Journal of Victorian Culture, 2015
Vol. 20, No. 3, 341–356, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13555502.2015.1057390

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Rape on the Railway: Women, Safety, and Moral Panic in Victorian Newspapers

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The railway was the primary means of increased mobility in the nineteenth century. In 1852, there were 6600 miles of railway in England and Scotland. Speeds could reach 60 miles per hour; even the average speed of 21 miles per hour was double the pace of a fast stagecoach. The speed, ease, and reduced cost of travel led to the purchase of 73 million tickets in Britain in 1850 and 507 million in 1875.[1] Enabling a wider degree of exposure to places and people, the railway was also a site of danger – and not just from accidents. The potential for sexual violence enabled by the intimate settings of railway carriages was a fact of Victorian life that is often overlooked today. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Jill L. Matus, and Paul Fyfe investigate travellers' psychological defences against the forces of modernity, as represented by the railway engine's power and speed, but they neglect to consider gender.[2] Even scholars like Michael Freeman, Ian Carter, and Amy Richter – who do consider women's experiences – minimize concerns about interpersonal violence.[3] Judith R. Walkowitz's and Lynda Nead's studies of the Victorian city have helpfully established the sexual harassment to which Victorian women were routinely subjected, but their focus is on the street rather than

1. David Norman Smith, *The Railway and its Passengers: A Social History* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1988), p. 12.
2. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Jill L. Matus, 'Psychological Trauma Victorian Style: From Perpetrators to Victims', *The Lancet*, 376 (August 2010), 410–11; Paul Fyfe, 'Illustrating the Accident: Railways and the Catastrophic Picturesque in the *Illustrated London News*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 46.1 (2013), 61–91. For bringing additional news reports to my attention, I am indebted to Kim Stevenson's '"Women and Young Girls Dare Not Travel Alone": The Dangers of Sexual Encounters on Victorian Railways', in *Gendered Journeys, Mobile Emotions*, ed. by Gayle Letherby and Gillian Reynolds (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 189–200.
3. In a discussion of sheet music, Freeman describes the 'all-too-common' tales of imagined sexual assault as comic. Carter paints the railway as a site of lewdness and immorality yet grants little space to questions of assault. Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 208; Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). Amy Richter's American study, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), ignores the possibility of sexual violence.

the railway.[4] Pedestrians who were 'spoken to' could outrun their assailant or call for help; female railway passengers were trapped with potential predators until the next stop.

The accessibility of railway travel tempted women to enter public spaces in greater numbers. In the early nineteenth century, a single lady with a small income would have had limited opportunities for travel due to cost and the necessity for chaperonage; rides in horse-carriages were quite expensive, and a servant would be expected to accompany her. Jane Austen, for example, frequently depended upon the travel plans of her relations. When her brothers journeyed to London, the 10 to 12 hour stagecoach journey in the cheapest seat would have cost one pound five shillings.[5] In 1855, by contrast, visitors to Austen's former home of Chawton could return first class to London in two to three hours for nine shillings, a great reduction in time and money.[6] In addition to direct savings, railway travel reduced associated costs such as meals and the servant's fare; a servant was usually not deemed necessary since a visit to London and back could be accomplished from most English stations in less than a day. Though the absence of demographic statistics makes it difficult to say with certainty how many women travelled alone, anecdotal reports of women's growing presence exist in diaries, news reports, visual art, and fiction.

The advent of the railway meant that women actively and independently engaged with strangers in public. They began to claim a privilege previously reserved for men and thereby gained, as one Victorian woman expressed it, 'a sense of strong, compelling inner dignity'.[7] A vocal minority of passengers, however, was discomfited by the loss of privileged male space, viewing women's freedom of movement as an encroachment into male territory. Gender-segregated railway spaces were not sufficient; women invaded the smoking carriages and did not always use the ladies-only carriages. A factor in their disgruntlement was the sexual danger associated with solitary women. News reports presented women both as threatened by (male) strangers and threatening towards respectable gentlemen with their accusations of sexual misconduct. The implications of this trope are made blatant in a pornographic novel from the end of the century, *Raped on the Railway*, which assumes that women travelling alone are inviting erotic attention.

Examining newspaper accounts, this essay suggests that the rhetorical sexualization of women in print was a response to women's increasing presence in public spaces. The railway carriage in particular routinely figured in novels and in the news as a site of

4. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
5. Smith, *The Railway and its Passengers*, p. 15.
6. George Bradshaw, *Bradshaw's General Railway and Steam Navigation Guide*, no. 259 (London: W.J. Adams, 1855), p. 21.
7. Malwida von Meysenbug, *A Journey to Ostend* (1850), as quoted in Beth Muellner, 'The Deviance of Respectability: Nineteenth-Century Transport from a Woman's Perspective', *Journal of Transport History*, 23 (2002), 37–45 (p. 38).

danger for and from female passengers. Two moral panics about railway travel in 1864 and 1875 concentrated the period's worries about gendered violence. Both cases illustrate how fears for women's safety and anger at their false accusations of men's misconduct were used as arguments to limit women's physical and social mobility.

Victorian railway compartments were intimate yet public spaces. First- and second-class passengers were isolated in separate six- or eight-person compartments within a carriage, unable to communicate with other passengers or officials. To change compartments during travel would require opening the door and carefully moving along the external footboard. Longer carriages with many seats and a corridor in the middle were recommended by the medical journal the *Lancet* in 1862 to reduce the jolts and concussions that led to nervous disorders in men and women and physical maladies such as trembling, miscarriage, and early labour—but the writers also acknowledged that such a layout would jar with English class prejudices.[8] The privacy considered necessary to the social habits of the English came at a price: in the event of a violent attack, passengers were utterly isolated.[9]

Passengers could obtain limited protection from fellow travellers by the railway companies' guards and private police officers. Guards were common on trains, but their primary responsibilities were to the cargo. They kept records, sorted luggage, parcels, and mail, and could signal the engineer to stop the train.[10] Their secondary tasks included locking the carriage doors in order to prohibit passengers' egress while trains were in motion. The latter was at first a controversial practice because of the danger to passengers in the event of accident or fire. An 1842 report presented to the House of Commons found that railway companies preferred to confine passengers to prevent them from hurriedly jumping from arriving trains and to limit chaos in the event of an accident. Most railways claimed to only lock the off-side door where other trains pass, but the Great Western secured all doors.[11] By the 1860s, locked doors were more accepted; an experienced traveller would carry a universal railway key, which could be purchased at bookstalls. For example, in Mrs Annie Alexander's 1866 novel, *Which Shall It Be?*, the hero is able to sidle along the footboards and save the heroine in the next compartment from a madman because he 'always carries a railway key'.[12] Similarly, in Ouida's 1897 *The Massarenes*, Lord Hurstmanceaux uses his key to release himself and Katherine from the carriage when the train's track becomes obstructed by

8. 'The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health: Report of the Commission. VII', *The Lancet*, 79.2010 (8 March 1862), 258–61.
9. H. W. Tyler, Report, 'Railway Trains. Copies of circular of 30 July 1864 from the Board of Trade to the railway companies, on the subject of a means of communication between different parts of a railway train whilst in motion; of correspondence between the Board of Trade and the Committee of the Railway Clearing House; and, of the reports by the committee and by Captain Tyler on the same subject', *Sessional Papers*, 50 (1865), 22.
10. Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle (eds), *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 197–98.
11. 'Communications from Board of Trade to Railway Companies, and Replies, on Practice of Locking Doors of Railway Carriages', *House of Commons Papers*, 41.1 (1842), CH Microfiche 46.289.
12. Annie French Alexander, *Which Shall It Be?* (London: Bentley, 1867), p. 426.

snow.[13] Women also carried railway keys: *Hints to Lady Travellers: At Home and Abroad* suggests purchasing a key for those times when a porter could not quickly come.[14] The easy availability of keys to those with a few pence highlights the extent to which passengers were responsible for their own comfort and safety.

Order at railway stations was maintained by the railways' private police forces. A guard would escort unruly passengers to police holding rooms at railway stations, where company officials would determine appropriate action. Police were not generally present on the lines and could be difficult to find at stations when needed, as was the case in 1875 when Daniel Hagan was killed by a bullet from outside the train. His fellow passengers called for police at the next stop; finding none, they continued with the body to the following station.[15] Some stationmasters were loath to transfer assailants to the regular police if the offence did not seem serious enough. In 1864, a 'presumed madman' in a third-class carriage on the Edinburgh Express claimed to have been robbed and began wildly attacking his fellow passengers. Since there was a gap of almost two hours between stations and they were unable to alert the guard, the passengers physically sat on the maniac until the train stopped. It then took the passengers some effort to convince the Peterborough stationmaster to pass him to the police.[16] These two cases illustrate that passenger safety frequently depended upon passengers taking action.

The account of the 'presumed madman' was one of many cases reported in the wake of the first murder on the English railway. On 9 July 1864, Thomas Briggs, a banker in his late sixties, was beaten with his own walking stick and thrown from the North London line at approximately 10 p.m. Franz Müller, a 25-year-old German immigrant, was convicted of the crime. The Briggs murder led to immediate demands for improved communication with the guards. Although a report to the Board of Trade maintained that 'no means of communication could have prevented' Briggs's murder, public feeling focused on the problem of isolation.[17] An editorial in *The Times* warned:

> A railway carriage is a place where we are cut off for a time from all chance of assistance, and this feeling of helplessness in case of emergency has been a bugbear to many travellers, male as well as female. Without the means of communications with the guard we are almost at the mercy of fire, collisions and fellow passengers. This last danger is to most minds by far the most intolerable of the three.[18]

As an ad hoc measure, some railway lines installed glass windows between compartments, called 'Müller lights', but these supplied more symbolic than practical help. On the advice of the Board of Trade, the Regulation Act of 1868 required

13. Ouida [Louisa de la Ramée], *The Massarenes* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1898), p. 139.
14. Lillias Campbell Davidson, *Hints to Lady Travellers: At Home and Abroad* (London: Iliffe & Son, 1889; repr. London: Elliott and Thompson, 2011), p. 137.
15. 'The Mysterious Railway Murder', *Western Mail*, 22 March 1875, p. 5.
16. 'A Presumed Madman in a Railway Carriage', *English Leader*, 13 August 1864, p. 3.
17. Tyler, 'Railway Trains', p. 8.
18. 'A Murder which Must Rank among the Most', *The Times*, 12 July 1864, p. 11.

cord-and-bell alarm systems. These were imperfectly maintained, as is evident in the case of Dickinson and Baker discussed below. Better communication was not established until the Regulation Act of 1889 ordered continuous brakes on all passenger trains; most lines then adopted devices that passengers could activate in emergencies. Another response to passenger fears was the design of a side-corridor carriage in 1870, but its reduction of passenger space and the expense of carriage upgrades prevented extensive implementation.

The first murder on the English railways alarmed men and women, yet women's endangerment was repeatedly emphasized over men's. This imbalance was justified to some degree by women's lesser physical strength and their constrictive clothing. The spectre of attacks on women was also rhetorically effective in arguing for the safety of all passengers, as crimes against women were considered more reprehensible. However, men were not simply worried about the safety of their wives and sisters; they worried about women accusing them of rape. As Captain Tyler noted in a report from the Board of Trade to the railway companies in 1864,

> gentlemen passengers, as well as railway officers of all classes, constantly refuse to travel singly with a stranger of the weaker sex, under the belief that it is only common prudence to avoid in this manner all risk of being accused, for purposes of extortion, of insult, or assault.[19]

In the old social order, women intruding into masculine spaces, such as bars and music halls, would have been considered prostitutes, or at least disreputable. Solo women in the liminal space of the railway carriage were similarly sexualized, as my discussion below about *Raped on the Railway* makes explicit.

There had been particular concern about protecting women travellers since the railway's inception. At way stations, ladies could avoid rough crowds by retreating into ladies' waiting rooms, where female attendants could assist them and bring refreshments. In novels, such facilities became refuges for women like Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) who, alarmed by some idling men on the platform, 'was thankful to be able to turn into the ladies' waiting-room, and sit down for an instant'.[20] Though Margaret considered herself 'very brave and very hard', the exposure and openness of a station induced anxiety. Neither was the enclosed space of the railway carriage secure: in Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1868), Miss Stanbury asserts, 'there's no place a young woman is insulted in so bad as those railway carriages'.[21] To reduce the likelihood of insults, some lines provided ladies-only carriages, but these were costly to the railway line and generally not well received due to their monotony and the presence of small children and nursing mothers.[22] It was therefore considered best for ladies on long journeys to travel with servants when

19. Tyler, 'Railway Trains', p. 8.
20. Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Dorothy Collin and Martin Dodsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 332.
21. Anthony Trollope, *He Knew He Was Right*, 2 vols (New York: Harper, 1869), I, 61.
22. Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls', p. 196.

possible. This practice was of little use when the servant rode in a lower-class carriage; in 1861, 14-year-old Louisa Haven was attacked in a second-class carriage while her mistress was in first class.[23] It was also of limited help should the maid and lady be too weak to overcome the perpetrator, as in *Which Shall It Be?* where Madeline Digby together with her maid cannot fend off Alphonse Delille: in this unlikely fiction, a man risks his life to rescue the women. This trope was present in many newspaper reports. Though there were cases in which women in company were attacked, and though the majority of sexual assaults would in all likelihood have been perpetrated by acquaintances rather than by strangers, lead articles and news reports emphasized the vulnerability of women travelling alone and their need for male protection.

Newspapers depended upon sensational stories to sell copies, and the railways offered many opportunities.[24] When an event was violent, the papers' headlines made the most of it. Murders, suicides, assaults, and robberies on the railway were described as 'fearful', 'dreadful', 'atrocious', 'horrible', 'desperate', 'extraordinary', 'strange', and 'mysterious'.[25] Diction varied by audience, format, and editorship. The *Standard*, a small Conservative London daily competing with *The Times*, deployed overtly melodramatic language in its headlines: the same article that was printed under the title 'Murder in a First-Class Carriage on the North London Railway' in *The Times* became 'Horrible and Atrocious Murder in a First-Class Carriage of a Train on the North London Railway' in the *Standard*.[26] Similarly, a sexual assault case listed without headline under 'The Police Courts: Marylebone' in the *Daily News* (which had a circulation of 150,000 in 1870), was titled 'More Bestiality in a Railway Carriage' in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, a smaller weekly aimed at a popular audience.[27] New or struggling papers were quick to adopt the American practice of melodramatic headlines, which would not become widespread until the 1890s.[28] Newspaper descriptions of

23. Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls', p. 191.
24. For analysis of Victorian crime reporting, see Jean Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Stephen J. A. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); and Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
25. 'Fearful Scene in a Railway Carriage', *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 22 April 1864, p. 10; 'Dreadful Suicide of a Lady', *English Leader*, 4 June 1864, p. 3; 'Horrible and Atrocious Murder in a First-Class Carriage of a Train on the North London Railway', *Standard*, 11 July 1864, p. 6; 'Desperate Murder on the Midland Great Western Railway', *Cork Examiner*, 5 December 1865, p. 3; 'Extraordinary Robbery in a Railway Train', *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 December 1866, p. 2; 'The Mysterious Railway Murder', *Western Mail*, 22 March 1875, p. 5.
26. 'Murder in a First-Class Carriage on the North London Railway', *The Times*, 11 July 1864, p. 9.
27. 'The Police Courts: Marylebone', *Daily News*, 27 August 1864, p. 6; 'More Bestiality in a Railway Carriage', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 28 August 1864, p. 5. Circulation information for the *Daily News* has been drawn from Andrew Hobbs, 'The Deleterious Dominance of *The Times* in Nineteenth-Century Scholarship', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18.4 (2013), 472–97 (p. 475).
28. Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850–1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 37.

railway assaults should thus be considered in light of a publication's regular practices and in comparison with the same item in other papers.

Articles were so frequently borrowed and reprinted that it is difficult to tell with certainty where a report originated. This proliferation and the emotional language used in some headlines increased the likelihood of a moral panic. 'Moral panic', a sociological and cultural studies term popularized by Stanley Cohen, refers to a demonized phenomenon or group that is perceived as a threat to the social order and as an offence against basic human decency.[29] The threat's amplification by the media leads to public alarm and, as a result, legislation or guidelines are developed to control the threat. The moral panic ends when fears are calmed, either because the threat is resolved or a new threat has distracted the public. Although critics like Peter King have used the term to imply that public alarm is unwarranted, moral panics often exaggerated a legitimate event or phenomenon.[30] I do not wish to claim that fears about the safety of railway passengers were unjustified but rather that the media stoked cultural anxiety through hyperbolic language and an excess of commentary, which resulted in greater state control over the panic's 'devil': the train itself. In the Briggs case, the murder occurred on 9 July, was reported in the papers on 11 July, and by 14 July was being discussed in the House of Lords. Letters to the editor of *The Times* on 13 July and the *Morning Post* on 14 July suggested structural ways to prevent violence: legislation, running gangways, and an open carriage design.[31] What is particularly striking about this moral panic is how often apprehensions about attacks on gentlemen turned to fears of sexual violence against women. For example, the *Morning Post* contributor who suggested open carriages argued that the design 'would enable ladies who may be necessitated to travel alone to do so without fear of being subjected to the insults and annoyances to which they are now so frequently exposed'.[32] This slippage is evident in the case of Mary Anne Moody.

In late June 1864, 18-year-old Moody found herself alone in a second-class railway compartment with William Nash after another lady had disembarked. He asked her personal questions then grabbed her around the waist and raised her dress. Fearing for her virtue, she opened the door of the carriage and stood on the footboard. Miss Moody was left clinging to the side of the train as it sped along at 40 miles per hour.[33] A gentleman in the adjacent compartment noticed her plight and reached out to hold her up for five miles until the guard's attention was roused by the cries of field workers.

29. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. vi–xliv. See also Jennifer Davis, 'The London Garotting Panic of 1862: A Moral Panic and the Creation of a Criminal Class in Mid-Victorian England', in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500*, ed. by V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker (London: Europa, 1980), pp. 190–213.
30. Peter King, 'Moral Panics and Violent Street Crime 1750–2000: A Comparative Perspective', in *Comparative Histories of Crime*, ed. by Barry S. Godfrey, Clive Emsley, and Graeme Dunstall (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 53–70.
31. J. Heron Maxwell and Julius Reuter, 'Crimes on Railways', *The Times*, 13 July 1864, p. 11.
32. 'Gulielmus' [pseud.], 'A Railway Grievance', *Morning Post*, 14 July 1864, p. 3.
33. Adrian Gray, *Crime on the Line* (Penryn: Atlantic, 2000), p. 34.

Though it occurred in June, the event did not make the papers – did not become 'news' – until three weeks later, after the moral panic about Briggs's murder began. Moody's attack and rescue were then described with dramatic language and novelistic details in two articles in the *English Leader*, a short-lived weekly published by George Holyoake that (ironically) sought to reduce elements of sensationalism in working-class publications. The first-person account of Moody's rescuer, 'H. S.', is the subject of the first article in the *Leader*. The second printed Miss Moody's testimony, which epitomized a stereotypical feminine attitude:

> My character, my welfare, everything that is worth having in this world is far dearer to me than my life, and, therefore, I got out of the carriage [. . .] neither you nor any one but a woman can understand how far a woman values herself.[34]

Miss Moody risked her life because the only other choice was remaining in a confined space where she would be compromised by a man's inappropriate behaviour. While H. S.'s account seems to have appeared only in the *Leader*, the second article affirming women's dependence upon men was reprinted in such papers as *Reynolds's Newspaper*, the *Belfast News-Letter*, the *Glasgow Herald*, and the *Leeds Intelligencer*, often on the same page as updates on the Briggs investigation.[35] This juxtaposition, combined with the delayed distribution of Moody's case, suggests that increased reporting of sexual violence was prompted by the moral panic about railway murder.

Reports of Moody's assault and rescue illustrate the media's conflation of a man's physical risk and a woman's sexual jeopardy. A leader in the *Globe* (reprinted in the *Preston Chronicle*) compared Briggs's murder to Moody's assault: 'One implies that no man is safe in a first-class carriage; the other, that no woman can travel alone except in peril of outrages on decency, and it may be assaults on her honour'.[36] This rhetorical turn was replicated in and perpetuated through other genres, including at least one theatrical production: in Sefton Parry's *The Odds* (performed in 1870 at the Holborn Theatre), a man attempts to rob the heroine on a train, the two struggling on the carriage's gangway until the hero arrives. The *Illustrated London News* reported that Parry 'conceived the idea from the murder [. . .] by Muller [*sic*] on Mr. Briggs'.[37] In its emphasis on the vulnerability of women travelling alone and their need for male rescuers, Parry's scene is more reminiscent of Moody's case than Briggs's; the proliferating reports of assaults on women became conflated in Parry's – and others' – imaginations.

34. H. S., 'The Perils of Railway Travelling', *English Leader*, 16 July 1864, p. 3; 'The Perilous Journey in a Railway Carriage', *English Leader*, 23 July 1864, p. 6.
35. 'The Assault in a Railway Carriage', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 July 1864, p. 7; 'The Indecent Assault in a Railway Carriage', *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 July 1864, p. 4; 'The Assault in a Railway Carriage', *Glasgow Herald*, 18 July 1864, p. 6; 'The Assault on a Lady in a Railway Carriage', *Leeds Intelligencer and Yorkshire General Advertiser*, 23 July 1864, p. 6.
36. 'A Railway Grievance', p. 3; 'The Perils of the Railway (From the *Globe*)', *Preston Chronicle*, 16 July 1864, p. 4.
37. 'Mr. Sefton Parry, the Proprietor of the Holborn', *Illustrated London News*, 3 December 1870, p. 570.

Though the discourse surrounding a particular moral panic might be longstanding, panics themselves are typically short-lived.[38] Thus Susan Edwards's claim that from 1870 to 1900 there was a moral panic about false accusations is imprecise.[39] Rather, key events during the period revived unresolved concerns. Charting Victorian reports about sexual assaults on trains reveals two clusters of fervent discussion, one in 1864 and the other in 1875.[40] Moody's and Briggs's cases occurred in June 1864 and were followed in July by information about the inquest and debates about changes to railway security. The following months saw reports of crimes that might have received little attention at another time. In August the *English Leader* reported on two drapers who were fined two pounds for 'insulting a respectable married woman' and using 'obscene and blasphemous language' in a railway compartment.[41] In late August and early September several papers recounted the trial of John Barber, charged with assaulting a 13-year-old girl, Ellen Scott, in a third-class carriage on the Great Western. On a slow-moving, passing train, off-duty railway worker Thomas Smith saw Scott calling for help. He jumped from his train, climbed onto her carriage, and chased down the escaping Barber. Headlines for versions of this article included 'Another Indecent Assault in a Railway Carriage', 'Another Railway Carriage Case', and the previously mentioned 'More Bestiality in a Railway Carriage', the adjectives signalling a superfluity of assaults.[42] Although the article, which varies little between papers, does not append a moral, its implicit claim is that girls and women are continually in danger without men's protection.

An obsession with women's safety on the railway persisted throughout the century, independently of periods of moral panic. For example, an early 1864 article in *The Times* recounts the story of an MP who captured a thief who had appropriated items from a female passenger. The writer comments: 'If these ladies [the woman and her children] had been by themselves they would probably have lost property of great value'.[43] Instead of titling this piece 'Burglar Discovered' or 'Bravery of an MP', *The Times* chose to emphasize 'Ladies Travelling Alone'. An 1875 letter to the editor of the *Graphic* in response to a sailor's death on the Midland Railway similarly shifted from general danger to women's particular peril:

> The taking of certain precautions beforehand, such as placing young ladies in a compartment reserved for persons of their own sex, or in a compartment in which several

38. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. xxxvii.
39. Susan Edwards, *Female Sexuality and the Law: A Study of Constructs of Female Sexuality as They Inform Statute and Legal Procedure* (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1981), p. 127.
40. Reports were collected for the period 1840 to 1900 from a partial keyword search of *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, *19th Century British Newspapers*, *The Times Digital Archive*, and *The British Newspaper Archive*, as well as mentions in secondary sources like Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls'.
41. 'Outrage in a Railway Carriage', *English Leader*, 13 August 1864, p. 6.
42. 'Another Indecent Assault in a Railway Carriage', *English Leader*, 3 September 1864; 'Another Railway Carriage Case', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 August 1864, p. 8; 'More Bestiality', p. 5.
43. 'Ladies Travelling Alone', *The Times*, 7 April 1864, p. 14.

> persons are already seated, will almost certainly obviate that form of insult which is the most common of internal railway dangers (at any rate to those who are gifted with youth and good looks).[44]

The writer's implication that only the young and beautiful are sexually assaulted matches reporting practices, in which news of attacks on married and plain women garnered less attention. The report's diction perpetuates a discourse in which women are presented as helpless, passive creatures in need of being safely situated by their male protectors.

The second moral panic about the safety of ladies on the railway was initiated by an event in 1875 in which a young woman took desperate action to preserve her safety. On 17 June, 22-year-old Kate Dickinson's mother and sisters escorted her onto a train at Midhurst. Dickinson changed trains at Petersfield and entered an unoccupied first-class carriage. At Liphook entered 50-year-old Colonel Valentine Baker, a war hero, member of the 10th Hussars, Assistant Quartermaster General, and acquaintance of royalty. Though at first gentlemanly, his behaviour changed during a long interval between stations. Kate tried to ring the bell, but it was broken. Had it worked, a guard might have chosen to stop the train or perhaps sidle along the footboards to her compartment. As no assistance was forthcoming, Kate slipped backwards out of the door and clung to the side of the carriage for five miles, just as Moody did. The train stopped after waiting passengers at a bye-station had seen Kate's distress. This example reveals not only the continuing poor communication on trains but also a remarkable case of *reportage*.

Baker's trial attracted much more media attention than Moody's similar situation 11 years prior, due to the status of the perpetrator. On 25 June the normally staid *Times* dedicated two and a half columns to Dickinson's initial deposition and on 3 August gave over a full page to the trial plus another column of commentary. Andrew Hobbs explains that this choice was unusual for *The Times*, which typically focused on political, foreign, and commercial news and limited its crime reporting to London.[45] The number of columns *The Times* dedicated to the case is comparable to those it devoted to the outbreak of the Sepoy Rebellion, another dramatic event in which women were endangered.[46] The paper's leader describes the crime as 'a gross outrage' and 'a brutal assault inspired by animal passion', yet suggests women's culpability when it remarks, 'ladies travelling alone must not forget that they do incur a certain risk'.[47] Dickinson's family had escorted her onto the train and her brother-in-law was to meet her at the terminus. Though her behaviour conformed to Victorian norms of modest

44. 'Topics of the Week: Safety in Railway Carriages', *Graphic*, 26 June 1875, p. 2.
45. Hobbs, 'Deleterious Dominance', p. 481.
46. Similar comparisons between British assaults and the Sepoy Rebellion were made during the period. An article from the *Northern Whig* concerning a girl's imprisonment and assault by three men at the Dundonald Railway Station was titled 'Sepoyism in the County of Down'. Reported in 'Ireland', *Leader*, 2 January 1858, p. 5. For discussion of rape during the Sepoy Mutiny, see Nancy Paxton, *Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830–1947* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), and Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

and domestic femininity, she was considered irresponsible for exposing herself to risk. Women were expected then, as now, to actively maintain sexual boundaries while simultaneously remaining passive in a man's world, a paradoxical responsibility that reveals fractures in Victorian gender politics.

Dickinson was largely exonerated by the press but another aspect of the extended reaction to women's mobility suggests her culpability: opposition to women in smoking carriages. Though women were permitted, throughout the latter half of the century this space was widely acknowledged as belonging to men. For example, in Ouida's *The Massarenes*, Katherine admits to her companion: 'In point of fact, it is I who am in the wrong place, for this is a smoking-carriage'.[48] The presence of ladies was felt to be an intrusion into male territory; in 1885, 'A Smoker' suggested in *The Times* that smoking carriages be labelled 'Gentlemen Only'.[49] Respectable women would abhor the tobacco aroma clinging to their clothes, and so a logical deduction was that only dishonest women would enter. In the same month that Baker was convicted, a man wrote to the *People's Advocate* about a woman travelling with him in a smoking compartment who disarranged her dress and sat on his lap in order to extort money; he bluffed his way out of the situation but worried other men might be entrapped.[50] The same paper contained a report that James G. Mooney was charged with assault on a woman in a smoking carriage. In the September hearing, the victim stated that her husband had placed her in the carriage and she had not realized it was reserved for smoking. The need for an explanation indicates that the defence had questioned her incursion into men's territory. When Mooney was found guilty of assault and indecent behaviour, his counsel complained, 'gentlemen in smoking carriages, or any other carriage, when alone had better in future be cautious when they saw a woman'.[51] Though Edwards identifies a 30-year media panic about 'Potiphar's wives', women who falsely accused men of rape and thereby hurt the reputation of unsuspecting gentlemen, this panic was most prominent in the 1870s and stems from Baker's case.[52] For instance, the anonymous 'Our Own Traveller' warned readers of *Town Talk* in 1879, 'many a female monster is on the alert for a carriage wherein a man sits who looks as though he would dread an exposure such as that which would rise out of an indecent assault'.[53] To friends and family of Valentine Baker, and anonymous others as well, Kate Dickinson was such a woman.

False accusers in smoking compartments or elsewhere might be despicable 'monsters' or simply hysterical: Michael Freeman describes a popular 1866 song that

47. 'Colonel Baker Was Convicted Yesterday at Croydon', *The Times*, 3 August 1875, p. 9. Stevenson mistakenly attributes this quote to Justice Brett: see 'Women and Young Girls', p. 198.
48. Ouida, *Massarenes*, p. 138.
49. A Smoker (pseud.), 'Ladies in Smoking Carriages: A Suggestion', *The Times*, 3 October 1885, p. 11.
50. 'Daring Impudence', *People's Advocate*, 21 August 1875, p. 3.
51. 'Assault in a Railway Carriage', *People's Advocate*, 4 September 1875, p. 2.
52. Edwards, *Female Sexuality*, p. 127. In the Hebrew Bible, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of rape; see Genesis 39.
53. Quoted in Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls', p. 195.

played on the latter belief. Alfred Plumpton's 'The Railways Guard, or the Mail Train to the North' figures a woman who mistakes the peckings of game-fowl for the insults of a gentleman; 'The moral of the tale, according to the last verse, was for all young men to be warned of the danger of riding in a train at night with a female all alone'.[54] In this scenario, the train becomes a catalyst for sexual impropriety, endangering both men and women. While rape was a genuine concern, the moral panic about rape on the railway was chiefly an artificial fear responding to (and generating) cultural anxiety about women's entry into public spaces – and potentially into the Habermassian public sphere.[55]

Rail travel contributed to the weakening boundary between public and domestic spaces. In its response to Dickinson's case, *The Times* compared the railway carriage to a house, traditionally an intimate and familial site: 'As far as the law can afford protection, a girl must be made as safe in a railway carriage as in her father's house'.[56] Railway companies encouraged a conflation between railway compartments and domestic space in order to encourage ladies' patronage; the welcome mat was propagated by a host of 'social hieroglyphs'.[57] Michael Freeman calls the carriage a 'parlour on wheels' and argues that its 'railway luncheon baskets, railway rugs and foot warmers, soon helped passengers form a new "psychic layer" in which old fears lapsed'. These fears, according to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, were worries about accidents, which domestic comforts veiled.[58] Appropriately, the title of a one-shilling book series sold on train platforms was *Parlour Library*.[59] Harriet Beecher Stowe on her speaking tour of England and Scotland described the railway compartment as 'a little compact home travelling about', a safe and segregated base from which to view the country.[60] From an ideological perspective, women were more 'at home' in the domestic realm. As women were courted as consumers, signifiers of domesticity proliferated. John Ruskin wrote: 'wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her'.[61] Following the material

54. Freeman, *Railways*, p. 208.
55. Jürgen Habermas describes the public sphere as a patriarchal space in which laws and ideology are created. See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989); Joan B. Landes, 'The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration', in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. by Johanna Meehan (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 91–116.
56. 'Colonel Baker was convicted'.
57. This strategy was often utilized by department stores. See Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London', *Representations*, 62 (Spring 1998), 1–30 (p. 5). Elaine Freedgood discusses social hieroglyphs and the importance of things *qua* things in *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
58. Freeman, *Railways*, p. 84. Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 130.
59. Michael Klotz, 'Dombey and Son and the "Parlour on Wheels."' *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*, 40 (2009), 61–79 (p. 77, fn 4).
60. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, 2 vols (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1854), I, p. 43.
61. John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1905), XVIII, 122.

Figure 1. Cover of *Raped on the Railway*. From the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries.

logic of his metaphor, women who enter public spaces would change the nature of those spaces. Depots become stations with restaurants and even hotels. The goods-wagon gradually transforms into a parlour. Male industry coexists with a quasi-domestic, hybridized, and liminal social space, which initially lacked conventions for safely interacting with strangers.[62]

The first-class carriage's domesticity transmitted contradictory signals of intimacy in a public space. An example of the implications of this ideological paradox can be found on the cover of a fin-de-siècle erotic novel, *Raped on the Railway, A True Story of a Lady who was First Ravished and then Chastised on the Scotch Express* (Figure 1).[63] Its illustration of a partially disrobed woman fighting off a gentleman attacker in a

62. Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls', p. 199.
63. For more on this novel, see Peter Webb, 'Victorian Erotica', in *The Sexual Dimension in Literature*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision, 1982), pp. 90–121.

drawing room corresponds to an actual scene late in the book, but its juxtaposition with the title suggests a slippage between parlour and coach, figuring the railway carriage as a porous space that blurred lines between social classes and between public and private spaces. The cover is also a reminder that rape typically occurs in domestic spaces. Though the home is supposed to be a sanctuary for its inhabitants, for some women it was a place of danger. In six of the eight depositions that still exist in the Public Records Office for sexual assault cases in 1880 and 1881, the attacks occurred in a home.[64] Judging by the newspapers, however, one would mistakenly conclude the majority of attacks occurred in public: alleys, parks, doorsteps, and, of course, railway carriages.

A practical reason for the prominence of railway cases in newspapers and other historical records is the greater likelihood of prosecution. Kim Stevenson explains that assailants would be prosecuted by the railway company 'under the company's private byelaws that regulated passenger behaviour', including interference with other passengers.[65] The companies pursued civil and criminal suits in order to protect their reputations and warn other passengers. By contrast, private individuals hesitated to prosecute due to the cost (the complainant was responsible for court costs), the shame, and the limited likelihood of a conviction.[66] Another factor in newspapers' seeming fascination with assault on the railways is the sexual symbolism of trains. The language used by *Raped on the Railway* plays on a symbolic link between trains and violent sexuality. The engine is described in sexual terms, suggesting the idea that the train itself is a deviant, erotic artefact: 'the huge red engine throbbing with suppressed strength', and 'a long, harsh gasp burst from the engine and a steam feathered overhead. A loud panting could be heard'.[67] Conversely, a penis is described as an engine: in a flashback scene, Robert 'faced round with his magnificent engine boldly rearing its huge red head' (118). Sex and the train become conflated, suggesting the potential danger of both to women's virtue. Carter's *Railways and Culture in Britain* similarly emphasizes the sexualized brutality of a train thrusting into a virginal landscape. In a discussion of J. M. W. Turner's painting, *Rain, Steam and Speed*

64. Public Records Office, National Archive: CRIM 1/8/5 (13 May 1880), CRIM 1/8/7 (24 May 1880), CRIM 1/8/8 (10 May 1880), CRIM 1/11/3 (December 1880), CRIM 1/12/7 (18 May 1881), CRIM 1/13/1 (2 December 1881; session January 1882), CRIM 1/13/5 (13 February 1882), CRIM 1/15/3 (July 1882). Only 2% of depositions from the Victorian era were preserved.
65. Stevenson, 'Women and Young Girls', p. 192.
66. For discussion of consequences of prosecution for the victim and of the unlikelihood of success, see Carolyn A. Conley, 'Rape and Justice in Victorian England', *Victorian Studies*, 29 (1986), 519–36; Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770–1845* (London: Pandora, 1987); Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); and Clive Elmsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750–1900*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1996).
67. Anonymous, *Raped on the Railway, A True Story of a Lady who was First Ravished and then Chastised on the Scotch Express* (London: Cosmopolitan Bibliophilists' Society, 1894), pp. 36, 201–2. The printed publication data is false: internal evidence points to October 1899 as the *terminus post quem*. Further citations are indicated parenthetically.

(exhibited in 1844), Carter characterizes the 'virile machine' as 'enveloped fully by his fecund female garden'.[68] In making these observations, Carter invokes a rhetorical tradition equating male sexuality with aggressive action and females with passive and violated purity.

One additional insight is offered by *Raped on the Railway*: the effect of newspaper reports on readers. This anonymous novel includes a mosaic of other texts, including poems, a discussion of an anthropological study, a summary of Zola's *La Terre*, and newspaper reports of adultery and sexual assault. The presence of these items in a book designed to arouse readers implies that each carries erotic potential. For instance, 'Dudley Woman's Extraordinary Story' (13), the first of the news reports, describes a case of gang rape in which the perpetrators were found innocent because the victim's behaviour was not in keeping with Victorian norms: she neither called for help nor complained to her rescuers.[69] When the novel's heroine and rape victim reads 'Soldiers Charged With Outraging a Young Lady' in a newspaper (209), she wonders 'whether such shameful and intimate details would have been published about herself, had the affair in the train been proceeded with' (213). Clara did not report her rape because she feared a scandal, exemplifying the point made by a leader in *The Times* regarding the Baker-Dickinson case that some licentious men 'will count upon the shame of their victim as almost certain to prevent her from making known their advances, and push to the utmost any advantage'.[70] Clara vocalizes a key reason why women hesitate to prosecute rape: the 'shameful and intimate details' become public. For real readers as well, news reports that emphasized the peril of solo women travellers functioned as a form of social control, silencing women and discouraging them from entering the public sphere.

Practically speaking, the boundary between public and private spaces is illusory. Middle-class Victorian homes were hubs of daily social contact with the outside world, as Sharon Olwen Jones has argued in her study of the Carlyles.[71] Working-class women socialized on the street while middle-class women shopped and performed charity work. The decline of chaperonage, the rise of the modern police force, and new technology meant that women were in public in greater numbers and with increased confidence. As John Tosh observes, this 'new confidence of women presented an overt challenge' to conceptions of masculinity.[72] Women's railway travel thus fuelled

68. Carter, *Railways and Culture*, pp. 200–1.
69. Sources for the novel's supposed newspaper reports have not been located but are consistent with other assaults, for instance the 'Mount Rennie Outrage' of 1886, in which a 16-year-old Australian girl was gang-raped. Her case was tried in the press. See Juliet Peers, '"Unsuspicious and Innocent of Wrong": Reading the Mount Rennie Outrage as a Romance of Victorian Gender and Politics', *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, 3.2 (1998), 1–21.
70. 'Colonel Baker was convicted'.
71. Sarah Olwen Jones, 'Staging the Interior: The Public and Private Intimacies of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle's Domestic Lives', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18.2 (2013), 181–97 (p. 187).
72. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 151.

broader concerns about women assuming masculine responsibilities: working, controlling money, and voting. In turn, separate sphere ideology fed moral panics about sexual assault on the railways.

As a 'mediating agent' between the world of the public and the private, newspapers had a complex relationship with Victorian society, public opinion, and private practice.[73] When the papers contributed to a moral panic, the 'extent and significance' of a phenomenon became exaggerated.[74] Railways did not increase the likelihood of sexual assault, yet at particular moments the media presented such cases as widespread. Just as reports of accidents reminded passengers of the dangers inherent in rail travel, panics about sexual assault performed the ideological function of cautioning women about the necessity of male protection at all times, a practice at odds with women's increasing freedom in an industrial world.

Acknowledgements

A version of this paper was first presented at 'The Local and the Global' conference in Venice, and I am grateful for the feedback and encouragement I received there. Amanda Caleb, Yvonne Pelletier, Samantha Murphy, Randi Marie Addicott, Judson Nichols, and my anonymous referees helped me clarify my thoughts and language.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

An award from the John C. Hodges Better English Fund provided release time for the paper's composition. Travel to the British National Archives was funded by a University of Tennessee Professional Development Award.

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73. Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5.
74. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. vii.