The lady in the trunk

Railways, gender and crime fiction

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'The Lady in the Trunk' is a short story by Peter Lovesey. Appearing first in the Crime Writers' Association's *Festschrift* for the centenary of Agatha Christie's birth,[1] this pastiche looks back across fifty years to the Golden Age whodunnit. That was a comfortable genre, with violence carefully neutered. Many characters died at others' hands, but nobody who mattered got hurt. Invited to visit this trammelled and artificial social world, readers sit back to admire the (often amateur) detective's skill in sorting out how yet another bad baronet came to a gory end in his mansion's library.

Lovesey's story is not set in a mansion. He shows us a trunk sitting in the left luggage office at Itchingham, a fictitious station on the railway line linking London with Brighton. The trunk contains a murdered woman's body. In a strong sense this body did belong to a lady – the relict of Sir Hartley Pettifer, an elderly south-coast hotel owner. The last of many personable young women whom Sir Hartley picked up on Brighton's promenade (and, occasionally, married), Lady Pettifer – we never learn her first name – worked as 'the Singing Flapper' before her marriage. She was 'a soubrette', defined as 'A maidservant or lady's maid as a character in a play or opera, usually one of a pert, coquettish, or intriguing character; an actress or singer taking such a part'. In other words, she was just the sort of person to turn up dead in suspicious Golden Age circumstances. No better than she should be, Lady Pettifer comes to much the end that might be expected.

Parody attacks a novelist's life-world from outside. Working within an author's parameters, pastiche is a loving art. By placing his tale on the steam railway, Peter Lovesey directs our attention to the many hundred British crime novels and short stories set in that place – including some celebrated examples by Agatha Christie. These hosts are exceeded only by thousands of Golden Age murders located in bad baronets' country houses; but even this hackneyed setting depended on the steam railway, since secluded outer suburban mansions could be exploited by mass-market crime writers only once spreading networks permitted Friday-to-Monday country-house partying to develop from the later Victorian years.

This article entertains no interest in who did what to Lady Pettifer or where, when and why. Two words from Lovesey's title frame the discussion:

trunk and *lady*. In each case we shall see that his narrative rests comfortably on railway history's substrate. And in each case he nods to a huge corpus (*sic*) of popular fiction reflecting and moulding popular attitudes to British railway travel.

Trunk

Mimesis

Golden Age writers faced a prime difficulty. 'That is, and has always been, the great stumbling-block to the murderer,' British crime fiction's first scientific detective lectures his friends: 'To get rid of the body.'[2] Parliament's requirement that railways should be common carriers, accepting any traffic which might offer, suggested a solution. Corpse-laden trunks could be hoisted into passenger trains' luggage vans if 'some dozen of tottering porters' rushed to bear the weight.[3] A more common fictional practice was to stow bodies in railway stations' left luggage offices. Needing to lose a corpse, one bunch of conspirators 'decided against leaving it in a trunk at the cloak-room of a railway station. It had been done before, several times, and inevitably it attracted the attention of Scotland Yard.'[4] Good thinking: in fiction at least this device had been done, one might say, to death. 'Bury … Cliff … Well … Acids,' a wife planning her husband's demise muses in one novel. 'Fire, quick-lime, *trunks in cloakrooms*, drowning … .' 'Do you see this grey suit I am wearing?' a crime writer asks a fellow Bohemian party-goer in another novel. 'It was bought out of the blood of a dismembered heiress in a trunk at Waterloo Station.' 'One reads these horrid stories of corpses left in luggage,' one British archaeologist in Greece tells a formidably saurian female detective when another archaeologist's body turns up in a box. 'Ah, that's at Charing Cross,' said Mrs Bradley. 'Ephesus isn't a bit like Charing Cross, in spite of all that poets try to tell us.'[5]

Notice that all these grisly deposits turn up in left luggage offices at London termini serving south-coast towns and resorts. They recall forgetful Miss Prism's dereliction in leaving her capacious Ernest-stuffed handbag at Victoria's facility. 'The Brighton side,' motherless Jack Worthing (a.k.a. Ernest) reports to his formidable mother-in-law-to-be. Lady Bracknell proves no railway enthusiast. 'The side is immaterial,' she thunders. It isn't, of course. Already rendered raffish through the Prince Regent's and his many mistresses' patronage, Brighton's public reputation as metropolitan gentle (and, over time, popular) classes' knocking shop was reinforced when the new railway line arrived from London in 1840. A string of cases over the next century made the fifty-five-mile Brighton line notorious for 'trunk murders'.[6] Wily Peter Lovesey well knew what he was doing when he chose his station's location.

Metaphor

Lovesey's story nods to a key device in detective fiction: Lady Pettifer's trunk is a tiny sealed room. As with all novels and short stories exploiting this

device, readers must come to understand how the victim got there. Was she dead before she went in, or did she die in there? Who did it, and (always the key issue for a locked room puzzle) how was the illusion managed? Variations on this puzzle proved almost limitless, as Dr Fell's splendid lecture revealed.[7] Isolated by that extreme speed which led Victorian critics to make railways the prime symbol of onrushing modernity, a moving train is a sealed room. 'He was born in this railway age,' John Dickson Carr – the man who spent a lifetime trying to write one perfect locked room puzzle – tells us in a book set in the mid-Victorian years. 'He had no qualms about being locked up here, shut away beyond escape or communication with another compartment, in a train hurtling along at fifty miles an hour.' Passengers' isolation framed the first book-length detective fiction with a railway setting. Five travellers share a second-class compartment on the Dover train. When their connecting service reaches the Gare du Nord in Paris one of the five lies dead with a bullet in his brain. One of the other four killed him; a third was a Scotland Yard detective. Our task as readers is to identify the villain and his motive before that detective does.[8] This archetype was soon copied (and subverted) by other writers, often through misdirection.[9]

The steam railway's passenger train encourages one particular form of misdirection. Cunning authors seek to focus our attention in one compartment. We must resist them. Think outside the oblong! 'There *is* such a thing as walking along the footboards of a train in motion, and getting into another compartment,' an Edwardian railway detective tells us. 'I've done it lots of times.'[10] True enough. Clambering along outside a District Railway first-class carriage, one of Edgar Wallace's Four Just Men assassinates an informer by opening his compartment door and smashing a phial of prussic acid gas on the floor.[11] Richard Morley reaches Thomas Raines's compartment in the same way, then smashes Raines's head in with a wooden mallet. This blunt instrument he discards by tossing it on a burning slag heap convenient to the railway line – where, sadly for Morley, it is incompletely incinerated.[12] Exiled in Kent, a White Russian officer clambers along a train's footboards until he reaches a German spy's compartment. He shoots out the light, steals important documents – which he will return to the British authorities, of course – and escapes a hue and cry by lying between his train's wheels at the next station. A daring woman kills her philandering husband on a coastal express racing south from London Bridge, then uses a folding cutting board (who would travel without one?) to cross to a Crystal Palace-bound express running on a parallel line.[13] A boat train from Calais to Paris sees *two* passengers clambering independently along slippery footboards, intent on robbery and murder.[14]

In later years, as railway equipment grew more sophisticated, one or several carriages linked by gangways could form the crime scene.[15] Sapper limits the number of suspects in his corridor train ingeniously by having his bookmaker murdered by a bullet (and a raw egg) in a physically isolated slip coach at the tail of a fast-running express;[16] but by suspecting only the four surviving passengers in this coach he displays woeful ignorance of railway operating procedures. The slip coach would have been controlled by a guard

sitting in his driving compartment, alert to separate the coach from its parent train at the right moment, then brake it to a halt at the station. Some recent thrillers set good and bad gangs fighting through all parts of hurtling hijacked diesel and electric trains.[17] Required to sustain readers' interest after initial bloody assaults have been completed, authors set their teams trundling repetitively up and down thundering trains as if they were testosterone-drenched rugby fields. As, of course, in one sense, they are.

Lady

Lady Be Good

'Let's review the menu,' Captain Hastings (Hercule Poirot's dim Watson figure) suggests. 'Robbery? Forgery? No, I think not. Rather too vegetarian. It must be murder – red-blooded murder – with trimmings, of course.'[18] Murder, or even robbery, on fiction's trains provides plenty of tasty trimmings for readers to savour. These trimmings had some foundation in real events. Railway travel was, and remains, the safest form of transport but lurid (and luridly reported) murders shocked Victorian readers. In France an 1860 shooting and an 1886 defenestration inspired episodes in Émile Zola's railway novel *La Bête humaine*. In Britain two separate attacks on passengers in 1864 by 'savage lunatics', and the robbery and murder of Thomas Briggs by Franz Müller in a North London Railway compartment the same year, generated a full-blown moral panic. For security reasons, several companies hastened to cut small windows, soon dubbed 'Müller's lights', in the partitions between compartments. A *Punch* cartoon suggested that this action might have unanticipated consequences as, mistaking a window for a mirror, a matron found 'an impertinent young man' grinning at her.[19] *Punch* poked fun at public fears about physical isolation in a moving train's compartment, but the cartoon's subtext suggests that the primary danger facing this woman was not robbery but sexual molestation.

This hint infused fiction, but in rather complicated ways. As the railway compartment became a popular venue for fictional mayhem when crime fiction flowered from the later Victorian years almost all cases involved men attacking men. I know only one case where a woman murders a man in railway fiction.[20] Despite widespread Victorian male concern over blackmail from false allegations of sexual molestation in railway compartments, it was not until 1953 that the single novel exploiting this promising device was published.[21] Those few women murdered on fiction's trains expire so that their personal jewellery may be stolen or, after married women's property legislation was enacted, so that faithless husbands may steal their estates. When women are attacked by men in railway compartments their death always reflects physical weakness.[22]

The lady is a tramp

Their victim status in murder mysteries does not mean that women enjoy unspotted reputations in railway crime fiction. Far from it: but their derelictions, one might say, are always embodied. Fiction conjured many train-travelling bad girls, sporting loose morals. With a string of fully consummated pre- and extra-marital affairs unsafely behind her, even Connie Chatterley disdained a trip on the Orient Express from Venice to Paris, denouncing 'the atmosphere of vulgar depravity on board *trains de luxe*'.[23]

The Orient Express is a proper target for this insult. Physical danger compounds with sexual excitement elsewhere in railway fiction, but never so blatantly as on international expresses. 'Tell me what you're doing on this train,' an American journalist demands of an English rose on a Vladivostok-bound Trans-Siberian service. 'I'm an adventuress,' she replies.[24] Paul Jennings would not be surprised by this, watching from his sidelined stopper as the Harwich boat train scorches past in the night, 'full of spies and international engineers and actresses'.[25] ('Actress' = 'tart' here, of course.) 'Baroness! What mischief are you doing in this train?' the Hon. Charles d'Arcy Mildenhall (Dragoon Guards major, and British spy) demands of voluptuous Beatrice von Ballinstrode as he wakes on the last peacetime service from Vienna to neutral Zurich. 'And how did you find your way into my *coupé*?'[26] Distinguished by his regular travelling pattern ('First-class, non-smoking, *Morning Post*; never in a hurry, nine thirty-seven, isn't he?'[27]), any commuter might expect not to find exotic sex spurting out in railway carriages.

Fiction suggests otherwise. 'Look here, old boy,' the British Museum's director urges a Harvard professor who shares his compartment.

> Do you remember a certain conversation you and I had in a railway carriage over six months ago, when you'd first come to England on your sabbatical? You were complaining of the lack of adventure and rowdyism in your prim, buttoned-up life. And I said, 'What do you mean by adventures, anyway? Do you mean in the grand manner?' I said, 'Do you mean a slant-eyed adventuress, sable and all, who suddenly slips into this compartment, whispers "Six of diamonds north tower at midnight' – or some such rubbish?[28]

Primed by popular fiction (and, later, by Hollywood movies), that is just what readers came to expect. Sitting in the eastbound Calais–Cologne–Constantinople Orient Express, Myatt remembers youthful hours spent reading railway romances – 'stories of King's Messengers seduced by beautiful countesses'.[29] Setting out on the eastbound Trans-Siberian with years spent reading English thrillers and whodunnits behind him, Peter Fleming anticipated standard amenities on long-distance continental trains:

> Complacently you weigh your chances of a foreign countess, the secret emissary of a Certain Power, her corsage stuffed with documents of the first political importance. Will anyone mistake you for No. 37, whose real name no one knows, and who is practically always in a train, being 'whirled'

somewhere? You have an intoxicating vision of drugged liqueurs, rifled dispatch-cases, lights suddenly extinguished, and door-handles turning slowly under the bright eye of an automatic … .[30]

This archetype could be traced back to real figures like Lola Montez, her corsets bursting with naval treaties or letters calculated to bring down a royal house as she scorches between European capitals in late 1840s express trains at speeds up to forty miles an hour. As British crime fiction flowered, fake Lolas materialised. Princess Zichy flaunted her wiles on the Nice express, scheming to lift Victoria's costly present to the Czarina from a frisky Queen's Messenger. Exploiting 'the sinuous vitality of the panther' in her movements, vampish Baroness Vali von Griesbach squiggles up to a King's Messenger on the *Belle Epoque* Orient Express.[31] We catch Lola's scent even in Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*. On the opening page exquisite Zuleika, university fiction's premiere sexual bacillus, arrives at the Great Western Railway's Oxford station – that antique wooden erection 'which … does still whisper to the tourist the last enchantments of the Middle Ages'. She carries her own library to this book-stuffed town. 'Both books were in covers of dull gold,' Max tells us. 'On the back of one cover BRADSHAW, in beryls, was encrusted; on the back of the other, A.B.C. GUIDE, in amethysts, beryls, chyroprases, and garnets.'[32] With Oxford's undergraduate population drowned for love of her, Zuleika consults her library. Unable to find a good connection, she orders a special train – for Cambridge.

This Siren is a lively lass, but railway fiction's vamp blooms most fully in the Scottish spy and sensualist Lady Diana Wynham's voluptuous person. In her novel's last pages she takes leave of her loyal secretary and lover, Prince Séliman, as she boards the Orient Express at the Gare de l'Est.

> I have a ticket for Constantinople [she tells him]. But I may stop off at Vienna or Budapest. That depends absolutely on the colour of the eyes of my neighbour in the compartment. I have reserved rooms at the Imperial, on the Ring, and at the Hungaria, on the quay at Budapest; but I am just as likely to sleep in some horrible hotel in Josephstadt or in a palace on the hill-side at Budapest.[33]

No matter where she lays her head, we know that Lady Di will get little sleep. Others soon enroll in her lascivious train ('My pedigree's Mitropa out of Wagons-Lit,' one German spy reports[34]), down to SMERSH corporal Tatiana Romanova bonking Bond through the Balkans on the westbound Orient Express.[35] Eastbound on that train, class-treacherous Countess Orlovska copies proletarian Tatiana's methods, offering Moscow gold (and softer inducements) to corrupt an upstanding Free World spy. Eager to divert his attention from her political secrets, Countess Magda Schverzinski rubs up against a concussed British academic physicist on a train outside Bucharest. Svelte Baroness von Ballinstrode uses all her wiles in trying (vainly) to explore Charles Mildenhall's tin document box.[36] As with other clichés,

adroit writers soon learned to turn this trick differently: making an English maiden dissemble as a travelling courtesan for disinterested matrimonial reasons;[37] rewarding an adventure-yearning city clerk for faithful service with a fake spy-houri;[38] reversing the usual gender pattern by arranging for a comfortably circumstanced woman on the Dover boat train to be seduced by a suave gigolo.[39]

Conclusion: women, class and modernity

Why do women find their actions limited so firmly in railway crime fiction? Why should possible careers as robbers and murderers evaporate, leaving an ambitious woman no possibility beyond private or State-sponsored prostitution? Three reasons protrude.

First, railway fiction's suggestion that train-travelling women might hire out their bodies was rooted in some historical evidence. Victorian sex workers forged strong connections with the new railway system. Large-scale traffic with soldiers barracked in Aldershot and sailors on shore leave in Portsmouth made slums around the London & South Western Railway's metropolitan terminus into Whoreterloo. Half feminine London was said to wait at night for its young man under the clock at Charing Cross, 'and the other half said that was who it was waiting for'.[40] For a few years after 1866, riverside services between Charing Cross and Cannon Street drew a curious traffic: 'Some ladies of the street had found that the SER's first-class compartments, combined with the uninterrupted seven-minute run, provided ideal conditions for their activities at a rental that represented only a minute proportion of their income.'[41] Paris had a traffic to match this, with a special cohort of intriguingly broken-English-speaking prostitutes working through carriages travelling the *ceinture* line between the Nord and Lyon termini.[42] Those stations, and the sparkling Wagons-lits carriages which left their *quais* for other major cities and for luxurious watering places, attracted pricier sex workers: 'a new and specialised type of prostitute, who frequented the booking halls of railway stations, ready to relieve the tedium of a journey … for any gentleman with the wherewithal'.[43]

A second reason for women's fictional restriction to railway prostitution lies in literary circles' *penchant* for psychoanalytic notions, with Freudian notions flourishing there long after they had been junked in (most) medical and social science. 'The sexual connotation of trains is well known,' we were assured recently, 'particularly trains entering tunnels.'[44] Ever since Freud's ideas escaped from the psychiatric zoo, literary attitudes to railways have glided smoothly along this track. Staying at Rye in August 1907, some time before her marriage to Leonard Woolf, Virginia Stephen told her diary about one twilit epiphany: 'A great luminous train … with a body like some phosphorescent caterpillar, & a curled plume of smoke, all opal and white, issuing from the front of it.'[45] As so often, diary entries prefigured fiction. Watching from her sleeping compartment's window in Virginia's last novel, one woman studies preparations for a Scotch express's departure from St Pancras. 'She

looked down the length of the train and saw the engine sucking water from a hose. It seemed all body, all muscle; even the neck had been consumed into the smooth barrel of the body.'[46] No need to ask which Austrian medical mystic's work Mrs Woolf thought she recalled here. Like couch grass, tough literary runners bound the modern railway to sexual excitement, though these runners enjoyed no direct connection with Freud's ideas.[47]

A third reason for women's constraint in British crime fiction concerns Victorian social critics' determination to install the train as modernity's cutting edge. It was here, they suggested, that organic limitations were transcended, as humankind managed at last to travel faster than a galloping horse. In the year after Victoria's death, H. G. Wells predicted that future historians would take 'a steam engine running upon a railway' to be the nineteenth century's central symbol.[48] He was right. 'Nothing,' Leo Marx insists, 'provided more tangible, vivid, compelling icons for representing the forward course of history than recent mechanical improvements like the steam engine.'[49] New railways were 'the first of the large-scale, complex, full-fledged technological systems'[50] – a *machine ensemble*, to adopt Wolfgang Schivelbusch's useful term[51] – with which modernity's children would become ever more familiar. The steam railway's machine ensemble extended far beyond technology, embracing fierce surveillance and discipline systems to control both passengers and railway workers. British society displayed social stratification markers based on rank before 1830, but the manner in which railways refined mail coaches' distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' travellers[52] into elaborate typologies (seven main classes, supplemented by Pullman and other 'super-first' forms) sedimented *class* as the central notion through which nineteenth and twentieth-century British people would think about social hierarchy.[53]

But class was modified by gender on the railway. *Gentlemen* and *ladies* travelled first, while *men* and *women* travelled third and fourth-class, and on workmen's tickets. Propelled by fears about sexual molestation in physically isolated carriage compartments, many respectable women took refuge in those class-differentiated 'ladies only' compartments which the railway companies provided from about 1845.[54] Lasting for more than a century, these virginal enclosures comforted and assured women travelling without a male companion. There was a drawback. Safe they might be, but travelling in ladies' compartments was notoriously dull. It is a striking fact that not a single case from several hundred British railway crime stories known to me is set in a ladies' compartment.[55] Controlled by male stereotypes of unmarried women as virgins, or (like all those sexual predators on fiction's long-distance international trains) as whores, any unaccompanied woman who declined the ladies' compartment's virginal delights risked being numbered in the latter category.

Like the broader Enlightenment project which it embodied, the steam railway's machine ensemble lived in a world saturated with assumptions about gender. They might weigh up to ninety tons, but footplate staff always referred to their warm and trembling steam locomotives (each marked by its individual, if not always tractable, character) as 'she'.[56] That apart, the railway's machine ensemble was a resolutely male domain. Working in Walsall's

cottage hospital from 1863 to 1878, Dorothy Pattison 'nursed many railwaymen, and always expressed admiration for the masculine mysteries of gauges, boilers, signals, plates, and shunting'.[57] After 1923 the Great Western Railway Company published a series of books about its delectable machinery, 'for boys of all ages'.[58] Men controlled women in this life world. Women entered on suffrance, and on men's terms.

Whether seeking like Charles Dickens (in *Dombey and Son*, 1848) to sketch the shining new steam railway's marvels in *fiction* which time would mature as canonical *literature* or, like crime writers seeking to confuse readers with trundling compartment-as-locked-room puzzles, all nineteenth and twentieth-century railway writers leaned on Kant's aesthetics. In his first attempt to lay down a philosophical basis for distinguishing between *beauty* and *sublimity*[59] Kant identified a strong tendency for beauty to inhabit the female domain, sublimity the male. This meshes with centuries of European social theory spent embroidering the idea that cultured men lived in reason's bracing realm while women lived in misty natural domains, clouded by sentiment and emotion. Classical social theory's last great synthesis makes the point clearly, spinning ramified webs of difference from a basic distinction between man's *rational will* and woman's *natural will*.[60]

From its inauguration in 1830 the modern railway stood four-square for natural will, for engineered reason. J. M. W. Turner conjured the railway as accelerating sublimity's central symbol in *Rain, Steam and Speed: the Great Western Railway* (1843–44), the early modern railway's classic image.[61] Aesthetically no less than in mundane practice, men were men in this man's world – whether driving and stoking William Gooch's snorting black broad-gauge engine up front in Turner's image or shooting, stabbing and bludgeoning passengers in all those hazily depicted carriages which trail behind. Women had no choice but to travel in gendered space on the railway. Massively overdetermined by centuries of discriminatory speculation about social and aesthetic difference, poor Lady Pettifer – 'Singing Flapper', lady *and* soubrette, virgin *and* whore, an anomalous figure trapped in tight male-policed discourses – never stood a chance. She was fated to meet death in her trunk.

Notes

1 Peter Lovesey, 'The lady in the trunk', in Tim Heald (ed.), *A Classic English Crime* (New York, 1990), pp. 77–94.

2 R. Austin Freeman, *The Eye of Osiris* [1911] (Oxford, 1989), p. 110. The detective is Dr Thorndyke.

3 R. L. Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrong Box* [1889] (1961), p. 49. Merely one blackly comic stage in an inept tontine fraud, this body's owner died of natural causes. For a murdered corpse carried in a train's luggage van see Barry Perowne, 'Knowing what I know now', in Eleanor Sullivan and Ellery Queen (eds), *The Omnibus of Modern Crime Stories* (1991), pp. 279–93.

4 Pamela Branch, *The Wooden Overcoat* [1951] (Harmondsworth, 1959), p. 46.

5 Pamela Branch, *Murder every Monday* [1954] (Harmondsworth, 1956), pp. 140–1 (emphasis added); R. Austin Freeman, *Dr Thorndyke Intervenes* (1933); Gerald Kersh, *Prelude to a certain Midnight* [1947] (Harmondsworth, 1953), p. 142; Gladys Mitchell, *Come away, Death* [1937] (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 285.

6 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of being Earnest* [1895], Act 1; J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday: a social history* [1947] (Hassocks, 1976); J. R. Whitbread, *The Railway Policeman: the story of the constable on the track* (1961), pp. 186–98; Alan A. Jackson, *London's Termini* (Newton Abbot, 1969), pp. 224–5, 260; Frederick Porter Wensley, 'Murder in a trunk', and Jonathan Goodman, 'A coincidence of corpses', in Jonathan Goodman (ed.), *The Railway Murders: classic stories of true crime* [1984] (1986), pp. 117–30, 131–60.
7 John Dickson Carr, *The Hollow Man* [1935] (Harmondsworth, 1951), chapter 17.
8 H. E. Wood, *The Passenger from Scotland Yard* [1888] (New York, 1977). This novel's complexity springs from the striking circumstance that, our detective aside, *every* passenger in that compartment is a crook: one jewel thief, one assassin, one pickpocket and one fraudster. Who would dare leave England by train?
9 Lightly disguised as a Board of Agriculture official, one detective must identify German spies bent on harming British fleets snoozing at anchor in Invergordon and Scapa Flow among the five men sharing his Highland Railway first-class compartment on a journey north from Inverness in the First World War. His task is ticklish socially—these fellow travellers comprise one major-general, one Royal Naval Reserve officer, one Guards subaltern and two Australian army officers. All five appear to be officers, but which among them dissembles as a patriotic gentlemen? J. Storer Clouston, 'The envelope', in A. K. Barton (ed.), *Mystery* (1937), pp. 181–97. The two Germans-as-Aussies are not difficult to spot (that *odd* accent), but winkling out the RNR officer is a sterner challenge. A detective on the Holyhead boat train must sort out which of his first-class compartment's respectable occupants—one Catholic priest, one fur-coated businessman, one bespectacled elderly gent, one young accountant—actually is Jim Dawson, a daring bank robber. Much as usual, in fact; except that this is a sting. The detective is a fraud, conspiring with his fellow travellers to abstract a large cheque from that ingenuous accountant. Garnett Radcliffe, 'On the Irish Mail', in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, Horror: Third Series* (1933), pp. 389–410.
10 Victor L. Whitechurch, 'The murder on the Okehampton line' [1903], in Peter Haining (ed.), *Murder on the Railways* (1996), p. 142. Original emphasis.
11 Edgar Wallace, *The Four Just Men* [1905] (1950), p. 155–60.
12 James Hilton, 'The mallet' [1929], in Michael Stapleton (ed.), *The Best Crime Stories* (1977), pp. 278–92.
13 Victor L. Whitechurch, 'How the captain tracked a German spy', in Whitechurch, *The Adventures of Captain Ivan Koravich* (Edinburgh, 1925), pp. 44–68, reprinted in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror: Second Series* (1931), pp. 444–55; Thomas W. Hanshew, 'The riddle of the 5.28' [1910], in Haining (ed.), *Murder on the Railways*, pp. 388, 390. A public-spirited citizen offers something like Hanshew's solution to explain a murder on a west-coast express, but it will not wash. Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The story of the man with the watches' [1898], in Doyle, *Tales of Terror and Mystery* [1922] (1978), pp. 142–59, and Alan K. Russell (ed.), *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (Secausas NJ, 1978), pp. 175–85.
14 Wood, *Passenger from Scotland Yard*.
15 The first British bellows connection appeared in 1869, linking two saloons in the London & North Western Railway's royal train. The first complete train with side corridor and bellows connections went into service on the Great Western Railway in 1892, ten years after the Great Northern company built the first ordinary carriage with a side corridor. Always progressive in carriage design and equipment, the Midland Railway offered equivalent arrangements from 1874—but in American–style Pullman cars whose open saloons were largely deprecated by British passengers. See C. Hamilton Ellis, *Railway Carriages in the British Isles from 1830 to 1914* (1965), pp. 95, 106, 119, 154. Victor L. Whitechurch's story 'How the bank was saved' (in Whitechurch, *Thrilling Stories of the Railway* [1912], 1977, pp. 81–99) has the Great Western's Paddington to Birmingham (Snow Hill) express made up of non-corridor stock, forcing robbers to clamber along external footboards to attack a bank messenger. Since corridor stock would certainly have been used on this service by 1912 (the year *Thrilling Stories* was published), we may assume that Whitechurch wrote it much earlier. It may seem that once corridor stock was common only desperate contrivance could limit attention to one carriage on an express train. 'You see, I happen to know that the doors at the ends of the coaches on this train were locked, the key being with the guard,' Thorpe Hazell tells a client. 'So it was impossible that anyone could get through to the next coach.' (Whitechurch, 'The stolen necklace', in Whitechurch, *Thrilling Stories*, p. 160.) Why would any railway company do that on a daytime corridor express

when it had just spent one fortune building corridor stock and a second advertising this novel amenity, except to oblige a crime writer? True enough—except that the Great Western Railway did rule that connecting doors between carriages should be locked on its early corridor trains. That guards could walk the train's length examining tickets was no reason, in that patrician company's view, why passengers should be permitted to amble where they chose. Ellis, *Railway Carriages*, p. 154.

16 Sapper, 'The mystery of the slip-coach', in Sapper, *Ronald Standish* (1933), pp. 163–90. Slip coaches held unexplored potential for crime writers, but E. G. Bartlett, *The Case of the Thirteenth Coach* (1958), and Lyn Brock, *The Slip Carriage Mystery* (1928), squander their opportunities. Here the slip coach's quiddities serve only to detach it from a moving train so that—for Brock—its passengers can be shunted on to a dark and remote siding to await another express's arrival; for Bartlett that it may roll, under the control of a crooked signalman, into a secluded loop and be robbed of the gold it carries.

17 Examples include Philip McCutcheon, *Overnight Express* (1988), set on the east-coast main line below Durham; John Godey, *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1973), set on the New York subway, and Frances Yarborough, *Murder on the Long Straight* (New York, 1979), set on the Nullarbor straight in Australia. These could not be steam trains, because steam locomotives required watering and other servicing at inconveniently frequent intervals. Of course, that need not deter the truly ignorant. The prologue to Robert Ludlum's *The Gemini Contenders* [1976], in Ludlum, *The Scarlatti Inheritance, etc.* (1979), pp. 571–83, has a steam-hauled freight train trundling from Salonika to Milan in 1939, just after war has been declared. Turnouts are manipulated by hand to set this train on the high iron or on sidings. It travels only at night, skulking in marshalling yards by day. It is hauled by the same locomotive for five days, apparently without taking on coal or water, let alone tedious tasks like grate raking, tube clearing or boiler washing. Arrived in Italy, instead of taking the direct main line from Trieste to Milan it skulks through the northern lakes to Switzerland. Having hidden overnight in the extensive goods yard at Zermatt—all of two sidings, the last time I was there—it crosses a non-existent pass back into Italy and chuffs off to Milan. Setting aside that lofty but fictive pass, among all this nonsense just getting the train to Zermatt takes the machine ensemble's biscuit. Would Ludlum like to explain how his standard-gauge train navigated the Brig–Visp–Zermatt company's metre-gauge line?

18 Agatha Christie, *The ABC Murders* [1936] (1962), p. 20.

19 *Punch* (1865), reproduced in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: trains and travel in the nineteenth century*, trans. Ansem Hollo (New York, 1979), p. 91.

20 Hanshew, 'Riddle of the 5.28'.

21 Sir William Hardman feared that a woman who entered his compartment on a London & South Western Railway train in 1866 was preparing grounds for a false molestation claim. 'These unfounded charges of indecent assault have been very common of late,' he tells us, 'and I have determined to object in future to the entry of any unprotected female into a carriage where I may be alone.' See Jack Simmons (ed.), *Railways: an anthology* (1991), pp. 102, 334. Andrew Garve's *The Cuckoo Line Affair* (1953) turns on a false molestation claim.

22 Mrs Main is robbed and strangled in her first-class compartment. 'Being an apoplectic woman of full habit, the assassin had found his wicked task comparatively easy.' Fergus Hume, *The 4 p.m. Express*, 1914, p. 49. Another woman who is robbed and strangled is less feeble physically, but her attacker is 'the pocket Hercules', a man whose short stature disguises unusual strength. Douglas Newton, 'The railway carriage crime', in anon. (ed.), *Best Mystery Stories* (1933), pp. 354–76. Among inheritance hunters, a rascally Edwardian husband uses a Borgia poison ring to dispose of his wife on a Metropolitan Railway train (Baroness Orczy, 'The mysterious death on the Underground railway', in Hugh Greene, ed., *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes: early detective stories*, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp. 206–25), and Clifford Flush—'The Balliol Butcher'—deploys his smooth Oxonian patter to marry three women, insure their lives heavily, then push them from express trains running at speed (Branch, *Murder every Monday*, p. 55).

23 D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [1928] (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 285. Lucius Beebe suggests one exception to this rule. From its first run in 1902, the Twentieth Century Limited presented passengers with a 'climate of almost unearthly rectitude', he insists. 'There is no record of sleeping space issued for a single passenger being occupied by two. No well heeled salesman sent wine to single women in the diner.' Lucius Beebe, *Twentieth Century: the greatest train in the world* (Berkeley CA, 1962), p. 11. Puritan pleasures on

the Century! So why, in the 1940s, does aged but sprightly radio magnate Ray Soderbjerg entertain a different high-spirited young woman in his state room each time he rides the Empire Builder from Minneapolis to New York? See Garrison Keillor, *WLT: a Radio Romance* (New York, 1991).

24 Anthony Lambert, *The Yermakov Transfer* (1974), p. 68.
25 Paul Jennings, 'Very Great Eastern', in Jennings, *Iddly Oddly* (1959), p. 93.
26 E. Phillips Oppenheim, *Last Train Out* (1941), p. 195.
27 Ernest Bramah, 'The crime in the house at Culver Street', in Bramah, *Max Carrados Mysteries* [1927] (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 159.
28 Carter Dickson, *The Red Widow Murders* [1935] (Harmondsworth, 1951), p. 9.
29 Graham Greene, *Stamboul Train* [1932] (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 121.
30 Peter Fleming, *One's Company* [1934] (Harmondsworth, 1956), p. 34. Peter Fleming must have discussed these fantasies with his brother, who created not 37 but 007. Springing a honey trap, SMERSH's top operative gloats over James Bond's imminent demise. 'Old man, the story's got everything,' he tells Bond. 'Orient Express. Beautiful Russian spy murdered in Simplon tunnel. Filthy pictures. Secret cipher machine. Handsome British spy with career ruined murders her and commits suicide. Sex, spies, luxury train.' Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love* [1957] (1959), p. 193. In the same discourse Victor Maskell contemplates his Soviet controller. 'He liked trains. I imagined him on the Blue Train with a gun in his hand and a girl in his bunk.' John Banville, *The Untouchable* (1997), p. 147.
31 Richard Harding Davis, 'In the fog' [1902], in Russell (ed.), *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 374–83; Hugh Greene and Graham Greene (eds), *Victorian Villainies* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 414–23; Valentine Williams, *The Three of Clubs* (1924), p. 40.
32 Max Beerbohm, *Zuleika Dobson* [1911] (1946), p. 6. Max's Middle Ages crack comes from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* [1869], where it adorned Oxford University, not the town's railway station.
33 Maurice Dekobra, *La Madonne des sleepings* [1927], trans. Neal Wainwright as *The Madonna of the Sleeping Cars* (1959), p. 221. Selling more than a million copies in French and in translation, this mildly salacious novel made Dekobra's fortune.
34 Michael Innes, *The Journeying Boy* (1949), p. 141. Founded in 1916, Mitropa Gesellschaft was imperial Germany's attempt to break Georges Nagelmackers's Compagnie Internationale des Wagons–lits et des Grands Express Européens' monopoly of long-distance European *train de luxe* travel. The challenge collapsed in 1945 with the Third Reich.
35 Fleming, *From Russia with Love*.
36 Robert Parker, *Passport to Peril* (1952); Eric Ambler, *Dark Frontier* (1936), pp. 68–72; Oppenheim, *Last Train Out*. For another example (if we need one) see Dennis Wheatley, 'Espionage', in Tony Wilmot (ed.), *Beware of the Trains* (Hornchurch, 1981), pp. 94–113.
37 Agatha Christie, 'The girl in the train', in Christie, *The Listerdale Mystery and other Stories* [1934] (1961), reprinted in William Pattrick (ed.), *Mysterious Railway Stories* (1985), pp. 161–82. This story offers some stylistic interest. Bertie Wooster read vast quantities of crime fiction, but he never tried to write the stuff. Christie's tale shows what he might have done—her narrative adorned by Rogers, that suavely Jeevesian family retainer-cum-father figure.
38 Agatha Christie, 'The case of the city clerk', in Christie, *Parker Pyne Investigates* [1934] (Harmondsworth, 1953), pp. 70–85. Danger thrills here, but elsewhere a dupe dies on a Leeds to London train to establish another man's alibi. 'He thought he was playing the secret agent for a representative of M.I. 5,' his killer reports. Harry Carmichael, *Money for Murder* (1957), p. 186.
39 '"Will you excuse my intrusion?" he asked, in a full caressing voice. "The train is absolutely full." … A moment later the tall, dark stranger had come over to her side of the carriage and, sitting down opposite her, had said something which had at once amused, thrilled, and, yes, allured her.' Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'Her last adventure' [1924], in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror: First Series* (1928), p. 584.
40 John Gibbons, 'Humour and history of London traffic' III, *Railway Magazine* 75, (1934), p. 159. John Betjeman (*London's Historic Railway Stations*, 1972, p. 88) quotes A. H. Binstead's 1903 quatrain: 'The terminus of Charing Cross/Is haunted when it rains/By nymphs, who there a shelter seek/And wait for mythic trains.'
41 Jackson, *London's Termini*, p. 176. Two things killed this trade. The District Railway's new line from Westminster to Blackfriars gave timid City men a quicker service to their offices. Then the South Eastern's new intermediate station at Waterloo ruined the run for

gallants attracted by these ladies' services. Seven minutes slaked their appetites, but three minutes bred frustration. As Eartha Kitt observed, an Englishman needs time.

42 Martin Page, *The Lost Pleasures of the Great Trains* (1975), p. 85.

43 Page, *Lost Pleasures*, p. 85. Mr Stein smacks his lips. 'The things that go on in these long-distance trains,' he complains in Constantinople. 'Did she cost you much?' his interlocutor enquires. Greene, *Stamboul Train*, p. 209.

44 Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: a social history* (Oxford, 1986), p. 13. 'Perhaps … it was the proximity of all the passengers to the piston-and-cylinder principle,' Paul Fussell suggests (*Abroad: British literary travelling between the wars*, New York, 1980, p. 113), 'which, when you get to thinking about it—.' Ludovic Kennedy ('Introduction', to Kennedy, ed., *A Book of Railway Journeys*, 1988, p. xx) finds an 'affinity between the womb and the [train's] steel cylinder'. Whenever Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson meet on Carnforth station as they conduct their remarkably constipated affair in David Lean's movie *Brief Encounter* (1946) a west-coast main-line express thunders through. Not subtle. Much later, in 1993, a television commercial advertising Young Persons' Railcards was banned following political protest. The ad's voice-over enjoined young folk to travel by train to meet those they loved. Its fast-cutting visuals showed nothing but multiple-unit trains shooting in and out of tunnels. Back-bench Conservative members roared that licentious British Rail exploited vulnerable adolescents here, encouraging pre-marital sex for (State) corporate profit.

45 Michael A. Leaska (ed.), *A Passionate Apprentice: the early journals of Virginia Woolf, 1897–1909* (1990), p. 369.

46 Virginia Woolf, *The Years* [1937] (Oxford, 1992), p. 256.

47 Train/penis and tunnel/vagina connections draw no direct warrant from Freud. See Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: the epitome of modernity* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 136–7 n. 31.

48 H. G. Wells, *Anticipations* (1902), p. 4. 'There has never been any sustained attack on the idea that the steam railway was the most significant invention or innovation in the rise of industrial society', the historian Albro Martin insists. *Railroads Triumphant: the growth, rejection and rebirth of a vital American force* (New York, 1992), p. 12. 'The nineteenth-century European, at once capitalist and revolutionary, had a dynamic conception of society,' the sociologist Alain Touraine reminds us. 'Lévi-Strauss was right to see the steam engine as the symbol of a social mechanism functioning between poles of heat and cold, between the capitalist entrepreneur and proletarianised workers.' Alain Touraine, 'The idea of a revolution', in Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture* (1990), p. 129. Ah, structuralists' chaste binary delights!

49 Leo Marx, 'The idea of "technology" and postmodern pessimism', in Yaron Ezrahi, Everett Mendelsohn and Howard Segal (eds), *Technology, Pessimism and Postmodernism* (Dordrecht, 1994), p. 13. See also Leo Marx, 'Closely watched trains', *New York Review of Books*, 15 March 1984. 'If people can make trains,' Jonathan Carrick tells us in a novel, 'people can do anything they want.' Joan Brady, *Theory of War* (1994), p. 57. Railroads crowd this tale of postbellum America.

50 Leo Marx, 'Idea of technology', p. 16, parsing Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: the managerial revolution in American business* (Cambridge MA, 1977); Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1980); Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor Pinch (eds), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (Cambridge MA, 1989).

51 Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, pp. 19–40.

52 Of course, this distinction ignored the vast majority. They walked.

53 David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven CT, 1998), p. 89; Harold Perkin, *The Age of the Railway* (1976), pp. 169–70; Jack Simmons, 'Class distinctions', in Jack Simmons and Gordon H. Biddle (eds), *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 84–7. For *class*'s conceptual biography see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), pp. 51–9.

54 Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (1991), p. 334.

55 The nearest approach comes in R. Austin Freeman's Edwardian story 'The stalking horse' (in Freeman, *The Famous Cases of Dr Thorndyke*, 1929, pp. 447–72.) When a ferociously anti-suffragist bank manager is found shot dead in a GNR first-class carriage, strong circumstantial evidence indicts another passenger: Miss Isabel Dalby, president of the Women's Emancipation League. We (but not the dunderhead police) know that she was framed—when the league's secretary tells us that Miss Dalby 'took a first-class ticket and

occupied a compartment for ladies only' (p. 452). For any skilled reader of railway crime fiction this is alibi enough.

56 Is Rudyard Kipling's '007' the only exception?

57 Jo Manton, *Sister Dora: the life of Dorothy Pattison* (1971), p. 224.

58 W. G. Chapman, *Caerphilly Castle* (1924), *'Twixt Rail and Sea* (1927), *The 'King' of Railway Locomotives* (1928), *Cheltenham Flyer* (1934), *Track Topics* (1935), *Locos of the Royal Road* (1936), all published by the GWR from Paddington Station. These shilling books enjoyed huge sales—in eight years *The 'King'* sold 60,000 copies. See *Locos*, p. 5.

59 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley CA, 1960).

60 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association* [1887], trans. Charles P. Loomis (1955), pp. 278–9.

61 Ian Carter, 'Rain, steam and what?' *Oxford Art Journal* 20 (1997), pp. 3–12.

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