanding the patent lock, Mrs. Grantly probably has access to her husband's drawer—she is, after all, the keeper of the household keys, as we discuss below—the novel employs an emblem of privacy that would have resonated with its middle-class readers. The locked drawer, in which Grantly also keeps the volume of Rabelais that serves as his private reading, represents his identity beneath the clerical cloth. This is where the novel reveals the self apart from the professional persona, the public image. In *Framley Parsonage*

(1860), a locked drawer conceals the evidence of Mark Robarts's sense of guilt for signing a second promissory note for Nathaniel Sowerby. After sending the bill to a moneylender, Robarts puts "away Sowerby's letter carefully, locking it up from his wife's sight." The narrator then comments, "It was a letter that no parish clergyman should have received" (150), indicating that the locked drawer functions here as a kind of conscience, hiding the conflict between Robarts's public clerical identity and his misguided private social ambition that initially led to his entanglement with Sowerby. Josiah Crawley's desk in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) offers a noteworthy departure from the earlier novels. While describing the parlor of Hogglestock parsonage, the narrator observes:

> At the further end of the room there was an ancient piece of furniture, which was always called 'papa's secretary,' at which Mr Crawley customarily sat and wrote his sermons, and did all work that was done by him within his house. The man who had made it, some time in the last century, had intended it to be a locked guardian for domestic documents, and the receptacle of all that was most private in the house of some paterfamilias. But beneath the hands of Mr Crawley it always stood open. (59)

The unlocked drawer represents Crawley's transparency and thus his innocence of the charge that he stole a cheque for £20. But the passage and the lost cheque also intimate that Crawley should keep his drawer locked in compliance with the protocols of privacy. He stands out as the exception—both in terms of the desk's intended purpose and in contrast with Grantly and Robarts. The narrator tells us that Crawley is "morose, sometimes almost to insanity"; and Robarts later observes to himself: "There was something radically wrong with him, which had put him into antagonism with all the world, and which produced these never-dying grievances" (35, 222). Because the troubled clergyman does little to conceal his moody and abrasive temperament from the

public, his behavior is at times anti-social. In this respect, one of Crawley's flaws throughout most of *Last Chronicle*, notwithstanding the injustice of the accusation against him, amounts to a kind of deviation from the social norm exhibited by his failure to cultivate privacy, a failure, as it were, to lock his drawer.

The fact that Victorian novels quite often draw attention to locks and keys reflects the reality of readers' everyday lives. The middle-class model of interior privacy and security created the necessity for a multitude of keys that were a central feature of appropriate household regulation.[79] Victorian writing on domestic management such as Isabella Beeton's *Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book* (1873), instructed women about their daily duties in terms that highlighted the central importance of lock and key:

> A mistress should rise at latest at seven o'clock…. The mistress should take her cold bath, and perform a neat, careful, and pretty morning toilet. Having performed this careful toilet, she will be ready to descend at eight o'clock, but before leaving her room will place two chairs at the end of the bed, and turn the whole of the bedclothes over them, and, except on very rainy mornings, will throw open the windows of her room. She should then fold her own and husband's night-dress, which have been airing during her toilet, and place them in their ornamented cover; she will put brushes, combs, hair-pins, &c., in their proper places, and leave her toilet-table clear and tidy, and make the whole room as neat as possible. Key-basket in hand, she should descend to the breakfast-room, at once ring for the kettle or tea-urn, according to the season, and make the tea, coffee, cocoa, or chocolate, as the case may be. Her eye should now glance over the table to see that everything required for the table is in its place, and that all is neatly arranged and ready for the family. ("Philosophy of Housekeeping" sec. 5)

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[79] Heidi de Mare points out that seventeenth-century Dutch domestic interiors provided a template for partitioning and organizing the middle-class home in the nineteenth-century (13-14). The superabundance of domestic keys in the Dutch model is telling. According to de Mare: "The use of rooms is regulated by means of the keys in possession of the master and mistress of the house. Thirty of these keys fit general locks. In addition, the husband and wife each have six keys for places and cupboards to which only they have access. The husband has the keys to the chests containing valuables and important papers, while only the wife has access to the linen cupboard, wardrobe, and her own jewel chest" (18).

Here housekeeping keys symbolically link a wife's responsibilities and her authority, joining the morning rituals of hygiene, grooming, and tidiness with the daily managerial tasks of domestic economy as well as marking her transition from private to public spaces (bedroom and dining room) within the home.[80] Beeton's description brings us back to *The Warden*, where Susan Grantly collects "all her house keys in her basket before she descend[s]" from her bedroom, the private space in which she lectures her husband the Archdeacon (64). The novel subsequently (and ironically) portrays her public side as she sits "meekly…behind her basket of keys with a little girl on each side" during family devotions. Mrs. Grantly's keys represent propriety but they also serve an important practical function in Plumstead Episopi, where "thick, dark, costly carpets" and "old-fashioned chairs, bought at a price exceeding that now given for modern goods," again call attention to the home as a kind of treasury. The narrator lays particular emphasis on the valuable contents of the parsonage: "The breakfast-service on the table was equally costly…. The urn was of thick and solid silver, as were also the teapot, coffeepot, cream-ewer, and sugar-bowl; the cups were old, dim dragon china, worth about a pound apiece…. The silver forks were so heavy as to be disagreeable to the hand…. The tea consumed was the very best" (67). The key basket was a ubiquitous fixture of bourgeois

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[80] There were of course limits to the authority signified by a woman's household keys and her control over domestic locks. When Caroline Norton, along with her maid, sought sanctuary against her abusive husband in a locked drawing room of their London home so that she could write in peace, he broke open the door in a fit of "rage." In a letter to his wife's brother, Norton "undertook to justify" his action: "he admitted all the facts; he admitted that I had withdrawn to write for my publishers, and had told him so, but said he broke open the door 'on principle; thinking it necessary, as a husband, to resist such extravagant and disrespectful proceedings' as locking him out of any room in the house" (34-35).

womanhood because the architects of the nineteenth-century household world organized daily activity around numerous locked enclosures designed to protect valuable goods like those depicted in Trollope's novel.

Securing the household valuables was one of the more prominent daily rituals of middle-class life. As Magwitch says to Pip of a lifetime marked by recurrent incarcerations, "I've been locked up, as much as a silver tea-kettle" (258). After servants cleared the table, Beeton counseled that breakfast items "should be put instantly by, the plates and dishes in their appointed places on the dresser, the china cups and saucers in the cupboard, the knives in the knife-basket, the silver in the plate-basket, and at once taken up to the dining-room, and placed in the cellaret, and locked in" ("The General Servant" sec. 202).[81] *Cassell's* further stressed the indispensability of interior locks, advising women that an ottoman for storing dresses and a chest of drawers were important articles of bedroom furniture and that both should have strong locks of superior quality (1: 157)—a recommendation readers would have understood to mean a Bramah or

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[81] Such precautions were necessary in part because plate was a particularly tempting target for thieves. Holland told his readers, "Plate is the housebreaker's dearest hope" (90). According to Charles Dickens, Jr.: "It may be taken as a general rule that burglary or thieving on a large scale is never attempted unless the practitioner knows perfectly well that the house contains booty worthy of the risk necessarily involved. It is, therefore, to say the least of it, injudicious to allow servants to make an ostentatious display of plate at area or kitchen windows" (123). Despite changes in interior design throughout the nineteenth century, a newlywed husband in E. Nesbit's *Red House* (1902) mentions the ever-important household lock in his description of a breakfast scene, illustrating the continued inextricability of domesticity and security in the early post-Victorian era: "I looked at the neat breakfast-table, bright with our wedding-presents—cruet-stands, butter-dishes, and silver-plated teaspoons. I looked at the row of shelves over the mantel-piece, where the more attractive of our crockery stood displayed; at the corner cupboard, picked up for a song in Great Portland Street, and fitted with a lock inexorably guarding the marmalade, the loaf sugar, the sardines, the bottled beer, and such like costly items" (5).

Chubb or some other type of patent lock. One of Beeton's essential "items of housewifery" included monthly maintenance (oiling) of locks, keys, and bolts to ensure that they remained in good working order ("Philosophy" sec. 163). Most important was the nightly ritual of securing the home's perimeter. In cases where families kept only a "general servant," "[s]he should…lock all the lower doors and turn off the kitchen gas, and having taken up the keys and the plate to her mistress, she should go to bed" ("General Servant" sec. 272); or if a family could afford two servants, the "cook will lock all the doors, turn off the kitchen gas, and take up the keys" ("Routine of Housework" sec. 412).[82] Given the importance of security in every area of household management, the *Cornhill* observed of the Victorian mistress of the house and her ever-present basket of housekeeping keys both that she "is all keys" and that "she has all sorts of outlying and isolated keys; keys *in partibus infidielum*; colonial and collateral keys; keys that lock out, and lock in, and lock up—everything lockable—especially *keys*" ("A Few Thoughts" 623).[83]

This extensive system of locks and keys carried legible meaning for the Victorians, representing respectability, proper regulation, and responsible exercise of authority within the home. We see the force of these social and cultural values illustrated in *Bleak*

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[82] This nightly transfer of keys from servant to mistress seems to enact, on the domestic level, a stripped-down version of one of England's oldest daily rituals, the Ceremony of the Keys, which has taken place at London's most famous fortress, the Tower of London—at various times in history, the Royal Palace, Mint, arsenal, prison, and repository of the Crown Jewels—for more than 700 years.

[83] As a convenient substitute for carrying a key basket or weighting down dress pockets with "heavy keys," *Cassell's* recommended a "key-bag," which a woman could wear around her waist (3: 32). This alternative to the key basket, by attaching the housekeeping keys to the female body, strengthened the ontological link between the mistress of the house and her keys.

House (1852-1853), where Dickens uses lock and key to reinforce the distinction between social order and chaos. The basket containing "two bunches of keys…all labeled," which John Jarndyce sends to Esther Summerson in the chapter appropriately entitled "Quite at Home," signifies for Esther "the magnitude" of Jarndyce's "trust" in her and serves as a constant reminder of "duty" whenever she shakes it, ringing the keys "like little bells" (65, 76). As Esther undertakes the managerial duties of Bleak House the following morning, she observes, "Every part of the house was in such order, and every one was so attentive to me, that I had no trouble with my two bunches of keys"; consequently she sets herself to memorizing "the contents of each little store-room drawer, and cupboard" (85). Bleak House, a home that takes security as its organizing principle, exemplifies the middle-class ideal of propriety. In contrast, when Esther, Ada Clare, and Richard Carstone arrive at Mrs. Jellyby's earlier in the novel, they find a filthy, chaotic household marked by conflict and misery. Neglected children and an empty hearth demonstrate that Mrs. Jellyby ignores the administrative demands of domestic economy in favor of "telescopic philanthropy," devoting her time and energy to raising funds for the scheme in Borrioboola-Gha instead of caring for her entropic family. We can formulate her evasion of private duty to follow a public pursuit as an exchange of the key basket for a pen, highlighting the collapse of the domestic sphere. Mrs. Jellyby signally fails to fulfill what Beeton described as one of a housewife's essential duties: attending to the home's locks. The doors of Esther and Ada's "excessively bare and disorderly rooms" are "impossible to shut," Esther explains, "for my lock, with no knob to it, looked as if it wanted to be wound up; and though the handle of Ada's went round and round with the greatest smoothness, it was attended with no effect whatever on the

door" (39, 40). The novel reiterates this symbolism when Esther and Ada visit the home of Harold Skimpole, which Esther describes as dilapidated, and find "two or three of the area railings…gone," "the knocker…loose," "the bell handle" missing, the threshold area soiled with "dirty footprints," and the lock on the front door "in a disabled condition" (523). The destruction of the cultural markers of ownership, the symbolic contamination of the threshold, and the failure of the lock illustrate that Skimpole has irrevocably rejected the responsibilities of middle-class selfhood and that he embodies a form of "social deviance" beyond the redemptive power of the bourgeois values to which Dickens often pays tribute in his novels.[84]

In *Bleak House* Dickens represents the "romantic side of familiar things" (4) like locks and keys along with their unromantic side in order to materialize the thematic tension between social order and social entropy as well as to symbolize certain characters' success or failure to live up to middle-class values and ideals. The lock and key, perhaps even more than the wall or door, provided the Victorians with the principal symbols for representing privacy and property as well as domestic propriety and the claims of selfhood. Thus David Copperfield, a personification of bourgeois values, remarks of his new home:

> It was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe, when he had got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him. It was a wonderfully fine thing to walk about town with the key of my house in my pocket, and to know that I could ask any fellow to come home, and make quite sure of its being inconvenient to

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[84] Hepworth argues that Victorian "respectability is defined in terms of images of the protected environment of the respectable home," whereas "deviance is located in the relatively unregulated world which lies beyond" (21). Skimpole's broken fence, polluted threshold, and useless lock fail to enforce the spatial distinctions we have looked at in this chapter and thus locate him in this "unregulated world."

> nobody, if it were not so to me. It was a wonderfully fine thing to let myself in and out, and to come and go without a word to any one…. (415)

As this passage and the other examples in this chapter suggest, whatever one's class status and wherever one's place of residence, the security of home and property—ideas crucial to creating a sense of place and developing and maintaining a sense of self according to the terms laid out by middle-class standards—was not only sacred, it was represented for Victorians who aspired to maintain those standards by a key of one's own. The era of the patent lock made a key of one's own, a key as unique as the individual who possessed it, a practical possibility. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the inventions of Bramah and Chubb made the "true principles of perfect security" available to consumers and in the process played a critical role in shaping the social codes and cultural imperatives of daily life.

Chapter II

Security and the Social Order: Representing the Lockmaker in *Barnaby Rudge*

Near the end of *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), Charles Dickens offers one of the most idyllic family tableaux in all of his novels. The scene takes place in the Varden household, located in the London district of Clerkenwell, in the days immediately after the Gordon Riots of 1780. Gabriel Varden, who has both bravely defied the mob and saved Barnaby Rudge from the gallows, along with his wife Martha, who has renounced her Protestant extremism and become emotionally reconciled with her husband, sit at a bounteous table awaiting the return of their newly engaged daughter and her fiancé:

> There he sat, with his beaming eye on Mrs V., and his shining face suffused with gladness, and his capacious waistcoat smiling in every wrinkle, and his jovial humour peeping from under the table in the very plumpness of his legs; a sight to turn the vinegar of misanthropy into purest milk of human kindness. There he sat, watching his wife as she decorated the room with flowers for the greater honour of Dolly and Joseph Willet, who had gone out walking, and for whom the tea-kettle had been singing gaily on the hob full twenty minutes, chirping as never kettle chirped before; for whom the best service of real undoubted china, patterned with divers round–faced mandarins holding up broad umbrellas, was now displayed in all its glory; to tempt whose appetites a clear, transparent, juicy ham, garnished with cool green lettuce-leaves and fragrant cucumber, reposed upon a shady table, covered with a snow-white cloth; for whose delight, preserves and jams, crisp cakes and other pastry, short to eat, with cunning twists, and cottage loaves, and rolls of bread both white and brown, were all set forth in rich profusion; in whose youth Mrs V. herself had grown quite young, and stood there in a gown of red and white: symmetrical in figure, buxom in bodice, ruddy in cheek and lip, faultless in ankle, laughing in face and mood, in all respects delicious to behold—there sat the locksmith among all and every these delights, 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)

This scene, as much as any in Victorian literature, seems to warrant an invocation of the proverbial *paterfamilias*. Yet where we might expect the title of husband or father or

head of the house, especially in a novel preoccupied with fathers and the theme of paternal authority, the narrator identifies Varden by his profession—"the locksmith."[1] This substitution of professional for domestic identity makes sense at precisely this moment for two reasons that will frame our discussion of *Barnaby Rudge*. First, the locksmith's kindly gaze protectively encloses the festive scene, which, with its emphasis on good health and good humor, marital bliss and material abundance, represents the accumulated rewards of middle-class propriety.[2] As he sits and watches from either end of this idealized depiction of private life, which has endured a sustained and violent assault by rioters throughout much of the novel's second half, Varden personifies the security of the middle-class home and the middle-class self.

Second, the substitution, by calling attention to Varden's guardianship of and thus his central importance to domestic stability, also suggests the lockmaker's significance in Dickens's vision of social order and by extension his political message in *Barnaby Rudge*.[3] For although the novel takes its name from the idiot boy who unwittingly plays a leading role in the Gordon Riots, its true hero and moral focal point is Varden, through whom Dickens expresses his own views, as well as those of his middle-class readers, on

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[1] For the classic and most influential discussion of the importance of fathers in *Barnaby Rudge*, see Marcus 169-212.

[2] John Bowen argues that Varden "who has the most moral authority in the book, sees clearly, and his power is related to this." Although Bowen does not connect the "phallic, paternal power symbolized in Varden's clear and lucid gaze" with the scene in question, he does note the relationship between keys (and by implication, security) and sight (169).

[3] Varden is also the narrator's functional equivalent in the scene, which he mediates through his center-of-consciousness perspective. The narrator, in fact, implies his identification with the locksmith earlier in the novel, claiming for himself the same power of access: "Chroniclers are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go through keyholes" (119).

an array of domestic, social, and political issues.[4] Dickens originally planned to call the novel *Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London* (*Letters* 1: 150), suggesting the locksmith's fundamental centrality to *Barnaby Rudge*; and Varden remained essential to the novel's development even after Dickens changed the title.[5] In February of 1841, during the early stages of composition, he told John Forster, "I build greatly on the Varden household" (*Letters* 2: 219). Despite domestic discord, the Vardens' home epitomizes the model English household and serves as an appropriate foundation for a novel that analyzes the structure of social order. As the narrator puts it early in *Barnaby*

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[4] Several critics have contended that Varden rather than Barnaby stands at the heart of the novel. Joseph Gold claims, "Dickens identifies in the novel, and invites the readers to identify, only with Gabriel Varden, the locksmith, whose name and whose habitat, 'The Golden Key,' are symbolic of the central role he occupies" (117-18). Gold uses the metaphor of the heart to argue further that Varden is *Barnaby Rudge*'s center of reason: "it is perfectly clear that for Dickens the heart is the center (Latin: *cor*), the true man, and that Dickens understands this term to be psychological in effect. The nearest concept to Dickens' use of 'heart' is the Renaissance of Right-Reason." Varden, who "remains unchanged through all adversity," repeatedly demonstrates this virtue (122). Natalie McKnight speculates that perhaps "in the end, Varden, with all his generous, affable but bourgeois normality, and with his job as a maker of locks—a professional keeper of order—is more at the center of the novel than Barnaby" (91). Peter Ackroyd reminds readers that in spite of Dickens's "imaginative sympathy…with the rioters and with the poor mad boy, Barnaby Rudge…it also ought not to be forgotten that the real hero of the novel—and the one after whom it was once to be called—is Gabriel Varden, the locksmith, the man who constructs the great locks which enclose the prisoners" (328). Andrew Sanders argues more emphatically, "At the real center of the novel is the Varden family. Gabriel was, in the early stages of planning, to have been the title character, but Barnaby's usurpation does not affect the locksmith's crucial importance to Dickens's point of view in his novel" (78). David Parker goes even further: Varden "combines the good heart of Mr. Pickwick, the practicality of Mr. Wardle, and the civic responsibility of the Cheeryble brothers. The older man, prosperous and established, offering a moral center in a work, was a device Dickens used repeatedly…. And into such figures [Dickens] poured his own values. Mr. Varden is a more than usually substantial version of the figure: married, a parent, a craftsman, and tradesman, prosperous, but not capable of solving problems simply by distributing money, dependent instead upon his goodness, wisdom, and influence" (186).

[5] Dickens later changed the spelling from Vardon to Varden.

Rudge, "there was not a neater, more scrupulously tidy, or more punctiliously ordered house in Clerkenwell, in London, in all England" (77)—a description that traces a defined trajectory of order from home to neighborhood to capital to nation. And this domestic prototype is inhabited by what becomes, by the book's conclusion, the ideal family. Edward Chester later observes of the Vardens, for instance, "the care, humanity, and sympathy of these good people have no bounds" (706).

Comments like these have political as well as social implications. Thomas Rice argues that in *Barnaby Rudge* Dickens uses the home of the Vardens, who have the distinction of being "one of the few intact families" in his fiction, to illustrate an analogical relationship between domestic and civil order. The novel portrays the private, middle-class household's determining influence on the wellbeing of the nation—an influence that middle-class readers of the early 1840s would have taken for granted. Varden in fact represents "the entire well-intentioned, moderate middle class," Rice maintains, which first examines and then engages "the threats of national chaos." The locksmith's middling social position and common-sense views "reflect the station and perspective both of Dickens and his contemporary audience." Moreover, Varden's home—which, we should note, the novel repeatedly refers to as "the Golden Key," the name of the locksmith's shop through which visitors must first pass to enter the domestic realm—mirrors "its owner's middle-class modesty and commendable sense of order, yet it also symbolizes the fundamental stability and good health of the nation." Varden the lockmaker thus becomes "the archetypal Englishman," ruling "his eccentric little nation with moderation, benevolence, and justice," and his household becomes a metaphor for

English social stability and political common sense, which come under attack in the novel (82-83, 101).

Yet social order was a vexed concept in the nineteenth century. When used by officials—particularly conservatives—as Charles Townshend observes, it occurred as a "negative" term, signifying the "mere absence of disorder," with the responsibility for social stability falling on centralized authority. Liberals, on the other hand, defined order as a "positive" condition that arose "out of the co-operative interaction of self-disciplined individuals," who were collectively responsible, through self-restraint and self-government, for maintaining the peace. These conflicting definitions led to uncertainty "about the individual and institutional meaning of security" in Victorian society (4).[6] Such ideological conflicts over definitions of social order, moreover, take place within specifically spatial frameworks, especially representations of space, through which individuals understand personal identity, society, and the relationship between the two.[7] The Victorian novel, we argue in this chapter, takes up this conflict, employing antithetical versions of the lockmaker, a conspicuously visible agent of spatial production, during historical periods of social upheaval to work out competing definitions of security and make rival claims about the spatial framework of social order. In contrast with Dickens's liberal vision of security and order, which Varden embodies, Benjamin

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[6] This problem gets further complicated if we define security in a negative sense. Steven Spitzer remarks: "security is especially difficult to study in so far as it is primarily defined in negative terms. In other words, security is said to exist when something *does not* occur rather than when it does. [….] Because security depends upon the *absence* of a certain range of foreseeable and unforeseeable events, conditions and activities, it is extremely difficult to specify what contributes or fails to contribute to security in any given case" (47).

[7] See Harvey, 205-18.

Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) represents the villainous lockmaker, Bishop Hatton, as the main agent of disorder, providing a foil with which Disraeli argues the need of a strong, central authority in order to create and maintain social stability. The fact that Victorian novelists place lockmakers in such prominent roles when exploring the conditions of social order underscores our claim that fiction worked alongside (or, in Disraeli's case, against) inventors like Barron, Bramah, and Chubb in shaping the protocols of modern security and spatial production.

I

Although *Barnaby Rudge*'s depiction of Varden seems to veer perilously close at times to middle-class hagiography—the narrator extols him, for example, as "the rosiest, coziest, merriest, heartiest, best-contented old buck, in Great Britain or out of it" (714)—the lockmaker remains a realistic figure, perhaps one of the most realistic in Dickens's fiction. According to George Gissing, himself a consummate realist, Varden is both believable and recognizable because Dickens draws him from everyday life rather than relying on comic caricature:

> Varden…is as honest and manly, withal as softhearted, as one could desire; the best type of his class completely realized. He does not incite us to laughter; we regard him with a friendly smile, and listen with quiet pleasure to his genial, common-sense talk. With his exasperating wife he is all good-nature and patience, yet he never loses our respect, and we are not at all surprised when, at the right moment, he vigorously asserts himself. Here Dickens is working upon lines of ordinary experience; for the moment, he sees life in simpler colours than of wont. The result is satisfactory from the artistic point of view. Other creations, more characteristic of the master, claim our preference; but we are in no danger of forgetting these studies in a softer tone. (111)

More recently, however, critics have argued that it is precisely the realism of Varden, specifically the reality of his profession, which threatens to undermine the novel's portrayal of the lockmaker's jovial demeanor. John Carey, for example, assigns negative

connotations to lockmaking, maintaining that Varden's "trade sorts weirdly with his cheerfulness and sociability" (119). But Carey's argument is unhistorical in a double sense. For a middle-class liberal like Dickens, lockmaking is not only consistent with the well-adjusted self, but, as we saw in chapter 1, essential to it. Moreover, Victorians had a specific and famous example of a merry lockmaker. In his *Industrial Biography* (1863), Samuel Smiles included the following synopsis of a memoir of Joseph Bramah published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1815, the year after the inventor's death:

> Bramah was a man of excellent moral character, temperate in his habits, of a pious turn of mind, and so cheerful in temperament, that he was the life of every company into which he entered. To much facility of expression he added the most perfect independence of opinion; he was a benevolent and affectionate man; neat and methodical in his habits, and knew well how to temper liberality with economy. Greatly to his honour, he often kept his workmen employed, solely for their sake, when stagnation of trade prevented him from disposing of the products of their labour. As a manufacturer, he was distinguished for his promptitude and probity, and he was celebrated for the exquisite finish which he gave to all his productions. In this excellence of workmanship, which he was the first to introduce, he continued, while he lived, to be unrivalled. (243-44)

With the exception of Smiles's allusion to Bramah's machine-tool inventions, his description of the inventor, based on the popular image available to Victorians, could easily apply to Dickens's locksmith, whether he is sitting in his parlor with Mrs. V. or busy in his workshop. Nearly every major character in *Barnaby Rudge* (and some of the minor ones) remarks on the lockmaker's benevolence, honesty, respectability, industry, courage, compassion, and other virtues, which the narrator never tires of echoing. After the riots have ended, for instance, Edward Chester calls Varden "The cheeriest, stoutest-hearted fellow in the world." Geoffrey Haredale responds, "He has a right to be. He has a right to be. A better creature never lived. He reaps what he has sown—no more" (706). Varden exemplifies self-sufficient, middle-class individualism, in other words,

enjoying the rewards of his own labor. The parallel in fact extends to Varden's intellectual independence and genuine concern for those in his employ. When, for example, he confronts the corrupted aristocrat Sir John Chester with the facts of Hugh's paternity, Varden asserts, "though I am a plain man of humble situation, and you are a gentleman of rank and learning, the truth raises me to your level" (679). So too after Varden fails in his attempt to save Simon Tappertit from the consequences of his participation in the riots, he sets his former apprentice up with his own business at the novel's conclusion (470, 734).

Dickens took pride in his reputation as a topical novelist and carefully researched his characters.[8] With that qualification in mind, and in the context of our discussion of the history of patent lockmaking, we can perhaps push our examination of *Barnaby Rudge* further and ask: did Dickens model Gabriel Varden, at least to some extent, on Joseph Bramah? The inventor was, after all, a well-known figure in early nineteenth-century England, and his name, as we saw in the previous chapter, was a household word for Victorians, especially with respect to lockmaking. Although the evidence connecting the fictional and the real lockmakers is more circumstantial than conclusive, it is nevertheless telling enough to warrant consideration.

In addition to similar personal characteristics, Dickens's lockmaker shares with Bramah the status of London's preeminent lockmaker. Dickens first envisioned Varden as "*The* Locksmith of London," as a man who holds first rank in his profession, much as Victorians saw Bramah, also of London, as the quintessential lockmaker; and his original

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[8] See, for example, Chesney's account of Oliver Twist's role as a "snakesman," which illustrates "Dickens' relish for authentic detail" (161).

intention did not change with the novel's new title. Myron Magnet argues that Dickens uses the definite rather than an indefinite article to indicate Varden because the locksmith constructed the lock that secures Newgate, "the chief prison of the realm" (150). If such is the case, then Bramah likewise merited that title. When Henry Mayhew and John Binny visited Newgate, they observed that the door leading into the prison "has a very strong Bramah lock with a big brazen bolt, which gives a peculiarly loud rumbling sound when the key is turned; and at night it is secured with strong iron bolts and padlocks, and by an iron chain" (*Criminal Prisons* 594). In 1835, Dickens toured the prison, which he chronicled in "A Visit to Newgate" (1836); and while he did not mention Bramah's lock in his sketch, he did make special note of the gaol's elaborate system of security, commenting: "if we noticed every gate that was unlocked for us to pass through, and locked again as soon as we had passed, we should require a gate at every comma" (115). Newgate's locks, in other words, made an impression on the soon-to-be novelist, who would first mention his idea for Varden the following year. The possibility of a link between Varden and Bramah gains added weight by Dickens's move to1 Devonshire Terrace, Marylebone Road, in December of 1839, having completed only two chapters of *Barnaby Rudge*. Not only did Dickens have Bramah locks on the front door of his new house as well as on the door of his study; Devonshire Terrace was located not far from Bramah's shop at 124 Piccadilly, of which Robert Horn observes, "It would be hard to find a more convincingly Dickensian establishment" (101).[9] What makes this even more suggestive is that Bramah's shop, like Varden's, connected to the front of his home

[9] Horn mistakenly claims that the company had vacated the shop at Piccadilly by 1839, when in fact it was still there during the Great Exhibition in 1851.

during his residence earlier in the century (McNeil 58). The name of Varden's establishment, the Golden Key, likewise hints at an association, for Bramah's company manufactured golden keys for its wealthier clients—and aside from the producers of watch keys, Bramah was apparently the only lockmaker in the first half of the nineteenth century to construct keys from gold [10]

We know, too, that the Bramah lock held a particular fascination for Dickens. In his Preface to *Oliver Twist*, he asserts, "of one thing I am certain: that there are such men as Sikes" (35). He knew the reality of the housebreaker through research and observation that were born of what he called his "attraction of repulsion" for criminals (qtd. in Collins 12). On the other hand, more than most middle-class Victorians, Dickens was obsessed with a "need for security, for safety," as Peter Ackroyd observes (66). This obsession seems to have manifested itself, at least in part, as a sustained fixation with Bramah's invention. Ackroyd comments: "Bramah locks and keys were a great innovation of Dickens's childhood, and they occur frequently in his published writings as if the image of them was fixed in his mind at some early age" (73). Dickens refers to Bramah locks and keys on five occasions in his fiction between 1836 and 1860, as Horn has pointed out, a detail all the more notable because Dickens rarely identifies products by brand name and he never mentions Chubb, even though the company advertised its Detector

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[10] A report on the robbery of Wortley Hall, an estate near Sheffield, published in *The Times* in December 1836, included "a gold Bramah key" in the list of items stolen ("Law Notices"). Golden Bramah keys also appeared in classified advertisements for lost keys and items for sale throughout the century (see: "Lost, on Saturday, the 5th," *Times* 7 Feb. 1848: 1A; "Lost, on Saturday Evening Last," *Times* 7 Dec. 1848: 1B; 'Twenty Pounds Reward," *Times* 27 June 1861: 1B; and "A Louis XVI Or-Moulu Musical Clock," *Times* 17 Sept. 1867: 12D). There is no evidence that Dickens possessed a golden Bramah key.

locks in his novels (100).[11] As Dickens uses them, the Bramah lock and key symbolize his "incomparable zest for London houses and streets" as well as "a sense of security and property, and…social status" (103, 105), which are the very things that the rioters in *Barnaby Rudge* target for plunder, violation, and destruction. More telling still, in *Pickwick*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), and *The Uncommerical Traveller* (1860), Dickens specifically associates dust with Bramah locks and keys. A character in each instance blows or shakes the dust from his patent key to prevent foreign material from entering the high-precision lock and causing it to malfunction. Horn describes the clearing of dust from the key as "the distinctive Bramah gestures and ritual" (105). *Barnaby Rudge*, on the other hand, contains an apparent reversal of this ritual. Before Sim, who lets himself out at night with a duplicate key that he has secretly made, returns from a meeting of the 'Prentice Knights, Miggs collects "a quantity of small coal-dust from the forge" in Varden's shop, and "dexterously blew into the keyhole as much of these fine ashes as the lock would hold" (121). Miggs rivals Mrs. Varden as the locksmith's chief domestic antagonist, and we might read her action as an anti-Varden gesture. Even though her target in this case is Sim, whose key will not work the lock when he returns and who must rely on Miggs to let him back into the house undetected, it marks the only time in *Barnaby Rudge* that Varden's locks fail to function. Haredale says of Varden, "nothing can conquer him" (706), and the novel extends this claim to his locks. Like Bramah, Varden makes an invincible mechanism. In the three cases where the mob breaches structures protected by Varden's work, they gain entry by means other

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[11] Of the two references to Bramah locks in *Pickwick*, Norman Russell says that Dickens "was not above 'advertising' goods and services that pleased him" (6).

than defeating the lock. They enter the Warren not by breaking the lock but by taking down an entire door in a unified assault (505-06). The rioters, who gather outside of the Golden Key demanding that the locksmith accompany them to Newgate and open the main portal, unsuccessfully attempt to break into his house through the front door. Even though Sim is one of the leaders, the impenetrable door forces them to enter the house with a ladder through an upper window; and they only succeed then because Miggs, repeating her earlier sabotage of the lock, has poured beer down the barrel of Varden's musket (570-74). Varden's subsequent refusal to pick the lock of Newgate forces the mob to burn the great door, which slowly gives way at the hinges (576-84).

Given the parallels and allusions, as well as Dickens's fascination with and repeated references to Bramah locks, it seems unlikely that he did not have Bramah in mind when creating his locksmith. Bramah of course did not patent his Precision lock until 1784, four years after the Gordon Riots. But this poses no problem if we allow for Dickens's use of the social history and the political details of 1780 in *Barnaby Rudge* as topical metaphors to address contemporary issues like the political alliance between ultra-Tories and "physical-force" Chartists, the ongoing threat of working-class violence, and the hanging laws.[12] Perhaps more important, though, Varden's professional function in society corresponds in its essential points with the one Bramah claimed for himself when he introduced his patent lock—that providing preventive security is vital to reform and does more to ensure social order than broadly exercised institutional power or legal

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[12] See Butt and Tillotson 82-84; Sanders 69-72; Parker 184; Rice, "Politics" 56; and Brantlinger 84-96.

retaliation against the criminal.[13] While there is no evidence that Dickens read Bramah's *Dissertation on the Construction of Locks*, he was, as George Levine observes, "extremely alert to modern scientific and technological developments" (122).[14] Through Varden, *Barnaby Rudge* affirms Bramah's social thesis, which has implications relevant to Dickens's sociopolitical views in the novel, in which the lock guards the borders of individual sovereignty and thus empowers and defends the middle class besieged by radical insurgency on one side and oppressively paternalistic forces on the other.

II

Dickens aims *Barnaby Rudge* at a specifically middle-class audience. He first mentions the novel by its original title, *Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London*, on 9 May 1836, just after the second monthly part of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837) had appeared in print. Writing to John Macrone, the publisher of *Sketches by Boz* (1836), he agreed to £200 for "a Work of Fiction (in Three Volumes of the usual size)" (*Letters* 1: 150). Motivated by the popularity of *Pickwick* and his rising economic value as an author, Dickens subsequently offered the novel to a second publisher. He wrote to

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[13] On the importance of prevention in *Barnaby Rudge*, Rice observes that the "failure of the civil powers to eradicate crime at its sources and their excessive reliance on capital punishment as a brutal object lesson are abuses of governmental duties." Moreover, the "state's preoccupation with punishment for crime, rather than its prevention, and its failure to proportion the penalty to fit the offense are merely logical extensions of perverted ideas in domestic government. Indeed, the English nation at the time of the Gordon riots had arrogated the power of life and death over its citizens as a God-given privilege and had abused it accordingly" ("*Barnaby Rudge*" 91).

[14] Quoting Alexander Welsh, Levine continues, "it would be unwise 'to underestimate the degree to which Dickens was aware of the intellectual ferment of his time.' " Further, "Dickens was very much a man of his time, 'a pure modernist,' Ruskin notoriously complained,—'a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*" (122). For an account of Dickens's historical sources, see Rice, *Barnaby Rudge: An Annotated Bibliography* 75-95.

Richard Bentley, the editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, asking for £600 for the novel, at which time he referred to "my first Novel Barnaby Rudge" (*Letters* 1: 238).[15] David Parker notes that by identifying *Barnaby Rudge* as his "first Novel," Dickens sought to distinguish it from his previous fiction, which was available to the masses in cheap, monthly parts. Although Dickens eventually serialized *Barnaby Rudge* in weekly numbers in Chapman and Hall's *Master Humphrey's Clock* from February to November 1841, his "original intention, plainly, was to target well-educated and prosperous readers who could afford a novel in three volumes," and to "establish [his] credentials as a serious novelist" (Parker 181).[16] The intended middle-class audience for *Barnaby Rudge* explains the novel's political tone, which demonstrates restraint when compared with Dickens's condemnation of the poor laws in *Oliver Twist* and of the system of education in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Rice detects in this change "a more moderate affirmation" of early Victorian "social order," which he attributes to Dickens's efforts to cultivate middle-class readers: "*Barnaby Rudge*, from its inception, was to be his first 'three-decker' novel, his calculated appeal to the intellectual readership that scorned 'penny dreadful' literature and that sought 'improving' writers…. As a prudent

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[15] Dickens later served as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, where he also serialized *Oliver Twist*.

[16] Nearly five years passed between Dickens's letter to Macrone and the appearance of the novel's first number. David Parroissien comments that this "is without question the most deliberate of Dickens's early novels, and in the length of its gestation exceeds that of any other work in the Dickens canon" (3). Based on *Barnaby Rudge*'s five-year "gestation period" and "the fact that Dickens proved so tenacious of this plot, when he had so many other projects in mind," Philip Collins maintains that he was deeply preoccupied with the story (44). Chapman and Hall, which also published *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), issued *Barnaby Rudge* as a single volume in December 1841.

delineation of the most accepted views of family governance, [the novel] was to appear intellectually and morally substantial" ("*Barnaby Rudge*" 82).

Not only does Varden share the political sensibilities and class values of *Barnaby Rudge*'s target audience. As the embodiment of security and social order, he is designed to appeal to a middle-class readership busily acquiring wealth and property and, if the Chubb poem that appeared in *Tait's Magazine* the same year as Dickens's novel was any indication, eager for the assurances of security even in their literature. This fact sets the lockmaker apart from the popular criminal protagonists of the thirties and early forties, most notably the sensational heroes of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830) and Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* (1839-1840). The public's fascination with crime fiction in the early 1830s intensified as "Newgate" novels continued to appear in the middle of the decade, and it escalated to the level of mania by 1839. Newgate fiction, which typically drew on historical criminal cases recorded in the *Newgate Calendar* (a chronicle that first appeared in 1760 and resumed publication around 1820), tended toward sympathetic portrayals of criminals. Ainsworth's novel, for instance, which is based on the life of the notorious London housebreaker whose repeated escapes from Newgate in the 1720s became the stuff of legend, generated a cultural phenomenon dubbed "Jack Sheppardism" by troubled and in some cases outraged reviewers, who claimed that it romanticized the criminal and crime itself. An article entitled "The Age of Jack Sheppardism" in the *Monthly Magazine* (March 1840) opened with this assault on popular tastes in fiction: "The present state of literature is of a nature to produce the utmost amount of alarm in the well-constituted mind…. The times are out of joint, and Chartism rages while Jack Sheppard *reads*" (qtd. in Chittick 158). The issue of class

raised by the connection between Chartism, with its threat of workers' insurrections, and Jack Sheppardism, presented the crux of the problem. A merchandising campaign aimed at members of the lower classes, some of whom adopted Sheppard as their role model and mimicked his criminal behavior, accompanied numerous cheap theatrical productions of Ainsworth's novel. Commenting in February of 1840 on the craze, William Makepeace Thackeray observed in *Fraser's* "that in some theaters one could even buy 'Shepherd [sic] bags—a bag containing a few pick-locks that is, a screw driver, and iron lever' " (qtd. in Buckley 427). Critics similarly accused Dickens of fueling the public's lurid enthusiasm for Newgate fiction with his depiction of fences, housebreakers, pickpockets, and prostitutes in *Oliver Twist*, and drew comparisons between that novel and *Jack Sheppard*. But Dickens chafed at the association and sought to distance himself professionally from the genre and Jack Sheppard mania in particular. Writing to Richard Henry Horne in February 1840, he complained: "I am by some jolter-headed enemies most unjustly and untruly charged with having written a book after Mr. Ainsworth's fashion. Unto these jolter-heads and their intensely concentrated humbug, I shall take an early opportunity of temperately replying" (*Letters* 2: 20-21). His reply came in the form of a Preface to *Oliver Twist*, which Dickens wrote in March of 1841—just two months after recommencing work on *Barnaby Rudge*—for a single-volume edition under the imprimatur of Chapman and Hall.[17] In the Preface, Dickens answers his accusers by pointing out that, unlike his contemporaries, he portrays criminals realistically rather than romantically. For the "examples" and "precedents" of this kind of sober realism, he cites "the noblest range of English literature. Fielding, Defoe, Goldsmith, Smollett,

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[17] See Dickens's letter to John Forster, 8 March 1841 (*Letters* 2: 226).

Richardson, Mackenzie; all these for wise purposes, and especially the two first, brought upon the scene the very scum and refuse of the land" (35).

The phrase Dickens uses to describe the early Victorian criminal class represented by Fagin and Sikes shows up again in *Barnaby Rudge*, suggesting that perhaps the later novel is also a response to the critics. The narrator remarks that the "vast throng" of rioters is "composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police" (453). Dickens not only uses the same language to define the mob as little more than common lawbreakers with no ideological commitment to Lord George Gordon's anti-Catholic agenda; he indicts England's late-eighteenth political and legal and civil authorities for their systemic failure to prevent crime, and even lays the blame for the increase of the criminal class at their doors. This passage highlights opposing forces that form a combined threat to the three main spheres of middle-class sovereignty: individual autonomy, privacy, and property.[18] It also signals Dickens's chief social dilemma in *Barnaby Rudge*. On the one hand, Philip Collins argues, Dickens's letters to Forster while he was writing the riot scenes indicate "at least an imaginative sympathy with the mob," a possibility that seems to gain further credence by the fact that the narrator " 'follows' the mob and not their victims or opponents" (45). On the other hand, Dickens "hated mobs and their violence, even if he could not imaginatively approve their rulers. Nor did he deny the necessity for firm government." Even so, aside from the military, Collins claims, the novelist "finds it quite impossible to identify himself with

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[18] See, for example, the narrator's description of Londoners "who had suffered in their persons, peace, or property, by the outrages of the mob" (483).

the authorities who had to restore law and order" (47). While this dichotomy ignores Varden's role as a representative of authority in *Barnaby Rudge*, it does point to what Kathryn Chittick calls the novel's central political irony: Dickens "preaches a reverence for authority and yet criticizes the historical government that constitutes that authority" (174). In order to analyze Varden's function in making sense of that irony, we need to situate him within Dickens's treatment of crime and punishment in the novel.

III

Crime rather than religious zealotry provides a thematic context for the riots in *Barnaby Rudge*. Gordon's Protestant Association and his petition to Parliament serve as pretexts for violence. There is violent crime of a specific nature, however, involving attacks on property and the private sphere. The novel focuses our attention on the threat to property when Hugh, the hostler from the Maypole Inn, seeks out Gashford, Gordon's secretary, to enlist at Sir John Chester's urging in the Protestant cause. During his first meeting with Ned Dennis, Hugh responds to the hangman's cry of "No Popery, brother!" with "No Property, brother!" (359). His substitution proclaims the mob's real if unconscious objective—looting.[19] After the riots have ended, the narrator identifies the motivations of most of those involved: "The great mass never reasoned or thought at all, but were stimulated by their own headlong passions, by poverty, by ignorance, by the love of mischief, and the hope of plunder" (483-84). Through the theme of looting, Dickens links the Gordon mob with fears of working-class revolution in the 1830s and 1840s. He uses the connection between Hugh and Chester, the master manipulator of the

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[19] The novel even associates Gashford with the common criminal. Haredale says that the secretary "was a thief" when he was younger and has since made his living by whining and begging in the streets (406).

lower class and chief political instigator of social unrest, to represent the ultra-Radical/Tory alliance and to warn middle-class readers of the impending political danger.[20] The substitution of property for popery thus also serves as a symbolic rallying cry for a lower-class assault on the bourgeoisie, which eventually comes into view through an erasure of domestic boundaries and destruction of the spaces they enclose. For the rioters' actions exceed mere looting; they concentrate with increasing intensity on annihilating the middle-class individual's claim to privacy and the identity that it protects. We see this first during the sacking of the Maypole, whose proprietor, John Willet, has previously declared that Hugh "an't fit for indoors" (282). Hugh, who resides in a stable, ironically confirms Willet's claim. The hostler, an undomesticated "centaur," as Chester frequently characterizes him, exacts revenge on the innkeeper by leading an invasion so complete that it obliterates the conceptual foundation of domesticity and selfhood:

> Here was the bar—the bar that the boldest never entered without special invitation—the sanctuary, the mystery, the hallowed ground: here it was, crammed with men, clubs, sticks, torches, pistols; filled with a deafening noise, oaths, shouts, screams, hootings; changed all at once into a bear-garden, a madhouse, an infernal temple: men darting in and out, by door and window, smashing the glass, turning the taps, drinking liquor out of China punchbowls, sitting astride of casks, smoking private and personal pipes, cutting down the sacred grove of lemons, hacking and hewing at the celebrated cheese, breaking open inviolable drawers, putting things in their pockets which didn't belong to them, dividing his own money before his own eyes, wantonly wasting, breaking, pulling down and tearing up: nothing quiet, nothing private: men everywhere—above, below, overhead, in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, in the yard, in the stables. (497)

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[20] See Rice, "Politics" 59-67 and "*Barnaby Rudge*" 95; Sanders 83-84; Brantlinger 84; and Chittick 165.

The Maypole serves as *Barnaby Rudge*'s initial marker of spatial "stability," designating the border between city and country (Connor 217). It also serves as the site where we first witness in graphic detail the effects of a violent intersection between the public and private spheres. The mob nullifies the spatial boundary that distinguishes the inn from the world outside. Looting represents an assault on private space; bedroom and yard, kitchen and stable become interchangeable terms, indistinct spaces occupied equally by rioters. Moreover, because Willet grounds his sense of self on the Maypole, the experience of witnessing the mob ransack the inn robs him of "all his powers of reason and reflection," leaving him mentally debilitated for the remainder of his life (500). His subsequent lack of comprehension and childishness point to his loss of autonomy and identity, both of which the novel links with spatial inviolability.

The mob's assault on the Warren further intensifies the public invasion of private space in its use of destructive force, marking the first time that the narrator associates the rioters with demonic power. The attack on Haredale's home, though comparatively brief, in fact rivals the violence of the mob's subsequent attack on Newgate. Whereas some of the rioters "searched the drawers, the chests, the boxes, writing desks, and closets, for jewels, plate, and money," "others, less mindful of gain and more mad for destruction, cast their whole contents into the courtyard without examination, and called to those below, to heap them on the blaze" (506). *Barnaby Rudge* imagines the breach and annihilation of secured spaces as a scene from hell; it attributes the greater horror of the scene not to the loss of valuables but to the violation of domestic sanctity. The novel earlier sets up the comparison between privacy and possessions through Martha Varden,

who observes to herself that "the sense of home" contains greater value than "the wealth of the whole wide world" (432). As the mob strips away even the walls of the Warren

> the exposure to the coarse, common gaze, of every little nook which usages of home had made a sacred place, and the destruction by rude hands of every little household favourite which old associations made a dear and precious thing: all this taking place—not among pitying looks and friendly murmurs of compassion, but brutal shouts and exultations, which seemed to make the very rats who stood by the old house too long, creatures with some claim upon the pity and regard of those its roof had sheltered:—combined to form a scene never to be forgotten by those who saw it and were not actors in the work, so long as life endured. (507)

In both scenes privacy—a right that apparently even the rats enjoy—loses the practical, spatial value that gives it social meaning. As the narrator puts it after the destruction of the Warren: "Nothing left but a dull and dreary blank—a smouldering heap of dust and ashes—the silence of solitude and utter desolation" (509). Taken together, these scenes illustrate that "nothing private" is the spatial equivalent of "nothing left." And both cases of sacrilege produce a kind of traumatic memory for victims and observers that anticipates the experience of watching the fall of Newgate and the inmates poring into the streets of London (594). The scenes function, too, as the antitheses of the tableau with which we opened this chapter. The mob's "coarse, common gaze" penetrates spaces that correspond to the one later enclosed and protected by Varden's watchful eye, raising the locksmith's social value as a result of the mob's activity. For despite Dickens's sometime sympathy with lower-class criminals, whom the novel elsewhere represents as victims of circumstance, social inequity, and their own crimes, this sympathy does not extend to an invitation to cross the domestic threshold. Unequivocally, Dickens wants them locked out.

Barnaby Rudge quickly establishes this aspect of Varden's social value when it introduces him to the reader. The lockmaker's encounter with the novel's arch-criminal,

the elder Rudge, a murderer and highwayman, frames our first impression of Varden while illustrating his central function in society. When Rudge, pursuing Edward Chester with the intention of robbing him, nearly runs his horse into Varden's wagon, the locksmith's first words—"Yoho…. What's that? Who goes there?" (62)—echo the watchman's traditional challenge, which the keepers of the peace never actually make in the novel. Varden subsequently watches Rudge "with a careful eye" (63). And when he suspects that the highwayman is about to rob him, the locksmith warns him off with a show of force, wielding the hammer from his bag of tools: " 'I know these roads, friend. When I travel them, I carry nothing but a few shillings, and not a crown's worth of them. I tell you plainly, to save us both trouble, that there's nothing to be got from me but a pretty stout arm considering my years, and this tool, which, mayhap from long acquaintance with, I can use pretty briskly. You shall not have it all your own way, I promise you, if you play at that game.' With these words he stood upon the defensive" (64). Here the lockmaker stands between the criminal and society, acting as the agent of prevention and security, whereas officials charged with these duties signally fail to provide either. Through Varden primarily, *Barnaby Rudge* juxtaposes the use of defensive force and individual benevolence, demonstrating that these are not conflicting positions but necessary counterparts of social order. However, the use of force has limits for Dickens the reform-minded liberal, and the scene raises questions about Varden as the representative of social order that recur later in the novel. Here it is sufficient to note that the locksmith does to some extent embody social authority, though his readiness the resist the criminal and prevent the crime distinguishes him from almost all of the official mechanisms of power as the novel represents them.

Barnaby Rudge portrays the breakdown of public security and social order during the late eighteenth century, tracing the mob's evolution and its increasingly destructive behavior in the failure of officials first to prevent crime and later to respond to the collapse of public order. In the novel's first half, which is set in 1775, the roads around London are "infested by footpads or highwaymen" (61); and residents, because watchmen are "utterly ineffectual and powerless," live in "great dread" of crime (177, 178). On the eve of the conflict, the mob's proletarian leaders, Sim, Hugh, and Dennis, drunkenly stagger through the streets of the city at night "shouting like madmen, and defying the watch with great valour." The narrator observes that their defiance entails no "unusual bravery or boldness, as the watchmen of that time, being selected for the office on account of excessive age and extraordinary infirmity, had a custom of shutting themselves up tight in their boxes on the first symptoms of disturbance, and remaining there until they disappeared" (371). During the early stages of the riots, "no authority restrained" the mob as it sacks Catholic homes and chapels (482). And just before the siege of Newgate, we see an abdication of authority at higher levels of civil power, as the commander-in-chief unsuccessfully attempts "to arouse the magistrates to a sense of their duty, and in particular the Lord Mayor, who was the faintest-hearted and most timid of them all" (567). Passages such as these call to mind the views of Georgian reformers like Colquhoun, Hanway, and others, including Bramah, who argued that social stability would result from preventive rather than punitive measures that failed to provide a moral lesson to future criminals. Dickens follows these reformers, assigning an equal if not a greater degree of culpability for social disorder to England's legal system, which the narrator simply calls "bad criminal laws."

Barnaby Rudge refers to the capital statutes that make up the Bloody Code, and chiefly represents the social logic and practical application of this judicial policy through Sir John Chester, an advocate of the gallows, and Dennis the hangman, its embodiment. Chester typifies a form of social arrogance and political corruption that Dickens associates with aristocratic-Tory demagoguery. As much as his rejection and exile of his son, Edward, or his disavowal of his bastard son, Hugh, the aristocrat's claim that "insane creatures" like Barnaby "really ought to be hanged for the comfort of society" (671) demonstrates his renunciation of social duty and the perversion of justice. For although Barnaby represents irrationality, chaos, and even lawlessness, as Natalie McKnight points out (88), he bears no culpability for his part in the riots, which the novel clearly distinguishes from the crimes committed by the rest of the mob. Chester's comment also illustrates the truth of the narrator's claim that one of the primary "evil[s] attendant upon the frequent exhibition of this last dread punishment, of Death, [is] that it hardens the minds of those who deal it out." Because he is a legislator, the aristocrat's symbolic responsibility for the abuses of law overshadows the hangman's. Execution hardens, as well, the minds of observers and thus society as a whole, for it is "a thing so common, that very few were startled by the awful sentence, or cared to question its propriety" (682). In fact, after officials sentence Dennis to death for participating in the riots, the hangman reasons that since he personifies England's solution to almost every type of crime, the legal system will ultimately spare his life because:

> When he remembered the great estimation in which his office was held, and the constant demand for his services; when he bethought himself, how the Statute Book regarded him as a kind of Universal Medicine applicable to men, women, and children, of every age and variety of criminal constitution; and how high he stood, in his official capacity, in the favour of the Crown, and both Houses of Parliament, the Mint, the Bank of England, and the Judges of the land; when he

> recollected that whatever Ministry was in or out, he remained their peculiar pet and panacea, and that for his sake England stood single and conspicuous among the civilised nations of the earth: when he called these things to mind and dwelt upon them, he felt certain that the national gratitude *must* relieve him from the consequences of his late proceedings, and would certainly restore him to his old place in the happy social system. (664)

Just as Newgate lies at the "heart" of London, which Dickens imagines as a "fallen and secular" city in *Barnaby Rudge* (Parrinder 409), the gallows lies at the heart of the irredeemably corrupt "social system." As a legal "panacea," the hangman enjoys national support from the monarchy downward. With a fair degree of historical accuracy, Dickens describes here the official reaction to crime in late eighteenth-century England.[21] The government used the terror of the gallows rather than the prevention of crime in its efforts to enforce social order. In his preface to the novel, Dickens assures his readers that the hangman's "allusions to the flourishing condition of his trade in those days, have their foundation in Truth, and not in the Author's fancy" (41). By using Dennis as one of the leaders of the mob that sacks the city and razes Newgate, Dickens demonstrates the Bloody Code's ultimate failure to provide a moral lesson. Through Dennis, Dickens illustrates, as well, how the gallows in fact subverts its alleged purpose, producing the very criminal the system designed it to repress.

Through his engagement with the question of capital punishment in *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens again uses history to take on contemporary social and political concerns. In the spring of 1840, François Courvoisier, a valet to Lord William Russell, slit his employer's throat as he slept. The murderer attributed his crime to the influence of *Jack Sheppard*, providing Dickens all the more reason the reject any connection between his

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[21] On Dickens's historical accuracy, see Gold 116-17.

work and Ainsworth's novel. More important, though, Courvoisier's execution in July of 1840, which was the first public execution Dickens witnessed, raised a new round of ethical questions about capital punishment, a policy opposed by most English writers of the 1840s.[22] Not until 1846 did Dickens publish a series of letters addressing Courvoisier's hanging in the *Daily News*. He did, however, write a political squib entitled "The Fine Old English Gentleman," published in the *Examiner* (1841), in which he aims sharp criticism at nostalgia for conservative policies that frequently led (and continued to lead) to the gallows. Of the Bloody Code, he satirically observes, "The good old laws were garnished well with gibbets, whips, and chains"; and he attributes this draconian system to "the fine old English Tory times" (qtd. in Chittick 168).

Aside from the narrator, the most active opponent of this system in *Barnaby Rudge* is Varden. In a draft version of the novel, the lockmaker tells Chester that England's "cruel laws" condemn members of the lower class to death while ignoring their upper-class counterparts in crime, like Chester himself (qtd. in Brattin 23). Although Varden's criticism is implied rather than articulated in the revision, he nevertheless remains the novel's principal antagonist of Tory legal policy. Varden tries to save his rebellious apprentice from the gallows by a scheme to help him escape from London and reform his character (470), and he repeatedly petitions the government for Barnaby's release (682). Of greater symbolic significance, his testimony ensures Dennis's conviction (663), leading paradoxically to the execution of the executioner, who acknowledges the lockmaker's moral superiority and social authority when he asks him to appeal to Chester

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[22] For accounts of Dickens's witness of and reaction to Courvoisier's execution, see Collins 224-26 and Chittick 162-64. See Buckley, 426-29, for a discussion of *Jack Sheppard*'s influence on Courvoisier.

on Hugh's behalf, as they await their deaths (676). This pattern of opposition to the gallows signals Varden's role as a reformer.[23] As Patrick Brantlinger puts it, Dickens's solutions to poverty and crime are "benevolence and legal reform," positive qualities embodied primarily by the lockmaker, "a virtuous individual 'standing midway in the gulf' between an insane mob and corrupt aristocracy." But Varden is, despite his symbolic value, still only one man, hence the rioters' successful breach of Newgate. Dickens therefore "looks also to a reform of the criminal code and the prisons, after the manner of the greatest of middle-class, benevolent locksmiths, Jeremy Bentham" (96).[24] Caught between to the steady escalation of crime on one hand and the failure of the justice system on the other, the reform culture that emerged over the latter half of the eighteenth century created the ideological machinery that produced modern security, as we saw in the previous chapter. Bramah, in particular, complained of the gallows's "ineffectual severity" and pointed out officials' failure to suppress crime and social disorder, offering his invention as a humanitarian solution to social ills. In the social context of *Barnaby Rudge*, Varden occupies the same position, and through him Dickens conveys much the same message. In order to get at that message in its fullest sense, however, we must deal with the question of Varden's association with institutional authority and the use of violent force.

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[23] According to Rice, Varden's political counterpart in the novel is Sir John Fielding, himself a historical legal reformer and co-founder with his brother, Henry, of the Bow Street Runners ("*Barnaby Rudge*" 101), further demonstrating the locksmith's connection with reform.

[24] For further discussions of reform in the novel, see: Rice, "*Barnaby Rudge*" 91; Sanders 71; and Fleishman 107.

IV

Because of Varden's identification with reform and the virtues of the private sphere, *Barnaby Rudge* establishes him as the standard against which it invites readers to measure characters such as Hugh, Chester, and Dennis, judge England's institutions, and assess the social values they represent. Critics have alleged, however, that Varden's trade complicates this scenario, citing as evidence the novel's depiction of Varden at work in his shop. The scene takes place in chapter 41, following seven chapters in which the main participants in the riots take their places and just before the eruption of mob violence. The narrator comments:

> From the workshop of the Golden Key, there issued forth a tinkling sound, so merry and good-humoured, that it suggested the idea of some one working blithely, and made quite pleasant music. No man who hammered on at a dull monotonous duty, could have brought such cheerful notes from steel and iron; none but a chirping, healthy, honest-hearted fellow, who made the best of everything, and felt kindly towards everybody, could have done it for an instant. [….]
>
> Tink, tink, tink—clear as a silver bell, and audible at every pause of the streets' harsher noises, as though it said, 'I don't care; nothing puts me out; I am resolved to he happy.' Women scolded, children squalled, heavy carts went rumbling by, horrible cries proceeded from the lungs of hawkers; still it struck in again, no higher, no lower, no louder, no softer; not thrusting itself on people's notice a bit the more for having been outdone by louder sounds….
>
> It was a perfect embodiment of the still small voice, free from all cold, hoarseness, huskiness, or unhealthiness of any kind; foot-passengers slackened their pace, and were disposed to linger near it; neighbours who had got up splenetic that morning, felt good-humour stealing on them as they heard it, and by degrees became quite sprightly; mothers danced their babies to its ringing; still the same magical tink, tink, tink, came gaily from the workshop of the Golden Key.
>
> Who but the locksmith could have made such music! A gleam of sun shining through the unsashed window, and chequering the dark workshop with a broad patch of light, fell full upon him, as though attracted by his sunny heart. There he stood working at his anvil, his face all radiant with exercise and gladness…the easiest, freest, happiest man in all the world. [….] 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. (381-82)

The problem in this passage, according to some critics, is that it exposes an inconsistency between the trade and the practitioner that undercuts Varden's benevolence and implicates him in the institutions that need reform.[25] Rather than indicating Dickens's conflicted view of security or unwillingness to admit some sort of ethical gap between Varden and his trade, however, this passage uses irony to frame what Joseph Gold calls "the paradox of the good locksmith," which is thematically central to the

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[25] Steven Connor argues, for instance, that Dickens exhibits his political concerns in *Barnaby Rudge*, the most overtly political of his novels, "most pressingly in the need to create and sustain physical and spatial separation" (212), which of course is Varden's primary professional function. Dickens's use of space reflects the efforts of officials to map social order onto London by establishing various types of boundaries—economic, class, legal, professional, and so on—that became "increasingly, and intensely political" toward mid-century (213). The lock in *Barnaby Rudge* symbolizes these boundaries. Yet as political symbol it allegedly raises problems, for it signals opposing spatial categories of confinement and protection (218). The lock, in other words, ambiguously signifies what amounts to a repressively conservative social order on the one hand, and enlightened liberal self-interest on the other. Connor thus reads in the passage's disavowal of strongboxes and prison doors "an interesting uncertainty" on the part of the narrator about Varden's profession that mirrors "Dickens's own political uncertainty regarding the question of restraint and liberty" (219). Magnet, along similar lines, asserts that Dickens's prose in this passage "rings false as it tries to slide over conflict and contradiction with forced heartiness, acknowledging truths even while appearing to deny them." The passage moves from an idealized depiction of Varden's labor to "the realm of that coercive force which guarantees the social contract," revealing Dickens's primary dilemma in portraying Varden. Inasmuch as he is "the very personification of social authority, the representative of that power which secures society's existence, the locksmith embodies what for Dickens in *Barnaby* is the greatest good and highest value." And yet, according to Magnet, the authority Varden personifies is also "inextricably bound up with force and violence" (149-50). Brantlinger puts the alleged problem in general terms, arguing, "the question of why locks are necessary if middle-class benevolence works apparently does not occur to Dickens, although he is never far from asking it" (96).

novel.[26] Dickens is simultaneously aware, as Gold puts it, "that lock and key are primary symbols of a fallen world" and "that if all men were Gabriel Vardens the lock and key would disappear" (118). Although Gold does not develop this line of argument, his comment does point us toward a historical understanding of the lockmaker's role in society that helps account for the seeming contradiction. In order to flesh out the paradox, we take a short detour through *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which shows how Dickens redefines the lock's social meaning in order to represent it in un-ironically negative terms.

As constant reminders of the struggle between acquisition and loss, lock and key and strongbox were among the predominant symbols of nineteenth-century economic life. Lockmakers themselves called attention to the paradoxical relationship between their trade's expansion and society's ongoing development. James Tildesley concluded his report on the Midlands lockmaking district with this commentary:

> The demand for locks and keys must necessarily extend with the growth of civilization, and it must also be maintained so long as lovers have secrets to treasure, and misers have hoards to keep, and affection has its sacred relics to preserve. But when the day dawns of which poets dream, and seers foretell—when the world shall rejoice in millennium light, and resemble Longfellow's Arcadian village where—
>
> 'Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to their windows,
> But their dwellings were open as day and the hearts of the owners;'
>
> Then, but not till then, will our treasures need no more the guard of lock and key, and the locksmith, like *Othello*, 'find his occupation gone.' (91-92)

In his *Rudimentary Treatise on the Construction of Locks and Keys*, Alfred Hobbs likewise observed the practical basis of security's symbolic value: "Until the world becomes an honest world, or until honest people bear a larger ratio than at present to the

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[26] Parker argues that the irony in *Barnaby Rudge* is "much more intense" than in Dickens's previous novels (188).

dishonest, the whole of our movables are, more or less, at the mercy of our neighbors. Houses, rooms, vaults, cellars, cabinets, cupboards, caskets, desks, chests, boxes, caddies,—all, with the contents of each, ring the changes between *meum* and *tuum* pretty much according to the security of the locks by which they are guarded" (2). The *Cornhill Magazine* essay "A Few Thoughts on Keys" took a satirical but no less practical approach to this issue, identifying the key as an emblem of the complexities and anxieties of life in modern capitalist society. Almost as if the writer had Hobbs in mind, he asserted that the key represents "finite man's infinite faculties of acquisitiveness and retentiveness" and arbitrates "those vain attributes 'mine and thine.' " The essay then called into question the logical possibility of a "civilized strongbox," though it resolved this ostensible contradiction through the familiar dichotomy of civilization and savagery, juxtaposing lock and key with the keyless "noble savage" free from the burdens of property ownership (624).

But not all commentators saw the lock in positive terms. Thomas Carlyle placed the lock at the center of the "gospel of mammonism" in *Past and Present* (1843). As a central symbol of political economy, it enforces an impenetrable barrier between the Two Nations. All "government of the Poor by the Rich has long ago been given over to Supply-and-demand, Laissez-faire and such like," Carlyle complained; and under this system the rich express their hold on wealth and power through total exclusion of the impoverished classes: " 'You are no sister of ours; what shadow of proof is there? Here are our parchments, our padlocks, proving indisputably our money-safes to be *ours*, and you to have no business with them. Depart!' " (280).

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens echoes to some degree Carlyle's criticism. *A Christmas Carol* renders useless the protection of lock and key in order to deploy a redefined symbolism by which the novel sets up the indictment against Ebenezer Scrooge. After Scrooge encounters Jacob Marley's face in his doorknocker and retreats to his rooms, he "closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom," thereby securing himself "against surprise" (56). Yet "when, without a pause," Marley's ghost enters "through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes," the failure of security signals the initial step by which Dickens gives the lock a social meaning markedly different from the one it has in *Barnaby Rudge*. Scrooge first recognizes Marley's face, "The same face: the very same," as well as "his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pig-tail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head." More noteworthy for the miser, however, is the chain the binds his former business partner: "The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail: and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" (57). Lock and key cease to function as mechanisms of self-protection and become the chains of self-imprisonment, which the living Marley forged a link at a time. Upon Marley's departure, *A Christmas Carol* extends this redefined symbolism, reversing the dichotomy, implicit in Carlyle's comment, between inside and outside, privacy and privation. Looking out of his window, Scrooge observes that ghosts populate the external world, cursed eternally to inhabit the public sphere due to their lack of private charity:

> The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost:

> some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever. (65)[27]

One must keep in mind that Scrooge's moral failure—like the failures of Marley and his spectral associates who haunt London's streets—is not his power of acquisition but the fact that he denies any humanitarian responsibility and in doing so divorces enlightenment from self-interest. He is merely greedy. Given that context and the fact that poverty rather than crime frames the narrative, we can say that Dickens strategically redefines the lock's social meaning in *A Christmas Carol*, and that this altered meaning does not indicate his view of the strongbox—or more broadly, of security—in general terms.

Dickens, for all of his "sentimental radicalism," as Walter Bagehot famously put it, is not so idealistic or even Carlylean as to suggest that strongboxes are unwarranted in *Barnaby Rudge*;[28] neither, for that matter, does he come anywhere near proposing that prisons have no use.[29] He acknowledges, albeit ironically, the social necessity of the

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[27] It is worth noting that in spite of the obvious message conveyed by the imagery in this scene, Scrooge's final act before seeking the shelter of his bed in the opening chapter, and just before the first spirit's visit, is to inspect "the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed" (65). Even though the miser subsequently breaks off his customary "Humbug" mid-speech, signaling the beginning of his transformation, his examination of the locks and bolts also suggests that securing one's door against the outer world is a reflexive behavior—ghostly intruders notwithstanding.

[28] *Barnaby Rudge* in fact shows little of Carlyle's influence, according to Michael Goldberg (101).

strongbox precisely because it protects the boundaries of ownership and thus symbolically guards the borders of domesticity and selfhood. By extension, the prison door protects social order if the lockbox fails to do its job. These forms of protection are in fact inversely proportional. According to the novel's implicit reformist logic, the better prevention (the strongbox) works the less often society must resort to punishment (the prison door). Through this logic, Dickens affirms that the lock is both an index of social conditions and a moral imperative on humanitarian grounds, much as Bramah claimed in his *Dissertation*. He reaffirms this point through the description of Varden's shop, which specifically contrasts the locksmith's rhythmic, harmonious activity, evoking order that extends outward, with the tumultuous external world characterized by harsh sounds, scolding, squalling, and "horrible cries," and which is about to explode into the worst episode of public violence in England's history. As the "perfect embodiment of the still small voice," the locksmith's labor simulates the conscience with its moral restraints and compulsion to social duty, which Simon Tappertit later mischaracterizes as tyranny when he denounces his association with Varden (543). The novel's ironic depiction of the lock shop comes into sharper focus when we read it against the politically subversive apprentice's earlier condemnation of Varden's "cursed old rusty mechanical trade" (108) and his comment to the Knights, a quasi-trade union shrouded in potentially dangerous if

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[29] While working on *Barnaby Rudge* in August of 1841, shortly after Robert Peel's Tory government had won a majority, Dickens wrote to John Forster: "By Jove how radical I am getting! I wax stronger and stronger in the true principles every day" (*Letters* 2: 357). But he also had an ideological connection with the founder of the Metropolitan Police Force. Dickens expressed his desire to become a police magistrate in 1843, and looked into the possibility three years later. He even owned a copy of the Police Act, which he once used in an effort to have a young woman arrested on the charge of using profanity in public (Magnet 1-8).

comic secrecy, that a strongbox secures the Constitution (115).[30] Despite Sim's mistake about the location of the nation's legal code, to the extent that the Varden household functions as a metaphor for good government, as Rice argues, *Barnaby Rudge* intimates a parallel between the legal (public) and domestic (private) realms through which the Golden Key itself figures as the strongbox to which Dickens repeatedly traces the guardianship of order. Rather than a "churlish" object, then, the strongbox, like Varden's gaze, protectively encloses the individual, the family, and therefore the fundamental conditions for social stability. The same kind of irony applies to prison doors. When the narrator says of Varden's locks, "Cellars of beer and wine, rooms where there were fires, books, gossip, and cheering laughter—these were their proper sphere of action," he foretells the locations of four of the novel's most figuratively and literally violent attacks: the sacking of the Maypole and the Golden Key; the razing of Lord Mansfield's home, which is among other things a treasury of rare books and manuscripts (599); and the destruction of the home of Langland, the vintner, whose cellars the mob empties before burning his house to the ground (610). Even though the last two assaults occur after the door of the prison fails, all four episodes suggest that the "Places of distrust and cruelty, and restraint," about which the narrator supposedly betrays uncertainty or wants to disassociate from Varden's work, according to some critics, are in fact central to that work and vitally necessary for society's existence. This is nowhere more clear than in Varden's refusal to submit to the rioters' threats and pick the lock of his own construction that secures Newgate. As he tells Akerman, the prison's governor, "You'll do your duty,

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[30] For a discussion of Dickens's distrust of trade unionism and his use of Sim and the 'Prentice Knights (later known as the United Bulldogs) to satirize the movement and its secret rituals, see Brantlinger 91-93.

and I'll do mine" (577). Through this invocation of shared social responsibility, to which we can again refer to the "still small voice" of conscience, the scene in front of Newgate identifies Varden with the warden (we could in fact reasonably read the name as a near homophone for the office): society charges both with keeping the prisoners in and the mob out.

The connection between Varden and Akerman brings us back to the question of force and the possibility of the locksmith's guilt by association with an institution—the prison—corrupted by oppression, violence, death, and urgently needing reform. We have to keep in mind, however, that the unreformed prison for Dickens is a symptom of the Tory version of society, most clearly represented in *Barnaby Rudge* by Dennis, the system's chief functionary, and Chester, its symbolic mastermind, both of whom Varden consistently opposes. During the scene at the door of Newgate, for instance, the locksmith resists Dennis's use of coercive force to get him to open the prison and in fact fights back with a gesture that envisages the hangman's ironic death: "Dennis dealt him a blow upon the face which felled him to the ground. He sprung up again like a man in the prime of life, and with blood upon his forehead, caught him by the throat" (579). The locksmith later disturbs the false tranquility of Chester's "well-ordered" room, which exemplifies for Dickens the façade of Tory social stability, when he comes to exhort Chester to visit Hugh in Newgate and awaken "him to a sense of his crime and danger." The aristocrat is, of course, the last man morally qualified for such a task, notwithstanding the father-son relation, because he bears the greatest culpability for Hugh's fate. This fact is not lost on Chester, who, after the confrontation with Varden, betrays an awareness of his own guilt for the only time in the novel: "Gabriel said no

more, but gave the knight a parting look, and left him. As he quitted the room, Sir John's face changed; and the smile gave place to a haggard and anxious expression, like that of a weary actor jaded by the performance of a difficult part" (670, 680). Despite such moments and the novel's repeated efforts to differentiate Varden from corrupted institutional authority, both Connor (219) and Magnet (153), who represent the lock trade as an extension of the system, assert the lockmaker's tie with the violence of state power by pointing out that the lockmaker wears the uniform of a sergeant in the Royal East London Volunteers while working at his anvil. But the scene requires a qualification. The narrator remarks that only "Gabriel's lower man was clothed in military gear"; his "cap and feather, broadsword, sash, and coat of scarlet" hang on the wall of the lock shop (382). Dickens uses this hybrid image—part locksmith and part soldier—to suggest that prevention (the "higher" or superior man) is preferable to force (the "lower" or inferior). But when the threat exceeds the restraining power of the lock, defensive force becomes the necessary and legitimate alternative. We should remember that the lockmaker's musical hammer is also a legitimately self-defensive weapon, as the novel illustrates through Varden's initial encounter with Rudge. Varden argues this point in a subsequent exchange with his wife, responding to her complaint about his involvement with the militia: "it's done to defend you and all the other women, and our own fireside, and everybody else's in case of need." He then counters his wife's claim that joining the militia is "unchristian" by contending that the use of defensive force is morally sanctioned: "Which would be most unchristian, Martha—to sit quietly down and let our houses be sacked by a foreign army, or to turn out like men and drive 'em off? Shouldn't I be a nice sort of Christian, if I crept into a corner of my own chimney and looked on

while a parcel of whiskered savages bore off Dolly—or you?" (383). Rejecting passivity, Varden here implicitly contrasts himself with civil authority—the watchmen, the magistrates, and the Lord Mayor—all of whom the novel condemns for failing in their duty to defend the individual and the private sphere against mob violence. His response, too, indicates that the impending defensive action is the collective effort of private individuals protecting "our houses" against assault from a force antagonistic to respectable, middle-class Englishness. This claim, within the context of the Victorian understanding of security, has undertones that distinguish Varden from the Tory model of social order and highlight his political value for Dickens.

V

Dickens, as we have seen, embraces what Townshend calls a "positive" model of order in *Barnaby Rudge* and consequently places emphasis on individual responsibility. Doing so further distinguishes him from Carlyle. As Sanders observes, in Dickens's historical novels, "partly in opposition to Scott, and certainly to Carlyle, it is in private, and not in public life, that he beds his solution to social problems" (74). We find the antithesis to this solution and to the positive definitions of security and social order in Disraeli's *Sybil*, which provides as well a sharply contrasting representation of the lockmaker and his relationship to the general conditions and structure of social stability. The lock, as we know, has political relevance as a symbol of liberal individualism and middle-class identity. In *Barnaby Rudge*, a novel that cherishes private life and acknowledges individualism as one of the highest virtues, Dickens reinforces this symbolism through the union of Varden's profession and bourgeois independence.[31]

Disraeli, too, is clearly aware of this symbolic value. But by combining "crisis, Carlyleianism and the chivalric ideal of an 'organic society'," as Christopher Harvie puts it (22), Disraeli forms a narrative laden with conservative social and political nostalgia set in opposition to the claims of modern political economy and democratic autonomy. His characterization of English society subsequent to the passage of the first Reform Bill (1832), for example, briefly demonstrates this point:

> If a spirit of rapacious coveteousness, desecrating all the humanities of life, has been the besetting sin of England for the last century and a half, since the passing of the Reform Act the altar of Mammon has blazed with triple worship. To acquire, to accumulate, to plunder each other by virtue of philosophic phrases, to propose an Utopia to consist only of WEALTH and TOIL, this has been the breathless business of enfranchised England for the last twelve years, until we are startled from our voracious strife by the wail of intolerable serfage. (56)

Whereas Dickens is firmly committed to the liberal doctrine of "social and moral progress" through the vehicle of individual agency in *Barnaby Rudge* (Sanders 69), Disraeli uses his novel, as the passage illustrates, to "rewrite the Whig version of history in order to place the blame for Chartism and trade unionism squarely upon the shoulders of the middle class, or at least upon middle-class liberalism," and eventually to synthesize Tory and radical politics into an alliance against the middle class, represented in Disraeli's novel by the marriage of Charles Egremont and Sybil Gerard (Brantlinger 96-97). Disraeli here reduces liberal individualism to acts of acquisition, accumulation, and plundering—all three of which bear an immediate relationship to the theme of security.

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[31] Chester, for instance, satirically notes Varden's independence during their interview (673). Commenting on the significance of individualism in *Barnaby Rudge*, J. Hillis Miller observes: "the most important single change in Dickens' novels, and the true turning point of his imaginative development, is a reversal which corresponds to a fundamental transformation of attitude in his century. The change can be defined as the rejection of the past, the given, and the exterior as sources of selfhood, and a reorientation toward the future and toward the free human spirit itself as the only true source of value" (qtd. in Fleishman 109).

A society of aggressively acquisitive individuals, according to the novel's formulation, is a society of mutual predators for whom personal security is not a sign of respectability or progress but evidence of modern barbarity and the erosion of Englishness. Disraeli argues this point in *Sybil* through Bishop Hatton, the master lockmaker, a relatively marginal and shadowy figure for most of the novel who plays a central role in instigating the labor strike and triggering working-class violence, and who therefore figures as the chief enemy of social order.

Like Dickens, Disraeli grounds his depiction of the lockmaker in a historical source, though he draws from the region of the Midlands. *Sybil* portrays England's lockmaking district, which it links with the ancient worship of Woden, as a relic of paganism and a cultural waste land bereft of any social controls or civilizing influences:

> It was land without an owner; no one claimed any manorial right over it; they could build cottages without paying rent. It was a district recognized by no parish; so there were no tithes, and no meddlesome supervision. It abounded in fuel which cost nothing, for though the veins were not worth working as a source of mining profit, the soil of Wodgate was similar in its superficial character to that of the country around. So a population gathered, and rapidly increased, in the ugliest spot in England, to which neither Nature nor art had contributed a single charm; where a tree could not be seen, a flower was unknown, where there was neither belfry nor steeple, nor a single sight or sound that could soften the heart or humanise the mind. (202)

Disraeli models Wodgate primarily on Willenhall, Staffordshire, using evidence from the *Appendix to the Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission* (1842), written by Dickens's friend Richard Henry Horne, who inspected the region in 1841—though as Sheila M. Smith has shown, Disraeli creates a "composite" image from various Midlands towns and villages, including Wolverhampton (380).[32] The "condition of

England" as Disraeli imagines it in *Sybil* reaches its lowest point in Wodgate, where "Labour reigns supreme" and the master lockmakers who brutalize their apprentices "form a powerful aristocracy":

> nor is it possible to conceive one apparently more oppressive. They are ruthless tyrants; they habitually inflict upon their subjects punishments more grievous than the slave population of our colonies were ever visited with; not content with beating them with sticks or flogging them with knotted ropes, they are in the habit of felling them with hammers, or cutting their heads open with a file or lock. The most usual punishment however, or rather stimulus to increase exertion, is to pull an apprentice's ears till they run with blood. (203-04)

Although Disraeli omits some of the worst conditions and cases of abuse contained in the blue-book report, claiming in his Advertisement to *Sybil* that the whole truth is too implausible for his readers (24), he also omits some of the district's redeeming features and exaggerates elements of violence against apprentices. Willenhall did have churches and schools, for example, and the region did have humane employers; moreover, Horne's observation of an isolated incident, in which a master knocked out an apprentice with a hammer, becomes a habitual practice in *Sybil* (Smith 373, 377, 378). This is especially the case in the warren of Hell-house Yard, the location of Bishop Hatton's workshop; Hatton, the head of Wodgate's quasi-aristocratic order, epitomizes oppression and tyranny. Tummas, one of Hatton's workmen, whose scarred body reflects the lockmaker's violence, recounts for Stephen Morley the abuses he suffered during his apprenticeship: "I should like to have a crown for every time he has cut my head open. He cut it open once with a key and twice with a lock; he knocked the corner of a lock into my head twice, once with a bolt and once with a shut; you know what that is; the thing

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[32] Dickens visited Wolverhampton and other areas of the Midlands during a tour of the north with Forster and Hablot K. Browne in the spring of 1840, though we have no indication that he visited any lock shops in the region. See *Letters* 2: 132, 496 and Ackroyd 273.

what runs into the staple. He hit me on the head with a hammer once. That was a blow!" (206).[33] In the same scene, however, Tummas praises Hatton for his ability to make perfectly secure locks. As the former apprentice tells Morley, "Give him a lock to make, and you won't have your box picked" (207).

Perfect security, as we have used that phrase throughout this study, loses its social meaning and cultural value in *Sybil*. Lock and key and the tools of the trade serve almost exclusively as weapons here and elsewhere in the novel, and therefore destabilize the conceptual basis of security. Indeed, Hatton's hammer becomes the primary symbol of his illegitimate authority during the Chartist riots, "with which he announced he would destroy the enemies of the people" (443), and with which he proclaims himself "the leader and liberator of the people of England" (461). Disraeli's focus on Hatton's hammer strangely corresponds with Varden's tool. One could perhaps read these passages as a parody of Simon Tappertit as well—whose Christian name, incidentally, is the same as Hatton's—when Hatton calls himself "the leader of a great people, the captain of a noble band," and claims that he is no longer "a private individual, but a public character; not a mender of locks, but a healer of the wounds of his unhappy

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[33] Tummas's wife, Sue, who has "a back like a grasshopper" (205), similarly embodies the physical punishment of the trade. Her deformity, the result of long hours of working with a file, was so prevalent in Willenhall that locals often referred to the town as Humpshire (McNeil 38). In Tildesley's report for the British Association in 1865, he noted the steadily decreasing number of apprentices in the Midlands lock industry and claimed that the "treatment of these youths is also much more considerate than when pictured by Mr. Disraeli" (91). In 1879, more than forty years after the publication of *Sybil*, lockmakers from the Midlands complained that Disraeli's depiction of Willenhall was "a gross libel," and *The Birmingham Daily Post* blamed the novel for much of "the existing prejudice against Willenhall and its mechanics" (*Controversy on English and American Locks* 53, 78).

country" (543).[34] Likewise, the novel's description of work in Hatton's shop, which Disraeli bases closely on a "nail and tip manufactory" in Wolverhampton rather than a lock shop (Smith 380-81), comes across as a distorted echo of the musical sounds of labor in the Golden Key, which Dickens contrasts with the "streets' harsher noises" and characterizes as "free from all cold, hoarseness, huskiness, or unhealthiness of any kind." *Sybil* indeed seems to mock the rhythmic harmony and goodwill of Varden's shop by combining dissonance, child labor, and physical abuse into the construction of locks and keys:

> 'Now boys,' said the bishop, in a hoarse, harsh voice, 'steady, there; steady. There's a file what don't sing; can't deceive my ear; I know all their voices. Don't let me find that un out, or I won't walk into him, won't I? Ayn't you lucky boys, to have reg'lar work like this, and the best of prog! It worn't my lot, I can tell you that. Give me that shut, you there, Scrubbynose, can't you move? Look sharp, or I won't move you, won't I? Steady, steady! All right! That's music. Where will you hear music like twenty files all working at once! You ought to be happy boys, oughtn't you? Won't there be a treat of fish after this, that's all! Hulloa, there, you red-haired varmint, what are you looking after? Three boys looking about them; what's all this? Won't I be among you?' and he sprang forward and seized the luckless ears of the first apprentice he could get hold of, and wrung them till the blood spouted forth. (221-22)

Whether or not Disraeli consciously parodies Dickens, *Sybil* reverses *Barnaby Rudge*'s juxtaposition of the benevolent locksmith and the corrupted aristocrat. Disraeli uses the novel's Wodgate episodes and Hatton to illustrate the working class's lack of

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[34] There is perhaps a further play on the lockmakers' names. Varden's Christian name, Gabriel, the biblical angel of the Annunciation (Gold 121), contrasts with the demonic Hatton's quasi-clerical title of Bishop. Tummas explains to Morley the origin of Hatton's title: "That's his name and authority; for he's the governor here over all of us. And it has always been so that Wodgate has been governed by a bishop; because we have no church, we will have as good." Hatton's reading of " 'Our father' backwards," like a witch's prayer, during his performance of Sue and Tummas's marriage ceremony, underscores his perversion of the office (207). Disraeli possibly caricatures Varden's shrewish wife as well in Mrs. Hatton, "a tall bearded virago" and domestic tyrant whose eyes flash "with unbridled power" (222).

fitness for self-government (Brantlinger 101). The "otherness" of the lockmaking district, John Ulrich observes, renders it "more…foreign than the most distant land imaginable"; and through Stephen Morley's indignant reaction to Hell-house Yard, Disraeli shows the urgent need for official intervention to redeem the inhabitants "from their 'animal-like' and 'savage' condition" (157-58). Given the contexts of production, security and social order in *Sybil* are not the result of perfectly secure locks that represent the protected space of liberal individualism but rather of paternalistic social organization, which Disraeli principally illustrates through Trafford, a combination of modern industrialist and medieval lord of the manor, and Egremont, the enlightened aristocrat. As "the younger son of a family that had for centuries been planted in the land," Trafford, like Walter Gerard and Sybil, allows Disraeli to trace out a branch of England's true nobility. Because of his hereditary identification with a social system that predates capitalism and middle-class liberalism, the factory owner represents the restorative power of "Young England": "With gentle blood in his veins, and old English feelings, he imbibed, at an early period of his career, a correct conception of the relations which should subsist between the employer and the employed. He felt that between them there should be other ties than the payment and the receipt of wages" (224). Trafford rejects, in other words, what Carlyle called the "cash nexus," and instead organizes labor relations according to a retooled code of *noblesse oblige*—a symbolic substitute for the capitalist relations of production. His factory-housing complex enacts an idealized social organization:

> When the workpeople of Mr Trafford left his factory they were not forgotten. Deeply had he pondered on the influence of the employer on the health and content of his workpeople. He knew well that the domestic virtues are dependent on the existence of a home, and one of his first efforts had been to build a village

> where every family might be well lodged. Though he was the principal proprietor, and proud of that character, he nevertheless encouraged his workmen to purchase the fee: there were some who had saved sufficient money to effect this: proud of their house and their little garden, and of the horticultural society, where its produce permitted them to be annual competitors. In every street there was a well: behind the factory were the public baths; the schools were under the direction of the perpetual curate of the church, which Mr Trafford, though a Roman Catholic, had raised and endowed. In the midst of this village, surrounded by beautiful gardens, which gave an impulse to the horticulture of the community, was the house of Trafford himself, who comprehended his position too well to withdraw himself with vulgar exclusiveness from his real dependents, but recognized the baronial principle reviving in a new form, and adapted to the softer manners and more ingenious circumstances of the times.
>
> And what was the influence of such an employer and such a system of employment on the morals and manners of the employed? Great: infinitely beneficial. The connexion of a labourer with his place of work, whether agricultural or manufacturing, is itself a vast advantage. Proximity to the employer brings cleanliness and order, because it brings observation and encouragement. In the settlement of Trafford crime was positively unknown: and offences were very slight. There was not a single person in the village of a reprobate character. The men were well clad; the women had a blooming cheek; drunkenness was unknown; while the moral condition of the softer sex was proportionately elevated. (225-26)

This model of social relations produces working-class contentment, order, and obedience to the law; through it, Disraeli imagines a deeply conservative system without the necessity of the gallows. The governing class establishes itself as a centralized authority that reigns benevolently but still supremely and enforces a hierarchical social structure and order through constant surveillance of what the novel designates as Trafford's "dependants." One of the most notable effects of this arrangement is that it extends disciplinary power "across the boundary between work and domesticity" (Ulrich 159). The threshold of the private sphere, which represents the claims of private, autonomous selfhood, thus becomes porous, penetrable to the "observation" of public authority, and loses its meaning. So a society like the one Trafford has created needs no locks (pickproof or otherwise). In fact, we can see in *Sybil* that the lock embodies a

liberal social logic of self-government, which Disraeli repeatedly reduces to materialism and greed, that is antithetical to the community organized according to a revived "baronial principle."

Sybil's depiction of the village rivals the image of the Varden household as the more idyllic but displaces the locksmith who occupies the "centre of the system" in *Barnaby Rudge*. For true security, Disraeli points readers instead to Trafford—a man with a gaze as powerful as Varden's—who inhabits "the midst of this village" as its overseer and protector. He directs readers as well to Egremont, whose dawning enlightenment comes through a redemptive vision of "the People," personified by Sybil and her father; from them Egremont he gains an awareness of his social and political responsibilities as a member of the governing class (169-70). Through him, Disraeli leaves no room for doubt about which model of security leads to a stable society. He pits the aristocrat against the Hell-cats, renegade lockmakers incited and led by Hatton, during the final scene depicting the storming of Mowbray Castle:

> One ruffian had grasped the arm of Sybil, another had clenched her garments, when an officer covered with dust and gore, sabre in hand, jumped from the terrace, and hurried to the rescue. He cut down one man, thrust away another, and placing his left arm round Sybil, he defended her with his sword…. Her assailants were routed, they made a staggering flight; the officer turned round and pressed Sybil to his heart.
>
> 'We will never part again,' said Egremont.
>
> 'Never,' murmured Sybil. (491-92)

In the end, as conservative forces defeat the riotous locksmiths, the People, wrapped in the embrace of aristocratic power, acknowledge their dependence on and pledge their commitment to the governing class, which alone can protect them from social disorder.

The contrasts between Hatton and Hell-house Yard on the one hand, and the combined forces of Trafford and his utopian factory and Egremont and his enlightened

paternalism on the other, frame the larger antagonism between *Sybil* and *Barnaby Rudge*. The terms of the conflict over security and social order are central to the stark differences between the novels' representations of the lockmaker. Disraeli locates social and cultural stability in a resurrection of the system of paternalistic, hierarchical authority that he explicitly envisions as a return to traditional Toryism:

> In a parliamentary sense, that great party has ceased to exist; but I will believe it still lives in the thought and sentiment and consecrated memory of the English nation. It has its origin in great principles and in noble instincts; it sympathises with the lowly, it looks up to the Most High; it can count its heroes and its martyrs; they have met in its behalf plunder, proscription. and death. Nor when it finally yielded to the iron progress of oligarchical supremacy, was its catastrophe inglorious. [….] Even now it is not dead, but sleepeth; and in an age of political materialism, of confused purposes and perplexed intelligence, that aspires only to wealth because it has faith in no other accomplishment, as men rifle cargoes on the verge of shipwreck, Toryism will yet rise from the tomb over which Bolingbroke shed his last tear, to bring back strength to the Crown, liberty to the Subject, and to announce that power has only one duty—to secure the social welfare of the PEOPLE. (330)

Private security, on the other hand, with it emphasis on the individual and thus as an emblem of self-government, is central to Dickens's liberal vision of social order in *Barnaby Rudge*. When Varden tears up Gordon's letter of protection, his act represents the individual's stand against a form of tyranny that follows the sacrifice of autonomy in exchange for security through any kind of system that wields absolute power (474).[35] Near the novel's conclusion, the restoration of Varden's sign and his home further highlights this point:

> The Golden Key itself, fair emblem of the locksmith's trade, 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

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[35] Of the Gordon mob's power during the height of the riots, the narrator says, "The crowd was the law, and never was the law held in greater dread, or more implicitly obeyed" (568).

> in days of yore. Indeed the whole house–front was spruce and trim, and so freshened up throughout, that if there yet remained at large any of the rioters who had been concerned in the attack upon it, the sight of the old, goodly, prosperous dwelling, so revived, must have been to them as gall and wormwood. (705)

Dickens here applauds and rewards private resistance to public tyranny, reminding us that the lockmaker, who personifies the sphere of autonomy, plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of social order. Varden's triumphant return to the restored Golden Key, accompanied by the newly pardoned Barnaby—whose release, which the novel compares to a resurrection from the dead, marks an emblematic reform of the Bloody Code—sets the stage for what is perhaps one of *Barnaby Rudge*'s most politically charged moments. In this scene, the benevolent locksmith's presence transforms the mob, as both a descriptive term and a physical entity, from a chaotic mass to an orderly social body that cheers King, Country, and Varden (710-12). This celebration of the locksmith translates into an endorsement of liberal individualism and seamlessly links the individual with the realms of political and social power. In other words, Dickens portrays a model of shared authority that stands in opposition to Disraeli's division between the Crown, which though bound by "duty" to the people, remains the locus of "strength" and "power," and the Subject, who though free according to the Tory formulation of "liberty," remains a passive recipient of protection rather than an active agent of his own security.

Like Bramah, Dickens views the lockmaker's function of securing the private sphere as a means of empowering the individual and as a response to the failures of public authority. (Indeed, in *A Tale of Two Cities* [1859] Dickens looks back to 1775, the era before the rise of modern security, and observes that England had "scarcely an amount of order and propriety to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies took place in the capital itself every night; families

were publicly cautioned not to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers' warehouses for security" [3].) Reading the version of social order in *Sybil* from the political vantage point of *Barnaby Rudge* suggests that the society without the benevolent locksmith is a society comprised of the protectors and the protected—or to put this dichotomy in terms that Dickens with his fundamental distrust of powerful systems might use, a society of the rulers and the ruled.

Chapter III

Victorian Security in Crisis: Public Interpretations of the Great Lock Controversy

Just as security lay at the heart of Dickens's liberal vision of a stable society in *Barnaby Rudge*, it played crucial roles a decade later in shaping the social and cultural meanings of the Great Exhibition of 1851, an event that, not unlike Dickens's novel, contributed to the production and maintenance of social order and, for many observers, illustrated liberalism's supremacy.[1] As the Exhibition's host nation, England itself embodied perfect security. Joseph Turner's commemorative poem, "Echoes of the Great Exhibition" (1851), represented England as a secure repository for exhibiting the world's industrial treasures while reminding readers, if any needed reminding, of its position atop the global manufacturing hierarchy:

> Hence are we set on high amid the nations,
> To us they trust their best and brightest things,
> Hence to us standing on sure foundations,
> Free Truth, free Thought, free Word, such glory clings. (qtd. in Auerbach 167)

The Lock Trophy built by Charles Aubin of Wolverhampton, displayed in the British lock exhibit in the Manufacturing Section of the Crystal Palace's west wing, appositely illustrated society's orderly progress while affirming the nationalist sentiment of Turner's poem.[2] Aubin's mechanism stood about three feet high and consisted of a hexagonal

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[1] Peter H. Hoffenberg, for example, in his study of British exhibitions and empire, argues that exhibitions were mechanisms for producing and enforcing a liberal version of social order (27, 31).

[2] The Royal Commission arranged objects by nation (England occupied the entire western wing of the Crystal Palace) and according to category, or section, of which there

base from which arose a central axis that passed through three tiers of discs of decreasing diameter and terminated in a British seal at the top. Each of the base's six sides was fitted with a reproduction of various ancient locks of Roman, French, and English origin, as well as an example of the basic lever-type warded lock. The ascending tiers contained examples of English patent locks—sixteen, twelve, and nine, respectively—including reproductions of locks by Barron, Parsons, Aubin himself, and Chubb; and the top of the trophy was fitted with a Bramah Precision lock.[3] Aubin constructed the mechanism using more than three thousand parts, and each of the forty-four reproduction locks worked by its own key. What made the trophy lock especially ingenious, however, was that the axis, a hollow brass tube, contained a system of racks, pinions, and levers that connected the forty-three locks on the lower tiers and base with the Bramah lock at the apex, which simultaneously operated them all with a turn of the key.[4] The Exhibition's *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue* (1851) described Aubin's invention as "Specimens to illustrate the rise and progress of the art of making locks, containing forty-four different movements by the most celebrated inventors in the lock trade" (665). The

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were four—raw materials, machinery, manufactures, and fine arts—each of which contained various classes and sub-classes. The British lock exhibit came under the designation of Section III, Class 22, "General Hardware, Including Locks and Grates," Sub-Class C, "Iron Manufacture." Richards notes that the way in which officials organized and distributed exhibition space "essentially balkanized the world, projecting a kind of geopolitical map of the world half occupied by England, half occupied by a collection of principalities vying for the leftover space" (25).

[3] By the beginning of the Exhibition, Aubin held six lock patents, obtained between 1830 and 1850. One of the more interesting "specimens" represented in the Trophy Lock was an invention patented in 1840 by a lockmaker named Pierce. Taking the lead from Worcester's *Centurie of Invention*, Pierce's lock shot a steel barb into the hand of anyone attempting to pick it, and the lockmaker was reportedly caught in his own trap while working on it (Hobbs 171).

[4] This description of Aubin's Lock Trophy comes from Price 521-24 and Hobbs 167-71.

critical term in this description was of course "progress," which for visitors to the Exhibition would have been almost immediately legible in the trophy's design without reference to the *Catalogue*.[5] Aubin's genealogy of lockmaking traced an ascending arc of British ingenuity in the modern era of industrial development and defined progress in almost exclusively nationalistic terms, using the impregnable Bramah lock to embody the ideal of technological perfection.

Even more important than the semiotic value of Aubin's Lock Trophy, perfect security was both figuratively and literally essential to displaying the Exhibition's crown jewel, the Koh-i-noor ("Mountain of Light") diamond, the most popular attraction for the Crystal Palace's six million visitors in the summer of 1851.[6] The East India Company seized the diamond from the Lahore Treasury after the death of its previous owner, Mughal Ranjeet Singh, and British annexation of the Punjab in 1849; the following year, it presented the gem to Queen Victoria, who loaned it to the Exhibition Commission, headed by Prince Albert, for display at the Crystal Palace. Before the Exhibition even got underway, as Michael W. Hancock observes, the diamond, which weighed 186 carats and had an estimated value of two million pounds, generated considerable publicity, capturing "the Victorian popular imagination as visible proof of England's prosperity and an important symbol of Britain's imperial power" (8).[7] To exhibit the Koh-i-noor safely

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[5] By the end of the decade, the high-security lock had become an important emblem of technological development. "The progress of the age in the improvement of every description of mechanical work," as a writer commented in *The New York Times*, "is not better exemplified than in the department of Bank and Safe Locks" (April 25, 1859; 8).

[6] As *Punch* observed of the gem's popularity, "The cynosure (or rather, the sinecure) of all eyes seems to be with the Koh-i-noor diamond" ("Front Row" 10).

amidst the crowds at the Crystal Palace, Chubb and Son, the monarch's official lockmakers, constructed a special display case that consisted of a large glass-enclosed, cage-like structure situated between an armored vault below (in which the diamond descended at night and in the event of an attempted robbery) and the imperial crown above.[8] The *Official Catalogue* informed visitors that the Chubb case "contains an arrangement for elevating and depressing the diamond without unlocking. It is considered to be impossible to pick the lock or obtain an entrance into this receptacle" (663).

With official recognition of its claim to perfect security, the Chubb case provided visitors to the Crystal Palace with an interpretive frame of reference for viewing the Koh-i-noor. Like the diamond it protected, the high-security display captured the public's imagination, figuring prominently in popular representations of the stone. *Punch*, for example, printed a caption under a drawing of two policemen leaving their post beside the display for the evening that assured readers of the gem's safety even in the absence of authorities: "It strikes seven; the Koh-i-noor sets in its iron safe, and the policemen depart" (qtd. in Chubb and Churcher 46). Among the most telling descriptions of the case was Richard Henry Horne's "A Penitent Confession," published in *Household Words* in August of 1851, a short story in which a man dreams of stealing the Koh-i-noor.

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[7] Miles Taylor argues that the Exhibition's Indian Court, with the Koh-i-noor as its "centerpiece," provided perhaps "the most compelling image of the importance that India had come to play in the monarchical style of Victoria by mid-century." "So successful was the Indian Court," he notes, "that two years later the East India Company and the Royal Society of Arts joined forces once more to stage an exhibition solely devoted to Indian artefacts and commercial wares" (269).

[8] Chubb based the high-security case on one of the company's commercial designs, introduced in 1839, for use in storefront displays.

According to the narrator, the theft would require an intrepid and extraordinarily talented cracksman:

> Bold, indeed, must be the thief that would make such a venture and such are not wanting as far as boldness is concerned; but to devise and execute any feasible plan for the capture of such a prize, so guarded by men and mechanism, by clockwork tricks within, which it is said would cause the diamond instantly to disappear, if the lightest of light fingers were but to touch it; by a bell-glass covering and by a great iron cockatoo cage, and policeman without—to obtain any success against such prodigious difficulties, visible and secreted, almost amounting to an impossibility, would require a thief of the very highest genius. (437)

The Illustrated London News, similarly, referred to the high-security display as "a golden cage or a prison" and "a great parrot-cage with gilded bars" (qtd. in Kriegel 166), employing metaphors that suggested both imprisonment and domestication of the foreign diamond and implicitly juxtaposing imperial spoils with English technology. Prominently situated in the Crystal Palace's Indian Court—a "South Asian treasure-chest of luxury goods and handicrafts, jeweled crowns, and thrones" (Hoffenberg 135)—the display did indeed offer visitors to the Crystal Palace a visually conspicuous affirmation of British superiority. This illustrative symbol of Britain's power of acquisition complemented *The Times*'s account of the Koh-i-noor's arrival in England in 1850:

> Her Majesty's steam-sloop Medea has just arrived at Portsmouth, with a freight more precious, in nominal value, than was ever carried from Peru to Cadiz. Major Mackeson, one of her passengers, a meritorious and distinguished officer, brings with him that famous diamond of the East called, in the fondness of Asiatic hyperbole, the Koh-i-noor, or *Mountain of Light*, which, after symbolizing the revolutions of ten generations by its passage from one conqueror to another, comes now, in the third centenary of its discovery, as the forfeit of Oriental faithlessness and the prize of Saxon valour, to the distant shores of England. (1 July 1850, 4D)

The Chubb cage, given its alleged inviolability, provided a fitting conclusion to a process that disrupted the cycle of revolutionary seizure, arrested the Koh-i-noor's "passage from

one conqueror to another," and thus finally secured "the prize" for England. The impenetrable display case, under the guardianship of the undefeated Chubb lock, lent itself to the effort to reformulate the diamond's sociocultural meaning, its "nominal value," suggesting a symbolic narrative closure that redefined the gem as Saxon rather than Oriental. By safely containing the Koh-i-noor—which simultaneously represented a miniaturized version of India and a commodified sign of British authority (Kriegel 167)—the Chubb case, adorned with the imperial crown, embodied the Empire itself, as perfect British security took center stage at the Exhibition, providing a technological framework for display that also functioned as a space of sociocultural enclosure.[9]

Despite the fact that the Koh-i-noor's rather lackluster appearance typically disappointed visitors expecting to view a more Anglicized (i.e., more precisely cut and finely polished) jewel, Chubb's display case maintained its hold on the public's imagination.[10] This fascination was in fact potentially as powerful if not more so than the diamond itself. The narrator of "A Penitent Confession," Simon Sparks, a self-described "private gentleman of small means" with a "passion for beautiful jewellery [sic] and precious stones," complains that he is disillusioned on first seeing the diamond:

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[9] The symbolic juxtaposition discussed here resurfaced in a more literal context during the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858). One of the Reverend John Cave-Brown's diary entries on the uprising in the Punjab, published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (June 1858), boasted that British security ultimately foiled insurgents who had captured a colonial treasury during the fighting: "The treasury was…in their power; but a patent iron safe and Bramah's locks defied all their power to get at the coin" (665). *Blackwood's* publication of Cave-Brown's diary was so popular in both England and India that he expanded it into the book-length *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857*. See Chakravarty 20.

[10] See Hancock 18-19. *The Times* observed, "many people find a difficulty in bringing themselves to believe, from its external appearance, that it is anything but a piece of common glass" ("Great Exhibition" 13 June 1851, 5A); and *Punch* commented, "Poor jewel—there is something the matter with it for it disdains to shine" ("Front Row" 10).

"Like everybody else, I have been, of course, to the Great Exposition; and, like everybody else, I was strikingly disappointed by the appearance of the Koh-i-noor. My imagination had portrayed something a million times more dazzling. In fact, I was not dazzled at all" (436-37). Whereas the stone fails to live up to the public hype, however, Sparks observes that the spectacle of the high-security cage leaves a lasting impression, one that in fact verges on the fetishistic:

> one thing did impress me deeply from the first, and always excited my imagination for some time after my departure; and this was the extraordinary care, and various ingenious and secret means adopted for its safe preservation. [….]
>
> I went several times to the Exposition after this 'lighting up' of the Koh-i-noor. I confess that my chief inducement in these repeated visits, was the strange attraction of these precautions for the preservation of the gem—far greater, I repeat, than the attraction of its equivocal beauty. The precautions and devices seemed to defy the ingenuity of man. I was fascinated by them. I could not help speculating how they could be defeated. Why not? The world was full of clever people—some of them rogues—and what the fine skill of one man could construct, the equally fine skill of another man might circumvent—the treasure that one acute locksmith might secure, an equally acute picklock might carry away. (437)

Sparks's fascination with defeating Chubb's reportedly inviolable lock, in fact, turns into a fixation with the Koh-i-noor display, which he begins to visit with obsessive frequency. Just as the temptation to steal the diamond becomes unbearable, Sparks has a dream in which he successfully burglarizes the safe. The dream quickly transforms into a nightmare, however, when he must flee England for fear of discovery. As he wanders the continent in a futile attempt to sell the famous gem, despite repeatedly reducing the asking price from his original figure of one million pounds, Sparks returns to England, where his seemingly unwitting accomplice—a vaguely roguish, semi-literate farmhand—blackmails him, forcing him to sell his few remaining possessions and property to survive. Impoverished, reduced to beggary, his health ruined, he finally sells the

diamond for £5, convinced by a mysterious buyer that it is a fake, and then enters the workhouse. The story ends when Sparks, laboring in the mud by a roadside, sees his former accomplice—now a prosperous gentleman who has made his fortune from the stone and acquired Sparks's pawned possessions—and the shock of recognition awakens him from his nightmare.

"A Penitent Confession" provides an ironic cultural counterpoint for our examination of the Great Lock Controversy—the series of picking trials in which the American Alfred Hobbs succeeded in picking Britain's best locks during the summer of 1851. For even as Horne's amateur cracksman mused on ways to defeat Chubb's "deep and curious keyhole" in *Household Words*, the secrets that it contained were already coming under an intense, protracted public scrutiny in the pages of the British press. The irony would not have escaped the notice of the mid-Victorian newspaper audience. Although Exhibition officials for obvious reasons would not have let Hobbs attempt to pick the Koh-i-noor display case, Horne's story, using what was, in 1851, the most famously protected space in England as its focal point, creates a site of shared experience, representing both a fascination with security and anxieties about its failure that would certainly have resonated with *Household Words*' middle-class readers, many of whom were simultaneously following newspaper accounts of the Lock Controversy, especially in *The Times* and *The Illustrated London News*. These were mid-Victorian England's most popular and influential papers, particularly with the classes that produced the consumers of patent-security, and both devoted substantial coverage to the performances

of Hobbs, the American lockpicking expert.[11] Even when we allow for the fact that the public's keen appetite for any news about the Exhibition significantly increased circulation of newspapers, the controversy takes its place in British history as one of the prominent "questions of the day" in the English press between July and September of 1851, demonstrating that Victorians did indeed view it as an issue of national importance and as a crisis.[12] The press's extensive reporting of Hobbs's contests with Chubb and Bramah illustrates, on one hand, that Victorians were genuinely interested in the technological complexity of security—in keeping with their interests in an array of technologies. Like Sparks, whom Horne portrays as a kind of mid-Victorian Everyman, security's fascination for readers, if articles in *The Illustrated London News* offer a fair

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[11] According to the narrator of *The Warden*, published four years after the controversy, "forty thousand copies of the *Jupiter* [Trollope's fictitious name for *The Times*] are daily sold, and…each copy is read by five persons at the least" (60). The Times outsold its top three daily competitors at a combined rate of four to one at mid-century, and The Illustrated London News was the leading weekly in 1851. See Altick, *English Common Reader* 355 and 394; Brown 27; and A. Jones 62. The Victorian press, particularly before the repeal of the stamp tax in 1855, "catered almost exclusively to the upper- and middle-class males" (Hampton 49).

[12] Overall, the British press sold eighty-five million newspapers in 1851 (Hampton 28). *Household Words* observed of the Exhibition's publicity: "Wherever you have gone—the one great topic of conversation has been the Great Exhibition; the one great topic of the newspapers was the Great Exhibition" ("A Pilgrimage" 321). Alexander Andrews wrote in his *History of British Journalism* (1859):

> The opening of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations afforded plenty of material for a time for the London and provincial newswriters. Monster supplements and extra numbers were issued to keep pace with the curiosity of the public, who wanted to know all about the goings-on of the huge glass beehive, as well as detailed account of its contents. The absorbing interest attaching to the subject raised the circulation of every newspaper for the time it lasted: but, from the very nature of its plan, of course the Illustrated London News—which could convey to the mind's eye of country cousin of all that her London correspondent had been seeing in the week—derived the greatest benefit. (320)

indication, encompassed how high-security locks worked as well as how someone could defeat them. Victorians, moreover, saw the controversy as part of a larger debate of scientific methods within the engineering community. Were the picking trials scientifically valid? Did they produce legitimate scientific knowledge? Were such questions even relevant to engineering issues?[13]

On the other hand, and more importantly, the Lock Controversy demonstrates how anxieties about the ever-impending loss of property and seemingly endless quests for security that pervade the nineteenth-century novel took shape and articulated themselves in the daily lives of the Victorian public outside the pages of fiction.[14] Among the dozen or so definitions of security listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one has particular relevance to our discussion: "Freedom from care, anxiety or apprehension; a feeling of safety or freedom from or absence of danger." Hobbs's performances troubled the public's sense of safety; and anxiety, as we will see in this chapter, was a term that recurred frequently throughout the press's reporting on the controversy. With the rapid growth of mass-journalism in the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian newspaper publishers became particularly adept at exploiting public anxieties to create and maintain a reading

[13] Public discussion of these questions reflected a revolution in scientific methodology that played out over the course of the nineteenth century. According to Jonathan Smith, the "shift from Baconian induction," a methodology that held sway throughout much of the engineering community in the early to mid-nineteenth century, "to something like what we now call the hypothetico-deductive method," sparked a contentious debate that "engaged virtually the entire culture" (13, 14). Although accounts of the Lock Controversy in the press, including numerous letters to the editor of *The Times* from the men directly involved in the picking trials as well as from concerned readers, did not explicitly invoke the Victorian debate over scientific methods, the debate nevertheless enables us to situate the public responses to the controversy in an important historical context.

[14] For a discussion of the ubiquitous concerns over the loss of property in the Victorian novel, see Nunokawa 7-10.

audience (Brown 95). The scenario of a foreign expert (especially, in this instance, an American) picking foolproof British locks at a high-profile event like the Exhibition and over the duration of several weeks' time both fascinated and scandalized the British public, providing a story that wove together suspense and sensation and was tailor-made for the mid-Victorian press and its audience of anxious property owners.[15] By most accounts, the controversy was indeed scandalous; and as we attempt to reconstruct the controversy, we will see that its development in the press follows the contours of William A. Cohen's description of the scandal as "a social phenomenon that has determinable characteristics and a consistent structure." As Cohen explains it:

> In terms of form, scandal is a densely plotted narrative with relatively fixed constituent parts: an accuser exposes an indiscretion or inquiry in the life of the accused and broadcasts that secret for public consumption, and the accused responds with denials. Even if it does not come to an actual trial, scandal still relies on a tripartite juridical model of plaintiff, defendant, and jury. The public interest evinced in the case is itself the product of several factors: the quality of the charges (how titillating they are felt to be), the symbolic status of the actors (how prominent a class or celebrity position they occupy), and the destructiveness of the proceedings (how much damage they have potential for). (7)

Amidst the technical minutiae that we explore in this chapter, we can recognize in the Lock Controversy similar "constituent parts" and a similar "juridical model." We can readily identify the men—all of whom could lay claim to prominent, even celebrity

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[15] The representational strategies of the mid-Victorian press resembled those used in serial fiction, according to Brown: the creation of suspense, running commentary, appeals to the reader's "experience and interests," and a "cast" of "reappearing" characters in the stories reported. Such strategies stimulated the "newspaper reading habit…by regular reporting of new installments of a long running story" (96). The Lock Controversy contained all of the elements Brown mentions. Moreover, the controversy qualified as a sensation—the controversial of course suggests the sensational—generating the kind of "excited feeling" that, as Michael Diamond observes, delighted the Victorian public, even though the press did not fully engage in sensation journalism until the turn of the decade (1).

status—occupying the first two positions in this model. The plaintiff, Hobbs, claimed to have uncovered vulnerabilities in the best English patent-locks, and publicly alleged that the country's most celebrated manufacturers had kept this knowledge from consumers, in effect putting them at risk. The defendants, Chubb and Bramah, responded to Hobbs's sensational claims with a series of denials and charged the American with misrepresentation and foul play. Satire notwithstanding, *Punch* put the problem of the controversy's scandalous recriminations and counter-recriminations into perspective:

> A Controversy—by means of advertisement in the *Times*—has been for some time going on between certain rival locksmiths; the question wherein appears to be, whether they have or have not succeeded in picking one another's locks. The species of dexterity for the palm of which these parties have been contending, is one that most people, perhaps, would rather rejoice in the silent consciousness of, than…to attain for it an amount of notoriety, not exactly identical with reputation. It might also be expected that such a discussion would be conducted on either side with the calmness of philosophers who have rendered themselves expert in thieves' tricks for the purpose of baffling thieves. On the contrary, however, it is carried on with extreme acrimony and animosity, accompanied by reciprocal imputations of unfairness and fraud. Why cannot these ingenious gentlemen pick the locks one of another without also picking holes in each other's coats? Their presumably common object, the advertisement of their respective articles, would be better promoted if they could manage to divest their arguments on both sides of personalities calculated to suggest a doubt how far either can be depended upon. ("Locksmiths at Loggerheads" 26: 96)

Speaking as a member of the third group in the model, which was comprised of a diverse array of participants, *Punch*'s commentary on the controversy illustrates that the jury had a difficult task and thus a more complicated role than the plaintiff and defendants. The primary problem was that the press, for all of its power to shape public opinion, gave the picking trials extensive coverage but offered conflicting accounts of their outcome and meaning.[16] To further complicate matters, the mid-Victorian press, especially *The Times*,

[16] The press, Samuel Smiles wrote in an article entitled "What Are the People Doing to Educate Themselves?" (1846), "must inevitably, in a free country, be the great agent and

tempered its influence with a desire to accommodate public debate, which often took the form of letters to the editor in which, in the case of the Lock Controversy, the public expressed equally contentious opinions about the validity of the charges and countercharges lodged by Hobbs, Chubb, and Bramah.[17] The possibility of reaching some sort of intelligible public verdict was rendered even more difficult by the fact that expert opinion—whether it came from the engineering committees that convened to certify the picking trials, other reputable British patent-lockmakers, or the Exhibition jury established by the Royal Commission to award prizes for the articles displayed at the Crystal Palace—were as divided about the controversy's outcome as the press and the general public. To summarize the problem of public interpretation, our examination of these diverse sources will reveal reactions ranging from support for Hobbs to rigorous defenses of British lockmakers to opinions that fell at various places between these extremes. This lack of anything approaching a unified response complicates the way we assess public interpretations of the Lock Controversy and how we form a conclusion about its sociocultural significance for the Victorians. But the lack of unity does suggest that if the controversy, like the scandal in Cohen's account, followed a narrative trajectory similar to that typically found in nineteenth-century realist fiction, then it

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instrument of Public Instruction. It is not only the Educator, but the Creator, of public opinion…it is read about, talked about, discussed" (qtd. in Hampton 58). This was especially true of *The Times*, whose power Anthony Trollope compared with that of "the Czar…in Russia, or the mob in America" (*Warden* 60). H. R. Fox Bourne similarly observes that *The Times* assumed for "itself the right and power" of dictating social and political policy (190).

[17] Newspapers operated according to what Mark Hampton calls an "educational ideal" that predominated from the 1850s through the 1880s and emphasized "both discussion and persuasion" (61).

deviated from one essential element of that plot structure in the final instance and thus failed to offer readers a clear sense of resolution or narrative closure.[18]

The Lock Controversy, like most narratives, and certainly like the narratives of nineteenth-century realist fiction, featured both manifest and latent content. A notable feature of the public discussion was what it omitted—any direct mention of security's deeper sociocultural meaning, security's fundamental, ideological role in stabilizing the borders of the bourgeois model of selfhood. At the level of manifest content, the focus remained almost entirely fixed on the protection of property and, to a lesser extent, the vindication of British industry. For the exception, we must turn to Horne's "A Penitent Confession," a tale of ingenious theft that engages the Lock Controversy by reenacting at least one of its essential features: when Sparks devises a plan to burglarize the Koh-i-noor display, he, like Hobbs, enters into his own "contest with Chubb" (438). Reading the competition between lock-picker and lockmaker in "A Penitent Confession" we discover a kind of latent content that does in fact offer narrative closure, though the conclusion of Horne's story encodes an ideological meaning evident in none of the other sources, and contrasts sharply with the manifest concerns and anxiety of mid-Victorian property

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[18] Although Cohen focuses on the sex scandals in the press during the latter half of the nineteenth century, he does point out that scandal, generally, "structures the usual plot of the realist novel in the Victorian period" (16-17). According to Cohen's synopsis:

> The typical story of the Victorian novel involves the loss and eventual recovery of a fortune, benefactor, parent, child, sibling, or spouse. The course of recovery necessitates disclosure of a secret, which has been hidden in some way immoral or illegal…. The plot of the novel unfolds by threatening and finally effecting the exposure of this secret to the community, and once this revelation has occurred, the goods (property, family) are redistributed, now more justly, among those who survive. The novelistic plot, distilled in this way, is analogous to the form of the scandal. (17)

owners that found expression in *The Times*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and other newspapers. Through our reading of "A Penitent Confession" we will argue that the high-security Koh-i-noor cage serves as the site of ideological rupture; that the spectacle of the security commodity, while central to the ideological aims of the Exhibition, creates in Sparks's case a "strange attraction" that eventually undermines the ideological work security ostensibly performed at the Exhibition.[19] As collective spectacle, the commodities on display at the Crystal Palace provided visitors with a kind of narrative framework for the sociocultural stability and superiority of mid-Victorian liberalism. As Thomas Richards argues:

> in the Crystal Palace the commodity was all there was to be seen. The real novelty of the Great Exhibition is that it constructed a centripetal space of representation that took the commodity as its center and axis. In the Crystal Palace the commodity was something more than the sum of its parts; it was now the key to all mythologies of Victorian society, the master fiction around which society organized and condensed its cultural life and political ideology. (53)

As we will see, implicit within the account of mid-Victorian society, culture, and politics that Richards detects in the display of commodities at the Great Exhibition is the concept of self-governing individualism, which served as the basis of liberal social order. It is precisely self-governing individualism and social order, as these notions found expression in the Crystal Palace, which "A Penitent Confession" calls into question, though not necessarily consciously, through a breach of security. Our reading of Horne's

[19] Security of course is not a "commodity" in the conventional sense of the term—not a tangible, material object, in other words—and thus has a unique status in capitalist commodity culture. Security's status as commodity inheres within objects such as locks or, in this case, the Koh-i-noor display. Steven Spitzer remarks, for example: "although security has become a commodity in modern capitalist societies, it is a peculiar one indeed since security is a derivative rather than primary commodity form…. [S]ecurity is a commodity neither directly available to the senses nor defined exclusively in physical terms. At bottom, security remains a quality which is derived from rather than constituted within the physical commodity itself" (51).

story will suggest that although the perceived threat to property occasioned by the Great Lock Controversy posed an understandable and legitimate concern for the press and its readers, the level of public anxiety generated by the controversy indicates, as well, that what contemporary accounts represented as Victorian security in crisis was also a crisis of bourgeois identity, a threat to the Victorian ego precipitated by the failure to security.

I

Notwithstanding the compelling symbolism of Aubin's Trophy Lock and Chubb's Koh-i-noor display case, the logic of *laissez-faire* political economy dictated that Britain's industrial-technological monopoly remained legitimate only to the extent that it withstood universal competition. Underlying Turner's invocation of "Free Truth, free Thought, free Word," the true conceptual foundation of the Great Exhibition of Industry of All Nations, according to organizers, was free trade. Peaceful global competition, as Prince Albert declared in his speech at the Crystal Palace's opening ceremony, was the Exhibition's central theme. The "products of all quarters of the globe are placed at our disposal," the Prince Consort observed, "and we have only to choose which is the best and cheapest for our purposes" (qtd. in Richards 28). Similarly, in a lecture entitled "On the International Results of the Great Exhibition of 1851" (1852), Henry Cole, the Exhibition's Executive Commissioner, identified "unrestricted competition," particularly between England and other industrialized European countries, as the primary reason for holding the event (420-21). British manufacturers concurred; and most, including lockmakers, saw Britain's success as a foregone conclusion. The story of the Great Lock Controversy really began with a somewhat complacent invocation of international competition by John Chubb, the president of Chubb and Son, in the spring of 1850, a

little more than a year before the Exhibition got underway in Hyde Park. Chubb assured an audience at the Institution of Civil Engineers, England's premier engineering body, that the English would dominate the field of lockmaking.[20] In "the [G]reat Exhibition of 1851," Chubb confidently predicted, "the lock-makers of England will enter into a generous rivalry with those of other nations, and, by combining the correct and elegant forms, with the application of their undoubted ingenuity and excellent workmanship, will produce such specimens as shall be unequalled by the rest of the world" (16).[21] Chubb, expressing a version of what L.T.C. Rolt has dubbed "the myth of British engineering infallibility" (173), spoke for the English lock industry, the engineering community, indeed for the nation, which proudly identified itself as the world's workshop, when he forecasted England's triumph at the Crystal Palace.[22]

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[20] Founded in 1818, the Institution of Civil Engineers, which held a Royal Charter by 1828, was a multidisciplinary body where engineers from various fields of specialization could gather to share ideas and find professional support. Mike Chrimes observes that a civil engineer in the early to mid-Victorian period "might embrace mechanical engineering, naval architecture, harbour engineering, bridge design and railway surveying. He was an engineer in the civil rather than the military sphere, and beyond that there was no limit to his practice" (24). The fact that patent-lockmaking fell under the rubric of civil engineering by the middle of the nineteenth century once again indicates how much the trade had advanced since the mid-eighteenth century.

[21] The initial outlay of cash to fund the Exhibition came from private subscriptions rather than public resources. Chubb and Son contributed £25 to Prince Albert's venture, a slight sum compared with the donations given by some of the other subscribers (Weintraub 227).

[22] In its coverage of Chubb's address to the Institution of Civil Engineers, The Builder reported that those in attendance "expressed a strong conviction in favour of Chubb's locks" ("Construction of Locks" 180). Generally speaking, the public, like Chubb, took England's dominance for granted. *Household Words*, for example, asserted that nothing "which has occurred for years has been more calculated to gratify the pride of an Englishman than the Great Exhibition" ("A Pilgrimage" 321).

Going into the Exhibition, few in England regarded other nations, especially the United States, as serious competitors. As Rolt puts it, a self-satisfied refusal "to believe that any other nation was capable of overtaking the overwhelming industrial lead that a pioneer generation of engineers had won" characterized British attitudes, despite George Stephenson's warning about foreign competition during his inaugural presidential address to the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1847 (173).[23] Americans, on the other hand, like the English, attached great moral, social, and cultural significance to the Exhibition, and most participants from the United States brought with them a sense that they needed to and in fact would prove themselves to the rest of the world, especially the host nation. The *Springfield Republican* asserted, for example: "If we mistake not, the English will learn some important lessons from their western child, whom they still associate with savage life and whom many among them regard with dignified superciliousness" (qtd. in Dalzell 29). But American participants had little practical cause for boasting when they set up shop at the Crystal Palace. Queen Victoria reportedly found little of interest in the American section, primarily because the displays, compared with those of England and other European nations, were disproportionately heavy on agricultural products, short on manufactured goods, and failed to fill up the space allotted by Exhibition officials, which resulted in the United States turning over some of its area to France (Dalzell 40-42). *Punch*, described by Altick as "the Crystal Palace's most enthusiastic publicity agent" (*Punch* 619), ridiculed the American section's dearth of manufactured articles and abundance of empty space, calling attention to "the

[23] The Institution of Mechanical Engineers, founded in Birmingham in 1847, was the first subsidiary organization of the Institution of Civil Engineers, demonstrating the "growth in engineering specializations" at mid-century (Chrimes 25). The Institution initially focused on railway and naval engineering.

glaring contrast between large pretension and little performance." The writer concluded, "For a calculating people our friends…are thus far terribly out of their calculations" (qtd. in Dalzell 43). Yet by the autumn of 1851, "The Last Appendix to 'Yankee Doodle'," also published in *Punch*, presented a much-revised assessment of the Americans. The following lines are the first and last stanzas:

> Yankee Doodle sent to Town
> His goods for Exhibition;
> Everybody ran him down,
> And laugh'd at his position:
> They thought him all the world behind;
> A goney, muff, or noodle;
> "Laugh on, good people—never mind"—
> Says quiet Yankee Doodle.
> [….]
> You also fancied, in your pride,
> Which truly is tarnation,
> Them British locks of yourn defied
> The rogues of all creation;
> But Chubb's and Bramah's Hobbs has pick'd,
> And you must now be view'd all
> As having been completely licked
> By glorious Yankee Doodle. (21: 117)

Chubb and Son, along with Bramah and Company, headed the list of thirty-seven English lockmakers and twenty-six foreign manufacturers at the Exhibition, including seven representing the United States. The other nations included France with six lockmakers represented, Portugal with three, Sweden and Norway with four, Tuscany with one, West Africa with one, and Zollverein with four. A total of sixty-three lock manufacturers participated in the Exhibition (Price 527). Although *Punch*'s dig at the famous English lockmakers and commendation for their American adversary comes at the end of the poem, the early stages of the Great Lock Controversy in fact provided the initial victories in a series of demonstrations of skill and technological ingenuity that marked a decisive

change in Britain's cool attitude toward American participation in the Exhibition and announced the United States as an emergent technological force in its own right.[24]

By the time Hobbs arrived in London, he had already gained a reputation for virtuosity as a lock-picker, having defeated numerous foolproof locks at public demonstrations in the United States. As *The Illustrated London News* reported, "Hobbs has picked every lock in America which he has been challenged to pick," including one that contained twelve levers ("Lock and Lock-Picking" 182). Given the doctrine of permutations, as we noted in chapter 1, this was theoretically impossible. A lock with twelve levers yielded nearly a half-billion variations, which meant that exhausting the possible permutations through a picking algorithm of one per minute without interruption would require close to 1,100 years. Hobbs attributed his ability to achieve such a feat, where English efforts had consistently failed on locks with far fewer levers and

[24] The British correspondent for *The New-York Daily Times* commended Hobbs, who "not only conducted himself extremely well in this 'lock controversy,' but contributed not a little to the creditable figure cut by his countrymen in the exposition of national industry" ("Great Britain" 13 Oct. 1851, 1). Other American technologies that defeated their British counterparts in practical competitions at the Exhibition included Starbuck's dray plows, McCormick's reaping machine, Colt's revolvers, Collins's steamers, Goodyear's India-rubber goods, and Lerow and Blodgett's sewing machine. And the American yacht America defeated the British Titania on August 28, 1851, at the Royal Yacht Club regatta at Cowes, winning what was to become known as the "America's Cup" (Dalzell 47-50). The London Times, in one of its daily reviews of the Exhibition, put the matter of America's successful showing quite candidly. In reference to a competition between English and American makers of hydraulic pumps, the paper observed: "We had been beaten in yachting, and some of our best locks had been picked; we had been taught to reap corn by machinery, and even to admire the destructive merits of Colt's revolvers. It only remained of our cousins to pump us dry by centrifugal force in order to return home from the Exhibition with a song of unqualified triumph" ("Great Exhibition," 3 Sept. 1851, 5C). *The Builder*, likewise, conceded, "Our American brethren are quietly walking into us, to use a vulgar expression, and that, too, in all the wrong places." In addition to Hobbs's triumph over Chubb and Bramah, British "naval superiority and our super-eminent skill in machinery are both questioned pretty closely" ("Lock Controversy" 558).

variations, to a mechanical method of picking, introduced by Robert Newell during a series of American challenges in 1841, which effectively bypassed the problem of permutations.[25] So sure was Hobbs of this strategy that he "declared to a party of scientific men in the Crystal Palace, that all the locks made in [England] up to [1851] admitted of being very easily picked" (*Rudimentary Treatise* 115). To prove his point, shortly after arriving in London, he began collecting lesser-known British locks, studying their designs, and for the most part easily picking them in demonstrations at the Crystal Palace (McNeil 192).

Hobbs used these picking demonstrations as advertising gimmicks, in effect staging unsettling spectacles that illustrated the vulnerability of British technology in contrast with the invulnerability of the Newell lock. Much like Bramah had in his *Dissertation*, Hobbs demystified older technology and offered a superior alternative; but rather than tucking his claims away in the pages of a pamphlet, he shrewdly capitalized on the publicity of the Exhibition to reach the largest possible audience. In his most startling performance to date, Hobbs turned his attention to the famous Chubb Detector, which he picked in under fifteen minutes as a group of Exhibition officials and engineers looked on. Following this demonstration, the American received an unsigned letter, presumably from Chubb and Son, challenging the trial's legitimacy. Nevertheless, *The Times* got wind of Hobbs's performance, reporting that a collection of jewels on display in the Crystal Palace's Belgian section, including the world's largest pearl, "has been surrounded by a cage and a lock, constructed by Mr. Chubb, after the fashion of the Koh-

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[25] Hobbs's mechanical method of picking, discussed later in the chapter, enabled the operator, by means of a special tension-tool inserted into the keyhole, to apply pressure on the talon of the bolt mechanism.

i-noor; but, if rumour speak truly, that is no perfect guarantee for its safety, for an American volunteers to pick the best locks that can be made in England, and has, we understand, challenged both Chubb and Bramah to try conclusions with him" ("Great Exhibition" 9 June 1851, 8A).

The Times's seemingly offhand reference provoked a sharp reply from Chubb the following day, initiating what turned out to be an ill-advised and largely ineffective public-relations campaign to defend the company's reputation. Chubb, who plainly understood the paper's power to influence public opinion, complained in a letter to the editor:

> A paragraph in this day's *Times* referring to our patent locks demands from us a notice which we have not thought it necessary to pay to the vague rumours as to their safety which have been current for several days.
>
> It is quite true that a person representing a house in New York has repeatedly declared that he can pick any lock in England, including our own, and that manufactured by Messrs. Bramah. It is also true that the same person or his agents have declared that in a period of thirteen minutes he has actually succeeded in picking one of our locks. But it is equally true that no challenge has been given to the public or to us of testing the honesty of the experiment, and that the lock, with its keys, professed to be picked was in possession of the person who boasts of his success for several days before he made any public attempt to establish his case. (10 June 1851, 7C).

Beyond Chubb's rather curious admission that the company was aware of the rumors but apparently ignored them (or at least failed to address them) until they became a matter of public record, his response in *The Times* contained another important point that framed much of the ensuing debate. Chubb's use of the term "experiment" to characterize Hobbs's demonstration at the Crystal Palace rhetorically shifted the conflict away from an empirically verifiable test (like the picking challenges of previous decades) to a more contingent mode of scientific inquiry. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Victorians understood the experimental as a contestable practice, according to Iwan Rhys

Morus. The space in which an experiment took place, along with the witnesses who attested to the validity of its procedures and results, were essential to constructing the experiment's meaning. Morus writes:

> In many respects, the classic term *closure* as applied to the end of experimentation may be inappropriate unless taken to mean no more than the end of a dispute. Experiments never end in that their meanings are never fully stabilized. Any particular sequence of experimental practices is always available for reinterpretation by different groups and in different settings. Contingency never goes away entirely. [….] The boundaries around an experiment that mark it as a successful achievement are a matter of negotiation and are continually being redrawn and redefined. (11)

Morus calls attention here to a problem of meaning that Chubb, Bramah, and even Hobbs in a subsequent controversy attempted to exploit. In the case of a picking challenge, if a lock was not fastened to a secured door, it did not offer a fair test of its security or an operator's skill, because there was the possibility that he had access to the lock's interior and there was thus the chance of cheating or at least an undue advantage. Although Chubb more or less impugned Hobbs's integrity, he did nevertheless raise a legitimate objection. In a transparent attempt to control the terms of the experiment and thus its public interpretation, Chubb invited Hobbs to the company's factory near Smithfield, where it would "devote two hours to his service, to give him a fair trial of his abilities" under the watchful eye of a company foreman. Chubb concluded his letter with an ostensibly reassuring note to the public: "the hundreds of thousands of persons who now place implicit confidence in the safety of our locks may make themselves perfectly easy as to the results."

Ignoring the semantic implications of Chubb's attempt to recast the question as an open-ended experiment, as well as the questioning of his character, Hobbs, in a letter to *The Times* two days later, made a sensational claim guaranteed not only to provoke

Chubb further but also to rouse the anxiety of English property-owners. He unflinchingly asserted:

> any and every lock made on the principle heretofore used by Mr. Chubb can be picked. The lock of Mr. Chubb, No. 142, 356, that I did pick was purchased at his store, and represented by him as being perfectly secure against picking. I picked the lock in the presence of [the] chief engineer of the machinery department at the Exhibition [and other] gentlemen well known as engineers and scientific men. [….] My object in picking the lock was to satisfy them that the lock described by Mr. Chubb before the Institute of Civil Engineers of Great Britain…could be picked without any knowledge except that obtained through the keyhole. Now, if lock No. 142, 356 can be picked, what voucher can he give to the public that all his locks made previously are secure? ("Lock Controversy" 11 June 1851, 6D).

Whether it was the categorical nature of Hobbs's claim to have already defeated a Detector, the implications of his rhetorical questioning of every Chubb lock before the court of public opinion, or both, *The Times* ran his letter under the title of "The Lock Controversy," announcing the public's involvement in what was quickly shaping up to be a contentious debate. Chubb's reply came in a letter to the paper the following day, in which he again complained that Hobbs's performance was meaningless and alleged that the American had possession of the lock and key "for several days…before he experimented on it" ("Lock Controversy" 12 June 1851, 8E). Chubb added, "We have given Mr. Hobbs a fair challenge. He has declined it because we require the presence of our foreman, a practical lockmaker, to prevent foul play." Despite their scientific and engineering credentials, the witnesses, as Chubb's comment intimated, were not lockmakers and thus lacked the qualifications necessary to validate Hobbs's experiment. Attempting to capitalize on this fact, he derided Hobbs as a kind of scientific dilettante, dismissing the American's reputed demand for payment for demonstrating to the company the Detector's vulnerability: "We can only say that, in this country at least,

lockpicking has not yet attained the dignity of a science, and we are unable to estimate the pecuniary value of the services of Professor Hobbs."

The fact that British lockmakers did not treat lockpicking as a science was precisely the problem, however. Chubb's statement revealed a bias, frequently characteristic of the attitudes and practices of British engineering institutions and established professionals in the mid-nineteenth century, against scientific approaches to mechanical and engineering problems.[26] With the growth of new technologies and the expansion of knowledge, British industry came under "increasing pressure to become more scientific." For the Victorian engineer, "becoming 'scientific' involved the pursuit of rational, systematic investigation of problems, in a manner which competitive enterprises, especially overseas, were already demonstrating successfully" (Buchanan 51). The pressure on British lockmakers to adopt a more scientific approach came from the press. Before the controversy was over, *The Times* criticized Chubb, Bramah, and British patent-lockmakers generally for their failure to treat lockpicking as a scientific problem, while praising the Americans for their more systematic approach to design:

> While we have been relying implicitly on the artful arrangement of 'tumblers' and such like devices, [the Americans] have been carefully developing their ingenuity in picking and opening locks. A man makes a lock, and he brings it to a mechanics' institute in New York, with a certain sum of money secured by it, which sum becomes the property of the successful operator who can shoot back the bolt of the new contrivance. Instantly astute heads and clever expert hands are

[26] Thomas Henry Huxley attacked what he regarded as the anti-scientific attitude of engineers, which he described as "very formidable" in the middle of the century, at the opening ceremony of Sir Josiah Mason's Science College in Birmingham in 1880. During his lecture, entitled "Science and Culture," Huxley remarked: "The practical men believed that the idol whom they worshipped—rule of thumb—has been the source of past prosperity, and will suffice for the future welfare of the arts and manufactures. They are of opinion that science is speculative rubbish; that theory and practice have nothing to do with one another; and that the scientific habit of mind is an impediment, rather than an aid, in the conduct of ordinary affairs" (526).

> in engaged in solving the mechanical riddle thus propounded to them, and so far have these dexterous manipulators carried their art, that their 'open sesame' sweeps springs, tumblers, false notches, letter devices, and everything else before it. Mr. Hobbs is by far the most accomplished and successful of these performers, and he has come over to this country at a very opportune moment to teach our makers a very useful lesson. ("Great Exhibition," 4 Sept. 1851, 5C)

The Illustrated London News similarly noted of the American system that numerous picking experts had unsuccessfully attempted to open Newell's lock in "repeated trials" held before scientific committees, which had documented the results ("Locks and Lock-Picking" 182).

II

Rather than reassuring property owners, Chubb's denials extended the controversy and provoked the frustration of the public, which quickly joined in the debate, expressing its impatience with both Chubb and Hobbs for leaving unresolved a matter of such importance. A writer to *The Times*, who signed himself *Clavis* (Latin for key), likened the lockmaker and the picking expert with "the old school of fencing masters, who wasted much time in their preliminary salutes before actually crossing blades," and urged them to get on with it:

> A third party…consisting of bankers and others, who are compelled to rely on 'patent detectors' and similar locks, are looking anxiously for more important operations. The fact of Mr. Hobbs buying a lock and keys from Mr. Chubb, and afterwards succeeding at picking it at his leisure, is no very convincing proof on either side; but that Mr. Chubb should insist upon being present personally, or by proxy, when his locks are attempted, is equally unsatisfactory. If the maker only guarantees his locks during the time the owner keeps guard over his strong box, then a sixpenny one, without wards or tumblers, may serve his purpose as well. (13 June 1851, 8F)

As this letter makes clear, the anxious public had a practical, primarily self-interested investment in the nascent controversy; and *Clavis*'s frustration was understandable, even though he overlooked, as did the press in the following weeks, the validity of Chubb's

objection. Still, his observation—that a cheap lock is as good as an expensive one if the owner of a strongbox must stand guard to guarantee its security—must have seemed ironically compelling, even logical; Chubb did nothing to help his argument or the Detector lock's reputation by being so intractably defensive and even, at times, shrill.

If British consumers, taking *Clavis* as an example, seemed to care more about the controversy's ramifications for themselves than for the reputation of British industry, British lockmakers watching from the sidelines offered a somewhat more partisan response. While the public interpreted the claims and counterclaims as inconclusive at this early stage, Edwin Cotterill, a patent-lockmaker from Birmingham and one of Chubb's chief competitors, wrote in *The Times* that Hobbs had indeed beaten Chubb, but that English locks could still lay claim to perfect security:

> Judging from the surprise and consternation occasioned by Chubb's locks being picked, a stranger would suppose that no other English lock had the slightest pretension to security, and that all reliance was centered solely on Chubb's. In order to disabuse the public mind of this erroneous impression I…challenge the successful picker…to a trial of skill upon my patent lock, as exhibited in Hardware Class 22, on the following conditions, viz.:—I will fix one of my patent bank safe-locks, of trifling value, on a door or chest, and every facility shall be afforded for one entire day, which time I consider quite sufficient for a man capable of picking Chubb's and other eminent locks in less than 20 minutes…. ("Lock-Picking, 2 July 1851, 7E)

In the event that Hobbs succeeded, Cotterill promised to give £20 to charity. Then with a fiercely nationalistic, even an anti-American sentiment, Cotterill escalated the terms of his challenge: "After this is disposed of I will take him upon higher grounds—I will make a lock at half the cost of the one he exhibits, and this lock I will not only defy his skill to pick, but the united efforts of every American he can bring to his assistance, upon their own terms." Cotterill in effect threw down the gauntlet to all of America, though in light of the fact that England was the world's leading exporter of locks we must recognize the

possibility that he was not motivated only by a desire to defend British honor. Following Cotterill's example, other English lockmakers joined in the fray, issuing challenges of their own. One of the more notable efforts to shape the public's interpretation of the controversy in England's favor, if not in Chubb's, came in September, shortly after Hobbs picked the Bramah lock. Walter Tucker, a patent-lockmaker from Tiverton, Devonshire, observed in a letter to *The Times*:

> the English public seems to be making up its mind to the rather humiliating idea that our Yankee friends have gone ahead of the British lockmakers, and that not one of us can produce a lock which will defy this gentleman's undeniable ingenuity and skill.
>
> To convince the public that such is not the case, and that the English are not so vulnerable on the point as the numerous paragraphs which have lately appeared in the public prints would lead one to believe, and that an English lock is now constructed which, with no more than one-fourth of the work which is contained in the Day and Newell, is more unquestionably secure and inviolable, I hereby challenge Mr. Hobbs to pick, with any instruments he may construct, the Permutating Detector Lock, of my invention, which is now in the Exhibition. (8 Sept. 1851, 6F)

After outlining his terms, including an allowance of 36 days for the trial, Tucker appealed to his countrymen's sense of evenhandedness: "Until Mr. Hobbs accept this challenge, in justice to English lockmakers in general, the public will, I hope, suspend their decision, and in their noble, national anxiety to give fair play to all nations, not forget that their own countrymen are entitled to the same measure of justice from them." Aside from the obvious facts that both lockmakers sought to use the Great Lock Controversy for self-promotion and that both had a vested interest in defending the national industry, their letters suggest the extent to which "the English public," as Tucker puts it, regarded the controversy as a defeat for British lockmaking as a whole.

Notwithstanding Cotterill's claim that Hobbs had succeeded, the trial's alleged outcome lacked the legitimacy of formal certification, though the public, which was

beginning to take a serious interest in the controversy, did not have to wait long for more substantive results. Matters came to a head on June 30 when Paul Hodge, an English lockmaker, delivered a paper entitled "On the Progress of Improvements in Locks of the United States of America" at a meeting of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in London. Hodge compared the arithmetical method of picking used by English lockmakers (a process popularly called "ringing the changes") with the tentative or mechanical method championed by Hobbs. He noted that whereas the English approach required meticulous, time-consuming tests of each tumbler's possible positions and thus the full set of variations, the American strategy allowed one quickly to determine the depth of each tumbler without laboriously working out mathematical progressions by process of elimination.[27] The subsequent discussion among members of the Institution, which was "animated" according to an account in *The Illustrated London News*, included John Chubb, who predictably denied that the American method could open a Detector Lock, and Hobbs, who of course argued otherwise, generating what would become one of the Exhibition's most important transatlantic contests. Before the meeting concluded, according to the paper, Chubb again challenged Hobbs to pick a Detector Lock, and Hobbs in turn offered a £1000 prize if Chubb or one of his representatives could pick one of Day and Newell's Parautoptic locks "in any time, and after any number of trials," as he put it with sarcastic generosity ("Locks and Lock-Picking" 142).

Although no Englishman immediately took up Hobbs's challenge, the American subsequently arranged a formal demonstration on a Detector Lock, including eleven witnesses to certify the result, and invited Chubb or one of his representatives to attend.

[27] Price 305, 554-58 and Hobbs 103-07 include comparative discussions of these methods.

Not surprisingly, given his previous objections, the lockmaker ignored the request. On July 22, Hobbs and the witnesses—among them the Secretary to the Board of Trade, a member of the Exhibition Commission, several prominent English engineers, and Hodge—convened at the former offices of the South-Eastern Railway, located in Great George Street, Westminster. The picking trial, conducted on the door of a strong-room that had once housed company records, lasted less than an hour. In their certification of the result, the arbitrators stated:

> we severally witnessed the operation, which Mr. Hobbs commenced at 35 minutes past 11 o'clock A.M., and opened the lock within 25 minutes. Mr. Hobbs having been requested to lock it again with his instruments, accomplished it in the short space of seven minutes, without the slightest injury to the lock or door. We minutely examined the lock and door (having previously had the assurance of Mr. Bell [the building's owner] that the key had never been accessible to Mr. Hobbs, he having had permission to examine the keyhole only). (rpt. in Price 551)

From the beginning the press capitalized, to some extent, on the story's potential for sensation. On July 25, 1851, in an article entitled "The Great Lock Controversy" (marking the first use of that phrase), *The Times* announced: "An important event regarding the celebrated 'lock controversy' has taken place. For some time past it has been well known that Mr. Hobbs, an American exhibitor of locks, has upon more than one occasion hinted at the possibility of opening without keys those locks which had been considered as possessing the great *desideratum* of perfect security." With a mildly alarmist tone, *The Times*'s use of the phrase "perfect security" cast a shadow on the watchword of British patent-lockmakers going back to Bramah's invention in 1784, and drove the point home by informing readers that the Chubb lock in question was the same model as one recently installed "on the door of one of the vaults of the State Paper-office." The paper's summary of the arbitrators' report included a brief but noteworthy

description of the American's method: "Hobbs produced from his waistcoat pocket two or three small and simple-looking tools—a description of which, for obvious reasons, we forbear to give—and proceeded to work." Despite *The Times*'s discretion about revealing the exact nature of Hobbs's tools, the description it did provide portrayed an almost casual scene, a spectacle all the more alarming because it was quick and not particularly spectacular. Rather than reading of Hobbs engaged in an extraordinary struggle to defeat the famous patent lock, the public learned that his "small and simple-looking" instruments made short work of one of England's most trusted technologies. Hobbs would next "try his skill upon the mysterious lock in Mr. Bramah's window," the paper announced, adding that the "experiment is looked forward to with considerable interest by all persons connected with the trade" (25 July 1851, 6F). The article's tone suggested a more stable meaning of "experiment" than Chubb's use of the term. And although *The Times* perhaps offered this last comment with no intentional irony, the fact was that everyone with property to secure, and certainly those who relied on patent locks, was in effect "connected with the trade" as well as with the events unfolding at the Exhibition, as subsequent reports and letters to the press would make clear.

At first glance, *The Illustrated London News*'s report of July 26 was more reserved in its judgment of Hobbs's demonstration than *The Times* had been, though the fact that the paper ran two articles on lockmaking on the same page, the first entitled "Newell's Patent Parautoptic Bank Lock" and the second "Chubb's Locks and Safes," in itself seemed to grant priority to American technology. The account of "Newell's Patent" opened with an observation that underscored the lock-controversy's interest to the public,

and included, like *The Times*, the refrain of perfect security, as if reminding readers of what was at stake:

> Few things in the department of the United States have attracted more attention than the safety lock of Newell, both from its own merits, and the great controversy now going on about locks in consequence of the feats of lock picking performed by Mr. Hobbs…. Of this controversy, and [Hobbs's] ability to pick those [locks] hitherto considered perfectly safe in this country, we shall at present offer no opinion, as the matter is under the consideration of the Society of Arts, and will be properly investigated by them. (130)[28]

Yet, if *The Illustrated London News* refrained from fully acknowledging Hobbs's skill, it exercised less restraint with respect to the merits of the American firm he represented. "That Mr. Newell's lock is one of very ingenious and beautiful construction, there can be no doubt," the article commented; "and, as he deserves, he has received medals from some public institutions and scientific bodies in America and Europe as a result of it." After a brief description of the American lock's complex bolt-system, the article closed with a favorable assessment, observing that the mechanism was pickproof and that it also possessed "another peculiar feature, one of considerable value, that it will withstand the action of gunpowder." The paper's account of "Chubb's Locks and Safes," by contrast, provided matter-of-fact descriptions of the locking hardware without evaluative commentary of any kind.

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[28] The Royal Society did not in fact investigate the controversy until 1854, when Hobbs delivered a paper entitled "Lockmaking and Lockpicking," during the course of which he explained "the principle on which all locks" constructed like those manufactured by Chubb and Bramah "could be as easily picked" as those built prior to the era of patent lockmaking. According to an account in the Journal of the Society of Arts of Hobbs's address, he had "justified his statements by the two facts,—that he had not only elucidated the principles on which all such locks might be picked, but that he had actually performed all that had been described." Hobbs further expressed his "hope…that whatever had been done and said to enlighten the public as to the insecurity of the many locks now in use, instead of causing any unpleasant personal feelings, would stimulate lock manufacturers to produce…secure locks, adapted to all purposes, of good workmanship, and at a moderate price" (251).

The Illustrated London News's articles also included detailed engravings of both manufacturers' locks that visually expressed the technological asymmetry implicit within the written accounts. A Day and Newell lock, bearing the date of its first English patent (1851), was prominently located at the upper left corner of the page, in effect dominating the visual field. On the periphery, removed two columns below and two columns to the right, the page contained five illustrations of various Chubb Detectors and Banker's Safe-Locks, all of which were disproportionately smaller than the Day and Newell lock and thus pictorially subordinated to the American mechanism. These illustrations arguably signified nearly as much to the paper's readers as the text they accompanied.[29] Visual representation in *The Illustrated London News*, particularly with regard to industry and technology, as Paul Dobraszczyk argues, took on a "'rhetorical' character" that served to document the news as well as educate readers and persuade them to embrace a progressive "ideology of improvement" on behalf of which the paper consistently campaigned (352, 354). In other words, visual rhetoric was expository and interpretive.

[29] This was the intention of *The Illustrated London News*'s founder, Herbert Ingram, and its editors, who had announced in the paper's inaugural number (14 May 1842) the marriage of text and image as a distinctively modern and superior method for reporting the news. The "progress of illustrative art" through advances in techniques for wood engraving, the paper declared, was revolutionizing "the world of publication." Illustration would play a central role in the production of meaning in *The Illustrated London News*, according to the editors, for it not only "adorned, gilded, reflected, and interpreted nearly every form of thought," it had "become the bride of literature, and there is now no staying the advance of this art into all the departments of the social system." As for the advantages to readers, they "will have henceforth under their glance, and within their grasp, the very form and presence of events as they transpire; and whatever the broad and palpable delineations of wood engraving can achieve, will now be brought to bear upon every subject which attracts the attention of mankind" ("Our Address" 1). Some critics maintain, however, that if *The Illustrated London News* oversaw the marriage of text and image, the latter was the dominant partner in the relationship. See, for example, Altick, *English Common Reader* 343 and Dobraszczyk 358.

If text and image formed an equal partnership in conveying meaning, as the editors claimed, then here, in the first of the paper's articles on the controversy, the expository and interpretive contexts plainly diminished the Chubb lock's iconic status.

The succeeding article in *The Illustrated London News* of August 2 on "Locks and Lock-Picking"—the first of three that ran under that title—further escalated the public's involvement with the controversy and extended the range of the paper's technical analysis. After reporting the arbitrators' decision, *The Illustrated London News* commented that Hobbs's demonstration in Westminster, "[a]s may be imagined, [had] created a great deal of excitement in the world interested in locks and keys" (141-42). Following a brief statement on the terms of the Bramah challenge, which had just gotten underway, and a summary account of the meeting at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers on June 30, at which Chubb and Hobbs had issued their mutual challenges, *The Illustrated London News* informed readers of its intention to explain the logic of lockpicking, using language that seemed to stress both the public's intellectual curiosity and its anxiety:

> In consideration of the interest very naturally excited in the public mind, and particularly amongst commercial communities, by the performances of Mr. Hobbs, and the consequences which they seem to involve, we have devoted some attention to the subject, with the hope of being able to give our readers a popular explanation of the rationale of the principles upon which Mr. Hobbs operates in lock-picking. (142)

Focusing on the Chubb Detector "as the last and most striking example" of Hobbs's uncanny ability, the article described the lock's basic construction and principles of operation, and then offered an exposition of the American's method for defeating it:

> In setting about picking one of these locks, Mr. Hobbs commences by supposing that the bolt would yield to force applied in the right direction but for certain obstructions, which it becomes his business to remove. Accordingly, he introduces into the lock a sort of skeleton key, or picklock, with which he presses

> the bolt in the direction backwards; and to the other end of that instrument on a lever arm, he puts a weight, which keeps the pressure of the bit constantly against the bolt; he then proceeds, by means of a very simple implement, to lift the tumblers one by one—an operation of considerable nicety, requiring great delicacy of touch; and, as he so lifts them successively to their right places, they are retained there, removing, one by one, the several obstructions against the backward movement of the bolt; so that, when the last tumbler is raised, the bolt is entirely free, and flies back by the pressure kept on it by the lever before mentioned, and the lock is opened. (142)

Unlike *The Times*, which withheld from the public what it deemed sensitive information, *The Illustrated London News* provided readers with what amounted to basic instructions on how to pick a Chubb lock—notwithstanding the "considerable nicety" of the procedure and Hobbs's "great delicacy of touch." Whereas *The Times* served as the primary medium for news and public debate of the controversy, *The Illustrated London News* took the lead in explaining for its readers the controversy's technological complexities and sought to unpack the "myth of British engineering infallibility" rather than enabling British industry to rest on the laurels of tradition.

We have noted *The Illustrated London News*'s ideological commitment to progress; its reports were consistent with the spirit of competition that initiated the Exhibition and had earlier played a pivotal role in the genesis of patent-lockmaking. If one of the more conclusive results of the Lock Controversy, as George Price claimed, was that it raised public awareness of and interest in the technology of patent-lockmaking (583), *The Illustrated London News* did far more in this respect than *The Times* or any of the other papers and periodicals reporting on the controversy. The paper's accounts of lockpicking and the failures of British security, though comparatively brief and less technical, resembled Bramah's disclosures in his *Dissertation* while helping to set the stage for subsequent revelations in works such as Hobbs's *Rudimentary Treatise on the*

Construction of Locks and Price's *Treatise on Fire & Thief-Proof Depositories and Locks and Keys*. There was of course an ironic relationship between the sensitive topic of high security and the openness with which *The Illustrated London News* and lockmakers analyzed it before the public. Some, like *Fraser's Magazine*, saw this as a dangerous irony, claiming that Hobbs, by picking the Chubb and Bramah locks in such a highly publicized manner, had "taught every lock-picker in England how to do it, if he possess the requisite tools and fingers" (qtd. in Price 582). Some of those connected with the industry, on the other hand, found compelling reasons for disclosure. Charles Tomlinson, a lecturer on physical sciences at King's College, London, addressed this problem while preparing an article on lockmaking for the *Cyclopædia of Useful Arts* in 1852. Tomlinson approached Edward Cowper, a professor of engineering at King's, who served as an arbitrator in the Bramah controversy and later became president of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. He asked for Cowper's advice about "the desirability of explaining to the general reader the defects of some of our English locks, which, previous to the celebrated 'lock controversy' of 1851, had borne a high character for skilful construction, beauty of workmanship, and undoubted security." Cowper's response, according to Tomlinson, was a "strong conviction that by exposing the defects of our locks, the cause of mechanical science, as well as the public in general, would be benefited; that if our locks were defective, inventors would be stimulated to supply the defects, and the art of the locksmith would be raised accordingly" (Tomlinson v). In his *Rudimentary Treatise*, Hobbs invoked the public's right to know whether or not it was in fact as secure as it assumed, and as some lockmakers led it to believe, in terms that echoed Bramah's *Dissertation*. Hobbs declared that the results of the "publicity"

surrounding the lock controversy and its aftermath "must lead to public advantage." Against the criticism leveled by *Fraser's*, Hobbs maintained that disclosure was in effect an ethical obligation and a public service:

> A commercial, and in some respects a social, doubt has been started within the last year or two, whether or not it is right to discuss so openly the security or insecurity of locks. Many well-meaning persons suppose that the discussion respecting the means for baffling the supposed safety of locks offers a premium of dishonesty, by shewing others how to be dishonest. This is a fallacy. Rogues are very keen in their profession, and know already much more than we can teach them respecting their several kinds of roguery. Rogues knew a good deal about lock-picking long before locksmiths discussed it among themselves, as they have lately done. If a lock—let it have been made in whatever country, or by whatever maker—is not so inviolable as it has hitherto been deemed to be, surely it is in the interest of *honest* persons to know this fact, because the *dishonest* are tolerably certain to be the first to apply the knowledge practically; and the spread of knowledge is necessary to give fair play to those who might suffer by ignorance. It cannot be too earnestly urged, that an acquaintance with real facts will, in the end, be better for all parties. . . . [….] [M]uch more good than harm is effected by stating candidly and scientifically the various methods by which such debasement has been, or can be produced. The unscrupulous have the command of much of this kind of knowledge without our aid; and there is moral and commercial justice in placing on their guard those who might possibly suffer therefrom. (*Rudimentary Treatise* 2-3; emphasis in original)

Later in his *Treatise* Hobbs described the logic of demonstrating the weaknesses of locks as a kind of evolutionary process of survival of the fittest: "It has been a succession of struggles—to attain security—to show that this security has not been attained—to make a further and more ingenious attempts—to detect the weak points in this renewed attempt—and so on" (102).[30] As security evolved during the middle of the century, many

[30] Victorian lockmakers tended to view the trade in terms of evolutionary progression. Harry Chubb, for instance, used specifically Darwinian language during an an address to the Society of Arts in 1893, observing, "the gradual growth or evolution of the locks in common use to-day can be traced, with but few missing links, from the earliest forms" ("Construction of Locks" 510). Simon Singh makes much the same claim about the development of cryptology as Hobbs did about the development of locks. He describes the history of cryptology as an "evolutionary struggle" between cryptographers, or codemakers, and cryptanalysts, or codebreakers, analogous with the relationship between

more disclosures were yet to come. Five years after the controversy, Price's massive *Treatise*, which ran to more than nine-hundred pages and revealed so much information (and about so many types of locks) previously regarded as trade secrets by those in the industry that bankers and insurance officials viewed the book as a how-to manual for criminals, referring to it as the "Burglar's Bible." Price, like Hobbs, defended the book's revelations with the rationale that the producers of security had an ethical duty to inform the users of locks of "their weak points," since criminals "make such defects their constant study." "We cannot teach these clever rogues more than they already know," Price reasoned, "but manufacturers may often learn a great deal which they never knew before from these *professors* of the locksmiths' vocation" (751). Concealing the weaknesses of security, according to these arguments, would benefit the thief but never the consumer.

Before leaving *The Illustrated London News*'s article of August 2, 1851, we should note that visual documentation again accompanied the paper's explanation of lockpicking. The article's sole illustration—taken from a daguerreotype by well-known photographer J. J. E. Mayall, whose work included portraits of Dickens and of the royal family—was an engraving of Hobbs in performance, as it were, his jaw determinedly set, brow slightly furrowed in concentration, and hands lightly at rest on a picking tool as he opens a lock. The illustration not only depicted what much of the public was coming to regard as Hobbs's skill; it also represented the American's growing cultural presence, his

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bacteria and antibiotics. As Singh puts it: "A code is constantly under attack from codebreakers. When the codebreakers have developed a new weapon the reveals the code's weakness, then the code is no longer useful. It either becomes extinct or it evolves into a new, stronger code. In turn, this new code thrives only until the codebreakers identify its weakness, and so on" (xiii).

celebrity status in England, which the controversy established over the ensuing weeks. Within two weeks of the Exhibition's closing, for instance, *The Times* published an advertisement for the new number of the *American Magazine*, which featured "Biographies of the great Novelist, Fenimore Cooper, and Hobbs, the Locksmith" (30 Oct. 1851, 3C). Hobbs's celebrity, moreover, had staying power. In 1853, Cotterill complained in *The Times*, "Any common observer would suppose, from the eager manner in which the press gives publicity to every little movement of Mr. Hobbs, that no man in England could pick a lock" ("Cotterill vs. Hobbs," 13 July 1853, 8F).[31] And nearly a decade and a half after the Exhibition, Charles Babbage recounted his meetings with Hobbs at the Crystal Palace in his autobiography, *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher* (1864). The renowned scientist and inventor was so impressed with Hobbs and with Day and Newell's lock that he brought the Duke of Wellington along to meet the famous picklock on a subsequent trip to the Exhibition. Apparently, Babbage made a habit of visiting Hobbs, who explained to him "from time to time many difficult questions in the science of constructing and of picking locks." Babbage recalled that Hobbs told him "that he had devised a system for defeating all these methods of picking locks, for which he proposed taking out a patent," and confessed that he was "much

[31] Cotterill made this complaint in the midst of challenging Hobbs, yet again, to pick his Climax-Detector lock. He also claimed in his letter that he was "able to produce at any moment several poor working locksmiths capable of picking any lock in half the time Mr. Hobbs occupies." In making such a statement, Cotterill unwittingly confirmed the point Hobbs had made during the controversy. The American responded in The Times: "Mr. Cotterill does not perceive that the ease with which locks can be picked is my own argument, and I agree with him that there are many who can accomplish the feat in less time than myself. In conclusion, it is not in Mr. Hobbs that either the public or the press feel any particular interest, but in the security of the enormous wealth confided to locks and keys so recently proved to be utterly valueless" ("Lock Question" 15 July 1851, 5C). Hobbs eventually accepted Cotterill's challenge, but failed to pick the lock.

gratified" when he learned "that it was precisely the plan I had previously described in my own unpublished pamphlet" (174).

Still, accounts of the Lock Controversy in the press and reactions to it in letters to *The Times*'s editor consistently overlooked the legitimacy of Chubb's objection that Hobbs might have had an unfair advantage by getting access to the lock before the picking trial.[32] But as we know, the tone of Chubb's letters to *The Times* could have done little to help his case. The same was true of his response to *The Illustrated London News*'s article on locks and lockpicking, which *The Times* published as an advertisement rather than in its editorial section. Chubb denied that Hobbs's had "formally accepted" his challenge during the meeting of June 30 at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, as *The Illustrated London News* reported, claiming instead that the American had twice "refused" his challenges (5 Aug. 1851, 8E). He then went further, in what one can only read as an insulting contradiction of the trial's eleven prominent witnesses. With a claim intended to render the arbitrators' certification invalid, Chubb dismissively observed:

> In reference to the alleged lock-picking at an empty house a Great George-street, it may be as well to inform the public that Mr. Hobbs had access to the lock for a fortnight previous to his public attempt, and that the door was opened for his convenience during the whole time he was operating. It will be remembered that the first lock said to have been picked was in his possession previously for seven days.

Reading Chubb's objection against the backdrop of his previous letters, he must have regarded (or at least tried to represent) "an empty house" as an illegitimate site of experimentation, equating empty space with the absence of empirical value and the lack of valid results, and thus again seeking to introduce uncertainty into the debate. This

[32] In addition to Babbage's endorsement, Hobbs's record in America and his subsequent performances in England, both during and after the Exhibition, indicated that he was a genuine phenomenon.

argument failed to persuade the public, however. *The Illustrated London News* subsequently pointed out that the lock "being affixed to an empty house, as alleged by Mr. Chubb, is no reason why it should be less secure than any other; empty houses stand particularly in need of good fastenings for their protection" ("Locks and Lock-Picking" 182).[33] Chubb next attempted to sway the public on the practical grounds of cost. He called into question Hobbs's description of the Newell lock as a "fair 'commercial' " product, assessing the American lock's price of £50—extremely high by the standard of any English patent-lockmaker—against a comparable Detector priced at 50*s*. Chubb closed by declaring, "we shall not be bound by any set attempts made by amateur or professional lock-pickers on locks out of our possession. The undeniable protection they have afforded for more than thirty years from thieves and burglars is the best evidence in their favour."[34] Three and a half decades of experience was a legitimate sphere of experimentation, and it had consistently produced valid, verifiable results, as Chubb repeatedly reminded the public through an aggressive advertising campaign mounted in response to the controversy.[35] But Chubb posited a seemingly irrational distinction

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[33] Thieves would use empty houses as a means of gaining access to the attic windows of adjacent occupied homes. In 1858, for example, there were 31 reported cases in London of burglary by this method (Ritchie 12).

[34] Chubb's appeal to the inductive process, whether intentional or not, coincided with William Whewell's argument in *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1847). The proper foundation for a "Philosophy of the Sciences," Whewell maintained, required "an examination of many instances," and "should form a system of which every part had been repeatedly confirmed and verified" (qtd. in Smith 22).

[35] Chubb's numerous advertisements in the months after the Exhibition included a series that claimed, "Chubb locks give entire security from picklocks and false keys." The advertisement also quoted a testimonial from the Superintendent of the Exhibition Police, dated October 29, 1851: " 'I can say that after 27 years' experience as an officer in the old and Metropolitan Police, I have never known an instance of a robbery having been

between "amateur or professional lock-pickers" on one hand and "thieves and burglars" on the other, notwithstanding the legitimacy of his concern about picking-trials on unsecured locks. Such a statement seemed almost calculated to fail to persuade the public, taking *Clavis*'s earlier comment that property-owners should not have to stand guard over their strongboxes as an indication of popular sentiment. To gain a clearer understanding of the public's response, we have to weigh Chubb's record of success against the ever-increasing ingenuity of burglars and growing concerns over the safety of life and property that had roused public anxiety prior to the controversy.

Overall, the crime rate began a gradual decline at mid-century, but it reached an all-time high in the years immediately preceding the Exhibition, with housebreaking and burglary posing particular threats. According to statistical records of the Metropolitan Police Commission, the per-capita rate of violent offences against property, which included housebreaking and burglary, peaked in 1850.[36] Moreover, the skill of the housebreaker and burglar was a widely acknowledged fact among mid-Victorians. An article on "The Modern Science of Thief-Taking" in *Household Words* (13 July 1850) rhetorically asked readers, "who denies that [burglary's] more subtle and delicate

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committed by picking one of your locks' " ("Safety for Street Doors," *Times* 30 Dec. 1851, 8A).

[36] See Emsley 32 and Jones 127. Beginning in 1834, the Criminal Registrar listed criminal offences in one of six categories: "1. Offences against the person (ranging from homicide to simple assault); 2. Offences against property involving violence (robber, burglary, etc.); 3. Offences against property not involving violence (larceny, etc.); 4. Malicious offences against property (arson, machine breaking, etc.); 5. Offences against the currency; 6. Miscellaneous offences (including riot, sedition, and treason)" (Emsley 22). Reform legislation in 1847, 1850, 1855, and 1879 transferred several non-violent property offences from higher to lower courts; and in contrast with a proportional increase in housebreaking and burglary, the per-capita rate of larceny, which spiked in the mid- and late-1830s and again in the late-1840s, steadily declined throughout the remainder of the century (Jones 124-26).

branches deserve to be ranked as one of the Fine Arts?" (368). George Cruikshank attributed the publication of his pamphlet on home security to what he characterized as an epidemic, making special note not only of thieves' skill but also their brutality, citing the murder of an Anglican minister by burglars in 1850 (2). Henry Mayhew's classic articles on London street life, which ran in the *Morning Chronicle* from 1849 to 1850 and were later published under the title *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-52, 1861-62), portrayed the public sphere as a dangerous territory from which crime constantly threatened to breach if not dissolve the boundaries of bourgeois private life. Mayhew described the masses of "street-folk" roaming the metropolis as living "in nearly the same primitive and brutish state as the savage" and exhibiting "the same predatory tendencies as the Bedouins of the desert"; and he informed readers that the large class of vagrants, "from which the criminals in this country are continually recruited and augmented," "pervade every part of the country, rendering property insecure" (100, 372, 380). Citing the findings of the Report of the Constabulary Commissioners published in 1848, Mayhew estimated that England's "entire criminal population" numbered 150,000, with less than 20,000 behind bars (381). Like Mayhew, Cruikshank depicted middle-class property owners as being under a state of siege by "a desperate race" of criminals, adding, "whilst these savages of the *back streets* of cities remain in this wild state we must use 'the art of self-defence,' and, by our skilful contrivances, try to 'stop the thief' " (16).

From this context, we can gather that, for the British public, the issues involved in the Lock Controversy transcended England's global image and claims of British engineering infallibility, important as these were to the ideological aims of the Great

Exhibition.[37] As Sidney Godolphin Osborne observed in *The Times* two years after the Exhibition, in what was almost certainly an allusion to the controversy: "Why do I, why do most people, keep loaded firearms in my house? Simply…because I have gathered from history and the experience of my own day that the locks one man makes another man can pick; the ingenious fastenings of the builder are not proof and skill against the daring of the burglar" (Letter, 16 Feb. 1853, 8B). Against such arguments, defeat at the hands of Hobbs, despite his publicly acknowledged genius for picking locks, seemed to translate into an unmitigated failure of British security.

III

On July 24, 1851, two days after picking the Detector Lock in Westminster, Hobbs turned his attention, as well as the public's, to the Bramah Precision Lock. Hobbs had first visited Bramah's establishment at 124 Piccadilly on June 2 to take wax impressions of the challenge lock from which the American designed his instruments. On July 22, the arbitrators' committee—comprised of Cowper, George Rennie, railway and marine

[37] The Exhibition itself had further heightened fears of social unrest and property crime by inviting an influx of lower-class and foreign visitors to the Crystal Palace. In Parliament, Colonel Charles de Laet Waldo Sibthorp, conservative M.P. for Lincoln who repeatedly opposed the Exhibition, spoke in an address to the House of Commons to fears of the homegrown mob in the summer of 1850: "all the bad characters at present scattered over the country will be attracted to Hyde Park…. That being the case, I would advise persons residing near the Park to keep a sharp lookout after their silver forks and spoons and servant maids" (qtd. in Patten 295). *Fraser's Magazine* similarly warned readers in February of 1851 that a pillaging horde of Continental radicals was about to descend on the capital (Miller 70-71). Jeffrey Auerbach observes that The Times, though not an opponent of the Exhibition, saw the commission's controversial choice of Hyde Park as an "invasion" of English "rights," for this region at the city's heart served not only as a "playground for respectable society," it established a clear geographical boundary between the haves and the have-nots (43, 44). The Royal Commission's decision to locate the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park threatened to erase the social border between "the fashionable, wealthy, and 'safe' West End and the commercial, poor, and 'dangerous' slums of the East End," transforming the metropolis into a matrix of crime, anarchy, and contagion (46-47).

engineer, and an American engineer named Black—met with Hobbs and Edward Bramah, the company's president, to work out the terms of the challenge.[38] Hobbs set to work two days later and, according to the agreement, had thirty days in which to pick the lock, which the committee had mounted on a wooden block in an upstairs room of Bramah's shop. After eight of the allotted thirty days had passed, Bramah took to the press in a preemptive effort to shape public perception of the ongoing challenge. He wrote to *The Times* that as "the lock controversy engages much attention, perhaps you will be so good as to allow us to state through your columns how the matter…stands at this date" (1 Aug. 1851, 3A). The letter included a brief description of the terms and stressed the fact that Hobbs had secured the lock "by an iron band under his own seal. All access to the lock is therefore taken from us." Aside from this complaint, however, the update was optimistic. Since Hobbs began his work, Bramah reported, the American had spent four days, one of which lasted eight hours, making his attempt. "After this severe test from the hands of this most celebrated operator," Bramah observed with a final note of satisfaction, "we cannot fear for the high public reputation which the Bramah lock has enjoyed for so many years." As far as the lockmaker was concerned, the experiment has already produced conclusive results.

Hobbs was quick to respond in *The Times*. Remarking that the committee rather than the contestants should make any public statements about the challenge, Hobbs added, "as Messrs. Bramah and Co. have told their part I feel bound to tell mine" (2 Aug. 1851, 8D). After relating the details of his progress, Hobbs warned that Bramah's

[38] Edward Bramah, the third of Joseph's four sons, joined the family firm in 1821. The company went by the names of Bramah and Son and then Bramah and Sons until 1836, when other partners entered and the name became Bramah and Company (McNeil 174-75).

sanguine statement was premature. Then in a series of claims that in effect reiterated Chubb's comment on the Newell lock's disqualification as a commercial mechanism, Hobbs reported that the challenge lock contained reinforced springs of such unusual strength "that it must be very difficult to operate the lock even with the true key," which "consequently offered an unexpected obstacle to the picking of the lock"; that he had "in fact pick[ed] the lock, but in consequence of the great strength required to move the bolt I had to leave it in that condition to make a stronger instrument"; and that the "public should understand that the lock now submitted for trial is not a commercial lock, but one made expressly for the test lock, and everything known to Messrs. Bramah and Co. done to prevent the possibility of it being opened." The American concluded on a note of portentous certainty: "The public may rest assured that the result of the experiment will be laid before them at the proper time by the committee."

Unwilling to give Hobbs the final word and not content to await the trial's outcome and the committee's decision, Bramah, again though the editorial pages of *The Times*, reassured readers that the Precision lock was as secure as ever. He dismissed Hobbs's allegation that he had already picked the challenge lock, and then, with a variation on Chubb's strategy, pointed out the experiment's inherent lack of substance:

> During the whole time Mr. Hobbs has been at work his operations have not once been inspected by ourselves or the committee…. [T]he lock remains—as it has done all along during his absence—protected by his seal, thus preventing all access whatever, by anyone else, to it. Mr. Hobbs is thereby enabled to retain during the whole period of his trial, any instrument he may place within the keyhole; a facility it must be evident, could only be afforded to an experimentalist. ("Lock Controversy" 4 Aug 1851, 8A).

The ideal conditions of the test, in other words, rendered it artificial, regardless of the outcome. The procedures of Hobbs the "experimentalist" thus bore no resemblance to those that actual burglars could practically undertake. Bramah closed by observing that

contrary to Hobbs's assertion that the company had specially constructed the challenge lock to resist any attempts to open it, including the use of a key, it was in fact "a commercial lock, and not so complicated as some we have made for bankers. [….] The lock Mr. Hobbs is now working upon…contains no especial security, nor is it at all difficult to open with its proper key; the principle of its construction is precisely similar to that of every lock now made at our manufactury."

The Times appended a notice to Bramah's letter, refusing to print any more communications regarding the controversy, "except as advertisements," until the arbitrators of the Bramah challenge announced their decision. With *The Times*'s editorial page temporarily closed to him, Bramah took out an advertisement in the paper the following day:

> The Lock Controversy having excited so much public attention and anxiety, the Bramah Co. feel it due to their numerous friends, whose distinguished patronage they have enjoyed for above three-quarters of a century, to assure everyone who possesses a real BRAMAH LOCK…that they may rest in perfect confidence in its entire security against the most expert thieves. ("The Lock Controversy" 5 Aug. 1851, 9A)

Aside from the fact that the advertisement reads almost like a public-service announcement in places, its acknowledgment that the picking challenges had roused "so much public attention and anxiety"—an acknowledgment not necessarily in Bramah's best interest—once again gives us a sense of the controversy's impact. Bramah informed consumers that the lock on which Hobbs was testing his skill had passed a weeklong picking trial at the hands of "an expert artist" several years earlier. Hobbs—strategically described now as the "celebrated American locksmith, long well known for his picking skill in the United States, and whose recent operations in London have also earned him a reputation in England," rather than as an "experimentalist"—had likewise failed after

more than a week, despite numerous conditions in his favor. The advertisement concluded by again insisting that the challenge had already proven the Bramah lock's superiority: "He requested thirty days for the trial of his skill, which Bramah and Co. consented to give, so that upwards of twenty days yet remain to him. Bramah and Co. still feel justified in saying that they believe the Bramah lock cannot be picked; but whatever may be the result of this trial, they think that they may still claim the pre-eminence for the Bramah lock."

True to its word, *The Times* published no columns or letters on the controversy for the next three weeks, though the paper was active with advertisements for Chubb and Bramah.[39] While the public awaited the outcome of Hobbs's attempt to open Bramah's lock, *The Illustrated London News* of August 9 ran the third of its articles on "Locks and Lock-Picking." Continuing with its technical analysis of lockmaking, *The Illustrated London News* devoted most of the article to a more detailed description and assessment of the superior principles of design that made Day and Newell's Parautoptic lock invulnerable:

> the discovery of the possibility of opening tumbler locks by such a process as that employed by Mr. Hobbs, which we described last week…suggested to Mr. Newell the necessity of adding to lock machinery an additional system of combination parts, independent of that immediately operated by the key, situated in a distinct chamber of the lock, not in any way attainable by the key, and which system of combination works should not possibly be set in motion until the whole of the conditions requisite for moving the first system of combination works had been complied with. Indeed, in Mr. Newell's lock, there are three distinct sets of combination works, in different parts of the lock, but mutually dependent upon one another; the *second* and *tertiary* combination parts being…so situated in what is called the 'security part' of the lock, that not only they cannot be reached by the

[39] One of Chubb's advertisements, for example, which ran under the title of "Safety for Street Doors," avoided any direct reference to the controversy, merely reasserting the lock's claim to inviolability: "Chubb's latches, with very small and neat keys, are perfectly safe from the attempts of picklocks and false keys" (8 Aug. 1851, 8B).

> key or any other instrument (a hard wall of iron inclosing them), but that no other observations can be made through the keyhole. (182)

The Illustrated London News, as this article and others from the series on "Locks and Lock-Picking" illustrates, assumed a sophisticated level of technical literacy and knowledge among its middle-class readership.[40] But we can read the technical account in this passage as intended for another audience as well. The paper was in effect laying out a new set of design standards for British lockmakers. Indeed, what we find in the paper's series of reports are enjoinders to well-established British companies, which had until then untarnished reputations for excellence, to implement new methods of design and production some half a century before the establishment of a formal organization to oversee national standards.[41] Adding public insult to injury, *The Illustrated London News* strongly urged British lockmakers to adopt the techniques of the American upstarts. To underscore the point, the paper, after informing readers that the American lock was perfectly secure and had withstood numerous documented picking trials in the United States, declared that in light of the "principles" by which Hobbs operated, the defeat of Bramah's lock was almost inevitable:

> we consider that no tumbler lock, not having anything within it to answer the purposes of Newell's secondary and tertiary combination parts, can hold out before [Hobbs]. Some, by the number and nature of their parts…may take longer time than others; but the work in such cases, though slow, is progressive and sure,

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[40] Pointing to a series of reports on archaeology published by *The Illustrated London News* later in the century as evidence, Lucy Brown concludes that the editors apparently marketed the paper for "an educated readership" (30).

[41] Britain had no formal body to set industry-wide manufacturing standards in engineering (either voluntary or compulsory standards) until a coalition comprised of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, and the Iron and Steel Institute created the British Engineering Standards Association in 1901. The Association's name changed to the current British Standards Institute in 1930.

> not accidental and uncertain. Such is our impression at present, resulting from the best consideration we have been able to bestow upon the subject: of course, there is no knowing what may be the result of the experiments now going on. (182)

Considering *The Illustrated London News*'s complimentary accounts of Hobbs's methodically scientific operations, both here and in earlier articles, its perfunctory refusal to predict the outcome of the picking trial with absolute certainty—"of course, there is no knowing what may be the result of the experiments"—could have done little to mollify public concerns.

Although Hobbs did finally succeed in opening the Bramah lock on August 23, 1851, and repeated his performance in the presence of the committee on August 29, the press did not report the news right away. Not until September 1 did *The Times* proclaim:

> The interest of the lock controversy has been suddenly revived, by the announcement of Mr. Hobbs, the American, that he has succeeded in picking that on which he has been challenged to try his skill by the Messrs. Bramah. He has taken a considerable time to accomplish the feat, and there are other questions which the committee of reference will no doubt have to decide upon before his triumph can be pronounced complete and satisfactory. ("Great Exhibition" 1 Sept. 1851, 5D)

The time Hobbs required was indeed "considerable," accounting for the delayed announcement in the press. Between July 24 and August 23, he had spent sixteen days working on the lock, logging a total of fifty-one hours—a striking contrast with the twenty-five minutes required to open the Chubb Detector.[42] On September 2 *The Times* again reported that while Hobbs had picked the Bramah lock, he had done so "in such a way that it is not at present decided whether or not he has entitled himself to the reward" ("The Lock Controversy" 2 Sept. 1851, 5D). The arbitrators had met but remained unable to reach a decision in the challenge, according to the paper, which reported that a

[42] Hobbs told an audience at the American Institute in 1863 that he spent a total of fifty-six hours preparing his tools and picking the lock ("Mr. Hobbs on Locks" 3).

verdict was nevertheless imminent. It also pointed out, in an obvious attempt to goad British lockmakers into action, that no one had yet accepted Hobbs's challenge and tried to claim the reward for picking a Day and Newell lock.

Meanwhile, Chubb had reentered the debate. Responding to a report in *The Globe* that Hobbs had defeated the Detector lock in a fair challenge, Chubb wrote to *The Times*, "this is wholly false, as we have twice challenged him in a fair trial, and he has refused in both cases" ("Lock Controversy," 3 Sept. 1851, 5F). Hobbs countered by providing *The Times* with copies of his letter notifying Chubb of the demonstration at Great George Street and the arbitrators' report, both of which the paper reprinted ("Lock Controversy," 4 Sept. 1851, 5D). *The Times* went further, pronouncing its own judgment on the English lockmaker. In a separate column, the paper took Chubb to task for his repeated attempts to characterize Hobbs's performance as illegitimate and for his refusal to accept defeat and build a better lock:

> It is well known, however Mr. Chubb may wrestle with the statement, that Mr. Hobbs has succeeded by perfectly fair means in opening his locks as they have hitherto been made. No formal and deliberate trial has taken place between them to establish the fact, but it nevertheless remains undoubted, and the sooner Mr. Chubb improves his patent, so as to set Mr. Hobbs at defiance, the better for his own interests. ("Great Exhibition" 4 Sept. 1851, 5C)

Whether the feat fell under the category of a trial of skill or an experiment, the result was the same, according to *The Times*—Hobbs had beaten Chubb, and the paper presented the fact as common knowledge. In this instance, the manufacturer's interest in improving his patent was inseparable from the interest of the public, over which *The Times* had considerable persuasive influence. Moreover, *The Times*'s criticism of Chubb no doubt overshadowed the company's sole defender in the press, *The Builder*, which protested, albeit somewhat tepidly and more than a month after the fact, that Hobbs had defeated

Chubb "under circumstances that did not make the triumph quite a fair one" ("Lock Controversy" 558).

In the same article in which it criticized Chubb, *The Times* offered its most comprehensive assessment of the Lock Controversy. It also reprinted the decision in the Bramah challenge, which the arbitrators had reached on September 2. *The Times* observed that the "lock controversy continues to be of great interest at the Crystal Palace, and, indeed, is now become of general importance" ("Great Exhibition" 4 Sept. 1851, 5C). By way of underscoring the fact that the controversy affected the public at large rather than just Hobbs and the firms of Chubb and Bramah, the paper acknowledged that Hobbs had effectively shaken the Englishman's sense of security:

> We believed before the Exhibition opened that we had the best locks in the world, and among us Bramah and Chubb were reckoned quite as impregnable as Gibraltar—more so, indeed for, the key to the Mediterranean was taken by us, but none among us could penetrate into the locks and shoot the bolts of these makers. In this faith we had quietly established ourselves for years, and it seems cruel at this time of day, when men have been taught to look at their bunches of keys and at their drawers and safes with something like confidence, to scatter that feeling to the winds.

By stripping "bunches of keys" of their meaning and rendering "drawers and safes" insecure, Hobbs called into question (if only symbolically) the guardianship of property at a time when security was of particular concern to prosperous Victorians who had much to protect and who regarded themselves as living in a state of siege.

Moreover, lamenting the public's loss of "faith" in British lockmakers, *The Times* employed apposite language. For the Victorians' acquisitive morality, their passionate pursuit of wealth, "took on an aura of a kind of displaced spirituality" (Herbert 189). Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century writers often associate the idolatrous passion for wealth with lock and key. Anthony Trollope, for instance, uses the mechanisms of security to illustrate the displacement in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871-73), a novel whose title

announces its preoccupation with security.[43] The "little patent-key" to Lizzie Eustace's strongbox supplants the eponymous necklace's Maltese cross around Lizzie's throat and next to her heart, acting as a surrogate marker of the sacred that she "never" removes other than on the rare occasions when she opens the strongbox (1. 96, 1. 285). Lizzie's strongbox similarly figures as a sacred object, intruding itself on the only scene—at Carlisle, just before the first robbery—in which we witness Lizzie engaged in any type of religious observance. As the narrator describes it: "Lizzie, when she was alone, bolted both the doors on the inside, and then quickly retired to rest. Some short prayer she said, with her knees close to the iron box" (2. 42). The novel, in other words, represents the strongbox as a substitute altar or prayer-bench, at which Smiler, the cracksman, subsequently kneels, as well, when he attempts to steal the diamonds. Even in texts that do not associate the idolatry of wealth with a heightened state of security, lock and key are conspicuous by virtue of their absence. Take, for example, George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861). On the night that Dunstan Cass steals the gold from Marner, he is able to open the door to the miser's cottage because Marner has left it unlocked, using his key, instead, to secure a string from which his dinner hangs over a fire to cook while he is away on an errand. Commenting on Marner's belief that his treasure will remain safe because no one has bothered it for a decade and a half rather than because he locks it up, the narrator observes:

> The sense of security more frequently springs from habit than from conviction, and for this reason it often subsists after such a change in the conditions as might have been expected to suggest alarm. The lapse of time during which a given

[43] For "the Victorian reader…'diamonds' not only connoted wealth but ostentatious, guarded wealth, which might be stolen" (McCormack xvi). With a little more than two hundred references to Lizzie's strongbox, locks, and keys, The Eustace Diamonds mentions security at a rate of roughly once every three pages.

> event has not happened is, in this logic of habit, constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen, even when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event imminent. [….] This influence of habit was necessarily strong in a man whose life was so monotonous as Marner's… and it explains simply enough why his mind could be at ease, though he had left his house and his treasure more defenceless than usual. […] He could not have locked his door without undoing his well- knotted string and retarding his supper; it was not worth his while to make that sacrifice. What thief would find his way to the Stone-pits on such a night as this? and why should he come on this particular night, when he had never come through all the fifteen years before? These questions were not distinctly present in Silas's mind; they merely served to represent the vaguely-felt foundation of his freedom from anxiety. (41-42)

While *Silas Marner* represents the psychological perils of idolizing wealth, the novel also seems to remind readers to attend to security with some vigilance rather than complacently trusting in habit.

Notwithstanding *The Times*'s loss of faith, however, the paper was unwilling to grant Hobbs a complete victory. Before reprinting the arbitrators' report, the paper praised Bramah and Company, in contrast with Chubb, for its "pluck" and for acting "with so much bold, open courage." It observed of the decision: "the public we are sure, when they read it, will not think the less of a firm which has been vanquished in a fair stand-up fight maintained for so long a period, and against such extraordinary skill." The arbitrators' verdict itself, despite remarking the unusual circumstances surrounding the picking trial, declared that Hobbs "had fairly opened the lock without injuring it." "We are, therefore, unanimously of opinion that Messrs. Bramah have given Mr. Hobbs a fair opportunity of trying his skill," the three members of the committee stated, "and that Mr. Hobbs has fairly picked or opened the lock, and we award that Messrs. Bramah and Co., do now pay to Mr. Hobbs the 200 guineas."[44]

[44] Although not a signatory of the arbitrators' report, Joseph Bazalgette was one of the witnesses on August 29. Bazalgette went on to serve as chief engineer of the

We can perhaps attribute the ambiguous tone of *The Times*'s report to a conflicted desire to maintain journalistic objectivity while defending one of the icons of British industry, particularly during the Exhibition and with global attention fixed on London.[45] The paper declared the arbitrators' report "conclusive on the merits of the question," and it encouraged Bramah to pay the reward "without hesitation." Although Hobbs had not abided by the letter of the challenge, which called for the use of "a single instrument," as *The Times* pointed out, he had nonetheless achieved "the main point, the picking or opening of the lock." But no sooner had the paper ruled in Hobbs's favor than it again cautioned readers not to assign too much meaning to the decision, calling attention to the American's uncanny skill and the advantages he enjoyed while working on the Bramah lock:

> The public, however, while they admire the expertness with which this mechanical feat has been performed, will not attach more importance to it than it deserves, or undervalue the merit of our best locks, because an American operator, highly accomplished in such matters, has succeeded, after an arduous struggle, in opening them. The facilities given him were such as no thief could ever possess, even if he had the necessary ability; and it is quite clear that the operation has not been one of ordinary picking. This rough lesson will probably lead Messrs. Bramah and Chubb to devise some means for rendering their patents more secure, and we have no doubt they will succeed in that object.

The lack of perfect security, in other words, did not necessarily translate into insecurity in this case. In *The Times*'s attempt to salvage the reputation of "our best locks," we see an effort to control the way the British public perceived the contest between seemingly inferior British technology and superior American ingenuity. While the question of

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Metropolitan Board of Works, overseeing major projects that included the construction of London's new sewer system, which got underway in 1859, and the Thames Embankment in the 1860s.

[45] Hampton points out that the Victorian press placed a great deal of emphasis on the "ideal of disinterestedness" (56).

personal security was of paramount importance during the controversy, as public comments consistently made clear, there remained a compelling matter of national pride. *The Times* emphasized this fact, reiterating its call for British lockmakers to avenge themselves and the nation by picking a Day and Newell lock:

> the American invention…is open to the attacks of our mechanics, and may be picked some of these days in its turn. An attempt will, it is said, be made to effect this; and certainly, when it is remembered that our cousins show several locks all of which are presented as perfectly secure, it is high time for our lockmakers either to show that the American patents are equally as unsafe as their own, or to acknowledge themselves beaten, and endeavour to make better locks for the future.

If the tone of *The Times*'s report was ambiguous, some of the paper's readers offered more conclusive interpretations of the outcome of the Bramah controversy. A man who identified himself as a Joint-Stock Bank Manager wrote a letter commending *The Times* for its reporting on the Lock Controversy, but took issue with the paper's claim that the "facilities given him (viz., the American picklock, as Messrs. Chubb and Son have it) were such as no thief could ever possess, even if he had the necessary ability, and it is quite clear that the operation has not been one of ordinary picking" (5 Sept. 1851, 6F). The writer related the tale of a bank robbery committed twenty years prior by four thieves who spent three months planning the heist. Three of the men befriended an elderly couple who lived in the building as caretakers, attending church with them on Sundays while their accomplice worked on fabricating keys for the vault. When the police investigated the crime scene, they found that the thieves "did not injure the locks, for they made, from wax impressions, perfect keys."[46] By way of closing, the

[46] An even more impressive performance six years after the Exhibition further illustrates the banker's point about criminal ingenuity and patience. Binny reported that in 1857 thieves demonstrated that someone with the requisite determination, patience, skill, and

bank manager, in what was the public consensus, expressed his hope that British lockmakers would "severely" test the Day and Newell lock "in order that the point of its security may be decided."

The same day, Chubb, in his final letter on the controversy, contested *The Times*'s assertion that the company lacked "pluck" in its handling of the matter and, repeating much the same argument he had used all along, again denied that Hobbs had defeated the Detector lock. Claiming that the company had taken "no notice" of Hobbs's "doings at the empty house in Great George-street" because he had access to the lock beforehand, Chubb declared, "So much for the pretended picking of our lock" (Letter, 5 September 1851, 5C). The lockmaker went further, however, linking (syntactically, if in no other way) his refusal to concede defeat with the extraordinary amount of time required by Hobbs to open the Bramah lock:

> In concluding (so far as we are concerned) this 'controversy,' we would add that our locks have been in extensive use for more than 30 years, and no instance has ever been known of a robbery having taken place through any one having been picked; and that we congratulate Mr. Hobbs on the envied honour of having picked a Bramah's lock after '16 days' labour.

Chubb's dismissive sarcasm, combined with Bramah's complaints, provoked scathing criticism from a writer to *The Times* who signed himself Common Sense, a pseudonym that signaled a decidedly unambiguous interpretation of the controversy. The writer noted that he had been following the picking challenges in *The Times* "with much interest," and that in his opinion the repeated denials and insinuations of "our leading tradespeople" constituted shameful treatment of "the ingenious American locksmith" (8

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tools could defeat patent locks when they robbed a London business of £13,000 by fabricating six patent keys during a period of time that exceeded Hobbs's work on the Bramah lock by three months (375). Although the robbery demonstrated considerable determination and skill, such feats were spectacular because they were anomalous.

Sept. 1851, 6F). Such behavior rivaled the scandalous defeat of British lockmaking and reflected poorly on the British public. Of Bramah's reaction, the writer observed that the company's public boast of perfect security had finally caught up with it: "Ever since I was a boy Messrs. Bramah have been obtruding on all the world their challenge to pick the enormous lock which has so long adorned their shop window. Mr. Hobbs at last has come forward and picked it, whereupon Messrs. Bramah raise a quibble as to the number of instruments which have been used by Mr. Hobbs in the operation." According to Common Sense, whose argument recalled the uncomplicated logic of *Clavis*'s complaint earlier in the summer, the picking trail admitted for no mitigating factors. Regardless of the terms of Bramah's challenge, Hobbs had opened the lock or he had not:

> it is very clear that the sole question at issue has been, *whether their lock is pickable or not*, and not whether it required one or more instruments to pick it. It would not have enhanced its value one farthing to any banker has he been in a position to allege that no *one* picklock could open it, admitting at the same time that it certainly was amenable to two or more instruments.

The letter reserved its harshest criticism for Chubb, whose treatment of Hobbs was "far worse" than Bramah's. Through Chubb's repeated denials in the press, Common Sense charged, the lockmaker by implication had questioned the integrity of the witnesses of the picking trial in Westminster as well as insulted Hobbs's honesty without warrant:

> That Mr. Hobbs has fairly picked one of their best locks is clear, unless they are prepared to impugn the veracity of the 11 gentlemen whose signatures are appended to the certificate to that effect, published in self-defence by Mr. Hobbs…nevertheless Messrs. Chubb have thought fit to publish on the following day an insolent and evasive letter, sneering at what they term Mr. Hobbs' 'doings at the empty house in Great George-street,' and at his 'pretended picking of their lock,' which they insinuate of his having been afforded improper opportunities of previously tampering with it.

After citing the witnesses' certification, expressing his satisfaction with the trial's validity, and reminding readers of Hobbs's challenge, Common Sense came to the conclusion that British lockmakers were in effect incompetent:

> As Messrs. Bramah and Chubb are not disposed to take up this challenge, I submit that it is proved, beyond dispute or denial, that Mr. Hobbs, the American locksmith, can open the locks of the English lockmakers while the latter admit their incompetency to open his. I sincerely wish, as we are beaten on this point, that Messrs. Bramah and Chubb had had the good taste and manliness to acknowledge at once what is clear to everybody—viz., their defeat.

The language throughout this letter suggested an incontestable and humiliating defeat not only for Chubb and Bramah, but also for the British public. Hobbs seemed to reemphasize this point within a week of the arbitrators' decision, displaying 200 newly minted golden guineas on a black velvet cloth at his table in the Crystal Palace's American section, an ostentatious demonstration, according to *The Morning Chronicle*, similar to the tasteless showmanship of another recent American visitor to England, P. T. Barnum.[47]

The Illustrated London News's final report on the controversy, published on September 6, 1851, was equally unyielding if not quite as harsh as Common Sense's letter to *The Times*. The article reminded readers of the paper's prediction that Hobbs would defeat the Bramah lock or any other not constructed according to Newell's design of multiple combination systems. It then announced:

> what we anticipated has turned out to be the fact. Mr. Hobbs has picked the famous Bramah lock, has done so upon a process so simple, as to almost be termed ludicrously simple, but that it is so unerring as to occasion feelings of anxiety to all who have treasures to keep under lock and key. It is always best to know the truth however, and, therefore, as we did in the case of the Chubb lock,

[47] See McNeil 199. Hobbs later conceded to an audience at the American Institute that he "perhaps foolishly" displayed the reward at the Exhibition and felt stung by *The Morning Chronicle*'s comparison ("Mr. Hobbs on Locks" 3).

> so now in the case of the Bramah, we shall endeavour to explain the whole process by which its supposed invulnerability has been disproved. (274)

The results were indisputable, according to *The Illustrated London News*, which sought to prove its point by including three technical diagrams of Bramah's lock as well as drawings of the six tools Hobbs used to defeat it. Even as the Bramah Precision Lock held its place of honor atop Aubin's Lock Trophy in the Crystal Palace, *The Illustrated London News* verbally and visually anatomized it before the public's gaze with a central cutaway image—meant not to display the lock's mechanical ingenuity in fine detail but to demonstrate its use of flawed (or at least outmoded) principles of construction. The paper introduced the first and largest illustration, an engraving of the lock cylinder, with language that guided the reader's interpretation of the visual evidence: "we will first describe the principle of the lock itself—that is, the combination parts, which constitute its supposed security" (274). Whereas *The Times* had repeatedly pointed to the length of the trial as evidence in Bramah's favor, *The Illustrated London News* argued that Hobbs had in fact succeeded in opening the challenge lock with remarkable speed. Putting the time of the picking trial into perspective by comparing it with the possible time required according to the doctrine of permutations, the paper observed: "How many lives would it take to hit by chance upon the right key out of so many changes? Yet by the process of observation used by Mr. Hobbs, he steadily arrived at the bearings of this lock, and unlocked it after paying ten visits, amounting in duration to less than fifty hours!" (275). Despite a slight misstatement of the facts, the logic must have seemed compelling to many, and *The Illustrated London News* used it to proclaim the superiority of American lockmaking and redefine the British lockmaker's reliance on permutations alone as an arbitrary and thus unreliable form of security:

> There is something, perhaps, in names; and it is remarkable that this is not the first time in our history that a Hobbs (or Hobbes) and a Lock (Locke) have been in antagonism. On the former occasion…the royal Locke had the best of it—now the Republican Hobbs has his turn. Seriously speaking, the event is one extremely interesting to all, both in an artistic and utilitarian point of view, and will probably set our lock-makers bestirring themselves to devise some new method of security, based upon some more certain principles that 'the doctrine of chances' (275)[48]

Notably, *The Illustrated London News* did not call on British lockmakers to defeat the Newell lock in turn, because the paper did not think such a defeat was possible. Here *The Illustrated London News* demonstrated its modern, scientific approach to the controversy, maintaining objectivity—in contrast with *The Times*, whose reports revealed a nationalist interest in the controversy's ultimate outcome—and relying on deductive reasoning for its conclusions.[49]

Across the Atlantic, reporting on the controversy was equally conclusive and even more sensational. The British correspondent for *The New-York Daily Times* wrote: "Hobbs…who must have been born with a genius for lock-picking, has just achieved another triumph. He has succeeded in picking one of Bramah's best…. Some demur took place as to the fulfillment of the conditions, since set to rest by the decision of the arbitrators; but there is no doubt as to the facts. Beating Bramah, he of course beats all the world" ("Great Britain," 19 Sept. 1851, 4). The report was not only a categorical

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[48] Predictably, *Punch* engaged in similar wordplay, observing "that the 'philosophical world' has only just woken up to the agitation over the 'Lock question' and that the Philosophical Transactions will contain an analysis of the 'relative merits of the philosophy of Lock and Hobbs' " ("We all Have our Hobbies" 123).

[49] In his *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* (1830), John Herschel wrote that legitimate scientific practice requires "the absolute dismissal and clearing of the mind of all prejudice…and the determination to stand and fall by the result of a direct appeal to the facts in the first instance, and of strict logical deduction from them afterwards" (qtd. in Smith 23).

pronouncement in Hobbs's favor; it also offered, in retrospect, an ironically fitting reinterpretation of Bramah's position atop the evolutionary chain of lockmaking represented at the Crystal Palace. If a Bramah key could symbolically open the world's best locks, as it did in Aubin's Trophy, then Hobbs could do so without the aid of a key and thus nullified the clever mechanism's semiotic value. The British correspondent then informed American readers that "to the utter consternation of Chubb, another of our great lock-makers," Hobbs had already "opened one of his best locks before his face with the most alarming facility." Although Chubb had predictably denied "that the trial was a fair one," the writer observed, "everyone knows how to estimate such declarations, and Hobbs, there is no doubt, has all the suffrages in his favor." But *The New-York Daily Times* overstated the judgment of the British public; and while it asserted that no British lockmaker had "daring enough to accept" Hobbs's challenge, a locksmith by the name of Garbutt had in fact begun an attempt to pick the Day and Newell lock on September 17, according to *The Times*, though he failed after thirty days. Of Hobbs's "genius," *The New-York Daily Times* concluded, it "merits every homage, and if he goes on at this rate it will be needful to keep a strict watch on his proceedings, especially if by any chance he were left alone in a bank; nothing, it is obvious, would be 'safe' from him unless his principles are on a par with his profound ingenuity." Reports like this one and those in *The Illustrated London News* were of course calculated to sensationalize the controversy, but they also conveyed a clear message that American ingenuity, at least where locks were concerned, had overtaken Britain's previously unquestioned technological dominance. Coupled with British lockmakers' failure to pick the American lock, such accounts in the press no doubt influenced decisions by the Bank of England, a Chubb

client since the 1820s, and the royal Mint, to order sets of Day and Newell locks, as *The New-York Daily Times* later reported, before the Exhibition had even closed ("Great Britain" 13 Oct. 1851, 1).

In contrast with the accounts we have considered so far, other news reports suggest that the British press was divided on the controversy's outcome and by no means prepared to admit defeat. Unlike *The Times*, which reported Bramah vanquished, if only technically so, or articles in *The Illustrated London News* and *The New-York Daily Times*, which declared Bramah's defeat categorical, both *The Builder* and *The Morning Chronicle* published articles that interpreted the results of the challenge in Bramah's favor, regardless of the arbitrators' ruling. Given the advantageous conditions under which Hobbs labored—including total seclusion, "the aid of 'thieves' wax,' a hinged mirror in the key-hole, a strong light, [and] all sorts of odd instruments"—*The Builder* expressed incredulity "that any lock could be found, made at a cost which would admit of sale, to resist such appliances." It also confessed astonishment "that Messrs. Bramah consented to submit [the lock] to such practice for so long a period" ("Lock Controversy" 558). On the question of whether or not Hobbs had abided by Bramah's original challenge to produce "an instrument" that would open the lock, *The Builder* declared, "we think not, in spite of the arbitrators' award." "Where is the instrument?" the writer asked.[50] Like *The Times*, though, *The Builder* encouraged Englishmen to take up

[50] Two years after the controversy, such views continued to make their way into the press, though sometimes in less cordial language. Cotterill wrote to *The Times*, during a subsequent debate with Hobbs, that the American's "tinkering about 16 days with a basketful of instruments, in attempting to pick Bramah's lock," was an unremarkable and inconclusive performance. "I say attempting," Cotterill added, "because I believe, judging from newspaper reports, which have not yet been disproved, that Bramah's lock was not honestly picked" ("Cotterill vs. Hobbs," 13 July 1853, 8F).

Hobbs's challenge, but called on another group of experts to defeat the American lock: "Is there no public-spirited burglar in London that will come forward to the honour of his country and a round sum of money?"

The Morning Chronicle, in a lengthy article of September 8, went further than *The Builder*, offering a more forceful defense of Bramah. Although the paper conceded that Hobbs had "increased his fame and reputation as a clever and skilful manipulator," it claimed that the challenge had produced "no practical end or purpose whatever," and that Hobbs's performance lacked any scientific value:

> Messrs. Bramah are not informed of the mode in which the lock was opened, neither have they been furnished with any instrument that opens the lock, which will enable them to make such alterations as the existence of any such instrument would require, in order to give additional security to their locks. Neither has it answered any scientific purpose, or added one iota to the stock of knowledge previously existing on so important a subject as that of the mechanisms of locks, for neither the arbitrators, nor Messrs. Bramah, saw anything of the process by which the lock was opened. The result of the experiment has simply shown that, under a combination of the most favourable circumstances, and such as practically could never exist, Mr. Hobbs has opened the lock. ("Messrs. Bramah" 22-23)

What the challenge required, the paper contended, was a more realistic set of test conditions, "circumstances more in accordance with those which attend the ordinary employment and uses of locks" (23). Short of such a test the results were artificial, unproductive, and thus meaningless. Putting the Bramah controversy into historical perspective, *The Morning Chronicle* praised the lock's inventor, "who fifty years since, constructed a lock which, after undergoing sixteen days' manipulation of, confessedly, one of the most skilful mechanics of our day, yielded only to the combined action of a number of fixed and moveable instruments made and applied for that purpose" (24-25). *The Morning Chronicle* then offered one of the most conclusive interpretations of the challenge contained in any of the press reports:

> We have no wish, in any remarks which we have made, to appear to detract, in the least degree, from the merit due to the perseverance and the great ability and skill of Mr. Hobbs…. […] We are bound, however, to state that, in our opinion, he has done nothing calculated in the least degree to affect the reputation of Messrs. Bramah's lock; but his exertions have, on the contrary, greatly confirmed the opinion that, for all practical purposes, it is impregnable. (25)

Whereas *The Illustrated London News* represented Hobbs's performance as "ludicrously simple" and "unerring," *The Morning Chronicle* interpreted the demonstration as definitive evidence of perfect security. The Bramah lock's reputation for inviolability under the usual conditions received further confirmation a little more than a month later when Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Rawlinson, British Consul to Baghdad, wrote to *The Times* a testimonial that, he said, would "reassure the numerous holders of Bramah's locks, whose nerves have been so shaken by Mr. Hobbs's recent exploits" (23 Oct. 1851, 7B). During a railway trip from Paris to Cologne, thieves stole a dispatch box containing approximately £500 and all of Rawlinson's official papers. When Rawlinson recovered the box after several days, he discovered that the lock had sustained damage and would not accept his key. He took it to a French locksmith, whom he described as "the Parisian Chubb," who was able to sufficiently repair the lock in order to open it with the key. According to the locksmith, thieves had made "every effort…both to pick the lock and to force it, and that it was only owing to its superior mechanism and strength" that they failed.

As the public debate over the Bramah challenge played out in the press, Bramah was notably reserved. Indeed, he did not make use of the press as aggressively as Chubb had, issuing only one substantive public comment on the controversy following the arbitrators' verdict. No doubt encouraged by columns in *The Builder* and *The Morning Chronicle* and even some of the comments made in *The Times*, Bramah published in *The*

Times and *The Morning Chronicle* a copy of his letter to Rennie, the chief arbitrator, in which he stated several objections to the judgment. "We need scarcely repeat that the decision at which the arbitrators have arrived has surprised us much," he observed to Rennie, "and we owe to ourselves and the public to protest against it" ("Great Exhibition," *Times* 10 Sept. 1851, 5F). First, Bramah argued, Hobbs's work in total seclusion without any kind of oversight or inspections violated the terms of "fair play." Second, the arbitrators failed to test the lock with its proper key to see if Hobbs had damaged it—and only tried the key twenty-four hours after Hobbs declared his success, giving him time to repair any damage. Third, the conditions of the "experiment" were stacked in Hobbs's favor and thus violated the "spirit of the challenge." Fourth, the trial failed to generate any "good scientific results" because Hobbs did not produce any of the instruments with which he claimed to have opened the lock. And fifth, the arbitrators repeatedly ignored Bramah's requests for oversight in contrast with the company's "interpretation of the challenge." The question of interpretation—of both the original challenge and its results—was paramount in the list of objections. Much like Chubb, though with a greater claim to legitimacy, Bramah sought to construct public meaning by raising objections about the virtually uncontrolled nature of the experiment.

The press's reporting on the Bramah challenge and on the Lock Controversy demonstrated a wide array of interpretations that suggested a lack of closure. Surveying the major London newspapers, we have seen that *The Illustrated London News* and *The Morning Chronicle* stood diametrically opposed to one another in their assessments, while *The Times* wavered somewhere in between the two. If the press, as Smiles argued, did much to create public opinion, then we can surmise that the segment of the public that

accepted the deductive reasoning of scientific reformers would have found *The Illustrated London News*'s account of the controversy persuasive, whereas those who accepted the inductive process of traditional science would have found the arguments in *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle* more compelling. On the other hand, if the average mid-Victorian reader got his news from a variety of sources from which he then developed his opinions about "questions of the day" (Hampton 61), then the press's competing claims about the controversy probably produced collective uncertainty, a response that is itself a form of anxiety.

Readers looking for conclusive judgments would have found little help by turning to the jury reports, issued by the Royal Commission of 1851, awarding prizes for various categories of exhibition. The official record was virtually silent about the controversy; and what little it did have to say reflected the collective irresolution of the press. According to the "Jury's Report on Locks" published in the fall of 1851:

> In the manufacture of locks, Wolverhampton still sustains its ancient reputation. Excellence of workmanship, lowness of price and an adequate degree of security characterise the contributions from that place…. The specimens of locks throughout the exhibition generally evince that the art is in a very advanced state, both here and on the continent, but still it is impossible for the jury to ignore the fact, that the present condition of lock-making is traceable to English ingenuity and invention; and they believe that, on the whole the collection of locks on the British side deserves the place of pre-eminence. (qtd. in Price 530)[51]

In its report, the jury did little more than allude to the Lock Controversy, suggesting that the outcome was questionable and that Hobbs, whom the report does not identify, enjoyed advantages that left the jurors skeptical of the practical results of the challenges: "On the comparative security afforded by the various locks which have come before the

[51] The Exhibition juries contained equal numbers of British and foreign jurors to prevent national favoritism and ensure fairness. Horace Greeley, editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*, served as the jury chairman for Class 22 (Hobhouse 47-48).

jury, they are not prepared to offer an opinion. They would merely express a doubt whether the circumstances that a lock has been picked under conditions which ordinarily could scarcely ever, if at all, be obtained, can be assumed as a test of its insecurity" (qtd. in Price 531). In response to the jury's claim that it had insufficient evidence to judge the relative merits of the locks embroiled in the controversy, a writer for *Fraser's Magazine* (November 1852) incredulously wondered that anyone could be unfamiliar with the controversy's implications. "This jury seems to have consisted of the only persons in England who did not hear of the famous 'lock controversy' of last year," he noted; "for one can hardly imagine that, if they had heard of a matter of so much consequence to the subject they were appointed to investigate, they would have altogether abstained from saying anything about it" (qtd. in Price 581-82).

The Exhibition prizes became the focus of further controversy in the closing months of 1851. The jury presented medals for locks to twenty-one entries from Britain and four from the United States. Only three lockmakers—Bramah, Chubb, and Day and Newell, the lockmakers associated with the controversy—received the additional award of "Special Approbation," which officials gave to less than twenty of the Exhibition's 17,000 participants (McNeil 200). Chubb seized on this fact as an opportunity to vindicate the Detector lock's reputation. Shortly after the close of the Exhibition in October, the company published announcements in *The Wolverhampton Chronicle*, *The Birmingham Journal*, and *The Times* that read:

> It will be noticed that but one other lockmaker in the United Kingdom, out of the immense number of exhibitors in this department, has received the award of 'Special approbation.' The decision of the jury, after a full and careful consideration and comparison of the merits of the articles exhibited is, therefore, in favour of the great superiority of Chubbs' [sic] locks, as the most secure against false keys and pick-locks" (qtd. in Price 528)

A group of seven lockmakers from Wolverhampton, among them Aubin, who had paid tribute to Chubb by including three of the company's patent locks in his Lock Trophy, publicly scorned such "pretensions." According to the lockmakers' complaint, which appeared in *The Times*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Builder*, the *Journal of Design*, as well as newspapers in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton: "we think that Messrs. Chubb should have been the last persons to put themselves forward, after the great humiliation they must have experienced in having their locks picked by Mr. Hobbs" ("Lock Manufacturers of Wolverhampton," *Times* 20 Dec. 1851, 1A). The Wolverhampton lockmakers, all of whom had received prize medals at the Exhibition, even proposed another picking trial, challenging Chubb to put the locks displayed at the Crystal Palace up against their own. Perhaps wary after losing to Hobbs, at least as far as much of the public was concerned, and weary of controversy, Chubb refused to take up the gauntlet.

IV

While the Great Lock Controversy did not provide conclusive proof that locks made in England were insecure under normal circumstances—not in the case of Bramah's Precision lock, at any rate—it did produce definite results, in addition to generating public interest in patent lockmaking. First, British lockmakers, unlike the Americans, had no interest in treating lockpicking as an exact science before the Great Exhibition. Chubb's comment had made that clear. Price observed of attitudes in the industry before Hobbs's arrival in England: "when one maker discovered that he could pick his neighbour's lock, he usually kept it secret, on the principle that if it became generally known, the whole trade would suffer in consequence. The objective was to keep the

public in a state of blind security" (543). The controversy brought this "state of blind security" to an abrupt end in a conspicuously public fashion. As a result, Chubb and Bramah improved their locks even before the Exhibition closed. Less than a week after the arbitrators' decision, in fact, Bramah and Company placed a new, improved challenge lock on display, offering another £200 prize, but had to remove it from the showroom window when crowds of men (and boys) coming into the shop to take up the challenge disrupted business. Indeed, in the wake of the controversy amateur attempts at picking challenge locks "became a popular craze," though patent lockmakers were safe from further embarrassment since the public lacked the necessary knowledge and skill to repeat Hobbs's performances (Monk 32).

Second, the controversy quickly made its way into a wider cultural discourse. Before the doors had closed on the Crystal Palace, a political writer in *The Times* used the picking trials as an analogy for decrying judicial activism: "Mr. Hobbs never applied himself to the locks of Messrs. Bramah and Chubb with one half the zeal with which so many of our judges pounce upon a new act of Parliament for the reform of the law. They seem to look upon it as a challenge rather than a mandate, and address themselves to its interpretation with the view of neutralizing rather than carrying out its provisions" ("Amid the general impatience," 8 Oct. 1851, 4D). Later that month, *The Times*, in the ongoing debate over political reform, satirically listed "5,000 ballot-boxes, warranted not to leak, with patent Hobbs's locks," among the unreasonable demands made by "Radical Reformers" ("A nice, quiet, little businesslike meeting," 28 Oct. 1851, 5B). A literary critic in *The Times* said of a stanza from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), which included the lines "That Shadow waiting with the keys / To cloak me from my proper

scorn," that not even Hobbs could penetrate what the writer complained was hopelessly obscure imagery:

> We ask seriously if that celebrated collector Mr. M. Scriblerus would not have bought up this stanza at any price? Unquestionably it is worth its weight in lead for a treatise on Bathos. Lately we have heard much of keys both from the Flaminian Gate and Piccadilly, but we back this verse against Hobbs. We dare him to pick it. Mr. Moxon may hang it up in his window, with a 200*l.* prize attached, more safely than a Bramah. That a Shadow should hold keys at all, is a noticeable circumstance; that it should wait with a cloak ready to be thrown over a gentleman in difficulties is absolutely amazing. ("Poetry of Sorrow," 28 Nov. 1851, 8A).

The Christmas pantomimes and burlesques performed at Princess's Theatre were equally rough on the British lockmakers, though the nation finally enacted vengeance against Hobbs in a manner of speaking, if only on the stage. According to a reviewer, "Bramah and Chubb do not, of course, escape; but they are revenged when Mr. Hobbs is sent for to pick Davy Jones's locker, and the discovery is made that there is at least one lock in the world that Mr. Hobbs cannot pick" ("Christmas Pantomimes," *Times* 27 Dec. 1851, 3A).

Third, the events of 1851 produced two other though far less sensational controversies in which Chubb and Hobbs were once again principal participants. Hobbs, who decided to stay in London and set up a business of his own, used the publicity of the Great Lock Controversy to generate public interest in the venture.[52] He opened a shop in Cheapside, introduced his own Protector Lock, patented it in 1852, and became a fixture in the British science and engineering community, frequently lecturing on security alongside Bramah and Chubb. Meanwhile, in November of 1852 the Society of Arts offered a £10 premium "for the invention of a good and cheap lock, combining strength

[52] Hobbs advertised ten thousand shares at £5 each for Hobbs' Patent American Lock Company in early 1852. According to the proposal, the company would purchase the patent rights for Day and Newell's Parautoptic lock, which had "attained such great celebrity," and market it in England ("Hobbs' Patent," *Times* 23 Jan. 1852, 3A).

and great security from fraudulent attempts" (qtd. in Price 686). The committee, chaired by John Chubb, awarded the prize to a lockmaker named Saxby from Sheerness, Kent. In June of the following year, Hobbs, skeptical of Saxby's design, attended a meeting of the Society of Arts where he put the winning invention to the test. According to an account in the *Banker's Circular* (reprinted in *The Times*): "to prove to the persons present that it possessed no 'security,' Mr. Hobbs, taking a small straight iron wire from his pocket, and a thin strip of steel, opened it in the presence of several members of the society in three minutes!" ("Mr. Hobbs," 7 July 1853, 8D).[53] The fact that Chubb headed the committee that awarded the prize for Saxby's lock reignited public frustration with the lockmaker and, this time, with Britain's scientific community as well:

> Without offering anything of a personal insult to Mr. Chubb, it is impossible not to question the accuracy of his judgment on this branch of the mechanical art. There can be no doubt that the first requisite in a lock is perfect security; but if the public are mislead by the mistaken judgment of men who decide upon the merits of the question it will undoubtedly throw great suspicion upon the character of public scientific institutions.

In a subsequent column, the *Banker's Circular* complained that the American had "proved very clearly that most of the locks made in this country can be easily picked; and there can be no 'great security' in a lock until we are certain that it *cannot* be picked, even by the ingenuity of a Hobbs" (qtd. in Price 704). Such a claim exaggerated the implications of Hobbs's latest performance, though the frustration, particularly since it came from a journal representing the banking community, was understandable.

After this series of humiliating or at least sobering public demonstrations, British lockmakers seemed finally to have turned the tables on the American in 1854. John

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[53] Americans continued to capitalize on Hobbs's exploits in England. *Scientific American*, for example, also reprinted the article from the Banker's Circular under the title "Hobbs Picking Another English Lock" (6 Aug. 1853, 374).

Goater, a foreman with Chubb and Son, picked two of Hobbs's Protector Locks in the space of six hours in the presence of six witnesses, though he claimed earlier to have opened one of the locks in under two minutes. At a meeting of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Goater, with Chubb at his side, maintained that the operation "simply consists in the application of a watch-spring and two common picks" ("Hobbs's Locks Picked," *Times* 24 Feb. 1854, 10E). Hobbs, however, maintained that he had already revealed this vulnerability to members of the Institution during an earlier lecture. Writing to *The Times*, he explained that "certain defects" in the lock's design, which he had since corrected, "rendered it possible…to introduce a piece of watch spring so as to fix the moveable stump, or protector, and thus convert the lock into a mere ordinary tumbler, or Chubb lock" ("Hobbs's Locks," 25 Feb. 1854, 11F). A defective American lock, in other words, provided security equal to a Chubb. Moreover, as Chubb and Bramah had in 1851, Hobbs complained that the test was artificial because the locks in question were not "properly fastened to a drawer or box." Goater, Hobbs concluded, had simply "achieved the very humble feat of bearing practical witness to the truth of what I stated only in words." Observing that Hobbs advertised his locks as "secure against picking," Goater suggested that Hobbs's protestations were hypocritical and that he "really has no right to complain of this exposure: he began the war against the English locksmiths in 1851." But England had ultimately triumphed and the war had ended on a note of poetic justice, according to Goater, who concluded his letter to *The Times* by quoting Psalms 7:15: " 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made'" ("Hobbs's Lock Picked," 28 Feb. 1854, 12E). The brief controversy ended when Hobbs offered Goater £200 if he could repeat his performance on one of the improved locks, and a

group of Hobbs's workmen promised him an additional £50 with the stipulation that he had to pay them £50 if he failed ("Hobbs's Locks," *Times* 1 March 1854, 12F). Goater never accepted the challenge, and we can assume that his refusal would probably have done little to assure the public that British engineering had truly vindicated itself against American ingenuity.

Nevertheless, the Great Lock Controversy and the controversies that followed seemed to have done little or nothing to permanently injure England's patent-lockmaking industry. In the autumn of 1854, *The Times* reported that business was thriving and that lockmakers had more work than they could handle:

> The patent lock trade is remarkably active, some of our great patentees having more work on hand than they can conveniently execute within the time specified. There are other orders ready to be put on hand, but which are at present suspended in consequence of the unusual busy state of the manufacture. We allude, of course, not to the common door lock business, but to the expensive patent lock inventions produced in Birmingham and the neighbourhood, and of which Cotterill's and Chubb's may be taken as examples. ("State of Trade" 16 Oct. 1854, 5C)

Moreover, as the patent-security industry expanded in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Britain's preeminent lockmakers reclaimed their positions as the guardians of privacy and property. Bramah found vindication in the pages of fiction as well as in the press. The "two Bramah house-keys" that work the lock to Clive Newcome's art studio, which the narrator of Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1853-55) describes as a "sanctum," a term that suggests security, represent the young man's coming of age and independence (211, 213). *The Times*, in a review of the Great French Exhibition in 1867, recalled the Lock Controversy, praising the ingenuity of Hobbs, who had returned to the United States in 1860, though the paper claimed that "the character of the Bramah lock was in no wise damaged" by the American's performance. The correspondent continued: "it was

clear that in practice it would be safe against the machinations of any thief, and it is now an accepted fact that many locks of many makers are for all practical purposes impregnable" ("Great French Exhibition," 19 Aug. 1867, 7A). Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* underscores the fact that Victorians continued to view the patent lock as practically impregnable. The thieves who steal the strongbox in which Lizzie Eustace usually secures the necklace are incapable of defeating the lock, despite the fact that Smiler, the leader, is an accomplished cracksman, described by the narrator as "very efficient at the trade" and supplied with "well-finished tools" (2. 43).[54] They succeed in

[54] Clearly, Trollope had read articles alerting readers to the technological sophistication of mid-Victorian burglars. The references to the cracksman's "trade" and his "well-finished tools" in *The Eustace Diamonds* echoes the language used by Cruikshank, Guernsey, Holland in their essays on security. In fact, in 1868, the year before Trollope began writing *The Eustace Diamonds*, he published an essay critical of the alarmist mentality that resulted from the garrotting scare that swept London in the 1860s, and which generated the publication of articles on crime-prevention like Guernsey's "Robbery as a Science" and Holland's "The Science of Garrotting and Housebreaking," both published in 1863,. In "The Uncontrolled Ruffianism of London, as Measured by the Rule of Thumb," which appeared in *St. Paul's Magazine*, Trollope argued that contrary to repeated warnings in the press, the criminal classes were not about to overrun Victorian society. Public fears about street crimes drew from Trollope a skeptical response. He attributed the source of public alarm to sensation journalism rather than a real threat of danger, claiming that he personally knew no victims of garrotting or robbery and that he had never been robbed himself. Trollope confessed to having "heard and read much of the predatory habits of our immediate neighbours, and of the rowdyism, barbarity, and what we have ventured to call the uncontrolled ruffianism, of those among whom we live," adding "and who is there that does not hear and read so much on the subject as to make the hair of the head stand on end from time to time?" (419). However, after comparing some of the statistics—as opposed to "the rule of thumb"—on recent crime against the population of London as a whole, he determined that "the percentage…was very small indeed,—so small that when we came to add garrotting to the other crimes of the citizens, it showed a result hardly to be appreciated" (420). The press, on the other hand, employed the same figures to "teach us to believe that we English are all gradually tumbling into a great Golgotha of crime, in which the innocent will be eaten up and swallowed by the criminals" (422). Trollope rejected the advice of journalists and commentators who cautioned the public to avoid going out at night, if possible, or to at least go out armed with a club or pistol, to stay in the middle of the street and off of the sidewalks, and to carry neither money nor anything else of value.

opening the strongbox only after a violent effort at breaking off the lid with a hammer and chisel.

Chubb had particularly benefited from the reassessment, and the company name eventually regained its power to signify practical invincibility.[55] By the mid-1850s, Chubb locks became a standard feature for the pillar letter-boxes introduced by the post office in 1851. Indeed, when Trollope proposed the idea of letter-boxes, he indicated that security was a primary concern:

> all that is wanted is a safe receptacle for letters, which shall be cleared on the morning of the despatch of the London Mails, and at such other times as may be requisite. Iron posts suited for the purpose may be erected at the corners of streets in such situations as may be desirable, or probably it may be found to be more serviceable to fix iron letter boxes about five feet from the ground, wherever permanently built walls, fit for the purpose can be found, and I think that the public may safely be invited to use such boxes for depositing their letters. (Letter to G. H. Creswell, 21 Nov. 1851 [*Letters* 28])

Trollope in fact saw the letter-box as something akin to a safe. The narrator of *The Eustace Diamonds* refers to the postal receptacle where Frank Greystock deposits his proposal to Lucy Morris as an "iron box" (1.133)—a phrase used repeatedly throughout the novel to designate Lizzie's strongbox.

"The streets which are very pleasant to us would cease to give us pleasure," he declared, "if it became needful for us to be ever on our guard,—to hurry along, looking over our shoulders to the right and to the left, mindful always of the cudgel in our hands" (423). Seeking to reassure readers that, the criminal classes notwithstanding, "an extremely honest set of fellows" comprised society, Trollope refused, for his part, to adopt an overly vigilant self-defensive posture. "Having, therefore, after our own fashion, measured the ruffiansim of London in our own scales, and by our own weights," he reasoned, "we decline to recognise any necessity for altering our usual mode of living" (424).

[55] The company's name also came to signify superior quality generally. According to Harry Chubb, "Chinese dealers have introduced a new adjective into their pigeon English' they speak of a 'Chubby pair of trousers,' or 'a Chubby pot of jam,' meaning that it is the best of its kind" (518).

Writing in 1861, Binny advised property owners: "Burglars cannot pick Chubb's patent locks. The best way to secure premises where no person sleeps is to have a good patent lock on the outer door, with an iron bar outside fastened by a patent Chubb lock. This acts with double safety" (371). Henry Holland's essay on "The Science of Garotting and Housebreaking" in 1863 claimed that the improved Chubb locks were more than a match for the burglar's skill and ingenious instruments. The "box-makers, and not the box-breakers," according to Holland, "have the advantage at present; and now the hope and dream of these latter is that some one will invent a chemical preparation capable of fretting a lock away or consuming an iron door" (87). These endorsements extended into the pages of fiction. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), a Chubb lock guards the door of Briony Lodge, the home of Irene Adler. The lock does not figure directly into the story, but it is one of the villa's few notable features, according to Sherlock Holmes, and it symbolizes Adler herself, who successfully foils five attempted burglaries to retrieve a photograph that could compromise the King of Bohemia, and who is one of a handful of people—and the only woman—to outwit the detective. The Chubb lock reprised its role as the embodiment of Empire late in the century. Chubb and Son made the ceremonial key used by Queen Victoria to open the Imperial Institution in London in 1893, based on a design personally approved by the monarch. The company constructed the key's two wards, which formed the letters I.I., and the stem and bow, an orb topped by the Imperial crown, out of gold and jewels from India, South Africa, Burma, Ceylon, Australia, Queensland, and British Columbia.[56] This

[56] Commenting on the key's unique manufacture, George Hayter Chubb, the founder's great-grandson, observed: "It would be difficult to imagine objects which, in so small a compass, could more fully symbolize the splendid loyalty of the Oversees Dominions to

time, rather than enclosing a colony in a gilded cage, British security represented the Empire's potency, its power to open the world, to gain access to treasures around the globe.

This is not to suggest, however, that patent lockmakers were able to restore the myth of infallible British engineering or that the public soon forgot the Lock Controversy. Despite assurances in fiction and the press, and despite the fact that Chubb and Bramah reestablished their reputations for practical invulnerability if not an idealized perfect security, the controversy lived on in England's cultural memory. In his *fin-de-siècle* series of urban sketches, *London up to Date* (1895), George Augustus Sala includes a visit to the *Morning Mammoth*, a fictional newspaper that represents *The Times*, in which he introduces the reader to the paper's lead writer, Sir Charles Launcelot Greaves Grandison. In addition to having produced leading articles that number in the thousands, Grandison, a prolific writer who fittingly resembles Trollope, also writes poetry, including an epic entitled *The Rape of Bramah's Lock* (294). The fact that a mid-Victorian controversy was available to late-Victorian satire as a meaningful allusion is in a sense symptomatic, suggesting that the events of 1851 remained embedded in the public's consciousness. We can perhaps attribute this lingering feeling of violation to an unresolved sense of anxiety that exceeded the demands of protecting property. Although security is a practical necessity where property is concerned, and thus a basic requirement for life in capitalist society, as we have seen repeatedly, it also erects a sacred boundary, represented for the Victorians by a key of one's own, which structures the fundamental conditions of liberal identity. As Gaston Bachelard observes: "It is not merely a matter of

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the Empire—devotion which has since found wider expression in the magnificent and unexampled rally to the Flag in the Great War" (Chubb and Churcher 78).

keeping a possession well guarded. The lock doesn't exist that could resist absolute violence, and all locks are an invitation to thieves. A lock is a psychological threshold" that meets the "need for secrecy," concealment, and self-preservation (81). In order to more fully explore the Lock Controversy's sociocultural significance, as well as its deep and lasting impression on the British public, we need to consider the possibility that Hobbs's uncanny power to violate a boundary or threshold that the Victorians, in their previous "state of blind security," had assumed was inviolable—his rape of the lock—had an unsettling psychological effect. The reaction to the controversy that registered this psychological effect, along with its ideological ramifications, was Horne's "A Penitent Confession," to which we now turn our attention.

V

Given that *Household Words*, in which "A Penitent Confession" appeared, largely shared the liberal agenda of the Great Exhibition, it seems unlikely that Horne's story consciously undermines that agenda.[57] In fact, in an essay co-written with Dickens, entitled "The Great Exhibition and the Little One," also published in *Household Words* in the summer of 1851, Horne praised the Exhibition as demonstrative proof of liberalism's triumph over conservative ideas and values. The "two countries which display (on the whole) the greatest degree of progress and the least—[are] England and China," Dickens and Horne observed; and they argued that the "true Tory spirit would have made a China of England, if it could" (357).[58] While the English goods on display at the Exhibition

[57] For a discussion of Dickens's efforts to create and address "a new middle-class audience" through *Household Words*, see Lorna Huett 68-72.

[58] Like *Household Words*, the Exhibition took the middle class as its primary audience. It also demonstrated "that the best way to sell things to the English was to sell them the

illustrated the progress enabled by the victory of liberal ideology, as Dickens and Horne maintained, a trip to the Crystal Palace also reminded visitors that progress depended on self-governing individualism for the maintenance of social order. Philip Landon argues, for instance, that visits to the Exhibition emphasized a "regulated spectatorship" which promoted social stability through "a voluntaristic ceremony of self-government" (28-29). Andrew H. Miller similarly claims in his study of the Exhibition:

> the orderliness of the objects displayed was infectious and overwhelming. One stated task of the Exhibition was the inculcation of respect for constituted authorities. Thus, in an early stage of planning, the Art Union maintained that 'the loyalizing effect of such an exhibition is not the least of its moral recommendations. Every man who visited it would see in its treasures the result of social order and respect for the majesty of law.' (82)

But if a trip to the Crystal Palace trained mid-Victorians in the protocols of self-restraint and social stability, respect for authority, and loyalty as citizens—if a visit educated them, in other words, in the behavioral codes of mid-nineteenth-century liberalism—Simon Sparks's frequent trips to view Chubb's Koh-i-noor display case in "A Penitent Confession" have the opposite effect. The Chubb cage, because of its reputed inviolability, seemingly compels Sparks against his will to devise various schemes to violate it. His incessant contemplation of the allegedly unsolvable mechanical puzzle escalates into an uncontrollable desire that, like the return of the repressed, defies immediate explanation and threatens his sanity. According to Sparks:

> These thoughts took such possession of my imagination, that I was literally haunted by them. Wherever I went, whatever I was doing, they constantly obtruded themselves. I vigorously strove to concentrate my attention and

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culture and ideology of England, its plans for commercial dominance, its dreams of Empire, its social standards, and its codes of conduct" (Richards 36, 40). The Exhibition, in other words, actively promoted to its largely middle-class audience a liberal vision of social and cultural progress that Dickens and Horne contrast with China and with the "Tory spirit" in their essay.

> speculations on other objects of interest in the Great Exposition. I called to mind the gigantic Astronomical Telescope…and suddenly the Koh-i-noor appeared shining at the other end, escaped from its cage. I bethought me of the various agricultural and other machines…but it always ended in one of them boring a deep hole under-ground, into which I put my foot, and drew it back suddenly, checking myself with a 'forebear.' I really felt ashamed of all this; but do what I would, I could not shake it off. […] I rushed back into the Crystal Palace, and the next moment found myself, as by a fatal fascination, standing in front of the iron cockatoo cage, with its policeman lounging beside the barrier rail, quite stultified with the dull monotony of his duty. There I beheld the illustrious captive shining on a platform or stage, which is evidently an iron safe, one (or more) of the panels of which has a deep and curious key-hole, which panel being opened, no doubt allows you to creep along in the dark, beneath the 'mountain of light.' Aha!—not so impregnable—not so impossible to be got at—by no manner of means impossible. I could imagine several ways. (436- 37)

As this passage illustrates, Sparks's obsession brings out a latent thief in his character, do what he will to repress his desire from his conscious mind. "A Penitent Confession" in fact invites readers to interpret Sparks's eventual burglary of the Koh-i-noor safe in psychological terms, to interpret the theft as an unconscious wish-fulfillment of this otherwise upstanding citizen. Sparks admits:

> I did, indeed, imagine several ways—several extraordinary ways. I fell into a habit of sitting in an armchair after dinner, and indulging in long reveries, in which I exhausted my ingenuity in devising and following out schemes for carrying off the Koh-i-noor. The thing had taken so thorough possession of my imagination, which I verily believe…I should have gone mad, had not the extremes found a vent, and a cure, in one of those after-dinner reveries which terminated in a deep slumber. But if reduced to a state of insensibility to all outward impressions, how active, vivid, and coherent were all those which I experienced within! (437)

Even though the majority of the story, including the theft, takes place in the dream-state that follows, a dream which, according to Sparks, "must have been [the result of] a high state of brain fever," the ideological implications of such a theft are nevertheless telling. For Sparks not only sets himself in competition with Chubb; more importantly, his theft of the Koh-i-noor diamond, the chief symbol of British prosperity, stability, and Empire

at the Crystal Palace, sets him in opposition with the ideological apparatus of mid-Victorian liberalism represented through the Exhibition. Using this ideological slippage as a point of entry into "A Penitent Confession," which employs the Lock Controversy as a crucial trope, our reading will explore how Sparks's obsession with stealing the Koh-i-noor diamond leads to the failure of self-government, exposing the divided nature of bourgeois identity; how his loss of self-restraint subsequently leads, through a series of reversals, to a loss of caste and of identity that disrupts liberal social order; and how the narrative finally resolves into a cautionary tale of acquisitive individualism.

The Great Lock Controversy's prominence in the press makes it difficult to imagine that Horne did not have the picking trials in mind when he wrote "A Penitent Confession." Any reader in the summer of 1851 would have understood a competition between an "acute locksmith" and "an equally acute picklock" (437) as a not-too-subtle allusion to the highly publicized controversy. Although Sparks eventually steals the celebrated diamond by tunneling under the Crystal Palace and boring a hole in the bottom of the Koh-i-noor vault, he constructs, like Hobbs, a set of special "instruments" and "probes" of his "own invention"; and his description of the tool with which he finally opens the case—"a long handle of steel, furnished at the other end with a compound action of hook and forceps"—sounds remarkably similar to the account of Hobbs's specially constructed instruments in the press (438, 439). Moreover, when Sparks finally does get the diamond out of the display case, his description of the event echoes Hobbs's boast that he had outmaneuvered Chubb by actually using the pressure from the detector spring of the high-security lock to pick it, although the detector was supposed to ensure against someone opening the lock without the proper key: "The cunning spring intended

to cause [the diamond] to dart downwards and disappear at the least touch, devised by the subtle brain of Mr. Chubb, had no doubt been the very cause of [the diamond's] sudden descent…. It is thus that great locksmiths, and others, outwit themselves. Like vaulting ambition, they pitch over on the other side" (440). Here, though, the similarity ends. For whereas Hobbs claimed to pick high-security locks in the interest of the public, self-interest motivates Sparks. But this form of desire, because it is antithetical to the enlightened self-interest mandated by the liberal political economy to which Sparks subscribes, can only fully realize itself in the unconscious fantasy of a dream. Put another way, "A Penitent Confession," in which the obsessive fascination with security masks a deeper motive of greed, is a story about the bourgeois unconscious giving way to its own selfish desire. To help us unpack Sparks's latent fantasy we need to first briefly consider a paradox invariably associated with security, and one to which the story calls attention.

If something is worth securing, it is worth stealing—and these values tend to rise proportionally. Thus the paradox: the better we secure something the greater the likelihood that someone will attempt to steal it'; or as Bachelard observes, "locks are an invitation to thieves." Victorians were well aware of the paradoxical relationship between security and theft, though they tended to attribute the paradox's motive power to what Mayhew called the "criminal classes" rather than to respectable members of bourgeois society such as Sparks. Take, for example, an observation made by the peripatetic narrator of Trollope's short story "The Man Who Kept His Money in a Box" (1861), who compares himself against a family of boorish, middle-class fellow travelers in Italy, their ubiquitous strongbox in tow: "Some people are always being robbed, and

are always locking up everything; while others wander safe over the world and never lock up anything. For myself, I never turn a key anywhere, and no one ever purloins from me even a handkerchief. [….] It is your heavy-laden, suspicious, mal-adroit Greenes that the thieves attack" (285). But the paradox of security has another implication, as well: it generates an alienating form of individualism. According to Steven Spitzer: "the search for security through commodities…becomes a fundamentally 'alienating' experience in its own right. Instead of bringing us closer together and strengthening the bonds of community and society, the security commodity becomes a means of setting us apart" (50). Observers of nineteenth-century social life were aware of this implication of the paradox, as well. We have to look no further than Miss Havisham's home in Dickens's *Great Expectations* for an illustration. Satis House, with its enclosure of high walls, locked gates, windows encased in brick and iron bars, and doors secured with heavy chains, is a veritable fortress in which time itself has stopped, and in which Miss Havisham obsessively enforces her seclusion from the outside world.

We find a more detailed elaboration of the paradox in one of Marx's early analyses of bourgeois society, which also mounts a critique of middle-class security. In "On the Jewish Question" (1844), Marx argues the impossibility of attaining true human freedom in a social system that establishes and enforces a rigid distinction between the political state and civil society. Whereas the former is the locus of citizenship, cooperative action, and shared communal power, the latter is the sphere of the laissez-faire ideology and bourgeois self-interest. This notion of separate spheres has irrevocably split the bourgeois subject between the public self, characterized by Marx as a "species-being"—an idealized citizen integrated within the community—and the private or "egoistic"

individual closed off from the rest of society and governed solely by the pursuit of self-interested desires. The duality that inheres within modern capitalist society, in other words, generates in the subject an irreconcilable contradiction. Marx writes:

> The perfected political state is in its essence the *species-life* of man in *opposition* to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life remain in *civil society*, as properties of civil society, *outside* the sphere of the state. Where the political state has reached its true form, man leads a double life, a heavenly life and an earthly one, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in life itself. He leads a life within the *political community*, in which he is himself a *communal being*, and he leads a life in *civil society*, in which he acts as a *private individual*, regarding other people as a means and degrading himself to the level of a means…. The political state is as spiritual in its relation to civil society as heaven is in its relation to earth. It stands in the same opposition to civil society…." (102; emphasis in original)[59]

Not only does Marx reverse the ethical polarity of the separate spheres, in contrast with numerous Victorian writers we have looked at in this study; he maintains that the bourgeois individual, "in his *innermost* actuality, in civil society, is a profane being" (102). As such, the individual inhabits "the sphere of egoism, of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [Hobbes's war of all against all]," which exists in direct opposition to the

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[59] In his critique, Marx focuses particular attention on the political architects of post-revolutionary France, who asserted in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens* (1791) the inherent rights of equality, liberty, security, and property. Marx interprets the *Declaration* as a betrayal of revolutionary aims and the ideal of citizenship:

> It is a curious problem that a nation which is just beginning to free itself, to tear down all barriers between various sections of the people and to found a political community, should solemnly proclaim…the vindication of the egoistic man, severed from his fellow men and from the community, and that it should even repeat this proclamation at the moment when only the most heroic sacrifices can save the nation and are therefore urgently required, when the sacrifice of all the interests of civil society has become the main order of the day and when egoism must be punished as a crime…. This fact becomes even more curious when we observe that the political emancipators reduce citizenship, the *political community*, to a mere means for preserving these so-called rights of man, so that the *citoyen* is proclaimed to be the servant of the egoistic *homme*. (110)

legitimate claims of community (104). Marx accordingly formulates the divided modern subject as the embodiment of an ethical dichotomy: an "*egoistic independent* individual" on one hand and "a *citizen*, a moral person" on the other (114).

Security enters into Marx's analysis as a negative concept that allows these contradictory selves to coexist by protecting the bourgeois ego from intrusion. It figures into his argument as a specifically capitalist idea in the service of bourgeois individualism and an alleged right—protecting other alleged rights, most notably the right to private property, inimical to Marx's theory of the just society—primarily responsible for the bifurcation of the modern state. "Security is the supreme social concept of civil society," he claims; "the concept held by the police that the whole of society exists only in order to guarantee to each of its members the preservation of his person, his rights, and his property" (109).[60] Rather than enabling the realization of a community of mutual interests, cooperation, and true citizenship, security provides civil society with "the *guarantee* of its egoism," enabling the individual to live "separated from life in the

[60] Although Marx mentions only the police, Victorians viewed the police as but one component of security, and a supplementary component at that. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, for example, wrote:

> it cannot be denied that we are not content to live…under the protection to our property of the best of fastenings and of firearms; we have added POLICE to Bramah locks and revolvers. We found as we grew in civilisation that it was absolutely necessary that waking men should guard our property while we slept, for we had learnt that the improved ingenuity of our race had found out means to get through our fastenings and rob us while we slept under the shadow of our firearms. (Letter, *Times* 16 Feb. 1853, 8B)

community and withdrawn into himself, into his private interest and his private arbitrary will" (109).[61]

In citing Marx's critique of the split bourgeois individual and modern security, we do not mean to imply that Horne's story demonstrates any socialist sympathies. There are, however, affinities between Marx's analysis and Horne's story that warrant consideration and that might help us make sense of the ideological slippage in "A Penitent Confession." The Great Exhibition attempted to synthesize the political state and civil society on a grand scale, demonstrating that the cooperative action of the community and self-interested laissez-faire individualism formed a symbiotic whole within the industrial-capitalist society on display at the Crystal Palace. Hence the effort of the Exhibition's organizers, noted by Landon and Miller, to educate visitors to be at once loyal citizens (motivated by cooperative action) and self-governing individuals (motivated by enlightened self-interested competition with others). The problem with such an effort is, according to Marx's reasoning, that the positions conflict; that the inherent tension between man as species-being or public self and man as egoistic or

[61] Aside from describing the private domain as profane and the public domain as sacred and thus reversing the conceptual polarity of the separate spheres, Marx offers no specific spatial solution to the problem he designates as the modern state's internal contradiction in "On the Jewish Question." We do, however, find an attempt to achieve spatial resolution in German socialist architect Bruno Taut's "A Programme for Architecture" (1918), which sought to nullify the doctrine of the separate spheres altogether. Taut proposed that a modern, revolutionary form of architecture should shape public consciousness and prepare the way for a socialist version of social order. Taut's plan, which was popular with Soviet urban planners, conjoined utopian and totalitarian elements, according to Karsten Harries, for it depicted "the individual and all that expresses and reenforces [sic] individuality…as forces that stand in the way of the required integration." Representing bourgeois individualism as the antagonist of revolutionary social change, Taut demanded that architects abolish "the distinction between private and public architecture," enjoining them instead "to imagine large-scale housing projects" and to "dream of megastructures that would collapse the distinction between public and private, sacred and profane" (338).

private self can never resolve itself; that the subject attempting to live under these dual regimes is fated to a split existence. "A Penitent Confession" alludes to such a division, suggesting that the breach of security—which in Marx's analysis functions an agent of ideology ensuring that the contradiction holds together—exposes an inherent duality. At precisely the moment, in fact, that Sparks violates the safe securing the Koh-i-noor diamond he encounters an uncanny apparition that we could well read as his double. Sparks recounts:

> What took place on this eventful night—this night marked with a finger of dazzling fire on my life's horoscope—I cannot pretend in any measured form of regular sequence to relate. I was in such a state of preternatural elevation, that I really consider it as a delirium. How…I bored my way up beneath Chubb's iron safe…how I drilled a small hole in the lower iron plate, into which I inserted my instruments, and gradually cut an aperture big enough to enable me to thrust half my face in—how I stuck up a lighted taper inside—how, as I was raising myself to insert half my face and look up and about, (feeling the moment was now at hand,) half *another* face was protruded through the aperture, and looked down and about. I thought I should have died on the spot. I wonder I did not. Of course the horrible appearance must have been a delusion of the senses—the senses acted on by my conscience. I looked again, and it was gone. It came no more. [….] I felt sure that my nervous imagination had played me this awful trick. (439-40)

When Sparks breaks in to the Koh-i-noor cage, which was of course the apotheosis of security in 1851, he ruptures the embodiment of what Marx calls the "supreme social concept of civil society," and in effect eradicates the "guarantee" of his own egoism by subverting the ideological force that keeps the political and civil selves at bay. The ego fails in this instance, through a failure of self-government, to acknowledge the community's overriding claim on the individual and his desires, generating an ethical conflict that manifests the split self. The "half *another* face" that Sparks sees looking down at him corresponds with the half he tries to insert into the bottom of the safe; Sparks has, in other words a (literally) face-to-face encounter with himself.

Sparks's explanation of the apparition as "a delusion" produced by his "conscience" finds support from the psychoanalytic theory of the uncanny, in which the theme of the double plays a crucial role, and which might help us flesh out the significance of the connection between Marx's critique and Horne's story. Freud argues in "The Uncanny" (1919) that the double originates at an early, narcissistic stage of ego development as another version of the self, most notably as "the 'immortal' soul," ensuring the ego's "preservation against extinction" (522).[62] When the individual passes beyond childhood, the double takes on an ominous meaning, becoming "the uncanny harbinger of death." Freud writes:

> The idea of the 'double' does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego's development. A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience' [later called the superego]. In the pathological case of delusions of being watched, this mental agency becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego…. (523)

What gives the double its uncanny feature is its same-but-different quality; it is a figure of self-alienation.[63] Transgression—in other words, the return of repressed material to the conscious mind—triggers the superego's alienation from the ego and its manifestation

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[62] We should note that Freud develops much of the theory of the uncanny from readings of nineteenth-century fiction, such as stories by Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain, and especially E. T. A. Hoffmann. Also notable, as Phillip McCaffrey observes, the "motif of the thief emerges with noticeable frequency" in Freud's readings (101).

[63] The "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien," Freud maintains, "but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (526). Before undertaking his analysis of literary texts in "The Uncanny," Freud demonstrates the alienation effect in the term *heimlich* (German for "homely"). After tracing the etymology and various conflicting definitions of the term, he shows that the original "meaning…develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich* ['unhomely']" (518).

as a double standing in opposition to the self. This psychic opposition coincides with the ideological conflict between the "spiritual" existence of the citizen and the "profane" existence of the individual in Marx's account: "man leads a double life, a heavenly life and an earthly one"; a public life of conscience (governed by the superego) and a private life of self-indulgence (giving way to the ego). Horne's story simultaneously enacts these psychological and ideological conflicts: Sparks as ego and as egoistic individual encounters, respectively, the superego, when he literally breaks the law, and the citizen, when he symbolically subverts the concept that keeps the public self from intruding on the private.

Although the uncanny double in "A Penitent Confession" does not portend death, Sparks suffers everything but death as the narrative unfolds, including an increasing sense of alienation from society. Immediately after the theft, Sparks realizes that the primary burden of possession, if not of ownership per se, is the problem of securing the diamond against discovery by officials and his seemingly unwitting accomplice, Bob Styles—a drunken farm laborer recently fired from his position and described by Sparks as "particularly stupid," a "fool," and "a great lout," and therefore the perfect person to help him dig the tunnel without suspecting his objective (437, 438). Defeating the Exhibition's most protected space renders all spaces penetrable and unsafe, and the problem of insecurity inverts Sparks's original fixation with stealing the diamond: "Where to hide the Koh-i-noor…this was a constant fever to me. No place seemed safe, or beyond suspicion. Hide it where I would, I was obliged to change its place the next hour" (440). After concealing the gem, first in a wine bottle and then in the casing of a German sausage, Sparks laments, "Oh, what a world of care and sleepless anxiety all this

cost me, no words can relate!" (441). At this point, Styles, whom Sparks previously sent back to the country, returns and demands money for his silence, suspecting that Sparks has done something illegal. Fearing exposure, Sparks flees to the continent where he repeatedly tries to sell the stone, asking a considerably lower price with each attempt. His failed efforts to find a buyer alert French authorities, forcing his return to England. To escape suspicion back in London, he depletes his dwindling resources to maintain the appearance of his former lifestyle, but the financial strain coupled with Sparks's alienation from society take a physical and mental toll.

As "A Penitent Confession" traces Sparks's downward spiral, the stone itself takes on an ambivalent quality. Sparks observes of the Koh-i-noor: "My bane and my antidote were before me—both in one" (442). The gem's simultaneous embodiment of curse and blessing corresponds with Sparks's loss of identity and the related theme of duality, which the story reemphasizes when Styles, who has figured out that Sparks has stolen the Koh-i-noor diamond, returns and threatens blackmail if Sparks does not give him half of the profit from the robbery. Sparks persuades Styles to settle for £600, but to cover the expense has to sell the last of his property, a small farm, sublet the house he has leased in London's West End, and move into a lodging house—a move that mid-Victorian readers would have understood not only as a loss of privacy but also as a humiliating and dangerous relocation outside the sphere of bourgeois social order.[64] Still unable to find a buyer for "the diabolical Diamond," Sparks stands on "the brink of ruin" and must pawn

[64] "Almost every book about London published between the 1840s and the 1870s," as Sharon Marcus observes, "singled out lodging houses and lodgings as exemplars of urban dirt, disease, crowding, and promiscuity. [….] Its epitomization of urban ills made the lodging house thoroughly antidomestic…because the imagery of dirt and contagion contradicted the domestic ideal's emphasis on cleanliness and order" (104-05).

his few remaining personal items, which he associates with his former identity, in order to survive. He recounts:

> I was soon brought to my last to my last shift for money to go on with, as the very nature of my position obviously required a constant outlay—a common thing with all great undertakings. I was compelled to part with my turquoise. It cost me a sever pang. And soon afterwards, my large cairngorm seal, my watch and its gold chains, and all my other elegancies had to follow;—all, all my pretty ones, had to be immolated to this Moloch of light, whose baleful lustre had led me on to destruction, and, I may now say—to despair. (444)

Impoverished and his health destroyed, Sparks eventually does sell diamond for £5, convinced by a mysterious Jewish merchant, secretly in league with Styles, that it is a fake. Reduced to "utter destitution," he relocates to a workhouse to live out the remainder of his life "a miserable, broken-hearted man" (445). The story's conclusion provides the final irony when Styles reappears one last time. As Sparks describes this final encounter:

> One day, while I was out in the road scraping up mud, I saw a gig coming along with a large, grey, high-trotting horse. As I was moving out of the way a little, I saw that the man driving it was no other than Bob Styles, in a new white silk hat. He wore a scarlet tie, and a bright silk waistcoat, with two gold chains across it, and a large cairngorm watch-seal dangling about. He had a ring on one finger of the whip hand. It was my turquoise! [….] As he passed me he leered down, with his tongue thrust in his cheek. At the same moment one wheel passed over the iron part of my mud-scraper, and jarred me all up to the elbow, which, by a simultaneous movement, I seemed to strike upon the hard wooden arm of a chair—and I awoke. (445)

As this closing passage suggests, Styles reenters the story as Sparks's double, bearing the markers of his former employer's previous identity. But there is a same-but-different quality about this double. Styles, as mid-nineteenth-century readers would have seen, is an uncanny gentleman, possessing the trappings of success without an identity to match. Not only has he ascended to the upper ranks of society by illegitimate means; his lack of gentlemanly deportment, signified by his crude facial expression, further illustrates his

disqualification, his unfitness, for membership in the bourgeoisie. Equally important if not as evident, Sparks becomes Styles's double. Through an inversion of class positions, he winds up more or less where his former accomplice began—financially destitute and engaged in the lowest kind of physical labor, a position for which he, too, is constitutionally unfit.

"A Penitent Confession" uses Sparks's reversal of fortune, which thematically overshadows Styles's prosperity at the end of the story, to achieve narrative closure and deliver its "moral." The tale reminds its readers that greed, which in Sparks's case creates an irresistible temptation to theft, can only lead to self-destruction. Such tales circulated with profuse regularity in Victorian fiction, as Christopher Herbert points out. The Victorian "fable of financial ruin…rehearses itself compulsively—far out of proportion to the occurrence of such events in real life—in one melodramatic redaction after another," cautioning readers that to cultivate an excessive desire for acquisition was "to court swift punitive disaster in the form of bankruptcy, disgrace, beggary" (190). Thus "A Penitent Confession," which begins by employing the cultural obsession with security that engrossed the British public and press, ends as a cautionary tale of acquisitive individualism that we could read as a critique of the primary reason for the public's deep and prolonged and self-interested fascination with the picking trials in the first place.

Horne's story provides, in other words, an alternative interpretive context for the crisis in Victorian security that generated a protracted public narrative and an array of

inconclusive interpretations in the press.[65] We could argue, in fact, that "A Penitent Confession" exploits the sensation of the Great Lock Controversy to create an early version of sensation fiction; that it goes beyond a mere cautionary tale and anticipates by a decade sensation fiction's preoccupation with bourgeois criminals operating from within the private sphere. Like the sensation novels of the 1860s, "A Penitent Confession" produces a shock effect—a sensation literally registered when Sparks experiences the shock of recognition when Styles reappears and he then strikes his arm on the edge of the chair with such force that he awakens**.** Awakening from the dream returns the narrator and the reader to the world of bourgeois normalcy, ostensibly resolving the narrative's ideological conflict.[66] But it remains unclear if the dream has enabled Sparks to purge his criminal desires or if he simply represses them upon regaining consciousness. In either case, Horne's story seems to affirm Marx's claims about security. And in doing so, it suggests the possibility that what Hobbs threatened during the scandalous and highly publicized Lock Controversy in the summer of 1851 was not only the security of property but also, on some level, the technology vital to the guarantee of bourgeois egoism.

[65] As Richard Grassby argues in an essay on material culture and cultural history: the "meaning of objects becomes clear within narrative contexts" (594).

[66] In his reading of Wilkie Collin's *The Woman in White* (1861), D. A. Miller discusses the sensation novel's "shock" effects and its efforts to ultimately "absorb" such shocks by resolving the scandalous narrative into a reaffirmation of Victorian "norms" (162-66).

Chapter IV

Breaking and Entering the Englishman's Castle: Late-Victorian Security and Its Discontents

Throughout our study of nineteenth-century security we have seen that the Victorians attributed to the threshold of the private sphere an inherent sanctity that was violable only under the direst of circumstances. Notwithstanding the humorous depiction of Wemmick's miniature domestic fortress, complete with portcullis and moat, in *Great Expectations*, Joe Gargery speaks for the majority of readers when he tells Pip, "a Englishman's ouse is his Castle, and castles must not be busted 'cept when done in war time" (346). If the security industry provides any indication, late-Victorian society, on which the present chapter focuses, rigorously defended the sanctity of the private space. The industry in fact experienced its greatest period of growth during the latter half of the nineteenth century, an era which generated not only new lock patents by the thousands but also a flourishing discourse of security, due in part to a growing crime rate that reflected increased poverty and economic failure and in part to the Great Lock Controversy. Indeed, most of the popular literature on personal protection and loss-prevention cited in our study appeared in print after 1851. In addition to pamphlets, essays, and books by Cruikshank, Hobbs, Price, Holland, Guernsey, *Cassell's Household Guide*, Charles Dickens, Jr., and others, popular articles such as "Thieves Versus Locks and Safes" (1894), published in *The Strand Magazine*, offered readers tips on fortifying their homes to protect themselves and their valuables.

Yet the metaphor of the Englishman's castle did not translate into an unconditional guarantee against invasions of privacy.[1] Even John Stuart Mill, one of the chief philosophical architects of Victorian privacy, in the midst of asserting that society must acknowledge "a circle around every individual human being which no government, be it that of one, of a few, or of the many, ought to be permitted to overstep," qualified his defense of inviolable personal space. Mill argued in *The Principles of Political Economy*:

> there is a part of the life of every person who has come to years of discretion, within which the individuality of that person ought to reign uncontrolled either by any other individual or by the public collectively. That there is, or ought to be, some space in human existence thus entrenched around, and sacred from authoritative intrusion, no one who professes the smallest regard to human freedom or dignity will call in question: the point to be determined is, where the limit should be placed; how large a province of human life this reserved territory should include. I apprehend that it ought to include all that part which concerns only the life, whether inward or outward, of the individual, and does not affect the interests of others, or affects them only through the moral influence of example. (326)

Victorian fiction during the latter half of the century repeatedly intrudes upon this sacred space, mounting ongoing explorations of its limits and the extent of the territory to which the public has a right of access.[2] Security was indeed the "supreme social concept" of bourgeois society and selfhood, as Marx argued, but beginning in the mid-nineteenth century that concept came under increasing scrutiny in the pages of fiction,

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[1] The metaphor recalls, moreover, the alienating effect of security that we discussed in chapter 3. Commenting on an observation made by Henry Mayhew in 1852—" 'The maxim that an "Englishman's home is his castle"…still shows that the dwelling of the family has ever been considered in this country as a kind of social sanctuary' "—Sharon Marcus points out "the paradox of a sociability based not on interaction but on isolation" (236 n. 24).

[2] Throughout its history, the novel has always had a complex, paradoxical relationship with privacy. The novel, as D. A. Miller argues, constructs the privacy of the reader on one hand against the violated privacy of fictional characters on the other (162).

and private space, as writers frequently represented it, suffered the gradual erosion of its sacred associations and axiomatic inviolability.[3] From the "Sensation" novels of the 1860s to *fin-de-siècle* detective stories, fiction relocated depictions of criminal activity from the dangerous streets and alleyways of London into the domesticated confines of the bourgeois household. As Anthea Trodd explains, "Sensation" novels "promoted a belief that there was something inherently suspect about the privacy of the middle-class home, and formulated those suspicions by displaying the home as a place where secret crimes flourished" (3). Novels such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) challenged the ideology of the separate spheres, laying bare what their authors saw as a contradiction between the public good and the middle-class individual's right to absolute privacy**.** Notwithstanding this exposure, Trodd contends that these tales of domestic mystery and crime attempted to resolve the conflict between competing interests by trying to seal the breach of private space and thus reinstate its sanctity without undercutting the importance and necessity of public judgments of the home (162). To put the matter in psychoanalytic terms, the bourgeois home represented in Victorian fiction becomes uncanny. Like Freud's unpacking of the ambiguous German term for homely, public invasions of the private sphere in Victorian fiction reveal that the *heimlich* of nineteenth-century social ideology is in reality often *unheimlich*, a violation of that ideology.

In Richard Henry Horne's "A Penitent Confession," which anticipates "Sensation" fiction by recounting the crime of a member of the middle class (even if the crime takes

[3] As one British observer put the matter in 1888, "We have grown quite accustomed nowadays to the invasion of what used to be called the sanctity of private life" (D. C. Murray, *Weaker Vessel*; quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Sanctity").

place only in an unconscious fantasy), we saw an early example of the private sphere as the site of such a contradiction. But in Horne's story the criminal confesses unbidden by the public, inviting the outside world to the scene of the crime so to speak—whereas in the "Sensation" novel we find fiction breaking and entering the private sphere. As Trodd points out, in tales of "domestic crime the middle-class home often appears as a beleaguered castle" (6). Fiction of the latter half of the nineteenth century sanctions such forcible entries by focusing on conflicts between what Marx called the egoistic individual and the citizen, conflicts that take shape, as in Horne's story, when self-interest threatens public-interest, producing dangerously divided or dualistic characters.

Explicit concerns with this conflict and the duality it generates lie at the heart of the two late-Victorian tales of domestic crime discussed in this chapter, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Copper Beeches" (1892). Both texts thematically entangle security in the competing assertions of individualism and privacy on one hand and the public's right of access to the private sphere on the other. The main feature that invites comparison in these stories is that each involves literal cases of breaking and entering the Englishman's castle in order to expose its hidden duality and secret crimes to the scrutiny of the reading audience. We therefore witness, in both, moments of violation, disruptions of security's semiotic value. Indeed, these texts represent a key of one's own as a potential threat to order. And together the stories call attention to the increasingly problematic status of the bourgeois claim to inviolable privacy, demonstrating cultural reassessments of security that trouble the spatial boundaries of individuality, even as the social productions, discourses, and practices of security proliferated at historic rates. In short, these texts

respond to social disorder with forced entry. Instead of locking doors to restore social stability, as we saw in *Barnaby Rudge*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and, in a qualified sense, "The Copper Beeches," break doors down to reestablish order, underscoring the growing suspicion in nineteenth-century fiction that disorder erupts from within the home rather than threatening it from without.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and "The Copper Beeches" both convey a strong sense of domestic geography, and both represent the English king in his domestic castle as an uncanny figure. Yet Stevenson's approach to breaking and entering the private sphere, while similar to Conan Doyle's, differs from the one taken by the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories. The authors have different views about bourgeois society, accounting for what are different ideological agendas in their stories.[4] *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* assails middle-class readers' ideological assumptions about the integrity of the self and its relationship to society. Stephen Arata's reading of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* points out that Stevenson repeatedly expressed a marked aversion to bourgeois society, on which his novel mounts a rigorous attack.[5] Arata notes, for example, that characters in the novel frequently refer to Hyde as "a gentleman," an ironic term of course given Hyde's character, through which *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* first effaces and then parodies the distinctions between respectable bourgeois identity and criminal identity (38-49). By

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[4] *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and "The Copper Beeches" are both Gothic tales, and the representation of setting in Gothic fiction, as Robert Mighall observes, "depends on the socio-political and cultural attitude which informs the writer's view of the geographical or institutional locale in question" (xviii).

[5] According to Arata, Stevenson's novel "is an angry book, its venom directed against what Stevenson contemptuously referred to as that 'fatuous rabble of burgesses called the public.'" Stevenson for a long time resisted professional authorship because "to be professional was to be bourgeois, and to be bourgeois was to embrace the very blindnesses, evasions, and immoralities delineated in *Jekyll and Hyde*" (43, 44).

exposing the fluid boundaries between bourgeois respectability and criminal behavior, Arata argues, Stevenson's' novel reveals "the possibility that the self is not unique and inviolable," revealing in turn "a crisis in bourgeois subjectivity" (51, 52). *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* illustrates this crisis nowhere more clearly than when Henry Jekyll, in a renunciation of his double, Edward Hyde, destroys the key to the back door to his laboratory, through which Hyde comes and goes. Breaking the key prevents Hyde from escaping the private sphere and reentering the public. But Jekyll's action, though it might seem at first glance to seal the transitional space between the separate spheres and thus reestablish a firm boundary between the two identities, conveys a greater symbolic meaning. Destroying the key effectively renounces the inviolability of the private sphere by destroying the object that symbolized that inviolability and the inviolability of bourgeois individualism throughout the nineteenth century.

Unlike Stevenson, Conan Doyle tempers his social criticism and ultimately accommodates the ideological expectations of his middle-class readers. By the 1890s, the public's incursions into the private sphere had intensified. Alongside an increasingly invasive press and the expansion of the powers of the police, *fin-de-siècle* crime fiction asserted the public's right to cross the domestic threshold in the interests of justice.[6] This assertion was especially true of the Sherlock Holmes stories, according to Trodd, which "emphatically endorse [the] view that public intervention is necessary to expose the dark secrets of the home," and which represent the bourgeois household as a locus of criminal activity that "no longer appears as a sanctuary which should be defended" (158). Trodd

[6] Trodd notes that by the 1890s the middle class "had only recently conceded the principle of police rights to intrude in the home" (161). Still, this was a grudging concession.

goes too far, however, in claiming that the "Holmes stories do not uphold the home's claim to privacy"; that Conan Doyle grants the public unrestricted access, finally portraying the home as "a secretive, dangerous and alien place which needs to be exposed and controlled by the guardians of the public sphere" (160, 163). On the contrary, Conan Doyle does not sanction the subversion of domestic privacy; rather, he authorizes strategic interventions solely for the purpose of restoring social order, but he wants to reestablish the sanctity of the private sphere, to leave its basic structural integrity intact.[7] Although Sherlock Holmes identifies the home a haven for crime in "The Copper Beeches," Conan Doyle's philosophy of privacy coincides with that expressed by Mill earlier in the century. Our discussion of "The Copper Beeches" will show that while Conan Doyle does acknowledge the need for occasional invasions of the home, he does so according to the limited terms outlined by Mill—only when private transgressions threaten society's interests or pose some kind of moral danger—and he does not advocate giving the public a key to the private domain to use at will. In contrast with the destruction of lock and key in Stevenson's novel, "The Copper Beeches" closes by suggesting that the production of locks and keys remains a matter of compelling social interest.

[7] Even more than the usual "violations of the official law," Rosemary Jann argues, Conan Doyle feared transgressions that challenged the sociocultural "conventions that insured order in his world" (704). Privacy was of course a central convention of Victorian order and to the representation of order in Conan Doyle's fiction. Steve Dillon notes, for instance, that the Sherlock Holmes stories represent privacy as "an absolute virtue, interrupted disastrously but then repaired" (113).

I

If *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* contains a thesis, we find it in Henry Jekyll's letter confessing his double life, which comprises the novel's the final chapter. According to Jekyll:

> man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens. I, for my part, from the nature of my life, advanced infallibly in one direction and in one direction only. It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man. I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both…. (55-56)

This thesis resonated with many of Stevenson's contemporaries, who read the novel not only as an exploration of psychic duality and hypocrisy but also as an exploration social duality, of the public and private selves that together comprise the individual within modern society.[8] Security and private space are not only thematically crucial to these

[8] Andrew Lang, for example, observed that "every Jekyll among us is haunted by his own Hyde." J. A. Symonds found the novel too "painful" to reread, noting in a letter to Stevenson that when "viewed as an allegory, it touches me too closely. Most of us at some epoch of our lives have been on the verge of developing a Mr. Hyde." Gerard Manley Hopkins went even further in identifying with the novel's villain. Writing to a friend, he defended the novel's merit and responded to criticism of Stevenson's handling of character by saying, "You are certainly wrong about Hyde being overdrawn: my Hyde is worse." A reviewer from the Unified Church of England, in an article entitled "Secret Sin," placed considerable emphasis on the how the novel casts the theme of duality in terms of the polar distinction between public and private selves and the binary relationship between outside and inside:

> How many men live out two distinct characters? To the outer world they are the honourable, upright men, with a good professional name, holding a respectable position in society, looked up to and spoken well of by all their neighbours. Within, however, the inner sanctum of the own hearts they are conscious of another self, a very different character. . . . Unfortunately…some act the part played by Dr. Jekyll. They live the respectable life 'to be seen by men,' and then, when away from the public gaze, they give way to the lower nature.

explorations, providing mechanisms through which *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* represents the divided self, they were also crucial to the novel's genesis. Indeed, a brief look at Stevenson's initial effort to dramatize the split bourgeois self suggests that he modeled the character of Jekyll/Hyde on a corrupted locksmith of sorts.

Stevenson originally explored the theme of bourgeois duality in his play *Deacon Brodie*, *or the Double Life*, which he began writing in 1864, a little more than two decades before he published *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.[9] Stevenson told a reporter from the *New York Herald* that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* originated from a dream he had about a man entering into a cabinet and transforming into another persona. A similar image inspired him to write *Deacon Brodie*. William "Deacon" Brodie, the notorious late-eighteenth-century Scottish cabinetmaker, built the cabinet in the bedroom of Stevenson's childhood home in Edinburgh. Brodie's cabinet and, more to the point, his

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In an early ideological reading of the public and private selves in Stevenson's novel, one reviewer claimed that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* accurately portrays the effects of contemporary sociopolitical structures by means of a focused exploration of what constitutes the democratic subject:

> Stevenson represents the individualizing influence of modern democracy in its more concentrated form. Whereas most fiction deals with the relationship between man and woman (and the fact that its scope is so much narrowed is a sign of the atomic character of our modern thought), the author of this strange tale takes an even narrower range, and sets himself to investigate the meaning of the word *self*.

Contemporary reviews of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are quoted in Maixner 201-29.

[9] Working with his close friend William Ernest Henley in 1879, Stevenson revised *Deacon Brodie*, which finally made it to the stage in December of 1882 and into publication in 1888. The play was not a success.

notorious life reportedly captured the future writer's imagination from an early age.[10] By day, Brodie, the leader (or deacon) of a craftsman's guild, member of the Edinburgh city council, and devoted husband and father, was a model citizen. But by night, Brodie, in league with an English locksmith turned thief and two other accomplices, employed his skill in carpentry and expert knowledge of locks to rob banks and burglarize the homes of his clients, using the profits to finance his gambling habit as well as support two mistresses and several illegitimate children. Brodie's twenty-year secret life of crime ended when a member of his gang informed against him after a failed robbery in 1786. Brodie died on the gallows in 1788.[11]

In Stevenson's play, Brodie's life, like the Jekyll/Hyde dichotomy, divides itself between public social respectability and private crime. For example, Brodie, while changing into a disguise that allows him to move through the streets of Edinburgh at night unidentified, comments:

> On with the new coat and into the new life! Down with the Deacon and up with the robber! [….] There's something in hypocrisy after all. If we were as good as we seem, what would the world be? The city has it vizard on, and we—at night we are our naked selves. Trysts are keeping, bottles cracking, knives are stripping; and here is Deacon Brodie flaming forth the man he is! [….] My father and Mary [Brodie's sister]—Well! the day for them, the night for me; the grimy cynical night that makes all cats grey, and all honesties of one complexion. Shall a man not have *half* a life his own?—not eight hours out of twenty-four? Eight shall he have should he dare the pit of Tophet. (26)

On one hand, Brodie is a pillar of society, caring for his sister and invalid father, and his home epitomizes domestic peace. On the other, he is the curse of society. Lawson, a judge who is also Brodie's uncle, says, before finding out that his nephew is the man

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[10] For a discussion of Stevenson's play and of his fascination with Brodie, see John Cairney.

[11] For an account of Brodie's life, see William Roughead.

terrorizing the city: "There's no house in Edinburgh safe. The law is clean helpless, clean helpless! [….] It's unbelievable, it's awful, it's anti-christian!" (12). The city cannot secure itself against Brodie because of his ability to open any locked door. As a member of his gang observes, Brodie is "King of the Cracksmen" (34). The play repeatedly calls attention to Brodie's finely crafted burglary tools—"a perfect picter of the sublime and beautiful," according to one of the Deacon's accomplices (97)—and to his expertise with locks, which in the fourth act we see him picking in some detail. Hunt, one of John Fielding's Bow Street Runners who has come from London searching for a fugitive highwayman, figures out that the burglaries require such skill with locks that only a man as talented as the Deacon could pull them off. Hunt comments: "A very tidy piece of work…very tidy! [….] Smacks of a fine tradesmen" (101).

The play's juxtaposition of Brodie's public life as the producer of private space and his secret life as the destroyer of privacy and producer of public anxiety and disorder ruptures the boundary between the separate spheres. The play associates this spatial rupture with the rupture of bourgeois identity, which—like the terms "work" and "tradesmen" that Hunt uses to signify burglary and the burglar, respectively—becomes unstable as the barriers between public and private fail to hold. For instance, Brodie, recalling the original motive for his double life, remarks:

> I felt it great to be a bolder, craftier rogue than the drowsy citizen that called himself my fellow man. It was meat and drink to know him in the hollow of my hand, hoarding that I and mine might squander, pinching that we might wax fat. It was in the laughter of my heart that I tip-toed into his greasy privacy. I forced the strong-box at his ear while he sprawled beside his wife. He was my butt, my ape, my jumping-jack. (55)

In this passage, which dramatizes the division between the citizen and the egoistic individual, Brodie's refusal to identify with those of his own class and disdain for the

slumbering burgess conveys a kind of self-contempt that troubles identity. Throughout the play, Brodie, like Jekyll, begins to crack under the emotional and moral strain of leading two lives. Indeed, as he wrestles with his conscience, he begins to question his identity—asking at one point, "I—what am I?" (83)—and desires to reform, to lead a unified life. But he finds himself unable to integrate the two selves because he needs the money from the burglaries to replace his sister's dowry, which he gambled away, and support his pregnant mistress. Housebreaking thus repeats itself compulsively. Moreover, the Deacon's violation of the "greasy privacy" of the middle-class home troubles the spatial framework of bourgeois selfhood. If Stevenson's exposure of the "hidden self" in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* "subverts the notion of an authentic self and makes subjectivity a surface effect," as Judith Halberstam argues (64), his initial effort to expose the secret self in *Deacon Brodie* highlights the importance of violated privacy, using the exploits of an uncanny housebreaker to locate the bourgeois criminal and the bourgeois unconscious in the same representational space.

The act of breaking and entering not only sets in motion and sustains the narrative of *Deacon Brodie* as well as Stevenson's critique of bourgeois identity; it also leads to the exposure of Brodie's double life at the end of the play. To keep his secret from his family, Brodie bolts door of his bedroom (which his sister refers to as a "sacred" space in the opening scene [5]) each night and then exits through a window. In the final act, entitled "The Open Door," the play concludes when a doctor, at the request of Brodie's sister, breaks open the door to inform him that his father has just died. Brodie, pursued by Hunt, returns home after a botched robbery during which he has killed one of his accomplices. Finding the bedroom door broken open, he realizes that he has no alibi for

his absence. With his sanctuary breached and his secret life all but exposed, Brodie confesses his crimes to Mary and then draws a knife on Hunt, who runs him through with a sword. As the play ends, Brodie dies, murmuring "The new life…the new life!" (115). Yet Stevenson's play, which portrays Brodie as the representative of social hypocrisy, suggests that the bourgeoisie is incapable of reforming itself under its own strength; that a "new life" is nothing more than words; and that the erasure of middle-class private space and the public exposure of middle-class crimes is therefore the only means of restoring social order.

II

Like *Deacon Brodie*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* focuses the reader's attention on the physical barrier between the public and private spheres. Almost as if it picks up where the play left off, the novel begins with a chapter entitled "Story of the Door." The narrator describes the door, which leads into a "sinister block of building" bearing "the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence," as "equipped with neither bell nor knocker" and "blistered and distained" (6). The door, we later learn, opens into Jekyll's private laboratory (formerly a public surgical theater), the space that originally produced the doctor's double. As such, the door does not invite public access; the lack of bell and knocker denotes a closely regulated privacy that in fact refuses public entry. At the same time, though, the door's shabby, diseased appearance signals that it needs maintenance, that it requires attention, that the public has neglected it for too long. The door's ambiguity makes it an apposite point through which Jekyll (if only in name) and Hyde enter the narrative. During a walk in the neighborhood adjacent to the doctor's home, Enfield asks Utterson, Jekyll's lawyer, "Did you ever remark that door?" and then

observes, "it is connected in my mind…with a very odd story" (7). What makes the story of the door particularly "odd"—beyond Enfield's account of Hyde's inscrutable appearance, which provokes aversion, and his amoral brutality when trampling on a little girl—is that the door admits Hyde and then produces Jekyll, in a manner of speaking. Enfield recounts that Hyde, acceding to the demands of the crowd that had gathered in the street, agreed to pay the family of the girl £100 in order to keep the police from getting involved. Hyde then led Enfield to the door,

> whipped out a key, went in, and presently came back with the matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance…drawn payable to bearer and signed with a name I can't mention, though it's one of the points of my story, but it was a name at least very well known and often printed. The figure was stiff; but the signature was good for that, if only it was genuine. (8)

At a loss for any other explanation, Enfield interprets the mysterious association between Hyde, "a really damnable man," and Jekyll, a man in "the very pink of the proprieties, celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good," as blackmail (9). For Utterson, who knows that Jekyll has made Hyde his heir in the event of his death or disappearance, and who knows where the door leads, Hyde's possession of the key to the door is the most troubling point of the story.[12] After listening to Enfield's account of Hyde and walking "some way in silence and obviously under the weight of consideration," Utterson asks, "You are sure he used a key?" Enfield answers by clearly establishing Hyde's possession of the key both at the time of their encounter and at the present: "The fellow had a key; and what's more, he has it still, I saw him with it, not a week ago" (10).

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[12] The "most private part" of the lawyer's safe contains Jekyll's will, which offends Utterson's sense of law and sanity and custom—primarily because of the mysterious nature of Hyde's identity (11).

Utterson understands that possession of the key grants Hyde legal access to Jekyll's home, which, like its owner—or so the lawyer thinks—is a stronghold of bourgeois respectability.[13] He knows, as he later tells Poole, Jekyll's butler, that the key signifies "a great deal of trust" (17). But according to everything that Utterson has learned, Hyde should have no right of entry into a place in which he is so out of place. Given that Hyde is, as Robert Mighall puts it, Jekyll's "class-antithesis," such access transgresses the socially prescribed geographical boundaries represented in the novel (147, 151).[14] Thus in Hyde's hands the key represents something uncanny. As if to underscore the point, the lawyer subsequently has a nightmare in which Hyde walks the streets of the "nocturnal city" trampling children as he goes, and then enters through the door of Jekyll's bedroom in the middle of the night, forcing the doctor to "rise and do its bidding." The phantom-like figure then moves unrestricted through even more private and public spaces: "if at any time [Utterson] dozed over, it was but to see it [Hyde] glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly and still the more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider more labyrinths of lamplighted city" (13). Hyde, in other words, because of his key, haunts both sides of the door, neither locked out nor in, rendering the door as uncanny as the key in his possession. Utterson's dream, which recalls Deacon Brodie violating the privacy sphere of the slumbering middle class, points to the novel's eventual identification of the door as the marker of the paradox of identity: on the inside of the

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[13] Jekyll holds degrees in medicine, civil law, and law, and a fellowship in the Royal Society. His titles, "MD, DCL, LLD, FRS, &c." (11), locate him at the heart of respectable society.

[14] According to Mighall: "Part of the horror with which Jekyll's circle regards Hyde is owing to his lack of deference and his not knowing his place. His 'place' is of course Soho; but Hyde also has a key to Jekyll's back door and is allowed to roam his house at liberty" (151).

door we find the public figure of Jekyll; on the outside stands the private figure of Hyde. The key guarantees the secret transition from public to private persona and back again. According to Jekyll's confession:

> I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it—I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or two to mix and swallow the draft that I had always standing ready; and whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror, and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll. (60)

In order to solve the mystery of Jekyll's association with Hyde, Utterson appoints himself doorkeeper. Like the phantom in his nightmare, the lawyer begins "to haunt the door" of the doctor's laboratory, declaring: "If he be Mr Hyde . . . I shall be Mr Seek" (14). Yet in seeking Hyde, Utterson is in a sense looking for the wrong man. Only the discovery of Jekyll/Hyde can unravel the mystery; and in order to make that discovery, Utterson must pass through the door which existentially binds the doctor with his double. The lawyer's initial effort in this regard fails. When he encounters Hyde for the only time in the novel, he sees him coming down the street and making "straight for the door…drawing a key from his pocket like one approaching home" (14). Utterson then approaches Hyde, calling him by name, and requests admission:

> 'I see you are going in…. I am an old friend of Dr Jekyll's…you must have heard my name; and meeting you so conveniently, I thought you might admit me.'
>
> 'You will not find Dr Jekyll; he is from home,' replied Mr. Hyde, blowing in the key. And then suddenly, but still without looking up, 'How did you know me?' he asked. (15)

When Utterson, with calculated duplicitousness, suggests that he might have heard about Hyde from Jekyll, Hyde responds angrily:

> 'He never told you…. I did not think you would have lied.'
> 'Come,' said Utterson, 'that is not fitting language.'
> The other snarled aloud into a savage laugh; and the next moment with extraordinary quickness, he had unlocked the door and disappeared into the house.
> The lawyer stood awhile when Hyde had left him, the picture of disquietude. Then he began slowly to mount the street, pausing every step or two and putting his hand to his brow like a man in mental perplexity. (15)

This exchange, aside from setting up Utterson's horrified meditation on Hyde's inexplicable but appalling countenance, contains two notable points about the representation of security in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. First, it suggests that a Bramah lock—which remained the best lock available to late-nineteenth-century consumers—secures the mysterious rear entrance to Jekyll's laboratory. For when Hyde blows into the key, his unusual action recalls the distinctive ritual practiced by characters clearing the dust out of their barrel-shaped Bramah keys in Dickens's novels and short stories. Here and elsewhere, Stevenson's novel makes the point that Jekyll's security is first-rate. According to the narrator, the door into Jekyll's cabinet, the private room within the laboratory, is "tough and the fittings [are] of excellent workmanship" (44). The novel reiterates this point when Dr. Lanyon recounts going to the laboratory, along with a carpenter and a locksmith, to retrieve, at Jekyll's request, the chemicals from the doctor's cabinet. He too takes special notice of the room's security: "The door was very strong, the lock excellent; the carpenter avowed he would have great trouble and have to do much damage, if force were to be used; and the locksmith was near despair. But this last was a handy fellow, and after two hours' work, the door stood open" (50).

The second point to note from the exchange between Utterson and Hyde is that the lawyer has no inherent right of entry into Jekyll's home, despite his long and intimate friendship with the doctor and their professional relationship. Hyde's key grants him an

authority that Utterson does not possess. Denied entry by Hyde, Utterson does gain admission by going around the block to the front door of Jekyll's home and knocking. At this point the narrator's description of Jekyll's home calls attention to the striking contrast between the two points of entry. The front door opens into a house described as wearing "a great air of wealth and comfort"; and when Poole admits the lawyer, the butler shows him to a "comfortable hall, paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright, open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak"—a hall thought by Utterson to be "the pleasantest in London" (16-17). Such descriptions suggest of course that Jekyll's home, to all appearances an embodiment of domestic comfort and bourgeois respectability, is in reality a façade. Although Utterson fails to see the doctor during this visit, their meeting soon afterward at a dinner party in Jekyll's home reenacts Utterson's encounter with Hyde at the door into the laboratory. The lawyer confronts the doctor about Hyde's bad character and the mysterious terms of the will. When Jekyll attempts to change the subject, the lawyer takes it up with greater vigor:

> 'You know I never approved of it,' pursued Utterson, ruthlessly disregarding the fresh topic.
>
> 'My will? Yes, certainly, I know that,' said the doctor, a trifle sharply. 'You have told me so.'
>
> 'Well, I tell you so again,' continued the lawyer. 'I have been learning something of young Hyde.'
>
> The large handsome face of Dr. Jekyll grew pale to the very lips, and there came a blackness about his eyes. 'I do not care to hear more,' said he. 'This is a matter I thought we had agreed to drop.'
>
> 'What I heard was abominable,' said Utterson.
>
> 'It can make no change. You do not understand my position,' returned the doctor, with a certain incoherency of manner. 'I am painfully situated, Utterson; my position is a very strange—a very strange one. It is one of those affairs that cannot be mended by talking.'
>
> 'Jekyll,' said Utterson, 'you know me: I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of this in confidence; and I make no doubt I can get you out of it.'

> 'My good Utterson,' said the doctor, 'this is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in. I believe you fully; I would trust you before any man alive, ay, before myself, if I could make the choice; but indeed it isn't what you fancy; it is not so bad as that; and just to put your good heart at rest, I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde. I give you my hand upon that; and I thank you again and again; and I will just add one little word, Utterson, that I'm sure you'll take in good part: this is a private matter, and I beg of you to let it sleep.' (19-20)

While this exchange establishes Jekyll's implicit trust in Utterson, it also demonstrates that, according to the behavioral codes of bourgeois ideology, privacy, like a threshold, represents a boundary that a person can only cross by invitation—even when that person, as Utterson understands, is a close friend and legal counselor. Indeed, Jekyll's invocation of privacy is the rhetorical equivalent of Hyde's use of his key to escape from Utterson through the laboratory door. The lawyer cannot pursue the subject further. And in conceding Jekyll's right to privacy, he has little choice but to promise to abide by the terms of the will.

When Utterson confronts Jekyll about the will, Hyde has not yet posed a significant threat to society. But the murder of Sir Danvers Carew, a Member of Parliament, one year after the dinner party, changes that. Besides being the most brutally violent moment in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the murder diametrically opposes Hyde with the society. As the narrator puts it, "London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity and rendered all the more notable by the high position of the victim" and society "resented [the murder] as a public injury" (21, 31). The murder also sets Utterson in pursuit once again. The lawyer joins in the police's search for the murderer, leading them to his rooms in Soho, where they find evidence linking Hyde with the killing. Utterson subsequently goes to confront Jekyll and see if he is harboring the fugitive in his home. But the doctor swears: "I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end. [H]e is safe, quite safe; mark my

words, he will never more be heard of," then producing a letter indicating that Hyde has escaped and will not return (27). Satisfied with Jekyll's promise and wanting to avoid entangling the doctor in a public scandal, Utterson locks the letter in his safe and drops the matter, even when he learns that the handwriting in the letter is Jekyll's. Hyde does in fact disappear for a brief period, during which time Jekyll becomes an active participant in the social, charitable, and religious life of the community.

Jekyll's public life ends, however, when Hyde reappears through spontaneous transformation. The doctor locks himself away in his home, repeatedly refusing to see Utterson, his "door…shut against the lawyer" (31). During one of these transformations, Lanyon learns Jekyll's secret, and the "shock" of witnessing the transformation leads to his death. Before Lanyon dies, he tells Utterson that he already "regard[s] [Jekyll] as dead," and gives the lawyer a letter which remains sealed until Jekyll's disappearance or death, describing what he (Lanyon) witnessed (32). Utterson, anxious to solve the mystery, immediately writes to Jekyll, "complaining of his exclusion from the house." But the doctor replies that he has withdrawn from public life, that he has in effect renounced his connection with society, and means to spend the remainder of his life in "extreme seclusion":

> you must not be surprised, nor must you doubt my friendship, if my door is often shut even to you. You must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. I could not think that this earth contained a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanning; and you can do but one thing, Utterson, to lighten this destiny, and that is to respect my silence. (32-33)

Suspecting that Jekyll suffers from something worse than madness, Utterson develops a fear of crossing the doctor's threshold, attempting less frequently to gain admission to the "house of voluntary bondage…with its inscrutable recluse" (34). Jekyll's absolute

privacy and inscrutability, two characteristics repeatedly associated with Hyde, transform domestic space, like the doctor's transformation into his double, into something uncanny. When Utterson, along with Enfield, sees Jekyll for the last time, the doctor is sitting at the window of his laboratory looking "like some disconsolate prisoner" in his own home (35). At this point, and in front of the door where the story started, the lawyer and his friend witness the early phase of one of Jekyll's transformations, at which the doctor retreats and the two men turn away from the house, horrified by Jekyll's expression of terror. Utterson only returns to Jekyll's house when Poole comes to him, claiming that the doctor has been the victim of a crime, and that he, or more likely Hyde, has locked himself in his cabinet for more than a week, refusing entry to every member of the household.

As in *Deacon Brodie*, breaking and entering is thus not only a necessity in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, it enables narrative resolution. For only after Utterson and Poole forcefully invade the private cabinet inside Jekyll's laboratory and discover the body of Hyde along with the doctor's letter of confession does the mystery achieve any clarity. Breaking and entering in fact literally forces the end of Jekyll/Hyde, who commits suicide as the lawyer and the butler break through the door, removing the veil of secrecy that sustains the narrative proper.[15] When Utterson and Poole first arrive at the cabinet, Jekyll is in effect still alive in the body of Hyde, pacing the floor of his sanctuary, what he calls his "last earthly refuge" in his confession, and listening for "every sound of menace" from the outside world (70). Utterson, thinking that perhaps Hyde occupies the

[15] We have to distinguish between the narrative of the story in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the narrative of the novel. Of the novel's ten chapters, the first eight tell the story from Utterson's center-of-consciousness perspective; the last two are letters to the lawyer from Lanyon and Jekyll, respectively, that reveal the details of the mystery.

cabinet and that he may have murdered Jekyll, tells the butler, "I…consider it my duty to break in that door" (42). This decision to invade the cabinet puts the men on shaky legal grounds. The lawyer comments: "If all is well, my shoulders are broad enough to bear the blame" (43). After dispatching two servants to guard the rear door of the laboratory in case the occupant should try to escape, the lawyer gives the man inside the cabinet an ultimatum:

> 'Jekyll,' cried Utterson, with a loud voice, 'I demand to see you.' He paused a moment, but there came no reply. 'I give you fair warning, our suspicions are aroused, and I must and shall see you,' he resumed; 'if not by fair means, then by foul—if not of your consent, then by brute force!'
>
> 'Utterson,' said the voice, 'for God's sake, have mercy!'
>
> 'Ah, that's not Jekyll's voice—it's Hyde's!' cried Utterson. 'Down with the door, Poole!'
>
> Poole swung the axe over his shoulder; the blow shook the building, and the red baize door leaped against the lock and hinges. A dismal screech, as of mere animal terror, rang from the cabinet. Up went the axe again, and again the panels crashed and the frame bounded; four times the blow fell; but the wood was tough and the fittings were of excellent workmanship; and it was not until the fifth, that the lock burst and the wreck of the door fell inwards on the carpet.
>
> The besiegers, appalled by their own riot and the stillness that had succeeded, stood back a little and peered in. There lay the cabinet before their eyes in the quiet lamplight, a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table, and nearer the fire, the things laid out for tea; the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London.
>
> Right in the middle there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes far too large for him, clothes of the doctor's bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone: and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer.
>
> 'We have come too late,' he said sternly, 'whether to save or punish. Hyde is gone to his account; and it only remains for us to find the body of your master.' (44-45)

In this scene, the self-destruction of Hyde, who embodies the dangers of absolute individualism shrouded in absolute privacy, coincides with the destruction of the door

and the lock mandated by Utterson and carried out under his direction. Utterson is "the lawyer," as the narrator puts it in the novel's opening sentence (5). As such, he represents the forces of law and order, of the public's interest, in the contest with the sociopathic Hyde. Utterson and Poole attack with such force that they damage the door and lock beyond repair. The description of Jekyll's inner sanctum conspicuously invokes a domestic scene, complete with glowing hearth and singing tea-kettle—"the quietest room…the most commonplace that night in London"—connecting the secret recess of the laboratory, the matrix from which Hyde emerged, with the average bourgeois household. Yet the destruction of the door and lock suggests that this sanctum, and presumably those it simulates, can no longer provide a private, safe haven for rampant individualism. Thus the scene of breaking and entering in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* provides a spatial context for what Arata calls the "crisis of bourgeois subjectivity" in Stevenson's novel. Now that "Hyde is gone," as Utterson observes, in what one cannot help but read as an over-determined play on words, what Stevenson called the "fatuous rabble of burgesses" has nowhere left to hide its secrets.

As if to remove any doubts about the erasure of private, bourgeois space, this final scene in the story bears witnesses not only to the irreparable breaking of door and lock, but also to the destruction of the key. Utterson and Poole, thinking that Jekyll may have taken flight through the back entrance to the laboratory, find the door locked, "and lying near by on the flags, they found the key already stained with rust." When Utterson observes that the rusty key appears to have been unused for some time, Poole responds: "Do you not see, sir, it is broken? much as if a man had stamped on it" (45). But we do not get an explanation for the broken key until the doctor's confession at the end of the

novel. According to Jekyll, with "the fortress of identity" breached and Hyde free to roam unrestricted, incarcerating himself in his cabinet solves the "problem of my conduct": "Hyde was thenceforth impossible; whether I would or not, I was now confined to the better part of my existence; and O, how I rejoiced to think of it! With what willing humility, I embraced anew the restrictions of natural life! And with what sincere renunciation, I locked the door by which I had so often gone and come, and ground the key under my heel!" (57, 65). Renouncing the key and then destroying it, Jekyll brings to an end (if only symbolically) the Victorians' century-long obsession with a key of one's own, which as we have seen repeatedly served as one of the predominant emblems of liberal individualism. And the fact that Jekyll destroys a Bramah key, the iconic value of which found its only match in Chubb, subtly but effectively underscores the cultural importance of the action.

Jekyll's destruction of the key seals off what has been for Hyde the porous boundary between the separate spheres, bringing physical closure to the public exploits of the doctor's double. But the end of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is somewhat more complicated. The story told from Utterson's center-of-consciousness perspective, which concludes in the chapter entitled "The Last Night," and which takes place in Jekyll's laboratory and cabinet, only partially resolves the ambiguity generated by the image of the door in the opening chapter. The chapter dissociates Jekyll's name from Hyde's through the revised will that the lawyer discovers after he and Poole enter the cabinet. Although the terms of the will remain the same as before, Jekyll has replaced Hyde's name with Utterson's as the beneficiary (46). Along with his last will and testament the doctor has left as well his confession, also addressed to Utterson. Upon discovering the

confession, the lawyer tells Poole: "I would say nothing of this paper. If your master has fled or is dead, we may at least save his credit. It is now ten, I must go home and read these documents in quiet; but I shall be back before midnight, when we shall send for the police." The main narrative, which began with "Story of the Door," ends with the two men leaving the laboratory and "locking the door…behind them," and with Utterson, in possession of the key, both literally and figuratively, heading home to "read the two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained" (47). The mystery achieves its full resolution only in the novel's final chapter, "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case," which concludes with Jekyll awaiting the inevitable, final reemergence of Hyde: "Here then, as I lay down the pen and seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (70). The doctor's final words conclude the *life* of the bourgeois subject—both as autobiography and as existence—in a private space—*here*—already irreparably breached by the time we read the confession. It remains unclear, however, whether Utterson, after he has read his late friend's account, will reveal the truth to the police and subject Jekyll's strange double life and the uncanny space in which it has played out to public scrutiny, or whether he will secure the doctor's confession, like Jekyll's will and Lanyon's letter, in the "most private part" of his safe. The lawyer is, after all, the only living man in possession of Jekyll's secret, and he proves repeatedly that he can keep a secret. The lack of a clear-cut answer to this question amounts to the lack of a clear-cut ideological (and spatial) resolution to the story. Despite the fact that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* destroys most if not quite all of the conventional mechanisms guaranteeing the security of private space, the irresolute ending suggests that perhaps the novel, in contrast with *Deacon Brodie*, does not in the final analysis advocate the

complete annihilation of bourgeois private life. Rather, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by giving the key of Jekyll's private laboratory to Utterson, transfers the guardianship of the Englishman's castle into what it represents as the lawyer's more capable and more public hands. Such a transfer, though, nonetheless compromises the structural integrity that characterizes the boundaries between public and private life throughout the preceding decades of the nineteenth century.

III

In one respect, Conan Doyle's portrayal of society in "The Copper Beeches," which contains some of the more notably negative depictions of the private sphere in the Sherlock Holmes stories, is as pessimistic as Stevenson's, if not more so. As the Holmes and Watson make their way by train from London to Winchester to meet Violet Hunter, a governess who has taken a position at the Copper Beeches against Holmes's advice, and who has sent the detective an urgent message requesting his help, a conversation between the pair frames the social threat posed by the home. Because the rural setting wraps the home in a shroud of natural privacy**,** the detective perceives a dangerous enclave where his unobservant friend and biographer sees only an idealized domesticity.[16] Watson relates:

> It was an ideal spring day…. The sun was shining very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man's energy. All over the countryside, away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and gray roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light green of the new foliage.
>
> 'Are they not fresh and beautiful?' I cried, with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.
>
> But Holmes shook his head gravely.

[16] Holmes makes this point about Watson in the first of the stories, "A Scandal in Bohemia": "You see, but you do not observe" (5).

> ‘Do you know, Watson,’ said he, ‘that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there.’
>
> ‘Good heavens!’ I cried. ‘Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?’
>
> ‘They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.’
>
> ‘You horrify me!’
>
> ‘But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard's blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. (259-60)

The relative “isolation” of the Hampshire countryside serves as a metaphor in this exchange for suburban bourgeois privacy. Holmes’s identification of England’s “dear old homesteads” as potential—even likely—sites of “horror,” “hellish cruelty,” and “hidden wickedness” marks them as greater threats to social order than the back-streets of London, where public surveillance and nearby neighbors all but assure official intervention if not always oversight. Such a claim demystifies the conventionally causal relationship between class position and crime—the notion, consistently challenged in Conan Doyle’s stories, that England’s criminal population resided at the bottom of the social ladder.[17] The story eventually confirms Holmes’s argument when he and Watson

[17] Franco Moretti points out that although Conan Doyle sets some of the scenes from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890) in working-class regions south of the Thames, he sets the subsequent Holmes stories, beginning in 1891, almost exclusively in the City and, far more often, in London’s fashionable West End. Conan Doyle has Holmes visit the East End only once throughout the fifty-six stories (134).

arrive at their destination, the home of Jephro Rucastle, to reveal its secrets; and the passage recalls the detective's guardedly euphemistic (and in hindsight, understated) comment to Violet Hunter earlier in the story that the Copper Beeches "does not seem to be a nice household for a young lady" (257). The scene also coincides with a recurring narrative pattern in Conan Doyle's stories that, in the case of "The Copper Beeches," underscores the thematic importance of security.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle asserts the primacy of reason in a world increasingly threatened by disorder and unintelligibility. With Holmes at their center embodying rational knowledge, Conan Doyle's detective stories typically conform to a fundamental outline by which the narrative emphasis moves from order to disorder and back to order in the end. According to Christopher Metress, the narrative usually begins at Baker Street, with Holmes providing Watson and the reader with an example of his rational acumen to dispel any fears that the world and human experience are irrational and meaningless. In the second phase, which shifts the action beyond the rational domain of Holmes's rooms in Baker Street to London or the surrounding countryside, the story brings Watson and the reader into direct contact with an enigmatic situation that resists interpretation and thus poses a threat to the belief in an ultimately rational, intelligible world and an orderly society. The final phase of the narrative returns Holmes and Watson to Baker Street, where the detective explains to his companion (and the reader) how he solved the mystery, how his acute powers of reason enabled him to make perfect sense of the seemingly irrational puzzle, thus reestablishing and reaffirming rationality, intelligibility, and order (186-88).

Although "The Copper Beeches" deviates slightly from this pattern in its final phase, as we will see, it otherwise follows Metress's outline of narrative development—opening with Holmes in Baker Street giving Watson a short lecture on logic and then moving to the countryside where the detective comments on domestic crime and disorder. The story then turns its attention to Rucastle, who is clearly a threat to social stability and, as such, figures centrally in the portrayal of irrationality in the narrative's middle section. Even his name creates an ideological dichotomy for the middle-class readers of the *Strand Magazine* in which the story (like most of Conan Doyle's) first appeared. Fusing misery with the nineteenth century's predominant metaphor for the Englishman's home, the uncanny name of Rucastle subverts the premise of bourgeois domestic ideology, which defined the home as a haven from *rue*, from the misery characteristic of the external world of struggle and hardship. And Rucastle lives up to his name. He has imprisoned his daughter, locking her in an empty wing of his home for her unwillingness to comply with his scheme to keep her money, inherited from her late mother, in the family and out of the hands of her future husband. Rucastle thus abuses the power and prerogatives of middle-class patriarchy, in the process demeaning the sanctity of the household. Moreover, by trying to disrupt the legal transfer of wealth, Rucastle threatens the fundamental principles of British socioeconomic stability, further endangering the public sphere.[18] His home, not surprisingly, given his corrupting influence, lacks any redeeming qualities. Like the private cabinet in which Jekyll engendered Hyde, the Copper Beeches is a matrix of suffering, disorder, and unintelligibility. Rucastle's house consequently produces a daughter harassed to the point of nervous exhaustion and

[18] For a discussion of the economic threat Rucastle poses to the British public, see Joseph Kestner 17, 93.

physical collapse; a boorishly egoistic son prone to "savage fits of passion," whose primary trait is that he derives sadistic pleasure from causing "pain to any creature weaker than himself"; and a wife, described by Violet Hunter as an ethically inscrutable "nonentity," who harbors "some secret sorrow" (262).

In conjunction with the dysfunctional domestic scene within the Copper Beeches, a basic element of Rucastle's danger—to Violet Hunter literally and to the nation figuratively—is that he presents a persuasively benevolent façade before what Holmes calls "the great unobservant public" (251). Describing him as a "prodigiously stout man with a very smiling face"; as "such a comfortable-looking man that it was quite a pleasure to look at him"; and as "pleasant" and "thoughtful" (253, 254), Violet Hunter initially depicts Rucastle in terms that apparently signify an embodiment of the Victorian *paterfamilias*. Yet Rucastle, like his offer to pay the governess £100 per year—more than twice the going rate—is "too good to be true" (254). Much as the exorbitant wage defies rational explanation, making Holmes "uneasy" and alerting him to the possibility of some undefined "danger" (257, 258), Rucastle's presence in the story challenges intelligibility, disrupting the signifying system. With meaning troubled in this fashion, the enigmatic Rucastle represents an unknown variable in what should be an otherwise knowable social equation. Watson, who observes early in the story that the terms of Violet Hunter's employment indicate "something abnormal," confesses his inability to determine if the man is "a philanthropist or a villain" (258), calling attention to a form of incoherent subjectivity that potentially endangers society. Unlike Stevenson, who explores the crisis of subjectivity as a means of exposing the pathological nature of bourgeois society, Conan Doyle seeks to resolve the crisis in order to keep society intact.

Rosemary Jann writes of the social necessity for cohesive, comprehensible identity in the Holmes stories: "Faced with increasing evidence of the disruptive power of the irrational and the unconscious, these tales strive to preserve the unified, fully intelligible self of realism by insisting that people remain totally predictable, or that at least among those deserving of social power, the desire that could undermine logic and predictability would be self-policing" (705). As the story's undefined variable, Rucastle, who is neither intelligible nor predictable, represents a failure of self-government. Watson's observation of a Jekyll-and-Hyde-like duality, that only fully reveals itself in secret but that threatens the interests of the public preemptively, justifies the invasion of privacy in "The Copper Beeches" in order to enforce conformity with the liberal-bourgeois codes of rational behavior.

Violet Hunter, whose powers of observation and independence recall those of Jane Eyre, another English governess who probes the secrets of a country manor containing an incarcerated woman, is a particularly apposite character to undertake such an invasion.[19] Indeed, the similarity between the governesses calls attention to fiction's changed attitude toward the private sphere in the nearly fifty years that separate *Jane Eyre* (1847) and "The Copper Beeches." Whereas in Charlotte Brontë's novel Rochester finally but voluntarily opens the door to the attic of Thornfield Hall to show Bertha to the public, Holmes, Watson, and Violet Hunter must break in to Rucastle's attic in an effort to rescue his imprisoned daughter. Along with Holmes, and in some respects even more than Holmes, Violet Hunter is the principal antagonist of Rucastle and the kind of

[19] Citing an article by Bernard Duyfhuizen, Kestner points out that Conan Doyle's story echoes Brontë's novel. Both focus on oppressed women and both represent their heroines as independent (93-94).

perverted domestic system over which he presides. Conan Doyle encodes her name, like Rucastle's, with symbolic value. The combination of Violet, which closely approximates *violate*, with Hunter, suggesting surveillance and pursuit, corresponds with her self-described observant nature as well as with her almost compulsive need to penetrate the locked spaces at the Copper Beeches and uncover the family's secret. If Rucastle is the equivalent of Hyde, Violet Hunter finds her counterpart in Utterson—she is in effect Miss Seek. Not long after her arrival, in fact, the governess opens a locked drawer of the chest in her bedroom with a key of her own that happens to fit the lock. In the drawer she discovers the coil of auburn hair belonging to her double, Alice Rucastle, whom she has unwittingly come to impersonate. Although she confesses a slight feeling of guilt for transgressing the protocols of privacy and in effect breaking in to a locked drawer—"I felt that I had put myself in the wrong by opening a drawer which they had locked" (266)—the moral implications of violated privacy begin to change with regard to the locked room in which Rucastle has imprisoned his daughter well before the governess suspects foul play. The first time she witnesses Rucastle exiting the wing through the door, which is otherwise "invariably locked," she detects the gap between public and private selves, which the threshold seemingly mediates:

> I met Mr. Rucastle coming out through this door, his keys in his hand, and a look on his face which made him a very different person to the round, jovial man to whom I was accustomed. His cheeks were red, his brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his temples with passion. He locked the door and hurried past me without a word or a look. (266)

When she casually comments on the apparently empty section of the house in an effort to learn its secret, Rucastle claims to use the area as a darkroom and pretends to be amused by her observant nature, at which point the social mask slips once again: "He spoke in a

jesting tone, but there was no jest in his eyes as he looked at me. I read suspicion there, and annoyance, but no jest" (267).

Working from the slippage between the signifier and the signified, the gap between what Rucastle says and what Violet Hunter reads to the contrary, the governess senses the need to intervene, the need to cross this guarded threshold in order to make sense of its unintelligibility. As she explains to Holmes, she regards her desire to invade the home's inner sanctum as a compelling moral obligation:

> from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty—a feeling that some good might come of my penetrating this place. [….] I was keenly on the look-out for any chance to pass that forbidden door. (267)

When the opportunity does arise and she gains access, she discovers that the mysterious door conceals yet another—one more enigmatic than the first because it is not merely lock but "barricaded" with iron bars and a padlock (268). Given the domestic context of this barricade, the inner door defies reason; it does not belong in a home and therefore presents an anomaly that Violet Hunter, even before realizing that there is someone imprisoned behind it, defines as "sinister," synecdochically referring to the house itself, which Watson similarly describes as "sinister" at the end of the story (274). When the governess detects someone on the other side of the door, the specter of the *heimlich* becoming the *unheimlich* produces "a mad, unreasoning terror" in her otherwise rational mind. She suffers a nervous shock and flees the area, at which point Rucastle catches and confronts her. The confrontation further highlights Rucastle's duality. She recounts:

> 'So,' said he, smiling, 'it was you, then. I thought that it must be when I saw the door open.'
>
> 'Oh, I am so frightened!' I panted.

> ‘My dear young lady! my dear young lady!’—you cannot think how caressing and soothing his manner was—‘and what has frightened you, my dear young lady?’
>
> But his voice was just a little too coaxing. He overdid it. I was keenly on my guard against him.
>
> ‘I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing,’ I answered. ‘But it is so lonely and eerie in this dim light that I was frightened and ran out again. Oh, it is so dreadfully still in there!’
>
> ‘Only that?’ said he, looking at me keenly.
>
> ‘Why, what did you think?’ I asked.
>
> ‘Why do you think that I lock this door?’
>
> ‘I am sure that I do not know.’
>
> ‘It is to keep people out who have no business there. Do you see?’ He was still smiling in the most amiable manner.
>
> ‘I am sure if I had known—’
>
> ‘Well, then, you know now. And if you ever put your foot over that threshold again’—here in an instant the smile hardened into a grin of rage, and he glared down at me with the face of a demon—‘I’ll throw you to the mastiff.’ (268)

The threshold, as we noticed previously, mediates the performance of social identity; by crossing it, Violet Hunter gets a glimpse, if only momentarily, of Rucastle’s hidden self. As much as her terror before the locked room or Rucastle’s threat to feed her to the dog, witnessing Rucastle’s uncanny transformation from benevolent *paterfamilias* to demonic figure causes Violet Hunter’s brief nervous collapse. The episode’s lack of an apparently intelligible explanation also necessitates Holmes’s intervention, for it is at this point that the governess’s investigative powers fail, as do her powers of interpretation.[20]

Holmes of course deduces the solution to the mystery, minus a few minor details, immediately upon the conclusion of Violet Hunter’s “extraordinary story,” and

[20] The story makes the point repeatedly that Violet Hunter, despite her keen powers of observation, lacks the intellectual acumen to put together the pieces of the puzzle. In the telegram that brings Holmes and Watson to Winchester, the governess closes with the confession, “I am at my wits’ end” (259); she begins her account of the family to Holmes by declaring that though she suffered “no actual ill-treatment” from the Rucastles, “I cannot understand them, and I am not easy in my mind about them” (261); and she subsequently requests of the detective, “tell me what it all means, and, above all, what I should do” (269).

determines that the only course of action is to break in to the house himself, rescue Alice Rucastle, and right the wrongs of the father (269). The detective understands that he is "dealing with a very cunning man" but also that he has no clear legal grounds for invading Rucastle's home (271). He thus devises the scheme for gaining access to the Copper Beeches through subterfuge—a plan that notably circumvents police involvement and publicity and at the same time seems to call attention to breaches of the home's security at every turn. After Violet Hunter locks the servant, Mrs. Toller, in the cellar and takes from the drunken groom the keys to the house, "which are the duplicates of Mr. Rucastle's" (271), she admits Holmes and Watson and they proceed to the suite of rooms in the empty wing. According to Watson's account: "We passed up the stair, unlocked the door, followed on down a passage, and found ourselves in front of the barricade which Miss Hunter had described. Holmes cut the cord and removed the transverse bar. Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but without success" (271). Upon discovering that none of Toller's keys will unlock the door—indicating that Rucastle trusts no one in his household, not even the man in charge of the dog that guards the property—the detective and his companion break it open. "It was an old rickety door and gave at once before our united strength," Watson recalls. They enter the room only to find that "the prisoner" is missing. As Holmes tries to put together the pieces of the puzzle, Rucastle arrives unexpectedly, charging that Holmes and Watson are in effect housebreakers. Rucastle's charge briefly shifts the legal focus and balance of power of the scene away from his wrongful imprisonment of his daughter to Holmes's unlawful entry of his home:

> a man appeared at the door of the room, a very fat and burly man, with a heavy stick in his hand. Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and confronted him.
>
> 'You villain!' said he, 'where's your daughter?'

> The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open skylight.
> 'It is for me to ask you that,' he shrieked, 'you thieves! Spies and thieves! I have caught you, have I? You are in my power. I'll serve you!' He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he could go.
> 'He's gone for the dog!' cried Miss Hunter. (272)

Although arguably Holmes and Watson are in Rucastle's "power," the story avoids entangling them in a reprisal for breaking and entering when the mastiff turns on his master. The mauling scene recalls Rucastle's comment on the dog and his warning to the governess earlier in the story: "God help the trespasser whom he lays his fangs upon. For goodness' sake don't you ever on any pretext set your foot over the threshold at night, for it's as much as your life is worth" (265). Not only does the attack illustrate the irony of Rucastle falling victim to his own "dreadful sentinel"; it also subtly and indirectly points to Rucastle's paradoxical status: he is "the trespasser" in his own home, a fact made evident when he crosses his own threshold. Nevertheless, Holmes's subsequent observation to Watson as Mrs. Rucastle and a doctor arrive at the house—"I think…that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our *locus standi* [rightful or legal position] now is rather a questionable one" (274)—indicates that justice and legal standing are not necessarily synonymous and that Conan Doyle perhaps does not wish to push this paradox too far.

And yet, whatever legal grounds Holmes may or may not have for breaking and entering the Copper Beeches, Conan Doyle vests the detective with an implicit authority that grants him right of access from the reader's perspective, overruling his dubious *locus standi* in this instance. The private detective is "the policeman of the private home," as Lisa Surridge puts it (238), and his work of exposing threats to social order and of reinstating and reinforcing the codes of middle-class normalcy throughout the stories

exonerates such invasions of privacy. But Holmes also embodies security in a way that we have not seen since our discussion of Gabriel Varden in *Barnaby Rudge*. We could say that the detective's name, with only a slight phonetic adjustment, signifies certain security or closure of the home—*sure lock homes*. The name is an ironic signifier in this context, however, since the detective's actions have connotations markedly different from—though not opposite to—those of Dickens's benevolent locksmith. For although Varden and Holmes figure pivotally to the production and maintenance of social order, they operate according to a different set of spatial practices and sociocultural assumptions about the proper interrelationship between the public and private spheres. On the one hand, Varden, as we saw in chapter 2, functions as the source of order that moves in only one direction, extending outward from the private sphere to the public. Holmes, on the other hand, follows what we could call a dialectical pattern of ideological enforcement, moving from order to disorder to the reestablishment and reaffirmation of order, described by Jann as "a higher or finer code of justice than that insured by official law" (703). Conan Doyle, through the name of his protagonist, seeks to assuage fears about the invasions of private life that the detective repeatedly undertakes, reassuring readers that Holmes, his intrusive scrutiny on behalf of the public notwithstanding, will reseal the breach of domestic boundaries and restore private space.[21]

Successful reassurance in this case depends on successful narrative resolution. In contrast with the ending of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the conclusion of "The Copper Beeches" leaves the reader with a sense of resolution, suggesting an

[21] This pattern of restoration consistently appears in Conan Doyle's stories. Simon Joyce notes that "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891), for example, "works to restabilize the family and a social order…grounded in the separation of spheres" (149).

isomorphic relationship between spatial and narrative closure. "And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door," Watson recounts (274). The image of the front door, the domestic threshold, symbolically guarded by the trees from which the house takes its name, suggests the reestablishment of natural boundaries that close off the private sphere. Moreover, in an ideologically necessary if somewhat charitable recuperation of domesticity, the story leaves most of the members of Rucastle household intact and in private, despite their collective crime and guilt. Rucastle is "a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife"; both of them "still live with their old servants, who probably know so much of Rucastle's past life that he finds it difficult to part with them."[22] The story even provides a marriage, that most conventional of narrative endings, between Alice Rucastle and her fiancé, Fowler, reproducing private domestic life in untainted, far more positive terms.[23] Although "The Copper Beeches" stops short of a domestic dénouement by refusing to pair Holmes and the heroine in a romantic relationship—an outcome Watson would apparently find gratifying—it does conclude with an allusive reaffirmation of the distinctions between public and private space. "As to Miss Violet Hunter," Watson says

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[22] This aspect of the ending of "The Copper Beeches" finds support in Jann's claim that Conan Doyle's stories "work relentlessly to preserve the status quo by shielding the upper classes from being legally punished—or what is just as significant in a world where knowledge means power—even allowing their secrets to be told" (703). Jann also comments that in "a late Victorian society rocked by scandals, how reassuring that Holmes and Watson would protect the upper classes from blackmail and publicity, and give them the opportunity to settle their accounts in private" (705).

[23] The marriage has a fairy-tale quality that in fact reemphasizes the theme of forcible entry. Much like the archetypal scenario of the distressed damsel rescued from the evil king's castle tower by the chivalric hero, Alice's escape from the Copper Beeches occurs when Fowler uses a ladder to scale the house and break in through the skylight, rescuing her from the tyrannical Rucastle.

in his closing comment, "my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success." As if Conan Doyle offers readers a compensatory gesture for invading the home, the story relocates Violet Hunter to Walsall, one of the principal towns of the Midlands lockmaking district—a town known especially for the production of padlocks. Here presumably she teaches the children of lockmakers, who are likely future lockmakers themselves. The move seems to nullify her nominal association with violation and suggests a symbolic restoration of privacy and security. For in the final analysis, Conan Doyle places the English household back under lock and key. Rather than, as usual, returning to Baker Street for the story's conclusion, where Holmes explains the mystery to Watson and where the "reader learns what Holmes has known all along, that the world…is readable and knowable, that although uncertainty may exist, it is, in the end, 'inconceivable' that it should remain so" (Metress 188), "The Copper Beeches" achieves resolution in an equally rational domain. The story leaves its readers, in other words, where we began this study—among the lockmakers who played a crucial role in the realization of the nineteenth-century social order and who helped to make the protection of privacy and property, along with the mechanisms that ensured security, a matter of compelling interest for the Victorians.

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