Sketches of the Metropolis: Pub-Crawling with George Augustus Sala in *Household Words*

CATHERINE WATERS
University of Kent and University of Sydney

Reviewing John Timbs's *Curiosities of London* (1855) in an essay of that title in *Household Words* on 23 June 1855, George Augustus Sala reflected upon the current fad for literature devoted to the metropolis:

> There is scarcely a writer at the present day, I believe, connected with the periodical press, but who has written picturesque, humorous, or descriptive sketches upon the sights, characters, and curiosities, moral and physical, of the Great Metropolis, the Great Wen, the Modern Babylon, the World of London, the Giant City, the Monster Metropolis, the Nineveh of the nineteenth century, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I even think that desultory essays upon some London curiosities have from time to time found their way into this journal. (497)

Indeed they had, many of them by this most loquacious and bohemian of Dickens's "young men." Given the global remit that Dickens had projected for *Household Words* in the "Preliminary Word" with which he opened its first issue – not just to "treat of the hopes, the enterprises, triumphs, joys, and sorrows, of this country only, but, in some degree, of those of every nation upon earth" (1) – and given London's status as cosmopolitan "World City," the metropolis was a crucial source of copy for his new periodical. The journal published urban travel writing by a range of contributors – John Hannay, William Blanchard Jerrold, John Hollingshead, as well as Dickens himself. But Sala is arguably its preeminent urban spectator, frequently adopting an obvious *flâneurial* role in contributing some of its most significant sketches of the metropolis.

This was a journalistic genre than spanned Europe. Martina Lauster's superb comparative study of nineteenth-century journalism and its *physiologies*, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century* (2007), argues for the

significance of these city sketches, contending that they "occupy a central space in the networks of knowledge that are so characteristic of the Victorian Age and its European equivalents" (13). Taking issue with Walter Benjamin's critique of the *flâneur* and his dismissal of the *Physiologies* as "innocuous portraits of social types, … [designed] to make a disturbing, dangerous urban world look familiar," Lauster argues that "on the contrary, these publications were in their very conception a parodist form, wittily subverting the portrayal of Parisian and French types" (14).[1] The *Physiologies* and natural histories enjoyed their greatest vogue in the 1840s (Lauster 14). But they were given new life in *Household Words* in the writing of Sala. His cosmopolitan pen-portraits of London for Dickens's journal can be seen as offering a challenge to Benjamin's account of the *flâneur* and of *feuilleton* writing about the city; but they also represent an apprenticeship in the techniques of "word-painting" that would become the hallmark of his later special correspondence. It is these two aspects of Sala's journalism for *Household Words* that I focus on here, using a series of his sketches of London pubs as illustrative.

The French *physiologies* of the 1840s were popular sketches involving the application of a quasi-scientific method of categorizing types to the humorous study of social life. They descended from Louis-Sebastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* of 1776–88. This was a series of eyewitness accounts of Parisian coffee-houses, changing fashions, old clothes markets, bill-stickers, street singers and so on which, according to Lauster, marked "the birth of city sketches," "the inception of verbal drawing as a discursive form capturing contemporary metropolitan mores" (144). Sala mentions his ambition to "bring Mercier's *Tableau* … down to the present day" (vii) twenty years later in his preface to the second edition of *Paris Herself Again in 1878–9*, itself a republished selection of his special correspondence; but we can see him already contributing graphic sketches of city life in the pages of *Household Words*. His observation regarding the plethora of writing about London in his review of Timbs's book, quoted above, continues with the wry admission, "I am afraid I must myself plead guilty spontaneously to having from time to time had something to say in a garrulous, discursive, rambling, digressive manner, about the bricks and mortar, the men and women, the ups and downs, the Lords and Commons, of London" (497). Such self-reflective comment – upon his own speculative faculty as metropolitan

1 Margaret Rose has similarly questioned Benjamin's account of this writing in her edition of Louis Huart's *Physiologie du Flâneur,* and Albert Smith's *Natural History of the Idler upon Town*. Both of these works, she argues, "show how irony, parody, satire and caricature grew in the nineteenth century both as popular genres and as antidotes to what have been described as the unhappy tribulations of the increasingly 'velociferic' and apparently unreflexive life of the large metropolis" (73).

observer and the digressive character of his sketching – is in keeping with the ironic awareness that distinguishes his contributions in this genre to Dickens's journal.

Since *Household Words* was unillustrated, a key difference distinguishing Sala's metropolitan sketches from the Parisian *Physiologies* and the earlier Natural Histories of London types – the idler, the gent, the flirt and others – published in the 1840s by his friend Albert Smith, was the absence of accompanying images. Arguably, however, the absence of illustration is more than compensated for by Sala's graphic descriptive technique, a mode of verbal "photography" that often starts not with social types themselves, but with the city streets or buildings with which they were associated. His sketches provide a *physiologie* of these urban spaces and work towards the formation of a metropolitan ethnology that was extremely popular with readers. A good example of such cumulative ethnographic vision is Sala's series on the "Phases of 'Public' Life," which appeared in three installments, the first two in May and the third in October 1852. The series is characteristic of the sketch tradition in moving between the general and the particular, the impulse to classify and to individualize, in its mediation of social knowledge. Even Sala's most persistent critic, the *Saturday Review*, acknowledged its success with readers – for "[t]here is, and always has been, a strange fascination for a very wide circle of readers in descriptions of what is called 'life,' and especially of 'low life'":

> There are many, no doubt, whose incentive is simple curiosity and a thirst for knowledge; while, on the other hand, there are some with whom their profound and intimate knowledge of the things described acts in the same way. For example, when Mr Sala devotes several of his essays … to public-house life and its attendant phenomena, he gratifies not merely the people who say "Isn't it strange?" but also those whose enjoyment finds vent in the exclamation, "Isn't it true to nature?" ("Mr Sala on Life in London", 7) [2]

Whether dealing with environments that are strange or familiar to readers, Sala's vision captures precisely the perspective of the European sketch as described by Lauster: "The eyes of the 'foreign' traveller will be shown to be at work in the depiction and analysis of *home environments* – an inversion of the visiting observer's perspective that is distinctive of the sociological orientation of sketches" (18). This blend of an insider and outsider perspective is an important part of the ethnographic project of the sketch tradition.

2 All of the essays from *Household Words* with which this paper is concerned were republished in *Gaslight and Daylight, with Some London Scenes They Shine Upon*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1859, the subject of the *Saturday*'s review here.

Sala's series on pubs recalls the function of the London coffee houses of the eighteenth century, each of which developed its own clientele and "became identified as the meeting-place for a particular occupation, interest group or type of specialised activity" (Pelzer 41). The role of the coffee house in the development of eighteenth-century journalism is well known. Indeed, Richard Steele used the names of coffee houses as subject headings in his *Tatler*, when it commenced in 1712:

> All accounts of *Gallantry*, *Pleasure* and *Entertainment*, shall be under the Article of *White's Chocolate-House*; *Poetry*, under that of *Will's Coffee-House*; *Learning*, under the Title of *Grecian*; *Foreign* and *Domestick News*, you will have from *St James's Coffee-House*, and what else I have to offer on any other Subject shall be dated from my own Apartment. (qtd. in Lauster 151)

The Victorian descendents of the coffee houses were the clubs, the product of an effort to maintain an ever more specialised and exclusive clientele. Rather than surveying these, however, Sala turns his ethnographic gaze upon the public house, a choice of watering hole that speaks to the expanded middle-class readership that *Household Words* was aiming to address.[3] The public house itself was undergoing a transformation at mid-century, as new modes of transportation and changes in recreational and social habits altered custom. Brian Harrison observes that "in mid-Victorian London, there were pubs for everybody's taste – for medical students, prostitutes, servicemen, sportsmen, actors, foreigners, and lawyers" (176).[4] But he also notes that a fundamental class contrast in drinking habits dates from this period: "whereas at the beginning of the century different classes patronised the same pubs, by the 1860s the respectable classes were drinking at home or not drinking at all" (166). In its peculiar urban geography and changing role and clientele, the public house was thus a particularly interesting object of social analysis for the metropolitan sketcher at mid-century.

Sala begins his first essay on "the peculiar social characteristics of the different metropolitan 'publics'" from the perspective of the future archaeologist or antiquarian, confronted with the advertising signage for a London brewer found amongst the ruins of the city:

3 For a brilliant account of the way in which Dickens positioned his journal to capture a new middle-class market, see Huett.

4 *Punch*, as Patrick Leary has recently reminded us, started in the "bibulous, talkative world of the old taverns that dotted the warren of narrow streets and alleys surrounding Fleet Street and the Strand, an area long consecrated to the printing and publishing trades" (15).

> I should very much like to know what the "Central Australian Society for the Advancement of Science," or the "Polynesian Archaeological Association," or the "Imperial New Zealand Society of Antiquaries," would be likely to make of a great oblong board which glares at me through the window at which I am writing this present paper – a board of some five-and-twenty feet in length perchance, painted a bright resplendent blue, and on which are emblazoned in glittering gold the magic words, "Barclay, Perkins, and Co,'s Entire." ("Chapter the First," 224)

Sala's looking backwards from the perspective of an imagined future here is a characteristic Victorian trope. As Kelly Mays has noted, the Victorians habitually "sought to make the present *present*, as it were, by imaginatively looking back at it" (447). This was a perspective "'lodged in the collective cultural consciousness'"[5] by the ubiquity of allusions to Macaulay's New Zealander, that philosophic future tourist who was imagined standing upon "a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St Paul's."[6] It is in keeping with the parodic tone of the sketch tradition, however, that Sala yokes the "'classical allusions' of the future-tourist trope from which the New Zealander derives" (Mays 451) to the relic of a brand of beer. This tone continues with an ironic allusion to the panoptical powers of the devil Asmodeus (popularized in Britain by Le Sage's novel) that he has had to manage without: "In the study of beer and Beerhouses, I have had no adventitious aid from accommodating demons, obliging genii, invisible caps, carpets or cloaks. '*Experientia*' – you know the rest," he wryly remarks (225). The allusion to the Asmodean sketch tradition speaks to the transnational character of Sala's writing in this vein, even as he familiarly addresses a readership distinguished by its local knowledge: "*I* know what Barclay and Perkins mean, I hope; – what Combe and Delafield – what Truman, Hanbury, and Buxton – what Calvert and Co … *You* know too, gentle, moderate, and bibulous reader" (225). Claiming, with no doubt indisputable authority, to "have graduated in beer" and "mastered its mysteries," he differentiates his perambulation of the metropolis "rapt in the contemplation of Beer" from the genre of the "process article," that form of industrial tourist tale in *Household Words* which sought to demystify manufacturing processes and explain the stages of commodity production. In the hands of an industrial enthusiast like Harriet Martineau,

5 Robert Dingley, "The Ruins of the Future: Macaulay's New Zealander and the Spirit of the Age," in *Histories of the Future: Studies in Fact, Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Alan Sandison and Robert Dingley (London: Palgrave, 2000), 16 (qtd in Mays 451).

6 Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Ranke's History of the Popes," in *The Complete Writings of Lord Macaulay* (Boston: Houighton, 1900), 3 (qtd. in Mays 451).

the process article was an intricately detailed analysis of the various stages of factory production. Sala, however, writes: "I do not propose … to enter minutely into the consideration of the aspect of a London brewery, or of the manufacture of the great English beverage." Instead, he bathetically remarks, "*en passant,* that an odour prevails in and about the establishment, resembling an amalgamation of several washing-days, a few cookshops and a stable or two. To cursory spectators, such as you and I are, the brewery will offer little besides this, and a general impression of 'bigness,' length, height, breadth, rotundity" (225–26).

Our first stop with him on this pub-crawl is a gin palace, notable for its promiscuously diverse architectural styles – "We have Doric shafts with Corinthian capitals – an Ionic frieze – Renaissance panels – a Gothic screen to the bar-parlour" (226) – and its

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

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

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

Rendered indistinguishable by their forlorn subjection to gin, these customers resemble the "drainings, overflowings, and outspillings of the gin-glasses" that are allowed to drop through the perforated pewter counter to be "collected with sundry washings, and a dash, perhaps of fresh material, [which] is, by the thrifty landlord, dispensed to his customers under the title of 'all sorts'" (227).

Sala's next stop, the Green Hog, belongs to "a class of publics, becoming rapidly extinct in London:" "one of the old, orthodox, top-booted, sanded-

floored taverns" (228). Taverns enjoyed their heyday in the seventeenth century, before they faced competition from the increasingly fashionable coffee houses. Symptomatic of the old-fashioned tavern they frequent, the customers of the Green Hog are of the "old school" – "men who yet adhere to the traditional crown bowl of punch, and the historical 'rump and dozen,' who take their bottle of wine after dinner, and insist upon triangular spittoons" (228). Men like Mr Tuckard:

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

As representative specimen of the "comfortable and old fashioned customers" who patronize the Green Hog, Mr. Tuckard is a metropolitan type who is at the same time given the features of an individual. His sketch is both generalized and particularized, both a classification and a portrait. As Lauster observes, "the constitution of social types by sketches cannot be subsumed under stereotyping, however much the classification method and the mass production of this type of literature may suggest this to be the case" (128). The distinction between type and stereotype, she argues, may be seen in the "textual structure of these sketches which often take a received or common view as their point of departure, only to replace it by an analytical, 'scientific' view of the type" (89). Sala evokes this double perspective as he moves from classification of Mr Tuckard's type, to description of his peculiar habits – which, in their regular recurrence, reveal the daily rhythms and movements of metropolitan life – and finally to the unresolved speculation about his professional employment from these appearances.

A similar combination of abstraction and individuation is found in the account of the theatrical public house located "over the way" from the Theatre Royal, Barbican. This "house of call for Thespians" is patronized by the actors of the Theatre Royal, "their friends and acquaintances, being actors at other theatres," as well as "comedians, dancers and pantomimists" (229). Having defined the class of customers, Sala proceeds to identify some of the individuals who compose it:

> At the door, you have Mr Snartell, the low comedian from Devonport,

> and Mr Rollocks, the heavy father from the Bath Circuit, who affects, in private life, a low-crowned hat with a prodigious brim (has a rich though somewhat husky bass voice), and calls everybody "My son." These, and many more dark-haired, close-shaven, and slightly mouldily-habited inheritors of the mantles of Kean, Dowton, or Blanchard, wait the live-long day for the long-wished-for engagements. …
>
> Then there is a little prematurely aged man, Doctor Snaffles, indeed, as he is called, who did the "old man" line of business, but who does very little to speak of now, except drink. (229–30)

The tension between group classification and analysis of individual types in the theatrical pub is compounded by the mixing of roles in public and private life and the sorting of performers into the sub-genres of their profession: low comedy, heavy father, old man and so on. Rather than providing an ideologically innocuous portrait of the theatrical pub as Benjamin's critique of the *physiologie*s would imply, Sala's sketch is an engaged reading of its customers that offers sociological insight into the struggles of those on the fringes of mid-century metropolitan life. Whatever the individual differences observable in the "various classes of theatrical publics," writes Sala, "there is common to them all a floating population of old play-goers, superannuated pantomimists, decayed prompters, actors out of engagement, and order-hunters and actor-haunters" (230).

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

> that transcendent genius Mr Cimabue Giotto Smalt, one of the P.P.P.B. or "Pre-painting and Perspective Brotherhood." Mr Smalt, in early life, made designs for the Ladies' Gazette of Fashion and was suspected also of contributing to the vigorous and highly-coloured illustrations to the Hatchet of Horrors – that excellent work published in penny numbers by Skull, of Horrorwell Street. Subsequently awakening, however, to a sense of the hollowness of the world, and the superiority of the early Italian school over all others, he laid in a large stock of cobalt, blue, gold leaf, small wooden German dolls, and glass eyes, and commenced that course of study which has brought him to the proud position he now holds as a devotional painter of the most aesthetic acerbity and the most orthodox angularity. ("Chapter the Second," 250)

This looks at first glance like overdrawn satire at the expense of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. But the figure of Mr Cimabue Giotto Smalt is

actually an ironic self-portrait of sorts – at least to the extent that Sala himself had served the same apprenticeship that is comically described here in his early life. He had accepted a commission to design some of the "patterns" and fashion-plates that featured in the *Lady's Newspaper*, a journal launched in 1849 by the engraver Ebenezer Landells, and he subsequently worked for the best part of a year as a draughtsman illustrating Edward Lloyd's gory penny dreadfuls. According to his biographer, Ralph Straus, "although it is impossible to identify his work it is known that he was responsible for the cuts in *The Heads of the Headless* … and for those in another "horror" with the appropriate title of *Murder Castle*" (57). Thus despite the satiric Pre-Raphaelite cliché with which Mr Cimabue Smalt is lampooned – "He paints shavings beautifully, sore toes faultlessly" and "dresses in a sort of clerico-German style" (250) – Sala ironically infuses him with individual particulars drawn from his own life.

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

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

The description recalls Dickens's ironic tale (in the first volume of *Household Words*) of the bachelor whose perception of the same artist's model being used for the various portraits hung in the Royal Academy is experienced as a haunting by "The Ghost of Art." The versatile function of the artist's model as a "pattern" or "text-book" for comically incongruous portrait subjects captures the tension between abstraction and particularity that distinguishes the metropolitan sketch tradition. Like the mixture of public and private identities performed by the patrons of the theatrical public house, the artists' public house blends group classification with the detailed delineation of individual type.

Richard Sennett attributes the rise of urban sketches to the problem of coping with an environment of strangers in the wake of the great migrations to the cities that marked the nineteenth century (7–8). Brought on not only by the agricultural crises throughout the century associated with new commercial and technological conditions but the revolutionary outbreaks that troubled Europe after Napoleon, these migrations gave London a

cosmopolitanism reflected in its designation as a "world" rather than a city.[7] Sala captures this cosmopolitan aspect as he moves on to sketch "one of the foreign hostelries of London – the refugees' house of call" (253):

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

His pub is located "in the centre of that maze of crooked, refugee-haunted little streets between Saint Martin's Lane and Saint Anne's Church, Soho." "No marked difference can at first be discerned, as regards fittings and appurtenances, between the refugees' and any other public house," says Sala. But "five minutes' observation of the customers" will reveal that the "little back parlour is filled, morning, noon and night, with foreigners under political clouds of various degrees of density, and in a cloud of uniform thickness and of strong tobacco, emitted in many-shaped fumes from pipes of eccentric design" (253). Sala's sketch of the customers at Herr Eselkopf's reveals his own cosmopolitan sympathies, as he considers how many of them

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

The limits of his cosmopolitan sympathies are, however, evident in the anti-Semitic stereotyping shown in the third and final chapter of "Phases of 'Public' Life," where the "chief object" of the customers who frequent the "Judaical public house" of a Sunday morning is the buying or selling of merchandise" ("Chapter the Third," 102–3). These patrons are described alongside sketches of a "fighting" public house (the "Bottleholder and Sponge") – distinguished by the signs of damage inflicted during former bouts of fisticuffs – and a servants' public house (the "Cocked Hat and Smalls") characterized by the petty squabbles of flunkeyism.

This third chapter ended the series; but Sala had not exhausted this

7 Tanya Agathocleous examines the literary techniques used to transform the city into an image of the world in *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*.

source of copy. He returned to the task of surveying the phases of public life five months later in "My Swan," a sketch that Dickens considered to be "so excellent" that he advised W.H. Wills to publish it as the leader for the issue of 26 March 1853. It describes a fishing public-house "on the little fishing river Spree" (73), whose landlord, Groundbait, we're told, is "the *arbiter piscatorium*, the oracle, the *expert juré* of angling" (75): Sala's ostentatious flourish of cod Latin and French sets the mock heroic tone for the description. The parlour of the Swan is replete with "badges and trophies of the piscatorial craft":

> Rods of all shapes and sizes, eel spears, winches, landing nets, Penelopean webs of fishing tackle, glistering armouries of hooks, harpoons, panniers, bait-cans; and in a glass case a most wonderful piscatorio-entomological collection of flies – flies of gorgeously tinted floss silk, pheasants' feathers, and gold and silver thread – flies warranted to deceive the acutest of fish. (74)

Such lavish inventorying of the contents of the parlor is typical of the way in which contributors to *Household Words* enlivened its non-fictional prose. As a reviewer in the *Morning Post* recognized, as well as creating a sense of immediacy through their use of the present tense, metropolitan sketch writers like Sala characteristically employed such lists in order to endow their scenes of daily life with realistic detail:

> Two peculiarities are remarkable in these writers; the first is the perpetual use of the "historic present," the other is the frequent occurrence of those interminable enumerative paragraphs, which are made up of an unlimited number of substantives (each with its adjective more or less appropriate tacked on to it) linked together by a chain of commas. ("Literature. *Gaslight and Daylight*," 2)

As the reviewer hastens to add, however, "[i]t is not that [these sketches] want point or interest;" but the level of descriptive detail used to vivify the scene can "make *us* want – repose" (2). Sala clearly enjoys expatiating upon the peculiar displays of the fishing pub: seemingly esoteric exhibits that serve simultaneously to portray the type and yet at the same time to mark its particularized individuality. Thus "My Swan" can boast the possession of some unique honors:

> Over the fire-place is the identical rod and line with which J. Barbell, Esq. hooked the monstrous and European-famed jack in the river Dodder, near Dublin, and in the year of grace eighteen hundred and thirty-nine; in one corner are the shovel and bucket with and in which at the same place and

> time the said jack, … was ultimately landed. Conspicuous between the windows is the portrait of J. Barbell, Esq., a hairy-faced man, severely scourging a river with a rod like a May-pole; beneath that, the famous jack himself *in propria persona*, in a glass case, stuffed, very brown and horny with varnish, with great staring glass eyes (one cracked), and a mouth wide open grinning hideously. (74)

The mock-heroic effect of Sala's account of these "trophies" comes from his emphasis upon their authenticity, their identity as originals, and his assumption of their universal renown while at the same time suggesting their localism. They are described in a comic crescendo that culminates in no mere representation, but the prize catch itself: "*in propria persona*." The stuffed fish, preserving a life-like form but "swimming vigorously through nothing at all," and having an unnaturally "neat fore-ground of moss and Brighton-beach shells and a backing of pea-green sky," shares its unrealistic aspect with the portrait of its captor, J. Barbell, and his improbably large fishing-rod. Such exhibits establish the distinctiveness of this public house, alongside the "varied and eccentric" members of the angling company who frequent it, the whole scene laying itself open to the ethnographic gaze of a spectator like Sala, who is not so much detached, as comfortably at home in this setting: "If you come to the Swan merely as an observer of the world, how it is a wagging, as I do, you may take your half-pint of neat port with Groundbait, or shrouding yourself behind the cloudy mantle of a pipe, study character among the frequenters of the Swan" (75).

Dickens's instructions to Wills regarding "My Swan" included the advice that he might confine the paper to the description of this public house "if it will make a better No." and the Pilgrim editors speculate that Sala's original sketch must have included part of what was subsequently published as "Powder Dick and his Train" on 7 May 1853 (*Letters* 7: 49n.)). Here, the generic characteristic of the water-side public-house is its dampness and representative of the type is the Tom Tug's Head, run by Rollocks. Its customers are mostly rough watermen, but on the occasion of a rowing match, it is "by no means unfrequent to see the happy class of society, known among the commonality as 'swells,' muster strongly within Rollocks's damp walls":

> The alumni of the two great seats of Academic education … drink out of his pots and clap him on the back, and are hail-fellows well met with the decayed tapsters and discarded serving-men; the river weeds, and slime, and scum. They meet here, not because they like it, but because some of their associates who have been two terms longer than they have at "Keys," or "Maudlin," say that it is very "jolly" to go to old Rollocks's "crib," that it is "life, my boy," that it is "the thing," and so on. ("Powder Dick," 236)

As Mark Girouard notes, "an element of deliberate slumming was probably never absent" (12) from the presence of the upper classes in the pub, and Sala's phonetic spelling of Caius and Magdalen foregrounds the role of knowing the vernacular in social positioning, even as the superficial sociability of the swells is critiqued. In contrast, a more genuine social sympathy is evinced in Sala's description of those motley patrons whose identity is held to partake of the public house and its surroundings:

> Homogeneous to the bar and purlieus of the Tom Tug's Head are casual half-pint-of-porter customers, mudlarks, sewer gropers, ratcatchers, finders, river thieves, steamboat touters, waterside beggars, waterside thieves, I am afraid, sometimes. They pick up a living, nobody knows how, out of the mud and soppy timbers, as men will pick up livings from every refuse; as a teeming population and an advanced civilisation only can have such livings to be picked up. (236)

Like the "floating population" glimpsed by Sala at the "theatrical public," these waterside figures make shift to survive in those marginal economies that form the other side to the triumphal narratives of industrial capitalism.

Sala went on to survey two more categories of public house in "Legal Houses of Call" and "Something to Drink:" the former dealing with what he refers to as the "Nisi Prius" Public "adjoining the Great Hall of Pleas" ("Legal Houses," 253) and the latter exploring the "Police public" ("Something to Drink," 430). But the concept was clearly starting to wear thin as Sala's garrulous efforts to fill up his copy became increasingly transparent. As Philip Collins has remarked of *Household Words*, some of the attempts made by Dickens's journalistic colleagues to imitate the "master's style" come out as "facetious persiflage" (122), and Sala's sketches of "London on Tap" were now heading in this direction. "Legal Houses of Call" and "Something to Drink" were not included amongst the contributions from the journal that he republished as *Gaslight and Daylight, with Some London Scenes They Shine Upon* in 1859. Instead, Sala concluded his sequence of republished sketches of "public life" in this volume with "The Bottle of Hay" – the fictionalized narrative of its former landlord, a "retired publican" of the "old school" who is convinced that "the public line is going to rack and ruin" because the current publicans are "introducing all sorts of innovations and new-fangled enticements to drink" ("Bottle of Hay," 69).

Placed as the leader in *Household Words* on 11 March 1854, the narrative is a comic account of the declining fortunes of the Bottle of Hay as seen through the history of its successive owners and their various efforts to "improve" it. The most egregious of these modernizers is a "young beardless man, in a coloured shirt and a wide-awake hat" (71) named J. Fishtail,

whose refurbishments are described with the same kind of imaginative inventorying seen in Sala's earlier series on "Phases of 'Public' Life." Fishtail is clearly an entrepreneurial pub owner, whose modernizing techniques anticipate the efforts of his twenty-first century descendents to diversify offerings in order to attract new patrons. Starting with the partitioning of the interior into "the jug and bottle department, the retail bar, the snuggery, the private bar, the ladies' bar, the wine and liquor entrance, and the lunch bar" (71), followed by its redecoration with mahogany, gilt carving and ground glass, and the introduction of ingenious weight-lifting machines for the use of patrons, Fishtail tries one novelty after another: he serves sausages and potatoes "hot and hot" all day long, together with "sandwiches cut into strange devices" and "ginger beer [of] all colours – blue, green and violet" (71); he hires a "real German green baize band" (72); he installs an "American Bowling Alley" with "a flaring transparency outside, representing General Washington playing skittles with Doctor Franklin" (72); he employs a Giant as a barman who "'drew' – as the play-acting people say – rather satisfactorily, at first, and was goaded on by J. Fishtail to ask everybody to treat him to six penn'orth of brandy and water for the good of the house" (73-4); he introduces a brandy-based "specific for the cholera" (74) and when that epidemic passes, he

> was hesitating between another giant who could sing beautifully, and a bearded lady, with pink eyes and long flaxen hair like floss silk, and was reported to have killed a man with a chopper, and would have been a great catch if she would have come down to his terms, when the Bloomer costume came out. Straightaway, Fishtail put his two barmaids into variegated satin trowsers and broad-brimmed hats. (74)

As the comic detail lavished upon the faddish changes made by Fishtail demonstrates, "The Bottle of Hay" ironically revels in its account of entrepreneurial public life – the narrative interest of the sketch lying in the retired publican's sardonic observation of the extraordinary sequence of innovations tried by Fishtail to entice customers to his pub. The escalation in his modish renovations and feats of showmanship, each one more fantastic than the last, conveys the emphasis upon spectacle and display, and the constant striving after novelty, that are associated with a rapidly expanding commercial culture at mid-century. From the ethnographic vision of his series on the "Phases of 'Public' Life" – in which a *physiologie* of the pub enables the sketch of metropolitan types – Sala's pub-crawling finally brings him, in "The Bottle of Hay," to the pen-portrait of a public house that has allegedly lost its identity under the pressures of commercial competition.

What do these accounts of mid-Victorian public houses tell us then

about metropolitan sketch writing in *Household Words* and about Sala's development as a journalist? Unlike Benjamin's painter of modern life who remains unconscious of his similarity to the commodities upon which he casts his *flâneurial* gaze, all of these sketches are distinguished by a self-conscious awareness of the tension between the classification of a type and the delineation of individual features. Their mode is comic or ironic, and they manifest a narrative blend of journalistic and literary technique that is distinctive of *Household Words* in its imaginative handling of non-fictional prose. Contemporary reviewers gave both positive and negative assessments of the peculiar form of realism Sala's sketches deployed. While the *Saturday Review* complained of popular taste in describing the enthusiastic response to Sala's scenes of London life ("Sala's Papers Humourous and Pathetic," 312) the *Morning Post* observed that "[h]e represents fairly the highest class of that ephemeral literature which endeavours to portray faithfully, if not always pleasingly, the scenes of familiar life, just as the daguerreotypist does faces" ("Literature. *Gaslight and Daylight*," 2). The image of the photograph gives way to the optical illusions of a kaleidoscope, as the reviewer explains the fatigue allegedly induced in the reader by the proliferating detail of Sala's descriptions, in terms of viewing an exhibition of paintings:

> It is rather an undertaking to go through a long picture-gallery where there are sufficient varieties of light and shade to soften the general effect upon the eye, but it is far more fatiguing to gaze stedfastly [sic] upon a number of bits of colour, which, however brilliant in themselves, seem to be connected with each other only by the caprice of the kaleidoscope. (2)

Whether likened to a daguerrotype or to the images produced by a kaleidoscope, however, the intense visual quality of Sala's verbal sketch is emphasized by the reviewer: a colorful, descriptive style that would come to distinguish his later work as a special correspondent. While it was, of course, Dickens who was credited by Walter Bagehot with the ability of describing London "like a special correspondent for posterity" (394), it was actually Sala who went on to make his name in this role. Bagehot was referring to Dickens's fiction; but his comparison identifies a peculiarly vivid quality of description that Sala's journalism also shares. Indeed, in describing that class of sketch-writers that Sala represents, the *Morning Post* declared:

> We should be very glad to have such glimpses into the private life of our ancestors as they may afford to our posterity; and, having once taken their line, perhaps they are right to subordinate everything to a vivid *prosopopoia*. (2)

Exercising his skills in "vivid *prosopopoia*" and other forms of word-painting,

Sala's work for *Household Words* was an apprenticeship crucial for his subsequent career as the pre-eminent special correspondent of his day.[8]

WORKS CITED

Agathocleous, Tanya. *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

[Bagehot, Walter]. "Charles Dickens." In *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Philip Collins. London: Routledge, 1971. 390–401.

Collins, P.A.W. "'Keep *Household Words* Imaginative!'" *Dickensian* 52 (1956): 117–23.

[Dickens, Charles]. "The Ghost of Art." *Household Words*, 20 July 1850, 1: 385–87.

——. "A Preliminary Word." *Household Words*, 30 March 1850, 1: 1–2.

Dickens, Charles. "To W. H. Wills." 12 March 1853. *The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1820–1870.* Ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson. 12 vols. Oxford:

Clarendon Press, 1965–2002. (2nd release) Electronic Edition. Vol.7. Accessed 2 November 2012. <http://library.nlx.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=dickens_c/dickens_c.07.xml;chunk.id=div.dickens.v7.93;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.dickens.v7.72;brand=default>

Girouard, Mark. *Victorian Pubs*. London: Studio Vista, 1975.

Harrison, Brian. "Pubs." In *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*. Ed. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. 161–90.

Huett, Lorna. "Among the Unknown Public: *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and the Mass-Market Weekly Periodical in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38 (2005): 61–82.

Lauster, Martina. *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and Its "Physiologies" 1830–50*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Leary, Patrick. *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London*. London: British Library, 2010.

"Literature. *Gaslight and Daylight*. By George Augustus Sala." *Morning Post*, 20 May 1859, 2.

Mays, Kelly J. "Looking Backward, Looking Forward: The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror of Future History." *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011): 445–56.

"Mr Sala on Life in London." *Saturday Review*, 3 December 1859, 676–78.

Pelzer, John and Linda. "Coffee Houses in Augustan London." *History Today* 32 (1982): 40–47.

Rose, Margaret A. "Introduction." In *Flaneurs and Idlers: Louis Huart, "Physiologie Du Flaneur" and Albert Smith, "the Natural History of the Idler Upon Town."* Ed. Margaret

8 This article is an expanded version of an earlier and shorter essay that appears in the proceedings of the bicentenary conference, *Charles Dickens and the Mid-Victorian Press* (Buckingham: U of Buckingham P, forthcoming).

A. Rose. Magdeburg: Austhesis Verlag Bielefeld, 2007. 1–74.
"Sala's Papers Humorous and Pathetic." *Saturday Review*, 9 March 1872, 321–13.
[Sala, George A.]. "The Bottle of Hay." *Household Words*, 11 March 1854, 9: 69–75.
—. "Curiosities of London." *Household Words*, 23 June 1855, 11: 495-502.
—. "Legal Houses of Call." *Household Words*, 14 May1853, 7: 253–57.
—. "My Swan." *Household Words*, 26 March 1853, 7: 73–76.
Sala, George Augustus. *Paris Herself Again in 1878-9*. 8th ed. London: Vizetelly, 1884.
[Sala, George A.]. "Phases of 'Public' Life: Chapter the First." *Household Words*, 22 May 1852, 5: 224–30.
—. "Phases of 'Public' Life: Chapter the Second." *Household Words*, 29 May 1852, 5: 250–55.
—. "Phases of 'Public' Life: Chapter the Third." *Household Words*, 16 October 1852, 6: 101–05.
—. "Powder Dick and His Train." *Household Words*, 7 May 1853, 7: 235–40.
—. "Something to Drink." *Household Words*, 2 July1853, 7: 430–32.
Sennett, Richard. "Foreword." In *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Ed. Judith Wechsler. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982. 7–9.
Straus, Ralph. *Sala: The Portrait of an Eminent Victorian*. London: Constable, 1942.