

Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture

**WOMEN AND THE RAILWAY,
1850–1915**

Anna Despotopoulou

Women and the Railway, 1850–1915

Anna Despotopoulou

EDINBURGH
University Press

© Anna Despotopoulou, 2015

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road
12(2f) Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ
www.euppublishing.com

Typeset in 10.5/13 Sabon by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire,
and printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A CIP record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 7694 1 (hardback)
ISBN 978 0 7486 7695 8 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 0 7486 7696 5 (Epub)

The right of Anna Despotopoulou to be identified as
Author of this work has been asserted in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988,
and the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations
2003 (SI No. 2498).

Published with the support of the Edinburgh
University Scholarly Publishing Initiatives Fund.

Women and the Railway, 1850–1915

Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture

Series Editor: Julian Wolfreys

Volumes available in the series:

In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres
Saverio Tomaiuolo

Blasted Literature: Victorian Political Fiction and the Shock of Modernism
Deaglán Ó Donghaile

William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880–1914
Anna Vaninskaya

1895: Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain
Nicholas Freeman

Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848–1930
Christine Ferguson

Dickens's London: Perception, Subjectivity and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity
Julian Wolfreys

Re-Imagining the 'Dark Continent' in fin de siècle Literature
Robbie McLaughlan

Roomscape: Women Readers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf
Susan David Bernstein

Women and the Railway, 1850–1915
Anna Despotopoulou

Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy
Kate Hext

London's Underground Spaces: Representing the Victorian City, 1840–1915
Haewon Hwang

Moving Images: Nineteenth-Century Reading and Screen Practices
Helen Groth

Jane Morris: The Burden of History
Wendy Parkins

Thomas Hardy's Legal Fictions
Trish Ferguson

Exploring Victorian Travel Literature: Disease, Race and Climate
Jessica Howell

Spirit Becomes Matter: The Brontës, George Eliot, Nietzsche
Henry Staten

Rudyard Kipling's Fiction: Mapping Psychic Spaces
Lizzy Welby

The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson
Kostas Boyiopoulos

British India and Victorian Literary Culture
Máire ni Fhlathúin

Forthcoming volumes:
Her Father's Name: Gender, Theatricality and Spiritualism in Florence Marryat's Fiction
Tatiana Kontou

The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities
Patricia Pulham

Visit the Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture web page at
www.euppublishing.com/series/ecvc

Also Available:

Victoriographies – A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Writing, 1790–1914, edited by
Julian Wolfreys

ISSN: 2044-2416

www.eupjournals.com/vic

Series Editor's Preface

'Victorian' is a term, at once indicative of a strongly determined concept and an often notoriously vague notion, emptied of all meaningful content by the many journalistic misconceptions that persist about the inhabitants and cultures of the British Isles and Victoria's Empire in the nineteenth century. As such, it has become a by-word for the assumption of various, often contradictory habits of thought, belief, behaviour and perceptions. Victorian studies and studies in nineteenth-century literature and culture have, from their institutional inception, questioned narrowness of presumption, pushed at the limits of the nominal definition, and have sought to question the very grounds on which the unreflective perception of the so-called Victorian has been built; and so they continue to do. Victorian and nineteenth-century studies of literature and culture maintain a breadth and diversity of interest, of focus and inquiry, in an interrogative and intellectually open-minded and challenging manner, which are equal to the exploration and inquisitiveness of its subjects. Many of the questions asked by scholars and researchers of the innumerable productions of nineteenth-century society actively put into suspension the clichés and stereotypes of 'Victorianism', whether the approach has been sustained by historical, scientific, philosophical, empirical, ideological or theoretical concerns; indeed, it would be incorrect to assume that each of these approaches to the idea of the Victorian has been, or has remained, in the main exclusive, sealed off from the interests and engagements of other approaches. A vital interdisciplinarity has been pursued and embraced, for the most part, even as there has been contest and debate amongst Victorianists, pursued with as much fervour as the affirmative exploration between different disciplines and differing epistemologies put to work in the service of reading the nineteenth century.

Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture aims to take up both the debates and the inventive approaches and departures from

convention that studies in the nineteenth century have witnessed for the last half-century at least. Aiming to maintain a 'Victorian' (in the most positive sense of that motif) spirit of enquiry, the series's purpose is to continue and augment the cross-fertilisation of interdisciplinary approaches, and to offer, in addition, a number of timely and untimely revisions of Victorian literature, culture, history and identity. At the same time, the series will ask questions concerning what has been missed or improperly received, misread, or not read at all, in order to present a multi-faceted and heterogeneous kaleidoscope of representations. Drawing on the most provocative, thoughtful and original research, the series will seek to prod at the notion of the 'Victorian', and in so doing, principally through theoretically and epistemologically sophisticated close readings of the historicity of literature and culture in the nineteenth century, to offer the reader provocative insights into a world that is at once overly familiar, and irreducibly different, other and strange. Working from original sources, primary documents and recent interdisciplinary theoretical models, *Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture* seeks not simply to push at the boundaries of research in the nineteenth century, but also to inaugurate the persistent erasure and provisional, strategic redrawing of those borders.

Julian Wolfreys

Acknowledgements

This book grew out of my participation in a research project entitled *Women in Spaces of Transit*, directed by Teresa Gómez Reus of the University of Alicante, and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. I vividly remember meeting with the members of the project in Warwick and later in Cadiz in 2009 to discuss our individual contributions. It is in this context that the railway became my particular space of transit, and I would like to gratefully acknowledge Teresa Gómez Reus for including me in the project as well as the other members of our team for inspiring conversations and support: Janet Stobbs, Valerie Fehlbaum, and Aránzazu Usandizaga. Early versions of my readings of Mansfield's and Oliphant's short stories appeared in the article entitled "'Running on lines": Women and the Railway in Victorian and early Modernist Culture', included in the book that Teresa edited together with Terry Gifford, *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan. The full published version of this article is available from: <http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=669457>. Also, revised versions of parts of my article on Rhoda Broughton, 'Trains of Thought: the Challenges of Mobility in the Work of Rhoda Broughton', *Critical Survey* 23.1 (Berghahn Journals 2011): 90–106, special issue entitled 'Other Sensations', edited by Janice Allan, whom I thank, appear scattered in Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

Several ideas developed in this book were presented in embryonic form in various conferences in London (twice), Rome, Thessaloniki, Naples, and Venice. Thanks are owed to various colleagues who stimulated my thinking in new and refreshing ways during lively conversations: Tamar Heller, Tatiana Kontou, Greg Zacharias, Donatella Izzo, Anna De Biasio, Peter Walker, Sheila Teahan, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, Alicia Rix, Matthew Beaumont, Tina Choi, and Ilana Blumberg.

At the start of this process of writing, in the summer of 2012, I

was very fortunate to spend time with my mentor Nicola Bradbury in Reading, and I would like to express my sincere thanks to her and to Lionel Kelly for stimulating conversations on literary railways, for their intellectual passion and generosity of spirit.

In the past years I have benefited from the academic and moral support of many colleagues at the University of Athens who have generously offered their time and expertise, helping to enlarge my thinking and my reading. I would like to thank Mina Karavanta for her reassuring and passionate presence and for enriching my theoretical perspective with enthusiasm and care. Many thanks are due to all the members of my Department of English Language and Literature for their encouragement and for granting me leave that enabled me to travel and conduct extensive research in libraries abroad. This research was also made possible by the generous University of Athens ELKE funding that was granted to me in 2012. I should also mention the help of my devoted students who, while studying for their graduate degrees in the UK, provided me with books and photocopies at a moment's notice: Thalia Trigoni, Charis Charalampous, Marouska Koulouri, and Danae Loukaki, many thanks to you.

At Edinburgh University Press, I am deeply grateful to Julian Wolfreys for his encouragement, his insightful comments, and for overseeing the manuscript with attention and care; the anonymous readers for thought-provoking remarks; Jackie Jones, Dhara Patel, and James Dale for their guidance throughout the production process and for securing funds which enabled me to acquire permissions for some of the images. I would also like to thank Nicola Wood for her expert copyediting and her careful attention to detail.

The four *Punch* images were generously offered by Mark Samuels Lasner and Curtis Small, Jr, of the University of Delaware Library, which I gratefully acknowledge for granting permission. 'Modes of Travelling in India', by Joseph Austin Benwell, was kindly and generously offered by a descendent of the artist, Dee Murray. The permission for the image reproduction of Rudolf Swoboda's painting was generously granted by the Royal Collection Trust, and of Augustus Egg's painting was given by the Birmingham Museums Trust. The *Funny Folks* image is reproduced by permission of the British Library. The George Gibbs illustration of 'Mrs Bathurst' has been scanned from my own copy of Kipling's book.

Finally I owe a special debt to my family – my parents for ongoing support and my mother especially for being such a careful and insightful reader of my work and for helping me with editing during the final stages of writing. My husband Kostas Vekrellis and my daughter Kalli have filled my life with inspiration, joy, adventure, and love. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Contents

Illustrations	vi
Series Editor's Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
1. Geographies of Fear in the Age of Sensation	22
2. Railway Speed	59
3. Breaching National Borders: Rail Travel in Europe and Empire	101
4. Railway Space and Time	148
Coda: Mrs Bathurst and Mrs Brown	181
Bibliography	187
Index	198

Illustrations

Figure 1	'A Little Farce', <i>Punch</i> (16 July 1859): 23. The University of Delaware Library	26
Figure 2	'Railway Morals', <i>Punch</i> (17 September 1864): 116. The University of Delaware Library	27
Figure 3	'Fast Young Lady (to Old Gent)', <i>Punch</i> (29 August 1857): 92. The University of Delaware Library	62
Figure 4	Augustus Egg, <i>Travelling Companions</i> . Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery ©Birmingham Museums Trust	64
Figure 5	'Making the Best of it', <i>Funny Folks</i> (14 August 1875): 44. © The British Library Board	67
Figure 6	George du Maurier, 'In the Metropolitan Railway', <i>Punch</i> (12 January 1878): 6. The University of Delaware Library	94
Figure 7	Joseph Austin Benwell, 'Modes of Travelling in India', <i>Illustrated London News</i> 1222 (19 September 1863): 283	111
Figure 8	Rudolf Swoboda, <i>A Peep at the Train</i> . Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2014	138
Figure 9	George Gibbs, illustration from 'Mrs Bathurst' in Kipling's <i>Traffics and Discoveries</i> (Scribner's, 1909)	183

Introduction

You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress other than the magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace [. . .]

You cannot conceive what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible, too. I could either have read or written; and as it was, I stood up, and with my bonnet off 'drank the air before me'. The wind, which was strong, or perhaps the force of our own thrusting against it, absolutely weighed my eyelids down [. . .] When I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful, and strange beyond description; yet, strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security, and not the slightest fear.

Frances Ann Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood* (1884), 281, 283

Fanny Kemble, the notable actress and writer, was one of the first women to experience the 'flying' sensation of the railway in August 1830, one month before the official opening of the Liverpool–Manchester line in September of the same year. By the side of the line's 'visionary' maker, 'the master of all these marvels', George Stephenson, with whom she professed to be 'most horribly in love' (280, 283), Kemble experienced the magic of locomotion. In the above-quoted letters she later collected in her autobiographical book, Kemble recorded the psychosomatic effects this trial journey had on her as well as the political climate and technological innovation that helped actualise the venture. Rhythmical motion, incalculable speed, identification with the mighty thrust of the engine and its 'cutting' power, and surrender to an invisible force which, nevertheless, inspires a sense of security, not dread or anxiety, are all felt by Kemble who, with bonnet off and no fear of exposure to the elements or to her fellow passengers, has a taste of a new social space which throughout the 'The Age of Transition' would become an important setting for the exploration of the subjectivity of women in literal and social transit.

This book examines Victorian and early modernist representations of women's experience of locomotion and the spaces of the railway at

a period of heightened physical mobility and urbanisation. It looks at literary and non-fictional texts which concentrate on women in transit by train and explores the tension between women's boundless physical, emotional, and sexual aspirations – often depicted as closely related to the feelings of freedom and speed that train travel evoked – and Victorian gender ideology that imposed restrictions through discourses which constructed the spaces of the railway as topographies of patriarchy, fear, or manipulation. Women in trains were a 'hot' topic in the mid- and late Victorian period, as the hundreds of stories, news items, and cartoons in periodicals attest, and the texts in question construct them, on the one hand, as objects of admiration, and, on the other, as targets of humour, satire, and even hatred. Within a theoretical framework set by prominent feminist studies of women's appropriation of public space,¹ and acknowledging the little but certainly very suggestive work that has already been published on the subject of women and the railway,² I investigate the ideological tensions and changes regarding women's relation to spaces of transit that are negotiated in fiction but also in as yet unexamined printed materials found in the Victorian periodical press, texts which are in themselves transitory and ephemeral like the journeys they describe. The railway is examined as an ambiguously gendered space that highlights the artificiality of the private/public divide, giving prominence to woman's impulse to traverse boundaries, not only physically but also mentally and emotionally.

Women's presence in the streets of the big European metropolises or within the urban spaces of department stores and cafés has been widely discussed by scholars who have attempted to theorise female subjectivity within the public spaces of the city. The railway, however, relatively unexplored as a gendered space, seems to be a more complex setting of modern urban life as it defies definitions and baffles those who brave its challenges. In the words of Alan Trachtenberg, 'Nothing else in the nineteenth century seemed as vivid and dramatic a sign of modernity as the railroad' (xiii). Indeed influential critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman have been tempted to define modernity by using diction and imagery associated with the railway: 'The velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of societal institutions are key components of modernity' (433). Yet women's relation to modernity has been long debated and often disputed, just as their occupancy of the spaces of modernity has been precarious and often misinterpreted. In order to address and study a different facet of women's response to modernity and their relation to transient space, I will concentrate on texts which represent them within settings of literal transit, the train and the railway station, as these were newly conceived Victorian spaces in

which the rules of circulation for men and women had to be formulated anew, balancing social conventions concerning gender behaviour with the emerging demands of travel, industry, and work, served primarily by the railway. These spaces of transit are experienced subjectively by women and open up fresh possibilities for self-exploration and growth as they challenge women's sense of identity.

Women's reasons for travel by train and their choice of terrain traversed in the nineteenth century have not always been the same. Their trajectories within and beyond the city, within and beyond the nation, as urban passengers, commuters, travellers, tourists, expatriates, exiles, or even nomads play an important role in the making and remaking of their identity as modern subjects in an urban, industrial, and imperial setting. As many theorists and critics of women's travel writing have pointed out, for a long time travel was considered a male privilege, and the relevant discourse which emphasised the political and intellectual benefits of travel – scientific exploration, colonialisation, or just broadening the mind – concerned the white bourgeois Western man and thus, by comparison, served to confirm the moral and spatial association between women and home. Nevertheless, recent exploration of women's texts on travel has challenged the nineteenth-century division between public and private gendered spheres, rejecting the association of woman with spatial restriction, immobility, and passivity. More particularly, as Sidonie Smith has argued, 'The expanding mobility of certain women in the middle to late nineteenth century came as an effect of modernity – democratization, literacy, education, increasing wealth, urbanization and industrialization, and the colonial and imperial expansion that produced wealth and the investment in "progress"' (xi). The train 'that drove modernity' (Smith, xi) offered women the opportunity to participate in the wide, freely visitable world, a world that normally men were entitled to and which was often identified with the fluidity and flux of the modern pace of living. As a result the mobile worlds presented by women, at both national and international levels, potently describe both the pleasures of mobility and the dangers of displacement, the acceleration of urban life and the complexities of networks and routes, the randomness of encounters and the shifts in perception that rail travel effects. In fact, in women's texts on railway travel very often the map of the imagination displaces the transportation map, by taking precedence over the geographical, scientific, or sociological details of location. In particular, women's highlighting of dispersed and disparate objects, merged by the speed of the transportation medium, results from their new panoramic perception, which tends to privilege unstable representation over literal reporting of view, impressionism over realism.

I draw my arguments from a variety of cultural materials: novels, stories published in weekly and monthly journals, news items and commentaries, essays, illustrations, and paintings. In fact, the abundance and richness of short stories published in nineteenth-century journals, utilising the railway as setting for plots of romance, terror, domestic drama, humour, and the supernatural, testifies to the appeal that the railway had on the imagination of the Victorians who explored its ambiguities and the opportunities it offered for new terms of interaction. In these stories railway carriages and stations appear as settings at once public and private, open to crime and secure or comfortable like homes, spaces of fear or of comfort, of dizzying mobility or of boring immobility, of time lost or of time gained. Woman is ever present in these stories, identifying with but also fearful of the new drifting identity experienced through mobility. All texts which draw on the railway for their plots, imagery, or commentary, irrespective of the sex of their author, construct spaces of tension between woman's aspirations and society's impositions – spaces in which the conflicts of Victorian gender and domestic ideology are played out. In the narratives of train journeys, thus, two conflicting gendered worlds are juxtaposed: the objective with the subjective; technology with imagination; organisation with confusion; punctuality with irregularity; the rational with the irrational.

The importance of the railway not only as a means of technological development, economic growth, and imperial expansion but also as a cultural metaphor with 'educational, intellectual, emotional and psychological dimensions' (Freeman, *Railways*, 19), has been recorded in many books with historical, sociological, technological, or cultural focus. In his insightful and pioneering 1977 study, *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch first concentrated on the pervasive impact of the railway – the most dramatic technological change to affect everyday life in the nineteenth century – on socio-economic structures as well as on the modern industrialised consciousness, which experienced changes in perception and identity. Mechanised motion, panoramic vision, the annihilation of the space-time continuum, isolation, and the medical side-effects of train travel are just some of the issues introduced by Schivelbusch, whose book constitutes the starting point for most subsequent studies, my book included, of the cultural, social, and psychological impact of the railway. A second point of departure is Michael Freeman's comprehensive *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (1999), which explores the ways in which socio-economic and geographic changes brought about by the railway interacted with the intellectual and cultural context to produce art and literature that reflected the fears and anxieties but also the thrill of and fascination

with scientific technology, speed, and circulation via the revolutionary train. The train was, according to these studies, an important, perhaps the most crucial, means of urban growth and development – ‘in terms of commodity circulation, the built environment of towns and cities, or of the city as a focus of conspicuous consumption’ (Freeman, *Railways*, 29) – but also of suburbanisation, as population in the nineteenth century was constantly undergoing a process of displacement due to crucial socio-economic, demographic, and geographical parameters. The railway was ubiquitous, and the invasion, or despoiling, of rural towns and areas unavoidable, to the extent that railway companies had more power than gentlemen of social rank who were deprived of the authority to impede the purchase of their land which had been deemed a prescribed route.³

Moreover, as it becomes clear from both Schivelbusch’s and Freeman’s books, even though the railway, as a seemingly neutral technological space, appeared to initiate social progress and individual liberty, promising to introduce people to a more democratic era where passengers from all walks of life could partake of the technological advances which ameliorated the conditions of travel within a fast-moving, industrial society, in reality it naturalised even further social divisions by embedding the new practices within old hierarchical systems that took such social distinctions for granted. The railway then, rather than levelling out differences, became responsible for the further segregation of the classes (and the sexes) through their literal compartmentalisation in separate spaces (first it was separate trains and next it was separate – first-, second-, and third-class – carriages), which mirrored segregating policies in urban space. Therefore, the view that the railway was one in a series of institutional changes rooted in the processes of the democratisation of society is perhaps a truism that obscures rather than consolidates the issue of equal access to public space, and more poignantly the question of women’s access to public space.

Bringing together the voices of many distinguished critics, Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman’s edited collection, *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (2007), introduces or in some cases takes a fresh look at many problematics related to the railway as a seminal cultural experience. Chapters focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and culture provide important insights into the ways the train affected space and social divisions, perception and consciousness, privacy and publicity, safety and danger. As the editors argue, ‘The locomotive was after all the first industrial machine to which the middle classes had to adapt themselves in their everyday lives’ (‘Introduction’, 21), but adaptation involved gradual

transformation, and the ‘machine space’ (26), in which passengers found themselves increasingly cocooned in the long period covered in the aforementioned book, stood for both positive and negative social and personal advancements and transformations: train compartments are seen as utopic spaces of privacy and order as well as dystopic spaces of crime, segregation, and trauma. As Beaumont and Freeman argue, the compartment ‘had an ambiguous ontological status, caught between private and public space, between interior and exterior, dream and reality’ (‘Introduction’, 23).

Important studies, ranging from Janet Wolff’s seminal ‘The Invisible Flaneuse’ (1985) and Deborah Epstein Nord’s *Walking the Victorian Streets* (1995) to Deborah L. Parsons’s *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000) and Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga’s edited volume *Inside Out* (2008), have elaborately described the challenges women faced as they ventured forth in the public spaces of Victorian cities, negotiating the impulse to wander in the metropolis and indulge in its spectacles with the objectifying and fixing gaze of society which deemed them exposed targets: at best objects of admiration and at worst disreputable or even fallen, but in both cases inviting harassment. The separate spheres ideology certainly dictated and checked the limits of women’s desire and ambition, but as all these critics have suggested, with the rise of consumer culture and the increased participation of women in public spaces of work or entertainment, the boundaries between public and private had become blurry, and with them so had clear-cut distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable femininity, domestic passivity and transgressive agency.⁴ Just as, in the words of Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, domestic interior ‘is never just private; it is a sign for public and cultural interaction’ (12), the public spaces of modern transit, in their varied manifestations, were open to multiple and often contradictory signification, private and public, especially for women who within such unfamiliar territory had to reconceive their own femininity and identity in relation to these impalpably demarcated spaces. A recent book that includes many studies of the porosity of the boundaries between public and private is Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford’s *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces* (2013). As the editors argue, ‘liminality and transition are indeed marked by contingency and uncertainty. While being “in transit” inevitably entails the prospect of failure, liminality may also bring about the sudden emerging of agency’ (6). If, as Rita Felski puts it, in line with social constructivist theory, ‘Gender is continually in process, an identity that is performed and actualized over time within given social constraints’ (21), women’s interaction with ambiguous urban spaces was instrumental in