Chapter 2

ROBERT SEYMOUR

George Cruikshank may have aided Dickens's literary ascent immeasurably; but it was Robert Seymour, his second illustrator, who propelled him to fame, albeit inadvertently. For the author, obscure at the time, working with established artists like Cruikshank and Seymour was a mixed blessing, since the difference in their relative positions made Dickens's insistence on absolute sovereignty over his story and their designs seem unwarranted. Ironically, however, it was the veteran artists for whom the relationship proved tragic. Cruikshank's gradual submission to the author contributed to his disequilibrium, and Seymour's brief involvement with him fatally unbalanced his already unsettled mind. Seymour, renowned in the 1830's for his comic sporting sketches, is remembered now mainly for his role as the first of the three illustrators for The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, better known as The Pickwick Papers. His heirs, like Cruikshank himself, tried to enhance his fame (and their fortunes) by claiming that Seymour had originated this work of Dickens. Posterity, however, never accorded him the laurels it did to Cruikshank, whose genius has proved more enduring.

Certainly a major distinction between The Pickwick Papers and the rest of Dickens's fiction lies in the controversy over its beginnings. Robert Seymour undeniably initiated what became the immortal story of Mr. Pickwick; to what extent he originated the book remains the central problem in the record of his relationship with Dickens. A lack of reliable information about the reclusive artist further complicates the issue. "Considering the great amount of work produced by Seymour, and the widespread popularity enjoyed by him in his own day," observed the Athenaeum in 1887, more than fifty years after Pickwick's debut, "it is astonishing that so little should be known of him in our time." Nearly a century later, we know very little more. Information about his association with Dickens still derives from the accounts of the increasingly exasperated author and his conciliatory Pickwick publisher—accounts that contradict those of the artist's hysterical widow, hostile son, and temporary Pickwick successor, Robert Buss. All of these circumstantial records were written long after the events they describe, by parties who could hardly be called disinterested. The sole undisputed fact concerning Seymour's collaboration with Dickens remains, as Forster blandly put it, that "between the first and second number of Pickwick, the artist, Mr. Seymour, died by his own hand." The inception of The Pickwick Papers was as rooted in Seymour's troubled past as its development was in Dickens's. The book probably confirmed the artist's long experience that each apparent success was a failure in disguise. The "posthumous" child of a Somerset gentleman, as the Victorians euphemistically described his illegitimate birth in 1798, Seymour was poorly educated by his mother, a deficiency for which he would be publicly mocked. Apprenticed to Thomas Vaughan, a successful pattern-draftsman, Seymour soon wearied of such mechanical work and quit. That daring action seemed justified when, in 1822, the Royal Academy accepted his ambitious canvas illustrating Tasso; its rejection of subsequent canvases, however, left his desire to pursue serious painting frustrated indeed. Forced to turn to book illustration for a livelihood, Seymour quickly mastered the techniques of copper engraving; the clear, minute style he had perfected during his despised apprenticeship suited the varied and prolific demands made on it to illustrate the Bible, poetry, travelogues, or nature descriptions. But in 1827, pressures mounted again when his principal employers, Knight and Lacey, went bankrupt, his mother died, and he married his first cousin, Jane Holmes—his self-proclaimed "guiding star to fame and fortune." When he found another steady employer, the publisher McLean, Seymour learned to etch on the newly
fashionable steel plates and began to specialize in humorous subjects. Insecure in these new spheres, Seymour not only imitated “HB,” as Richard Doyle’s father, another leading caricaturist of the time, called himself, but the style and manner of George Cruikshank as well, even affixing the nom de plume of Shortshanks to his earliest prints until Cruikshank, his neighbor in Islington, protested. He finally discovered more original, profitable, and psychologically gratifying sources of inspiration closer at hand.

Throughout these vicissitudes, Seymour found relative peace in Islington, a rural suburb of London. Here he could work, read undistracted in his garden studio and exercise his talents as a sportsman. It was also here that he found and exploited his artistic specialty. If Islington was a convenient place for artists like Seymour and Cruikshank to live, it was also a natural spot for working-class Londoners to visit on Sundays and holidays. Seymour’s published Sketches (1833–36) attest to his unabated observation of these overequipped, undertrained sportsmen pursuing cats, birds, and stray pigs on foot or on horseback. The artist’s sympathies are evident in his work, the animals being far more sensitively portrayed than the Cockneys. Seymour the sportsman may have been snobbishly irritated by these absurd spectacles, but Seymour the artist made valuable use of them; if John Leech could not see the humor in these sketches many others readily could. Numerous artists before Seymour had caricatured the amateurs hunting, but none so well. This work provided him with an emotional as well as a creative outlet. He could mock others harmlessly in ways that pleased rather than offended, and that replenished his pride as well as his purse. Seymour became as preeminent in this sphere as was Cruikshank, first in political, then in literary caricature.

By the time he started Pickwick in 1836, Seymour was fully established with the public as a prolific, influential, and popular caricaturist. His fame even crossed the Channel. In 1857, when Baudelaire surveyed humorous English art, he noted after his evaluation of Cruikshank: “Il serait injuste, en parlant de l’Angleterre, de ne pas mentionner Seymour dont tout le monde a vu les admirables changes sur la pêche et la chasse, double épopée de maniaques.” Nevertheless, he must have had misgivings about himself, for he continued to suffer from suicidal depressions. Perhaps Seymour shared the Ballot’s fear that he was “doing a great deal too much to allow of his doing anything very well.” Ironically, the very popularity of his comic plates, apparently reproduced until the impressions became smudges, must have damaged what remained of his reputation as a serious artist.
Seymour's loftier ambitions, inflated by his wife, yet hindered by a nature that tended to shrink from contact with the world, combined to prevent him from enjoying his success for what it was.

In 1834, at the height of his prosperity, Seymour unwittingly began his association with Charles Dickens. As one of his numerous projects, the artist was illustrating the Comic Album, a short volume of previously published extracts. One small vignette he executed—whether by his own choice or in accordance with instructions is unknown—was technically the first illustration to any of Dickens's writing. For the extract he illustrated was taken from "The Bloomsbury Christening," a Dickens piece that had appeared anonymously in the Monthly Magazine and would later be included in Sketches by Boz (T, XI, 465 [469–72] 480).10

Seymour's future collaboration with Dickens on The Pickwick Papers, however, was far more influenced by his involvement with Figaro in London the same year. Since 1831 Seymour had been illustrating, among other things, Figaro—a forerunner of Punch in that it was the first magazine, as Patten has noted, to wed journalism to caricature.11 The cheap weekly reflected the clever but abusive character of its owner-editor, Gilbert a Beckett, publisher of Cruikshank, friend of Dickens, and future Punch staffer. Figaro's chief attraction was Seymour's front-page caricature, then discussed in the feature article, a contribution that Beckett acknowledged with extravagant editorial praise. When, however, Beckett's theatrical speculations left him unable to pay the artist, who then quit, he was furious. He published Seymour's last woodcut with insults as excessive as his former praise. Not content with having hired Cruikshank's brother Robert to replace Seymour, Beckett went on libeling his former illustrator from a spurious "To Correspondents" column. Seymour has not gone out of his mind because he had none to go out of, the editor answered one sham correspondent; to another "reader" asking why Seymour could not write his own name, Beckett replied that no education could overcome the artist's innate stupidity; without his patronage, he claimed, the artist could not sell his wretched caricatures, for indeed, it was "a well-known fact, that the ideas for the caricatures in Figaro were always supplied by the Editor, he (Seymour) being a perfect dolt, except in the mechanical use of his pencil."12 It is hard to imagine from Beckett's callous treatment of the artist that the same man could, a decade later, weep so copiously over The Chimes.13

Despite the transparency of these slanders, the insecure artist acknowledged their partial validity concerning his mental instability, defective education, and lack of originality. The libel ceased when Beckett abruptly abandoned the magazine. Figaro was taken over by Henry Mayhew, who quickly restored Seymour to his former post and conspicuously advertised his name on the title page. But the damage had been done. Even Mrs. Seymour connected her husband's suicide two years later with this public humiliation at Beckett's hands.14 But, in fact, it must have been Seymour's experience with Dickens and The Pickwick Papers that confirmed his innate belief that he was indeed "a perfect dolt," even in the mechanical use of his pencil.

By 1835, however, Seymour's pain at his Figaro humiliation had been soothed somewhat by the continuing success of his comic sporting sketches. Far from feeling that he had exhausted this imaginative vein—one in which he was unrivaled—Seymour wanted to plumb it further. He conceived a plan for a series of plates depicting the mishaps of a club of Cockney sportsmen—rather like the series R. S. Surtees had just done with such success, called Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities (1831–34).15 The indifference of the various publishers he approached only increased his stubborn attachment to his idea, which, however derivative, he had initiated.16 Only Edward Chapman expressed interest. The young publisher liked Seymour's idea of doing "a series of cockney sporting plates of a superior sort to those he had already published" and "thought they might do, if accompanied by letterpress and published in monthly parts."17 The newly established firm of Chapman and Hall welcomed a chance to publish work by such a popular artist.

After settling the terms of payment with Seymour, the publishers sought an author to compose an accompanying letterpress. It was only by chance, and at the end of a complex chain of circumstances, that they eventually offered the position to Charles Dickens. Chapman first proposed the job to William Clarke, whose companion text to George Cruikshank's plates in Three Courses and a Dessert had recently amused London; when he received no reply, he temporarily shelved the scheme.18 Seymour, meanwhile, was preoccupied with Thomas Hervey's The Book of Christmas for another publisher; this was not published, however, until after the holidays, and its reception was disappointing—a fact that doubtless renewed the artist's desire to see his own plan materialize. He urged Chapman to decide whether to pursue it. Chapman did not want to offend the popular Seymour, and he foresaw that the project could well make a profit, so he once again cast about for an author. At this time the new firm had begun a Library of Fiction for which they wanted a contribution from the anonymous author of the sketches that had appeared in the Monthly
Magazine. Chapman was totally ignorant of Dickens's name, but Charles Whitehead, a former Monthly employee and newly appointed editor of the Library, managed to recollect it. Thus Dickens was commissioned to write "The Tuggs's at Ramsgate," which would appear in the spring with two illustrations by Seymour as part of the Library. "Having opened already a connection with you," Chapman told Dickens thirteen years later, "we naturally applied to you to do the Pickwick; but I do not think we even mentioned our intentions to Mr. Seymour." Time doubtless simplified Chapman's recollection of the event. It is far more likely that the publishers scanned the newly issued Sketches by Boz to check on the ability of the writer whose name they did not know. And, indeed, Mrs. Seymour and Buss both maintain that they consulted the artist before approaching Dickens. Surely all the parties involved must have been duly impressed by the fact that the obscure author had been illustrated by the famous George Cruikshank.

On February 10, 1836, Chapman's partner, William Hall, came to Furnival's Inn to propose the collaboration to Charles Dickens. The author instantly recognized Hall as the vendor from whom he had bought the copy of the Monthly Magazine in which his first sketch had appeared "in all the glory of print" (PP, xviii, and see also DC, 622). Hailing the coincidence as an auspicious omen, the men quickly settled down to business. If the publisher thought that Dickens's youth and obscurity would make him wholly eager and acquiescent, he was mistaken. The writer, whose first book had just been illustrated by the best-known caricaturist of the times, was probably pleased but far from overwhelmed by Hall's proposal. On the contrary, as he recalled in his 1847 Sketches by Boz preface, he had a good many reservations about supplying prose to go with Seymour's sporting plates (which the famous author now could express more forcefully in public than the unknown one had in private in 1836) (xvii-xix).

However much he admired the artist, Dickens feared that "writing up to" Seymour's pictures might compromise both his growing independence and his reputation. In the Sketches by Boz, interest had centered on the prose, giving the author at least nominal authority over the artist. As Hall presented Seymour's plan, the interest would center on the plates. Dickens's text linking the artist's plates in a coherent narrative—and hence Dickens himself—would be subordinate, a fact that hardly suited the ambitious author who already considered himself a man of letters. The proposed mode of publication did not make him any happier. In the 1830's, a cheap "monthly something" was suitable for circulating old literary classics or new fads, but not for presenting serious new fiction. The only respectable method of publication, as Dickens's friends were quick to remind him, was the traditional three-volume novel (xix). Given his tenous finances in 1836, however, it is probable that Dickens withheld these reservations from the publishers. He could easily have rationalized that the required letter-press, which could be executed quickly on a monthly basis, would not jeopardize his grander aspirations.

Dickens did voice his objections to the intended subject matter, however. Later, at a time when Mrs. Seymour was claiming undue credit for her husband, he claimed to have forgotten whether it was the author or the publisher who insisted on it—a notable lapse of memory (xviii). With a certain amount of condescension, he did concede that the "notion" of a club of inept sportsmen was the "best means of introducing" Seymour's plates (xviii). Unfortunately, however, despite his own birth and early upbringing near the countryside, he was nearly as ignorant of hunting and fishing as any member in the proposed club (xviii). Sporting misadventures might be Seymour's forte, but they would hardly afford Dickens scope for his own Hogarthian talents. In any case, he tellingly observed, the idea was not new. William Combe, Thomas Rowlandson, the Cruikshank brothers, Pierce Egan, and above all, R. S. Surtees had not only created series of their own, but had inspired innumerable other comic annuals and sporting magazines full of amateurs muddling through field and stream (xviii). Even at this early stage of his career, Dickens declined to act the part of William Combe to Seymour's Thomas Rowlandson, whose pictures were drawn before the text was written.

After deriding the substance of Seymour's plan, the author reversed its raison d'être in an assured counterproposal: instead of his writing up to Seymour's plates, Seymour should illustrate his prose. "It would be infinitely better," Dickens counseled Hall, "for the plates to arise naturally out of the text" (xviii). He wished to follow his own bent, ranging freely among more varied English characters and scenes. Indeed, he was "afraid" he would ultimately do so, whatever course he might "prescribe" to himself at the start (xviii).

Hall's reaction to this interview—and what he reported back to Chapman—is unrecorded, but certainly Pickwick seems to have developed from Dickens's prose rather than Seymour's plates. Describing their conference more than a decade later, Dickens doubtless exaggerated his own initiative. Yet it is undeniable that, even as he recollected it, Dickens's response to an offer that would have flattered many better-known writers than himself was characteristic. The brash young author who had not hesitated to declare that Cruikshank required a "touch of the spur," did not intend to be subordinate to Seymour or to anyone else.
"Inimitable Boz" displayed an indomitable will and, from this time forth, his views about *The Pickwick Papers* indeed "were deferred to" (xviii).

Dickens regarded a collaboration with Seymour as a commercial rather than an aesthetic opportunity, and celebrated it primarily for the remuneration involved. As he wrote to his fiancée, Catherine Hogarth, after talking to Hall on Wednesday, he was to make his "estimate and calculation" before giving his decision to Chapman and Hall on Friday morning. The emolument was particularly irresistible because, in addition to his newspaper salary, it would enable him to marry. He did not even mention the artist, but stressed that each number, which was to contain four plates, would be written and edited "entirely" by himself. Nevertheless, when Dickens accepted the offer, both artist and publishers must have been relieved to have the project underway at last.

When Seymour and Dickens began work, each apparently was certain he was doing so on his own terms, neither aware that the other considered himself in charge; the inevitable conflicts that followed were compounded by the fact that Chapman apparently dealt with Seymour, Hall with Dickens. The publishers probably assumed that whatever problems arose would iron themselves out during the long course of publication. Indeed after so many delays, Seymour must have been gratified by the speed with which his project was to proceed. The work, nameless in mid-February, was advertised on March 26. As the notice proclaimed, the artist had "devoted himself, heart and graver, to the task of illustrating the beauties of Pickwick" (x).

Nevertheless, it became evident immediately that Seymour's efforts were at odds with Dickens's text, and the continuous strain proved almost as immediately fatal to the work as to the artist. In designing the *Pickwick* wrapper (see F), for instance, Seymour illustrated his original scheme, doubtless out of ignorance rather than spite for the modifications Dickens intended. The fishing and shooting scenes on the wrapper and the larger size and distinctive Gothic-style print of "SPORTING TRANSACTIONS" in *Pickwick's* lengthy subtitle (A Faithful Record of the Perambulations, Perils, Travels, Adventures and Sporting Transactions of the Corresponding Members), however, were in distinct contrast with the text, which never even mentioned angling and involved guns only in a humorous, rather minor way (83–85, 246–53). The unindividualized figures further suggest that Seymour designed the wrapper without reference to text. The artist no doubt tacitly assumed that Dickens would make the sporting incidents and equipment portrayed on the cover loom large in the story. Dickens, however, never intended seriously to involve his characters in these Waltonian recreations about which he, unlike the artist, knew so little.

Even if readers could hardly object to the inaccuracies of a cover designed before the tale was fully underway, the cross-purposes of author and artist undermined both the book and Seymour's stability from the first. The strain was evident throughout the opening number of *Pickwick*. In the first chapter, Dickens supposedly described the club Seymour wanted, but he failed to make any of its members Cockneys, and only one, Winkle, was even a sportsman, and he was only put in as a condescending concession to the artist (xviii). The detailed care Seymour lavished on the self-styled sharpshooter and his equipment in the first illustration (I, facing p. 4) was at odds with the text, which described the poet Tupman at greater length (I, 3). In fact, the text in this number provided few outlets for Seymour's special talents, although he exploited these few. Jingle's tale of "The Sagacious Dog," for example, gave him a chance to display his skill in drawing gun-toting gamekeepers, receding wooded landscapes, and beautifully proportioned animals (II, facing p. 12). If Seymour could not equal Cruikshank's urban street scenes, the older artist could never have modeled as well as Seymour the wise dog, or the horses featured in 'The Pugnacious Cabman' (II, facing p. 8) and in 'Mr. Winkle soothes the refractory steed' (V, facing p. 62) in the second number. Indeed, Seymour's animals and inanimate objects are more memorable than the Pickwickians themselves.

Dickens may have worried that Seymour would not pay due attention to his Pickwick, who was more cerebral than Seymour had intended. Still, he need not have pointed out Seymour's duty to him so baldly as he did by prefacing the description of Mr. Pickwick addressing his friends with: "What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present!" (I, 3). No artist would have passed up the scene anyway. Nevertheless, though he warmed to his task, Seymour portrayed a gathering as appropriate to any reputable Islington pub as to Dickens's text, but, somewhat unaccountably, made the hero too pompous in pose and disagreeable in expression (I, facing p. 4) (see fig. 18). Perhaps by the time Dickens complimented Seymour's portrait of Pickwick as "happy" in 1847 (xviii) and in 1868 (xxii), he was confusing Seymour's Pickwick with the more benevolent figure later created by Phiz (X, facing p. 124) (see fig. 21).

For all their problems, however, Dickens readily acknowledged in 1847 that Seymour's first portrait of Pickwick "made him a reality" (xviii). The author was lucky that Seymour portrayed his hero so memorably, for his text had...
given the artist minimal help. All Seymour knew about Pickwick's appearance was that he had a bald head, beaming eyes, circular spectacles, and nondescript genteel dress; he was left to determine all the other details of face and figure.

Dickens should not have been so astonished to learn from Edward Chapman in 1849 that Seymour's initial sketch showed a long, thin man, for the text had not indicated his size at all (fig. 16). The publisher had wisely insisted that Mr. Pickwick be fat, aware that flesh and good humor had been inextricably associated long before Falstaff; but Seymour did not need to use Chapman's plump Richmond friend that the publisher had suggested as a model. If a fat Pickwick was desired, the artist had him ready at hand. He simply selected from his earlier work one of his stock elderly Cockneys, suitably altered him, and the "immortal" Pickwick, as Dickens called him, was created (fig. 17). The epithet "immortal" was apt in the most literal sense, for not only had the pudgy figure already led a number of other lives in Seymour's art, but he survived basically unchanged in the hands of subsequent illustrators (figs. 19, 20, 21).

The opening numbers included other developments that could not have pleased Seymour. In keeping with the mention of Kent in the Pickwick prospectus, Dickens had the club visit his own native city of Rochester, a place entirely unfamiliar to Seymour, and thus difficult for him to represent. Then too, in his sketch of 'Dr. Slammer's Defiance of Jingle' (II, facing p. 22), the artist had drawn Slammer clenching his fist over his head; Dickens insisted

Fig. 16 (top left). Robert Seymour, Thin Prototype of Mr. Pickwick, 1833. Detail from 'Damn 'un I missed 'un,' [Richard Penn], Maxims and Hints for an Angler (London, 1833), facing p. 23. Lithograph. 5" x 3" (12.7 x 7.6 cm). Fig. 17 (top right). Robert Seymour, Fat Prototype of Mr. Pickwick, 1833. Detail from 'Do n't shew yourself to them,' [Richard Penn], Maxims and Hints for an Angler (London, 1833), facing p. 3. Lithograph. 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (8.9 x 8 cm). Fig. 18 (center left). Robert Seymour, Mr. Pickwick, March, 1836. Detail from 'Mr. Pickwick addresses the Club,' The Pickwick Papers, no. 1. Etching. 4\(\frac{1}{2}\)" x 3\(\frac{3}{8}\)" (10.2 x 9.9 cm). Fig. 19 (center right). Robert Buss, Unused Study for Mr. Pickwick, May, 1836. Detail from sketch for title page, reproduced in Joseph Grego, Pictorial Pickwickiana (London, 1899), 1:119. Line cut after pen drawing. 6\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (16.5 x 7.6 cm). Fig. 20 (bottom left). Robert Buss, Unused Study for Mr. Pickwick, May, 1836. Detail from sketch for 'Mr. Pickwick and his Friends under the Influence of the "Salmon,'" reproduced in Joseph Grego, Pictorial Pickwickiana (London, 1899), 1:115. Halftone facsimile after pen and pencil drawing. 4\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 3\(\frac{3}{8}\)" (11.5 x 9.2 cm). Fig. 21 (bottom right). Hablot Browne, Mr. Pickwick, June, 1836. Detail from 'First appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller,' The Pickwick Papers, no. 4. Etching. 4\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (11.8 x 9.7 cm). All from the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
that he change the sketch to show Slammer with an outflung arm—a change that even Seymour's son conceded "showed considerable sense of dramatic propriety." Nevertheless, Seymour may have been offended by this first intrusion into his own sphere, for he did not sign either of the two plates for this design. To compound his difficulties, the surfaces of the steel plates to which he transferred his sketches were of such inferior quality that they broke down after a few hundred impressions, and Seymour had to do the etchings all over again, a chore that forced him to dwell on his grievances—real and imagined—when he could have been using his energies more creatively. This technical problem was soon remedied but too late to benefit Pickwick's first illustrator.

Seymour's problems did not end with the first number, despite the fact that, though it was not widely read or reviewed, what praise it received was mainly for its "clever and laughable cuts." The second number made it clearer than ever that Dickens was deliberately departing from what Seymour thought was the plan. For aesthetic as well as personal reasons, the artist may have been seriously disturbed by Dickens's inclusion of the melodramatic "Stroller's Tale" (III, 35–40). The dismal man's grim narrative about a paranoid clown drinking himself to death harshly violated the comic spirit that the artist found congenial. Seymour probably would have agreed with two later commentators who felt that the tale had "no other apparent purpose than to exhibit Boz's versatility and his independence of Seymour's designs." He could hardly ignore the narrative; indeed, it formed so prominent a part of the number that it would have to furnish the subject for at least one of his four illustrations. He could only resent the way his initial plan kept being altered and marred by his brash collaborator. He could not have been much reassured by Dickens's insistence that "many literary friends, on whose judgment I place great reliance, think it will create considerable sensation." The tale did just that, though not in a way anyone anticipated.

Seymour's antipathy to "The Stroller's Tale" was undoubtedly heightened by his dual identification with its suicidal narrator as well as with his wretched subject, who, in his illness, even turns against his devoted wife. The dying clown was, like Seymour, an oversensitive comic artist, compelled to make a living by amusing others; surely it is significant that Seymour's delineation of him is one of his least delicate (see fig. 22). Perhaps the subject was too close emotionally for aesthetic objectification. Baudelaire might well have cited Seymour's first sketch as an example of his "manière simple, archbrutale, et directe." Passing on with obvious relief, to judge from the freer lines, to the comic scenes in the second number, Seymour sketched Pickwick chasing his hat at the Rochester review (IV, facing p. 50), two designs illustrating the abortive ride to Dingley Dell—the one of Winkle with his stubborn horse was selected (V, facing p. 62) over the one of Snodgrass and Tupman falling out of the runaway chaise; and the Pickwickians cleaning up in Wardle's kitchen. This last drawing was never etched, for Dickens sent Seymour back to do more work on 'The dying Clown.' Indeed, this plate, which Seymour had executed with such apparent distaste, utterly failed to satisfy Dickens. Chapman and Hall probably decided that author and artist, who had as yet never met, should discuss the illustration in person. If the publishers were aware of Seymour's increasing anxiety about the enterprise, there is no indication that they warned Dickens.

The author's patronizing invitation to Seymour to join him and the publishers for a glass of grog the following Sunday ("the only night I am disengaged") reveals his continuing ignorance of his hypersensitive illustrator. Dickens began his letter by expressing his pleasure at the pains Seymour was taking with their "mutual friend," clearly unaware of how inimical Pickwick was becoming to the artist. "How much the result of your labours has surpassed my expectations," the author continued in a vein condescending, if not downright insulting, to the established artist. Dickens proposed that all the Pickwick principals meet, not to celebrate the success of their project (which he unaccountably termed "most complete") but to inspect a revised sketch of 'The dying Clown.' "I have seen your design for an etching to accompany 'The Stroller's Tale' and thought it extremely good," Dickens elaborated, "but still, it is not quite my idea." He wanted the woman to look younger, he said, the dismal man less miserable and more compassionate, and the emaciated clown less repulsive. "The furniture of the room," he granted in conclusion, "you have depicted admirably." Seymour must have been gratified, as Edgar Johnson acidly notes, "to have it conceded that he could draw a bed and a three-cornered table, and that it was merely the people he had got all wrong." Certainly Dickens left Seymour no choice but to furnish him with another drawing.

One can imagine the reluctance with which Seymour accepted Dickens's invitation. Nothing could have been more disagreeable to the artist than to rework this painful subject, and then to submit it to Dickens, whom he had never met, in the presence of the publishers, who were allowing the writer so much control over his plates as well as over the plan that had initially been his. Whether, upon his arrival at Furnival's Inn, Seymour felt relieved or slighted to find Dickens's wife and brother (xxiii) instead of Chapman...
and Hall is unknown.\textsuperscript{40} No record of the meeting exists, except for Dickens's comment, twenty-two years later, that Seymour "certainly offered no suggestion whatsoever" about \textit{Pickwick} (xxiii).

Although Dickens approved his new sketch of 'The dying Clown' (fig. 23), Seymour must have despaired after leaving their meeting. It had become perfectly clear that the experienced artist, whose name had originally been considered the only real asset to the project, was now playing second fiddle to an obscure writer supposedly hired to concoct a story around his plates. Pride as well as the needs of his family doubtless prevented Seymour from withdrawing from \textit{Pickwick}, but by remaining without protest, he tacitly acknowledged Dickens's control over the illustrations as well as the text. Although author and artist parted with an appearance of cordiality that Sunday evening, Seymour must have felt humiliated. It must have seemed to him that he was indeed, as Beckett had said, "a perfect dolt," incapable of implementing even his own ideas, a clown himself, whom people laughed \textit{at}, not \textit{with}.

On Monday, the perturbed artist completed his new design for 'The dying Clown,' but unfortunately, he accidentally ruined the plate he was etching it on. Time was running out. Only two of the required four illustrations were completed. It must have seemed to the artist that now even his "mechanical" abilities were failing. In desperation, he devoted most of Tuesday to doing the etching over.\textsuperscript{41} In the final plate (III, facing p. 38) (fig. 24), the woman appears as aged as before and even more haggard, and the dismal man is solicitous enough; but not only is the clown's emaciation more pronounced, his facial grimace makes him more horrifying than before, as if in reflection of Seymour's own frightened affinity with his representation. Dickens's "idea" of the plate was not realized until Phiz later altered and re-etched it, making all the characters more attractive, hence, more sympathetic (fig. 25).

The Seymours' servant girl, on her way to bed late Tuesday evening, noted nothing unusual about the artist conversing with his wife in the parlor, nor did she think anything amiss about his habitual noises in the hall early the next morning.\textsuperscript{42} But when, before breakfast, she went out for a walk, she discovered Seymour behind his garden studio lying in a pool of blood with his clothes on fire. Her screams summoned a neighboring butcher who grabbed a nearby watering can and unceremoniously doused the fire. Seymour had shot himself through the heart. The servant found a piece of paper at the body's feet and handed it to the horrified servant. He then prevented Mrs. Seymour from entering the garden where a surgeon he had summoned confirmed that the shot had been fatal. The servant further distracted the widow by handing her Seymour's note. The artist's concluding words expressed a hope that God would grant him the peace in death that he could never find in life.

Dickens may have had suspicions in retrospect that Seymour's suicide could have been precipitated by his failure to control the project he had initiated. At that point, the author may also have recognized Seymour's tragic affinity with the dying clown. But Dickens, who had never even met Seymour until after the train of events had been set in motion, could hardly have anticipated that he would shoot himself on either score. Chapman and Hall had not obliged Dickens to accept the \textit{Pickwick} offer unconditionally; in fact, they hired him with full awareness of his objections. Furthermore, the artist need not have been so entirely silent about his objections. Yet the sensitive author could hardly have felt easy about Seymour's death in light of the highhandedness with which he had treated his contributions to the \textit{Pickwick} venture.

Understandably, however, Dickens's anxiety about Seymour quickly yielded to anxiety about his own future. Seymour's plates had called \textit{Pickwick} into existence, and the publishers' expectations for it were based primarily on the artist's name. With Seymour dead before the publication of the second number, Chapman and Hall might well decide to drop the enterprise. Instead, they decided to let Dickens
Robert Seymour, Unsatisfactory Sketch for 'The dying Clown.' Pencil and wash. 4\(\frac{1}{2}\)" × 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (11.5 × 9.5 cm) [sight]. From the Suzannet Collection, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Dickens House Museum. Fig. 23 (bottom). Robert Seymour, Altered Sketch for 'The dying Clown.' Pencil. 3\(\frac{1}{2}\)" × 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (8.4 × 9.5 cm). From the original in the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, reproduced by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Robert Seymour, 'The dying Clown.' The Pickwick Papers, no. 2, facing address. Etching. 3\(\frac{3}{8}\)" × 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (10 × 8.4 cm). Fig. 25 (bottom). Hablot Browne, 'The dying Clown.' The Pickwick Papers, 1st ed., 2d issue (1837), facing p. 31. Etching. 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" × 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (10 × 9.7 cm). Both from the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
address Pickwick's small audience in an optimistic preface to the second number. After eulogizing Seymour and apologizing for the fact that the issue had only three plates, Dickens summoned his bravado and heralded a new "improved" (and cheaper) plan, calling for eight more pages of text but two less illustrations. It remained to be seen whether or not readers would be as satisfied with this plan as was the author; for the publishers, having economized on the plates, increased Dickens's remuneration. "Poor Seymour," chorused the reviewers, whose attention to Pickwick, prompted perhaps by morbid curiosity, increased after his death. Seymour's passing was indeed a "public loss," declared the Satirist, "for with the exception of George Cruikshank, he had no 'rival near his throne.'"

Within weeks, however, the fickle public had discovered Browne (Phiz), Dickens's new illustrator, and ceased to mourn for Seymour. Indeed, relieved of the tensions generated by the incompatible approaches of Seymour and Dickens, The Pickwick Papers shortly became not only more profitable, but also a better work of art. The few efforts Dickens made to accommodate Seymour's sporting tastes had not improved the narrative. Now he had no further need to dwell in what Pickwick's earliest reviewer called "that melancholy region of exhausted comicality, in which few laughs remained." Gradually, he also abandoned the cumbersome club machinery he had adopted in deference to the artist. Winkle endured, but Snodgrass and Tupman rarely appeared as later chapters were given over to urban concerns more in line with Hogarth's art than with Seymour's. If Seymour had lived, Dickens might have tried to maintain some tenuous semblance of his original plan, but his death freed the author to shift focus happily and irrevocably. Within weeks of Seymour's death, Pickwick reigned supreme, his figure stamped on minds, hearts, and objects throughout England.

Indeed, everyone initially involved with Pickwick prospered except Seymour's family. As the resources of his widow dwindled, her resentment of Dickens and the fortune he was making from the book increased. Reasoning that if it had not been for Seymour, Dickens would never have written Pickwick, she concluded that the author owed her an incalculable debt. Throughout the next three decades she and her son sought to collect it, first by private appeals and threats, then by public accusations. Dickens was forced to think far more about Seymour's role on Pickwick after his death than he ever had during his lifetime.

In 1840, Mrs. Seymour asked Dickens to contribute, along with other writers and artists, including Cruikshank and Browne, to a book for her relief. Convinced of Dickens's special obligation to her, she was astonished when he expressed his regrets. His excuse that his time was fully occupied by other works, including The Pic Pic Papers to benefit the widow Macrone, only incensed her. In 1845, Dickens again angered her by refusing to direct or perform in an amateur theatrical in her behalf, though he did compose a brief statement for it. Aware of Dickens's charitable efforts for all kinds of individuals and institutions, Mrs. Seymour became downright paranoid about his refusal to help her. She speculated for a while that slander against her made him hostile to her personally, but she finally decided that he was simply satanically evil. She looked forward to the day when he would be sentenced by the Lord for his wrongs inflicted on Seymour's orphans and widow.

Before that day arrived, however, she believed this world would recognize, to Dickens's eternal discredit, that Robert Seymour had been the true creator of The Pickwick Papers. Rumors of the widow's claim—which perhaps inspired Cruikshank's to Oliver Twist in the mid-1840's—reached Dickens. In direct contrast to his lasting silence regarding Cruikshank's allegation, he publicly refuted it, though by confronting Mrs. Seymour, he indirectly warned Cruikshank. "In the course of the last dozen years," Dickens wrote in his preface to the 1847 edition of Pickwick, "I have seen various accounts of the origin of these Pickwick Papers, which have, at all events, possessed—for me—the charm of perfect novelty" (xviii). The author expressed sincere regard for the "admirable humorous" Seymour, but commented that he nevertheless thought it due to himself and his public to recount his first meeting with Hall, the latter's proposal, and his reservations about it. His reasonable, though oversimplified, account of events eleven years past temporarily silenced Mrs. Seymour.

In 1849, however, compelled by family illness and debt, the widow again wrote to Dickens for financial assistance, reminding him of what she still considered his unpaid debt to her husband. Dickens was upset more by the grounds of her demand than by the demand itself. Her assertions about Pickwick then, as later, doubtless included claims that Seymour conceived the work, prepared the plates in advance, determined its monthly mode of publication, permitted the publishers to engage Boz, approved the text, allowed "The Stroller's Tale" to remain only at his wife's insistence, and quit the enterprise after the engravers spoiled 'The dying Clown.' Dickens termed her accusations "utterly false," but was nevertheless disturbed enough to forward her letter to Chapman. Was his published account of Pickwick's beginnings, he asked, not strictly accurate? The publisher, drawing on his own recollections and those of the deceased Hall, replied that it was, except that Dickens
had been too generous when he gave Seymour credit for making Mr. Pickwick a "reality." Otherwise, the partner reassured the author (who he hoped would return to the firm), "from the beginning to the end, nobody but yourself had anything whatever to do with it."  

Mrs. Seymour also demanded reasons for Dickens's animosity toward her, and minutely described appeals by herself and others in her behalf which he had rejected. Dickens, vainly trying to remember all these occasions, then wrote to Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall, a family friend (no relation to the publisher, William Hall) whom the widow had mentioned as being sympathetic to his cause. Enclosing the letters from Mrs. Seymour and Chapman, he implicitly requested her assurance that he was innocent. Apparently Mrs. Hall affirmed Dickens's belief in his own blamelessness and the widow's audacity. Probably she also must have reinforced his suspicion that Mrs. Seymour, near deranged with grief, poverty, and envy, was desperately exaggerating her husband's Pickwick role to extort Dickens's assistance. His case substantially fortified, the author replied to Mrs. Seymour, denying her request for money as well as her assertions, and declining further communication with her.

After she heard from Dickens, Mrs. Seymour warned him that she could call down dire consequences on his head if she were to call public attention to the affair. Dickens remained silently contemptuous of this threat, and it took the widow five years—until 1854—to get around to executing it. In her privately printed Account, which was never very widely circulated, she presented her case with implausible circumstantiality. If she had based it on Pickwick's appearance in Seymour's earlier work, or that the artist was far better known in 1836 than the author, she might have made a strong case to the effect that her husband had initiated, if not originated, Pickwick. She might also have scored by arguing that Seymour's death was at least partly due to the distasteful work he had had to do for Pickwick and Dickens's brashness and irreverence. Instead, however, she recycled all her old arguments in order to illustrate her husband's genius—which no one questioned—and Dickens's lack of charity to her. Dickens wisely refrained from disputing this Account, which possibly he never read. Mrs. Seymour's excessive detail, irrelevant or unwarranted assertions, illogical conclusions, hysterical tone, and paranoid point of view were self-defeating. Her gross distortion of fact, especially her drastic revision of Dickens's one letter to Seymour to make it appear that the author liked the sketch of 'The dying Clown' so much that he requested a copy for a gift, was not evident until the unaltered material was published during the Pickwick centenary in 1896, by which time Mrs. Seymour had been discredited anyway.

In 1866 the controversy flared again, this time threatening to continue into the next generation as both widow and author turned to their eldest sons for support. When the author-publisher Henry Bohn advertised his reissue of Seymour's Humorous Sketches in the Athenaeum, the artist's son and namesake, far from welcoming a sympathetic ally, wrote the editor in a fury. Not only had Bohn stolen the copyright to the drawings, alleged young Seymour in the published letter, but he had written a memoir for the edition that was inaccurate about his father and that sneered at his mother's Account. He promised to provide a full refutation of Bohn's memoir and a valid account of Pickwick's origin in an edition he was preparing of his father's works. Bohn was not alone in protesting to the Athenaeum. Unable to remain aloof from the fray, the author of Pickwick and "of one or two other books," as Dickens sarcastically described himself, replied in another letter to the editor and stirred up the old teacup tempest. Yet again, Dickens publicly denied the Seymours' claims. The artist, he said, whom he met only once, whose handwriting he had never even seen, "never originated, suggested, or in any way had to do with, save as illustrator of what I devised, an incident, a character (except the sporting tastes of Mr. Winkle), a name, a phrase, or a word to be found in The Pickwick Papers" (CP, 1: 108-10). The editors of the Athenaeum printed a second letter from Dickens, correcting a minor factual error in his first, but when Seymour's son wrote a second letter to reiterate his position, they did not print it, being unwilling to carry the dispute any further in their pages.

But Dickens, as G. K. Chesterton wryly noted, perpetuated the quarrel "as if it had been a Highland feud." In between his two letters to the Athenaeum, the author wrote his oldest son Charley all about the quarrel and Mrs. Seymour's attempted blackmail. He mentioned Chapman's supporting letter and his Athenaeum ones, written to quash the revived lies once and for all. He requested that Charley complete the record by asking his mother for her notes about that Sunday evening forty years ago when, as Dickens put it, "that poor little man and I looked upon each other for the last time" and of that Wednesday morning when Frederick Dickens reported Seymour's suicide. The uneasy Dickens wished only to spare his descendants future trouble, he told his son in apology for his overcautiousness.

Dickens's preventive measures did not cease. In 1867 J. C. Hotten published an edition of Seymour's Sketches with a biographical memoir, the material for which must have been provided, if not actually written, by the artist's son. Before he left on his second American tour in 1867, Dickens gave Chapman's 1849 testimony to Forster for safekeeping
or to use, should the occasion arise while he was gone. He took advantage of the 1868 edition of his works to revise the 1847 preface to *Pickwick* in order to include all the accumulated evidence against the Seymours. He wished, he said, to demonstrate “the monstrosity of the baseless assertions in question, and (tested by details) even of the self-evident impossibility of there being any truth in them” (xxii–xxiii). The controversy subsided only after the author’s death in 1870, but not, perhaps, before reinvigorating the similar one instigated by Seymour’s fellow Dickens illustrator, George Cruikshank.

The allegations of the Seymours, like those of Cruikshank, are not without some basis. What emerges from the welter of claims and counterclaims is that more than one person shaped the destiny of the most popular English novel of the nineteenth century. Seymour did indeed generate a plan that, through Chapman and Hall, was implemented by Dickens. The manner, however, in which Dickens developed the plan was entirely his own. Thus the problem of whether the artist or the author “originated” what eventually became *The Pickwick Papers* becomes one of insoluble semantics. It is hard, however, to dispute Chesterton’s assertion that it was “quite easy to originate *Pickwick*. The problem was to write it.” More intriguing to later generations of readers is why Dickens increasingly involved himself in a controversy that might have abated had he remained silent. Indeed, the fact that he became so indignantly exact about every detail of his *Pickwick* authorship suggests his inability to exorcise the troublesome specter of Robert Seymour.