

Chapter 10

DANIEL MACLISE

Daniel Maclise's many pictures of Dickens, his family, his friends (and even his pet) testify to his intimacy with the author. His few illustrations for Dickens's books—one for *The Old Curiosity Shop* and several for the Christmas books, all motivated by a sense of obligation rather than desire—testify to the problems of collaboration between close friends. Indeed, the very qualities of artistic intensity that initially attracted the two men to each other proved a strain not only on their professional relationship but ultimately on their personal one as well.

The artist and the author had much in common. Both came from humble social origins. Maclise's rise to prominence was as legendary, if not as meteoric, as that of Dickens.¹ His art, with its wide range of subjects—portraits, as well as historical, literary, and fantasy scenes—characterized by idealized figures (not drawn from models), powerful draftsmanship, minute detail, and polished finish, impressed a succession of influential viewers beginning with his Cork schoolmates. A friend of Dickens (and the Seymours), Samuel Carter Hall, persuaded him to abandon medicine to pursue painting—the same course as that taken by Leech. Sir Walter Scott predicted a fine future for the young man who sketched his likeness unawares during a visit to a Dublin bookstore. And John Jackson, engraver and friend of Seymour, Buss, and Browne, recommended him to the Royal Academy, which accepted him as a student in 1828, exhibited his work from 1830 on, and elected him to membership in 1835. Like Dickens, the handsome Irishman (fig. 143) was socially as well as artistically versatile, and felt equally at ease among Ainsworth's colleagues, the Gore House circle of the Countess of Blessington and the Count D'Orsay, or the staffers of *Fraser's* magazine. It is likely that the latter group first brought the two men together and possible that a portrait of the author as a Parliamentary reporter was one of the first fruits of their meeting (fig. 144).²



Fig. 143. E. M. Ward, Portrait of Daniel Maclise, 1846. Oil on panel. 18" × 13⁷/₈" (45.7 × 35.2 cm). By permission of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The two men apparently took to one another at once, soon forming with Forster a close "triumvirate," which endured more than a quarter of a century. Indeed, though Carlyle may have felt that Maclise was among those friends of Dickens whose uncritical admiration "did him no good,"³

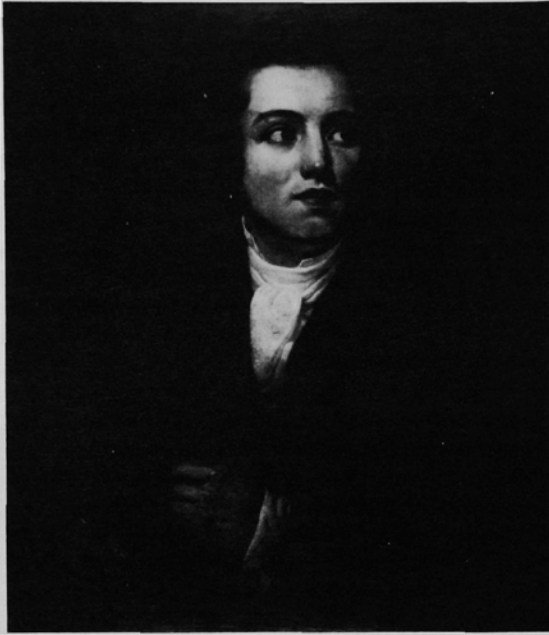


Fig. 144. Attributed to Daniel Maclise, Unpublished Portrait of Dickens as a Parliamentary Reporter, ca. 1837. Oil. 28½" × 24½" (72.4 × 62.2 cm). From the Gimbel Collection, by permission of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

the author, in awe of the artist's talents, was completely captivated by his unselfconscious charm, his ability to live wholly in the present moment—be it one of action or indolence—, his blend of shrewdness and simplicity, and his perceptive humor; Maclise, a fellow member of the Shakespeare Society as well as the Portwiners, did many canvases of literary subjects, and Dickens felt that his sensitivity to literature was such that he could well have been a writer had he wanted to (*RP*, 134).⁴ "A greater enjoyment than the fellowship of Maclise at this period would indeed be difficult to imagine," recalled Forster; indeed, by 1840, he and Dickens agreed that "a dinner here without [the artist] seemed an absurdity."⁵ Not only dinners but the author's theater parties, charitable banquets and projects, tours for visitors, and excursions in and out of London invariably included the painter.⁶

Furthermore, although there seems to be no truth to the rumors that Maclise, who lived with his unmarried sister Isabella, was ever in love with young Kate Hogarth or engaged to Mary,⁷ the bachelor was closer to Dickens's family than a brother-in-law. The author's household sup-

plied the artist with carefree domesticity, and the artist's many flirtations afforded Dickens much vicarious pleasure.⁸ Less inhibited with Maclise than with Forster, the author wrote him unreservedly on subjects ranging from early baldness to parental death.

Just as it was eminently appropriate that Forster should write the first comprehensive biography of Dickens, it was fitting that Maclise should paint the author's best-known portrait. "There are only two styles of portrait painting: the serious and the smirk," as Miss La Creevy explained to Kate Nickleby, "and we always use the serious for professional people" (*NN*, X, 116). Maclise's portrait of Dickens, commissioned by Chapman and Hall for an engraved frontispiece to *Nickleby*, was to be serious, unlike his humorous informal characterizations for *Fraser's*. Yet he had no intention of producing the typical genteel Academy likeness; moreover, Dickens was also determined that his portrait would be different. Exerting the same brand of control over the portrait as he did over the illustrations to his writing, the author "countermanded" at least one "face" before approving the final one ("which all people say is astonishing").⁹ By June, 1839, the finished portrait was in the hands of Finden, the noted engraver (and Browne's former employer), while Maclise and his sitter unwound from their task at Petersham.¹⁰

The sensitive portrait, unveiled at the *Nickleby* dinner on October 5, dominated not only the setting but also the conversation (fig. 145). Family, friends, rivals, and readers alike admired the portrait. Though, as Richard Ormond has pointed out, the pose of the man of letters seated by a table had been developed and used by Maclise in his *Fraser's* portraits, and elsewhere, this one managed, by its use of light as well as of line, to suggest the shrewd individual as well as the inspired author.¹¹ Clearly, the artist "understood the inward 'Boz' as well as the outward," observed Thackeray, noting the intelligence of the eyes and the capacious forehead, the spirit implicit in the flared nostrils, and the generosity in the smile playing about the full mouth.¹² George Eliot might have detested the "keepsakey, impossible face which Maclise gave him" when Forster re-engraved it in what she called "all its odious namby-pambyness" for his 1871 biography of Dickens; but most of Dickens's contemporaries found it a true likeness.¹³ Accordingly, in the era before photographs of celebrities, readers readily based their idea of the author's appearance on Maclise's widely reproduced portrait. Chapman and Hall owned the copyright to the canvas, which, perhaps imitating the generosity of Constable to Sir Walter Scott, they gave to Dickens.¹⁴



Fig. 145. Daniel Maclise, Portrait of Dickens, 1839. Oil. 36" × 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (91.5 × 71.4 cm). By permission of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Throughout the 1840's, at the height of their intimacy, Maclise more lightheartedly documented the central characters in Dickens's private life. In March, 1841, when Dickens sent Maclise a black-bordered announcement that his pet raven Grip had died, the artist responded with characteristic wit.¹⁵ He extended his sympathy both rhetorically and pictorially (fig. 146), speculating that the black raven—"the very prototype of a Byron hero—and even of a Scott,"—had committed suicide but would live forever in his owner's prose. Meanwhile, the bereaved might take comfort from his sketch of the bird's apotheosis, perhaps, as has been suggested, a caricature of Cattermole's tail-piece of little Nell borne to heaven by angels (*OCS*, LXXII, 593) (see fig. 123).¹⁶ As the artist had prophesied, Grip was immortalized in the next number of *Barnaby Rudge* (III, XII, 105) (fig. 147), and a successor was soon welcomed to Devonshire Terrace.

In 1842 Maclise provided a more sober graphic consolation for Dickens and his wife. Anxious about leaving her young children in London while they toured America, Kate

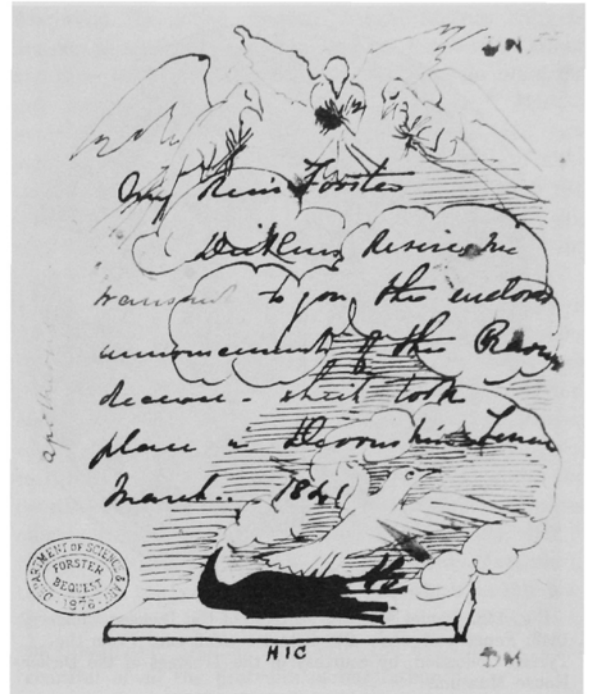


Fig. 146. Daniel Maclise, Sketch of the Apotheosis of Dickens's Raven. Letter to John Forster [March 12, 1841]. Ink. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (11.5 × 9.2 cm) [sheet]. From the Forster Collection (Library), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 147. Hablot Browne, 'Barnaby and the Raven.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 52, p. 306. Wood engraving. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " × 4 $\frac{7}{16}$ " (5.7 × 11.3 cm). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Dickens asked the artist to make a group portrait of her four little ones. "With all my heart I will do what you wish," answered Maclise, who vowed to include even their unchristened baby, if only with "three dots and a line" (fig. 148); perhaps at this time he also made his sketch of their



Fig. 148. Daniel Maclise, Portrait of the Dickens Children, 1842. Pencil and wash. 21" diameter (53.3 cm). From the Tyrrell Collection, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Dickens House Museum.

home at Devonshire Terrace as an additional farewell memento (fig. 149).¹⁷ Throughout their American journey, according to their secretary, George Putnam, both anxious parents derived comfort from the picture of their children in which Charley and Mamie held wine glasses, while baby Walter stretched his arms behind Katie, who was absorbed in the recent edition of Strutt's *Costumes*;¹⁸ even Grip's successor was included, looking indifferently out the window. The charming sketch was greatly admired by their American fans, one of whom asked to have the picture as a souvenir. "Imagine such impudence! and audacity!" cried the outraged mother to Maclise.¹⁹

Much as Kate must have missed her children, she was less vociferous about it than her husband was about his longing for his close friends. Forster's lengthy accounts of his and Maclise's doings were not enough for him, and he was pained when he did not hear directly from the artist who, never a willing correspondent and presently depressed by his mother's death, may have felt that news from him would be superfluous. "Was it a necessary consequence of being out of your sight that we should be out of your mind, likewise? Oh Mac, Mac!" Dickens wrote in March, after he had been abroad only two months; "I have not yet heard from him," he sourly notified Forster in April; in May, when

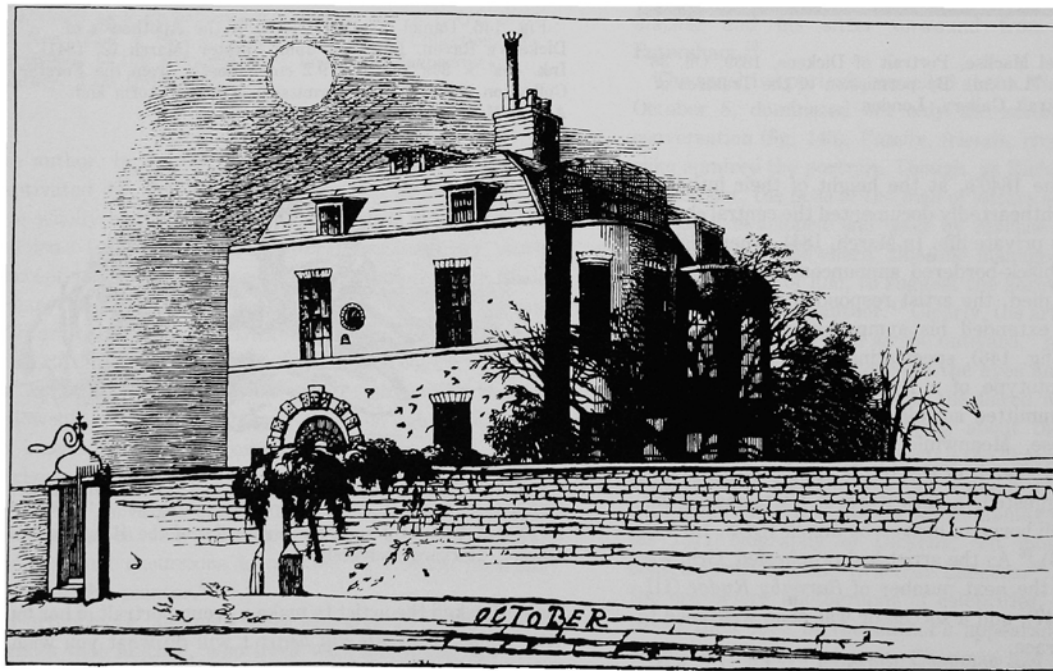


Fig. 149. Daniel Maclise, Sketch of Devonshire Terrace. Photograph of a wood engraving. 4" × 6½" (10.2 × 16.7 cm). From the Forster Collection (Library), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

at last the artist did write, Dickens found his letter "as good as his painting, I swear."²⁰ Throughout all his adventures in the *New World*, Dickens constantly wondered what his intimates were doing in the Old; and whenever he was traveling, be it to Boston or Broadstairs, nothing delighted Dickens more than anticipating his return.²¹ First he wanted Maclise and Forster to come out in the Pilot's boat when he sailed into Liverpool; then disregarding the idea of this prearranged reunion, Dickens decided instead to rush without warning into Forster's study and Maclise's studio—a plan that he executed.²² Afterwards, he enjoyed an uproarious dinner at Greenwich, where he saw most of his other friends as well.²³

Though soon hard at work reading *American Notes* for its October publication, Dickens always found time to divert himself with Maclise, whether viewing the artist's widely discussed scene from *Hamlet* or entertaining Longfellow.²⁴ Then to celebrate the completion of the *Notes* and partly to challenge the picturesque sights he had seen overseas, Maclise, together with Forster and Stanfield, arranged a scenic journey to Cornwall for Dickens. Forster was put in charge of the luggage; Stanfield the maps; Dickens the finances; and Maclise the entertainments.²⁵ In one of the few serious moments on the trip, Maclise was inspired by the magnificence of St. Nighton's waterfall, which he painted upon his return to London. Into the picture, with its painstakingly detailed background of rushing falls and mysterious dark cave, he introduced a statuesque peasant maiden holding a pitcher while crossing the stream to retrieve her shoes (fig. 150).²⁶ He used as a model Dickens's fifteen-year-old sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, who partly filled the place in the author's household left vacant by Mary Hogarth's death.

Dickens was eager to purchase the picture before its exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1843. He knew from his experience with the *Nickleby* portrait that if his wish were known to Maclise, the artist would simply give it to him or sell it for a sacrificially low price. Therefore, he enlisted Thomas Beard in a "pious fraud" to purchase the painting without the artist's knowledge.²⁷ The ruse, that one of Beard's country friends wished to purchase a work by Maclise with only one figure in it, worked. The artist, absent because of illness from the party where the author unveiled the canvas for his friends, was irate when he discovered what had transpired. "How could *you* think of sending me a cheque for what was to me a matter of gratification?" stormed Maclise, returning the money with regret that it had been sent at all.²⁸ He resented not being permitted to give Dickens some token of the value he attached to their

friendship. "Do not be offended," begged Dickens, entreating him to accept the check in payment for so much talent and time; he would be glad to be indebted to the artist for any scrap of his work except this portrait.²⁹ Maclise evidently found this arrangement acceptable. His two subsequent portraits of Mrs. Dickens (figs. 151 and 152), the former probably an intended companion in size if not quality to his famous portrait of her husband (see fig. 145), may have been his responses to Dickens's benevolent machinations.³⁰

However, Dickens could hardly refuse the next sketch of family members that came from Maclise's pencil. After the Cornwall journey, the author found it difficult to get back into harness for *Martin Chuzzlewit*. One February afternoon in 1847, despairing at his inability to write, Dickens took his "pair of petticoats," as he called Kate and Georgina, to Richmond for supper. Afterwards, while he related the details of this salutary excursion to his friends, Maclise quickly sketched the trio in graceful profile (fig. 153).³¹ Forster thought all the likenesses excellent, particularly that of the thirty-one-year-old author, which he felt perfectly conveyed his look and bearing at the time; Dickens's daughter, Mamie, considered the drawing the most beautiful of all the portraits of her father.³²

Events soon conspired to alter and age Dickens's youthful expression in this picture. The disappointing *Chuzzlewit* sales, the unexpectedly low profits from *A Christmas Carol*, and the birth of his fifth child precipitated a "triumvirate conference" about Dickens's future.³³ He rapidly acted on the decision to leave Chapman and Hall as well as England. The novelty of a quiet, economical life in Italy quickly palled on Dickens, who sorely missed accustomed activities and acquaintances. From Alvaro, he wrote to Maclise with "something of the lofty spirit of an exile—a banished commoner—a sort of Anglo-Pole," expressing his depression at being separated from his "arms and legs," as he called his two best friends.³⁴ He was more cheerful after moving to the Palazzo Pechiere in Genoa from which he could see the Mediterranean, as blue in the autumn light "as the most pure and vivid prussian blue on Mac's palette when it is newly set."³⁵ In a happier frame of mind, Dickens started work on a successor to *A Christmas Carol*. He was gratified to hear that, for the first time since 1841, Maclise had agreed to illustrate his work as well as his life.

Almost nothing had come of the novelist's original hope to have Maclise regularly join Browne and Cattermole in illustrating *Master Humphrey's Clock*.³⁶ Perhaps the busy painter might have contributed more often had the *Clock*



Fig. 150. Daniel Maclise, 'Waterfall at St. Nighton's Keive, near Tintagel,' 1842. Oil. 35½" × 24¾" (90.2 × 62.9 cm). From the Forster Collection (Room 104), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 151. Daniel Maclise, Portrait of Mrs. Charles Dickens, ca. 1846. Photograph of oil painting. $8\frac{7}{16}'' \times 6\frac{5}{8}''$ (21.5 × 16.8 cm). From the Tyrrell Collection, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Dickens House Museum.

continued as a miscellany. As the story of little Nell advanced, however, the artist must have indicated his willingness to try his hand at it. Dickens advanced the matter with calculated casualness. He promised to read his friend the chapter where Nell arrives at her last earthly home—a church redolent of life, death, and resurrection—rich in graphic possibilities that, he added, “if you exert your pencil in my behalf at all, perhaps would suit you as well as any other.”³⁷ The artist evidently did not “mind” depicting the old sexton showing the child the church well underneath the bells; and Dickens not only extended “a million thanks” upon his friend’s acquiescence but, for only the second time in dealing with any of his illustrators, explicitly promised to accommodate the text to the illustration, if Maclise wanted to add more figures to his design.³⁸ The artist took advantage of the author’s unprecedented flexibility—he included the bell pull, but not the bells, and ignored the banal hourglass Dickens suggested, for example—and his friend let him have his way.³⁹

Maclise’s scene proved worthy of Dickens’s solicitous trust; the text and illustration are truly inextricable. “Look in,” the sexton tells Nell, pointing downward with his finger



Fig. 152. Daniel Maclise, Portrait of Mrs. Charles Dickens. Engraving of painting. $4\frac{3}{4}'' \times 6\frac{1}{2}''$ (12.1 × 16.5 cm) [photograph]. From the Tyrrell Collection, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Dickens House Museum.

toward the well (*OCS*, LV, 441) (fig. 154). The text breaks off, the reader confronts the illustration, and in doing so necessarily duplicates the child’s lowering gaze. The downward action of the text and of the reader’s head, as Harvey has also noted, is further reinforced by the artist’s use of multiple verticals: the well’s upper frame, tight rope and handle as well as the sexton’s dress-folds, crutch and pointing forefinger.⁴⁰ The sole horizontals—the tomb and sculptured effigy behind the sexton and the oval well opening—thus become more prominent and more ominous. The reader’s eye, like Nell’s, focuses on the well, finally moving below it only to confront the reinforcing line of text: “It looks like a grave itself” (LV, 441). Maclise’s use of light and shadow similarly exploits the symbolic implications of the episode. If the text ambiguously suggests the child’s fate, the artist, by making Nell’s figure glow with light, and her posture follow the shape of the protective church arches, graphically anticipates that if she must be enveloped in the blackness of death, she ultimately will transcend it. The illustration not only supplies a striking finale to the chapter and number, but gives the text literal and figurative depth.



Fig. 153. Daniel Maclise, Sketch Portrait of Georgina Hogarth, Catherine Dickens, and Charles Dickens, 1843. Pencil. $7\frac{7}{8}'' \times 5\frac{3}{16}''$ (20 × 14.8 cm) [sheet]. From the Forster Collection (Department of Prints and Drawings), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Doubtless Maclise was too preoccupied with his own canvases to further illustrate Dickens's work at this time. Moreover, as Harvey also perceives, further random contributions to the *Clock* by the painter might have impeded coordination of the other principals and upset the evolving aesthetic balance between Cattermole and Brown.⁴¹ Besides, despite his sincere appreciation of his friend's writing, Maclise did not share Dickens's fondness for girls Nell's age, whom he considered "most insipid."⁴² Like Ruskin, perhaps, he was more intrigued by Barnaby's raven.

For *The Chimes* in 1844 it was decided to depart from the format of *A Christmas Carol* by engaging more than one artist, in order to alleviate the strain on Leech as well as to incorporate greater visual variety, and increase the number of illustrations to attract more purchasers. ("Eight illustrations," the *Times* noted snidely, "were thought sufficient to

"A black and dreadful place!" exclaimed the child.
"Look in," said the old man, pointing downward with his finger.
The child complied, and gazed down into the pit.



"It looks like a grave, itself," said the old man.
"It does," replied the child.

Fig. 154. Daniel Maclise, 'Nell and the Sexton.' *Master Humphrey's Clock*, no. 35, p. 108. Wood engraving. $4\frac{7}{16}'' \times 3\frac{15}{16}''$ (11.3 × 10 cm). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

make the *Carol* understood, twelve were necessary for the sale of the *Chimes*."⁴³ Maclise readily agreed to contribute to the frontispiece and title page design for the new holiday book. He himself was fascinated by the season's secular rites, and had even made them the subject of an 1838 canvas, 'Merry Christmas in the Baron's Hall,' as well as a ballad for *Fraser's* that year.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he probably considered that to execute two designs was the least he could do for Dickens, self-exiled on the Continent. To Forster, however, in charge of coordinating the enterprise, Maclise expressed his reluctance to be associated with such a commercial venture by complaining about the format. He found it hard, he said, to squeeze a design on one small page, being accustomed to large-scale canvases. Would Forster ask Dickens to have the width of the margin increased? A

larger page would make the format more elegant, the artist argued more objectively. In his opinion, the appearance of the *Carol* had represented “the very climax of vulgarity in its *mise en planches*.”⁴⁵ *The Chimes* pages do seem to have been enlarged, but so slightly as to be imperceptible to the common reader and, doubtless, unsatisfactory to Maclise.⁴⁶

Maclise’s designs, allegorical rather than realistic like Leech’s, displayed his characteristic industry and polish. But it seems evident that he felt cramped. In contrast to the traditionally reticent frontispiece, Maclise’s overwhelmed the page (following p. 79) (fig. 155); indeed the lack of any margin along its bottom suggests the printer may have had to trim the design. The forceful, somewhat geometrical composition—aptly described by Richard Ormond as an X-axis formed by swirling groups of elves, superimposed on the verticals and horizontals of the Gothic belfry⁴⁷—successfully strained to provide an illusion of space. Dickens, more sensitive to the substance than the technique, was charmed by the symbolism of the elves emerging from the bells, some bearing the coffin of the old year, others the infant new year, but some readers no doubt agreed with the reviewer who saw only a “monstrous mélange of kicking, sprawling nudities.”⁴⁸ Maclise’s title page (following p. 79) is similarly playful and imaginative, with goblin figures forming many of the letters as in a medieval manuscript, according to Ormond,⁴⁹ yet the five different styles of calligraphy are more visually distracting than pleasing. Nevertheless, the artist had lived up to his agreement, however reluctantly, and need feel no qualms while awaiting his friend’s return.

In Italy, as in America, Dickens had become obsessed with planning his return to London. Not only was it imperative that he personally see the holiday book through publication, he rationalized to Forster, but he wished to read the completed story to his friends.⁵⁰ His week-long visit in December accomplished these objectives. Maclise was present among both groups of friends whom Forster summoned on successive nights to hear Dickens read *The Chimes*, a moving event that helped inspire the author’s later public readings. After one of the performances, Maclise made a sketch in which he managed to include a halo of light around Dickens’s head and the *Chimes* spirits on the left-hand side, as well as to individualize the expressions of the assembled listeners (fig. 156).⁵¹ “I do not think there was ever such a triumphant hour for Charles,” wrote the artist to Mrs. Dickens, to whom he sent the sketch; “every face was either extended into the broadest possible of grins, or else altogether hidden behind the handkerchief.”⁵² The reaction of this admittedly biased audience was also shared by the general public. Sales were unaffected by criticisms like that of the *Times*, which found the “gross absurdities” of



Fig. 155. Daniel Maclise, Frontispiece to *The Chimes*. *The Chimes* (London, 1844), facing title page. Steel engraving. 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ " \times 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (15.5 \times 9.9 cm). From the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the tale further perpetuated and upheld by “illustrations equally atrocious.”⁵³

The success of *The Chimes* and the prospect of returning to London for good in the spring, after a reunion with the triumvirate in Flanders,⁵⁴ lightened Dickens’s remaining period of Italian exile. During his first months after he came home, Dickens was preoccupied with founding his amateur theatrical company. Immediately after its debut, however, he began to plan his next Christmas book. The reluctant artist delayed committing his services to *The Cricket on the Hearth*. “I have already given Mr. Maclise to understand that he must let me know, *this week*, whether he will do the



Fig. 156. Daniel Maclise, Sketch of *The Chimes* Reading, December, 1844. Pencil. 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (11.1 \times 17.5 cm) [sheet]. From the Forster Collection (Department of Prints and Drawings), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Frontispiece," the author wrote Bradbury and Evans at the end of September.⁵⁵ Still the painter vacillated. He was preoccupied now with the scenes he had been commissioned to make for the new Parliament buildings, and balked at diminishing his energy and compromising his standards on yet another commercial venture for Dickens. He argued that his illustration could add little of value to his friend's work. The author chided this self-deprecation: "Do not think so nonsensically about the value of your frontispiece. I can hardly believe you to be serious, when I know so much better, and so far above all possibility of dispute, what its value is."⁵⁶ At last, probably after a personal conference, Dickens persuaded Maclise to provide not only the frontispiece but the title page as well.

Once again, however, the artist expressed his ambivalence about participating in this holiday enterprise by complaining to Forster about the technical arrangements. The publishers sent what seemed to the artist such a small pair of blocks for his designs that he sent them back; of the two replacements he received, he found only one satisfac-

tory. Not only did the artist rage to Forster that he must have Dickens insist at once, but once again urged him to have Dickens insist on a still larger page to improve the book's appearance—a change that, Maclise claimed, would make him "happy for life."⁵⁷ Dickens, meanwhile, chafing at Maclise's delay in producing the illustrations but unaware of its causes, demanded that the publishers see if the artist was nearly finished.⁵⁸ Finally, the artist received a suitable block—one that was at least the same size as the ones for *The Chimes*, if no bigger—and completed his carefully structured designs to Dickens's if not his own satisfaction.

Once again, the *Cricket* page barely contained Maclise's frontispiece (180) (fig. 157), which was far more complex than the one for *The Chimes* (see fig. 155). As Ormond has shown, the artist's symmetrical structure managed to control its superabundant detail.⁵⁹ Between the solid horizontals of the furniture and fire grate, Maclise centered a cricket over the fire by which the Peerybingles sit. The insect is almost lost, however, in the cloud of steam rising from the boiling kettle, which leads into the swirls of holly



Fig. 157. Daniel Maclise, Frontispiece to *The Cricket on the Hearth*. *The Cricket on the Hearth* (London, 1845), facing title page. Wood engraving. 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 3 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (16.2 \times 9.7 cm). From the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

surrounding ten miniature tableaux from the narrative. Meanwhile, on a strong diagonal below the couple, fairies rock their baby's cradle. The cozy claustrophobia is somewhat alleviated, however, by the lack of an enclosing linear frame around the upper third of the scene. Maclise's title page, as in *The Chimes*, is far simpler and more effective (181). To structure this holly-bordered design, with its sportive pudgy elves, the artist utilizes the powerful horizontals of the clock striking midnight. The ropes on which the pendulums hang somewhat obscure the letters of the title but at least the latter's clear block style does not

compound this difficulty. Maclise obviously took pains with these *Cricket* illustrations, which, being the preliminary scenes, had to set the gentle tone for the narrative. But he got little thanks for his pains. The *Cricket* sold well, but the reviewers were particularly unkind to Maclise. Thackeray might term his frontispiece "one of the most brilliant specimens of the art," but the *Illustrated London News* deemed it inappropriately "un-English" and clearly agreed with the *Times* in finding the title page, with its naked spirits, "outrageous and not very decent."⁶⁰ Dickens himself said nothing whatsoever. The proud artist must have regretted his efforts, so misunderstood even by sophisticated critics and only tacitly appreciated by the author.

Dickens was so caught up in his work on the *Daily News*, however, that he did not immediately sense Maclise's chagrin, which was no doubt exacerbated by his labors for the Parliament buildings at Westminster. The painter was helpful at the Rochester meeting about the author's future in February, 1846 when it was decided that Dickens should quit the newspaper and go abroad again to write a new novel, but his absence at the subsequent series of farewell parties was conspicuous.⁶¹ When Dickens first wrote Maclise from abroad, it was to convey his hurt at the painter's cold leavetaking rather than to recount his journey to Switzerland.

Once abroad again, Dickens's anxiety about his future manifested itself partly in excessive concern about the illustrations for his next holiday production, *The Battle of Life*, as well as for *Dombey and Son*. Forster, again in charge of coordinating the principals in the author's absence, contacted Maclise about illustrating this Christmas story, which was to be loosely set in Goldsmith's eighteenth century rather than the present. He predictably encountered strenuous opposition. "On the whole," the artist replied to his solicitation, "I would prefer not engaging in the matter at all."⁶² If Forster really felt that the volume's appearance should resemble the former ones as closely as possible, said Maclise, he would accede to his request but "not at all for D," for given his recent indifference and present silence, he obviously did not "care one damn" whether Maclise contributed to the book or not.⁶³

Nevertheless, Forster somehow elicited Maclise's sympathy for their absent mutual friend, for the artist not only agreed to illustrate *The Battle* but markedly altered his attitude toward its production. He agreed to execute the frontispiece if Forster would remove the subject from Doyle and save it for him.⁶⁴ Since he thought a plain title page would look better than an ornate one, he offered to make another design for the narrative—whatever Forster liked: "The girls and the Doctor, Marion reading, &c., or the lover

of Marion's interview with her, and Clemency outside the door, &c."⁶⁵ He wanted plenty of time to work and promised, in any case, to keep his designs within the limit on the size of the page. Dickens knew nothing of these negotiations. Forster merely announced to him the "glad surprise" that Maclise, along with Stanfield, Leech, and Doyle, would contribute to *The Battle*; the artist, in turn, must have been pleased to learn from Forster that this news had made the author "jump for joy."⁶⁶

Dickens's obvious gratitude perhaps stimulated the artist to efforts that more than compensated for his prior reluctance. "Mac has come out with tremendous vigour in the Xmas Book," Forster reported to the author, "and took off his coat at it with a burst of such alarming energy that he has done four Subjects!"⁶⁷ Maclise prepared not only his customary frontispiece and title page for the story, as agreed, but two other illustrations as well. Executing a decorated title page after all (281), he displayed his usual strong sense of structure in composing the martial figures in a U curve, crossed by the strong diagonals of the clearly lettered title banner and weapons. More delicate designs were required for the frontispiece (this time readily contained within the small page) and the other two illustrations, all of which involved female rather than fantastical figures. Yet the Jeddler sisters dancing (280) (fig. 158) and reuniting (III, 376),⁶⁸ and even Clemency despairing over Marion's interview with Michael (II, 336) are all depicted in the mannered and sensuously statuesque fashion characteristic of the artist. If Maclise's portrayals of "Eve's fair daughters" wanted any "maudlin taint," as Dickens had noted earlier in mock-serious verse (*CP*, 2: 305), they invariably lacked charm as well. Doubtless this is why Leech despaired so at Maclise's determination to see his representation of Clemency carried through by the *Battle's* other illustrators.⁶⁹

Indeed, Maclise's concern about the reception and reproduction of his *Battle* designs—ostensibly done merely to help out his friend—was more like that of an artist trying to win a reputation than of an established artist just commissioned to help redecorate the Houses of Parliament. Stung by the charge that his *Cricketer* work smacked of the obscene, he worried particularly about his frontispiece, which depicted the Jeddler sisters dancing before an apple tree to the delight of the female onlookers, themselves ogled by two men peering over the fence (280) (fig. 158). He half-jokingly worried that a moralist like Thackeray might find it "lecherous, libinous, lustful, lewd, and loose" though he intended it to be "pure and mild as the moo-n-beams."⁷⁰ Thackeray did gently protest, but not about the licentiousness of the artist's illustrations. Rather, he thought that the



Fig. 158. Daniel Maclise, Frontispiece to *The Battle of Life*. *The Battle of Life* (London, 1846), facing title page. Wood engraving, 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ " \times 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13.7 \times 8.9 cm). From the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

costumes, whose imprecisely old-fashioned details attempted to satisfy Dickens's desire to utilize apparel of "dear old Goldsmith's day," merely "prettified" the female characters in the narrative, as in "some of Mr. Maclise's charming designs."⁷¹

Maclise was more seriously concerned about the reproduction of his designs. He was furious to learn that Samuel Williams's brother Thomas and the Dalziels, among the best wood engravers of the day, were unavailable, though his assigned engraver, John Thompson, was their equal. To make matters worse, he was informed that Thompson did not have sufficient "time" to do his designs justice.⁷² When

the finished prints of all four illustrations predictably disappointed him, Maclise unleashed his frustration: "I am mortified and humiliated by the effect of those damnable cuts," he wrote hysterically to Forster; "I would give anything that I had kept to my original resolve and had nothing to do with the thing."⁷³ This time, he kept his resolve. Maclise did not illustrate a Dickens work again. And Dickens, who apparently shared the artist's disappointment in the *Battle* illustrations, did not protest.⁷⁴

The two men began to draw apart. The Christmas book illustrations had strained the artist's perfectionist standards but not destroyed his friendship with Dickens. Yet the heavy workload involved in his monumental work for the rebuilt Houses of Parliament made him less available and more prone to hypochondria and melancholy. Dickens's amateur theatricals, however, continued to provide a neutral ground for their social and professional lives. Maclise, an avid theatergoer, had originally taken a part in the opening production, *Every Man in His Humour*; but just before rehearsals began, he felt too shy at the prospect of facing an audience and withdrew.⁷⁵ However, he never ceased to share his knowledge of period costumes with the troupe, and Robert Browning, aware that the costumes had benefited from the artist's expertise, found them all "perfect."⁷⁶ At the play's debut on September 20, 1845, Maclise made the last of his informal portraits of the author; on the front of a handy play bill he sketched Forster as Kately and Dickens as Bobadil (fig. 159).⁷⁷

But even these offstage contributions ceased as Maclise became totally absorbed by his Parliament project. He did not design the garlanded title page for Mrs. Gamp's 1847 "Projiss" of the theatrical company that Dickens asked him for; and nothing came even of the artist's own proposal that he paint the company in the command performance of *Not So Bad as We Seem*, dedicate it to the Duke of Devonshire who had housed the production, and engrave and publish it for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art.⁷⁸ But he was always invited to attend the group's performances and rarely missed any of them. For this and other reasons, when Queen Victoria commanded a private showing of *The Frozen Deep*, it was Maclise whom Dickens, too busy backstage and embarrassed by his undignified appearance, asked to greet her.⁷⁹

Ironically, Queen Victoria and her consort, who had afforded Dickens and Maclise much amusement in their youth, now inadvertently hastened the dissolution of their friendship. In the early years of the "triumvirate," the author and the artist had carried on an imaginary infatuation for their young sovereign.⁸⁰ Victoria was aware of "McLise"

even then (though she never accustomed herself to the artist's preferred spelling of his name): on the recommendation of his fellow artist, Edwin Landseer, she had purchased some of his Academy canvases, and she gossiped with Melbourne about Maclise's affair with Disraeli's former mistress, Lady Sykes.⁸¹ After she married Prince Albert in 1840, to the mock despair of Dickens and Maclise, Maclise occasionally was patronized by the royal pair; he painted special pictures for the queen to give her husband on his birthday, and joined Landseer, Stanfield, and six other artists in painting frescoes (his first) for the Buckingham Palace garden pavilion.⁸² Aware of the artist's access to royalty, Dickens loved to tease him about his impending knighthood. He also hoped, entirely seriously, that the painter, whose powers he found remarkable, would "leave his mark on more enduring things than Palace Walls."⁸³

The prince consort also encouraged Maclise to produce something monumental, doubtless thinking of the unadorned walls of the new Houses of Parliament at Westminster, rebuilt after the 1834 fire. Dickens was particularly delighted when Maclise decided to compete with other artists hoping to execute the Westminster murals of British historical subjects. Such a project would provide both a challenge and an outlet for his friend's genius. The Commissioners of Fine Arts, actively led by Prince Albert, selected Maclise to design a cartoon for a mural entitled 'The Spirit of Chivalry.' When it was completed in 1845, the partisan author publicly speculated "whether the Fine Arts in any period of their history, have known a more remarkable performance" (*CP*, 1: 35). When the highly praised cartoon was accepted, and Maclise commissioned to paint the subject for the House of Lords, Dickens trusted that the important assignment finally would give his talented but often lazy friend a sense of purpose. The huge scope of both space and subject would allow Maclise to indulge his love of numerous and grandiose figures, yet might prevent him from over-elaborating minute details.⁸⁴ The commissioners were so pleased with 'The Spirit of Chivalry' that they asked Maclise to execute a companion mural, 'The Spirit of Justice,' which he duly completed in 1849; and to begin the first two of a proposed series of frescoes for the Royal Gallery at Westminster, 'The Meeting of Blucher and Wellington' at Waterloo and 'The Death of Nelson' at Trafalgar.⁸⁵ These works proved the artistic triumphs of Maclise's life, however artificial they may appear to later taste, but they also hastened his ruination.

During, and partly because of, his work at Westminster, the bachelor artist became more reclusive and hypochondriacal.⁸⁶ Dickens and his other friends, also worried that his style, with its cold colors and one-dimensional figures in

STRICTLY PRIVATE.

Amateur Performance,

AT MISS KELLY'S THEATRE, 73, DEAN STREET, SOHO,

On Saturday Evening, September 20th, 1845,

WHEN WILL BE PERFORMED

HEN JONSON'S COMEDY OF

EVERY MAN IN HIS HUMOUR.

CHARACTERS.

<p>KNOWELL <i>Mr. Mayhew</i> An Old Gentleman. EDWARD KNOWELL <i>F. Dickens</i> His Son. BRAINWORM <i>Frank Lamer</i> The Father's Man. GEORGE DOWNRIGHT <i>D. Cobble</i> A plain Squire. WELLDRED <i>Mr. Thompson</i> His half-brother. KITELY <i>Mrs. Forster</i> A Merchant. CAPTAIN BOBADIL <i>C. Dickson</i> A Paul's man. MASTER STEPHEN <i>D. Powell</i> A Country Gull. MASTER MATHEW <i>Mr. Leach</i> The Town Gull.</p>	<p>THOMAS CASH <i>Rev. Dickens</i> Kitley's Cashier. OLIVER COB <i>Mr. Leigh</i> A Water Weaver. JUSTICE CLEMENT <i>J. Stone</i> An old merry Magistrate. ROGER FORMAL <i>Mr. Evans</i> His Clerk. WILLIAM <i>Mr. B. B. B.</i> His Servant. JAMES <i>Small J.</i> Wellbred's Servant. MARY KITELY <i>Mrs. Forster</i> Kitley's Wife. MISTRESS BRIDGET <i>Unknown</i> His Sister. TIB <i>Unknown</i> Cob's Wife.</p>
---	---

TO CONCLUDE WITH THE FARCE, IN ONE ACT, CALLED

A GOOD NIGHT'S REST

OR, TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

CHARACTERS.

Mr. SNORINGTON. The STRONG.

Previous to the Comedy The Overture to William Tell.
 Previous to the Farce The Overture to the Good Shepherd.

The Cards of Invitation are presentable to the Theatre from Seven o'clock. The performance will commence at Half-past Seven precisely: at which time it is requested that the whole of the company may be seated.

EVENING DRESS.



Fig. 159. Daniel Maclise, Sketch of Forster as Kitley and Dickens as Bobadil, 1845. Playbill, September 20, 1845. Ink. 10" x 7 3/4" (25.4 x 19.7 cm) [sheet]. From the Forster Collection (Library), by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

theatrical postures, was becoming more mannered than monumental, urged him to travel abroad for rest and rejuvenation, but Maclise, habitually irresolute, vacillated: he said he was too busy; he claimed he was not well; he refused to travel first with, then without Dickens.⁸⁷ Though proposed trips to Italy and Ireland never materialized, the artist finally did accompany the novelist to Paris for a brief visit in 1850, and again in 1855, after which he toured Italy alone, rejoicing as each day brought him closer to home.⁸⁸ Back at Westminster, however, Maclise once again confronted unbearable working conditions. He labored in a drafty, dusty hall with its seasonal heat, damp, and poisonous paint fumes. The stained glass windows cast odd patterns on his own work. He was further discomfited by the quick-drying fresco process, which, unlike his familiar oils, made his painting difficult to alter since the plaster had to be relaid to rectify any mistake. Maclise decided to resign his commission. Prince Albert persuaded him to remain. He not only promised to have the hall dusted and the colored windows removed, but he dispatched Maclise to Berlin in 1859 to investigate a new fresco technique.⁸⁹ The artist, after effacing the finished portion of his fresco in order to apply the new methods he learned in Berlin, finally completed the massive Waterloo subject in December, 1861, the year of Prince Albert's death. Dickens, whose disgust at the queen's prolonged mourning was as immoderate as his despair at her marriage almost two decades earlier, failed to anticipate the devastating effects of the consort's decease on his former intimate.⁹⁰

With characteristic pains, Maclise had already proceeded with the Trafalgar tableau. Although the widowed queen came to inspect and encourage his work, national enthusiasm for the Parliament murals cooled after the consort's

death. In 1864 the commissioners voted Maclise payment beyond that stipulated in their original contract for his first two frescoes, but canceled all agreements for future ones without compensating the painter even for designs he had already made. Nor did they take any account of the lucrative projects he had given up during the years he had been working at Westminster. He was hardly consoled by the universal praise his murals elicited, remarking only that "nobody comes for the pictures after they are done, or wants them as far as I can see."⁹¹

Ill and apathetic after his long ordeal, Maclise withdrew into almost unbroken seclusion. Even after the death, in 1865, of the spinster sister with whom he had lived, he rarely sought company, either of the old "triumvirate" or of his colleagues; the following year, he even declined an offer to become president of the Royal Academy.⁹² Dickens continued to praise his friend publicly (*CP*, 2: 305; *RP*, 109) and tried to remove any grounds between them for offense.⁹³ But, as Forster prophesied to Dickens, one day they would hear that the "wayward" life into which Maclise had fallen was over and "there an end of our knowledge of it."⁹⁴ When that day came, in April, 1870, both were nevertheless shocked. The funeral took place the day of the annual Royal Academy dinner, for which Dickens composed himself enough to eulogize his dead friend. The audience listened magnetized to his moving testimonial.⁹⁵ No artist, he said, "ever went to his rest leaving a golden memory more pure from dross, or having devoted himself with a truer chivalry to the art-goddess whom he worshipped" (*CP*, 2: 534). It was ironic and fitting that it was in honor of Maclise—the closest of the friends who "one by one" had recently "dropped" from his side—that Dickens spoke his own last words in public.