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1 Jerrold, John Hollingshead, as well as Dickens himself—it is arguably  
2 George Augustus Sala who is *Household Words*' pre-eminent urban spectator.  
3 His series on 'Phases of "Public" Life' attests to his skills in cataloguing  
4 metropolitan types.

5 Boz's visit to a London 'Gin Shop' was undertaken with an explicitly  
6 social reformist aim, alerting his middle-class readers to social miseries lying  
7 beyond their ken. The 'inordinate love of plate glass, and a passion for  
8 gaslights and gilding' are described as a new mania, and the dazzling  
9 splendour of the gin shop evokes Benjamin's methodological concept of the  
10 'dream house', projecting an alluring collective fantasy.<sup>2</sup> From the description  
11 of this glittering interior, Boz proceeds to sketch the wretched customers—  
12 the two old washerwomen seated to the left of the bar, the 'two old men  
13 who came in "just to have a drain"' and who are now 'crying drunk' and the  
14 'knot of Irish labourers at the lower end of the place'—in order to argue that

15 until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-  
16 famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his  
17 own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family,  
18 would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in  
19 number and splendour.<sup>3</sup>

20 Gareth Cordery has shown how this sketch is bound up with Victorian  
21 anxieties about the relationship between public and private life in the  
22 construction of modern subjectivity, manifesting 'the crude beginning of a  
23 structure central to making money, maintaining control and at the heart of a  
24 panoptical public house in an age of capitalism'.<sup>4</sup> But when Sala came to  
25 revisit the subject of the public house in a series of essays for *Household Words*  
26 on the 'Phases of "Public" Life' some seventeen years later, he was  
27 concerned not with the spatial instabilities unsettling the ideology of separate  
28 spheres, but rather with surveying the pub as an urban 'type'. Attempting 'a  
29 mild classification of the peculiar social characteristics of the different

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<sup>2</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin  
McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp.  
388-415.

<sup>3</sup> *Dickens' Journalism*, Vol. I, pp. 183-84.

<sup>4</sup> Gareth Cordery, 'Public Houses: Spatial Instabilities in *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver  
Twist* (Part 1)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 20:1 (2003), 3-13 (p. 10).

1 metropolitan "publics";<sup>5</sup> Sala provides an ethnography of 'London on Tap'  
2 that inverts subject-object relations—a narrative strategy that is in keeping  
3 with *Household Words*' imaginative engagement with a developing commodity  
4 culture.<sup>6</sup> The series appeared in three instalments, the first two published in  
5 May and the third in October 1852, and was followed by a number of  
6 separate articles on further drinking establishments in 1853.

7 Our first stop with Sala on his exploration of the 'Phases of "Public"  
8 Life' is a gin palace, notable for its promiscuously diverse architectural  
9 styles—'We have Doric shafts with Corinthian capitals—an Ionic frieze—  
10 Renaissance panels—a Gothic screen to the bar-parlour' ('Chapter the First',  
11 p. 226)—and its

12 sundry little placards, framed and glazed, and printed in colours  
13 telling in seductive language of 'Choice Compounds,' 'Old Tom,'  
14 'Cream of the Valley,' 'Superior Cream Gin,' 'The Right Sort,'  
15 'Kinahan's L.L.,' 'The Dew Off Ben Nevis' [and] the 'Celebrated  
16 Balmoral Mixture, patronised by his Royal Highness Prince Albert'  
17 ('Chapter the First', p. 227).

18 Ironically, however, and in contrast to the variety of compounds  
19 dispensed, what most distinguishes the gin palace is the stereotyping and  
20 homogeneity evident in its customers:

21 Like plates multiplied by the electro-process—like the printer's  
22 'stereo'—like the reporter's 'manifold'—you will find duplicates,  
23 triplicates of these forlorn beings everywhere. The same woman  
24 giving her baby gin; the same haggard, dishevelled woman, trying to  
25 coax her drunken husband home; the same mild girl, too timid even  
26 to importune her ruffian partner to leave off drinking the week's  
27 earnings, who sits meekly in a corner, with two discoloured eyes, one  
28 freshly blacked—one of a week's standing. The same weary little  
29 man, who comes in early, crouches in a corner, and takes standing  
30 naps during the day, waking up periodically for 'fresh drops'  
31 ('Chapter the First', p. 227).

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<sup>5</sup> [George A. Sala], 'Phases of "Public" Life: Chapter the First', *Household Words*, Vol. V, No. 13 (22 May 1852), 224-30 (p. 225). Subsequent page references are to this edition and appear in the text.

<sup>6</sup> I have discussed this aspect of the journal in Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's 'Household Words': The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

1        Rendered indistinguishable by their forlorn subjection to gin, these  
2 customers resemble the ‘drainings, overflowings, and outspillings of the gin-  
3 glasses’ that are allowed to drop through the perforated pewter counter to be  
4 ‘collected with sundry washings, and a dash, perhaps of fresh material,  
5 [which] is, by the thrifty landlord, dispensed to his customers under the title  
6 of “all sorts”’ (‘Chapter the First’, p. 227).

7        Sala’s next stop, the Green Hog, belongs to ‘a class of publics, becoming  
8 rapidly extinct in London’: ‘one of the old, orthodox, top-booted, sanded-  
9 floored taverns’ (‘Chapter the First’, p. 228). Taverns enjoyed their heyday in  
10 the seventeenth century, facing competition after the Restoration in 1660  
11 from the increasingly fashionable coffee houses. Symptomatic of the old-  
12 fashioned tavern they frequent, the customers of the Green Hog are of the  
13 “old school,”—men who yet adhere to the traditional crown bowl of punch,  
14 and the historical “rump and dozen”, who take their bottle of wine after  
15 dinner, and insist upon triangular spittoons’ (‘Chapter the First’, p. 228). Men  
16 like Mr Tuckard:

17        [A] round old gentleman, supposed to be employed in some capacity  
18 at the Tower of London, but whether as a warder, an artillery-man,  
19 or a gentleman jailer—deponent sayeth not. He appears regularly at  
20 nine o’clock every morning, eats a huge meat-and-beer breakfast,  
21 orders his dinner, re-appears at six o’clock precisely, eats a hearty  
22 dinner, drinks a bottle of port, and smokes nine pipes of tobacco,  
23 washed down by nine tumblers of gin-and-water [...]. He rarely  
24 speaks but to intimate friends (with whom he has had a nodding  
25 acquaintance for twenty years perhaps) [...]. He occasionally  
26 condescends to impart, in a fat whisper, his opinions about the funds  
27 and the weather (‘Chapter the First’, p. 228).

28        As a representative specimen of the ‘comfortable and old-fashioned  
29 customers’ who patronise the Green Hog, Mr Tuckard is a metropolitan type  
30 who is at the same time given the features of an individual. His sketch is  
31 both generalised and particularised as part of the ethnographic account of a  
32 participant observer, whose claim to expertise is that he has ‘graduated in  
33 Beer’ (‘Chapter the First’, p. 225).

34        A similar combination of abstraction and individuation is found in the  
35 account of the theatrical public house located ‘over the way’ from the  
36 Theatre Royal, Barbican. This ‘house of call for Thespians’ is patronised by  
37 the actors of the Theatre Royal, ‘their friends and acquaintances, being actors  
38 at other theatres’, as well as ‘comedians, dancers and pantomimists’ (‘Chapter

1 the First', p. 229). Having defined the class of customers, Sala proceeds to  
2 identify some of the individuals who compose it:

3 At the door, you have Mr Snartell, the low comedian from  
4 Devonport, and Mr Rollocks, the heavy father from the Bath Circuit,  
5 who affects, in private life, a low-crowned hat with a prodigious brim  
6 (has a rich though somewhat husky bass voice), and calls everybody  
7 'My son.' These, and many more dark-haired, close-shaven, and  
8 slightly mouldily-habited inheritors of the mantles of Kean, Dowton,  
9 or Blanchard, wait the live-long day for the long-wished-for  
10 engagements. [...] Then there is a little prematurely aged man,  
11 Doctor Snaffles, indeed, as he is called, who did the 'old man' line of  
12 business, but who does very little to speak of now, except drink  
13 ('Chapter the First', pp. 229-230).

14 The tension between group classification and analysis of individual types  
15 in the theatrical pub is compounded by the mixing of roles in public and  
16 private life and the sorting of performers into the sub-genres of their  
17 profession: low comedy, heavy father, old man and so on. Sala's sketch is an  
18 engaged reading of its customers that offers sociological insight into the  
19 struggles of those on the fringes of mid-century metropolitan life. Whatever  
20 the individual differences observable in the 'various classes of theatrical  
21 publics', writes Sala, 'there is common to them all a floating population of  
22 old play-goers, superannuated pantomimists, decayed prompters, actors out  
23 of engagement, and order-hunters and actor-haunters' ('Chapter the First', p.  
24 230).

25 Amongst the many varieties of painters who frequent the 'artistic public  
26 house'—'grey-headed professors of the old school', 'spruce young fellows  
27 who have studied in Paris', 'moody disciples of that numerous class of artists  
28 known as the "great unappreciated"'—Sala picks out one who 'very rarely  
29 condescends to visit' such a venue:

30 [T]hat transcendent genius Mr Cimabue Giotto Smalt, one of the  
31 P.P.P.B. or 'Pre-painting and Perspective Brotherhood.' Mr Smalt, in  
32 early life, made designs for the Ladies' Gazette of Fashion, and was  
33 suspected also of contributing the vigorous and highly-coloured  
34 illustrations to the Hatchet of Horrors—that excellent work  
35 published in penny numbers by Skull, of Horrorwell Street.  
36 Subsequently awakening, however, to a sense of the hollowness of  
37 the world, and the superiority of the early Italian school over all  
38 others, he laid in a large stock of cobalt, blue, gold leaf, small

1 wooden German dolls, and glass eyes, and commenced that course  
2 of study which has brought him to the proud position he now holds  
3 as a devotional painter of the most aesthetic acerbity and the most  
4 orthodox angularity.<sup>7</sup>

5 This looks at first glance like overdrawn satire at the expense of the Pre-  
6 Raphaelite Brotherhood. But the figure of Mr Cimabue Giotto Smalt is  
7 actually an ironic self-portrait of sorts—at least to the extent that Sala  
8 himself had served the same apprenticeship that is comically described here  
9 in his early life. He had accepted a commission to design some of the  
10 ‘patterns’ and fashion-plates that featured in the *Lady’s Newspaper*, a journal  
11 launched in 1849 by the engraver Ebenezer Landells, and he subsequently  
12 worked for the best part of a year as a draughtsman illustrating Edward  
13 Lloyd’s gory penny dreadfuls. According to his biographer, Ralph Straus,  
14 ‘although it is impossible to identify his work it is known that he was  
15 responsible for the cuts in *The Heads of the Headless* [...] and for those in  
16 another “horror” with the appropriate title of *Murder Castle*.<sup>8</sup> Thus despite  
17 the satiric Pre-Raphaelite cliché with which Mr Cimabue Smalt is  
18 lampooned—‘He paints shavings beautifully, sore toes faultlessly’ and  
19 ‘dresses in a sort of clerico-German style’—Sala ironically infuses him with  
20 individual particulars drawn from his own life.

21 Equally ironic is his description of the artists’ models, whose identity is  
22 paradoxically established through the versatility of their posing:

23 Another pattern is refreshing himself with mild porter at the bar,  
24 being no other, indeed, than the well-known Caravaggio Potts,  
25 Artiste-modèle, as he styles himself. He began life as Jupiter Tonans,  
26 subsequently passed through the Twelve Apostles, and is now  
27 considered to be the best Belisarius in the model world. His wife was  
28 the original Venus Callipyge, of Tonks, R.A., but fluctuates at  
29 present between Volumnia and Mrs Primrose (‘Chapter the Second’,  
30 p. 251).

31 The description recalls Dickens’s ironic tale (in the first volume of  
32 *Household Words*) of the bachelor whose perception of the same artist’s model

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<sup>7</sup> [George A. Sala], ‘Phases of “Public” Life: Chapter the Second’, *Household Words*, Vol. V, No. 14 (29 May 1852), 250-55 (p. 250). Subsequent page references are to this edition and appear in the text.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Straus, *Sala: The Portrait of an Eminent Victorian* (London: Constable, 1942), p. 57.

1 being used for the various portraits hung in the Royal Academy is  
2 experienced as a haunting by 'The Ghost of Art'.<sup>9</sup> The versatile function of  
3 the artist's model as a 'pattern' or 'text-book' for comically incongruous  
4 portrait subjects captures the tension between abstraction and particularity  
5 that distinguishes the metropolitan sketch tradition. Like the mixture of  
6 public and private identities performed by the patrons of the theatrical public  
7 house, the artists' public house blends group classification with the detailed  
8 delineation of individual types.

9 Richard Sennett attributes the rise of urban sketches to the problem of  
10 coping with an environment of strangers in the wake of the great migrations  
11 to the cities that marked the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Brought on not only by  
12 the agricultural crises throughout the century associated with new  
13 commercial and technological conditions, but also the revolutionary  
14 outbreaks that troubled Europe after Napoleon, these migrations gave  
15 London a cosmopolitanism reflected in its designation as a 'world' rather  
16 than a city.<sup>11</sup> Sala captures this cosmopolitan aspect as he moves on to sketch  
17 'one of the foreign hostleries of London—the refugees' house of call':

18 Herr Brutus Eselskopf, the landlord, is a refugee himself, a patriot  
19 without a blot on his political scutcheon. He has been a general of  
20 brigade in his time; but he has donned the Boniface apron, and  
21 affiliated himself to the Boniface guild, and dispenses his liquors with  
22 as much unconcern as if he had never worn epaulettes and a cocked  
23 hat, and had never seen real troops with real bands and banners  
24 defile before him ('Chapter the Second', p. 253).

25 His pub is located 'in the centre of that maze of crooked, refugee-  
26 haunted little streets between Saint Martin's Lane and Saint Anne's Church,  
27 Soho'. 'No marked difference can at first be discerned, as regards fittings and  
28 appurtenances, between the refugees' and any other public house', says Sala.  
29 But 'five minutes' observation of the customers' will reveal that the 'little

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<sup>9</sup> [Charles Dickens], 'The Ghost of Art', *Household Words*, Vol. I, No. 17 (20 July 1850), 385-88 (pp. 385-87).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Sennett, 'Foreword', in *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, ed. by Judith Wechsler (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), pp. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Tanya Agathocleous examines the literary techniques used to transform the city into an image of the world in Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).



1 back parlour is filled, morning, noon and night, with foreigners under  
2 political clouds of various degrees of density, and in a cloud of uniform  
3 thickness and of strong tobacco, emitted in many-shaped fumes from pipes  
4 of eccentric design'. Sala's sketch of the customers at Herr Eselkopf's reveals  
5 his own cosmopolitan sympathies, as he considers how many of them

6 have lost everything in the maintenance of what they conscientiously  
7 believed to be the right against might, live quietly, honestly,  
8 inoffensively, doing no harm, existing on infinitesimal means,  
9 working hard for miserable remuneration, willing to do anything for  
10 a crust, teaching languages for sixpence a lesson, painting portraits  
11 for a shilling apiece, taking out lessons on the flute or pianoforte in  
12 bread and meat! ('Chapter the Second', p. 254).

13 The limits of his cosmopolitan sympathies are, however, evident in the  
14 stereotyping shown in the third and final chapter of 'Phases of "Public"  
15 Life', where the 'chief object' of the customers who frequent the 'Judaical  
16 public-house' of a Sunday morning 'is the buying or selling of [...]   
17 merchandise'.<sup>12</sup> These patrons are described alongside sketches of a 'fighting'  
18 public house (the 'Bottleholder and Sponge')—distinguished by the signs of  
19 damage inflicted during former bouts of fisticuffs—and a servants' public  
20 house (the 'Cocked Hat and Smalls') characterised by the petty squabbles of  
21 flunkeyism.

22 This third chapter ended the series, but Sala returned to the task of  
23 surveying the phases of public life five months later in 'My Swan', a sketch  
24 that Dickens considered to be 'so excellent' that he advised W. H. Wills, his  
25 subeditor, to publish it as the leader for the issue of 26 March 1853. It  
26 describes a fishing public-house 'on the little fishing river Spree', whose  
27 landlord, Groundbait, we're told, is 'the *arbiter piscatorium*, the oracle, the  
28 *expert juré* of angling': Sala's ostentatious flourish of cod Latin and French  
29 sets the mock heroic tone for the description.<sup>13</sup> The parlour of the Swan is  
30 replete with 'badges and trophies of the piscatorial craft':

31 Rods of all shapes and sizes, eel spears, winches, landing nets,  
32 Penelopean webs of fishing tackle, glistering armouries of hooks,  
33 harpoons, panniers, bait-cans; and in a glass case a most wonderful

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<sup>12</sup> [George A. Sala], 'Phases of "Public" Life: Chapter the Third', *Household Words*, Vol. VI, No. 134 (16 October 1852), 101-05 (pp. 102-03).

<sup>13</sup> [George A. Sala], 'My Swan', *Household Words*, Vol. VII, No. 157 (26 March 1853), 73-76 (p. 73). Subsequent page references are to this edition and appear in the text.

1 piscatorio-entomological collection of flies—flies of gorgeously  
2 tinted floss silk, pheasants' feathers, and gold and silver thread—flies  
3 warranted to deceive the acutest of fish. ('My Swan', p. 74)

4 Such lavish inventorying of the contents of the parlour is typical of  
5 *Household Words*' handling of advertising and commodity culture. Sala clearly  
6 enjoys expatiating upon the peculiar displays of the fishing pub: seemingly  
7 esoteric exhibits that serve simultaneously to portray the type and yet at the  
8 same time to mark its particularised individuality. Thus 'My Swan' can boast  
9 the possession of some unique honours:

10 Over the fire-place is the identical rod and line with which J. Barbell,  
11 Esq. hooked the monstrous and European-famed jack in the river  
12 Dodder, near Dublin, and in the year of grace eighteen hundred and  
13 thirty-nine; in one corner are the shovel and bucket with and in  
14 which at the same place and time the said jack [...] was ultimately  
15 landed. Conspicuous between the windows is the portrait of J.  
16 Barbell, Esq., a hairy-faced man, severely scourging a river with a rod  
17 like a May-pole; beneath that, the famous jack himself *in propria*  
18 *persona*, in a glass case, stuffed, very brown and horny with varnish,  
19 with great staring glass eyes (one cracked), and a mouth wide open  
20 grinning hideously ('My Swan', p. 74).

21 The mock-heroic effect of Sala's account of these 'trophies' comes from  
22 his emphasis upon their authenticity, their identity as originals, and his  
23 assumption of their universal renown while at the same time suggesting their  
24 localism. They are described in a comic crescendo that culminates in no mere  
25 representation, but the prize catch itself: '*in propria persona*'. The stuffed fish,  
26 preserving a life-like form but 'swimming vigorously through nothing at all',  
27 and having an unnaturally 'neat fore-ground of moss and Brighton-beach  
28 shells and a backing of pea-green sky', shares its unrealistic aspect with the  
29 portrait of its captor, J. Barbell, and his improbably large fishing-rod. Such  
30 exhibits establish the distinctiveness of this public house, alongside the  
31 'varied and eccentric' members of the angling company who frequent it, the  
32 whole scene laying itself open to the ethnographic gaze of a spectator like  
33 Sala, who is not so much detached, as comfortably at home in this setting:

34 If you come to the Swan merely as an observer of the world, how it  
35 is a wagging, as I do, you may take your half-pint of neat port with  
36 Groundbait, or shrouding yourself behind the cloudy mantle of a

1 pipe, study character among the frequenters of the Swan ('My Swan',  
2 p. 75).

3 What do these accounts of mid-Victorian public houses tell us then  
4 about metropolitan sketch writing in *Household Words*? 'Comparison in urban  
5 history is best conducted at the level of particular institutions within the  
6 town, rather than between towns as a whole', argues Brian Harrison, and the  
7 'pub and the temperance society, which can be found in most Victorian  
8 towns, demand such an approach'.<sup>14</sup> Sala's survey of the 'Phases of "Public"  
9 Life' adopts such a comparative approach to give a lively ethnographic  
10 survey of contemporary London life. The public house is an evolving  
11 institution whose various manifestations, as sketched by Sala, provide an  
12 interesting mixture of urban types. Unlike Benjamin's painter of modern life  
13 who remains unconscious of his similarity to the commodities upon which  
14 he casts his *flâneurial* gaze, Sala's ethnographic portraits are distinguished by a  
15 self-conscious awareness of the tension between the classification of a type  
16 and the delineation of individual features. Their mode is comic or ironic, and  
17 they manifest a narrative blend of journalistic and literary technique that, as I  
18 have argued elsewhere, is distinctive of *Household Words* in its imaginative  
19 handling of non-fictional prose.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Harrison, 'Pubs', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 161.

<sup>15</sup> See Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's 'Household Words'*.