Introduction

Harry Furniss (1854–1925) was a well-known if somewhat abrasive figure in English literary, artistic and political circles during the half century either side of 1900. Today he is almost forgotten, his reputation resting largely upon his caricatures of politicians (especially of Gladstone with his famous winged collars) that he did from 1880 to 1894 for *Punch* magazine, including hundreds of sketches for Henry Lucy’s humorous weekly diary of parliamentary proceedings “The Essence of Parliament.” But he also contributed to some 40 other illustrated magazines and newspapers of the time including *Black and White*, the *Cornhill*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Strand Magazine* and the *Daily News* and illustrated dozens of books by late nineteenth-century writers such as G. E. Farrow, James Payn, Walter Besant, John Davidson and also Lewis Carroll’s last major works *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893), as well as re-illustrating all of Dickens (1910) and all of Thackeray (1911).

As one of the leading black-and-white artists of his day he resented that this group was excluded from membership of the Royal Academy and he constantly lampooned the work of Academicians. His most successful venture in this field was his popular “Artistic Joke,” an 1887 exhibition at the Gainsborough Gallery of about 70 parodies of RA artists, including two of Dickens’s illustrators, Marcus Stone and Luke Fildes (Figs. 40 and 41). With unflagging energy he founded and edited two short-lived, commercially unsuccessful magazines *Lika Joko* (1894–1895) and *Fair Game* (1898–1899), and wrote as the subtitle accurately describes it “a nondescript novel,” *Poverty Bay* in 1905, in addition to two “how to” books for aspiring “pen and ink” art students. Ever ready to embrace the latest technology (he experimented with air fuelled artists’ brushes and was one of the first to use an early form of the dictaphone), he made several early films with Edison in New York before setting up his own studio in Hastings in 1913, another money-losing venture.

Born in Ireland in 1854 he was somewhat of an artistic prodigy for he started in his profession “at the age of fifteen” (36) and a year later, in uncanny anticipation of his work for Lucy, produced “The School-Boys’ Punch” at Dublin’s Wesleyan Connexional School (attended also at the time by George Bernard Shaw and Edward Carson) and contributed to *Zozimus*, the so-called Irish *Punch*. His parents were comfortably off and well known in his birthplace Wexford and later in Dublin society. His father was a Yorkshire engineer, his mother a Scot whose father, Aeneas Mackenzie, was a leader of a group of philosophical radicals in northern England. He claimed to have inherited
his artistic talents from his mother who had exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition and though he spent his first 19 years in Ireland he downplayed the connection and remained staunchly Unionist and decidedly anglophile all his life.

When he arrived in London in 1873 with letters of introduction and a portfolio of sketches under his arm he quickly established himself with some of the leading magazines of the day including the Illustrated London News. With considerable gusto he embraced the Bohemian lifestyle of the metropolis of the 1870s, joining numerous clubs such as the Savage, Beefsteak, Gresham and Garrick where he hob-nobbed with (and sketched) the leading public figures of the day, including Beerbohm Tree and Henry Irving. The theatre and the music hall were a particular passion and his published writings such as Confessions of a Caricaturist (1901), Harry Furniss At Home (1904), My Bohemian Days (1919), Some Victorian Women (1923) and Some Victorian Men (1924) are full of reminiscences and anecdotes about the leading performers of the time, so it is unsurprising that “A Sketch of Boz” is similarly peppered with theatrical references and allusions.

Furniss & Dickens

Furniss was eminently suited to giving a lecture on Dickens and his artists. For one thing, his expertise and experience as an illustrator invested his views with considerable authority. For another he was, as he tells us, “a thorough Dickensian” (84) who as a small boy of thirteen had “pushed and peered in vain for a glimpse of the great ‘Boz’” (Some Victorian Men 183) at his Dublin reading in March 1867, the only real life contact between the two of them. He “possessed an intimate knowledge of the great author” (Some Victorian Men 183) which together with his undoubted skill as an illustrator led in 1910, the year he became a member of the Charles Dickens Testimonial Committee, to the publication of the 18-volume Charles Dickens Library Edition for which he drew 500 new plates. He rightly claimed to be the only artist to have “illustrated an entire series of Dickens’s completed works” (Some Victorian Men 183) for the whole canon had never been illustrated previously by a single artist but by various hands ranging from Seymour to the more recent Fred Barnard, the very artists that constitute the substance of his 1905 lecture. This, at the invitation of the Dickens Fellowship, he delivered at the Memorial Hall, London, on 1 March and in the winters of 1905–1907 he toured England and Scotland with a considerably expanded version. The advertisement for the lecture (Fig. i) shows Furniss cowering before the great man but this visual representation of their relationship is not to be taken seriously. It is a mock deferential pose, for while he admired and respected Dickens he was no slave to the master novelist. For one thing he was, like Dickens himself, strong willed and independent; for another he viewed the illustrator as a collaborator who is to be given a certain artistic license.4

In 1905 Furniss was also elected President of the Hastings and Leonard branch of the Dickens Fellowship, delivered an hour long inaugural address on 11 January, a second on 27 April, and in between, according to Walter Dexter, gave “a very amusing speech” to 1,500 members of the Fellowship gathered in London to celebrate the In-
imitable’s birthday (Dickensian, December 1943, 26). He was elected a Vice-President of the Dickens Fellowship in 1906 and on 7 February of the same year he gave his “Dickens and His Illustrators” (probably “A Sketch of Boz” but with a different title) to the Boz Club. Five days later he talked on “Charles Dickens and To-Day” at the London Institution.

**Furniss & Platform Culture**

His credentials, then, for giving a lecture on Dickens’s artists were impeccable and as can be seen he was also one of the most experienced (and popular) speakers on the lecture circuit. Given that it was one of the commonest forms of organised cultural activity the public lecture, illustrated or not, is a sadly neglected aspect of Victorian life.

For much of the century, in response to a widespread need for self-improvement, the function of the platform was primarily to inform and instruct on a whole range of scientific, religious, literary and political topics. Both amateur and professional speakers gave lectures at a variety of venues such as church halls, mechanics’ institutes, literary and philosophical societies, museums and even pubs. With the rise of the popular press and the introduction of compulsory education the platform lecture became less instructive and more entertaining, a distinction that Furniss himself was careful to make.

He began his platform career in the late 1880s with two lectures on art, “Portraiture: Past and Present” (1887) and “Art and Artists” (1888). “I was desperately serious in both of these early lectures,” he writes, but he soon decided “to appeal to the more general public, and to attempt, upon the occasion, something more ambitious than a mere discourse” (At Home 110), namely “entertainments.” So drawing upon his experiences as the illustrator to Henry Lucy’s “The Essence of Parliament” he toured the country in 1891 and 1892 and later the USA, Canada and Australia, with his popular and lucrative “The Humours of Parliament.”

There followed a succession of “entertainments”—“America in a Hurry” (1896), “Peace with Humour” (1900), “Comedy in Charcoal” (1902)—in which he appealed directly to the public at hired venues instead of being “engaged by some Society or Institute” to give “Dry as dust” discourses (Flying Visits 11, 12). As his friend Milliken comments Furniss “soon fell out of love with mere lecturing, whose sphere was too
limited, its character too conventional, and its results too restricted for his high aims and soaring ambition” (8). The results of his hugely successful entertainments, in which he regaled audiences sometimes in excess of 3,000 with his fund of anecdotes and typical Victorian wit, were anything but restricted since they earned him large sums of money and in any case they were much more congenial to his energetic and exuberant personality. “A born actor, he has that personal magnetism that gets over the footlights. He is endowed with a strong carrying voice and an easy, conversational manner . . . it was especially the personality of Harry Furniss himself that made these lecture entertainments so attractive. . . .” (unpublished anonymous account). In the 1890s he became one of the most sought after speakers on the platform circuit for the reviews were invariably positive. To quote just one: “He kept his audience in rippling laughter throughout the entertainment, as they listened to his droll stories and descriptive, sparkling wit, and looked at his still more droll illustrations thrown on a screen overhanging the platform,” wrote the Daily News of “America in a Hurry.”

In his early years as a platform speaker Furniss gave his “lecture entertainments” trial runs at the Savage Club but by the time he delivered his Boz lecture in 1905 he had more than fifteen years of experience behind him. While strictly a lecture because he was invited to present it to the Dickens Fellowship and termed so by the Dickensian, “A Sketch of Boz” was in many respects an entertainment, anecdotal, humorous and dominated by the small man with the large presence. Above all it was illustrated by magic lantern slides.

From Magic Lantern to Film

Along with the increasing emphasis on entertainment in illustrated public lectures the 1870s saw the replacement of hand-painted with photographic slides and the development of more convenient and reliable projection equipment (Fawcett 453), even though the experienced Furniss, who employed technical assistants to operate the gas-powered projectors that produced the so-called limelight, had nightmares about biunials and triunials, magic lanterns with two or three separate optical systems respectively (Fig. ii). The 63 slides for the lecture were, as the advertisement put it, drawn from “Mr. Furniss’s sketches and other sources” (Dickensian, February 1905, 82), namely the original illustrations by Cruikshank, Phiz and the rest. These would have been produced by slide manufacturers such as E. B. Fry Ltd. or Newton & Co. There was quite a flourishing industry at the time because “the introduction of simpler projection techniques around 1890 gave a decided boost to the lantern lecture” (Fawcett 456) and lecturers could hire slides and purchase printed texts of lectures on a huge range of topics from commercial lantern distributing agencies such as E. G. Woods. But as a professional platform entertainer Furniss wrote his own text though it is evident he obtained some of his slides from companies. Nine days before his Boz lecture he asked a Mr. Tyrell, who regularly made available to the Fellowship copies from his “remarkable collection of Dickensian photographs” (Dickensian, December 1912, 311), “Have you any slides for me yet? I should like to see them as I forget what you have in hand” (letter, 20 February 1905).
The magic lantern slide gave the oral lecture a visual dimension that widened its appeal and technical developments maintained its popularity until in the words of Furniss “the entertainer and the lecturer [were] killed by the cinema” (Some Victorian Men 175). Partly because of the highly visual nature of his art Dickens’s works adapted readily to the new film medium (the first Dickens film appeared in 1897), and because many of his characters seemed to survive independently of the novels they could, as Orwell put it, “start off as magic-lantern slides and . . . end by getting mixed up in a third-rate movie” (104). While we may prefer, along with Richard Crangle, the term “bricolage” over “evolution” to describe the relation between the two forms (46), there is little doubt that the magic lantern significantly influenced film, and Furniss’s career confirms this.

By 1902 he was already experimenting with a hybrid form as in “Comedy in Charcoal” in which, as he says, “dispensing with the lantern, I drew my subject in front of the audience” (At Home 118–19) at the Steinway Hall. Advertised as “an Entertainment Illustrated by Humorous Hieroglyphics” or “Thought Drawing” (Fig. iii) the Morning Post wrote that “Mr. Furniss gives utterance to his immediate thoughts by means of his fingers, a form of visible speech which, in the shape of many amusing and clever sketches in black and white made in the presence of the audience, proved most diverting.” By 1914 he had moved on from “thought drawing”; by means of “an ingenious combination of screens” (Daily News) he presented a series of “lightning sketches for the Cinematograph” (“Magic Hand” 667), a propaganda show called “Peace and War Pencillings” that ran for six weeks at the London Coliseum, consisting of caricatures of Kaiser Wilhelm and his German troops, described by Rupert Brooke as “a dreadful cinematographic reproduction of a hand drawing patriotic things—Harry Furniss it was” (Keynes 607). Furniss learned the film business from Edison in New York where together they collaborated on seven films in 1912 and then in 1914 he set up his own studio in Hastings though this ended in financial disaster. Furniss, then, exemplifies the transition from magic lantern to film and at the same time provides the link backwards to illustrated books. Ever since Sergei Eisenstein’s famous 1949 essay “Dickens, Griffith, and Film Today” the novelist has been seen as a key figure in the evolution of the early cinema. During the silent film era “no novelist was more frequently filmed than Dickens” writes Philip Bolton (5) but in his standard survey of dramatic adaptations of Dickens’s novels and stories such as “productions of
plays, films, and radio and television dramas . . . playscripts, film scripts, and radio and television scripts” (vii) the illustrated platform lecture is conspicuously absent. It is not going too far to say that “A Sketch of Boz” was an adaptation: it was dramatic, it was presented before a live audience, and it projected images onto a screen. In short it was a performance just as much as a play, a film or a reading by Dickens himself.

In his analysis of “the pre-cinema life of A Christmas Carol” Fred Guida is one of the few critics to date who convincingly argues for the magic lantern as a precursor to the modern cinema, especially in relation to Dickens. “Its foundation, its modus operandi—in truth, its heart—was highly cinematic. It is the source of some of the most
fascinating and yet virtually unknown adaptations ever produced, and the medium that exerted the most direct influence on the fledgling motion picture industry” (50). During the heyday of the magic lantern, the decade of the 1890s, the first movies also appeared but it was less the technological similarities between the two forms (as movie projector superseded the magic lantern) than their compatibility in terms of screen practice that was significant: “In such a history [of screen practice] cinema appears as a continuation and transformation of magic lantern traditions in which showmen displayed images on a screen, accompanying them with voice, music, and sound effects” (Musser, qtd. in Guida 60). In the early silent films there were no subtitles, but a narrator who elaborated upon a rough summary of the plot and action provided by the film makers, just as the showman Furniss accompanied his slides with extensive commentary, a fund of anecdotes and dialect imitations for which he was known. “A Sketch of Boz” then, especially once it was “released” on tour in 1905–1907, may be seen as exemplifying and consolidating the transition from magic lantern to film in which Dickens played so central a role.

The Lecture’s Title

Dickens was also, as we shall see, a prime example of the commodification of the author in Victorian and Edwardian capitalist society. With the magic lantern a precursor to that most marketable of art forms the movie Furniss, a business man as well as an artist, needed a title for his entertainment that would sell it to his public. Interestingly “A Sketch of Boz,” as it was advertised (Fig. i), excluded the author’s proper name in favour of his equally well-known pseudonym, at least for the version given to the Fellowship and at the provincial centres. According to Kathryn Chittick “the connotations of ‘Boz’ were comic” and there was “tremendous affection associated with the fun of Boz” (Schlicke 52). Dickens himself continued to use the name until abandoning it completely with the publication of Dombey and Son (1847–1848), often seen as the pivotal novel in the shift from the so-called sunnier to the supposedly darker novels. By this time “‘Charles Dickens’ had become its own identity, one that indicated more of the serious reformer than the comic ‘Boz’ would allow” (Schlicke 53). So Furniss’s choice of “Boz” in his title was a recognition of his public’s preference for the earlier, apparently less serious novels: at the turn of the century, judged by circulation, the favourites were The Pickwick Papers, David Copperfield, Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop in that order (The Charles Dickens Library, vol. 18, 385) and the commodity culture overwhelmingly chose characters and scenes from the Boz period.

But what about “sketch”? The allusion to Dickens’s own Sketches by Boz (1836) is obvious enough as is the title’s appropriateness to a brief account, given by a well-known contemporary artist on Dickens’s own illustrators, accompanied by numerous actual sketches. It suggests the visual and verbal dimensions of an ephemeral presentation with a journalistic flavour delivered as if off the cuff, in keeping with Boz’s sketches that originally appeared in the magazines and newspapers of the 1830s. The word is rather ponderously exploited by Furniss in his opening comments: a “lady who on being informed that Sketches by Boz was the work of Dickens re-
marked ‘that she was not aware Mr. Dickens could draw!’ There are many today un-
aware of the drawing power of Dickens . . . the name of Boz draws as well as ever” (36). It certainly did for Furniss who on the basis of the lecture’s successful London de-
but toured the provinces for two profitable years. A “sketch” initially appears to be
something spontaneous, an unfinished fragment tossed off at a moment’s notice, and
indeed Furniss was famous for the rapidity with which he captured likenesses on the
spot, but as Alison Byerly argues, and Furniss’s own pun demonstrates, the sketch dis-
guises the text as commodity: “Its apparent freedom from economic imperatives was
an illusion” (310).

Alternative titles to “A Sketch of Boz” were “Charles Dickens—His Art, His Artists
and His Admirers” (37) and “Dickens and His Illustrators,” the latter used by Furniss
when, significantly, he addressed the Boz Club chaired by Lord Robertson at the
Whitehall Rooms of the Hotel Metropole on 7 February 1906. Founded in 1900, two
years before the Fellowship, it was an invitation only club, “a somewhat exclusive as-
semblage of diners [that] featured among its members several representatives of the
aristocracy of rank if not the aristocracy of intellect” (Ford 174), though Furniss is
kinder in allowing its membership to include “all the great men of light and learning”
(36). In addressing this “House of Lords” of Dickens admirers with “Dickens and His
Illustrators” and “the House of Commons” (89) with “A Sketch of Boz,” though the sub-
stance was the same, Furniss signals not just his awareness of different audiences (and
his preference for the latter is made clear in his fable of the two frogs, 89), but also the
distinction between the dignified and respectable Dickens, the greatest of English
novelists, and the popular Boz, caricaturist and contributor of mere sketches to news-
papers. In the lecture Furniss moves between the two Dickenses more easily perhaps
than the author himself whose career was a balancing act between the sometimes
competing desires for professional recognition and popular acceptance, as is seen, for
example, in his careful control over the circulation of his own image.

Portraits of Dickens

According to Gerard Curtis “about 250 different versions” of Dickens’s image “were in
circulation in the late nineteenth century” (143) and they helped establish Dickens as
“the first true celebrity [author] in the modern sense” (Smiley 24). The word “celebrity”
in its current sense of a public personality is first cited by the Oxford English Dic-
toary in 1849 and as historians of the term have noted it was a concept made possible
by the rise of capitalism and the establishment of a consumer culture in which public
figures were marketed as commodities to be circulated and consumed.13 By the turn
of the century the Dickens industry, as we shall see, was in full production, an industry
over which, of course, the deceased Dickens could exercise no control, including the
seven “portraits” Furniss showed at his 1905 lecture (Figs. 1, 3, 5, 7, [59], 8, 15 and 34).
However they were very much predetermined by what was available: even Furniss’s
own sketches are not especially original and so it matters little that he opens his talk
with the admission that he has lost one of the first he “ever offered to a publisher”
(36).14 He begins his lecture with Daniel Maclise’s famous 1839 painting (Fig. 1), a
“fine art’ portrait [that] gives an aura of respectability and authority to ‘Charles Dickens’ as Boz the sketcher gives way to the dignified professional writer (Curtis 130). Then there is Fred Barnard’s sketch Dickens at the Blacking Warehouse (Fig. 8), used as the frontispiece to the Household Edition of Forster’s biography and subsequently the basis for countless more portrayals of his working class suffering over which he was to triumph. Buss’s well-known but unfinished Dickens’s Dream (Fig. 15), one of numerous depictions of the author surrounded by characters from his novels, is the basis for Furniss’s frontispiece to The Uncommercial Traveller (Fig. 5). Both form part of a well-established Romantic view of the writer as possessed or captured by his characters who seem to have a life of their own, a life that will continue beyond the author’s grave. Indeed the original, drawn by Fred Barnard for Fun magazine (25 June 1870), was entitled Charles Dickens’s Legacy to England. Later I will discuss the significance of this legacy for its fashioning of a certain brand of Englishness.

The other two original sketches of Dickens by Furniss (Figs. 3 and 7/59) are loosely based upon photographs by Gurney (1867) and Watkins (1858) respectively. These and the others, except for Barnard’s (Fig. 8), all portray Dickens as the respectable, professional author and in doing so miss the realities of his personality and inner life, perhaps because as Fred Kaplan suggests Dickens “did not believe that any photograph embodied his own sense of himself” (534), though portraits like Maclise’s came much closer, according to Thackeray, to capturing “the real identical man Dickens: the artist must have understood the inward Boz as well as the outward before he made this admirable representation of him” (Fraser’s Magazine, 22 [1840], 113, qtd. Letters 1: 558), an opinion not shared by George Eliot (39).

Furniss, whose hundreds of on-the-spot caricatures of contemporary public figures enlivened the pages of Punch for fourteen years, naturally preferred his models to be living human beings and not portraits or photographs. So his two Dickens sketches are unusually representational and not characteristic of his best work. The sketches of Dickens writing at his desk (Figs. 7, 59)—only the second time that Furniss repeated an illustration during his lecture and one that draws upon at least three earlier representations of Dickens in his study, Ward’s (1854), Watkins’s (1858) and Frith’s (1859)—simply capture and confirm the image of the successful, hard-working author practising his craft, though the goose quill that Dickens habitually wrote with hints at the moment of individual creativity when Romantic inspiration fuses with Victorian perspiration, when the labouring writer begins to establish himself alongside the outcast genius in the public imagination. Consistent then with the presumed desire to depict Dickens as a respectable, professional author, all but one of the images of him shown in the lecture, even Furniss’s own derivative sketches, are in one way or another formal portraits showing that he shared the opinion of a fellow professional, the miniaturist Miss La Creevy in Nicholas Nickleby whom he quotes: “there are only two styles of portrait painting, the serious and the smirk; and we always use the serious for professional people (except actors sometimes), and the smirk for private ladies and gentlemen who don’t care so much about looking clever” (40).
Illustration & Caricature in the Nineteenth Century

Furniss’s sketches of Dickens are unusually representational partly because they are based on existing photographs or formal portraits but also because of the changing style of caricature during the course of the nineteenth century. When we come to Furniss’s assessment of Dickens’s artists we are made aware of the shift from the grossness, vulgarity and viciousness of Gillray and Rowlandson to the “kindly gaiety” of later cartoonists. Furniss’s platform entertainments were praised for their “essential good humour” and for departing from “the more Rabelaisian features of the early caricaturists” (Black and White, 9 May 1891, 430). In surveying Dickens’s illustrators from Seymour to Barnard, Furniss is also tracing the history of book illustration and the fate of caricature in the nineteenth century.

From his perspective Furniss recognizes that the original illustrations are inseparable from the novels and preferred by many readers “to any substitute, even if those substitutes are better” (75). Thus George du Maurier nostalgically recalled that Dickens’s characters had been “fixed, crystallized, and solidified into imperishable concrete by those little etchings” (qtd. Cohen 233) and Percy Fitzgerald asserted that there “may be finality in this connection of original illustrations with the text, from which, bad, indifferent or good, they are not to be divorced” (qtd. Cohen 234). On the other hand, in line with many of his contemporaries such as Joseph Pennell who denounced the early illustrations as “rubbish” (qtd. Cohen 233), Furniss condemns the caricatures of Cruikshank and Phiz that so offended late-Victorian and Edwardian sensibilities. In The Old Curiosity Shop Browne’s “gallery of grotesqueness … is altogether too repulsively ludicrous” (55) while Cruikshank “had little refinement of any kind” (73). Furniss is careful to exempt the later Dickens from this criticism but he concedes that “Boz” is tainted by the “forced caricature” of the early drawings with the result that “Boz was a caricaturist and Charles Dickens was not” (63), though inconsistently he points out that “it is not Boz that is old fashioned but Phiz” (54). The shift to a more carefully crafted and representational style of illustration ushered in by the Pre-Raphaelites and the social realist illustrators of the fifties and sixties saw the demise of caricaturists like Browne whose final sketches for Dickens were for A Tale of Two Cities in 1859. Mid- and late-Victorian middle class respectability demanded a less critical and more reassuringly naturalistic style in keeping with the hideous solidity of its Podsnappian world which it saw as more civilised than the Regency era depicted by the vulgar crudities of Rowlandson and Gillray whose descendants in the tradition of graphic satire were Cruikshank and to a lesser extent Browne.

Furniss notes the “reaction against the mannerism and caricature of Cruikshank and Phiz” by seventies illustrators like Mahoney and Green yet he finds they “went to the other extreme” for in their work there was too much “of the artist’s model, and of the studio properties.” He admires their technical skill but laments the consequent loss of the “spirit of the author” (75). The exception was the main contributor to the Household Edition (1871–1879) Fred Barnard who “as an illustrator of Dickens, stood alone” (77). He managed to retain the Dickensian spirit without alienating his viewers, that is he successfully combined the talents of Browne and Green such that, in Furniss’s
opinion, he was “as serious and as great an artist” as Dickens himself (79). This appears an exaggerated claim but Furniss is in good company. Barnard’s contemporary Van Gogh greatly admired him and his fellow English black-and-white artists, including Furniss himself.\(^\text{18}\)

Later commentators like Arthur Waugh wrote that he “took the ‘Phiz’ types and humanized them; they lost nothing of Phiz’s creative interpretation, but they were stripped of the eccentricity which tended to emphasize the author’s own trick of symbolic hyperbole” (qtd. Schlicke 209). And a modern critic writes that “nearest in feeling [to Dickens], perhaps because of also being nearest in time, was Fred Barnard. . . . Although in technique there is little affinity between Barnard’s work and that of Phiz, they share a precise appreciation of the nuances of Dickens’s humour and a sensibility no less acute to his changes of mood and atmosphere” (Bentley 226).

Barnard apart Furniss is less enamoured with modern illustrators of Dickens for he says of the latest editions “Paul Dombey is a modern child, with long hair like his sister’s; Dombey, in modern cut clothes; Pecksniff might be a member of the County Council, and Quilp, a modern member of Parliament” (85).

**Furniss’s Assessment of Dickens’s Relations with His Illustrators**

If Furniss’s views on Dickens’s artists were conditioned by historical circumstances in the shape of changing attitudes to illustration in the nineteenth century his assessment of Dickens’s working relationship with his illustrators is coloured by his own experiences as a practising professional. He strongly believed that the illustrator needed some guidance but not too much from the novelist. Furniss complains that “authors . . . do not often consider the illustrator at all” in, for example, describing places that no longer exist or in making changes to the characters “to the utter confusion of the conscientious illustrator” (“The Illustrating of Books” 99, 100). In questioning whether authors and artists work sufficiently together Furniss writes that “few authors are as conscientious as Dickens was, or, in fact, care to consult with their illustrators at all. In operatic works the librettist and composer must work hand in hand. Should not the artist do likewise?” (*Confessions*, vol. 1, 93). Here Furniss advocates cooperation but the relative status of author and illustrator is clearer in the following theatrical analogy: “An actor seldom creates a part: he merely carries out the part created by the author. Nor does the illustrator create the character he illustrates: he, like the actor, portrays the style of man the author indicates in a professional way” (“The Illustrating of Books” 102). In other words “an illustrator should not have any ideas of his own. Like an actor he should merely interpret his author” and Furniss is critical of Browne for one for having “created far too much in his scenes” (61) which are too full of Hogarthian emblematic detail, a feature of Phiz’s art that modern critics like Michael Steig admire. On the other hand, Furniss finds minute instructions from “the exacting author” in the form of “lengthy epistles about every detail” leave “little to the artist’s imagination” (“The Illustrating of Books” 103). Thus, while he praises Dickens for his conscientious consultation with his illustrators he is aware of what verges on unwar-
ranteditference when, for example, he quotes Stone complaining of “harassing restrictions” (70).

Consistency not being the hallmark of Furniss’s writings, his bold statement that Dickens “did not understand art, and did not know how to control or guide his illustrators” (58) is not entirely commensurate with all of the comments just quoted but it is undoubtedly fuelled by a sympathetic understanding of the difficult circumstances under which illustrators worked. His views are worth careful consideration not least because he was a proficient illustrator, vastly knowledgeable in the practicalities and day-to-day workings of his profession (he learned engraving while still a boy) and experienced in dealing with sometimes unhelpful or interfering authors like Lewis Carroll. Hence his defence of his predecessors in the lecture. The stress of having to work under the pressure of deadlines led to “worrying blunders on the part of his [Dickens’s] artists” (58), of which Furniss gives examples by Buss, Phiz, Doyle, Maclise and Stone. The blame for these mistakes he places squarely on Dickens’s shoulders: he “was an architect who did not give his builder a chance of doing justice to the work in the time allowed” for the “periodical and piecemeal form of publication—working against time—whilst it may have suited the genius of Dickens, severely handicapped his illustrators” (57). Thus the “mistake” by Phiz in Doctor Blimber’s Young Gentlemen as They appeared when enjoying Themselves (Fig. 25) of drawing seventeen instead of ten young gentlemen as the text states (Dombey and Son, chap. 12) has nothing to do with Browne’s creative additions but everything to do with the poor artist having to work “like a squirrel in a cage: scratch, scratch, scratch, round and round, hour after hour, whether his master was at home or not” (58). One wonders though why, if Browne were pressed for time, he increased and did not decrease the number of Dr. Blimber’s young gentlemen. Still, coming as it does from an experienced book illustrator aware of the constraints and practical difficulties of his art, Furniss’s lecture offers a useful corrective to modern critics who view illustrations as critical commentaries on or interpretations of the written text. Furniss’s defence of his fellow professionals, as befits one whose relations with authors were generally stormy, emerges in the following summary: “It is, therefore, abundantly evident that all through the great, triumphal career of Charles Dickens his artists were but slaves tied to his chariot; and in justice to them, pleading as I am as a brother artist, I must ask all Dickensians who admire and treasure the illustrations to Dickens, not to lose sight of the fact that those illustrations were generally accomplished under conditions of the greatest disadvantage to the artist” (70).

If Furniss identifies disadvantageous conditions as prejudicial to the success of his brother artists he also pinpoints Dickens’s friend and eventual biographer John Forster as the villain of the piece in his story of Dickens and his illustrators: “I think that Dickens made a mistake in having Forster as a buffer between himself and his artists” (22). Indeed he was more like a “big wasp . . . buzzing round” those “working for Dickens,” implying that he was an interfering busybody partly responsible for Leech’s entirely misleading illustration for “The Night of the Return” to which Dickens responded with “horror and agony” (66). For some reason Furniss, even though he agrees with his
characterising Cruikshank’s claim to have suggested *Oliver Twist* to Dickens as “a deliberate untruth” (47), was hostile to Forster whose role as “Dickens’s Home Secretary” (69) he interpreted as unwarranted interference: “the ideas of Dickens had a Foster mother and that mother brought them up by hand, while strange children were sometimes palmed off on the parent” (75). It must be remembered though that Dickens trusted Forster implicitly and his role as go-between in the author’s dealings with his illustrators, especially when Dickens was abroad, was crucial.

The “Boom in Boz”: The Revival & Commodification of Dickens

In his lecture Furniss refers to “the present day Boom in Boz” (37), a revival of interest in Dickens around the turn of the century which may be seen partly as a defensive response to the persistent denigration of Dickens that dates back at least to the criticisms of Lewes and James in the 1860s and which reached its zenith during the late 1890s when Dickens’s reputation “was at its lowest ebb among the critics” (Coustillas 171). George H. Ford has expertly traced the attack on Dickens from various quarters during this period: by members of the “high aesthetic line” who viewed him as “too gutterly gutter” (238); by the realists who found him “merely fantastic”; and “to those who sought topicality in fiction” he was “merely antique” (224). But it was at this very moment that the Dickens revival got underway. He may not have been flavour of the month with the early modernists but the defending forces gathered round the exclusive Boz Club (founded in 1900) and the enormously successful Dickens Fellowship (1902). In less than three years the Fellowship’s membership was nearly 8,000 and by 1909 it was 17,000 with “branches springing up in every corner of the world” (37), and as we have seen Furniss himself addressed a crowd of 1,500 Dickensians gathered in 1905 to celebrate the novelist’s birthday.

His continued popularity, despite assertions to the contrary, is seen also in the number of volumes borrowed from public libraries and in the number and nature of editions of his works published at the time. According to Patten “Chapman and Hall alone sold 2,000,000 copies of his works between 1900 and 1906” (330) and the sales were so important that a company official said that “if it weren’t for Dickens … we might as well put up the shutters tomorrow” (Schlicke 209). You could buy cheap individual volumes from, say, the Library Press Cameo Classics series begun in 1905 for sixpence, or splurge £20,000 for the so-called American Millionaire Edition (p. 86 and note 159).

Furniss’s own heavily advertised limited edition (1910), with its royal blue cloth covers blocked with a gilt “CD” monogram on the front, of “The Charles Dickens Library in eighteen handsome volumes, together with a bookcase (if desired) and the bust, sent to any home in the kingdom” (Fig. iv) catered to middle-class preoccupations with book collecting and status and was sold as much to look impressive on the shelf as to be read. Sir John Hare, a friend of Furniss, in his address to the Boz Club annual dinner in 1907 said that “in every public library, on the bookshelf of every modest house, are to be found “The Works of Charles Dickens” (Some Victorian Men 187) and the Fellowship’s Coulson Kernahan wrote in the edition’s promotional book-
let that Dickens’s “books should be household gods in every home . . . to be Dickensless, in the sense of possessing no set of his novels, should become a household reproach” (Evening 10). That cozy domesticity so celebrated at the time by Chesterton, whose Dickens also created a “mythology” of “demi-gods” (60), is here in the Furniss edition reproduced in the very shape and location of Dickens, the metonym for writer and works. It was promoted as “an investment upon which one may congratulate oneself in the years to come” (Evening 48) and other copies of his works were used as free gifts to sell products as varied as tea, embroidery silks and furniture, all one might add household goods. Gods had become goods, goods gods and the difference was nought.

The burgeoning Dickens industry and the commodification of the author is seen, too, in the widespread circulation of his scenes and characters in various other forms. The original illustrations together with new versions of familiar iconography were often torn from their original context (the novels) and reproduced to be sold separately as portraits as were Fred Barnard’s and C. E. Brock’s. New artists like Albert Kaye, Harold Copping, Arthur Moreland and Hilda Miller produced fresh designs for the flourishing postcard industry that also published photo postcards of famous actors playing Dickensian characters, such as Beerbohm Tree as Fagin in Comyns Carr’s popular 1905 adaptation of Oliver Twist, specifically mentioned by Furniss in his lecture (36). Furthermore Phiz’s original illustrations were redrawn by artists such as W. H. Caffyn as supplements to magazines. Dickens’s characters and scenes were used, too, to promote commercial products ranging from Wright’s Coal Tar Soap (Mrs. Gamp) to Robinson’s Barley (Mrs. Micawber) both designed by S. T. C. Weeks. The artist “Kyd” (J. Clayton Clarke) even designed ten “Characters from Dickens” for cards that were included in packets of Player’s cigarettes while James Buchanan the Scotch Whisky Distillers commissioned Frank Reynolds to do a series of portraits for The Buchanan Portfolio of Characters from Dickens (1912–1914). You could also purchase illustrated playing cards, calendars or “handsomely decorated with Dickensian devices” (Dickensian, September 1905, 232), that quintessentially English combination, a barometer and thermometer for the drawing room. None of this was especially new. As Gerard Curtis has shown by mid century Dickens and commodity culture were inextricably linked and mutually supportive; it was just that fifty years later, with better communications, cheaper production methods, a more efficient distribution system and, quite simply, more people (sixteen million more), the Dickens industry was bigger and virtually ubiquitous.
However, the boom in Boz, in line with economic theory, quickly went bust for “between 1916 and 1937, no editions of Dickens’s collected novels appeared with the original illustrations” (Cohen 234) and it wasn’t until the 1940s that a new cycle began.24

The Significance of Furniss’s Lecture

To summarise the main points so far. By nature oral lectures are ephemeral and their substance is passed down to posterity via eye-witness accounts of varying degrees of reliability such as brief press reviews, passing references in contemporary memoirs, and the like. When the text of a lecture survives in toto, as is the case with “A Sketch of Boz,” it becomes an important document in the history of platform culture. And when it is illustrated by magic lantern slides, as is also the case here, we can see how, Janus-like, it looks back to the illustrated book and forward to the early movie, providing a link between the two. Furthermore, perhaps unwittingly, Furniss exemplifies a shift in attitude towards portraiture and caricature in particular in the nineteenth century that coincided with the rise of the celebrity author, manifest in the proliferation of Dickens’s images. And finally the lecture participated in and contributed to the early twentieth-century boom in Boz: the commodification of author and novels in the burgeoning Dickens industry and the reconstituting of Dickens as a figure of public recognition (which I address in the final section).

But what does this hitherto unknown manuscript add to our stock of knowledge about Dickens and his illustrators? One has to admit not a great deal since Furniss is no Chesterton or Gissing, though we must remember that the so-called lecture is no “dry-as-dust discourse” full of profound scholarly insights but an “entertainment” and meant to be just that. As Furniss concedes, because he never knew Dickens, he has to “draw upon others much older than myself for some of my material” (36), including Forster (frequently) and above all Kitton’s *Dickens and His Illustrators*. So there is considerable repetition of conventional wisdom such as Dickens’s (and thus his illustrators’) inability to portray women: “his pretty women lack life and individuality; and in nearly every case, are dollish and conventional” (73). This is a case of the pot calling the kettle black for the criticism is true of Furniss’s own drawings of women, partly because he invariably used his daughter Dorothy as a model, thus lending them a certain stereotyped sameness. There is some recycling of hoary old chestnuts like Cruikshank’s claim to have originated *Oliver Twist*, though as an artist he reluctantly sides with Forster in dismissing it as untrue (47–48). And many of the illustrations by Phiz and the rest are already well known.

On the other hand Furniss does bring to the attention of the modern reader some relatively obscure later illustrators of Dickens such as Mahoney and Barnard and as we have seen he usefully comments from the perspective of a practising professional illustrator whose assessments should be given careful consideration. His observations on some illustrations such as the allegorical allusions in Phiz’s *Mr. Carker In His Hour of Triumph* (62) are perceptive. He sensibly defends Dickens against accusations of vulgarity on the basis that “to deal sympathetically or critically with the low, because of
some ideal aim you have in view, or because of its human interest and the opportunities it offers for artistic treatment and for chiaroscuro, is not vulgarity at all” (86). He supplies two sketches of Dickens (Figs. 3 and 7/59) and one of Eliot (Fig. 4) unpublished elsewhere. And, finally, he had access to some, like Percy Fitzgerald and Joseph Parkinson, who had had contact with Dickens so a few of his anecdotes may provide new information such as Browne’s comment, relayed to Furniss by an un-named friend, that Dickens was “a disagreeable chap, impossible to get on with” (60). However, the reliability of such anecdotes remains questionable since in respect to this particular incident Furniss, who was not averse to elaboration, may simply have invented the anecdote on the basis of Kitton’s footnote (see note 98).

The significance of the lecture lies perhaps less in its actual substance than in its contribution to the contemporary debate over the novelist’s reputation during the Dickens revival. That there was a revival is not, as we have seen, in question, but why did it take place when it did, at the turn of the century when “there was a shift in taste; there was a development in new theories of the novel, and there was a recognition by English readers of fresh talents among the novelists of England, France, America and Russia” (Ford 180), and when the anti-Victorian movement which culminated in Lytton Strachey’s Eminent Victorians (1918) was already well underway? The answers have less to do with those artistic strengths or weaknesses aired by his supporters and detractors, less a matter of the novels’ form and content, and more to do with the cultural and political issues at stake in discussions over Dickens’s status, in particular the fashioning of a version of Dickensian Englishness at a time of national crisis.

The Construction of Dickensian Englishness

Why then did the Dickens revival take place when his reputation was at its nadir and the anti-Victorian movement was gathering momentum? A clue may be found in Walter Crotch’s 1919 essay in the Dickensian in which he sees “the return to Dickens” as “much more due to events than to any literary influences,” and for him the crucial event was the Boer War (1899–1902), which “marked the end of British Imperialism.” “It was,” he writes, “during these two-and-a-half years that the Dickens renaissance took shape and form” (123). At the time Britain’s economic and naval supremacy was challenged by America and by Germany. Domestically the political and social stability that characterized so much of the Victorian age was threatened by nationalism (especially in Ireland), by feminism (the suffragette movement), by socialism (the trade union movement), and by polarization and fragmentation in politics (the rivalry between the Liberal and the Conservative parties and the split in the ranks of the former). The titles of two recent surveys of the period indicate that this was indeed a time of crisis and upheaval. Crotch’s sense that the Boer War “had an immense effect upon the mind of England” (123) is confirmed by modern historians, who see it as telling us “more about British life and spirit than any other event of its time” (Havighurst 1), namely that it was “a blow to the country’s self confidence” which left England with “a lasting anxiety as to its power and status in the world” (Brooks 2), and with “a neurosis about national decline which has never gone away” (Brooks 5).
One response to widespread anxieties about a nation's selfhood is to reaffirm its sense of identity, in this case England's Englishness, and I want to argue that the Dickens renaissance at this moment in history emphasized and fashioned a particular version of Englishness promulgated by the Fellowship, by its one-time president G. K. Chesterton, whose *Charles Dickens* was published in 1906, and by Furniss himself. As Anthony Smith says, in response to uncertainties and fears during times of crisis various versions of national identity may be constructed (such as the creation of a pre-industrial rural myth) in order to suit the needs and purposes of different interest groups and classes. That the Dickens revival and "the moment of Englishness" arrived at the same time was, then, no coincidence. The form of Englishness that underpinned the Dickens revival was Chesterton's Dickensian Christmas, which he identifies as "distinctively English in the style of its merry-making" because it embraces comfort and charity both "very English instinct[s]." He continues: "This ideal of comfort belongs peculiarly to England; it belongs peculiarly to Christmas; above all, it belongs pre-eminently to Dickens" (118). There is an almost metronomic insistence on the identification of Dickens and Englishness and inevitably the association of Dickens with "the sentiment of the hearth" (127). This domestic cosiness that Chesterton sees at the heart(h) of Dickens is, significantly, articulated and valorized in terms of the hostile forces outside the window: "There is in it a note of defence, almost of war; a note of being besieged by the snow and hail; of making merry in the belly of a fort" (119).

But neither Chesterton's nor Dickens's nationalism is aggressively bulldogish or boastfully patriotic, a type satirized in the figure of Mr. Podsnap who "considered other countries... a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, 'Not English!' when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away" (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book I, chap. 11, 132). As for Chesterton, writing at the height of the Boer War, he famously objected to "the deaf and raucous Jingoism" of "'my country right or wrong'—it is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober'" (Kemp 63).

And as for the Fellowship, how did it respond a few years later to having "just come through, for the third time in four years, the throes and bitterness of party strife" (the General Elections of 1906 and 1910), and the pitting of "class against class" (Hearn 14), a reference to contemporary labour disputes and strikes? The answer was to invoke "Dickens's Influence on National Character," the title of an address by the newly elected President of the Fellowship, J. Cuming Walters, in which he called for a "Dickensian England, preserving what is worthy of the past, admitting new ideas into the present, breaking down barriers between class and class, [and] aiming at brotherhood." *Pace* Virginia Woolf, for the Fellowship human character did not change on or about December 1910 because in that very month Walters could look back to Dickens and assert that "he had become a moulder of character, and he had helped to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation... He represented the real Englishman" (320).

The humane, moral and cosily domestic Dickens, then, carefully promoted by the Fellowship and by Chesterton, became a rallying call for a nation under threat and in
fact Crotch claimed that “any study of Dickens means a spiritual arming of the people for Democracy” (qtd. Gardiner 163). During World War I the Fellowship sent, together with night shirts and flannel bed jackets, copies of Dickens’s works—“bulky and heavy books not requested”—to the wounded soldiers on the Continent (Dickensian, November 1914, 303), while “soldiers in France were reported to carry volumes of the Pickwick Papers or of David Copperfield in their pockets as an antidote to the horrors of war” (Rantavaara 144). The choice of novels is interesting: the Christmas stories apart, if one had to choose two novels that best expressed Dickens’s version of Englishness, they would be The Pickwick Papers and David Copperfield. But long before Archduke Ferdinand was shot dead at Sarajevo, Dickens was pressed into national service by Chesterton, the Fellowship, the commodification of his works, and by public lectures like Furniss’s “A Sketch of Boz.”

Furniss’s nationalist agenda, which is more aggressively patriotic than Chesterton’s or Dickens’s, is evident throughout the lecture. With clearly the aesthetes and early modernists in mind, he defends Dickens against “the modern school of writers” who “pronounce his work bathos and claptrap” (37). “The sneers of the present-day logrolling Lilliputians of the critical pen are mere veneer to hide their own ignorance and conceit. They treat the full-hearted genius of Boz as something foreign to themselves” (45). Dickens’s Englishness is thus defined in terms of the foreign, and Furniss’s major criticism of Phiz’s illustrations is, ironically, a Podsnappian “Not English!” Because “he came of a French family” Browne “never drew English people, at all . . . his English working men were French ouvriers. His crowds were French crowds. . . . His manner of work was French” (64). He analyses Phiz’s Mr. Pecksniff Discharges A Duty Which He Owes To Society (Fig. 32) and concludes “it is strange, that the most popular and essentially English Novelist should have been interpreted by having his characters portrayed as more French than English” (65). But ultimately Browne, who had the misfortune to be “called Hablot after a French officer at Waterloo,” is saved from the hell of being not English when Furniss praises his “British pluck in working, as he did, in spite of many disadvantages” (64, 65). Here the sense of labouring under difficult circumstances shared by fellow professionals overcomes national difference.

Because he is “in some way . . . the key to the Victorian age” (Gardiner 161), the attacks on Dickens were part and parcel of a general anti-Victorianism that identified the middle years as its main target. Furniss proudly proclaims his mid-Victorianess: “the present-day Pigmies of the Pen sneer at those who love their Dickens as old-fashioned and Mid-Victorian. Well, if being a lover of Dickens is to be old-fashioned then I am Mid-Victorian, and I am glad of it—I am not alone” (37). Later he writes: “I was curiously mid-Victorian . . . in consequence of my being a thorough Dickensian” (84), by which he meant he rejected hypocrisy and cant and embraced earnestness and decency together with those values Chesterton identified with the Dickensian Christmas: cheerfulness, cosiness, and kindliness. These struck a chord with the Fellowship, Furniss, and others seeking assurance of their Englishness at a time of crisis.

What Dickens provided for the pro-Victorians at the turn of the century was a confirmation of nationhood through a vast stock of instantly recognizable characters. The
history of the appropriation of Dickens's characters for social and political purposes
has yet to be written, but from very early on public figures were cast as characters from
his novels. *Punch* in particular raided the Dickens oeuvre: John Leech has Lord
Brougham asking for more (1844); Sir John Tenniel casts W. E. Gladstone as Mrs.
Gummidge thinking of the old 'un, Benjamin Disraeli, (1885); Furniss himself draws
Sir William Harcourt as Pecksniff (1885), Mrs. Gamp (1889) and Pumblechook (1890),
and Joseph Chamberlain as Joe Gargery (1893).32 But why was Dickens and not, say,
Eliot or Hardy such a ready resource for social and political commentary? It was partly
Dickens's very popularity: he had entered the nation's consciousness to the extent that
Orwell in 1939 "was convinced that audiences would recognize Dickensian characters
from books they had never read" (qtd. Trezise 167), and in the early 1900s this was
even more the case. It was partly the sheer variety and numbers of situations and char-
acters, a seemingly inexhaustible supply, provided by the novels. And it was partly
"the apparent simplicity of some Dickensian characters [that] made them an effer-
cient, popular currency of thought" (Trezise 162). Pecksniff is inseparable from humbug,
Scrooge from mean spiritedness. And with Dickens's famed visual quality easily trans-
ferred to the caricaturist's medium, itself relatively simple and readily understood, it
was hardly surprising that Furniss and his fellow cartoonists, when in need of direct,
bold, and easily comprehended statements on the affairs of the day, found their ideal
social and political dictionary in Dickens's novels.

In Furniss's words Dickens "had given the world a national portrait gallery of men-
tal photographs of the best known English names in the world—Pickwick, Dombey,
Copperfield, Pecksniff, Pinch and a host of others" (88). Only one other writer could
be said to have done this: Shakespeare who, like Dickens, had so entered the nation's
consciousness that, according to Furniss, it is "as necessary to the reader of newspa-
pers, all current literature and magazines to know his Dickens as he knows his Shake-
speare" (44). Together they defined Englishness, and in times of strife the nation
turned to them to rediscover English greatness, reassert its identity, confirm its heri-
tage, and find inspiration, as it did in Olivier's film of *Henry V* (1945). If Shakespeare's
heroes were invoked when Britain was at war, then Dickens's characters were mobili-
lized in defense of a threatened realm in the early 1900s. Furniss in his lecture uses the
military metaphor: "I am, as a Dickens illustrator, merely one of the reserved forces of
the line, but ready, as all reserve forces are, to do my duty when called upon, in this
case by the Dickens Clubs to review those old campaigners [illustrators]" (37). To com-
pare Dickens with Shakespeare was then, as now, a commonplace. The *Dickensian*
ranked Mrs. Gamp, Fagin and Sydney Carton alongside Falstaff, Lear and Perdita for
their "human sympathy and insight" (October 1905, 268). George Gissing wrote in
1898 that for Mrs. Gamp we “must go . . . to him who bodied forth Dame Quickly and
Juliet's nurse, for the suggestions of equivalent power,” and rather unexpectedly
Swinburne in 1902 praised *Great Expectations* for having "little less than Shakespear-
ean strength and skill of hand" (Gager 8). Such comparisons invariably attempt to de-
fine the special quality of Dickens's art, whereas my focus is on how these writers are
co-opted in the service of an ideology of Englishness with particular reference to the
existence of an already nationally known set of characters.
This is not the English character (singular) born of adversity on the playing fields of Eton and Rugby, developed by the Arnoldian public school system into muscular Christianity, and disseminated by series such as Macmillan’s English Men of Action (1889–1895), a character made up of manliness, courage, humility and fairness. This Englishness, as we have seen, is constructed of a Chestertonian cosiness, but it also coalesces around characters (plural) as much as around character itself. The pantheon of unique, larger than life Shakespearean and Dickensian individuals (and in the case of the latter literally larger when projected onto a giant screen during a lantern lecture), did indeed constitute “a national portrait gallery … of the best known English names in the world,” a phrase that conveys the sense that Dickens's novels and Shakespeare’s plays appealed simultaneously to nationhood and to individuality. Englishness is an ideology composed of character and characters, and is to be found within the covers of Dickens's novels. When Cecil Chesterton in a 1915 speech to a Fellowship Conference in War-Time imagined “a visitor from another planet” asking “what was this England” they were fighting for, “the best answer he could make would be to present that visitor with a complete edition of Dickens's works and say: ‘That is England’” (Dickens, July 1915, 183).

In a little-known, short-lived weekly magazine founded and edited by Furniss called Lika Joko after his Punch sobriquet, Fred Barnard drew for a series called “The Shakespeare-Dickens Combination Company” twenty “Shakespearean characters as played by well-known Dickens Stars.” While these appeared between November 1894 and February 1895, Furniss showed five of them during his 1905 lecture, testimony not just to his continued admiration for Barnard but also to the marshalling of Shakespearean and Dickensian characters in support of nationhood. Richard III is played by Quilp, Touchstone by Sam Weller, Hamlet’s father’s ghost by “the late Mr. Marley,” Malvolio by Mantalini, and Juliet’s nurse by Mrs. Gamp (Figs. 51–55).

A year later in an article by Furniss for the Pall Mall Magazine we read this: “We met on that day to celebrate a great deal more [than a great man’s birthday]. We met on that day to celebrate the birthday of a vast army of living men and women, who would live for ever with an actuality greater than that of the men and women whose external forms we saw around us, and whom we knew better than we knew ourselves” (426). One could be forgiven for thinking this to be a report of a Dickens Fellowship birthday celebration, but in fact Furniss is quoting from an after dinner speech Dickens himself gave on 22 April 1854 to the Garrick Club, assembled to celebrate (a day early) Shakespeare’s birthday. The description, applicable equally to Shakespeare and to Dickens, signals the existence of a national mythology, a pantheon of “demi-gods” described by G. K. Chesterton as “more actual than [they] really are” (34). Dickens, then, “was not so much mirroring nature as creating a second nature, a popular language which enables us to engage with reality” (Trezise 162), a recognizable and known language of character(s) that confronted an unstable and uncertain turn-of-the-century reality. Hence the interchangeability of characters in Barnard’s “Shakespeare-Dickens Combination Company” and the allusion by Furniss in his Boz
Lecture to Ben Jonson’s famous epithet: “Dickens is still . . . the great character delineator . . . not of his day only but of all time” (42).

A defining feature of Dickens’s characters is their individuality, their uniqueness, their quirkiness, in short their eccentricity which has long been seen as a defining feature of Englishness itself. Chesterton remarks upon Dickens’s “incomparable hunger and pleasure . . . for the infinite eccentricity of existence” and that word “brings us, perhaps, nearer to the matter than any other” (205). Similarly Furniss in his Boz lecture says that “when we meet with eccentric persons . . . how often one hears it said ‘Oh! he or she might have walked out of Dickens’” (42). Julia Saville convincingly argues for the mobilization of eccentricity in defense of national unity in the mid-Victorian period, and she sees Dickens as a key figure in the process. “At a time when the national identity of Englishness was being forged character,” in particular Dickensian eccentricity, “was frequently the articulating term that integrated distinctiveness of the individual with the coherence of the nation” (782). Such is the case at the end of the period too. As Saville shows, eccentricity operated as a disguise (and agent) for moral values like decency and earnestness, and even Pecksniffian hypocrisy was seen as a peculiarly English vice. Such commonly shared Christian values are the bedrock of the Dickensian version of Englishness, and because they cut across class and gender lines their appeal is widespread and especially attractive in times of national crisis.

The British government employed Furniss in their propaganda campaign during World War I. As we have seen he caricatured the Germans in his “lightning sketch[es] for the Cinematograph,” a series of short patriotic films shown at the London Coliseum in 1914. He also contributed propaganda sketches to The Cartoon (1915) and the following year exhibited 69 War Cartoons and Sketches at the Graves Galleries. In that part of his private ledger that survives, Furniss’s register of his drawings includes, intriguingly, 13 for a future Dickens project. Alongside titles such as Pickwick Bagman’s Story, Welcome Inn, Pickwick, The Spaniards, Hampstead, and Pickwick Bull Inn Rochester, Furniss writes: “Drawn for The ‘Pickwick Touch’ never used book abandoned. Keeping these to complete another volume on Pickwick to offer publishers see others following.” However, this is the final entry (c. 1917) in the ledger and so, unfortunately, none do follow. What is significant is that these titles are listed on the same page next to War. A Strange incident, Germans in the City, Invalid soldier, and so on. That is, overt political propaganda and Pickwickian Englishness lie side by side in the ledger, in Furniss’s mind, and in the national consciousness. It was above all to Pickwick that the nation turned when faced by attacks both literary and military because, as T. P. O’Connor writes in Furniss’s edition of Dickens’s works, “you realise in its pages the conditions of English life, and the qualities of the English race, better than you could in contact with the race for a whole life-time. The Pickwick Papers revealed England and English character to England and Englishmen” (vol. 18, 344).

Character and literary characters need “to be preserved as part of a celebrated past heritage on the verge of becoming lost, but also reinvented to accommodate shifting cultural tensions” (Saville 784). It has been my contention that the circulation of a particular version of Dickensian Englishness via the novelist’s commodification, through
the Fellowship and Chesterton, and by means of Furniss’s generously illustrated and widely performed platform lecture, significantly contributed to the reinvention of Dickens in response to the tensions evident in early twentieth-century English society. In one sense the Dickens renaissance was cultural compensation for the country’s political decline, but in another it was a powerful instrument in the formation of a brand of Englishness for contemporary and future generations.