CHARLES DICKENS AND HIS ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATORS
Introduction

DICKENS AND THE RISE OF THE ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED NOVEL AFTER 1836

"You know how I build up temples in my mind that are not made with hands (or expressed with pen and ink, I am afraid)," Dickens once complained to John Forster. Dickens was highly susceptible to disappointment about the illustrations for his books; it is impossible, however, to credit those who suggest that Dickens wished his books had never been illustrated. He left abundant testimony to his intense involvement in most of the nearly nine hundred original illustrations of his writing, and the pictures were a part of the initial complete publication of nearly all his major works: the collected Sketches by Boz; all the novels except Hard Times and Great Expectations, which first appeared in Dickens's own unillustrated periodicals; all five Christmas books; and the finished versions of Pictures from Italy and A Child's History of England. He had a close personal as well as professional relationship with many of the eighteen artists who worked with him. Even when his reputation was secure, his sales steady, and his audience literate enough to permit him to publish his texts unadorned, as some critics urged, he usually retained the illustrated format clearly convinced, despite the difficulties of coordinating text and pictures, of its advantages to himself, his publishers, his illustrators to a lesser extent, and, above all, to his readers.

Illustrations may have been so important to Dickens partly because the world into which he was born on February 7, 1812 was deprived of visual material compared to our own. Lacking television, movies, photographs, a regular illustrated press, and even a public art museum, the semiliterate audience keenly anticipated, relished, and remembered what it was able to see. There were, of course, random pictures in broadsides, advertisements, signs, and, later, annuals or "keepsakes" with their glossy views of fashionable women so admired by Mrs. Nickleby (NN, XXVII, 343-44). Yet Dickens acknowledged mainly two sources of graphic stimulation: prints—the realistic satires of William Hogarth and, to a lesser extent, the grotesque caricatures of Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray—and the illustrations for nursery tales and adult fiction. Both sources profoundly affected his imagination and his art.

From the Sketches by Boz in 1836 to The Mystery of Edwin Drood in 1870, Dickens's books reveal his exposure and his debt to prints, particularly those by Hogarth, with whom he has consistently been compared. Before his father's bankruptcy, he may have spent many evenings thumbing through a rented or owned print portfolio, a property common to the libraries of many families aspiring to gentility. Even as an impoverished drudge at Warren's Blacking warehouse, young Dickens could have seen without cost the latest prints in the printseller's windows, which served the public as an art gallery (fig. 1). Old favorites,
such as Hogarth's prints, graced the walls of the humblest shops and hovels as well as prosperous homes like those of Mrs. Thrale, Lord Byron, and, much later, Dickens's own at Gad's Hill. These prints not only helped to form Dickens's vision of his world—and that of his older illustrators—but, as has been suggested, taught him ways of conveying it to others. They suggested the importance of making every detail of character and setting contribute to a point, usually a moral one. They may have inspired him to seek verbal equivalents for the graphic narrative or "progress," the emblematic detail, the physical and mental idiosyncrasy, and the revealing gesture. As the best of the prints by Hogarth and his heirs—Rowlandson, Gillray, and Cruikshank—were often meant to be "read," so Dickens's prose was meant to be visualized. If the so-called Hogarthian tradition became attenuated in Victorian graphic art, its vital qualities survived in the graphic prose (as well as in many of the best illustrations) of a Dickens novel.

Dickens was also influenced by the book illustrations of his youth, which were less taken for granted than they are now. If, in his maturity, he occasionally doubted the desirability of illustrations in his books, he must have recalled that his literary predecessors were frustrated by having no choice in the matter. The eighteenth-century doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, whose abuse prompted Pope's complaint about books in which "the pictures for the page atone" (*Dunciad*, I, 1, 139), did not apply to fiction of that time, which almost always appeared in three volumes, occasionally graced by a portrait or a map, but more usually undressed. Swift vainly wished that Hogarth would "draw the beasts as I describe them," and Fielding was forced to refer the first readers of *Tom Jones* to Hogarth's paintings for the appearance of some of his characters (I, xi; II, iii). Only when a novel was an established commercial success might it be counted on to appear with a single frontispiece, such as Fuseli furnished for the fourth edition of Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* and Hogarth designed for the second edition of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, or even with several designs, as Stothard provided for Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* thirty years after its first publication in 1766. But very often these illustrated classics were produced in a limited edition and sold by prior subscription.

Near the end of the eighteenth century, however, mechanical advances enabled pictures to be printed cheaply in illustrated part-issues and volumes, and illustrated fiction classics became easily available. These illustrations remained ineffaceable in the memories of Dickens and other readers of his century. Charles Lamb, poring over Thomas Stothard's portrayals of "Clarissa mournful, and prim Grandison/ All Fielding's, Smollett's heroines" believed they really existed; John Ruskin was more moved by the "rude" vignettes of Robinson Crusoe crashing into the rocks and escaping the wreck than by most of the "High Art" of his maturity; and even at age eighty-four, Thomas Hardy recalled his fright at the picture of Apollyon fighting Christian in his copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Much eighteenth-century fiction specialized in moral assessment rather than visual description, yet despite or because of the quality, Dickens remembered the plates in many books more vividly than the texts. As an author, he made his own prose increasingly graphic, at the same time as he tried to maintain the highest standards for the illustrations that accompanied it.

Throughout Dickens's youth, graphic materials, however sparse, probably reached a far wider audience than any literature. Even when pictures were accompanied by a text, as in Pierce Egan's popular *Life in London* (1821) and modish travel and sporting books, the pictures were the important asset. When Boz began his sketches in the mid-1830's, authors still wrote "up" to the artist whose plates were counted on for a work's success. Only by a series of accidents at the start of *The Pickwick Papers*—the publishers' selection of Dickens as serial writer, the suicide of the first illustrator, Robert Seymour, and its unprecedented success—did Dickens manage to reverse the supremacy of artist over author in his lifetime. Dickens's introduction of *Pickwick* in an illustrated serial format, with parts published separately, revolutionized the publication of new fiction between 1836 and 1870. Illustrations had always bolstered sales of already established fiction: Sir Walter Scott had observed in 1831, after issuing a new edition of his works, that "without plates 5000 less of the Waverley novels would have been sold at a difference on the whole work of £13,000." But the success of *Pickwick*, a new story, was such that publishers and authors rushed to emulate it in every respect. Illustrations, once a luxury, now became commonplace. New fiction, if issued serially with illustrations, was clearly more profitable and less risky than the traditional unembellished three-volume sets had ever been. The presence of plates in the cheap monthly (or, less often, weekly) issues attracted the widest possible audience; the increased number of readers attracted more advertisers; and the additional profits absorbed the extra graphic costs. By contrast to a bound volume, part-issues elicited several notices from reviewers instead of just one; and the illustrations made perfect advertisements for booksellers' windows at regular intervals. Furthermore, if a work of new fiction was failing—and even *Pickwick*'s fate had been doubtful for a while—publication could easily slow down or cease alto-
gether. It was more likely, however, that this format guaranteed higher sales and steadier incomes over longer periods not only for the publisher, but for the author and artist as well.

The importance of illustrations to the commercial success of post-*Pickwick* fiction was lost neither on Dickens nor on contemporary novelists and their publishers. Profitability made the once despised form respectable (*PP*, XIX). William Ainsworth, Charles Lever, William Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope introduced most of their major works in illustrated monthly parts; later novelists preferred to issue their writing in illustrated magazines: Thomas Hardy often used this format; George Meredith and Charles Reade tried it twice; George Eliot once. Although Dickens never admitted his dependence on illustrations as openly as some of his peers, during his anxious years in the 1840's, as the *Times* snidely observed, he did not send his Christmas books "to market" without the aid of many well-known artists.

Yet Dickens's concern with illustrations was not motivated purely by economic considerations, for it continued long after illustrations were needed to help boost sales. Apparently illustrations provided a necessary outlet for the overflow of his remarkably visual imagination. "There is no writer, in my opinion, who is so much a painter and black-and-white artist as Dickens," declared Vincent van Gogh, driven like so many commentators to commonplace rhetoric to describe the distinctive quality of the author's prose. Dickens explained his creative process to Forster by saying, "I don't invent it—really do not—, but see it, and write it down." His instructions to his artists indicate that he visualized the scenes he wanted illustrated thoroughly indeed. He usually specified the number of the characters as well as their position, gestures, expressions, dress, and settings; in one instance, he even supplied details of color, though the illustration, as usual, was to be black and white. Similarly, Dickens endowed his protagonists with his own ability to visualize experiences and perceptions with memorable painterly details.

Dickens concerned himself not only with illustrations but with every aspect of the appearance of his books. He refused, for example, to accept even for presentation purposes the first copies of *A Christmas Carol*, whose colors had not turned out well in printing. The friends who finally received presentation copies never knew that the author had gone to great trouble and expense to change the endpapers from green to yellow and the title page print from red and green to red and blue. When the weekly installments of *Master Humphrey's Clock* provided the opportunity to "drop" wood engravings into the text—the steel engravings in the monthly issues preceded the text—Dickens, not his illustrators, determined where to put them to obtain the best dramatic and aesthetic effect. Dickens even took pains with the arrangement of his paragraphs, breaking them up or running them together for visual effect: in *David Copperfield*, he insisted on a white line left before each of the three paragraphs—disconnected in time—concerning the progress of Dora's illness (LIII, 758-60); and in *Great Expectations*, he instructed the printer to leave two white lines between the description of Orlick's assault and Pip's recovery to reinforce visually the hero's "blank" of unconsciousness (LIII). Even Dickens's detailed criticisms of the early sketches of illustrations appear to stem less from disapproval than from frustration at the difficulty of conveying to his illustrators what his mind's eye so fully conceived.

Dickens exerted unprecedented authority over everything but the actual execution of the illustrations to his works. With few exceptions, he selected and entitled (often ironically) the subjects, provided the proofs or précis, and suggested conceptions, models, and details. He usually inspected not only the final drawings, but the preliminary sketches as well, which he rarely returned without ideas for improvement. He was not "mechanically acquainted" with drawing or painting (*CP*, 1: 67 and *PFI*, XVIII, 244); he could enliven his letters only with occasional crude sketches. Otherwise, like Thackeray and George du Maurier, Dickens might well have illustrated his own novels. If he shared his success with his illustrators, however, at least he did so on his own terms. He never worried, as did later authors like Henry James, that his prose might suffer from rivalry with another medium.

Indeed, the force of Dickens's personality and of his pictorial imagination determined the success of his illustrations as much as the talent of his artists. Although he was flattered at first by the opportunity to collaborate with George Cruikshank and Robert Seymour, the two most famous illustrators of the 1830's, Dickens soon found the traditional subordination of author to artist intolerable and managed to reverse the roles on his own works. It was no accident that Hablot Browne (Phiz), who was young, obscure, and diffident, succeeded to the post held by these two more assertive veterans and retained it so long. Nor was it mere coincidence that most of Dickens's other illustrators were either intimates, giving their services out of friendship for a short time only, or unknowns and dependents. A William Blake, Thomas Bewick, or Joseph Turner—as Cruikshank, perhaps the most independent of Dickens's artists, discovered—would not have long toler-
ated such authorial dominance. Though Dickens is ultimately important for what he wrote, not what others illustrated of his works, modern readers owe it to him to give his artists the same extensive consideration of their efforts that he did.

Despite the impetus given to English book illustration after 1836 by Dickens and by continuing technological advances, illustrating remained a hard, ill-paid occupation. Many artists cut their teeth on illustrated fiction; indeed, there was such a flood of scenes in the 1840's from *The Vicar of Wakefield* alone that Thackeray publicly protested. But few artists possessed Hablot Browne's talent and, at the same time, the temperament to pursue book illustration full time. Most, like Marcus Stone and Luke Fildes, used it as a stepping-stone to careers in painting; others, like George Cattermole and Daniel Maclise, supplemented what income they could earn from more "serious" art by accepting occasional commissions to do illustrations. Yet even at the height of book illustration in the Victorian era, book illustrators remained to painters what novelists are to poets: the less prestigious, though usually the more popular, practitioners of their craft.

On the whole, Dickens's original illustrators fared better than most of their colleagues: Robert Buss was the only one whose career was impaired by his association with the author. If George Cruikshank and Robert Seymour hastened Dickens's rise to fame, they, in turn, were assured immortality by their work for him. Hablot Browne's stature rested almost exclusively on his illustrations for Dickens. John Leech's name on the title pages of Dickens's Christmas books consolidated his reputation as a talented graphic satirist, and John Tenniel's helped lead perhaps to his work for *Punch* and for Lewis Carroll. Some illustrators were already respected painters when they worked for Dickens: Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield, Edwin Landseer, and Frank Stone were prominent members of the Royal Academy; and George Cattermole, Samuel Palmer, Frank Topham, and Charles Collins were celebrated in more esoteric circles. With few exceptions, until the recent revival of interest in Victoriana, most of them were better remembered for their casual illustrations of or for Dickens than for their labored canvases. Marcus Stone and Luke Fildes parlayed the attention attracted by their work for Dickens into successful careers as Royal Academy painters. Certainly many of Dickens's illustrators, like Landseer and Palmer, have earned a place in Victorian art history irrespective of their work for him, and there may have been better artists who never attained deserved fame because they never had the luck to associate with him. All of Dickens's original illustrators are gaining stature still as scholars begin to realize that the major graphic achievement of the Victorian era may be that of book illustration.

At the time of their work with Dickens, however, the artists were compensated mainly by the value of their friendship with Dickens. The artists who illustrated his books were personally as well as professionally important to Dickens. Indeed, he counted more artists than writers among his intimates since his friendships, as George Bernard Shaw perceived, were determined by "social" rather than "cultural" factors. They supplied companionship during the collaborations and after them when the stern taskmaster unwound over meals and on excursions. When Dickens involved them in his numerous charitable theatricals and committees, it was as much for the continued pleasure of their company as for the immediate usefulness of their names and talents.

Indeed, Dickens had a notable affinity for all kinds of artists, many of whom never illustrated his books. His appreciation was clearly reciprocated: he was one of the few outsiders ever invited to the weekly *Punch* round tables or to address as well as attend the annual Royal Academy dinners (*CP*, 2: 441, 466-67, 532-34). In his frequent capacity as sitter, he came to know still other artists than his illustrators. By the end of his life, Dickens had better reason than Mr. Snevellicci to boast that "most men have seen my portrait" (*NN*, XXX, 393). And, although he could not know all the Victorian artists whom his books inspired, he was gratified to see so many of his characters depicted in canvases as well as in cartoons. The paintings and drawings hanging in Dickens's homes were predominantly portraits of himself and his family or subjects from his books, executed and given to him by his illustrators and other artist friends.

The author was as discreet as he was entertaining. Though Dickens increasingly utilized his knowledge of paintings, portraits, and objets d'art in his novels to suggest—long before Henry James—the moral as well as literal wealth or poverty of their owners, he never exploited his knowledge of his artist friends. Though he often recognizably incorporated the traits of his acquaintances in his fiction, Leigh Hunt/Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House* being the most notorious example, he proved unusually reticent about his illustrators. In Dickens's novels, neither the two professional artists—Miss La Creevy and Henry Gowan—nor the amateur artists—Jack Redburn, John Westlock, Mr. Carker, Edith Granger, and Edwin Drood—bore any resemblance to his artists. Dickens exercised other kinds of discretion on behalf of his illustrators. He may have removed from the 1867 edition of *The Pickwick Papers*...
an allusion to an earlier scandal involving a portrait by Maclise not only because it was too topical and dated but lest it still pain his friend. After their deaths, he gave prospective biographers of Maclise, Leech, and Stanfield polite but short shrift, telling them their lives were best illustrated by their works. Dickens remained a loyal friend to the families of many of his artists even after their deaths.

If Dickens was discreet about his illustrators in his fiction, he was their willing publicist in articles and speeches. When *Pictures from Italy* came out in 1846, he was attacked by commentators for his philistine art criticisms and his unwillingness to separate moral from aesthetic judgments. Thereafter, for the most part, he confined his public remarks on art to praise of his illustrators for work unrelated to his own. Accordingly, his illustrators escaped his general censure of the fine arts, whose rules, cant, models, and bores, he repeatedly claimed, perpetrated false views of history and humanity and hence various social and moral evils. His comments on them reveal that his aesthetic judgments stemmed from some positive standards, and not just from some generalized cantankerousness. Thus Dickens praised many of the works, though not the distorted philosophy, of George Cruikshank's temperance period. He appreciated that the artist's revelations of the grotesque were capable both of shocking viewers into recognizing the social wretchedness around them—if not its causes—as in 'The Drunkard's Children,' and of stretching their imaginations, as in his *Fairy Tales* (CP, 1: 157–60, 464). The caricatures of Leech earned Dickens's admiration for their beauty, which he and his contemporaries came to feel conveyed satirical points more pleasantly and hence more effectively than the repellent ugliness employed by Rowlandson and Gillray (CP, 1: 190–93). The author's adulation of Maclise's 'Spirit of Chivalry' for the rebuilt Houses of Parliament clearly indicated his profound belief that art, by the grandeur and fine execution of its subjects, ennobled it still pain his friend.

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Dickens was not aesthetically blinded, however, by his affection for his artist friends. If he expressed only approbation of their works publicly, in private certain reservations emerged. At the 1855 Paris Art Exposition, for example, he perceived that the innovative canvases of Corot, Manet, Courbet, and Degas excelled the conventional ones by his Royal Academy friends like Maclise and Stanfield. As he wrote Forster, "It is of no use disguising the fact that what we know to be wanting in the men is wanting in their works—character, fire, purpose, and the power of using the vehicle and the model as a mere means to an end. There is a horrid respectability about most of the best of them—a little, finite, systematic routine in them, strangely expressive to me of the state of England itself." Considerations of friendship, of course, prevailed over those of criticism, and publicly Dickens held his tongue. (But it seems no coincidence that his very next novel, *Little Dorrit*, portrayed England as a victim of its routine-encrusted institutions, and contained his only sustained, full-length, and completely contemptuous portrait of a painter, Henry Gowan.) The author had no pretensions about his ability as an art critic. Yet it must be recalled that he not only reflected the tastes of his time, but often helped to mould them. Today, many still share Dickens's assessment of the work of his own illustrators and other artist friends.

The published illustrations, so important to the author and his first audiences, hardly revealed the extraordinary effort that went into producing each one. As Miss La Creevy remarked to Kate Nickleby, "the difficulties of art, my dear, are great" (NN, X, 115). The inherent difficulties of book illustration—those stemming from the necessity of resolving the clash between two talents and two media—were compounded by Dickens's mode of publication and by his personality. Because Dickens's work was published in monthly serial issues, his illustrators had to work more closely with him over a longer period of time than they usually did with other authors. Furthermore, Dickens ruled over the visual as well as the verbal spheres of his books like a benevolent tyrant. As Forster observed, "even beyond what is ordinary between author and illustrator, his requirements were exacting." Accordingly, Dickens doubtless was found high-handed by Cruikshank, subversive by Seymour, arbitrary by Browne, and indifferent by Maclise, though younger artists, such as Marcus Stone and Fildes, called him paternalistic. Even so, Dickens maintained a better than average professional relationship with his illustrators for authors were, as a group, notoriously and variously difficult to satisfy (as Tenniel learned working for Lewis Carroll, and Marcus Stone for Anthony Trollope).

If Dickens's brand of supervision was dictatorial, at least it relieved his illustrators of some decisions; plenty remained, of an aesthetic and technical nature, to complicate
their task. It was never easy for illustrators, even when dealing with a known text by a dead author, to enhance the appearance, interest, and meaning of the text for the reader. When confronted with a text executed at monthly intervals by a demanding author, the problems were formidable. Although Dickens's narrative was usually created before the illustrations, it was visual material that the reader saw first each month—the wrapper design and the two plates that were bound in together before the text. Thus, the original illustrator of each of Dickens's long, serial stories had to produce a wrapper design that would be eye-catching not just once, but month after month, usually for over a year. At a point when only a few chapters were actually written, the artist had to create a wrapper design that encompassed the general drift and even specific events of the entire narrative, and to do so without confining the author or misleading the reader. The illustrator executed the two plates that accompanied each installment after Dickens had written or, at least, conceived the relevant text, but because the plates were placed first, he had to illustrate the story without giving it away.

Dickens's first illustrators had to sustain a delicate balance between pictures and text throughout the narrative. George Eliot, after working with Frederic Leighton on Romola, her only work initially published with illustrations, admitted "the inevitable difficulty, nay, impossibility of producing perfect correspondence between my intention and the illustrations." Dickens never conceded this impossibility, and his attitude was infectious. He expected his illustrators to attract readers but never compete with him for attention, and trusted them to follow his text and instructions with care, yet not slavishly. When Dickens's description of a scene or character was minute, they had to incorporate myriad details without blurring their overall design; when he supplied fewer details, they had a freer hand, but ran a greater risk of not realizing the scene to the author's satisfaction. Whether portraying major or minor characters, representing decisive or fleeting actions, reinforcing themes, conveying atmosphere, or suggesting psychological significance, the illustrators had to make their visual compositions natural outgrowths of Dickens's verbal one. Dickens's original illustrators were not always able to realize his intention, but they succeeded in more plates in more books over a longer period of time than have the illustrators of most other authors.

Dickens's first artists also faced more tangible problems. As the narratives were often set in the recent, if not remote, past, they had to worry about the authenticity of costumes and interiors. Given contemporary stories, Dickens's early illustrators depended on memory or imagination for details, but his last illustrators used models and did research in books and locations. Deadlines were an even greater problem. Ideally, an illustrator should have time to ponder a completed text. Often, all his illustrators received from Dickens were marked-up proofs, hastily written précis, or brief verbal instructions—and those at the last minute. Then, too, the artists had to adjust their schedules to those of publishers, printers, and engravers, even at the expense of other commissions.

The illustrators also had technical problems. They had to worry about the limits imposed by the predetermined size and shape of the page and the conditions and requirements of the metal or wooden surfaces of the plates and blocks. The skills of the etcher or engraver who transferred his drawings to the printed page were especially crucial to the artist, for it was the latter's reputation at stake. Dickens's illustrators dealt with this problem in various ways. His first artist, Cruikshank—one of the few to have mastered the etching process, which was démodé in the 1830's—was able to execute his own drawings on copper plates, which were later coated with steel; Dickens's second illustrator, Seymour, also executed his own etchings, but the inferior quality of the new polished steel surface of his plates added to his other misfortunes on Pickwick; Robert Buss learned to etch in a fortnight but, not surprisingly, his plates failed to do justice to his drawings, and cost him his Pickwick post; Dickens's principal illustrator, Hablot Browne, was luckier in being able to summon his friend, Robert Young, and older veterans for etching help.

When wood engravings became increasingly fashionable and practical from the 1840's on, Dickens's illustrators were fortunate to have the services of men like Ebenezer Landells, the Williamses, and the Dalziel brothers, who were regarded as the finest engravers of the day. But the artists were rarely pleased. Leech and Maclise, unlike the luckier Fildes, tried but failed to secure engravers of their choice for their Dickens work; Browne and Palmer went to elaborate but often ineffectual lengths to insure that their lines would be properly interpreted; Marcus Stone, like Maclise, was bitter about the engravers' ruinous effects on his designs. All of Dickens's original illustrators—except for his most transient one, Samuel Williams, who both designed and executed his one drawing for the author (OCS, I, 14)—doubtless would have appreciated Dante Gabriel Rossetti's satiric complaint:

O woodman, spare that block
O gash not anyhow.
It took ten days by clock,
I'd fain protect it now.
The Dalziels and their colleagues justifiably complained, in turn, that many illustrators (Rossetti most notoriously) lacked proper understanding of how to execute a drawing suitable for engraving on wood; and even if its engraving was satisfactory, the artist's original illustration might still be adversely affected by the subsequent proofing and printing processes. Whatever the compromises involved in producing the illustrations, most of Dickens's first readers accepted them as an unmixed blessing. As Mrs. Leavis has noted, they were more accustomed than twentieth-century audiences to visual presentations of political, social, and moral ideas, especially in popular prints. Their pleasure from literature of any kind, whether they read or were read to, was heightened immeasurably by illustrations. Only the very sophisticated early Victorian reader might have agreed with Goethe that illustrated texts placed before our eyes held the mind "in chains" or with William Wordsworth that they signaled a "backward movement" to childhood and possibly barbarism. Illustrations enabled most Victorians to apprehend a variety of worlds beyond their own. For rural families, even cultivated ones like the young Edmund Gosse's, they provided the only means of "realizing the outward appearance of unfamiliar persons, scenes, or things"; that is probably why Ruskin insisted that an illustration should be judged partly on whether it contained "plain facts" as well as thought. Dickens's illustrations, informative as well as imaginative at best, not only expanded the world of his readers, but the number of his readers, especially among the uneducated. The plates made his stories more accessible to children, a great asset since many Victorian families read them aloud every evening. The most ignorant adult auditor could comprehend the illustrations, even if the pronunciation or meaning of the words eluded him, and study them to recollect the story long after the words had faded from memory. Dickens was, of course, enormously popular with the undereducated classes. The author did not disdain memory. Dickens was, of course, enormously popular with the undereducated classes. The author did not disdain memory.

The only readers to challenge seriously Dickens's illustrations were reviewers. In the years just after Pickwick, reviewers assumed that the plates were indispensable to Dickens's success and invariably commented on them as well as on the text. In the 1840's, when Dickens's reputation was having its ups and downs, some reviewers implied that most of his early success was due to his illustrators. Such remarks probably helped create a climate in which Robert Seymour's heirs and George Cruikshank, all noting that the artists were veterans when they worked for Boz, began to claim excessive credit for The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist. Unquestionably Seymour initiated Pickwick and
Cruikshank suggested important details for Oliver (just as Marcus Stone supplied the model for Mr. Venus and his shop in Our Mutual Friend). Nevertheless, posterity shares, with these reservations, Forster's opinion that of all the notions regarding Dickens's relationships with his first illustrators "the most preposterous would be that which directly reversed these relations and depicted him as receiving from any artist the inspiration" he always tried to give.\textsuperscript{55}

Other reviewers complained that Dickens's style was unduly influenced by the presence of illustrations. As Blackwood's put it: "The writer's 'mind's eye' becomes . . . obedient, insensibly, to the eye of his body; and the result is, a perpetual and unconscious straining after situations and attitudes which will admit of being illustrated. Thus the writer follows the caricaturist instead of the caricaturist following the writer; and principal and accessory change places."\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, at the start of his career, Dickens occasionally displayed moments of self-consciousness about the presence of illustrations: for example, he crudely anticipated Pickwick's first club meeting for both reader and illustrator with "What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present!" (I, 3). Yet the presence of illustrations was not what made Dickens's style so pictorial. In Hard Times and Great Expectations, both of which were published initially without plates, the prose shows no decline or overcompensation in visuality. What is notable, particularly during the course of Dickens's long collaboration with Browne, as Michael Steig and others have perceived, was a roughly parallel development of verbal and graphic techniques.\textsuperscript{57} This parallelism—one which, as Steig also notes, mirrors the evolution of popular taste from caricature to realism\textsuperscript{58}—indicates the author's ability to change and the artist's ability to keep pace, not the other way around. When Browne could no longer match Dickens's development—his prints becoming less "readable" as the prose became more visual—he lost his position as illustrator. Indeed, Dickens's writing became so profoundly pictorial that it was difficult for any of the illustrators of his later work to do more than represent rather than illustrate his narratives in the fullest sense.

One reviewer even urged Dickens to rid his books of illustrations for the sake of his reputation. In 1845 the London Times noted, with some justification, that by increasing the number of illustrations and celebrated artists in the Christmas books, Dickens was trying to obscure their literary worthlessness.\textsuperscript{59} But in 1846, when Pictures from Italy was published with only four small vignettes, the Times attacked the presence of any illustrations at all. "The time perhaps may have come for dismissing the crutch hitherto afforded by the painter and caricaturists, and for walking alone in the manliness and strength of proud and self-conscious reliance. The time must come, when the good public, sick of illustration, will demand that he shall rely, like his great predecessors, upon his own unaided power. Anticipate that demand, Mr. Dickens, and be your own emancipator!"\textsuperscript{590}

Dickens's readers made no such demand, however, and the author voluntarily perpetuated his bondage. He knew better than the Times that most members of his audience considered the plates an invaluable bonus. He continued to work in this format not out of mere habit, but because he continued to find his own economic, aesthetic, and personal reasons for doing so valid. In 1858, for example, just before he stopped using Browne as an illustrator, a natural moment to have dispensed with illustrations altogether, Dickens articulated yet another justification for retaining them. "I am strongly disposed to believe there are very few debates in Parliament so important to the public welfare as a really good picture. I have also a notion that any number of bundles of the driest legal chaff that was ever chopped would be cheaply exchanged for one really accessible, really humanising, really meritorious engraving."\textsuperscript{591} It was consistent with Dickens's enduring belief in the moral efficacy of all art that he continued to have his work illustrated even after 1858 when illustrations were not as imperative as they had been in 1836. Reviewers in the Times and elsewhere tacitly shrugged and rarely mentioned the plates in Dickens's later novels; but if they took the illustrations for granted, the author and his readers never did.

Readers in our time, especially scholars, should be more grateful than their earlier counterparts for the continued presence of Dickens's illustrations. "Half the silly criticisms of Dickens need never have been written," as V. S. Pritchett has put it, had the original illustrations and illustrators been studied as closely as the author's life and text.\textsuperscript{592} For whatever their artistic merit, the original illustrations remain of special value in understanding Dickens's life and work. They are a unique form of contemporary literary criticism, and they often throw light on the author's conception of the novel and on his technique as a craftsman. Because of Dickens's close personal involvement in their creation, the original illustrations provide a unique insight into the way Dickens himself visualized his stories; certainly we cannot read Dickens as his first readers did without them. The legends and anecdotes that gathered around the subject of Dickensian illustration, often provoking sneers in the sophisticated, indicate the extent to which the original illustrations were studied and the affectionate esteem in which they and their artists were held. As the original
illustrations were inextricable from Dickens's books, so his original illustrators were often inseparable from his life. As their art elucidates aspects of his work, so their relationships with Dickens elucidate aspects of the man, and their collective achievement continues to instruct and delight countless readers.