Part II: Dickens and His Principal Illustrator

HABLOT K. BROWNE
"Can any of your readers say who Nemo is?" inquired Robert Buss's eldest son, perplexed about the signature of the two plates that originally appeared between his father's ill-fated designs and those of Phiz in *The Pickwick Papers*.¹ “Nemo is Latin for no one," as Mr. Tulkinghorn explained in *Bleak House* (X, 132). What most Dickens readers still remember about the odd name is that it was the assumed name of Lady Dedlock's lover. Only a few recall that long before *Bleak House*, N.E.M.O. was a pseudonym briefly adopted by Dickens's principal illustrator, Hablot Knight Browne—better known by his subsequent *nom de crayon*, Phiz (fig. 36).² Indeed, in 1836, his first pseudonym more or less reflected the status of the book illustrator. Often an aspiring painter did not wish to have the public come to know him as a mere embellisher of contemporary fiction. Through most of the Victorian era, Browne's distinguished work for Dickens, as well as that of book illustrators in general, helped make such anonymity unnecessary. Like the Dickens novels he illustrated, many of Browne's plates became famous in their own right. Their persistent fame, however, remains oddly distinct from Browne's stature as an artist.³

Perhaps Browne subordinated himself too completely to Dickens to acquire a personality of his own as far as the public was concerned. Certainly Browne's first pseudonym, though he kept it only briefly, was indicative of his self-effacing nature. Although he illustrated ten of Dickens's fifteen novels, contributing over five hundred plates, title page vignettes, frontispieces, and wrapper designs, Browne remains peculiarly obscure. Partly this is due to the relative placidity of his relationship with Dickens—a distinct change from those of Cruikshank, Seymour, and Buss. Browne's personal colorlessness may make him less memorable to later generations, but it was tacitly appreciated by the
flamboyant novelist and partly explains why their association lasted twenty-three years.¹

Dickens, whose experience with veteran artists had been strained, to say the least, must have welcomed the prospect of working with an artist younger than he was, who possessed technical ability and literary sensitivity but lacked reputation and its accompanying vanities. If Browne, unlike Cruikshank or Seymour, was relatively unformed, Dickens would mold him.⁸ Indeed, the artist’s pliability—his most distinctive personal and artistic quality—hastened both his success and his decline. Those who tend to dismiss Browne cite his “feeble” imitations of Cruikshank or his “pale” echoes of Dickens’s words.⁶ Those who admire him argue that Browne became so sensitive to Dickens’s writing that his own style and technique often appears to have assimilated and mirrored its strengths, weaknesses, and, above all, its changes.⁵ As the novelist shifted his emphasis from picaresque plot in *Pickwick* to moral theme in *Dombey* to layered symbolism in *Bleak House*, Browne kept pace graphically, content to let Dickens’s imagination spark his own. At its best, the artist’s work for him lived up to the original meaning of the word *illustrate*—“to light up” or “illuminate,” without being obtrusive or merely representative. But it has not been widely recognized nor sufficiently demonstrated that ultimately Dickens’s dense prose precluded meaningful illustration altogether.⁵ By the time of *Little Dorrit* in 1855 and *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1858, there was little left for an illustrator to depict.

Unfortunately, when his services for Dickens were no longer needed, Browne felt adrift. Isolated from the aesthetic mainstream of the 1860’s by his reclusive habits and now old-fashioned talents, he was unable to find other stimulating authors to work for, but lacked inner resources to maintain himself as an entirely independent artist. Further plagued by age and paralysis, Browne fell back into an obscurity far bleaker than that from which he had emerged, an artistic “Nemo” again. That he and Dickens had set a matchless standard for sustained collaboration between authors and illustrators provided scant consolation.

Dickens’s principal illustrator did not always bend to circumstances. As a young man, he was apprenticed to Finden’s, a prosperous firm of engravers of picture books, by his wealthy brother-in-law, Elhanan Bicknell (whose gracious wife and superb Turner collection attracted his Herne Hill neighbor, John Ruskin).⁹ Like Seymour, Browne rebelled at the monotonous, mechanical routine. With and without his employer’s knowledge, he reportedly pretended to work while reading and sketching scenes from his favorite authors or covering plate margins with comic figures; when sent out to superintend long engraving operations, he often escaped to the nearby British Museum.¹⁰ In 1858, a timely award from the Society of Arts for his spirited representation of the memorable flight of John Gilpin, the comic hero of William Cowper’s 1785 poem, enabled Browne to cancel his indentures before they were due to expire.¹¹ Despite his premature departure, his engraving experience at Finden’s turned out to be his only regular art training. With Robert Young, a fellow apprentice who had learned engraving techniques more diligently, Browne formed a loose partnership, and set up a studio at Number 3 Furnival’s Inn.

The artist did not immediately or inevitably meet Charles Dickens, three years his senior, who occupied chambers on the opposite side of the Furnival’s Inn gateway at Number 15. While the aspiring author was supporting himself by recording Parliamentary debates, Browne was attending—though with increasing irregularity—“life” classes and turning out drawings to pay his share of expenses. By the time Boz began publishing his early sketches, however, the artist began to reap the benefits of his Society of Arts medal (as well as for his work for another Finden’s acquaintance, Henry Winkle, who produced three monumental volumes on cathedrals in England and Wales from 1836 to 1842).¹² The Gilpin picture became Browne’s carte d’entrée to Chapman and Hall, and eventually to Dickens. Accepted by the publishers for display and sale in their windows, the etching was engraved by John Jackson, Buss’s friend and sponsor.¹³ The appealing print secured Browne a commission to provide illustrations for *The Library of Fiction*¹⁴ (in company with his future *Pickwick* predecessors Robert Seymour and Robert Buss) and for *Sunday Under Three Heads*, Dickens’s anonymous protest against extreme Sabbatarians. While Buss was struggling with his *Pickwick* etchings to nobody’s satisfaction, Browne, who could etch as well as draw, became a candidate for his position.

Ironically, considering that Robert Buss blamed his rejection entirely on the publishers, Dickens was allowed complete control over the selection of a new *Pickwick* illustrator. He, not the publishers, dealt with the applicants—Browne, Thackeray, and belatedly, Leech—and examined specimens of their work. The author probably favored Browne from the first. He must have been pleased by the artist’s sprightly woodcuts for his *Sunday* pamphlet (*SBB*, 500, 510, 519). If the individual figures were somewhat rigid, the integration of the buildings and landscape in the background, the handling of perspective and the variety of line showed technical sophistication and each print clearly conveyed the relevant textual argument.¹⁵ Moreover, Browne’s depiction of ‘Winkle’s First Shot’ had a
sense of line and structure clearly superior to Buss's stilted effort, though neither version was published. Most gratifying to Dickens, this artist was not saddled by anything equivalent to Cruikshank's vanity, Seymour's hypersensitivity, and Buss's etching inexperience. Consequently, Browne was engaged and Buss was given notice. This choice of illustrator, as Forster patronizingly put it, proved "so thoroughly justified, that through the greater part of the wonderful career which was then beginning the connection was kept up and Mr. Hablot Browne's name is not unworthily associated with the masterpieces of Dickens's genius."

With Buss's fate in mind, perhaps, Browne dared not allow himself too much elation about his Pickwick employment. With the help of Robert Young, whose thorough mastery of etching techniques proved invaluable in meeting this and future deadlines—though it inspired rumors that Browne could not (rather than preferred not to) etch—the new illustrator executed the two subjects for the fourth number. In "The Breakdown" of Pickwick's carriage (IX, facing p. 116), the faces and hands were crudely conceived and the horses—usually a Browne specialty—lacked tension though not grace; nevertheless, the variety of line and texture marked a great advance over Buss's version. Browne's other etching, Pickwick's meeting with Sam Weller at the White Hart, radiated charm and humor despite the tentative details of the faces and background objects, rendered with too many purposeless short strokes (X, facing p. 124). At last Dickens's hero acquired his memorable expression of benignity, in welcome contrast to the hostility and foolishness with which Seymour and Buss respectively imbued him (see figs. 18 and 19). Whatever hopes Browne had for the success of this scene in particular and of the number in which it appeared were realized to a fairy-tale extent. Indeed, the number marked, if not determined, the turning point in Pickwick's fortunes. Readers in enormous numbers took Sam and his suddenly more appealing master to their hearts. Booksellers could not keep the issue or its successors in stock, it was snapped up so fast. "It was Sam Weller that did it, and the illustrations," maintained the binder who had singlehandedly stitched the early issues of the book, which was considered a failure until the fourth number when sales so increased that he had to employ assistants to do his job.

The Pickwick enterprise and Browne's connection with it were both secure. The success of Dickens's new character and the artist's delineation of him augured well for their future collaboration. Boz became a celebrity; N.E.M.O. a somebody. Though Browne still wished to veil his identity, in obedience to custom, his innate reserve, and, perhaps, higher artistic aims, he sought a more assertive nom de crayon. He settled on Phiz, the old humorous, colloquial abbreviation of physiognomy—an appropriate pseudonym for one who excelled in capturing facial expressions with a few deft strokes, and also a memorable and artistic signature (whose "z," like Cruikshank's "k," often resembles a comic profile). Browne's stated reason for his choice, however, proved characteristic of him and his desire to please Dickens: "Phiz," he explained, would harmonize well with Dickens's "Boz." Through such evidence of amiable humility, as well as of talent, Browne anchored his position with the author. When, in July, John Leech belatedly applied to replace Seymour, Dickens quickly informed him that "the plates for The Pickwick Papers are in the hands of a gentleman of very great ability, with whose designs I am exceedingly well satisfied, and from whom I feel it neither my wish, nor my interest to part." When, in October, Cruikshank rashly suggested alterations to the text of the second series of the Sketches by Boz, Dickens wondered aloud whether his "Pickwick man" should do those plates as well. He never carried out his implied threat, but Browne had already become almost as well-known to the public as Cruikshank, and certainly he was more amenable to the author, as the latter's use of the possessive in denoting him suggests.

At last Dickens had a free hand with the illustrations as well as with the text. Since the procedures he evolved with Browne during their work on Pickwick never varied greatly thereafter, it is instructive to look at them closely. Stung in various ways by his trials with Cruikshank, Seymour, and Buss, the author now took inordinate pains to specify what he wanted in the illustrations and to insure that he obtained the desired result. The factor of time, not the artist's personality, proved to be the besetting problem now. Boz's first Sketches, issued separately, had been written long before their publication in collected and illustrated form was contemplated. The serial format of Pickwick and Dickens's subsequent novels, however, meant that the plates had to be created immediately after the text, if not sooner. Everyone involved in the monthly production of the twenty numbers was beleaguered by multiple deadlines. Yet no matter how busy Dickens was, he always found time to supervise the creation of illustrations. His unprecedented involvement was not due to any mistrust of Browne's ability or loyalty, but rather to his compulsion to control every aspect of his work, his awareness of the plates' importance, and the keenness of his own visual imagination. And, in contrast to the veterans who had preceded him, Browne cheerfully accepted his subordinate role.
Dickens's communication of instructions to Browne remained a problem, however, because of the pressures of time. Browne rarely enjoyed leisurely contemplation or discussion of a finished manuscript. When Dickens and Browne were still neighbors, the author apparently would often stop in, read a portion of the number he was writing, indicate what passages should be illustrated, and discuss the points to be stressed. After Dickens's move to Devonshire Terrace in May, 1837, time seldom permitted even those brief meetings. "It is due to the gentleman, whose designs accompany the letterpress," Dickens generously explained in his first Pickwick preface, "to state that the interval has been so short between the production of each number in manuscript and its appearance in print, that the greater portion of the illustrations have been executed by the artist from the author's mere verbal description of what he intended to write" (xvi).

By whatever means Dickens relayed his instructions, however, he was unvarying in his insistence that he approve the artist's preliminary sketches. "Have you got the second Design from Mr. Browne," Dickens anxiously wrote Chapman and Hall concerning 'The middle-aged lady in the double-bedded room' (XXII, facing p. 308), "Or is it to go on the steel, without our seeing it?" Doubtless this drawing, like its fellows, was submitted for Dickens's inspection before it was etched (see fig. 37). The author often returned the drawings with marginal corrections that, reflecting his confidence that his suggestions would not be resented, were tactful and free of his occasional condescension to other illustrators; indeed they seem to transfer the burden of change from the artist to the characters themselves. "I think it would be better if Pickwick had hold of the Bandit's arm," Dickens scribbled beneath the sketch of 'Mrs. Leo Hunter's Fancy-dress déjeuner,' and if "Minerva tried to look a little younger (more like Mrs. Pott—who is perfect) I think it would be an additional improvement." Browne, whose fealty was never overwhelmed by his discrimination, did not have the hero take the Bandit's arm but he did reduce as well as reposition Minerva to Dickens's apparent satisfaction (XV, facing p. 202). The artist was similarly selective when he altered Mr. Pickwick's 'The First Interview with Mr. Serjeant Snubbin.' He obviously tried to follow Dickens's instructions that the officer's face appear "younger, and a great deal more sly, and knowing" about the Bardell suit, but probably (and wisely) thought it more humorous to have him enter the room naturally with an unfocused gaze than to look directly at the innocent victim, as the author had wished, with a stagey compassionate smile (XXXI, facing p. 428).

When he sent Dickens his sketch of 'Mr. Winkle's situation when the door "blew-to'"—an incident reversing the stock farcical plight of the undressed heroine—it was Browne who first utilized the margin to ask whether Pickwick should remain at the window or be put in bed, and Dickens who might have made alterations in his text to suit the illustration. Pickwick should be left where he is at the first, not the second story, replied the author who also seems to have made his prose accommodate the atypically obese chairman Browne had drawn. Winkle should hold the candlestick above his head, not in front of him, Dickens also urged, because it "looks more comical, the light having blown out," forgetting, as had the artist, that at the moment depicted by the text, Winkle had thrown away the useless candlestick (XXXVI, 513; cf. facing p. 513). But when Browne too readily anticipated authorial approval, as he did for his sketch for 'Mr. Winkle returns under extraordinary circumstances' (XLVII, facing p. 660)—to judge from his request that it be forwarded to the publishers after the usual inspection, along with his usual instructions about how it was to be etched—Dickens did not hesitate to exercise his prerogative and compelled the artist to redefine and relocate Sam Weller and Mary. Only once did Dickens use the margin of Browne's sketch to convey approbation rather than correction. With the humorous signature "Charles his mark" on the last of the Pickwick sketches bearing marginal notations, the author expressed his unqualified approval of Browne's handling of 'The ghostly passengers in the ghost of a mail' (XLIX, facing p. 686).

No detail of position, gesture, expression, or dress was too paltry for Dickens's consideration. Indeed, when discrepancies occurred, like the one involving Winkle's light, it was usually because time and circumstance did not permit such close examination of the drawing. On a later occasion, Dickens, ill throughout the writing of the Christmas scene at Dingley Dell, and assuming that the artist was busy with 'Christmas Eve at Mr. Wardle's' (XXVIII, facing p. 390) and 'The Goblin and the Sexton' (XXIX, facing p. 396), did not give Browne the first subject for the February, 1837, number, 'Mr. Pickwick slides,' until the last minute. The Quarterly Review was unwittingly sarcastic when it observed that the skating scene was "brought home fully to the mind's eye without the aid of 'Phiz's' illustrative sketch" for, in fact, the artist forgot to put ice skates on any member of the party (XXX, facing p. 412) and depicts Winkle fallen, whereas in the text he has been restored to his feet before Pickwick begins slipping (XXX, 410). The surprise is really not that these discrepancies occurred, but that they occurred so rarely.
Certain that Browne would never exceed his authority, Dickens willingly accorded him roles of aesthetic importance. The same man who had refused to "write up to" Seymour's plates kept Browne's particular skills constantly in mind as he created subjects, though he was under no outside pressure to do so. Understanding, but not resenting, the importance of visual aids to the success of his work, he never relegated Browne to minor subjects. The artist's contributions illustrated the climaxes of each number, and taken together, apart from the text, recapitulated the main events.

Dickens also used the plates to reinforce his own uniquely graphic conception of each number and of the narrative as a whole. Although the scheme was used only randomly in the Sketches by Boz, each number of Pickwick from the start typically consisted of a discrete prose scene, framed by the author's description, elaborated on by the participating characters, and capped by the artist's rendering of it. The entire narrative turns on visual perceptions and misperceptions from "the first ray of light which illumines the gloom" of Pickwick's earlier history (I, 1) to the time of Mrs. Bardell's ill-timed faint—[The Pickwickians], in their turn, stared at [Pickwick] and Master Bardell, in his turn, stared at everybody" (XII, 153), to Winkle's return with Arabella—Mr. Pickwick could hardly believe the evidence of his senses" (XLVII, 660), and on to "our last parting look" at the Pickwickians (LVII, 796). Mr. Pickwick becomes heroic only when he displays insight as well as accurate ocular perception. In Dickens's later works, the author speaks less in his own voice and more through his major characters who supply interpretive as well as graphic description, but at this early stage in his career, Dickens, with the help of his illustrator, leads the reader step by step visual.

Dickens was so successful at giving Browne opportunities to make the plates as comic as possible that the pictures often appear to provide the excuse for the narrative. "How tame," observed the Quarterly Review, would be many Pickwician situations without the artist's portrayal of them. The implied criticism was expanded by Barbara Hardy over a century later:

The Pickwickians and the unwilling horse, Winkle with a gun, Pickwick and the ancient stone, Pickwick in the wrong bedroom, Winkle and Pickwick on the ice—in all these comic scenes there is very little beyond an opportunity for the illustrator. ... When a joke in Pickwick seems especially tedious and flat it often turns out to have some justification for an illustration and this is true throughout the novel, despite the dominance of Dickens's text over the engravings of "Phiz." ... A fat man on the ice, legs carefully apart, makes a funny picture. So does a round face, topped by a nightcap, looking out from bedcurtains while a thin lady makes a complacent and blissfully ignorant toilet. Spread out in words, neither joke is strong, and such jokes take up too much space in The Pickwick Papers. In later works, when Dickens tightened his structure and left Browne freer to comment on events as well as to depict them, the plates began to complement the prose on more profound levels.

As he gained confidence, Browne ventured to add graphic comments of his own, apparently independent of Dickens's text or instructions. These touches became a hallmark of his later work for Dickens. In Pickwick, for example, Browne twice added animals not specified by the text but suitable for it (when he moved to his rural home the shy Browne, like Seymour, would spend as much, if not more time in the company of animals than of people). In his first sketch of 'Christmas Eve at Mr. Wardle's,' Browne underscored the harmony of the occasion by depicting the amicable play of a cat and dog in the foreground (XXVIII, facing p. 390). When tipy Pickwick lands in the Pound (XIX, facing p. 258), Browne, not Dickens, surrounded him with donkeys and pigs, a stroke that deepens the comedy not only because of its pictorial humor, but also because of the aptness of these symbols of stubbornness and gluttony (which contrast with the church towering overhead with its implicit promise of forgiveness). Robert Patten has noted these details as well as other Quixotic aspects of Pickwick's life, which the artist makes explicit in his suggestive frontispiece. On top of an armoire above the hero's head lies abandoned the kind of visored helmet and shield Cervantes's hero might have worn, a reinforcement of the text's suggestion that Pickwick's days of active chivalry have ended. He can continue his study of life more appropriately (and more wisely than the Don) from books, like the ones shown on the shelves to his right, guided in this pursuit by the illiterate Sam Weller, in this ultimate reversal of their roles.

Browne's capacity for growth, however, proved even more instrumental in his success with Dickens than his capacity for originality. The artist's ability to change and improve often equaled Dickens's own. Browne demonstrated this ability early. The demand for Pickwick increased so much during its serialization that its later plates had to be etched in duplicate, and the first twenty-one steels became so badly worn that they had to be copied over for the bound edition in 1838. Disliking slavish reproduction of any kind, as he made clear during his Finden's apprenticeship, the artist altered every one of these early plates. Noticeable immediately was his improvement on the work of his.
predecessors. In re-etching Seymour's plates, he refined them; by adding a few subtle strokes, he was able to realize fully Dickens's idea of a sympathetic dying clown for example (III, facing p. 38) (see fig. 25). He replaced Buss's ‘Cricket Match’ altogether and rescued his humorous conception for ‘Arbour Scene’ from mere caricature (VIII, facing p. 98) by including pretty details of a house and trees in the background (VIII, following p. 98) (see fig. 34).

The same distaste for mere copying may have prompted Browne's demonstration of his striking ability to improve on his own earlier efforts. As scholars have long observed, his revisions of his own drawings and etchings for *Pickwick* display how much he had developed in the course of the book's publication: this is immediately evident, as John Harvey has shown, in the first three etchings for the 1838 edition, as well as in subsequent ones. In the artist's initial version of 'The Break-down,' for example, Pickwick has emerged from the overturned carriage with a lowered face while his attendants, holding three overrelaxed horses, look on without expression, as do the obscure Pickwickians in an ill-defined chaise in the background (IX, facing p. 116). Browne's revised version distinctly shows a shaken Pickwick, an amused postboy, and two postillions strenuously trying to control four spirited horses, while precisely delineated friends look back from their clearly drawn chaise down the road. The 'First appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller' evoked humor from the first but was so sketchily executed in places that Wardle’s cane, for example, appeared broken (X, facing p. 124). For the 1838 edition, Browne not only made the minor repair, he repositioned and individualized the faces of the principals, gave sharper shadings and outline to the dog, boots, and background figures, and made the previously flat spaces in the rear balconies recede naturalistically.

The improvements Browne wrought on 'Mrs. Bardell Faints in Mr. Pickwick’s arms' (XX, facing p. 154), which Harvey has amply described, are similar in kind and effect to those made on 'The middle-aged lady in the double-bedded room.' In the 1836 version, the vaguely surprised face of Pickwick peers out between his bed curtains to see a tall, spare woman with a Cruikshankian long face combing her stringy hair before a mirror; behind, her dark outer dress lies across the seat of a chair, both difficult to discern against the dark wall, which makes the white mop cap on the chair knob seem almost suspended in space (XXII, facing p. 308) (fig. 37). After Browne's revisions in 1838, Pickwick's expression shows appropriate consternation; the lady has been endowed with a more supple shape, a more natural stance, a rounder face and softer hair; on the light-colored chair behind her, now clear against the still dark wall, her pale dress is gracefully draped across the seat and a beribboned bonnet perches flirtatiously on the knob (fig. 38).

Fig. 37. Hablot Browne, 'The middle-aged lady in the double-bedded room.' *The Pickwick Papers*, no. 8. Etching. 5¼" × 3⅞" (13.7 × 10 cm). From the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Browne proved equally resourceful when he confronted less humorous subjects a second time. In 'The last visit of Heyling to the old man' (XXI, facing p. 292), for example, he first strengthens the lines defining the ceiling beams, window, window panes, and door in the interior in which the visit takes place. The originally effete expressions of both men become intensely dramatic as terror is added to the older face, a fierce scowl to the younger, more enlarged one. Nor does the artist's ability to surpass himself diminish in scenes involving large groups, such as the ones at Eatonwill (XIII, facing p. 172), Mrs. Hunter's party (XV, facing p. 202), the seminary (XVI, facing p. 220), the pound (XIX, facing p. 258), and at Ipswich (XXIV, facing p. 334). Almost
inevitably, bodies become more distinct, faces more individualized, buildings and trees better integrated, background details more pertinent, while the black, white, and gray tones are altered accordingly to achieve or enhance these improvements. As if to underline his more confident graphic power, Browne squarely centered his famous pseudonym at the bottom of these 1838 etchings, in contrast to his habitual practice of locating it more obscurely to the left or right.

Whatever Dickens thought of these revised illustrations, if he even noticed them, it appears certain that they were inspired by the artist's initiative. The changes Browne made in his Pickwick plates, however, were curiously analogous to some of the changes occurring in Dickens's style. Clearly, both men drew strength from the enormous public response to their efforts. The tentative lines of Browne's early plates became clearer and more expressive as Dickens's prose became increasingly direct and forceful. In both drawings and text, characters became more vital, less puppet-like. Increasingly, both men omitted details that made no textual or graphic point. There is even an analogous quality to their faults—Dickens's exaggerated prose and the lack of Browne's proportion, for example, in the disproportional size of both Pickwick and his elderly dance partner on Christmas Eve (XXVIII, facing p. 390), as well as of the cook's face in the 1838 version of the seminary breakup (XVI, facing p. 169). By the time they finished Pickwick, however, Browne had discerned and polished the qualities in his own art that best complemented those of Dickens.

Inevitably, of course, a few readers felt that "the loss of Mr. Seymour to the work, as far as the illustrations go, is obvious." But the majority echoed Forster, who found Browne's plates not only equal to Seymour's best work but worthy of Dickens's very best scenes as well. With Pickwick, Browne became famous. His designs were imitated by other artists; his skills were sought by other authors and publishers. Also gratifying to Browne must have been Dickens's recognition of his contribution to the author's unprecedented success.

Dickens was so delighted with his new illustrator that he soon extended their collaboration into other professional and social areas. When Dickens supplied the libretto for John Hullah's operetta, The Village Coquettes, which opened in December, 1836, Browne provided the drawings on which the scenery was based. The Strange Gentleman, a play adapted by Dickens from one of his own Sketches, appeared on the same bill; when Chapman and Hall published it early in 1837, Browne was invited to supply the frontispiece. Again, at Dickens's request, Browne supplied an illustration for Bentley's Miscellany as well as for its prospectus prior to the magazine's debut in February, 1837; the artist cleverly matched the humor of the prospectus itself—a parody of royal announcements—with a scene depicting Dickens on publishing day leading a burly porter overloaded by periodicals, fallen copies of which are eagerly snatched up by onlookers (SBB, facing p. 532).

A less amusing portrait of the author appeared under the artist's sobriquet in the April, 1837, issue of The Court Magazine. This picture of the seated author, holding a portfolio while a Punch and Judy show performs in the background, was not superior to other contemporary likenesses, even Cruikshank's unflattering ones (fig. 39), and many viewers have vilified it as bad caricature. Dickens made no comment. Browne apparently repudiated any connection with the portrait, whose signature bears no resemblance to his others at this time, and which may have
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Fig. 39. Artist Unknown, Portrait of Dickens, 1837. *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic*, 10 (April, 1837), facing p. 185. Etching 9" × 5½" (23 × 14 cm). By permission of the Trustees of the British Library.

been the unscrupulous effort of someone trying to capitalize on the popularity of both author and artist.⁴⁶

Also suspect, but far more entertaining and less controversial, is a watercolor representation of 'King Pickwick' that is usually attributed to Browne (fig. 40). The artist's initials appear on the drawing, but in atypically close-linked fashion. Moreover, Pickwick appears unduly red-cheeked and younger than might be expected from one who had drawn the aging man so often. Then, too, it is difficult to imagine the shy artist here, or in *The Court Magazine* portrait, exploiting his work for Dickens in this way at any time. Though the boisterous inscription suggests a date closer to 1836, it is possible that Browne, whose watercolors are less well-known and highly regarded than his illustrations, executed this portrait at a later date when he survived mainly on the strength of his past work for Dickens. In the absence of conclusive evidence, these questions of the picture's date, purpose, and artist must remain minor enigmas. That Browne helped to establish Dickens on a literary throne as a first-rate writer by his illustrations for *Pickwick*, however, remains indisputable.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1837, Browne did produce a genuine, if unsatisfactory, portrait. The death of Dickens's young, beloved sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, on May 7, 1837, had so upset the author that he was unable to complete the subsequent numbers of *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist* on time. He commissioned Browne to do an oil portrait of her. The

Fig. 40. Attributed to Hablot Browne, 'King Pickwick.' Pen and watercolor. 7½" × 4¼" (19.5 × 12.4 cm). By permission of William Self.
finished likeness, with its severe features and stern expression (fig. 41), scarcely corroborates contemporary accounts of her merry charm and loveliness; the finished portrait, however, as Dickens himself conceded, would have been worthless compared to his own idealization of her. Indeed, she proved more suitably enshrined in her brother-in-law’s memory and in his fiction than in Browne's painting.

Fig. 41. Hablot Browne, Portrait of Mary Hogarth, 1837. Engraving of oil painting. 13 9/16" × 10 9/16" (35 × 26.3 cm) (sight). From the Tyrrell Collection, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Dickens House Museum.

Browne’s companionship on many assorted occasions was far more effective in diverting Dickens. In June the artist, together with Forster, George Cattermole, and William Macready, accompanied the author on the first of his many tours of London prisons; in July, Browne accompanied him and his wife on a more carefree excursion to Belgium. The shy but genial artist fitted as quietly and easily into Dickens’s life as into his work, and was soon taken for granted, even overlooked, by the author’s livelier intimates. His appearance, for example, at the dinner celebrating Pickwick’s completion on November 18 was not noted by Forster, Macready, or Ainsworth, though all kept careful records. If he was oblivious to Browne’s social presence, however, Forster, at least, was fully aware that had it not been for the “shrewd and observant” artist’s contribution to Pickwick, the dinner might have been less jubilant, if indeed, it had been held at all.

There was never any question as to whether Browne would illustrate Dickens’s next book (aside from Oliver Twist, which Cruikshank was illustrating for Bentley’s Miscellany), plans for which were already under way. For both author and artist, however, Nicholas Nickleby marks a period of consolidation rather than advance. Dickens’s deliberate efforts to silence his critics led him to create a tighter structure and fuller characterization. Yet the design of the resulting narrative seems more imposed than organic. Browne’s illustrations, now published with engraved legends beneath them, in contrast to the unentitled Pickwick plates, reflect Dickens’s self-consciousness. Too often the melodramatic progress of the narrative is approximated by the set-like interiors and puppet-like figures of the plates. Yet Browne’s continuing responsiveness to Dickens, and the establishment of effective routines to accommodate the more mundane aspects of their collaboration, set the stage for a more innovative future.

The Nickleby contract was signed before Christmas, 1837. In a search for inspiration as well as documentation, Dickens planned a tour to observe the Yorkshire “Cheap Schools” filled with youngsters—almost abandoned by their families or guardians—who too often learned little, ate less, and died young. From childhood he had heard rumors of their cruelties, and he hoped to expose and destroy them in his forthcoming novel. Browne was to accompany him in order to help transform the facts into visually memorable scenes. Deferring their journey until after the holidays, the two men worked on the Sketches of Young Gentlemen, issued anonymously as a companion piece to the Sketches of Young Ladies by “Quiz”—Reverend Edward Caswell—, published the previous year with crude plates by Browne; in 1840 Browne and Dickens would create the final piece in the series, Sketches of Young Couples. Uninspired by these potboilers and exhausted by Pickwick, perhaps, Browne’s imagination seems to have flagged. Though carefully conceived and drawn, the plates are drawn with stiff lines and the characters seem unrefined and one-dimensional. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the quality of his Nickleby work is sometimes closer to that displayed in these minor works than to Pickwick.

On January 30, 1838, posing as friends of a widow planning to place her sons in a Yorkshire school, Dickens
and Browne left London. Taking the route Nicholas, Squeers, and their charges were to follow, the pair began to accumulate characters and incidents for the projected novel. The howling storm they endured, the pretentious lady's maid they met, the legend they heard of the Five Sisters of York were all incorporated into the narrative (V, VI, 52–67). Inspired by a passenger carrying a letter from a parent severely lecturing his son on his refusal to eat boiled meat, Dickens created Mobb's stepmother, who was upset that her son would not eat fat. The grave of a prematurely deceased adolescent gave Dickens the idea for Smike. Attorney Barnes, who begged him to send the "widow's children" anywhere but Yorkshire, inspired the coarse but kindly John Browdie.

In fact as well as in the later fiction, their most memorable encounter was their meeting with Shaw, the prototype of Squeers. The schoolmaster's harsh voice, defective eye, and hostile attitude toward the pair, whose stated purpose he correctly doubted, were all recognizable embodied in the proprietor of Dotheboys Hall. Nevertheless, the author insisted that Squeers and his school represented a class, not an individual and, as such, was but a faint picture of the reality (xi–xii). Browne conceded only that the master in his drawings was not "unlike" Shaw. In the artist's allegorical wrapper design for *Nickleby*, however, the only recognizable figure is that of the culprit, Squeers (facing p. xix) (see F).

The truth of the matter is that, despite the fact that the men drew inspiration and detail from real people, the characters they created did, increasingly, represent a class and serve satirical purposes. Neither the Yorkshire trip nor a later one to Wales and the Midlands inspired the men to anything resembling a naturalistic style. Dickens's imagination always re-created everything he saw, and Browne always felt cramped drawing from reality. Both were open to charges of distortion, being better able to depict the gross rather than the ideal. Indeed, Thackeray, in his capacity as art critic as well as colleague, publicly urged Browne to "think more and exaggerate less." In *Nickleby*, Browne exaggerated in response to Dickens's lead as well as to his own inclination. Dickens, in turn, was following a tradition of popular graphic as well as literary satire. However repulsive the author later found Gillray and Rowlandson's use of ugliness, at this time he, too, employed the powers of physical distortion for purposes of moral satire. In no other novel did Dickens create so many male characters—Ralph Nickleby, Gride, Bray, Hawk, Pluck, Pyke—who, as their names suggest, are physically as well as morally hideous. Even Cruikshank might have been taxed to individualize so many grotesques. Browne relied heavily on distorted facial expressions to convey their villainy, but effectively utilized physical height and girth as well. The animal compactness of Ralph (III, facing p. 26) (fig. 42) and Squeers (IV, facing p. 32) (fig. 43), the bloated body of Master Wackford Squeers (LXIV, facing p. 830) (fig. 44), the outsized heads of Gride (XLVII, facing p. 614) (fig. 45) and Bray (XLVI, facing p. 608) (fig. 46), and the elongated physiques of Sir Mulberry, Lord Frederick, and their stooges Pluck and Pyke (XIX, facing p. 236) (fig. 47)—all parasites on society—may be unnaturally distorted, but no more so than the values and morals they reflect.

More valid and disturbing is the complaint that Browne made certain characters more grotesque than Dickens intended them to be. The author did protest, though with little effect, that Smike did not look "frightened" enough nor Squeers "earnest" enough for his purpose in 'A sudden recognition unexpected on both sides' (XXXVIII, facing p. 498), yet he never objected to the artist's consistently unfair representation of Newman Noggs (V, facing p. 48; XI, facing p. 134; XLVII, facing p. 614). Browne never endowed Noggs with any of the innate kindness and dignity he gradually begins to display in the text, thus, in a sense, abusing his license by refusing to let the bizarre figure develop after Dickens's opening description of him (II, 8–9). Usually, however, Browne's graphic reinforcement of Dickens's benign grotesques proves flexible and accurate, as it does, for example, in the scenes involving Crambles's troops (XXII, facing p. 282) or the Dotheboys students, who are individualized by Browne better than by Dickens. The horror of the boys' aged appearance, which truthfully attests to their starved condition (VII, facing p. 90), is somewhat mitigated by the spirit of catharsis in Nicholas's castigation of Squeers (XIII, facing p. 156) and the breaking up of the school (LXIV, facing p. 830).

Both Browne and Dickens relieved the grotesqueness of the characters with touches of naturalism and beauty, as well as humor and sensitivity. If the artist did not spare Dickens's male villains, he did not, like Cruikshank, deny feminine beauty. In the background of 'Nicholas starts for Yorkshire' (V, facing p. 48), for example, two pretty, buxom chambermaids ignore their duties to watch the activity (and an admiral) below the graceful balustrade, to the fury of their homely coworker who ineffectually brandishes a mop at their shapely backs. When the text appealingly described "The Five Sisters of York," Browne certainly rose to the occasion (VI, facing p. 58); and in his hands, both Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray are suitably pretty in face and figure, though often, as in the 'The Children at their cousin's grave,' they are insufficiently distinguished from one another in their pictures as in the text (LXV, facing p. 834).
Fig. 42. Hablot Browne, Ralph Nickleby. Detail from 'Mr. Ralph Nickleby's first visit to his poor relation,' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 1. Etching. $3\frac{3}{4}\times 4\frac{3}{4}$ (9.5 x 10.3 cm). Fig. 43. Hablot Browne, Squeers. Detail from 'The Yorkshire Schoolmaster at the “Saracen's Head,”' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 1. Etching. $4\frac{3}{8}\times 4\frac{3}{8}$ (10.6 x 10.5 cm). Fig. 44. Hablot Browne, Master Wackford Squeers. Detail from 'The breaking-up at Dotheboy's Hall,' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 19. Etching. $4\frac{3}{8}\times 4\frac{3}{8}$ (12.5 x 10.6 cm). Fig. 45. Hablot Browne, Arthur Gride. Detail from 'The Consultation,' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 15. Etching. $4\frac{3}{8}\times 3\frac{3}{8}$ (11 x 8.9 cm). Bottom row, left to right: Fig. 46. Hablot Browne, Mr. Bray. Detail from 'Nicholas makes his first visit to the lodgings of Mr. Bray,' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 18. Etching. $4\frac{3}{8}\times 4$ (11 x 10.2 cm). Fig. 47. Hablot Browne, Sir Mulberry Hawk, Lord Frederick Verisopht, Pluck, and Pyke. Detail from 'Miss Nickleby introduced to her Uncle's friends,' *Nicholas Nickleby*, no. 6. Etching. $4\frac{3}{8}\times 4\frac{3}{8}$ (10.3 x 11.8 cm). All by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
The virtuous male characters, except for Noggs, are physically as well as morally attractive. Nicholas is an appealing hero; so are the robust Cheerybles—modeled on the brothers Grant whom Dickens and Browne had heard of from Ainsworth and met in Manchester (xii)—under whose benevolent auspices the story ends in proper fairy-tale fashion.

In the course of their work on *Nickleby*, Dickens and Browne managed to regularize their communication—no small achievement, especially considering the random quality of their contacts about *Pickwick*. Dickens's more carefully planned novel enabled Browne to organize his own professional life better. He was even able to draw up a timetable of his Dickens work for the publishers. Taking January as a typical month, in which, ideally, Dickens wrote his number the first ten days, the artist projected his subsequent progress.

Friday evening, 11th Jan. ....... Received portion of copy containing Subject No. 1.

Sunday .......................... Posted sketch to Dickens.

Monday evening, 14th Jan. ....... Received back sketch of Subject No. 1 from Dickens, enclosing a subject for No. 2.

Tuesday evening, 15th Jan. .... Forwarded sketch of Subject 2 to Dickens.

Wednesday, 16th Jan. .......... Received back ditto.

Sunday ..........................

Tuesday, 22nd Jan. .......... First plate finished.

Saturday, 26th Jan. .......... Second ditto finished.—Supposing that I had nothing else to do, you may see by the foregoing that I would not well commence etching operations until Wednesday, the 16th.

“What do you make of it?” Browne asked Chapman and Hall.

The publishers knew all too well how oversimplified this schedule was. It did not suggest that Browne had to duplicate each steel plate two to four times. Nor did it allow for Dickens to conceive and the engravers to print a title (often ironic) as well as page numbers beneath the drawings, aids especially to those readers who later bound their monthly issues in hard covers with the illustrations in their proper place in the story. It permitted no time for Dickens to inspect and return a sketch nor for known errors to be corrected—as happened once at least when a drawing was executed before the text, and it failed to take into account unexpected developments like delays in visits or communications from Robert Young in London or the illness that incapacitated Browne for *Nickleby*'s fourteenth number.

Finally, it was rare that Dickens's copy was on time or that Browne had nothing else to do. Browne's association with Dickens attracted commissions for other plates at least equal in number to those he was doing for *Nickleby*. Dickens did not fear that another author would prove more stimulating to Browne than he, but the drain on the artist's inventiveness is often apparent throughout the narrative. Still, the two men wasted less time and energy on the mundane aspects of their collaboration as it became more regular.
Unlike Dickens, who seemed inexhaustible, Browne was limited by a finite supply of energy. As the author doubtless discovered on their travels through Yorkshire, the artist never rose in the morning without the use of force. On the eve of their trip to Wales and the Midlands, the author felt compelled to invite Browne to his home for the weekend, lest he miss the Monday morning coach. Socially the artist dissipated much of his strength in self-consciousness. Only during an out-of-town excursion would Browne have attended something like the Shrewsbury “bespeak” —though, when he did, he laughed, as Dickens reported to his wife, “with such indecent heartiness at one point of the entertainment that an old man in the next box suffered the most violent indignation.” That the performance resembled the Miss Snevillacci episodes, appearing in the current November Nickleby (XXIV, 301–17, facing p. 316) certainly contributed to Browne’s hilarity. Once back home, however, it did not suit the shy artist to join Dickens at the theater, even to see the pirated stage version of Nickleby, though he must have been flattered to learn that the fine scenery was based on his sketches. These basic differences of temperament may have prevented greater intimacy between the two men, but it probably fostered rather than hindered their harmonious work together at this time.

It had been a most prosperous year, Dickens observed on his twenty-seventh birthday, which even Browne joined his family and friends in celebrating. Readers were snapping up issues of Nickleby, delighted to find again, as the Athenaeum put it, that “the characters were drawn twice over—to the eye as well as to the mind.” Chapman and Hall were so pleased that they held a “Nicklebeian fête” on October 5, 1838. Legend has it that on such public occasions as this, the shy illustrator lurked in the corners and hid behind curtains; whether or not this is the literal truth, Browne succeeded in effacing himself at the party. His reticence may have been increased by the presence of George Cattermole, Daniel Maclise, and Clarkson Stanfield, artists better established in sophisticated circles and closer personal friends of Dickens. He should have been reassured, however, by the cameo ring on his little finger, a present from Dickens to express his appreciation to the artist who had helped to assure Nickleby’s success and to settle the question of whether Pickwick was but a flash in the pan. The fact that Nickleby was not the success that Pickwick had been may reflect, in part, the tendency of both men to flourish best in the face of challenge. Perhaps they needed fallow periods like the Nickleby one to gather strength for more innovative collaborations.

Before a word of Nickleby had been committed to paper, Dickens had already conceived a new challenge. After his interview with the kind Yorkshire attorney, the author had strolled down to the local cobbled marketplace. According to legend, an old-fashioned shop displaying the sign HUMPHREY, CLOCKMAKER, and a quaint longcase clock in its recessed doorway, caught his eye and sparked his ready imagination. In this accidental manner, Dickens’s new project, which he titled Master Humphrey’s Clock two years later, was initiated. It was to be a magazine containing legends of old England and contemporary tales in the manner of the eighteenth-century periodicals he so admired, which would appear in weekly parts, to be bound and sold monthly as well. Dickens hoped to profit from a more continuous relationship with his audience by producing a work that he need not write entirely himself. He planned on using many artists to provide not only more numerous illustrations, but decorative initial letters and head and tail pieces as well, to make the Clock as visually enticing as possible.

From the first, Dickens paid extraordinary attention to the appearance of the magazine. His early decision “to have woodcuts dropped into the text” must have been welcomed, if not suggested, by the publishers. The economy of this graphic process had always been appreciated by cheap periodicals. For wood blocks were not only more durable than the metal plates for etchings, but they could be printed right along with the letterpress; the slight extra expense was compensated for by the savings in distribution and binding. But Dickens’s decision to adopt this format was not based simply on economic considerations. The author must have sensed what Ruskin later enunciated so condescendingly: that although some readers appreciated the “disciplined” qualities of a steel engraving, “the attention of a child [might] be excited, and the apathy of a clown overcome by the blunt lines of a woodcut.” Such stimulation would be needed if a wide audience was to absorb and remember the varied fare that Master Humphrey’s Clock was to offer. Crucial to this stimulation was the greater control over the integration of pictures and text that wood engravings afforded. Steel plates lacked such flexibility, since they were separately engraved and then inserted together inside the wrapper before the text, far from the passages they illustrated. Dickens was so attracted to the dramatic possibilities of an integrated arrangement that even after he had all but abandoned other aspects of the Clock, turning over the magazine to two longer narratives, The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge, he did not abandon his lavish pictorial plans. Indeed, the herculean pressures of providing text and supervising illustrations on a weekly basis seemed to spur him to assist his readers more visually than ever before. His instructions to his illustrators, necessarily more frequent, were just as detailed as always.
as he sought to reinforce graphically, by parallelism or contrast, the impact and meaning of his characters, themes, and descriptions.

As the *Clock* evolved, Dickens characteristically met this new challenge of placing the illustrations by overseeing them himself to insure that their inherent dramatic advantages, as well as the usual aesthetic ones, were fully exploited. Joan Stevens has amply demonstrated how he, not the printer, positioned the engravings to establish graphically and then recall his many characters, themes, and complex plot developments, often widely separated in time and space, and John Harvey has suggested that they often are treated as narrative units in their own right. Stevens has also shown that the magnitude of Dickens's achievement in this regard has been shamefully obscured by the failure of later publishers to place his engravings exactly where he wanted them. Placed as they were intended to be, the best illustrations perform yeoman service. At the point, for example, when Nell and her grandfather look back on the London they have fled, the picture provides a physical and emotional pause needed by the readers as well as the characters (XV, 132) (fig. 49). The view of the city, which renders verbal description of what they see unnecessary, does not replace the narrative but becomes part of it. Moreover, by bringing *Pilgrim's Progress* to Nell's mind at this moment (XV, 122), Dickens adds historical, literary and moral perspective not only to this scene, but to the entire narrative. That Browne's portrayal resembles John Martin's well-known illustration of 'The Celestial City' in Dickens's personal copy of the Bunyan allegory adds yet another dimension, albeit an extrinsic one (fig. 50). Had this woodcut been placed at the beginning of the number, asetchings then had to be, both its immediacy of impact and its gradual resonance would have been seriously impaired.

When the *Clock* ceased to be a miscellany, Dickens found it both unnecessary and impractical to employ various illustrators. The still formidable task of providing pictures for the entire enterprise (except for the two provided by Williams and Maclise) fell to Browne and George Cattermole, an established illustrator of romantic fiction and a respected antiquarian painter, as well as Dickens's friend and relative by marriage. The self-effacing Browne did not object either to the presence of the painter or to the fact that his name preceded his own on the title page, though Cattermole provided far fewer illustrations. His cooperative attitude did not vary, even under the relentless pressures of weekly publication. Dickens's plan was to have each artist illustrate several consecutive numbers while the other rested. As it turned out, however, he assigned three-quarters of the subjects and over half the initials to Browne, rarely giving him a chance to relax. But the artist did not protest, even when some of the subjects meant for Cattermole were sent to him because of error, or, more often, because of the painter's indisposition or disinclination to do them. On the contrary, Browne must have welcomed the fact that Cattermole took on at least part of the burden. Browne, according to his son, was less comfortable with wood techniques than with those required for steel plates. He often failed to make allowance in his drawings for the fact that an engraver was likely to work more extreme
changes on a wood block than on a steel plate, since the process of cutting away wood to leave lines outstanding was more drastic and less precise than that of applying acid to metal. Whatever Browne's difficulties, however, they were not evident to Dickens or to his readers. He certainly was more expert than Cattermole, whose drawings he copied onto the wood block without complaint until the painter learned to do so himself, characteristically anxious that he do justice to his colleague’s work.79

For the announcement heralding its publication by Chapman and Hall on April 4, 1840, Browne depicted Dickens opening the door of Master Humphrey’s Clock, liberating the fictional characters inside (SBB, facing p. 686). Readers, anticipating another Dickens novel, flocked to buy the weekly. Their disappointment at finding only elderly Master Humphrey and his friends, who were to provide continuity for the short pieces by various writers, was not appeased by the increased number of illustrations or even by the reappearance of Pickwick and Sam Weller in the second number. Falling sales reflected their refusal to rest content with anything less than a full-scale fiction from Dickens’s pen. Consequently, the author decided to expand the “little child story” that he had produced for the fourth Clock number. Although Dickens himself did not lose interest in Master Humphrey (whom, he felt, Browne had delineated in “ADMIRABLE” fashion [SBB, 730]), it was little Nell who recaptured the author’s audience for the periodical and ultimately absorbed Dickens’s own attention.80

The growth of The Old Curiosity Shop from a short tale to a full-length narrative increased the task of the two main illustrators and the importance of their illustrations. From its inception, the story was built around simple polarities of good and evil. Dickens not only exploited them verbally as he developed his narrative, but sought to sharpen them visually by assigning Cattermole most of the serious or sentimental subjects involving the heroine, Browne the far more numerous comic or grotesque scenes usually involving the villains. Now that Master Humphrey’s Clock was devoted to weekly installments of The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens no longer sought variety, but, as Harvey has also shown, wished to maintain clear (if numerically unequal) pictorial contrast.81

Perhaps inspired by Dickens’s concentrated attention, Browne relished his work in the grotesque vein; and, except for his regressive portrayal of the marchioness (LVII, 457) (LXIV, 507) (LXV, 519), began to excel at its sequential as well as its discrete aspects.82 Certainly The Old Curiosity Shop contains more interesting grotesques than does Nicholas Nickleby. They are morally as well as physically a far more varied lot. Topping the hierarchy of evil is Quilp who, unlike Ralph Nickleby, has fewer nefarious associates to blunt the effect of his singular brand of malevolence. Browne’s illustrations reflect the fact that Quilp and his few cohorts are a more integral part of the narrative than their counterparts in the loosely structured Nickleby; none are gratuitous, for as Forster explains, “The hideous lumber and rottenness that surround the child in her grandfather’s home take shape again in Quilp and his filthy gang.”83

Following Dickens’s lead, as always, Browne continued to perpetuate the popular belief that physical deformity was not only laughable but also implied moral deformity, unfair as this seemed to the enlightened Thomas Hood.84 Increasingly, however, as he moved through the book, Dickens stressed Quilp’s innate malformations over his external ones. Similarly, Browne’s early portrayals of the dwarf stressed his physical ugliness in the old Nickleby manner (VI, 467) (fig. 51), whereas later he captured Quilp’s real deformity—his moral hideousness—more subtly, by increasing the brutality of his face and figure. By the time he depicted the villain leering out of the tavern window, the words he placed on the wall to the right of the sill—MAN BEAST—seemed equally applicable to him (LX, 477) (fig. 52).85 Taken together, Browne’s portrayals of Quilp—nearly one-quarter of all the illustrations in The Old Curiosity Shop—forcefully heighten Dickens’s Victorian re-creation of a fairy-tale monster. So thoroughly did Browne allow his imagination to be dominated by Quilp that the face of Kit, hugging his pony after his release from prison, oddly, and perhaps accidentally, resembled that of his deceased enemy (LXVIII, 549). Cattermole was unable to enter the spirit of the villain so fully, and his characterization of Quilp is unsuitably tame (IX, 72) (fig. 53).86

The subtle brilliance of Browne’s later portrayals of Quilp, especially his widely praised death scene (LXVII, 544), may have surprised admirers of his comic work. Indeed, the artist now began to display in a positive way the versatility that would enable him to keep pace with Dickens for so long. The author took notice. Though he continued catering to the sentimental and antiquarian tastes of Cattermole, he wisely assigned Browne many other kinds of subjects. Certainly Browne was better suited than the painter to depict the dance at the Ladies’ Seminary (VIII, 67), the Nubbles’ theater party (XXXIX, 312), and the unemployed rioters (XLV, 359). Only he would have added the touches that would become hallmarks of his style—such as placing a sign “TAKE NOTICE! MAN TRAPS” on the wall behind Miss Monfathers and her genteel charges, thus undercutting their snobbish scorn of Nell (XXXI, 249).88 It also became apparent that Browne did as well or better than
Cattermole, even in the latter's areas of specialty. When the painter was unable to do the frontispiece for the second bound volume of the *Clock*, containing the bulk of little Nell's story, for example, Browne showed himself capable of rendering the sentimental as well as the grotesque characters of the book (xiv). And, as shall be seen later, when Browne, a former illustrator of Winkle's *Cathedrals of England and Wales*, got a chance to depict gothic architecture in 'Quilp at the gateway' (XXVII, 218) (see fig. 124), he puts its symbolic features to work for the story far more skillfully than his colleague. Fortunately, pressures of time prevented much comparison between the two artists.

Though he appeared to take its excellence for granted, certainly Dickens was pleased with Browne's work. The artist must have been gratified when Phiz's true identity was publicly disclosed for the first time on the title page of the first bound volume of the *Clock*. He himself had dispensed with his pseudonym in signing his engravings, using instead his own initials, first HB and then, perhaps due to its closeness to John Doyle's pseudonym, HKB. The artist would continue to sign "Phiz" to his subsequent etchings for Dickens's novels; but his present use of his real name seems especially appropriate, for it was during the *Clock* that Browne artistically came into his own, manifesting unsuspected versatility that the author would be quick to utilize in their long collaboration ahead.

Strengthened by Dickens's tacit approval and oblivious to Cattermole's favored treatment, Browne even conquered his shyness to attend with eagerness the dinners that marked the *Clock's* progress. In his note accepting Dickens's invitation to the first such dinner, the artist, in a rare burst of affection, expressed "a disinterested wish that, having completed and established one 'Shop' in an 'extensive line of business' you will go on increasing and multiplying suchlike establishments in number and prosperity till you become a Dick Whittington of a merchant, with pockets distended to most Brobdignag dimensions." Browne
well understood the author, whose constant allusions in his early works to Whittington, the English Horatio Alger, reflected his own dreams of achieving security, status, and popularity—all of which were coming true.

Dickens, having finished *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which marked the halfway point of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, could afford the momentary pause needed to finish his self-assigned obligation to edit *The Pic Nic Papers* for the benefit of Mrs. Macrone, the wife of his first publisher. Browne, who, along with Cruikshank and other artists, was to illustrate the work, had by now forgotten the author's request, made in 1838; it was understandable that the project had not been very "vividly" present to Browne in the busy years since. Nevertheless, the work, including six of Browne's illustrations, was finally published in 1841. In an irony of timing that Macrone would have appreciated, Dickens, turning his full attention back to *Master Humphrey's Clock*, began to fill it with installments of the long-deferred *Barnaby Rudge*.

The new novel—so different from *The Old Curiosity Shop*—that surged through the latter pages of the *Clock* had a stormy history. In May, 1836, the still obscure author of *The Pickwick Papers* had accepted a small advance from Macrone for *Gabriel Varden, the Locksmith of London*, and rashly promised to complete it by November. Released from this unrealistic contract just before Macrone's premature death in 1837, he offered the incomplete story to fulfill another contract he had made with Richard Bentley. Once again, Dickens failed to deliver the work, and it became a major source of contention with Bentley, with whom he ultimately broke. In 1840, having rescued *Master Humphrey's Clock* from certain failure with the story of Nell, Dickens needed another narrative. Reviving the skeletal *Clock* machinery for a few pages to bridge the gap, the author, after changing the title from *Gabriel Varden* to *Barnaby Rudge*, finally felt motivated to proceed with that much postponed story. The gentler characters in *The Old Curiosity Shop* consequently bowed off stage in Browne's complex tailpiece to the story, while grotesque figures hoisted a spear with a crude flag proclaiming the title of the radically different narrative to come (SBB, 809).

Despite its troubled past, *Barnaby* proceeded smoothly from the moment it began to appear in the *Clock*. In contrast to his hurried expansion of Nell's story, Dickens had had six years to ponder, draft, and even research his fictional history of the 1780 No-Popery Gordon Riots. His fewer major characters were a challenge to his illustrators, and his calculated placement of their work insured that the pictures would reinforce his text dynamically. Dickens continued the pattern of illustrations he had established during *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Throughout *Barnaby*, two scenes, portraying main characters or events, were allotted to each weekly number. Each monthly part included a small headpiece as well, marking key settings or incidents and an elaborate initial, sometimes purely decorative in the fashion of the time, but more often functional (which perhaps inspired Thackeray's functional use of decorative initials in *Vanity Fair*). In addition, certain significant conclusions to numbers often were underlined by tailpieces, if not full-page illustrations. As Stevens has observed, deviations from this pattern—in the *Shop* cut depicting Quilp's death, which appears in the middle rather than the end of a number (LXVII, 544), or the extra headpiece and initial to chapter 33 of *Barnaby*, in which the narrative resumes after a five-year break (267)—signal moments of special significance. Dickens's awareness of the weekly text and illustrations as a composite unit was at its height throughout *Barnaby*. Consequently, compared to his previous work, this narrative contains fewer pictorial but inconsequential details, episodes, or even illustrations like those of Swivelles dancing (VIII, 67) or Kit gardening (XL, 317).

Both author and artists, particularly Browne, met the challenge of providing the greater variety of styles needed for the historical, compared to the allegorical, fiction in the *Clock*. Dickens and Browne continued to exploit their skill at expressing the exaggerated or grotesque to render the crude characters—Gashford, Dennis, and the Protestant mob (XXXVII, 308; LXVIII, 565). They treated the Maypole rustics in their earlier humorous manner (I, 6). Throughout the first two-thirds of the narrative, however, both men were uncharacteristically restrained: Dickens's prose was plainer and more direct, and Browne's representations were uncommonly realistic. When, at the story's climax, Dickens really let his imagination go in describing the orgiastic riots, Browne readily caught his spirit. His designs, with their tumultuous crowds yet individualized participants, fully embodied the violent excitement of the prose (LII, 431; LXIV, 528; LXVI, 548; LXVIII, 565). Author and artist attained a unity of mood and technique at this point that would be sadly dissipated when, almost twenty years later, they next collaborated on a historical fiction, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

As in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Browne executed the bulk of the scenes for *Barnaby*, this time including those involving the heroines. With few exceptions, Cattermole was again assigned the antiquarian subjects. Browne's versatile talents, Cattermole's narrower skills, and Dickens's careful coordination of both are evident throughout, but especially in their combined presentation of the novel's
most sophisticated villain, John Chester. This character, as his name suggests, parodies Lord Chesterfield, particularly his cynical values as expressed in his letters to his son. Unlike Squeers or Quilp, this moral monster could not be portrayed mainly through body distortions or crude facial grimaces; more subtle and ironic means were required.

Examined as a whole sequence, as Dickens's illustrations should be more often, the woodcuts involving Chester display an impressive range of small but significant graphic touches, especially on the part of Browne. Such understated approaches are required because nothing about Sir John, whether it is his appearance or his plan to turn his son's affections from the daughter of Haredale, his impecunious, longtime, Catholic enemy, is ever revealed in a straightforward manner. The first portrayal of Sir John, done by Cattermole, is well calculated to pique our curiosity and create an aura of suspense. Cattermole provides a grand setting—the Maypole Inn's finest room—but turns the seated genteel figure away from the viewer (X, 84) (fig. 54). The next few pictures of Chester, rendered by Browne, better indicate his appearance as well as his importance. First, Sir John is lounging jauntily at the breakfast table, seen not quite full face (XV, 123) (fig. 55). Unlike most of Browne's scenes, which tend to be crowded, the figure here fills the space. The only character the artist had previously given such solitary treatment was Hugh, depicted as he dozed during his menial Maypole job (XI, 98). Furthermore, Hugh and Chester are linked graphically, as they will be narratively, by the artist's unusually naturalistic treatment of them both.

This link is carried out in Chester's next appearance, where he is laughing malevolently with Hugh (XXIII, 186) (fig. 56). In fact, now that Sir John is seen full face, it is clear that he somewhat resembles Hugh. This scene provides the headpiece to the fourteenth number and signals its domination by Chester in both illustrations and text. The corkscrew formed by the initial letter T suggests the sinister purpose of these unlikely associates. The studied elegance with which Chester enters his carriage in the next picture (XXIII, 195) (fig. 57), after hearing the account of Hugh's mother's hanging and the empathic reaction to it by his dog, is maintained throughout his subsequent visit to Mrs. Vandenhoff's (XXVII, 222) (fig. 58). Browne makes all the listeners attentive to Sir John except for Dolly, who averts her head while the aristocrat blatantly manipulates her mother.

The very next illustration, by Cattermole, involves Chester with the story's other heroine, Emma Haredale, whose face, like Dolly's, is also averted, though not deliberately, from Chester. From the Vardens, Sir John has proceeded to the Warren in order to alienate Emma's affection from his son, Edward. "He had not gone far, or looked about him long, when he descried coming towards him, a female figure. A glimpse of the form and dress as she crossed a little wooden bridge which lay between them, satisfied him that he had found her whom he desired to see. He threw himself in her way, and a very few paces brought them close together" (XXIX, 237–38) (fig. 59). Instead of portraying Chester in the act of first seeing Emma, Cattermole takes his point of view from Dickens, and shows Emma as she looks to Chester, thus involving the viewer in the villain's machinations just as, later, Browne involves the viewer with the rioters by showing the mobs through Barnaby's eyes (LXVIII, 565). So absorbed is the viewer that he may not notice immediately Cattermole's weak suggestion of the Warren in the background or his Cruikshankian portrayal of Emma in the foreground. Browne takes up Sir John again after his mission with Emma is accomplished, and he is leaving the Maypole (XXX, 247) (fig. 60). He continues his subtle use of postures to suggest affinities and enmities between Dickens's characters: Chester's back is to us as is Hugh's, each has his left hand on his hip and his right hand raised; Joe Willet, meanwhile, turns away from the obsequies passing between his father and the departing guest, much as his beloved Dolly had turned away from Chester and her mother earlier.

In the final illustration of this sequence, which completes the establishment of the villain's nature and of the plot, Browne simultaneously suggests Chester's motivations and comments upon them. While the heartless father baldly lies to Edward about Emma, as he has to Emma about Edward, a volume of Lord Chesterfield's Letters lies open beside him, and a picture of Abraham on the verge of sacrificing Isaac hangs behind him (XXXII, 263) (fig. 61).

Five years—and many numbers—pass before Chester (now Sir John) again figures in the action. The next time we see him, Westminster Hall, as drawn by Cattermole, completely dwarfs him and Gashford during their awkward encounter with Haredale, though Chester's doffed hat clearly distinguishes him from his two old schoolmates (XLIII, 351) (fig. 62). Browne moves Sir John to the center of the consequent scuffle on the river stairs, individualizing him by a smirk as well as by his singular white coat (XLIII, 358) (fig. 63). As Chester's acts of personal vengeance become inextricable from public ones, however, he becomes increasingly vulnerable to close communal investigation.

Sir John's more significant reappearance in the headpiece to the eighteenth number, once again at breakfast (LXXV, 618) (fig. 64), has been carefully prepared by Dickens and Browne. Sir John's jaunty air at the earlier meal has yielded to one of anxiety. A contrasting note to the bedside setting
CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

WILIGHT had given place to night some hours, and it was high noon in those quarters of the town in which "the world" condescended to dwell—the world being then, as now, of very limited dimensions and easily lodged—when Mr. Chester reclined upon a sofa in his dressing-room in the Temple, entertaining himself with a book.

He was dressing, as it seemed, by easy stages, and having

Above, top to bottom: Fig. 54. George Cattermole, 'The best apartment.' Master Humphrey's Clock, no. 51, p. 291. Wood engraving. 3⅛" × 4⅛" (9.2 × 11.3 cm). Fig. 55. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester lounging.' Master Humphrey's Clock, no. 54, p. 14. Wood engraving. 3⅛" × 4⅛" (8.3 × 10.8 cm).

Right, top to bottom: Fig. 56. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester dressing.' Master Humphrey's Clock, no. 58, p. 61. Wood engravings. 3¼" × 4¼" (8.3 × 11.5 cm) (scene). ⅛" × ⅛" (2.7 × 2.5 cm) (initial). Fig. 57. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester's chair.' Master Humphrey's Clock, no. 58, p. 68. Wood engraving. 3¼" × 4¾" (8.3 × 11.5 cm). Fig. 58. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester with Mrs. Varden.' Master Humphrey's Clock, no. 60, p. 89. Wood engraving. 3½" × 4¾" (8.9 × 11.3 cm). All by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Left, top to bottom: Fig. 59. George Cattermole, 'Miss Haredale walking.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 61, p. 101. Wood engraving, $3\frac{3}{4}'' \times 4\frac{1}{4}''$ (9.2 x 11.5 cm). Fig. 60. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester leaving the Maypole.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 61, p. 107. Wood engraving, $3\frac{1}{4}'' \times 4\frac{7}{10}''$ (8.3 x 11.3 cm). Fig. 61. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Chester and Edward.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 62, p. 118. Wood engraving, $3\frac{5}{8}'' \times 4\frac{3}{4}''$ (8.3 x 11.5 cm). Above, top to bottom: Fig. 62. George Cattermole, 'In Westminster Hall.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 63, p. 183. Wood engraving, $3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{1}{2}''$ (9.2 x 11.5 cm). Fig. 63. Hablot Browne, 'Mr. Haredale draws.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 68, p. 188. Wood engraving, $4\frac{1}{4}'' \times 3\frac{3}{4}''$ (11.3 x 8.4 cm). All by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.