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CHAPTER THREE

COMMODIFYING CULTURE:
CONTINENTAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM
IN *HOUSEHOLD WORDS*

CATHERINE WATERS

In Book Two of *Little Dorrit*, Dickens describes the prevailing air of “unreality” that his heroine finds touring through Switzerland and Italy under the command of Mrs General: in Rome, “[e]verybody was walking about St Peter’s and the Vatican on somebody else’s cork legs, and straining every visible object through somebody else’s sieve. Nobody said what anything was, but everybody said what the Mrs Generals, Mr Eustace, or somebody else said it was” (*LD* II vii 428). Dickens’s satire on the social pretensions of the newly-rich Dorrits and their vain efforts to obliterate the Marshalsea past is conveyed through the superficiality of their tourism. In seeing the Continent through the prescriptions of the guidebook, most members of the Dorrit family manifest the “tourist gaze” – a particular form of looking, of a mass character, that is directed towards features of landscape or townscape which separates them off from everyday life and in which they are consumed as visual experiences (Urry 2).

As John Urry has argued, the tourist gaze developed as part of the growing mass movement of leisure travellers associated with modernity’s major transformations in paid work. The nineteenth-century transition from “Grand Tourism to mass tourism” (Pemble 3), enabled by steam locomotion and rising middle-class incomes, generated considerable debate in the contemporary periodical press about the commercialisation and standardisation of foreign travel. Such coverage can be found in *Household Words*, the journal Dickens was “conducting” contemporaneously with the publication of *Little Dorrit* throughout the 1850s. Dickens’s description in the novel of “the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome ... sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family, and ... daily being sketched out of all earthly proportion, lineament and likeness, by travelling pencils innumerable” (*LD* II viii 430), suggests a repetitiveness, predictability and lack of authentic response to the foreign encounter depicted, that is also explored in *Household Words*’ accounts of Continental travel and tourism. This essay examines a selection of essays by George Augustus Sala, Henry Wreford, John Delaware Lewis and Dickens himself, and their contribution to what Jill Steward has described as the “creation of a ‘culture of travel’ in which popular tourism to foreign destinations began to expand and flourish” (Steward 39).

Marvelling at this expansion in 1853, *Eliza Cook’s Journal* declared that the tourists “have become a legion in multitude. They are ever scouring this land and other lands for strange sights and beautiful scenes” (“Travelling Englishmen” 409). Like other such mid-century cheap miscellanies, *Household Words* included articles about foreign excursions that reflect the growing interest associated with a widening market for travel. Describing “Continental Ways and Means” in 1852, Charles Lever observes: “the great cities and towns of Europe have become almost household words to English ears; and we are all of us now as familiar with Paris, Brussels, and the Rhine, as our fathers were with Holborn and Hackney” (*HW* 4: 490). As James Buzard has shown, however, this expansion and popularisation was not universally welcomed; it gave rise to a powerful distinction between the true “traveller” and the mere “tourist” that was bound up with the emerging idea of “authentic culture”, and with the role of travel in the formation and maintenance of Victorian social identities (Buzard 4–5). “Snobbish ‘anti-tourism’”, he writes, “offered an important, even exemplary way of regarding one’s own cultural experiences as authentic and unique, setting them against a backdrop of always assumed tourist vulgarity, repetition, and ignorance” (5).

Such snobbery is condemned in *Household Words*, where, ever a champion of the amusements of the people, Dickens admonishes Macaulay for “loftily” deriding, “in the third volume of his brilliant History”, “the thousands of clerks and milliners who are now thrown into raptures by the sight of Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond”:

No such responsible gentleman, in France or Germany, writing history – writing anything – would think it fine to sneer at any inoffensive and useful class of his fellow subjects. If the clerks and milliners – who pair off arm in arm, by thousands, for Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond, to celebrate the Early Closing Movement, we presume – will only imagine their presence poisoning those waters to the majestic historian as he roves along the banks, looking for Whig Members of Parliament to sympathise with him in admiration of the beauties of Nature, we think they will be amply avenged in the absurdity of the picture. (“Insularities” *HW* 13: 3)

While bound up with changes in the social make-up of the British travelling public, as Dickens’s comment suggests, the opposition between traveller and tourist also reflected anxieties about the growth of commodity culture and the forms of cross-cultural contact it either enabled or precluded. Analysing its connection to the semiotics of nostalgia, John Frow argues that one of the central conditions of tourism is a sense “of estrangement, a state of ontological homelessness” (Frow 135) – a loss of origin that the tourist ironically attempts to assuage with a product that “in its most general form, is a commodified relation to the Other” (150). Such “saleable otherness” (150) was part of the early development of mass tourism in the nineteenth century and *Household Words* frequently satirises it. Alongside travelogues describing the people, customs and sights to be seen on the Continent, *Household Words* also directed attention to the institutionalisation of tourism and its effects: on the one hand welcoming its democratising spread, while on the other, lampooning some of the consequences of commercialism in satiric accounts of the romantic tourist gaze, comic tales about the commodified hospitality of foreign hotels and descriptions of travellers frustrated in their quest for the genuine foreign encounter. At the same time, of course, *Household Words* itself was a commercial venture – a cheap, mass-circulation weekly, aimed at a broad middle-class readership, which reached sales of 40,000 per week at its height. While satirising the commodification of foreign scenery, hospitality and culture as part of the development of mass tourism in the nineteenth century, the journal’s contributors also participated in it by virtue of their publication in Dickens’s lucrative weekly miscellany.

The mass of scribbling English tourists traversing the Continent by the middle of the nineteenth century elicits ironic remark in *Household Words*. As the pseudonymous “Roving Englishman”, Grenville Murray remarks, “it is generally thought that an Englishman travelling is making notes for a book, to be published when he gets home” (*HW* 6: 359). Travel writing was a popular commodity form in the nineteenth century, with the more upmarket monthly, *Blackwood’s*, sardonically lamenting in 1848 that, notwithstanding the acknowledged merits of the railroad and steam-boat, “they have covered Europe with Tourists, all pen in hand, all determined not to let a henroost remain undescribed, all portfolioed, all handbooked, all ‘getting up a Journal’ and all pouring their busy nothings on the ‘reading public’, without compassion or conscience, at the beginning of the ‘season’” (“Modern Tourism” 185). *Household Words* contributed to this growing narrative production and consumption of foreign places by publishing individual contributions sketching life and manners on the Continent, as well as series like Murray’s “The Roving Englishman”, Sala’s “A Journey Due North” or Percy Fitzgerald’s “Down Among the Dutchmen”.

Contributors generally welcomed the extension of opportunities for foreign travel brought about by new technological and commercial improvements in transportation and communication. Dickens writes memorably of his delight in rapid steam travel in his account of a trip to Paris by the South Eastern Railway’s express service in 1851: “Here we are – no, I mean there we were, for it has darted far into the rear – in Bermondsey where the tanners live. Flash! The distant shipping in the Thames is gone” (“A Flight” *HW* 3: 530). Moreover, as Frederick Knight Hunt argues in “How to Spend a Summer Holiday”, “nor is this marvellous change in speed – this real economy of life – the only variation from old modes”:

for the cost in money of a journey has diminished with its cost of time. The cash which a few years ago was required to go to York, will now take the tourist to Cologne. The Minster of the one city is now, therefore, rivalled as a point for sight-seers by the Dom-Kirche of the other. When the South-Eastern Railway Company offers to take the traveller, who will pay them about three pounds at London Bridge one night, and place him by the next evening on the banks of the Rhine, – the excellent tendency is, that the summer holiday folks will extend their notions of an excursion beyond the Channel. (*HW* 1: 356)

Household Words was not alone in hailing the tourist opportunities opened up by railway travel. *Eliza Cook’s Journal* noted that “the Englishman has become unwontedly locomotive. Railways have made him so; and the facilities which these afford have (as shown by the rapidly increasing railway returns) enormously augmented the number of travellers of late years” (“Travelling Englishmen” 409).

Offering “A Few Words to Tourists” in 1857, *Chambers’s Journal* described the steam-boats and railways which “brought hosts of Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons – all anxious to see with their own eyes ‘the castled crag of Drachenfels’”, and other images that have “long haunted their susceptible imaginations” (155); and *Fraser’s Magazine* remarked in 1861 that “from end to end of England, and next from end to end of Europe, great and small have been jumbled together, to the occasional pride of some, and mortification of others, but to the convenience of all, and to the immense increase of the habit and love of locomotion” (“A Few Words on Tours and Tourists” 342). Dickens’s journal thus joined other mid-century miscellanies in contributing to that coverage of foreign travel in the periodical press Steward has identified as having “helped to make the activity seem normal and routine and a ‘taken-for-granted’ feature of middle-class life” (40). But the peculiar imaginative style of writing used to enliven the non-fictional prose of *Household Words* – itself the mark, as I have argued elsewhere,¹ of Dickens’s successful effort to carve out a niche in the highly competitive mid-Victorian periodical market – distinguishes its accounts of Continental travel and tourism, linking them to the journal’s more widespread interest in the mid-nineteenth-century development of commodity culture.

A reflex of the anxiety about the idea of the autonomous self that developed with modern capitalist society, tourism, according to Dean MacCannell, is a quest for an authentic realm of being, a realm outside the circuit of commodity relations. “The rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see”, he writes (14). The proliferation of books of travel, deplored by the *Blackwood’s* reviewer quoted above, threatened this quest for authenticity by shaping and colouring the tourist’s gaze through their construction of “the sight”. John Pemble notes that travel books on Italy alone were emerging at the rate of four a year in the 1840s (7), and in an 1858 *Quarterly* review of “Italian Tours and Tourists”, R.H. Cheney observes the illusory effects of such writing in “the abstractions of ideal beauty and superhuman sensibility – men all fire, and women all love; a literature all poetry, a language all music; seas all blue, and skies without a cloud; palaces of marble, hedges of myrtle, orange groves studded with antique statues, peasants dancing in fancy ball dresses, under vine-coloured trellises, and a youth with bare legs singing all day to a guitar” (347). “This is not Italy”, he writes, but “with this idea of it the untravelled public are so familiarised, that they will scarcely accept any other; and it is curious to observe how long in the tourist’s mind this conventional type, which he has brought out with him, prevails over the reality which he sees spread before his eyes” (347).

While the *Quarterly* reviewer cautions against such false impressions, *Household Words* imaginatively dramatises their operation in George Augustus Sala’s account of “Cities in Plain Clothes”. Sala describes several key Continental destinations of the mid-Victorian tourist, but “in their apparel of homespun, very different from the gala suit they wear on high days and holidays, and in books of travel” (“Cities” *HW* 5: 418). Using the clothing metaphor to expose the constructedness of the “cities that poets sing, that painters limn, that rapturous tourists describe” (419), he presents what Buzard refers to as the “‘prosaicist’ reaction” (211) to the picturesque:

Let me take a city. – Constantinople. What a holiday dress she wears in Mr Thomas Allom’s pictures, in the pages of Byron and Hope, in Mr Lewis’s lithographs, in the eyes even of the expectant tourist on board the Peninsular and Oriental Company’s steamer, who, disappointed with Naples, Malta, and Athens, opens wide his eyes with wonder, admiration and delight, when he first surveys the City of the Sultan from the Golden Horn. (419)

That tourist “is a native, we will say, of Clapham; Stockwell was his *alma mater*; Camberwell resounds with his erudition. He is well read in that curious repertory of books that go to make up in England the usual course of reading of a young man in the middle classes of society” and he “is the hope and joy of a wholesale house in the Manchester line, and in Bread Street, Cheapside. We will call him Moole” (419).

Sala’s characterisation of Mr Moole picks up on contemporary changes in the social profile of the British tourist. Mr Moole is a “gent”, a distinctive lower-middle-class urban type, whose geographical mobility here hints at his “growing social mobility” (Steward 42). Mr Moole’s preconceptions about Constantinople compose an orientalist fantasy, liberally sprinkled with exotic terms that are comically derived from his reading of travellers’ tales:

I shall listen to the dulcet tones of the mandolin, hear the pattering fall of perfumed waters, catch heavenly glimpses of dark-eyed beauties behind lattices, puffing lazily at the aromatic chibouque, or perchance become an unwilling witness of some dark and terrible tragedy, – the impalement of a grand vizier, or the sacking and salt-waterising of some inconstant houri of the Padisha.... (419)

Mr Moole, however, will be disappointed – as of course all tourists are who, taught by the guidebook, seek access to the “*type of the beautiful*” (Frow 125). Instead of odalisques, janissaries and fret-worked mosques, Mr Moole finds a “dirty, swarming, break-neck city” in place of “Stamboul the romantic, the beautiful, the glorious” (“Cities” 420). As another mid-century writer in *Eliza Cook’s Journal* declares, of course “everybody has some notion of Constantinople, for we have had descriptions of it by men of all classes, from poets downwards, and in all moods and tenses of mind” (“Peep at Constantinople” 54). But what distinguishes Sala’s account in *Household Words* is the imaginative device of “assuming that cities wear clothes, plain or otherwise” (“Cities” 418) – a device that, while in keeping with the journal’s house-style, also signifies its abiding fascination with changing relationships between people and things in an evolving commodity culture.

Turning to his next “city in plain clothes”, Venice, Sala describes being confronted by “fourscore poets, twelve score sentimental tourists, a bevy of blooming young ladies, far too numerous for me to count, and the editors of six defunct landscape annuals” who combine to paint a vision of “marble halls”; “Landscapes, or, rather, water-scapes, with crimson, green and gold skies, orange waves and blue palaces (see Turner)”; “the Doge [as] a venerable old man, with a white beard and a high cap, constantly occupied in dandling the lion of St Mark”; and all the canals “studded with gondolas, painted with fanciful arabesques, hung with splendid tapestry, filled with purple velvet lovers and white satin angels (see Lake Price), making love and eating ices beneath a moon certainly twice as large as any French, German, or English one” (420). Similarly, he shows Naples to be falsified by the gaze of tourists and travel writers:

Imagination incorrigible, in three vols. 8vo, just out (see Evening paper) persists in seeing only Naples the sunny, the romantic, the beautiful “*Vedi Napoli e poi morire*”. “See Naples and die”, says Imagination. “See Naples”, says Reality sternly in the shape of Mr Gladstone, “see St Januarius’s sham blood, and Poerio’s fetters, and Ferdinand’s Shrapnel shells, and then die with shame and horror”. (421)²

Sala’s allusion to Gladstone’s letters on the State Prosecutions of the Neapolitan Government and the plight of imprisoned patriots like Carlo Poerio is in keeping with *Household Words*’ support for the Risorgimento throughout the 1850s³ and draws a sharp distinction between idealised, touristic representation and underlying social and political realities. Ironically, however, this distinction masks another. While lampooning the “sentimental tourists, and writers of stanzas, and imaginative painters” (422) who clothe the cities they visit in “ideal and imaginative garments” (419), Sala himself was not – despite appearances to the contrary – writing an eyewitness account. Partaking of the “doubleness” evident in the cities he describes, he conceals the fact that his journalistic copy about Italy was second-hand. Editing Sala’s account of Italian hotels for the 1 March 1856 issue of the journal (discussed below), Dickens wrote to Wills on 17 February: “I have taken some things out of Sala, where he is wrong. He has not been in Italy, I feel sure” (Lehmann 213). Sala had effectively admitted as much in an 1855 essay likening Brighton to Capri: “Not that I ever saw Capri, or Naples either. My Italian travels have been made, hitherto, with my feet on the fender, and my eyes on a book” (“The Metamorphosed Pagoda” *HW* 12: 444).

The quest for an authentic foreign encounter propels many of the travellers who contribute to *Household Words*, and Dickens is one who seeks distance and difference from the familiar and conventional in his leader, published on 4 November 1854, entitled “Our French Watering-Place”. Here, he delights in the unfashionableness of Boulogne as a summer holiday resort for the English, and as the collective possessive pronoun of the title, “Our”, suggests, he positions himself as a participant observer and lays claim to a paradoxical holiday “at-home-ness” in Boulogne, based upon a residence of “two or three seasons”, that distinguishes him from the mindless guidebook follower:

[Our French Watering-Place] is more picturesque and quaint than half the innocent places which tourists, following their leader like sheep, have made impostors of. ... [T]here is an ancient belfry in it that would have been in all the Annuals and Albums, going and gone, these hundred years, if it had but been more expensive to get at. Happily it has escaped so well, being only in our French watering-place, that you may like it of your own accord in a natural manner, without being required to go into convulsions about it. We regard it as one of the later blessings of our life, that BILKINS, the only authority on Taste, never took any notice that we can find out, of our French watering-place. (“Our French Watering-Place” *HW* 10: 266)

Similarly, in “A German Table d’Hôte”, William Owen appreciates the undiscovered quietness of the Rhenish guesthouse in which he is staying: it “does not form part of the outworks of any of the large and fashionable Rhenish cities”, its does not advertise its name “for the behoof of tourists” (*HW* 12: 478), and

the company gathered in its “dining and coffee-room” includes “[c]omparatively few English, armed to the teeth with Murray’s hand-books, Panoramas of the Rhine, Sketch and Conversation Books” (479). What *Fraser’s* disparaged as “imitative travellers” – “those who travel to say they have travelled, who wander through Pompeii and ascend St Peter’s and spend a night on the Rigi, merely to boast of having done so when they return home” (“A Few Words” 346) – were frequent targets of satire in the periodical press. But getting off the beaten track on the Continent was becoming increasingly difficult, as explained by a writer in *Chambers’s*, who laments that he “put up last summer at an out-of-the-way chalet six thousand feet up in one of the Alpine chains, and found a dissenting minister from Glasgow, an inspector of schools, and a London police magistrate, in wide-awakes, to say nothing of an archdeacon in highlows and a flannel shirt, discussing the shortest climb to a neighbouring peak” (“Going Abroad” 369). While such encounters comically attest to the democratisation of travel, they also compromise the “total change”, the pursuit of a genuine foreign encounter, which *Chambers’s* identifies as the goal of going abroad. William Howard Russell ironically remarks the same sentiment in describing his breakfast in Turin for *Household Words*, as he observes the “strong detachment of our own countrymen, women, and children, regarding each other with that aversion which a true Briton always exhibits to a fellow-subject when on foreign travel” (*HW* 6: 190).

A symptom of the ubiquity of English tourists on the Continent was the increasing provision of English amenities in the form of meals and accommodation, and in his first essay of a series on “The Great Hotel Question”, Sala objects to this trend, showing what he, like Russell, calls the “true Briton’s” spirit, in deploring the “purely English hotel abroad”: the “worst features of the continental system are grafted upon the worst features of the English”, he complains, although “[y]ou have, to be sure, the consolation of being swindled in your own language by your own countrymen, and of being bitten into frenzy by vermin that may, haply, have crossed the Channel in British blankets” (“Great Hotel Question: Chapter the First” *HW* 13: 101). Complaints about the high cost of English hotels had been voiced earlier in the decade, as *Eliza Cook’s Journal* described the letters to the *Times* in 1853 from “Done Brown”, “Victimised”, “Fleeced”, “Diddled”, and many “Unfortunate Travellers”, who “prefer rushing abroad by steamboat-loads, from Southampton, Dover, Folkestone, London, Yarmouth, and Hull, to incurring the hideous annoyance of being systematically fleeced by the exorbitant practices of English hotel-keepers” (“Travelling Englishmen” 409). Indeed, Sala’s three-part series in *Household Words* was prompted, he writes, by Albert Smith’s diatribe against *The English Hotel Nuisance*. He takes a satiric look at the current state of French, Swiss, German, Italian and American hotels. German hotels, Sala divides into three classes, of which the first is the “watering-place hotel – let us say, the Gross-Herzog Albrecht, at Saxe-Roulettenburg” (“Great Hotel Question: Chapter the Second” *HW* 13: 141). “It is *the* building in the little capital of the Duchy; for the Grand Duke never could raise money enough to finish his freestone palace on the Eselskopf-Platz, and lives chiefly at a shabby little hunting-lodge”, deriving a large portion of his revenue from the Gross-Herzog:

not, perhaps, from the actual hotel department of the establishment, but from certain succursal institutions under the same roof, to wit, the Kursaal; comprising dancing, conversation, and reading saloons; together with two gaily-decorated apartments, which you would take to be the most innocent chambers in the world, but which, nevertheless, lead straight down to – well, to the infernal regions... (141)

The “flower of Europe, both aristocratic and financial”, descends upon this resort about the month of August every year “to the great pleasure and profit of [its landlords,] Herren Brauwer and nephew, the increase of the grand ducal revenues; and, through him of course, though indirectly, the greater glory of the Germanic Confederation”. Whether the Gross-Herzog is comfortable or not remains an open question, for there “is such a continuous round of amusing folly, gaiety, and excitement; you lose and win so much money; you fall in love (or out of it) so often, that you have really no time to inquire whether the doors and windows are properly fastened; whether the chimneys smoke, or the sheets are well aired” (143). Indeed, for “the same reason, although Herren Brauwer and nephew stick it on very heavily in the bill, no one cares to dispute the items” (143).

To illustrate Italian hotels, Sala selects “the great Caravanserai of travelling milords: say in Rome, Milan or Florence, the Casa Borbonica. This was, in old times, the palazzo of the princely Cinquantapercento family” (“Great Hotel Question: Chapter the Third” *HW* 13: 148). Its good points are its splendour combined with cheapness: “the rent of the malachite and gold, or of the ivory and black velvet suite, lags far behind the jocundly extortionate price which you have to pay for a first-floor in the Rue de la Paix, or a garret in Pall Mall” (149). But the landlord, he complains, is a humbug, charging for sugar never consumed and wax candles never burnt, “the rooms are awfully damp”, and “after every

shower of rain, the grand frescoed saloons are pervaded by sundry unwelcome visitants from the gardens” (149). In Rome, he lampoons the entrepreneurialism of a “special hotel which appears to lie fallow during fifty-one weeks in the year, and suddenly to start up into life, with a teeming crop of guests, in Holy Week” (149):

Nobody heard of the Hotel del Matto Forestiere, or of the Madonna di Scarlatina, since last carnival; but now, sallow commissioners rampage about Rome lauding the unrivalled accommodations of these hotels. Whole English families, who have been unable to obtain rooms in the Piazza di Spagna or Del Popolo are hustled almost involuntarily into atrocious Bugparks in remote quarters of the city. Principi Inglesi find themselves dwelling among the Trasteverini; and travelling archdeacons are pent up in outhouses among mouldy old convents and churches and seminaries, where the Scarlet Lady rides rampant. (150)

The Swiss hotel is typically “spacious, well-aired and cheerful”, but outrageously expensive: “Few men have the courage to read a Swiss hotel bill straight through [claims Sala], or even to look at it in its entirety” (“Great Hotel Question: Chapter the First” *HW* 13: 102). As he goes on to explain, however, the Alps can be toured without having to pay such extortionate hotel prices – indeed, without even having to leave London at all. At the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, Albert Smith’s multi-media show of his “Ascent of Mont Blanc” played to sell-out crowds for six years, from January 1852. Appearing before a set of stationary scenes depicting the route from Geneva to Chamonix during the first act, and a vertically-moving panorama of the ascent in the second, Smith offered his audiences a vicarious ascent, combining anecdote, impersonation, song, and, for the third season, ten St Bernard dogs and four chamois in his performance (Altick 477). As *Punch* observed in 1855, “[c]onsidering how pleasantly one can ascend Mont Blanc, in the company of MR. ALBERT SMITH, at the Egyptian Hall, it seems unnecessarily laborious and expensive to perform the task elsewhere than in Piccadilly” (“Who has Ascended Mont Blanc?” 140). Dickens had remarked the authenticity effect of the show the year before, in his toast to Smith as guest of honour at the Annual Dinner to celebrate the Anniversary of the Foundation of Commercial Travellers’ School on 30 December 1854:

So many travellers have been going up Mont Blanc lately, both in fiction and in fact, that I have recently heard of a Company to employ Sir Joseph Paxton to take it down. Only one of those travellers, however, has been enabled to bring Mont Blanc to Piccadilly, and, by his own ability and good humour, to thaw its eternal ice and snow, so that the most timid ladies may ascend it twice a day ‘during the holidays’ without the smallest danger or fatigue. (quoted in Fitzsimons 135)

In *Household Words*, Sala captures Dickens’s suggestion of a mutually-constitutive relation between the Mont Blanc show and the place it purports to represent, identifying the range of entrepreneurs capitalising upon Smith’s success and throwing the difference between the Swiss original and its commodity-forms into question:

[The Swiss] are visited occasionally by their friend and patron, Mr Albert Smith, who teaches them how to make toys in carved wood, and brings them prints of sham Swiss costumes from Paris, against the summer masquerading time. When the tourist season is about to commence, Mr Beverly and Mr Danson, from the Surrey Zoological Gardens, send over a staff of scene-painters and carpenters; and, the Switzerland of travellers, of dioramas, and of landscape annuals, is built up. The toy châteaux are put together like huts for the Crimea, or houses for Australia; valleys are excavated by Messrs. Fox and Henderson; the mountains are ‘flats’, the rocks ‘set pieces’, the cataracts canvas on rollers. Mr Murray’s Guidebook-maker is in the secret, and writes the bill of performance; and Mr Gunter does Mont Blanc by contract. ... There is a grand dress-rehearsal of ‘Switzerland as it isn’t’ just before the prorogation of Parliament; and then the thirteen cantons are ready for the avalanche of lords, invalids, Cambridge tutors, Oxford undergraduates, French countesses, German barons, travelling physicians, landscape-painters, fashionable clergymen, old maids, and cosmopolitan swindlers. (“Chapter the First” *HW* 13: 102)

Sala anticipates here the modern tourist phenomenon MacCannell has referred to as “staged authenticity”. According to MacCannell, “the variety of understanding held out before tourists as an ideal is an *authentic* and *demystified* experience of an aspect of some society or other” (94). But it is always possible that what is taken to be entry into the secluded and thus more authentic “back region” of a foreign culture or place “is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation” (101). The disappearance of the distinction between front and back regions in the constitution of the tourist sight leads, as Sala recognises – anticipating Baudrillard’s world of simulacra – to a regime of simulation in which the difference between original and copy starts to disappear (Frow

128). While the success of Smith's show was discussed elsewhere in the mid-Victorian periodical press – *Eliza Cook's Journal*, for example, declaring that “[i]t is impossible to say how much of this popularity is due to the panorama and how much to Albert Smith, who presides and describes, tells capital stories, and sings in first-rate style” (“Albert Smith” 309) – Sala's account is distinguished by his acute perception of the complex reciprocal relationship between the tourist sight and its representation. His parody of Smith's exploitation of the public appetite for travel panoramas, together with the publicity mania surrounding his “Ascent of Mont Blanc”, represents the performances constructing the attractions that will be sought out by hordes of tourists when the season commences.⁴

By 1857, however, the ascent had dwindled in prominence as part of Smith's show, and the second half of the performance was devoted to another mountain capturing popular attention, Vesuvius, which as Richard Altick dryly observes, “had the considerable advantage of being explosive” (Altick 477). *Household Words'* correspondent from Naples, Henry Wreford, had earlier described an eruption of Vesuvius in 1855, and his remarkable determination, together with “thousands of others”, to view the “grand spectacle” from the summit itself (*HW* 11: 436). The eruption was clearly good for business, for upon arriving in Resina Wreford observes the “motley crowd of guides and donkeys, facchini, and torchbearers, all insisting on the necessity of their services, and forthwith attaching themselves to our persons”. An unidentified contributor named “Dulton” had described a similar experience stopping for breakfast at Resina in 1852: “Most of the Vesuvian guides live here; and, while I was cracking my eggs and sipping my coffee, a posse of these worthies were noisily disputing outside for possession of my person” (*HW* 5: 235). Accompanied by one of these guides, Wreford approaches the top amidst stones being shot up into the air from the new crater with flames of fire and “a heat and light that scorched and blasted us” ([Wreford] 437). However, the grandeur of the sublime spectacle is undermined by the tourist activity he encounters at the summit:

Some were baking eggs, or lighting cigars, or hooking out lava to stick their coppers in. Some had brought baskets – ham and chicken, and such like luxuries – and had stowed themselves away under a mass of coke of some hundreds weight. ... The orange man and the man with cheap pastry, too, made their rounds continually, and last, though not least, the man with pieces of lava, which he was liberally offering for thirty grains each. (437)

Dulton too had been plagued with the sale of dubious souvenirs, as he describes visitors “being fleeced in the purchase of a box, containing minute fragments of granite, and other equally scarce pieces of stone” ([Dulton] 235).

These Vesuvian tourists and hawkers disturb the sublime scene with their bathos, disrupting the atmosphere that is required for the traveller to contemplate the awesome power of the volcano. One of the key motifs identified by Buzard as contributing to the production of an overall authenticity effect for nineteenth-century Continental travellers is “stillness” (177), which finds its quintessential expression in Pompeii, the city buried by an eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD and only partially excavated by the 1850s. In two articles, “The City of Sudden Death” and “Preservation in Destruction”, published on 8 May and 5 June 1852 respectively, John Delaware Lewis describes a visit to this city of ruin. Standing within the oval arena of the amphitheatre at Pompeii, with its solemn historical associations, Lewis is awed by the thought of the gladiator who “died for the amusement of an audience” perhaps on this very spot (“City of Sudden Death” *HW* 5: 172). But like Wreford he is continually diverted by the presence of tourists. Passing the entrance for the gladiators and wild beasts, he notices an inscription carved on a nearby seat and speculates that it is probably “the name of the Decemvir or Decurion who sat there”, only to find, on closer inspection, that “the British penknife has not spared even these stones of Pompeii”, and that “J. Wilkinson, 1847” has left his mark on the monument (173).⁵ Musing upon the various objects found strewn about in the excavation of the Soldiers' Quarter, Lewis asks “who is there who will not construct for himself ... [from these,] some picture of what that awful moment must have been, when Vesuvius poured her boiling ashes through every pore and fibre of the city and its citizens? Who? certainly, not those two young men, beloved compatriots”, he sardonically remarks, “young Oxford students”: “One smokes a cigar, the other wields an immense sandwich; they are laughing and poking each other about with sticks, and ‘chaffing’ their guide through the ruins”. These kinds of tourists visit sights without seeing, “[d]odging each other round the gay columns of the Alhambra – ornamenting one another with pigtales at Mount Vernon, watching intently some good-looking *grisette* in the galleries of the Louvre [and] dashing frantically out of St Peter's for some newly-invented pipe-light” (173). In contrast, travellers like Lewis appreciate the remarkable evidence of frozen time to be seen in the objects excavated from Pompeii and now exhibited at the Museum in Naples. As he reflects upon the gap

between the value of these goods as quotidian commodities and their historical significance: “the value of small things; the worthlessness of great ones; – how many lessons are taught by these relics” (“Preservation” *HW* 5: 283). Overwhelmed by Pompeii’s archaeological evidence, Lewis is finally led to reflect upon the vicissitudes of such tourist sites, wondering whether

... in those future ages, when Mr Macaulay’s New Zealander is to contemplate the ruins of London (including, as we may suppose, the remains of the still unfinished Houses of Parliament), will our descendant, in like manner, stalk uninvited through those tall and mysterious mansions, which you and I pass by with fear and trembling, or only read of in the ‘Morning Post?’ The splendid galleries which we enter by means of tickets our posterity may perhaps comfortably spit over...; they may pursue each other round the colossal fragments of the Marble Arch, armed with flasks of the liquid then in use, like the two Oxford students. (“City of Sudden Death” 175)

Lewis’s account of Pompeii expresses a sobering awareness of the rise and fall of empires that stands in ironic contrast to the survival of the tourist. The lack of interest shown by the Oxford students exemplifies a more general touristic failure that is opposed to the kind of engagement shown by travellers seeking a genuine foreign encounter. As Susan Stewart has argued in relation to the souvenir, within “the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object become critical” (133). Whether understood in existential or empirical terms, as a property of selfhood or of the objects that help to constitute it, the quest for authenticity in an age of mass production and consumption was a problem that assumed a new urgency for the mid-Victorians and to which Dickens’s journal responded. Like the “antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); ... [and] morsels of tessellated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii” (*LD* I xvi 163) proudly displayed by Mr Meagles in *Little Dorrit*, the accounts of Continental travel in *Household Words* expose the difficulty of assuring the genuineness of goods and services associated with such sightseeing. While contributing to the periodical press coverage of Continental travel as increasingly within the reach of new middle-class consumers, *Household Words* at the same time offers a significant critique of the way in which tourism was bound up with the development of commodity culture at mid-century.

Notes

1. *Commodity Culture in Dickens’s Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
2. St Januarius is the patron saint of Naples, two phials of whose blood are preserved in the cathedral. The relic is shown twice a year and on these occasions the substance contained in the phial liquefies, which the Neapolitans regard as a supernatural manifestation. “W.C.” (presumably William Chambers) describes witnessing the event in “Something of Italy: Naples” (157).
3. In “Justice at Naples”, D.L. Meadows describes his imprisonment “in a cell so foul that bread turns green in twenty-four hours; his constitution is undermined; one of his companions has died of consumption, another is paralysed, and Poerio himself has been operated upon for the tumours raised by his chains” (*HW* 14: 459).
4. Raymund Fitzsimons claims that Smith’s entertainments contributed towards the “corruption” of the Chamoniards, as the pastoral life they “had enjoyed for centuries yielded to a mercenary interest in the tourist trade, and soon every peasant in the valley catered, in one way or another, for the visitors” (14).
5. The extent to which English tourists had become notorious for such graffiti is suggested in *Punch*’s first piece of facetious advice in the form of “Small Change for Persons Going on the Continent”: “1. Write your name in large letters, with date and address, wherever you go. For this purpose, you had better carry about with you a bottle of WARREN’S blacking and a large brush, and you can then lay it on as thick as you please” (71).

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