Railways and Regret:
Revising Mobility Myths in Victorian Literature and Culture, 1857-1891

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Richard Bevins Kale, Sr. and Hayden Eliot, who never met but who, respectively, inspired the beginning and end of this fulfilling endeavor. I hope it makes you both proud.

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ABSTRACT

Since 1979 when Wolfgang Schivelbusch applied Marx's phrase "annihilation of time and space" to the nineteenth-century railways, the idea that locomotives revolutionized mobility and restructured life has undergirded historical analysis. Recent scholarship challenges this long-standing assumption, countering that transportation networks expanded through evolutionary change and that cultural adaptation occurred by resisting the imposing forces of modernity. My study joins this critical departure but proposes a new conceptual model defined by regret and revision. This dissertation argues that fiction written between 1857-1891 illustrates railway growth as a recursive and participatory process. I show through the writing of Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Riddell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Charles Dickens, and Margaret Oliphant that expansion was neither radically disruptive nor seamless but occurred through a series of fits and starts, re-assessments and alterations. Additionally, this body of fiction illuminates how Victorians actively negotiated the challenges the railways introduced, rather than merely adapting their lives to technological modernization or turning away from the present to recuperate part of a lost past.

As the railways transformed from invention to commodity to industry, popular nineteenth-century engineering biographies shaped the story of the railway and its inventors, engineers, and investors into inflated myths of personal success and smooth progress. Valorizing self-interest over government interference, these narratives reinforced the laissez-faire arrangement between Parliament and railway companies. However, by mid-century redundant and abandoned lines, accidents, financial mania, and social immobility sparked debates about the detriment of lax regulation on public welfare. Along with newspapers and journals, fiction contributed to this debate. Works by Dickens, Gaskell, Riddell, Oliphant and others addressed these regrets by revising the story of the railways, correcting the strategic selection, erasure, and exaggeration of those early myths. In chapters focused on the expansion of lines, traveler safety, financial investment, and social mobility, this dissertation showcases authors who amplified the voice of public opinion in their fiction during a time when Parliament and boards of directors dominated the conversation. Demonstrating that to regret the past is also to envision a better future, such fiction provided the space within which Victorians could imagine balance between corporate, state, and public interests.

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INTRODUCTION

PARALLEL TRACKS: COMPETING ACCOUNTS OF THE RAILWAY'S STORIED PAST

On March 12, 1980, the Royal Mail issued a special pack of stamps commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. The pentaptych illustrates a story about the opening of the first intercity passenger railway that balances the revolutionary technological achievement with its gradual evolution (**Figure 1**). To maintain a sense of cohesion, the stamps construct a narrative of smoothly-integrated progress between people, land, and technology, which abridges the history of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway by levelling incongruities and eliding struggles, failures, and even death. The narrative image exemplifies how we re-shape history into something new and myth-like when we strategically edit the retelling of the past.

This study is concerned with nineteenth-century historical accounts of railway development similarly wrought by tools of selection, erasure, and exaggeration. The primary focus, though, is on fiction that revised those histories in the hopes of addressing the present and future problems of the railways. Proposing a new conceptual model defined by regret and revision, I argue that fiction written between 1857-1891 illustrates railway growth as a recursive and participatory process. I show through the writing of Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Riddell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Charles Dickens, and Margaret Oliphant that railway expansion was neither radically disruptive nor seamless but occurred through a series of fits and starts, re-assessments and alterations. Additionally, the body of fiction I examine illuminates how Victorians actively negotiated the challenges the railways introduced, rather than merely adapting their lives to technological modernization, as scholarship of the last few decades has maintained.



Figure 1. 150th Anniversary of Liverpool and Manchester Railway 12p Stamps (1980)

Source: Stamp designs by David Gentleman, reproduced with kind permission of Royal Mail Group Limited © Royal Mail Group

I begin with a creative exercise, performing my own narrative revision by analyzing this brilliant image from 1980, which provides a rich visual example of retrospective re-shaping and a useful inroad into some prevalent social, technological, and political conflicts that attended the early development of the railway in Victorian England. The stamps' background scenes demonstrate the radical transformation of nature—the literal leveling of the earth—required to lay the tracks of the new iron road. In railway construction, Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains, "mechanical regularity triumphed over natural irregularity" (23). Panel one, "Rocket approaching Moorish Arch, Liverpool" shows the award-winning Rocket engine passing in front of the Cavendish cutting near the Edge Hill Tunnel, the world's first tunnel ever bored beneath a city.[1] Through a convex effect, panel two, "First and Second Class carriages passing through Olive Mount Cutting," attempts to convey a sense of awe inspired by the immense two-mile-long and eighty-foot-deep cutting.[2] Besides tunnel boring and deep cutting, building the Liverpool and Manchester Railway required establishing a foundation on and across the harrowing ten-square mile peat bog. Panel three, "Third Class Carriage and Sheep truck crossing Chat Moss," depicts the 30-foot deep bog, tamed by George Stephenson's innovative thinking. Stephenson engineered a wood and stone foundation that floated on top of the bog, allowing trains of railway carriages to traverse the 4.75 miles across Chat Moss safely. It was a ground-breaking technological feat.

While asserting the railway's mastery over the physical environment, the commemorative image also portrays the harmonious integration of railway technology into the natural, social, and

[1] To generate publicity for the Liverpool and Manchester line, the Company ran a contest inviting inventor-engineers to enter locomotive engines that met a set of qualifications, including weight, speed, and distance. Out of the five locomotives entered in the Rainhill Trials, only Rocket completed the competition. Rocket was designed by the Chief Engineer, George Stephenson, and his son, Robert Stephenson, and built by Robert Stephenson.
[2] In *The Life of George Stephenson* (1857), Samuel Smiles writes, "Some idea of the extensive character of the cuttings may be formed from the fact that upwards of three millions of cubic yards of stone, clay, and soil, were removed and formed into embankments at various parts of the line" (259).

commercial world. In panel four, “Horsebox and Carriage Truck near Bridgewater Canal,” the railway passes serenely by the tranquil country house, and the rural countryside of moss and manor is nestled between the towering urban cityscapes. The separation of people, animals, goods, and correspondence in the individual railway cars demonstrates the ease with which the locomotive, despite being the vehicle of change, maintains social, commercial, agricultural, and manufacturing order.

Together, the background and foreground also exhibit the extensive interconnection the railways cultivated between land, enterprise, and national progress. As each landscape scene plots a point across a map, the unbroken line of railway cars spans from the Wapping Docks at the Mersey all the way to the factories at Manchester. Coupled together, they illustrate a narrative of linear, staged progress. Further, the images suggest that such progress occurs through an evolution of mobility technologies, particularly emphasized between panel four and five. Panel four depicts the railway car having just carried the recreational horse and carriage smoothly over the notably out-of-frame Bridgewater Canal, which had been the primary conduit for transporting materials. Meanwhile, panel five, “Goods Truck and Mail-Coach at Manchester,” shows the loaded goods car departing the manufacturing hub. The image asserts that, though all vehicles remain relevant on some level, locomotives have ascended to the chief mode of transport. In emphasis of the railway’s contribution towards the development of a coherent transportation network, the Moorish Arch at Edgehill (panel one) echoes the double arch at the Water Street entrance to the Manchester Liverpool Road station (panel five), as the smoke from Rocket’s smoke stack and from the factory stacks arc towards each other. An effigy

of Queen Elizabeth's head, embossing the top right corner of each panel, endorses the works. This is the imagined community occasioned by the railways.[3]

Of course, this version does not tell the whole story. In fact, the elisions and modifications to the stamps' account of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway tell a story of their own. Chat Moss, for instance, was more than a technological feat. It was also the source of Parliamentary defeat for the original 1825 Liverpool and Manchester Railway Bill and repeatedly threatened personal defeat for George Stephenson.[4] Overall, it was a great nuisance for the railway project. Likewise, the transition between mobility technologies was far from smooth. In fact, canal companies constituted one of the strongest forces of opposition to the railways. The move to develop locomotive technology into a new transportation system was inspired by the need for better conveyance of materials from the seaport to the center of manufacturing.[5] However, those with canal interests lobbied hard against the railways, especially the Superintendent and active trustee of the Bridgewater Canal estate, Robert Bradshaw.[6] In addition to those with canal interests, stringent opposition was found in the landowning classes, who thought locomotive engines would pollute the bucolic countryside, devastating its natural

[3] I am referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of nationalism. See Anderson, esp. p.7.

[4] During the hearing for the 1825 Bill, counsel for the opposition found in Chat Moss a weak spot in the survey and applied to "leading engineers—not, like Mr. Stephenson, self-taught men, but the regular professionals" to undermine the validity of Stephenson's plan (Smiles 241). Mr. Francis Giles, C. E. claimed, "*No engineer in his senses*…would go through Chat Moss if he wanted to make a railroad from Liverpool to Manchester" (qtd in Smiles, emphasis in original). The failure of the 1825 Bill was largely attributed to Stephenson's inability to establish his credibility. After the Bill passed in 1826 and the project was well under way, doubts about Stephenson's ability to conquer the sinking bog again rose to the surface but from within his own enterprise. Stephenson wrote, "Even my assistants began to feel uneasy, and to doubt of the success of the scheme. The directors, too, spoke of it as a hopeless task, and at length they became seriously alarmed; so much so indeed, that a board meeting was held on Chat Moss to decide whether I should proceed any further" (Smiles 258). Ultimately, he was allowed to "persevere" to protect the amount of money already invested.

[5] Though the canals could not keep up with the pace of the cotton industry. Samuel Smiles writes, "Up to this time the Duke of Bridgewater's Canal and the Irwell and Mersey navigation had principally supplied the means of transport; but the enormously increasing demands of the trade outstripped their tardy efforts" (175).

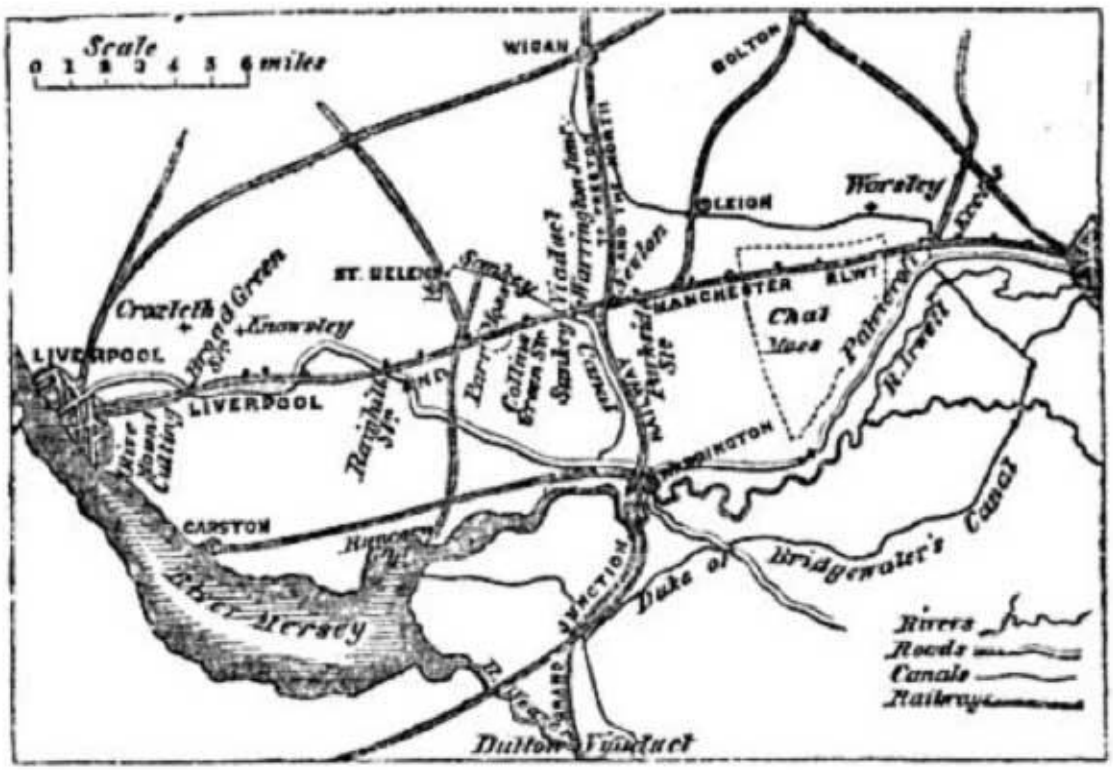
[6] Pamphlets decrying the railways as a vehicle of destruction to agriculture, industry, and society were attributed to canal men. They also used ties to members of Parliament to obstruct passage of railway bills, beginning with the 1825 Liverpool and Manchester Railway Bill.

beauty and endangering animals and people.[7] Thus, the image of the railway passing peacefully by the country manor, just past Bridgewater Canal, bears the nostalgic glaze of the retrospective eye. In truth, the story of the railway also included much geological, economic, political, and social *dis*order.

Additionally, if you did use the locations of the stamps to plot the course Stephenson's Rocket made across the "Map of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway" (**Figure 2**), you would notice a sizeable gap in the journey—a void in the narrative, too. Perhaps the most striking omission in the 1980 version is also the most dramatic event of the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, which took place September 15, 1830. Halfway between Olive Mount Cutting and Chat Moss, the caravan of engines and carriage trains were scheduled to stop at the now-defunct station at Parkside, where passengers were instructed to remain in their seats while the locomotive engines took in water. William Huskisson, the MP for Liverpool, disregarded the warning, using the break to make peace with the Duke of Wellington after a recent falling out with his political rival. Huskisson approached the Duke, seated in his lavishly decorated carriage, to shake hands and make a public show of reconciliation. As he did, someone called out a warning that Rocket was approaching.[8] William Huskisson acted with indecision and, after a

[7] In 1916, W. T. Jackman wrote that landowners "stubbornly resisted the encroachment upon their domains of these black monsters, the locomotive engines, with their trailing clouds of smoke, disfiguring the landscape, destroying the privacy and seclusion of their estates, and causing a great decrease in the value of their lands…the mental picture of the railway with its tail of smoke curling across the country, blackening everything even to the fleeces of the wool on the sheep, reckless of the aesthetic rural conditions and of the security of individual or public property, was to them the symbol of all that was disagreeable, vulgarizing, and mercenary" (497). Jackman catalogues letters to newspapers that voice such opposition from 1825 to 1835 in footnote 4, page 497-98. I discuss early fears and superstitions about the railways in future chapters.

[8] At the time, the engines were not equipped with breaks; drivers were required to reverse the gear, essentially applying the steam in the opposite direction, which meant that the engines were slow to stop.



Map of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

Figure 2. Map of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway (1859)

Source: Map of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. In Samuel Smiles, *The Story of the Life of George Stephenson*. London: J. Murray, 1859. 149. This image is in the public domain in the United States because its copyright has expired.

failed attempt to climb over the side of the Duke's carriage, fell awkwardly in the path of the oncoming locomotive. The prize-winning engine severed part of his leg, and he died that night.[9]

His death left a deep impression in the cultural imagination for decades to come, but Huskisson affected the fate of the Liverpool and Manchester railway in life, too. He was credited with encouraging Lord Stafford of the Bridgewater Canal company to invest a sizeable portion of capital in the railway line, which, in turn, influenced those with canal interest to relax their opposition. Unlike the 1825 Bill, there was no petition filed on behalf of the canals to obstruct the passage of the 1826 Liverpool and Manchester Railway Bill. The image in panel one of Rocket cheerily chugging up to the Moorish Arch evinces the success of Huskisson's sociopolitical influence, but the elision of his death is made more disturbing by the direction of the locomotive and the cheering bystanders. Though the background scenes progress from Liverpool to Manchester (left to right), the foregrounded train of carriages appears to be making the return trip from Manchester back to Liverpool (right to left). Thus, Rocket pulls into Edge Hill, here, *after* having severed the limbs and life of one of its heartiest advocates.

Of course, it would be unreasonable to expect a stamp collection to commemorate death, disaster, and failure. The special issue was meant to celebrate, not mourn, the first passenger railway line and the beginning of the transportation network that by 1980 had become a part of everyday life. The story is told from the future perspective of knowing that, despite the early struggles, the railways would eventually become a national success. This look back to the beginning, then, is one of confirmation. There is a difference, however, between celebrating a

[9] For a cinematic description of Huskisson's death and a thorough explanation of his life's work in reform politics, see Simon Garfield. For an equally informative and engaging account of the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, see Paul Fyfe.

long history that culminates in success and framing the beginning of that history as already successful. The latter represents wishful thinking as fact.

Another way of interpreting the pentaptych is that it imagines the version that many people living at the time had hoped to hear, though it does not accurately represent the lived experience. An article published in *The Times* two days after the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway marks the sharp distinction between what was expected and what actually occurred:

> …though I had intended to give you some faint description of this astounding work of art, of the crowds which have lined almost every inch of our road, of flags and banners, and booths and scaffoldings, and gorgeous tents, which have enlivened even the dullest parts of our journey, I am obliged, on account of the lateness of the hour, to defer that description as comparatively uninteresting, owing to the fatal accident (as I apprehend) that has befallen Mr. Huskisson. ("Dreadful Accident" 11).

Through the balance of what he "intended" and what he was regretfully "obliged" to share, the *Times* reporter manages to respectfully convey that there had been celebration along with shock, and sadness.[10] Just a year later, though, another account of the event contends that the tragedy wholly overwrote the jubilation. Placed at the Parkside station in 1831, Huskisson's memorial plaque claims that the death "changed a moment of the noblest exultation and triumph that science and genius had ever achieved into one of desolation and mourning and striking terror into the hearts of assembled thousands" (**Figure 3**). The echoes of Huskisson's death

[10] The Duke's cortege had to manage the predicament of continuing on despite the fatal accident. Word had not travelled to Manchester about the accident, and the crowd, which had been waiting for the Duke and the procession grew restless and hostile. For more on this, see Garfield and Fyfe.



Figure 3. Huskisson Memorial Plaque

Source: © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum, Science Museum Group Collection.

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reverberated in newspaper articles, literature, and the cultural imagination for decades to come. While it makes sense that the trauma of the day would have faded from view 150 years later, the impulse to re-shape the story of the railways actually began immediately, when the advent of passenger transport was within living memory.

An additional explanation for the narrative shape the commemorative illustration took is that it replicated historical narratives already in place by mid-nineteenth century. In the decades that followed the opening of the first passenger railway lines, advocates for railway companies, competing businesses, landowners, shareholders, the general public, and government all had stakes in the story of the railways. While defining what constitutes success was important, the various interest groups understood that controlling the way in which the regrets of railway development were framed had more impact on how the railways might be managed in the future—especially if those regrets could be reframed as components of success, a rhetorical move exemplified in the stamp narrative.

As a radical technological innovation that evolved into the national transportation network through private enterprise, the railways were bound to encounter technical, administrative, economic, and cultural setbacks during their growth. As the railway network expanded, managing these difficulties became a national priority. Many attributed those early developmental setbacks to a lack of regulation and, with public interest in mind, called for the government to intervene in the new mobile technology's management. However, such interference conflicted with the highly valued principles of laissez-faire capitalism that some credit for the railway network's very existence. The threat of state intervention incentivized railway advocates to downplay or distort railway problems, or strategically attribute blame to a cause other than lax regulation. Likewise, historical accounts could exaggerate the role of

individualism or falsely assign credit for railway successes in order to protect liberal ideologies that resisted reform through government mediation.[11] Though they were deeply rooted in the cultural imagination, these wished-for versions did not go unchecked.

As they became more integrated into daily life, the railways frequently appeared in Victorian fiction from mid-to late-nineteenth century and often with some degree of attention to the perils of development. Major authors, such as George Eliot in *Middlemarch* (1871-72), relate the negative perceptions of the railways in the 1830s by protective landowners and the superstitious working classes. Wilkie Collins's "The Last Stage Coach" (1843) and "Rambles Beyond Railways" (1852), and Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848) present the railroad as an agent of invasion, destruction and alienation during the subsequent period of rapid growth. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) simultaneous railway expansion and economic devastation instigated by a bank collapse characterize the state of modernity as subject to the turbulence of constructive and destructive forces. While this fiction spotlighted or gestured towards problems the railways faced or created, these works limited their attention to reactions against the railways or observations about their presence in modern life. As I will show, other fiction probed deeper, closely examining the particular problems attendant to the railways and imagining solutions. This understudied body of fiction drew attention to distorted historical narratives informed by imbalanced priorities and the role they played in railway mismanagement.

[11] For instance, Samuel Smiles was perhaps the most prominent purveyor of biographies that were borderline fictional. In the 1850s and 60s, Smiles published a series of biographical tributes to inventors and engineers. The railway specific books included, *The Life of George Stephenson* (1857), *The Story of the Life of George Stephenson* (1859), and *Lives of Engineers, vol. 5, The Locomotive—George Stephenson and Robert Stephenson*. *The Life of George Stephenson* influenced Smiles's famous conduct manual, *Self-Help* (1859), a tribute to the ideals of individualism. These well-read books offered testimony regarding the role laissez-faire enterprise and individualism played in the success of the railways. Though not the first of their kind, these extremely popular biographies helped to establish the practice of telling history using fictional techniques, which many other writers replicated. Accounts of George Stephenson's extraordinary genius and perseverance in establishing the railways proliferated mid-century until his story and the story of the railways became part of the same mythos.

The aim of this project is to examine fiction that sought to revise the dominant technological, political, financial, and social narratives about railways. These narrative myths colored historical perspectives by downplaying, distorting, or eliding regrets about the transformations of society wrought by the arrival of steam-powered railways.[12] While I draw on historical documents, such as newspapers and Parliamentary records, that date back to 1825, my primary focus is on railway fiction written between the 1850s and the 1890s, the period when major negotiations in railway expansion, safety, finance, and sociocultural affordances occurred. The works I examine are mostly non-canonical works by authors, including Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, and Charlotte Riddell. Though under-read, these works are important because they imagine alternate pathways towards resolving problems of railway management outside of the dominant ideology. To varying degrees, the works also evince these authors' participation in civic discourse about the repercussions of technological innovation and, thus, deserve further consideration.

Through their fictional narratives, the novels and short stories in this study offer a nuanced account of the railways, spotlighting in particular the deleterious effects of unfettered railway development and the unbridled devotion to individualism. These fictional narratives filter the larger public regrets of railway mismanagement through the personal regrets of characters. By exploring the regrets of self-interested engineers, beset innovators, manic speculators, and social climbers, fiction writers could spotlight problems in railway legislation, management practices, financial speculation, bureaucratic inadequacies, and socioeconomic iniquities. I argue that, in closely examining the problems of railway development in the past,

[12] By railway fiction, I do not refer to the cottage industry of book stalls at railway stations but the fiction where the railways are either central to the narrative, serving as a major catalyst for change, or potent symbols which help to interpret key messages about how mobility shapes modernity.

these writers actively engaged in public discourse about how the railways ought to be managed in the present to ensure more even geographical, technological, financial, and social progress in the future.

Spirit of the Times: Regret and the Affective Infrastructure of Progress

In examining the way fiction engaged in the discourse of railway reform, my method relies on a nuanced understanding of regret. In this section I want to elaborate on the relevance of regret—particularly, its structure of feeling—to railway expansion in the nineteenth century. In the next section I will explain how understanding the relationship between regret and the railways provides me with unique interdisciplinary insight into literary revisions of cultural myths, and I will situate my analysis within recent work in mobility studies. I begin by establishing a theoretical definition of regret before offering some diverse examples of Victorian railway-era regret.

A complex emotion with diverse applications, regret can be experienced individually or collectively in active or passive modes. What I term the passive mode is defined as "sorrow, distress, or disappointment due to some external circumstance or event" ("regret" 2.) and what I identify as the active mode is defined as "sorrow, remorse, or repentance due to reflection on something one has done or omitted to do" ("regret" 3.).[13] To regret as an individual, then, is to think: *I wish I had done otherwise* (active mode) or *I wish my circumstances were different* (passive mode). Collective regret, the main interest of this study, increases in complexity. While felt by the group, collective regret might be expressed by an individual (especially publicly or in print). So, a writer or politician, for example, might express with regret *I wish our circumstances*

[13] While other 16th and 17th-century usages are now obsolete, the definitions of regret I provided have remained stable since the late 17th century. See: "regret" OED.

were different or *I wish we had done otherwise*. Shifts in who makes up the group depend on the context and perspective. "Our" might refer to as large a group as the nation, while "we" might refer to particular segments, such as Parliament, the public, landowners, railway companies, or shareholders in the case of the railways. Similarly, "our" might correspond with a contemporary national identity while "we" might correspond to the same national identity of the generation before.[14]

Regret, especially as I have just described it, may seem to indicate a preoccupation with the past—a wish to go back and do things differently. While regret does occur through retrospection, it is important to recognize that the look backward is preceded by an assessment of the present. Periods of uncertainty or dissatisfaction often lead people to imagine how life might be otherwise. That counterfactual exercise, in turn, inspires a search for a root cause to explain present circumstances, frequently found in the past. The combination of counterfactual imagining and retrospection in regret looks like this: *things might be different now if only I/we/they had done/not done X*.

In the case of collective regret, the uncertainty about the present often attends periods of great change. Thus, even as regret scrutinizes the past, it offers a useful assessment of the resulting state of change. Therefore, careful analysis of expressions of collective regret (what group is being represented, whether the mode is active or passive) can help identify various, competing perspectives held at that time about progress—or, the spirit of the times. In this study,

[14] Those group identifications, I would argue, are never very stable, especially when referring to the past. For instance, someone might express regret that "we" dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is proximity to that "we" as it encompasses Americans, who continue to bear the responsibility generations later; however, there is also distance from a more particular "we" of the government, military, and presidential administration who actually commanded the order. Thus, examining expressions of collective regret means accounting for slippage in who is doing the regretting and who has/ has not committed any given act of regret.

part of my aim is to identify contrary expressions of collective regret that attended the uncertain period of railway development.

It is, perhaps, unsurprising to find expressions of regret during the early days of the railway era. One of the most violent transformations of the nineteenth century, the railroad tore up and through the countryside, redefining space and time, and consequently rending the social fabric sewn into the land. Those living in the 1830s and 40s witnessed a sharp division between past and present and viewed the landscape with the remembrance of a way of life hauntingly just out of reach. For some, the uncertainty that attended that transformation incited cultural regret. In *England and the English* (1833), Edward Bulwer Lytton lamented the radical shift in modern experience and perspective:

> Every age may be called an age of transition—the passing on, as it were, from one state to another never ceases; but in our age the transition is *visible*…An age of disquietude and doubt—of the removal of time-worn landmarks, and the breaking up of the hereditary elements of society—old opinions and feelings—ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change. (318-319)[15]

Those who shared Bulwer Lytton's conservative reaction to change resist the march of progress. The process of cultural, technological, and political advancement first requires letting go of the status quo, which Bulwer Lytton, a landed aristocrat, is reluctant to do. He identifies the state of flux induced by interventions in the status quo as a malevolent force: "To me such epochs appear but as the dark passages in the appointed progress of mankind…passages into which we have no

[15] Edward Bulwer Lytton does not mention the railways specifically, here. He is speaking more generally about the intellectual spirit of the time and Bentham in particular, but in 1833 the technological innovation of the railways was certainly numbered in the agents of change whose effects Bulwer Lytton is describing.

reason to rejoice at our entrance, save from the hope of being sooner landed on the opposite side. Uncertainty is the greatest of all our evils" (319). Lytton's resistant perspective recasts progress as dangerous, threatening devolution. The passive mode of his expression of regret shows that he feels change as a force that is inflicted on culture that the people living through it must withstand until they can reestablish the status quo "on the opposite side."

Rather than taking an oppositional stance, others viewed progress initiated by technological innovation as a natural force that they could join. While registering the potential for dangers of a radical intervention like the railways, this perspective held that the path of progress can and should be continuously directed towards the best outcomes. In *An Account of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway* (1831), Henry Booth--one of the railways' earliest and strongest advocates and eventual director of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Company—espoused the view that periods of uncertainty do not spell doom but are pregnant with possibility:

> Meanwhile, the genius of the age, like a mighty river of the new world, flows onward, full, rapid, and irresistible. The spirit of the times must needs manifest itself in the progress of events, and the movement is too impetuous to be stayed, were it wise to attempt it. Like the "Rocket" of fire and steam, or its prototype of war and desolation—whether the harbinger of peace and the arts, or the Engine of hostile attack and devastation—though it be a futile attempt to oppose so mighty an impulse, it may not be unworthy our ambition, to guide its progress and direct its course. (94)

Here, Booth cautions against reactions like Lytton's, which waste energy by resisting the force of change instead of directing energy towards ensuring that it serves the public good.[16] Booth's advice to instill engagement and purpose in the spirit of the times is not an expression of regret like Lytton's, but it is a recipe for how to anticipate regret during a period of uncertainty and redirect the path of progress to avoid or correct those regrets as they come. Booth is able to prescribe this cultural attitude because it borrows from the formula of practical regret that attends railway adoption and construction. In his advocacy for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway line, Booth experienced first-hand the setbacks that required a series of modifications to original plans in order to keep the project moving toward successful completion.

In addition to active and passive modes, regret can also be characterized as productive. The process of regret actually begins by having expectations about how things will turn out in the future. When that future becomes the present, and that present is found to be dissatisfying and does not match the counterfactual ideal, then retrospection searches for an explanation in the past. Rather than dwelling on a hopeless wish that something in the past had been done differently, a productive expression of regret instead seeks to alter the trajectory in an attempt to achieve better outcomes in the future.[17] This productive, practical regret shapes the process of early railroad development. For a railway to be built, a line from point A to B must be determined necessary. Then a path must be designed based on the cheapest method to deal with land and other obstacles. A prospectus is then drafted to solicit financial support based on predicted cost and earnings ratios. A Bill on behalf of the company is submitted to Parliament,

[16] Psychologist Janet Landman elaborates on the destructive and constructive functions of regret in her interdisciplinary tome, *Regret: The Persistence of the Possible*, esp. pages 3-34.

[17] Social psychologists determine that "People's immediate affective responses to these counterfactuals—as well as their attitudes, plans for the future, and behavior—may very well be determined by what the counterfactuals imply for the future as well as by what they imply for the past" (Gleicher et al. 284). For more about the processes and functions of counterfactual thinking, see Roese and Olson.

and then revisions are made based on criticism (Simmons 52).[18] Likewise, the trajectory of the project must be continuously revised during construction when obstacles arise that require alteration. Similarly, financial investment in the railroads is predicated on expected outcomes that are often not met.[19] I want to point out that this process characterizes progress as recursive rather than linear.

Current practices of economic historians replicate the procedure of measuring how things could have been against how they actually were. For instance, in *The World's First Railway System: Enterprise, Competition, and Regulation on the Railway Network in Victorian Britain* (2009), Mark Casson creates a counterfactual model of how the British railways might have been constructed.[20] He writes: "The counterfactual represents the best available alternative to the actual system—or at least an approximation to it. It also represents a viable alternative—that is, an alternative that might have been implemented had circumstances been a little different" (58).[21] The failure to have constructed a better system, Casson argues, lies in part in "path-dependency, in which the network gets 'locked in' to a particular trajectory of development" resulting in inefficient network design (24). The irrational commitment to an original plan, without willingness to anticipate potential regrets as Booth had prescribed, derives from a basic misunderstanding about how technological innovations work. They do not simply intervene in

[18] For an elaboration on this process, see Jack Simmons.
[19] Recall the extraordinary efforts it took for George Stephenson to master the land at Chat Moss, a project that exceeded proposed time frames and cost.
[20] In economic analysis, counterfactuals are retrospective models constructed according to how the railroads *should* have been built to achieve optimum efficiency and are used to compare to actual models in order to learn more about why they were built the way they were. Casson explains, "Counterfactuals are widely used in economic history. If it is asked, 'Why was the railway system the way it was?' the answer is 'Because it was not the way that it might have been.' There are many possible 'might have beens', but economic theory suggests a natural scenario—namely that the system was the most efficient possible" (4).
[21] Casson follows with a particular example: "More specifically, it is a counterfactual that could well have been implemented at the time of the Railway Mania in 1845, and that might have been championed by the Board of Trade, had Parliament given it the appropriate mandate (which it failed to do)" (58). I will take up the failure to empower the Board of Trade in chapter two and the economic effects of under-regulation in chapter three.

the status quo and reestablish a new status quo, as Lytton had hoped. Rather, the railways and other innovations progress through a series of readjustments and corrections.

By constructing counterfactual models, economic historians provide useful insights into the regrets of early railway growth, but as I have mentioned above, they were not the first to do so. In the decades that followed early railway development, nineteenth-century writers engaged in counterfactual thinking in short stories and novels, illustrating the errors of path-dependency and also gesturing towards the possibilities of how things might be managed otherwise. Literary scholarship would benefit from an interdisciplinary approach that includes sociological concepts, such as counterfactual regret, to better identify the way railway fiction helped imagine a new trajectory for the future of the railway network.[22]

Critic Andrew Miller deftly argues that the optative mode, or the engagement in counterfactual thinking, has "a privileged relation to realistic fiction" (781). He argues, "things that do happen and those that do not are complementary parts of the narrative machinery, paired cogs with interlocking teeth" (779). However, Miller purposely eschews interdisciplinary engagement. Despite his acknowledgement of a growing and vibrant conversation about modal logic in the fields of historiography, sociology, and psychology, Miller purposefully limits his study to "literature and moral philosophy and centers on what the philosopher Stuart Hampshire calls the 'optative' mode of self-understanding" (774). Miller's study provides fascinating insight into the personal experience of the counterfactual thinking, which he reads through character: "The optative conception of the self, underpinned by this process of atomization, allows for a distinctive set of contrastive emotions, regret and relief most importantly: to regret a past action,

[22] Though there is a good amount of literary criticism that addresses the concept of nostalgia (which I will discuss in the section below), I have yet to find literary scholarship that theorizes counterfactual regret to the degree that psychology, social psychology, and economic theory does in behavior analysis. My hope is to continue developing such an interdisciplinary approach that will provide new insights for literary interpretation.

or to be relieved, one must have an alternative in mind" (780). I find Miller's analysis compelling and helpful, but ultimately limited. Without interdisciplinary engagement, it is difficult to draw conclusions about how this kind of thinking affected culture at large. It sifts the political from the personal.

Drawing on sociological, historiographical, and economic concepts, I employ an interdisciplinary approach, reading the selection of fiction in this study as thought experiments that test out the effects of path-dependent thinking in railway management in the decades that followed early development. I read in the personal narratives, as Miller does, the "singular and typical, self-present and contingent" characteristics of individual lives which "generate not only the prospective choice among possibilities […] but also that retrospective reflection on them (784). However, I continue by mapping that onto the larger cultural narratives to examine those same features writ large and how they affect public regret. This enables me to identify that final part of the process of regret—adjusting the trajectory to make improvements for the future.

Mobility Studies: The Literary Reconstruction and the Scholarly Landscape

My study contributes to a rich field of scholarship about mobility technologies, which itself has a storied past. The touchstone of the last several decades is Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1986). While he concedes an "apparent smoothness of transition to industrialized travel" from horse to railway, he also characterizes the intervention of the railways as revolutionary, describing its impact by adopting Marx's well-worn phrase—an "annihilation of space and time." Schivelbusch delineates the radical impact the railways had on the human experience, changing the relationship between people and the land, especially as passengers travelling at a dizzying

pace. He emphasized how people had to adjust to inconvenience, discomfort, and conformity and to acclimate to the new reality of jarring sensations, the risk of accident. While he acknowledges that some viewed the locomotive as the engine of progress, his characterization of the new experience borders on the traumatic. At any rate, the changes wrought by the railways happen *to* the individual, who must learn to adapt.

For decades, scholarship accepted this perspective as a given. In *Railways and Culture in Britain: the epitome of modernity* (2001), Ian Carter urges, "it is not easy for us to appreciate how radically railway travel disturbed contemporaries' cultural understandings" (25). Carter proceeds to describe cultural attitudes of resistance in art and literature. The chapters largely focus on destruction, death, accidents, and crime. Like Schivelbusch, Carter frames progress as a force, driven by the "new railway's relentless modernity," that overpowers the individual (66).

It is true that the introduction of the railway was disruptive and that those living at the time felt like it sharply divided time into life before the railways and life after the railways. This sentiment is most famously illustrated by William Makepeace Thackeray, who wrote:

> We who have lived before railways were made to belong to another world…It was only yesterday, but what a gulf between now and then! Then was the old world. Stage-coaches, more or less swift, riding-horses, pack-horses, highwaymen, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue, and so forth—all these belong to the old period…But your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one…We who lived before railways, and survive out of the ancient world, are like Father Noah and his family out of the Ark. (64-65)

Thackeray emphasizes the starkness of historical rupture by tracing a long line back to the beginning of British history. The break is so disruptive that those living through the change must "survive" it. However, that long line of history that precedes the railways is not as smooth and linear as it appears. In fact, if you review it in chronological order, what Thackeray has catalogued is a list of aggressive takeovers by clans, warriors, and rogue villains joined to a progression of mobile technologies. He illustrated a long history of drastic intervention, even as he stresses the point that the introduction of the railway profoundly divided time, which signals the extreme degree of the change may be less a fact than a feeling.[23]

Jonathan Grossman made a critical contribution to the field with *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (2012). Slowing down the argument of "relentless modernity" and smoothing out the claim of railway as rupture, Grossman offers, instead, a vision of mobility development as staged progress. While Thackeray's representation of the *feeling* of rupture are not in doubt, Grossman uses the works of Dickens to show how people had already been grappling with a fast-paced modernity in actuality. His work "recover[s] 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" (4). The railways did not actually annihilate space and time, Grossman asserts; uniformity of time and conforming lives to the order of the transportation network was already in progress. In fact, Grossman contends, "the railways copied and intensified this system as a system" (4).

Grossman's work adds nuance to the larger history of transportation network development. However, in resisting an argument of radical intervention, his theory of staged

[23] In other words, the Norman invasion probably felt pretty drastic to those living through the change rather than a smooth transition between armored knights and roman legions.

progress adopts a linear one that does not account for the discontinuities, setbacks, and failures at the center of this study. As Wendy Parkins notes, "Scholars from a range of perspectives have argued that the movement of modernity was characterised by discontinuities, reversals and unevenness both in processes of technological and social change and in people's *experience* of these processes" (7). Additionally, while Grossman's argument substitutes incremental for radical, it adheres to the idea that people adapt to change by aligning their behavior and attitudes to new realities. I will show that the Victorians were much more participatory in the process of modernization, rather than being subject to it.

Ruth Livesey's *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2016) offers a subtle corrective to the streamlined formula of technological change followed by direct behavioral alignment, focusing on discontinuity as an experience and a method of adaptation. Livesey selects a sample of literature that chooses the stage coach era as the setting despite being written during the era of railways. She contends that writers do this in response to a sense of loss for the "affect of strongly felt local belonging" (2). Rather than "a simple retreat backwards from the face of dislocations" or "an escape hatch to forgetfulness," Livesey argues, writing about the recent past is "a means to assert the power of the novel to stand outside the linear flow of progress." She recuperates the concept of nostalgia from its misidentification as a desire to return to the past and resituates it within a more historically accurate understanding of homesickness. As Livesey explains that "the persistent spatialization of the past in these novels written in Victorian modernity unsettles an idea of time as a linear flow," she also offers an illustration of progress and adaptation that resists linearity

(4).[24] The desire to return to the past to locate a sense of belonging and bring it forward into the present illustrates a method of adjusting to the discontinuities of progress that is recursive.

Like Livesey, I examine fiction set in the recent past, what she calls the "just past" (2). Helen Kingstone argues in *Victorian Narratives of the Recent Past: Memory, History, Fiction* (2017) that periods of disruptive change created a desire for histories of the just past,[25] but that this demand was not easily met. As historiography professionalized, she explains, "Aspiring scholars, looking for credibility for their nascent discipline, felt little incentive to engage in debates over the uncertain and controversial period within living memory" (3). Kingstone explains that literature filled the gap that the aversion of professional historiographers created: "Victorian engagement with the recent past was thus diffused and displaced into genres including autobiography, biography, and the novel." I am particularly drawn to the way Kingston recasts the "imperfect" narratives of the recent past as assertive "alternative contemporary histories."[26] In my study, I will make use of this association, but I will separate them into two sets: versions and revisions.

My study dovetails with Grossman and Livesey's contributions to mobility studies and provides a body of alternative contemporary histories that expands Kingston's study of Victorian historiography. I focus first on the biographical histories and the "imperfect" narratives about the railways they constructed to smooth over the discontinuities of railway development before turning my attention to the contemporary fictional revisions of those historical myths. I show

[24] I discuss Ruth Livesey's argument of place, as well as Jonathan Grossman's argument of staged progress, in chapter four.
[25] Kingstone explains the difficulty of defining the parameters of the "recent past." She first offers a simple method of identification: "Its key characteristic is its existence within living memory: it is a remembered past" before problematizing that definition (9).
[26] Kingstone draws from Ann Rigney's argument that historical narratives of a past that is still being processed will always be "imperfect" because writers of these narratives have to make choices about what is consequential without the advantage of temporal distance to put it in context. See: Rigney.

how, in addition to recuperating nostalgia, a nuanced understanding of regret as both a feeling and a process helps us to understand that the impulse to consider the past does not indicate a fruitless desire to return to it but rather the productive desire to alter the future. Unlike nostalgia, though, regret is not an affective method used to adapt *to* the present but rather a process for adapting the present itself to achieve that better future. Thus, expressions of regret, as I have explained above, participate in the recursive movement of progress. This understanding alters, also, the idea that change is a unidirectional force that happens to people and to which they must adjust. My work shows how literary revisions of biographical myths facilitated cultural adaptation to the changes wrought by the railways. More importantly, these works vocalized socio-political opinions about the policies and practices that directed the continued development of the railway network.

Railway Prospectus: The Plan of the Project

I begin my project with the cornerstone of railway mythology: Samuel Smiles's *The Life of George Stephenson* (1857). In his biography, Smiles shapes Stephenson into the "Father of the Railways," the quintessential self-made man. The fictionalized history of the inventor-engineer hero, who embodies the liberal ideals of individualism and laissez-faire enterprise, illustrates how self-interest ensures national interest. According to the Smilesean myth, applying the principles of self-help to his own life enabled George Stephenson to construct a new transport system that forever altered the course of British life. In chapter one of this study, "Broken Branch Lines: The Self-Made Man and the Shunted National Network," I examine challenges to those claims, as the country grappled with the regrets of unfettered railway enterprise at mid-century.

The aftermath of unregulated early development of the national transport network included a proliferation of main lines in major cities and neglected or abandoned branch lines in rural areas of England. In *Cousin Phillis* (1863), which features a selfish professional railway engineer who abandons a branch line to make a name for himself on a railway line out of the country, Elizabeth Gaskell challenges the overvaluation of self-interest found in the Smilesean myth of the self-help hero. After exposing the fallacies of individualism in her reworking of *The Life of George Stephenson*, Gaskell reconstructs a healthier narrative for inventors, one that prioritizes the intrinsic value of technological innovation and the inventor's contributions to the public good. By plotting a new trajectory for national progress that promotes public interest first and more modest individual success second, *Cousin Phillis* contributes plans for a more evenly developed 'imagined community' of the nation.

Chapter Two, "Accident Reports: Public Interest in Railway Safety Management," continues to examine revisions of the Stephenson myth.[27] This chapter traces the decline of the inventor figure against the backdrop of the railway safety regulation debates of the 1840s in which George Stephenson played a large part. By 1840, the railways had transitioned from a technological innovation into a commodity, and this shift affected inventor-engineers' ability to contribute to the management of railway improvements. Though the devastating degree of accidents in the decades that followed the inception of the railway invited innovative safety features, decisions about how to improve railways were no longer the purview of the inventor but in that of the Board of Directors, who were often accused of prioritizing profit over the public. A

[27] Since Gaskell's novella revises *The Life of George Stephenson*, an analysis of *Cousin Phillis* warranted a thorough recounting and analysis of the Stephenson history. While it is less central to *City and Suburb*, Riddell's novel relies on familiarity of this myth. Therefore, though Gaskell's 1863 novella was published after Riddell's 1861 novel, I chose to place Gaskell before Riddell in this study.

Parliamentary Select Committee was formed to determine whether the Board of Trade should intervene and legally compel companies to institute uniform safety measures. To maintain an amiable relationship, the committee decided to cede power to the companies, limiting the power of the Board of Trade to suggest, rather than require, safety improvements.

Charlotte Riddell's *City and Suburb* (1861) illustrates the cultural regret of an impotent Board of Trade and its detrimental effect on inventors. Riddell's novel further revises the self-made man myth, showing how lax regulation does not facilitate but rather disempowers inventors from implementing necessary improvements to the railway. Through the formal inquest of the anti-hero inventor-engineer role in a fatal railway accident, *City and Suburb* performs its own interrogation of liability, launching a direct attack against the greed of Boards of Directors and the incompetency of the Board of Trade. As it challenged the status quo, the novel also offered a credible resolution to the safety problem by imagining a specific technological invention that could plausibly reduce the degree of risk for railway travelers. Like Gaskell's novella did for railway development, Riddell's revision offered an alternate path for managing safety reform that served public rather than private interests.

Chapter Three, "New Railway Scrip: Discounting Financial Mania Myths in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," focuses on the investment myths that surfaced after the devastating financial manias of the 1840s. An investment upswing in the late 1850s heightened anxieties about another mania and sounded the alarm for financial reform. Fearing a negative impact on future railway finance, railway advocates wanted to promote railway investments as safe while resisting calls for financial regulation. The most common myth that developed out of these twin desires was the myth of the manic naïve investor, who had no

business in the capitalist market. Samuel Smiles, in particular, was not shy about specifically identifying women as the main constituents of this category.

Since sensation fiction conventionally raises fears in order to alleviate them, this subgenre proved an ideal vehicle for processing these cultural anxieties about unstable railway investment cycles. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861) seems at first to subscribe to such financial myths in its deployment of the trope of female insanity and masculine constraint. In my reading, I show how Braddon's novel ultimately subverts the myth, though, by questioning not only the naiveté and gendered assumptions of investors but also the idea that investments can be made safe. Fluctuations are natural to financial cycles and not necessarily an indicator of mania. While the attempt to legally contain the presumably insane Lady Audley spans much of Braddon's novel, the narrative neither definitively concludes that she was actually insane nor that the extreme legal measures were necessary. Thus, *Lady Audley's Secret* explores cultural regrets about investment practices, regulation, and reform from a variety of perspectives. This chapter concludes that the novel subtly projects a path for managing future railway finance that protects both investors and companies by encouraging a more active and informed public. As it explores possible explanations for mania and evaluates degrees of redress, Braddon's novel gestures towards sensibly moderate reform that avoids repeating the past mistake of under-regulation but also resists the constraints of over-regulation.

As the railways became more integrated into life and culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Victorians grew accustomed to the idea that they had access to economic as well as geographic mobility. The belief that they could "move up" often led people to feel both dissatisfied with their current socio-economic "place" and also to expect access to the higher social circles if they did manage economic mobility. Chapter Four, "The Permanent Way:

Socio-economic Mobility and Diverging Perceptions of 'Place'," looks at literature that considers how the sense of entitlement to a better "place" and the related sense of disconnection to one's "place" of origin each were tied uniquely to the affordances of railway mobility.

Charles Dickens's contributions to *Mugby Junction*, a collection of short stories published in *All the Year Round* in 1866, and Margaret Oliphant's novel *The Railway Man and His Children* (1891) both illustrate the disillusionment that occurred when denied access to a better place. The works of fiction diverge, though, in how they manage the regrets of social immobility. Whereas Dickens's stories urge people to revise their desire for unfettered access and settle into a more realistic "place," Oliphant's novel suggests charting a new route to a redefined destination of social status. As Gaskell, Riddell, and Braddon did, Oliphant reroutes ideas about railway mobility that allows for a truly progressive future for more people rather than reestablishing the status quo to preserve power. Because this type of social reform did not have the same legal avenues as technological and financial reform arguments, Oliphant targeted the conventions of the marriage plot to make her case. *The Railway Man and His Children* argues that reforming the cultural imagination begins by revising the premier cultural artifact—the novel. Oliphant makes pointed claims against reproducing outmoded social expectations in outmoded novelistic forms. The open-endedness of her novel clears the map for others to chart new cultural "places."

Finally, the Conclusion, "Imperial Engines: Women and the Global Trajectory of Railway Regret" examines more closely why women writers wrote about the developmental problems of the national transport network differently from their male contemporaries. I offer the novels in this study as specific examples of Victorian women's abiding interest in technological innovation and its management beyond the pleasures or discomforts of traveling on the railways.

The work of Gaskell, Riddell, Braddon, and Oliphant evinces an awareness that the discourse of railway management, itself, often was framed in gendered terms already in order to emphasize power imbalances. I show how these authors capitalized on established gendered distinctions to show how women could gain power through acts of intersectional solidarity and enact change. I trace the parallel between women and disenfranchised inventors, investors, and laborers from Gaskell's regional argument to Oliphant's global critique on engineering empire in *The Railway Man and His Children*. Together, these authors articulate a vision for national progress driven by the railways that includes ethical considerations for global development.

CHAPTER ONE

BROKEN BRANCH LINES: THE MYTH OF THE SELF-MADE MAN AND THE SHUNTED NATIONAL NETWORK

The spirit of innovation that followed the successful (though traumatic) opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway transformed into a spirit of opportunism as railways grew into a booming industry. Because the railways continued to develop through private enterprise, the need for a national network of passenger and commercial transport presented a clear opportunity for financial gain. Intense competition meant prioritizing private profit over public interest, which resulted in redundant urban schemes, abandoned lines, and neglected areas unconnected to the national network.[28] Such drastically uneven development invited government regulation. However, railway promoters considered government interference a threat to future growth. Arguing that unfettered enterprise enabled the railways to be built in the first place, railway advocates began to shape the story of the 'just' past (to borrow Ruth Livesey's term) in order to support railway interests.

[28]The rise of abandoned railway lines led Parliament to pass the Abandonment of Railways Act, 1850, which set the protocol for abandonment in the case that "such railways, or certain parts thereof, cannot be made or carried on with advantage to either the promoters thereof or to the public, and it is expedient, therefore, that facilities should be given for the abandonment of such railways or parts of railways, and for the dissolution of such companies, or some of them, and winding up the concerns thereof." "Abandonment" 14 August 1850. p.240
A short notice in *The Wrexham Advertiser* in 1877 illustrates how abandonment had become a matter of course: "The Birkenhead, Chester, and North Wales Railway Project is, we regret to say, not to be carried out, the promoters having given notice of a bill to be brought before Parliament next session authorising the abandonment of the railways and works authorized by 'The Birkenhead, Chester, and North Wales Railway Act, 1873'."
The Wrexham Advertiser, (Wrexham, Wales), Saturday, November 17, 1877; pg. 4. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900.*
In Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), he describes the geographic evidence of a railway scheme impossibly not yet built and already abandoned: "Railroads shall soon traverse all this country…but, as yet, such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams, like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up, and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over them; tripods of tall poles appear on hilltops, where there are rumours of tunnels; everything looks chaotic, and abandoned in full hopelessness" (801).

One way to protect laissez faire policies of non-interference was to promote the value of individualism. This period gave rise to engineering biographies, which told the stories of hard-working, borderline geniuses, whose dedicated efforts enabled them to make extraordinary technological contributions that radically altered daily life, both professionally and personally.[29] Arguably, few capitalized on this trend more than Samuel Smiles, who spun out several volumes on engineers and inventors, characterizing them as titans of technological industry.[30] In *The Life of George Stephenson* (1857), Smiles masterfully wove the story of the invention with that of the inventor until they were inextricable—there would be no railways without the "Father of the Railways." Smiles shaped the story of Stephenson and the railways into a monumental myth that celebrated the power of self-interest, but that celebration did not come without regrets.

Smiles's emphasis on George Stephenson's self-taught skills and attitude of perseverance was meant to showcase individualism as a positive attribute. While it did accomplish this goal,[31] Smiles's rags-to-riches story of Stephenson's life also invited opportunistic inventors to find in it a model of how to acquire fame and fortune. Likewise, an over-valuation of self-interest created

[29] I am drawing a correlation here, rather than making an argument of causation. People's interest in the lives of engineers and inventors increased as they lived out the benefits of those feats of engineering and invention. This increased public interest served private interest, though, by providing evidence of the successes of liberal ideology.
[30] Christine MacLeod identifies the 1850s and 1860s as the inventor's "interlude of glory" (4). She argues that the designations of high praise occurred largely a generation or so later in order to challenge outmoded social, cultural, and political power structures, including the aristocracy. Most inventors became celebrated posthumously, revived as success stories to promote liberal ideals. As those ideals gained a foothold, inventors became less necessary to champion and were later relegated back to their workshops to toil in obscurity once again. For more on the long historical arc of inventor in anonymity and approbation, see Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention*.
[31] Evidence of Stephenson's posthumous popularity is found in the letters of George Eliot. In the postscript of her February 1862 letter to Cara Bray, Eliot wrote, "Geo. Stevenson is one of my great heroes—has he not a dear old face?" (GEL 4:11). Eliot's comment is notably present-oriented, though Stephenson had been dead for fourteen years. In a footnote, Gordon Haight elaborates on Stephenson's second life as a character of interest. He notes that George Eliot read *The Life of George Stephenson* aloud to George Henry Lewes on 26 June 1857 after its reissue as Vol. III of *Lives of Engineers*. He adds that Eliot recorded in her journal on 10 November 1859: "'I went to the Congreves' where George joined me and we had much chat—about George Stephenson, religion, etc.'" (GEL 4:11). Nancy Henry cites George Eliot's expression of affection for Stephenson as evidence that an "emphasis on application and self-reliance was emerging along with a wealthy middle class in the mid-nineteenth century and presenting an implicit ideological critique of the English class system—based on inheritance of property within families—that was more threatening to that system than other, more radical or revolutionary visions (Henry 155).

a slippery slope to selfishness as engineering became increasingly professionalized. What got lost in this extreme focus on the individual was the intrinsic value of the railways themselves and the priority of developing a coherent national network meant to serve the public good. Inventing necessary improvements for the railways and ensuring even and thoughtful development of the network to connect communities became secondary to self-interested competition. This desire for fame, fortune, and promotion only exacerbated problems of redundancy, abandonment, and neglect for the developing railway network.[32]

While engineering biographies were not directly responsible for the regrets of railway development, some felt that their contributions to a larger cultural preoccupation in self-interest warranted criticism. These critiques targeted the works of Smiles, whose biography of Stephenson served as the urtext that inspired the popular *Self-Help* conduct manual, which presented self-interest as a virtue. Nineteenth-century fiction writers such as Margaret Oliphant, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charlotte Riddell all took the principles of *Self-Help* to task in their novels and short stories. By replicating the generic conventions of what Aeron Hunt terms "business biographies" (70), these writers could expose the elements of fiction and exaggeration in these so-called histories.

[32] In 1854, *The Economist* reported, "The engineers have a common interest with the lawyers; they work together, and there has grown up between them a well-organised system of co-operation, rendered more efficient by the wealth and influence which both have each year accumulated. To promote their ends, influential solicitors place their nominees on the board of directors, and engineers of lines as shareholders propose extensions which they will have to execute. With these two contractors, now men of vast wealth, co-operate, and by their united influence lines are fostered into being which it is known from the beginning will not pay." "Our Railways." *The Economist*, 21 October 1854: 1148. Later, in 1865, *The Economist* wrote, "We have now made ninety-nine hundredths of the railways we ought to make but still the 'engineers' and lawyers' railway projects' go on." "The Political Cost of Railways." *The Economist* 14 January 1865: 36. The "ought" in this later article illustrates counterfactual thinking that measures the ideal against the actuality. The quotation marks around the "engineers' and lawyers' railway projects" conveys a deep skepticism about these projects' service to the public. For these excerpts from *The Economist*, I am indebted to John Kellet, *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (78).

Conducting thought experiments in their fiction, these writers tested the logic that prioritizing self-interest would inevitably serve public interest by imagining the long-term consequences of a preoccupation with self-interest. While other critics focus on the presence of *Self-Help* in fiction, I begin by analyzing Samuel Smiles' *The Life of George Stephenson*. My analysis contributes to the work of Adrian Jarvis and Simon Dentith, each of whom identify elements of fiction in Smiles's first engineering biography. I argue that those elements of fiction crystalized into myth, which was replicated in literature and the cultural imagination. In chapters two and four, I will show distorted echoes of that myth. In this chapter, I examine Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*, which uses the frame of the engineering hero myth to uncover its dysfunctions and inconsistencies.

I argue that in *Cousin Phillis*, Gaskell challenges the overvaluation of self-interest found in the Smilesean myth of the self-help hero. Gaskell redeploys the framework of Smiles's first biography to take the logic of self-interest to its worst conclusions. The story features a selfish professional railway engineer who simultaneously abandons a branch line in order to make a name for himself on a Canadian railway and the budding love of the eponymous Phillis, whose tender affection he slyly courted. By foregrounding the aborted love affair against the backdrop of the abandoned branch line, Gaskell dramatizes the national regret through the personal one. She shows that over-prioritizing self-interest also harms inventor-engineers, as the public learns to be skeptical about their motives. After exposing the fallacies of individualism in her reworking of *The Life of George Stephenson*, Gaskell reconstructs a healthier narrative for inventors, one that prioritizes the intrinsic value of technological innovation and the inventor's contributions to the public good. By plotting a new trajectory for national progress that promotes public interest first and more modest individual success second, *Cousin Phillis* offers plans for a

more evenly developed "imagined community" of the nation. In this chapter, I will first examine *The Life of George Stephenson: Railway Engineer*, analyzing the way in which Smiles shaped Stephenson into the "Father of the Railways," the quintessential self-made man. I then turn to Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*, to show the way in which it dismantles that myth of self-interest and individualism.

Inventing the Self-Help Hero: Samuel Smiles and *The Life of George Stephenson*

Samuel Smiles's biography *The Life of George Stephenson* and the popular non-fiction book it inspired, *Self-Help* (1859), reflect the spirit of innovation that gained strength in the 1830s when rapid technological advancement corresponded with radical self-reinvention. In this context, the individual became empowered to make something of him*self* by making some*thing*. *The Life* won Smiles literary recognition, but it was *Self-Help*, the oft-quoted "bible" of mid-Victorian industrial values, that catapulted the author into fame: "almost overnight, he became a leading pundit and much-consulted guru" (Sinnema, "Introduction," vii). Part of the tremendous appeal of *Self-Help* was Smiles's prescription for good conduct, which placed success in the hands of the individual:

> citing examples of what other men had done, as illustrations of what each might, in a greater or less degree, do for himself; […] upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control—and, above all, on that honest and upright performance of individual duty, which is the glory of manly character. (*Self-Help* 7)

The strong emphasis on the 'self' ('*self*-culture, *self*-discipline, and *self*-control') in the success stories of engineers, inventors, artisans and other self-made-men-turned-heroes contributed to the

book's enormous popularity. They illustrated a new world of possibilities seemingly available to every man. Fiction of the 1850s capitalised on these models, especially Dinah Mulock's *John Halifax Gentleman* (1856), which is often identified as the quintessential Smilesean novel.[33] The accomplished self-help models, however, were also the targets of its early critics. Just as some fiction writers subscribed whole-heartedly to the self-help philosophy, others, such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Riddell, challenged problematic aspects of the philosophy in ways that anticipated some of Smiles's self-revisions.

In the preface to the second edition of *Self-Help* reissued in 1866, Smiles felt the need to address the book's criticisms, primarily to explain why the book excluded narratives ending in failure and to clarify that self-help was not a philosophy of self-glorification. "It has been objected to the book," Smiles discloses, "that too much notice is taken in it of men who have succeeded in life by helping themselves, and too little of the multitude who have failed" (*Self-Help* 3). Smiles grants that it was a matter of authorial choice: "There is, indeed, no reason why Failure should not have its Plutarch, except that a record of mere failure would probably be found excessively depressing" (3-4). He acknowledges that "the best of men may fail, in the best of causes," but he does not venture any possible explanations for such outcomes. Setbacks should be read rather as a test or opportunity for the individual to prove his determination: "Failure is the best discipline of the true worker, by stimulating him to renewed efforts, evoking his best powers, carrying him onward in self-culture, self-control, and growth in knowledge and wisdom" (4). Smiles displays an unwillingness to consider a man in context or even admit the existence of the complex social and economic networks within which the individual acts and

[33] For more on Mulock on pro-self-help 'industrial success literature', see Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867*: p. 120, 123, and esp. 119. See also John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1988) p. 336.

which undoubtedly contribute to his success or failure. Smiles's admitted practice of selection highlights the design behind the self-help narrative and locates it in the generic realm of creative illustration rather than historical realism.

Though Smiles conceded to the first complaint of exclusion, he took umbrage at the suggestion that his book promoted selfishness, an error he felt to be unjust: "the title of the book, which it is now too late to alter, has proved unfortunate, as it has led some, who have judged it merely by the title, to suppose that it consists of a eulogy of selfishness: the very opposite of what it really is,—or at least of what the author intended it to be" (*Self-Help* 3). Though he attributes the error to a surface reading that neglects content, careful readers may detect hints of authorial regret in that last hyphenated clause. Noting the disparity between his intentions and the reception in the work, he made efforts to re-frame the content in the second edition. He amended, for example, the attribution of "glory" to "individual duty" in the original by emphasizing in the 1866 preface that "it will also be found, from the examples given of literary and scientific men, artists, inventors, educators, philanthropists, missionaries, and martyrs, that the duty of helping one's self in the highest sense involves the helping of one's neighbors" (*Self-Help* 7). Smiles's response evinces two critical points: first, his reluctance to consider circumstances beyond the power of the individual and, second, his awareness that some of the self-help precepts (e.g. self-interestedness) might be taken to conclusions he had not anticipated or desired (e.g. selfishness) and, hence, warranted correction.

In the preface to the *Autobiography of Samuel Smiles*, Thomas MacKay locates Smiles's engineer biographies somewhere between fiction and nonfiction, drawing attention to their narrative design:

> His was a new departure in biography. He saw that the everyday work of applied science had its romance. He grasped the fact that the millions had become readers, and required to be amused as well as instructed. This, from the literary point of view, is his great merit, and entitles him to be enrolled in the honourable company of story-tellers. Apart from the historical value of his biographies, they are told in a manner so vivacious and dramatic that they have proved themselves irresistibly attractive to young and old in all countries of the world. Both in regard to the interest of the theme commemorated and the literary skill with which it is presented, the *Life of George Stephenson* has made good its right to rank as an English classic. (viii)

As Mackay's laudatory description makes clear, Smiles wrote with two Horatian objectives in mind: to satisfy an audience who wanted 'to be amused as well as instructed'.[34] To achieve these ends, in the biographical sketches Smiles created characters out of his subjects who performed nearly impossible dual identities. For entertainment, he crafted a 'romance' with an exceptional hero who achieved monumental feats with his natural genius. However, Smiles also sought to ward off the threat of institutional intervention in enterprise. Therefore, he needed his protagonist to embody a typical labourer, who advanced in career and status steadily by hard work and dedicated study. This humble hero must be oblivious to wealth or fame while also able to navigate complex economic and legal transactions shrewdly. Likewise, the narrative of innovation that characterizes his life must be both radical and incremental, and progress must occur as a result of steadfast perseverance while also in accordance with a philosophy of

[34] From Horace's *Ars Poetica* we get the well-known literary edict that literature should 'instruct and delight'.

inevitability.[35] Simon Dentith attributes this combination "of magic and ideology" to nineteenth-century popular culture generally while affirming that Smiles particularized the ideology with the notion of self-help (47-48).[36] Smiles found his first perfect candidate in George Stephenson who embodied all of the contradictions that Smiles needed to be able to present the ideal liberal figure: the inventor-engineer hero, an ordinary man, with innate mechanical genius, who would reconfigure the world if left to persevere according to his natural inclinations.

In the 'English classic' *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer*, the 'story-teller' Smiles attempts to balance his portrait of Stephenson as an entertaining romantic genius with his instructive depiction of a dedicated worker. However, the resulting narrative comes across as inconsistent and Smiles as unreliable.[37] Though Stephenson's family had few advantages, Smiles assigns a sense of nobility to their commonness. Stephenson's parents, Smiles reports, "belonged to the ancient and honourable family of Workers—that extensive family which constitutes the backbone of our country's greatness—the common working people of England" (*The Life* 2). This noble common family produced a son who demonstrated a proclivity for engineering in his youth. "[H]is favourite amusement at this early age," Smiles remarks, "was erecting clay engines" (7).[38] Smiles eagerly aligns this behavior with other natural-born inventors: "This early indication of a mechanical turn may remind the reader of a

[35] The combination of innate genius and dedicated work ethic that Smiles forwards complicates the arc Christine MacLeod traces from Romantic to Victorian inventor figures in *Heroes of Invention*.
[36] Adrian Jarvis expands on those magical qualities by reading in Smiles's narratives elements of fairy tale narratives as well as historical echoes of saints' lives in *Samuel Smiles and the Construction of Victorian Values*, esp. pp.92-128.
[37] Adrian Jarvis catalogues Smiles's inaccuracies, particularly the false attributed origination of certain technical ideas to George Stephenson, in Adrian Jarvis, 'The Story of the Story of the Life of George Stephenson', esp. pp.35-45. Jarvis notes that many of these technical inconsistencies and misattributions occurred in works prior to Smiles's biography.
[38] Simon Dentith identifies this as a trope originating in Smiles's engineering biographies and traces it through the *Lives of Engineers* series, and locates its reverberations in compatible fiction, such as Dinah Mariah Mulock's *John Halifax Gentleman* and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *'My Novel'*, and comic echoes in works such as Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*. See, esp. pp. 47-8 in Dentith.

similar anecdote of the boy Smeaton, who, when missed one day by his parents, was found mounted on the roof of the cottage fixing a puny windmill" (8). Here, he creates readerly expectations of a romantic fairytale-like narrative, wherein the hero inventor's true identity (as a genius)—already present—will be revealed in due course.

Initially making the case for Stephenson's mechanical genius, Smiles then shifts his argument, claiming that Stephenson's mechanical knowledge grew not intuitively but rather out of dedicated study. Out of necessity, Stephenson began work early, doing odd jobs around town with ambitions to get hired on at the colliery where his father worked as a fireman. By seventeen, George had surpassed his father when he was promoted to engineman, and he put aside money to attend night school. At night he finally learned to read and do basic arithmetic, while by day he studied the engine, often taking it apart in off-hours to become proficient in its inner-workings and in turn perfecting his "practical knowledge" (12). Smiles tracks Stephenson's steady progress from fireman to plugman to brakesman to self-taught engineer and asserts that "George Stephenson was…a sober, steady, and expert workman. Beyond this, and his diligence and perseverance, and the occasional odd turns which his curiosity took, there was nothing remarkable about him. He was no precocious genius" (22).

As the narrative progresses, however, Smiles switches tack again, insisting that Stephenson be recognized as the true genius he is. He notes, in particular, that Stephenson's improvements on the steam engine were "so strikingly characteristic of true mechanical *genius*, that we would particularly call the reader's attention to this *ingenius* device, which was more remarkable, as it was contrived long before the possibility of steam locomotion had become an object of parliamentary inquiry or even of public interest" (137, emphasis added). Stephenson is not only a genius but one whose inventive capacity was way ahead of his time. Smiles also

makes the contradictory case that Stephenson's inevitable and colossal achievements occurred *despite* his roots in labour and not because of them: "He may be said to have learnt his practical sciences first, and acquired his education afterwards; and although he was a late learner, he nevertheless lived long enough to carve his name deep on the world's records, and to leave works in which future ages will trace the hands of a giant" (148). It is clear that Smiles shapes the biographical information to suit his dual purposes, which extend beyond his characterization of Stephenson to that of his invention, the railway system.

Smiles's narrative of technological innovation also follows a nearly impossible trajectory, at once progressive, recursive, and radical. He carefully charts the development of the railway over time as well as asserting Stephenson's stake in the claim of outright invention. Smiles first acknowledges that innovation occurs incrementally: "Progress, in this as in almost all branches of mechanics, was effected through the exertions of many; one generation entering upon the labours of that which preceded it, and carrying onwards their improvements" (56). He qualifies, though, that incremental progress occurs recursively through revision: "Profitting by what his predecessors had done, warned by their failures and encouraged by their partial successes, [Stephenson] commenced his important labours" (82). Yet, even as he traces a long, looping line of innovative progress, Smiles insists in the end on a narrative of radical intervention, which could be accomplished by one inventor alone, George Stephenson:

> There was still wanting the man who should accomplish for the locomotive what James Watt had done for the steam-engine, and combine in a complete form the separate plans of others, embodying with them such original inventions and adaptions of his own as to entitle him to the merit of inventing the working locomotive […] This was the work upon which George Stephenson now entered,

> probably without any adequate idea of the immense consequences of his labours to society and civilisation. (82)

Here, Stephenson seems called to fulfill his destiny as the one true hero who can bring this invention into being. Smiles describes Stephenson's desire to work as compulsive, driven purely by the spirit of innovation without any apparent awareness of the magnitude of his invention.

Determined to credit the railways to Stephenson alone, Smiles further doubles his eponymous protagonist by linking the biographies of man and invention. So, along with his complex role as both romantic hero and persevering labourer, Stephenson also embodied the railways themselves: the inventor "has been so closely identified with [the railroad's] progress, and eventual establishment on a sound, practical basis, that his life may be said to include the history of Railway Locomotion almost to the present time" (vi). Integrating the story of Stephenson with the story of the railways further transforms the man into a monumental myth and allows Smiles to chart their troubled, yet meteoric, rise in a single biography.[39] Because they had each other, Smiles claims, both Stephenson and the railways triumph:

> George Stephenson's idea was indeed at that time regarded as but the dream of a chimerical projector. It stood before the public friendless, and scarcely daring to lift itself into notice for fear of ridicule. The civil engineers generally rejected the notion of a Locomotive Railway; and when no leading man of the day could be found to stand forward in support of the Killingworth mechanic, its chances of success must have been pronounced but small. But like all great truths, the time was surely to come when it was to prevail. (225)

[39] Though this biography would be repacked in the series *Lives of Engineers*.

Smiles applies a philosophy of inevitability to the eventual success of the railways as well as a philosophically compatibilist assertion that Stephenson brought the invention to light through a combination of deterministic fate and his own willful labor.

However, even while Samuel Smiles insists that the development of the railways be attributed solely to the perseverance of an inventive thinker (or even conceding to a chain of thinkers), he gives evidence to the contrary. Though it is not foregrounded, the biography offers undeniable proof of the informal social and economic networks with which an inventor must be partnered in order for his invention to be widely noticed and adopted. An individual may have the highest inventive faculties, but he will not attain success without access to the proper channels of finance and influence. At a speech during the opening of the Newcastle and Darlington Railway in 1844, Stephenson reflects on the circumstances that helped produce his first locomotive, made in 1812, which took place "at Kingworth colliery and with Lord Ravensworth's money. Yes! Lord Ravensworth and partners were the first to entrust me with money to make a locomotive engine" (84). The finance provided by a wealthy member of aristocracy troubles the neat image of the working-class boot-strap hero, particularly as he laughingly adds, "That engine was made thirty-two years ago, and we called it 'My Lord'." Lord Ravensworth was just one of the many financial backers who assured Stephenson's success and the advance of the locomotive.

Smiles's biography reveals that Stephenson's progress was not a solitary project but rather was affected through a series of tactical partnerships. After Stephenson made improvements to his engine, he partnered with Mr. Dodd, who provided the necessary funding to obtain a patent, which they acquired February 28, 1815, "for an engine which combined in a remarkable degree the essential requisites of an economical locomotive" (90). After Dodd

followed Mr. Losh, a Newcastle iron-founder who helped Stephenson acquire a patent for his half-lap joint, which smoothed the transition between rails. Smiles describes Losh as "a wealthy, enterprising iron-manufacturer [who] having confidence in George Stephenson and his improvements, found the money for the purpose of taking out the patent, which, in those days, was a very costly as well as troublesome matter" (137). After constructing and patenting a locomotive engine, Losh and Stephenson joined with William James, who had not only additional wealth but also essential social connections.

Smiles depicts James as "a man of considerable fortune, [who] occupied an influential position in society. Possessed of good address, and mixing freely with men of the highest ranks, he was enabled to gain a hearing for his speculations, where humbler persons had no chance of being listened to" (158). Stephenson and Losh struggled to get their patent locomotive adopted: "This they believed Mr. James, with his large connection and his access to persons of wealth and influence might be able effectively to do for them" (180). In 1821 they added his name to the deed of their patent and assured him ¼ of the profits from the use of the locomotive. Mr. James detailed his assistance in a letter published in the *Railway Magazine* quoted in Smiles's biography:

> Having projected the measure, perfected the surveys, lodged the plans and sections, and completed the preliminary business of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1822, I came to London in January, 1823, to demonstrate the importance of the engine railway system, and to acquire and employ, amongst my friends in the higher circles of life, sufficient influence to meet the avowed opposition of the Earl of Derby, the Bridgewater Trustees, and other powerful

> landed proprietors; for private interest, as well as contempt for the measure, and calumny as to my motives, hostilely met me in all shapes and directions. (182)

James's account first delineates the many steps and stages required to execute an invention, but it also discloses an uncomfortable truth for Smiles—that the adoption of the railways, and particularly the locomotive, were vulnerable to hostile *private* interests rather than institutional intervention, as Smiles contends. The friends and operators of the canal monopolies and the landed wealthy who felt threatened by the necessary path that must be built across their lands went to great lengths to prevent the adoption of the railways. But, as William James's letter also reveals, the railways had their advocates, too. The fate of Stephenson's invention depended on James's and others' access to networks of finance and "sufficient" influence in "higher circles." Smiles includes plentiful evidence in his biography of both the networks of support required for inventions to become realized as well as the barriers erected by opposing private interests. He downplays their importance, though, so that they do not detract from or contradict his larger argument of individualism and liberal ideals, which he continues to advance.

In his summary of the story of the railroads and the conclusion of the most active parts of George Stephenson's life Smiles continues to offer the dual biography as an emblematic illustration of the possibilities that laissez faire policies afford. He describes the continued development of the railroads through joint-stock companies as "characteristic and national" as they "are conformable to our national habits, and fit well into our system of laws. They combine the power of vast resources with individual watchfulness and notions of self-interest; and by their means gigantic enterprises […] were carried out by associations of private individuals" (305). These "associations" clearly indicate those necessary social and financial networks, yet Smiles stubbornly defines them as a collection of "individuals" rather than as strategic partnerships of

combined effort. He punctuates the summary with a firm avowal that the construction of a railway system, which surpassed previous public utilities in scale and scope, was effected "in the face of government obstructions," and primarily through the efforts of Stephenson (306).

Smiles rewrites self-interest as selflessness, placing emphasis on the national benefits purchased without "taking a penny out of the public purse." Similarly, he underscores Stephenson's need to carry the invention through without a thought to personal wealth. Yet, again, he gives evidence to the contrary. In fact, Stephenson partnered with Mr Pease in 1822 to build a locomotive foundry and manufactory in Newcastle (192). He wanted to be able to train mechanics to specialize in engine manufacturing and believed, Smiles shared, the factory "would prove a remunerative investment, and that, on the general adoption of the railway system, which he now confidently anticipated, he would derive solid advantages from the fact of his manufactory being the only establishment of the kind for the special construction of railway locomotives" (205). Stephenson clearly operated in part from a desire for financial gain in addition to the successful manifestation of his vision, and, as this passage indicates, he was not above benefitting from a monopoly in the field.

In no way do I wish to paint Stephenson as a scheming enterpriser who sought to take advantage of the market purely for his own gains. I merely want to suggest that Smiles's picture of a humble worker, beleaguered by forces beyond his ken, who invents for purely altruistic reasons is simply untrue. Stephenson was evidently a savvy businessman who, indeed, worked impressively hard to realize his goals, which included financial prosperity and a firm grasp of what his advances in railway innovation would mean for the nation. Additionally, his success and the success of the railways was enabled by strategic partnerships with men who had access to crucial social and economic networks and who knew how to navigate institutional and

informal channels successfully. These textual inconsistencies and the logic they spelled out for the national narrative of innovation clearly alerted some readers to question the authenticity of the narrative.

It seems fitting, considering Smiles's particular authorial liberties, that some responses took the shape of fiction. As Clare Pettitt has noted, Margaret Oliphant's 1850's works "as often serve to undermine a conventional 'self-help' fantasy of industrial success, as to uphold it" (Pettitt, "Everyman" 164). Pettitt cites Oliphant's novel *John Drayton: Being a History of the Early Life and Development of a Liverpool engineer* (1851) in particular as "a repudiation of the middle-class fantasy of 'self-help'," in which Oliphant constructs a narrative that challenges the popular form of Smilesean philosophy. Elizabeth Gaskell took a typically subtler critical approach in *Cousin Phillis* (1864). Rather than a "repudiation," Gaskell's revised narrative reimagines that middle-class fantasy and puts it in service of the communal good. Constructing a healthier goal for the inventor-engineer, she puts him to work to develop the railway network more steadily and evenly.

Heroic Revisions: Narratives of Selfishness and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*

Part of the body of contemporary criticism directed at Samuel Smile's *Self-Help* before Smiles performed his own revision came from outside the traditional non-fiction channels of literary review in the form of fictional re-tellings. Elizabeth Gaskell, for instance, adopted conventions of the self-help narrative in *Cousin Phillis* (published in the *Cornhill Magazine* serially from November 1863 to February 1864). As Linda Hughes and Michael Lund observe, often "Gaskell spoke by taking up and altering the voices of other prominent figures in her world…. [t]aking on some of the fixed formulas of her culture in her narrative voice and novel

structures" (1-2). In *Cousin Phillis* that fixed formula is the self-help biographical illustration. Clare Pettitt and Julian Wolfreys have noted the presence of the more celebrated conduct manual, *Self-Help,* in the content of Gaskell's novella, pinpointing her engagement with Smiles's concepts in the minor character of Mr Manning, the self-improving mechanical inventor. Pettitt identifies *Cousin Phillis* as a return to "the discourse of self-help" after "her bleak evocation in *Sylvia's Lovers* of a world devoid of will" (473). Wolfreys claims that a mid-plot description of the character Manning "could easily have been extracted from Smiles's own biographical illustrations from his popular *Self-Help*" (93). Wolfreys ties the depiction of Manning to the biographical sketch of James Watt found in *Self-Help* and claims that the language of the description "is carefully considered so as to dovetail into Smilesian ideology, even to the point of the qualifying negatives which insist we see Manning as a truly isolated individual whose 'success' is due only to himself" (94).

Critics, however, have overlooked the specific allusion Gaskell makes in the opening passage of *Cousin Phillis* to Smiles's first illustration, *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer*, and it is this precise connection and its implications I examine in this chapter. I argue that by returning to *The Life,* the original Smilesian text of self-innovation, Gaskell performs a thought experiment meant to test the depth and boundaries of the ideological claims invested in Smiles's nascent figuration of the inventor hero. She effects her critique, though, by not only addressing the content of Smiles's claims but also challenging the formal conventions of the self-help narrative.

Gaskell's fictional re-telling draws attention to the logical fallacies of self-help—particularly the belief that individual success is determined almost entirely by the individual's good character and choices without regard for circumstance—and the potentially dangerous

conclusions of the logic of self-interest. By adopting and converting the form of Smiles's paradigmatic biography, Gaskell reframes the narrative of invention to better match reality and also to reprioritize higher community values within a capitalist economy, values that acknowledge the importance (and proper use) of networks and the dangers of self-interestedness. After comparing the opening frames of Samuel Smiles's biography *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer* and Elizabeth Gaskell's novella *Cousin Phillis*, this chapter will examine the contradictions and dangers Smiles sets up in *The Life* before turning to *Cousin Phillis* to analyze how those contradictions and dangers are confronted and resolved.[40]

Cousin Phillis is the first-person retrospective of Paul Manning, who reflects back on life when he was seventeen and working as a clerk to railway engineer Edward Holdsworth. Just as the reader is getting acquainted with Paul in the first few sentences, the narrative veers over to a description of his father, Mr. Manning, in what seems like an inconsequential digression:

> My father had gotten me this situation, which was in a position rather above his own life; or perhaps I should say, above the station in which he was born and bred; for he was raising himself every year in men's consideration and respect. He was a mechanic by trade, but he had some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance, and had devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery. He did not do this for profit, though, as was reasonable, what came in the natural course of things was acceptable; he worked out his ideas, because, as he said, 'until he could put them into shape, they plagued him by night and by day.' But this is enough about my dear father; it is a good thing for a country where there are many like him. ("Cousin Phillis" 156)

[40] A version of this argument can be found in my article "Engineering Heroes."

This description perfectly summarizes George Stephenson's life and aligns Manning's fictional character with Stephenson's biographical one. Driven by both an innate inquisitiveness and a practical desire to innovate, Manning, like Stephenson, rises steadily due to his willingness to 'persevere' despite difficulties. For Smiles, George Stephenson, the self-taught engineer and "Father of the Railways" epitomized the ideal self-help hero. In the preface to *The Life of George Stephenson*, Smiles states: "the life of George Stephenson will be found to furnish subject of interest as well as instruction. Strongly self-reliant, diligent in self-culture, and of indomitable perseverance, the characters of such men—happily numerous in England—are almost equivalent to institutions" (vi). Echoes of Smiles's industrious man, "happily numerous in England" resonate in Paul's description of his father: "it is a good thing for a country where there are many like him," as does the term "perseverance," a watchword for Smilesian ideology. By drawing on the Stephenson narrative in *Cousin Phillis*, though, Gaskell does more than mimic. She invites readers to notice what she alters, what faults she finds in the self-help principles, what suggestions she offers for revisions.

The opening passage of *Cousin Phillis* reveals some important discrepancies, mainly the difference between the outcomes and the characterization of the story of Stephenson and that of Manning. Smiles crafts a story of monumental achievement through a radical re-writing of the self in his Stephenson narrative. Manning's rise is more gradual, and, though he does achieve a degree of success, it is comparatively modest. Manning's noticeable lack of Stephenson-level success, I suggest, is one of the puzzles that Gaskell's novella asks the reader to solve. It was a measured choice to make Manning, the representative figure of George Stephenson, a minor character and his life a backstory. As readers, we must trouble ourselves to ask why Manning

does not become a Stephenson (and, in turn, why Paul does not become a Robert, Stephenson's equally accomplished son).

Gaskell's fictional revision of *The Life* reveals two fundamental problems with the Smiles narrative of success. First, Gaskell draws attention to the range between the "happily numerous" success stories and the "multitude who have failed" and identifies the primary factor that determines where within that range potential innovators will fall—the access to networks of influence. *Cousin Phillis* advances a strong, if subtle, argument that individuals do not succeed in isolation but rather become empowered by networks of strategic support. Manning does not achieve any level of success until he gains a financial partner who has access to the necessary wider-ranging social and economic networks, as I have shown was true for George Stephenson, too. Second, I see in Gaskell's work an anxiety about the repercussions of valorizing self-interest, which risks encouraging selfishness. In Manning's foil, the civil engineer Holdsworth, Gaskell takes the implicit values in the logic of self-help to their more dangerous conclusions. Gaskell shows through the contrasting examples of Manning and Holdsworth that individuals must utilize networks in good faith in order for their success to contribute to the greater good. An inventor like Manning plugged into the right network can benefit the public as long as the spirit of innovation takes precedence. Seeking prosperity is acceptable, but it has its proper place. An innovator like Holdsworth who prioritizes wealth and fame over all else degrades the nation. Gaskell anticipates precisely the issues that Smiles felt compelled to address in the 1866 preface to *Self-Help*, the issue of a crafted, one-dimensional illustration of success and the slippery slope that leads from self-interest to selfishness.

That critics have not attended to Gaskell's revisionary reading of Smiles thus far indicates Gaskell's skill in subtlety. In fact, much of her critique comes through the narrative

obliquely, often set in the background. While drawing attention to the inventor hero narrative, I want to address other stylistic aspects of *Cousin Phillis*, particularly the parenthetical asides and other off-hand clauses in Paul's narration, which is where I locate much of Gaskell's couched criticism about hero-worship, self-interestedness, and compromised national interests. Offered indirectly, these criticisms appear innocuous, almost as afterthoughts. This implicit style of criticism is not uncommon to Gaskell who seemed to prefer setting up problems and letting readers draw their own conclusions rather than make pointed, impassioned indictments. In *Cousin Phillis*, however, methodically embedding criticism in the background enacts the additional function of urging her audience to read more critically the accepted popular narratives of the day. In this novella she challenges the conventional form of Smiles's biographical illustrations, which became so popular at the time. In challenging the form, Gaskell also critiques the mythos of the inventor such biographies shaped and brings to light the injuries such representations causes—not just to the inventor but to the nation.

The larger scope of *Cousin Phillis* considers the complex set of relationships that modernity ushers in along with advances in industry and innovative technology in particular. The situation that initiates the plot of the novella is the construction of the branch railway line from Eltham to Hornby under Mr Holdsworth, who is the "managing engineer" (157). The project takes Holdsworth and his clerk, Paul Manning to Heathbridge near Hope Farm, where Paul learns that his relatives, the Holmans, live. The foregrounded narrative is the abortive romantic relationship between Holdsworth and Phillis, Paul's slightly younger cousin, but it is evident at the outset that there is also a story behind the story driving the plot. Though Paul declares that Phillis is the true subject of the story: "It is about cousin Phillis that I am going to write', he adds, "and as yet I am far enough from even saying who cousin Phillis was" (157). Paul's delay

occurs, notably, because he spent time setting up the novella's veiled frame with the allusion to George Stephenson.

Samuel Smiles crafted *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer* with enough creative flourish to warrant its classification as a biography with elements of fiction.[41] Smiles depicted his protagonist, George Stephenson as both a mythical hero of epic proportions and as an accessible model of what any aspiring inventor 'might' do with enough good character and hard work. Conversely, in *Cousin Phillis*, Gaskell shaped her novella with elements of Smiles's biography in order to revise his narrative of the English inventor and to redefine heroism using more realistic terms. As Aeron Hunt argues, in the nineteenth century "[n]ovels and other character narratives joined with the representational practices of business to find the genres and forms that would manage these problems and navigate the representation of truth and the discernment of value in the transactions of a competitive and volatile market" (5). Gaskell shares Smiles's desire to promote the value of good conduct, but she challenges his over-reliance on individualism. At the heart of her discursive thought experiment are important questions about Smiles's key concept, self-interest, identified as "the moral counterpart to economic theories of laissez-faire, stressing the virtues of self-reliance, temperance and perseverance, which Smiles sought to sum up in the notion of 'character'" (Dentith 48).[42] Does promoting strong individualism require denying the power of networks of support? Is self-interest a means or an end? Gaskell answers those two questions respectively by charting the divergent careers of two engineers, Mr Manning (the mechanical engineer) and Mr Holdsworth (the civil engineer).

[41] A comparison of the editions reveals liberties Smiles took with reported language, which become in most instances lengthier and more dramatic, clearly altered for effect and not accuracy.

[42] Gaskell's argument in *Cousin Phillis* is not a challenge to capitalism per se, but one that asks to reconsider and revise value systems in conjunction with a capitalist economy.

Rather than presenting one model character, she offers two options so that, through their two storylines, she can guide readers to define the proper terms of heroism.

Through Paul's narration the reader deliberates about which type of inventor-engineer should be valorized and why. Paul first introduces his father, bringing him to the forefront and defining his life in Stephensonian terms. Manning, he describes, "was a mechanic by trade, but he had some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance, and had devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery" (*Cousin Phillis* 156). Here, Paul attributes "some" genius to his father, which balances the inconsistency found in Smiles's narrative that Stephenson was both an exceptional genius and yet unremarkable. Yet, genius is not sufficient to qualify Manning to be perceived as the hero in Paul's eyes. After his brief introduction to his father, Paul pushes him to the background and introduces Mr. Holdsworth, who Paul tells us "held the position of hero in my boyish mind" (158). Holdsworth has the correct combination of ambition and station according to Paul's rubric that earns him this distinction. By attributing his admiration of Holdsworth to his "boyish mind," however, Paul hints that in retrospect he recognizes his early choice in worship as immature. So, too, it signals to the reader that this character will reveal some quality or action that eventually disqualifies him as a hero.

Clare Pettitt identifies Manning as a "hero-victim inventor" and argues that Gaskell seems ambivalent about Manning's eventual success. She argues, "Gaskell is anxious to dispel any suspicion that Manning may be in possession of power. She seems equally anxious to indicate the gradualism of his transformation into a rich man" (Pettitt, "Cousin Holman" 475-76). Pettitt reads the Manning narrative and his lack of power, as evidence of Gaskell's conservatism – her "own troubled response to social change" (489). What Pettitt interprets as

Gaskell's reluctance, I see as an oblique attack on Smiles. Gaskell plots Manning's career to follow Stephenson's narrative as it is foregrounded in Smiles's biography.

Much like Stephenson, the spirit of innovation drives Manning. He works on his inventions in his free time because, "as he said, 'until he could put them into shape, they plagued him by night and by day'" (*Cousin Phillis* 156). Manning's railway inventions, the patent winch (171) and the driving wheel (182), raised him "in men's consideration and respect" (156).[43] Though he has committed to Smiles's prescribed "honest and upright performance of individual duty, which is the glory of manly character," he seems to fall short of achieving the success that others see as within his reach and raises a question about "individual duty" (Smiles, *Self-Help* 7). Paul confesses that his father does not invent "for profit, though, as was reasonable, what came in the natural course of things was acceptable" (*Cousin Phillis* 156). Manning's motives appear altruistic, but Paul interprets his passive acceptance, rather than active pursuit of financial remuneration for his innovative contributions, as unreasonable.

Holdsworth shares this assessment, telling Paul that he admires Manning for "working out his own thoughts into steel and iron, making a scientific name for himself—a fortune, if it pleases him to work for money—and keeping his singleness of heart, his perfect simplicity of manner" (188). While professing his regard for Manning, Holdsworth downplays Manning's achievement. Manning may have a "scientific name," but he isn't realizing his full potential. The hyphenated aside indicates that Manning lacks an important variable in the calculation of inventive achievement. Likewise, Manning's "singleness" and "perfect simplicity" signal a

[43] Paul explains to Holman that he inherited his clear headedness from his father: "Have you not heard of his discovery of a new method of shunting? It was in the *Gazette*. It was patented. I thought everyone had heard of Manning's patent winch" (171-72). The Holman's lack of knowledge of Manning's invention is meant to show that, in "those remote parts" (229), they were far removed from the advances of modernity (Holman uses centuries old farming techniques). But, it is also meant to show Manning's naiveté about his father's renown. His social recognition is limited to the scientific community and not to the culture at large as Stephenson was.

certain amount of naiveté about the complexity of success in the field of invention. Celebrated inventors like Stephenson, Gaskell seems to be arguing, do not act from purely altruistic motives. A certain amount of financial gain is well within the bounds of healthy self-interest, and there is no sense downplaying this fact. George Stephenson, too, made a scientific name for himself by working his thoughts into steel and iron. However, it was not until he formed those strategic partnerships that those inventions fulfilled their potential and he, in turn, profited.

Once Manning adopts those tactics that Smiles downplayed, he is able to raise himself reasonably in class as well as esteem. After consulting with Holdsworth on a few occasions about a partnership, he accepts the offer. He shares his news with Paul: '"Paul,' he began, 'I never thought to be a rich man; but I think it's coming upon me. Some folk are making a deal of my new machine (calling it by its technical name), and Ellison, of the Borough of Green Works, has gone so far as to ask me to be his partner'" (184). Paul replies, "'Mr Ellison the Justice!—who lives in King Street? why, he drives his carriage!' said I, doubting, yet exultant." Paul's doubt most likely derives from his immature vision of his father as a model of failure. Manning proves himself to be more astute than Paul (or Holdsworth) thought. He learns how to access influential channels that will bring his inventions forth. He does so by making self-interest a means to his continued end of manifesting his ideas. He responds to Paul: "Ay, lad, John Ellison. But that's no sign that I shall drive my carriage […] I reckon I should start with a third of profit. It might be seven hundred, or it might be more. I should like to have the power to work out some fancies o'mine. I care for that much more than for th'brass" (184). His goals still model that "perfect simplicity" that Holdsworth subtly disparages. He remains driven by the spirit of innovation, but he now has a more developed understanding of the complexities of professional

invention than he did earlier. If Manning was ever a victim, he was the victim of the inconsistencies of the self-help narrative.

Holdsworth, on the other hand, has always understood that networks—informal and institutional—can benefit the individual, but he exploits rather than cultivates them. His birth and education gained him the gentleman-apprenticeship in the machine-shop, which prepared him to be a civil engineer and brought him in contact with Manning. Though Paul makes a tremendous effort to emphasize the mutual regard between his father and Holdsworth, he also characterizes it as benevolent condescension. Paul clearly perceives Holdsworth's image of success as superior to that of his working-class father. The sincerity of Holdsworth's claim that "it puts [him] out of patience" to think of his own advantages and still he has "done nothing to speak of" registers a false note. Unlike Manning, Holdsworth is not driven by the need to make something in order to make something of himself. He is only interested in making a name for himself. Self-interest is his end and the networks are his means.

Holdsworth subscribes to the monumental version of success that Smiles put forward as a means of entertaining his readers. However, he enacts that success through such extreme self-interest that his rise, rather than the result of healthy self-interest, is attributable to selfishness. Unsatisfied with the smaller role as a "managing engineer" on a smaller scale "branch line," Holdsworth takes advantage of opportunities that enable him to rise in his career, though they require terminating several personal and professional relationships. He informs Paul that he has received a letter with "a very advantageous proposal for me to go out to Canada, and superintend the making of a line there" (206). Rather than celebrate with his professed hero, Paul feels shocked and abandoned. He petulantly declares that he will "hate" Holdsworth's replacement as his master. Rather than recognizing how his actions affect Paul, Holdsworth laughs and chides

him "'But you must not,' he resumed; 'or this is very good thing for me, and, of course, if no one can be found to take my inferior work, I can't be spared to take the superior."' An individual is a replaceable part in Holdsworth's version of networking and upward mobility.

It is clear, too, that Holdsworth perceives work as hierarchical rather than dynamic. This accords with a radical view of progress rather than an incremental one. In accepting this "superior" work he forces a rupture in both work and personal relationships, leaving them behind as inferior relics of the past. He does so unapologetically, too. Offering what he thinks will justify his sudden departure, he explains to Paul, "You see, the salary they offer me is large; and beside that, this experience will give me a name which will entitle me to expect a still larger in any future undertaking" (208). Holdsworth uses his network connections to make a name for himself, which makes self-interest his objective. In Gaskell's oblique style, the reader is cued to his miscalculation parenthetically. Holdsworth's proposal came from an engineer named Greathed, and Paul tells us in an aside: "(Greathed was well known in those days; he is dead now, and his name half-forgotten)." Parenthetical statements by nature suggest a degree of indeterminate significance; however, Gaskell clearly signals through this syntactical glimpse a weighty truth: "making a name" for oneself is a transitory, unworthy aspiration. Because this is information that Paul adds in retrospect, we can pinpoint where he begins to revise his understanding of what motivations contribute to true heroism. There is more substantial national value in the loyal productivity of the hard-working multitude than in the self-seeking few.

Incremental Progress and Community-Interested Narratives

Networks, and in particular partnerships, should function to the benefit of all constituents. On a visit home Paul reports that "Everything was prospering there; my father's new partnership

gave evident satisfaction to both parties" (199). Manning entered the partnership for future-oriented reasons, as well. He told Paul when he accepted the position that '"Ellison has no lads; and by nature of the business would come to thee in course of time […] It will be an opening for thee, lad, if thou art steady"' (185). Manning's sense of steadiness as integral to success not only echoes the quality and practice of perseverance that Smiles so cherished, but it reinforces the idea that long-lasting progress is affected gradually on an incremental rather than a radical or monumental scale. Towards the novel's conclusion, Paul reports that the branch lines, which are just as essential as the main lines, were completed and that he returned home "where there was a niche already provided for me in my father's prosperous business" (221). Gaskell allows her readers to conclude, as Paul does, that the steady business niche, rather than the pedestal of transient fortune, becomes the better site to situate the inventor.

In revising Samuel Smiles's biography *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer* Gaskell subtly invites her readers to be skeptical of the popular narrative of the successful inventor engineer. By shedding light on the reality beneath Smiles's foregrounded narrative of individual success, Gaskell offers a clearer and more practical sense of how an individual might achieve a good life as an inventor that would benefit others (particularly the nation) as well as himself. As tempting as it may be to worship individual triumph as a testament to solitary efforts, such worship is false. First, that image of isolated effort does not offer an authentic picture of how inventors actually achieved success. In reality, men were situated within a complex set of informal and formal networks. An inventor needs to know how to cultivate these networks, but he must learn how to operate within them in a manner that benefits all parties. Additionally, within these networks, an individual can (and should) look for opportunities to improve his situation, but there is a line between opportunism and selfishness. Self-interest is not inherently

dangerous. However, it should be understood to be a means and not an end to individual success, else it runs the risk of transforming into selfishness.

In *Cousin Phillis,* Gaskell works through some of the Smilesian contradictions and dangers in the two primary engineering characters. Rather than clearly presenting her case for Manning, she unfolds evidence of his incremental success and Paul's own revision of his position to allow the reader to re-engineer the value of the inventor. Scholars often identify *Cousin Phillis* as a conservative tale of the encroachment of modernity on pastoralized traditional values; I read Gaskell's novella as a strong assertion for keeping the noble spirit of innovation at the forefront of national growth. Gaskell wanted to reinforce the substance of technological progress rather than fleeting fame or glory.

Gaskell embeds concerns about the convergence of pastoral values and modernity as well as the intrinsic value of technological progress in Paul's explanation of the "shaking, uncertain ground" that initially brought him and Holdsworth near the Holman's in Heathbridge (159). In one of Paul's weekly letters to his father, he confesses, "I fell to describing the country—a fault I was not often guilty of. I told my father of the bogs, all over wild myrtle and soft moss, and shaking ground over which we had to carry our line." Paul's description evokes the terrain of Chatt Moss. This allusion recalls Stephenson's tremendous achievement in constructing the floating line; it recalls the struggle, too. Paul says, "how I hoped we should often have to go there, for the shaking, uncertain ground was puzzling our engineers—one end of the line going up as soon as the other was weighted down." Paul is engaged with the problem for the sake of good engineering and not for its extrinsic value as a way to get promoted. He adds parenthetically, "(I had no thought for shareholders' interests, as may be seen; we had to make a new line on firmer ground before the junction railway was completed.)." Here, Paul models the

proper way to develop the national network. He understands the primary goal is to revise the plan to ensure the branch line was joined to the junction. The "shaking, uncertain ground" also gives Gaskell metaphorical purchase to elaborate on the contraries of progress she identified. Besides the comparison of the two types of engineers, Gaskell interrogates several seemingly irreconcilable differences that "go up as soon as the other side goes down."

Through the concept of "goodness," Gaskell explores the contraries of old-fashioned traditional values with that of the newfound value of professionalism. After Paul visits with his newly acquainted relatives, Holdsworth is eager to meet them but Paul is reluctant to make the introduction. Holdsworth confronts him: "'Manning,' said he, 'I see you don't think I am half good enough for your friends. Out with it, man'." (190). To which, Manning replies, "'No,' I replied, boldly. 'I think you are good; but I don't know if you are quite of their kind of goodness'." Holdworth concludes for Paul, "'And you've found out already that there is a greater chance of disagreement between two 'kinds of goodness', each having its own idea of right, than between a given goodness and a moderate degree of naughtiness—which last often arises from an indifference to right?'." Holdsworth makes his own claim to goodness by setting professional ambition against indifference. As he does, though, he makes an argument for two kinds of right, a point Gaskell teases out to question. As readers, we are invited to evaluate competing belief systems through the contrasting characters.

One aim of this evaluation in the novella is to expose and revise prejudices that held traditional, rural values to be outmoded. We are first tempted to see Holman as too old-fashioned, since he employs centuries-old tools and farming techniques. However, when Paul describes the problem of the bog, Holman's comprehension surprises Paul:

> By-and-by he got round to the more practical subject of railroads, and on this I was more at home. I really had taken an interest in my work […] and I was, besides, full of difficulties which beset us just then, owing to our not being able to find a steady bottom on the Heathbridge moss, over which we wished to carry our line. In the midst of all my eagerness in speaking about this, I could not help being struck with the extreme pertinence of his questions. I do not mean that he did not show ignorance of many of the details of engineering: that was to be expected; but on the premises he had got hold of, he thought clearly and reasoned logically. (171)

Gaskell exposes the fallacious assumption that people in rural or remote regions of the country would not be capable of engaging in discussions of technological advancement.[44] Holman may not have professional training, but that does not exclude him from having intellectual powers nor does it mean he does not have interest in technological advancements. Holman tells Phillis, "now that the railroads are coming so near us, it behooves us to know something about them" (174). In *Cousin Phillis* Gaskell reminds readers that the rural and remote are not actually diametrically opposed to the urban metropole; they all belong to the larger community of the nation. This fact is emphasized by the relationship between Paul and Holman, who are distant cousins.

Through the relationship of Manning and Holman, Gaskell depicts the "deep, horizontal comradeship" that characterizes Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" of the nation.

[44] Gaskell, herself, grew up in the remote town of Knutsford and regularly attended scientific lectures. After her mother's death she lived for a period of time in Newcastle with relative William Turner, who established the Mechanics Institute in 1824 (Uglow 59). Notably, Turner helped George Stephenson when he was unknown and struggling to become an engineer. In R. S. Watson's *History of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society* (1897), George Stephenson was quoted claiming that Turner "was always ready to assist me with books, with instruments […] He gave me the most valuable assistance and instruction; and to my dying day I can never forget the obligation which I owe to my venerable friend" (Uglow 60). Additionally, Gaskell married William Gaskell, who became chairman of Manchester's Portico Library in 1849. His borrowings included many new scientific works (Uglow 43-44).

(Anderson 7). When Manning first arrives in Heathbridge, he and Holman head out into the fields. Again, Paul is surprised by their comradeship, to borrow Anderson's term: "It was odd yet pleasant to me to perceive how these two men, each having led up to this point such totally dissimilar lives, seemed to come together by instinct, after one straight look into the other's faces" (182). What Paul witnesses before he can comprehend is that their lives are not actually dissimilar—they are both instinctive problem solvers.

Manning and Holman share genuine curiosity that interconnects rather than separates the two. Paul watches his father, who stands in the field next to Holman "with his hands behind his back, listening intently to all explanations of tillage, and the different processes of farming; occasionally taking up an implement, as if unconsciously, and examining it with a critical eye, and now and again asking a question, which I could see was considered as pertinent by his companion" (182). Manning's interest in agricultural technology corresponds with Holman's interest in industrial technology. Their respect for other knowledge systems and practices allows them to be open to discovery. It was during this meeting that Manning conceived of the turnip-cutting machine that won him the partnership with Ellison. Gaskell does not press the point, but readers might draw the conclusion that the puzzled railway engineers of the branch line might have solved the problem of running the line over the moss in Heathbridge more quickly if they had consulted any of the rural inhabitants who understood better the topography and the characteristics of soft moss.

The genuine interest and energy of Holman and Manning, together, expose Holdsworth's energy as superficial. Holdsworth tells Paul, "Activity and readiness go a long way in our profession. Remember that, my boy! I hope I shall come back, but if I don't, be sure and recollect all the words of wisdom that have fallen from my lips" (207). Holdsworth makes this

self-important statement as he is packing to leave for Canada. The "Activity and readiness" of Holdsworth's professionalism means willingness to desert a current project if the opportunity to accept a better proposal comes along. Holdsworth is not a problem solver; instead, he's a problem creator. And it is this distinction that represents the metaphorical contrariness of two irreconcilable lines.

The consequences of Holdsworth's abandonment of the branch line are dramatized most effectively through the devastation it wreaks on Phillis. During one of Holdsworth's visits to the Holman farm, he falls ill and has to stay for a short while to regain his health. When Paul visits to check on him, he is uneasy about Holdsworth's attitude towards Phillis. Holdworth says he is surprised Paul "find[s] it so impossible to fall in love with such a beautiful woman" (194). When Holdsworth discovers Phillis's notes on her translation of Dante's *Inferno,* he jots down his own interpretations in her notebook. Paul thinks, "I was not sure if he was not taking a liberty: it did not quite please me, and yet I did not know why" (195). Holdsworth's aside during Paul's next visit provides a clue, though. Holman had requested books, which Paul diligently brought. Holman quizzes him, "Were you not surprised at the list of things I sent for?" and clarifies, "some books were for the minister, and some for his daughter. (I call her Phillis to myself, but I use euphemisms in speaking about her to others. I don't like to seem familiar, and yet Miss Holman is a term I have never heard used.)" (197). Holdsworth is clearly taking liberties and capitalizing on the opportunity of being near a beautiful young woman by acting familiar with her. To the inexperienced Phillis, their developing affection towards each other signifies the intention of a promise.

When Holman suddenly leaves for Canada, he delegates the task of informing the Holmans to Paul. He claims to be sad about not being able to say goodbye, hinting that he had

imagined a possible future with Phillis. He wonders, "'How one's thoughts change,—this morning I was full of hope, Paul.' He paused and, then he said,— 'You put that sketch [he made of Phyllis] in carefully?' 'That outline of a head?' asked I. But I knew he meant an abortive sketch of Phillis" (207). When Paul witnesses Phillis's sorrow after Holdsworth's departure, he tries to soothe her by conveying his impression of Holdsworth's feelings to her: "'He had never spoken much about you before, but the sudden going away unlocked his heart, and he told me how he loved you, and how he hoped on his return that you might be his wife.'" (216). Later, Paul deeply regrets his interference, realizing he had underestimated Holdsworth's opportunism in love as well as career. Soon after settling into his new job, Holdsworth writes Paul that he has made a friendship with the Ventadour family in French Canada, who have a daughter, Lucille, "curiously like Phillis" (220). For a supremely self-interested person, relationships are not as significant. Connections are interchangeable as are people. Just as Greathed already has "a young man ready to put in [Holdsworth's] place," Holdsworth marries Lucille Ventadour, the French-Canadian version of Phillis.

The parallel narratives of abandoned love and branch lines diverge at the conclusion of the novella, emphasizing the remaining need to reimagine network development more holistically. Technology should not be separate from the people it serves. Though Paul reports that the "railway and its branches came to an end. The lines were completed," Phillis's suffering has not concluded. Her distress at being abandoned made her vulnerable to brain fever, from which she finally recovered after nearly dying. Paul never tells us how they solved the problem of the Heathbridge moss; we only know that his team does solve it. And the substitution of the young man for Holdsworth is not given much address, either. Railway progress advances inevitably, making Holdsworth's abandonment insignificant. There appear to be no

consequences. In Phillis's case, though, the abandonment has lasting consequences. By ending the novel with Phillis's, perhaps permanent, unrealized potential, the novella directs us to consider the relationship between railways and people. What is the point of developing a railway network where people are not the priority? The railways should serve the public, especially by connecting them to each other. The novella concludes railway networks constructed without feeling are, indeed, regretable.

In an effort to discourage paternalism, Samuel Smiles constructs isolated individuals to serve as models of self-effected success. Elizabeth Gaskell identifies the danger as well as the inaccuracy of such models and, in *Cousin Phillis*, revises Smiles's narrative to reconnect ideas of progress and community. As she does so, she rehabilitates the idea of the inventor engineer as a thinking, feeling person, who can honor the intrinsic value of innovation and contribute his problem-solving instincts to improving technology. Gaskell seems to instinctively intuit the problem that self-interest and opportunism would create not just for the railways but for the inventor, who would become increasingly devalued and mistrusted in the years ahead. Whereas in this chapter, I addressed the problem *of* the inventor, in the next chapter I examine the problems faced *by* the inventor, whose role in railway development became increasingly marginalized.

CHAPTER TWO

ACCIDENT REPORTS: PUBLIC INTEREST IN RAILWAY SAFETY

After the successful completion of the Liverpool and Manchester line in 1830, a proliferation of inventors mid-century sought to make their fame and fortune by improving upon the macro-invention of the railways, suggesting alternatives to steam power or horizontal railway lines. Others offered micro-inventions that improved upon the existing railway's efficiency and economy with upgraded brakes, joints, chairs, boilers, suspensions, et al.[45] As we saw in chapter one, some inventors were clearly opportunists, hopping on board what they saw as a gravy train with more desire for success than practical expertise. Others were led by a genuine love of scientific inquiry and saw the steam engines as a problem to be solved, perfected. Whether motivated by wealth or scientific interest (or both), most at least claimed to be devoted to the public good. Their improvements, they declared, would make railway travel and construction less destructive to land and property, more comfortable, safer, and more economically efficient. Safety, in particular, was a problem that needed to be solved as accidents and injuries became an increasing concern. Of course, inventors' self-declared altruistic desire to benefit the public was not always genuine, and determining which inventions were projected in good faith was difficult.

Public benefit can become obscured due not only to professional rivalry between inventors but also to the technological expertise required to understand the scientific principles of new forms of railways or railway improvements. In many mid-century regulation debates, for instance, competing inventors and entrepreneurs relied on knowledge less readily available to the general public to make their cases for or against government intervention in safety management.

[45] Joel Mokyr observes, "much of the popular literature is concerned with the great breakthroughs (macro-inventions), whereas economists seem widely agreed that the most productivity gains are generated by the smaller improvements (micro-inventions)." See Joel Mokyr, "Technological Change, 1700-1800," esp. 12-43, 15.

However, as Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrated in *Cousin Phillis* (and in her own life), public inquisitiveness grew along with advances in railway technology. The public was not constituted of hapless victims, subject to whatever fate the schemers and scientists doled out to them, as they were sometimes described. In fact, conversations about railway inventions and their legitimacy, as well as negotiations of the role of the inventor, took place mid-nineteenth century in newspaper journals, scientific magazines, and in fiction, indicating a wide-ranging audience that included engaged non-experts.

In this chapter, I continue to explore the problems faced by inventors as the consequences of Smilesean ideology were born out in mid-century. Charlotte Riddell's novel, *City and Suburb* (1861) offers a critique of the Smilesean myth of the lone-acting inventor hero, a misrepresentation that proved detrimental to the fate of inventors. As Gaskell performed a thought experiment that tested out the dangers of self-interested inventor, Riddell performs a thought experiment to test what happens to the inventor when he must advocate simultaneously for his invention and public benefit in the face of a mistrusting public, self-interested private railway companies, and an indecisive government.

Besides the slippery slope of self-interest to selfishness, Smiles was criticized for not including any narratives of failure. Showing how the inventor and, consequently, the public have both been marginalized, Riddell illustrates a devolutionary tale of technological progress. Because it is largely imaginative rather than just mimetic, Riddell's fiction certainly reflects on the problem at hand, but, more importantly, it actively engages in the discussion about inventors, offering a solution to the unresolved problem. I argue that *City and Suburb* articulates the idea that inventors need to hold a higher-valued, central role in the advancement of railway technology. Without their primary role, public safety cannot be guaranteed and may even be

compromised. Part of the solution that *City and Suburb* offers is an understanding of how an inventor can be constructively integrated into healthy networks of support that ensure the centrality of his role for the public good. I first examine the stakes of the 1840 Railway Regulation Act and George Stephenson's role in its precarious fate before turning to Riddell's *City and Suburb* to analyze her revision of the troubling mythos of the inventor.

Measuring the Costs of Public Safety in the 1840 Railway Regulation Act

Because there were so many inventions being projected at the macro- and micro-level and because railway companies at this time were still private ventures, state participation in railway management seemed necessary. Since the 1830s, the government took a laissez faire approach to maintenance and improvements, which were left in the hands of the private companies. The problem was that the public expected some kind of standard of safety, which required a larger coordinating body since the public struggled to overcome company interests. Companies strongly resisted interference on the part of the government, but the lack of oversight in safety measurements meant that companies adopted and rejected railway improvements as they were deemed necessary and/or cost efficient and usually not with the public's best interest in mind. A steady increase in railway accidents, which some claimed could be prevented if companies adopted inventions that improved safety, created an exigency that demanded governmental response. Hence, in 1840 Parliament appointed a Select Committee on Railways to "consider whether it is desirable for the public safety to vest a discretionary power of issuing Regulations for the Prevention of Accidents upon Railways, in the Board of Trade; and if so, under what conditions and limitations" (222).

The main sticking point of the act became the 11th clause of the Bill and the amount of power the Board of Trade would have in the inner workings of these several railway companies. The clause began:

> And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for the Lords of the said Committee to issue from time to time such regulations as they shall deem necessary for the prevention of accidents upon Railways: Provided always, that such regulations shall not prescribe anything of an experimental nature […]; provided also, that any such regulation shall be, as nearly as circumstances may render it expedient, the same upon all railways […]." (223)

The language here encodes the problem of inventors and inventions mentioned earlier. Inventions are, by nature, experimental, but with enough support they can be proposed as critical interventions. The universal application of an anti-experimental policy the clause endorses also resonates with the inventor's impulse to get his invention accepted as the new standard and to have it secured as the part of the new status quo. For example, once one mode of locomotion has been adopted (i.e. Stephenson's steam locomotion), all other alternate modes will be deemed "experimental" to ensure the establishment of the first accepted.

Testimony during the hearing was solicited from Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Fredric Smith of the Royal Engineers—who was appointed to the position of Inspector General of the Railways, revered inventors Isambard Kingdom Brunel and George Stephenson, along with railway company directors and managers, and other interested parties. The main point of discussion was the controversial 11th clause and its level of interference with corporate interests. When asked if he thought the clause "so framed as to be injurious to the railway proprietary," Sir Frederic Smith responded, "on the contrary, it is calculated to give confidence to the public, and I could

almost have imagined that the Bill had been framed in concert with the railway body, because they appear to be protected in every way in which protection could be desirable" (231). Smith is careful to include public assurance in the calculation, which no company would want to deny, though they may rate profitability higher in their private rubric.

Though he evidently leaned in favor of the 11th clause during the hearing, George Stephenson contacted the President of the Board of Trade, the Right Honourable Henry Labouchere, afterwards to firmly, though privately, take a stand. Stephenson writes:

> Perhaps I ought to be the last man to admit this (the whole system of Railways, and Locomotive Engines having been brought out by my exertions) but when I see so many young engineers, and such a variety of notions, I am convinced that some system should be laid down, to prevent *wild, and visionary schemes*, being tried, at the great danger of injury or loss of life to the public. I consider it right that every talented man should be at liberty to make improvements, but that the supposed improvements should be duly considered by proper judges. Then the question follows, from the opponents to the Bill, who are those judges to be? (emphasis added, "Letter" np)

Stephenson seems to be following that impulse of inventors to protect their own work, while claiming public welfare as their primary motivation. Here, he reinforces the false binary that some men are schemers, whilst others are "talented," a category in which he certainly includes himself, as his parenthetical aside asserts. Stephenson attempts to answer the evocative question he raises by suggesting an alliance between railway companies and the government appointed Board of Trade. Stephenson recommends:

> Suppose any Engineer has any improved plan for the better working of Railways to propose, he should submit his plan to the Engineer belonging to the Board of Trade, but before that Engineer should give his decision as to the utility of the scheme, he should have full power to call together the chief Engineers of the principal Railways of the Kingdom, and after the subject has been duly discussed, votes should be taken for or against the measure: the discussion should be laid before the Board of Trade, accompanied with the observations of the government Engineer, and if approved of should be placed into his hands to carry out. (np)

Though his efforts to reconcile the competing interests of railway companies and governmental management are admirable, Stephenson's interference advocates for a coalition of private and public institutions that dominate over the individual inventor. His proposal also presents a problem for the government Engineer, who would have to negotiate with all of the "chief Engineers of the principal Railways of the Kingdom." The Railway Companies were not all aligned in their private interests, and, since the railways were not yet nationalized, they were also not standardized—some railways had different sized rail gauges, for instance (which Stephenson and Brunel would battle to establish in a later Parliamentary debate). So, a suggested safety standard might cause more financial burden on one railway over another. Hence, consensus would not likely be achieved in any one recommendation.

The 1840 report summary given by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Smith introduces proof that this arrangement might cause the governmental Engineer to concede to Railway Company interests over public interest. Smith began with a strong assertion that it is "important for the public safety that a power should exist somewhere of preventing what experience shows to have occasionally happened, the disregard of points so essential to the safety of the railway

traveler, that there can be no rational doubt as to their necessity" (224). However, after hearing the "widely different opinions [which] have been expressed by witnesses of great practical experience in the management of the Railways," he concludes:

> It is established by evidence to the satisfaction of Your Committee, that the existing power of supervision vested in the Board of Trade by the Act of last Session, for Regulating Railways, has worked well hitherto, and promises considerable advantages for the future, from the continuance of amicable spirit and cordial co-operation which seem to have happily prevailed on the part of both of the Inspector-general and the Directors and Engineers of Railways. (225)

Smith cedes the discretionary power of the Board of Trade in favor of keeping on good terms with the railway companies. The conclusion is that not only has the inventor been marginalized as the technology advances but so has public welfare. Shareholder profit trumps public safety, and the inventor, who has the technical power to ensure safety, must also be subject to this dually imbalanced power structure. Charlotte Riddell explores the fate the inventor suffered during this struggle for power over how the railways ought to be managed.

Inventing the Anti-Hero: Narratives of Failure in Charlotte Riddell's *City and Suburb*

'This is the way England treats her inventors' observed one paper scornfully, 'she kills the goose, and then in her wisdom marvels she has no golden eggs'

In Charlotte Riddell's novel, *City and Suburb* (1861), the protagonist, railway engineer Alan Ruthven, invents a railway safety carriage "calculated to save life and property, to render railway travelling comparatively secure, to compass an end devoutly to be prayed for; viz., that of making, not collisions, but death to passengers therefrom almost impossible" (119). Though

Ruthven designed his invention to answer the fervent prayers of distressed railway travelers, the future he "calculated" diverges sharply from the present (twenty years later) in which the narrator reflects:

> Years have passed away since then, and every year has added to the list of railway accidents—of lives sacrificed to carelessness, stupidity, and false economy. Years have passed away, and railway travelling is no safer now than it was then—men are killed, limbs are broken, carriages are smashed, just as they used to be: but all this does not alter the fact that at the time of which I am writing, Alan Ruthven had discovered a means of rendering collisions comparatively harmless, and that on the morning in question he was reconsidering his plan. (119)

The narrator explores tensions between intention and realization, static non-interference and dynamic consequence. Railway dangers remain "just as they used to be," while repetition of the time marker "years have passed away" emphasizes their duration, and the catastrophic consequences experienced by travelers remained freshly present and gruesome: "men *are* killed, limbs *are* broken, carriages *are* smashed" (emphasis added). The concerns expressed in *City and Suburb* reflect contemporary fears about railway safety at midcentury. While it is debatable whether or not railway accidents rose markedly at that time, the degree of devastation gave legitimate cause for public anxiety.[46] The persistence of fatal railway accidents, unresolved since the railway safety regulation debates of the 1840s, left the public feeling powerless.[47] Despite the

[46] Ralph Harrington discusses the gap between perceived increases in railway accidents and relative safety in more detail in "Railway Safety and Railway Slaughter: Railway Accidents, Government and Public in Victorian Britain." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 8.2 (2003): 187-207. For more on the press's role in heightening public anxiety about accidents, see Peter W. Sinnema, "Representing the Railway: Train Accidents and Trauma in the 'Illustrated London News'." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31.2 (1998): 142-168. See also, Paul Fyfe, "Illustrating the Accident: Railways and the Catastrophic Picturesque in *The Illustrated London News*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46.1 (2013): 61-91.

[47] The debates about the 1840 Regulation of Railways Act centered on the contentious 11th clause that gave the Board of Trade power to appoint railway inspectors to determine the necessity of safety improvements. As private

fact that accidents were no less traumatizing over time, travelers continued to utilize the railways, accepting the risks for the convenience of travelling by rail. In doing so, the public disincentivized companies from implementing many costly improvements with any sense of urgency and effectively ensured the status quo.

After emphasizing the longevity of railway destruction in the passage above, the narrator performs a rhetorical reversal, claiming the only unalterable fact is not, in fact, the continued wreckage but rather the clear solution to a persistent problem provided by Alan Ruthven. The reader is led to question what prevented the inventor from interceding (and, perhaps, if such an intervention were still possible). By bookending the passage with reference to Ruthven, Riddell reframes the problem of railway safety in terms of the inventor: his invention was the original solution, but its lack of successful adoption and his disempowerment becomes the new problem. Resolving safety issues, *City and Suburb* indicates, requires an examination into the past and, in particular, the inventor's insecure role in railway management.[48] *City and Suburb* demonstrates an awareness that the technical—in addition to political and philosophical—implications of innovation were missing from contemporary discourse about railway safety. These technical implications are under-examined in critical conversations today.

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enterprises, railway companies voiced strong opposition to interferences by the government. In order to appease the companies, the Select Committee limited the power of the Board of Trade so that safety improvements could be recommended but not enforced. Thus, favor shifted from protection of the public to the profitability of the company. I will discuss this in more detail in a later section. See: "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Railways" (1841).

[48] I will be making a distinction between macro-inventions and micro-inventions in this essay. Macro-inventions would include monumental innovations, such as steam power and railway engines. Because macro-inventions tend to be more radical interventions, macro-inventors typically receive more notoriety than micro-inventors whose inventions include the smaller technical innovations that help maintain or improve the performance of macro-inventions, such as Alan Ruthven's safety carriage, fixed signals (suggested by Mrs Lirriper below), or George Stephenson's self-acting breaks (referenced below). While the instability of public perception about inventors historically includes both macro and micro, in this chapter I will be focusing on the plight of the micro-inventor as it relates to the safety improvements under discussion in the railway regulation debates. For more on the historical trajectory of inventor reception in general, see Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010; and, also, Claire Pettitt, *Patent Inventions—Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Critics interested in the normalization of risky railway travel, including Paul Fyfe in *By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis* (2015), Ralph Harrington in "Railway Safety and Railway Slaughter: Railway Accidents, Government and Public in Victorian Britain" (2003), and Tom Crook and Mike Esbester in *Governing Risks in Modern Britain: Danger, Safety and Accidents, c. 1800-2000* (2016), examine nineteenth-century texts that deliberate about railway accidents, causality, responsibility, and risk. In nineteenth-century newspapers and fiction, journalists and authors ascribed blame in varying degrees to negligent signal men and engine drivers, ineffective governance, and greedy railway directors and boards (respectively, the "carelessness, stupidity, and false economy" Riddell alluded to in the above passage). While they fully explored culpability, these contemporary writings largely concluded their inquiries with a sense that the status quo was inevitable or too firmly entrenched to expect change.[49] Riddell's understudied novel would benefit current critical discussions because its clear position on causation as well as its firm refusal to accede to the status quo distinguishes it from its contemporaries. *City and Suburb* performs its own interrogation of liability (through formal use of an inquest, the novel launches a direct attack against the Board of Directors and Board of Trade), but it also gives due attention to achieving a credible resolution that would reduce the degree of risk for railway travelers.

Charlotte Riddell's fictional narrative differed from other fiction and non-fiction in that it proposed a concrete solution to the safety problem by imagining a technologically specific

[49] Critical discourse sometimes adopts the contemporary notion that destruction is inherent to railways. Ralph Harrington concludes his article confirming that Victorian assumption as a given: "Just as the Victorian railway was a vast and highly visible expression of technology triumphant, so the railway accident constituted a uniquely sensational and public demonstration of the price which that triumph demanded – violence, destruction, terror, injury and death" (204). Harrington no doubt reflects a common belief at the time, but it was just this sense of inevitable degree of harm that Riddell refutes in *City and Suburb*, and her novel demonstrates that not all Victorians espoused the view that death was a necessary or inevitable cost.

intervention that had real world implications.[50] The narrator's qualification of "comparative" security in the passage above reveals Riddell's nuanced understanding of the distinction between technological and operational guarantees. With so many variables at work in the operation of railways, including human error, any guarantee of absolute safety would be false. However, a specific technological improvement—a safety carriage—could reduce the degree of devastation, making death "*almost* impossible," a more impressive qualification (emphasis added).

If the public truly wanted to alter the conditions of railway travel and ensure safety, *City and Suburb* posits, they must do more than condemn greedy private enterprise and ineffective governance; they must alter, also, their understanding of innovation and the value of the inventor's voice in managing improvements. If the railway inventor was a principal participant in the technological management of railways, then his voice would inevitably speak for the public by virtue of advocating for the improvements necessary to ensure safer travels. The first step in motivating acts of solidarity was for the public to understand not only how the inventor was disempowered but how, collectively, it was, too.

Mid-way through *City and Suburb*, the narrator pauses to explain the bleak odds inventors face when trying to bring their inventions to life:

> …it is no light matter for a man to be cursed at once with the faculty of invention, and the power of concentration; to conceive of some project, and work at its completion till the plan is without flaw, till he knows it to be so; and then attempt to carry it to high places, meeting disappointment and rebuff, and insolence, and

[50] During the Select Committee hearing determining the reach of the Board of Trade, George Stephenson was interrogated about his own micro-invention of self-acting breaks. When asked if he thought breaks were "an important element of safety in railway travelling," he responded "Certainly, the most important of anything that can be contrived for the safety of travelling. I believe that if self-acting breaks were put upon every carriage, scarcely any accident could take place." ("Report from the Select Committee" 115). George Stephenson's breaks were not, in fact, widely adopted—a pattern that repeats in Riddell's novel. I will expand on the connection between the Select Committee hearing and Riddell's novel later in the essay.

> prejudice by the way…. There is not one invention in five hundred which brings forth fruit for the man who planted it; therefore, most ingenious reader, do not invent if you can avoid doing so; the chances are a thousand to one against your scheme, and they are ten thousand to one against you. (304-05)

Describing the inventor figure's engagement with the process of innovation, this narrative aside evokes the cultural trope of the self-help hero, especially as conceived by Samuel Smiles. However, the narrator undercuts the expectations of success integral to the trope, presenting instead a narrative of failure in which the protagonist is shaped by negative circumstances frustratingly out of his control. The narrator describes the inventor figure as having the twin faculties of genius and perseverance Smiles claimed were necessary to bring inventions to life. But, rather than being blessed by his "faculty of invention," "power of concentration," and ability to "work at its completion till the plan is without flaw," the inventor, here, is "cursed" with these gifts. Such affliction is fully informed by those institutional barriers that prevent even the most flawless of innovations from bearing the "fruit" of their inborn potential. Spatially, the disparity between the inventor and the "high places" of the patent office, board of trade, and corporate offices situates the inventor not only in the inferred powerlessness of the low ground but also at the bottom of an incline up which he must "carry" his invention as if it was now more of a burden than an accomplishment.

In his construction of the inventor figure, Smiles underscored the difficulties that George Stephenson faced (making his triumph all the more impressive), but he also insisted on the inevitability of his success and concomitant success of the railways. In contrast, Riddell troubles the characteristic melding of inventor and invention that Smiles asserted in the Stephenson biography and contradicts the philosophy of inevitability. According to the narrator the odds are

stacked “a thousand to one” against the invention but are exponentially worse for the inventor, who meets odds of “ten thousand to one.” These different rates of success raise a significant question: What point about the uneven process of invention does Riddell seek to make through the narrator’s disparate weighting of odds between the inventor and his invention?

In part, Riddell may simply be accounting for the practice of inventors to sell their ideas to others who may be more willing and able to navigate the complicated, time-consuming, and expensive process of getting an invention patented and adopted. As H.I. Dutton notes “Selling the rights of inventions was probably the method which quasi-professional inventors preferred, since it allowed them to concentrate on inventing” (125). The inventor in this case could make money faster by selling his invention to a second party and move on to designing his next invention. Additionally, Dutton confirms, “inventors were generally reluctant to dissipate their efforts in the commercial exploitation of their inventive output, because the fates of insolvency were too easily tempted” (123). Though he made less money than if he managed to sell the patented invention directly to the railway company himself, selling the idea ensured the inventor would make money with less risk.

City and Suburb is preoccupied with the role the inventor’s disposition plays in his own failure and explores what aspects of his personality help or hinder his ability to meet with success. Related to this interest is the novel’s focus on the informal and formal networks that enable good inventions to become adopted and, particularly, the inventor’s ability to recognize and engage with these networks successfully. The central plot focuses largely on the interpersonal relationships (between Alan and his partner Hugh Eliot, Alan and his love interest Ina, Ruby and her love interest Mr. Perman) as well as Alan’s ability to interact effectively in the business world, but these personal plot lines are set against the larger backdrop of impersonal,

institutional power structures. So, while the narrator chastises Alan for his fallibility, the most damning censure is directed at the greedy railway companies and ineffective governmental Board of Trade, whose dysfunctional networks are built on a loose coalition of selfish personal interests rather than on an empowering system of merit.

City and Suburb poses a challenge to those large public and private institutions that construct obstacles to innovation and reinforce an unhealthy value system, which rewards convenience over progress and profit over safety. Finally, Riddell's novel confronts the part the public plays in perpetuating these disproportionate systems of power to the detriment of inventors as well as their own well-being. The public is chastised for accepting the status quo rather than using their collective power to demand change. In her novel we can detect a call to action for the public to demand better safety standards, which, according to the novel, should be regulated by functional government agencies at the insistence of the public. The cry for government intervention comes in recognition of railway companies' disincentive to adopt improving micro-inventions willingly since implementing those improvements often conflicted with profit motives. Seeing the inventor as a key player in correcting the existing problem of sub-par safety measures encourages the public to advocate for him and, consequently, to take full advantage of his gifts, thereby converting them into public blessings rather than private curses and him into a proper hero rather than an anti-hero.

In crafting *City and Suburb* into a narrative of failure, Charlotte Riddell imagines the kind of narrative Samuel Smiles was criticized for eliding in *Self-Help*. Smiles's admitted practice of selection highlights the design behind the self-help narrative and locates it in the generic realm of creative illusion rather than historical realism. Riddell's novel, on the other

hand, offers a fictional exploration of contemporary problems that depends to a degree on historical accuracy.

Charlotte Riddell was no stranger to the experience of failure or to the plight of the inventor. Her husband, Joseph Hadley Riddell, Esquire tried his luck in the inventing game with little to no success and yet with unswerving (perhaps stubborn) persistence.[51] Throughout his life, Joseph claimed variously to be a chemist, an inventor, and a civil engineer, amongst other pursuits. He managed only to accrue debts and was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1871.[52] Despite his lack of success, Charlotte was famously supportive of Joseph and his endeavors. She was the primary financial provider in her household and even paid off his debts after his death as an act of honor. She believed her husband's claim that he "belonged to an old Staffordshire family, a branch of the Scotch Riddells, of long descent and gentle blood," and, thus, deserving the good fortune that was his birthright (Black 18). In an 1893 interview with Helen C. Black published in *Notable Women Authors of the Day*, she shared that her husband was "Courageous and hopeful, gifted with indomitable energy" and "endowed with marvelous persistence and perseverance; modestly conscious of talents which ought to have made their mark, he, when a

[51] Sir Wemyss Reid recounts an amusing anecdote about one of Joseph Riddell's unsuccessful inventions. Reid had been working for Charlotte Riddell while she held the position of editor and proprietor of the *St. James Magazine* (1867-71) and was often invited to the "Bohemian" literary parties held in the Riddell house in Tottenham. Reid explains that the center of the house was devoted to the display of Joseph Riddell's patent stoves, which were "ornamental as well as useful. They were made to look like anything but what they were. One stove appeared in the guise of a table, richly ornamented in cast-iron; another was a vase; a third a structure like an altar, and so forth." Reid recounts that Riddell requested that one of her guests, "a well-known barrister, who at that time dabbled a little in literature, and who has since risen to fame and to a knighthood" to sing a song. When he went to get some of his music from his coat in the hall, the rest of the guests "heard a groan of anguish, and, looking out, we saw Mr. C— holding in one hand the charred remains of a roll of music, and in the other the remnants of what had been an excellent overcoat. He had laid his coat, when he arrived, on what was apparently a hall table. Unluckily for him, it happened to be the patent stove that had been lighted that evening to cheer and warm us when we escaped from the storm outside." Reid shares, also, that the literary men who made up these Bohemian parties were exasperated by Joseph Riddell's attempts to join their conversation with "long-winded narration" and "made it very clear, in fact, that it was the novelist and not the inventor of stoves whom they came to see" (Reid 144-145).

[52] For more biographical history of Joseph Hadley Riddell and Charlotte Riddell, as well as the influence of his failed pursuits on Charlotte Riddell's literary career, see Nancy Henry (forthcoming).

mere lad, began his long quest after fortune, one single favour from whom he was never destined to receive" (Black 18-19). Though J. H. Riddell did not meet with individual success, Mrs. Black credits him as a resource for the technical and business knowledge that characterized Mrs. Riddell's oeuvre (a narrative Charlotte herself endorsed).[53] We now know, though, that Mrs. Riddell developed her own business acumen through personal experience and out of necessity, first, to provide for herself after her mother died and, later, to cover her husband's string of failures.[54] Charlotte's proclaimed support for her husband's aspirations may be genuine and true, but we cannot help but hear in her novel about a failed inventor-engineer signs that she may have wished Joseph had made other choices.

City and Suburb is the story of Alan Ruthven, Esquire, the first son of an ancient family whose fortune has dissipated, forcing him to leave the estate home and travel to the City to make his fortune. While he has the natural capacity to think inventively and develops the studied knowledge to work his ideas into defendable plans that will surely improve railway safety, he is met with obstacle upon obstacle, and his inventions are ultimately abortive. We hear in the novel Charlotte's personal regrets most at the end of the chapter called "Alan's Invention," when the narrator conveys the failure of the protagonist to convince the Board of Trade's head engineer to endorse his invention or any Railway Company to adopt it based on the merit of its guaranteed improvement to safety despite cost: "He had thrown his last dice and lost, and if it be in human nature to bear such disappointment patiently, I can affirm, from experience, it is not in inventor

[53] Helen Black reports that, along with being "gifted with much inventive genius, Mr. Riddell was also possessed of considerable general knowledge, and was deeply versed in literature, medicine, science, and mathematics. To him his wife turned for all the information she needed in her novels; the chemistry in 'Too Much Alone,' the engineering in 'City and Suburb' […] Mrs. Riddell says she has 'but told the simple story of what, when in ill-health and broken in spirit, he had to encounter before ruin, total and complete, overtook him'" (19).
[54] See Silvana Colella.

nature—to die and make no sign" (313).[55] Like Joseph Riddell, who pursued the inventing line until it culminated in ruin, Alan Ruthven's journey charts a devolutionary path from railway inventor, civil engineer, and manufactory owner to bankrupt and finally railway engine-driver.

Contemporary critical reviews intuit this biographical influence. The *London Review* claimed that the novel "mainly devotes itself to giving in detail what reads as if it were an actual biography of a proud, highly gifted young man, unaided by friends, flinging himself into the midst of the great battle of life in London" (rpt. in *The Living Age* 694). Riddell is taken to task for her liberal use of biographical detail in *The Saturday Review*. At first seeming to praise Riddell's realistic mode, the reviewer claims, "the book is a natural fruit of *Adam Bede*" (356). However, the critic ultimately disparages the novel and its author for overusing biographical detail: the narrator "frequently pauses to assure us that she is speaking literal truth, not borrowing from imagination. To bring in a bevy of personal acquaintances and set them to work out an imaginary plot, is the surest way to produce confusion out of which the reader cannot disentangle the author's real aim and design" (357). Indeed, the line between Charlotte Riddell's realism and real life is blurred repeatedly in the narrator's frequent asides: "In a case like this, I dare not place an imaginary man among imaginary books, reading to an imaginary end; at the same time that, having watched the flesh and blood man whom I am striving feebly to reproduce, I have no fear but … my readers will yet believe it true" (*City and Suburb* 2). That Riddell was determined for her readers to "believe" that the character and his story were real extends beyond wanting the readers to invest fully in a fictional world; it indicates the desire to engage the public, to elicit from them a specific reaction to an existing problem. The narrator's (and perhaps Riddell's)

[55] Allusion to Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Part II, Scene III. *King Henry*:: "Peace to his soul, if God's good pleasure be!-- / Lord cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss, / Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.-- / He dies, and makes no sign: --O God, forgive him!"

insistence that "in a case like this, [she] dare not" do anything other than represent the actual truth emphasizes the critical importance of that problem. Silvana Colella argues that in doing so, "Riddell lays claim to the significance of urban experience not only by choosing the City of commerce and finance as a subject matter (unique though this choice was) but also by elaborating a distinct public rhetoric" (102). This brand of realism allowed Riddell to introduce the public to the inventor as a person and not a type.

Though it is likely that her husband's story partly inspired the novel, his was not the only influence for *City and Suburb*, and other critics recognized the larger conversations with which Riddell was engaging. The review in *The Spectator* recounts that, along with "a simple but sufficient plot, the details of which come forth in a natural manner out of the inward condition and outward circumstances of a few well-defined and consistently developed characters," "the scene of action is one of surpassing national interest, and yet almost a terra incognita in novels" (21). Though railways were of great interest, fiction had left them relatively unexamined (at least according to this reviewer). As she was known to do, Charlotte Riddell purposefully entered typically un-trod subject areas, such as finance and engineering, to fully explore and examine how and why such industries operate the way they do.[56] In *City and Suburb* she engages with contemporary conversations about the railways, particularly how and why inventors were treated poorly and how the devaluing of inventors directly affected the public and their safety.

[56] As the reviewer of *The Spectator* observes, "In one respect she stands almost, if not quite alone, upon ground but vaguely known to most male writers of fiction, and known not at all to any of their sisters in art except herself and Miss Martineau, who is not a novelist though she might be. Mrs. Trafford [the pen-name under which Riddell wrote *City and Suburb*] does not debar herself from the right of making occasional excursions into Belgravia, or into the country even as far as Cumberland, but she fixes her head-quarters in the City or its manufacturing environs, and there she plants her people, and bids them become part and parcel of that wondrous struggle for wealth, an existence which has not its parallel in any other spot on the face of the globe" (21).

Part of her criticism to these ends was directed at the proliferation of engineering biographies mid-century and their irresponsible claims that hard work and dedication guaranteed success. At the beginning of the chapter following "Alan's Invention," the narrator makes an oblique accusation to writers like Samuel Smiles for presenting inventors with unrealistic and inaccurate models of achievement: "The great misfortune of inventors, as a rule, is, that they will not give up. It has for years been a practice of every writer to insist that if a man only stick long enough to any one purpose he is sure of success, and writers have a great deal of misery to answer for in consequence" (*City and Suburb* 314). The self-help model insists that an individual can succeed if they continue to persevere in their individual efforts, but we learn by examining the difference between Stephenson the myth and Stephenson the man that individuals only succeeded with the help of the networks in which they were embedded. It is the perpetuation of the fiction of the stand-alone individual that both won Smiles success and contributed to the failure of many men. While Smiles took liberties in his biographies, fictionalizing fact, Charlotte Riddell enacts the generic inverse, factualizing her fiction, as part of her method of critique. By adopting the narrative structure of the biographical self-help model and strategically altering certain aspects, *City and Suburb* exposes the fallacy of its promises of success and offers explicit reasons why failure is more common in the inventing line than Smiles is willing to concede.

Much of Alan's characterization follows the Smiles-Stephenson model of the prototypical inventor figure. Like Stephenson, Alan has a natural inclination towards invention—railway improvements, in particular: "He had always been fond of scientific pursuits; like his father in the days gone by, he had tried experiments and thought out inventions; poverty and the necessity for some rule of action had added practical sense to natural talent, and given a definite direction to what had been before a desultory taste" (*City and Suburb* 116). Similar to Stephenson's own

relentless schedule of dedicated work and pursuit of higher learning, Alan works as a draughtsman by day to earn money and studies civil engineering by night in order to advance in his career:

> He 'wrestled with knowledge' and overcame it, working as a man never works, unless he feels that his day is short and his task is long; reading when he could, thinking as he walked, flinging ideas into the fire of practicability, and only choosing for his weapons those which came out of steel; reading, working, and thinking for one definite object, viz., a thoroughly available knowledge of engineering and all its roots and branches. (116)

Alan's path follows Stephenson's so closely that readers might reasonably predict how the narrative will develop and end. However, rather than replicating the mythos in its entirety, Riddell purposefully alters Alan's story in ways that test both the foundations and conclusions of the self-help theory.

One of the main differences between Alan Ruthven and George Stephenson is their disparate origin stories. While Stephenson was a working-class hero who rose in the ranks to gain the status of a gentleman of merit, later attaching the honorary "esquire" to his name, Alan Ruthven was a gentleman born. Rather than working his way progressively up through the ranks as Stephenson did, Alan's recent poverty requires him to leave behind the old world system of rank and work his way into the new world system purportedly built on merit. In this way, Riddell's novel asks how the self-help mythos is affected by an origin story outside of the rags-to-riches form. In the traditional Stephensonian model, the inventor figure fights his way to success by his own fortitude and determination. He begins with nothing—no help—and his achievements thus exemplify what one man can do if he is able to rely solely on his own will.

Stephenson's story informed *Self-Help* because he was successful but, more importantly, because he had humble beginnings. Though he was a tremendously successful railway-inventor and engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel was never a subject in any of Smiles's *Lives of Engineers* biographies, and one might fairly assume that this was primarily due to the fact that Brunel was born into a life of privilege and classically educated. Thus, the Stephenson figure, because of his low birth, epitomizes the liberal ideals developing over the nineteenth century that insist on allowing greatness to mature naturally out of modest circumstances rather than to be ascribed by birth. What constitutes the ideal liberal subject, then, is one that most contrasts the aristocratic gentleman.

Making Alan Ruthven a gentleman, Charlotte Riddell sets his character against the liberal ideals entailed in the Stephenson model, yet in a manner that still seemingly aligns with Smiles's goals. Rather than another iteration of successful individual achievement, Riddell's novel offers proof of liberalism's superiority through an illustration of aristocratic failure. Indeed, the narrator foreshadows in the first pages that this will be a narrative of failure, despite the potential for success, because of the protagonist's over-evaluation of his origins. "Whilst he carried within his breast the seeds of success," the narrator remarks, "he likewise bore the germ of failure. His talents stood out like goodly flowers for the world to see; but there was a worm gnawing at the roots—pride—which as surely goeth before a fall as that sin produceth sorrow" (2). Alan's detrimental pride derives from his continued attachment to the old world that values his gentleman status. The novel opens with a view of the protagonist heading into "the great city to seek his fortune; behind him—white, straight and dusty, lay the Great North Road he had traversed—before him was the goal he desired to reach; and yet, instead of pushing faster and faster forward" as the prototypical man of perseverance should do and as the path of

socioeconomic progress requires, he "paused, and…looked back" (1). Riddell confirms Smiles's and other's desire to make aristocracy a flaw that the meritocracy system corrects, and Alan's character and narrative take on characteristics of an allegory that illustrates this lesson. However, Riddell also challenges the assumptions that new systems of power, purportedly built on a system of merit, have not made such a radical departure in actuality. Alan's personal Orpheus-like sin represents the sin of the larger collective who still cling to the hierarchies of outmoded socioeconomic organization.

While working to adjust to the new world of business, Alan unintentionally exposes how old world hierarchical investments undergird much of the new business networks and skew personal and business relations. As the narrative develops, Alan's investment in ancestral pride becomes complicated as he recognizes that status alone is not economically sustainable. The aristocratic model was evidently losing its economic potency in the nineteenth century. Depleted estate coffers required first sons, like Alan, in addition to second sons to seek their fortune by entering a profession, a new and uncomfortable situation for many heirs. The lack of success Alan experiences in his first attempts to regain his fortune does much to ameliorate his personal pride. Since his inventions had not come to fruition, his income largely depended on working out others' ideas as a draughtsman (118). Thus, his identification with his former gentleman status wanes in favor of his new business identity.

That transference is put to the test, however, when two men seek to do business with Alan, motivated by personal interest in Alan's gentlemanly status. Mr. Perman and Mr. Bonsil consult "Mr. Ruthven, C.E." about the "practicability of a most important invention" of one of Mr. Bonsil's ideas (120).[57] Mr. Bonsil explains that he chose Alan because of his aristocratic

[57] Earlier in the novel when Alan first rents an office apartment, he has emblazoned on the door "Mr. Ruthven, Civil Engineer." The narrator explains that this new identity was self-affixed: "though Mr. Ruthven might not have been

status, suggesting that high birth retains worth even in the business sphere. He explains, "Mr. Perman assured me you were a gentleman, or I never should have entered your office. A mere business plodder I dared not have trusted; trade deteriorates, trade is low" (121). Here, Alan interrupts him to claim, "I consider myself a business plodder" and corrects Bonsil's assumptions that such a business man is less honorable. When Bonsil responds, "Ah! You know nothing of business," Alan retorts, "Pardon me—I am in business." Bonsil then seeks to make the distinction: "In—but not—of" and repeats that "Mr. Perman assured me you were a gentleman; otherwise…" Bonsil's distinction between "in" and "of" reflects the difference between Alan and Stephenson that Riddell constructed, where Stephenson—already inside the realm of labor and trade—needed to work his way *up* and Alan had to work his way into the merit-based system.

Bonsil also seeks to re-establish a sense of essentialism attributed to Alan's birth—once a gentleman, always a gentleman. Alan pushes against this model by reaffirming his new status: "'Mr. Bonsil,' interposed Alan firmly, 'I am an engineer and I should greatly prefer in any business transactions between us, that you would consider me as what I am, rather than what I was'" (122). Alan's self-identification as someone inside the inventor-engineer business world shows signs of personal progress. With opportunity, he has the chance to work his way up the rungs of success (now that he has worked his way into the merit-based system) by matching his own inventive genius with continued hard work. In this sense, Alan successfully interprets the challenge to the Stephenson model (that his original gentleman status precludes his ability to

recognized by the Society in Great George Street, he had a right to call himself C.E. if he chose" (31). The disparity between his self-identification and the lack of recognition by the Society of Civil Engineers echoes the experience of George Stephenson mentioned above. It also underscores the difference in the idealization of a merit-based system and the reality of systems which rely heavily on hierarchical and recognized status.

follow it) and responds correctly by rejecting his past in favor of the future he is empowered to make manifest as an individual.

Alan also successfully reads Bonsil's character, recognizing him as an inauthentic inventor (and thus himself as a genuine one). Bonsil claims that he is so "rich in inventions" that he "want[s] some one to do the mere rote-work for me; a man can't be all head and all hand at one and the same time—can he?"—a question that contradicts the Stephensonian model that pairs genius with hard work. Bonsil is a bad model of what H. I. Dutton cites as the 'uncommitted mind,' those inventors who "diversified their invention portfolios across several industries" (123). Bonsil is presented as something closer to a schemer who seeks fame without any real developed skill. He seeks consultation because he has "[gotten] into a slight difficulty in detail: a mere mechanical difficulty; nothing which interferes with the usefulness of the discovery, but which might prevent the general public from at once acknowledging its value" (121). "The state of the case is plainly this," Bonsil admits, "I have conceived a most valuable idea; but, owing to a want of knowledge of dry details, I cannot work it." Alan understands that knowledge of those "dry details" is what sets authentic inventors apart from mere opportunists.

Alan's studied knowledge and natural inclination enable him to interpret Bonsil's idea as "a mare's nest" and to conclude that, though the idea is "seductive," it is "valueless" (123).[58] Alan states that he would be "neither acting honourably nor honestly if I encouraged you to persevere in a plan which I know has plausibility at one end, but failure at the other." Mr. Bonsil is insulted and leaves without attempting even to pay Alan for the consultation. Apologetically, Mr. Perman covers the debt, which Alan tries to reject, claiming that since "your friend considers

[58] The OED explains that the idiomatic phrase "to have spied a mare's nest" means "to imagine that one has discovered something wonderful, which in fact does not exist. Hence: an illusory discovery, esp. one that is much vaunted and betrays foolish credulity" ("mare's nest" 1.)

my opinions valueless, I cannot think of taking a fee for it" (124). But Mr. Perman is well-seasoned in the world of business and responds, "An opinion is an opinion, Mr. Ruthven, no matter what value the client attaches to it, and is worth its price accordingly." Though acting with self-proclaimed honorable intentions, Alan misreads the scene. As Alan rejects the value of the invention absolutely and says so directly and without feeling, so he rejects the value of the business connection. Alan shows that he doesn't understand the parts of business that are more concrete (a consulted opinion costs a objectively set fee that cannot be altered by subjective evaluation) and those that are more nuanced (as an inventor entrepreneur, Bonsil and Alan are in the same network and thus need to establish amiable relations). Alan misreads the merit-based system as one without personal attachments; he does not see that the individual is embedded in a network of personal and business relationships that are often intertwined. For Alan, it seems plausible to separate the business from the personal, and this belief indicates that he has not so much as transferred his self-identity from heir to entrepreneur, but that he has compartmentalized them.

Though Alan claims an identity shift from gentleman of leisure to civil engineer, one that has left the past behind and embraced the new future, it becomes clear that he holds his family name sacred and seeks to protect it from the reach of vulgar new money. Alan realizes after Bonsil and Perman leave, that Perman is the same man he caught talking to his beautiful sister, Ruby in the Euston Railway station when she first arrived, which offended his sense of decorum. Railway cars may have retained class divisions from the outset, but railway stations became a contentious site of class mixing. The mixed space, symbolized both class mobility and the threat to traditional status. As Michael Freeman has noted, "very deliberate efforts were actually made to keep [classes] apart," including separate waiting rooms, staircases, bathrooms, and

refreshment areas in recognition of this anxiety and in deference to traditional divisions (111). Maintaining these class divisions is something that Alan also does mentally by fastidiously separating his family life from his business life, even as he strives in one sphere to re-establish the other. While waiting for Ruby, his other sister Lorine, his brother Murrary and his ward, Ina Trenham to arrive, Alan reflects on the distance between his position as heir of Tarn Hall and a businessman in the City, as well as his purpose to restore the former: "he had to preserve an ancient name untarnished; he had to fight out such a fight between himself and mankind with brains alone, as no Ruthven had previously dreamed of attempting" (*City and Suburb* 44). Though he has to sully himself by entering into business and adapting his identity, he justifies this course of actions by ensuring that his family members will retain their original character. His attempts to keep his personal and business lives separate, however, are constantly thwarted throughout the novel.

As Aeron Hunt has argued, the boundaries between the business and personal spheres are often blurry. Her definition of the term "personal business" relies on what she determines is "a historical and social reality" in the Victorian era defined by "the interpersonal networks and relationships through which commercial transactions and interactions occurred, in contexts ranging from small family firms to large and complex organizations and in relationships with customers and co-workers, credit seekers and lenders, bosses and subordinates, bank chairman and board members, and so forth" (Hunt 3). Throughout the novel, Alan struggles to keep business and personal relations separate, but ultimately fails. Much to his chagrin, he must borrow money from Ina to be able to purchase his manufactory. His business partnership with Hugh Eliot fails in part because they compete for Ina's romantic interest and in part because of Alan's contradictory desire to learn (and eventual demand to know) about the aspects of Hugh's

life he persists in keeping private. Finally, Alan rejects offers from the Perman family to subsidize his inventions with capital both because he rejects their vulgar new money and because he wants to prevent a romantic connection between Ruby and Perman.

Alan Ruthven might overvalue his ancestry, but so too do the men of business with whom he engages. Mr. Perman brought Mr. Bonsil to Alan Ruthven's office because he was enamored of Ruby. He was attracted by her beauty and charms, but also by her lineage. After reflecting about how well-suited Ruby was to his taste, he thinks: "Next to calling Miss Ruthven wife, would not the greatest piece of good luck be to have such a man as Mr. Ruthven for a brother-in-law" (92). Perman does not see this connection as intimate between two people but rather as a joint family venture. He thinks, "The family was *boná fide*, the Ruthvens were really what they seemed to be—gentry, and as such Mr. Perman felt desirous of improving the acquaintance" (93). Perman again introduces a particular understanding of substantive value, one that attributes authenticity to Ruthvens based on their aristocratic status. This high valuation of ancestry troubles his own status.

Meritocracy was supposed to free the nation (particularly the entrepreneurial middle class) from the strictures of birth, but the lingering desire to associate with families of aristocratic status tainted those new networks. Perman recognizes that, despite his entrepreneurial success, he has less access to "ancient" families like the Ruthvens because of long-standing social boundaries: "how to get at them, there was the difficulty—a difficulty John Perman, Esq., of Stamford Hill, with all his wealth, could by no means see his way through." Perman eventually realizes the way to establish the personal connection is through business. When Ruby is considering marrying him, she explains to Ina that Mr. Perman promised her that "he would push Alan forward in any business he liked to enter; he showed me very clearly what a hopeless thing

it is for an unknown man to strive to make his way" (197). Perman has the desire and the ability to back Alan financially, assistance that Alan desperately needs. Alan, however, rejects his help—not just because he is repulsed by the idea of Ruby tarnishing the family name by marrying into new money but also because he fully subscribes to the false promise of self-help that guarantees individual success to those who persevere. He does not understand the actual predicament he puts himself in by rejecting network affiliation and striving in isolation.

Following the Smiles-Stephenson model so absolutely, Alan does not perceive the truth that an individual requires a network of support to enable even the best ideas to manifest successfully through the innovative process—a truth that Stephenson the man fully recognized. After months of toil, Alan imagines an idea that would not only win him certain good fortune but would benefit the nation and resolve the railway safety problem that plagued the country:

> Still spite of difficulty, there it was—an invention calculated to save life and property, to render railway travelling comparatively secure, to compass an end devoutly to be prayed for; viz., that of making, not collisions, but death to passengers therefrom almost impossible. Years have passed away since then, and every year has added to the list of railway accidents—of lives sacrificed to carelessness, stupidity, and false economy. Years have passed away, and railway travelling is no safer now than it was then—men are killed, limbs are broken, carriages are smashed, just as they used to be: but all this does not alter the fact that at the time of which I am writing, Alan Ruthven had discovered a means of rendering collisions comparatively harmless.[59] (119)

[59] This invention is later identified when Alan receives his patent, after much expense and trouble navigating a pre-1852 Patent Office. The official patent document describes the invention as "a new safety carriage intended to render Railway Travelling safer, and in many respects more eligible, and that the said Carriage is entirely new, and of his own invention, and that it will be of great service to the public" (*City and Suburb* 305-06).

Alan's invention cannot prevent collisions, as those usually occur from human error (though they might be reduced with better organization and attentive workers), but by intervening with his micro-invention he can prevent certain death. The gruesome catalogue of decades-long human suffering and death emphasize the great national need for such an intervention. Rather than acquire the funding by the ready and willing means of Perman money in order to get the invention patented adopted, however, Alan waits to accrue it on his own. Alan's obstinacy, here, can be read as selfish, since his personal motives supersede national need, which in turn casts the Smilesean idea of self-interest in a negative light.

Entrepreneurial independence, rather than network integration, becomes misinterpreted as the path to success. With the help of Ina, he buys a manufactory and sells his other inventions to interested entrepreneurs to gain capital: "He sold one, and then another, and beyond all, he was able to test their powers in his own factory, and have experiments tried, and models made, which otherwise must have remained untried and unmade for ever" (304). Though he is able to guarantee the inventions' functionality, he does not receive credit for the ideas and, thus, does not establish his reputation as a successful inventor. He does not view the business exchange as profitable beyond accruing money: "He never strove to work any of these inventions; he was thrown amongst men willing enough to pay something for ideas they could never have originated themselves, and by the interventions of these capitalists the patent office became all the richer, and Alan Ruthven none the poorer" (304). Alan does not recognize the opportunity he had to convince these venture capitalists to fund him based on their knowledge of his credibility as an inventor or to make use of their connections to a wider network of support in the business world. Unlike Stephenson, he is not savvy enough in this regard to strategically link himself to people

of influence. Thus, even as he eventually accumulates the funding needed to finally push his one prized invention through, he has to wait a considerable amount of time and then attempt to navigate the rest of the process without the advantage inherent to those connections. He does not seem to have developed any ties with any of these men with whom he "was thrown amongst" and who he does not seem to respect or value.

After many months Alan begins the process of getting the railway safety invention adopted by navigating each stage as a solitary agent. He is determined to see this invention, described as "his Benjamin whom he could not send down the Egyptians even for corn" through on his own. As Smiles connected Stephenson's identity and narrative with the invention of the railways, Alan seeks to intertwine his fate with that of this most important invention: "He felt, cost what it might, he must link his name with that, the best invention of his life, and rest his hopes of fame and fortune on the certainty of its success" (304). Like Stephenson too, Alan's invention takes on the characteristics of the monumental, though it is a micro- and not a macro-invention. The narrator confirms that this safety invention is "the one thing needful for the temporal salvation of England." According to Smiles's model, then, this invention and Alan's success are inevitable. This, of course, is not the case.

City and Suburb explores how the character of the inventor contributes to (or detracts from) his success. The narrator explains, "To be a successful inventor a man must possess a rare combination of qualities—he must be brave and gentle, patient and energetic, indomitable yet submissive, clever, yet tolerant of ignorance, hopeful, yet able to bear disappointment, and, in addition to all, he must be gifted with powers of speech, conciliating manners, and the temper of a saint" (304). Interestingly this division between "a successful inventor" and "a man" reflects the disparity between Smiles's figure of Stephenson and Stephenson the man. The narrator's list

of the "rare combination" of inventors' traits describes the paradox created by conflating the ideal figure and the real person. The pairings are not only "rare," they are unreasonable. On one hand, they describe the ideal self-help man: "brave," "energetic," "indomitable," "clever," "hopeful," and "gifted with the powers of speech." As Smiles would have it, these characteristics alone should determine an inventor's success. The paired characteristics, though—"gentle," "patient," "submissive," "tolerant of ignorance" and bearing "conciliating manners, and the temper of a saint" all point to a major systemic problem in the process itself, one outside of the individual inventor's control. Though Riddell does mention problems the inventor encounters with the patent office, the majority of the struggle this novel addresses is the difficulty in communicating effectively with Railway Companies and the government office of the Board of Trade.

The typical experience of the inventor presented in *City and Suburb* echoes that of Stephenson's when he first attempted to get the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Bill adopted. Riddell's narrator relates:

> There is no kind of opposition he must not feel prepared to face—he will be considered an enthusiast, a bore, an imposter, a self-opinionated blockhead; he will be buffeted about from post to pillar, referred from one pedandic dunce to another, snubbed, bullied, sneered at, ignored (always supposing the invention be worth anything), till he pushes it before the public, when the caps of a thousand admirers will be flung in the air, and the despised of today be the king of tomorrow. (304)

Stephenson experienced this same negative perception of inventors, and the all-important railways was an idea "regarded as but the dream of a chimerical projector" (Smiles *The Life*

225). The perceptions the narrator describes ("enthusiast," "bore," "imposter," "self-opinionated") seem to take a negative slant on the positive Smilesean traits listed above. Those same self-interested characteristics, here, are regarded as unpleasant or present the inventor as untrustworthy. The drastic conversion from negative to positive reception is one Smiles imagined in his Stephenson narrative, too. Smiles explains the transformation the inventor experiences in how he is perceived as an organic process where "truth" inevitably "prevails" (225), a belief that is absent in *City and Suburb*.

Inventors do not win acclaim naturally on the merit of their inventions but rather suffer abuse at the hands of a dysfunctional system of power. The above passage includes a list of treatments to which the inventor is subject—he is "buffeted about," "snubbed," "bullied," "sneered at," and "ignored" by those "pedantic dunces" who hold positions of unmerited power. Once the invention is finally "push[ed] before the public," the way to acceptance seems secure. What is missing from the description of the process of getting an invention adopted is the step that occurs between the encounter with the various institutional functionaries and the public. How does an inventor—especially one who acts as his own agent—bypass the ill and unjustified treatment by people in power who do not value him or his invention? Smiles elides this explanation by employing the philosophy of inevitability—in a way, it doesn't matter *how* it happens once you know that it simply *will*—but Riddell's novel seeks to explore this precarious terrain. The reader looks just over the shoulder of the narrator and witnesses this stage in the process as well as its ill-fated consequences.

Besides dysfunctional networks, invention in the mid-nineteenth century suffered from conflicting value systems. The merit of the invention was subject to the priorities of capitalist enterprise. After the arduous process of getting his invention patented, Alan applies to fifteen

railway companies by letter asking to show his invention to them. Only three companies honored his request: “The Consolidated, the Great Southern, and The All England” (306). He met with each company, explained his plans, and illustrated the working of the safety carriage using models he manufactured himself and received substantial acclaim from each railway company representative, which instilled hope in the young inventor: “‘I congratulate you, my dear sir,’ said All England, grasping his hand, ‘on the most important invention of the age’. ‘I see no fault in it,’ declared the Consolidated, after a critical examination’” (306). The Great Southern made a practical inquiry about the carriage’s ability to manage curves, a concern Alan assuaged by illustrating the action with his model: “There was a profane expression of intense admiration wrung from the lips of the secretary, who, as a practical man, and a clever engineer, could not fail to be struck with the extraordinary beauty of the invention” (307). The fate of Alan’s invention seems secure. However, the Board of Directors had the ultimate say in whether or not to implement safety improvements. With no governmental oversight on safety standards, railway companies were free to make this decision at their own discretion based on their own cost/benefit rubric, regardless of the benefit to the public. George Stephenson brought this problematic arrangement to light during his testimony in the 1840 Railway Regulation debates.

Before George Stephenson reached the height of fame but after he had established himself as a respected engineer, he continued to struggle for the legitimacy of his own improvements. During the Railway Regulation hearing in 1840, the committee used one of Stephenson’s recent micro-inventions, self-acting breaks, to illustrate the problem of conflicting interests. Stephenson’s testimony initially depicts him as idealistic if not a bit naïve regarding his faith in railway companies’ ability to make decisions that were ethically and rationally motivated

to protect people and property rather than financially motivated to protect the bottom line. The line of questioning first establishes his invention as not only useful but arguably necessary:

> Q. You have paid much attention to the subject of breaks?
>
> A. I have
>
> Q. Do you consider them an important element of safety in railway travelling?
>
> A. Certainly, the most important of anything that can be contrived for the safety of travelling. I believe that if self-acting breaks were put upon every carriage, scarcely any accident could take place. ("Report from the Select Committee")

The resemblance between Alan Ruthven's new safety carriage and Stephenson's self-acting breaks, as well as their shared assertion that their inventions would dramatically reduce railway deaths, is striking. There is no direct evidence that Riddell was aware of Stephenson's invention. It is reasonable, though, to assume that Joseph Riddell would have read about it in a scientific magazine, newspaper mention, or published report by the Select Committee. Even if neither Mr. or Mrs. Riddell encountered information about Stephenson's invention, it is clear that Alan's story echoes the concerns of the time, particularly what motivates railway companies to adopt improvements or not.

Stephenson is then questioned about how financial interests might affect the likelihood of companies adopting the useful, necessary invention on their own volition:

> Q. Will the interest of the railway companies, and the desirableness of protecting their own property and the lives of the passengers that travel by them, induce them to take this precaution, as their own voluntary act, without the enforcement of a positive law on the subject?

A. I believe, as soon as it is found to be beneficial, and that it diminishes the wear and tear, all the companies will be induced to do it, even if it was not enforced by an Act of Parliament.

Q. Do you not think it would materially affect the receipts and profits of a railway company, if the public, who are in the habit of frequenting the railway, had an impression that there was not sufficient caution with respect to the mode of travelling?

A. I think it would. ("Report" 115)

Following the lead of the examiner, Stephenson begins with an assumption that the Railway Companies will be motivated by reasons other than financial costs, that safety would rank higher in a hierarchy of concerns. There does appear to be an understanding, though, that financial burden would hinder chances of the safety invention being adopted. The follow-up questioning attempts to frame the financial disincentives not as company expenditure but company loss because it assumes that the public will advocate for better conditions. The presumption is that the railway companies are subject to the power of the public's collective influence.

The questioning then addresses the possible conflict between the appointed Board of Trade engineer and the railway company's chief engineer:

Q. If the Government engineer and the engineer of the railroad differed upon those points, which, in your opinion, would be most likely to be in the right?

A. The practical man is certainly most likely to be the best judge upon a difficult point, and he has the right to judge.

Stephenson's answer is evasive, imagining that the practical man would be revealed inevitably. However, we hear his uncertainty in the letter he later wrote to the President of the Board of

Trade, The Honourable Henry Labouchere. He admits that "the supposed improvements should be duly considered by proper judges," but then raises the evocative question, "who are those judges to be?" How can either engineer be trusted to act practically and not to please the company directors, since either the company directors are his employer or he enjoys the current harmony between companies and the government, as Sir Frederic Smith expressed? The unspoken question asks who decides which judge is more practical, or even if he be practical at all.

The second half of *City and Suburb* searches for the elusive answer to this question. After the high praise he received from the great Southern, Alan is told by the secretary that the Board of Directors will not entertain the idea of adopting his invention without a recommendation from the Board of Trade: "You must go to the honourable Major Herod, and try to enlist him on your side—he is at the head of all these things in England, and if you can once make him see the importance of your invention, your fortune is made (307). Alan felt hopeful, thinking of the legitimate importance of his invention, which the secretaries unanimously confirmed. The narrator warns the reader, "In these matters he had not been blessed with much experience." In particular that lack of experience leaves him unprepared to meet with someone of Major Herod's character.

Rather than finding the proper judge, the practical man, Alan encounters the worst of all of the "pedantic dunces," when he meets with Major Herod. Rather than developing expertise, Major Herod "had taken up science as other members of his house had taken up fox-hunting, and fancied he knew more about wheels, and screws, and engines, and boilers, than all the engineers in England" (308). Not only does he lack expert knowledge, the narrator reveals, but "he received a large salary for the express purpose of discouraging improvements, and preventing

any useful discovery finding its way into general use." Recalling George Stephenson's letter to Labouchere, Herod seems to be the nightmarish enactment of Stephenson's desire for "some system [to be] laid down, to prevent wild, and visionary schemes, being tried, at the great danger of injury and loss of life to the public" (Stephenson Letter). His purpose of preventing the trials of inventions, though, is not based on rational judgment, as Stephenson had hoped (and perhaps assumed), but on his own personal inclinations, and "he conceived a dislike to his visitor the moment he set eyes on him" (308).

Riddell disturbs the calculus Stephenson envisions in his letter, one that suggests the inventor is the catalyst for destruction, and imagines instead that it will be the "system," headed by an unpractical man, that guarantees loss of life and property by immobilizing the inventor. Major Herod, the narrator tells us, was "an altogether theoretical man, it was the aim and object of his existence to make it apparent he was eminently practical; he had been wheedled and flattered into recommending the most preposterous inventions, and he had been angered into smothering the best ideas of the best men of the day" (307-08). Led by his emotions rather than judiciousness, Major Herod forecloses the inevitable success that Smiles ensured for the "best ideas" and "best men." Herod's behavior exposes how institutions, such as the Board of Trade, draw on nepotism and partiality rather than on earned skill, blurring the lines between the old hierarchies and the new system of meritocracy, the past and the present. Riddell's novel brings to light the reality that new paradigms, like meritocracy, can be adulterated just as easily by the advantages of power and self-interested personal relations. Herod is also not an exception to the rule, either. The narrator emphasizes that he is "a fair type of a class whom our grandchildren will wonder we tolerated" (307). If it will require two more generations to cure England of this

type, then this problematic figure and the system that enables his power are particularly insidious and desperately want correction.

An article printed in *The Railway Magazine* in 1897 titled "The Romance of Inventions," reflects the persistence throughout the century of the inventor's disadvantage in the face of more powerful and less sensible institutions. The article begins by first reiterating the inventor myth of wide-spread success: "To even mention the number of true stories that might be related concerning the remarkable manner in which poor men have been raised to immediate affluence by the lucky idea of hitting upon some useful or improved method of doing an every-day action would be truly startling" (287).[60] If this late idea of invention was a romance, however, it was a bad romance. The author also notes the persistent problem the inventor faces, combating unsuccessfully the more powerful institutional forces:

> It is often very difficult, however, to get a railway company to take up an invention. We know that inventors very often are not practical, but it is very seldom they get much encouragement from a big corporation such as a railway company. […] If the inventor has influence he may get prompt attention, but otherwise he may wait a long time before getting justice. This is by no means the fault of the very many courteous officials who watch for the interests of the big company. It appears to be the fault of a system which will not encourage the trial of new inventions. (288)

In his critique of systemic failure, the author is unwilling, even this late in the century, to place even a modicum of blame on those "courteous officials," who enable railway companies to prioritize financial interest over necessary or useful innovation. Though the inventor, here, is

[60] *The Railway Magazine*, Vol. 1, London: Economic Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., July to Dec. 1897.

portrayed as impractical, evidence suggests that it is government officials, like Major Herod, driven by self-interest (and perhaps even those such as Sir Frederic Smith, driven to be overly conciliatory), who lack large-scale common sense.

Besides government officials, the problem of managing progress also rests with the Directors of railway companies. Though the engineers who work for the companies might be practical men (as the narrator describes the secretary of the Great Southern), their allegiance ultimately lies with the company and, thus, they are complicit in the continued denigration of the inventor and devaluation of much needed railway improvements. The author illustrates a typical example: "If a new system of signaling was suggested to a railway company," he imagines, "it probably goes before a chief engineer, and here misfortunes commence" ("Romance" 289). He then explains that even if the invention is tested and adopted, "the official in question gets no benefit, and probably a good deal of work." But, supposing that he does recommend its adoption and proves ineffective, then he bears the responsibility of the cost of failure and faces the discontent of the railway directors. As the author astutely concludes, "the consequence probably is that it is the safest, as far as the official is concerned, to turn down all inventions which come before him, as they may be a source of trouble and no possible advantage. This is the state of things which should not be permitted" (289). This practice of avoiding conflict disempowered the inventor. In this illustration, it doesn't matter if the invention is worthy or not; the gate-keeping "courteous official" is disincentivized from the start to promote the invention. Such a chain of obstruction is the legacy of the Railway Regulation debates of the 1840s and one of the problems that Riddell examines in *City and Suburb*.

After critiquing the role of the official, Riddell then caricaturizes the relationship between the Board of Trade and Board of Directors. Alan Ruthven painstakingly explained his safety

invention, but Major Herod denies it will work. Ruthven demonstrates its effectiveness using his model, but Herod insists it will not work with real trains. The inventor offers to run an experiment, and the official refers him back to the Railway company:

> 'Carry it to Mr. Wheedon, secretary to The Great Southern Railway Company, and he will at once say whether the project be worth anything or nothing.'
>
> 'I have been to see him…and he told me it was the prettiest thing he had ever seen in his life, and advised me to bring it to you.'
>
> 'In that case you had much better take it back to his Directors.' (309)

This maddening scene resembles the illustration of bureaucracy Charles Dickens paints in "A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent" (1850) and then later in the description of the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit* (1857). In Riddell's novel, though, the forces working against the inventor are not faceless or caricaturized as they are in Dickens, nor are their motivations oppressively formless. Riddell uses her caricature to emphasize the serious consequence of a bureaucracy constituted of individuals who, without a clear mandate, are enabled to make specific decisions without accountability to a larger common purpose of public benefit—in this case, railway safety. Riddell's novel pushes past the generic claim that bureaucracy is bad for inventors to shed light on a historically specific arrangement that bore real consequences for her contemporary moment and gestures towards a hopeful future.

Riddell then tests the idea that railway companies equally prioritize public safety and company property. Despite the irrationality of the process, Alan forges ahead and seeks out a meeting with the board of directors of The Great Southern. Though they concede that the invention is designed intelligently and will work, they will not adopt it until it meets their standard of worth—cost efficiency. They tell Alan, "It is of no use your bringing anything to

save a life. If you can suggest any plan by which we can save money, I have no doubt I express the opinion of the board when I say that, after seeing your extremely ingenious scheme for avoiding injury from collision, we shall be happy to entertain your proposals" (309-10). This response highlights the different value systems at work amongst inventors, railway companies, and the government. This assessment directly contradicts the beliefs that Stephenson shared in his testimony—that companies would see the benefit of the improvement, despite material costs. *City and Suburb* illustrates how the hierarchy of priorities manifest in the decision-making process—it's not personal; it's business.

Railway companies knew, though, that the public valued convenience over safety when they were given the two choices only. The company's assessment of the public is perverse, but the novel does not suggest that it is inaccurate. Incredulous, Alan tries to reason with the board of directors: "But, surely,' urged Alan, 'yours is a short-sighted policy: human life must always be worth a price" to which one of the directors responds with unmasked disdain:

> The public are willing to risk their lives,' answered the chairman, with an undisguised sneer, 'They take averages, and when they find that so many per cent are killed by railway accidents they are content. It is on individuals, not the public, that railway accidents press heavily; but if we were to increase our expenditure in order to avoid accidents, the public would have to pay for that, and they would not like it. Directors must follow the lead of the public; and therefore, sir, while admitting the beauty of your invention, and inclining to a belief in its efficiency, we must decline trying any experiment, or holding any hope in the matter to you. As I have said before, any suggestions which may enable us to pay larger dividends shall receive our best attention. (310).

The directors understand that people have mentally separated themselves into individuals with whom they do not share the same experience (*that* individual was injured) and the public, an aggregate that buffers the odds that they will become one of the individuals. In this way, the public can manage the either/or choice before them, which grants them access and relative peace of mind.

The public will take their chances, now that railroads have become the more common and convenient method of travel. The narrator confirms that "Having to travel by rail, the public is generally slow to think about collisions; it rather inclines to shut its wise eyes to their occurrence: as it cannot avoid the danger, it would rather not reflect upon it, and usually tries to forget that such things as 'frightful accidents' are possible and probable to-day, to-morrow, and the to-morrow after" (310). Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues this point in his exploration of John Eric Erichsen's 1866 book, *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System.* Erichsen argued that fright was a cause and not a symptom of railway trauma, induced by the shock of undermined expectations of safe travel (Schivelbusch 139). Schivelbusch adds that mid-nineteenth century passengers became accustomed to the fright by forgetting, or repressing, their fears in order to make necessary travel bearable (160). Thus, the railways conditioned passengers into a modern, industrialized mindset that normalized individual encounters with powerful technology to make travel palatable.

Schivelbusch concedes that, though technological improvements helped to legitimize this new mindset, the initial fears people felt were warranted. He explains that "as technology in its first phase still suffered from 'gaps', or infantile maladies, which were real enough sources of danger" (Schivelbusch 160). The gaps that Schivelbusch references are technological, but Riddell points to the additional gaps in management as well as gaps in competing value systems

that contributed to the prolongation of these dangers long past technology's capacity to correct them. The public may be "wise," according to Riddell's narrator, to avoid thinking about imminent dangers in order to make traveling mentally manageable. However, the narrator also hints that the either/or choice passengers must grapple with is part of the problem—either you run the significant risk of injury or death, or you suffer the inconvenience of not using the railways. Recognizing the logical fallacy of the problem, Riddell's novel suggests a third way, one that empowers the public to act on its behalf and lessen the risk of serious injury and prevent death by recognizing and demanding that companies ought to do everything in their power to ensure the highest safety standards.

In fact and fiction, railway accidents bring these underlying value systems to the surface. Paul Fyfe argues that the occasion of the railway accident "offer[s] an overlooked historical context in which a variety of cultural actors reconsidered the civic, epistemological, and ethical significance of causation" (12). I would add to Fyfe's argument that the responses to accidents, particularly railway accidents, also indicate a ranging ethics of resolution. In other words, some threads of the contemporary conversation about railway safety were less concerned with where to place the blame (or to distribute the blame liberally) and more concerned with generating motivation to affect change regardless of culpability. The Sept. 14, 1861 edition of *The Saturday Review* explored the logic of accidents in the article "The Verdicts in the Railway Inquests." They examine the outcome of two accidents, one in Brighton and one in Kentish Town. While two individuals—a Brighton Railway official and a boy in charge of signals in Kentish Town—were found guilty of manslaughter, the author takes the opportunity to shift the focus from the two official defendants, whose crimes he deems "technical," to indict the railway companies, who are truly the responsible party. He explains the difference in value systems that Alan

Ruthven cannot at first see in his encounter with The Great Southern Railway Company: "A Company, which has no conscience to which to address moral reasoning, and no personality to which to administer corporeal arguments, is not to be reached by coroners' inquests" ("A Verdict" 273). Just as the director in *City and Suburb* distinguishes between individuals who suffer accidents and the public who hedge their bets, the railway companies operate with financial efficiency by denying that they, too, are a network of individuals with moral consciences and ethical responsibilities and instead act as a body that resists identification with vulnerable human life.

To effect change, *The Saturday Review* editorial suggests, shareholders should take action by appealing to the company's economic interest. This argument rests on the belief that public advocacy may be more effective if driven by the demands of shareholders because the financial value system is more widespread and ingrained than a rationally ethical one. He explains that the cost of the two accidents will be reflected in the dividends, and, thus, "in the next session of Parliament, we may expect a clamour on the part of shareholders which will be the more likely to succeed as by the time the names and memories of the Clayton Tunnel and the Kentish Town Station will be absorbed in the long, vague, shadowy recollection of the crowds of railway accidents" (274). Part of the wisdom that the narrator of *City and Suburb* credits to the public is their ability to forget. However, *The Saturday Review* specifies that they, as well as the Railway Companies, may forget the risk of accidents to passengers, "but deep in the memory of shareholders will be branded the recollection of shrinking dividends and swollen compensations" (274). According to the reporter, the railway companies are beholden to the powerful memories of the shareholders, which supersede the advantages of the public's willful forgetting. The "branding" in the shareholders' memory indicates that the accumulation of disastrous events

gathers force as it accrues, which converts to powerful bargaining power: “All, therefore, of security and hope in railway travelling is to keep a strong hold on the Companies through their interest. They must be kept to at least decent care for public safety by arguments of *ad crumenam*. To any other appeals they are not open” (274). The assumption is that power of the purse will prevail.

Shareholders may wield more power, but some believed that the public still had the ability and the responsibility to make demands. Though passengers willingly ran the risk of danger to enjoy convenient navigation, they did have their limits. In *City and Suburb*, the public is shown to react when negligence and danger prevent the ability to forget danger. Abandoning hope that The Great Southern will come to a consensus and adopt a new safety measure, Alan tries again with The Consolidated Railway Company. It happened that “The Consolidated had frequently been latterly before the public in a manner singularly obnoxious to the feelings of the shareholders,” since “collisions had been of too frequent occurrence for general attention not to be drawn to the fact. The Consolidated had, in fact, exceeded its average, and its orthodox number of deaths, by two or three accidents a-week, and the public, as was natural, did not like it” (310). Here, the public and shareholders, share the affective response to excessive accidents, uniting their interests, but the public and the threat of their displeasure seems to wield the most power.

In *City and Suburb* the public seems to become empowered in its collective force rather than suffering from the diffusion of dissonance. The narrator explains, “though the masses will bear a great deal there is a limit to their patience, and The Consolidated Railway Company had passed that limit.” Once that limit is exceeded, the veil of the public’s forgetfulness is lifted and

the shareholders' branded memory is accessed to put combined pressure on the railway companies to take action:

> Day after day the signals were wrong, or the people in charge drunk, or the lines out of repair, or the carriages not properly attached; daily these things happened, and the natural results followed—broken carriages, disabled engines, mangled passengers, an indignant public, and alarmed shareholders. The directors of The Consolidated were growing uneasy, or, to speak more correctly, had been seized with a sudden panic, and were consequently in a mood to listen patiently to any proposal likely to lessen the chances of accidents and loss of life. (310-311)

The litany of causes attributed to railway accidents illustrates how many variables are at work in the "machine ensemble" of the railway system, many of which are difficult to manage because they occur due to the behavior of individuals. What is needed is a micro-invention, such as Alan Ruthven's, which will make individual negligence nearly moot. His improvement intervenes in this equation of causes and effects by preventing, not accidents, but injury and death. It is this fact that must be understood by the public so that they can specify their demands to include the testing of new safety inventions as part of the critical intervention.

While lower level railway officials understood the value of inventors and new safety improvements, their senior officials were less technically knowledgeable, motivated mainly by profit. Just as with The Great Southern, the secretary of The Consolidated fully understands that testing new inventions is essential to addressing the problem of accidents, but he also knows that gaining the Board's approval is a nearly insurmountable task, especially if attempted by a lone inventor, such as Alan. When presenting Alan's invention to the chairman, the secretary of The Consolidated "went into the matter heart and soul," hoping that his added recommendation and

support would help usher it through the approval process. The chairman, while acknowledging the certain success of the invention, decides to take it before the full board, which proves "a death-blow." The full board consists of twenty-four gentlemen, four of whom supported Alan, but each of the remaining twenty, though "they wished to attain the same end," entertained his own separate plan. Though they represent the larger network of the railway company, they act more like Smiles's definition of a network as "associations of private individuals" than a coherent acting body, working together to forward the shared interests of the company. These directors act from self-interest and thus make up a dysfunctional body of disparate parts. Alan's hopes, already waning, sink when he recognizes in the group of directors Mr. Bonsil, "a principal man" (311). Acting with selfish interest rather than with the company's (and the public's) benefit in mind, Bonsil exacts his revenge against Alan.

Prioritizing Alan's failure over soliciting a viable solution to The Consolidated Railway Company's safety problem requires Bonsil to argue against logic. The first Director to speak, Bonsil declares Alan's invention "impracticable" and insists that it will not work. Alan proceeds to demonstrate successfully the invention's effectiveness using his model, but Bonsil insists that "if the patent were attached to a train, certain destruction to life, property, directors, shareholders, The Consolidated, and the general public"—the very parties to benefit from this intervention—"were the least evils that might be anticipated" (312). His claim is unfounded, offering absolutely no scientific or technological evidence to support it. Much like Major Herod, he justifies his personal feelings by framing them as facts. Though in a position of power, he is not held to any standard of rationality.

Bonsil's critique then shifts from the invention to the inventor, underscoring that important identification of an inventor with his work and using it to malign them both. He

attacks Alan in the aspiring inventor's most vulnerable spot—the recognized legitimacy of his credentials. Calling Alan "inexperienced," Bonsil asks, "What could he know about engineering matters? He had never served his time—never seen the inside of an engineer's shop till some two or three years previously!" (312). Drawing on that sense of inexperience, he calls Alan's model "a toy" and asks, "'how would a bauble like that work when two heavy trains came crashing together? It would be smashed!' cried Mr. Bonsil, raising his voice as though he heard the collision then—'it would be smashed—shivered into ten thousand atoms! He added with *goût*." Again, Bonsil offers no explanation for how he arrives at this conclusion, using only alarmist and unfounded claims to state his case, which shows how easily persuaded his fellow directors are, themselves not well-rooted in practical knowledge about the technology they manage. It also emphasizes how the value of inventions can be disparaged and the invention dismissed by first defaming the inventor's character.

Applying inconsistent logic to evaluate the relationship between inventors and self-advocacy, Bonsil makes his final appeal to his fellow directors. He first questions how the directors ought to approach the problem, reminding them that "they were met together to take into consideration the causes of those accidents, and the best means of preventing their recurrence" (312). Thus, he re-frames the problem with an assumption that accidents can be eradicated and the directors need, therefore, to get to the root cause. This assumption denies the complexity of the "machine ensemble" and the improbability of managing all of the variables that contribute toward accidents. Bonsil seems at first unwilling to concede the point that an invention that reduces destruction and prevents death is worth considering. He connects the improbability of the invention to the inventor's promotion of it. Bonsil presumes, he says, "that the board did not mean to waste precious moments in hearing inventors praise their own ideas;

and for his part, he considered Mr. Ruthven's scheme below contempt" (312). Though Alan follows the self-help model of a self-acting individual, Bonsil characterizes him as audacious for advocating for his invention.

Bonsil's criticism of Alan as a presumptuous and not humble inventor echoes the disparity between Smiles's idealized figure of Stephenson and Stephenson the man. While Smiles portrays Stephenson as humble and hardworking, Stephenson was perceived negatively during the Proceedings of the Committee of the House of Commons on the Liverpool and Manchester Railroad Bill Sessions in 1825. After close and critical examination of the legitimacy of Stephenson's claim to be a practical and then civil engineer, his testimony about the effectiveness of the railroads is scrutinized. Stephenson is asked if one of his technical explanations is based on the idea that "the Railroad is perfect," to which he replies, "It is, and I mean to make it perfect" (1825 Bill Proceedings 203). Stephenson's boldness was shocking and thought presumptive. Emphasizing the strength of his belief in the invention, Stephenson's assertion also introduces the complex idea that perfection occurs in idea and execution, that it will require fine-tuning, continued attention to achieve and maintain that perfection. Built into the design (and the perfection of the design), then, is the requirement of improvements. The cross-examiner then introduces examples of early issues with the rail lines and chairs that caused "evils" in the railway's effective execution, and Stephenson confirmed that these problems were corrected and "put in a proper state" (207). The examiner then attempts to undermine Stephenson's claim by pointing out, "Then your perfect Railroads require looking after?" to which Stephenson replied with aplomb, "Yes, they do." It makes sense that inventors have confidence in their inventions. Their belief in their ideas provides an assurance in its value. That

belief, coupled with evidence to warrant it, justifies the trial necessary to determine whether or not to adopt the invention.

An inventor's confidence in his invention provides not only assurance to others but also a source of empowerment that counters the lack of communal support in the inventor world, wrought by poor odds and high competition. In other words, inventors should be confident in their work, but they also *must* be confident in their work in a system that forces their self-advocacy. Hypocritically, after belittling Alan and his invention, Bonsil introduces his own, underscoring that lack of community between inventors. He declares that "He, himself had a plan—a cheap, novel, and effective plan to lay before the board; one which had cost him some thought, and that he had reason to believe would answer every requirement. He would merely state, in the first instance, that for simplicity and certainty, his idea…had never been surpassed" (312). Clearly he is an inventor praising his own ideas. And, though his invention is only vaguely described in the narrative, it also does not promise to eradicate the root causes of accidents but rather proposes a micro-improvement, like Alan's, that reduces safety problems. His arguments are fueled by a sense of competition and demonstrate the power he has in his position on the board to evaluate the worth of his fellow inventor's work and his own in bad faith. Bonsil's treatment of Alan illustrates the result of the plea Stephenson made to LaBouchere, too. While Stephenson may not have been acting in bad faith, exactly, his request could certainly be read as an attempt to ensure his own invention at the risk of entertaining other equally plausible ones. To a degree, it was motivated by a sense of competition.

As Riddell shows, though, competition does not always invite or ensure practical judges. Bonsil cross-examines Alan one more time until Alan loses his temper and "spoke truths to the board which directors are not much accustomed to hear" (313). This breach in decorum

appears to be the last straw and closes the negotiations, reinforcing the narrator's earlier assertion that a paradoxical personality is required to withstand the process of getting an invention adopted. George Stephenson was also criticized for his hostility and arrogance, along with his inability to consistently supply accurate information about surveys and estimates, during the 1825 Liverpool and Manchester Bill hearings. His performance during cross-examination was cause for much lingering personal regret, only confirmed by the fact that they did not rely on his testimony during the next session, which concluded in the passage of the bill.

In *City and Suburb* we find an attempt to explain the relationship between the individual inventor, his personal characteristics, and the context within which he is embedded and interacts. Smiles's argument, that the combination of perseverance and inventive genius is enough to guarantee success, falls apart when we look closely at the actual process and the complications the inventor encounters. The narrator remarks, "We hear too much of strong minds in these days, of the power of will, of the certainty of genius proving ultimately successful; obstinacy is exalted into a god, talent into a capital—whereas the fact is that obstinacy as often conducts men to the workhouse as to high places, that genius is a curse unless a man can adapt to the exigencies of his situation" (314). The novel addresses how aspects of Alan's personality make him unable to adapt to those exigencies. He is foremost too prideful in his family to develop the working relationships conducive to making progress in the invention profession. He is also, the novel tells us, impatient in his encounters with people who do not immediately recognize and support his endeavors and unwilling to invest in business connections which might ensure his success.

These assessments may be true, but the novel also points out how those exigencies are themselves unreasonable. Many of the people he encounters are ignorant, willfully obstinate

themselves, overly competitive, or acting from selfish motives. The system is set up for him to fail unless he transforms his personality into an impossible set of contradictory traits. Rather than the inventor adapting to the circumstances, the novel seems invested in the argument that in reality the circumstances need reform. Change can occur only once the larger bodies of power creating those circumstances change. This reverses the order of adaptation and adjustment so that, rather than beleaguered, the inventor is enabled to affect the necessary improvements in the invaluable railway system. No group is left unindicted in *City and Suburb*, either. Lack of government oversight, company mismanagement, and public inaction are all cited as contributing factors to the prolonged and exacerbated problem of railway safety. Though the inventor has the skill and imagination to make improvements, the dysfunction of these formal and informal institutions disables his ability to do so. No amount of perseverance on the part of the inventor can overcome these obstacles.

In *City and Suburb* Alan realizes that he does not stand a chance as a solo agent in the inventor business. He recognizes that the dysfunction within the groups of power is caused by a value system that is at odds with his own. The narrator tells us that after his failed meeting with The Consolidated, Alan Ruthven quit inventing, "setting forth that money is more than life or honour to the multitude" (315). He understands, too, that not only is money more important in this value system, but also that he is devalued as an inventor, even demonized, in order to maintain the status quo. The narrator explains that his experience led him to discover the truth: "the English as a nation regard any struggling man who imagines he has found a plan to benefit them as a thief in the night—that whilst proud of inventions, they look upon inventors as dangerous characters—that from fear of believing too much, they are apt to decline to believe at all" (315). That pride, we know, often comes retrospectively, after the invention has been fully

integrated into the new way of doing. Until that point of recognition, the inventor is perceived negatively by formal and informal institutions and aggregates of people, alike, which leads him to a cynical perspective about the state of the nation.

Inventions may be valued retrospectively, but at the time of their often much-needed introduction, inventions are seen more as troublesome interferences rather than the critical interventions they actually are. Competing values obscure the true worth of innovation and disempower the inventor from serving as a catalyst for change and a contributor towards national progress. Alan declares he is "weary of Directors, Boards, and the public, and shall try no more" (326). Though he lumps them all together, he is aware that the public is the one amongst the three that stands to suffer the most. It was mainly for the public's benefit that he persevered, but now he states in resignation, "let the public take care of itself." His brother Murray inquires, "'But if the public be not capable of doing that?'" to which Alan replies, "'It will still not thank you or me for meddling in the matter', answered the elder man bitterly." Alan understands the score that the public, though much in need, cannot be counted to act in its best interest. In response to Alan hearing about a railway accident, Murray presses, "'Yet, you are troubling yourself about it … you are grieving for the public even while inveighing against it!'" Alan, knows, though how the public calculates its position, responding, "'I am not annoying myself about a public that believes in averages, and takes its risk of accidents in order that travelling may be cheap'" (326). The public does make its decisions with its purse strings, but not in the way that *The Saturday Review* suggested above. Passengers would rather pay the cost of convenience than safety.

City and Suburb seeks a solution that honors the value of technical innovation and public safety separate from economic interest.[61] A major railway accident in the novel first exposes the fact that blame for the contemporary circumstances is to be distributed across the board to Railway Directors, the Board of Trade, and the Public—there is no Manichean division of good guys and bad guys, the novel insists. The novel espouses the perspective that the public are clearly complicit in their own vulnerability since their actions, too, are motivated by monetary interests even as that behavior endangers their own safety. The narrator in *City and Suburb* explains the calculus of safe versus cheap travel: "Something under a half penny a mile may pay dividends, but it can never ensure safety; and if the public, smarting under a broken limb, enquires with sudden energy—why do you lower your fares then? The Board has nothing to do but turn and ask, with a bland smile, 'Why do you travel?'" (411). The public and the Railway Companies are bound in conflict according to their monetary interests. The narrator reminds the reader that this conflict has plagued railway travel for decades and will continue without interference: "Is not this, reader, the summing up of the war which has been waged in England for years past? Do not Railways take advantage of the public folly? And then do they not virtually taunt the public for its folly? Can we now travel with the slightest degree of safety to Manchester or Scotland…?" (411). Riddell's novel emphatically contradicts Stephenson's

[61] This is not to suggest that Riddell's novel takes an anti-capitalist stance. Her oeuvre evinces her interest in and support of sound capitalist finance. Silvana Colella explains Riddell's moderate stance, which she characterizes as a "fine ideological line to tread": "For Riddell, the process whereby individuals pursue their self-interest, the struggles they endure in the effort to achieve economic security and the commercial challenges they encounter are heroic in novelistic terms. Small capitalists, inventors, and managers alike are deserving of the prestige of literary representation…But when capitalism is synonymous with wealth amassed and exhibited, when the struggles are over and the enjoyment of money and power comes to the fore Riddell joins forces with Dickens, Trollope, or Thackeray" (Colella 114). My argument is that the novel seeks a solution that considers other value systems in addition to economic ones. This position accords with most pro-regulation perspectives, which are not anti-capitalist even if they recognize that capitalist motivations have to be checked in the name of public welfare. A nation can decide that it wants to be a leader in technological innovation *despite* economic cost because it prioritizes scientific progress. The American space program would be a good example of such a value system in effect.

testimony in the Select Committee hearing of 1840, urging instead, that safety improvements will never occur by the will of the Railway Companies *or* the public, thus requiring government intervention to ensure change. *The Saturday Review* editorial suggests, "when, as now, there are no regulations at all, it is not too much to ask for some compulsory interference with the present organized anarchy" ("The Verdicts" 274). This "organized anarchy" is constructed by the dysfunctional systems that guarantee only the status quo.

Coroner's Inquest: Anti-regulation on Trial

A collision between an Express train and an Excursion in *City and Suburb* stresses the competing interests between the Public and private enterprise. Notably, the Excursion was transporting The Honourable Major Herod of the Board of Trade, the government official who should have been acting on the public's behalf. By this time Alan suffered a series of financial setbacks that leads him to work as an engine-driver of a railway. He feels liberated by a complete detachment from those informal and formal institutions of power and the direct relationship he enjoys with the magnificent macro-technology of the railway engine. When doubtfully inquiring into Alan's invention of the safety carriage, Mr. Bonsil asked, "how will a bauble like that work when two heavy trains came crashing together?" The accident that occurs answers a different question: What will happen when two heavy trains crash together without the introduction of Alan Ruthven's safety carriage?

City and Suburb illustrates the details of a collision, such as one that might be reported in any newspaper at that time, explaining both the causes and the larger implications of such accidents. Alan was driving the express train, which was running a few minutes behind. This was a common occurrence and difficult to avoid altogether. It required other trains to adjust their

speed to allow safe passage at crossways, and this need was conveyed through signals. Though the danger signals were up, "the driver of the Excursion train had disregarded them," emphasizing the persistence of human error (408). The only chance of minimizing damage was if the Excursion put on the break and Alan put on the steam, so Alan went full steam ahead, but the Excursion still hit the tail end of the Express. The Excursion fared the worse: "carriages had overturned; along the Junction line women and children were standing by the embankment crying and wringing their hands; men were looking for their wives, fathers for their daughters; people were gathered together in groups round crippled and maimed sufferers." The Honourable Major Herod happened to be on the Excursion. Both of his legs were broken and he died later, a narrative event which would have recalled in the readers' minds the famous death of Huskisson, run over by Robert Stevenson's prize-winning engine, the Rocket, during the grand exhibition run of the Liverpool and Manchester Line—a traumatic memory in the public consciousness. Knowing that he will be called to serve as a witness at the coroner's inquest, Alan vows to himself that he will state the truth plainly: "My invention would have saved them all,' he said to himself twenty times over, 'and I will tell them so, come or go what may'" (410).

Though the purpose of an inquest is to examine an accident and clearly determine fault, the inquest in *City and Suburb* reveals a general confusion—about culpability, the public's best interests, and how railway technology operates. Paul Fyfe claims, "Inquests pop up throughout Victorian Fiction not merely as scenes of crimes or testimony, but as evidence of their insufficiency to establish causes, contexts, and relations, which novels (at least) implicitly claim as the domain of narrative" (51-52). Indeed, the narrator of *City and Suburb* describes the inquest as a tragic event turned comic "by the absurdity of the whole proceedings—by the words of the coroner, the stupidity of the jury, the resolution of the lawyers present to get the Railway

Company into trouble, and the determination of the Railway Company to prove that though everybody else in the land might be wrong, they were always right" (410-11). The inquest made that much more absurd by its repetitiveness. Only the jury changes, the narrator explains: "the same scene is enacted at every inquest of a like character throughout the United Kingdom" (411). The Directors always win, and only pay lip service to the actual tragedy:

> They are always 'affording every facility,' and they are always 'smoothing things over;' they always regret the 'lamentable occurrence,' and in the same breath they prove how much worse it might have been; they assure the public that iron is but metal, that men are but flesh and blood—that they carry so many millions of passengers per annum over the iron highways of England, and only kill so many per cent—they are always 'making arrangements'—they declare their arrangements are perfect. (411)

Riddell writes the Directors' prototypical responses as if they were a collection of quotes from official reports or newspaper articles, emphasizing both their meaninglessness and their ubiquity. This news is not new, the novel emphasizes; the public encounters it regularly.

Riddell adopts the formal convention of testimony in the inquest scene—as newspapers did at the time—adding to her realism but also enlightening the reader about how the terms of Railway management are officially negotiated. Rather than a full Q & A, the narrator only shares Alan's responses in a list of declarative remarks, presenting them as factual in nature. By allowing the reader to intuit the questions being asked, this style draws attention to what information is most interesting to officials and, thus, puts those questions themselves under the spotlight:

> Am a gentleman by birth—an engine-driver from necessity; never thought myself above my work—never neglected it. Did my best to avoid the accident….Knew the Excursion train was to cross my line at Raymoor Junction—was on the look out for it. Saw the danger signals were up to warn the other train to wait till the Express was past. Put on all steam when I perceived those signals had been disregarded. Believe that even at the last, if the driver and guard of the Excursion train had put on the breaks, a collision might have been avoided. Am confident that had I slackened speed scarcely a passenger would have escaped uninjured; (to a juryman) half a second would have carried us past the danger, (to the coroner) three carriages could clear a train in half a second. (412)

As he did in each stage of his experience with the process of innovation, Alan must first defend his status and his character before defending the rationality of his actions to an audience that does not understand them. In both cases it is clear that he is subject to distrust rather than appreciated for his expertise. As Alan oscillates between the juryman and the coroner, Riddell points to those representative agents, the public and government officials, who have the power to affect change on a large scale.

It is the tendency during these inquests to focus on the individual actors, rather than to look at the big picture and who is more largely responsible. Alan is forced to defend the ethics of his testimony as well as his behavior: "Am not here in the interest of my employers—have given notice to leave them—have not been discharged—no dissatisfaction has been expressed by any one at my conduct" (413). Alan quickly establishes that he is not one of those "courteous officials" mentioned earlier who speak for the protection of the company interests, nor does he stand accused by his own company. He has positioned himself as neutral in interest, yet with a

firm opinion. Though he portrays himself as ethically detached, his morals are tested when he is asked if he said, “it served him right,” when he learned that Major Herod was amongst the injured. He explains that, while he “regret[s] making use of such an expression,” he stands by his reaction. His answers are motivated by the desire to make the truth transparent.

In an attempt to repair his image, the inventor first had to establish the fact that his technological expertise was an asset and not a liability. Much like the report in the 1861 article “The Verdicts in the Railway Inquests,” Alan shifts the blame from the technical actions of the railway operators to the larger systems of management, who have the power to arrest the cycle of railway accidents. Alan explains, “Had Major Herod examined into the merits of an invention of mine two years since, he would have been alive now. To a certain extent I consider him responsible for all the deaths that have been caused by railway collisions since then. I laid my invention before him when I occupied a different position to that I do now” (413). He is asked to explain his invention to the jury, though he doubts they will understand it as “unscientific persons,” an opinion perhaps warranted by the fact that he previously had such difficulty explaining it to the unscientific persons in power, Major Herod and the Railway Board of Directors. This lack of understanding, he shows, contributed to his personal decline as well as the decline of the value of the invention. He relates the fate of his safety carriage, explaining that he had to sell the patent to his creditors during his financial downfall, who will most likely shelve it until the new owners are sure it will realize wealth. Thus, much like Alan’s own devolution from gentleman, to inventor-engineer, to engine driver, to unemployed, his invention shares a downward path from promising idea to ridiculed scheme to impotent commodity.

Paul Fyfe argues that “accidents at once exemplified the randomness of the railway network and provided occasions to re-interpret it” and that “Depictions of railway accidents in

Victorian fiction have this double function" (193). However, Riddell's representation and explanation in *City and Suburb* refuses the idea of randomness, ascribing blame at every level. Alan extends his condemnation from Major Herod, the inept agent heading the Board of Trade, to the immorality of Railway Directors. He states plainly that he has "strong opinions on the subject of collisions, and the prejudices of directors. Distinctly remember stating that a company had 'neither a soul to be saved, nor a body to be kicked;'" (414).[62] Alan's strong opinions escalate to incendiary remarks. He declares, "if on the occasion of every railway accident a director were hung, the directors either drawing lots or taking it rotation, there would soon be none but unavoidable accidents; by unavoidable accidents, mean those arising not from the willfulness, ignorance, and conceit of man, but from the visitation of God" (414). The reception of such a suggestion can be intuited by Alan's next response, "Am not mad; have quite as many senses as the coroner or any of the jury."

By associating himself with the inquisitioner and the jury (the government and the public), Alan implies that they should share his extreme contempt, that they, too, should have "strong opinions." Alan furthers the point, asserting that the matter is not just one of responsibility but about complicity, too. He explains that he "gave notice because I would not again be an actor in such as scene as yesterday for ten times my present salary" (414). He uses the connection to the jurors—the representative public—and their implied complicity to promote a value system that positions safety above monetary cost or gain for the good of the nation.

The jury, however, does not recognize the larger responsibility of the Railway Directors or the Board of Trade, much less their own complicity, and blames the technical errors

[62] This is a common misquote (though not a misinterpretation) from Edward Thurlow, First Baron Thurlow: "Corporations have neither bodies to be punished, nor souls to be condemned; they therefore do as they like." *Literary Extracts* (1844), vol. 1, p.268.

performed by singular individuals, instead. Though they place the majority of the blame on the guards and the engine-driver of the Excursion, hinting that they may have been "tipsy," they take a moment to condemn (but not indict) Alan's actions as well as his character. They conclude that Alan "was an unfit person for the responsible position of an engineer; they expressed their strong disapproval of the manner in which he gave his evidence… and they regretted that there was not sufficient testimony as to the recklessness of his conduct to justify them in committing him for manslaughter" (415). The jury's utter misevaluation of Alan's knowledge and skill and complete misrecognition of his potential value is further ironized by the concluding statement that "railway companies should adopt some plan for securing greater safety of life and limb to their passengers." The jury may be oblivious to their complicity in the perpetuation of the problem, but, the narrators tell us, "the initiated laughed till their sides ached, whilst the representative of the Company gravely promised that every effort should be used in the future as in the past, to ensure security to passengers." In other words, the Company would maintain the status quo promising only the same cycle of negligent accidents and responsibility shirking.

The jury was representative of the public's worst ignorance, but the fourth estate of newsmen voiced the best of the thoughtful, rational people of England. They condemned the Company and doubted the jury's ability to weigh in on scientific manners, but "were especially indignant at the manner in which the engine-driver, Ruthven, had been treated solely because he spoke out his mind, and chanced to be by birth a gentleman" (415). As George Stephenson was harassed during his 1825 testimony for his low birth and lack of formal training, Alan Ruthven is criticized for his high birth and lack of formal training. Though both develop the expertise required by studied perseverance, it is clear that higher value is placed on the professional training provided by civil engineering schools. This perverts the precepts of a true meritocracy,

promoting instead a hierarchy in support of an established professional class of men, one that is largely afforded by money and nepotism and, thus, an infrastructural replication of the old aristocratic system.

The newspaper also addresses the irony of condemning the inventor while searching for a viable solution to the railway safety deficit. With the same exasperated and emphatic tone that *The Saturday Review* employed to call for an end to the "present organized anarchy," the paper in *City and Suburb* exclaims, "This is the way England treats her inventors…she kills the goose, and then in her wisdom marvels she has no golden eggs" (416). The invention provides the main part of the solution to the problem and cannot be separated from the inventor. Thus, the inventor should be seen as the central figure who will serve as the ultimate catalyst for change. In Alan's case, the inventor knows how often the public's perception of him as an untrustworthy figure adulterates invention's reception. Alan became the subject of many articles, and, though he could have used this to his advantage and "managed to get up a very sufficient controversy as to the merit of his invention," he knows, "he might NOT have had his invention tested nor its merits acknowledged" (416). Finally subdued by the process, "he held his peace."

Public Safety as National Prosperity: The Railway Inventor's Golden Eggs

Riddell initially frames the problem of *City and Suburb* as a flaw in Alan Ruthven. In the beginning of the novel, she tells us Alan's talents "stood out like goodly flowers for the world to see," but that he was hindered by his own pride. As the novel continues, the reader expects the arc to trace his personal salvation from his sin. The novel concludes with nothing short of deep personal regret: "Gazing on it, and thinking of his past and his present, the irremediable past, the remorseful present…wishing, oh, vainly, that he could go back five years, and…begin his

working life anew. But the drama had played out, there was no treading the boards afresh, there was no use sorrowing for what had happened" (472-73). Alan realizes how barren regret is without a reorientation towards the future. He illustrates the process of productive regret when he concludes, "But God give me grace…I will try to make a better thing of life in the future" (473). Alan breaks his personal cycle of obstinacy that hindered his progress. In *City and Suburb* Alan's story is set against the backdrop of the national narrative of progress, the two running parallel, showing the decline of both. Alan's personal story is also used allegorically to imagine how the nation could act otherwise.

Through the personal and individual experience of Alan Ruthven, Riddell models the move she asks the nation to make—to see the error of its ways, to make amendments, and to commit to a better future. It is clear that the novel calls for railway regulation as part of this commitment, but also a reform of those agencies that are enabled to enact and enforce change—the Board of Directors and the Railway Companies. The commitment also calls for conscientiously putting people in power who consider economic feasibility, but who put it second to safety, favoring innovation that improves railways and not just lowering costs. Finally, the commitment asks for the nation to champion, above all, the inventor, who has the practical knowledge to give England back it's golden egg.

During the inquest, Alan Ruthven declines to explain the principle of his invention to the jury because he questions "whether unscientific persons could comprehend its action." But *City and Suburb* itself demonstrates that the public might be interested enough about the technologies defining their modern lives to learn about them. In the details of their writings, Charlotte Riddell, as well as and Elizabeth Gaskell, demonstrate knowledge of the patent system, railway technology, and the nuances of the Railway Regulation debates. In their fiction, they stake a

position, helping also to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between the public and inventors. Their studied interest as authors suggests that the public has the capabilities not only to understand but also to show interest in scientific innovation. By reworking the Stephenson narrative in their fiction, they help to mediate perceptions of the inventor to show he could be viewed neither as exceptional nor dangerous but rather a part of the integrated network of contingencies that defined Victorian modernity. The inventor was not the only type of person mischaracterized as dangerous to protect laissez faire principles amidst the chaos of railway development. In the next chapter I will explore the regrets of railway finance and the myths of the dangerous shareholder.

CHAPTER THREE

LOCO-MOTIVES: RAILWAY MANIA AND THE TROPE OF INSANITY IN SENSATION FICTION

"*Who is quite safe from the trembling of balance?" —Lady Audley's Secret*

The introduction of railway technology to British life and culture ushered in an era of improved mobility, but the path was far from smooth. The integration of the ground-breaking innovation was experienced as dynamic, forward progress punctuated by a series of arresting shocks. Drastic changes to the landscape and the ability of passengers to travel at previously unimagined speeds and distances radically altered familiar ways of seeing and doing. Besides the shocking changes in perspective and routine, those living during the mid-nineteenth century experienced the literal shocks of railway travel, which were due both to the unfamiliar and discomforting sensations of vibrating, jolting railway cars and also to the often catastrophic devastation wrought by railway accidents. Financial investments in these private ventures also generated economic shockwaves. The democratic nature of investment opportunities—and subsequent upward mobility when those investments paid off—contributed to the in-progress shake up of traditional class organization while the aftershocks of financial manias, induced by unregulated speculation, reverberated throughout the economy. Great and small fortunes alike were amassed and decimated at mid-century. Those living through these changes had to adapt to the new, precarious balance between progress and disaster, gratification and regret.

Nicholas Daly, Jill Matus, Paul Fyfe and others explore how literature helped manage the shocking effects of railway construction, railway time, railway travel, and railway accidents in the modern consciousness.[63] However, critics have little attended the correlation between

[63] See: Nicholas Daly. "Blood on the Tracks"; Paul Fyfe, *By Accident or Design*; Jill Matus. *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*; Daniel Martin. "Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in 'Lady Audley's Secret'"; Robin Barrow, "Rape on the Railway."

sensation fiction, mental illness, and the mid-century fears about railway finance incited by the series of railway manias that occurred in the 30s, 40s, and 60s — arguably the most shocking aspect of railway history. I find this economic anxiety in the background of sensation fiction in which the railways serve as a significant plot device. While drawing from other fiction and non-fiction from that period, this chapter focuses on the case of *Lady Audley's Secret* as an example of a mid-century sensation novel that features the railways alongside characters who are both socio-economically mobile and allegedly mentally unstable.[64] I examine how literature about managing mental instability helped readers adapt to the instabilities of railway investment.

In Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861), several characters experience mental maladies, including frenzied fevers, monomania, and acute mania. This psychological mania, I claim, recalls the financial railway mania England experienced twenty years earlier. Though railway investment promised socio-economic mobility to the growing middle class, England suffered catastrophic financial devastation when the speculative bubble burst in the 1840s. When railway investments again increased in the late 1850s, fears of another traumatic collapse contributed to a culture of nervous apprehension. I argue that fear of future railway manias surfaces in the trope of insanity in order to alleviate that anxiety. In Braddon's novel, the dangerous potential for insanity to manifest in any moment encodes the fears Victorians had of the instabilities of the financial market, particularly railway investments. While drawing on these fears, the novel works to assuage them. Instances of crime, attempts to avoid detection, and efforts to discover the truth are all effected by expert knowledge and adept use of the railways. By tying the railway both to the danger of insanity and its institutional containment, I argue

[64] In Charles Reade's *Hard Cash* (1863), Richard Hardie's increasingly manic investment in railway shares is directly linked to false accusations of his son's sanity, a point on which I will elaborate below. The impossibly abandoned railway scheme in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) mentioned above in chapter one (footnote 2), is described in the novel just before detailing the mental and physical demise of Lady Dedlock (801).

through the example of *Lady Audley's Secret*, sensation novels offered a sense of security for readers amidst the precarious "trembling of balance" wrought by unpredictable railway investment.

Shocking Sensations: Railway Finance and its Fictional Forms

In order for the railways to become integrated into everyday life, people had to learn how to cope with the discomforts attendant to the new technology, which required affective adjustments in conjunction with the more obvious physical ones. Wolfgang Schivelbusch contends that anxiety developed as a modern adaptation to the shocks induced by railway technology. Shock, he explains, occurs because of a "lack of readiness": "*Now 'shock' describes the kind of sudden and powerful event of violence that disrupts the continuity of an artificially/mechanically created motion or situation, and also the subsequent state of derangement*" (158, emphasis in original). Anxiety counterbalances shock, serving as a protective mechanism—a buffer against the threat to physical safety wrought by railway travel by "creating an attitude of readiness" (163). This meant that the modern subject normalized an almost constant state of anticipatory nervousness in order to avoid the disruption of shock. At the same time, fear of danger became "repressed, one could even say, reified as a feeling of safety," meaning that fear was elicited first in order to be subdued. The "forgetful" modern subject was then able to participate in the new method of traveling without being paralyzed by such fear. Schivelbusch's psychoanalytic assessment of railway passengers' adaptation to physical shock finds purchase in the relationship between readers and the shock of sensation fiction. Since fear-anxiety-safety processing occurred in the collective imagination, fiction was able to reinforce its cultural internalization by building that process into the literary form.

Reading sensation fiction helped mitigate the impact of the physical, financial, and imaginative railway shocks while also helping readers adapt to risk.[65] The sensational aspects of railway travel (shaking railway cars, jostling platform crowds, traumatizing accidents, shattering financial repercussions) seem particularly suited to the subgenre that in 1863 H. L. Mansel famously claimed, "preaches to the nerves" (357).[66] In *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860*-2000 Nicholas Daly builds on Schivelbusch's foundational work, explaining literature's role in the shock-anxiety relationship: "Wherever nervousness or anxiety is, then, shock is not: by living on his/her nerves, the modern subject seeks to actually cocoon him or herself from the impact of modernization" (39).[67] Sensation fiction performs this cocooning function most effectively, Daly argues, through the formal element of suspense, which catalyzes the fear-

[65]Elaine Freedgood argues that "the 'modern' attitude to risk is distinguished from past attitudes more by its strategies of containment than by a new acceptance of the inevitability of risk" (2). She positions herself against Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann and Marshall Berman. In Braddon's novel I see the concurrent efforts of legal and mental containment developing through an acceptance not only of the inevitability of risk but also the probability of disruptive financial cycles. The cocoon-like state of anxiety contains the justifiable fear of risky business. See: Elaine Freedgood, *Victorian Writing About Risk*; Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*; Niklas Luhmuann. *Risk: A Sociological Theory*.
The point that books (especially Sensation Fiction), if read attentively, have the potential to instruct readers on how to think or act is made within *Lady Audley's Secret*, which I will discuss in detail in the conclusion.

[66] Mansel criticizes writers of the new, popular subgenre that appeared mid-century because "Excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim." He blames the quick convenience of "periodicals, circulating libraries, and railway bookstalls" for contributing to the popular consumption of literature that he views as spiritually impoverished. His characterization of the sensation novel is that it "abounds in incident" and "consists of nothing else." He contrasts these empty ends and easy means with "the higher features of the creative art" which pursue "Deep knowledge of human nature, graphic delineations of individual character, vivid representations of the aspects of Nature." What Mansel fails to recognize, of course, is how sensation fiction helped readers deal with horrific new realities at that mid-century moment *precisely* by exploring sensational incidents, particularly railway incidents common at that time. H. L. Mansel. "Sensation Novels."
In "Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel" Andrew Maunder surveys the field, pulling together a variety of criticism in an effort to define sensationalism and its various functions. Of particular interest is his review of Tom Gunning's article "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," wherein he summarizes Gunning's identification of sensationalism's aesthetic mode of "mix[ing] fear and thrills and confront[ing] the audience through a 'marked encounter, a direct stimulus, a series of shocks', throwing the spotlight on the horrific and the freakish" (6).
My argument takes this a step further by suggesting that sensation fiction did more than to reflect or "throw a spotlight." Its purpose was to examine fears—not to revel in incident but to quell the fears attendant to the horrific often by suggesting interventions, such as legal reform.

[67] Daly is also drawing on the works of Georg Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) and Walter Benjamin in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1968) who are writing more broadly about the effects of shock on the consciousness of the modern subject. In Schivelbusch, we see these theories applied directly to the consciousness of the railway traveler.

anxiety-safety process. The reader senses danger, suspects a cause, readies herself with nervous anticipation during a prolonged period of suspense, and then submits to the cathartic safety of the resolution. Thus, reading prepares the reader for literal shocks with figurative training in protective nervousness and helps the reader to "forget" danger by inuring her to shock exposure. I particularize this claim, arguing that mid-century sensation novels featuring the railways help manage nervousness about financial manias, in particular, by utilizing the fear-anxiety-security process as a narrative structure. [68]

The over-arching fear driving this type of narrative was that the rise in railway investments in the late 1850s threatened another devastating financial bubble.[69] Though apprehension during a financial up-cycle after the relatively recent turbulence would be warranted, fear at this time was also the result of general uncertainty about how capitalist finance worked. During the initial stages of railway development in the 1830s, investment was the purview of more experienced professionals. As railway projects multiplied in number and competition increased, companies elicited investments from a much broader base. Because the companies needed to finance ventures in advance, they were incentivized to care more about the speed with which they could accrue financial support than who gave it. Rather than convincing a few supporters to subsidize railway projects with large investments, railway boards and directors

[68] In her general examination of nineteenth-century shock in *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (2009), Jill Matus resists associating psychic shock with any one subgenre. For her, it is significant that the formal eruption of shock is transportable across genre and subgenre, enacting shock's disruption of stability in literature as in life (15). However, Matus's point—that shock emerges suddenly to disrupt the linearity of the narrative—remains important to the examination of sensation fiction's particular engagement with railway trauma since shock catalyzes resolution by finally disrupting suspense. So, while I acknowledge that the subject of shock may not be limited to sensation fiction, I contend, also, that shock and its management inhere to the subject and structure of sensation fiction. Additionally, we should expect the conflicts of the railways to appear in sensation fiction since the subgenre reached the height of popularity in the 1860s, a period rife with sensational railway accidents.

[69] John Reed notes, "England experienced recurring financial crises in 1825, 1836, 1847, 1857, and after, with many smaller panics and booms in between. There was anxiety about the money market in 1863, for example, but that panic was muted until the real crash came in 1866." For more on evidence of anxiety in literature, see: John R. Reed, "A Friend to Mammon."

found that more investors purchasing smaller shares were sometimes easier to secure. Those with a little spare capital, including women and the working classes, were encouraged to purchase shares and eager to do so. Thus, driven by the bottom line, railway companies (perhaps inadvertently) initiated a more democratic economy.[70]

Egalitarian investment opportunities, however, did not necessarily entail a thorough understanding of how investments worked—or did not work. So, the catastrophe of the 1840s mania proved shocking not only because of the degree of turbulence in the financial cycle but also because the very nature of economic cycles was largely unanticipated by less savvy shareholders. In order to develop the kind of healthy anxiety that readied them for future manic trends, the less-experienced investors of the 1860s needed to understand why the railway manias occurred in the first place. If a clear (and ideally preventable) cause was attributed to the catastrophic mania of the forties, then the public might be able to "forget" enough about the risk to place trust in the next investment boom. The abstract nature of capitalist finance mystified most people; consequently, initial explanations of railway mania tended to be so over-simplistic that they distilled truth into myth. Because these early causation myths lacked nuance, they fell short of fully explaining the manias and required additional explanation. Rather than promoting confidence with cocoon-like protection, though, these layers of explanation further obscured the truth and, in consequence, increased fears that finance was too inscrutable to trust. Thus, the difficult task of achieving a healthy anxiety required, first, a causal explanation that was coherent and comprehensive.

In newspapers and journals, and in literature, too, writers and readers peeled back the investment fictions layer by layer in an effort to solve the mystery of the manias. This process of

[70] See George Robb, *White Collar Crime in Modern England*.

discovery structures the narrative unfolding in *Lady Audley's Secret* in which, I argue, mental mania represents financial railway mania. The ambiguity of the self-titled "secret" of the novel reflects the general inscrutability of abstract finance and allows for multiple revelations—the secret, in fact, changes as the novel progresses.[71] The revelation of each secret in the novel corresponds with contemporary explanations about the cause of the 1840s financial mania, including fraud, unpredictable market cycles, and irrational investor behavior. The rest of this chapter borrows from the novel's structure by examining the three main secrets the novel uncovers, in turn, to explore how each narrative discovery about fictional mania revealed insufficiencies in the oversimplified explanations about financial mania given at that time.

In addition, I show that, while examining mania, *Lady Audley's Secret* reveals latent anxieties about the economic mobility of women. Mary Elizabeth Braddon follows the cultural tendency to link women to mania literally and figuratively in the novel; however, she also undermines those associations throughout the narrative. Just as the mania myths are debunked in the narrative unfolding of *Lady Audley's Secret* so, too, the gendered links to the myths are subtly uncoupled as the novel reconstructs its own revised historical narrative of railway finance. In this way, Mary Elizabeth Braddon adds the function of critique to sensation fiction's ability to facilitate the fear-anxiety-security process, cautioning the reader to be judiciously anxious.

Railways run through the background and foreground of *Lady Audley's Secret*, crisscrossing the narrative, in metaphor and plot device, and driving it forward. When one character is overwhelmed with shocking news, his physical and emotional state is conveyed figuratively as "a great noise as of half a dozen steam-engines tearing and grinding his ears" (37). Characters reference Bradshaw's railway timetables often as they plot their course, and the

[71] For more on the relationship between secrecy and financial investment practices, see Mary Poovey, "Writing about Finance."

relative ability to catch an express train on time shapes characters' circumstances by obstructing or enabling plans, facilitating chance encounters, and broadening the range of action. Finance, too, lurks in the background, yet clearly motivates character interactions. As the novel opens, the reader learns that George Talboys has returned from Australia, having left his wife Helen behind with child while he made his fortune speculating for gold. After travelling to London, he runs into his old friend Robert Audley in the City (London's financial district). Robert, a barrister, is forced to sell "a couple hundred pounds worth of consols" because "he had in an evil hour obliged some necessitous friend by putting the ancient name of Audley across a bill of accommodation, which bill not having been met by the drawer, Robert was called upon to pay" (34). By drawing attention to Robert Audley selling government security to cover the liability of the unpaid bill, the novel forecasts its preoccupation with a legal system that puts the nation at risk by too easily accommodating shaky economic scenarios.[72]

While the threads of railway, finance, and law appear tangentially related at the outset of the novel, they quickly converge at the sudden disappearance of George Talboys, when the novel shifts in intensity. In response to Robert Audley's question about whether she has seen George Talboys, Robert's landlady first answers no and then immediately wonders if anything happened to him, a query which alarms Robert: "Happened to him! What should happen to him? They had only parted at two o'clock the day before" (82).[73] The narrator then reports the landlady's likely response: an anecdote about a shocking railway accident: "Mrs Maloney would have related to him the history of a poor dear young engine-driver, who had once lodged with her, and who went

[72] See Tim Alborn *Conceiving Companies*, especially the finance section "An uneasy peace railway shareholders and City" of chapter 7, "Early Railways and the Machinery of Joint-Stock Politics, pp 187-200.
[73] Several times throughout the novel, Robert Audley and the baronet Lord Audley experience what is described as vague alarm. After meeting Lady Audley, Robert experiences a "vague sense of uneasiness" about her (78). When Lady Audley arranges for a telegraphic message to be left as a red herring with Helen (nee Maldon) Talboy's father, it fills Robert with a "vague sense of alarm" (88). This same "vague alarm," echoed on pages 15 and 86, symbolizes both an apprehension of future manias and also lack of understanding about them.

out, after eating a hearty dinner, in the best of spirits, to meet with his death from the concussion of an express and luggage train" (82). The secondhand account of the happy-go-lucky and unsuspecting engine driver killed suddenly by the catastrophic head-on collision of two trains provides an illustrative analogy for the surprise of the destructive financial railway manias. Similarly, Robert Audley's shocked reaction and repetition of Mrs Maloney's question of what happened to George Talboys reflects the cultural desire to comprehend the historical event. The question "what happened?" reverberates throughout the novel, as the narrative cycles through the sequence of answers.

Myth One—Criminal Intent: Unstable Identities and the Mania of Mobility

Braddon structures *Lady Audley's Secret* by repeatedly presenting what appears to be true and undercutting that truth with ambiguity, beginning with the novel's adherence to the conventions of sensation fiction. Initially, the narrative unfolding promises to follow the traditional trajectory of a suspenseful crime novel: the crime, the detection, the resolution. Presumably, George Talboys, the missing friend of London barrister Robert Audley, has been murdered. The reader is coached to presume that Lady Audley, the young second wife of Robert's uncle Lord Audley, committed the crime though the reader is unsure why. Once Robert Audley suspects Lady Audley, the chase ensues, and the majority of the novel is spent following Robert, as he hops trains from City to country estate to seaport hunting down leads, and simultaneously observing Lady Audley, as she slips on and off the railways suspiciously covering her tracks. The crime, the cover up, and the motive all are assumed to be the "secret" of the novel's title the narrative seeks to divulge. According to the traditional arc, the suspense should be resolved when Robert Audley is finally able to expose Lady Audley as the murderer

and discover her motive. However, the arc becomes increasingly disturbed the more Robert Audley investigates Lady Audley, for he quickly understands that the key to solving the crime is to scrutinize her identity. Robert senses something unintelligible in her character, which he finds suspect, and declares he "must trace the life of my uncle's wife backwards, minutely and carefully" (188). Through Robert's investigative efforts, Lady Audley's identity is traced backward to Lucy Graham (first teacher, then governess), to Helen Talboys, George's wife (whom he abandoned with child to seek his fortune), and finally to Helen Maldon, the poor daughter of a profligate spendthrift seaman.[74] As the focus shifts from the crime to the criminal, the criminal's unstable identity becomes the primary crime. The re-centered focus on fraud in *Lady Audley's Secret* reflects the first causal myth of the railway mania of the 1840s.

The first, predominant, and lasting myth that developed out of the 1845-46 railway mania was that evil and false confidence men preyed on an unsuspecting public. While this type of fraud was committed more frequently through smaller, sham projects, one of the biggest perpetrators of fraud was the famed "Railway King," George Hudson. Alongside the manic cycle of railway investments in the 1840s, Hudson's popularity as a railway financier and promoter rose to tremendous heights before crashing down. The success of Hudson's initial ventures allowed an inexperienced investment class to place their confidence in his future ventures with relative ease of mind. Numbered among those investors were Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Brontë, who purchased shares in the York and North Midland Railway with money inherited from their aunt, Miss Branwell, upon her death. Investor confidence in the "Railway King" eventually rested more in his persona than the security of the venture. Emily and Anne Brontë were among

[74] The point that the railways enabled this act of fraud / identity theft is symbolically represented when Robert Audley closely inspects an old bonnet box that Lucy Graham left with Mrs Vincent. He noticed upon that the label bearing the name Miss Graham was pasted over another label. Though the reader is not privy to Robert Audley's discovery, we later learn that is Helen Talboys

the shareholders who "raised a large subscription to demonstrate their gratitude and confidence in him," giving a guinea each (Dodds 353). Such unquestioning allegiance to George Hudson contributed to his own over-inflated confidence in his abilities and unwittingly empowered the Railway King to risk the welfare of his domain. Hudson's companies in the early forties were responsible for a quarter of the railways built in England, but he did not have the returns to support them or his loans. Over-extended financially, he began paying dividends using capital rather than revenue, and, when this was exposed, share prices fell dramatically. This same scenario played out many times over to varying degrees by other railway projectors.

The story of rogue railway fraudsters was appealing, at first, because it absolved investors from the embarrassment of being duped. Since so many people, including the Brontës, were cheated out of their investments—and, in worst cases, out of their livelihood—it was easy (perhaps comforting) to construct an initial narrative that cast the Railway King and his kind as villains and the inexperienced investors as hapless victims. In an 1849 letter to publisher George Smith, Charlotte Bronte reports on how the loss affected her family: "the business is certainly very bad; worse than I thought, and much worse than my father has any idea of. In fact, the little railway property I possessed, according to original prices, formed already a small competence for me, with my views and habits. Now scarcely any portion of it can, with security, be calculated upon" (qtd in Dodds 354). She also evinces the level of shock it induced, claiming, "I must open this view of the case to my father in degrees." By characterizing swindlers like Hudson as anomalies in an otherwise functional system, the early version of the myth attempted to preserve the sanctity of the liberal marketplace. However, the widespread havoc the fraud wreaked exposed the narrative of fraudsters as outliers as insufficient and pointed to larger, systemic problems. Charlotte Bronte illustrates the degree of devastation in her letter: "When I

look at my own case, and compare it with that of thousands besides, I scarcely see room for a murmur. Many, very many, are by the late strange railway system deprived almost of their daily bread. Such, then, as have only lost provision laid up for the future should take care how they complain" (354). Contemporary critics suggested that laissez faire investment structures produced a set of conditions that not only allowed for fraud but also encouraged moral ambiguity in general.

Investigation revealed that fraudulent figures did not work in isolation. The *Times* insisted, "neither the other officials nor the shareholders must hope to escape censure under cover of a personal onslaught upon Mr Hudson" since they were aware that "things were not quite what they should have been" ("Mr Hudson" 5). By the late forties critics realized that fraud was far more systemic than first imagined. While shady financiers such as George Hudson were legitimately worthy of blame, attributing the railway mania to these swindlers alone avoided challenging a system that, in its lack of proper oversight, seemed to invite and endorse abuse. The *Times* indicted the entire enterprise, alleging, "The system is to blame. It was a system without rule, without order, without even a definite morality." The editorial informs the reader that Parliament repeated offers of a public audit, but the shareholders and Hudson's colleagues decline it "because they had a misgiving that there were things necessary to the success of railway operations which would not quite stand a stiff official scrutiny."

Lady Audley's Secret illustrates the network of complicity that enables fraud. As the criminal investigation shifts to Lady Audley's identity, the tangled skein of who Lucy Graham is and what happened to Helen Talboys unravels, revealing the shocking truth that Lucy Graham *is* Helen Talboys. Helen Talboys's ability to con Lord Audley first sets her up as a clear and singular villain, as flagrantly duplicitous as George Hudson. We do not blame Lord Audley for

making himself "perfectly absurd about his new wife" because, according to his daughter Alicia, Lady Audley "makes herself perfectly agreeable to everyone" (*LAS* 46). Besides her charisma, Lucy benefitted from loosely-supported endorsements. Since Lucy Graham was governess at the home of his respectable neighbor, Lord Audley had no reason to question her credentials. He simply accepted her at face value. The problem was that Mr. Dawson had done the same. The narrator explains, "No one knew anything of her except that she came in answer to an advertisement which Mr Dawson, the surgeon, had inserted in the *Times*. She came from London; and the only reference she gave was to a lady at a school in Brompton, where she had once been a teacher. But this reference was so satisfactory that none other was needed" (10). The minor norm infractions and leniencies add up to show the relative level of ease with which a confidence man—or woman—could establish a false persona and gain trust. It also reveals that Helen Talboys was not able to transform her identity and reach the status of Lady Audley without aid, and thus not an isolated outlier. Her ability to commit identity theft relied on a network of support from both negligent enablers, such as Mrs Vincent of Brompton and Mr Dawson, and also willfully complicit and self-interested parties, such as Phoebe the maid and Helen Maldon's father, Captain Maldon. Each of these characters were financially motivated to facilitate Helen Talboy's fraud—or, at least had the incentive to overlook the inconsistencies surrounding her identity for their personal gain. An April 1849 article in the *Times* shed light on such moral ambiguity, stating, "In 1845 respectable men did monstrous things, and were thought very clever" ("Mr Hudson" 5). The editorial implies that the morals of those who endorsed such behavior as "very clever" were just as questionable as those who "did monstrous things."

In various non-fiction media, writers explored such consequences of the laissez faire arrangement between companies and the state. In his famous pamphlet, "The Bubble of the Age"

(1848), Arthur Smith condemns railway companies and the deviousness entailed in their lack of transparency. He first positions the government, who approved so many of the fraud-based bills, as victims equal to that of the investing public. He writes, "Since the Legislature and Government have been so much misled, can we be surprised at the manner in which the public generally, and even Shareholders themselves have been betrayed into mistaken notions of the real nature of Railway investment?" (5). Smith recognizes, though, the danger in viewing the government as a dupe, not the least because it does not alter or justify the devastation it caused many shareholders. He notes that, ultimately, "there is little difference between measures founded on corrupt motives, and the legislation based on incorrect information" (6). In truth, the laissez faire arrangements that enabled fraud implicates the state, Smith argues, because Parliament granted the Acts for these poorly run and sham railway projects. Rather than being "hands free" the state had a complicit hand in the wreckage:

> For, under the authority of these Acts, money has been obtained from tens of thousands, by a specious appearance of value, premiums having been fictitiously created in the market, and other deceptions being resorted to, which concern not the respective interested or injured alone, but are matters of the deepest import to the whole community: crimes affecting the whole nation, and should be strictly regarded as such. (6)

By claiming that these are "crimes affecting the whole nation" and that "the whole system cannot be too soon brought before the public," Smith mandates the state to take legal recourse and intervene in company policy and procedure in order to protect not just the investing public but the nation. Such an intervention challenged the foundational principals of free enterprise and, thus, had to be justified.

Advocates of legislative reform attempted to alleviate the discomfort of intervening in enterprise by arguing that a "hands free" policy prevented the law from fulfilling its purpose. *Lady Audley's Secret* illustrates the argument that the law was not living up to its potential through the character of Robert Audley. As an enervated barrister, Robert Audley represents laissez faire law as lazy. When Robert Audley is introduced into the narrative, the narrator raises doubt about his legitimacy: "Robert Audley was supposed to be a barrister" (32). By emphasizing the uncertainty of his identity as a representative of the law, the narrator makes a distinction between nominal law and operational law:

> As a barrister was his name inscribed in the Law List; as a barrister, he had chambers in Figtree Court, Temple; as a barrister he had eaten the allotted number of dinners, which form the sublime ordeal through which the forensic aspirant wades on to fame and fortune. If these things can make a man a barrister, Robert Audley decidedly was one. But he had never either had a brief, or tried to get a brief, or even wished to have a brief in all those five years…He was a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow. (32)

After underscoring Robert Audley's idleness, the narrator draws a distinction between his current indolent state and his innate lively nature: "Robert Audley was a good fellow…a curious fellow…with a fund of sly wit and quiet humour, under his listless, dawdling, indifferent, irresolute manner" (33). It is clear that a lack of expectations limits Robert's capacity to put his curiosity and sharp intellect to use. In the case of law, that ability to inquire and analyze should be commissioned for the benefit of the people the law represents. When he encounters George Talboys in need, "Robert Audley, the most vacillating and unenergetic of men, found himself

called upon to act for another. He rose superior to himself and equal to the occasion" (39). In service of others, the novel argues, Law embodies its ideal state.

According to the pro-intervention perspective, the liberal notion of "hands free" government could be viewed as a form of constraint. The lack of authority to determine the legitimacy of company practices in effect disables the law from detecting liabilities and protecting the public. Braddon's novel illustrates how law that disproportionately favors enterprise over public protection enables corruption through Robert Audley's initial inability to recognize maliciousness in Lady Audley. Like his uncle, Robert Audley is charmed at first by Lady Audley. He reports to George Talboys after meeting his uncle's young wife, "She's the prettiest little creature you ever saw in your life" (53). He is happy to believe that her ideal image justifies taking her at face value: "Such blue eyes, such ringlets, such a ravishing smile." He's so smitten, in fact, his attraction borders on inappropriate. He confesses to George Talboys, "I am falling in love with my aunt." However, scrutiny from an outside party—a painter, commissioned to represent Lady Audley—first cues Robert to the fact that the ideal image may only be a façade.

When he encounters the portrait of Lady Audley in her private boudoir, Robert Audley notices how the artist's vision revises his own earlier one. He brought out "a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes" and gave "to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look" (65). This more critical perspective allows Robert to perceive the duplicity in Lady Audley's character. Robert Audley is then able to revise his early assessment that she is "fairy like" (53) and begin to view her with more nuance as a "beautiful fiend," or, the power to attract coupled with the potential to do harm. Once Robert is able to detect the irregularity in her character, he is motivated to investigate Lady Audley. He

explains, “I see her, and she forces me onward upon the loathsome path—the crooked byway of watchfulness and suspicion” (175). He is forced into this “byway” because he is not officially authorized to access any direct channels of scrutiny a policy of transparency would endorse.

Without oversight into company practices, the law can sense danger but not necessarily prevent it. Thus, another rise in railway investments in the 1850s inspired anxiety in the investing public since the advances in legal reform that could ensure safety through transparency were lacking. In 1855, Herbert Spencer challenged those who assumed that corruption was a mark of the past. Reputable men were not necessarily moral men. You cannot trust respectable men because, Spencer insisted, the “history of railway management and railway intrigue” teaches that unchecked railway enterprise inherently requires men of wealth and respectability to fall” below the generality in moral character” (10) and enter into “ruinous undertakings that benefit the few at the cost of the many” (4). At the advent of the third mania of the late fifties, Spencer raised the specter of the earlier mania of the 40s and inspired fear by arguing that the relatively unchecked system compounded instability over time. He claims, “[T]he doings of projectors and the mysteries of the share-market would occupy less space than the analysis of the multiform dishonesties that have been committed since 1845” (4). Spencer’s argument for intervention combined state-imposed accountability with corporate transparency. He explained that if the railroad company published the details about their construction and management then owners would be able to manage the railways properly (113-14). The only way to ensure that the "intelligence” would be applied to “its proper ends,” Spencer suggested, was through government enforcement. Understandably, the lingering threat of fraud and corruption Spencer and others emphasized to make their case for intervention shook public confidence in the railways overall as a safe venture. which, in turn, ran the risk of decreased investments.

As the historical myth of fraud developed into a story of systemic abuse requiring drastic reform, the priority of protecting railway development from over-regulation called for a narrative revision that recast victims as villains. Some claimed that fraud and corruption would not have been so widespread without the influx of inexperienced investors freely giving evildoers their confidence. A strong advocate for free enterprise, Samuel Smiles represents the far end of the spectrum of victim blaming by vilifying the previously-thought dupes in his celebrated biography *The Life of George Stephenson* (1857). Rather than viewing inexperienced investors sympathetically as naïve, Smiles saw them as a corrosive aberration in an otherwise healthy system. He argues, "The public outside the stock exchange shortly became infected with the same [share-dealing] spirit, and many people, utterly ignorant of railway, knowing and caring for nothing about their great national uses, but hungering and thirsting after premiums, rushed eagerly into the vortex of speculation" (407). Though Smiles admits that "[t]he game was open to all," his short list of blame-worthy participants included "the widow and spinster of small means, who had up to that time blessed God that their lot had happily lain between poverty and riches, but were now seized by the infatuation of becoming suddenly rich" (408).[75] George Robb recognizes in Smile's summary an accusation that "the mad frenzy of railway speculation would not have been possible without the ignorance and credulity of female shareholders" ("Ladies of the Ticker" 129). For Smiles, women were the catalyst for financial contagion. Once they entered the market, "The madness spread everywhere" (Smiles 408). Smile's language of disease recasts the railway mania not just as a wild event but a cancer-like invasion, which signals fear of a traditional economy adulterated by the middle class mobility, especially women.

[75] See Broadbridge re: widows and spinsters insignificant; many female subscribers had more than speculative interest (205-207).

Scrutiny of women investors tended to focus on their emotional unfitness for the high stakes game of finance. Women were thought to be too trusting, too high-strung, too emotionally inflexible, and this made them not only vulnerable to evildoers but also victims of their own lack of objectivity. Though the Bronte sisters were victims of George Hudson's fraudulent practices, partial blame for the sisters' economic loss fell on Emily Bronte, whose decision making was thought to be led by irrationality. In a letter dated January 30, 1846, Charlotte Bronte updates her friend and mentor, Margaret Wooler about the status of her and her sister's railway investments. She writes, "I thought you would wonder how we are getting on, when you heard of the railway panic." Charlotte anticipates her friend's concern as the financial mania of the mid-forties began to rise to a peak:

> The York and Midland is, as you say, a very good line; yet, I confess to you, I should wish, for my own part, to be wise in time. I cannot think that even the very best lines will continue for many years at their present premiums; and I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it be too late, and to secure the proceeds in some safer, if for the present, less profitable investment. I cannot, however, persuade my sister to regard the affair precisely from my point of view; and I feel as if I would rather run the risk of loss than hurt Emily's feelings by acting in direct opposition to her opinion…I will let her manage still, and take the consequences. Disinterested and energetic she certainly is; and if she be not quite tractable or open to conviction as I could wish, I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity…it is a small thing that [she] should vex us occasionally by what appear to us unreasonable and headstrong notions. (qtd. in *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* 340).

We find in Charlotte Bronte's letter a characterization of Emily that fits Smiles's model of the over-zealous, inexperienced woman investor. Emily's "energetic" and intractable, "unreasonable" and "headstrong" nature marks her as a contributor to the infected investment culture.

In *Lady Audley's Secret* the instability of the figurative investor reflects the historical revision of investors from victims to villains. Lord Audley continues to represent the sympathetic, if not foolish, investor victim, while Lady Audley becomes the vessel for cultural representations of dangerously irrational women shareholders for much of the novel. Described variously as childish, irrational, conniving, and consumed by greed, Lady Audley's character embodies the argument that the invasion of women in the financial market enabled confidence men to commit fraud—in Lady Audley, the figures of the fraudster and the specious economic woman become one. Braddon raises the narrative stakes by revising the gold-digger marriage plot into one that figures marriage as financial speculation, which draws on a vocabulary of risk, investment, security, calculation, and consequence. Robert Audley interprets Helen Talboys's decision to marry Lord Audley, despite already being married to George Talboys, as "a conspiracy concocted by an artful woman, who had speculated upon the chances of her husband's death, and had secured a position at the risk of committing a crime" (228). Robert Audley characterizes Lady Audley's risk-taking as capricious, condemning her as "a foolish woman, who looked at life as a game of chance, in which the best player was likely to hold the winning cards, forgetting that there is a Providence above the pitiful speculators and that wicked secrets are never permitted to remain long hidden" (228). However, Robert's evocation of Providence belies a concern that has less to do with the legitimacy of Lady Audley's methods and more to do with her ability to secure a better position than the one she was assigned.

Lady Audley's Secret exposes the latent fear of economically mobile women underwriting the accusation that women investors were responsible for the devastating mania of the 1840s. The novel's two criminals are both upwardly mobile women. Lucy Graham is a piano teacher who rises to governess before becoming a Lady. Phoebe, her maid, purchases and runs an inn. Their upward mobility is effected, however, through criminal exploits. Lady Audley improves her lot by committing bigamy, and the money Phoebe extorts from Lady Audley to keep her secrets affords Phoebe's self-improvement. The criminalization of these businesswomen in the fictional narrative might seem to endorse the historical narrative espoused by Smiles et al., wherein fraud is redefined as a case of financial imposters that includes women investors along with confidence men. Braddon, however, complicates the social criminalization of economic women by providing context that inspired those women to take financial risks. Helen Talboys pursues a new identity after George Talboys abandoned her with child and no money. Phoebe, too, has to support her profligate spendthrift and debauched husband. Normally, such women might be subject to the stagnancy of their limited early professions. In the nineteenth century, the ability to invest helped liberate women from such hopeless circumstances. Lucy Graham was reluctant to accept Sir Michael's proposal at first but then realizes, "The simple Dawsons would have thought it something more than madness in a penniless girl to reject such an offer" (14). *Lady Audley's Secret* presents the decision to act with self-interest as reasonable.[76]

Braddon's novel suggests that the conservative desire to protect traditional wealth and status, in part, drives the social criminalization of economic women. As Lady Audley's criminal

[76] From a Simmelian perspective, Leila May argues for a positive reading of Lady Audley's secrecy. She claims, "by stressing the negative [features of secrecy] Braddon will end up accentuating the positive by showing how the dialectics of concealment and revelation produce a new and perhaps more just social world (109).

activity increases, Robert Audley senses danger in a vision of a devastating storm: "In those troublesome dreams he saw Audley Court, rooted up from amidst the green pastures and the shady hedgerows of Essex, standing bare and unprotected upon that desolate northern shore, threatened by the rapid rising of a boisterous sea, whose waves seemed gathered upward to descend and crush the house he loved" (209). The ruinous results of the financially speculative marriage Robert Audley forecasts connect fears about economic mobility with fear of financial mania. The railway mania of the 1840s was frightening for the widespread economic ruin it incited, but that extensiveness was indicative, also, of a wide population of investors capable of redefining the borders of status.

As it forewarns a future manic cycle, Robert's vision is curious, though. The powerful imagery evokes the famous financial mania from much earlier—the speculative South Sea Bubble of the eighteenth century. By recalling the bubble from the century before, the narrative encourages the reader to see the deep history of nefarious business practices that preceded women's misidentified "flood" into the financial market mid-nineteenth century. In other words, the existence of previous manic cycles invalidated the strength of the Smilesean link between women and mania. However, the reminder also threatened investor confidence and fueled the continuing battle between free enterprise and legal reform. *Lady Audley's Secret* recounts the historical struggle to develop a narrative that prevented overregulation while accounting for the natural vicissitudes of the market. As Braddon's novel moves towards the revelation of its next secret, it urges readers to remember that manic financial cycles occurred not only in prior history but in railway history, particularly. Addressing the fear repetition inspired, the fictional narrative continues to question misplaced anxiety as it works to achieve security in railway finance.

Myth Two—Scene of the Crime: The Mania of the Irrational Marketplace

The undeniable role fraud played in the 1840s railway mania warranted calls for government oversight in railway management to ensure company credibility. However, since manias occur regardless of fraud, legal reform could not cure railway finance from future manias. Thus, advocates of unfettered railway development supported a historical narrative that insisted that the inherent instability of capitalist finance was the shock to which future shareholders needed to adjust. Braddon's novel illustrates the continued negotiation between advocates of free enterprise and legal reform who each sought to determine the degree to which both economic fluctuations and legal intervention were healthy. As the historical explanation for the 1840's railway mania entered the abstract domain of finance capitalism, so too the fictional narrative in *Lady Audley's Secret* abstracted the roles of the two main characters—Lady Audley and Robert Audley, who embody the abstract concepts of Finance and Law, respectively. The narrative interrogates the difficulty the Law has determining whether repeated instabilities of Finance constitute normal fluctuations or indicate that a free enterprise system is prone to infection and in need of treatment.

When Lady Audley claims, "my secrets are every body's secrets" (256), she signals that the narrative had entered a larger field of play than fraud. Rather than fearing that they might become an individual victim of a confidence man, readers are instructed by the narrative to understand that all investors were subject to the variations of the financial market, which implied future manias. When the most impactful secret of the fictional narrative—that she has the inherited predisposition for mental mania—threatens imminent exposure, Lady Audley expresses the general cultural angst about the inherence of financial manias to investment cycles. The narrator explains, "she would rather have suffered anything than that slow suspense, that

corroding anxiety" (289). Lady Audley's use of the terms "suspense" and "anxiety" draw attention to the narrative convention of sensational novels and the process of working from fear to security. As with the first myth, however, the generic expectations are undermined. The slowness of the suspense and the corrosiveness of the anxiety suggest futility in wondering *if* a mania would occur in the future when it would be more effective to develop a healthy anxiety that prepares investors for *when*. By illustrating mania figuratively as a hereditary mental disorder, the fictional narrative expresses the contemporary concern that financial mania was more of a probability than a possibility.

The intense public discomfort that followed the realization that future manias were probable resulted in the desperate desire to understand what causes manias and how they can be avoided in order to alleviate that anxiety. As the desires to attribute blame and seek protection became exaggerated, they were also put in competition. Framing the concepts of Finance and Law in terms of mental health and authority allowed Braddon to show that doubts about women's trustworthiness as investors, as well as paranoia about state overreach, lingered. Gendered notions of irrational and emotional women and reasonable men shaped those abstract concepts of Finance and Law into a *feminized* Finance and *masculine* Law in the fictional narrative.

Braddon's novel shows that desire to protect the wealth of the nation from the instabilities of railway finance incited demands for legal reform that bordered on the irrational. Accountability and transparency were reasonable claims to demand from railway companies, but finance itself could never achieve complete transparency. Robert Audley, however, becomes obsessed with the idea of knowing all, and senses the danger of such a preoccupation. At the end of volume I of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the train hopping to cover up and detect crime accelerates

and results in a hasty encounter between Lady Audley and Robert Audley on a railway platform, as they head in opposite directions. Robert Audley wonders, "Has she baffled me by some piece of womanly jugglery? Am I never to get nearer to the truth; but am I to be tormented all my life by vague doubts, and wretched suspicions, which may grow upon me till I become a monomaniac?" (127). Lyn Pykett's footnote illuminates the historically specific concern tied to the term "monomania":

> in mid-Victorian psychiatry the term monomania was applied to a range of irrational obsessions, but it was particularly used to designate a delusional fixation on one particular subject. In his *Mental Maladies: A Treatise of Insanity*, trans. E. K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lee and Blanchard [1845]), J. E. D. Esquirol suggested that monomania was a disease to which the modern educated classes were particularly prone: 'the more the understanding is developed, and the more active the brain becomes, the more the mania is to be feared' (pp. 200-01). (fn 387)

Robert Audley's fear of monomania, then, suggests that there is a danger in the Law fixating on Finance to an unhealthy degree. Lady Audley, herself, speaks to the dangers of too much oversight, which she sees as an overcorrection to the previous lazy (laissez faire) state. "What is the first appalling sign of mental aberration?" she asks:

> The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of the mind is interrupted; the thinking power of the brain resolves itself into a monotone. As the waters of the tideless pool putrefy by reason of their stagnation, the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action; and perpetual reflection upon one subject resolves itself into monomania. (244)

These stagnant waters contrast with the image of the manic flood of Robert Audley's earlier vision. Here, the threat is too much contact. She tells Lord Audley that his nephew threatened to "pull down every brick in the house." After representing Robert Audley's preoccupation as madness to Lord Audley, she insists, "If you do not want to make me as mad as he is, you must never let me see him again." Lady Audley's argument that legal intervention creates more instability suggests counterintuitively that non-intervention will establish a secure investment culture.

By framing the concern of monomania in gendered terms, the novel conveys a cultural preoccupation about the propriety of legal intervention. Continuing to express worry about his commitment to "tear[ing] away the beautiful veil under which she hides her wickedness" (216), Robert Audley questions whether "the chain of evidence which I have constructed link by link" is the result of "the nervous fancies of a hypochondriachal bachelor?" (217). The implication is that the Law risks emasculation by over involvement, too. Becoming too preoccupied in his profession endangers Robert Audley's ability to develop into the properly masculine figure of proportional restraint just as much as his enervated state did. This danger to his masculine development is induced by her feminine derangement. Robert Audley blames Lady Audley's "womanly jugglery" for his overreaction.

When Lady Audley undercuts Robert Audley's exposure of her secret by confessing her mania herself, she signals how steeped these representations are in asymmetrical gender dynamics. She exclaims, "You have used your cool, calculating, frigid, luminous intellect to a noble purpose. You have conquered—a MADWOMAN!" (294). Lady Audley emphasizes that Robert Audley's rationality is completely devoid of destabilizing emotions. Seemingly, effecting the exposure of this secret has allowed him to reach his masculine potential as a levelheaded man

of action. Conversely, as the embodiment of financial mania, Lady Audley is far from the feminine ideal. Robert Audley exclaims, "Henceforth you must seem to me no longer a woman….I look upon you henceforth as the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle" (294). The negative stereotypes of female irrationality in Braddon's novel are the same ones Smiles used to feminize finance in culture. Robert Audley's denial of Lady Audley's femaleness corresponds with contemporary beliefs that a woman shareholder entering the investment market generates unstable market behavior while debasing her femininity. My symptomatic reading of finance in the novel draws attention to the deeply permeated belief that women's participation contributed, if not to the fact of financial mania, to the extreme degree.

Contrary to popular contemporary belief, economists began to understand that, while manias were inherent to fluctuating markets, they are not always devastating. In fact, the mania of the 1830s generated a lot of growth. *Lady Audley's Secret* reflects this understanding and the misplaced fear that all manias would behave like the 1840s mania. Lady Audley describes her own revised understanding of her inherited potential. She describes her initial assumptions about her mother's mania: "I brooded horribly upon the thought of my mother's madness. It haunted me day and night….I had no knowledge of the different degrees of madness; and the image that haunted me was that of a distraught and violent creature" (297). However, after facing her fears and meeting her mother she discovered something altogether different: "I saw no raving, strait-waistcoated maniac, guarded by zealous gaolers; but golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature, who seemed as frivolous as a butterfly" (298). The descriptions of Lady Audley's mother are remarkably similar to her own and raise questions about those later distortions Robert Audley developed after seeing the portrait.

Lady Audley's personal experience of revising ill-founded assumptions to reflect the truth illustrates how ignorance about capitalist finance contributes to speculative fears. Lady Audley confesses, "I went away with this knowledge in my mind, and with something more—a secret to keep….I was to keep the secret of my mother's madness; for it was a secret that might affect me injuriously in afterlife" (298). She hints that the injurious treatment she sought protection against with secrets had more to do with perceptions about mania than the fact of its probability. This fear is confirmed when the servants of Audley Court speculate about the family trouble when a doctor is called to the house to examine Lady Audley. The narrator explains, "the elder servants decimated the Audley family in their endeavours to find a likely relation—or of some alarming fall in the funds; or the failure of some speculation or bank in which the greater part of the baronet's money was invested" (314).[77] The ability to "decimate" the family based on little information suggests that security was required to protect railway finance from the destructive potential of rumors and to the public from abuse. That destructive potential was a danger for the country, not just the country estate. Doctor Mosgrave was chosen because "He looked like a man who could have carried, safely locked in his passionless breast, the secrets of a nation" (320).

As it brings various anxieties about railway finance to the surface, the doctor's diagnosis in *Lady Audley's Secret* illuminates the complications entailed in achieving transparency about railway mania. These complications often appear to be contradictory. After meeting with Lady Audley in private, Dr. Mosgrave declares:

[77] Here I see one of Braddon's many hints that invites a "suspicious" reading about the relationship between secrets and finance, mania and unstable economics.

> There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a life-time….perhaps acute mania; but its duration would be very brief, and it would arise under extreme mental pressure. The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr Audley. She is dangerous! (323)

I read in the doctor's diagnosis of Lady Audley's insanity a cultural prescription for adapting to the latent threat of financial turbulence. It was important for investors to understand that finance is an inherently risky venture because it necessarily fluctuates. Thus, investors were required to tolerate a certain level of oscillation. However, they should be aware, too, that such instability has the potential to vacillate wildly. As the symbolic representation of Finance, Lady Audley has the inborn inclination to go mad, though she may not ever do so. A savvy investor would learn to read the signs though they may appear suddenly, disappear just as quickly, or never appear at all. Thus, investors were required to be confident as well as vigilant. This state of anxiety was not for the faint of heart, and in the novel, that included Lord Audley. On his uncle's behalf, Robert Audley removed the danger far from Audley Court withheld her location.

The uncertainty of Lady Audley's crime also calls into question her punishment. Dr Mosgrave asks Robert Audley, "You would wish to prove this lady is mad, and therefore irresponsible for her actions, Mr Audley?' said the physician" (320). To which, Robert responds, "Yes, I would rather, if possible, think her mad. I should be glad to find that excuse for her." On the surface, Robert Audley's comment refers to Lady Audley's role in George Talboy's near-death. However, the fact that he encourages her removal despite the doctor's confirmation that she does not show signs of mania signals a misplaced blame inflected with unfair gendered

assumptions about her potential to do damage. Dr. Mosgrove finds a place for Lady Audley in a *maison de sante* in the remote town of Villebrumeuse. He informs Robert, "'From the moment in which Lady Audley enters the house,' he said, 'her life, so far as life is made up of action and variety, will be finished. Whatever secrets she may have will be secrets for ever! Whatever crimes she may have committed she will be able to commit no more" (324). By connecting secrets and the questionable fact of criminal activity to the "action and variety" of Lady Audley's life, the doctor diagnoses the criminality of the economically mobile woman. Significantly, when determining her next location, "Robert had consulted a volume of *Bradshaw*, and had discovered that Villebrumeuse lay out of the track of all railway traffic, and was only approachable by diligence from Brussels" (326). The myth of the irrational marketplace removed the direct accusation of women investors from the historical narrative, though it made the suggestion that keeping women away from railway investments might instill confidence in the enterprise as a less risky investment.

Myth Three—The Suspect Motives of Victims: The Mania of Investment Masochism

Lady Audley's Secret provides the opportunity for women to question the disparaging narrative imposed on them. Lady Audley thinks aloud: "'Have I really been *wicked*, I wonder?' she mused. 'My worst wickednesses have been the result of wild impulses, and not of deeply-laid plots. I am not like the women I have read of who have lain night after night in the horrible dark stillness, planning out treacherous deeds, and arranging every circumstance of an appointed crime" (253). The distinction between "wild impulses" and "deeply-laid plots" indicates a difference in degree about the effect inexperienced women investors had on the fluctuating market. The suggestion is that the mania could not even in part be attributable to them. After all,

Lady Audley did not ever suffer from mania nor was she ever diagnosed as being manic. This surprising truth, I contend, is the main, underlying secret of the novel—not Lady Audley's personal secret, but the shocking secret of *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon offers a final kernel of truth wrapped inside the myths of financial mania—that manias have devastating results not because of wild, inexperienced, emotional investors, and not because the marketplace is itself inherently unstable, but because of people who know better. Through her allegorical invocation of railway investment, she reveals the shocking truth that investors are ultimately their own victimizer and that regulations need to be put into place to protect them not only from others who may want to do them harm, but from themselves who see the dangers and proceed anyway. When Sir Michael first decides he wants to invest in marriage with Lucy Graham, he appears a foolish and naïve investor. His desire for rejuvenation first elicits an emotional response: "Destiny! Why, she was his destiny!...But *this* was love—this fever, this longing, this restless, uncertain, miserable hestitation…this frenzied wish to be young again…Sir Michael had fallen ill of the terrible fever called love" (12). The language of disease in this passage recalls the language of Smiles's contagion. However, the idea that Sir Michael was an irrational investor capable of being duped, is a ruse.

Inexperienced as he is, Sir Michael Audley represents a more common type of novice investor, who was fully aware of the consequences of risky ventures. Though out of the marriage market for some time, Sir Michael Audley has clear expectations for his marriage proposition and enters into the contractual relationship with full awareness of the stakes. He claims, "nothing but misery can result from a marriage dictated by any motive but truth and love" (14). Similarly, Lucy Graham offers complete transparency about her feelings. She exhorts, "Do not ask too much of me, then. I *cannot* be disinterested; I cannot be blind to the advantages of such an

alliance. I cannot, I cannot!" (14). Sir Michael was cognizant that his standards of security would not be met. The narrator explains, "He walked straight out of the house, this foolish old man, because there was some strong emotion at work in his heart—neither joy, nor triumph, but something almost akin to disappointment" (16). Though he did not have full confidence in the marriage, which then increased the risk, he proceeded anyway. Definitionally, it was Sir Michael rather than Lucy Graham, whose practices could be identified as speculative. He entered into the investment perhaps with the hope that his desired result might be realized in the future but with complete understanding that it likely would not. By his own claim, as circumstances stood, "nothing but misery can result" otherwise. The narrator explains that such an awareness of a bad investment was ever present:

> But I do not believe that even in his misery he felt that entire and unmitigated surprise, that utter revulsion of feeling….I do not believe that Sir Michael Audley had ever *really* believed in his wife. He had loved her and admired her; he had been bewitched by her beauty and bewildered by her charms; but that sense of something wanting, that vague feeling of loss and disappointment which had come upon him in the summer's might of his betrothal, had been with him more or less ever since. (299)

In *Bubble of the Age*, Arthur Smith claimed that "honest men see their wealth fast dwindling to nothing," but the narrator in *Lady Audley's Secret* complicates that perception. In a reflection about Sir Michael's motivations we hear the most difficult truth to admit—that sometimes people act against their own best interests with complete sentience: "I cannot believe that as an honest man, however pure and single may be his mind, however simply trustful his nature, is ever really deceived by falsehood. There is beneath the voluntary confidence an involuntary

distrust; not to be conquered by an effort of the will" (300). As opposed to the abrupt shock of fraud and inherent mania, the shock of self-victimization slowly and subtly unravels throughout the novel.

This truth is evident in the case of the Brontes and the Hudson railway investments, too. Charlotte Bronte's letter to Miss Wooler reveals that perhaps the most shocking aspect of the Brontes's loss is not Emily's irrational obstinacy but Charlotte's compliance with a risky investment plan *despite* knowing that the balance of the investment has tipped over into a danger zone. She urges, "I cannot think that even the very best lines will continue for many years at their present premiums," knowing that even a sound market cannot perpetually produce high yields and will correct itself (Dodds 353). She knows that smart investors know when to sell. She explains, "I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it will be too late." While Hudson's fraud was certainly responsible for the Brontes's losses, it should not also be attributed to ignorance nor naiveté as the popular historical narrative suggested. In her account of overly-trusting shareholders who raised a subscription to George Hudson, M. Hope Dodds starkly notes, "Among the subscribers were Emily and Anne Bronte, who each sent a guinea. Charlotte did not subscribe." Charlotte Bronte represents the inexperienced, yet savvy, investor who knew how important it was "to be wise in time."[78]

Other literature illustrates this investment behavior in male characters, which bolsters the refutation that counter-intuitive motivation was gendered. In Charles Reade's *Hard Cash,* Richard Hardie is presented as an investment banker too savvy about railway finance to enter headlong into too volatile a market—at first. His character provides a sketch of speculative bubbles, railway development, and prior railway manias. Reade gives credence to the existence

[78] See Kindleberger on "Rationality of the individual, irrationality of the market" in chapter three, "Speculative Manias": 33-54.

of those Arthur Smith identified as "half ignorant and half cunning" (6), who contributed to the frenzy of investment:

> Nearly everything that had a name, and, by some immense fortuity, could write it, demanded its part in the new and fathomless source of wealth….Once more in Time's whirligig gentlemen and their footmen jostled one another on the Exchange, and a motley crew of peers and printers, vicars and admirals, professors, cooks, costermongers, cotton-spinners, waiters, coachmen, priests, potboys, bankers, braziers, dairymen, mail-guards, barristers, spinsters, butchers, beggars, duchesses, rag-merchants—in one word, of Nobs and Snobs; fought and scrambled pell mell for the popular paper, and all to get rich in a day. (128)

The narrator presents the manic urge to invest as democratic and gender-neutral. He contrasts this erratic behavior, though, with that of Hardie, who was seen in the fictional town of Barkington as a "wet blanket" for his ability to see the perils. He uses his knowledge of past bubbles to determine the insecurity of the present one. He also understood that the scale of consequences extended beyond personal loss. When his customers clamoured for railway shares, Hardie responded, "The Bubbles of History, including the great one of my youth, were national as well as individual consequences" (128). He read the danger in the impossibly high projections, which he identifies as the "Arithmetic of Bedlam!" (129). Though he has all the knowledge at his disposal, Hardie decides to act against his best interests. The narrator notes the disparity in his awareness and his behavior: "Richard Hardie *talked* like this from first to last. But, when he saw that shares invariably mounted…he itched for his share of the booty, and determined to profit in act by the credulity of mankind, as well as expose it in words." The narrator explains, though, that "it is dangerous to be a convert, real or false, to Bubble: the game is to be rash at once, and

turn prudent at the full tide." Just like Charlotte Bronte during the actual mania, Reade's character went against his own inclination.[79]

As it encodes the contemporary struggle to balance legal reform with unfettered railway enterprise, *Lady Audley's Secret* forwards an important revision to the historical narrative. Certainly legal reform should prevent fraudulent figures from taking advantage of greedy and naïve investors. However, it is also the case that legal reform serves as a form of national self-restraint for investors who knew better but struggled to behave otherwise. As the novel concludes its fictional revision of the historical narrative of railway mania and its multiple causes, it offers a definitive position about the role of law. Reviewing his past behavior, Robert Audley "sat brooding darkly over the fire and wondering at the strange events which had filled his life within the last year and a half, coming like angry shadows between his lazy inclinations and himself, and investing him with purposes that were not his own" (341). In his enervated state, Robert Audley was not living up to his true potential. His love interest in the novel, Clara Talboys (George Talboy's sister), compels Robert Audley to actively apply himself in service to the larger community: "She recommended Mr Audley to read hard and think seriously of his profession, and begin life in real earnest. It was a hard, dry sort of existence perhaps which she recommended; a life of serious work and application, in which he should strive to be useful to his fellow-creatures, and win a reputation for himself" (373). He views this as a "barren prospect," however, and signals the impending marriage that neatly concludes most Victorian novels.

[79] Unlike the Brontes, though, Reade's character had speculated with the money of customers who invested in his bank. To prevent exposure of his misconduct, he has his son (who knew the truth) committed to an insane asylum.

Lady Audley's Secret subtly resists the conveniently neat ending, even as Braddon apologizes for it. In the concluding paragraph, she slyly begs forgiveness, demurely stating, "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace" (380), while calling into question the legitimacy of that peace.

After becoming engaged to Clara Talboys, the narrator explains that Robert Audley, "went back a new man, with new hopes, new cares, new prospects, new purposes; with a life that was so entirely changed that he looked out upon a world in which everything wore a radiant and rosy aspect, and wondered how it could ever have seemed such a dull, neutral tinted universe" (376).

While Robert Audley was not fulfilling the potential of the Law as a bachelor, the dullness he experienced was not due to neutrality but lack of engagement altogether. The narrative urges the reader to remember that even the Law has the tendency to act irrationally. Robert Audley admits that he is "naturally of a vacillating and dilatory disposition" (373). His new life, symbolized by the union with Clara, is questionable in its rose-colored perspective. He characterizes the work he was called to do as an obstacle. He shares that "the shadow of the next morning's express which was to carry him away to London loomed darkly across the pathway of his joy" (374). He explains that being in her presence made him "forgetful of the past, reckless of the future" (374). The reader is required to remain suspicious of the motives of Law. So, too, in another typically insignificant-seeming narrative detail, the narrator explains that Robert Audley's "French novels have been presented to a young Templar" (380). Braddon hints that the next generation of legal professionals need to prepare against future shocks. The novel concludes with the reader in a readied state of anxiety about future railway manias, too.

Conclusion: The Art of Detection and the "attitude of readiness"

In this chapter, I see the fictional narrative of *Lady Audley's Secret* performing a literary diagnosis of the various, competing historical narratives that attempted to explain the financial railway mania of the 1840s. Such a reading is, itself, symptomatic—symptomatic, but not paranoid. The novel deliberately prescribes such an analysis to readers repeatedly throughout the text. As the fictional narrative examines the historical narrative it seeks to comprehend, the novel gestures towards other fiction as a resource. Hunting for information that would help him discover Lady Audley's secrets, Robert Audley relies on the skills he developed as a fiction reader. Muttering to himself, "I haven't read Alexandre Dumas and Wilkie Collins for nothing" (341), Audley specifically identifies sensation fiction as the genre capable of working through the anxieties of the time. Braddon pushes her audience, too, to read into the text, trace clues, and uncover messages. The investigation shifts from George Talboys's whereabouts to Helen Talboy's identity when Robert Audley searches through a set of books in George Talboys's abandoned portmanteau. Opening each book, Audley is convinced "There may be something to help me in them" (134). He discovers "a bright ring of golden hair" belonging to Helen Talboys in an 1845 annual, the year prior to the height of the mid-century mania. It is the job of the reader to pick up on the historical clues as the novel revises the historical narrative running just below the surface.

Lady Audley's Secret forwards the argument that fiction offers a valuable resource to help work through those mysteries of our recent history that continue to inform the present and future. Braddon's novel insists, however, that reading passively will not suffice. Readers must be attuned to the messages embedded in the text and to participate actively in the work of analysis. When Robert Audley encounters Lord Audley's daughter Alicia reading, he inquires about the

book title, author, and significance. She identifies the book as "*Changes and Chances*" (192). When Robert asks, "Who is it by?" Alicia answers by identifying the author's previous work: "The author of *Follies and Faults*." Robert probes further, asking for her evaluation, "Is it interesting?" to which Alicia responds, "Not particularly." Many readers may pass over this short passage, as it appears to be an insignificant bit of dialogue. The careful reader, though, should be alert to the missed opportunity. Without learning first from the prior follies and faults, Alicia Audley will unlikely be able to appreciate the changes and chances she encounters. More significantly, this exchange occurs at the end of a chapter titled, "Retrograde Investigation." It signals to Braddon's readers the larger message of examining the past to understand the present and prepare for a better future.

The novels that followed *Lady Audley's Secret* demonstrate Braddon's continued interest in sensational representations of women, finance, and crime. *Aurora Floyd* (1863), *Birds of Prey* (1867), and *Charlotte's Inheritance* (1868) each belong to what Tamara S. Wagner terms "The Sensational Stock-Market Novel." Wagner argues that "the main interest of the fully-fledged stock-market novel as it emerged in the 1860s rested precisely in the fissures of […] attempts to manage speculation and sensation crazes" (63). In the fledgling financial novel, *Lady's Audley's Secret*, Braddon first worked through how people felt about the prior railway investment history that created that fissure. This more psychological approach tested out the genre's capabilities of managing speculation through the fear-anxiety-security process by first asking readers to scrutinize the legitimacy of their fears, to assess where their anxiety might be misplaced, and to determine their complicity in their own victimization. In other words, the covert nature of *Lady Audley's Secret* insisted that readers locate answers that would explain the regrets of railway investments within themselves. The narrator explains, "There is nothing so delicate, so fragile, as

that invisible balance upon which the mind is always trembling. Mad to-day and sane to-morrow" (344). In other words, by the end of the novel, mental mania did not simply stand for financial mania—the financial and mental manias intertwined. After internalizing the precariousness of finance, the narrator then universalizes the experience to show how a widespread mania might occur: "Who has not been, or is not to be, mad in some lonely hour of life? Who is quite safe from the trembling of balance?" (344). *Lady Audley's Secret* makes the case that the precariousness of balance that investors felt was necessary for investments to be successful. Investors had to develop a healthy anxiety that anticipated fluctuations of the invisible balance while still allowing them to take risks. Braddon's novel instructs readers to develop this personal, internal awareness of their own motivations and limitations within this balance, which would allow them, in Charlotte Bronte's words, to be "wise in time."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERMANENT WAY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND DIVERGING PERCEPTIONS OF 'PLACE'

> *If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it…I should get into trouble…They would displace me*.—Dickens, "The Signal-Man"

> *[T]he whole complexion of the place altered. He had not known what a homely, poor part of town it was: he saw it now as if it were a new place with which he was making acquaintance for the first time*.—Oliphant, *The Railway Man and His Children*

As railway lines developed into intricate networks that sprawled across the country in the second half of the nineteenth century, passengers could move from the city outward or from the more remote parts of England inward towards London, and choose from a constellation of options between the two. People could relocate for work opportunities more easily, or—if they could afford even a cheap third-class ticket—they could explore parts of the country previously out of reach. As we learned in the last chapter, railways also afforded economic movement. The democratization of investment opportunities in railway enterprise allowed some savvy investors to move up in economic class or effect independence (if they were "wise in time" and avoided some of the infamous pitfalls). While the increased ease of mobility improved the quality of life for many Victorians, greater access also contributed to a sense of dissatisfaction as it invited people to reevaluate their "place."[80] This chapter looks at literature that examines how the sense

[80]"Place" in this sense indicates a sense of identity connected to social stature. The Oxford English Dictionary defines place as "position or standing in an order of estimation or merit; spec. a person's social rank or status; the duty or rights appropriate to a social rank." See: "Place, 15.a." OED. In the nineteenth century and earlier, this sense of place often was tied intricately to a physical place, and, when used, might often referred to as both. Place eventually included profession, too. Thus, when I use "place," I use it interchangeably between the multiple meanings and/or conflate more than one meaning at a time, as nineteenth-century readers and writers did. I made an effort in this chapter to cue the reader to the correct sense. I trust that the context of the sentence avoids confusion.

of entitlement to a better "place" and the related sense of disconnection to one's "place" each were tied uniquely to the affordances of railway mobility.

For some, the progress of railway mobility signified unfettered access to a better life. These people assumed that economic mobility and geographic mobility would work in concert to ensure social mobility. This type of thinking branches from the idea of meritocracy explored in earlier chapters. Just as George Stephenson could claim the title of engineer through self-teaching rather than professional schooling, people believed that the concept of the self-made man applied to the social sphere, too. Presumably, someone could study behavior, acquire manners, and be accepted into the social circles previously unavailable to him if he had money to access social connections (or vice versa). However, while the landscape and economic system may have been drastically altered by the radical intervention of the railways, strict social codes remained staunchly embedded. When the access to higher social placement did not manifest itself for those operating under the assumption it would, disappointed expectations led to a regretful sense of social immobility.

For others, the speed of railway mobility—and literal re-location—induced a crisis of identity dislocation. More than a simple transferal from one place to another, mobility signified a transition between spaces that often linked place and identity. What previously took weeks or longer could now be done in a day, so the transition was abrupt rather than gradual and made the difference between one place and another appear much starker. Such sharp contrast forced a comparison between place and identity. As it altered self-perception mobility also encouraged a reconsideration of who people used to be, who they are now, and who they might be. These shifts in perspective often invited regret. While regret normally requires the distance of time to measure the difference between the way things were and the way things are, the rapidity of

change actuated by the railways induced those who experienced mobility (both physical and economic) to overlay a "now and then" distinction onto a "here and there" comparison, framing a new kind of "there was then, here is now" mentality. Thus, the speed of dislocation between past, present, and place accelerated a sense of identity disjunction as reflected in the literature of the period.

Both attitudes reveal a mobility problem at the intersection of access and displacement during a period of sociocultural transition. The inability to go backward or move forward created an ironic state of flux for those living in the age of the "permanent way." I contend that, even as the railways connected people and places (and people to places) and fixed new routes, the radical technology also unmoored people from their previous way of life and from what they imagined possible for themselves. My argument complicates narratives of coherence forwarded by Benedict Anderson and others that focus on the sense of shared national identity the railway network inspired. I argue that, even as a sense of Britishness cohered with the experience and awareness of simultaneity and synchronicity, people living through the transition grappled with feelings of displacement that made them distant from themselves as well as other people. As the railways became a fixture in the second half of the nineteenth century, many people living at the time struggled to establish a firm sense of "place" in the unstable space between there/then and here/now.

Railway fiction, generally, processes the discomforts of transitions wrought by railroads. In railway fiction featuring stations and junctions, though, I often find these more specific themes of dislocated identity and disillusioned expectations about personal "place." As spaces of literal transition, junctions and stations become imbued with symbolic meaning, providing tangible metaphorical space within which to explore the cultural problem of restricted access to

social spheres. In this chapter, I examine two works: Charles Dickens's contributions to *Mugby Junction*, a collection of short stories published in *All the Year Round* as an extra Christmas number in 1866, and Margaret Oliphant's two-volume novel, *The Railway Man and His Children* published in 1891. Both works of fiction illustrate the disillusioned expectations of railway mobility as a breach of promise, and both imagine a resolution to the problem of access, though from distinctly different perspectives. Whereas Dickens's stories urge people to revise their desire for unfettered access to something more realistic, Oliphant's novel suggests charting a new route to a redefined destination of social status. In simplest terms, one perspective persuades people to adapt to current circumstances while the other encourages people to reshape reality to meet a new ideal. I begin by examining a passage in Trollope's more canonical work, *The Prime Minister* (1876), published between these less well-read works of Dickens and Oliphant, to provide a point of comparison as well as establish a spectrum of perspectives about social progress.

A 'Gentleman for Nowhere' Learns His Place: Conservative Reform in *Mugby Junction*

A railway junction is an intermediary space of directional change, where inbound and outbound lines meet and crossover each other as they follow their planned routes. Junctions require at least three lines, where an inbound line has at least two options for outbound routes. As a physical point of access to multiple lines and a variety of routes, the transitional space visibly illustrated for nineteenth-century passengers the idea that railway mobility entailed more possible pathways for their lives. If someone wanted to change the trajectory of their life, it seemed a matter of choice between a proliferation of options. The discovery that some of those choices were restricted, however, meant that the appearance of greater access was, in part, an

illusion. Thus, the symbolic space of the junction—in addition to signifying potential and choice—included a revised understanding about limited options. During this period of change, the junction signified the convergence of hopes, opportunities, chances, choices, restrictions, disappointments. It was both a literal and a figurative space within which Victorians could discern the choices available within the restrictions and adjust their attitudes to that more realistic understanding of what mobility meant for them as an individual and as a member of a larger community.

Written ten years after *Mugby Junction*, Anthony Trollope's novel *The Prime Minister* (1876) prominently features a junction as the space wherein the symbolic convergence of hope and disappointment for those seeking to become "somebody" materializes.[81] Social climber Ferdinand Lopez managed to acquaint himself with the right people, though "none of them knew whence he had come, or what was his family" (3). While it "was not generally believed that Ferdinand Lopez was well born," the narrator explains that "certain unexpressed allowances for possible exceptions" are made for claiming the status of gentleman. The narrator suggests that the exception in this case was that "Ferdinand Lopez was a monied man" (6). When his investment scheme falls through and he is exposed as moneyless, Lopez seeks refuge at his social club, "Progress." The irony of the club's name becomes apparent when no one at the social club speaks to him. We are told that "the committee which was to be held with the view of judging whether he was or was not a proper person to remain a member of that assemblage had not yet been held, and there was nothing to impede his entrance into the club" (186). While it seems like his fate is decided, the omniscient narrator explains that club members are divided.

[81] Trollope opens the novel by asserting a connection between mobility, identity, and place of origin: "It is certainly of service to a man to know who were his grandfathers and who were his grandmothers if he entertains an ambition to move in the upper circles of society, and also of service to be able to speak of them as of persons who were themselves somebodies in their time" (1)

The description of club members' ambivalence provides a visual sign that the sometimes-intangible social sphere was undergoing transition. The debate within "Progress," also suggests that the club's name is less ironic than indicative of a non-linear path of progress. The novel illustrates that the terms of the status and the boundaries of the social sphere were under negotiation.

While hope might be found in the fact that negotiation was taking place, unclear boundaries of status complicated identity formation for those seeking entry. In the chapter "Tenway Junction," Trollope illustrates the devastating effects of feeling denied access to being "somebody." Realizing that his financial misfortune means he would have to live "some very retired and solitary life," Lopez buys a first-class ticket to Tenway Junction (189). The sharp contrast between choice and restriction in the description of the junction infuses it with symbolic weight. After claiming, "It is quite unnecessary to describe the Tenway Junction, as everybody knows it," the narrator, in fact, indulges in a description: "From this spot, some six or seven miles distant from London, lines diverge east, west, and north, northeast, and north-west, round the metropolis in every direction, and with direct communication with every other line in and out of London" (191). The apology for describing the widely familiar junction and details of its widespread coverage explain how the idea of unfettered mobility seemed a given to most people. However, the *assumption* of easy access to that "direct communication" to any place of their choosing is sharply contrasted with the actual *experience* of access to the places people desire: "It is a marvelous place, quite unintelligible to the uninitiated, and yet daily used by thousands who only know that when they get there, they are to do what some one tells them." Despite the high visibility, the place is largely "unintelligible" to those without inside knowledge, but even people with experiential knowledge appear to lack control and do what they are told.

The vision of chaotic mobility in the junction conveys the sense that social mobility is riskier during this period of uncertainty. To an outside observer, the convergent rails "always run one into another with sloping points, and cross passages, and mysterious meandering sidings, till it seems to the thoughtful stranger to be impossible that the best trained engine should know its own line" (191). The confusion and intelligibility of the pattern in the railway lines mirrors the larger cultural transition of social place. Just as the members of "Progress" defined the terms of who has access to their sphere, the junction has its own invisible prevailing order: "Men and women, — especially the men, for the women knowing their ignorance are generally willing to trust to the pundits of the place, — look doubtful, uneasy, and bewildered. But they all do get properly placed and unplaced, so that the spectator at last acknowledges that over all this apparent chaos there is presiding a great genius of order" (191-92). The passive voice of "placed and unplaced" stresses the idea that external forces, rather than individual choice, determine social movement. People are effectively put in their place by a superior agent of action, "a great genius of order," who is vague and inscrutable.

Employing the language of mobility, Trollope illustrates the devastation of restricted social access in the space of transition. The convergence of hope and disappointment in the text transforms the junction into a personal limbo for Lopez. Significantly, he finds "a spot that was unoccupied" at Tenway Junction, which signifies that there is space enough to access opportunity. However, for Lopez, the junction becomes the site of mobility converging with immobility. While he stands "still" and "fixed," the express from London "flashed by" (193). Transfixed by his motionlessness, Lopez is warned by the guard, "Gentleman can't wait here all day, sir. The horders is against waiting on the platform." In other words, on the platform to the express uptown, you must either get on or off. Lopez's inertia—his inability to move forward—

underscores the pain of disappointed expectations that once appeared possible: “He did not fail to remind himself over and over again that he had nearly succeeded” (188-89). Lopez is forced to confront his failure to rise to a permanent position within the sphere he so desired, and he does so head on.

While progress at large appears to be unidirectional and interconnected, we know from Lopez’s experience with “Progress” that advancement is awarded on a case by case basis, which means that progress overall occurs—or is awarded—unevenly, and for some that unevenness is—or appears to be—vertical rather than horizontal. After suffering a financial reversal that ensured a social one, Lopez feels doomed to a life marked by socioeconomic failure. The narrator describes the weird mobility of anticipated decline: “Lopez, departing from the platform which he had hitherto occupied, was soon to be seen on another, walking up and down, and again waiting” (193-94). Lopez reaches a dark conclusion about the choice he feels is available to him:

> At that moment there came a shriek louder than all the other shrieks, and the morning express down from Euston to Inverness was seen coming round the curve at a thousand miles an hour. Lopez turned round and looked at it, and again walked towards the edge of the platform. But now it was not exactly the edge that he neared, but a descent to a pathway,—an inclined plane leading down to the level of the rails, and made there for certain purposes of traffic. As he did so the pundit called to him, and then made a rush at him,—for our friend’s back was turned to the coming train. But Lopez heeded not the call, and the rush was too late. With quick, but still with gentle and apparently unhurried steps, he walked down before the flying engine—and in a moment had been knocked into bloody atoms. (194)

The increased decibel level of the shrieks is meant to register with Lopez alone. Earlier, the narrator explains the theory that "each separate shriek […] is a separate notice to separate ears of the coming or going of a separate train" (192). The emphasis of separateness that links shrieks, ears, and trains, conveys a sense of mobility constituted by individual efforts disconnected from rather than linked to a network of social progress. Mobility defined by these terms requires that a person be granted access to social place in order to be somebody. Certain that his fate entails a slow decline into obscurity, Lopez accelerates his downward mobility with a preemptive "descent" on an "inclined plane leading down" until he is "level" with the point of access unavailable to him. "[K]nocked into bloody atoms" by the oncoming train, Lopez literally becomes a nobody.

"Barbox Brothers": One-Way Ticket to Nowhere

We hear in Trollope's desolate description of a violent underworld of transition at Tenway Junction the exaggerated echoes of Charles Dickens's *Mugby Junction* written ten years earlier. Repeated imagery of Dickens's fiction in Trollope's novel tempts an argument of influence. The narrator in *The Prime Minister* describes the noises of Tenway junction as "pandemoniac" (192) and the movement of the trains as "crashing through like flashes of substantial lightning, and others stopping, disgorging and taking up passengers by the hundreds" (191). Similarly, the narrator of Dickens's first tale in the *Mugby Junction* collection, "Barbox Brothers." describes a train passing through Mugby Junction: "Red hot embers showering out of the ground, down this dark avenue, and down the other, as if torturing fires were being raked clear; concurrently shrieks and groans and grinds invading the ear, as if the tortured were at the height of their suffering […] An earthquake accompanied with thunder and lightning, going up

express to London" (1-2). Regardless of whether Trollope read this Christmas edition of *All the Year Round* (or, if he did, intentionally alluded to it in his novel), the remarkable similarity indicates a shared vision of chaos in the cultural imagination at large during this time of social transition. Though the two authors' imagery draws from the same sense of extreme disorder, each literary response ultimately reaches a different conclusion. The cynical vision of progress in Trollope's novel serves as a useful point of comparison with which to locate the position forwarded in *Mugby Junction* about technological progress and how it affected social progress, which has been difficult for scholars to pinpoint.

Camilla Cassidy notes that critics often interpret the author's vacillation between "sentimental nostalgia" and "'savage satire' on the inflated dignity granted to periods of the past" as a "confused and conflicting attitude to progress," and that "[s]tagecoaches and the railway have become a neat short hand for these conflicting points of view" (368-369). In other words, such critics expect Dickens's fiction featuring the stagecoach to signal a desire to return to the simpler times of the past and fiction featuring the railways to signal an embrace of modernity. Cassidy concludes, however, that "Dickens somehow accommodates both perspectives and seems able to oscillate between regret for the past and an enthusiastic celebration of the modern age without any acknowledged contradiction of purpose" (369). Ruth Livesey also rejects the idea that stagecoaches symbolize nostalgia in fiction written during the railway age. Much like Cassidy's argument that the presence of "superceded and superceding modes of travel represent a productive interaction between old and new in a period of rapid transition" (368), Livesey affirms that stagecoaches more often signal a desire to re-establish a sense of "place" and belonging rather than a desire to return to the so-called simpler past. Likewise, Jonathan Grossman finds a celebration of modernity in Dickens's earlier works featuring stagecoaches and

omnibuses, and shares Cassidy's argument that Dicken's historical novels envision progress as "a graduated process of change" (376).

My argument in this section continues the work of Cassidy, Grossman, and Livesey in deconstructing the false link between early mobile technologies and regret, and later mobile technologies and a repudiation of the past. In the modern setting of *Mugby Junction* (rather than in a historical novel featuring a stagecoach). I find both a sense of productive regret and the desire for "place." These stories express a dissatisfaction with a present reality, marked by dislocated place and identity. While Dickens's stories give credence to the constrictive circumstances of the past and the obstructed present, they also express regret for the present pessimism. The developmental arc of the main character locates the source of feelings of disconnection in personal attitudes. Dickens's stories suggest that the large extent of people's dissatisfaction develops out of their own unrealistic expectations. A fair conclusion to draw from the collection is that modernity may be disappointingly uneven, but the state of social progress is not so dire. At the same time, the center of the collection, "Signal Man," envisions a gothic nightmare of the present for those who have little access to the affordances of mobility. As a collection, these stories illustrate how past, present, and future all problematize "place" while providing a hopeful path to progress for some but not all and by varying degrees. The ambivalence about progress that current critics project onto Dickens is precisely the problem I see being worked through in *Mugby Junction*. Each of Dickens's stories draw from the larger cultural desire to understand the balance between chance, choice, and circumstance, and the relative speed—and violence—of progress.[82]

[82] The majority of my analysis is spent on the first of Dickens's tales, "Barbox Brothers." I attend to those aspects of the second story, "Barbox Brothers and Co.," that provide answers to the questions raised in the first story and that conclude the frame of the tale. My examination of "Signal Man" focuses on the exceptions to the rules of argument presented in the first two stories.

In addition to an illustration of the underworld, the opening description of Mugby Junction in "Barbox Brothers"—the first story of *Mugby Junction*—resembles the scene of a crime, setting the stage for an examination of circumstances that are particularly punishing. "A place replete with shadowy shapes," Mugby Junction is a suspicious space: "Mysterious goods trains, covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals, conveying themselves guiltily away from the presence of the few lighted lamps, as if their freight had come to a secret and unlawful end. Half miles of coal pursuing in a Detective manner, following when they lead, stopping when they stop, backing when they back" (1). The language of criminality ("mysterious", "guiltily," "secret," "unlawful,") attaches nefarious motives to the trains, but the truncated sentence structure obscures any discernable purpose. The descriptions of train and trail of coal smoke are detailed, and the strings of gerunds suggest movement; however, the incomplete sentences each elide a main verb and central action. The train and trail, too, suggest an inseparable link between action and consequence; however, the lack of a clear sense of purpose means the "Detective" smoke follows without insight, clouding rather than clarifying. While the motive of the trains is hidden, the language of death ("palls," "weird funerals," "end") suggests a sense of fatality in their destination. This picture of Mugby Junction is not the scene of choice that a space of transition and convergence would suggest. Nevertheless, this space of vague criminality and death is the place where the main character alights, attempting to alter his path, which forecasts his position as a victim and, much like Lopez, a potentially fatal one.

To convey a sense of troubled identity linked with dislocated place, the name of the main character, his place of origin, and his destination are obscured from the outset of "Barbox Brothers." Spontaneously choosing to "sacrifice" the remainder of his "through ticket" and disembark at Mugby Junction, the character first identified as "the traveler" is then referred to by

the narrator as the "belated traveler." Stopping at Mugby Junction, he willingly enters a liminal space of immobility. Ironically, he paces the platform of the junction "with a steady step…up and down, up and down, up and down, seeking nothing, and finding it" (1). The contrary kinetic and purposeless motion underscore the chaos of the period of transition and map it onto a personal narrative. The traveler visualizes his life as a figurative train, coupling circumstantial constraints to communicate a life of limitation and disappointment:

> a shadowy train went by him in the gloom which was no other than the train of life. From whatsoever intangible deep cutting or dark tunnel it emerged, here it came, unsummoned and unannounced, stealing upon him and passing away into obscurity. Here, mournfully went by, a child who had never had a childhood or known a parent, inseparable from a youth with a bitter sense of his namelessness, coupled to a man the enforced business of whose best years had been distasteful and oppressive, linked to an ungrateful friend, dragging after him a woman once beloved. Attendant with many a clank and wrench, were lumbering cares, dark meditations, huge dim disappointments, monotonous years, a long jarring line of the discords of a solitary and unhappy existence. (2)

The increasingly constrictive stages of life conveyed in the passage starkly contrast the ideal of boundless opportunity afforded by mobility. As a space of convergence, the junction should provide a place where people could adjust their trajectory at each stage. However, the metaphorical stages of the traveler's life are linked together on one "monotonous," "jarring" line, confined by an "intangible deep cutting or dark tunnel," and leading only to unhappiness. The "oppressive" restrictions in his life press from the outside in, and from birth to death. Like Lopez in *The Prime Minister*, the series of increasing constrictions is first set in motion by the inability

to claim identity through the family, which explains the sense of illegality that colors the traveler's suspicious perspective. A victim of "namelessness," the traveler is forcibly "coupled" to a career he does not desire nor did he choose. The "once beloved" woman and intimate friend should be the boons of a better life, yet are painfully denied to him. He experiences these "dim disappointments" as a breach of promise for a better life he thought he could access through the merit of hard work. He believed he was changing course at school after he encountered a mentor he described as "the ray of hope and prospering ambition" (3). By dedicated study, he thought he might escape a life of "silence and constraint." However, the concurrent stages of his life proved "inseparable" from that outside status he incurred at birth. He felt doomed to observe his birthday each year as a "penitential anniversary"—his crime was being born out of "place."

In the world of Mugby Junction, birth-assigned social place and identity are examined through the lens of class and labor. The message about constricted identities forwarded by "Barbox Brothers" initially invites Marxist analysis about the alienation of labor. Identities constrained by class and social status appear to be interpellated by the job foisted onto them. We learn that the traveler was known in his youth as "Young Jackson" (the story hints that this name was given to him as an illegitimate child with the cutting irony of no existant "Old Jackson"). Unattached to this name, the former traveler assumes the identity of "Barbox Brothers," which is the label on the luggage he brought with him and the name of the company for which he felt "enforced" to work. He describes his position as a slave with a "seat in the Galley of Barbox Brothers" (3). The narrator describes Barbox Brother's place of employment as "some offshoot or irregular branch of the Public Notary and bill-broking tree." While the "tree" implies upward growth, the "irregular branch," adopting the language of the railways, suggests a route separate from the mainline and subject to instability. Not only is Barbox Brothers denied access to the

path of upward growth, the irregularities of the compulsory path shape how he is perceived. The company had "gained for itself a griping reputation…and the reputation had stuck to it and him" (3-4). The narrator, assuming Barbox Brother's perspective, sympathizes with the vulnerability of unrooted identities whose work molds—or grotesquely embodies—their persona: "This character had come upon him through no act of his own. It was as if the original Barbox had stretched himself down upon the office-floor, and had thither caused to be conveyed Young Jackson in his sleep, and had there effected a metempsychosis and exchange of persons with him" (4). The traveler's nameless birth divested him of an identity, leaving an empty shell vulnerable to the imposition of an identity defined by labor. Such alienated identities are characterized not only by a disconnection from the self but also a separation from others.

Dickens's story suggests that the greater tragedy of identities malformed by constricted mobility is the equally misshapen view of others it fosters. When Barbox Brothers first stepped onto the platform at Mugby Junction, he encountered a railway worker who was inquiring about his portmanteaus. Barbox Brothers asks him, "Are you a Porter?" to which the man replies, "On Porter's wages, sir. But I am Lamps" (2). Barbox Brothers first seems "a little confused," when he asks, "Who did you say you are?" and the man responds, "Lamps, sir." However, Barbox then confirms, "Surely, surely," as if it makes perfect sense for Lamps to assume the identity of his job. Not only does Barbox conflate job title and identity, addressing him as Lamps for the remainder of the story, he also refuses to allow Lamps to identify himself by name.[83] The characteristically Dickensian description of Lamps repeatedly oiling his face with a handkerchief

[83] When Lamps finds Barbox Brothers in his house he begins to introduce himself, "And first of all, that you may know my name—" to which Barbox exclaims, "Stay!...What signifies your name! Lamps is name enough for me. I like it. It is bright and expressive. What do I want more!" (8). While this could be read generously as reinvestment of the signifier as symbolic of a positive attitude rather than work, the continued dialogue also reveals that it is a way for Barbox to avoid intimacy. "Why to be sure, sir,' returned Lamps. 'I have in general no other name down at the Junction; but I thought, on account of your being here as a first-class single, in a private character that you might—"

is comical, but the point of conflating an identity and a job is clear. As synecdoches, identities like Barbox Brothers and Lamps may represent parts of the whole, but they are also juxtaposed with the most potent symbol of mobility—the trains. Though they facilitate mobility (through bill-brokering or lamp-lighting), they express a limited mobility themselves.

The story slowly undermines its own initial reading of interpellated identities, however, and offers exceptions to the perspective of fixed identities Barbox Brothers has espoused. Through increased intimacy with Lamps, he learns the porter is also a poet. The fact that Lamps can be *both* a porter *and* a poet deconstructs the idea that an identity is attached to one's situation—or, place of work. After his first shock of discovery, Barbox Brothers affirms uncharacteristically, "Be what you like." Stressing the difference between his chosen identity as a poet and his assigned identity as a railway man, Lamps grants, "Some people, sir,' remarked Lamps, in a tone of apology, 'are sometimes what they don't like'" (3). With residual identification as a victim, Barbox Brothers woefully confirms, "Nobody knows that better than I do," sighed the other. 'I have been what I don't like, all my life'." Barbox Brothers misses the distinction Lamps makes with "sometimes." Lamps, for instance is a part-time Porter and part-time Poet. Barbox Brothers's self-perception that he is wholly a victim of circumstance is as entrenched as the "deep cutting" he feels shaped the train of his life. The transition space of the junction, though, helps to transform his perspective. While exploring Mugby Junction, he encounters a true case of immobility in Lamps's daughter Phoebe, which further disabuses Barbox Brothers of the notion that constraints overpower choice.

The story of "Barbox Brothers" makes the case that an attitude of victimhood is more regrettable than the fact of constraint in people's lives. Focusing an inordinate amount of attention on the injustices in his own life blinds Barbox from seeing the difficulties in other lives.

At the same time, because he defines his life solely by what he has been denied, once he is aware of the suffering of others, he struggles to define their lives outside of that suffering. His encounter with Phoebe begins to dismantle the pessimistic myth of identity formation he adopted early on. Wandering around the town, Barbox Brothers observes a "very fragile though very bright face" and animate hands in a window that spark his curiosity (5). A child who came from the abode tells him it is Phoebe's house. When he asks, who Phoebe is, the child responds, "Why Phoebe, of course" and then emphasizes that Phoebe "can't be anybobby else but Phoebe. Can she?" The child's tautological explanation about Phoebe's identity exposes the fallacy of interpellation to which Barbox Brothers had surrendered. He returns to introduce himself to Phoebe, who he suspects cannot move. From below her window, he questions her about her physical constraints:

> "You are an invalid, I fear?"
>
> "No, sir. I have very good health."
>
> "But are you not always lying down?"
>
> "O yes, I am always lying down, because I cannot sit up. But I am not an invalid."
>
> The laughing eyes seemed highly to enjoy his great mistake.

Phoebe's correction of Barbox Brother's assumptions and invitation to alter his view dislodges his psychological immobility:

> "Would you mind taking the trouble to come in, sir? There is a beautiful view from this window. And you would see that I am not at all ill—being so good as to care."

> It was said to help him, as he stood irresolute, but evidently desiring to enter, with his diffident hand on the latch of the garden gate. It did help him, and he went in. (6)

In the face of Phoebe's resistance to victimhood despite being actually affected by immobility, Barbox Brothers is forced to revise his perspective about his own life. Rather than viewing her life with the backward gaze of regret, Phoebe casts her eyes outward to the beautiful prospect: "Her eyes were turned to it as she spoke…There was not a trace in it of any sense of deprivation" (7). Phoebe's literal, positive outlook not only pushes Barbox Brothers to rewrite his past but also motivates him to take decisive action for his future. When Lamps enters the home to discover Barbox Brothers there, he exclaims, "The gentleman for Nowhere!" and explains, "It's your being noticed so often down at the Junction, without taking any train, that has begun to get you the name among us of the gentleman for Nowhere" (7). Inspired by Phoebe, Barbox Brothers renews the personal transformation of attitude and action, initiated before arriving at Mugby Junction.

Charting Barbox Brother's shifting attitudes towards self-empowerment in the face of oppressive circumstances and outside status further undercuts a Marxist interpretation. While acknowledging real external pressures, the story insists that Barbox's prior outlook on life was truly a self-imposed prison of the mind. Though he felt shuttled into his present circumstances, Barbox Brothers eventually acted on his own behalf and initiated his own emancipation. Rather than submitting to a life of declined mobility (or atomizing himself as Trollope will imagine for Ferdinand Lopez), Barbox Brothers "did at last effect one great release in his condition. He broke the oar he had plied so long, and he scuttled and sank the galley. He prevented the gradual retirement of an old conventional business from him, by taking the initiative and retiring from it

[…] he obliterated the firm of Barbox Brothers" (4). Dickens's story offers a new understanding of mobility and opportunity that involves individual participation. To find your place, you must create the space of opportunity within your given constraints. Choice does not come to you; you must affect it. The story also suggests that individuals develop an awareness of their limitations and, viewing them unemotionally, learn to act within those limitations.

For Victorians who saw the junction as an indicator of unfettered opportunities, "Barbox Brothers" models how to avoid tunnel vision and take a wider view that offers a more accurate picture of mobility. When Barbox Brothers wakes the morning after his arrival and a day after his liberation from his former place and wanders contemplatively through Mugby Junction, he first adopts the more naïve perspective of limitless choice, asking himself, "Where shall I go next? [...] I can go anywhere from here […] There's no hurry, and I may like the look of one Line better than another" (4). When his morning ambulation takes him to the bridge overlooking the Junction, he is at first struck with wonder at the technological feat of the railways. He thinks, "But there were so many Lines. Gazing down upon them from a bridge at the Junction, it was as if the concentrating Companies formed a great Industrial Exhibition of the works of extraordinary ground-spiders that spun iron. And then so many of the Lines went such wonderful ways, so crossing and curving among one another" (5). He first sees plenitude, convergence, coherence, and possibility. Further study, though, reveals that not all lines promise continuous mobility: "And then some of them appeared to start with the fixed intention of going five hundred miles, and all of a sudden gave it up at an insignificant barrier, or turned off into a workshop. And then others, like intoxicated men went a little way very straight, and surprisingly slued round and came back again." If the railway lines of geographic mobility double as figurative lines of opportunity for socioeconomic mobility, they also stand for the people who

seek access to that mobility. The passage distinguishes between intentions and actions and insists that those who "gave it up at an insignificant barrier" accept partial responsibility for their failed mobility.

"Barbox Brothers" illustrates socioeconomic movement along an axis, where externally-imposed restrictions intersect internally-imposed constraints, and teaches that choice is relative to individual positions on that axis. Phoebe's immobility forces Barbox Brothers to acknowledge his own greater potential for mobility, however modest. After revising his understanding of personal agency, he decides to become "the gentleman for Somewhere" (9). Rather than a blind assumption that all paths leading out of Mugby Junction are equal in their potential, Barbox Brothers realizes his "choice of a road shall be determined by his choice among his discoveries" amongst the lines (10). Phoebe taught him to appreciate the ability to make that choice, which honors the fact that others are not afforded even that opportunity. Phoebe finds fulfillment in an other-oriented pleasure of mobility, one with a deeply developed belief in the greater good:

> '…and those threads of railway, with their puffs of smoke and steam changing places so fast, make it so lively for me,' she went on. 'I think of the number of people who *can* go where they wish, on their business, or their pleasure; I remember that the puffs make signs to me that they are actually going while I look; and that enlivens the prospect with abundance of company, if I want company. There is the great Junction, too. I don't see it under the foot of the hill, but I can very often hear it, and I always know it is there. It seems to join me, in a way, to I don't know how many places and things that *I* shall never see'. (7)

Just as Phoebe connects herself to the opportunities of others, Barbox Brothers couples himself to her constraints. He decides to limit his choices of exploration to the lines Phoebe can see from

her window—seven (9). “Well!” Barbox exclaims, “I propose to myself, at once to reduce the gross number to those very seven, and gradually to fine them down to one—the most promising for me—and to take that” (9). Places of origin and circumstances at each stage of life determine each individual’s unique place on the axis. Barbox Brothers’s statement reveals, too, that the trajectory from that place on the axis, the one “most promising,” is also specific to the individual. This message of specificity is about accepting the “fitness” of mobility, a degree of personal progress appropriate given a set of individual contingencies.

The central message of “Barbox Brothers” advises people to spend less time regretting that they are denied a better situation and, instead, appreciate when their place is good in comparison to others. As Phoebe illustrated above, this type of awareness should constitute an affective network of mobility rather than simply a collection of self-interested pathways. At the conclusion of the story, Barbox Brothers has converted his personal dissatisfaction into an other-oriented regret for Phoebe’s immobility. By curing his self-interest from selfishness, Barbox can dislodge himself from the state of flux. He commits to taking one last journey before choosing a new place for himself, and gives Phoebe a musical instrument at parting. He looks back and sees her embrace the gift against her breast and caress it affectionately: “The glimpse gladdened his heart, and yet saddened it; for so might she, if her youth had flourished in its natural course, have taken to her breast that day the slumbering music of her own child’s voice” (10). He imagines an alternate trajectory for Phoebe’s life with a sadness distinctly different from the regret he used to feel about the unnatural course of his own life. When he first related his history to Phoebe—the “lost beginning” of his childhood, broken engagement and betrayal, his bitterness in her presence embarrassed him. He heard an internal whisper, “O shame, shame!” (9). He learns to see his negative perspective as a bad habit, apologizing, “I am all wrong together.” Barbox Brothers

realizes that the degree of his disappointment was out of proportion with his situation. When he dismantled the company of Barbox Brothers, he had "enough to live on (though after all with not too much)" (4). His situation was not as dire as his earlier bitter perspective had colored it. This conversion of attitude required that he re-write the story of his past in a way that continued to reconnect him to others and to himself. The link between place and self for Barbox Brothers is reestablished as he journeys outward from the junction, searching for a new place to live. As he does, he revises his personal history so that it is integrated into a larger collective network of place and progress.

"Barbox Brothers and Co.": A Choice Among Discoveries for Somewhere

"Barbox Brothers and Co.," follows sequentially in the order of the collection, though it is the chronological end of the tales' frame. The rest of the stories told by Dickens and others are presumably the tales of each of the journeys of discovery that Barbox Brothers takes as he explores the possible new places to settle. In "Barbox Brothers and Co." Barbox makes a final journey back to London before settling down (presumably in Wales), signifying the completion of his personal transformation as well as his journey of discovery. Barbox Brothers only refers to the city as "the great ingenious town" (11). The significant return trip not only emphasizes his newly altered perspective but also underscores the symbolic value of the junction as a visual marker of points of access within the intangible social network. He suspects that "Mugby Junction was a Junction of many branches, invisible as well as visible, and had joined him to an endless number of byways" (11). These byways, rather than signifying the possible paths an individual can take to move forward (or upward), represent the pathways of all the other lives around that individual. It is these many lives, which he observed from the bridge overlooking the

Junction, going "such wonderful ways, so crossing and curving among one another" (5). He explains, "For, whereas he would, but a little while ago, have walked these streets blindly brooding, he now had eyes and thoughts for a new external world. How the many toiling people lived, and loved, and died (11). Barbox realizes he previously was unaware of his surroundings because his gaze was too self-focused on the one direct line of his own past, present, and future.

This "new external world" to which Barbox Brothers feels connected is constituted by the material reality of physical beings and an intangible organizing force of socioeconomic order. As Barbox Brothers opens his eyes to the many unique lives around him he becomes full of wonder at the balance between their individualism and their contribution to the whole. He thinks, "how wonderful it was to consider the various trainings of eye and hand, the nice distinctions of sight and touch, that separated them into classes of workers, and even into classes of workers at subdivisions of one complete whole which combined their many intelligences and forces, though of itself but some cheap object of use or ornament in common life" (11). This separateness is not the same message of separation conveyed in Trollope's *The Prime Minister*, where each train shriek signals the self-interested motives of isolated individuals. That kind of separateness, we know, ends in estrangement from self and others. Barbox Brothers celebrates the distinctness of individuals and their unique thoughts and abilities while also asserting that the value of their individual gifts can only be realized when joined with the unique thoughts and abilities of others.

"Barbox Brothers and Co." insists that a reformed understanding of "place" seeking to situate individual mobility within the greater sense of national progress should begin by rejecting the faulty assumption that people are degraded by their relative position within the network. Barbox thinks, "how good it was to know that such assembling in a multitude on their part, and such contribution of their several dexterities towards a civilizing end, did not deteriorate them as

it was the fashion of the supercilious May-flies of humanity to pretend." Knowing their place within the order makes such a place worthier, Barbox concludes, and makes an incremental cultural rise—even amidst a radical technological revolution—more reasonable. He determines that it "engendered among them a self-respect and yet a modest desire to be much wiser than they were." Barbox Brothers concludes that the dream of individual upward mobility was always an illusion when imagined as its own separate movement disconnected from the communal network. He reflects, "'I too am but a little part of the great whole,' he began to think; 'and to be serviceable to myself and others, or to be happy, I must cast myself into, and draw out of, the common stock'" (11). Thus, Barbox's vision for the future is a national vision that seeks to revise the self-interestedness entailed in the contemporary understanding of mobility and opportunity. The transformation of his character models a better course of life designed to help others achieve the more modest mobility that benefits the whole.

Dickens illustrates this shift from self-centeredness to a deeper sense of community through Barbox Brothers's transformation to Barbox Brothers and Co. Though he began life without family and was subjected to a life of little choice, Barbox Brothers believed he had merited a happy life with a wife-to-be. The breach of promise on the personal level, though, matched for him the breach of promise of mobility and confirmed for him a worldview that life was about denial and disappointment. In this story, and conclusion of the frame tale, Barbox Brothers confronts his past. By a chance encounter, he meets a lost little girl, Polly, on the street and discovers she is the daughter of his former friend and co-worker and Beatrice, whom he thought he would marry. He discovers that Beatrice and Tresham suffered many losses, which they attributed to their treatment of him.

Barbox realizes that with each of his personal disappointments he had disconnected further from other people and himself, assuming everyone else—especially those who had transgressed against him—was living a better life. In forgiving Beatrice and Tresham, Barbox Brothers reconnects to a larger sense of community. After reconciling with his former friend and lover, he walks about the town, observing the pleasures and obligations in others' lives. He "looked in upon the people at their work, and at their play, here, there, everywhere, and where not" (16). Barbox Brothers vision of life and circumstance is as balanced as the workers' lives between work and play. He notes, too, the limitations, counterbalancing "everywhere" with "where not." His openness to the visible and invisible connections between himself and others transforms him: "For he was Barbox Brothers and Co. now, and had taken thousands of partners into the solitary firm" (16).

The outside frame of the *Mugby Junction* collection illustrates how to settle into the space of transition. Having revised the false narrative of his earlier life and rewritten a more positive definition of mobility, Barbox returns to live at Mugby Junction. His decision to make Mugby Junction his destination signals that his perception of the space of transition has altered, too. No longer a space of limbo, Mugby Junction becomes a place of purpose: "the convenient place to live in, for brightening Phoebe's life. It was the convenient place to live in, for occasionally borrowing Polly. It was the convenient place to live in, for being joined at will to all sorts of agreeable places and persons" (16). The repeated term "convenient" emphasizes his revised understanding of easy access. Rather than allowing people to adjust their trajectory toward an upwardly mobile life, the junction becomes a place of connectivity, linking Barbox to all other lives, including the ones of his past. Barbox's altered perspective about the affordances of mobility enables him to experience satisfaction in his present situation: "So he became settled

there…his house standing in an elevated situation" (16). The story imagines a new kind of upward mobility in settling into the space of transition and making peace with "place."

Encouraging satisfaction in the modest affordances of mobility comes dangerously close to endorsing the status quo. A less generous reading of "Barbox Brothers" and "Barbox Brothers and Co." might detect a "good enough" attitude towards change that keeps people in their "place." Critics have long accused Dickens of promoting a too-cautious approach to reform that avoids any semblance of radicalism, a position informed by an aversion to the violent pace of change. I do identify a strange conservativism in Dickens's vision of progress in these tales. The account of everyone happily inhabiting their place within the "machine ensemble" of national progress is as "convenient" as Barbox Brothers's feeling about settling in Mugby Junction. However, in this collection I do not find a resistance to the speed of progress as much as a nervousness about the speed of regression, seen as a possible by-product of the violence of an already radical technological revolution. Dicken's fourth contribution to the collection, "No. 1 Branch Line. The Signal-Man" imagines socioeconomic regression as a speedy decline that offers no way to level up.

"No. 1 Branch Line. The Signal-Man": Inscrutable Danger on the Line

"The Signal-Man" is a tragic ghost story, a narrative retelling of an encounter the unnamed first-person narrator had with a signal man, whose own death by railway accident the signal man unknowingly predicted and the narrator witnessed. Critics have not yet reached a consensus about whether the unnamed narrator in Dickens's story is Barbox Brothers. David Greenman concludes that "such an identification is by no means absolutely necessary given the

composite authorship of 'Mugby Junction'" (46).[84] However, I agree with Tamara Wagner, who claims, "it is precisely the overall structure of the narrative that marks it out as a single 'veracious chronicle' detailing the directionless traveler's collection of stories" (58). It makes sense to read the stories following "Barbox Brothers" and "Barbox Brothers and Co." as the series of exploratory journeys Barbox Brothers conducts on the lines leading out of the junction. The six stories that follow the beginning Barbox frame (plus the final trip to London before settling at Mugby Junction) total the number of lines he promised Phoebe he would explore, "until he attaches something that he has seen, heard, or found out, at the head of each of the seven roads, to the road itself" (10). Understanding "The Signal-Man" as a story told by Barbox Brothers offers a fuller picture of how he was able to make his "choice among his discoveries" (10).

Reading "The Signal-Man" as one of Barbox Brother's explorations better contextualizes a story that threatens to disrupt the coherent and conservative message of the collection's frame. In contrast to the "elevated situation" Barbox Brothers secures at the end of his journey, "The Signal-Man" illustrates a nightmarish life of decline and hopelessness. Tamara Wagner, too, resists interpreting Dickens's unsettling story, which she categorizes as "technological gothic," as one that undermines the message of harmony she finds at the conclusion of "Barbox Brothers and Co." Instead, she credits Barbox Brothers's signal-man experience with the final "reversal" of Barbox's path, motivating him to return to Mugby Junction and rewrite the story of his past. I agree that Barbox's personal transformation signifies a revised cultural attitude towards disruptive technologies but disagree with Wagner's conclusion of harmony and containment. She

[84] The first story following "Barbox Brothers and Co." is Dickens's third contribution, "Main Line: The Boy at Mugby," a short comic tale satirizing the "Refreshment Room." The next 5 tales are all numbered Branch Lines, beginning with Dickens's final contribution to the collection "No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man" and following with the stories of Andrew Halliday, Charles Collins, Hesba Stretton and Amelia B. Edwards.

argues that by "inverting the developing paradigms of Victorian technological Gothic" the collection "imaginatively tracks divergent imaginaries of the railroad, its termini, junctions, and crashes to turn them into a narrative centrally concerned with forging of new connections" (62). This conclusion converts "the divergent imaginar[y]" of "The Signal-Man" and the discordances symbolized in the gothic eruption into a harmonious whole because, she insists, the story "is after all securely framed in advance by the two "Barbox stories" (58). Wagner's reliance on a traditional chronology, however, is faulty.

The arrangement of "The Signal-Man" within the collection and the form of the story itself circumvents chronological containment. In the sequential order of the stories, "The Signal-Man" escapes the frame and demands a distinct conclusion outside of a harmonious vision of progress as connectivity. The story-within-a-story retelling also vexes chronology. By overlapping present, past, and future, it pushes an argument of simultaneity. Though we know that Barbox ensures for himself a better life, the signal man will always be meeting his unavoidable fate, underscoring a separate simultaneous reality of disconnection experienced by some Victorians. Rather than integrating the discordances into an overall harmony that converts divergences into convergences, "The Signal-Man" insists on the coterminous existence of contraries: upward and downward mobility are activated—to differing degrees—by the same technological force. I argue that the story serves as a warning against the dangerous assumption that states of socioeconomic mobility and immobility are limited to remaining at the status quo or moving upward. In other words, if Phoebe taught Barbox to appreciate his "place" despite limitations because other people suffered more limitations, "The Signal-man" teaches Barbox that he could be in an infinitely worse place.

The title of the story encapsulates the overlap between the organized labor of the railway network, systems of communication, and identity. Describing transport networks as a form of "communication" between people and places pre-dates the railway, but the construction of the railway network fixed those lines of communication more than previous mobility technology (especially with the advent of the telegraph), but as I noted earlier, this occurred at uneven rates and with disparate levels of clarity. Remoter areas were slower to receive those lines of communication. Similarly, stubborn railway competition for inroads to the city resulted in the needless proliferation of lines, which criss-crossed dense urban areas. Influential railway historian John Kellet chronicles how companies strategically saved money by plotting courses to run "through a wilderness" of impoverished neighborhoods, creating "shadow areas" (17). He details how the superfluous lines created a "maze of tracks" that separated neighborhoods and "crystalliz[ed] these areas' dereliction." Kellet concedes that railroads cannot wholly be blamed for creating or perpetuating poor conditions; however, he argues that they played an indirect part in compressing populations within "twilight zones" and creating "no-man's lands" (335). Thus, as the railway network connected more people to more places, it also disconnected others from those lines of communication.

The themes of degeneration, miscommunication, and dislocation saturate "The Signal-Man." In contrast to Barbox Brothers establishing a line of communication with Phoebe by calling up to her from below, the first-person narrator here calls below to the signal man, who struggles to interpret the message accurately. His spatial hail, "Halloa! Below there!" emphasizes the distinction between each character's place in a geographic and socio-economic sense. The reader already knows about Barbox Brothers's elevated destiny, which stands in sharp contrast to the signal-man's lower position. Curiously, the signal-man "looked down the Line" rather than

up at Barbox Brothers in response to the call, illustrating his confusion, which motivates Barbox to descend to his level to investigate. He describes the cutting as "extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I went down" (20). Using primordial imagery, Barbox Brothers signifies that the signal-man inhabits a less-evolved place, separated from "the natural world":

> His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way, only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction, terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing and forbidding air. (20)

The characterization of the signal-man's environment as isolated, "crooked," "gloomy," with "forbidding air" echoes Kellet's description of the crystallized derelict neighborhoods cut off from railway construction. In both cases, the separation by and from the mobility network catalyzed the process of devolution. The signal man describes his life in the deep cutting as preverbal: "he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here—if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it" (21). His form of communication is not only separate but unclear even to himself

Though Barbox identifies this devolutionary environment as separate from "the natural world," he recognizes that this is not the signal-man's natural "place." He hesitantly inquires, "On my trusting he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offence), perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of

slight incongruity in such-wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men…and knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff" (21). The signal man accedes that his current place is "incongruous" with the station he should have—but failed to—reach. The signal-man confesses to Barbox Brothers, "He had been, when young…a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another" (22). While he takes responsibility for his downward mobility by squandering opportunities, he also highlights the fact that his case is unexceptional, in fact one of many in keeping with a general proportion "among large bodies of men." By naming the "railway staff," in particular, as an industry wherein a percentage of workers are likely to be "incongruously" placed, the signal-man gestures towards the problem of access and displacement created by railway mobility at large. The signal-man's claims of responsibility are overshadowed by the speed and force of his decline. In the end he is stripped of agency, "gone down, and never risen again." Just as the derelict neighborhoods crystallized, so too the signal-man's identity, dislocated from himself and others, molds into a function of unthinking labor.

The signal-man's incongruous station also signifies his disconnection from his past and future, conveyed in the story through supernatural ghost visitations. On two instances, he has seen a ghost, visibly signing a warning, matched with a ghostly bell, signaling danger on the line; however, he cannot interpret the message in time and only realizes retrospectively that the visitation warned of future railway accidents. The third visitation repeatedly directs the message toward the signal-man, who is frustrated by his inability to decipher the message. The signal-man expresses his frustration to Barbox Brothers, "By this time you will fully understand, sir,' he said, 'that what troubles me so dreadfully, is the question, What does the spectre mean?'" (24).

The deep cutting of the signal-man's primordial place obscures the lines of communication. He clamors, "What is its warning against?...What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging, somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of *me*. What can *I* do?" (24). Feeling both a target of misfortune and powerless to ward against it, the signal-man affectively illustrates the horror of degeneration that attends large-scale progress.

In the story, displacement is a fate more feared than death, which emphasizes the precariousness of "place." Exasperated by his inability to communicate, the signal man explains, "If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it…I should get into trouble…They would displace me" (24). The instability of his sub-level station is overshadowed only by its lack of credibility in the social world. He laments, "A mere poor signalman on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with more credit to be believed, and power to act!" (24). Though the signal-man's job requires that he see far enough down the line to warn engine drivers of danger, he is unable to decipher the communications of the ghostly visions from the past to predict his own future. The story stresses the fact that his inability to communicate is a direct result of his lower position. Having spied the ghost again, the signal-man had wandered onto the tracks. Unable to adjust the speed of the train, the engine driver called out "Below there!," but the signal-man had not heard the warning in time and was obliterated. His death illustrates the nightmarish conclusion of the dangers of railway mobility. Wolfgang Schivelbusch famously claimed that the railways annihilated space and time. In "The Signal-Man," Dickens illustrated the correlative annihilation of place and identity.

In closing the frame of the narrative retelling in "The Signal-Man," Barbox Brothers adds, "I may, in closing [the narrative], point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-

Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signalman had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated" (25). By claiming the origination of the message, Barbox Brothers repositions himself as an agent who can foresee dangers and sound warnings. This ability coheres with Barbox Brothers's concluding position on place: learn to moderate your desire for a better place by appreciating modest success and the affordances of mobility to which you have access, and recognize that there are others who exist outside of the machine ensemble and for whom access is denied. As a collection, *Mugby Junction*'s reluctance to tell a story of triumphant upward mobility seems conservative. I have shown in this chapter thus far, however, that we should view this hesitancy as a cautionary attitude, seeking protection from the *violence* of rapid transformation of social order more than a resistance to change overall. In "The Signal-Man" the need to reform access to socio-economic mobility is shrouded but present, and that protective attitude is contiguous with the promotion of an incremental, communal program of national progress.

Social Stations: Generational Re-Placement in Oliphant's *The Railway Man and His Children*

The impressive "Industrial Exhibition of the works of extraordinary ground-spiders" that characterized junctions symbolically conveyed to Victorians an idea of progress defined by a proliferation of options (*Mugby Junction* 4). Experience taught that this expectation was more myth than reality, since socio-economic place was still subject to individual limitations and external restrictions. But easy access was not the only false assumption about socio-economic mobility the railways inspired. In contrast to the multiplicity junctions conveyed, a station, which

doubles conceptually as a stage of progress on a journey towards a terminus and a "place" of social status, visibly illustrated the idea of a secure one-track line of upward mobility. As we have seen in our discussion of Samuel Smiles, some people took for granted that access to a prosperous track through the merit of hard work or financial good fortune (or both) automatically afforded entry into the previously restricted spheres. If you could get on the right track, it seemed, you would eventually arrive in Society.[85]

Just as with junctions, the expectation of guaranteed access to a better social station that railway stations helped imagine often resulted in disappointment. Not only were the nuances of social rules inscrutable to most outsiders, the boundaries of higher social classes were also policed heavily by insiders as well as outsiders. The experience of railway travel conveyed the contrariness of hopeful expectation and disappointing reality. Though the station was a social space where different classes mixed, the compartmented coaches on the train carriage sorted people into first, second, and third class passengers. The décor as well as the comfort level reflected these class distinctions. While the first-class carriages resembled Victorian parlors, the initial third-class carriages were open wagons with un-upholstered benches. Anyone who could afford a ticket could be mobile, but the affordances of such mobility were sharply distinct, and this translated to the social sphere as well as the geographic one.

While social climbing and strict boundary enforcement were not new practices in British culture, the Victorians clearly felt the railways had ushered in a new era of easier access to social spheres and that social mobility would follow economic mobility as a matter of course.

[85] Oliphant's book uses the capitalized "Society" to identity the particular social sphere that some characters experience while other characters fantasize about. The OED defines this usage: "Also with capital initial. The aggregate of fashionable, wealthy, or otherwise prominent people regarded as forming a distinct class or body in a community." Also, "high society." Throughout this section, I will use Society as Oliphant does in this novel, to stand for the concept of this upper sphere and the people who inhabited it.

Nineteenth-century literature reflects how the railway station, in particular, had become a symbol of social progress. In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1885), set between 1850-1870, Sue Bridehead rejects Jude's suggestion to visit a Cathedral, exclaiming, "I think I'd rather sit in the railway station…That's the centre of town life now" (139). Whereas Hardy's famously pessimistic novel focuses on the socioeconomic constraints that prevent individual progress, Margaret Oliphant's two-volume novel *The Railway Man and His Children* (1891) examines how dreams of upward mobility often were built on an outdated understanding about what constituted high Society.

Oliphant invited closer scrutiny into the state of Society to see that the exclusive social sphere had degenerated in manner as well as money and no longer met the high standards that previously defined it. As the novel explores this cultural erosion, it raises questions about the worthiness of this contemporary iteration of social place as a destination of upward mobility. Like other novelists of the age, Oliphant exposes the ineffectiveness of wedding new money to old social standing,[86] but she also pushes the narrative beyond those limits and imagines for the willing members of the next generation a new social place and attendant identity. This innovative station promised accessibility to upward mobility by the merit of active work and the good character of service to others.[87]

The Railway Man and His Children processes the difficulties of upward mobility in the domestic story of Mr. Rowland, the renowned chief engineer on an Indian railway project, and his family. At the beginning of the story, Rowland proposes marriage to Evelyn Ferrars, an older woman from a landed English family. They confess to each other their past histories leading up to the intersection of their lives—his, a story of upward mobility from Scottish foundry worker to

[86] The Ruby Ruthven and Mr. Perman marriage plot in Charlotte Riddell's *City and Suburb* adopts this formula.
[87] Hard work and concern for others prevents Mr. Holman from progressing in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*.

a famous Railway man; hers, a story of socio-economic decline after devastating economic loss due to her father's risky financial speculations. When the Rowlands decide to return to the homeland,[88] the narrative explores the initial struggles of how to plot a future course together in their new social station since they have different relationships to their social sphere.

While the awkward negotiations between new money and old manners remains important to the story, the regrets of how socioeconomic mobility affected the next generation informs the remainder of the novel. Rowland was afforded the opportunity to go to India and make his great, transformative fortune after the death of his wife. He placed his son, Archie and daughter, Marion in the care of his wife's sister, Mrs. Brown, who had no inner knowledge of refined manners and received no instruction about how the next generation ought to be raised in preparation for their new "place." Like Rowland, Evelyn's bad fortune brought her to India. After her financial situation changed in her youth, her fiancé Edward Saumarez shamefully abandoned her, and she was left to the care of her brother. Her brother was forced to relocate to India in search of better opportunities and brought Evelyn with him, but he died suddenly soon after arrival, leaving her to the charity of old friends, for whom she became a tacit governess.

After Evelyn and Rowland's wedding, they temporarily relocates in London where Evelyn chances upon her old fiancé, who was in shockingly degenerative health, impoverished, and a widower with two children, Eddy and Rosamond, of about the same age as Rowland's children. Saumarez manipulates Evelyn into accepting Eddy and Rosamond as guests for the summer in Scotland in the hopes, the novel implies, that at least one of them will make a match and secure a better economic future for the others. From the outset, Eddy (Saumarez's son) and Marion (Rowland's daughter) share the desire to link their social capital (name and wealth,

[88] They had not yet settled on living in England or Scotland.

respectively), while Archie (Rowland's son) and Rosamond (Saumarez's daughter) both struggle to carve out a new place for themselves, rejecting the entanglements of money and status. Thus, the narrative constantly teeters between a what-might-have-been past, a transitional present, and two possible future trajectories that, in turn, threaten continued degradation or promise radical reform of social spheres and identities.

Peripheral Stations: Rowland, Evelyn, and Old Manors

Margaret Oliphant set the world of *The Railway Man and His Children* in a colonial outpost, where the borders of British Society are blurrier. The narrative opens with the gossipy circulation of Evelyn Ferrar's impending wedding to Mr. Rowland spreading "through the Station like wild-fire, producing a commotion and excitement which had rarely been equaled since the time of the Mutiny" (I:1).[89] The women of the Station register the engagement as an act of social rebellion, positioning Rowland as a kind of class marauder and Evelyn like a fallen woman, suggesting that Miss Ferrars "was perhaps stepping a little out of her sphere," which resulted in "a murmur of deprecation or regret—'Oh, poor Miss Ferrars!' The ladies cried. 'A lady of such a good family, and marrying a man who was certainly not a gentleman'" (I:1-2). The criticism against the match underscores the connection between place and identity by linking Evelyn's proper "sphere" with Rowland's status. However, the more flexible boundaries of sphere and status effected by the distant location undermines the criticism, which is founded on

[89] An analogy between social mobility and colonial rebellion may make current readers recoil, compelling them to view the point suspiciously using a firm post-colonial lens. We should be suspicious of the argument but not for that reason. Recently, in *Radical Orientalism: Rights, Reform, and Romanticism* Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud revises the critiques of Orientalism forwarded by Said and others, arguing that Orientalism often was deployed to help people disassociate from prevailing norms and generate reform. I find this kind of application in Oliphant's novel. In my epilogue to this project, I gesture towards the global implications of railways and regret. It's enough for now to say that Oliphant's novel provides its own critique of how Rowland's fortune was made on the backs of Indians which I will touch on below in the section on labor and work.

the traditional link between identity and homeland. In the "little masterful alien community in the midst of that vast continent," the narrator asserts, "To be an Englishman is itself in India a social grade" (I:8). In India, the more flexible boundaries ensure that, though Rowland is not technically a gentleman, his money and status gain him entry everywhere. The false sympathy and snobbery of the chorus of women thinly masks jealousy of the truly advantageous match. The narrator reveals that "had he proposed for Edie or Ethel they would have pushed his claims as far as legitimate pressure could go" (I:2). This revelation highlights both the flexibility of social boundaries and the fine—yet staunchly guarded—line demarcating social legitimacy that the railways brought under scrutiny. These twin impulses to change and preserve social spheres shape the narrative.

The Rowlands' wedding highlights the dynamic tension between traditional spheres and flexible boundaries and further unmasks the hypocrisy of those who would redraw the borders of the social sphere if it facilitated their own upward mobility. Rowland offers Mrs. Stanhope carte blanche to plan an ostentatious wedding and reception, and she agrees, knowing that it will provide an opportunity for her husband, Fred, to advance, even if she considers it vulgar. When Evelyn notices the Governor and General in attendance, she assumes that it was their good fortune that railway matters brought these high-ranking officials to their reception and not because her husband and Mrs. Stanhope had arranged a "grand affair":

> Thus the bride accepted, without knowing it, the extraordinary honours that were done her, while all the Station stood amazed by the number and greatness of the guests. The Lieutenant-Governor came without a murmur to compliment the great engineer. He would not have done it for Fred Stanhope, who was Brevet-Major, and thought himself a much greater man than Rowland. Neither would the

> General commanding have come to Fred unless he had known him in private, or had some special interest in him. But they all collected to the wedding of the man who had made the railroads and ditches…. (I:53)

The Governor and General confer honor on Evelyn Ferrars by their presence, but the credit is due to the Great Railway man, Rowland, and the tremendous respect they have for his position. Presumably, Fred thinks of himself as "a much greater man," because he would be so considered in England. In the Indian station, though, military rank crosses over the traditional hierarchies of position, and the professional status of railway men intersects them both.[90]

Though the idea of the gentleman was being redefined over the course of the nineteenth century, the railways offered a specific mediation by evaluating the gentleman against the concept of the self-made man, made increasingly popular by the railway. Valorizing merit, work, and action all tested the traditional values of the gentleman, who was not expected to *do* anything. Deciding what aspects of comportment and behavior constitute a gentleman and what status could be conferred on the self-made man first required an answer to the question: could these concepts work together or does one type undermine the other? The gossipy ladies on the verandah identify the terms of such a negotiation as they reveal the fault lines in the skewed logic designed to obstruct Rowland's entrance into the protected sphere:

> "'Not a gentleman: why, he does not even pretend to be a gentleman,' said the lady, as if the pretention would have been something in his favour. 'He is not a man even of any education. Oh I know he can read and write and do figures—all those surveyor men can. Yes, I call him a surveyor—I don't call him an engineer.

[90] The OED provides a historically specific definition of station: "In India under the dominion of the East India Company or (later) the British Raj: a place inhabited by the English officials of a district, or the officers of a garrison. Also: the people living in such a place collectively." (OED 3.b.)

> What was he to begin with? Why he came out in charge of some machinery or something! None of them have any right to call themselves engineers. I call them all surveyors—working men—that sort of thing! And to think that a woman who really is a lady—'". (I:2)

While trying to sharply demarcate the difference between being a gentleman and "certainly not" being one, the gossiper actually reveals some gray area. Traditionally, birth determines the status of gentleman. However, someone could be considered a gentleman if he is afforded a good cultural education, which accords with the idea that a proper gentleman not *do* anything—as an embodiment of culture, he simply *is*. The acquisition of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills does not constitute education in the gossiper's eyes, as these correspond with labor. The gossiper seems anxious to downgrade Rowland's status as an engineer, since he was not properly trained in a professional school but rather self-taught, which implies that good professional schools had begun to confer greater status. The logic's dysfunction lies in its circuitousness, since the gossiper infers that Rowland could incur favor if he would simply "pretend to be a gentleman," an act of self-teaching. As the gossiper attempts to invalidate the self-made man, she underscores his radical potential.

Rowland's experience as someone who achieved professional and financial success through the merit of work shapes the way he views the concept of social status. He does not view gentlemanly status as something inherently denied him. For his part, the narrator explains, Rowland "was not himself conscious of this deficiency, or if he was, accepted it as a matter of fact that did no real harm" (I:7). He perceived the concept of a gentleman as a status towards which people could progress rather than a discrete category. He tells Evelyn, "I wasn't always what I am now. I am not very much to brag of, you will say now—but I'm a gentleman to what I

was,'" (I:21). He describes his professional rise as parallel to his ability to access social spheres previously out of reach:

> I had always been a dreadful fellow for my books, the firm saw I suppose that I was worth my salt, and made a proposal for me to come out here. There was not Cooper's Hill College or that sort of thing then. We came out, and we pushed our way as we could. It comes gradually that sort of thing—and I got accustomed to what you call society by degrees, just as I came to the responsibility of these railroads […] The railroad is an affair of calculation and of keeping your wits about you. So is the other. You just do as the other men do, and all goes well. (I:24)

Rowland revises the gossiper's summary of his status and achievements, giving credence not only to the process of upward mobility but also to what he views as experiential learning through observation rather than "pretending." These themes of authenticity and imitation permeate the novel, slowly dismantling outmoded assumptions about place and identity. Place, in fact, becomes the variable within which to test the portability of identity and the alternative metric of work. In India the boundaries of social sphere are redefined by high value of the imperial railway project, but it is uncertain that higher status achieved remotely will transfer back home, namely if it will work in the same way for Rowland as it will for Evelyn, whose "place" seemed unaffected even by her unofficial labor as a governess.

The novel raises questions about the permanency of home and problematizes the idea of the return for those living in the age of mobility. In thinking of where they should reside as a married couple, Rowland feels certain that Evelyn will want to return home and reestablish her place. He thinks, "Yes! This was what every English lady banished in India must desire. A house

in her own country" (I:24). Underscoring the link between place and identity, he thinks, "She looked like a home in England" (I:37). The narrator elaborates on the ties between ancestral class and identity:

> If Mr. Rowland had heard of Langley Ferrars which was in the market…He would have telegraphed to his man of business in London, regardless of expense, directing him to lose not a moment in securing that place…Her own home restored to her, where she could live at ease, not poorly as her ruined father, poor gentleman, had been compelled to do…But fortunately he never heard that Langley Ferrars was in the market. He was not even aware indeed at this early period where his future wife had lived, or what the name of her home had been. (I:37-38)

Rowland misses the opportunity to restore Evelyn to Langley Ferrars because he lacks insider knowledge about estates. Yet the narrator suggests the fault lies not in his unawareness (a result of his class experience) but rather in his impulse to recuperate what is lost, which seems regressive (especially ironic for someone who achieves upward mobility by engineering railway lines). For Evelyn, "Home in England meant something to her which could never be again" (I:28). Realizing that there is no return to the home of the past, Evelyn was "slowly coming round to a world which was changed indeed and had lost something, but also gained something, a world with no vague outlines in it or uncertainty, but clearly defined, spread out like a map before her" (I:33). Evelyn recognizes the benefits incurred through the act of creative destruction that attends innovation.[91] The socioeconomic decline Evelyn had experienced led her to an

[91] Need to explain the term in 1950 economics. Change renders old ways obsolete but in doing so it also eradicates what was dysfunctional.

ambiguous “place.” The “clear definition” she feels after her marriage results from the fact that with the support of wealth she can behave like a proper lady. In this way, she is restored to herself without returning to the way things were. Retaining her manner rather than her manor, she is now able to conduct her way forward amidst a changing world. Evelyn models the proper method of adapting change Oliphant’s novel suggests for culture at large: retain the best qualities of the past and let go of the remainder.

While promoting a progressive attitude towards social change, the novel tests the reception of the upwardly mobile in the well-guarded social sphere. Though Evelyn professes confidence about her place, she is uncertain how her relationship to Rowland, who is not a gentleman, affects the security of her position as a lady. While Rowland arranges their new residence in Scotland, Evelyn temporarily resides in London and meets up with an old friend, Lady Leighton, a devoted socialite. Evelyn vacillates about whether to engage with the old, familiar social network because she cannot gauge how her position as the wife of a rich engineer will be perceived. Hesitant to call on Madeline Leighton when she first arrived, she explains, “Part of the reluctance rose from the fact that she did not know how to introduce herself. Would any one in London have heard of the wedding far away at an obscure station in India?” (I:67). Initially, Lady Leighton confirms the transferal of Rowland’s status to England, reassuring Evelyn: “as if a great person like Mr. Rowland could travel and bring home his bride without all the papers getting hold of it” (I:68). Insisting on helping Evelyn reestablish her position, Lady Leighton emphasizes that “it is *most important* to know people and take your place in society” (I:77), and with this encouragement Evelyn is tempted “to step, just a little, not much, into the living stream, to feel the movement” (I:82). Madeline’s oblique disclaimer, “Of course you don’t require to be pushed into society like a mere millionaire who is nobody” signals to Evelyn that

others rate her husband differently than they do her. Rowland's newness prevents him from being considered "somebody" in the London social sphere despite Lady Leighton's professed claims that Evelyn "made a great match after all" (I:68). New wealth may afford access to the social sphere, but it does not secure an identity within that place, which relies on ancient memory. Madeline tells Evelyn, "You are quite different. People remember you" (I:77).

Designating new wealth as vulgar protects the value of deep ancestral roots of old wealth.[92] However, the continued erosion of land-based fortune, accelerated by the rise of finance capitalism driven in large part by the railroads, exposed the shocking degradation of traditional moral principles that previously sustained that value. Drawing attention to the distinction between past and present comportment, Oliphant's novel calls traditional metrics for rank into question. In London, Evelyn happens upon her ex-fiancé Eduard (Ned) Saumarez, whose degenerated wealth and manner are manifest in his deteriorated health. Surprised to find Ned so changed, Evelyn must reassess not only their relative positions but their appropriate affect towards each other:

> Had she seen him in his ancient supremacy of good fortune—a well-preserved, middle-aged Adonis, smiling perhaps, as she had imagined, at her late marriage with a rich *parvenu* keeping the superior position of a man who has rejected a love bestowed upon him, and never without the complacent sense of having 'behaved badly,' which is one of the many forms of vanity—the sight would not have disturbed her, except, perhaps, with a passing sensation of anger. But to see him in his downfall gave Evelyn a shock of pain. (I:74)

[92] See Elsie Michie.

Having been away from home, Evelyn was unable to witness Saumarez's decline. In her mind, his "superior position" would be forever "preserved" by his "ancient supremacy of good fortune." As she registers the shift in superiority, though, Evelyn observes the process of creative destruction in the identities of her husband and former intended, intuiting a correlation between Rowland's rising position and Saumarez's decline. The social repositioning following upward mobility meant rewriting traditional social codes and removing that which was no longer functional. This revision required an evaluation of the social sphere. In this moment of comparison, Evelyn is forced to recognize that Saumarez had never been authentically worthy of his "ancient supremacy." It was merely a tromp l'oeil perpetuated by social routine. After this appraisal, Evelyn felt she had "peeped through some crevice behind the lively bustling stage, and suddenly [saw] what was going on behind the scenes" of the center of the social sphere. She realizes she no longer identifies with this "place," which seems to her now to have a kinetic energy with no real purpose, and so she retires from it.

In agreeing to settle in Scotland rather than England, Evelyn can recede from life as it used to be and begin life anew. For Rowland, though, heading homeward allows him to enact the fantasies of his youth to which he still clings. He arranges to settle in Rosmore, an Earl's mansion he long-admired as a member of the working class: "Naturally, at the time when he first conceived a passion for it, the young foundry man, however clever, could never have had any means of entering into such a place" (I:124). Significantly, while Rowland's economic success enables him to occupy the place he never dreamed he could enter, it does not offer him permanent residency. He may have enough money to purchase it, but the Earl refused to sell it despite its vacancy. Symbolically, Rowland must rent space in the social sphere. Besides the external social restrictions on place, the great engineer is hampered by internal limitations, too.

Rowland does not understand what was expected of "a family of condition" to occupy the space. He says to the house agent, "Oh, I know that decayed style is the fashion…but you can't imagine we'll put up with these old hangings? You must have them cleared away" (I:125). Rowland realizes that his instinct to furnish the house with everything new and bright contradicts the taste of the class he wants to affect after a subtle nudge from the house agent: "We'll do that, if it's your desire; but the hangings are real tapestry—the oldest in Scotland. The Earl will be just delighted to have them back." Rowland quickly revises his inclinations to fit the social standard: "Now I look at them…I believe my wife will like them. For my part I like fresh colours and rich stuffs. I like to have bright things about me. I find it all a little dingy." On the surface, the scene is meant to illustrate that Rowland is out of place in this sphere. However, by identifying that this standard of taste is "decayed" and "dingy," Rowland draws attention to its degraded state. Rowland's inclination is not to reject what is best from tradition in favor of what is new but rather to replace what is worn out. In the rented space of Rosmore, Rowland and Evelyn will negotiate the convergence of old and new social behavior and attitude, not as much for themselves—they are happy to meet each other where they are—as for the children.

As a late nineteenth-century novel, *The Railway Man and His Children* is concerned with how the socioeconomic changes catalyzed by the railways would affect the next generation. In her lifetime, Evelyn experienced both the decline of traditional social class as well as the upward mobility afforded by her rich husband. As both a lady and the wife of a professional engineer, Evelyn is in the position to both observe the changes to social place as well as to test its boundaries. Thus, the third-person narration is often filtered through her perspective, though it does not always espouse her point of view. Regarding the impending arrival of Rowland's children to Rosmore, the narrator describes Evelyn's state of mind: "Useless to say that she was

anxious too, wondering how the experiment would turn out. Whether the lowly upbringing would be so great a disadvantage as she feared, or whether the more primitive laws of that simpler order would develop better faculties, and suppress the conventional, as many a theorist believes" (I:61). As Dickens did in "The Signal Man," Oliphant plays with the language of evolution (and devolution) to identify those aspects of culture that moved forward alongside technological and economic development as well as those aspects which remained despite their dysfunction. However, Evelyn's description of working class behavior as "primitive" does not place Rowland's children behind on the evolutionary scale as much as it displaces them out of the scale altogether, re-framing them as a different species—not insignificantly like the Indian caste system.

The narrator's subtle criticism of Evelyn's old habits of thinking and feeling points to opportunities for cultural reform more largely. If a nation embraces upward mobility, then culture must create the space for the upwardly mobile to take their place. Creating this space requires removing the old thinking and behavior that are outmoded or dysfunctional and retaining the best practices. However, this should not require members of the lower class who achieve upward mobility to refashion themselves according to the same pattern as those of the upper class. The shifted space also needs to reserve room to create new ways of thinking and being. Though Evelyn senses this truth, her conventional upbringing obscures her full realization of it. Thus, in the evolution of social intelligence, Evelyn remains in a space of transition, preparing the next generation for life she herself is not fully prepared to live. As the novel progresses, the narrative shifts from Evelyn helping Marion adjust to her new place in society to Evelyn's own adjustment to a wholly new identity embodied by Rosamond. In the social evolution, the narrative concedes that its central protagonist, Evelyn, must also be phased out.

Evelyn observes this same staged progress in the course of Eddy to Archie's lives, too, and helps Rowland to adjust his expectations to allow the next generation to chart a new course.

As it was for most Victorians, upward mobility was both a fantasy and an actuality for Rowland, and the disjuncture between the two appears in the disorienting experience of returning to Sauchiehall road and meeting his now-grown children. The meeting juxtaposes who he used to be when he first formed the dream, including his hopes for his children, and who he and his children turned out to be. Discovering that his children were raised neither by the standards of a foundry man nor those of a gentleman, Rowland laments to Archie, "I've been a fool!…I thought, I suppose, that you would take my rise in life like nature and start from where I ended. I hoped you would turn out like—the lads I've been accustomed to see. How should you? They all started from gentlemen's houses, and had it in their vein from their birth" (I:151). As he struggles to comprehend how social progress works generationally, Rowland draws on the language of evolution. He first hypothesized that upward mobility functioned like natural selection, where the next generation would be more equipped to adapt to a new environment, but when this theory proved false he assumes the opposite—that his children were already disadvantaged at birth, lacking the inherited traits of the upper class. But Rowland contradicts any theories of discrete identity by suggesting his children might have adapted if they had been younger and, thus, more easily conditioned (I:131). Intuiting a point of no return, though, he fears that "transplanting them to so different a life" will be unnatural (I:174). Rowland's theories about social progress are diverse and confusing, but they have a shared theoretical underpinning based on the idea that, while individuals vary in their fitness to it, "place" is a fixed variable, retaining a constant value.

In *The Railway Man and His Children*, houses symbolically frame the different iterations of social place. The narrative maps them over time according to the character's changing relationship to them as the sites of old dreams, new hopes, rejected pasts, and revised presents, testing the theory of place as a fixed variable with constant value. After meeting Archie and Marion, Rowland believes that his children, who he hoped would be more adapted to their new social sphere, will be "quite out of place" at Rosmore, whereas he, "if a little unpolished, would be quite in his proper place" (I:132). This realization altered the way that he views Rosmore, the manifestation of his dreams: "It filled him at once with a sweet delight and disappointment, to see the reality growing before him. It was not, and could not be, ever so fine as in his dreams, and yet it was Rosmore, and it was his" (I:184). Rowland's revised view of Rosmore illustrates not only that place is less fixed than he had imagined but also that social place is more subjectively defined—and re-defined—by personal experiences.

The narrative cycles through different homes and their attendant social places, imagining different possible life trajectories for Evelyn and Rowland and the next generation. When Lady Leighton tempted Evelyn to take up a house in London, she steered her towards a house on Chester street, which she is explains is "such a capital situation; and yet quite modest, no pretension. It is more like you, Evelyn" (85). She suggests that Rowland "would prefer Belgrave Square, and the biggest rent in London" because he thinks like other millionaires, but Madeline advises that they set up "a real good foundation" first, since it is late in the season. It is as Evelyn has opted out of London life that Rowland has an uncanny experience in Sauchiehall road: There was something horribly familiar to him in the aspect of the room. He had seen nothing like it for many years, and yet he recognised it in a moment. It was the best room of the respectable mechanic—the parlour in which his wife put all her pride" (134). The physical places of

residence in the novel represent the irretrievable past, the fantasy future that cannot be, rejected trajectories, and spaces of innovation. The central house, though, is the mansion Rosmore of Rowland's dreams. From there, the narrative conducts its primary thought experiment, imagining two possible trajectories for the next generation—one, where a son and daughter adapt to an arguably fixed place and, another, where the son and daughter innovate new places and new identities.

Terminal Stations: Eddy, Marion, and Old Mannerisms

Rowland envisioned that the profit of his life's work would enable his children to live like the children of a gentleman, though they technically are not. This dream presumes that future generations would be more naturally fitted to their place. Rowland's reaction upon meeting them shows that he misplaced his value, prioritizing the social sphere rather than the people inhabiting it. Directing all of his energy toward getting his children to adapt to the standards of their new life, Rowland does not consider the possibility that the social sphere itself had not properly evolved over time and needed adjusting. Just as he did in the professional world, he assumes that the burden rests on the individual to learn how to become a proper member of Society. Because he has only a surface knowledge of cultural practices and behavior, though, he does not distinguish between adapting to the sphere by acquiring manners and imitating mannerisms. Thus, he views Archie's inability to act like a gentleman as a failure and Marion's affected behavior as signs of progress. The narrator, filtered through Evelyn's perspective, is much more critical of imitation without thoughtful intention.

Marion's initial source of cultural instruction comes from novels she has read, which she accepts uncritically. Though Marion is sharply observant, she relates her observances back to her

book-reading rather than through experiential knowledge. Thus, she has a fantastical interpretation of social realities, much like her father's constructed dream of how he imagined life at Rosmore would be. The narrator explains, "She divined from the smallest indication what was the right thing to do; but then she had read a great many novels, in some of which the very circumstances in which she now stood were set forth. Novels are a great help to an intelligent young lady endeavouring to acquire the manners of society to which she has been unaccustomed" (I:178). A bit tongue in cheek, the narrative takes aim at novels, blaming them with the propagation of outmoded cultural practices deficient of modern values.[93] Despite her novice position, Marion attempts to use her knowledge of novels to correct Evelyn's behavior after a minor disagreement with Rowland. Forwarding an outdated argument for separate spheres, Marion sermonizes, "I've always read that a lady should be the mistress of her own side; the gentleman, outside; and she's not to meddle with him; but the lady—" (I:294). When Evelyn interjects, "I assure you I shall meddle with him, Marion…I don't know a thing in which I shall not meddle," Marion staunchly clings to her point, continuing, "The lady,' said Marion, raising her voice a little, 'should have all the house to manage, and the children, and all within her own sphere. The books all say that a woman's sphere is Home." When Evelyn retorts, "Excellent Marion; you have said your lesson very well," she underscores the instructional function embedded in novels, but Marion cannot recognize the ideological investments. Though she uses novels as evidence of proper conduct, she is unwilling to question their rhetorical underpinnings: "But it was no lesson. It was just what I've read in books" (I:295). By accepting the "what" without considering "why," she ensures that social conduct is replicated unchallenged.

[93]While examining how people use novels as instruction for life, the novel also explores the practice of viewing life as if it were a story. Rowland often refers to his life like a story that he looks back on as a spectator, which has a distancing effect (I:22-23). Evelyn too frames her history as a story that needs revising with past heroes revealed to be villains (I: 116).

Marion's uncritical appraisal of novels characterizes her bad faith approach to learning conduct through experiential observation, too. At Rosmore, she imitates everything Evelyn does, which gains her the appearance of acquiring good manners. To Rowland, this signifies success: "a great superficial improvement was notable in the girl. She learned in an inconceivably short time how to manage all the circumstances of her changed life; adapted herself to everything as one to the manner born" (I:305). Technically, she performs what Rowland thought he wanted: to act as the children of a gentleman do. Copying Evelyn without considering intention, however, she only develops the ability to mimic mannerisms rather than acquire manners: "Marion, who studied and copied Mrs. Rowland's manners, her tone, as far as she could master it, her little tricks of gesture, till Evelyn became ridiculous to herself" (I:304). Marion's mimicry of Evelyn's conduct hollows out the original meaning. The effect of such distortion is most apparent in Marion's attitude towards others. Civil and reserved toward the servants of Rosmore, Evelyn's "demeanour … was just that kind of quiet familiar affability and ease which characterises a relationship in which there is no desire, on the part of the superior at least, for any more demonstration than is felt, or unnecessary intercourse" (I:306). Insider status is often defended most viciously by those whose place within it is most precarious. Converting Evelyn's aloofness into a weapon, "Marion's was a kind of brutality by which the inferior was made to feel as if she had no existence at all except as a ministrant to certain wants. Thus the little girl achieved that polish of the Tartar, which, when scratched, shows the savage through." Anxious about the security of her position, Marion inflates her power in an attempt to fix her actual place within it.

Rather than learning to connect with people as Barbox Brothers did in *Mugby Junction*, Marion seeks to establish her place by distancing herself from others she considers inferior, even if they share aspects of her identity. Though Scottish, Marion "was very careful herself to be as

English as possible" (I:194). She also introduces herself to the groundskeeper as "Miss Rowland…of Rosmore" (I:196). She learns though that those in inferior positions police the boundaries and prevent overstep. The groundskeeper Rankin corrects her, "No of Rosmore…Ye may say Miss Rowland, Rosmore, and that will be right enough: but tenants never can take the name of the laird" (I:196). She may have perfected her affect after Rowland "transplanted" her to Rosmore, but her roots will always expose her. Though she cannot claim Rosmore, she attempts to disown Sauchiehall Road. When Archie takes Eddy Saumarez to Glascow, Eddy asks to come with Archie when he visits the Aunty Jane, who raised them. Marion, who knows that Eddy is possible marriage prospect for her, is furious and insists he explain to Eddy that she was their "old nurse" and not their relation. Archie views this as treachery, but Marion considers him a class traitor: "It just means that we have our position to keep up. We belong to the upper classes and not to Sauchiehall Road" (II: 98). Her allegiance is to her new "place," and not to any person. She has fully committed herself to secure her position through marriage, which she knows requires joining her new money to an old family with an ancient name. She tells Archie, "but except for our money we are just nobody" (II: 100). Her desire to become "somebody" has led her to disconnect from her own relations. This attitude encourages alienation rather than community.

Marion's desire to rise is driven by a complete self-interest. On the marriage market her commitment to a competitive spirit informs her self-perception as a commodity to be bartered. Because Marion's strategy is largely formed by novelistic fantasy, she inflates her value and imagines the possibility that when she is introduced at court, she may attract the attention of a Duke, a desire she shares with Rosamond Saumarez: "It was in reality a sign of her simplicity and unsophisticated mind that she gave herself up so unhesitatingly to this dream. Rosamund

knew a great deal better: she knew for one thing that there was no duke in the market—a fact hidden from poor Marion" (II:219). Much like Rowland was unaware of Langley Ferrars being on the market, Marion "did not even know that all that information could be acquired from *Debrett*, nor was there a *Debrett* in the house, had she been aware of its qualities" (II: 219). Though Marion fantasizes about her prospects, Eddy Saumarez takes a much more realistic view. He knows that, though he has no money, his ancient name and property makes him a good match. He thinks, "unless I'm very far mistaken, we meet—that little Glasgow girl and I, that am the fine flower of civilisation—on equal ground" (II:196). Indeed, much like Marion, Eddy's behavior as the son of a gentleman is largely defined by form and not content. Hollowed of its core values, his conduct is characterized as a mockery of mannerism rather than representative of good manners.

Eddy embodies the corruption of the age, wandering aimlessly without purpose, spending—and even fabricating—money he does not have. Rowland wanted Archie to live the life of a gentleman's son, and he fantasizes that this is a life of carefree worry and enjoyment. Eddy reveals that it is much more about habit, and often bad ones. The strong insinuation in the novel is that Eddy tried to pass a bad note and the money lender is calling him on his debt, threatening exposure. When he accidentally comes across Eddy's checkbook, which is linked to Rowland's account, he seizes the opportunity and forges a check in Rowland's name. During the ball at Rosmore that Eddy convinced Evelyn to throw so that the four adult children could have fun, a representative of the Bank of Scotland came to Rosmore to call attention to the blank cheque, which was cashed. Rowland, thinking it must have been Archie, pretends it was an error on his part. After the ball, he accuses Archie, who angrily leaves Rosmore, injured by the unjust accusation. When Eddy performs the duties of a good host to the post-ball guests in Archie's

place, Rowland laments that his son could not be more like Eddy. Thus, Eddy perpetrates a forgery and a fraud economically as well as socially. On the outside, his ability to perform the proper mannerisms identifies him as a gentleman's son; however, on the inside, his true manner is degraded and unworthy of praise.

Because the novel forwards hope of a reformed social sphere, it imagines possible recuperation of Eddy's spirit. Evelyn senses that the blame placed on Archie is misplaced and tracks Eddy down in London and exhorts him to confess the truth about the forgery. Rowland is at first jealous of her attention towards Eddy, but soon discerns that Evelyn views Eddy as the son she might have had if she had remained on her earlier life trajectory as the wife of Ned Saumarez. In respect of her concern, Rowland offers to help reform him and suggests they remove him from his social sphere, where temptation is too great. Evelyn sees this as impossible. Unlike being transplanted from Sauchiehall Road to Rosmore as the Rowland children were, Eddy would never survive life out of his social sphere. Evelyn explains, "Oh, my dear James, he was born in it, and he will die in it. He could not manage to exist outside of that atmosphere of society" (II: 343). Stubbornly, Rowland responds, "I have a great mind to try…I like radical measures. I would send him right away to some sort of work" (II:343).

Rowland offers to buy him out of all his debt if he takes a new path in life and offers him a couple of choices: 'You might go out to my overseer in India, and try what you can do on the railways. There is nothing succeeds so well there as a man who knows how to manage men…It really does not matter what it is, if it's good hard work. I make a stand upon that. Good, hard work" (II:358). Rowland considers himself a possible model for Eddy, but he forgets that his own experience is one of upward mobility. For someone who was expected to by somebody by doing nothing, such a path does not resemble progress. "I'm a product of corrupt civilization," he

claims, “I am not the thing that lives and thrives that way. Probably out there I should gravitate to a gambling saloon or a drinking bar” (II:359). Eddy recognizes that he is ill-equipped to affect the kind of radical change Rowland supposes, but knows well how to secure a future he feels he is fitted to.

The engagement of Eddy and Marion fulfills the fantasy ending standard of many nineteenth-century novels, where marriage signifies that the conflicts have been resolved and all matters are settled. The union between inherited money and inherited status reconciles upward mobility with traditional social hierarchies, but the union is uneven. Newness is a flaw that has to be absolved through integration with established status, and, thus, has to do all the adapting. Injecting money into a deteriorating iteration of Society means replicating old values that have degraded. Marion (“May”) and Eddy want to live the old dream of landed wealthy offspring. Though Eddy cannot promise Marion the same status as a Duke, he can guarantee a life of do-nothing pleasure:

> I’ll tell you what I’d to, May, if old aunt Sarah would only die. I’d settle with the governor about Gilston, and we’d furbish it up and live there…We should be as jolly as the day’s long, and nobody to interfere with us. And I promise you, you’d go out of the room before Mrs. James Rowland, though he is the great Railway man. I could do that for you, Marion, though I couldn’t make you Her Grace, you know. (365-66)

Because Marion values superiority and entertainment, a life of acting out the dream of a lady, she negotiates with her father, commanding Rowland to settle Gilston for them. Though Marion is technically enacting his earlier, immature wishes, he now understands through experience the corruption of that vision. He claims they will waste his efforts “and play the fool all year

round—on my money, that I've worked hard for, every penny!" (II: 370). Marion uses his own logic against him and reminds him that his way is not the established way. Marion and Eddy propose to conduct life in the manner fit for a gentleman's son, a method well-established over time. Marion's attempt to erase newness elides its productive possibility. The novel presents the urge to replicate tradition not only as dysfunctional but also insular. We get the sense that they will phase themselves out of existence by not adapting to progress. Rather than a flaw, Rosamond and—eventually—Archie find productive potential in the space of newness within which to innovate place and identity.

Intermediate Stations: Archie, Rosamond, and New Manners

For some Victorians, the idea of upward mobility was clearly defined by their cultural knowledge or lived experience. Though Marion's cultural knowledge is problematically shaped by her limited exposure to books that chart a familiar, yet outmoded, path to upper social spheres, her sense of direction is firm. She means to rise socially and is willing to shape herself to fit a definitive pattern. While Eddy's experience could not be described as upwardly mobile in terms of class and access to social sphere, he is able to rise above the deficiencies of his current situation. His path, too, is clear—money will help him to rise above his economic constraints and live the better life he had always imagined. In either method of gaining access (by acquiring money or status or both), the idea of the destination was consistent, largely defined by a particular understanding of Society. But this specific destination was not desired by all people of the age. In *The Railway Man and His Children,* Archie and Rosamond represent types of people who do not feel fitted to the "place" they are supposed to inhabit and struggle to form their

identities by searching for new destinations. These challenge the legitimacy of the already established "places" and the pre-formed shape of identities fit to them.

In the novel, Archie represents an intermediate identity between past and future, here and there. Rowland is disappointed to find that he has not been raised to assume a life like a gentleman's son, but more regretful that he was not raised to fit *any* particular station. He admits fault to his sister-in-law, Jane Brown: "That's just the pity of it,' said Rowland. 'He has fallen between two stools, neither a working lad nor a gentleman's son. That proves, Jane, we have both been in the wrong, and I, more than you, for I should have known better. We have made a terrible mistake" (I:233). The idiomatic phrase "between two stools" registers Archie's ambiguity as a failure and shores up Rowlands either/or understanding of identity. With hopefulness, he asserts, "we must try a different system now" (I:234), suggesting that moving Archie from Sauchiehall Road to Rosmore will help shape his expected cultural identity. However, Archie struggles to understand the constitution of a gentleman's son. Sympathetically, the narrator shares, "Poor Archie felt himself the equal of nobody, not even Sandy the groom, who, at least, had an occupation of his own and knew how to do it" (I:205). Archie is confused by an identity that is not attached to an occupation. He does not know what to *do*, and, thus, he does not know how to *be*: "instead of exerting himself like Marion to acquire a new, if it should happen to be fictitious standing ground, remained a sort of unknown quantity in his father's house" (I:307). Again, this "unknown quantity" is viewed unfavorably by everyone at Rosmore, including Archie, himself.

In part, Archie's struggle to form his identity derives from a lack of clear expectations as well as a functional model. While Marion could emulate Evelyn, Archie has to rely on others to explain how to do as gentleman do. Rowland's expectations are confusing. He firmly insists that

Archie "is not a gentleman, but only a wealthy engineer's son" (I:151) when they are at Sauchiehall Road. At Rosmore, Evelyn encourages Archie to go shooting, though Rowland does not partake of this activity. She explains, "I think…that your father, though he does not shoot himself, would be pleased if you showed a little enthusiasm about it" (I: 311). She justifies her reasoning, clarifying, "for are not you his heir—his successor—to represent him in anything he does not do himself?" Evelyn's logic takes up the thread of social evolution that positions Archie on a stage of progress legitimizing a gentlemanly status. Though reluctantly, Archie commits to acquiring the skill of shooting but not without deep regrets. He very sorrowfully kills a rabbit but learns to keep his feelings to himself. The narrator reports, "He managed to be able to carry his gun like other feeble sportsmen after that terrible initiation" (I:315). The narrator concludes that this violent ritual marks Archie's adaptability to his new sphere. However, his crowning achievement is his performance at the ball the Rowlands throw at Rosmore.

By juxtaposing the "terrible initiation" of shooting with dancing, the novel questions the value of traditional cultural activities. The novel does not condemn shooting, per se, but by sympathizing with Archie's reaction to it, questions the legitimacy of its normalization. In Archie's case it requires him to separate his actions and his feelings. Archie is no less comfortable with the thought of a ball, but Rosamond calls him on his general lack of sociability and how it alienates other people. She teaches him how to passably dance and, since he is Rowland's representative in this case, too, shares with him the rules about who he should ask to dance first according to rank. Archie dedicates himself to performing this duty well after receiving Rosamond's coaching and takes great pride in what he feels was a success. At the close of the ball, Lady Jean invites him to shoot grouse on her land and the Earl says he will fix a day, which conveys the sense that the invitation and compliment are made in earnest. The narrator

affirms, “What greater honour could have been done to the son of the railway man? He felt the glory of it” (II:137). The day after the ball Eddy confirms the high praise, adding, “Archie was magnificent with Lady Jean,’ said Eddy. ‘I never saw anything so good as his bow. He put his feet together like a French dandy of the last century. We’ve lost the art in our degenerate days” (171). Unlike Marion’s attempt to replicate Evelyn’s mannerisms, which degenerates in the hollow imitation, Archie restores manner to its peak condition through his emulation. The novel clearly promotes civility as a value and connects it to authenticity. Archie does not merely adapt to sociability by performing civility, he adopts the behavior which then becomes part of his constitution. By becoming more civil, he connects being and doing.

Re-forming the idea of what constitutes a gentleman does not mean distilling the identity to its best qualities and letting the degenerate traits fall way. It means rethinking what “place” signifies, too. The misplaced accusation of forgery that Archie suffers not only reveals Eddy’s corruption as a son of a gentleman, it also obliquely implies that living a life as Rowland’s “heir” and “successor” is a kind of forgery. Besides the fact that Archie has easier access than most people to Rowland’s wealth, Rowland assumes that Archie was the perpetrator because their handwriting is so similar. Archie realizes that life at Rosmore means that his identity would become a poor facsimile of his father’s rather than an upgraded version. Though he leaves Rosmore out of anger in reaction to the unjust accusation, Archie must also leave that place because he cannot thrive in a space confined by fixed expectations that limit his growth as an individual. He was between two stools when he arrived. His father’s “different system” at Rosmore, to do as other gentleman do, proved unsuccessful. Knowing no other way, Archie attempts to return to Sauchiehall Road.

While any nineteenth-century vehicle that enabled mobility affected people's relationship to home and self, the rapidity of the railways intensified the disjuncture that occurred when travelers distanced themselves from life as they knew it. Likewise, Victorians enjoyed an accelerated economic mobility that was driven, in part, by the railways. The sense travelers felt—that one could never go home again—was shared by those who experienced upward mobility, too. The easy affordances and higher quality of life in a higher class quickly altered people's perception of their old life making it unrecognizable to them. After a few short months of life at Rosmore, Archie struggled to identify with life at Sauchiehall Road: "As for the old life in Glasgow, Archie somehow did not go back to that—it had retired so very far away out of his ken. If it had been thirty years ago instead of four months it could not have become a more completely impossible, a thing got into the abyss of the past, not to be thought of anymore" (II: 64). The familiar saying that the railways "annihilated space and time" refers to how quickly people could travel somewhere else, but it also signifies how quickly their relationship to where they came from changed. When Archie makes the clandestine trip to Glasgow to provide Archie with his savings in order to cover one of Eddy's debts, he revisits the house he grew up in:

> How strange and wonderful now were all these familiar ways that led to the Sauchiehall Road! Already the work of time and change had operated upon them. They were narrow, and mean, and grey, not comfortable and friendly as they had once looked. The houses were small and poor, the streets confined and filthy, the whole complexion of the place altered. He had not known what a homely, poor part of the town it was: he saw it now as if it were a new place with which he was making acquaintance for the first time. (II: 82)

Archie's description of his return refutes the notion that the railways induced a feeling of nostalgia, if nostalgia is understood to be the desire to return to a simpler past. It does confirm the longing for place, though, that Ruth Livesey describes in her analysis of stagecoach literature. In railway literature, though, place will not be found in the familiar. The railways ensure that places of the past can offer no comfort. They become inaccessible. For Archie, though, fitness of place is not found the present either. When Marion accuses Archie of wishing he could return to the past, he explains that his former life "was a kind of living, and this is none—to be waited on hand and foot when you're not used to it, and feel like a fool and have nothing to do. But that's not the harm it's done. When I went back to the Sauchiehall Road, I was just as much out of place there! That's ended: and the other is begun, and there's no satisfaction anywhere" (II:100). Archie pinpoints the fact that the relationship to place is intricately linked to identity. By experiencing new places and new ways of being and doing, people are not only unable to relate to past places but past selves.

While economic mobility can move in both directions, the novel raises a question about the directional capabilities of identity. When the false accusation of forgery forces Archie to leave Rosmore, his only option is to return to Sauchiehall. If the return is to be successful, Archie knows that he will have to reset his identity, too:

> He had put on his old clothes, with which he had first come to Rosmore, garments of which he only now knew the unloveliness—and was as unlike in appearance as in feeling to the millionaire's son, the young master of everything in his father's luxurious house. Archie had never indeed felt his elevation very real: he scarcely ventured to accept and act upon it as if he were himself a person of importance. (II: 293)

Again, the rapidly-effected distance from life at Rosmore reveals not only what that place meant to his life but also how it had re-formed his identity. Realizing that he had been in an "elevated" position conveys to him the fact that Sauchiehall now represents a devolved existence. The regressive nature of the return is further underscored by feeling that his old clothes are now "unlovely." Whereas he previously bemoaned leaving Sauchiehall Road, he now regrets losing his place at Rosmore. But even more so, he is saddened by the loss of fondness for home: "It was true that already Sauchiehall Road had sustained the shock of disenchantment, and he had a shamed and subdued feeling of having somehow gone beyond the circle to which he had once been so pleased to belong, and being no longer at home in it" (II:293). The narrator emphasizes that the reaction to home is a signal that his re-shaped identity is the obstacle to fitting in there again. The narrator reports that "Archie did not spend happy days in his old home. He found it so changed, so unlike what it had once been" but then raises the question, "or was it only he who was changed?" (II:302).

Archie cannot do as other gentleman do, but he cannot do as he used to do, either. Between two stools again, "He was now more a nobody than ever, belonging neither to one life nor the other, cast out of both; and he walked along dreamily" (II:294). His last hope to become somebody was to do as his father had done and effect his own rise through work. However, if he claimed he was his father son, they felt the work was beneath him and that he "would revolutionise everything" as a rich man's son, unserious about work (II:308). And, if he tried to mask his identity, he could offer no references and no one would give him work, then, either: "Neither as his father's son, nor as nobody's son, could he make any advance" (II:311). Archie cannot be nobody's son because, as the Great Indian Railway Man's son, he is the son of

somebody. Archie cannot reset his identity but does return to the place of limbo he experienced when he first arrived at Rosmore as an "unknown quantity."

When Evelyn uncovers the truth about the forgery, Archie is restored to Rosmore but having spent time away, Archie is more ambivalent about resuming his place there. When Rosamond Saumarez tells him, "I am glad you have come home," Archie responds, "So am I, more or less" (II:346). Rosamond assumes that his reticence to return is that he had been enjoying a less restricted life away from the confines of home. She says, "I suppose you like the freedom of being away. But the more you are free to go, the more endurable the dullness should be" (II: 347). Archie had not considered life at Rosmore dull as much as he had frustrating by not knowing how to behave quite like a man of Society, but Rosamond assures him not to bother with the attempt because "society men are not amusing at all" (II: 348). This surprises Archie who assumed she "would have liked them best." Rosamond swears the opposite: "No…the worst is, people are so hideously like each other…One hopes to light upon a new species somewhere" (II: 348). Rosamond rejects the idea of replication and reappraises newness as the ideal rather than a flaw. Earlier in the novel she had berated Archie for his incivility and for claiming that he was a victim of circumstance. She prods him, "What is the good of being a man at all?" to which he retorted, "with an injured, offended air—'I did not make myself'" (I:359). Relentlessly, Rosamond urged him, "You ought to make yourself,' said the severe young judge, 'if you are not made properly to begin with." She assured Archie, "But there is nothing the matter with you. You are not deformed" (I:360). Rosamond supports the idea of the self-made man, but draws the attention that it creates for the next generation. Just like men of Society are "hideously like each other," the son of a self-made man should not be expected to replicate his identity or imitate another type. Evelyn views the space "between two stools" as a productive space from which

Archie can fashion himself into "a new species." As the son of a rich man, he has the resources to affect such a change and do as other gentleman don't. He also, Rosamond repeatedly emphasizes, has the privilege of gender that grants him the ability to chart a new course.

Though railway travel was open to anyone who could purchase a ticket, the experience was shaped by gender as it was by class. Just as railway cars were separated into first, second, and third classes, some railways invested in ladies-only carriages. And, while the station was a space where classes and genders mixed, there were ladies' only waiting areas, too. Additionally, just as in other spaces of transit, respectable women of higher status were not encouraged to travel unattended. Thus, for women, railway mobility entailed more restrictions than for men. As a woman, Rosamond's desire to depart convention and define "make herself" into a "new species" is more complicated than it would be for Archie. However, while gendered conventions placed her a stage behind Archie in her ability to construct a new kind of life for herself, she is a stage ahead in her ability to imagine it.

Part of Rosamond's ability to imagine a new place for herself derives from her lack of attachment to any home. In fact, she is the only character in the novel unbound by home. Gilston will eventually go to Eddy (though Rosamond is sure he will lose it to cover debts), so she has no future prospects. Because of her father's impoverished state, he cannot afford to keep them at present, which is partly why he imposes on Evelyn to take them to Rosmore. When Rosamond first introduces herself to Evelyn in London, Evelyn tells her that, though she may be "old-fashioned…everybody must see that in your case your duty lies at home" (I:100). In part, Evelyn was referring to Ned Samaurez's deteriorated health. Rosamond explains, though, that her father pretends to be in worse shape than he is and does not require her nursing. She also challenges Evelyn's commitment to her claim by asking, "If anybody who was a very good match wanted to

marry me,' said the girl with a laugh, 'would you then think that my duty lay at home?" (I:110). By disputing her logic, Rosamond unsettles Evelyn, who "felt herself reduced to absolute imbecility by this bewildering question." Evelyn exclaims, "you know a great deal too much; you are too wise." Though Evelyn will eventually see behind the curtains of the London scene, Rosamond intuits the inauthentic performance of class and gender at a much earlier age. Her ability to do so is due to her lack of a definite model.

Just as Rosamond is not attached to a particular place, she has no parent whose behavior and goals she should emulate. Since her mother died when she was young and her father was negligent in her upbringing, Rosamond was left largely to think for herself and speak for herself. Evelyn notes how differently Rosamond communicates than she did when she was her age: "It is a long time since I was a girl like you,' said Mrs. Rowland, 'and we were not allowed to be so frank and speak our mind; that is the chief difference, I suppose" (I:106). Rosamond explains that her ability to detect inauthenticity in life means that she rejects false representation in culture, too: "Oh, I have always heard from all the old ladies that I am dreadful. But certainly the thing we do now-a-days is to speak our mind—rather a little more than less, don't you know. We don't carry any false colours, or pretend to pretty feelings, like the girls in the story-books" (I:106). Though she may be restricted in her choices, the lack of a pattern frees her from having to mold herself to fit a standard.

If she is not yet free to choose a destination, Rosamond signals her capacity to be a mobile woman in the way she moves her body in public spaces:

> Evelyn watched her going along, keeping, so to speak, the crown of the causeway, she and her dog giving place to no one. She was on her right side of the pavement, and to be hustled out of her course was an impossibility. Her strong, confident

> step, her half masculine dress, jacket and hat like those of a youth, were wonderful and terrible to the woman who had never moved anywhere without an attendant. She stared after this wonderful young creature with a bewilderment which almost took from her the power of thought. (I:111)

The queerness of Rosamond's "half masculine dress" suggests that this new shape of a mobile woman disturbs the boundaries of conventional gendered identity. Though it agitates Evelyn's sense of propriety, she also finds pleasure in "this wonderful young creature" who seems like a new species to her. Evelyn's observation of Rosamond's movement "on her right side," refusing "to be hustled out of her course" also indicate her tacit endorsement of Rosamond's progression. When she lands at Rosmore, Rosamond's personal movement is contrasted with Archie's. After meeting and walking side by side, she "went on in advance, very quickly, with her smooth firm step, and her head held high, as she walked in London, where, intent upon her own business, this young woman of the period passed where she pleased, as safe in her own protection" (I:339). Rosamond's manner conveys an advanced state of self-possession— "her step," "her high head," "her business." She requires no attendants to ensure her safety. This self-assurance is contrasted with Archie's reticent manner: "Archie walked by her, a step behind, finding it slightly difficult to keep up with her long yet graceful steps" (I:339). Archie's lagging progress signifies his lack of a clear purpose. He struggles to move forward because he has mixed signals about what he is supposed to *do*. Rosamond, on the other hand, knows that only by activity will she be able to alter her course and create a better life.

Place of Work: Managing Others or Community Service

The Railway Man and His Children questions the desire of rising only to live a life of pleasure, to access a better social sphere and live out a fantasy of repose. Concomitantly, the novel questions how such desires affect the value of work and, by showing that goals of class emulation are regressive, the novel deems the degenerative desires a threat to national progress. The movement, Oliphant's novel suggests, should always be forward. Rosamond espouses this higher value of work. When she meets Evelyn, she shares her plans: "I have a great friend whom I see constantly, and who is exactly my way of thinking. As soon as we are old enough we both mean to take up a profession. I have not quite decided upon mine, but she means to be a doctor" (I:109). Though she is sure about her purpose, Rosamond expresses uncertainty about her destination. She explains, "As for me, I have not such a clear leading as Madeline. I am still quite in doubt." She does not have the resources of education that Eddy squanders, nor does she have the support to explore. She acknowledges the limitations to her mobility: "Of course they will try to forbid it, and that sort of thing." Like her comportment, her goals disturb the boundaries of her gender. The narrator explains that, while "Rosamond's aspirations were not perhaps very lofty," the "hope of departing from all the conventionality (as she thought) of life, and setting up with Mabel Leighton in lodgings like two young men, to work together at whatever fantasy might be uppermost, was an opening at least to the imagination which Marion's limited commonplace had no conception of" (II: 218). Designating Rosamond's desire as a fantasy might seem critical on the narrator's part. However, by contrasting the desire to Marion's limited one, the narrator suggests that Rosamond's fantasy productive rather than regressive. I find in the narrator's assessment a call to writers of the period to imagine new spaces within which these new women could operate. That call requests not only that writers imagine women moving into the sphere of

work but revising the purpose of work. Though Rosamond has not identified her profession, Madeline's desire to be a doctor signals a high value in professions that help others in need.

Oliphant's novel evaluates contrasting perspectives about work as a means or an end and how those perspectives shape people's views about the purpose of upward mobility. When Rowland seeks to reform Eddy's delinquent behavior, he claims, "Honest work, that's the only salvation—in this world" (II: 216). Here, work is a means to correct his regressive behavior, but it also appears to have an intrinsic value: work is good. However, Rosamond challenges Rowland's commitment to the intrinsic value of work just as she tested Evelyn's conventional beliefs about a proper lady's duty. In particular, she probes into how his principles of work have been applied "in this world." In his version of his life's story, his heroism is constructed on the merit of hard work. In an earlier discussion with Marion, Rosamond criticizes Rowland's conception of himself as a hard worker. To save Eddy from having to do ranch work in America, Marion hurtles Rosamond's critique at him: "I've been talking to Rosamond on that subject, and she thinks that men like you are under a great delusion [...] it's not hard work, as you suppose, but just that you're awfully clever, and have had tremendous luck" (II; 370). Slightly wounded, he defends himself to Rosamond, saying, "I thought I was a great one for work." "'Ah!' said Rosamond. 'I know! In a different way: which chiefly means, I believe, getting other people to work for you, and directing them, and planning everything, and making money'" (II:374). Rosamond points out that it is less *his* work that ensured his fortune than the labor of the workers he controlled. Additionally, she undermines his claim to an intrinsic work ethic by pointing out that his goal was to gain a fortune.

Through Rosamond's critique, the novel uncovers the social Darwinist underpinnings warranting the theory of work to which Rowland ascribes. She identifies the primary motivating

force as competition and the goal as acquisition. The novel posits this acquisition as a kind of obsessive desire to use work as a means to gain access to Society and its attendant material pleasures: "Rowland once more blew forth with a snort from his nostrils the angry breath. He felts sure there were arguments somewhere with which he could confound this silly girl, and show her that to work was to rise in the world, and make a fortune, and surround yourself with luxury, with the certainty of a mathematical axiom. But he could not find them" (II:374). Despite his belief that work is the vehicle to upward mobility and leisure is the destination, Rowland can find no proof beyond his lived experience. Rowland's inability to see the contradiction intrinsic and extrinsic values of work as salvation and fortune, respectively, underscores their cultural embeddedness. Rowland's belief is not so far afield from the belief shared by many people of the period. Oliphant's novel shows that this belief finds support in nineteenth-century novels, which reproduce, detrimentally, the fantasies of upward mobility.

Rosamond insists on exposing the fallacy of the fantasy of work and its guarantees. After exposing Rowland's desire to work in order to gain a fortune she illustrates the fallacy that work could even be a salvation. She points to the uneven distribution of wealth conferred on work in proportion to exertion and the lack of any guarantee of dignity:

> —like you, Mr. Rowland! Who, in a few years, without hurting yourself in the least, have got so much money that you don't know what to do with it. One sees that in the world. I have heard of men—not like you, who are a great engineer and a genius, everybody says—but mere nobodies, with shops and things, people one would not like to touch… 'But that is not WORK,' said the girl, throwing back her head. (II:374)

Rosamond shows that people who commit to hard work often do not become "somebody." Rising up in an age of competition requires positioning yourself higher up in the order of authority and benefitting off the labor of others. Rosamond's mention of "people one would not like to touch" gestures towards the untouchable caste in India. Thus, she signals that class mobility, rather than an indicator of a more democratic economic system, serves as a vehicle for self-interested individuals to capitalize off of others. In contrast, she explains that she and Mabel Leighton want to serve others: "To be of a little use, we hope: though people say that the results are not always so satisfactory as—But at all events,' she added, more cheerfully, 'it is WORK. And that must always be the best thing, whatever one may do" (II: 373). Rosamond's clarity of purpose indicates the value system the novel supports while Rowland's confusion represents the misplaced values of culture at large.

Generational progress is hopeful but creates a painful distance between one generation and the next. Injured by the charges Rosamond fires at him, which unveil his motivations as less worthy, Rowland turns to his wife for support, asking, "Where would I have been without work? Not here with my lady-wife upon the terrace at Rosmore!" Unlike Rosamond, Evelyn has no desire to challenge Rowland, yet she, too, perceives how luck and power, rather than hard work, afford him his lifestyle: "Evelyn did not say, what perhaps was on her mind, 'You might have been, with a great deal harder work, a respectable foreman in the foundry, as good a man, and as admirable an example of what labour and honest zeal can do.' She did not say it, but her historian does for her" (II:375). Oliphant's narrator further stresses the "historian" author's role in promoting transparency about the way the world works and offering suggestions for how to make it better. Evelyn does plant the seed of new thoughts as she comforts her confused husband: "Mrs. Rowland only pressed her husband's arm, and said, 'The young ones, perhaps,

are not without reason, too." (II:375). Evelyn's statement of reassurance confirms the idea of generational intellectual development. While Evelyn has advanced beyond the strict separate sphere ideology that Marion parrots, Rosamond reveals to her some of her remaining old fashioned habits of thinking and doing. Significantly, when Evelyn goes to London to clear Archie's name, she travels unattended, which was an act of unfamiliarity as well as discomfort for her. The novel confirms that such non-stop movement was a severe drain on her faculties, but this same feeling does not apply to the next generation.

At the end of *The Railway Man and His Children*, the narrator summarizes the outcome of the thought experiment. Conforming to the traditional Victorian plotline, Eddy and Marion married "and settled at Gilston, which was relieved and rescued by Marion's money, and restored to its dignity as one of the finest places in the county" (I:376). This happy ending is undermined by the subtly cynical summary: "if they did not perhaps live happily ever after, they were at least a great deal better off than they deserved, and fulfilled their own prophecies, and suited each other—down to the ground." The directional tag at the end of the summary, "down to the ground," affirms the trajectory as a decline. In contrast, Oliphant resists concluding the paths of Rosamond and Archie with a marriage. The potential that they could form a union in the future is not foreclosed, but the narrative urges that there is work yet to be done. The narrator does suggest a hopeful fate for Archie: "his complete development into a man, on a different level from his father, with other aims, and an ambition which grew slowly with his powers, cannot be here entered into. It would exceed the limits permitted in these pages, and might touch upon graver problems than are open to the historian of domestic life" (II:376). Rosamond's comrade Mabel was "soon drawn off from that eccentric career" and married with children, fulfilling her mother Madeline Leighton's prediction, but Rosamond committed to her path. The

narrator comments, “Rosamond has not yet married any more than [Archie], and has had full opportunities of testing the power of work and its results” (376). Rather than envisioning the characters in a set place, the novel concludes by suggesting an open-ended space yet to be imagined. Significantly, though the narrator confirms Archie’s “complete development,” the assertion only relates Rosamond’s “full opportunities” without assuring of her success. Thus, the novel concludes by suggesting that expectations and opportunities improve, yet unevenly at different stages.

Mobility, by nature, means moving from one place to another. That movement forces new perspectives that change the way people view destinations, places of origin, and themselves. While the experience of altered perspectives can occur by walking, horseback, steam-powered ships, and stagecoaches, the railways affected people in a particular way. The speed of railway travel accelerated the ability to go further faster and in shorter periods of time. Besides travel, the railways also offered the opportunity for more rapid economic mobility. This occurred directly, through investment opportunities in railway shares, and indirectly, through capital enterprises improved by use of the railways and easy access to more jobs through relocation. Thus, the railways facilitated physical and economic mobility, and also represented upward mobility symbolically in the imagination of Victorians living during its rise and integration into life and culture. In this chapter, I have shown how the physical aspects of the railways helped shape people’s ideas about what access to mobility guaranteed them and how this figurative (mis)representation highlighted existing problems and, in some cases, even created them.

The spaces of junctions and stations were sites upon which Victorians often projected their expectations about what they thought mobility promised them. In Charles Dickens’s contributions to *Mugby Junction* and Margaret Oliphant’s *The Railway Man and His Children*,

the authors use the physical spaces of the railways to process the disappointment of not gaining access to a better place they thought was available to them. Representative of real Victorians, characters in these works of fiction discover the restrictions of class and gender and the limitations of their own capabilities that prevent them from living the life they wanted. The two works diverge, though, in how they approach dealing with that disappointment, how they allocate blame, and what they suggest for the future. Dickens's stories locate regret in too radical ambitions. People whose desires are unrealistic are bound to be disappointed. The collection of his stories concludes that individuals need to set modest, realistic goals for change. They can rewrite what constitutes a better life and work within the restrictions to create that place for themselves. Oliphant's novel, on the other hand, suggests that expectations for the place that upward mobility could take you were not radical enough. Her novel locates regret in the misapplication of ambition to gain access to an outmoded definition of success. She encourages authors to help imagine a new place within which people could refashion new identities that accord with the progressive times they were living in.

I chose these two works not only because they demonstrate their own transitioning perspectives over the second half of the century but also because they evince, as my previous chapters do, how women writers of railway fiction often revise the dominant narratives of their male contemporary authors and forward arguments of stronger, more revolutionary, more democratic reforms that would plot a course for progress open to women. While I do not want to be overly reductive, I often find male writers of railway fiction to represent women's restricted mobility less critically. In *Mugby Junction* Phoebe's immobility, and her sunny disposition despite of it, models for Barbox Brothers how to be grateful for the limited mobility you are afforded, knowing someone else probably lives a more constrained life.

Other later fiction by male authors may acknowledge women's restricted mobility but surrender to its injustices. In George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), the protagonist Diana Warwick exhorts, "we women are the verbs passive of the alliance, we have to learn, and if we take to activity, with the best intentions, we conjugate a frightful disturbance. We are to run on lines, like the steam-trains, or we come to no station, dash to fragments. I have the misfortune to know I was born active. I take my chance" (64). I find the inability to imagine mobility for women in the work of women writers too. Phillis in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* is more capable than Mr. Manning's son of contributing to advances in mobile technology, yet she silently fades out of the path of progress. Gaskell's story obliquely urges future writers to imagine a way forward for Phillis. A generation later, Margaret Oliphant answers that call by imagining for Rosamond Saumarez the confidence to pair with ability. Thus, Oliphant's novel shows the stages of progress that will allow women to come to new, rather than no, stations.

CONCLUSION

IMPERIAL ENGINES: WOMEN AND THE GLOBAL TRAJECTORY OF RAILWAYS AND REGRET

Imagining how a study might be conducted otherwise is part of the joy of concluding it. Such thoughts are also the inherent result of reaching the end and realizing what a different approach might look like, as well as where further research might go. My own counterfactual thinking began, though, after I encountered an article in *The Guardian* from March 2017 titled, "'But what about the railways…?' The Myth of Britain's Gifts to India." In it, Shashi Tharoor points out that touting the benefits provided by the railways, the vehicle of colonialism in India (and elsewhere), is a method employed by "apologists for empire" to downplay two centuries of mistreatment. Tharoor argues that this rationalization is the result of "Britain's historical amnesia about the rapacity of its rule in India." What struck me about this article (besides the exciting discovery of current discussions of railway myth and revision) is that I find its argument in Margaret Oliphant's 1891 novel, nearly 50 years before the end of Crown Rule in India.

When Rosamond Saumarez first meets James Rowland in *The Railway Man and His Children*, she begins making polite conversation about the hot London atmosphere: "One feels as if one were breathing dust and noise and people, anything but air. But you have it hotter in India,' she said, turning her face towards Rowland, with a little gracious acknowledgement of his presence, and of what and who he was" (259). By mentioning India, Rosamond signals her awareness that she is in the company of the Great Indian Railway Man who made his fame and fortune abroad. Rosamond's perfunctory social grace quickly gives way to her personal attitude of disapproval when Rowland responds, "It is hotter, but there are more appliances. I was saying to my wife we should have had a punkah" (260). For Rosamond, Rowland's comment signifies a

larger ethical problem of progress, and she uses this moment to shed light on what she identifies as regretful mistreatment of others at both a personal and national level. She probes, "Something that the poor natives pull and pull to give you air? I have heard of that—but who punkahs them?' said Rosamond, with a sweet severity, as if calling upon him to give account of his tyranny and selfish misgovernment, presumably, yet perhaps not inexcusably his fault."

This brief interchange reveals two sets of ideological assumptions that are quite at odds: reciprocation and superiority. Rosamond's question, "but who punkahs them?" conveys a baseline assumption of reciprocation. Rosamond connects lack of reciprocation at the personal level to the larger problem of exploitative empire-building. Rowland responds, "I am afraid we don't think much on that subject,' said Rowland; 'they are natives, you know and like it, not the punkah, but the heat'" (260). Here, Rowland addresses the problem of reciprocation by explaining that the natives are adapted to their conditions, so they have no need to be fanned. He leaves unanswered the problem of exploitation, even after clarifying that it is the heat and not the punkah that the natives like. Rowland takes for granted that his needs will be served regardless of the native's own desires, and it is this selfish attitude that Rosamond links with the larger problem of "tyranny and selfish misgovernment" tied to Indian railway development.

Interpreting Rosamond's thoughts, though, the narrator draws a nuanced distinction between fault and accountability. While misgovernment is "presumably" Rowland's fault, she qualifies her accusation with the thought that the error is "perhaps not inexcusable." This suggestion precedes Rowland's unintended admission: "I am afraid we don't think much on that subject," which invites us to read it as an expression of naiveté as well as arrogance. Rowland's unquestioning attitude is not as much a personal failing as it is part of a larger cultural one, characterized by devotion to a rigidly defined philosophy of linear progress. Rosamond cues

Rowland to his narrow-minded vision by exclaiming, "Ah! There is, of course, always something to be said on both sides of a question" (260). Rosamond's response invites Rowland to reconsider the assumptions he takes for granted. As she does, she vocalizes the larger cultural need for revised thinking that defines Oliphant's novel and the other novels in this study.

That invitation to reflect on other aspects of a question invites me, too, to consider the future trajectory of my project and an alternative frame with which to analyze this set of railway fiction. The above passage is striking for its pointed colonial critique, and that is one of many reasons why Oliphant's understudied novel deserves more attention. But, the passage is also remarkable because that colonial critique is delivered through the voice of a budding New Woman figure. These two facets raise interesting questions: is there something about a New Woman in particular that enables her to make an anti-colonial argument? Also, why are the more pointed critiques about railway revision being made by women writers? In the pages that follow, I want to sketch out briefly how an argument about fictional expressions of colonial regret might be made using two works from this study – Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* and Oliphant's *Railway Man and His Children*. Then I want to suggest how the story of railways and regret might be reframed with a focus on gender and how the parallel tracks of colonialism and gender might intersect.

Colonial Railway Regret: A Through Line from the Local to the Global

George Stephenson had high expectations for the transformative power of the railways. He once said to his former apprentice Thomas Summerside, "I will send the locomotive as the great Missionary over the World" (qtd in Rolt 297). Stephenson's brazen assertion is predicated on the belief that the railways are inherently good, even if they require adjustments. I term this

belief in the inherent good of railways, coupled with assumptions of British superiority, Permanent Way ideology. Wherever they are introduced, railways will improve life and culture. *The Economist* boldly claimed in 1851: "The rail is an English art; it is carrying English arts, English men, and English opinions all over the world. It is civilising Egypt. If it be capable of teaching mildness to Mussulman tyranny, and placing restraint on the power of the Pachas, what other power is there in either Europe or Asia it will not in time subdue?" ("Railways Abroad"). Our retrospective vision of the now allows us to see the almost comical error in Permanent Way ideology. For, it was the British whose power and tyranny needed to be restrained.

Recent railway scholarship in economic, history, and cultural studies grapples with the lack of consensus about the railway's role in India. As Shashi Tharoor explained above, historically critics have suggested the beneficial influence of the railways. In *Railways in Modern India,* Ian Kerr notes, "Some of whom have even gone so far as to declare in effect, 'no railways, no modern India'[94]" (7). Kerr elaborates, "The Indian World made by the railways included features some people would differently label progressive, destructive, retrogressive or the unfortunate but necessary by-products of technological advance" (9). Kerr himself focuses on the discrepancy between the counterfactual ideal and the devastating real.[95] In his chapter on "'Productive' Indian Railways, 1875-1914: Space for Gentlemanly Capitalists and Industrialists in a Mixed Economy," Stuart Sweeney homes in on the role of finance in the Imperial railway project in India, particularly the distorting influence of liberal philosophies.[96] Alternatively, in

[94] Kerr quotes from *The Cambridge History of India* (1932).
[95] See, for instance, "The Dark Side of the Force: Mistakes, Mismanagement and Malfeasance in the Early Railways of the British Indian Empire."
[96] Sweeney describes how John Chapman, chief promoter of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, explained the wildly different estimated and actual costs of the line: "The inability of private management to realize these ambitious expectations for high revenues and low costs was to be explained, under Chapman's laissez-faire thinking, by the contagion effect of guarantees. By 1853 he described such guarantees, which he had fought for, as 'an effectual quietus to [shareholders]…they care nothing about how fast or slowly the works go on" (14-15).

Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility, Marian Aguiar focuses on fictional narratives that challenge imperialism, analyzing much of Rudyard Kipling's works, including "The Bridge-Builders" and *Kim*. Aguiar builds on criticism that problematizes Kipling's Imperial critique, pointing out that his challenges to colonial authority are often tempered by Orientalist misrepresentations of India.[97]

My contribution to this line of study would be to integrate the ideological, financial and cultural criticisms I just described into one interdisciplinary study and to root such imperial regrets in the regional. I see a through line between the effects of laissez faire philosophy and the selfish mismanagement of branch lines illustrated in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* to the colonial critique in Oliphant's *Railway Man and His Children*. Part Aguiar's and others' complaint about Kipling is that his colonial critique comes through the narrative voice, which is overridden by the dominant authority of his authorial voice (Aguiar 41). The works of Gaskell and Oliphant add to such studies because they offer authorial voices from the margins. Though they are members of the ruling class, as women writers these authors operate from an outsider position.

In the body of fiction I discuss in this dissertation, authors present female characters who occupy marginalized spaces the reader should see as shared with other marginalized spaces and people. In *Cousin Phillis,* when Holdsworth selfishly abandons the branch line and aborts the romantic relationship he initiated with Phillis to pursue self-interested opportunities abroad, we are meant to conflate the two: the rural and the regional are feminized just as the feminine is pastoralized. Similarly, Rosamond Saumarez's critique of Rowland and a fortune built by exploiting the labor of others comes from a desire to work but being prevented due to dominant

[97] See Zohreh Sullivan and also Benita Parry.

rule. Though I would not argue that we are invited to conflate Rosamond with Indian "natives," I do think we are expected to see that they both suffer from the dominion of imperial masculinity.

The Gender of Regret: Conducting Railway Revisions from the Margins

This kind of intersectionality is another way to understand my study. My project, as all such projects do, started with much broader ambitions of coverage. In my initial plan, I intended to write about how railways were represented in the works of Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, more on Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, as well as Rudyard Kipling. My focus was suitably narrowed during the course of the project to address technological, economic, and social regrets expressed through myth-making and revision, which required me to whittle my large party into the intimate few you find here. What remained were four women writers and Dickens, whose works revised the dominant railway myths. As I noted in chapter four, though, Dickens' fictional revision of ideas about place focused on the changing individual expectations and refrained from suggesting sweeping cultural change as did Oliphant's novel.

One question that might be used to reframe a more prominent gendered analysis in this study is: Why were women writers more likely to make critiques of dominant narratives about managing technological, economic, and social aspects of railway mobility? The answer lies in the concept of self-interest, which drives much of the regret I explored in the study. The ability to be self-interested comes from a place of privilege that women do not typically enjoy or at least not to the degree that they want or that matches the men around them. In *Cousin Phillis*, Phillis has an intellect superior to her male cousin by far. While he cannot comprehend the technical conversations his engineer-inventor father has with Holman and Holdsworth, Phillis can. Yet, he is the one who benefits from nepotism. Though he is not "great shakes" in the inventing line, he

will be afforded a spot in his father's partnership. Meanwhile, Phillis's potential will be wasted by the refusal of all the engineers in the story to value her intellect.

The devaluation of women's potential that correlates with these dominant myths allows Gaskell and Riddell to take up the plight of the inventor in *Cousin Phillis* and *City and Suburb*. Not only do they empathize with the inventor's marginalized status they also benefit from advocating for a vision of progress that is inclusive, recognizing the potential contributions of those who exist outside of the decision-making realm. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, that includes the women investors, too, who should not be branded as interlopers, wreaking mayhem but rather contributors to the national project of technological advancement. Finally, in *Railway Man and His Children* we find the argument that women should be able to make the choice to work, to do real labor, in service of other people by their own choice. This gendered frame, while retaining many of the material aspects, views mobility more conceptually—the railways become more symbolic than literal. There is value in such a project, as I imagine here, and it would contribute to studies of women and mobility that extend past women's use of the railways. The technical knowledge exhibited by Gaskell and Riddell, in particular, demonstrates women's interest in science and industry. Focusing on how that interest was incorporated in their fiction gives a fuller picture of how women writers contributed to negotiations of what should constitute national progress, as well as what actually did.

Progress and Its Final Revisions

I began this study by analyzing a 20th-century image that visually narrated the 1830 opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway as an example of the shortfalls of historiography and myth-making. I want to close by offering a visual example of 20th-century

railway revision in the station formerly known as Victoria Terminus and the female statue, "Progress," which crowns the highest central dome (left of center in **Figure 3**).

"Progress," a fifteen-foot marble statue carved by Thomas Earp, crowns the erstwhile Victoria Terminus in Mumbai designed by Frederick William Stevens and completed in 1888 (**Figure 4)**. A reading of the statue provided on the Victorian Web raises an eyebrow:

> The female figure has a star above her forehead, flowing classical robes, and a winged wheel at her side suggesting change, forward movement, speed and, of course, transport. Looking down from her great height she wears a benign expression, and holds aloft a flaming copper-gilt torch to illuminate the way and lead the advance towards the future. ("Progress")

This uncritical description of the statue espouses the proud, imperial, nineteenth-century attitude towards progress that Shashi Tharoor warns about. This vision of progress is defined as both linear ("forward movement," "advancing towards the future") and hierarchical (the statue "looks down from her great height" "benignly"). A more discerning view sees Earl's statue, fixed atop the station, as a perfect encapsulation of deep-seated tensions that defined railway mobility. As a station, The Victoria Terminus denotes the flow of people, goods, and ideas in and out of Mumbai on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, but as a terminal station, the end of the line connotes unidirectional flow rather than circulation, which gestures towards a hierarchical power structure. This is not the reciprocal exchange that Rosamond Saumarez envisioned. The appellation, Victoria, chosen in honor of the Golden Jubilee in 1887, unapologetically awards advancement to those already in power.



Figure 4. The Victoria Terminus, designed by Frederick William Stevens, completed 1888.

Source: Library of Congress Online Gallery, Digital ID 4a02613.



Figure 5: Statue of Progress, marble, carved by Thomas Earp, 1887

Source: A. Savin. “The Victoria Terminus (Chhatrapati Shivaji) in Mumbai, India.” 14 March 2016. Wikimedia Commons.

And, yet, we know that the railways are not the permanent way that some imagined. In his poem, "Railway Station," Nobel Prize-winning Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore interprets the space of the station as a nexus between language, the material experience of mobility, and conceptions of modernity, which he characterizes as "Forever forming, forever unforming." In March of 1996, nearly 50 years after conclusion of The Raj, the Victoria Terminus was renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji, after the warrior king who founded the Mahratta empire in the seventeenth century—the empire the British conquered in the nineteenth century. Renaming the station for a radical warrior who predates Victoria's rule may seem like an attempt to erase the period of colonial rule and empower a nation by emphasizing its roots. What I find, instead, in the renamed terminus (with the statue of "Progress" still affixed to the central dome) is an accumulation of contraries—movement and stasis, access and limitation, advancement and regret--that defines railway mobility at large.

On 6 May 2017, the station name was changed for the fourth time, now called the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. Some suggest that the honorific "Maharaj," meaning "great king," is meant to convey respect to an idol, while others claim it is "a political move taken to appeal to the working class by echoing deep-rooted Maharashtrain sentiments" (Iyengar). It is too soon in the 'just' past to determine, however. And so, it appears that railway myth-making and revision continues "Forever forming, forever unforming" even as I write these lines.

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VITA

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