View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

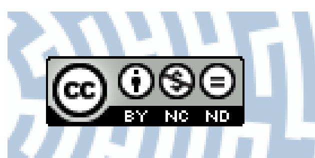
brought to you by CORE

You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: The third on the train : on class and travel in the 19th century

Author: Małgorzata Nitka

Citation style: Nitka Małgorzata. (2004). The third on the train : on class and travel in the 19th century. W: W. Kalaga (red.), "The same, the other, the third" (S. 173-193). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).

UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH

Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego

Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

The Third on the Train
On Class and Travel in the 19th Century

Małgorzata Nitka
University of Silesia
Katowice

The phrase Industrial Revolution was brought into circulation at the beginning of the 19th century, and, as Leo Marx argues, it less stresses the seismic vehemence of the economic and technological forces transforming England and more points at the political and social ramifications of intense industrialisation.[1] It is then in this context that one must view the coming of the train, one of the most powerful emblems of the new industrial order. And so it was by contemporaries, who responded to the invention with both enthusiasm and distrust which embraced far more than new mechanised and staggering or terrifying speed for behind this ambivalence was also the anticipation of momentous changes which the train would wreak within society. Perhaps the most notable objection to the railways which touched precisely on their social significance was the Duke of Wellington's grudging remark that "Railways will only allow the masses to move restlessly and aimlessly about." Evidently, it is political foresight which made the eminent statesman identify, and consequently fear, the train as a vehicle of revolution or anarchy. While

[1] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 187.

the word revolution does not make an explicit appearance in the comment itself, there can be little doubt that the free and unrestrained movement facilitated by the railways would bring, alongside a change in travelling, a threat to the existent social and political layout.

What the Duke of Wellington quickly and apprehensively grasps is the previously unknown mass character of transport, but of course when he speaks of masses he means more than just large numbers. Large numbers of travellers do not matter but only as long as easy travelling remains confined to the trustworthy and well-behaved social classes. Whereas when the possibility of facile movement becomes granted to the lower orders, though for a while a fare would act as a buffer against their too extensive a progress, then it acquires a menacing aspect. Since freedom presupposes mobility, then if before the railway age mobility — let alone mobility *en masse* — was restrained, so was freedom. Thus the railway might be mistrusted as an unexpected ally of the liberation of the classes to whom easy mobility was previously denied. But the Duke of Wellington does not speak of the masses' acquisition of the right to movement as such, what he resents is the use he believes the populace to make of the railways: not only will common people move, but, what is worse, they will "move restlessly and aimlessly." The privilege of mobility would be wasted on them for they would not be able to turn it to proper, i.e. purposeful, uses. It seems that the railway would just disorientate or displace the lower orders, detract them from home and work, indeed socially derail them. After all, aimlessness implies not only the lack of purpose or destination, but it also may bespeak idleness, a condition detrimental to the country's economy. The train, it is feared, might patronise a large-scale vagrancy, reprehensible on economic account, but, more worryingly, also conducive to political mischief. Able to travel as a large group from one part of the country to another, the lower orders could all too easily create political disturbances. Not incidentally does then the Duke of Wellington envisage the masses' mobility as restless, and thus suggestive of dissatisfaction, disorder and anarchy.

Justified though his anxieties might have been, they could not be considered since the railway was ultimately a commercial

enterprise, much dependent on the number of passengers it carried, and so it could hardly afford to ignore the poorer who too, even if only moderately, contributed to its prosperity.[2] Nor would it be politically prudent to preclude the poorer, by one decree or another, from travelling by train if they could only pay the fare, in the early days high enough to be an effective means of discouragement and discrimination. Like everyone else, the lower orders had to be taken on board, but, of course, they were taken on board differently from the wealthier and more respectable passengers.

Naturally, the distinctions between various classes of travellers existed well before the railway age and various social classes travelled differently, depending on their rank and resources available; the oldest distinction, practised for years, being into those who walked and those who rode or were carried. The coach was this means of transport which became available to different categories of passengers and although it made it possible for them to travel together yet it kept them apart. Thus social and, what goes with it, economic, differences were acknowledged and sanctioned as refined travellers were allocated to the inside of the carriage while the rougher sort to the outside. Recollecting the glory of the English mail coach Thomas De Quincey wrote sneeringly of the social divisions carefully observed during the journey: "it has been the fixed assumption of the four inside people (as an old tradition of all public carriages from the reign of Charles II), that they, the illustrious quaternion, constitutes a porcelain variety of the human race, whose dignity would have been compromised by exchanging one word of civility with the three miserable delf ware outsides. Even to have kicked an outsider might have been held to attaint the foot concerned in that operation."[3] So no communica-

[2] Such a view expressed for instance Dionysius Lardner claiming that "goods and third-class passengers supply a more steady revenue in general [...] than the other classes." (Dionysius Lardner, *Railway Economy: A Treatise on the New Art of Transport, its Management, Prospects, and Relations, Commercial, Financial, and Social* (London: Taylor, Walton and Maberly, 1850), p. 283).

[3] Thomas De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach," in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 185.

tion between the two categories took place: the distinction, once visibly established, was binding and adhered to throughout also during stoppages at inns when the outsiders were relegated to the kitchen, or, as De Quincey narrates, were at best given a separate table in a corner of the room. Only the distance was shared, all other elements of the journey were eligible for differentiation.

The system of fares and accommodation adopted by the railway was that used by the pre-industrial forms of conveyance: "each train had a first class, corresponding to the inside of the old stage coach; and a second class, in the absence of cushions, stuffing, and other comforts and in the exposure, or partial exposure to the weather, corresponding to the outside."[4] Thus the inside and outside distinction does not disappear on the introduction of the new means of travelling which will make locomotion accessible to many for whom it was previously out of bounds. The original division — soon elaborated into three or occasionally even four classes — is an obvious borrowing, one of many, which the railway imported from the coaching tradition, as at first it seemed the simplest method of discriminating between the polite and the vulgar travellers, and keeping them apart. It had, however, to be modified in that riding on the outside of carriages would be fraught with danger; in the case of the rail journey the outside would translate into open, unroofed, wagons which became the hallmark of the third-class journey. So the poorer, for a period of time, travelled unsheltered, in a manner reminiscent of the way in which perhaps they had always travelled, whether on foot, in a cart or on the box of a coach, as if for them the very possibility of expeditious locomotion granted by the railway already entailed a social promotion. The idea that to travel poor is to travel exposed can be found in Peter Lecount's consideration: "[...] it should be remembered that railways will to a certain extent drive vans and waggons off the road, which were the ordinary vehicles for the travelling poor, and they ought to have a substitute, if it were

[4] Quoted in J.A.R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday. A Social History* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, Ltd., 1976), p. 88.

merely an open box without seats."[5] Inconvenience is inseparable from social inferiority to the point of its being one of its emblems; after all, comfort is an economic as well as a social category, it is what one can buy, but also what one's rank entitles one to.

In its taking into account social differences the railway managed to replicate the social structure with greater precision than coaches did; having technical means and possibilities it neatly diversified the event of travelling for its diverse customers so as to recognise and conform to distinctions exercised in other practices of daily life. It is on the train journey that class became a useful and widely used category, indispensable to clearly define the type of the train, accommodation or even passengers themselves. By means of varying charges and then the quality of travelling facilities, social and economic differences among travellers could be reflected and respected: the organisation of the train journey not merely reiterated but, more importantly, endorsed the organisation of society.

Indeed, when the Midland Railway abolished the second class it was read as an attempt at a sacred order, an act of gross misrepresentation since "by universal admission there are, roughly speaking, three classes in all societies, and the existing arrangement of railway carriages appears to correspond very closely with the ordinary habits of life."[6] Once such a strict correspondence between the design of the train journey and the idea of the social order is claimed, all divisions have to remain strict and inflexible. What one guards by guarding the railway division into three classes is no less than the analogous division of society. Any attempt to do away with one category was then read as a gesture that was little short of anarchy, a gesture whose reverberations went far beyond the domain of travelling since what, in fact, was questioned and disturbed was the structure of society.

For the railway class posed a serious concern. So serious that, to a large extent, the evolution and perfection of the railway system went hand in hand with the process of working on the exact

[5] Peter Lecount, *A Practical Treatise on Railways, Explaining Their Construction and Management* (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 346.

[6] *The Times*, 12.10.1874.

translation of class distinction into travelling practice. In this process of translation time and space played a vital part, becoming principal means of establishing and testifying to the difference. If one were to trust the popular slogan claiming that the railway annihilated time and space, one would be inclined to assume that it did so for every traveller: for all passengers riding on the same train and covering the same distance the duration of the journey could not but be the same. Indeed in this sense time and space were a measure of the equality of passengers, and could be therefore referred to in support of a sanguine, though imperceptive, claim that the railway was a social leveller. "Does not the railway, on most of the lines, at least, take the third-class passenger at the same speed at which even royalty itself travels?"[7] John Bright asked. The question while triumphantly asserting the principle of the equality of travellers is not however exempt from a moment of hesitation, the interpolated supplement points to exceptions, to situations in which time and space too could be instruments of social discrimination.

When embodied by the solid railway track which connects two locations, the spatial distance is given a fixed, permanent value: the technological requirements of train traffic which has to be confined to the metals serve as a warrant of its inflexibility. And yet the permanent way does not necessarily secure the permanence of distance, and the seemingly straightforward and clearly defined route which trains take, may lose its direct uncompromising character. What, to all appearances, extends the distance, is the disruption of its continuity: the more stoppages break the distance, the more intermittent the motion of the train is, the longer the journey becomes for the traveller. Of course, even broken, the distance retains its objective value: it neither stretches nor shrinks. But the rail traveller does not think of the distance he will be covering in terms of miles for this is a somewhat abstract, truly distant, method of assessment. Instead one adopts more familiar,

[7] *Public Addresses*, ed. J.E.T. Rogers (1879), p. 419. Quoted in Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 364.

temporal categories so that the journey means not so much the distance travelled but the time taken.

So the journeys between two particular locations can be of many shapes and sizes: direct and indirect, smooth and erratic, effortless and laboured ones, journeys which pass quickly and journeys which take their time. The slow journey is a poor man's journey. Not only were the poor rail passengers subject to spatial but also temporal discomfort. When travelling on the third-class train one lost time, as it were, but there was an element of convenience in this slowness too: the train was slow not just because it was pulled by a less powerful engine, but also because it would stop frequently so as to make its services more widely available. But this is where the generosity of the railway ended: the cost of availability was discomfort. The slow train, as the cheapest category, made one's journey economical only in one sense, but essentially gain was here inseparable from loss for the price one paid for travelling cheaply was the loss of time. Third-class passengers were then all those who had to have more time to spare, even though they could not afford to spare it. The slow train conveys then a specific idea of slowness in which the absence of urgency indicates the lack of importance. It is those who do not matter who travel slowly, and not only that: the lower orders would travel at small hours, for early morning or even night was the time when slow trains would run. So third-class traffic occupied peripheries of the railway system. Its peripheral nature is implied by its relation to the geographical space — on its journey the slow train painstakingly picked up passengers from small and unimportant places — as well as its relation to time, that is to say relegation to small time. The inconvenient early hours of travelling are inconspicuous hours too: a third-class journey began or happened on the outskirts of time, and so on the outskirts of visibility and thus awareness of the polite society.

This is well illustrated by George Augustus Sala who in his project of describing Victorian London round the clock decides on the parliamentary train as the most representative image of urban activity at seven o'clock in the morning (the hour which, of course, may not strike us as particularly outrageous). By definition the

parliamentary train was the poor people's train; introduced in 1844 on the instigation of the Select Committee on Railways, it charged its passengers one penny a mile and offered them, in return, a very low standard of comfort. While the criterion of comfort meant the quality of accommodation, it also translated into the quality of time at which the poor could travel. Thus at seven a.m. the railway station is occupied almost exclusively by the third-class throng of "hard-faced, hard-handed, poorly-clad creatures; men in patched, time-worn garments; women in pinched bonnets and coarse shawls, carrying a plenitude of baskets and bundles."[8] The other, leisured and more prosperous, classes can afford to begin their day and journey at a later hour without, however, wasting time. With its detailed specification of routes, types of trains, journeys threaded on the temporal scale, the time-table does more than organise the system of transportation since it also proposes a social interpretation of time as it neatly assorts and arranges the travellers, grants them different mobility rights and privileges: different classes move in different time. There is a prime and small time, a first-class and third-class time. Much seems to be included in the train fare: when one pays for the passage one pays for the distance covered, for the duration of the journey, its conditions, its continuity, the speed at which the train runs, the time within which the journey is inscribed. Once the journey is a commodity so is travelling time and, by the same token, speed. "Who, indeed," Sala asks, "among the bustling Anglo-Saxons, almost breathless in their eagerness to travel the longest possible distance in the shortest possible time, would care to pay first-class fare for a trip to Manchester, which consumes ten mortal hours, when, by the space-scorning express, the distance may be accomplished, at a not unreasonable augmentation of fare, in something like five hours?"[9]

The proper comfort of travelling, he indicates, inheres thus less in the soft seats and quiet privacy of the first-class compartment

[8] George Augustus Sala, *Twice Round the Clock or the Hours of the Day and Night in London* (London, 1858), p. 61.

[9] Ibidem, p. 62.

and more in high speed and non-stop motion which can so considerably contract the journey. In economic terms then time turns out to be a more desirable and better-valued commodity. Indeed, when the Liverpool and Manchester company introduced the term class it was in order to discriminate between the fast and slow trains rather than between different types of accommodation available for passengers.[10] Express motion became a property of the well-off and an index of financial as well as social superiority. Perhaps not incidentally Sala dubs the fast train a "space-scorning express" — it is the engine itself that confidently and cavalierly manages time and space, but haughtiness is the attitude assumed by privileged passengers who, carried fast and comfortably to their destinations, think little of distance and less still of those who travel slowly. "What is the use of being in a hurry?" Sala checks the impatience of parliamentary train passengers anxious to start their journey, "you will have plenty of breathing-time at Tring, and Watford, and Weedon, and some five-and-twenty other stations, besides opportunities for observing the beauties of nature at remote localities, where you will be quietly shunted off on to a siding to allow the express to pass you by."[11] The fast train visibly asserts thus the priority which the prosperous classes take over the poor; if they get to their destination earlier, this is at the expense of third-class travellers whom the express, literally, forces off the track in order to gain time. The practice of shunting off functioned as yet another means of conveying the marginality of the parliamentary train with its load of socially inferior passengers. Obliged to give way, subject to occasional immobility and waiting, they were even less than any other class of the railway travellers not the masters of their movement or time.

As the rail passenger pays for time, he pays for the time the train takes as well as the time the train gives. In going from one place to another, at a specified speed, the train takes so long of one's time: depending on one's resources one has to prepare oneself

---

[10] J. Simmons, *The Victorian Railway...*, p. 359.

[11] G.A. Sala, *Twice Round the Clock...*, p. 63.

to resign or spend an adequate portion of it. But on the railway journey one is also offered or sold time, the train provides its passengers with its own time, as it were, time other than that defined by arrival and departure. Again, this inside time, the time inside the train, can be of different value, of various quality, of varied intensity. The slow train gives its passenger an uncomfortable time in that it has to be a shared time; the third-class passenger's slowness is busy since crammed with other passengers from whose presence one cannot easily or effectively distance oneself, nor take rest or shelter. Such slowness lacks privacy, one's time and space are undefined and hence always at the disposal of others, encroachable, and under threat of infringement. The poor traveller's journey entailed the perennial discomfort of exposedness. Thus there appears to be only one kind of slowness that was available to third-class passengers, the speed-and-stoppage slowness, which meant that in the course of the journey more of their time was taken. The time that was given did not feel gain in that as a communal, unprotected time it could not insulate the traveller and so create conditions in which the other, superior or luxurious, kind of slowness could originate. The latter was not an entirely impossible slowness, the train one travelled on could pick few people up and remain for some part of the journey largely empty, but if this emptiness occurred it was a windfall, a comfort one had no right to expect to obtain when paying a penny-a-mile fare.

Having some space to oneself, a small enclave of comfort and privacy, is the advantage which, among other privileges, is enjoyed by the wealthy traveller. Comfort, privacy, and speed are trademarks of the first-class journey, but all these conveniences are, like the event of transport itself, always affordable commodities, available to the wealthy order of society at a certain price. Much of the comfort afforded by the first-class journey is, more or less directly, related to speed. The direct and fast train takes less of the traveller's time, and so less of one's time is lost, but while the rich passenger gets speed, with it is enclosed slow time; time enclosed by the walls of the compartment, sheltered and upholstered time, time in which one can take one's own time and forget the railway

time of departures and arrivals. Such unharassed time one may find in the interior of the compartment and although this space is, in most instances, a shared space too, it does make privacy and solitude possible. One can claim it, or rather one is invited to take possession of it for the duration of the journey, there is always a clearly defined portion of it that one is entitled to.

As the following description demonstrates, the first-class traveller has at his disposal space which seems almost a replica of a sitting room, a space which is social, but which tries to guarantee as much privacy to each of its users as possible.

> The first-class passenger is accommodated with a spacious carriage, in which usually a separate seat is divided off for every passenger, the interior being luxuriously cushioned, lined, and carpeted. Convenient means of varying the ventilation at the will of the passenger are provided over the windows. A lamp is placed, in some of the best conducted railways, in the centre of the roof, with a reflector projecting the light downwards, which illuminates the carriage in passing through tunnels, and at night. In some railways, also, a heater is placed in cold weather in first-class carriages under the feet of the passengers, and other accommodations of minor importance are provided.[12]

Thus the gentle or wealthy traveller is placed in the compartment that is furnished in a way that is to make him feel almost at home: it is a fairly commodious and cosy space offering the passenger such comforts as only can be supplied on the train. Although evidently modelled on the interior of the coach, the train compartment by far surpasses it with its evident emphasis on softness and warmth, elegance or luxury even, which effect is created by the pervasive presence of upholstery, cushions, carpets, and padding. Such an interior feels homely and safe to the point of almost coddling one, making one less of a traveller. The train compartment extends to one the promise of relaxation, and so the experience which is a concluding act of travelling, the far end of it.

---

[12] D. Lardner, *Railway Economy...*, p. 85.

Repose becomes misplaced in that it is no longer a journey's supplement, a reward for travail, it is rather a premium one receives in recognition of one's social standing, and as such it can happen at any moment, it can even take the place of the journey. It is specifically in the velvety interior of the compartment that the rail passenger is made to forget his identity of the traveller; there any awareness of physical effort is locked out while one is asked to treat a journey as a spell of respite. For the first-class passenger travel can be a form of retreat: as one withdraws into the relative privacy of the compartment and, possibly, one withdraws into one's own self, one becomes oblivious of the outside. The journey is then a celebration of the inside; with the outside that eludes the eye and the grasp of the traveller, the immediate space of the train becomes the principal space of travelling. But it is also the space which at all costs tries to distance itself from the idea of travelling, which, in fact, is made to imply sedentariness, such as one associates with home, and, in particular, with the drawing room.

The need for privacy and isolation, and distrust of contact or conversation with strangers seem natural to the highbred order of travellers. "Some people are of isolated habits, but much of the love of isolation arises from refined temperament that cannot endure the coarseness more common amongst the gregarious,"[13] William Bridges Adams observed. Thus in the construction of the railway carriages account was taken of not only social and economic differences but also different aspects of human nature: passengers of various disposition should have at their disposal various accommodation. And so Adams proposed that on the train there should be "enclosed cabins or apartments for four persons each, for passengers wishing to be private, and open saloon would be provided for the gregariously disposed."[14]

Such attentive consideration was, however, paid only to first-class passengers: only they were believed to have a more delicate

[13] William Bridges Adams, *Roads and Rails and their Sequences, Physical and Moral* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862), p. 196.

[14] Ibidem, p. 184.

constitution and so were allowed sundry habits and predilections, all of which should be duly respected in the course of the railway journey. Towards third-class travellers a wholesale approach was adopted; conveniently enough, they all were assumed to belong to one and the same category of the gregariously disposed and thus were claimed to have no need for privacy or personal space. Open, that is not divided into discrete compartments, carriages to which they were allocated, or rather in which they were crowded together, best suited their more communicative, or, as Adams would perhaps imply, simply unrefined or uncouth nature.

The space of the third-class open carriage originally was indeed an unrefined space. As Dionysius Lardner goes down his classification of carriages, his descriptions shrink since perforce less and less space can be devoted to the presentation of accommodation which offers less and less space to its passengers. There is not much to be described not only because there is little space, but also because this space contains so little that to describe it one must simply enumerate what it does *not* have: "The carriages appropriated to third-class passengers are still more contracted in the space allowed for a given number of passengers. They are neither cushioned, lined, or carpeted, ventilated, nor illuminated, and in some cases are unprovided with any other means of closing the windows than wooden blinds or coarse curtains. These carriages are, however, usually roofed."[15] It seems then that the absence of comforts is compensated for by the presence of the roof, or perhaps the roof is elevated to the status of comfort. The roof over the poor traveller's head covers and seals up space, and as it completes it, it turns it into an inside. Complete with the roof, the carriage is a sheltered place, and although it is barely more than a shelter, and by far remains the worst class of accommodation available, it provides the minimum convenience as well as dignity to the poor who no longer approached the status of freight carried in open boxes. In the context of the railway journey the roof intimated a social upgrading, as it were, not only could one travel, but also one could travel as an insider.

---

[15] D. Lardner, *Railway Economy...*, p. 85.

Lardner's description applies to the mid-19th-century carriage, and it documents the state of the already improved accommodation. And yet it turns out impossible to mask the embarrassing plainness or poverty which never ceases to look the humble traveller in the face. To capture the extent of barrenness and comfortlessness of this interior it is necessary to inventory all its absent furnishings and so disfurnish it, list all the missing comforts and so expose its discomfort. But in his disclosure of discomfort Lardner does not seem to be too sympathetic to the privations suffered by the third-class traveller; one could say that since these inconveniences are defined as the absence of anything suggestive of extravagance and luxury, they are looked upon as endurable. It is as if the poor traveller could not expect the travelling space to be too different from his own plain habitation.

But one may also look at the third-class carriage as a replica of a poor district street in that it combines openness and congestion. Its openness means not so much spaciousness but rather extreme cramfulness:

> [...] what a contrast to the quietude of the scarcely-patronised first and second-class wagons are the great hearse-like caravans in which travel the teeming hundreds who can afford to pay but a penny a mile! [...] What a hurly-burly; what a seething mass; what a scrambling for places; what a shrill turmoil of women's voices and children's wailings, relieved [...] by the deep bass voices of gruff men! What a motley assemblage of men, women, and children, belonging to callings multifariously varied, yet all marked with the homogenous penny a mile stamp of poverty![16]

Differently from Lardner, who defined the third-class carriage in terms of its furnishings, or rather their scarcity, the quoted above Sala inscribes it within the more social dimension. While Lardner's carriage is so bare that also curiously passenger-free, Sala, to adequately express the character of such an interior, packs it with people, and packs it almost beyond its capacity. The dis-

[16] G.A. Sala, *Twice Round the Clock...*, p. 63.

comfort of the interior can best be apprehended through showing people in this space. Third-class travellers are, first and foremost, the Duke of Wellington's restless crowd: "a seething mass" confusedly penned into "great hearse-like caravans." The latter grim hyperbole — and so an imprecise, emotive statement — is about the only reference to space, the emphasis remains all the time on people, their number as well as their peculiar commotion suggestive of that of a throng in the street. Inasmuch as Sala conveys the impression of a congested multitude, more central to his representation of that assemblage is its restlessness, somewhat unusual for the standard concept of the railway passenger as one placed in a situation of mobile passivity. The third-class carriage is "teeming" and "seething" with motion and noise, is in a state of hurly-burly, whereby the movement of the train is supplemented by the more frantic mobility of those it contains and carries. Their mobility betokens competition, here exemplified as "a scrambling for places," which seems to be a predicament characteristic of the common people, conceived as an ever-restive, ever-striving crowd.

Despite their respective shift in focus Lardner's and Sala's descriptions of the third-class carriage share the principle of being constructed around the idea of the absence of either objects or qualities. It is as if the travelling conditions of common passengers could not be adequately rendered without the foil of the first-class journey. Sala ushers the reader into the third-class vehicle via the overt evocation of the superior space. In his description first comes "the quietude of the scarcely-patronised first and second-class wagons" with which the bustling third-class crowd is juxtaposed. Further differences multiply: besides the central contrast between quietude and noise, there are those between restfulness and scramble, dignity and humiliation, privacy and communality. To some the excessive communality of the third-class carriage signified the increased physical discomfort of the journey, others recognised, however, the emotional comfort with which such a crowded vehicle could provide a traveller. Even if the first-class isolation gratified the subtle tastes of the respectable passenger accustomed to privacy and tranquillity it could, nonetheless, give rise to anxi-

eties. Much as it sought to emulate the drawing-room outfitting and intimate ambience, the railway compartment remained a communal space, which one could not always secure entirely for one's exclusive use. While sharing any space with strangers could be a source of awkwardness and unease, the all-too complete seclusion of the railway compartment in a corridor-free carriage, could not but make the discomfort evolve into fear for one's safety.

Still, in Sala's description the noisiness of the crowded carriage constitutes an obvious disadvantage, it is one of numerous inconveniences to which the travelling lower classes were exposed. Sala does not conceal his sympathy for their discomfort; more, he clearly seeks to stir, however sentimentally, a feeling of compassion and embarrassment, or even compunction, in first-class readers and travellers:

> Ah! Judges of Amontillado sherry; crushers of walnuts with silver nut-crackers; connoisseurs who prefer French to Spanish olives, and are curious about the yellow seal; gay riders in padded chariots; proud cavaliers of blood-horses, you don't know how painfully and slowly, almost agonisingly, the poor have to scrape and save, and deny themselves the necessaries of life, to gather together the penny-a-mile fare.[17]

Yet in order to be solicited sympathy has to be particularised: directed at the poor at large it suffers, paradoxical though it may seem, dispersal and becomes an abstraction. Hence, Sala's atomisation of the crowd in which he briefly inventories its members, gives the concourse its faces, professions, identities. Thus broken up, it turns out to be an assemblage of rough yet essentially inoffensive people: sturdy but gentle towards women and little children fellows, journeymen mechanics carrying tool-baskets, Irish labourers or railway navvies.

But whenever the travelling poor are viewed *en masse* sympathy gives way to alarm. At such moments of comprehensive survey Sala, however inadvertently, invests the plebeian crowd

[17] Ibidem, pp. 61–62.

with a menacing aspect as he looks upon it, or rather down on it because of his assumed role of Asmodeus, not without awe. Collective expressions deployed to denote the poor travellers: "teeming hundreds," "human menageries," "hurly-burly" point to strength residing in their numbers. Perhaps the most powerful of these images is that of the third-class crowd as the "seething mass" filling the interior of the carriage, which puts one in mind of the formidable energy for the time being repressed and controlled, not unlike that of the steam engine itself, apparently domesticated yet always threatening with an explosion. When in his description Sala moves between the images of the crowd as a whole and as an atomised assortment, he also moves between different responses to it as he veers from vociferous dismay at the treatment of the poor to the muted, yet still discernible, apprehension of their might. This might he realises in a glimpse when the moment of departure approaches: "the train bell rings; there is a rush, and a trampling of feet, and in a few seconds the vast hall is almost deserted."[18] The brief scene becomes a powerful and unnerving demonstration of the efficient mobility of the apparently amorphous and clumsy assemblage: with an impressive ease, in a trice, the crowd mobilises itself into a unity, flashes its inner discipline. Only a moment ago a dispersed and desultory farrago, it now closes its ranks and becomes a purposeful homogeneous body. In such a form it functions in the consciousness of the polite observer as a dangerous other from whom a prudent distance had better be retained. Unsurprisingly, even at the moments of overt sympathy Sala's interest in the third-class does not go so far as to tempt him into experiencing the physical proximity of the populace. Indignant as he may be at its lot, he would still go by express.

Yet some mingling of the classes on the train did happen. Some privileged travellers would wistfully glance at the open carriage longing for the excitement they associated with its clamour. A journey amid the noisy poor could have thus the value of an adventure: a third-class carriage could provide a thrilling diversion from the quiet and insipid respectability of the compartment. Once the

---

[18] Ibidem, p. 62.

railway turned travelling into a regular and predictable business, efficient to the point of perfection, an adventure, once an almost inherent element of travelling, became an unlikely occurrence. As it became impossible for the traveller to get lost and chance on the unknown territory when carried by a reliable conveyance so well fixed to its path, perhaps the only possibility of lostness and experiencing the unfamiliar could be offered by a deliberate excursion into a socially alien space of the third-class carriage. For one whose senses got pampered by the so quiet that almost sterile interior of the compartment and whom comfort and leisure drove to ennui, the third-class carriage could be an attractive interlude, serving to relieve boredom and also satisfying one's thirst for variety. Indeed, the comfortable and polite monotony of the compartment offers little by way of diversion.

Not so the third-class carriage where one may socially lose oneself "in the midst of drunken sailors singing, big fat peasants sleeping with their mouths open like those of dead fish, little old ladies with their baskets, children, fleas, wet-nurses, the whole paraphernalia of the carriage of the poor with its odour of pipe smoke, brandy, garlic sausage and wet straw."[19] The poor from Alphonse Daudet's carriage are not so much poor as simply picturesque in their strangeness; the poverty he encounters bears a genial, picture-postcard rather than ominous, aspect largely through the emphasis placed on variety. The third-class carriage impresses the stray other-class traveller, above all, with the diversity of human figures and objects filling the space to capacity as well as with the overpowering medley of new sounds and smells. Consequently, it seems to invite a different attitude towards fellow-travellers in that its crowdedness endorses one's open interest in those one shares space with as it facilitates a more manifest, unembarrassed observation. Within its confused interior one's gaze can roam freely from one person or object to another since the etiquette of the third-class,

[19] Alphonse Daudet, "La petite chose." Quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey. Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Anselm Hollo (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 82.

much accustomed to communal living, does not disallow curiosity. The attractiveness of the carriage consists further in the physical proximity of other travellers, an experience from which the polite passenger has been weaned. Although small, cosy and potentially intimate, the interior of the comfortable compartment did not bring first-class passengers together since it allotted to each of them a clearly defined seat, provisionally at least separating one from the others. This insistence on however nominal privacy communicates an essentially modern attitude which consists in social reticence or restraint: through silence and elimination of touch, one takes shelter in oneself and so manifests one's autonomy, a token independence within the social system in which the act of travelling on a public conveyance involves one. Thus the refined passenger's escapade into a third-class carriage would become, even though it might escape his awareness, a reversion to what had been a more common practice. But although an instance of an unacknowledged social atavism, it was primarily a frivolous breach of convention in pursuit of different experiences. While it is the others of the third-class carriage that are the professed object of the vagary, after all the jaded passenger gives up the tedium of his compartment so as to see and hear *them*, it still for the sake of *his* sensory satisfaction that he undertakes it. Only apparently does he then exercise his more comprehensive or generous social aspect since in the last analysis the third-class adventure means a selfish enterprise in which he responds to his own emotional demands.

So when Daudet concludes his description on a nostalgic note: "I think I'm still there," he regrets less the poor amongst whom he sat than his own state of excitement occasioned by their company and unavailable in his more customary, polite setting. His third-class journey is a gentleman's flirtation with the other class, done primarily in the hope of a *frisson* to be had from rubbing shoulders with commonalty. Such a venture into the open noisy carriage resembles De Quincey's travels on the box of the coach, which mode of journeying, although out of his class as well as because of this very fact, was prized for its promise of sensations from which the passenger travelling in comfort was debarred.

When De Quincey viewed "the different apartments" available to coach-travellers he disregarded the obvious criterion of comfort, instead considering their capacity for sensory experience and adventure. In so doing he turned them inside out as he ascertained the "incommunicable advantages" of the rough outside never to be foregone by a true traveller. If on the coach journey the thrill belonged to the outside and meant "the air, the freedom of prospect, the proximity to the horses, the elevation of seat [...] but, above all, the certain anticipation of purchasing occasional opportunities of driving"[20] on the train it would be provided by the inside in its most extreme form, that is to say the most congested vehicle of the lowest class.

[20] T. De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach...," p. 186.

Małgorzata Nitka

„Trzeci" w pociągu. Klasowy porządek podróży w XIX wieku

Streszczenie

Autor przedstawia relacje pomiędzy kategorią klasy a podróżowaniem w XIX wieku. Z jednej strony kolej, która zrewolucjonizowała ówczesny transport, można postrzegać jako sprzyjającą demokratyzacji podróży, ponieważ umożliwiła stosunkowo tanie przemieszczanie się na znaczące odległości niższym warstwom, jednak z drugiej strony kolej rygorystycznie przestrzegała obowiązującego porządku społecznego. Rozmaite kategorie pociągów (lub przedziałów) stanowiły wyraźne odwzorowanie struktury brytyjskiego społeczeństwa: jego trzem zasadniczym klasom odpowiadały trzy klasy (w) pociągu.

W centrum rozważań znajduje się podróż wagonem trzeciej klasy, charakteryzująca się wszelkiego rodzaju niedogodnościami, zarówno w zakresie czasu, jak i warunków podróży: ślamazarne tempo, stłoczenie w wagonach bez przedziałów, a w początkowym okresie upowszechniania się kolei i bez dachu, ustawiczny hałas. Mimo tych oczywistych uciążliwości, dla niektórych pasażerów wyższej kategorii wagon trzeciej klasy, społecznie i kulturowo obcy, stanowił atrakcyjną przestrzeń inności, w którą zapuszczali się w poszukiwaniu doznań nieosiągalnych w eleganckich i wygodnych przedziałach. W tych specyficznych eskapadach, stanowiących jednostronne przekraczanie granic klasy, można dostrzec swoistą tęsknotę za przygodą, odmianą i urozmaiceniem, niemal integralnymi elementami podróżowania w epoce przedindustrialnej, a coraz bardziej niedostępnymi w czasach, gdy postęp techniczny narzucił podróży żelazną dyscyplinę.

Małgorzata Nitka

Der „Dritte" im Zug. Die Klassenreiseordnung im 19.Jh.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel zeigt Relationen zwischen der Klassenkategorie und dem Reisen im 19.Jh. Die Eisenbahn, die den damaligen Transport revolutioniert hat, hat bestimmt zur Demokratisierung der Reise beigetragen, weil sie auch den niedrigeren Gesellschaftsschichten eine verhältnismäßig billige Verlagerung auf erhebliche Entfernungen ermöglicht hat. Andererseits aber beachtete sie streng die damals geltende Gesellschaftsordnung. Es wurden verschiedenartige Kategorien der Züge, der Abteile und der Passagiere eingeführt, die die Struktur der britischen Gesellschaft genau widerspiegelten: den drei grundlegenden Gesellschaftsklassen entsprachen die drei Eisenbahnklassen.

Der Verfasser befasst sich vor allem mit der Reise der dritten Klasse, die mit vielen Unbequemlichkeiten (träges Tempo, großes Gedränge in abteillosen und manchmal auch dachlosen Wagen, ständiger Lärm) verbunden war. Trotz aller diesen Beschwerlichkeiten war der Wagon der dritten Klasse, obwohl auch gesellschaftlich und kulturell fremd, für manche Reisende der besseren Kategorie ein attraktiver Andersartigkeitsraum, den sie in der Suche nach den, in ihren eleganten und bequemen Abteilen unerreichbaren Empfindungen, betraten. In diesen spezifischen Eskapaden, die als einseitige Überschreitung der Klassengrenze betrachtet wurden, erkennt man eine Sehnsucht nach Abenteuer, Änderung und Abwechslung, die in der vorindustriellen Epoche wesentliche Elemente des Reisens waren und dann, zur Zeit des technischen Fortschritts, als die Reise mit strenger Disziplin verbunden war, immer unzugänglicher waren.