CHAPTER 1
Romantic Walking and Railway Realism

Rachel Bowlby

I would like to start off with some words about Rousseau's walking. It may seem perverse to begin by returning to a moment that is before, not after, the period of Romanticism: by going backwards into some pre-Romantic place of thought, when the whole direction of the topic of this book is for an onward movement beyond or after Romanticism. However, in a certain sense we can see that Rousseau is not only proto-Romantic in the widely acknowledged sense of having directly inspired or furthered some of the thinking that came to be called Romantic. He is also, on the topic of walking that I am about to consider, post-Romantic as well. But I do not want to get ahead of myself, and I will explain that in a little while. First of all, let us look at one or two passages from the *Confessions* (1782), where Rousseau speaks of his passion for walking and his preference for that mode of travel. In other words, let us look at legs before legacies.

Rousseau (1977) is speaking, in relation to his own life, about the absence of a legacy, of a tangible written record of what has meant most; but he is also supplying just that in now setting down a statement of what, he says, has been lost. Here is what he says:

> The thing I most regret in the details of my life that are lost to memory is not having kept journals of my journeys. Never have I so much thought, so much existed, so much lived, so much been me, if I can put it like that, as in the journeys I made on my own and on foot. Walking has something that animates and brings to life my ideas; I can barely think when I stay in one place; my body has to be in motion for my mind to be put in it [*pour y mettre mon esprit*]. (215)

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Here the stationary body precludes thinking; but the thinking, moving body precludes writing—writing it *down*, as English curiously puts it. For writing, you need to be sitting (or sitting *down*): there is an absence of movement and therefore (in Rousseau's terms) an absence of thinking: "I can barely think when I stay in one place; my body has to be in motion for my mind to be put in it." Later in the passage he elaborates further on this tension between walking and writing, referring to the splendid sights he has seen and the wonderful thoughts he has thought. He stages a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor: "'Why not write them down?' you will say. And why write them down, I will reply: why take from myself the present charm of enjoyment in order to tell other people that I have enjoyed [*que j'ai joui*]?" (215). (This, by the way, goes against the post-post-Romantic logic of social media, in which there is implicitly a pleasure of its own in telling other people that you have enjoyed or are enjoying, or "liking": and by implication, that the representation and publication of one's enjoyment takes precedence over the enjoying itself, or is already a component of it.)

So Rousseau makes walking a pre-condition of imaginative thinking—with the two brought together in a solitary and pleasurable activity. But walking is also explicitly set above other modes of travel. Planning a journey to see his beloved Madame de Wahrens, Rousseau refuses the opportunity of going on horseback, even though he has the money to pay for it: "I couldn't agree, and I was right: I would have lost the pleasure of the last journey on foot that I made in my life; for I cannot give that name to the excursions I often used to make in my neighbourhood, when I was living at Motier" (226). Here Rousseau compares two modes of travel for a journey that has a fixed end. He is going to a specific destination for a specific purpose, which is to see the woman he calls Maman. But at the same time, the reason for preferring

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walking to riding is that walking goes against the teleology of a definite end, and thus against the subordination of the journey itself to its destination. He says:

> I am, in recounting my journeys, the way I was in making them; I couldn't arrive. My heart was beating with joy when I was approaching my dear Maman, and I wasn't going any faster. I like walking at leisure, and stopping when I please. The ambling life is the one for me. To travel on foot in beautiful weather in beautiful country, in no hurry, and to have a pleasant object as the end-point of my way [*course*]: that of all the modes of living is the one that is most to my taste. (227)

An absence of haste, no speeding up when in sight of the end: this is the mark of the happy walk, of the superiority of walking over the alternative method of travel. Speed is precisely not the criterion for choosing between the two ways: or rather, speed, which makes the time of arrival more important than the journey, carries a negative value. It makes the journeying itself into a matter of quantifiable distance and time, to be abbreviated as far as possible. There is a pleasurable anticipation in the prospect of seeing Maman at the end of the journey, but there is no rush to get to her, and every advantage in enjoying the different places encountered *en route*.

Those places along Rousseau's route, by the way—and literally "by the way"—are just what we associate with the landscapes of the Romantics, with the opposition of the sublime and the beautiful that Edmund Burke brought into view:

> Never did a flat region, however beautiful it was, appear so in my view. I have to have torrents, rocks, willows, black woodlands, mountains, paths that are resistant [*raboteux*] to climb and to come down, and precipices right next to me that make me really afraid. I had

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> this pleasure, and I tasted it in all its charm when I was getting near to
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> Chambéry. (227)

Torrents, rocks, willows, black woodlands, mountains, precipices: this sounds like a checklist of the dramatic painterly landscape of the sublime. In Rousseau's experience, however, the "pleasure" and even more the "charm" seem also bound up with the anticipated return to the familiarity of the safe maternal place at the end of the journey.

1.

But now, after passing the leisurely time of day with Rousseau as he slowly moves on his own two legs through his romantically rocky terrains, we will have to speed up. We will have to leap over the moment of Romanticism itself. We cannot do this on foot, not by fisherman's hook or shepherd's crook, and so we will have to make use of the mode of transport eschewed by Rousseau and instead avail ourselves of an exceptionally well-endowed steed. We have to do it this way because as yet, at this time, there is no other possible way to go. We could try the stagecoach, which would be faster than mounting a horse of our own—but that is a horse-drawn vehicle, too. What we are waiting for, really, and this is the reason for the return to Rousseau, for the journey back to Romantic nest-eggs rather than Romantic legacies—what we are waiting for is the train. Once the train arrives and becomes established as part of the landscape, actually and metaphorically; once the train is a normal way of getting around, and once the countryside is covered with bridges and viaducts and cuttings and embankments and lines of carriages rolling across the valley—then the whole meaning of walking is changed. Walking ceases to be a mode of travel that is somewhat slower than a horse, but still a viable option if there is a journey to be

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made. Instead—like the horse as well—it belongs in a different travelling orbit from what has become the customary way of getting from one place to another. If you want to go from London to Birmingham, you are going to go by train; in fact it is *because* you can go by train, within a single day, that you might have the idea of making that journey at all. Rural walking is no longer likely to serve for other than short, local journeys. But on the other hand, and for the same reason, walking can now take on the leisurely, solitary, experiential qualities that Rousseau was already celebrating and enjoying long before the first puff of a steam engine had made its appearance on the horizon. In that sense, Rousseau the philosopher of walking is already post-Romantic: in celebrating the pleasures of slow pedestrian movement he is writing, or walking, for the age of the train.

Just as the period of Romantic art and philosophy was drawing to a close, or coming to an end—in textbook form, it has often been presented as something like a colourful performance—two things happened which, in retrospect, appear to have marked this termination with needle-sharp punctuality. We are in the 1820s. In Britain, the very first trains set off, with the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in the northeast of England, in 1825, the first railway in the world. (There has always been a certain amount of dispute, by the way, about what constitutes a railway, or a railroad, whether in terms of the material method of carriage—the rails themselves, and the rolling stock—or in terms of the framework of regularity and public service provision, for carrying goods or people. But certainly it is generally agreed that it was in the late 1820s, and in the north of England, that what quickly came to be understood as the railways got started.)[1] This is the first post-Romantic event. The second occurred across the Channel in Paris, in 1826, when a writer in a short-lived literary periodical called *Le Mercure du XIX^{è} siècle* (*Mercury of the 19th*

Century) threw out a new word for a new phenomenon. That word was realism (or rather, *le réalisme*). Realism was defined as a "literary doctrine . . . which would lead to the imitation not of artistic masterpieces but of the originals that nature offers us." He then suggested that there were indications that such a practice might turn out to be "the literature of the nineteenth century, the literature of truth" (quoted in Hemmings 1974, 9-10)

As if to highlight and confirm the significance of the juxtaposition of realism and the train, F. W. J. Hemmings (1974), writing in the middle of the twentieth century, began a book about the first of them with the words: "The Age of Realism was the age of railways" (9). Admittedly, this is not the end of the sentence, which reads in full: "The Age of Realism was the age of railways and of wireless telegraphy and of countless other mechanical inventions that collectively revolutionised the nature of society and the quality of human life within a short span of time" (9). But the railways are first in that list, and there is a kind of lilting alliteration, anti-realistic in its way, which softly links the two words with their shared Rs and Ls, as if sending you to sleep for an overnight journey with the naturalness of their association.

Both of these phenomena, realism and the railways, with their small beginnings in the 1820s, were destined to leave a defining mark on the cultural and intellectual history of the nineteenth century (and beyond). And both, in their different ways, appear to be leaving Romanticism far behind—without, it might be said, so much as a backward glance. By their very differences from it, they help to shed light on how Romanticism itself has come to be defined and understood: they provide, as it were, a kind of post-life of Romanticism in the sense of both a reaction to it and a diversion away from it. That is to say, they take it in new directions, and at the same time they leave it in the background. In this first description, we can immediately see

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how railways and realism are unromantic, are anything but "Romantic" legacies—except insofar as they could be said to represent a rejection of Romanticism, or at least a turn away from it. This is directly the case with realism, which is an artistic and intellectual movement that consciously goes against Romanticism; and obliquely with the railways, which represent the triumph of a certain kind of practical enterprise and straight-line rationality, in another world from the ideals of the Romantics.

2.

Let us pursue a little further the analogy between realism and railways, in order to bring out just how well they seem to complement one another in their post-Romantic pairing, as though they had arisen along perfectly laid out parallel lines, thrusting themselves forwards into the future and far away from the mists and myths of romance and Romanticism. There is something about that smoothly fitting coupling of Rs and Ls, rolling along together, that suggests that they might have been made for each other—or at least, made alongside each other, as mid-nineteenth-century products or offshoots of the that earlier R, Romanticism—along with many other industrial and artistic parents, too numerous and multifarious to mention.

For after their small, not very significant starts in the 1820s, realism and the railways both became prominent and proudly indicative of a nineteenth-century modern world. Thousands of miles of rail track had been laid across Britain by the early 1840s, by thousands of labourers called navvies doing backbreaking and lung-wrecking work, and by numerous companies that were rapidly set up, drawing on wealthy investors and also making new fortunes. By that time the railway was established as a mode of transport for human beings as well as for the goods which it had first been designed to move (the popularity of the train as a people-carrier was a

surprise of its first decade in existence). The railway was the first form of "mass" transport, with a capacity for carrying many, many more bodies than the old horse-driven stagecoaches which it superseded.

This phenomenal increase of scale went along with an equally dramatic increase of speed. The time taken for a journey is not a new question, as we saw in relation to Rousseau and the question of riding versus walking. But the railways changed the scale of speed out of all recognition: in effect they changed the world, because they connected places, as possible destinations from one to the other, which would have previously been impossibly far away from each other in travelling time. Thus railways brought into being the modern compacting of geographical space to the point that places that had been several days' journey apart became accessible to one another at a distance of an hour or two. And simultaneously they inaugurated a new kind of time, a regimented and homogeneous timetable time, called "railway time." This even took over from spatial measurement as an expression of the gap between two places: so you might say that London is "five hours" from Edinburgh, rather than four hundred miles.

Realism, meanwhile, was making its own inroads into the literary world. Like the railways in another mode, it was branching out along new narrative lines that changed the face of the literary landscape from what it had been. Realism became a prominent international movement, within Europe especially in France and French-influenced countries (such as Portugal). Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the term was invoked in relation to authors such as Balzac, Flaubert, Sand, and Zola, with fierce arguments about who was or was not a realist, and who did or did not desire or agree to be called one. In Britain, the word itself was not so commonly used as a point of either identification or repudiation, but the general trend

of narrative discussion was towards a consensus that the representation of ordinary life was what novels should now be doing, and in the 1850s there was a forceful promotion of realism, called by that name, particularly in the pages of the *Westminster Review*, and particularly on the part of the critics such as G. H. Lewes. The industrial novels of the 1840s and 1850s—from Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) to Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854)—were thematically at the forefront of the new direction away from idealization or "romance," and towards a representation of the modern working world. These novels were urban without being metropolitan (Manchester, not London); and they are certainly not rural or romantic. They presented regions of life that had hitherto had no place on the literary map: the working classes, the industrial cities, the factory world. They made visible previously unseen worlds to a middle-class readership, and there was often a sense of an educational or consciousness-raising mission.

This realist extension of the view, of knowledge of the world "around" us, is comparable to what the railways brought about in their own domain. The new railway network would eventually create a complete map of the British Isles, not to mention the rest of Europe and ultimately most of the rest of the world. Realism is a comparable practice of charting the territory. It brings into representational sight all kinds of place and practice and person that had not been considered appropriate artistic subjects before. Both developments can be seen as forms of *expansion* in a positive and not necessarily imperialistic sense (though the building of colonial railways was certainly very much part of an imperial project). They equalize and they level. All regions, all people, all ways of life are potentially open to the new mode of realist representation. Individual places are understood as points on a network, stops on the line, any one of which is open to arrival or departure on the same basis as all

Comment [MOU1]: I have changed this because all the punctuation seems to have been Americanized, so presumably the spelling needs to be too?

the others. At the same time, their particular qualities, whatever their place in a hierarchy of social privilege, are accorded a new kind of value.

With realism, there are no longer just certain categories of people and certain milieux—the upper classes and their lives—that are deemed to be worth attention. And with railways, anyone and everyone is free to buy a ticket and board the train. (I leave to one side, for the purpose of this part of the argument, the discrimination of passengers into first class, second class, and so on; which in the early decades did tend to correspond quite closely to the existing differences of social class. You would not have bought a ticket that did not reflect your "place" in the world outside the train. So in this sense, railway ticket classifications operated in a very different way from the equally divided airline distinctions of today, which are much more a matter of what you are able to pay—or how many "miles" you have previously notched up—than of some notion of an unchanging status or "station": a curious word!) The accessibility of railways meant, in practice, that people started to move around the country in unprecedented numbers—and they moved, in most cases, for pleasure: this was the first age of lower-class leisure travel. In England, the Great Exhibition of 1851 is the landmark moment here, when no fewer than six million people (out of a population of 27 million) visited the Crystal Palace in south London, travelling in special "excursion" trains.

So the railways, neutrally bringing together distant and virtually unconnected areas, also convey their inhabitants away from home. People are no longer so likely to remain where they live all year round; nor are places, as they used to be, set apart from one another in isolation and uniqueness, each its own locality, unmarked in relation to others. Instead, the people are now passengers, and the places have become stations.

But there are other ramifications, other branch lines, which complicate this preliminary sketch of the changes. In many instances, the stations were built at a distance from an existing village or town, whether for reasons of land availability (it was not always possible to purchase the sections needed) or because the terrain made it difficult to run the train through the place where the people lived. This could result in the development of new towns and villages that grew up around the stations themselves, and in some cases took over priority from the original settlement where the station had failed to be built. In other cases, the situation of a town might change anyway, just because (for whatever reason) the new railway lines had missed it out. The French Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval (1972) has a passage about such places in his Rousseauesque memoir, *Promenades et souvenirs* (1854-1855):

> If I could do a bit of good along the way, I would try to draw some attention to these poor abandoned [*délaissées*] towns from which the railways have diverted the traffic and the life. They sit sadly on the débris of their bygone fortune, and are focused on themselves, casting a disenchanted gaze at the marvels of a civilisation that condemns them or forgets them. (76)

This thought is prompted by the condition of the town of Saint-Germain, which has made him think of another town, Senlis; such backward places, with their illusionless personified stare at the modern world that has left them behind, and condemned them to anachronism, can be treated, collectively, as a type: "these poor abandoned towns." Nerval, it is touching to read, here presents himself as an eccentric sympathiser with places like these, recounting how he insisted on spurning the railway and going by the old road—taking much longer and costing much more—to visit his friend in Brussels. The friend is none other than the famous writer Dumas, so there may be a touch of

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name-dropping going on, but this is nonetheless a delightful anecdote about the altered significance of a slower old mode of travel in the context of the speedier new one. The memoir was written in 1854, which gives some sense of how quickly the railways had established themselves as the dominant mode of transport, and how radically they had altered the sense of place in the areas that they affected:

> I like going against the railways, and Alexandre Dumas, whom I accuse of a bit of embroidery recently on the subject of my youthful follies, has accurately said that I spent two hundred francs and took a week to go and see him in Brussels, by the old Flanders road—and in spite of the northern line railway. (76)

The eclectic Nerval, quite proudly reporting his eccentricity, comes over here as something like the equivalent of a twentieth-century railway buff: in the age when the railway itself was the new technology and it is the older modes of transport that are perversely clung to and enjoyed for their aura of old-world charm. We could also note that from another point of view Nerval looks like a precocious manifestation of a man in touch with the many options on offer from Google directions: the one who, when given the choice between 28 minutes by car and 3 hours 45 minutes by train and bus, will be sure to pick the second.

As early as 1842, just ten years into the new developments, Balzac (1951) begins his short novel *Un début dans la vie* (*A Start in Life*) with a comparable reflection about the changes the railway is making to the situation of the towns it either visits or passes by. In this case, the narrator is looking back twenty years to the time of the novel's setting, and also looking forwards to a future in which the early 1820s will be even further behind:

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The railways, in a future which today is not very distant, must bring about the disappearance of some industries, and modify others, above all those that involve the different modes of transport in use for the Paris region. As a result, soon the people and things that are the elements of this story [*Scène*] will give it the value of an archaeological work. The next generation will be delighted, won't they, to get to know the social material of a period that they will call the olden days? (600)

This striking passage, which is the very beginning of this "beginning" novel—lays out three points on a straightforward journey through the years in which the "elements" of the present narrative, scientifically denominated, will have been reconfigured according to a schema which is predictable, now, at the middle stage. At this present moment, the development of the railways is already underway, and the line of its progress, before and after this midpoint, is projected into a future retrospective summary in which the beginning, the pre-railway time of the story, will be seen at once scientifically and nostalgically: an archaeological work, or *travail*, on the one hand, and on the other the olden days, *le vieux temps*.

Balzac thus begins *Un début dans la vie* with his adumbration of a railway story that is both abstract, in that it can be analysed into its elements, and subjective, in that it takes on different colours and associations for different generations. There is a presumption of social change, meaning a change in the modes and norms of perception and everyday understanding, as well as a change in the outer forms, the external "material," in which a given social subject can be found. In the passage from Nerval, the same point emerges through a description not of change, but of stasis. Nerval (1972) describes the stationless town of Pontoise like this:

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Pontoise is another of those towns situated at a height, which I like because of their patriarchal appearance, their walks, their views, and the conservation of certain ways [*moeurs*] that are no longer found elsewhere. Here there is still playing in the street, and conversation, and singing in the evening in front of the doorways; the restaurateurs are *pâtissiers*; there is a feeling of family life in their establishments. . . . The church is beautiful and perfectly maintained. Nearby a shop selling Parisian novelties is lit up, and its young female assistants are alive and laughing like the ones in M. Scribe's play, *La Fiancée*. . . . For me, what makes the charm of small towns that are a little abandoned [*abandonnées*] is that I recover in them something of the Paris of my youth. The appearance of the houses, the shape of the shops, certain habits, some customs. . . . From this point of view, if Saint-Germain recalls 1830, Pontoise recalls 1820. (77; first ellipsis mine)

At first sight, such a passage resembles any number of scenes in Romantic literature in which a speaker encounters a ruin or deserted dwelling which is a sign of human loss; it evokes the lives and the death of those who once lived within its bounds and for Wordsworth, for instance, in "The Deserted Cottage" (1858), it is a prompt for a whole story of the people who are encountered in their absence now from a place which is itself no longer the place it was. Superficially, by the use of the word "abandoned"—*abandonné* in this passage, and *délaissé*, left behind, in the passage cited before—the structure is the same. It is as if we are confronted with a ruin or wreck, in which lives were once lived but are lived no more. But in fact, the contrary is the case. For Pontoise is still Pontoise, still a place where children are growing up

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(there they are, playing on the streets), where would-be fashionable articles are sold in a *magasin de nouveautés*, and where there are restaurants to eat in. There is not even a suggestion that any of these activities are in decline; instead, everything is going on just as it was several decades before when the speaker was young. The power of the passage, then, is that it makes the town appear in a new light: appear outdated and old-fashioned, that is, in the context of the new world that now passes it by. It is as if it is no longer real, as if it is only a replica or performance of what it once was; but in fact nothing has changed, and it is precisely this non-changing aspect, in a world which is now all about change and movement, which casts Pontoise in its anachronistic role.

We are coming to the end of this preliminary excursion through the terrain which brings together those two great nineteenth-century inventions of realism and the railways. And until now I have barely hinted at one feature which associates them all the way, as it were: and that is the fact that both of them run on straight lines—to the greatest possible extent, in the case of the railway, and in the form of that much-maligned "linear" narrative in the case of realism. The first use of the term railway "line" that the *OED* records is in July 1836, with a quotation from the *Times* newspaper: "The Duke of Richmond presented a petition . . . against Cundy's Brighton railway line." Railways were constructed with minimal bends and minimal hills: as far as possible, for reasons of economy and safety, they kept to the straight and narrow and level. A realist narrative, meanwhile, like a railway journey, is supposedly straight and regular. You know where you are with it (so it is said), and you know where you're going because it will be clearly announced or signposted: no labyrinthine or gothic mysteries in a realist narrative. The world is a visible and visitable place, just as it is on the train.

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Nerval's sense of the old towns left behind and becoming backwaters when they did not have a railway station draws on the juxtaposition, in the real world, of two sorts of place, those on a line and those not, or the towns and villages with stations and those without one. In turn, that local doubling or clash is linked with the temporal movement from the world before the railways and the world of the later time of writing. Senlis, Saint-Germain, and the rest have become old towns in the present, not because their buildings have aged, but because a new development, both physical and symbolic, has put them in the shade—or off the map. In their topographical separation they are also consigned to a contemporary demotion, in relation to a line of progress that has taken over as the default way of seeing. And it is not simply that some kind of new standard has superseded an older one. The trains confirmed a historically unprecedented sense of perpetual movement and change: of the displacement of one kind of settlement, one way of life, by another. That model of historical movement, of a line of progress and a speed of change, was the new world—and time—that the railways brought with them.

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Existing places and ways of life are not only seen as left out or abandoned in the wake of railway realities, however. They may also find themselves strangely yoked to the new possibilities and constraints of what the English novelist Thomas Hardy (2008), in just such a context, calls "modern life" (204). In *Tess of the D'Urbevilles* (1891), Tess and Angel Clare are in a vehicle with the wonderful name of a "spring-waggon" (202), pulled by a horse. They are on their way to the local train station, and the wagon is carrying churns of milk that has just been collected from the cows at the dairy farm where they work. At the station the milk will be uploaded onto a passing

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train and carried to the capital city in time for tomorrow morning's doorstep deliveries. This juxtaposition of the age-old and the modern at the station represents the meeting, momentarily and daily, of two places and two historical times, and Hardy makes this explicit. Here, as the wagon makes its way along the lane, Tess and Angel are getting close to their destination:

> They crept along towards a point in the expanse of shade just at hand at which a feeble light was beginning to assert its presence; a spot where, by day, a fitful white streak of steam at intervals upon the dark green background denoted intermittent moments of contact between their secluded world and modern life. (202)

Because it involves a sign that appears against a landscape background, this view bears a first-sight resemblance to the famous episode in Greek mythology when Theseus's father tragically hurls himself over the cliff because his son returning from Crete and his fight with the Minotaur has forgotten to put out the sign of victory. As the ship comes into view, the father sees what he thinks is the token of his son's death, the absence of a white sail. In reality, though, Theseus in his happy haste has simply forgotten what he had said he would do. The story can be taken as suggesting an insidiously binary logic of human interpretation such that, in this case, what is not there—the white sail—takes precedence over the comforting sight of what is, the ship rounding the horizon.

In Hardy's passage, rather than a one-off sign (or a one-off absence of a specific sign), there is a regular visible incursion into an otherwise natural view, and this white stream of steam, as real in its way as Theseus's missing white sail, is taken as a settled and repeated sign that both separates and brings together the two realms that Hardy calls first, "modern life" and second, "their secluded world." But of course,

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as with Nerval's towns "left behind," it is a world that only appears to be secluded from the perspective of the modern. The passage continues:

> Modern life stretched out its steam feeler to this point three or four times a day, touched the native existences, and quickly withdrew its feeler again, as if what it touched had been uncongenial. (204)

Now we have a (literally) touching metamorphosis of the steam train into a primitive organism. But this is not the monster of size or fearfulness that one might expect from such a likeness. Here the associations are not, as they so inescapably are in Zola's railway novel, *La Bête humaine* (*The Human Beast*), published the year before *Tess*, with a savage bestial power; but rather with the softness of what is called a "feeler," a word that is not even moderately formalized into the zoological Latin of an *antenna*. Modern life, in the form of this gentle giant, enters and quickly withdraws, and it does this over and over again. It is as if the strange contiguity of the old and the modern is being endlessly re-enacted or re-presented in the form of this particular sign of the white flare against the "dark green background."

If this looks painterly, a passage a little further on verges on the cinematic in the way that it poses the woman dramatically caught in the flare, as "the light of the engine flashed for a second upon Tess Durbeyfield's figure" (205). On the one hand, there is the slow motion of the rhythmic journey in the cart to get to the station: a journey which, Hardy tells us, proceeds at "walking pace" because it is getting dark, and in which there are no sounds to be heard but "the smack of the horse's hoofs on the moistening road, and the cluck of the milk in the cans behind them" (204); that delightful homely "cluck" of the cans is itself, like a farmyard echo, repeated from an earlier phrase on the way.[2] Sometimes, the two of them, Tess and Angel, are shown as if lulled towards another kind of existence, outside and before human time. They are

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travelling along a lane where ripe clusters of blackberries and hazelnuts hang from the hedgerow branches, there for the plucking. It is all theirs, and for this moment it is as if they are in paradise, where the food offers itself without toil, and where there is no other human soul to be seen apart from the two of them.

But the distinction between old times and modern times is not consistent with the simple difference between rural Wessex and urban London. The journey with the milk was begun when the dairyman looked at his "heavy watch" (201) and realised the time was later than he thought. The agricultural world is from this point of view fully incorporated into the larger world of trains and their timings, and of mechanical devices that enable each person to remain functionally connected to that system.

Hardy deploys Tess herself as a commentator on the distance between the two worlds and the speed with which it is crossed by the train:

> Tess was so receptive that the few minutes of contact with the whirl of material progress lingered in her thought.
>
> 'Londoners will drink it at their breakfasts to-morrow, won't they?' she asked. 'Strange people, that we have never seen.' (205)

This is the line of reciprocal imagining that brings "strange" Londoners into Tess's consciousness at the same time as she herself is an alien in comparison to the locomotive: she "could not have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels" (205). Her word "Londoners"—she gives them quite an upbeat modern label—is then childishly amplified as she expands them into "Noble men and noble women—ambassadors and centurions—ladies and tradeswomen—and babies who have never seen a cow" (205); Angel teases her about the centurions, but as far as Tess is concerned, ancient Romans and present-day Londoners are equally distant (or close).

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In his imagining of Tess's imagining, Hardy touches on a fundamental point about realist representation at this time, whether pictorial or literary. Realism implies the presentation of actual worlds, existing or formerly existing, that the reader may or may not already know, and that may or may not have established conventions of representation that already attach to them. Tess here sets her contemporary Londoners very concretely in a normal daily routine: what could be more realistic than sitting down to breakfast on a specific day (tomorrow)? But they are then splayed out into a fantastical cast of characters mixing classes and generations and epochs, even: from the long-gone centurion all the way down to the new babies. London, for Tess, is the place where all people ordinary and exotic are mixed together, those "strange people" whom she—like Clare as well, she supposes—has "never seen."

At the same time, Tess can realistically picture in reverse the likely effects of ignorance on the imagination or knowledge of the other. In her list it is only the babies who may not have seen a cow (how nice, as well, that she pictures a baby that would obviously understand a cow to be a cow, and to be the source of milk); she assumes that all the grown-up folk, from the noblemen to the tradeswomen, will know a cow when they see one—even if their experience is visual and removed, and not the multisensual hands-on experience of a dairy worker like herself. Hardy's novel was written the year after the first publication of Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), one of whose many jabs at realism is the memorable line (spoken by Lord Henry Wootton): "The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one" (Wilde 1998, 159). Those who could call a cow a cow, might well, by the same Wildean logic, be compelled to milk one.

Tess has called a cow a cow all her life; she has also seen them and handled them and known them as individuals, and it is fair to say that the single word cow

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would hardly begin to suggest all the meanings and uses of this kind of creature, for her. But now her contact with the London train—which she, a Wessex girl, has seen—has turned her into a speculative philosopher. By way of the train she is comparing two worlds, imagining what it might be like to drink milk without knowing where it has come from.

Tess never does see London, or Londoners in their home town, and on this night she returns with Angel along the same lane, now in darkness, back to the dairy farm. But at the time when this novel was published, many Londoners and many others from many cities would in fact have seen their first cows, along with many other new sights, from the windows of a train. In this sense the railways accomplished something that went beyond their dramatic diminishment of the distances between different places. They were providing their passengers with an ever-changing and moving view of the regions through which they passed, as fields and towns rolled along in the world outside the window. The reality newly available to the passenger-spectator might well be the sort of extraordinary and beautiful landscape prized by the Romantics (and by Rousseau): from early on, there were railways built through the most mountainous parts of the countryside as well as through every other kind of terrain. In that sense there was in effect a democratization of aesthetic travel, as ordinary people were given a sight of the places they would not have had the means to travel to or through before. And there was also, by the same token, a widening of the Romantic view, as people of all classes were offered the scope of travel that previously only the aristocrat or gentleman might have aspired to.

These are the Romantic, or post-Romantic railways. But there is another kind of view that the railways make available to their passengers, as though from the opposite side of the train, and that is the sights exposed when the route passes so close

to private dwellings that it is possible to see inside them. The passenger becomes not a tourist so much as an involuntary voyeur; what is open to view is not the grand spectacle of nature but the intimacy of domestic life. This, in other words, is where railway romanticism meets railway realism. A passage in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) says it all:

> The posterior aspect of any old farm-house, behind which a railroad has unexpectedly been opened, is so different from that looking upon the immemorial highway, that the spectator gets new ideas of rural life and individuality, in the puff or two of steam-breath which shoots him past the premises. (Hawthorne 1991, 149)

"New ideas of rural life and individuality": what could be a more concise advertisement for realism in the sense of expanding the reader's or spectator's knowledge of other people and other ways of life? But there is also an aspect of exposé, in that this is not a view that was ever meant to be seen. The side of the house that faces the main road is for Hawthorne a "front" in both senses of the word: "it is meant for the world's eye, and is therefore a veil and a concealment. Realities keep in the rear" (149).

Railways and novels are clearly opening up new realities to the travelling and reading public. And often, of course, these people are one and the same, as the passenger moves her eyes from the view outside the window to the novel on her lap which she has purchased from the selection of "railway novels" available at the station bookstore. But what of the narrative lines along which these realities are to be shown? It is one thing to imagine reality as a snapshot of a scene that is glimpsed from a train window; but what kind of stories will count as the real links that put together the disparate images encountered on the way, or else that make sense of the

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single picture presented to the passing spectator, like a *tableau vivant*: the back-story of the rear view?

In time, at the start of the twentieth century, a new technology would provide a further model of the link between railways and realism, and that is film. For the steadily moving view from the train window is just like the roll of film that projects its twenty-four images per second as if they form a continuous and unbroken story. The cinema, in its very name, is movement—and the train, in a comparable way, moves its passengers through both space and time while keeping them exactly where they are, seated in the train carriage.

I want to end, however, with a slower picture of realism—indeed an argument about the very identity of realism, which is prompted by missing a train. We are once again with Nerval, and another of his projects for going on a journey to an old-fashioned town at a certain distance from Paris. One day, he gets the idea of going to Meaux, but he's already too late for the train—he didn't realise that the timetable had been changed on the first of the month, and characteristically, he gives us this detail. Therefore, by his own extempore planning logic, he now has many hours to occupy before the next train is due to depart, at three in the morning. What does he do? He goes to a café and there he comes across a recent journal in which, he says, is a translation of a short story by Dickens (actually, it is not: it is a translation of a piece called "The Key of the Street" by someone else, George Augustus Sala; but that's the kind of detail that we can ignore . . .). Reading this piece leads Nerval to the thought that the English are so fortunate, because they can get away with telling reality like it really is, whereas a French writer would be pushed into making a neat ending with either a death or a marriage. This first chapter of Nerval's *Les Nuits d'octobre* (*October Nights*, 1852), in which these incidents occur, is actually called "Le

Réalisme," and as he meanders through the following nights of real life in Paris and Meaux and a few places in between (he manages to get arrested after leaving his ID card behind at a hotel in an obscure provincial town), Nerval is offering his experiences, and his writing up of them, as an example of just what real realism should be, which is to say, the English type, devoid of false plots and finishes and consisting of "observation" rather than "invention."

The topic of realism comes up again explicitly at a later point in Nerval's October ramblings. He begins his chapter with three dots, followed by: "I'm stopping. The job of a realist is too difficult to do" (Nerval 1974, 238). There is another chance encounter with printed realism, this time a diatribe against the realist movement itself, "*l'école du vrai*" ("the school of truth"), in a journal found under a heap in another café. Here is Nerval's reconstruction of the critic's response to the idea that literature should be true, not fictional (and therefore false):

> Is that entertaining for me if you recount your life step by step, if you
> analyse your dreams, your impressions, your sensations? . . . What do
> I care if you slept at the Sirène hotel, at Vallois's place? I take it that
> that's not true, or else that it is contrived, you will tell me to go and
> see . . . I have no need to take myself to Meaux! And moreover, if the
> same things happened to me, I wouldn't have the nerve to share it with
> the public. (238)

Nerval's realist *pièce de résistance*, at this point is "the woman with merino hair" whom he saw advertised on a poster when he first arrived in Meaux, and whose reality he has now verified for himself by going to the show where she performs. Reality, in this instance, is fantastic: stranger than fiction. For the most part, though, Nerval's wanderings round a minor province of north-eastern France is presented as a

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demonstration of the delightful randomness of reality, seen most clearly in its defiance of the predictability or regularity of timetables and plans. This is no ordinary railway realism; instead, it is realism against the straight linear order, a realism that is played out along different ways and in other places than the rational routes of the modern world.

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Notes

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[1] On the definition of a railway, in relation to the railways' beginnings, see Michael Robbins (1965, 11-17).

[2] As Tess and Angel make their way to the station the only sound is "the clucking of the milk in the tall cans behind them" (209).