For the first time since *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens was without an illustrator. In late November, 1869, Dickens, ailing himself, warned Chapman and Hall, "There is little time to be lost." The publishers, who planned an April publication date for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, probably were less disconcerted; they now had far more notice and experience than they had had over three decades earlier when Seymour committed suicide in the middle of the second number of *Pickwick*. The anxious author enlisted the aid of other artists, Millais and Frith, to help find a new illustrator; thanks to their concerted efforts, Luke Fildes, a former student at the Royal Academy, was located and engaged within a few weeks (fig. 195). His work seemed to combine the aesthetic ideals of the new school of black-and-white illustrators and the social consciousness of the older generation: he seemed the perfect illustrator for Dickens in every way.

While Charles Collins had been painfully executing sketches for his father-in-law's forthcoming novel, Luke Fildes had been anxiously trying to produce a memorable scene to fulfill a commission for the new (and ultimately influential) illustrated weekly, *The Graphic*. The younger artist hoped, with this scene together with the illustrations he had been commissioned to do for the English translation of Victor Hugo's *L'Homme qui rit*, to make enough of a mark to secure sustained employment as an illustrator, which would support his more serious efforts as a painter. Fildes's book illustrations delighted Hugo, himself a draftsman, and his wood engraving of the 'Houseless and Hungry' (fig. 196), whom he had viewed firsthand, was featured in the opening issue of *The Graphic* (which also contained an announcement, corrected the very next week, that Charles Collins would be Dickens's new illustrator). It was Fildes's *Graphic* subject, of dismal applicants outside the kind of workhouse that Betty Higden tried so hard to avoid dying in (OMF, II, X, 378), that caught John Millais's attention. "I see Millais running to Charles Dickens," imagined Vincent van Gogh, a devoted admirer of Dickens, Fildes, 'Houseless and Hungry' and *The Graphic*, who re-created for himself the legend of how the Drood artist was hired. Dickens undoubtedly was impressed with Fildes's moving scene, the kind, as Millais knew, he himself loved to depict in words.

Recalling, perhaps, the complications that had ensued with Seymour's temporary successor, Robert Buss, Dickens...
proceeded cautiously. He had the publishers contact Fildes; at their request, the artist not only dispatched specimens of his work but promised a sketch based on *David Copperfield* that would better display his ability to draw pretty heroines like Rosa and Helena as well as to illustrate other aspects of Dickens's prose. The author, already impressed by Fildes's firm draftsmanship and expressive use of line and tone, was understandably curious to see what the artist would produce for his favorite novel. The forthcoming sketch of little Em'ly being embraced by Peggotty after announcing her engagement to Ham confirmed Dickens's favorable opinion; "I am going to engage with a new man," he informed an American friend on January 14, 1870. "Congratulate me!" Fildes wrote to his uncle and mentor three days later.

I am to do Dickens's story. Just got the letter settling the matter. Going to see Dickens on Saturday.

Now for what I can do. This is the tide! Am I to be on the flood? My heart fails me a little for it is the turning point in my career.

A meeting was arranged to settle other matters. The twenty-six-year-old Fildes, nervous at meeting the famous author, was put at his ease by the same paternal manner Dickens displayed toward Marcus Stone. Though elated at the prospect of illustrating *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the young artist honestly expressed his aesthetic and technical reservations. First, if Dickens wanted an artist who excelled in comic subjects, as had Browne, for example, he might not be suitable, for Fildes felt himself better qualified to stress the grayer aspects of the author's work. The novelist, without disparaging his earlier artists, seemed pleased by the prospect of being taken so seriously, and he may have indicated that there would be relatively little comedy in *Drood* and that even those bits would serve various sober purposes. The young artist, probably at this time, also expressed concern about the usual misrepresentations of his work by engravers. He noted that engravers destroyed the artist's original drawing in the process of copying it. Fildes wished to utilize a new process, which...
Marcus Stone claimed to have made reputable, by which his drawings would be photographed onto the woodblock, enabling the drawings to be duplicated more accurately, and the originals retained to compare with the final result (and to sell later).\(^1^3\) Dickens had no objection to this innovation. Whatever helped Fildes would help Dickens to put his story across. The two men parted, mutually impressed.\(^1^4\) It seemed auspicious that this novel—one in which the plot is determined and the characters are delineated by the fact that each is endowed with artistic gifts—should be illustrated by one called Luke, after the patron saint of painters.\(^1^5\)

Work began in earnest. Fildes received a proof of Collins's wrapper, a necessary though not binding point of departure for his own realization of Dickens's scenes and characters.\(^1^6\) Indeed, the text posed far more problems than the wrapper. Its distinctive plot and style—simple, yet complex, and suggestive of divided personalities, mesmerism, death, and resurrection—did not lend itself easily to illustration. The few leading characters were of more psychological than physical interest. The main action of the narrative, the probable murder of Drood, could be anticipated but not depicted. Actions, such as Crisparkle's morning swim or Neville's arrest, were not important enough to need graphic reinforcement. The symbolic prose, as well as contemporary taste, made Hogarthian or other background detail superfluous.

Yet Fildes coped effectively, better than Marcus Stone had done when confronted with similar dilemmas in *Our Mutual Friend*, and better than Collins would have done, to judge from his trial sketches. Fildes, of course, benefited from being a stranger, whose relationship was not complicated by the ties binding Dickens to Marcus Stone and to Collins. Moreover Dickens, in the course of *Drood*, unlike that of *Our Mutual Friend*, was not dashing around the country or over to the Continent, communicating with his artist in brief notes. Fildes conferred with the author at Hyde Park Gate or at Gad's Hill where the scene Dickens wanted illustrated would be read or acted out; the subject having been agreed upon, with or without debate, Fildes returned to his London studio.\(^1^7\) Following Dickens's lead, which, in turn, reflected contemporary developments in fiction as well as art, Fildes usually portrayed only a few figures; he drew them from real life models, a technique as appropriate for *Drood* as Cruikshank's and Browne's numerous, smaller figures—grounded in imagination as much as actuality—had been for the author's earlier works.\(^1^8\) Moreover, by voluntarily but not compulsively taking some of the unobtrusive backgrounds in the outdoor scenes from actual landmarks (III, facing p. 28; XII, facing p. 128; XX, facing p. 225; XXII, facing p. 246), in keeping with his and Dickens's inclinations as well as contemporary practices, so unlike that of Browne, for example, he helped to anchor the mystery in reality.\(^1^9\) Though Dickens retained the right to inspect Fildes's sketches, he rarely exercised it—as his trust increased and his strength waned—and the artist simply forwarded his work to the engraver.\(^2^0\)

The first number of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* appeared in April, 1870. Fildes had ample time to study the proofs, refine Collins's early perceptions of 'In the Court' (see figs. 191–94), and conceive the meeting between Edwin and Rosa 'Under the Trees' (III, 29).\(^2^1\) Anxious for an assessment of the illustrations, partly, perhaps, because contemporary reviewers had increasingly ignored the pictures in his recent work, Dickens wrote to William Frith: "You will please me with what[ever] you say about my new illustrator of whom I have great hopes."\(^2^2\) The veteran artist confirmed Dickens's own opinion that Fildes was a sensitive interpreter of his carefully wrought story.\(^2^3\) Although the artist used rectilinear frames for his *Drood* illustrations, as had Marcus Stone so often for those for *Our Mutual Friend*, his scenes were powerful enough in content and technique to minimize any sense of graphic isolation. His deployment of heavy black lines and meaningful white spaces, especially in the interior or dimly lit scenes, satisfied the viewer's demand for representation while it left ample room for imagination.

In subsequent numbers, the artist continued to do imaginative and skillful work. Whether at the author's urging or on his own initiative, he wisely portrayed the psychological turning points in the mystery, particularly those involving Rosa and Jasper (who somewhat resembled Dickens at this time much as Copperfield and Pip had been his alter egos). Though Fildes did not depart very far from Collins's sketches of Rosa (see figs. 189, 194, 195), she becomes more expressive in his hands, whether sitting indifferently next to Edwin (III, facing p. 28), shrinking from Jasper (XIX, facing p. 217) (fig. 197) or gazing intently at Tartar (XXII, facing p. 246). His departures from Collins's undecided delineations of Jasper were more radical. Fildes, in seven of his twelve illustrations, rendered him in all his complexity: the manipulative teacher, relative, and host (VII, facing p. 64; VIII, facing p. 74); the thwarted schemer (XV, facing p. 172); the demonic lover (XIX, facing p. 217) (fig. 197); and the confused opium smoker (I, facing p. 2; XXIII, facing p. 263) (see fig. 193). That Jasper's appearance—his hands as well as his facial expressions and body postures (I, 3 and XIX, 216, for example)—varies slightly each time he is portrayed suggests no vacillation on the part of the artist,
who made several studies for each illustration, but rather a firm graphic understanding of the development of Dickens's subtle protagonist. Indeed, Fildes’s realization of the choirmaster, as well as of the other main characters, so gratified Dickens that he declared them “veritable photographs” of his creations, endowed with a reality that transcended mere naturalism.

Fildes not only earned Dickens’s praise and confidence but his friendship as well. The young man was charming as well as accomplished and Dickens often invited him to Hyde Park, where all was done to make him feel at home. Consequently Fildes had only to mention his preference to have his drawings engraved by his friend, Charles Roberts, rather than the better-known Dalziel brothers, who had done the first two illustrations, to secure the author’s support in the matter with Chapman and Hall.

In one crucial instance, Fildes even prevailed over Dickens’s choice of subject. In the fourth number, apparently, Dickens wanted him to show Jasper mounting the dark gatehouse steps with a murderous expression on his face and a neckerchief wound twice around his throat (XIV, 162). Frustrated by not knowing the significance of such details, the artist asked why Jasper’s usual small black tie should be so conspicuously replaced. Dickens, worried that he was revealing too much of his mystery too soon, reluctantly disclosed that Jasper would use the neck scarf to strangle Edwin. Fildes then dissuaded the author from having the subject illustrated at all. He convincingly argued that the gatehouse stairs would require demystifying illumination; the obvious change in neck wear would be a giveaway; and the scene was so powerfully described in words that further elucidation was unnecessary. Dickens, in another rare change of mind, yielded to Fildes’s tactful and logical appeal.

Trusting in the artist’s discretion, Dickens then talked openly to him about the final projected scene in the book, which he had determined far in advance. He invited Fildes to Gad’s Hill for an extended weekend visit in early June to inspect other Rochester sights for future backgrounds. On earlier visits to Kent, the artist had sketched the interior of Rochester Cathedral (fig. 198)—which would have well served the last published scene (XXIII, 271-72)—, the exterior of “Nun's House” and a characteristic Rochester street, none of which were used, but his view from the medway of the castle and cathedral did serve as an appropriate title page vignette (v). Dickens particularly
wanted him to sketch—perhaps for the very last illustration—one of the Maidstone jails. It was here, according to Collins and Forster, that the author planned to have Jasper's murder confession elaborately elicited from him, perhaps by opium or mesmerism, just before his own death, and delivered as if he were talking about someone else. Fildes "might do something better than Cruikshank," Dickens encouraged the artist, alluding to the famous drawing of the condemned Fagin. This intimidating challenge, which might have invited invidious comparisons or plagiarism charges, was never taken up, however. While preparing on Friday, June 10, for his weekend visit, Fildes saw the newspaper with its announcement of Dickens's death the day before; for personal as well as professional reasons, Fildes was devastated by the news, for Dickens had treated him, as he had Marcus Stone, like a son.

Only three numbers of Drood had been published. Engravings had not been entirely determined for the remainder of the text that was already written. Forster subsequently assembled Dickens's manuscript for publication, while Fildes selected, completed, and entitled the illustrations for it himself. The sudden deprivation of direct authorial inspiration and supervision—and consequent turmoil—may account for the uneven quality of the last six engravings compared to the first six. The four illustrations involving Rosa, for example, are disappointing. Fildes, better at rendering a few characters at once, nicely spaced the girls bidding farewell to Rosa at Miss Twinkleton's but hardly differentiated them either from one another or from the heroine, who is identified mostly by her central position in the picture (XIII, facing p. 143). The way Rosa shrinks from Jasper during his proposal is too theatrical, even in terms of this melodramatic scene (XIX, facing p. 217) (see fig. 196), and the badly defined foliage against which she retreats recalls the similarly ill-defined wall against which she almost disappears when Jasper earlier frightens her at the piano (VII, facing p. 64).

Fildes's early reservations about his ability to represent the lighter moments in Drood were somewhat substantiated
after the author’s death. In ‘Mr. Grewgious experiences a new Sensation,’ a scene of Rosa and her elderly guardian at Staple Inn after her flight from Cloisterham, Fildes’s choice of sentimental subject is dramatically questionable though appealing (XX, facing p. 225). Similarly, his representation of their subsequent ride ‘Up the River’ with Tartar and Lobley is unsatisfying (XXII, facing p. 246). Dickens had wanted Fildes to portray the recognition scene between Crisparkle and Tartar originally in the fifth number, but Forster’s rearrangement of the text delayed Tartar’s introduction until the sixth number (XXI, 231). Not only did Fildes show poor judgment in not waiting to illustrate that more interesting confrontation later, but his execution of the principals in the river excursion is flawed: Rosa appears too intense to be enjoying herself as the text maintains she does (XXIII, 246); Grewgious appears inexplicably stockier on sea than on land; Tartar, seen mainly from the back, is hardly memorable; and his man, Lobley, whose fully revealed face resembles a bemused kindly monkey, dominates the romantic idyll. The artist, as he himself anticipated, better displayed his talents in the grimmer scenes involving Jasper, whose prone body is

surveyed by the suspicious Grewgious in one picture (XV, facing p. 173) and by the eavesdropping Opium Woman in another (XXIII, facing p. 263). In fact, these two illustrations, with their striking use of firelight and shadow as well as their expressive representation of hands as well as faces, make the viewer wish that Fildes had had the opportunity to deal with the full tragic depths of a completed Dickens novel.

After the author’s death, Dickens’s family, friends, and even his former illustrators became closely involved with Fildes. Concerned that Drood’s termination might adversely affect the career of the personable young artist, the Dickens family encouraged him in many different ways. After the Westminster funeral, they invited him to Kent in belated fulfillment of the novelist’s wish. When he showed interest in Dickens’s desk, with its odd assortment of cherished objects, Georgina gave him the memorandum slate, quill pen, and a piece of blue stationery to keep. The family granted permission for his watercolor portrayal of the library, including Dickens’s desk, to be engraved for The Graphic, where it appeared with the title, ‘The Empty
Fig. 200. Vincent van Gogh, 'Gauguin's Chair,' 1888. Oil. 35⅞" × 28⅝" (90.5 × 72 cm). By permission of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
The Illustrators of "Our Mutual Friend" and "The Mystery of Edwin Drood"

It was greatly admired by many, but none more so than Vincent van Gogh, whose 1888 painting of "Gauguin's Chair" it apparently influenced (fig. 200). Fildes's graphic engraving was accompanied by Charles Collins's description of Dickens. Indeed Collins, far from appearing to resent or envy Fildes, was particularly helpful. He introduced him to his brother Wilkie, some of whose works, as well as ones by Lever, Reade, and Thackeray's daughter, Anne, among others, Fildes subsequently illustrated. Collins also introduced him to Millais, whose illustrations in the 1860's had inspired Fildes to work for periodicals but who now encouraged him to rent a studio, concentrate his energies on painting just as Marcus Stone was now doing, and advised him as to subjects for paintings that might be of interest to the Royal Academy; indeed, one of his subsequent paintings, 'Simpletons,' which was displayed at the Royal Academy in 1873, was entitled by Collins and his wife. Even after Collins died in 1873, Fildes continued his friendship with Kate and her new husband, Carlo Perugini, and other members of the Dickens family; in later years, he painted Kate's portrait, as well as that of her younger brother, Henry, and also gave her his sketch of 'The Empty Chair.' Meanwhile, Forster commissioned him to do a watercolor of Dickens's grave in Westminster Abbey to be engraved for the third and last volume of his biography of the author. By 1877, just seven years after Dickens's death, Fildes was successful enough as a painter that he could resist the entreaties of Lewis Carroll, who admired the pictures for 'Drood' so much that he was very eager to have Fildes illustrate the successors to the 'Alice' books. If, in his own old age, Fildes grew bored with the works of Dickens, at least he never forgot that he owed him much of his subsequent good fortune.

Throughout his life, Fildes was plagued by Dickens enthusiasts, especially those trying to track down the ending of The Mystery of Edwin Drood—an enterprise they pursued with a tenacity never displayed by admirers of Mrs. Gaskell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thackeray, whose last works were also unfinished. The artist, however, contributed little information that readers could not deduce for themselves. But the multiple ironies of the situation made further inquiry irresistible. Just as Dickens's first novel still provokes controversy about its origins, his last work provokes controversy about its ending. In both disputes, any position must be based in part on the testimony of the illustrators and their families as well as on a minute examination of their drawings. The problem of Drood's conclusion, like those of Pickwick's genesis, may never be resolved conclusively. That they still engage readers after more than a century, however, testifies to the novels' transcendent power. Thus this account of Dickens and his original illustrators comes full circle with the author, not the artist, having, as always, the last word.