



Peter Blake. *George Augustus Sala and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press: The Personal Style of a Public Writer*

Peter Blake. *George Augustus Sala and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press: The Personal Style of a Public Writer*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. 286 p., ill. ISBN 9781472416070. UK £60.00 (hardback).

George Augustus Sala was a central figure to the New Journalism that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. With a seemingly equal and vocal amount of devout followers and vehement detractors, Sala's personal style of writing was both praised and lambasted. This dichotomous reception appears to remain to this day. Peter Blake sees Sala as a wrongly marginalized figure, someone who many have heard of, but whose life and work is not well understood. This volume is his attempt to rectify this problem.

Blake's work centers on a chronological analysis of Sala's life, career, and influence on the New Journalism. Blake argues that Sala's career was molded by his work across various mediums including visual arts, bohemian journalism, contemporary novels, travel writing, and pornography. Written for those interested in nineteenth-century journalistic writing and readership, this volume also discusses the effects that societal changes had on Victorian periodicals and the effects that such changes had on society in turn. Blake does a commendable job of addressing these changes through his study of Sala's journalistic career. The introduction, which takes a broad look at Sala's career and influence, establishes his central position in the period and provides a background against which Chapter 1 seeks to situate the early origins of his writing style. Blake lays out how, from being blinded as a child, to the beginning of his career in the visual arts, this part of Sala's life laid the foundation for his writing style by blurring the distinction between the visual and the verbal.

Chapters two, three, and four are interrelated as they follow Sala's writing in three distinct locations: London, Paris, and Russia respectively. Chapters two and three assess Sala's writing for Charles Dickens's *Household Words* and his role as social commentator in London, comparing these functions to his role as urban spectator in Paris. Blake analyzes the effects that studying societal problems and experiencing Parisian bohemian life had on Sala's career. Chapter four follows Sala's time in Russia as a special correspondent and his emerging desire to write novels while his journalistic stories blur the line between fact and fiction.

Chapters five and six look at Sala's departure from and ultimate return to journalism. In Chapter five, Blake looks at Sala's move to fictional territory, analyzing the influence that realism and sensationalism in his journalistic style had on his fiction writing and the anxieties that he experienced in moving away from journalism. Chapter six examines Sala's move back



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to journalism and his shift toward being one of the first international special correspondents. Blake explores this through Sala's travel writing from America, Algeria, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand and comments on the effect this writing had on foreign reportage. Blake asserts that here Sala helped forge a new style of reporting which mirrored "a more general shift in Victorian thinking 'away from domestic class conflict toward racial and international conflict'" (181).

Chapter seven examines Sala's pornographic writing and obsession with flagellation, an area in Sala's life which Blake views to be both important and under-researched. Blake looks at the events in Sala's life that led to this fascination and how it manifested during the first part of his career in his illustrations. Blake also analyzes Sala's participation in the flagellant correspondence column phenomenon, "particularly the way that these correspondents subverted the ideologies of family magazines" (15). In doing so, Blake provides a broad study of Victorian pornography and its politically subversive nature.

In the conclusion, Blake assesses Sala's influence upon the evolution of a new wave of journalism as well as how this profession changed from the beginning of his subject's career to the end. This conclusion leads Blake full circle to his purpose stated at the beginning when he writes: "I contend that without this overall survey and without analysing the influences and theories behind Sala's work we cannot truly understand Sala's influence on the New Journalism." (10) Blake mentions that only two other serious studies have been written with the purpose of analyzing Sala's writing and career. In part, this volume is Blake's attempt to foster new discussions and research on Sala's life and influence, and to create a "sustained effort to encapsulate his [Sala's] style and the theories underpinning his writing" (7).

Blake's study consistently brings the discussions back to nineteenth-century journalism, publishing, and readership. It provides a deeper understanding of Sala's life, the many facets of his career, and his influence in the context of Victorian print culture. It is an interesting and informative study, even for those with only elementary knowledge of this area.

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