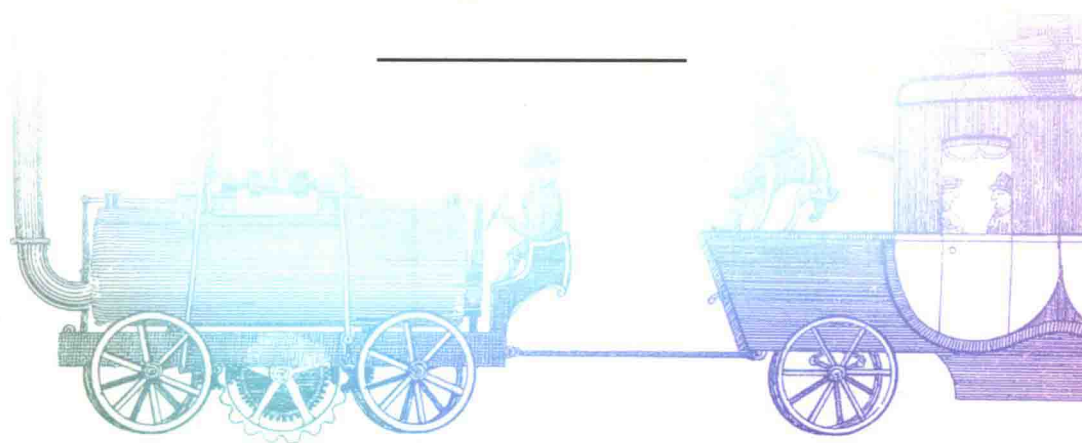


CHARLES DICKENS'S NETWORKS

Public Transport and the Novel

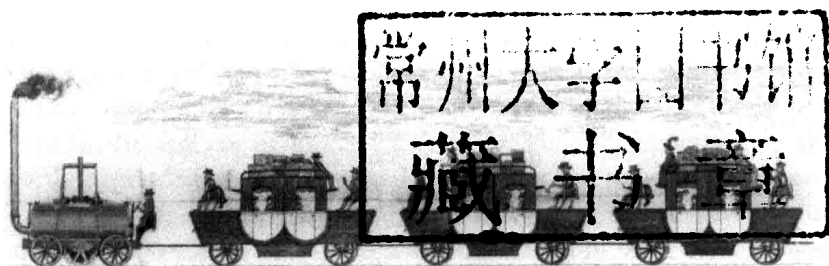


JONATHAN H. GROSSMAN

OXFORD

CHARLES DICKENS'S NETWORKS

Public Transport and the Novel



JONATHAN H. GROSSMAN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Jonathan H. Grossman 2012

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First published 2012

First published in paperback 2013

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011944133

ISBN 978-0-19-964419-3 (Hbk.)

ISBN 978-0-19-968216-4 (Pbk.)

Printed in Great Britain by
Ashford Colour Press Ltd., Gosport, Hampshire.

CHARLES DICKENS'S NETWORKS

The same week in February 1836 that Charles Dickens was hired to write his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, the first railway line in London opened. *Charles Dickens's Networks* explores the rise of the global, high-speed passenger transport network in the nineteenth century and the indelible impact it made on Dickens's work. The advent first of stage coaches, then of railways and transoceanic steam ships made unprecedented round-trip journeys across once seemingly far distances seem ordinary and systematic. Time itself was changed. The Victorians overran the separate, local times kept in each town, establishing instead the synchronized, 'standard' time, which now ticks on our clocks. Jonathan H. Grossman examines the history of public transport's systematic networking of people and how this revolutionized perceptions of time, space, and community, and how the art form of the novel played a special role in synthesizing and understanding it. Focusing on a trio of road novels by Charles Dickens, he looks first at a key historical moment in the networked community's coming together, then at a subsequent recognition of its tragic limits, and, finally, at the construction of a revised view that expressed the precarious, limited omniscient perspective by which passengers came to imagine their journeying in the network.

Acknowledgments

This book is about people's journeying. Not wanting the subject of my analysis to be confused with my analysis of it, I eschew creating metaphors myself about journeying, leaving others to suggest, for instance, that there is no frigate like a book to take one lands away (Emily Dickinson). Here, however, I want to make a single exception for an exceptional colleague and friend: Irene Tucker. Irene has been my fellow traveler and guide as I wrote this book. Throughout its writing, she frequently saw much better than I did where it should go and how to get there. (Whether I actually arrive is another matter.) All along the way, in a rare gift that only the truly gifted can give, Irene taught me as much as I could learn about thinking through my arguments.

Every year at the opening of the Dickens Universe summer conference in Santa Cruz, California, the faithful director, John Jordan, declares in a grand metaphor that Charles Dickens represents 'a railway station through which all things Victorian pass'. This book might help explain the aptness of Jordan's metaphor. This book's existence also partly depended upon this annual conference and the many experts—not all academics—that it assembled. I am especially grateful for valuable conversations I had there about my research with John Bowen, Andrew Miller, Bob Newsom, Bob Patten, Robyn Warhol, Carolyn Williams, and Alex Woloch.

I am also indebted to my intelligent and witty colleagues at UCLA, who create a stimulating and supportive environment in which to work. In particular, year in and year out, Helen Deutsch, Chris Looby, Yogita Goyal, Sianne Ngai, and Michael North provided wisdom and energy, professional and intellectual. Anne Mellor and Felicity Nussbaum cared about this book and my work, and that felt like a gift. A number of colleagues read or responded directly to my work in progress: Mark Seltzer quickened my thinking about systems; Mark McGurl demanded to see the big picture; Joseph Bristow was a resource for all things Victorian; Kirstie McClure, early on, suggested

the fallacy of applying political discourse to interpret a transport-networked community; later, Saree Makdisi reminded me not to forget about politics completely. Tom Wortham was department chair when this project began and Ali Behdad when it was completed; both mentored and sponsored the research that appears here.

Many people, too many people to list, provided valuable information, judicious counsel, or other forms of assistance. To name just a few: Nina Auerbach, Julie Crawford, Ian Duncan, Matt Dubord, Jen Fleissner, Maria Frawley, Natalka Freeland, Dustin Friedman, Holly Furneaux, Philip Joseph, Richard Kaye, James Landau, Ron Lear, Andrew McNeillie, Richard Menke, Elsie Michie, John Plotz, Leah Price, Josie Richstad, Simon Stern, Gillian Silverman, Robert Thornton, Lindsay Waters, and Julian Yates. This book is better than it would have been thanks to Hilary Schor, who shared her deep understanding of Dickens, and Helena Michie, who, after reading chapters or listening to arguments, always responded with searching critical questions. My long-time mentor John Sutherland took time out to critique the first draft of the manuscript. As he gently reminded me, the book still needed an introduction, and my efforts to produce one benefited greatly from the fresh eyes of Jayne Lewis and Talia Schaffer. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my three anonymous readers. As they will recognize, I pounced on virtually all of their many superb, deeply intelligent suggestions, even sometimes directly adopting their words and ideas. At Oxford University Press, the book gained an expert editor in Jacqueline Baker.

I recruited much help from friends and family as well. Two creative masterminds, Rayna Kalas and Liza Yukins, have kept me sane. Adam Parker deserves a prize for making me laugh and think at the same time. For broadening my perspectives, I thank Tim Mackey, Jane Penner, Etsu Taniguchi, Laura Wason, my sister Gillian Grossman, and my brother Nicholas Grossman. I will always be grateful to my mother Penny Grossman for the talks about this book over tea at the Life Boat House, Isle of Wight, and to my father Marc Grossman for pages of insightful comments on the chapters. Eli, my ten-year-old son, gave me much sanity-saving advice ('maybe you need to have fun with it?'), while my seven-year-old daughter Dhalia, whom I promised to get a dog after finishing my book, asked me almost every day the question that others began to feel they couldn't voice: 'Did you finish your book yet?' Her good-humored determination encouraged my own. My

partner Jana Portnow helped me talk through all the ideas in this book and helped edit it too. How, though, to acknowledge her endlessly tested patience and daily support for the writing of this book? One day, years ago, when I was momentarily off somewhere else, Jana found my computer running, and she typed some words into one of the chapters. I stumbled across her little addition sometime later, and it made me smile. I cut and paste her words here; they are oh-so-true: 'JP is the best and I worship her! Love, JG.'

List of Illustrations

1. William Heath, 'March of Intellect' (1829).	2
2. Train of Coaches, from Thomas Gray, <i>Observations on a General Iron Rail-way</i> (1823).	16
3. Chart of the 'Number of daily departures of Royal Mail and stage coaches', London to Birmingham.	20
4. Pickwick's Journeys.	29
5. The 'Plan of the Railways' in 1840 and Pickwick's Journeys.	30/31
6. 'Bob Sawyer on the Roof of the Chaise', <i>The Pickwick Papers</i> .	33
7. Robert Seymour, 'The Schoolmaster Setting Forth on his Tour' (1834).	57
8. Frontispiece to <i>Sketches by 'Boz'</i> .	59
9. Dickens booking a stage coach, <i>Sketches by 'Boz'</i> .	62
10. Frontispiece to <i>Master Humphrey's Clock</i> .	95
11. Nell and her grandfather outside London, <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> .	108
12. Nell and her grandfather departing London, <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> .	111
13. Nell and her grandfather observed, <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> .	117
14. Inland waterway maps, 1760 and 1820.	124
15. The grandfather at Nell's grave, <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> .	135
16. Duck-Rabbit.	158
17. Isambard Kingdom Brunel.	177
18. <i>Little Dorrit's</i> monthly wrapper.	178
19. 1852 map, showing towns keeping local or Greenwich time.	183
20. Rigaud's journey in <i>Little Dorrit</i> .	202

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
Introduction	I
Chapter One: The Speeding of the Pickwick Coach	10
I. Time	10
II. Space	27
III. Serialization	54
IV. Systems	71
Chapter Two: On Tragedy's Tracks	91
I. In <i>Clock</i>	91
II. A Tale That Is Told	103
III. <i>Clock</i> Strikes	136
Chapter Three: International Connections	155
I. Perspective	155
II. Simultaneity	165
III. Plottability	195
<i>Afterword</i>	215
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	245

Introduction

In 1829, British colonist and colonized Indian alike were not sucked direct to Bengal by Grand Vacuum Tube boarded at Greenwich Hill. Nor, as William Heath also inventively pictured (Fig. 1), once there, did a short climb allow anyone access to a convenient company suspension bridge to South Africa, restaurants built into the towers. No one ever saw a solo aviatrix threading via kite through the sky, apparently steering with a modified spindle. Balloon platforms never airlifted troops; nor were any convicts transported to Australia by winged mechanized bat-monster. On the water, at no time did pilots take whip in hand to drive boats harnessed to sea creatures. On the highways, once crawling wagons, now motorized, did not do London to Bath in six hours. And no farmer, no gentleman, no squire, and no lady ever commuted by a steam-horse called Velocity on an express with 'no stop[p]age on the road'.

Yet such impossibilities pictured the real sense in the 1820s that a revolution in passenger transport was realizing impossibilities. This book is about this nineteenth-century revolution in passenger transport. It examines its actual—and not much less amazing—history.

It is a busy picture. In the engraving, partly the busyness is simply typical of the 'March of Intellect' series to which it belongs; the series' images intend to overwhelm its viewers with zany, futuristic possibilities in whatever realm they depict. Here the busyness also reflects, however, public transportation's busyness, evoking people everywhere in speeded motion across a shrinking globe. Its scattered disorganization mirrors a spatialized content in which ordinary people seem flying off in all directions, for all sorts of separate reasons. And, as I recreated in my opening's partial redescription, the viewer's attention largely hopscotches between different vehicles, each a self-contained, miniature specimen. The artist aims to portray a panoply of imaginary modes

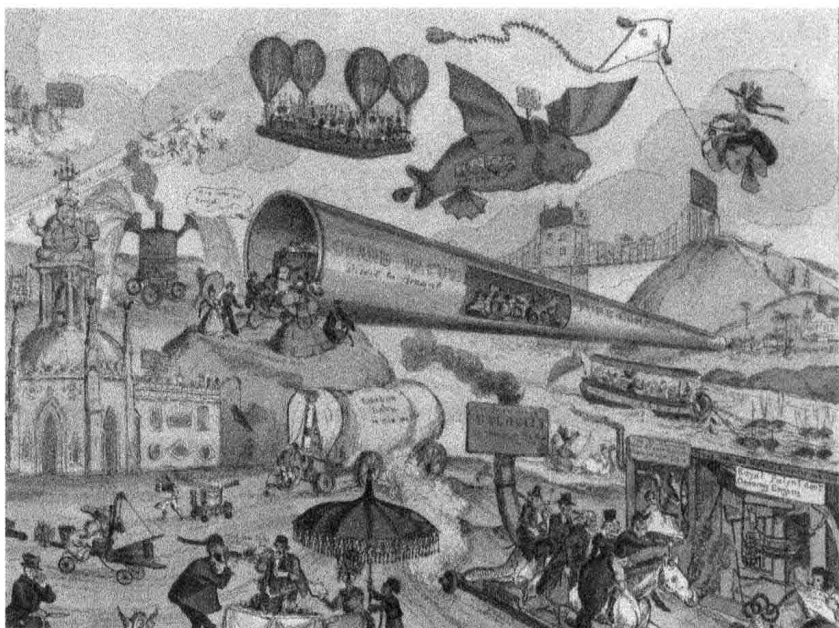


Figure 1. William Heath, 'March of Intellect', London: T. McClean, 1829. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

of mobility, all discretely operating at once. (The tube connecting to the bridge represents an exception to the rule.) 'Vont you take a-hire Joe', barks a man in the center-front foreground, through a mouth stuffed with a pineapple, symbol of hospitality. While the black child servant, opposite him, propping up an umbrella, undercuts the intended implication that everyone falls equally under the umbrella of the question (which is also gendered—'Joe'—and addressed to the well-to-do), the question nonetheless accurately captions the picture as offering up to its viewers all its separate, futuristic means of passenger transport.

It cuts against this picture's grain to ponder the stories of the passengers. On the steam horse, a wigged squire may be leering at a woman, but generally, interaction, which might cue personal narrative, is noticeably absent. No one is greeting anyone; no one is waving goodbye. The artist does not render these travelers as coming and going from their meetings and partings. Nor does he survey their crisscrossing with strangers or their journeying in round-trip circuits, with, for

instance, two of the same conveyances passing each other in opposite directions. So though they are all in one frame, the people hardly appear circulating in a single story. The only thing coherent would seem to be that their diverse world is shrinking, their means of mobility is accelerating, and everyone all around seems on the go (not in fact on a 'march' together). What else could that indicate but a mishmash of separate communities?—Buddha sits atop St Paul's cathedral dome; the ordinary man staffing the 'Royal Patent Boot Cleaning Engine' (lower right) is reading the *Gazette de Français*. It's geo-kinetic social chaos.

The picture falls short of imparting any sense that the advances in public transport were interconnecting passengers by networking them together. It envisions people separately zooming about, and it deduces that their separate communities mingle hodgepodge. More than merely being a byproduct of its technological focus, this inability to imagine passenger transport in networked terms calls attention to the fact that the networking of passengers had, historically, to be comprehended—and that it was perhaps even somewhat difficult to comprehend. People, after all, had always traveled. What was the difference? Weren't they just doing it more and faster? This book is about the history of public transport's systematic networking of people and the difference it makes—how it revolutionized perceptions of time and space, how it involved re-imagining community, and how the art form of the novel played a special role in synthesizing and understanding it. In a nutshell, this book looks first at a key historical moment in that networked community's coming together, then at a subsequent recognition of its tragic limits, and, finally, at the working out of a revised view that expressed the precarious, limited omniscient perspective by which passengers came to imagine their journeying in the network.

Today most people primarily associate the nineteenth-century public transport network with the birth of the railways. And because the railways laid down a brand new, wildly successful passenger transport system essentially from scratch, they were, in that way, revolutionary. In the history of passenger networks especially germane here, however, the railways were also continuing an acceleration and systematization notably brought together previously by stage coaching. Consider again, for instance, the engraving. It declares a passenger transport revolution is under way: where are the railways? There is no hint of them, though the picture appeared the very same year (1829) that steam locomotives on rails famously broke the speed barrier set by horse-drawn coaches

at the Rainhill trials and just the year before the world's first successful passenger commercial railway began running between Liverpool and Manchester, spelling the doom of stage coaching. Instead, however, the only futuristic invention this artist correctly saw coming was intercity highway-traveling steam coaches. These did appear fleetingly on the roads before surrendering to the railways, and that steam horse's promise of 'No stop[p]age on the road' announces pretty precisely the advance steam might seem to offer in 1829 to *stage coaching*—obviating the long-distance coaches' requisite five-minute pit stops to change for fresh horses every ten miles. Similarly, the sole historical figure to whom the picture refers is not George Stephenson, the father of the railways, whose locomotive *Rocket* would win at Rainhill. Rather, the artist depicts (in the left background) a giant, wheeled, motorized, multispouted watering pot labeled 'McAdams'. This bizarre invention, designed to lay the dust notoriously kicked up by macadamized roads, alludes to John Louden McAdam, pioneering engineer in smoothing and waterproofing road surfaces, progeny of the eighteenth-century's new turnpike system for maintaining roads.

This book aims, in part, to recover the significance of the rise of a fast-driving, stage-coach network that systematized—before the railways—swift, circulating, round-trip inland journeying, with regular schedules, running continuously, available to ordinary passengers. The railways copied and intensified this system as a system, and, in this way, the railways will be seen to matter greatly here.

This nexus of stage coach and locomotive as part of a single transformation was somewhat more apparent in its own time. When, for instance, in 1866, in introducing *Felix Holt*, George Eliot wished to recollect the historical transitions under way just before the first reform bill in 1832, she evoked a stage-coach journey across the Midlands. For her, rendering a trip from the point of view of the coachman and the passenger outside on the box usefully traversed the changing national landscape. They pass, for instance, from country village to industrialized city, 'from one phase of English life to another'. More than that, though, the swift stage coach itself also represented an essential change. Some provincial people, Eliot imagined, might still not yet know how to interpret it. Racing past a shepherd, it seems part of a 'distant system of things called "Gover'nment"'; overtaking a rich farmer, it appears 'an accommodation for people who had not their own gigs, or who, wanting to travel to London and such distant places,

belonged to the trading and less solid part of the nation'.¹ Thus did Eliot rework Thomas De Quincey's earlier, similar, powerful retrospective vision in *The English Mail Coach, or The Glory of Motion* (1849) of a nation becoming networked by stage coaches (more, briefly, on De Quincey in Chapter 1).

It was Charles Dickens, though, who most deeply understood that the stage coaches systematized public transport and the difference it made. De Quincey and Eliot are typical in translating passenger transport into some other system—in their case, national politics. Dickens, by contrast, repeatedly isolated passenger transport's networking effects and explored how the notionally mobile characters of his novels offered the means for comprehending the networking of passengers. And, rather than casting a wide net, this book focuses on Dickens. In fact, my argument, to restate it now more fully, is that Dickens realized the historic transformations wrought by stage coaching in his time initially by celebrating its unifying, communal dimension in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7), his first novel. Then, after the railways consolidated this system, the community it networked began to reveal more clearly its tragic dimensions, and, noticing this, Dickens rendered it in depicting the fatal intercity trek of little Nell in *The Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey: The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1). Later still, the system's international reach became increasingly apparent, and Dickens showed the implications of this in *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), with its stunning opening onto Marseilles and the activity of 'fellow travellers' abroad pictured as happening simultaneously. By that point also, however, neither the networked community's comic nor its tragic aspects seemed to count most, but rather the narrative perspective—which Dickens had all along been developing—capable of taking in its precarious formation.

This trajectory traces, through a trio of road novels (treated in three separate chapters), an evolving understanding of the passenger transport system. In each instance, Dickens takes the measure of the passenger transport revolution from a different present moment and returns to depict roughly the same period—the 1820s and 1830s—because each time he is discovering, along with his readers, something new that retrospectively can be seen to have always been true of the way the passenger transportation system networks people, warps space and time, and transforms the art of the novel, which provides a means for its comprehension. Though he too could see earlier evolutions in

passenger transport, Dickens looked back over and again to changes that he associated primarily with the stage coaches, and he did so with an acuity that was something like the opposite of a hazy-dazy nostalgia: shedding light for his readers on how what had been wrought then was making their present.

Along with his readers, Dickens comprehended their networking by public transport through narrative, and their networking by public transport entailed reconfiguring narrative form, particularly the picaresque road novel and travel literature. In Dickens's hands, the novel as an art not only could enable his community, whose individuals were increasingly atomized, to come to know their manifold unseen connectedness, but also, more specifically, could help to produce its self-comprehension in terms of a crisscrossing journeying of characters simultaneously circulating all around. (This is just what the artist of the engraving missed.) As Chapter 1 explains, *Pickwick* helped craft a recognition of this networked community structured around a 'simultaneous plurality', to quote J. Hillis Miller's apt phrase. Dickens had, however, silently supplied the omniscient narratorial view that conjured the simultaneous, eclectic activity happening all around a passenger transport network. As Chapter 2 explores, Dickens recognized in *The Old Curiosity Shop* some of the tragic limits of the networked community, and that meant also confronting the construction of that supervising omniscient perspective. In a multiplotted novel, the omniscient narrator had to assemble retrospectively and serially the characters' simultaneous circulation; a coordinating 'Meantime...' logic bound together community. *Little Dorrit*, the subject of Chapter 3, would subsequently represent the warping effect of stretching that 'Meantime...' across an international terrain. It also again presented a totalizing omniscient perspective of a community figured as fellow travelers, 'journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another' such that 'in our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads'.² Now, however, Dickens fashioned a story that exposed that individuals, who grasped their networking through projecting themselves from a third-person perspective, could never actually achieve a comprehensive picture of their plottable plots. Only belatedly and dimly could they glimpse their crisscrossing, closely networked relations with others.

As this outline indicates, certain narratological complexities form a substratum of this book: especially omniscient narration, simultaneity, serialization, and multiplottedness. At its most general level, though, this is a book about imagining community in an era of systems and networks. That term ‘community’ will necessarily change in meaning here. It is what is getting redefined, and a clear perception that its definition is perplexing and unstable—sometimes, for instance, awkwardly provoking its replacement by the less positively inflected term ‘collective’ and other times making its modification by the adjective ‘networked’ feel virtually redundant—is fully part of the point. Meanwhile, no sharp terminological distinction is made here between the term ‘network’, which tends to emphasize connectivity and its extensions, and the term ‘system’, which tends toward enclosing—if ever shifting—boundaries and self-defining processes. While sustaining those differing inflections, both aspects are treated as jointly in play.

This book does sharply distinguish, however, the passenger transportation system, which delimits its subject, from the communication system, which only appears here in distinction from the passenger transport system. (In this book, ‘communicating’ never waffles into its secondary sense of indicating a physical passage between two places.) The differences between those two affiliated systems are often, and sometimes quite correctly, blurred, collapsed, or braided, but this book aims to orient its readers to a separate history of passenger networks. Hence, for example, in cropping slightly the engraving of futuristic passenger transport (Fig. 1), I intentionally pruned out a winged postman, who appeared in the lower left corner. Thus—as that which is chopped out—does he re-enter here. As especially the conclusion of Chapter 1 will show, Dickens hones distinctions between the communication system, to which medium his novels belong, and the passenger transport system, about which they have so much to say.

As my subtitle, *Public Transport and the Novel*, announces, this book thus stakes out a different angle than the mass of critical attention paid in the past few decades to communication systems. Taking up the intellectual mantle of Marshall McLuhan (‘the medium is the message’), Friedrich Kittler—beginning with his *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (1985, trans. 1990)—now towers behind a diverse, interdisciplinary discussion of media. A couple of relevant, recent direct descendants are Bernhard Siegert’s *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (1993, trans. 1999) and Cornelia Vismann’s *Files: Law and*

Media Technology (2000, trans. 2008). For Victorianists, there is especially Richard Menke's *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (2008). Menke's introduction to the field need not be recapitulated here; rather, precisely because so many excellent books have sharpened and reshaped our sense of the communication revolution (which continues to rage all around us today), we need a book that does the same for passenger transport. This book aims to use networking to rethink the nineteenth-century revolution in passenger transport in the same way that Kittler, Menke, and others have used it to rethink Victorian talk. It is about Brunel, not Babbage, cabs, and not copyrights.

Separately from communication systems, but in conjunction with them, public transport occupies a similarly second-order, infrastructural relation to other systems. In organizing the circulation of living bodies, it refines the form of other systems—economic, political, religious, and so on, which all compel people's circulation—into its contents. In the nineteenth century, transport most obviously helped to fulfill the activities of commerce and government—e.g. 'Direct to Bengal'—and this book will seem to deflate the historical importance to passenger transport of commerce, government, and such other systems. This is a fault to which it accedes because it aims to clear some ground to sharpen understanding other systems in relation to passenger transport.

Consequently, this book draws together the work of transport historians.³ Especially informative has been Philip Bagwell's *The Transport Revolution* (1974), and I have intentionally adopted Bagwell's title as something of a refrain in this book. This is perhaps somewhat incautious. Bagwell wisely spreads his transport revolution across the entire eighteenth century through to his late twentieth-century present, and this study focuses much more narrowly. I intend, however, the term 'revolution' only to refer back to Bagwell's broader, uncontroversial sweep, not to bog readers down in assessing the comparative impact of one historical advance over another or whether, at some threshold, acceleration equals revolution. This book's cultural and theoretical approach to transport history has been inspired by Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* (1977). Schivelbusch enters creatively into details of transport history to call attention to its transformative social experiences.

As I mentioned earlier, I especially scrutinize the novel's multiplot-ted 'Meantime...' structure by which it renders the simultaneous