Postal Bodies: Imagining Communication Infrastructures in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Submitted by Eleanor Jayne Hopkins to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, September 2020.

I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

(Signature) ……  ……

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uncovers material and metaphorical bodily encounters with postal infrastructures in the nineteenth-century. As the Post Office expanded in the nineteenth century, particularly with the advent of uniform penny postage in 1840, infrastructures, such as sorting houses, Travelling Post Offices and steam packets, had a profound impact on British Victorians' engagements with and imaginings of the Post Office. In this thesis, I place original emphasis on 'postal bodies', demonstrating that postal infrastructures were embodied by both those who worked on and used them. In doing so, I intervene in and complicate scholarship that has invested in the Victorian postal mythology of speed, mechanisation and disembodiment, and rethink the role of one of the key institutions of Victorian Britain in the literary imagination.

By reinserting the cultural importance of the postal body into the scholarly picture, 'Postal Bodies: Imagining Communication Infrastructures in Nineteenth-Century Literature' argues that these infrastructures were interactive and shaped by the messiness of bodily exchange. Underpinned by literary readings, non-literary sources, and archival research, as well as theories of infrastructures and mobility, I demonstrate that these expanding postal infrastructures shaped, and were shaped by, the bodies that facilitated and utilised them. As the complex infrastructures of postal exchange were employed by nineteenth-century authors, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and Hesba Stretton, they become imagined, negotiated, and subverted, through postal bodies. This thesis places the question of embodied representation at the centre of its analysis, and, in doing so, provides new insights into the multiplicity and heterogeneity of embodied experiences of the mail, from labour intensive sorting and mail running, to rapid transit on the mail train and international steam packet lines.

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INTRODUCTION

In Amelia B. Edwards's short story 'Another Past Lodger Relates His Own Ghost Story' (1864), the narrator is taken for a ride, and experiences near-death, in a ghostly 'night mail from the north' on a Yorkshire moor.[1] The narrator's first acknowledgement that the mail coach is out of the ordinary is not the lack of human responses to his questions, nor the icy coldness of the interior, but its dilapidated condition:

> [The mail] was in the last stage of dilapidation. Every part of it was not only out of repair, but in a condition of decay. The sashes splintered at a touch. The leather fittings were crusted over with mould, and literally rotting from the woodwork. The floor was almost breaking away beneath my feet. The whole machine, in short, was foul with damp, and had evidently been dragged from some outhouse in which it had been mouldering away for years, to do another day or two of duty on the road [....] 'This coach,' I said, 'is in a deplorable condition. The regular mail, I suppose, is under repair?'.[2]

The state of the mail is made visceral: splintering, damp, mouldering, and breaking away under the narrator's feet. Despite its decomposition, the narrator assumes that the 'regular mail [...] is under repair'. The evocation of the regular mail is part of an uncanniness here — it stands for an efficient and elegant network, and its absence displaces the ordinariness of the mail into the ghoulish. Indeed, the narrator exclaims his mundane and misguided conclusion to his fellow passengers on-board while failing to realise that they mirror its disrepair.

Published in the Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*, Edwards's short story raises many of the questions that this thesis explores and untangles, particularly that of the relationship between bodies and postal infrastructure. While the mail physically falls apart around the narrator, foregrounding the embodied experience of travel via the mail, he finds himself trapped in a coach with ghostly apparitions that are, by virtue, disembodied; their eyes which glow 'with a fiery unnatural lustre', and 'bloodless lips' construct the fearful ghostliness of the 'corpses long buried'.[3] Edwards's phantom mail

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[1] Edwards's short story is better known now by the titles 'The North Mail' or 'The Phantom Coach'. It appeared under the title 'The North Mail' in Edwards's collection of short stories *Miss Carew* in 1865 (Jack Sullivan, *The Penguin Encyclopaedia of Horror and the Supernatural* (New York: Viking, 1986), 140. Internet Archive). 'Another Past Lodger Relates His Own Ghost Story' is the title under which it was published in the Christmas edition of *All the Year Round* in 1864. The Christmas Edition was entitled *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy*, and contained several stories told by the eponymous narrator's lodgers in her lodging house on the Strand.

[2] Amelia B. Edwards, 'Another Past Lodger Relates His Own Ghost Story', *The Extra Christmas Number of All the Year Round*, 7 (December 1864): 592. Dickens Journals Online.

[3] Edwards, 'Ghost Story', 592.

coach has all of the outward signs of regular scheduling, but the narrative replaces the bodies of the guard and driver, one outside passenger and three inside passengers with disembodied corpses. Edwards's narrative relishes in the slipperiness between embodied and disembodied travel, as well as the living and the dead. While the ghosts' eyes have an otherworldly 'stony glitter', their bodies are of this earth: 'the light of putrefaction [plays] upon their awful faces; upon their hair, dank with the dews of the grave; upon their clothes, earth-stained and dropping to pieces'.[4] The narrative simultaneously suggests their unearthliness *and* their literal decay in the earth. Edwards's playfulness makes the relationship between embodiment and the mail uncanny and thrilling here.

Importantly, Edwards's narrative raises questions about the relationship between mail infrastructures and embodiment: how exactly can you climb on-board a phantom mail and how can a phantom mail literally crash? Is this infrastructure embodied or ghostly? The accident and subsequent trauma continue to haunt the local community, who have failed to mend the reminders of the damage; the servant warns the narrator to 'mind where the parapet's broken away, close again the sign-post. It's never been mended since the accident'. [5] In line with the broken parapet, the coach continues to repeat the temporal rhythm and delivery of the mail and thus the fateful crash that killed four people twenty years ago. Yet, despite its ghostly reappearance, the reiteration of the crash is physical and dangerous for the narrator:

> In that single instant, brief and vivid as a landscape beheld in the flash of summer lightning, I saw the moon shining down through a rift of stormy cloud--the ghastly sign-post rearing its warning finger by the wayside—the broken parapet—the plunging horses—the black gulf below. Then, the coach reeled like a ship at sea. Then, came a mighty crash—a sense of crushing pain—and then, darkness.[6]

The jars and jolts of this sentence, as well as the fleeting images, indicate the speed, confusion and turmoil of the crash. Though an apparition, this mail coach inflicts 'crushing pain' on the narrator. Edwards's deliberately ambiguous narrative, which the narrator maintains cannot be explained away as a dream, raises the question of how bodies fit into and become an intrinsic part of the technological infrastructures of the mail, even ghostly mails.

In tandem with the questions that Edwards's short story raises, this thesis argues that mail infrastructures revolutionised perceptions of communication and travel, and

[4] Edwards, 592.
[5] Edwards, 591.
[6] Edwards, 592.

thus offered new imaginative avenues for literary artists. Mail infrastructures, I argue, were a central component to the everyday lives of Victorian Britons, and interpolated themselves into the imagining and constructing mobility in novels, short stories, poetry, sketches, and periodical articles. 'Postal Bodies: Imagining Communication Infrastructures in Nineteenth-Century Literature' is the first thesis-length study to examine and establish the importance of postal infrastructures in nineteenth-century British literature. I place original and important emphasis on 'postal bodies', demonstrating the period's fascination with the way that postal infrastructures were embodied both by users and those who worked on them. In doing so, I intervene in and complicate scholarship that has invested in the Victorian postal mythology of speed, mechanisation and ceaseless circulation. My thesis enables us to rethink the role of the mail in the Victorian cultural imagination and the embodied experience of using it. Indeed, I work to deepen our understanding of encounters with and imaginings of one of the key institutions of Victorian Britain.

'Postal Bodies' covers the period from 1821, with the opening of the first steam packet line between London and Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire, near Dublin), to 1900, when British steam packet lines began to decline against American and German rivals. I analyse popular literature — including novels, short stories, poetry, and periodical articles — predominately from the mid-nineteenth century, through the period of postal expansion between 1840 and 1870; however, I also analyse literature from the late-nineteenth century in order to reveal discursive legacies and further infrastructural developments, particularly on international routes, such as the Suez Canal. The national and global expansion, as well as technological development, of mail infrastructures in the nineteenth century fundamentally altered both domestic and imperial discourses, as well as practical realities, associated with the principle of the ceaseless mobility of the mail. Such infrastructural developments had tangible impacts on how working and travelling bodies negotiated their place, and mobility, within them. Edwards's short story is but one excellent exemplar of the literary art forms that contributed to the synthesising, understanding and imagining these changing circulation infrastructures.

I argue that, largely due to the pervasive nature of the post in the nineteenth century, postal infrastructures, such as mail trains, sorting houses and steam packets, shaped not only imaginative responses to the mail, but also broader ideological, and often political, questions about Victorian Britain. Though set in a coaching past, the publication of Edwards's short story in the 1860s places it in a period in which the Post

Office became embedded in Victorian culture. When the uniform penny post came into effect in 1840, the number of letters dispatched through the Post Office doubled from 82.5 million to 168.8 million; by 1850, this had grown to 350 million, and by 1895 nearly 2 billion letters were circulating through the Post Office.[7] These institutional changes had an impact on conceptions of communication in the Victorian period. Importantly, uniform penny postage and the rhetoric that surrounded it ensured that Victorians conceived the institution of the Post Office as democratic, efficient and affordable from the beginning of Victoria's reign.[8] By the 1860s and 1870s, infrastructures like local post offices, pillar post boxes, telegraph offices, Travelling Post Offices on mail trains, and steam packets ensured that the institution became an endemic feature in the daily lives of British Victorians.[9] Like the railways, the Post Office became a discursive symbol of Victorian 'progress' and 'achievement', but there has been little focused work on the role of communication infrastructures beyond the telegraph in the cultural imaginary.

In order to explore the importance and complexity of postal infrastructures, I bring to the fore the imaginative fascination with different components of these infrastructures and their development. I uncover their roles both in the everyday lives of Victorians, as well as in different forms of literature, and reveal the different issues, pleasures and anxieties they evoked. The chapters of 'Postal Bodies' examine postal infrastructures that were recognisable facets of postal distribution in the nineteenth century in order to develop an understanding of the shared cultural associations fostered by the circulation system. This includes the iconic 'heart' of the Post Office, St Martin's le Grand; mail trains and Travelling Post Offices; the globalised infrastructures of the steam packet; and the overland mail route to India, which utilised runners, agents, mail trains and steam packets to circulate mail between Britain and the empire. As I uncover the relationship between passenger transport and communication infrastructures, I argue that to travel as a postal body was to travel along distinctly hybridised routeways, on which the transfer of information was a priority over the transfer of people.

As the ambiguity and uncanniness of Edwards's ghost story suggest, the infrastructures of the mail were plural, various, liminal and interactive. This plurality is

[7] Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication: Letters, Telegrams and Postal Systems* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 5; Ian Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post: The Authorized History of the Royal Mail* (London: Penguin, 2011), 167.
[8] Catherine Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 3.
[9] Koehler, *Thomas Hardy*, 5-6.

further exemplified by the terms Post Office and Royal Mail, which are both variably used to denote postal circulation. The terms are largely interchangeable, both in nineteenth-century literature and present scholarship, so I aim to maintain the slippages in terminology utilised by the literature studied in the course of this thesis.[10] Duncan Campbell-Smith's non-academic history of the Post Office, notes that the term 'post' is derives from the Roman courier system in which stations were called 'positus', while 'mail' comes from the French word 'malle', meaning travelling bag.[11] He argues that the Royal Mail first became a common term for the Post Office after 'it became a familiar sight on the enamelled paintwork of high-speed coaches of 1789' but that the terms are ultimately interchangeable.[12] Importantly for this thesis, the term 'mail' encompassed a multiplicity of meanings. In the nineteenth-century, the term 'mail' was used as a synecdoche for a form of transport facilitated by postal infrastructures: to catch the mail is to climb on-board a particular postal infrastructure, such as the mail coach, mail train or steam packet. This use in itself exemplifies the heterogeneity of the term, as mail comes to denote either coach, train or ship. Individuals could also receive 'mail', suggesting both individual letters and a metonym for the Post Office as a whole. The mail, then, appears to mean the transit, or mobility, of the postal object; the infrastructures on which postal objects travelled; as well as its relationship to an embodied audience either travelling alongside the mail or sending and receiving letters. The very terminology of the mail exemplifies the slipperiness and heterogeneity that gives rise to its imaginative potential in literature.

1. Mobilities and/or Infrastructures?

'Postal Bodies' explicates the infrastructural impact of the principle that the Post Office should facilitate the continuous movement of the mail, partly ushered in by Rowland Hill and uniform penny postage. This ceaseless postal system could only operate if supported by extensive systems of infrastructure. We can consider the postal network to be at once mobility and infrastructure. In the nineteenth century, it operated as a system that provided infrastructures with which to move information (and people) across

[10] Notably, Martin Daunton's academic history of the postal service is titled *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), and Campbell-Smith's non-academic history is titled *Masters of the Post*.
[11] Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, xxiii.
[12] Campbell-Smith also holds that the interchangeability of these terms still causes confusion in Whitehall today, see *Masters of the Post*, xxiii.

Britain and the globe. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this included toll roads and mail coaches, coaching inns and stables, fast-travelling schooners to carry packets of letters abroad, letter carriers, runners and private messengers. By the end of the century, shifts in technology and postal services meant that infrastructures included Travelling Post Offices and mail trains, globalised and contracted steam packets, telegraph cables and post offices, runners, mail carriers, and sorters. These developments fundamentally shifted domestic and imperial conceptions of communication and its infrastructures and thus offered imaginative avenues for literary authors, as well as generating large numbers of periodical articles and illustrations concerning its working.

Significantly, these infrastructures were all about facilitating and accelerating the rapid movement of information. Cultural geographers define mobility as socially produced motion; or, in other words, movement that becomes meaningful through the interplay of subject, space and social relations. Thus, the nineteenth-century communication system can be — and often is — conceptualised as a mobility. In recent years, cultural geographers' extensive theorisations of mobility have attempted to articulate and provide a critical framework for the importance and sociability of moving in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[13] In their monograph *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (2010), Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman identify that mobility theory's attention to the 'practice and performance' of mobility, as well as the 'philosophical agendas' behind the new mobilities paradigm, stem from 'a post-structuralist sensitivity to movement and practice'.[14] Furthermore, they argue that mobilities must:

> remain focused on the way in which bodies and things move[;] the political, cultural, and aesthetic implications and resonances of these movements[;] the meanings ascribed to these movements[;] and the embodied experiences of mobility.[15]

Mobility is layered, and the critical framework of mobilities fosters attention to the different ways in which mobilities signify. In an earlier article, Cresswell articulates these

[13] Indeed, there has been an accepted spatial turn across the humanities which explores space in all its aspects. This turn was arguably initiated by Michel de Certeau's and Henri Lefebvre's social theories on the production of space in capitalist societies. Please see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Contuum, 1995).
[14] Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman eds, *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 5.
[15] Cresswell and Merriman, 2.

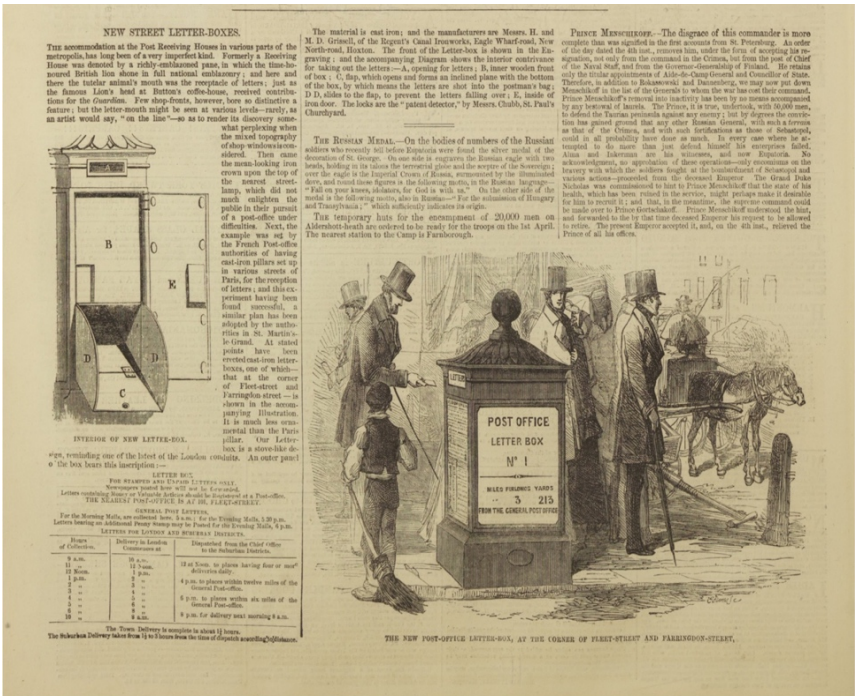
layers as ‘constellations of mobility’: a group of associated aspects of mobility, such as patterns of movement, representations of movement and practices of movement, which together make sense of mobility.[16] By approaching mobilities through constellations, Cresswell indicates the importance of these different facets — patterns, representations, and practice — to the sense of the whole. Cresswell’s concept of constellations will resonate through this thesis as I seek to establish not only the patterns of mail movement, but also the social meanings ascribed to it, its depiction and representation in nineteenth-century literature, and the embodied practice and depiction of postal mobility.

Scholarship on mobilities has often focused on twenty-first-century mobilities, from airports to mobile phones.[17] However, issues like mass-immigration and emigration, increasing communication and a faster pace of life are pertinent in a nineteenth-century context, and there has been much significant scholarship on nineteenth-century, and, indeed, early-modern and eighteenth-century mobilities. There is a potential danger in anachronistically mapping a twenty-first-century theory onto the nineteenth century, and I take a cue from scholarship that is concerned with nineteenth-century conceptions of mobility, and how contemporaneous literature theorised and created mobilities. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

Despite its potential characterisation as a mobility, the nineteenth-century British postal system, and its role in the public transportation of information and people, relied on infrastructural nodes that complicate the picture drawn by the new mobilities paradigm. For Mimi Sheller and John Urry, mobilities often entail ‘highly embedded and immobile infrastructures’; they argue that the complexity of mobile systems ‘stem[s] from the multiple fixities or moorings often on a substantial physical scale that enable the

[16] Tim Cresswell, ‘Towards a Politics of Mobility’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 1 (February 2010): 18. Sage Journals.

[17] Mobility theorists have often focussed on contemporary forms of mobilities, such as cars and aeroplanes, and mobile phones. Please see, for example: Monika Büscher, Mimi Sheller, and David Tyfield. ‘Mobility Intersections: Social Research, Social Futures’, *Mobilities* 11, no. 4 (7 August 2016): 487. Taylor & Francis Online; Tim Cresswell, ‘Towards a Politics of Mobility’; Peter Adey, *Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2009); Leopoldina Fortunati and Sakari Taipale, ‘Mobilities and the network of personal technologies: Refining the understanding of mobility structure’, *Telematics and Informatics*, 34 (2017) 560–568. Science Direct.


NEW STREET LETTER-BOXES.

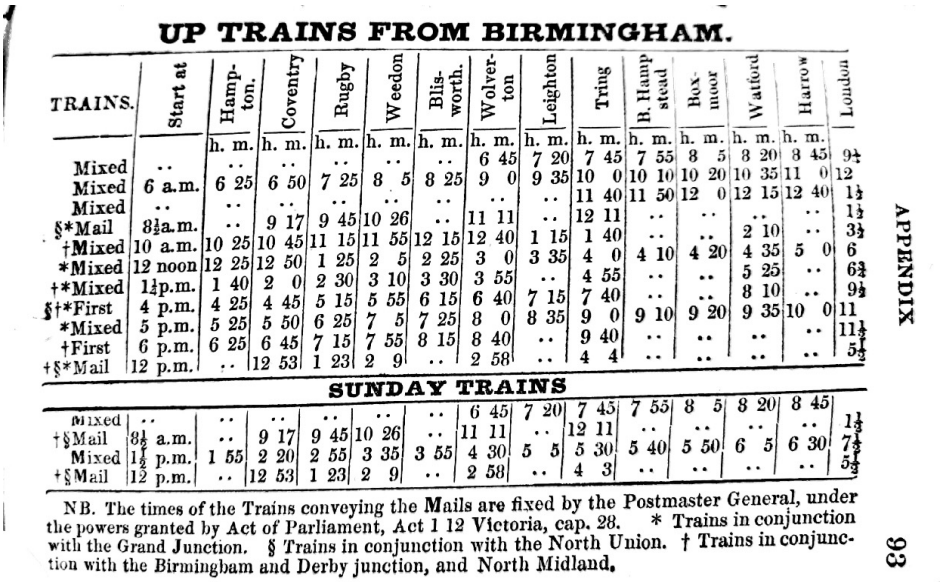
THE NEW POST-OFFICE LETTER-BOX, AT THE CORNER OF FLEET-STREET AND FARRINGDON-STREET.

Figure 1. Anon, ‘New Street Letter-Boxes’, *The Illustrated London News*, March 24, 1855. The Illustrated London News Historical Archive.

fluidities of liquid modernity’.[18] This language is pertinent to certain aspects of postal infrastructure — we may think of, for instance, pillar post boxes or ports and railway termini. However, this language of fixity and immobility potentially does a disservice to the ways in which infrastructures, and especially infrastructures of the post, function. Pillar post boxes received letters and were emptied multiple times a day, while railway termini and steam packet ports were hives of activity at particular temporal moments. The infrastructural operations of the nineteenth-century Post Office were confusingly embedded *and* uprooted, human *and* machine, moorings *and* mobile networks.

Furthermore, the ‘Post Office’ does not operate only as a metonym for the communication network but can be conceptualised as an infrastructure in and of itself *and* made up of multiple mobile infrastructures. For example, for Brian Larkin, ‘infrastructures are built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space’.[19] Similarly, Jo Guldi defines ‘the infrastructure state’ as one in which ‘governments regularly design the flow of bodies, information, and

[18] Mimi Sheller and John Urry, ‘The New Mobilities Paradigm’, *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006): 210. Sage Journals.
[19] Brian Larkin, ‘The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42, no. 1 (2013): 328. Annual Reviews.



UP TRAINS FROM BIRMINGHAM.

TRAINS.	Start at	Hampton.	Coventry	Rugby	Weedon	Blisworth.	Wolverton	Leighton	Tring	B. Hampstead	Boxmoor	Watford	Harrow	London
		h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	h. m.	
Mixed	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 45	7 20	7 45	7 55	8 5	8 20	8 45	9½
Mixed	6 a.m.	6 25	6 50	7 25	8 5	8 25	9 0	9 35	10 0	10 10	10 20	10 35	11 0	12
Mixed	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	11 40	11 50	12 0	12 15	12 40	1½
§*Mail	8½a.m.	..	9 17	9 45	10 26	..	11 11	..	12 11	..	..	..	..	1½
†Mixed	10 a.m.	10 25	10 45	11 15	11 55	12 15	12 40	1 15	1 40	..	..	2 10	..	3½
*Mixed	12 noon	12 25	12 50	1 25	2 5	2 25	3 0	3 35	4 0	4 10	4 20	4 35	5 0	6
†*Mixed	1½p.m.	1 40	2 0	2 30	3 10	3 30	3 55	..	4 55	..	..	5 25	..	6¾
§†*First	4 p.m.	4 25	4 45	5 15	5 55	6 15	6 40	7 15	7 40	..	..	8 10	..	9½
*Mixed	5 p.m.	5 25	5 50	6 25	7 5	7 25	8 0	8 35	9 0	9 10	9 20	9 35	10 0	11
†First	6 p.m.	6 25	6 45	7 15	7 55	8 15	8 40	..	9 40	..	..	..	..	11½
†§*Mail	12 p.m.	..	12 53	1 23	2 9	..	2 58	..	4 4	..	..	..	..	5½

SUNDAY TRAINS

Mixed	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 45	7 20	7 45	7 55	8 5	8 20	8 45	1½
†§Mail	8½ a.m.	..	9 17	9 45	10 26	..	11 11	..	12 11	..	..	..	..	7¾
Mixed	1½ p.m.	1 55	2 20	2 55	3 35	3 55	4 30	5 5	5 30	5 40	5 50	6 5	6 30	5½
†§Mail	12 p.m.	..	12 53	1 23	2 9	..	2 58	..	4 3	..	..	..	..	

NB. The times of the Trains conveying the Mails are fixed by the Postmaster General, under the powers granted by Act of Parliament, Act 1 12 Victoria, cap. 28. * Trains in conjunction with the Grand Junction. § Trains in conjunction with the North Union. † Trains in conjunction with the Birmingham and Derby junction, and North Midland.

APPENDIX

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Figure 2. Charles Fowler, *Fowler's Railway Traveller's Guide*, 2nd ed. (Leeds, 1841). General Reference 1606/1392, British Library, London.

goods'.[20] As my chapters will show, the postal network operated through multiple transmission lines which branched from central nodes, for example, from the centralised sorting office of St Martin's le Grand, and required the labour and mobility of sorters, runners, mail trains and steam packets. Furthermore, these infrastructural exchanges operated with a mobility and instability that Urry and Sheller do not define within the remit of infrastructural in their conception of mobility. These infrastructural problems continually lead me back to the bodies of the workers within this system — infrastructure does not only operate as a mechanised system but is reliant on human bodies to facilitate the global flow of information.

In order to challenge ideas of frictionless, disembodied circulation, theories of infrastructures, as well as mobilities, have been central to my methodological approach. In their special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, Michael Rubenstein, Bruce Robbins and Sophia Beal argue that:

> [i]nfrastructure lives — conceptually though not actually — outside the domain of private property. What we refer to as infrastructure sometimes goes by the name public works. The adjective "public" in these instances refers both to government ownership (or regulation) of infrastructure and to the notion that this infrastructure is available to all.[21]

[20] Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4.
[21] Michael Rubenstein, Bruce Robbins, and Sophia Beal, 'Infrastructuralism: An Introduction', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 4 (29 December 2015): 577. Project Muse.

In line with this argument, I mostly examine literature from after the 1839 Postage Act. After uniform penny postage, the Victorians increasingly understood the Post Office as a democratic, government institution, which was publicly owned and available to all. However, I also complicate this picture by demonstrating that though the Post Office was a metonymic state infrastructure of information, it also contracted private firms, such as railway companies and steam-ship companies, to carry the mail. As Chapters Two, Three, and Four will argue, this often led to clashes of culture between the function of the state and that of private firms.

Furthermore, infrastructural turn complicates and pushes my analysis of the postal in literature. Importantly, Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal argue that infrastructures 'find powerful forms of expression in literary fictions, where speculation and experimentation beyond the factual are made uniquely possible'.[22] For Rubenstein, Robbins and Beal, infrastructures are intrinsically 'unsexy' — they are 'below-structure[s]', that 'tend to go unnoticed when [they are] in fine working order'.[23] In his earlier monograph *Public Works* (2010), Rubenstein also analyses the domestic arrangement of water and gas infrastructures in Ireland. He argues that in the early-twentieth century, 'the advent of public utilities [....] restructure[d] the home architecturally [and] demand[ed] a profound restructuring of the domestic habitus'.[24] So too did the infrastructures of the nineteenth-century Post Office architecturally change homes and streets, and demand a profound restructuring of communication habits. In the clearest example, after the advent of uniform penny postage in 1840, letters had to be prepaid, fostering a whole set of structures that enabled this publicly owned network to operate.

Importantly, in *Public Works*, Rubenstein articulates the complicated relationship between infrastructures and power, which, he argues, fundamentally shaped 'Ireland's early and traumatic experience of modernity and modernization'.[25] For Rubenstein, it was not the case that Ireland 'lacked modernity or development', but that infrastructures associated with modernity developed incredibly quickly through imperial projects led by the British: thus 'they had too much [development], [...] without the protections of national

[22] Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal, 'Infrastructuralism', 575.
[23] Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal, 576.
[24] Mark Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 5-6.
[25] Rubenstein, 18.

sovereignty to soften its violent transformations'.[26] Literary fiction, Rubenstein argues, is uniquely able to bring the 'below-structures' of infrastructures to the surface, and to make their relationship to power visible. For Caroline Levine, paying attention to usually-forgotten infrastructures can reveal their potential to perpetuate inequalities:

> Structures and infrastructures demand analysis because they are all too readily overlooked, especially when they are working smoothly, organizing life in ways that feel given, and easy to naturalize or take for granted to those who are benefiting from them.[27]

The invisibility of infrastructures renders the inequalities they perpetuate equally invisible. These inequalities are, however, also at work in the self-consciously visible infrastructures of the Post Office. As images from *The Illustrated London News* in 1855 suggest (see Figure 1 above), the introduction of postal infrastructures garnered a keen interest in Victorian popular literature. These images, one of the interior structure of the pillar post box, and the other illustrating how the pillar post box might look on Fleet Street, are interested in how these structures fit into the everyday lives of postal workers and postal users. Indeed, the image of a child street sweeper looking up to the top-hatted gentleman is ambiguous in its potential symbolism. Is this another indication of how the Post Office was being opened up to everyone, or of the inequalities still at work in terms of access to the network? I take a cue from Rubenstein's and Levine's critique of power and infrastructure in order to examine how postal infrastructures became political symbols of British innovation at home and imperial power abroad.

For both Rubenstein and Levine, infrastructures are political and powerful: access to them, or lack thereof, can significantly impact an individual's and community's ability to fully participate in society with agency. This understanding of encounters with infrastructures will feed into my interrogation of the ways in which postal infrastructures signify: when brought to the fore of a text, their presence can undermine assumptions about nineteenth-century mobility. These infrastructures operate with socialised human bodies on-board; both the bodies of those working to facilitate informational mobility, such as sorters on the Travelling Post Office (TPO), and middle- and upper-class passengers expediting themselves on-board mail trains and steam packets. While the infrastructures of the nineteenth-century mail challenge conceptions of infrastructure being invisible (and even 'unsexy'), they also appear as embedded in stratified

[26] Rubenstein, 18-19.
[27] Caroline Levine, '"The Strange Familiar": Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 4 (29 December 2015): 600. Jstor.

nineteenth-century conceptions of information mobility. This form of mobility has distinct class structures associated with it and is, first and foremost, an indicator of middle- and upper-class mobility.

Infrastructures also raise questions about the individual's relationship with the nation. Rubenstein further theorises that infrastructures bring an individual or community into conjunction with the state. He discusses the conflicting relationship between the state and public utilities (such as power lines, water and sewerage-works), and its representation in fiction, arguing that there are:

> moments in fiction where the state […] becomes visible through the unnoticed rituals of daily life: rituals that are, though we would rarely stop to think of it, underwritten by the provision of public utilities through municipal and state authorities.[28]

This connection with the state through infrastructures allows us to 'commune with the material culture of the state, encountering its power and, when things are in working order, its benevolent provision'.[29] I complicate Rubenstein's argument through my attention to infrastructures that were more likely to be encountered through embodiment when working at their most ceaseless and scheduled, i.e. when they are in excellent working order.

The infrastructures of the nineteenth-century Post Office were visible not only in the domestic spaces but also in more public settings — these were not infrastructures hidden below the ground, as may be the case for water, electric, and gas works.[30] For instance, pillar post boxes bearing the insignia of Victoria Regenia began to appear on significant thoroughfares from 1853. Furthermore, documents in the Postal Museum Archive indicate that members of the public so valued pillar post boxes that wealthy citizens petitioned for their construction. In 1859, for instance, Sir James Duke MP wrote to Hill in order to request that a second pillar post box be erected on Portland Place, as 'you know Portland Place is a long street and the most convenient position is opposite the Belgium Ambassadors'.[31] Steam packets also explicitly bore the prefix RMS for Royal Mail Steamship, and major timetables, such as Bradshaw's and Fowler's, labelled

[28] Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 9.
[29] Rubenstein, 9-10.
[30] One could cite the underground pneumatic dispatch railway as an example of an invisible mail infrastructure. Though trialled, with much public interest, in the 1860s, the Post Office never entered into a permanent arrangement with the Pneumatic Dispatch Company. See Kate Thomas, 'Postal Digressions: Mail and Sexual Scandal', in *Postal Pleasures*, 39-69 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015) Oxford Scholarship Online.
[31] 'Rowland Hill Post Office Correspondence 1858-9', 15 March 1859, POST 100/59, Postal Museum Archive, London.

mail trains in their schedules, as seen in Figure 2. As this thesis demonstrates, infrastructures in the nineteenth century seem to become visible when they are most ardently operating in 'fine working order', and literary representation relishes in the visible infrastructures that prioritise the mail, and leave bodies in positions of discomfort, abandonment and mechanical failure.

Furthermore, these moments of tangible interaction with the working order of the benevolent state brings Rubenstein's work into conversation, and potential juxtaposition, with Benedict Anderson's influential study on the creation and preservation of nationalisms. Anderson famously argues that nationalism is upheld by *imagining* the community as a nation, as a homogeneous whole: 'it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members […] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[32] Importantly for my thesis, Anderson argues that newspapers and novels are two of the most vital literary forms that convey the imagined community. For Anderson, the form of the newspaper depicts the 'sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time [which] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history'.[33] The experience of postal infrastructures treads this fine line between tangible encounters with the state and the imagining of the nation. As well as carrying letters, the Post Office also operated the book post from 1848, which, following the abolition of compulsory stamp duty in 1855, was widened to include all printed material, including newspapers.[34] Aligning Rubenstein's and Anderson's readings then, the infrastructures of the Royal Mail and Post Office could further cement 'imagined' connections between disparate communities through their circulation of letters, newspapers and books, while also serving as tangible encounters with the state, from the head of the Queen on the stamp to the embodied experience of mobility on-board government-contracted mail trains and steam packets.

Patrick Joyce's socio-historic analysis of the role Post Office infrastructures in the history of the British state also informs my understanding of state infrastructures. Joyce argues that postal infrastructures of the state brought together transport, work, information and domestic life 'in a new and revolutionary configuration [in which] [t]hings,

[32] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.
[33] Anderson, 26.
[34] Martin Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 55.

people and ideas were brought into a closer relation than ever before'.[35] Though this thesis contests Joyce's claim that in comparison to the Austro-Hungarian empire and German-language writers 'the British state seems to have produced a far less penetrating literature on the subject [of state infrastructures]', it is broadly aligned to his monograph's interest in the expansion of the Post Office in the nineteenth century.[36] Joyce argues that through the nineteenth century, the Post Office shifted from a network — which he argues indicates a component of openness — to a 'system proper' — which is closed and self-regulating: 'Part of the process of a network becoming a system involves the degree to which durability and consistency will have been implanted in the network'.[37] Joyce reveals the implications of this move from network to system on infrastructures:

> [T]he series of links which made up "the Post Office" [....] encompassed for example the paths, roads, seaways and railways that literally made up the links. These pathways in turn connected and aligned the locations of nodes that made up the network. The transport and communication "devices" which traversed and connected these links were also involved as were the forms of what was transmitted.[38]

Joyce traces the shift from an open network of trusted postboys and coaching-inns to a 'system-proper', connected and aligned to the state. The infrastructures of mail train, steam packet, coaches and runners were as important as what was being transmitted infrastructurally to the expanding nineteenth-century Post Office. I build on Joyce's detailed infrastructural study of the state by considering the literary representation of these changing postal infrastructures. As Rubenstein argues, the representation of infrastructures in literature (and popular print media more broadly) is often their most forceful and powerful presence in the imaginary.

My interest in textual representation complicates Joyce's distinction between network and 'system-proper'. For this reason, I also take a cue from Jonathan Grossman's use of the terms 'network' and 'system' in *Charles Dickens's Networks* (2012), which I discuss in more detail in the next section. Unlike Joyce, Grossman does not make a sharp terminological distinction between these terms. Though his use of 'network' and 'system' is inflected by their respective emphasis on interconnection and extension, and enclosed boundaries and self-definition, both these characteristics are

[35] Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53.
[36] Joyce, 3.
[37] Joyce, 58.
[38] Joyce, 59.

'treated as jointly in play'.[39] In a slight complicating of Joyce's sharp delineations between these terms then, I utilise the terms 'network' and 'system' where appropriate, whilst also allowing for their potential slipperiness and instability in literary representation.

The ongoing innovations in nineteenth-century postal mobility and infrastructure also raise the question of 'modernity' and how I use the term in this thesis. 'Modernity', like 'network' and 'mail', is an equivocal term that shifts with use; as Marian Aguiar has argued: 'modernity' appears to be 'an object to be attained (to *acquire* modernity) and a condition to be achieved (to *be* modern)'.[40] My usage of and interest in modernity take their cue from the work of Aguiar and Nicola Kirkby, whose thesis I consider in more detail in the next section of this introduction. In her monograph *Tracking Modernity* (2011), Aguiar approaches modernity 'as rhetoric', and uses this as a basis from which to explore the history of this rhetoric's role in a range of 'representational and material practices'.[41] By looking at modernity through the lens of rhetorical practice and historical contexts, 'it is possible to see both its fluidity as circumstances change and, perhaps more strikingly, the moments that those meanings congeal into static forms'.[42] Furthermore, in her thesis, Kirkby is careful of the pitfalls of simplicity in interpreting the railway as a vehicle or driver of 'modernity'. Indeed, she argues that critics such as Nicholas Daly and Andrew Thacker risk shrinking 'the impact of industrialization on multiple generations into a noun — modernity', rather than 'a temporally and experientially multifarious and shifting nexus'.[43] Following Kirkby and Aguiar, then, I reveal how nineteenth-century literature and print media constructs the Post Office as aligned with a sense of modernity, especially in the mid-nineteenth century, while being alert to the unequal and multifarious experience of such modernity. As exemplified in Edwards's phantom mail coach and its exploration of a coaching past in the railway present of the 1860s, the mail could also be used metaphorically as a representation of this multifaceted modernity.

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[39] Jonathan Grossman, *Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7 and 226.
[40] Marian Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1.
[41] Aguiar, 3.
[42] Aguiar, 3.
[43] Nicola Elizabeth Kirkby, 'British Railway Infrastructure and The Novel: 1850-1910' (PhD Thesis, King's College London, 2017), 42.

This thesis mainly considers postal infrastructures from a British perspective, though I acknowledge and remain cognisant of the fact that they are part of a global picture. Both Aguiar's monograph on the development of railways in India and Chandrika Kaul's work on the media's role in the British Empire approach transport and communication from a postcolonial perspective that takes into account both the metropolitan gaze of a colonial centre and the peripheral perspective of the colonised. Furthermore, Joyce's *The State of Freedom* offers a detailed analysis of the development of postal infrastructures under the British Raj in India. Additionally, Rubenstein's analysis of public works in Irish literature is also culturally specific in its analysis of the influence of British imperialism in Ireland. While I follow the expansion of postal infrastructures through a primarily British lens, I aim to be attentive to the cultural impact of this expansion, especially as it was an active enabler and emblem of British imperialism.

While I examine anglophone literature on the Post Office and, where appropriate, those travelling between and through Britain via postal networks, it is worth noting that these perspectives shaped and in turn were shaped by, changing communication networks across the world, particularly in Europe, India and Asia, Australasia, and North and South America.[44] Bernhard Siegert's work, *Relays* (1999), traces the potential relationships between postal history and literary form across Europe and argues that language itself is 'relayed' through postal systems. Siegert's ambitious analysis of 'epochs', and range of German literary and philosophical text, bears little subject overlap to the scope of this thesis. However, Siegert also recognises the gaps and 'ghosts' created by postal systems, arguing that the 'material conditions of history, are in turn just many sites of withdrawal, postal halts [….] What is recorded is the necessary trace of posting'.[45] Siegert's concept of the 'trace of posting' has furthered my understanding and engagement with how postal infrastructures and the signs and nodes of the route travelled, tend to leave their mark on a letter — halts and diversions are as important to postal infrastructures and complicates their depiction as embodying speed and utilitarian efficiency.

David Henkin argues that in North America, the 'popular items of postal exchange, registered contemporary fascination with new possibilities of mail and shared

[44] Golden, *Posting It*, 5.
[45] Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 11.

popular understanding of the post as a medium of long-distance communication'.[46] While the British Post Office was central in conceptualising Britain as an imperial nation, the United States Post Office created a connection and construction of the nation as a whole, connecting the East Coast to the developing West Coast. Notably, Henkin also contends that postal infrastructures had a role in this connection of the nation:

> Though a mail steamer or stagecoach might embody an absent parent, lover, or business partner in the imagination of a displaced correspondent, it also came to represent a system of circulation whose regular openings and transmissions rendered absent people always in some sense accessible. Posted letters were not simply individual utterances sent through a specifically appointed messenger; they were the content of a continuous stream of messages passing through a network of communication channels that ran whether or not any particular person had something to say.[47]

I have quoted Henkin at length here because this argument points to many of the contentions and questions posited by 'Postal Bodies'. How did the infrastructures of the mail come to embody the rhetoric surrounding the postal service, and how does the individual, subjective letter fare in a system designed to operate with complete impersonal precision? Henkin and Siegert's interest in absence/presence and the impersonal networks associated with the intensely personal resonates through the course of this thesis.

A final point for consideration in the infrastructural materiality of the nineteenth-century postal service is its complexity. Each of the postal infrastructures I discuss would have been a recognisable part of the operations of the nineteenth-century Post Office. Each helps shape the postal imaginary — a shared set of cultural associations and metaphors created by these infrastructures — during the nineteenth century. As I uncover this complexity, it is worth noting that the postal service was imaginatively, and sometimes experientially, amalgamated with other services, including non-postal transportation and alternative communication methods (such as the telegraph, which came under the jurisdiction of the Post Office in 1869). Furthermore, the legacies of older postal infrastructures were still present in the age of steam communication — the rhetoric of speed and technological advancement which coloured the age of steam was undoubtedly present in the postal reforms that devised the mail coach in the late-eighteenth-century.

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[46] David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 9.
[47] Henkin, 4-5.

2. Mobility and Infrastructure in Nineteenth-Century Scholarship

Attention to mobilities and infrastructures has led to a critical endeavour to complicate and nuance the picture of nineteenth-century transport innovations. Through this next section, I demonstrate how my thesis builds on, and sometimes challenges, scholarship that has constituted a mobility and infrastructural turn in nineteenth-century studies. Notably, this scholarship poses a critique to arguments that begin with the railway's 'annihilation of space and time', made seminal by Wolfgang Schivelbusch's work *The Railway Journey* (1986). Schivelbusch's monograph places the developments in locomotion alongside other aspects of Victorian culture, such as the panorama and the medical condition 'railway spine', arguing that the railway impacted concepts of time and space, changed visual perception and the travel experience, and induced new medical diagnoses. Central to Schivelbusch's thesis is the assertion that steam fundamentally changed the experience of travel: 'as the motion of transportation was freed from its organic fetters by steam power, its relationship to the space it covered changed quite radically'.[48] Though much significant scholarship on the railway, literature, material culture and experience has followed Schivelbusch's research, I resist the narrative that the railway was synonymous with modernity, and indeed a radical change, in which some of this scholarship has invested.[49] Ian Carter discusses the nineteenth-century railway as a 'qualitative break' from the past, while Nicholas Daly argues that the railway was 'an icon of the acceleration of the pace of everyday life, annihilating an older experience of time and space'.[50] This narrative, while sometimes appropriate in conceptualising the railway's potential to shift perceptions of time and distance, potentially does a disservice to competing perspectives and alternative uses. As

[48] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 10.
[49] See Jill Matus's study on how trauma and the railway disaster become signalled through railway infrastructures in, 'Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection', *Victorian Studies*, 43.4. (2001): 413-436. Jstor; Anna Despotopoulou's work on the ambiguity of the railway as a gendered space in *Women and the Railway, 1850 – 1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2015); Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman's edited collection *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), particularly Ana Parejo Vadillo and John Plunkett's chapter on the transformations of visual perception, which aligns the visual experience of the first audiences of the moving panorama in the late-eighteenth century with that of the speeding train in the nineteenth: 'The Railway Passenger; or, The Training of the Eye', 45–69.
[50] Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 11; Nicholas Daly, 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses', *ELH* 66, no. 2 (1999): 463.

Matthew Beaumont argues, 'the railway destroyed communities as well as created them, and it brutally exhausted human labour as well as liberating those who could afford to use it'.[51] The language of homogenising revolution can silence the nuanced responses to the railway that included multiple and diverging perspectives. As Edwards's ghostly mail coach suggests, the kind of clean divisions between a 'coaching past' and a 'railway modernity' is often pushed against, questioned and complicated in nineteenth-century literature.

Recent scholarship on Victorian mobilities has been particularly foundational to my research, especially in conceptualising how mobility and infrastructures operated in different contexts. Indeed, I utilise much of the following scholarship throughout 'Postal Bodies'. In her monograph, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel* (2015), Charlotte Mathieson examines the embodied experience of mobility in the nineteenth-century novel, from walking and the British railway, to train travel across the European continent. The embodied experience of travel, she argues, creates a connection between mobility and nation. Mathieson contends that in the nineteenth century, nation-building was not a process of interiorisation; instead, she argues that 'the confluence of intra- and inter-national mobilities produced through the body' generated an understanding of 'the place of the nation as integrally connected to and situated within the global landscape'.[52] In *Writing the Stage Coach Nation* (2016), Ruth Livesey also utilises mobility theory in order to analyse mid-nineteenth-century articulations of the nation through the stage and mail coach. The work of Urry and Sheller on infrastructural nodes and mooring points becomes vital to Livesey's analysis of the forms of national mobility fostered by the stage and mail coaches, which were 'enabled by, and in turn shaped, a series of local halts and anchoring points'.[53] Livesey argues that the use of the stage and mail coach in the mid-nineteenth-century 'just past' novel becomes the 'perfect analogy of nationhood as a constant process of drawing itself together' — communicating with the whole while retaining a local identity and anchorage.[54] Mathieson's multi-modal study of embodied mobility and Livesey's attention to narrative form have impacted my attention to the

[51] Matthew Beaumont, 'The Railway and Literature: Realism and the Phantasmagoric', in *The Railway: Art in the Age of Steam*, eds. Ian Kennedy and Julian Treuherz, 35–43 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 36.
[52] Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 17.
[53] Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.
[54] Livesey, 10.

multi-modal conception of postal infrastructures, and the legacies of the recent network of mail coaches that travelled Britain's roads.

Kirkby's 'British Railway Infrastructure and The Novel: 1850-1910' has also been foundational to my critical perspective. Her work examines the 'structural and logistical impact of fixed railway components on the novel form', concentrating on novels by Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy and E. M. Forster.[55] Importantly for Kirkby, the fixed components of the railway, such as railway termini, station platforms, junctions and bridges, 'framed nineteenth-century experiences of and responses to locomotive mobility'.[56] Like myself, Kirkby argues that seemingly static infrastructures can never be 'truly static', and is wary of the language of mobility theorists.[57] Importantly for this thesis, Kirkby analyses a range of other material and literary forms, while maintaining that the form of the realist novel represents and thinks through aspects of railway infrastructures in ways that 'cannot be incorporated into other forms'.[58]

Furthermore, Kirkby demonstrates that by the 1850s railway infrastructure was an established part of the British urban and rural landscape; experiences and representations of railway infrastructure were, therefore, as much shaped by 'familiarity and boredom', as it was by the 'revolutionary [...] annihilation of space and time' focused on by other scholarship.[59] So too did attitudes towards the Post Office shift and change throughout the nineteenth century as legislation like uniform penny post came to be a regular part of everyday life. These changes meant that public encounters with the visible infrastructures of the Post Office continued to shift, from the introduction of pillar post boxes in 1853 to the integration of the telegraph into the Post Office system in 1870. I aim to be attentive to the changing contexts which may frame fictional encounters with postal infrastructures.

Grossman's *Charles Dickens's Networks* (2013) has also been foundational to the methodological approach of my thesis. He argues that from the stagecoach to the railway, public transport systematically networked people, and the 'art form of the novel played a special role in synthesizing and understanding' these reimagined, networked

[55] Kirkby, 'Railway Infrastructure', 13.
[56] Kirkby, 14.
[57] Kirkby, 51.
[58] Kirkby, 26.
[59] Kirkby, 43.

communities.[60] Grossman's attention to public transportation leads him to clarify that, in his monograph, '"communicating" never waffles into its secondary sense of indicating a physical passing between two places'; indeed, Grossman contends that 'Dickens hones distinctions between the communication system, to which medium his novels belong, and the passenger transport system, about which they have much to say'.[61] I am also aware of Grossman's repeated assertions in his analysis of letters and transport in *The Pickwick Papers* that characters do not post themselves:

> postal letters once composed and mailed enter into a temporal and spatial dimension all of their own, and one separate from that of living bodies [....] The goal here is simply to avoid the tempting deconstructive word slide that the critic John Bowen makes when he argues that because characters may ride the mails or travel by post, "the characters [...] are [...] posting themselves"'.[62]

Grossman is right to highlight the temporal and spatial differences between passenger and postal transport and, to a large extent, my thesis invests in this differentiation. I argue that the experience and imaginary potential of mail infrastructures were unique: to travel by mail is not to simply travel on passenger transport. I am also wary of a simplistic conclusion that passengers are 'posting themselves'.

However, there is a delight in the slippage between mail and transport infrastructures in the nineteenth century, for which Grossman's analysis does not quite make room. For instance, in one of *The Pickwick Papers*' interpolated tales analysed by Grossman, the ride in the ghost of a Royal Mail coach details the *mailness* of the mail with absolute glee. Grossman argues that the punchline of this narrative is that 'living people cannot dream themselves back into the letter bags of those "ghosts of mail-coaches"', but there is also a punchline in the postal infrastructures interrupting the bodily romance taking place in this story-within-a-story.[63] In this precursor to Edwards's phantom mail coach, the ghost mail coaches in Dickens's story continually fail to uphold the high standards of the Royal Mail: on being addressed as Jack Martin only, Bagman's Uncle asks if there is not a '"Mister" before it? [...] For he felt, gentlemen, that for a guard he didn't know to call him Jack Martin, was a liberty which the Post-office wouldn't have sanctioned if they had known it'.[64] When driving out of the wheelwright yard, Martin looks out of the coach window and observes:

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[60] Grossman, *Dickens's Networks*, 4.
[61] Grossman, 8.
[62] Grossman, 77.
[63] Grossman, 77.
[64] Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, eds. Mark Wormald (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 650.

> that the other mails, with coachmen, guards, horses, and passengers, complete, were driving round and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour. My uncle burned with indignation, gentlemen. As a commercial man, he felt that the mail-bags were not to be trifled with, and he resolved to memorialise the Post Office on the subject, the very instant he reached London.[65]

The journey further feeds Martin's indignation as the coach proceeds with unusual slowness: 'a mail travelling at a rate of six miles and a half an hour, and stopping for an indefinite time at such a hole as this, is rather an irregular sort of proceeding, I fancy'.[66] Amid a heroine stolen away by two villains, a gallant fight for her honour and a double murder, Dickens inserts Jack's expectations of and disappointment with the mail service of the recent past — the functioning of the infrastructure of the mail comes to disrupt the fleeing bodies in Jack's imaginary and becomes a cause for bureaucratic concern. The punchline is also, therefore, that the bureaucratic and temporal dimension of the mail interrupts the narrative of a gallant, romantic, and heroic story.

From the perspective of Grossman's research, the transport system remains distinct from that of communication; however, this is where my focus on transportation diverts from Grossman's analysis and adds significantly to the scholarly field. I explicitly focus on communication infrastructures that 'waffle [...] into [the] secondary sense of indicating a physical passing'.[67] In doing so, I demonstrate the imaginative uniqueness of mail lines compared to other forms of travel — they not only synchronised passenger travel but synchronised this travel with the circulation of information. This synchronous system, involving both bodies and posted objects, was one of the ways travel was conceptualised in the Victorian period and was part of a broader cultural fascination with information circulation.

As has been suggested in Edwards's phantom mail coach, and in Livesey's work, steam transport infrastructures were not necessarily a complete rupture or change from the past, but instead grew out of an established relationship with transport infrastructure. By keeping in mind the kinds of legacies of language and discourses that arose out of the technological innovation of the mail coach, I aim to achieve a nuanced reading of cultural responses to new postal infrastructures. In his timely study *Mobility in the English Novel from Defoe to Austen* (2018), Chris Ewers argues that the changes to public transport in the nineteenth century, which have experienced considerable scholarly attention, were occurring the century before. Ewers argues convincingly that

[65] Dickens, *Pickwick*, 653.
[66] Dickens, 654.
[67] Grossman, *Dickens's Networks*, 8.

in the eighteenth century, 'the development of transport created a weight of infrastructure that was a visible, active ingredient in how lives were shaped'.[68] Placing the transport revolution in the century before the engineers John McAdam and Thomas Telford — whose road innovations, he argues, were already underway — allows Ewers to explore the development of the 'annihilation of space and time' (quoted from Edmund Burke, 'Essay by "Genius"', 1761) in the eighteenth century.[69] The novels of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, he argues, were developed as an 'ideal form to consider the effects of this mobility'.[70] Furthermore, Ewers locates part of this rapid transportation revolution in the development of Postmaster General John Palmer's introduction of mail coaches in the 1780s:

> [The] collision between fast and slow, present throughout the long eighteenth century, intensifies as a result of "flying" coaches, John Palmer's mail-coaches, which started plying major routes from 1784 [….] Britain became patterned by speed: proximity to a good road allowed rapidity and a greater connectivity, while poor turnpikes and country byways created pockets of slowness.[71]

Though Victorians imagined the railway as a revolution from an idling coaching community in the mid-nineteenth century, concerns over connectivity and speed as opposing stagnation and slowness were developing earlier than often anticipated by nineteenth-century literary scholars. Ewers demonstrates that the kinds of inequalities between speed and slowness that scholars have often associated with the advent of the railway were set in motion by eighteenth-century turnpike roads.

Indeed, in alignment with Ewers, Guldi demonstrates that stage and mail coach travel exacerbated transport class divisions that scholars often only associate with railway travel. She argues that:

> Middle-class persons in a stagecoach, moving from inn to inn, equipped with pocket watches and shepherded by maps and guidebooks, had fewer practical reasons to interact with strangers. Interactions between rich and poor were reoriented around privileges of access to transport developments.[72]

Importantly, Guldi illustrates that these travel infrastructures did not operate to homogenise travel, instead arguing that though travellers of different classes journeyed 'along the same routes, they occupied increasingly isolated spheres. Rather than being homogenised by infrastructure, their routes and meeting habits were developing new

[68] Chris Ewers, *Mobility in the English Novel from Defoe to Austen* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 2.
[69] Ewers, 7.
[70] Ewers, 3.
[71] Ewers, 134.
[72] Guldi, *Roads to Power*, 2-3.

forms of segregation'.[73] Guldi's in-depth history of eighteenth-century road infrastructures points to one of my critical contentions, that though infrastructures are often seen as homogenising movement, heterogeneity of movement was more often the case. Though the 'infrastructure state […] regularly design[s] the flow of bodies, information and goods', it is more often the case that bodies and information flow and circulate in unexpected and unintentional ways.[74]

Ewers's and Guldi's demonstrations of the importance of eighteenth-century transportation infrastructures to the imagining of time and place in the novel intentionally complicate the legacy of Schivelbusch. Ewers, as well as Livesey, Kirkby and Grossman, work to destabilise the concept of a revolutionising railway. I toe the nuanced and sometimes difficult line between these two contentions. First, it is clear that the transport revolution began in the eighteenth-century, and that the mail coach was just as important as, if not more important than, the mail train in terms of conceptualising travel via the mail in the nineteenth century. However, the literature studied through the course of this thesis also demonstrates that nineteenth-century discourses about steam technology imagined and constructed it as a break with a horse-drawn past. To some extent, the Victorians themselves constructed the narrative of the steam-engine's break from a recent past. At times, these two opposing contentions are at play together in literature and become blurred in the imagining of nineteenth-century communications infrastructures.

3. Embodiment, Objectivity and Subjectivity

A key claim of my thesis is that is uncovers and places new emphasis on the bodies that made up nineteenth-century postal infrastructures — labouring bodies, travelling bodies, gendered bodies, racialised bodies and writing bodies all shaped, and were shaped by, postal infrastructures. To this end, my analysis of the implications of bodies on the mail raises questions of the relationship between the self and the material world in the nineteenth century. Letters, and their circulation through the infrastructures of the post, were at once material objects, and also, as we shall see through 'Postal Bodies', autonomous things, imbued with their relationship to the distinctly personal. In this section, I consider scholarship that has informed my analysis of embodiment and the

[73] Guldi, 3.
[74] Guldi, 4.

material cultures associated with the bodies who travelled upon and ran the infrastructures of the nineteenth-century Post Office.

Scholars have argued that nineteenth-century 'modernity' can be conceptualised around a changing relationship between the self and the body, which was destabilised by new technologies and industry. In their introduction to *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770-1930* (2011), Hilary Fraser and Deidre Coleman argue that, in the nineteenth century, the relationship between the human and the machine became 'a pervasive theme'.[75] William A. Cohen identifies changes such as mass industrialism and urbanisation, imperialism, as well as evolutionary theories, as further exacerbating questions concerning Cartesian dualism, and the relationship between the mind, body, and material world.[76] The mind and body, he argues, could no longer be philosophised as separate, just as the body could not be separated from the material world — the material world was increasingly encroaching on the conception of the self.[77] Furthermore, Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello argue that, in the nineteenth century, experiences of looking were never 'just visual', but also 'tactile, kinaesthetic, fully embodied, and affected by the material properties of objects'.[78] These changing conceptions between the inside and outside during the nineteenth century, especially the flow of information from the subject and object world, are useful for my interrogation of the relationship between the body and the mail. Sorting, reading, writing letters and addresses, and sticking a penny stamp on the front of the envelope, can be conceived as connecting the embodied and individual with the infrastructures of the state.

Furthermore, scholarship has explored how different literary forms, such as the novel and periodical press, raise and contest questions of material and commodity culture. John Plotz's nuanced and detailed study of the signification of objects as 'portable property' has been foundational to my interrogation of the material and metaphorical experiences of British bodies on international mail infrastructures. Plotz argues that the novel lies at the intersection of commodity culture, which was both private and public, transient and of long-term value. For Plot, 'portable property' are

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[75] Deirdre Coleman and Hilary Fisher eds., *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770-1930*, series *Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.
[76] William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 5.
[77] Cohen, *Embodied*, xii.
[78] Luisa Calè, and Patrizia Di Bello eds., *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 5.

those material objects that become 'metonymic placeholders' for social networks that had become separated from Britain geographically. [79] Plotz's argument that we need 'to investigate [the] ways in which cultural value is imagined circulating, in objects, practices, even in persons', is pertinent to my contentions about the imaginary and political importance of the mail to constructions of the Britishness of British power and mobility overseas.[80] As we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, the steam packet and overland mail route became infrastructures that constructed and contested the global circulation of 'Britishness'.

Significantly, Plotz discusses postal items as objects that, like the novel, traverse the boundaries between owned and private, circulating and public. He cites the letters in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853), which circulate 'with absolute abandonment through [the] universal medium [of] the post,' only to be ultimately 'reimagined as circulating so that it reaches only its intended addressee: you, the singular reader'.[81] The novel, like the letter, circulated through the networks of the Post Office, and both function as examples of 'portable property'. Plotz defines portable property as an object that at once exported a restrictive and distinctive sense of Englishness across a non-English world and also moved 'across boundaries with a potentially unsecured, and even unsecurable, diffusion'.[82] Another example from Gaskell's *Cranford*, that I would draw attention to, is Mary's letter to Peter in India. After dropping the letter 'in the post', she imagines making the journey to India:

> It would get tossed about on the sea, and stained with sea-waves perhaps, and be carried among palm-trees, and scented with all tropical fragrance; the little piece of paper, but an hour ago so familiar and commonplace, had set out on its race to the strange wild countries beyond the Ganges![83]

Mary's 'little piece of paper', which remains 'familiar and commonplace', is sent out into a distinctly non-English world of 'palm-trees' and 'tropical fragrance'; a letter's journey through global mail networks is imagined here as travelling across Plotz's unsecurable boundaries and hybridising the English letter with the scents and stains of another world. As much as the portable property of the letter worked to construct and create ties across the British Empire, they also held the possibility of 'disruptive anonymity, of a dissident

[79] John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), xiii, 2.
[80] Plotz, 9.
[81] Plotz, 11.
[82] Plotz, 21, 23.
[83] Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Cranford', in *The Cranford Chronicles*, revised ed. (1853) (London: Vintage, 2007), 240.

solitary tending to unsettle fixed divisions'.[84] Plotz's analysis of the potential for the postal letter to uphold and unhinge ideas of 'Englishness' across the empire will feed into the arguments of Chapters Three and Four, as I uncover the globalised routes of the postal service through the steam packet and overland mail.

Similarly to Plotz examination of material culture, the discussion of bodies and material culture is rarely an a-political act. It is possible, for instance, to read the interaction between institutionalised postal infrastructures through a Foucauldian lens. In particular, there is ground to draw parallels between the principal of ceaseless postal circulation and Michel Foucault's argument that disciplinary control 'imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed'.[85] However, this thesis resists a Foucauldian reading of the postal body as a 'disciplined' or 'docile' body. The bodies that I uncover in this thesis, talk back to, complicate, and transform postal infrastructures. Instead, I take my cue from Tamara Ketabgian, whose work on Victorian machines and the body makes room for the potential flows and exchanges at work between the machine and the body. She argues that 'we must reread and rehistoricize Victorian culture in ways that do not merely pit people against machines but instead examine their close mingling and identification'.[86] Significantly, she demonstrates that, as scholars, we must remain sceptical of an 'easy denigration of the "mechanical" in a culture where machinery also represents our most powerful and unspeakable notions of emotions and community'.[87] The relationship between body and machine operated through an interdependence and exchange.

Furthermore, the fluidity of object-subject relations has become an increasingly crucial critical perspective in nineteenth-century studies and is pertinent to my analysis of the relationship between the mail and the body.[88] In Bill Brown's special issue of the

[84] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 23.
[85] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 152.
[86] Tamara Ketabgian, *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 1.
[87] Ketabgian, 14.
[88] For example, in her foundational monograph *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Elaine Freedgood argues that the objects that populate Victorian novels, and the relationships mid-Victorians had with their things, preceded Marx's fetishism of the commodity. Her work's importance to scholarship on objects and material culture is grounded in her metonymic readings of objects, in which the 'object is investigated in terms of its own properties and histories'. Katharina Boehm's edited collection *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2015) argues that 'things' help to negotiated changing understandings of the

Critical Inquiry (2007), he argues that: 'The story of objects asserting themselves as things […] is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation'.[89] In alignment with theories of infrastructure, Brown argues that when an object fails to perform as intended, for instance when a dirty windowpane fails to perform its object status as a view to the outside world, it asserts its 'thingness' and the relationship between subject-object is changed.

The fascination with 'dead' letters in nineteenth-century periodical literature typifies the potential 'thingness' of the letter within postal infrastructures. The term itself is suggestive that the livelihood of an object is tied up with its ability to travel as seamlessly as an object through postal infrastructures. One such article in *Bow Bells* from 1866, asserts that '[t]o a curious mind it must be very entertaining to peruse the piles of letters sent to the "Dead-letter Office" in London'.[90] The reader must be 'prepared to laugh at every grotesque expression, to smile over every display of folly and ignorance, to sigh over every development of moral corruption'.[91] As late as 1898, the *Strand Magazine* published an article 'Found in Uncle Sam's Mail's'; in this article, Laura B. Starr discusses a museum 'connected with the Dead Letter Office at Washington', and relishes in the 'most heterogeneous mass of stuff ever collected together'.[92] The thingness of these postal items, unable to traverse the network with uniformity, raises questions and assumptions about their senders and receivers. Both articles emphasise the letters' and items' heterogeneity, their uniqueness and their human-like characteristics of folly and ignorance; as Starr suggests in her article: 'It would strike an outsider that, even without a law to forbid it, no one would wish to send rattlesnakes through the mails would it not?'.[93] Dead letters of course also point to the unique legal status of letters as belonging to the British Crown, and the *Bow Bells* article is at pains to placate their readers' anxiety by emphasising that the task becomes 'mechanically monotonous' to the confidential official.[94] Though 'things', these dead letters become the

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relationship between object and subject in nineteenth-century literature; 'things', she argues, are always discussed in conjunction with the mediation performed by the human body.

[89] Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 4.

[90] Anon, 'Dead Letters', *Bow Bells*, August 22, 1866, 78. British Periodicals.

[91] Anon, 78.

[92] Laura B. Starr, 'Found in Uncle Sam's Mails', *Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly; London* 16, no. 92 (August 1898): 148. British Periodicals.

[93] Starr, 148.

[94] For further discussion on the legal status of dead letters and the opening of postal letters in protection of the state, please see Joyce, *Freedom*, 62-3 and Maurizio Masetti, 'The 1844 Post

legal property of the British Crown, rescinding their relationship with the sender or would-be receiver.[95]

As these 'dead letter' articles suggest, bodies were understood as an intrinsic part of the postal network in terms of both its operation, such as sorting clerks, and end-user engagement, such as letter writers. The Post Office, with its halls and trains of sorters, letter carriers and runners, is a system which mediates the boundaries between 'things' and 'bodies'. Katharina Boehm argues that, in the nineteenth century, the body and its individual parts were 'given object-status when they were sold, bought, exhibited, collected, and exchanged', and the human body became 'a site where subject and object positions [were] hybridised'.[96] This hybridisation means that we can understand the dynamics between subject and object as continuously evolving — not static or fixed. Objects become things as they gain autonomy and bodies become sites where the subject and object are also hybridised. Dorothy Van Ghent's famous article on objects in Dickens's literature discusses how the author's novels treat the animate as if a thing, absorbing the life of people 'who had become incapable of their humanity'.[97] Though I do not follow Ghent's interest in the morality at play in the creation of thing-like humans, her conception and attention to things imitating the human, and the human imitating the inhuman aligns my research with her seminal study.[98]

Nevertheless, the 'thingness' of postal items offers a unique conundrum. They do not participate in the increasingly commodified culture of the mid-nineteenth century in quite the same way as objects-turned-subjects do. Or perhaps they are an exemplary case of object-to-subject fluidity? Analysis through the perspective of thing theory understands that an object becomes a 'thing' through its inability to act as an object. However, can a postal item actually be described at any point as an object? In 1840, the new system of the penny post introduced a system of prepayment, marked by an adhesive stamp bearing Queen Victoria's head. Stamping an item with the emblem of the monarch's head simultaneously turns it into an intensely subjective and discursive 'thing' while meaning that it can move with the fluidity of an object, protected by the

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Office Scandal and its Impact on English Public Opinion', *Exiles, Emigrés and Intermediaries* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 203-214. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[95] Anon, 'Dead Letters', 78.

[96] Katharina Boehm, *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6.

[97] Dorothy Van Ghent, 'The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's', *The Sewanee Review* 58, no. 3 (1950): 420. Jstor.

[98] Van Ghent, 419.

Crown, through the changing infrastructures of the postal network.[99] Alternatively, to what extent is a body which travels as if the mail a subject? How often is the subjective postal body treated as an object? A further aim of this thesis, then, is to question and uncover the ways in which the 'postal body,' as either post as body or body as post, travelling on both a transport and communication network, subverts and negotiates ideas of subjective autonomy.

4. The Post Office and Victorian Literature

The implementation of the uniform penny post across Britain in 1840 is often cited as a critical moment in postal history, and, indeed, a defining feature of Victorianism itself. This policy certainly shaped the Victorians' relationship to the letter in a way that is distinctive to the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[100] Prior to the uniform penny post, letters were paid for upon receipt and costed by distance travelled as well as the number of paper sheets used.[101] However, in his recently updated history of the British Post Office, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840* (2015), Michael Daunton draws attention to the picture of legislative changes to the Post Office as more complicated than a focus on uniform penny postage would suggest. While his history begins explicitly in the 1840s, he emphasises that many of the legislative changes to the nineteenth-century British Post Office took place in the 1850s.[102] Significantly for Daunton, though the use of the Post Office increased dramatically after the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840 — from 82.5 million to 168.8 million — the Post Office's revenue fell by 69.3 per cent after the instigation of the uniform penny post, and it was not until 1863 that it regained its revenue to the level of 1839.[103] Furthermore, my argument that the Victorians had a fascination with the infrastructural arrangements of postal circulation calls for attention to changes to the conveyance of mails before the establishment of the uniform penny post. The mail train, for instance, was initially established on British

[99] As Joyce notes, a letter posted in Britain had a unique legal status as the property of the Crown, unlike other national postal systems where it continued to be the property of the sender (*Freedom*, 63).
[100] Literary scholars such as Catherine Golden, Karin Koehler, Laura Rotunno, Kate Thomas, and Mary Favret have emphasised the importance of this date in the history of postal history and its relationship with literature.
[101] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 6.
[102] Daunton, 36.
[103] Daunton, 24.

railways from 1836, and the Admiralty was establishing international steam packet routes to Malta, Gibraltar, North America and the West Indies in the late 1830s.

However, scholars such as Catherine Golden, Laura Rotunno, Karin Koehler and Kate Thomas have pointed to the marked impact the establishment of a uniform penny post in Britain had on nineteenth-century literature. Before the Postage Act of 1839, receiving a letter could cost a significant proportion of a middle-class family's weekly income; as Daunton notes:

> the lowest rate for a letter of a single sheet was fourpence for up to 15 miles, rising to one shilling for a distance up to 300 miles. Beyond that, one penny was charged for each additional 100 miles.[104]

These costs became more crippling as recipients were also charged double for two sheets of paper and triple for three.[105] Furthermore, this burden of cost for letters was unfairly distributed, as Members of Parliament enjoyed franking privileges.[106] As the campaign for uniform penny post got underway in the mid-1830s, proponents would frequently cite the moral repugnance of a communication system that threatened to leave people destitute or compelled them to behave illegally for the sake of a letter.[107] Hill and his campaigners, of whom we shall see more in Chapter One, called for a change to this postal system, and a series of petitions and pamphlets, as well as a parliamentary enquiry, led to the Postage Act of 1839 and, subsequently, uniform penny post across Britain from 1840. Upon the legislating of the uniform penny post, Queen Victoria famously gave up her franking privileges as a symbol of the newly democratic postal service.[108]

In the last ten years, there has been a surge in scholarship on the Post Office and its impact on Victorian literature. Catherine Golden's significant study of the Post Office's impact on material culture in *Posting It* (2009), analyses a plethora of material objects and ephemera associated with Victorian letter-writing culture. She argues that the post was a ubiquitous form of communication for Victorians, and fundamentally shaped their construction and understanding of 'modernity'. The material objects surrounding the Victorian letter revolution, she argues, 'transmit information about

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[104] Daunton, 6.
[105] Daunton, 6.
[106] Daunton, 82-3.
[107] Catherine Golden discusses the propaganda utilised by uniform penny post campaigners in detail. Please see 'Why the Victorians Needed a Letter Writing Revolution', in *Posting It*, 43-82.
[108] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 40.

empire, identity, aesthetics, labour, education, class, and gender', and act 'as "materials of memory" — physical reminders informing our understanding of ideas, values, traits, concerns and assumptions of the Victorians'.[109] Building on Golden's new historicist study, I turn from such everyday objects and ephemera of the Post Office, such as portable writing desks, pens, writing manuals and letter holders, to one of the most significant Victorian infrastructure projects. I am interested in how 'the mail' as infrastructure came to determine how the period wrote about, conceptualised, and imagined this endemic communications system. Indeed, these conceptualisations, I show, transmit their own information about identity, labour, class and empire.

The expansion of the nineteenth-century Post Office produced a new level of bureaucratisation, which has also been explored by literary scholars — most notably Rotunno and Thomas. For Rotunno, there were discursive parallels between the professionalisation of the civil service through postal reform, and that of the literary writer. Rotunno argues that while the penny post acted as a catalyst of potential social and political change, inviting more people into 'active citizenry', conflicts arose from both postal reform and mass literature circulation; namely that readers inclined to read widely were also inclined to 'consume the most popular as opposed to the more artistically and ideologically sophisticated fiction of the day'.[110] It is this voracious, expansive and heterogeneous readership that drives the argument of Thomas's *Postal Pleasures* (2012): for Thomas, the considerable expansion of the postal network meant that 'it began to be understood as a potential site for sexual and gender deviation'.[111] The postal letter's position in literature, Thomas argues, is shaped by its association with linking anyone with everyone, taking the writer 'to places otherwise out of bounds […], in the close company of a vast miscellany of others'.[112] Though I do not discuss sexual and gender deviation or professionalisation centrally, the bureaucracy of the Post Office — and its potential for deviation — will be relevant to my examination of postal infrastructures. The bureaucratic, impersonal circulation of letters that followed the uniform penny post was often imagined as highly personal and embedded in the bodily, and I investigate the imaginative pull of this paradox.

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[109] Golden, *Posting It*, 7.
[110] Laura Rotunno, *Postal Plots in British Fiction, 1840-1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.
[111] Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25.
[112] Thomas, 2.

Koehler has argued that the penny post 'redrew the already porous boundaries between public and private life, creating new possibility both for intimate personal expression and public exposure'.[113] In her meticulous analysis of lettered communication in Thomas Hardy's fiction, Koehler demonstrates Hardy's investment in lettered communication as a site through which to explore and expound the broader themes of his work, including questions of selfhood, the personal and the collective, sexual politics, and the experiences of rural life. Furthermore, in her thesis on railway infrastructures and the nineteenth-century novel, which I discussed in detail in Section 2, Kirkby draws comparisons between early railway termini and the General Post Office at St. Martin's le Grand, London. She argues that the Postal Reform Act of 1839 'substantially adjusted the relationship between objects of communication [...] and the physical spaces that they travelled through'.[114] Though she points to Grossman's highlighting of the temporal and material differences between the animate and inanimate cargo travelling on mail coaches, she also explores how fictional depictions of the Post Office crossed and blurred boundaries: 'in fictional and hypothetical fora, [the separation between inanimate cargo, living bodies, and letters] began to collapse'.[115] Kirkby argues that 'moving information through any kind of system involves an act of mediation, and to do so at great volume and at great speed it is necessary to encode that information and render it readily available'.[116] I build upon Koehler's and Kirkby's conceptualisation of the blurred boundaries fostered by the Post Office. As I analyse the infrastructures of circulation, my thesis demonstrates how embodying the post offered the possibility of losing oneself in the system, of negotiating new identities, and blurring the boundaries between Nation and Other.

Through this thesis, I demonstrate how Victorians understood bodies as part of the technological infrastructure in ways that have been neglected by existing scholarship. I place the bodies of those workers who constituted and facilitated postal infrastructures, and those travelling on the mail, at the centre of my investigation. Thus, 'Postal Bodies' breaks new ground in the scholarly field of nineteenth-century communication by revealing how bodies were made a part of the technological infrastructures, rather than only the items travelling through it or the material culture surrounding it. These 'postal bodies' articulate the metaphorical and embodied

[113] Koehler, *Thomas Hardy*, 8.
[114] Kirkby, 'British Railway Infrastructure', 79.
[115] Kirkby, 81.
[116] Kirkby, 81.

experience of travelling on the routes of the mail, through the interaction between infrastructures, mobilised bodies and postal items. For instance, in Anthony Trollope's short story, 'George Walker at the Suez' (1861), which we shall see more of in Chapter Four, the protagonist finds himself flung across the Egyptian desert on mule-drawn omnibuses, with little consideration to the bodily discomfort of travelling alongside the 'Australian cargo'.[117] Individuals are expected to behave like postal items, caught up in an all-encompassing network with a distinct temporal rhythm. This metaphor turns one thing into another in a process of exchange and communication. However, 'postal bodies' is an evolving term which is neither hegemonic nor static. As the mail and bodies merge and exchange positions while travelling on the various infrastructures of the post, they transform each other.

Furthermore, 'Postal Bodies' challenges some of the technologically-deterministic or anachronistic language utilised by scholars of communication technology, instead inserting the body, and the complications it brings, into the conceptualisation of communication infrastructures. In their chapter '"You've got mail": Technologies of Communication in Victorian Literature' in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture* (2016), Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton argue that the interaction of humans and technologies of transport and communication creates a key site through which Victorian authors can network their characters and experiment with form.[118] They note that while Victorian critiques of technologies opposed the human with the mechanical, the 'intersection of humans and the technologies of communication and transportation' became fertile ground in the 'nineteenth-century cultural imagination'.[119] They articulate this as a 'shift from thinking of people in industrialised modernity as cogs in a machine to [thinking of them as] nodes in a network'.[120] While this critical perspective has been useful to my interrogation of communication and transport infrastructures, this language can become anachronistic or imprecise. For instance, Meadows and Clayton argue that in Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels:

> the everyday nature of the communication and transportation technology depicted […] reveals that such innovations can foster moments of deep interiority and generate narrative structures that link characters and novels to each other

[117] Anthony Trollope, 'George Walker at the Suez', in *Tales of All Countries* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), 263-4. Internet Archive.
[118] Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton, '"You've Got Mail": Technologies of Communication in Victorian Literature', *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Julian John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 461.
[119] Meadows and Clayton, 461.
[120] Meadows and Clayton, 461.

> in complex webs mimicking Victorian Britain's network of rails, wires, and postal routes.[121]

Similarly, Susan Zieger has also written on the importance of the logistics of Trollope's postal work in his literary work, arguing that in his 'fictional scenes of letter writing, posting, and reading represent the local points of nodes at which individual communities interfaced with this global system'.[122] For Zieger, Meadows and Clayton, the postal network's bureaucratic interface in a text connects characters to broader innovations in communication technology and logistics. However, language like 'interface', 'effaced', 'complex webs', or even the title of Clayton's and Meadows's chapter 'You've got Mail', is suggestive of a digital technologisation. It potentially elides the embodied facilitation and experience of postal infrastructures and misses the important slipperiness of the use of 'mail' in the nineteenth century, that was at once a letter, but also a form of public transport.

As has already been suggested, the infrastructures of the Post Office also enabled the proliferation and circulation of key literary forms. These forms included the periodical, newspapers and the serial novel. Graham Law argues that after the 1819 Newspaper Stamp Act 'finally removed the imposition of the stamp duty on monthly periodicals, […] there began to appear a generation of magazines prominently featuring full-length original serials by established writers'.[123] However, as Law later argues in 'Distribution' in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (2016)

> it was not until June 1855 that Parliament finally took action to abolish the penny stamp as an obligatory duty on newspapers, instead making it an optional general charge for the "transmission by post of printed periodical publications".[124]

This legislative change meant that the Post Office had become an even more intrinsic part of the circulation of periodical literature, including the periodical novel, during this period. Furthermore, the Post Office network would have been central to circulation libraries like Mudie's (started 1842) or W. H. Smith's (1860), for whom subscription

[121] Meadows and Clayton, 460.
[122] Susan Zieger, 'Affect and Logistics: Trollope's Postal Work', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 128 (2015): 227.
[123] Graham Law, 'Serial Fiction', in *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 14.
[124] Graham Law, 'Distribution', in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, eds. Andrew King, Alexis Easley, and John Morton (Routledge: London, 2016), 48.

services and the circulation of texts were vital.[125] Indeed, Mary Hammond argues that in the nineteenth century, circulating and public libraries were discussed critically as 'dangerous social melting pots', indicating the parallels between this kind of circulation and that of postal items.[126]

My research breaks new ground through its analysis of the infrastructures that facilitated this kind of circulation within Britain — the Post Office was responsible for the circulation of a plethora of material, including letters, parcels, postcards and notes, but also national and local newspapers and periodicals, packages of books, financial documents, and other miscellaneous items. Alongside the political reforms that shaped the production of newspapers and periodicals, postal infrastructures and networks created the opportunity for mass-circulation. Law notes, for example, the steam train and steamboat became the dominant forms of postal distribution of newspapers and periodicals across Britain and the world by the mid-nineteenth century.[127] I complicate Law's argument by emphasising the specific forms of the mail train and steam packet on which information and literature circulated. As Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, though these infrastructures have been folded under trains and steamships more generally, they were a distinct form of communication and transport infrastructure. Furthermore, as Chapter Four reveals, commentators and literary authors relished the potential for news and mail to rub shoulders, and, in an imperial context, the mail was explicitly connected with information and news exchange.

5. Nineteenth-Century Literature and the Telegraph

It is important to note here that there has been significant scholarly attention on the nineteenth-century telegraph and its impact on newspaper media and literature. Though telegraphic infrastructures are beyond the scope of this thesis, they were an essential part of nineteenth-century communications, and, from 1870, one of the communication services offered by the Post Office. The telegraph network initially developed in Britain alongside the railway in the 1830s and 1840s, and by 1854 the technology had developed enough to lay the first transatlantic cable, creating rapid global

[125] For further discussion on the significance of circulating libraries in the nineteenth century, please see Simon Eliot, 'Circulating Libraries in the Victorian Age and After', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, eds. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, 125–4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Cambridge Core.
[126] Mary Hammond, '"The Great Fiction Bore": Free Libraries and the Construction of a Reading Public in England, 1880-1914', *Libraries & Culture* 37, no. 2 (2002): 85. Project Muse.
[127] Law, 'Distribution', 50-2.

communications systems. When, in 1870, the government took the unprecedented decision to nationalise the telegraph, it became part of the communications infrastructure of the Post Office.[128] The numbers of messages sent through the telegraph rocketed from 7 million in 1869 to 10 million in 1870, with 1000 Post Offices and 19,000 railway stations acting as telegraph offices across Britain.[129]

I do not investigate the telegraph explicitly due to my focus on infrastructures that carried both letters and people, but that is not to suggest that the telegraph was not associated with bodily networks, as recent scholarship has demonstrated.[130] Instead, my analyses challenges a technological determinism that sees the telegraph, and indeed the Victorian Post Office, as completely revolutionary in the history of communications infrastructures. Importantly, I aim to reassess the importance of mail networks in the late-nineteenth century in tandem to the development of the telegraph. Despite the importance of the telegraph, the letter retained its position in the market of communication devices, as seen in the 2 billion of letters sent at the end of the century, in comparison to 90 million telegraphs.[131] Keith Jeffery has argued that 'postal services were more ubiquitous, democratic and dramatically more heavily-used than the telegraph'.[132] At the same time, Roland Wenslhuemer concludes that '[t]elegraphy only allowed for brief and to-the-point messages that were often transmitted separately from

[128] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 33.
[129] Christopher Keep, 'Technology and Information: Accelerating Developments', *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, eds. Patrick Brantlinger and William. B. Thesign. (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 142.
[130] For an examination of the potential deviancy of embodiment and the telegraph, see Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Menke argues that realist fiction embodied the information technologies of the nineteenth century, and argues that the reader also embodies the information webs created by the telegraph in *Telegraphic Realism*. Clare Pettitt has also explored how the bodily disturbs utopian visions of the telegraph, queering and hybridising bodily cohesion in 'Mermaids Amongst the Cables: The Abstracted Body and the Telegraphic Touch in the Nineteenth Century', in *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1880s*, eds. Penny Fielding and Andrew Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15-33. Laura Otis frames her analysis of the relations between different networks of communication in nineteenth-century literature and science around contemporary debates about telegraphs and railways in *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).
[131] Following the decrease of telegraph rates to a halfpenny per word in 1885, the number of telegrams sent rose to 50 million in 1887, and 90 million by the turn of the century. Though this is a significant and steep increase, it remains well below the number of letters circulated through the Post Office at the end of the century (approx. 2 billion). Please see Keep, 'Technology and Information', 142.
[132] Keith Jeffery, 'Crown, Communication and the Colonial Post: Stamps, the Monarchy and the British Empire', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 46. Taylor & Francis Online.

longer and more detailed information sent by post'.[133] This is not to say that the telegraph was less important than the post, but that the letter and the telegraph were fundamentally different forms of communication; rather than competing, they had different and specific uses and places in the imaginary.

Charles Dickens's edited collection *Mugby Junction*, which appeared as the 1866 Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*, exemplifies the coterminous relationship between the letter and the telegraph. The often-cited telegraphic short story 'Branch Line: The Signalman' appeared in this collection alongside short stories focused on other railway infrastructures, including 'Branch Line No. 1: Travelling Post Office', which I examine in Chapter Two. In short stories by Charles Dickens, Andrew Halliday, Hesba Stretton, Charles Collins, and Amelia B. Edwards, these communication networks structurally and thematically collide; as James Mussell argues: '*Mugby Junction* is about movement and things that move, whether trains and those who travel, the telegraph and the signals it relays, or the post and letters that circulate'.[134] So while the telegraph does not feature as a postal infrastructure in the scope of 'Postal Bodies', the coterminous development of these infrastructures and their potential imaginary alignment are essential contexts for its methodology.

These changes in telegraph technologies were developing across the world, and there has been significant scholarship on the globalised picture of nineteenth-century communications. Kaul's introduction to the collection *Media and the British Empire* (2006), argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, communications media in Great Britain and across the empire had undergone 'a revolutionary change'.[135] For Kaul, Britain held a unique position as a 'communication media power; that is to say, it possessed an unparalleled capacity to report and transmit news, information and ideas, as well as transport people, soldiers and produce, around the world'.[136] Indeed, this communication infrastructure also worked discursively to connect a disparate empire to a 'home'; as Denis Cryle argues: 'The extension of the international [telegraph] cable via Suez and India to Australia in 1872, and to New Zealand by 1876, brought about a much

[133] Roland Wenslhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.
[134] James Mussell, '"Seeking Nothing and Finding It": Moving On and Staying Put in Mugby Junction', in *Replication in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Julie Codell and Linda K. Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 231.
[135] Chandrika Kaul, *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4.
[136] Kaul, 4.

awaited but protracted integration of periphery and metropole'.[137] As Chapters Three and Four show, the networks of steam packets, and the overland mail route across Egypt worked to quickly connect Britain to India, Australia and New Zealand long before and after the laying of the international telegraph cable. Indeed, 'Postal Bodies' adds to this globalised picture of imperial information route-ways by exploring the importance of the 'mail' as a set of global infrastructures that supported and facilitated the exchange of news, trade, finance, even exporting British troops abroad.[138]

6. Chapter Outlines

My chapters begin at the central infrastructure of the nineteenth-century Post Office, the sorting office of St Martin's le Grand in London. First established in 1829, it became of consistent literary interest after uniform penny post and the subsequent expansion of the postal service (Chapter One). From there, I branch out onto other infrastructures that facilitated the circulation of postal mail; this includes the mail train, first used on the Grand Junction Railway 1838 (Chapter Two), and the steam packet, first utilised by the Post Office on mail lines to Ireland in 1821 (Chapter Three). I then reveal the co-ordination of these infrastructures in the route-way of the overland mail route to India (Chapter Four), established through the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company in 1845.

I focus in particular on popular authors, such as Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Hesba Stretton, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Bram Stoker, Rudyard Kipling, and Richard Marsh, among others, as their widely read texts point to the potential cultural significance of the presence of mail infrastructures. I further develop this postal picture through attention to items from the Postal Museum Archive, the British Library, and The Huntington Library, as well as online databases, such as British Periodicals, British Library Newspapers, and Dickens Journals Online. This archival

[137] Denis Cryle, 'Peripheral Politics? Antipodean Interventions in Imperial News and Cable Communication (1870–1912)', *Media and the British Empire*, ed. Chandrika Kaul. Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 175.
[138] For further scholarship on the importance of the telegraph and media news to British imperialism, please see Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India, c. 1830-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922*. Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Wenslhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World*; pertinent to this study is Daniel Headrick's *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) which discusses the importance of the mail networks of the railway in India and steamship, as well as the telegraph.

work has allowed me to draw my arguments from a variety of cultural materials, including periodical literature, news items and commentaries, timetables, pamphlets, illustrations and maps. The abundance and richness of these sources — which utilise, discuss and play with postal infrastructures through metaphors, plotlines and narrative form — is suggestive of the fascination with and attention to postal infrastructures in Victorian culture.

Chapter One explores and puts new onus on the role of bodies in the running of postal infrastructures, centred upon the sorting office of St Martin's le Grand in the mid-nineteenth century. I shine light on the Post Office's use of intensive manual labour and the subsequent emphasis on the body in depictions of postal circulation. The Post Office, I argue, shaped the plethora of bodily metaphors utilised in popular literature to conceptualise circulations — be they economic or medical — in this period. Various articles concerning postal circulation, such as Andrew Wynter's article 'The Post Office' in *Our Social Bees* (1861), imagine postal circulation through different bodily metaphors. Through a collection of periodical and newspaper articles, alongside items from the Postal Museum Archive, this chapter contrasts the conception of the Post Office that Hill purveyed from the utilitarian inception of the penny post against Trollope's alternative, and perhaps better informed, understandings of the running of the Post Office. I argue that the repeated conflation of the postal network with circulatory systems of the human body was, in fact, central to a Hillite ideal of a mechanised system of communication.

This chapter also interrogates the popular sub-centre of 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' articles in order to explore further the association of postal circulation with the body and its potential for disruption. The success of these articles, initiated by Charles Dickens's and W. H. Wills's article for the first edition of *Household Words* in 1850, indicates the potential pleasure taken in associating the Post Office with the bodily — they imagine the sentiment associated with valentines as being transferred and transformed through the multiple hands of those sorting the mail during the influx of lettered post. I also explore the importance of bodies to postal signifiers in Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862) and Hesba Stretton's 'The Postmaster's Daughter', published in *Household Words* in 1859. In texts that rely on the idealised, Hillite postal system in the form and plot of the narrative, bodies have a transformative effect on imagining postal infrastructures. Both of these texts invest in an understanding of the strain associated with the relentless nature of the 'mechanised' postal system and consistently come back to the body as a site where the pressures of this system are played out.

Chapter Two moves on to argue for the significance of the role of the mail train in imagining postal and transport infrastructures. While scholarship has often conflated the mail train with standard train services, this chapter places new emphasis on these specific infrastructures, and the potential implications of its use in nineteenth-century literature. Through my analysis of periodical and newspaper literature, including fiction and non-fiction, I argue that the depiction of mail train in popular literature is a testament of public interest in, and even excitement towards, the rapid transport offered by the service. Importantly, the mail train held the potential of both transport and communication infrastructures in its significance.

This chapter demonstrates that the bodies sorting mail on-board Travelling Post Offices played a vital role in the medicalisation of railway travel. I examine the famous *Lancet* report's, 'The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health' (1862), use of the medical records of the postal officials working on the TPO, and demonstrate the importance of postal workers to its argument that the railway's speed and sensorial overload could be damaging to the human body. Chapter Two also analyses two sensation novels by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, revisiting their railway themes with an eye on the mail. My analysis of *John Marchmont's Legacy* and *Lady Audley's Secret* (both published in 1862), alongside Hesba Stretton's contribution to *Mugby Junction* 'Branch Line: The Travelling Post Office' (1866) demonstrates the instability of networked, feminised travel wrought by the fast-paced information transmitters of the mail and express trains.

My third chapter argues that the financial stability and prestige awarded to a steamship company by a mail contract with the Admiralty were essential components in the growth and eminence of Britain's steamship lines in the late 1830s and 1840s. Though the role of the mail in the creation and running of steamship lines has been side-lined in academic scholarship, their association with the Royal Mail was a selling-point for passengers and the stability of the mail contract allowed for investment in critical infrastructures, such as coaling stations. Indeed, the importance of coaling stations to the routes of steam packets established the significance of colonies like Gibraltar and Aden. I argue that during the course of the nineteenth century, the concept of the steam packet simultaneously became more homogenous, as government contracts legislated the terms on which a ship could carry mail and packets came to bear the prefix R.M.S. for Royal Mail Ship, *and* more heterogeneous, as the 'packet' became increasingly

conflated with major steamship passenger lines, such as the Cunard Steamship Company and the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.

Chapter Three aims to reinstate the importance of the mail to these steamship lines, and unpack how the steam packet figured in the imperial imaginary of Victorian Britain. I examine examples from popular literature, including periodical articles, newspaper articles, travel literature, guidebooks, maps and pamphlets. This chapter demonstrates that in factual and fictional travel narratives, the steam packet had an essential role in facilitating an imperial imaginary. This role can be seen, I argue, in Jules Verne's famous pastiche of the travel novel, *Le Tour de Monde en Quatre-Vingt Jours* (1873) or *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Verne structures Phileas Fogg's 'English' round-the-world trip around packet infrastructures that exemplify the 'Brit abroad': in contrast to his servant Passepartout's 'French-ness', Fogg's 'English-ness' offers him the theoretical opportunity to circulate the globe with ease. Fogg's ease of travel breaks down, however, as the mail infrastructures assert themselves as beholden only to the mail, letting-down those bodies who attempt to travel the globe postally. In tandem, I also analyse the role of the packet in Bram Stoker's late-nineteenth-century modern-Gothic *Dracula* (1897); here, fluid, boundary-crossing travel is reimagined through the journey of the Transylvanian vampire. By analysing Dracula's journey as a Gothic echo of Fogg's British mutiny on-board the Henrietta, I argue that steam packets become one of the critical signifiers of blurred imperial and temporal boundaries in the novel.

My final chapter analyses the consolidation of the infrastructural route-ways that have been revealed in 'Postal Bodies' through the globalised overland mail routes. Imagined as a homogenous 'overland mail route' to India, this consisted of a series of routes facilitated by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company across Egypt to India, China, Australia and New Zealand. The term also denoted the overland route across Panama, which, partly facilitated by the Cunard Steamship Company, expedited the exchange of mails from the East to West coast of America. In this chapter, I analyse the ways in which popular culture, from periodicals and newspaper articles to panoramas and board games, utilised a specific postal logic in order to articulate and understand British imperial circulation in the mid-nineteenth century. As I turn to the bodies caught-up in the postal logic of these information route-ways, I utilise poetry and short stories in which bodies become disruptive to the idealised mobility of the overland mail — from William Makepeace Thackeray to Dickens and Trollope, bodies on the overland mail disrupted and hybridised simplistic binaries between West and East,

coloniser and colonised. This hybridisation becomes more marked, I argue, by the end of the nineteenth century. Here, I turn to *Dracula*'s counterpart, *The Beetle* (1897) by Richard Marsh — I argue that the imaginative legacy of the overland mail route in the late-nineteenth century made possible the hybridised, communicative and invasive creature of the Beetle, whose vengeful expedition to London is arguably more sinister and accomplished than her vampiric counterpart's.

Through this heteroglossia of literary factual and fictional texts, this thesis aims to uncover the importance of the mail in the imagination of the nineteenth century and how bodies were transformative to conceptions of its infrastructures. As human bodies interact with route-ways designed for the facilitation of information, they continually disrupt the hegemonic ideals associated with these infrastructures. Furthermore, mail infrastructures also talk back, so to speak, and continually assert themselves unexpectedly. In doing so, they undermine and challenge subjective and objective divides. Mail infrastructures in nineteenth-century Britain can be understood as complex and ever-expanding, but represented by a single penny stamp; nationalised and government-driven, but heterogeneous and politicised. Above all, they were negotiated, driven, and transformed by nineteenth-century bodies.

CHAPTER ONE

Embodying the British Post Office: St Martin's le Grand

> *The Post Office seems to be bound to keep pace with the wonderful improvements with which the present age abounds.*
>
> — Secretary to the Post Office, Sir Francis Freeling, 1830.[1]
>
> *The wonder really would have been if the Post Office, the heart of our whole system of circulation, had not kept pace with the progress of other things.*
>
> — Anon, 'The Post Office', *St James's Magazine*, 1868.[2]
>
> *The post offices must be bewitched, my beloved friend, & I do begin to have certain misgivings as to the evil being attachable to ours as well as yours, seeing that two letters of mine sent to Brighton some five & three days since, were, one of them, three days on the road, &, the other, unreceived at all.*
>
> — Elizabeth Barrett Browning letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 1843.[3]

'This post, this post. Time gallops when I write to you'.[4] So the voracious letter-writer Elizabeth Barrett Browning ends a letter to her friend and fellow author, Mary Russell Mitford on December 28th, 1842. In this note, the 'post' timetables and schedules Barrett Browning's conception of writing time, leaving her without the chance to say all that she wishes to convey before the last post leaves. Less than a month later, Barrett Browning complained to Mitford that the 'post offices must be bewitched' as some of her letters were 'three days on the road, &, the other, unreceived at all'.[5] Here, the postal letter seems to operate on a magical temporal plane, not imploding space and time — a key mythology of the uniform penny postage — but instead warping and looping them so that some letters arrive before others, and some disappear completely. Barrett Browning's experience of the post here suggests that Victorian postal infrastructures were not always understood as uniform, and regular, but were experienced through a warped and sinuous timeline.

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[1] Secretary to the Post Office, Sir Francis Freeling quoted in Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 122.
[2] Anon, 'The Post Office', *St James's Magazine*, no. 2, October 1868, 339.
[3] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, January 4, 1843, in *The Browning Letters*, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/26591.
[4] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, December 28, 1842, in *The Browning Letters*. http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/26153.
[5] Barrett Browning to Russell Mitford, January 4, 1843.

Furthermore, the term 'post time' is one that appears throughout Barrett Browning's letters, and it reveals a complex relationship between letter-writing and the schedules of the post — her letters come to embody post time. In a letter to Hugh Boyd, she excuses her fast pace with the statement that she is 'writing on the verge of post time!'.[6] In another letter written to Anna Brownell Jameson in 1851, she apologises for a delay with: 'This should have gone to you yesterday, but we had visitors who talked past post time'.[7] The schedules of the Post Office influence the shape and texture of Barrett Browning's letters. These letters, and her temporal relationship to them, demonstrate the ways in which the Post Office infiltrated the lives of those writing in the nineteenth century. Indeed, a search on Historical Texts shows a spike in the use of the term 'post time' between 1848 and 1900, with the term being used 470 times across this period.[8] To write and post a letter was to encounter postal infrastructures, and the very contents of letter writing becomes implicated in the varying temporalities of their circulation mechanisms. The deliveries and collections of the post shape these letters — from the speed with which Barrett Browning writes them to the contents they can address.

Barrett Browning's letters counter the epigraphs from Sir Francis Freeling and *St James's Magazine*, both of which exemplify a mythology of technological progress and efficiency which surrounded the discourse of the uniform penny post. Scholarship has often focussed on the importance of the Victorians' mythologisation of the penny post as exemplifying efficient and frictionless communication. Scholars such as Kate Thomas, Bernhard Siegert, Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton have concentrated on the realigning of distance and time fostered by the uniform penny post.[9] This chapter

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[6] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Hugh Stuart Boyd, May 16, 1831, in *The Browning Letters*, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/23826.

[7] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Anna Brownell Jameson, December 10, 1851, in *The Browning Letters* http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/30769.

[8] 'Historical Texts — Results ("post time")', Historical Texts (July 2020) https://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk/results?terms=%22post%20time%22&date=1800-1900&undated=exclude&advanced=MUST%7C%7Ctitle%7C%7C.

[9] Kate Thomas argues that Hill's reforms became widely regarded as ones that made distance immaterial or, to use the immensely popular contemporary phrase, "annihilated time and space"' (Kate, Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13-4); and Bernard Siegert that the logic of the penny post allowed Victorians to 'think of all Great Britain as a single city [....] mail — following Hill's insight — had nothing to do with distance' (Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 102). Additionally, Elizabeth Meadows and Jay Clayton hold that the uniform penny post ushered in an era in which the 'postal network that would catch all recipients of letters' (Elizabeth Meadows, and Jay Clayton, '"You've Got Mail": Technologies of Communication in Victorian Literature', in *The*

complicates the mythology of postal efficiency, arguing that the irregularities and difficulties in nineteenth-century encounters with postal infrastructures, exemplified here by Barrett Browning, can be traced to the different bodies at work in the system, both facilitating it and participating in it.

As Barrett Browning's use of 'post time' suggests, the subjective 'I' of the letter-writer, and the objective, stamped postal letter, capable of passing through the 'uniform' postal system, were connected. This chapter explores and puts a new onus on the role of bodies in the running of postal infrastructures from the nodal centre of St Martin's le Grand. I examine the Post Office's use of intensive manual labour and the debates on how those bodies should be working, which emanated from the London centre of St Martin's le Grand, and impacted rural as well as city posts. Furthermore, the mid-nineteenth-century understanding of the body as central to postal circulation is evident in the plethora of popular literature that utilised metaphors of the body to elucidate and explain postal circulation and its infrastructure. I aim not to draw sharp delineations between kinaesthetic working bodies and the metaphors utilised to explicate postal circulation, but to consider the overlaps and politics at work in these metaphors of circulation.

Thus, part of my intention is to complicate some scholarship's focus on Rowland Hill's concept of a 'uniform', mechanised postal system and intervene in a post-modernist reading of postal infrastructures as signifying easy, frictionless mobility. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there has been much significant and nuanced scholarship on the nineteenth-century Post Office and letter writing. However, there has been an investment in considering imaginative responses to the nineteenth-century Post Office as representative of a frictionless, almost digital, mobility. Jay Clayton's important work *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace* (2003) draws links between the nineteenth-century technology of the Post Office and that of the modern-day internet. In his analysis of Charles Dickens's and W. H. Wills's 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' (1850) — on which Section 4 will focus — Clayton claims that entering the Post Office's back-of-house 'is how it feels to enter cyberspace, nineteenth-century style'.[10] Indeed, Richard Menke argues in *Telegraphic Realism* (2008) that the nineteenth-century realist novel both responds to an information-heavy world, but also anticipates and shapes a larger

Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture, eds. Julian John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 465).

[10] Jay Clayton*, Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

cultural understanding of information overload. For Menke, 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' offers a glimpse into the workings of the Post Office that 'is the real-life story of the wonders of Victorian "data-processing"'.[11] Though these metaphors have their place in creating a common understanding between our digital age and the new technologies of the mid-Victorian Post Office, they also are a little disingenuous. I aim to develop, through the course of this chapter, an emphasis on the Post Office's use of intensive manual labour in sorting offices and rural delivery. I demonstrate that imaginative responses to the Post Office place a concerted emphasis on the body, as well as data.

In my analysis of circulation infrastructures, and labouring and metaphorical bodies, I wish to avoid a Foucauldian reading in which the body becomes 'disciplined' by the institution or, indeed, the machine. Postal reformer Hill's idealisation of how the labouring body should work within the institution of the Post Office, which we shall see more of in Section 1, has potential resonances with Michel Foucault's influential reading of the army and prison systems' disciplinary imposition on the body.[12] However, I find that bodies do not become docile. Rather, my argument is more aligned with that of Tamara Ketabgian, whose work on Victorian machines and the body makes room for the potential flows and exchanges at work between them. Ketabgian argues that 'Victorian machines were not simply soulless, lifeless, predictable, and unidimensional; not simply opposed to organic feeling and vitality; and not simply reductive material objects'.[13] Indeed, the Victorian 'machinery' of sorting infrastructures was conceptualised through metaphors of organic circulation. While I challenge a narrative that has removed the body from conceptions of mail infrastructural circulation, I do not denigrate the mechanical; rather, I demonstrate that the messiness and unruliness of the body was central to Victorians' conception of and, indeed, fascination with, the 'mechanical' circulation of the post.

The sections of this chapter explore the different ways in which material and metaphorical orders of bodiliness operate within the nineteenth-century literary imaginary. In order to analyse the relationship between these variegated and overlapping postal bodies, I first complicate the conception of the Post Office that Hill

[11] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 51.
[12] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 135-169.
[13] Tamara Ketabgian, *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 2.

purveyed from the inception of the uniform penny post in 1840. Though this perspective is an important means of understanding how this period was mythologising the Post Office, it was certainly not the only way the circulation system was understood. Section 2 argues that the abundance of bodily and organic metaphors in imaginative responses to the infrastructure of the St Martin's le Grand sorting office demonstrates contemporary writers' investment in the understanding that Hill's conception of a mechanised postal system relied on bodily labour to facilitate such relentless circulation. The Post Office was not imagined as a disembodied network, or a 'cyberspace', but instead understood as the metaphoric heart of the system. Equating the 'Grand Central Post Office' with the bodily centre allows writers to invest in a metaphor of the centre's health in relation to the health of the whole. Such metaphors of circulation are suggestive of the importance of the Post Office within the Victorians' use of bodily metaphors to conceive of circulation systems including the economy, politics and disease. The characters of Mrs Jellyby and Caddy Jellyby in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852), I show in Section 3, exemplify the importance of the imaginative relationship between bodily and postal circulation. In a novel profoundly interested in circulation versus stasis, Caddy's body is tied into the postal circulation system and becomes part of the novel's interest in the relationship between individual bodies and broader metaphors of systematic circulation.

However, the repeated conflation of the postal system — both its structures and its workers — with the circulatory systems that energise the living body, ultimately disrupts a Hillite ideal of a mechanised system of communication. Section 4 reconsiders the popular subgenre for articles about the Post Office and its operation: 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office'. Like other 'process articles' printed in *Household Words,* Dickens's and William Henry Wills's article 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' (1850) demonstrates the disruptive presence of bodies in the machine-ensemble. As Catherine Waters argues, process articles 'reveal an ambivalence in the journal's response to mass production' — simultaneously recovering the labour involved in the manufacture of goods, and also 'complicating the question of subject-object relations'.[14] Building on Waters, I argue that the popularity of 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' articles in multiple periodicals, initiated by Dickens's and Wills's article for the first edition of *Household Words*, demonstrates the heterogeneous ways in which the uniform penny post was imagined as operating through the bodily. Though discourses around the

[14] Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 87.

uniform penny post idealised the postal system as a utilitarian machine, the necessary bodily labour of postal infrastructures disrupts this narrative. These labouring bodies abut and contest the metaphorical circulatory systems of Section 2 and signal a fascination with the potential for efficiency *and* fallibility encompassed within bodily labour.

Finally, I assess the importance of bodies to postal signifiers in Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862) and Hesba Stretton's 'The Postmaster's Daughter', published in *Household Words* in 1859. In sensation texts that rely on the idealised, Hillite postal system for the form and plot of the narrative, bodies are central to the imaginative use of Hillite postal infrastructures. Both of these texts invest in an understanding of the strain associated with the relentless nature of the 'mechanised' postal system and consistently come back to the body as a site where the pressures of this system are played out. While the intricacies of the plots depend on the national, and indeed international, post working exactly to time without deviation, the upholding of such a system intrudes upon the bodies that participate in it. The interaction between a

Figure 3. William Heath, *March of Intellect*, 1829. Etching, 305 mm, 422 mm. 1948,0217.34, The British Museum, London.

perfected Hillite postal circulation system and labouring, interactive, and fallible bodies are ultimately proven to be incompatible in these mid-nineteenth-century sensation fictions.

1. Debating the Bodily Infrastructures of the Post Office

William Heath's *March of Intellect* (1829) (Figure 3) satirises the phrase made famous by Robert Owen in *The Times*, May 1824. Heath here ridicules the cry for technological progress propounded by Owen and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, of which soon-to-be postal reformer Hill was a founding member.[15] This satire pushes technological innovation into the ridiculous: a bat flying machine; a huge, steam-powered, watering machine; and a bridge to Cape Town, all point to a technologically progressive world that is shrinking. Heath depicts a confusion of cultures as speedy interchanges collide the Occident and the Other. People are shuttled from Greenwich Hill via the 'Grand Vacuum, Direct to Bengal', and in the background Irish emigrants are unnervingly blown out of a canon. This swift travel is implicated in a melting pot of cultures, as Buddha sits smiling on top of a renovated St Paul's Cathedral.[16] For Jonathan Grossman, Heath's parody 'envisions people separately zooming about, and it deduces that their separate communities mingle hodgepodge'.[17] However, Grossman cuts out the only suggestion that the travellers are not as separated as may first appear — the winged letter-carrier, depicted delivering a letter in the bottom left-hand corner. This intriguing addition is important to me here because it suggests that the postal system, and its workers, were closely connected to technological innovations before the epoch of uniform penny postage. The letter carrier bears a satchel inscribed with 'two penny post,' and rings his bell as he hands over a letter mid-flight; his presence in this technological satire becomes a remarkable demonstration of a postal body — a literal embodiment of postal innovation and a connective tissue in the 'hodgepodge' of travelling communities.[18]

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[15] Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 134. Indeed, 'The Diffusion of Knowledge' is another circulatory metaphor operating in the mid-nineteenth century.
[16] William Health, *March of Intellect*, 1828, Print. 1948,0217.34. The British Museum, London.
[17] Jonathan H. Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
[18] Many cities, including Edinburgh and London, had one penny and two penny posts before the Postage Act of 1839 was passed. Many of these operated on a commercial basis, independent from the British Post Office; however, the London penny and two penny posts had

The Post Office's place as at the centre of technological change was not an idea ushered in by the change of uniform penny post under the 1839 Postage Act. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, the legacies of the mail coach, introduced by Postmaster General John Palmer in 1785, cemented the Post Office as an institution associated with the most up-to-date and rapid forms of transportation.[19] As the Secretary to the Post Office, Sir Francis Freeling would famously remark upon the opening of the railroads in 1830, 'The Post Office seems to be bound to keep pace with the wonderful improvements with which the present age abounds'.[20] The Post Office's place as part of technological and transportation innovation was not a concept invented by Hill.

However, prior to the uniform penny post, the Post Office operated through a complex system which required infrastructure to deliver each letter on an individual basis. The receiver paid postage tax on letters, and the cost varied according to the distance the letter had travelled and the number of sheets of paper used. Furthermore, postage could vary from location to location meaning that multiple carriers delivered letters. For instance, London had three offices which ran completely autonomously: the two penny post delivered letters sent from London and its environs; the Inland Office sorted letters from the rest of Britain; alternatively, the Foreign Office sorted letters from overseas.[21] Cheap local posts in other towns further aggravated the complexity of this system: as Martin Daunton explains 'by the mid-1830s there were 295 Penny Posts in Ireland, 81 in Scotland, and 356 in England and Wales'.[22] As seen in the introduction to this thesis, Patrick Joyce distinguishes pre-reform and post-reform postal infrastructures through the difference between an open network and a self-regulating system, or 'system proper'.[23] He argues that the infrastructures of the pre-reform postal networks included letter-carriers, postboys, horses, inn-keepers, mail coaches, and chartered boats to facilitate these multiple posts — none of which were owned by the Post Office.

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been operated by the Post Office since the late-seventeenth century (see Martin J. Daunton *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 5-7).

[19] Mary Favret considers the significance of the eighteenth-century mail coach and its potential influences on the epistolary novel. She argues that the interchange between passage and post aboard the mail, 'exacerbated the problem of regulating correspondence by accelerating and proliferating the channels of exchange'. Please see *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19.

[20] Quoted in Martin J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 122.

[21] Daunton, 6.

[22] Daunton, 6.

[23] Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 58.

Instead, the Post Office 'contracted with a series of private individuals in order to maintain a passable network'.[24] The complexity of the postal network, then, reflected an ideology of treating each letter, and each postal infrastructure, as an individual.

Postal reformers centred their petitions on the costliness, inefficiency and unfairness of this system. Taking payment from the individual receiver was an incredibly time-consuming process for letter carriers: 'a letter carrier in London, for example, could deliver on average, only seventy letters in a "walk" of an hour and a half'.[25] Hill's famous 1837 pamphlet, *Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability*, follows the logic that if the system were made open to most of the population through the reduction of 'postage tax' to one penny no matter the distance, then the added customers would cover any shortfall in pricing. The proposed reform would democratise the system and also rationalise it, making sure that each area was as efficient as possible. Importantly, Hill's utilitarian outlook had a moral edge — he argues that the current system penalised the poorest of society and encouraged them to pursue illegal methods of communicating via the post in order to bypass crippling costs. In an appendix to the pamphlet, Hill famously quotes Samuel Taylor Coleridge's encounter with a woman and letter carrier, who are in dispute because she cannot afford to pay her postage:

> I paid the postage; and when the man was out of sight, she told me that the letter was from her son, who took that means of letting her know that he was well: the letter was 7d to be paid for. It was then opened, and found to be blank![26]

Coleridge discovers that the woman is evading the postage tax altogether through the tactic of sending blank letters through the postal system, thus communicating that both parties are well, but refusing to pay the postage. As Hill furiously notes after his extract: 'This trick is so obvious a one that in all probability it is extensively practised'.[27] For Hill, one of the critical shortfalls of the pre-1840 postal system is its inefficiency — both the time it took to circulate and the possibility for it to be manipulated by those who cannot afford to partake legally.

The reforms that were brought about by the public backing of Hill's uniform penny post saw a tangible change in popular conceptions of British postal infrastructures. Following the administrative changes ushered in by the Postage Act of 1839, the sender would have to prepay a penny per half-ounce letter. In May 1840, a small portrait of the

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[24] Joyce, 62.
[25] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 7.
[26] Rowland Hill, *Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability*, 4th ed. (London: Charles Knight and Co, 1837), 102. General Reference Collection C.T.228.(1.), British Library, London.
[27] Hill, *Reform*, 102.

Queen's head on a piece of black, gummed paper indicated this prepayment. This new uniformity abstracted distance and time, making them equivalent in terms of a penny. Heath's depiction of a condensed world does not seem so far-fetched in the face of a system which made equal the distance from one London house to another and a London house to Scotland.

Though it has been argued that the Postage Act of 1839 has been exaggerated in scholarship for its part in revolutionising the British Post Office, British Victorians themselves certainly understood this as a key moment in their national history, and Hill as at the forefront of this change. [28] As Catherine Golden demonstrates in *Posting It* (2009), Victorians understood uniform penny postage as a democratising act, and quickly developed a letter-writing culture around it. She argues that the Postage Act:

> led to an increase in mail, fostering consumerism and giving rise to letters of business, education, condolence, congratulations, and invitation, as well as a host of postal products demanded and created for women and men across the social classes.[29]

Furthermore, when Sir Rowland Hill retired from his position as Secretary to the Postmaster General in 1864, newspapers regarded him as the 'father of the Post Office'.[30] The *Liverpool Mercury*, for instance, described Hill as 'one of the greatest revolutionaries this country as seen for many years' while the *Birmingham Daily Post* gushed that only Hill could have 'carried out […] the plan which he originated […] and which he has now carried to the point of perfection'.[31] Though, as Daunton illustrates, internally 'the Post Office […] took a cynical view of the public's response to lower rates', the Victorians were busy mythologising the 1840 uniform penny post as an important example of the progressive accomplishments achieved in the period, placing Hill at the centre of revolutionising the system.[32]

Early in his career, Hill, along with his brothers, become a follower of Benthamite utilitarianism, and this perspective would influence much of his work prior to reforming the British Post Office. Daunton demonstrates that Hill was part of a group of radical

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[28] See 'Chapter 2: Mail Services', in Daunton *Royal Mail*, 32-81.
[29] Catherine Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 5.
[30] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 5.
[31] Anon, 'Testimonial to Sir Rowland Hill', *Liverpool Mercury*, May 31, 1864, 5. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900; Anon, 'Sir Rowland Hill and His Services', *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 3, 1864, n.pag. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.
[32] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 22.

reformers, whose priority was to change a political-economic landscape that they saw as undemocratic and fundamentally unfair. He argues that they were critical of:

> self-elective municipal corporations, the monopoly rights of trading companies and the corn laws [arguing that they] were examples of […] injustices which benefited some at the expense of others. High postage rates were yet another example of the injustice of limited access or unfair distribution.[33]

For Hill and his counterparts, the postage tax was one among many examples of systems which benefitted the few at the cost of the many.

However, part of the pushback against Hill's proposed reforms, particularly from Secretary to the General Post Office, Lt-Col William Maberly, revolved around the presumption that management costs would be unaffected by the growth created by the reforms.[34] Hill's understanding of management was of a disembodied infrastructure, run like a well-oiled machine. In his pamphlet, *Post Office Reform*, Hill proclaimed that the 'progress of the people, would be accelerated by the unobstructed circulation of letters' and that the Post Office would assume 'the new and important character of a powerful engine of civilisation'.[35] Hill aligns the system with the running of a machine and morally links this smooth operation to the progress of the nation. For Siegert, Hill's conception of the network was fundamentally mechanical, and the prototype for a disembodied network started early in his career as headmaster at Bruce Castle, one of his family's schools. In a letter, Hill discusses the efficiency and time-keeping brought in by a system of bells at the school:

> Indeed, the whole *machine* of school (for such is the regularity of our proceedings that the appellation is not misapplied) is now become so *perfect* that we are able to *appropriate every minute* of the day to its respective use; and the bells ring, the classes *assemble*, break up, take their meals &c. with such a *clock-like regularity* that it has the appearance almost of *magic*. [36]

For Hill, the 'magic' of the school's proceedings stems from its machine-like time management — he even glosses his use of the term 'machine' in order to emphasise the appropriateness of its use. Hill's conception of the ideal system was one disembodied from the mistakes and inaccuracies of the body and transformed into the uniform machine.

This conception of a disembodied postal machine links Hill's ideology with famous rational thinkers of his era. The connections between Hill's machine-orientated

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[33] Daunton, 15.
[34] Daunton, 24.
[35] Hill, *Reform*, 8.
[36] Hill, quoted in Siegert, *Relays*, 124. Emphasis my own.

philosophy and the works of other utilitarians — namely Charles Babbage and Jeremy Bentham — is explored further by Siegert, who argues that the rationalising methodology of utilitarianism can be seen across Hill's uniform penny post, Babbage's Difference Machine and Bentham's infamous panopticon.[37] The links Siegert makes here are compelling, and the picture is, perhaps, even more connected than first appears — Babbage, it seems, was a contender for being the mind behind the uniform penny post. In a document in the Hill files at the Postal Museum Archive, Hill copies an extract from Babbage's 'Passages from the Life of a Philosopher', scouring it for proof that he, not Babbage, had the initial idea of uniform penny postage and subsequent postal changes.[38] In this document, Hill underlines Babbage's support of 'the question of a uniform rate of postage', and writes anxiety-laden notes on the text:

> On a careful revision of the above I am inclined to think that Mr Babbage has been misunderstood […] all that he claims I now think is the first suggestion of the Parcel post and of the Book post.[39]

This detailed record-keeping of the timeline of Babbage's ideas is suggestive of Hill's preoccupation over the originality of his beloved uniform penny post. As his brother would later joke:

> When you go to heaven […] I foresee that you will stop at the gate to inquire of St Peter how many deliveries they have per day, and how the expense of postal communication between heaven and the other place is defrayed.[40]

Hill works almost obsessively, and certainly meticulously, to prove, that the idea for the uniform penny post, though backed by the similar philosophy of Babbage, is his and his alone.[41] Further, this demonstrates the links that Siegert draws out: Babbage and Hill's ideology was so similar that one could be mistaken for the other.

What also interests me here is that this extract from Babbage's 'Passages from the Life of a Philosopher' details his development of a pneumatic dispatch in order to save money on collection and distribution. Hill copies down Babbage's assertion that he and General Colby had 'considered and advocated' for uniform penny post, and that the logic of such opinion was that transporting the letter bore little cost: 'the heaviest part of

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[37] See Siegert, Chapter 13 'Hill/Babbage/Bentham: The Mechanical Alliance of 1827', in *Relays*, 122–27.
[38] This anxiously scribbled note follows articles which claimed that Hill was not the founder of the Penny Post, and one in which General Colby claims that Babbage was the originator.
[39] 'Uniform penny postage, book and parcel post. Charles Babbage's plans. Comments by Rowland Hill' (1864-1875) POST 100/46, Postal Museum Archive, London. Emphasis original.
[40] Matthew Hill, quoted in Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 11.
[41] Hill is presumably working to prove this to himself as these notes are not re-written by clerks.

the cost arose from the collection and distribution'.[42] In order to avoid the bodily costs of 'collection and distribution' altogether, Hill copies Babbage's assertion that he had:

> devised a means for transmitting letters enclosed in small cylinders, along wires suspended from posts, or from church steeples. I made a little model of such an apparatus, and this transmitted notes from my front drawing room, through the house, into my workshop, which was in a room above my stables.[43]

Hill's detailing of Babbage's description of pneumatic dispatch gives us a glimpse of the ideology that connected these two men. Babbage's construction of an information system that runs without the need for legs disembodies the system, cutting out what he sees as the most burdensome aspect of postal costs. It is also evocative of Heath's 'March of Intellect': a world where pneumatic dispatch infrastructures top church steeples. Moreover, Hill's lack of comment on this pneumatic dispatch is suggestive in its absence. Does it simply not matter? Or is this a shared conception of postal infrastructures — one of disembodied exchange, removed from the costly aspects of 'collection and distribution'?

Hill's ideology that the Post Office was an institution reignited by a change that made it both democratic and efficient was certainly internalised by many in this period. However, it was also a conception quickly used as a means for ridicule. In 1840, the Post Office put William Mulready's penny envelope design into circulation — the first conception of an indication of prepayment (see Figure 4). In this depiction of postal infrastructures, Britannia sends angelic postal emissaries across the globe, connecting Britain to the world in a paternalistic ideal of shared emotion. However, as Golden succinctly puts it, 'rejection of Mulready stationery was immediate, forceful, overwhelming and universal' and within two months, the Post Office made the decision had to replace the stationery.[44] The caricatures that emerged in parody of Mulready stationery tell an interesting story about conceptions of postal infrastructures. They mercilessly derided the idealised representation of universal goodwill and, as Menke argues, 'ridicule[d] not only the individual elements of the original but also its logic of juxtaposition and its fantasy of benign imperial breadth'.[45] Caricatures by John Leech and Thomas White, J W Southgate, and Orlando Hodgson (see Figure 5) also mocked the angelic letter carriers set forth by Britannia, invariably turning them into uniformed

[42] 'Comments by Rowland Hill', POST 100/46. Emphasis original.
[43] 'Comments by Rowland Hill', POST 100/46.
[44] Golden, *Posting It*, 96.
[45] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, 47.

Figure 4. William Mulready, 'Mulready May 6th 1840', Digital Collection. Bath Postal Museum.

Figure 5. Orlando Hodgson, *Hodgson's Rejected Design for an Enwelope*, 1840. Lithograph with hand-colouring. Drawing and Prints 1952,0517.48, The British Museum, London.

letter carriers ringing bells.[46] This change demonstrates that many Victorians also saw the angelic, disembodied figures of the Mulready envelopes as a fantasy, and the caricatures place the mobility of the system directly back into the bodies that transported it.

As we have already started to see, many of those already working within the Post Office contested Hill's conception of a disembodied, mechanical system. For some of those employed by the Post Office, an emphatically mechanised labour-force was a mode of work likely to fail, not least for Anthony Trollope. Hill, Trollope resentfully contends in his posthumously published *An Autobiography* (1883) (which is to be treated with some caution), was a figures man, not one who invested in the sentimentalities and feelings of men. He tells the reader:

> In figures and facts he was most accurate, but I never came across anyone who so little understood the ways of men [….] To him the servants of the Post Office — men numerous enough to have formed a large army in the old days — were so many machines who could be counted on for their exact work without deviation, as wheels may be counted on, which are kept going always at the same pace and always by the same power.[47]

This extract gives a picture of the debates taking place within the mid-nineteenth-century Post Office. Trollope simplifies it here but makes his opinion plain: a man cannot be expected to behave as a machine. A piece contending Hill's proposed reforms, published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1839, argues that 'Mr. Hill, we say, imagines a scheme for sweeping away the whole of the financial and account branches of the Post-office, and reducing duties to the mere mechanical functions of receiving, conveying, and delivering letters'.[48] For this un-named commentator, the reforms that Hill proposed reduced the Post Office to mere mechanical labour, simplifying the postal infrastructures to the bare bones of the system. It was, as Trollope attempts to persuade us, possible to be as passionate as Hill about the efficiency of the Post Office, without making invisible the bodiliness of the mechanism.

Later in his autobiography, Trollope describes his retirement from the Post Office, an institution of which he had been part for over 26 years. Perhaps surprisingly, Trollope seems to suggest that he valued his role in this institution above and beyond his literary career. He discusses how he would have given up his writing and income for the position

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[46] See Major E.B. Evans, *The Mulready Envelope and Its Caricatures* (London: Stanley Gibbons, 1891). General Reference Collection 8247.de.30., British Library, London.
[47] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 177-178.
[48] 'Comments by Rowland Hill', POST 100/46.

of Under-Secretary to the Postmaster General because of his love for postal letters: 'I was attached to the department, had imbued myself with a thorough love of letters, I mean letters which are carried by the post, and was anxious for their welfare as though they were my own'.[49] In this extract, Trollope's informal narrative style catches itself and he has to qualify his love of *postal* letters. Indeed, these are letters that are travelling through the post, and whose personified welfare are in the charge of Trollope.

Trollope joined the Post Office as a postal clerk at the behest of his mother, and both his autobiography and R. H. Super's *Trollope at the Post Office* (1981) explain in detail the doggedness of his experience in this role. In 1841, after seven years of this unfulfilling role in London headquarters, Trollope decided to apply for the role of Clerk to the Surveyor in Connaught, Ireland. During this period, infrastructural routes for the mail were changing in Ireland. Throughout the 1830s, the expansion of railways and steam packet routes were transforming and complicating postal circulation.[50] His role as a Clerk to the Surveyor had Trollope moving around rural areas of Ireland, assessing their current postal infrastructures and finding ways to make them more efficient, particularly in reference to mail train schedules. Trollope's work, then, made him an author of a changing mobile landscape, traversing different infrastructures and reassembling them into a system that ran more efficiently.

As Clerk to the Surveyor, and then Surveyor, Trollope was working as a key agent in Hill's plans for progression of the Post Office, which included making sure that postal delivery was available across as much of Britain as possible. Indeed, Trollope's work also took him to America, Egypt and the West Indies, of which we shall see more of in Chapters Three and Four.[51] Hill explained the role as connecting the whole of Britain to a homogenised postal system:

> The surveyor determines the length of a walk a letter carrier might reasonably make in a day, arranges the walk to include as many villages and hamlets as he can, determines whether the weekly volume of letters for those places be sufficient to pay the expense [and] establishes the route.[52]

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[49] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 113.
[50] Stephen Ferguson, *The Post Office in Ireland: An Illustrated History* (Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2016), 170.
[51] Brian Friel's *Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), though concerning Ordnance Surveyors, suggests how closely associated such surveying roles and work were to British colonialism.
[52] Hill, quoted in Robert H. Super, *Trollope in the Post Office* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 21.

For Hill, the surveyor was central to understanding and constructing British postal routes; it was a role in which it was essential to have both an understanding of postal infrastructures and route-ways, and the ability to rethink problems in rural areas in reference to a larger system. Trollope was, to some extent, an essential part of Hill's reforms to the efficiency and reach of postal infrastructures.

This re-writing required Trollope to think about the working of postal infrastructure as a whole and the different ways it could effectively circulate mail throughout the rural areas of Ireland and Britain; it meant analysing the routes of the postboys and letter carriers who ran the postal routes and organising them to operate in tandem with the expanding mail train lines and steam packets. One letter from a report of the survey of rural posts between Louth and Inniskeen in 1856, demonstrates the extent to which Trollope's role was tied up with the bodies who ran the mail. In a petition, the postmaster protests:

> The pay is so small I find it hard to keep a lad of size profitable for other labour in the office — if this Post now so much increased in number […] and the runner paid in proportion it would not be too much for the work done — and would much benefit the public and make it worth-while [for] a large sized boy to attend to it.[53]

This petition makes clear the relationship between efficiency and the body of the postboy — by paying the runner more, the Post Office could afford a larger sized boy and the public will benefit from the increased weight the boy could carry. Following this petition and his own report on this postal district, Trollope proposes that the man be 'entitled to have his wages raised from £10 per an: to 6/ a week — his distance being 9 miles daily'.[54] This work cuts against the mythologisation of the new postal system which abstracted distance and time; instead, the surveyor is tasked with measuring distance, working out time, and doing this on an individual basis for each area. It becomes a measure of the bodily components of mail infrastructures, in opposition to Hill and Babbage's bodiless pneumatic dispatch.

Indeed, we can further see the importance of bodily labour to the role of the surveyor in correspondence between Trollope, his managers and the Secretary to the Postmaster General in St Martin's le Grand, concerning the establishment of pillar post boxes on the island of Guernsey in 1852. This famous trial, advocated by Trollope, would bring pillar post boxes to mainland Britain in 1853.[55] In his report, Trollope discusses the

[53] 'Papers Relating to the Rural Posts between Louth and Inniskeen, under Dundalk post town' (1856) POST 14/221, Postal Museum Archive, London.
[54] 'Louth and Inniskeen', POST 14/221.
[55] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 40.

infrastructures of postal circulation of Guernsey, emphasising that 'three rural post runners serve every house in the island of Guernsey 3 days a week'.[56] Though Trollope is partially interested in the 'mechanical' infrastructures of the Post Office here, i.e. steam packets and pillar post boxes, he also has to consider, and indeed emphasise, those bodily infrastructures in this report:

> I propose to establish an additional receiving house in the district delivered by the St Martins messenger, in the village of St Peters, as at present that village, and those of Torteval and Forest are distant 5.4 and 3 miles from the post office: the salary at St Peters will be £3, and I propose to allow the Receiver in this case £8 for clearing this office and St Martins, taking up letters to Forest, and bringing back return bags to St Peters, and St Martins. He will have to travel 4 double miles 3 days a week. The total expense of the first will be £21.17.4.—the revenue at 1/2 as above stated £33.13.6.[57]

As seen in this longer extract from Trollope's report, his work has its eye simultaneously on the importance of bringing the rural post to the ports of St Peters and St Martins, in order that letter bags are travelling as quickly as possible between the islands and the mainland, and on the intricacies of the annual expenses in comparison to miles travelled. The bodies of the messengers, and how far they travel, become crucial to the operation of postal circulation, even amid the complexity of pillar post boxes and steam packets.

Trollope's aptitude for the role — this was the first role within the Post Office that he had excelled at — may seem credulous to the rules and efficiency of the postal service, but his autobiography gives testimony to the problems of Hill's rationalisation of the system.[58] Though he admits that he had 'an over-eagerness to extend postal arrangements far and wide', his reflections also point to how a purely rational and mechanical approach to the movement of these bodies could be misplaced.[59] He tells the reader:

> Our law was that a man should not be required to walk more than sixteen miles a day. Had the work to be done been all on a measured road, there would have been no need for doubt as to distances. But my letter-carriers went here and there across the fields.[60]

In this passage, Trollope highlights how Hill's mechanised division of labour and emphasis on efficiency can be held in tension with the practicalities of such labour. He

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[56] 'Papers Relating to Revision of Guernsey Rural Posts', (1851-1853) POST 14/35. Postal Museum Archive, London.
[57] 'Guernsey Rural Posts', POST 14/35. Emphasis original.
[58] Details of Trollope's troubled position as a postal clerk can be found in *Autobiography* (1883), particularly Chapter 3; Super's *Trollope in the Post Office* (1981), and Chapter 2 of Thomas's *Postal Pleasures* (2012)
[59] Trollope, *Autobiography*, vol. 1., 123.
[60] Trollope, 119.

is unable to simply 'determine the length of a walk' for a letter carrier, as Hill would have it, because the roads are difficult to measure and bodies walk 'here and there' — bodies, and their efficiency, are not necessarily quantifiable data.[61] The letter carrier might also take short-cuts, or the surveyor, i.e. Trollope, might measure 'on horseback the short cuts which they would have made on foot', thus displacing the distance travelled in a day.[62] Trollope's mobile surveying also had the problem of being from the perspective of a human body, likely to make mistakes and pull pranks. His reflections demonstrate that Hill's mechanised, uniform penny post was beholden to the human-ness of kinaesthetic, autonomous and, in this case, rebellious bodies.

2. Imagining Postal Bodies in St Martin's le Grand

The operations of the central hub of St Martin's le Grand were simultaneously, and contradictorily, praised as mechanical while imagined through metaphors of the organic. This section collects examples of this simultaneity, arguing that the organic metaphors used to describe the mid-nineteenth-century sorting office places it in the context of broader conceptualisations of healthy circulation systems. Indeed, the periodical articles which I consider below are part of a broader genre concerned with the movement and making of goods, or what Waters calls a 'process articles'. She argues that these articles, published across the mid-Victorian periodical press, at once demystify the commodity and shed light on the process of labour invested in the manufacturing of a product, but also blur the distinction between the subject and object 'through [their] representation of the human-machine complex.[63] As I uncover the importance of metaphorical bodies to the conceptualisation of Hill's efficient human-machine, perfection and efficiency constantly abut and compete with bodily (and fallible) metaphors of organic circulation. As the postal system became mythologised as disembodied by Hillites and expounded as distinctly embodied by those who opposed his proposals, depictions of the operations of the Post Office tow the simultaneity of its circulation infrastructures in the public imagination. Prior to uniform penny postage, the Post Office mapped postal circulation sporadically, with varying techniques for depicting the methods of postal mobility. A series of maps by John Cary depicst vectors stemming

[61] Hill, quoted in Super, *Trollope*, 21.
[62] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 119-120.
[63] Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 87.

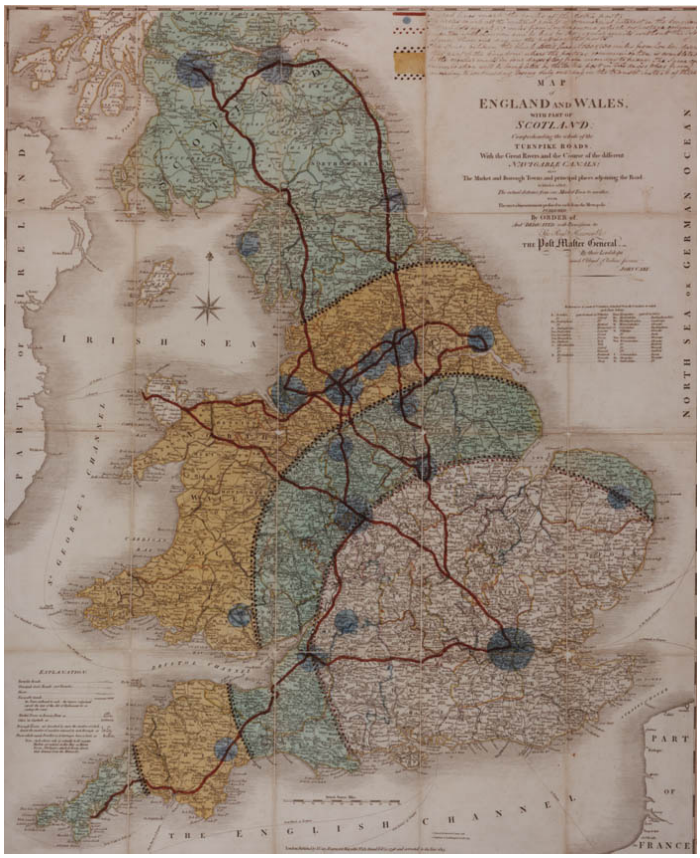

Figure 6. John Cary, 'Map of England and Wales with Part of Scotland'. Circulation Map, 1 inch: 15 miles. London: John Cary, 1819. POST 21/155. The Postal Museum, London.

from the central point of London, intersected by the changing prices of postal tax according to distance. As seen in Figure 6, the different prices of the transportation of mail to different areas of England and Wales are depicted through the use of compass points from the central point of London, interjected by the red lines of the turnpike roads. This conceptualisation of postal circulation, prior to the universal penny postage, carves up the landscape of Britain into distinct segments based on their distance from a London centre.

From 1840, and the uniformity of postage, this kind of circulation map became redundant, and the visualisation of postal infrastructures changed drastically. Now circulation maps were re-drawn every ten years in the same style, and depictions of circulation had to encompass more specific detail as the system expanded into more areas of the country — a testament to Hill's streamlining and rationalising of the service. However, as Figure 7 shows, by 1863 the circulation map encompassed multiple

infrastructures, from the railway to mail coaches and runners, highlighting the continued heterogeneity of the service, in spite of the 'uniform' penny post. In his seminal work *The Railway Journey* (1977), Wolfgang Schivelbusch characterises a change of understanding of landscape as converging with the advent of the railways. He argues that the architecture of the railway strikes through the landscape and minimises the space between two points, thus eroding traditional understandings of time and space: 'regardless of their geographical remoteness, the regions appeared as close and as easily accessible as the railways had made them'.[64] However, these maps stand in contention to Schivelbusch's assertion that railways homogenously changed the relationship with space into one of vectors: prior to the uniform penny post, and railways, space and distance are imagined as vectored in these maps, while the visualisation of postal infrastructures in Figure 7 imagines circulation post-1840, facilitated by runners, trains and coaches, as a mixture of heterogeneous and complex infrastructures, filtering communication into every part of Britain. The colours chosen for the maps emphasises a new conceptualisation of circulation — the different methods of circulation are depicted as the red arteries and blue veins of the system, mimicking the perfected circulatory system of the body.

Scholarship on economic circulation and nineteenth-century literature has demonstrated the importance of organic circulation to conceptions of political economy. Catherine Gallagher's seminal work on *The Body Economic* (2006) argues that nineteenth-century political economics and literary authors conceived of such economies through 'bioeconomies' and 'somaeconomies'. She argues that 'bioeconomies' conceives of '"Life" [a]s the ultimate desideratum and the energy force that circulates through organic and inorganic matter'; while 'somaeconomies' theorises that 'emotional and sensual feelings [...] are both causes and consequences of economic exertions'.[65] For Gallagher, then, the body was theoretically connected to conceptions of economic circulation in the nineteenth century. David Trotter has also argued that the works of Charles Dickens understand the health of the social body through circulation systems at risk of stoppages, which 'posed [a threat] to the health

[64] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 38.
[65] Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3, 4.

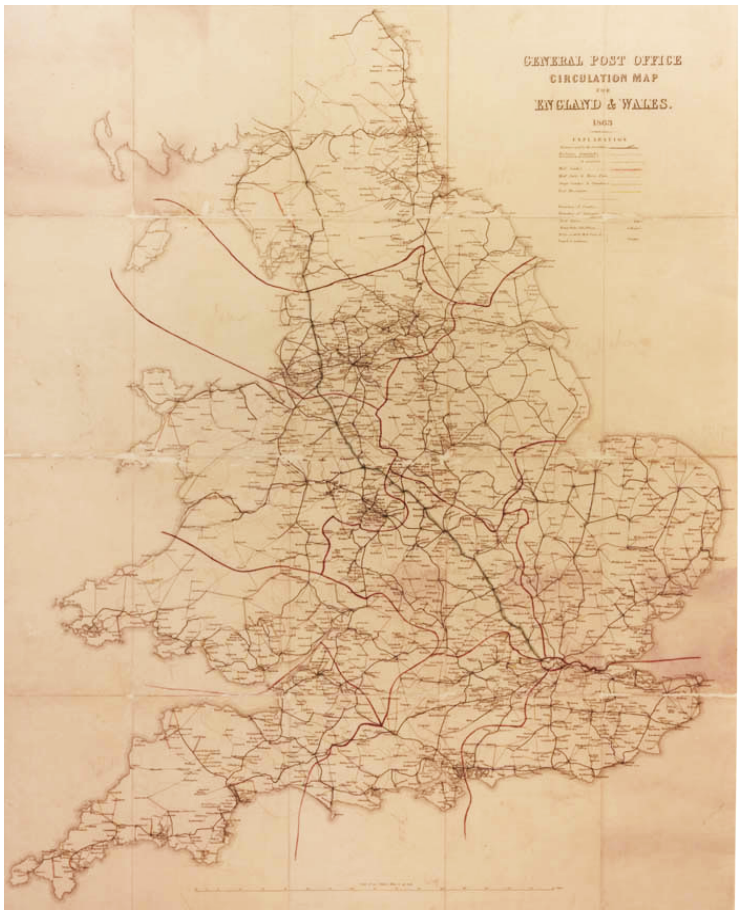

Figure 7. 'General Post Office Circulation Map for England and Wales', Circulation Map, 1 inch: 10 miles. London, 1863. POST 21/386. Postal Museum, London.

and wealth of the nation'.[66] It is my contention in this section that discourses and understandings of the circulation of the Post Office were not only reflecting these metaphors of bodily circulation, but contributing to them and shaping the ways in which mechanical, efficient circulation could be imagined as bodily. Furthermore, the utilisation of the body as metaphor for postal circulation often inserts the unruliness and messiness of bodily circulation into the utopia of mechanised, 'uniform', postal circulation as ushered in by penny postage.

The central headquarters of St Martin's le Grand in London became a key location from which to imagine the circulation of the British Post Office. Indeed, this hub of the General Post Office sorted letters for dispatch across the country; as Daunton notes, it was reliant upon an intensive use of labour to sort letters in short periods of

[66] David Trotter, *Circulation: Defoe, Dickens, and the Economies of the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1988), 101.

time ‘according to very marked ebbs and flows of traffic during the day’.[67] Here, sorters threw letters collected from posting boxes onto large tables in order to be first ‘faced’, i.e. placed with stamp and address facing up; transferred them to ‘stamping’ tables where the stamp was covered with the date and place of posting; and sorted them into ‘roads’ consisting of large towns in the same direction. Sorting had to be completed by 8 p.m. with mailbags sealed and ready for dispatch to the mail vans, which conveyed the bags to the various railway stations around London.[68] Sorters repeated this process to bring letters from the provinces to London. For Nicola Kirkby, this infrastructural control over ebbs and flows makes St Martin’s le Grand comparable to railway termini:

> St Martin’s-le-Grand was a large-scale building, partly open to members of the public, and concerned with the arrival, departure, and onward travel of information. The General Post Office relayed letters, parcels, and even passengers via mail coaches into local, national, and international communication networks.[69]

The General Post Office’s bureaucratic and circulation hub, with its association with the facilitation of national and international communication, became an imaginative heart of postal infrastructure. It was also, perhaps surprisingly, opposed by Hill, who favoured a system of multiple sorting houses, divided between eight or ten districts across the city of London: ‘more uniformly distributed with reference to the density of the letter-writing population [....] I think [London] should be treated as [several] towns’.[70] The large-scale central post office and sorting house was not part of Hill’s plans — indeed, its appearance in multiple periodical articles as a nodal infrastructure whose operations required physical labour draws the postal system away from a utilitarian ideal of pneumatic dispatch and into the bodily.

In a review of several postal-themed articles (including ‘Valentine’s Day at the Post Office’, which we will see more of later in this chapter), Francis Head’s ‘Mechanism of the Post Office’, published in the *Quarterly Review* in June 1850, attempts to elucidate the complexity of the postal infrastructures. In its depiction of St Martin’s le Grand, the public use of the grand central post office is emphasised as heterogeneous and large in scale, while also beholden to the postal temporalities of dispatch. Head highlights this sense of postal time throughout the text, remarking of the sorting hall’s inspectors that

[67] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 121.
[68] Daunton, 119.
[69] Nicola Elizabeth Kirkby, ‘British Railway Infrastructure and The Novel: 1850-1910’, King’s College London, 2017, 78-9.
[70] Hill, quoted in Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 38.

they 'regulate the whole of their movements by the expressive but ever-varying features of the hall's huge round-faced clock'.[71] The very narrative is formulated through this postal temporality, as the narrators apologise to the reader: 'As however the clock is unrelentingly progressing towards 6 p.m. we must reluctantly beg our readers to move with us'.[72] Indeed, 6 o'clock became the iconic postal time for St Martin's le Grand, indicating the time the offices shut for sorting.

Of course, Head's narrative relishes in the multitudes of people that course into the post office before closure: 'At about three quarters past 5, however, the stream of passengers had not only evidently increased [...] the majority were observed to be diverging or reeling towards the windows of the inland department'.[73] This critical postal time features not only in Head's narrative, but also George Elgar Hicks 'The General Post Office, One Minute to Six' (1860) (see Figure 8). Though Hicks's painting was completed ten years after Head's article, the similarities between the characters suggest the popularity of the conception of the central post office as a place of heterogeneous, democratic and potentially unrestrained and overwhelming engagement. In Head's article, the narrators describe the 'multitude' approaching the counter slits taking letters 'out of their pockets in the breasts of their coats, or very cautiously out of their hats'. These characters included:

> shabbily dressed men, busily stuffing [in] hundreds of circulars [...] Clerks and men of business deposited their letters with real as well as affected gravity [....] Boys generally came up whistling [....] Among the number of women, each of whom, although under high pressure, had an outstretched arm with a penny and a letter at the end of it, we observed a short and very stout one holding a child whose whole face was squalling.[74]

In a literary parallel to Hicks's famous painting, the narrative depicts not only the heterogeneity but also the crush of bodies in this postal space. There is a pleasure, but also potential anxiety, in the detailing of all these bodies — they have the potential to overwhelm and overwork the sorting bodies inside the building.

Importantly, the narrators begin with the architecture of the infrastructural hub, developing a sense of the scale and complexity of the building, as well as the need for continual expansion: 'When the present London Post-Office was completely finished in 1829, it was found, after all, to be barely large enough for its business', and the rooms

[71] Francis B. Head, 'Mechanism of the Post-Office', *The Quarterly Review* 87, no. 173 (June 1850): 71. British Periodicals.
[72] Head, 71.
[73] Head, 73.
[74] Head, 73-4.

Figure 8. George Elgar Hicks, *The General Post Office, One Minute to Six*, 1860. Oil on canvas, H 108 x W 153.7 cm. The Museum of London.

had to be expanded, particularly in the 'great sorting chamber'.[75] What comes to the fore in Francis Head's 'review', is less the iconic building, than the inadequacy of its rooms for the expanded postal system: 'Soon after our Parliament adopted Mr. Rowland Hill's bold proposal of the penny post, the brick and mortar boot, which had always been too tight, was found to pinch most intolerably'.[76] Indeed, the continual, and haphazard, expansion of the offices, leaves rooms that are not adequate for the working practices of the Post Office:

> The principal hall on the ground floor has been deprived of its sky–lights, and to the serious inconvenience of the poor fellows who work in it […] this important portion of the London, and consequently of the largest post–office in the world, is now lighted almost entirely during the whole sunshine, even of summer, by stinking gas![77]

The concern here lies not with the efficiency of the system, but with the circulation systems of the postal sorters, who must breathe in the 'stinking gas' of artificial lights. The bodily interjects the mechanical as the author draws attention to the miserable

[75] Head, 69.
[76] Head, 70.
[77] Head, 70.

working conditions of the sorting house. The article's focus on the skilled labour, as well as the toil, of postal sorters, not only emphasises the body as part of the mechanisms of the Post Office, but also contends that the body is not a machine, and therefore cannot remain unaffected by an unhealthy, stagnant environment.

In Head's article, as well as other 'process articles' concerning the Post Office, the rhythms of this labour and exchange are also metaphorically aligned with the body. The opening sentences of 'Mechanism of the Post Office' describes these postal surges as 'two very violent convulsions,—namely, the morning delivery and evening despatch, and two comparatively slight aguish shivers, caused by the tiny arrival and departure of letters by the day mail'.[78] Head's narrators compare postal surges with bodily convulsions, shivers, and agues, emphasising the importance of the bodily to imagining postal circulation. In Andrew Wynter's collection of articles in *Our Social Bees* (1865), published first with periodicals such as '*Fraser's Magazine*, the *London Review*, and the *Times*', the post office is imagined as a gluttonous beast and the sorters as part of its digestive organs.[79] Wynter imagines postal architecture as the face of the post office, which gorges and swallows postal letters and gapes for newspapers.[80] This article stretches the metaphor of digestion to encompass the entire process of letter sorting: as the clock strikes six and the post office closes, 'all the windows simultaneously descend. The post, like a huge monster, has received its full supply for the night, and, gorged, begins […] in quiet to digest'.[81] This link to digestion is striking, especially considering Wynter's position as a physician and as editor the *Association Medical Journal* between 1855 and 1860 (also known as the *British Medical Journal* or *BMJ* from 1857). Wynter links the imperceptible nature of the sorting house to the body's digestive system, another system impossible to witness in action and, perhaps more compellingly, one prone to delay, bloating, and even bodily discomfort.

Wynter contributed essays on medical, social, and entertaining subjects to the periodical press, including the *Cornhill Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, and he specialised in translating scientific information for general readers.[82] *Our Social Bees* decodes complex systems through extended

[78] Head, 69.
[79] Andrew Wynter, 'The Post-Office', in *Our Social Bees; or, Pictures of Town & Country Life, and Other Paper*s. (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1968), v. Internet Archive.
[80] Wynter, 1.
[81] Wynter, 2.
[82] P. W. J. Bartrip, 'Wynter, Andrew (1819–1876), Physician and Author', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), n.pag.

metaphors, and this is especially true of his chapter on the Post Office. Through Wynter's narrative, the reader is given the opportunity to enter into 'the vast stomach of the office' and its 'animal economy' in order to witness the secretive process of its digestion.[83] This 'animal economy' — a phrase used several times through the text — reimagines the processes of the sorting infrastructures as part of this digestion:

> The huge piles of letters, and the huger mountains of newspapers, lie in heaps — the newly-swallowed food. To separate their different atoms, arrange and circulate them, requires a multiplicity of organs, and a variety of agents […] no one interfering with the others, no one but is absolutely necessary to the well-being of the whole.[84]

Wynter's extended metaphor richly demonstrates the overlapping conceptions of the division of labour at the Post Office and the body. Instead of aligning the work of sorting with the mechanical, the text embeds it within the bodily. Moreover, in Wynter's imagined circulation system, the letters and newspapers become inert — they 'lie in heaps' waiting for the process of sorting to be enacted upon them.

In the mid-nineteenth century, articles in medical and popular journals debated the processes of digestion and its influence on the body as a whole. During Wynter's editorship at the *Association Medical Journal*/*BMJ* and subsequent connection with the association after his resignation in 1860, he would have come across the medical community's interest in the influences of digestive health upon the whole health of the body.[85] In 1862, the journal published a 'Lecture on the Importance of the Digestive Organs in Therapeutics' by Thomas Chambers; the speaker opens by emphasising the 'importance of the digestive viscera to the cure of disease'.[86] He tells us that 'the result of every case, surgical and medical, depends almost entirely on how far […] these organs are watched over'.[87] Another article from 1860 entitled 'Observations of the Treatment of Asthma' suggests the interconnectedness of the respiratory and digestive circulation systems, claiming that 'it appeared to me probable that the original cause of the disease was in the overworked powers of digestion'.[88] We can see this relationship not only the *Association Medical Journal*/*BMJ* but also in popular periodical articles. W.F.

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[83] Wynter's use of 'animal economy' could certainly align his circulatory system with those proposed for political economy by Gallagher in *The Body Economic* (2006).
[84] Wynter, 'Post-Office', 2.
[85] Bartrip, 'Wynter', n.pag. The *Association Medical Journal* became the *BMJ* from 1857
[86] Thomas K. Chambers, 'Lecture on the Importance of the Digestive Organs in Therapeutics', *BMJ* no. 69 (24 April 1862): 427. BMJ Archives Online.
[87] Chambers, 'Digestive Organs', 427.
[88] T. L. Pridham, 'Observations on the Treatment of Asthma', *BMJ*, no. 180 (9 June 1860): 434–35. BMJ Archives Online.

Wilkinson in *Good Words,* for instance, asserts that each component of the human frame 'produces its beneficial effects not only upon those parts of the system with which we have especially connected it, but more or less directly upon all others'.[89] Articles in both medical and popular journals understood the digestive system as connected to the health of the overall system.

It is not surprising that Wynter uses the metaphor of the digestive system in order to explain the circulation system of the Post Office. Describing with excruciating digestive detail, and drawing upon his experience as physician and editor of the *Association Medical Journal*/*BMJ*, Wynter understands the success of sorting in St Martin's le Grand as contributing to the overall health of the system. He explains to the reader that the infrastructural process of separating letters from 'their different atoms, arrang[ing] and circulat[ing] them, requires a multiplicity of organs, and a variety of agents'.[90] This conflation of sorters with organs and agents extends further; he claims that:

> a certain number [of sorters], performing the functions of the gastric juices, proceed to arrange, eliminate, and prepare it for future and more elaborate operations; certain others take away these eliminated atoms and […] transport them to their proper office.[91]

The detailed account of 'gastric juices' and 'eliminated atoms' aligns his metaphor with medical rhetoric of the day. This perfected circulatory process points to the health of this particular system and implies its association with the health of a larger system, potentially the nation, as a whole. But what really interests me here is that digestion emerges as a messy metaphor for 'data' processing, which Hillites would rather imagine through cleaner and neater imagery.

This association between the health of the postal system and the health of the whole is not an anomaly. J. Wilson-Hyde's *The Royal Mail: Its Curiosities and Romance* (1885), which had three printed editions, professes to be written by a man 'who had held an appointment in the Post Office for a period of twenty–five years', and endeavours to 'collect facts […] of curious, interesting, or amusing character'.[92] In the chapter on 'Sorters and Circulation', Wilson-Hyde indicates that one can measure the success of a

[89] W. F. Wilkinson, 'Health of Body and Mind', *Good Words* (January 1866): 50. British Periodicals Collection II.
[90] Wynter, 'Post-Office', 2.
[91] Wynter, 2-3.
[92] James Wilson-Hyde, *The Royal Mail: Its Curiosities and Romance*. 3rd ed (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1885), xi. Internet Archive.

capitalist venture through its connection to the circulation of the post: 'in any office pretending to importance, the letters pour in all day long (and all night too, possibly), and they pour out in a constant stream at the same time'.[93] This 'stream' is facilitated by diligent sorters, who must have, according to Wilson-Hyde, an understanding and knowledge of the circulation system of the Post Office, as well as the 'activity of the body'.[94] It is, he argues, 'no mere mechanical process':

> With some men it is impossible for them ever to become good sorters, even with the most earnest desire on their part to do so [….] So much has a sorter to learn, that a man without a head can never distinguish himself; and an educational test, except as a measure of acquirements in a collateral way, is of very little use. A sorter's success rests chiefly upon natural aptitude.[95]

With his assertion that it is the inherent capability of the sorter that leads to their success, Wilson-Hyde gives us the sense that the sorter operates at the core of the circulation system he has spent most of the book discussing. The sorter is a particular specimen, with specific and unique skills that are emphatically associated with the body.[96]

Furthermore, the relationship between skilful sorting and the 'activity of the body' is central to Wilson-Hyde's efforts to explain the process. The texts imagines the methodology of sorting as part of the body of the postal system — he tells the reader:

> Before a sorter is competent to do [their] work, he must learn "circulation," which is the technical name for the system under which correspondence flows to its destination, as the blood courses through the body by means of the arteries and veins.[97]

Here, Wilson-Hyde labels the experience and skill required to sort effectively as 'circulation'. Not only does Wilson-Hyde explicitly compare postal circulation with that of the blood in the body, but he also implies that St Martin's le Grand can be imagined as the metaphoric heart of this system, whose hard-working and skilful agents enable the miraculous flow of circulation from the centre to the periphery.

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[93] Wilson-Hyde, 161.
[94] Wilson-Hyde, 164.
[95] Wilson-Hyde, 164.
[96] The assertion that the competency of the sorter is down to a 'natural aptitude' (Wilson-Hyde, 164) speaks to the debates raging in the Post Office about examination during the job application process. Trollope was famously anti progress-through-examination and merit brought in by the reforms in the Post Office during the 1840s and 1850s. Trollope argued that he would never have got into the Post Office on aptitude alone, but had learnt his profession during his experience as a clerk and postal . For more information, see Chapter One of Menke's *Telegraphic Realism* (2008) and Chapter One of Super's *Trollope in the Post Office* (1981).
[97] Wilson-Hyde, *The Royal Mail*, 159.

Importantly, the association between the postal system and the flows that energise the living body linked the Post Office with other systems of flow, including the flow of capital and goods. Trotter notes that, in an article on the Great Exhibition in *Household Words*, Charles Dickens quickly renders civilisation 'as exchange and flow, [and] backwardness as stagnancy'.[98] Trotter brings Dickens's interest in the flows of commerce and information to the fore, citing Dickens's and Wills's article on the Bank of England: 'When Dickens and Wills visited the Bank of England, they marvelled at the mighty heart of active capital, through whose arteries and veins flows the entire circulating medium of this great country" (6 July 1850)'.[99] Correspondingly, this was also a simile that Dickens utilised to conceptualise the circulation of the Post Office. In an article for *Household Words*, titled 'The Sunday Screw' (1850), Dickens criticises the ending of Sunday deliveries in rural areas, claiming that:

> Delivery in London would stop, for many precious hours, the natural flow of the blood from every vein and artery in the world, to the heart of the world, and its return from the heart through all those tributary channels.[100]

For Dickens then, the Post Office was one amongst other circulation systems which, like Wynter's digestive tract and Wilson-Hyde's arterial system, allows for the healthy functioning of the whole, while a blockage or stagnancy to the heart can be associated with the illness, and even death, of the system as a whole.

There were many efforts to historicise and describe postal infrastructures in this period, and the analogy between the Post Office and bodily circulation, particularly arterial circulation, is picked up in numerous articles. An extended article detailing the history of 'The Post Office' (1868), in *St James's Magazine*, makes the association between the two clear: 'It is obvious to remark the close analogy between the daily working of our postal system and the arterial system of our bodies'.[101] Indeed, in utilising this explicit metaphor, the central post office of St Martin's le Grand is painted as the beating heart of the system, and Britain the thriving body:

> London is practically the heart of the world of commerce, and daily it sends forth and receives back into itself again, the flood of correspondence on which commerce and trade depend, and which pulsates through every vein and artery

[98] Trotter, *Circulation*, 101.
[99] Trotter, 101.
[100] Charles Dickens, 'The Sunday Screw', *Household Words*, 1, no. 13 (22 June 1850): 290. Dickens Journals Online.
[101] Anon, 'The Post Office', *St James's Magazine*, 345.

> of the social fabric from the Land's End to John o' Groat's House, and from Great Yarmouth to Galway and Cape Clear.[102]

The Post Office's close association with the arterial flows of the body explicitly linked it with the flows that were progressing into a modern, 'civilised,' capitalist culture, one in which trade and information flow freely between Britain and the empire. The article asks its readers to imagine 'for an instance what would be the effect of a like stoppage of that mail now-a-days, even for a single twelve hours!'.[103] St Martin's le Grand here is not only the central beating heart of the circulation of information in Great Britain but also that of 'Greater Britain'; it functions as the circulator of Britain's 'social fabric' across the world.

3. Stagnating Postal Circulation in *Bleak House*

The closeness of the relationship between material and metaphorical bodies in the Post Office made the institution an exemplar when it came to the abundance of metaphors of bodily circulation in the mid-nineteenth century. The imaginative pull of the bodiliness of the Post Office can be read in relation to wider metaphors of circulation and stagnancy. This section argues that Mrs Jellyby and Caddy Jellyby are examples of the imaginative relationship between individual and systematic circulation. Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) is obsessively concerned with the dichotomies between circulation and stasis, connectivity and solipsism, community and individuality. I demonstrate through this section that Caddy's body, in particular, is metaphorically tied to the postal circulation system, signalling how enforced participation in mechanised postal labour has implications on individual and systematic bodily health.

It is worth noting here that throughout the 1850s the Post Office's infrastructural presence in Britain continued to expand and shift. The Post Office abolished prepayment in money in provincial offices in 1851, and extended this to London, Edinburgh and Dublin in 1855 — the penny stamp bearing the Queen's head would become the primary indicator of prepayment after this.[104] As we have seen, Anthony Trollope introduced the pillar post box to the Channel Islands in the 1850s: by 1855 six pillar post boxes were provided in London and, by 1900, there were 32,593 pillar boxes in the United Kingdom.[105] Daunton also details the expansion in free deliveries during the 1850s: the Royal Mail had expanded the free delivery of letters to areas around large towns, and

[102] Anon, 345.
[103] Anon, 345.
[104] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 40.
[105] Daunton, 40.

by 1854, '515 post offices were opened, 1,242 free deliveries established and a further 245 extended. Indeed, by 1859 about 93 per cent of letters were delivered free of additional charge'.[106] During the 1850s, then, the presence of postal infrastructures continued to expand into the everyday lives of Victorians.

In line with 'The Sunday Screw', considered in the previous section, Dickens's *Bleak House*, serialised in 1852-3, is acutely concerned with the potential infection that could pervade a society in which circulation has become reduced to stasis. From the stagnancy of the courts of Chancery to the permanent veil of fog over the city, London is depicted not as the beating heart of the empire, but as a cancerous organ, infected as a result of its solipsism. This central concern has been identified by Trotter, who argues that the *Report on the General Scheme for Extra-Mural Sepulchre* — which was presented to Dickens in 1850 and advised on the deplorable conditions of London's graveyards — 'represents a collective pathology of the social body. The density of this discourse is remarkable, a thrilling reminder of the threat stoppage posed to the health and wealth of the nation'.[107] For Trotter, discourses of circulation in the works of the 'medical police' had a direct bearing on the imagination of Dickens and his work in the mid-nineteenth century. It is also possible to conceptualise the circulation systems of *Bleak House* within Gallagher's rubric of 'somaeconomics', which theorises 'economic behaviour in terms of the emotional and sensual feelings that are both causes and consequences of economic exertions'.[108] While I do not utilise Gallagher's conceptualisation of the dynamics of political economy here, her argument that economic exertions can be traced to emotional and sensual feeling, or the bodily, has resonances in my analysis of the relationship between institutional circulation and the individual in *Bleak House.* Just as the circulation of the Post Office had been imagined as part of its overall health, *Bleak House* can be read through its preoccupation with flows and stoppages, and their impact on the health of the overall system.

In an echo, or parallel, of the excesses of papers that clog the circulation of Chancery, Mrs Jellyby's profuse postal habits swamp the postal network, and Caddy's forced role as scribe becomes implicated in her mother's deleterious use of the system. Mrs Jellyby's letter writing is not associated with the healthy circulation of knowledge and empathy through the post, but rather with the closed circuits of Chancery

[106] Daunton, 44.
[107] Trotter, *Circulation*, 105.
[108] Gallagher, *Body Economic*, 4.

bureaucracy. She posts correspondence to 'public bodies, and private individuals', petitioning them on the health and welfare of a new colony, 'cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gah'.[109] In our first encounter with Mrs Jellyby, she asks Esther:

> "If you would like," said Mrs. Jellyby, putting a number of papers towards us, "to look over some remarks on that head, and on the general subject, which have been extensively circulated, while I finish a letter I am now dictating to my eldest daughter, who is my amanuensis—"[110]

Mrs Jellyby and her condescending acquaintances continually highlight her excessive circulation of letters through the postal system: 'Mrs Jellyby, you once mentioned that you had sent off five thousand circulars from one post-office at one time?'.[111] Importantly, her actions are indicative of a disregard for the health of the whole system—her letters swamp the postal system, clogging the local post office with a proliferation of correspondence. For Caroline Levine, *Bleak House* 'represents social relationships not as static structures but as constantly superimposed, conflicting, and overlapping relational webs [and] imagines society itself as a network of networks'.[112] An echo of Chancery then, Jellyby's network is one of prolific postal communication and the sheer quantity of letters sent almost turns the Jellyby's household into its own postal unit. However, the text makes it clear that these circulars are just that, caught in the loop of their network of correspondence: during dinner, Esther amusingly tells the reader, Mrs Jellyby 'received so many letters that Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy at once'.[113] These letters do not even end up in the hands of the intended. Furthermore, Esther continually confides in the reader that she 'felt quite ashamed to have thought so little about [Borrioboolah-Gah]'.[114] In the stagnant circulation system of the Borrioboola-Gah patrons, information and knowledge are circulated continually around those already in the know, and correspondence arrives only to encounter its end, unopened in the gloopy graveyard of the gravy-boat.

Mrs Jellyby's disregard for her status as mother and wife, and therefore head of the Jellyby household, is made more acute by Caddy Jellyby and her ink-stained body. The house of the Jellybys is one in perpetual disarray: a husband side-lined to the

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[109] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* eds. Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 53.
[110] Dickens, 54.
[111] Dickens, 57.
[112] Caroline Levine, 'Narrative Networks: Bleak House and the Affordances of Form', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 3 (2009): 518. Jstor.
[113] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 56.
[114] Dickens, 55.

uncomfortable position of sitting with his head against the wall (and a greasy mark to prove his stasis) and the children 'in a devil of a state'.[115] The narrative stresses this problem through Caddy's strong aversion to her mother's mission as well as her despair at the state of the house. She confides in Esther, exclaiming that: '"It's disgraceful," she said. "You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. *I'm* disgraceful. Pa's miserable, and no wonder!"'.[116] Caddy's forced role as scribe to her prolific letter-writing mother becomes caught up in questions of gender and social divisions, which sees Mrs Jellyby renounced for her lack of maternalism and care of the house (a repudiation emphasised through Esther's feminised maternalism and ability to make even the Jellyby's house comfortable). For Martin Danahay, Esther's role as housekeeper is one 'carefully differentiated from the circulation of female philanthropists […] who are shown as destructive of their own households because their energies are directed outward toward society'.[117] I would venture to build on Danahay's argument here by suggesting that, though part of the novel's issue with Mrs Jellyby is her outward rather than inward energy, part of the problem is also her engagement in the closed, and thus stagnating, circulation of letters among a particular group of people, underscored by her putrefying household. Though postal letters are used elsewhere in the novel to police and identify feminine misdeeds — Lady Dedlock is of course identified by her handwriting in letters to Nemo — Mrs Jellyby is exemplary in that her engagement with postal circulation stagnates the system. Esther observes the next morning that Mrs Jellyby 'was greatly occupied during breakfast; for the morning's post brought a heavy correspondence relative to Borrioboola-Gha'; her destructive force is not only waged on her household, but also on the health of the postal system as a whole.[118] It is this double destructive engagement which condemns Mrs Jellyby's unwomanliness.

Caddy's only escape from this stagnant circulation is to extract herself from the household through marriage and persuade Esther to instruct her: 'Over and above this, Caddy was very anxious "to learn housekeeping," as she said'.[119] However, it is Caddy's body, more than that of Mrs Jellyby, which is impacted by her engagement with the

[115] Dickens, 84.
[116] Dickens, 62. Emphasis original.
[117] Martin Danahay, 'Housekeeping and Hegemony in *Bleak House*', *Studies in the Novel* 23, no. 4 (1991): 423. Jstor.
[118] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 78.
[119] Dickens, 477.

closed circuit of the Borrioboolah-Gah mission. Caddy is frequently observed by Esther to be in various states of inkiness:

> But what principally struck us was a jaded and unhealthy-looking though by no means plain girl at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink.
>
> She would not sit down, but stood by the fire dipping her inky middle finger in the egg-cup, which contained vinegar, and smearing it over the ink stains of her face, frowning the whole time and looking very gloomy.[120]

Caddy's state of inkiness links her physical body with her forced participation in the mechanical reproduction of her mother's letters. Echoing Nemo's mechanical reproduction of legal documents as a copywriter, Caddy engages in reproducing vast numbers of documents that go around ad infimum in a closed circulation system. Indeed, her inked body becomes a sign of a loss of humanity perpetuated by the forced participation in this swamped system — her own bodily circulation system becomes swamped by ink. This simultaneously renders Caddy as an individual postal body but also links her to broader discourses about circulation and systematic health. By utilising postal circulation as an underlying metaphor here, Dickens draw a link between the individual alongside the circulation of the whole.

This bodily marking of the labour of letter-writing, then, becomes part of Dickens's wider questions about circulation, stagnancy and the health of the whole. It is, arguably, important that Caddy's transition into the role of wife and mother cannot let her entirely escape the impact of the role of scribe to Mrs Jellyby. When Esther visits Caddy and her newly-born baby Esther, she is struck by the baby's smallness and weakness:

> It had curious little dark veins in its face and curious little marks under its eyes like faint remembrances of poor Caddy's inky days, and altogether, to those who were not used to it, it was quite a piteous little sight.[121]

Baby Esther's weak body, with her inked, dark veins, operates here as a literal reminder of Caddy's labour as a scribe. Again, the text implies the ill health of Caddy's bodily circulatory system through the inkiness of her veins: as a mother, she also passes on the impact of enforced mechanical participation in a stagnating postal network to the circulation systems of her child. Here, the vitalising circulation system of blood becomes instead associated with stagnancy, and ill health passed from mother to child. However, Caddy's renunciation of Mrs Jellyby's postal excessiveness and emulation of Esther's housekeeping ultimately leads to a happy marriage for herself and Prince Turveydrop.

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[120] Dickens, 53 and 60.
[121] Dickens, 768.

4. Valentine's Day at the Post Office

'Process articles' could most compellingly explore the infrastructural 'heart' of St Martin's le Grand when the circulation system was operating at its peak: notably Valentine's Day and Christmas Day. Valentine's Day, above all, became a subgenre of the 'process article' — one where the authors relished in the bloating of the system with letters and paper products circulating between lovers. Golden has noted that this paper holiday became popular after Hill's reforms, while Karin Koehler argues that uniform penny postage played its part in the explosion of epistolary exchange on Valentine's Day: 'Prepaid stamps and pillar post boxes made it possible to correspond with anyone, anywhere, without giving away one's identity'.[122] Alice Crossley has also considered the annual attention to Valentine's Day not only through epistolary practices, but also 'the prominence of advertisements, displays in stationers' windows, public commentary of the strain placed on the postal services, and reminders in periodical articles about the history and heritage of these material tokens'.[123] The imagery at work in the subgenre of 'process articles' concerned with the charged letter-holiday at the Post Office, depict the infrastructure of St Martin's le Grand as intimately connected to the bodies that operated the sorting rooms. In doing so, 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' process articles collapse the material and metaphorical orders of postal bodiliness. I argue that the material labour of the postal sorter becomes a part of a wider conceptualisation of postal circulation as metaphorically bodily, and the mechanisms of postal circulation at St Martin's le Grand become conceptualised through the potential unruliness of the body.

I primarily consider Dickens's and Will's famous article 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office', *Household Words* (1850), alongside three other Valentine's Day-themed postal articles. 'St. Valentine's–Day at the General Post–Office', published in *The London Journal* (1870), aims to elucidate the 'interior arrangements' of the 'colossal department'.[124] 'St. Valentine's Day', in *The Graphic* (1871), answers the question '"Is

[122] Golden, *Posting It*, 11; Karin Koehler, 'Valentines and the Victorian Imagination: *Mary Barton* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 45, no. 2 (June 2017): 395. Cambridge Core.
[123] Alice Crossley, 'Paper Love: Valentines in Victorian Culture', in *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects*, eds. Helen Kingstone and Kate Lister, The Nineteenth Century Series (New York: Routledge, 2018), 230.
[124] Anon, 'St. Valentine's–Day at the General Post–Office', *The London Journal and Weekly Record of Literature, Science and Art,* March 1, 1870: 132. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.

there anybody in love in the house?"' by turning to the 'industrious agency' of the 'General Post Office'.[125] Finally, 'St Valentine's Eve at the Post Office', published in *The Sphinx* (1870), attempts to understand the connection between the saint 'of gushing tales of the loves of the farmer's son and the pretty but virtuous dairymaid' and 'the Post Office'.[126] These articles' publication coincides with the nationalisation of the telegraph network and provide evidence that though telegraphic infrastructures were gaining cultural importance, the bodily infrastructure of the sorting office was still significant to the conceptualisation of the post.

In Dickens's and Will's well-known article 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' (1850), which appeared in the first issue of *Household Words*, the narrators delve behind-the-scenes into the infrastructural hub of the general post office at St Martin's le Grand. The narrators send three distinct Valentine's Day letters through different nodes on the communications infrastructures of the Post Office: two 'into the box of a Fleet Street receiving house,' and the other one through a shop, in exchange for a penny.[127] As they track these postal letters through the inner workings of the 'Great Post Office in St Martin's-le-Grand', the circulation system becomes one which blurs the body and the machine.[128]

By using Valentine's Day as a framework, Dickens and Wills purposefully link the postal system to the lives and loves of those sending letters through it. The article sits only six pages away from Dickens's opening 'Preliminary Word,' in which the editor proclaims that he wants *Household Words* 'to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil' — an attribute only made possible by the increasingly seamless infrastructures of the post.[129] Menke argues that Dickens develops a sense of circulating affection in the 'Preliminary Word' through the imagery of a shadow, or 'airy-shapes'.[130] For Menke:

> the Shadow's power of "going about" and poking into curious corners would be exercised in the nonfiction articles about contemporary society that made up

[125] Anon, 'St. Valentine's Day', *The Graphic*, February 18, 1871: 154. British Periodicals.
[126] Anon, 'St. Valentine's Eve at the Post Office', *The Sphinx*, February 19, 1870: 60. British Periodicals.
[127] Charles Dickens and W. H. Wills, 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office', *Household Words: A Weekly Journal*, March 30, 1850, 6. Dickens Journal Online.
[128] Dickens and Wills. 'Valentine's Day', 6.
[129] Charles Dickens, 'A Preliminary Word', *Household Words: A Weekly Journal*, March 30, 1850, 1. Dickens Journals Online.
[130] Dickens,1.

> much of *Household Words*, especially in what Dickens called its "process" articles.[131]

However, it is through the Post Office that Dickens is able to cultivate an understanding of the role of empathy and affection: 'We have considered what an ambition it is to be admitted into many homes with affection and confidence'.[132] Arguably, it is with this emphasis on affection and confidence that Dickens and Wills make 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' the first focus of their '"going about" and poking into curious corners' — this article is not only about the awe of the data processing procedures, but also about those many hands and bodies, filled with the emotion of St Valentine's Eve, who sort these numerous letters.

In Dickens's and Wills's 'process' article, the copious quantities of letters still hold individual identities. The narrators see missives:

> consisting of hearts, darts, Cupid peeping out of paper-roses, Hymen embowered in hot-pressed embossing, swains in very blue coats and nymphs in very opaque muslin, coarse caricatures and tender verses.[133]

By using Valentine's Day as a framework, then, Dickens and Wills are able to emphasise the labour and emotions of those many bodies who participate in the system. The other articles also place a clear emphasis on the emotional connections afforded by the labour-intensive work of the postal service. In *The London Journal*, 'Valentine's-Day at the Post Office' concludes by considering those who had sent valentines into the postal system:

> But if the festival creates a commotion in such a well-drilled establishment as the General Post-office, what must be its effect among the general public — among that mighty multitude whose hearts beat responsive to that coping and trilling which the legend […] tells us is universal among the birds at the season.[134]

The Post Office sorters' 'well-drilled' circulation of candid emotions causes a visceral impact on the bodies connected through it. The relationship between the subject and the object become blurred here, as Valentine's Day cards move seamlessly through the system while emotionally connecting people to one another.

However, the Post Office is also a system that refuses to operate homogeneously. In the Valentine's Day article published in *The Graphic* in 1871, the writer contends that the purchase of a Valentine's Day card is 'a specimen of the inane and useless prettiness, [though] for the comic valentines, we confess, we have more

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[131] Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, 49.
[132] Dickens, 'Preliminary Word', 1.
[133] Dickens and Wills, 'Valentine's Day', 8.
[134] Anon, 'Valentine's–Day', *London Journal*, 133.

sympathy'.[135] The volume of pre-made and shop-bought Valentine's Day cards may be inane, and the comic valentines amusing, but the Post Office will process these numerous interpretations of the day whatever their form. In 'St Valentine's Eve at the Post Office', published in *The Sphinx* in 1870, the narrators are amazed by the assortment of cards coming through the postal infrastructures:

> The shapes and sizes were as remarkable as anything else. We saw all of them, from a pill-box to a flat case, nearly three feet by two, and every size between […] One case we saw, about a foot and a half square, was evidently a cardboard box.[136]

The narrators are stunned by the number of different letters travelling through the infrastructure, and the Post Office's ability to process them all. This heterogeneity is significant to Thomas's reading of the postal network; Thomas understands the Penny Post as 'invoking "everyone" as communication subjects, and incorporating "everyone" into a new network designed to connect that same "everyone" to anyone'.[137] Furthermore, as Koehler argues, 'perhaps more than on any other date, on Valentine's Day, 'the contents of post boxes and letter bags reflected the astonishing diversity of interpersonal constellations'.[138] These periodical articles indicate the interest in the sheer quantity of different types of people, and different types of valentines being sent through the sorting infrastructure, emphasising the non-discriminatory and heterogeneity of the system.

This indiscriminate system can be further seen in William Waverton's *The People's Letter Bag and Penny Post Companion*, which was released amid the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840 for those new to frequent letter writing. In this text, people of all walks of life are given letter-templates, from a servant-girl writing to her former mistress for a reference and an elderly man petitioning a philanthropist for money, to 'one young Lady to another, with whom she wants to open a correspondence'.[139] Waverton's companion speaks to the Valentine's Day articles we have seen, by demonstrating how postal letters linked the lives and loves of everyday men and women. He includes positive and negative responses to many of these letter-templates, including a positive and negative response of a woman to the offer of love,

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[135] Anon, 'Valentine's Day', *Graphic,* 154.
[136] Anon, 'Valentine's Eve', *Sphinx*, 60.
[137] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, 4.
[138] Koehler, 'Valentines', 396.
[139] William Waverton, *The People's Letter Bag, and Penny Post Companion*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton and Clark, 1840), v-vii. General Reference Collection 10921.a.2., The British Library, London.

to accepting or declining a friend's request for a temporary loan.[140] This heterogeneity of templates suggests that the letter-book is not for one type of person — in fact, the letter-book may be entirely useless for an individual. These letter-templates exemplify the interest in and pleasure gained by reading the letters of all sort of people. Furthermore, they demonstrate how the Victorians understood the Post Office: this system was not only about data and the 'rationalisation' of the infrastructure that we have seen mythologised, but also heterogeneity of it. The Post Office sent everybody's letters without discrimination, and it also connected people in new ways. It is a system potentially filled with a multiplicity of mobile bodies.

Turning now to the bodies operating the infrastructure of St Martin's le Grand, Dickens and Wills relish in the perception of the Post Office as the epitome of efficient working; as they spring into action, the narrators describe the sorters as 'a colony of human ants!' — they work 'like lightning' and 'instinctively detect' when a letter has not been prepaid.[141] Here, sorting requires repetitive processes functioning in a conveyor belt of human labour: 'The letters are ranged in a long row, like a pack of cards thrown across a table, and so fast does the stamper's hand move, that he can mark 3000 in an hour'.[142] The sorter 'counts as he thumps, till he enumerates fifty, when he dodges his stamp on one side to put his black mark on a piece of paper'.[143] Though there is a fascination here with how the sorters work with speed and diligence, Dickens's and Wills's portrayal of this work roots efficiency firmly in the bodies that conduct this labour. The focus on the stamper's hand that thumps, counts and dodges, as well as the repeated use of 'he' concentrates the reader's attention on the body of the man performing the task. In bringing the body to the fore, the narrators blur distinctions between the mechanical and the bodily — the mechanical continually giving way to the body.

This trope appears time and time again as the conception of 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' became a running theme in periodicals. Published alongside a printed image of the multitude of sorters in the general post office (see Figure 9), *The London Journal* article discusses the sorters' 'nimble fingers' alongside their 'keen eyesight and

[140] Waverton, 73-5, 31-3.
[141] Dickens and. Wills, 'Valentine's Day', 7.
[142] Dickens and Wills, 7.
[143] Dickens and Wills, 7.

extraordinary experience in calligraphy'.[144] The article emphasises the labour-intensive work of the sorters, claiming that:

> The energies of all engaged in St Martin's-le-Grand are […] taxed to the utmost [….] Stampers and sorters are working at high pressure force, and strong porters, staggering under heavy loads, are every few minutes bringing fresh material for their lightning-like manipulation.[145]

Though the article highlights the 'mechanical precision' required by sorting, it also highlights the bodily labour required for these tasks. The bodies of the labourers are 'taxed' by the task, 'staggering' under heavy loads — the efficiency of the Post Office is repeatedly brought back to the bodies of those working in the system. *The Graphic* (1871) marks the role of the Post Office as an intrinsic part of modern celebrations: 'Little exception can be taken to the present mode of celebrating St Valentine's Day, except that it inflicts a serious additional burden on a very hard-worked body of public servants'.[146] Again and again, these articles link the circulation of love letters to the hard-working bodies of those employed as sorters at St Martin's le Grand. Indeed, they relish in the juxtaposition between a romanticised St Valentine's Day and the 'hard-worked body'.

In one striking tangent to Dickens's and Wills's article, the narrators ponder what must become of the sorters when they retreat from the 'Grand National Post Office' and into their own lives. The narrators wonder:

> But when a sorter goes home from these places to his bed, does he dream of letters? […] When he has a glass too much, does he see no double letters mis-sorting themselves unaccountably? When he is very ill, do no dead-letters stare him in the face?[147]

As this system infiltrates the minds of those who sort, the narrators' questions blur the boundaries between the circulation system and bodily experience. The repetitive and extensive work of sorting impacts the physiology — indeed psychology — of those performing the labour. Moments in which the mind can wander are moments in which the mechanical disrupts the bodily and drives those who sort to distraction. In the sorters dreamscape, letters miss-sort themselves, dead letters remain unsorted, and the circulation system misbehaves. Clayton argues that Dickens and Wills are enthused by the amount of data the system can handle: '[Dickens] provides a careful description of

[144] Anon, 'Valentine's–Day', *London Journal*, 132.
[145] Anon, 132-3.
[146] Anon, 'Valentine's Day', *Graphic*, 64.
[147] Dickens and Wills, 'Valentine's Day', 9.

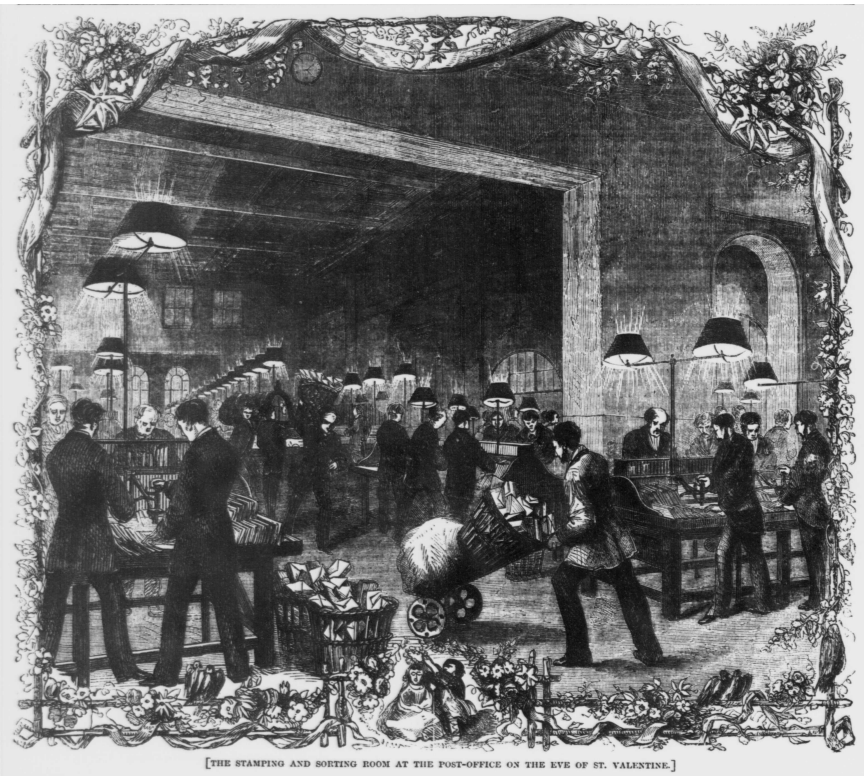

Figure 9. The Stamping and Sorting Room at the Post-Office on the Eve of St Valentine', *The London Journal and Weekly Record of Literature, Science and Art*, March 1, 1870: 132. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.

the routing grid, which to a contemporary eye resembles the division of a web address into domain name, server, and individual addresses'.[148] However, this particular moment counters Clayton's suggestion that this system was one imagined only in terms of data. It both demonstrates that the bodies of the sorters refuse to behave as Hill's machines — dreaming, drinking, getting ill — and the potential impact of mechanical circulation on the individual.

The conflation or complication of the bodies and mechanisation is not limited to the bodies of the sorters themselves — these texts also blur the 'mechanical' components of the system with the bodily. Dickens and Wills use distinctly visceral bodily metaphors to describe the moment when the postbags are brought into the hall for sorting. The bags become conflated with sheepskins and the sorters with butchers:

> They looked like whole flocks suddenly struck all of a heap, ready for slaughter; for a ruthless individual stood at a table, with sleeves tucked and knife in hand,

[148] Clayton, *Dickens in Cyberspace*, 4.

> who rapidly cut their throats, delve into their insides, abstracted their contents and finally skinned them.[149]

The narrators play with the association of the Post Office with the red stamps of the penny post and stretch it until the imagery turns into that of a butcher and his carcass. We do not necessarily get a sense of web addresses and domain names here, but rather of how this system is linked to living and breathing (or not) bodies.

Moreover, the blurring of the boundaries between the subject and the object, or the body and the machine, is heightened as the narrators find themselves in an institution whose terminology links the official structures of postal circulation with the body. The narrators imagine the very architecture of St Martin's le Grand as different elements of the body. In their first encounter with the institution, the narrators' metaphors associate aspects of postal architecture with the face:

> Here huge slits gape for letters, whole sashes yawn for newspapers, or wooden panes open for clerks to frame their large faces, like giant visages in the slides of a Magic Lanthorn [sic]; and to answer their inquiries, or to receive unstamped paid letters.[150]

Here the architecture becomes anthropomorphised: the slits of the windows become mouths which gape, and the sashes yawn — the very building becomes a giant face. Furthermore, the clerks' faces, framed by wooden panes, become morphed by the glass and '*like* giant visages'; this simile indicates that the faces of the clerks no longer seem to belong to them, but become merged with the spectacle of the body of the Post Office.

The use of 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' as a foundation allows these process articles to analyse the complexity of the workings of the Post Office, while framing it within an idealised system, connecting a multitude of emotional human bodies to one another. Nevertheless, the attention to the mechanisms of the Post Office sorting house necessarily means focusing on those bodies which undertook this work. These bodies, we have seen, throw into question Hill's aggrandisement of 'uniform' penny postage, in which men work as efficiently as machines. To behave 'as so many machines' risks bodily, and potentially systematic, disruption — the repetitious work of sorting becoming part of their physiology as they dream of mis-sorting letters. In the process articles of 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office' the infrastructural complexity of the central sorting office operates with beating hearts, labouring bodies and potential for human error.

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[149] Dickens and Wills, 'Valentine's Day', 6.
[150] Dickens and Wills, 6.

5. The Perils of Circulating through Hill's Penny Post

In the final section of this chapter, I consider the bodies, particularly women's bodies, who bear the burden of their engagement in the utopian ideal of Hill's postal circulation. Here I put the bodies of Magdalen Vanstone, from Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862) and the twin sisters Anna and Mary, from Hesba Stretton's 'The Postmaster's Daughter', published in *All the Year Round* in 1859, into conversation with one another, in order to explore how the circulation infrastructures of the Post Office become formative in the depiction of overworked and outcast bodies in these texts. Like Caddy, these women are forced to participate in postal circulation, and Anne's relentless labour and Magdalen's clandestine use of the system takes its toll on the health of their bodily health. I demonstrate that though the narrative of *No Name* utilises an idealised Hillite postal system as a structuring device, postal letters become implicated in bodily and mental health, as well as the form of the text. In Stretton's and Collin's texts, Hill's mechanical Post Office comes into tension with the bodily as characters attempt to navigate the relentless circulation system.

In Collins's novel *No Name*, Hill's ideal of the frictionless circulation of postal letters becomes central to the sensation plot. In this text, the sisters Norah and Magdalen Vanstone become suddenly outcast and destitute when it emerges after their parents' sudden death that they were not married when the children were born. In the eyes of the law, they are now 'Nobody's Children,' and relinquish their inheritance to their estranged uncle.[151] Norah, the novel's paradigm of feminine restraint and morality, takes the burden of the illegitimacy upon her shoulders and takes up work as a governess; Magdalen, however, refuses her fate and, by disguising her identity multiple times, conspires to take back the sisters' share of the money by marrying her uncle's morally abhorrent heir, Noel Vanstone.

Significantly, a reading of a postmark catapults the Vanstone family into chaos. On an ordinary morning, a letter with a postmark 'from New Orleans' causes Mrs Vanstone's 'eager, expectant attention' in the opening chapters of the text; Collins quickly flags the postmark as a critical component in this thickly woven novel and the markings of postal infrastructure as signifiers which allows for the detection of letters with precision.[152] As the catalytic postal letter enters the Vanstones' breakfast room, its

[151] Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, ed. Virginia Blain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 221.
[152] Collins, 18-19.

postmark becomes the focal point of the mystery, and its potential to be solved. Indeed, the lawyer of the family uses the remembrance of the postmark to explain to the governess, Miss Garth, Mr Vanstone's previous marriage to a duplicitous Canadian woman. The markers that allow a postal letter to travel through the infrastructures of the uniform penny post, then, becomes a key signifier in the mystery of the Vanstones' history.

Importantly, the form of *No Name* is shaped by postal infrastructures; specifically, a postal system in which it can be taken for granted that the dates and addresses stamped onto the front of envelopes indicate time and places accurately and precisely. An imagined efficient postal service is, of course, a plot device utilised in many sensation fiction novels, but *No Name* is particularly concerned with the postal specificity facilitated by the expanding jurisdiction of the Post Office.[153] In seven 'Between the Scenes' sections entitled 'Progress of the Story Through the Post', the narrative is continued by postal letters — not only an epistolary form, these letters are emphatically postal. Each letter includes a date and address, suggesting that these letters move fluidly through postal infrastructures. They also construct the web of relationships and correspondents that impact the complex plot of this story, particularly through the voices of lawyers and agents. It is through these sections that we hear of Magdalen's initial disappearance, Frank's wish to end his engagement with her, Mrs Lecount's hunt for the newly-wed Vanstones, and Norah's engagement to the next heir of the girls' inheritance, George Bertram (though, of course, for moral paragon Norah, George's position as the heir is unknown). The framing of the narrative around the Post Office suggests the importance of the infrastructures of the uniform penny post to constructions of empirical truth about the time and place of the writer, amid the articulation of a heterogeneous arrangement of voices.

This self-conscious engagement with the postal in Collins's text is a crucial distinction to the tradition of epistolary novels: as Laura Rotunno boldly asserts, '[b]y 1840, the epistolary novel was dead'; however, the letter was still very much alive in Victorian fiction, especially the postal letter.[154] Indeed, Koehler has also demonstrated

[153] Examples might include Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), in which Count Fosco intercepts letters between Marian Holcombe and Walter Hartright or the letters intercepted by Ingleby on their way to Madeira in *Armadale* (1864-66); or Lady Audley's use of telegraphs and letters in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and the letters that reveal bigamy truths in *Aurora Floyd* (1862).
[154] Rotunno, *Postal Plots*, 1.

that the postal letter allows characters to engage with an 'astonishing diversity of interpersonal constellations'.[155] The engagement with the penny post in *No Name*, and its investment in the signifiers of where letters have been, indicates the importance of postal times and dates to the detective work of this sensation novel — for instance, it is by plying Norah with questions about Magdalen's postal letter that Mrs Lecount ascertains where the newly, and illicitly, married Noel and Magdalen are hiding. The duplicitous character of Captain Wragge, who hides behind the anonymised address of the Post Office, further draws attention to the significance of postal information. We first meet Wragge through the sensible and shrewd eyes of the girls' governess Miss Garth:

> Miss Garth looked down at the card in her hand, and looked up again in blank astonishment. The name and address of the clerical-looking stranger (both written in pencil) ran as follows:—
>
> Captain Wragge. Post-office, Bristol.[156]

At different points in the novel, Wragge's letters are sent to the Post Office of Birmingham, West Strand, and Whitby.[157] Though wishing to maintain a degree of anonymity, Wragge also understands the importance of remaining contactable through the Post Office — it serves Wragge to have letters sent to local post offices, rather than dealing with the admin of forwarding addresses. Reasonably anonymous, and certainly retaining no fixed address or staff, Captain Wragge maintains his correspondence through the infrastructures of local post offices.

The reliability of the nineteenth-century Post Office is an ideal that Collins's narrative relies on; indeed, Captain Wragge, utilises and manipulates the efficiency and uniformity of postal infrastructures to further his and Magdalen's duplicitous plan to ensnare Noel Vanston. As a prime-swindler, Wragge understands the usefulness of being able to navigate the infrastructures and temporality of the post. The Post Office is his first port of call when intercepting a letter from Mrs Lecount which will disclose the true identity of Magdalen to Noel Vanstone. Furthermore, Wragge has Lecount sent to Switzerland through a conniving use of postal infrastructures: he persuades Noel

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[155] Koehler, 'Valentines', 396.
[156] Collins, *No Name*, 28.
[157] The relationship between the Post Office and suspect personalities, utilised by sensation fiction in the mid-nineteenth century, is playfully alluded to in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (first performed in 1895). Lady Bracknell famously disparages Jack's proposal with the insult 'You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel?' Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 1961), 22.

Vanstone that Lecount is jealous of his love for Magdalen (currently posing as Wragge's niece Miss Bygrave), and conspires with Noel in order to forge a letter from Lecount's brother's doctor, designed to call her to his sickbed in Switzerland. This daring heist requires an astute understanding and manipulation of postal infrastructures:

> The railway recourses of the Continent (in the year eighteen hundred and forty-seven) were but scanty; and a letter sent, at that period, from England to Zurich, and from Zurich back again to England, occupied ten days in making the double journey by post.
>
> "Date the letter, in French, five days on from to-morrow [….] The result is, that in ten days from to-morrow, Mrs. Lecount will be on her way to Switzerland — in fifteen days from to-morrow, Mrs. Lecount will reach Zurich, and discover the trick we have played on her — in twenty days from to-morrow, Mrs Lecount will be back in Aldborough".[158]

This sensational plotline asks the reader to suspend their disbelief in order for the infrastructures to operate with a clockwork precision that emulates Hill's idealised, efficient, and uniform system. Wragge calculates the timings of the mail from Britain to Zurich with the utmost precision in order to prevent Lecount's presence from impacting his and Magdalen's plan. Here, he contrives to make Lecount a postal body by sending her into the infrastructural system of the Post Office, in which she must have a sender (Wragge) and a receiver (her brother). Accordingly, she takes ten days to travel to Zurich and, upon finding her brother alive and well, indignantly begins her journey back: 'When the half-hour had passed, he helped her into her place on the mail'.[159] Once in the postal system, Lecount is forced to travel alongside the mail — indeed, she travels as if a dead-letter being returned to sender. As her brother ominously cautions: '"Be careful of her, or she will break down under the pressure." The mail started'.[160]

However, Mrs Lecount is also aware of the potential benefits of travelling on this efficient mail: no sooner has she arrived to find her brother alive and well, than she steps on the next mail travelling back to Britain, a mere half an hour after she has arrived. Moreover, when back in Britain and searching for the newly married Mr and Mrs Vanstone, Lecount uses the postal system in order to further her knowledge and build her case. After catching the mail home from Switzerland, Lecount immediately writes to a mysterious agent, Mr De Bleriot, who helps her acquire the knowledge that Magdalen has sent Norah a letter. She arranges an interview with Norah by sending her a letter on

[158] Collins, *No Name*, 433.
[159] Collins, 514.
[160] Collins, 514.

the pretence of her concern, and works to discover the postmark stamped on Magdalen's ill-advised letter:

> Norah answered, as well as her terror and distress would allow her, "I have had a letter, but there was no address on it." Mrs Lecount asked, "Was there no post-mark on the envelope?" Norah said — "Yes; Allonby".[161]

The traces of postal infrastructures then — the ins and outs of its infrastructures — while manipulated by Wragge, behave indiscriminately; the postal system is one whose signifiers can be accessed and assessed by anyone, not only the (anti-)heroes of the novel.

However, engagement with this uniform, efficient postal system also takes its toll on multiple characters in *No Name*, including Lecount. Like Caddy's inked body and those bodies of the sorters dreaming postal nightmares, characters forced to submit to the speed and efficiency of the system become vulnerable to bodily disorder. As her brother's warning foreshadows, Lecount's rapid journey back on the mail from Zurich leaves her a shadow of her former self, she arrives back in Essex looking 'seriously and literally, at death's door' — a dead-letter indeed.[162] She is nursed back to health by the Bartrams, and it is only through their help that she survives her expedited journey on the mail. However, the postal journey has a physical impact on her body that could be compared to Esther's famous transformation after contracting a smallpox-like virus in *Bleak House*. The transformation is so great that her former employer barely recognises her:

> Was it the spectre of the woman? Or the woman herself? Her hair was white; her face had fallen away; her eyes looked out large, bright, and haggard over her follow cheeks. She was withered and old [….] The quietly impenetrable resolution, the smoothly insinuating voice — these were the only relics of the past which sickness and suffering had left Mrs. Lecount.[163]

The sheer stress of being sent unwittingly on the mail has left Lecount not only visibly withered and fatigued but spectre-like, a 'relic' of her former self. The association between the Post Office and its deathly stress upon the, here feminine, body, is one that Collin's continues to explore through Magdalen Vanstone, pushing Dickens's and Wills's question of whether letter sorting can influence the mental health of a sorting clerk to new extremes.

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[161] Collins, 530.
[162] Collins, 516.
[163] Collins, 538-9.

Magdalen Vanstone, a woman of many faces and co-postal-conspirator with Captain Wragge, is aligned with the Post Office early in the novel and her body most fervently feels the system's impact. The early encounter with the catalytic New Orleans letter equates Magdalen with a mail carrier:

> [Magdalen] unlocked the post-bag at the sideboard and poured out the letters into a heap. Sorting them gaily in less than a minute, she approached the breakfast table with both hands full; and delivered the letters all round with the business-like rapidity of a London postman.[164]

In the reader's first encounter of Magdalen, she is equated with the bodily postal infrastructures that, by 1862, had become an expected facet of postal delivery. Indeed, the language here mimics the detailed descriptions of sorters' work that we have already seen in Sections 2 and 4. She 'unlocks the post-bag, [...] pours the letters into a heap' on the table, and sorts through them with a 'business-like rapidity' that is equated with the speedy work of a 'London postman'. While Magdalen is capable of 'dropping the postman's character and assuming the daughter's', her commitment to the role of postal sorter sees the text itself assume the role of 'process article' as both she and the narrative itself ardently embody the bodily infrastructures of the post.[165]

It is worth pausing here, to consider the depiction of postal workers in Hesba Stretton's (alias for Sarah Smith) 1859 short story 'The Postmaster's Daughter'. Published in *All the Year Round*, the short story bears biographical resemblance to Stretton's experience as a young woman, when herself and her sister bore the responsibility for managing their father's post office and stationery shop in Wellington, Shropshire.[166] Stretton's story has sensational overtones, with the depiction of a corrupt postal clerk wooing the twins' younger sister and attempting to make off with stolen money pilfered out of the post office mailbag. However, it is not the sensation that takes the forefront of this story, but the trials of running a busy provincial post office in the era of the uniform penny post. 'The Postmaster's Daughter' depicts the return of the narrator, Mary, to her family's post office in Tunbridge, after seven years working as a governess in France. She returns to find her sister, Anna, careworn and exhausted from her role as a postal sorter in the provincial post office:

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[164] Collins, 19.
[165] Collins, 19.
[166] Elaine Lomax, *The Writings of Hesba Stretton: Reclaiming the Outcast* (London: Routledge, 2016), 39.

> But I silently noted the greatest change in my twin-sister [....] I saw, with sorrow, that her cheeks and lips were pale; her clear grey eyes, that used to wear a look of quiet hopefulness, were dimmed and careworn.[167]

The impact of running this system is not only played out upon Anna's feminised body but also that of their father: 'My father had become a bowed-down, hoary-headed old man, fitted only for a comfortable retirement [...] soon wearied with the unwonted exertions required by his official post'.[168] Indeed, though the text continually emphasises that their father 'was in many respects well fitted for his post', his body so bears the burden of his relentless work that he becomes blind.[169] The roles of postmasters and mistresses, even in a provincial post office, leaves bodies reeling from the labour.

Importantly, it is the new, Hillite postal service that inflicts this physical toll. The story takes its time to establish the differences between the Post Office pre and post uniform penny postage: 'It is altogether altered [....], and now a great number of letters are received and despatched [sic] here—an average of thirty thousand a week passes through our office'.[170] Indeed, it takes a tremendous amount of labour to sort and shift this number of letters through the small post office, and the twins take on a majority of the labour. Anna explains:

> There is, first, the great morning mail, which comes in at three in the morning. Then our own bags for the sub-offices have to be made up and despatched [sic], which occupies us till six o'clock. The letter-office must be opening to the public at seven, and the money-order office at ten. At eleven, there is a mail from our country town, and one to be sent to London. We go on all day, until our great nightwork begins, which lasts till after ten, when we send out our greatest number of bags.[171]

I have quoted this extract at length here because it seems an echo of the depictions of St Martin's le Grand in 'Valentine's Day' process articles. Here, three bodies must fulfil the role of several, adhering to schedules of the centrally organised institution. The postal timetables of dispatch and delivery shapes and punctuates their working day: the hours of 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock become significant in relation to their association with the mail. Furthermore, unlike Dickens's and Wills's dreaming sorters, these women are expected to labour late into the night to fulfil postal circulation.

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[167] Hesba Stretton, 'The Postmaster's Daughter', *All the Year Round* II, no. 28 (November 5, 1859): 38. Dickens Journals Online.
[168] Stretton, 40.
[169] Stretton, 40.
[170] Stretton, 38.
[171] Stretton, 38-39.

The narrative takes issue with the centrally organised institution, especially with respect to the lack of pension permitted for their retired father, who has been made blind by his labour. His enforced retirement sees the arrival of the District Surveyor, Mr Jeremyn, a representative of Hill's expanding and systematising postal system:

> He had not held his present post many months, and was anxious to reduce the expenditure of his district wherever he could do so without detriment to the public convenience. A little extra work had been put on here and there in various departments without extra pay, small innovations had been diligently suppressed, and he was gaining the character of a zealous official.[172]

Mary holds as much contempt for the zealousness of this official, forcing more hours with less pay, as we saw in Trollope's summation of Hillite principals. Indeed, Stretton's later anecdotal short-story 'A Provincial Post Office', also published in *All the Year Round* in 1863, holds the same tone of contempt for these Hillite officials: 'the official surveillance has grown vigorous [....] [the surveyor], or any one of his numerous assistants, may enter the office at any moment, and institute a rigid examination of all the details of its work'.[173] For Stretton, then, the surveyor is represented as a rigid, zealous postal official, whose work is to legitimise the official line of St Martin's le Grand despite of the human cost in regional post offices.

Furthermore, 'The Postmaster's Daughter' raises questions about women's work in the Post Office during this period. Daunton notes that women were first employed as counter clerks and telegraphists in the Post Office in 1870, while Patricia Hollis observes that 'the post office was the first, and remained the largest, government department to employ women', with 6,000 women employees in 1881.[174] However, Daunton also argues that the Post Office employed large numbers of women as 'unestablished workers' — unestablished staff were employed 'without the security of regular employment, pensions and benefits'.[175] Furthermore, he notes that the statistics of employment in the Post Office in the mid-nineteenth century 'are a mass of inconsistencies', especially in relation to sub-postmasters running provincial post offices; sub-postmasters 'might employ assistants to work at the counter of their offices', but such assistants did not appear as employees of the Department in official figures.[176]

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[172] Stretton, 41
[173] Hesba Stretton, 'A Provincial Post-Office', *All the Year Round* IX, no. 201 (February 28, 1863): 14. Dickens Journals Online.
[174] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 217; Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London: Routledge, 2012), 50.
[175] Daunton, 194-5.
[176] Daunton, 193

The nature of the sisters' employment in the institution of the Post Office was unstable and potentially completely ignored by postal officials. Indeed, Mr Jeremyn's decision to bring in a male postal clerk to run the office discredits the difficult and skilled labour of the sisters:

> "I have already had a letter from the banker of this town, complaining that it is unsuitable and unbusinesslike for a post-office of such size and importance as this to have only women about it, and there is some reason in what he says; abuses are liable to creep in, under rule like yours".[177]

Though even the vocal Mary does not refute Mr Jeremyn's misogyny-inflected decision, the story undermines his assumption that a male clerk will lead to more suitable and business-like behaviour in the post office. The clerk, Richard Trevor, 'a dark, fine-looking young man, of agreeable and insinuating manners', acquires influence over the father and younger sister Ettie in order to gain trust in the post office and steal postal cheques.[178] Indeed, Mr Jeremyn's decisions are further delegitimised by Anna's increasing frailty and inability to continue labouring into the night sorting letters. In Stretton's provincial post office, corruption becomes rife when the Post Office officialdom force honest workers to labour until their bodies give-out, making way for less scrupulous clerks.

In a relevant parallel with Collins's *No Name*, it is Mary, the stronger and more outspoken of the sisters, who, like Magdalen, works to retaliate against the advice and decisions of 'superior' male professionals. Mary vocally opposes Mr Jerymyn's decision to put their father on an effective pension of 100*l*. a year, and spending the rest of the Post Office income on a new postal clerk. '"Not at all," I exclaimed; "deduct 40*l*. rent, [...] and it leaves only 60*l*., for which two of his daughters must work hard and constantly, in health or sickness"'; instead Mary suggests giving her father his own pension of thirty pounds a year, '"leaving us at liberty to earn money in our own way [....] Pray do not call it a retiring pension; call it by a right name — an injustice"'.[179] It is Mary who has the presence of mind to do to some detective work in the post office following Trevor's flight with a large remittance for the local bank — a remittance that holds importance to Anna's separate love-story. Sorting through the letter-bills, she finds one missing and searches the mailbag to which it belonged:

> from the bottom I drew forth a letter stuck between the seams, and had not fallen out when the bag was emptied: it was in Trevor's hand, and bore the stamp of

[177] Stretton, 'Postmaster's Daughter', 41-42.
[178] Stretton, 42.
[179] Stretton, 42.

> our office [....] He had evidently slipped it into the bag after the tied bundles of letters had been put in. It had been missed at the post-office to which it was addressed, and consequently had been returned to us by the next mail.[180]

The letter offers a vital clue to Richard's whereabouts, as it is (sensationally) addressed to his wife in Southampton. Importantly for me here, in Stretton's narrative, it is the presence of mind of Mary *and* human error that leads to the reunion of the stolen money with its rightful owner. If not for the Southampton sorting office missing the letter in the seams, it would not have been returned to the provincial post office. Furthermore, the narrative suggests that it is precisely the Hillite volume of letters travelling through the system that leads to imprecision and mistakes.

Despite Mary's sagacity in detecting this postal clue, the impact of this postal crime leaves a long-lasting impact on the bodies of Anna and her father. On the morning the remittance is due to arrive, Anna insists on collecting and sorting the mail, and she receives a blow from Trevor in his bid to escape: 'Anna lay pale and insensible upon the heap of bags near the counter'.[181] Stretton's text fails to end with simple congratulations and heroics. Instead, it focuses on her father's grief and her younger sister's agony from betrayal. Indeed, Anna is not able to simply recover from her knock, but undergoes a prolonged illness: 'She lay tossing to and fro and raving of the work that had wasted her youthful energies and bodily strength'.[182] As with Dickens's and Wills's dreaming sorters and Caddy's ink-stained circulation system, the postal system is brought to the fore in this moment of bodily distress; in a cruel irony, Anna raves of the work that left her unfit for the physical and mental exertion of trauma.

Similarly, engaging in efficient and relentless postal circulation also holds risks in Collins's *No Name*. We have already seen the physical toll on Mrs Lecount as she travels alongside the speeding mail, and lettered postal circulation also has a detrimental effect on Noel Vanstone, who suffers from a heart attack while writing to his fraudulent wife Magdalen to break off the marriage.[183] However, it is Magdalen Vanstone who experiences two breakdowns associated with 'The Progress of the Story Through the Post' sections of the text. In these sections, the circulation of letters has a direct impact on Magdalen's bodily health. In the first of these postal progressions, Magdalen receives a letter from her fiancé Frank, who has been sent to China in order to make enough

[180] Stretton, 44.
[181] Stretton, 42.
[182] Stretton, 44.
[183] Collins, *No Name*, 583.

money to marry. In his letter, Frank terminates their engagement due to a lack of prospects. Frank's letter is forwarded by his father, who claims that he 'never knew [Frank] was a Scoundrel until the mail came in from China'; thus the text directly links the circulation of disturbing news to the circulations and schedules of the mail.[184] In the following letter from Mrs Wragge, writing to her husband with news of Magdalen's ill-health, the doctor adds a small addendum:

> I revived her with great difficulty from one of the most obstinate fainting fits I ever remember to have met with [….] She sits, as I am informed, perfectly silent, and perfectly unconscious of what goes on about her, for hours together, with a letter in her hand.[185]

Frank's letter becomes literally attached to a deterioration in Magdalen's mental health, and the sad news that it circulates stagnates Magdalen's vital body. It is only after receiving a letter from her sister that Magdalen revives, and she writes to Norah exclaiming, '[m]y mind lives and breathes once more — it was dead until I got your letter'.[186] Magdalen's health here seems to shift with the temporal rhythms of postal circulation.

In the lead up to Magdalen's second, and more dangerous, collapse, postal letters continue to complicate the plotline in 'Between the Scenes' segments. If Nicholas Daly reads the sensation novel as using suspense and nervousness in order to 'provid[e] a species of temporal training' to synchronise the reader with the industrial modernity of the railway, then we might read *No Name*'s temporal training to be shaped around the schedules of the post.[187] Here, nerves and suspense are shaped not by the railway, but by the snippets of further developments, such as Magdalen's employment in the household of Admiral Bartram, and Norah's engagement to his son, who becomes the Vanstone-fortune heir. There is no doubt that Magdalen is dealing with multiple aggressors, and the text depicts her decision to masquerade as different people as having a deleterious effect on her heath.

However, Magdalen, despite being marked by what Kylee-Anne Hingston calls 'excessive health', also suffers from to bouts of mental and physical ill-health. Indeed, these periods of ill-health run in parallel to her participation in the complex circulation of

[184] Collins, 314.
[185] Collins, 314.
[186] Collins, 316.
[187] Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

information through postal letters that shape the novel.[188] We might think of Magdalen's episodes of ill health alongside Max Nordau's late-nineteenth-century concern, in *Degeneration* (1895), with the 'little shocks' that, he argues, have multiplied since the year 1840: 'our suspense pending the sequel of progressing events, the constant expectation of the newspaper, of the postman, of visitors, cost our brains wear and tear'.[189] Indeed, in Edward Robson Roose's seminal work on *Nerve Prostration and other Functional Disorders of Daily Life* (1882), the physician concludes that nervousness is a 'condition [...] mainly due to excessive wear and tear of body and mind'.[190] Though both texts were published between thirty and forty years after Collins's novel, they illuminate Magdalen's illness. After a treatment of saline for symptoms of 'shivering fits and hot fits' produces no effect, the surgeon is called.[191] He concludes that:

> She has suffered some long-continued mental trial, some wearing and terrible suspense — and she has broken down under it [….] Her whole nervous system has given way; all the ordinary functions of her brain are in a state of collapse.[192]

For the surgeon, Magdalen's fainting, fever and malady is the effect of an over-exertion of her nervous capability. Predating Nordau's theorisation of 'little shocks', Magdalen's collapse is the result of the weight of wear and tear upon her system, and, as she writes to Miss Garth: 'I had been suffering for many weary weeks past such remorse as only miserable women like me can feel. Perhaps the suffering weakened me'.[193] The continual strain of perpetual suffering wears on Magdalen, and, in Collins's novel, it is the 'expectation [...] of the postman' that compounds the stress on the bodies of the text.

Indeed, it is only when Magdalen has cut herself off from the informational circulation systems of the Post Office and focuses on healthy relationships that she begins her recovery from her near-fatal attack of neurasthenia. Collins emphasises Magdalen's new-found isolation and slowness by including another 'Between the Scenes, The Progress of Story Through the Post' before the final section, in which Magdalen's voice is notably absent. We instead receive letters from the final set of

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[188] Kylee-Anne Hingston, '"Skins to Jump Into": The Slipperiness of Identity and the Body in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 1 (2012): 121. Jstor.
[189] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*. 2nd ed. (London: William Heinemann, 1898), 40. Project Gutenberg.
[190] Edward Charles Robson Roose, *Nerve Prostration and Other Functional Disorder* (London: H. K. Lewis and Company, 1888), 16. Internet Archive.
[191] Collins, *No Name*, 700.
[192] Collins, 703-704.
[193] Collins, 586.

traditional heroines and heroes, including Norah, her fiancé George Bertram, and Miss Garth. Furthermore, the final section of the novel sees Magdalen nursed back to health through the loving care of Captain Kirke, who finds her fainting after docking his ship, the aptly and postally named *Deliverance*. Magdalen's disconnection from the circulation of secrets, frauds and misinformation allows her to convalesce with those who protect her body from the strain, wear and tear of her criminal endeavours.

Conclusions

As we have seen through this chapter, nineteenth-century postal infrastructures, particularly those associated with sorting and post offices, were imagined as embedded in the bodily. Though the Hillite ideal of disembodied, pneumatic dispatch was a vital part of the Victorians' conception of postal infrastructures, so too were the many bodies who sorted through vast quantities of letters in the central node of St Martin's le Grand. Indeed, the relationship between this system and bodily circulation becomes an important metaphor for literary artists. Dickens's interrogation of this relationship can not only be seen in his articles for *Household Words*, but also in his depiction of Mrs and Caddy Jellyby in *Bleak House* — here, Mrs Jellyby's misuse of the system is physicalised in the circulation of inky blood from Caddy to her child and speaks to broader questions about healthy circulation at the centre of the text. However, even the effective running of Hill's idealised uniform penny post has an impact on the body. In Hesba Stretton's 'The Postmaster's Daughter', the uniform penny post almost works the sub-postmaster and familial assistants into an early grave. Their overworked lives can only be put to rights through a mistake in Hill's, almost infallible, system. Furthermore, in Collins's sensation novel *No Name*, the efficient postal system comes not only to frame information, but also bodily order and disorder; here the infrastructures of the post have a part in the duplicitous schemes of the novel's (anti)heroine, but also in indicating her overall health. It is only by extracting herself from postally-mediated relationships that Magdalen can recover from the constant strain of engaging with a relentlessly efficient system. I also hope to have demonstrated the multiple ways in which these sorting infrastructures were imagined and utilised in nineteenth-century fiction. There is no, one particular type of sorting body, nor one bodily depiction of sorting infrastructures — popular literature simultaneously conceived St Martin's le Grand and postal circulation as digestive-like and arterial-like for instance. Instead, like the many letters in Waverton's *The People's Letter Bag*, the sorting offices of the Post Office were

conceived as a space for many different, heterogeneous, and sometimes competing, postal bodies.

CHAPTER TWO

‘More vibration and more oscillation’: Mail Train Infrastructures and the Body

> *‘Now then! Show your ticket, child!’ the Guard went on, looking angrily at Alice. And a great many voices all said together (‘like the chorus of a song,’ thought Alice), ‘don’t keep him waiting, child! Why, his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!’ […] And after that other voices went on (‘What a number of people there are in the carriage!’ thought Alice), saying, ‘She must go by post, as she’s got a head on her—’ ‘She must be sent as a message by the telegraph—’*.
>
> — Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871).[1]
>
> *The greater, also, the speed, the more injurious are the effects on persons [….] There is more vibration and more oscillation at a high speed than when the train is moving more slowly. While personally carrying on the investigation [into the health of TPO workers], I have sometimes been so shaken as to have experienced considerable difficulty in preventing the act of vomiting*.
>
> — Augustus Waller Lewis, ‘The Health of Travelling Post Office Officials’, in *The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health from ‘The Lancet’* (1862).[2]

In his famous sequel *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871), Lewis Carroll utilises an absurd image of postal travel on-board a train. Accompanied by an illustration by John Tenniel (Figure 10), which parodies Augustus Egg’s famous painting ‘The Travelling Companions’ (1862) (Figure 11), Carroll’s depiction of train travel is anything but the calm scene depicted by Egg; this is one fraught with stress, judgement and the dangers of embodiment. As the chorus rings out ‘she must go by post, she’s got a head on her’, Alice’s head becomes a synecdoche for the penny post stamp, which bore the Queen’s head and indicated pre-payment. Postal travel here threatens Alice’s relationship with her body — her embodied travel, and its link to the infrastructures of the mail turns her body into a postal item or, perhaps even more alarmingly, as mere information to be sent on a telegraph line. The punchline of Carroll’s joke here is the specific relationship

[1] Lewis Carroll, ‘Alice Through the Looking Glass’, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43-44.
[2] Augustus Waller Lewis, ‘The Health of Travelling Post Office Officials’, in *The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health from* ‘*The Lancet*’ (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1862), 55. Internet Archive.

between railway travel and the circulation of postal items. Scholarly criticism on the railway too often conflates the mail and other railway services, homogenising and flattening the multiplicity of railway experiences in the nineteenth century. However, this chapter nuances the field of mobility, embodiment and the passenger in the nineteenth century, by focusing on the mail train as a vital and unique railway-and-postal infrastructure.

Indeed, this intervention reveals that some of the major texts that have shaped understandings of railway mobilities are unique to, or based upon, the infrastructural mobility of the mail and Travelling Post Office. Notably, *The Lancet*'s famous editorial, 'The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health' (1862), utilises the information on Travelling Post Office staff gathered by Dr Augustus Waller Lewis, Principle Medical Officer for the General Post Office, to infer what travel on-board fast-moving trains might do to the body. Like Alice's experience of travelling via the railway postally, Waller Lewis reports that the speed of the mail train, meaning 'more vibration and more oscillation', causes more stress and bodily disorder than that of regular services.[3] The postal infrastructure of the mail train, it seems, has highly specific impacts on bodies on-board, whether they sort the mails in the Travelling Post Office, or sit inside the carriages that accompanied it.

This chapter is among the first in literary scholarship to explore the infrastructure of the mail train as explicitly different to that of other railway services. In doing so, it nuances a field that has tended to flatten experiential embodiments of railway travel. This chapter demonstrates that the mail train offered a unique and rich infrastructural mobility for literary artists in the nineteenth century. As Carroll's imagined and Waller Lewis's empirically studied postal railway travel suggest, the infrastructure of the mail train fascinated Victorians, and was discussed and disseminated through medical, literary and popular culture.

The first section of this chapter teases out the material distinctiveness of mail train mobility in the nineteenth-century. With complex infrastructural arrangements, including Travelling Post Offices and mail train apparatuses, the mail train appears as a unique mobility in nineteenth-century popular culture, including railway timetables and periodical articles. An important facet of discourses surrounding the mail train was their place in the medicalisation of the (male) travelling body. By revisiting the famous *Lancet*

[3] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 65.

Figure 10. John Tenniel and Dalziel Brothers, *Alice in the Train,* 1872. Engraving, H 89 W 112 mm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 11. Augustus Leopold Egg, *The Travelling Companions*, 1862. Oil on canvas, H 65.3 x W 78.7 cm. Birmingham Museums Trust.

series on railway travel and passenger health, I demonstrate the importance of the mail to the data collected for the articles. The distinctive mobility fostered by the infrastructures of the mail provoked debates about the medicalisation of passengers in the mid-nineteenth century — its unique infrastructure and mobility meant that bodily issues associated with velocity and distance-covered become intensified on the mail. The embodied relationship between passengers, workers, and mail train infrastructures, uncovered and addressed through medical discourses, I argue, is transformative. As medical discourses get reimagined in the periodical press, popular periodical literature relishes in the potential for disruption and transformation garnered by mail mobility.

Literature, particularly sensation fiction, picks up on the importance of the mail train to medical and popular discourses concerning speed and bodily health. Contemporary to *The Lancet*'s publication of 'The Influence of Railway Travelling', Braddon published the sensation novels *Lady Audley's Secret* and *John Marchmont's Legacy* in periodical publications in 1862. While Braddon's sensation fiction has frequently been tied to the railway by literary scholars, the importance of the mail as a unique and significant railway infrastructure as not received similar scrutiny.[4] *Lady Audley's Secret* and *John Marchmont's Legacy* exemplify sensation fiction's interest in railway infrastructures, but, significantly, much of this railway infrastructure is postal. The mail train figures in both texts not only as plot devices but as a significant narrative metaphor. I argue that the mail's importance in medical discourses on railway travel shapes John Marchmont's Legacy's use of the mail train as a catalyst for communicative paralysis. Furthermore, by analysing the role of the mail in *Lady Audley's Secret* alongside Hesba Stretton's 'Branch Line: Travelling Post Office', published in *Mugby Junction* (1865), I demonstrate the potential threat of the mail train to masculine bodies through the utilisation of the mail train by the hyper-feminised bodies of the narratives' proto-femmes fatales.

[4] Notably, Nicholas Daly has also argued that sensation novels acclimatised readers to railway time and space. He argues that in *Lady Audley's Secret* victory goes to whoever conquers the technology ('Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses', *ELH* 66, no. 2 (1999): 474. Jstor.). Daniel Martin has considered the extent to which the production and circulation of Braddon's work was a part of a literary market-place that grew out of the railway. Martin points to *Lady Audley's Secret* as an example of the railway signification of fatigued and nervous bodies ('Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Review* 34, no. 1 (2008): 131. Jstor.). Mathieson also argues that in Braddon's sensation novels the railway becomes normalised as a signifier of narration and nation as characters move through a national network which facilitates the progress of the narrative itself (Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 74).

There has been much significant scholarship on the relationship between nineteenth-century railways and culture, particularly focused on how the railway, both materially and metaphorically, was encoded as a vehicle of modernity and social change. In his seminal work, *The Railway Journey* (1986), Wolfgang Schivelbusch establishes the experiences of travel created by the new form of public transport. In particular, Schivelbusch argues that the railway created new pathologies, including a 'new kind of vibration' caused by 'the interaction between steel rail and steel wheel, from the speed and, particularly, from the distance between the rails'.[5] Importantly, Schivelbusch argues that the railway was conceived as a radically 'new' kind of transport. By comparing the railway with canals and barges, and turnpikes and stage coaches, Schivelbusch concludes that in unlike these forms of transport, where infrastructure and transportation method operated relatively independently of each other, on the railway 'route and vehicle became technically conjoined [...] there was no leeway between the rails and the vehicles running on them'.[6] For Schivelbusch, there was a new kind of discipline at work on the body on the railway that formed new relationships with mobile spaces. He considers these new relationships at length in his analysis of the medicalisation of the 'railway spine' as well as new social taboos and behaviours, such as reading in the carriage to avoid conversation.[7] Ian Carter has also argued that railways 'disciplined' bodies medically, socially, and infrastructurally, in transformative ways.[8] I aim to nuance and tease apart the impact of the railway on the body through the specific lens of the mail train: where does the 'mail' fit in these discourses on the relationship between the body and the railway? Does the mail act as a disciplinary machine, or does it foster a different kind of relationship within the strict schedules of infrastructure designed for mail exchange?

It is worth noting here that, unlike the relationship between a railway and a horse and carriage, there are legacies and discursive slippages potentially at work between the mail train and its predecessor, the mail coach. This slippage makes it difficult, and potentially methodologically unsound, to consider the mail train *only* in terms of a rupture

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[5] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 114.
[6] Schivelbusch, 16-17. J. M. W. Turner's famous painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844) exemplifies Schivelbusch's contention, as the rails, and the steam train itself, are erased in favour of the effect of speed and movement.
[7] Schivelbusch, 136, 189.
[8] Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 8.

or new harbinger of the modern. As we saw in the introduction, the mail coach, first introduced to English roads by John Palmer in 1784, was associated with both the swift transportation of letters and a rapid form of public transport.[9] This association with rapid travel was particularly true in the early-nineteenth century when roads and turnpikes improved drastically: mail coach speeds accelerated from six miles per hour in the 1780s, eight miles per hour in 1800 and ten miles per hour by 1830.[10] As mail coaches did not have to pay tolls, turnpike gates were opened on their arrival, which meant that mail coaches could maintain their speed in comparison to stage coaches.[11] Ruth Livesey notes that 'Palmer's scheme brought together passengers and mailbags in the same vehicles [....] The promise of speed and security fast made the mail coach a popular choice for passengers along the routes it travelled'.[12] In their conveyance of people and post, nineteenth-century mail trains were similarly associated with speed, security, and regularity, as we shall see in this chapter. Furthermore, Chris Ewers has noted that not only were mail coaches associated with speed, but with spectacle:

> the guards in their scarlet liveries used post-horns to clear the way ahead, and even stops to change horses were a rapid affair. The bright red mail-coaches, emblazoned with royal insignia, with magnificent teams of horses, were a daily spectacle, injecting a new sense of speed through the nation's arterial road.[13]

As Ewers and Livesey demonstrate, the late-nineteenth-century mail coach developed the association between the mail infrastructures and rapid modes of public transport. There are potential discursive and imaginary legacies at work, then, in the literary signification of mail train in the Victorian era.

Wary of using the railway as a technologically deterministic signifier, I am also aware that Victorians conceived the railway as a new kind of mobility and infrastructure. However, I also shake up scholarly assumptions about railway modernity by demonstrating that not all railway journeys were made equal. Charlotte Mathieson's reading of embodied travel on the railway in *Mobility and the Novel* (2015) argues that 'all was flattened and regulated into a smooth, homogenous space, which was

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[9] Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.
[10] Headrick, *Information*, 188.
[11] See Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016),16; and *Chris Ewers, Mobility in the English Novel from Defoe to Austen* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 116.
[12] Livesey, *Stage Coach Nation*, 16.
[13] Ewers, *Mobility*, 116.

experienced [...] as an altogether new and disorientating form of mobility'.[14] While Mathieson is right in her analysis of realist and sensation fiction's interest in the strangeness of the railway experience in the mid-nineteenth century, the railway was not necessarily smooth and homogeneous. There is a difference between the speeding mail trains I analyse in this chapter, and the slow parliamentary trains which stopped at every station en route. Matthew Beaumont forcefully claims that 'trains are apprehended as the disorientating agents of alienation, loss, of death and destruction'.[15] However, Beaumont has also asserted with Michael Freeman that 'the railway should be reappraised neither exclusively as a transport system nor merely as some floating signifier for the spirit of modernity'.[16] The mail train, with its legacies in the mail coach, resists the technological determinism and homogenisation that scholarship has tended to focus on. As this chapter demonstrates, the mail offers a new lens through which to understand debates surrounding the railway in the nineteenth century. Embodying the railway isn't as simple as embodying a flattened modernity — instead, the mail train reveals the potential for a multiplicity of experiences on-board the rail.

1. The Infrastructure of the Mail Train

In a short, satirical piece published in *Funny Folks* in 1882, the mail train is at the centre of a joke about the speedy transportation and transference of postal letters. Starting from the news that it was now possible to post letters through letter-boxes 'suspended outside the sorting-carriage[s] at each station at which the mail train stops', the article claims that 'the next step will be to enable the public to shoot their letters into the train as it passes at full speed'.[17] Playing on the mail train's reputation as a rapid service, the piece jokes that, with practice, they will be able to 'convert [their] miss-ives into hit-ives as the mail whizzes by. No better plan could be devised for facilitating e-pistol-ary communication'.[18] This tongue-in-cheek article makes assumptions about the infrastructures of the mail train: the mail travels quickly in its rapid dispatch of postal

[14] Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 66.
[15] Matthew Beaumont, 'The Railway and Literature: Realism and the Phantasmagoric' in *The Railway: Art in the Age of Steam*, eds Ian Kennedy and Julian Treuherz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 37.
[16] Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 1.
[17] Anon, 'Post-Office Playfulness', *Funny Folks*, October 28, 1882, n.pag. Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
[18] Anon, 'Post-Office Playfulness'.

letters with such relentless speed that letters must be shot into the van. This association of the mail train with target practice is a compelling one, and raises questions that I wish to explore throughout this next section: what are the infrastructural details that distinguish the mail train from other forms of transportation? How were these infrastructures imagined in popular culture during the nineteenth century? What is the relationship between the railway and the postal network — was it as antagonistic as this playful piece implies?

As Chapter One demonstrated, the Post Office and the uniform penny post were discussed and disseminated in Victorian popular culture through their relationship with infrastructural embodiment. In this section, I analyse the infrastructures at work on the mail train and their re-imaging in periodical literature. I demonstrate that the mail train featured as a site where travel and communication, and bodies and letters, came together and intersected, often in violent and disorientating ways.

The mail train, like the mail coach before it, became imagined as a symbol of the speed of modernity. In an article entitled 'The Post Office', published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in 1884, the narrator considers the difference in time taken between John Palmer's high-speed mail coach and the mail train: 'Thanks to steam-power, the correspondence which in Palmer's time must have taken more than four days to travel from London to Edinburgh […] is now less than ten hours on the road'.[19] This passage is specifically interested in the infrastructures of the steam-railway, and how it, as opposed to the horse, can transfer the postal letter in record time. Indeed, the article is even suggestive of the potential invisibility of infrastructures, which go unnoticed when working well.[20] The narrator concludes that:

> Such are some of the adventures which befall our letters. We find them on the breakfast table in the morning, and treat their appearance as no more remarkable than that of the coffee and toast. We write to our friends with a confidence approaching to absolute certainty that they will be reading our words the next morning.[21]

The smooth running of the mail train makes letters an innocuous part of the (decidedly middle-class) morning routine. However, periodical literature was invested in reinserting this seemingly invisible infrastructure into the imagination of its readers and delights in

[19] Anon, 'The Post-Office', *The English Illustrated Magazine* (February 1884): 289-90. British Periodicals.
[20] See Introduction: Section 1 for a more detailed discussion of the potentially invisible nature of infrastructures, as theorised by Rubenstein and Levine.
[21] Anon, 'The Post-Office', *English Illustrated*, 299.

making visible the complexity of the infrastructural arrangements between railway and mail.

While Rowland Hill and the uniform penny post fostered an idealised homogenous network, the mail train, like St Martin's le Grand, resists similitude. Though the mail travelled on railways as early as 1830, it was not sorted en route until the development of the Travelling Post Office (TPO) in the late 1830s. There is contention over which railway line first carried the TPO: scholars and non-academics cite either the Grand Junction Railway or the London and Birmingham Grand Northern Railroad. However, the Post Office used mail coach carriages converted to run on the rails in the earliest inception of TPOs in 1838. We can align these carriages with the glorious 'spectacle' and speed of the painted red and gold mail coaches (see Figure 12).[22] In contemporary sources the TPO was also known as sorting office, sorting tender or railway post office. Furthermore, the term 'express' was often used synonymously and interchangeably with the 'mail', even though not all express trains were strictly mail trains.[23] To some extent then, within the public imagination, the fastest thing travelling on the railway was the mail.

The Post Office's use of the railway to sort and move the mail was a critical shift its infrastructural history, but contemporaneous accounts and contemporary histories contest the TPO's role in the developments of the nineteenth-century Post Office. Duncan Campbell-Smith argues that without the railway, uniform penny post may have floundered, and by the mid-1860s the railways accounted for 15-20 per cent of the Post Office's annual spending via contracts with thirty different railway companies.[24] However, Martin Daunton suggests that St Martin's le Grand viewed the relationship between the uniform penny post and the railway as a coincidence and that the large portion of annual spending on the railway was primarily due to excessive rates charged

[22] See Tom Nicholls, 'The "Grand Junction Railway" Travelling Post Office Replica', *The L&NWR Society Journal* 9, no. 7 (December 2019): 252–60; and Peter Johnson, *Mail by Rail: The History of the TPO and Post Office Railway (Revised and Updated)* (Shepperton: Ian Allan Publishing, 1995), 10.

[23] This assertion stems from the use of the term in both nineteenth-century timetables, literature, newspapers, and periodicals, as well as scholarship on railway history. See, for example, Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 145. The famous express train, the 'Limited Scotch' was a mail train. See also, Sir Cusack P. Roney, *Rambles on Railways with Maps, Diagrams, and Appendices* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1868), 112. Google Books.

[24] Duncan Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post: The Authorized History of the Royal Mail* (London: Penguin, 2011), 165.

Figure 12. Grand Northern Railroad. *Illustration of an Exterior View of a Travelling Post Office*. 1839. POST 118/489. Postal Museum, London.

by companies who had a monopoly on transport routes.[25] However, he does concede that the shift from mail coach to mail train can be conceived as a 'circulation revolution'.[26] This lack of consensus is indicative of the multifaceted and mobile relationship between the railways and the Post Office — it cannot be understood through any one, sweeping evaluation.

The relationship between railway companies and the Post Office through the 1840s–60s was, however, often a discordant one. The 1838 'Act to Provide for the Conveyance of the Mails by Railway', certainly gave the Postmaster General evident authority in the scheduling of mails on the railway. It stated that, on any railway, it would be:

> lawful for the Postmaster-General [...] to require that the mail or post letter bags shall [...] be conveyed and forwarded by such company on their railway, either by the ordinary trains of carriages, or by special trains, as need may be, at such hours or time in the day or night as the Postmaster-General shall direct.[27]

[25] Martin J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 123.
[26] Daunton, 123.
[27] 'An Act to Provide for the Conveyance of the Mails by Railways', in *A Collection of the Public General Acts for the Regulation of Railways: Including the Companies, Lands, and Railways*

Despite this Act of Parliament, or perhaps because of it, the relationship between the Post Office department and railway companies was antagonistic. Daunton has extensively researched how the department argued that as a state institution, the Post Office should receive compensatory-use of the railway; in contrast, railway companies argued that the operation of high-speed trains at inconvenient times disrupted railway operations, and thus the companies should receive compensatory sums.[28] Part of the issue was a lack of bench-mark when it came to the cost of the Post Office's use of the railway. The Post Office used mail trains in two broad categories: the first utilised 'ordinary trains', run by the companies for their own needs, which were also convenient to the Post Office for the transport of mail; the second came under the control of the Postmaster General, and 'the timetable, speed and stopping places were fixed by mutual agreement'.[29] Furthermore, multiple factors impacted the calculations for payment, such as the weight of the mail carried, the conveyance of Post Office staff, the provision of sorting carriages, and the income lost from other traffic.[30] The infrastructures of the state-run mail train were influenced by and a part of the infrastructure of private, profit-making railway firms. As Mark Rubenstein argues, infrastructures are:

> [a]mbiguously a part of the state, ambiguously a part of private enterprise[;] the public works, especially in the form of the public utility, stand on the verge of being dominated by one or the other, or of being both at the same time, or [...] of being neither.[31]

The mail train is a prime example of a nineteenth-century infrastructure wherein the divisions between private and state enterprise were in contest and being continuously negotiated.

Though the Post Office operated a uniform penny post facilitated by railway infrastructures, which fostered a sense of connection and expansion, this ideology was held in tension with the logistics of this operation, which functioned through a logic of compartmentalisation. As Campbell-Smith argues: the sorting office of St. Martin's le Grand, whose infrastructural operations I explored in Chapter One, began its sorting process 'by assigning each item to one of twenty-eight divisions [....] which accorded with divisions of the nation's rail network, adopting the topography of Britain' that was

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Clauses Consolidation Acts, 1838-1846 (London: James Bigg and Son, 1846), 1. Google Books.

[28] Please see Daunton, 'The Penny Post and Railways' in *Royal Mail*, 124-133.

[29] Daunton, 123.

[30] Daunton, 123.

[31] Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 7.

governed by railway companies like London & Northern Western, the Great Western, and the Great Northern to name a few.[32] We can further see this compartmentalisation in the earliest inception of the postcode: the postal districts of London. Mapped for the General Post Office in 1881, Figure 13 demonstrates how the lines of the railway were a central component of the division of the city into the postal districts of north, north-west, east, south-east, south-west and west. The red blocks indicate the railway stations that facilitated the circulation of the post, while the red and blue dots symbolise other railway stations in the area. This map is a testament to the importance of railways to the conceptualisation and mapping of compartmentalised circulation within the Post Office. The potential for railways to compartmentalise is significant to Freeman study — he argues that:

> [T]he great paradox of Britain's railways in the nineteenth century was the way they simultaneously annihilated space and compartmentalized it. Geographical space shrank in the face of "railway velocity", but the insertional agency behind that process, the private railway company, was highly territorial.[33]

Freeman's contention here relates to how railway companies remained highly competitive about their lines — he discusses, for instance, the competitive rivalry between the South Western and Great Western railway companies. However, this compartmentalisation is also an essential facet of mail infrastructures, and the intersections between these mobilities helped to guide the first postal divisions of the country.

The logic of these divisions is not only present in the historical archive, but also in the depiction of the infrastructure of the mail train in periodical literature. In 1841, the *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* published an article entitled 'Post-Office Dispatch in 1717 and in 1841: The Railway Post-Office', which sought to explain how railway infrastructure facilitated the circulation of the mail. The author explains this via the compartmentalised logic that the Post Office used these infrastructures:

> The north of England, the whole of Scotland, and the greater part of Ireland, with parts of Wales, are connected with London by means of the Birmingham Railway; and four out of the nine omnibuses or post-office accelerators are loaded with correspondence for those parts of the country and for Birmingham and

[32] Campbell-Smith, *Masters*, 165.
[33] Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 149.

> intermediate and collateral places; three proceed to the station of the South-Western Railway, with the correspondence for all parts of Hants and the western counties.[34]

This description extends for two columns and details how each station and line connects London to particular parts of Britain, with the Birmingham Railway transporting nearly half of all letters leaving London. These trains even serve 'intermediate', 'collateral' and 'surrounding' areas with correspondence, connecting all parts of Britain in information circulation. Circulation and expansion are here paradoxically facilitated through the logic of compartmentalisation.

Furthermore, 'Post Office Dispatch' also emphasises the scale of the operation of mail sorting on the TPO and the particular mobility fostered by these infrastructures: non-fiction pieces focussed on the infrastructures of the mail are undoubtedly aware of the centrality of the railway to postal circulation. The article considers, for instance, the sheer weight of letters transported through the railway network: 'The total weight of the newspapers and letters dispatched on a Saturday Night, including the bags, is above

Figure 13. London drawn and engraved expressly for the Post Office Directory', 1881. POST 21/72, Postal Museum, London.

[34] Anon, 'Post-Office Dispatch in 1717 and in 1841. The Railway Post-Office', *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, April 24, 1841, 159. British Periodicals.

eight tons, and we should imagine that at least five tons are dispatched by railway'.[35] Here, the interest lies in the volume of letters and newspapers that traverse this network on the busiest day of the week for the railway mail. Furthermore, the article also explains that if the mail train were only facilitating postal circulation, it would not require stoppages at all:

> if the engine did not stand in need of a supply of water, and passengers were not leaving the line at different towns, the post-office business would scarcely require any stoppages. The time allowed cannot exceed three minutes at some of the stations, at some five, and at others ten minutes are allowed, but at Birmingham, which is so important a central point, the train stops for half an hour.[36]

As early as 1841, the mail train was understood facilitated a particular type of mobility; the mail, unlike regular services, scarcely required stoppages, and, even where engineering constraints and passenger needs caused scheduled stops, these only took place for a few minutes at a time. Here, longer stops are only accepted when facilitating mail circulation.

This facilitation of a different kind of mobility to regular passenger services was not only happening in the early history of the mail train. Nearly fifty years after the publication of 'Post-Office Dispatch', *Chamber's Journal* published the article 'The Post-Office on Wheels'; this narrative aims to 'have the effect of dispelling much of mystery by which the [TPO] is surrounded' — though the TPO's frequent appearance in periodical articles suggest that the service was not wholly mysterious. Thus the narrator boards the 'Special Mail which leaves London from Euston Station at 8.30 P.M.'.[37] This article draws attention to the 'extension and expansion' of mail train services, as well as the implications of these infrastructures on railway mobility:

> Crewe is, for Travelling Post-office purposes, by far the most important junction in the kingdom; indeed, I may venture to stay there is nothing like it in this respect in the whole world. Within three hours […] not fewer than fourteen mail-trains, each with sorting-carriages attached, arrive and depart from this station; whilst the weight of mails exchanged here […] is no less than twenty tons.[38]

The scale of the mail is again emphasised, this time through the central node of Crewe. Here we have no pesky passengers forcing stoppages; instead, it is the mail that dictates that 'no fewer than fourteen mail-trains' now stop for the purpose of mailbag exchange. The central nodes on this line are dictated by the mail, and Crewe becomes transformed

[35] Anon, '159'.
[36] Anon, 159'.
[37] Anon, 'The Post-Office on Wheels', *Chambers' Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* 6, no. 276 (April 13, 1889): 236, 234. British Periodicals.
[38] Anon, 236.

Figure 14. West Coast Joint Stock TPO', 1885. No 186 Station Hall, National Railway Museum, York.

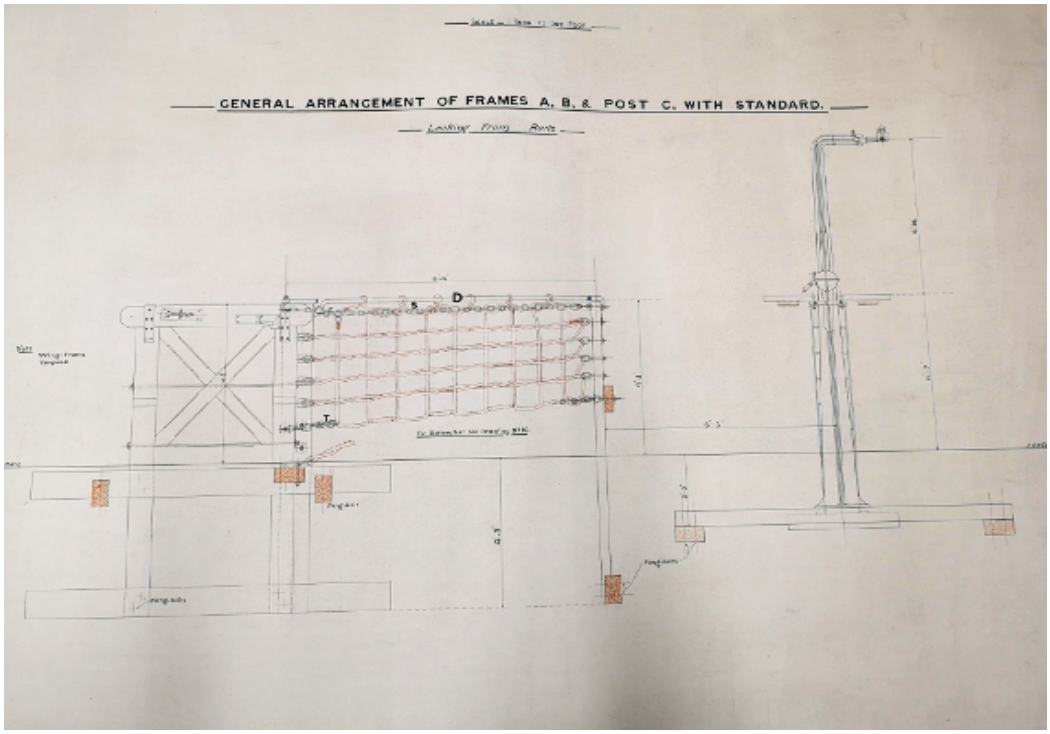

Figure 15. J.P. Maginnis, 'General Arrangement of Frames [Mailbag Apparatus]', West Coast Joint Stock Travelling Post Offices Part 2, 1891. POST 18/232, Royal Mail Archive, London.

by this night-time infrastructural circulation, with endless mail trains entering and exiting the node, depositing and collecting their mailbags.

While key nodal points required stoppages for large-scale mailbag exchange, the mail train travelled past most regularly scheduled stops on train routes. The 'mail bag apparatus' facilitated this lack of stoppages on mail trains — introduced in 1839, the apparatus was designed to allow for the exchange of mailbags without needing to stop the train or slow its speed.[39] The apparatus consisted of two main components, one fixed onto the side of the carriage and the other to the trackside. A sliding door in the carriage allowed mail guards to push sorted mailbags into the device on the side of the TPO and for a net stationed at the trackside to pick them up. Meanwhile, mailbags could be hoisted onto a trackside device to be picked up by a net attached to the side of the TPO (see Figures 14 and 15).[40] For Campbell-Smith, the 'mail train apparatus' was instrumental in connecting small towns and villages to the rapid circulation of postal letters: by 1865, he attests, there were more than 100 stations that utilised the apparatus and '900 or so post offices [had a] direct link to the trunk routes of the rail network'.[41] The mailbag apparatus was an important component, alongside the sorting tenders, that made the railway infrastructure a viable facilitator of postal circulation.

This innovation was often the most thrilling part of the mail train service for periodical article authors and was given a central space in their rendition of journeys in the TPO. In 1861, the popular three-halfpence magazine, *Chambers's Journal*, published an article by Hesba Stretton, which was used by Henry Lewins (though unattributed to Stretton) in his 1864 book *Her Majesty's Mails*.[42] The article 'The Travelling Post-Office' invites its readers to 'follow us in imagination [...] on a journey in the travelling post-office'.[43] The article takes great interest and pleasure in describing

[39] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 122.
[40] The exchange of mailbags via the mail train apparatus, though described here through realist literature, is perhaps best depicted in the GPO Documentary 'The Night Mail' from 1936. Even in this twentieth-century depiction of the exchange, the precision and noise of the operation are emphasised. Harry Watt and Basic Charles Wright. *The Night Mail*. Documentary. GPO Film, 1936. BFI Player. Accessed: June 1, 2020.
[41] Campbell-Smith, *Masters*, 166.
[42] Elaine Lomax, lists 'The Travelling Post-Office' as one of Stretton's articles on page 221 of *The Writings of Hesba Stretton: Reclaiming the Outcast* (London: Routledge, 2016). The repeated section of 'The Travelling Post Office' can be found on page 282 of William Lewins, *Her Majesty's Mails: A History of the Post-Office and an Industrial Account of Its Present Condition* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1865) Google Books.
[43] Sue Thomas, 'Chamber's Journal 1854-1910 – Indexes to Fiction', *Victorian Fiction Research Guides*, no. 17. Accessed June 1, 2020; Hesba Stretton, 'The Travelling Post-Office', *Chambers's Journal*, no. 394 (July 20, 1861): 44. British Periodicals.

the complexity of the mail train apparatus, claiming that the 'ingenious contrivance [...] is now being called more and more into requisition'.[44] Though the narrator asks the reader to *imagine* postal infrastructures, the article still gives over half a column of this six-column article to explain how the apparatus operates in detail:

> For the purpose of receiving bags, a large strong net is fixed to one side of the van, to be drawn down at the proper moment; and close to the door, on each side of it, securely fixed to the carriage, are hollow iron bars, inside each of which, working by means of a rope a pulley, an iron arm is fixed, upon which the bags to be delivered, securely strapped in a thick, leathern pouch, are suspended; and where the exchange has to be effected at the station we are nearing, the arrangements are just the counterparts of this. A net is spread to catch each pouch from the extended arm of the carriage, and pouches are hung from iron standards in the ground of sufficient height for the net in the train.[45]

The complexity of the mechanical operation, as well as the ingeniousness of the apparatus, function here as a kind of spectacle; no longer a spectacle of paint and livery, the mid-Victorian periodical press relishes in the spectacular *process* of mail circulation. It is worth noting that this article describes mailbag exchange in painstaking detail in a journal that had an average weekly circulation of around 80,000.[46] Interest in postal infrastructures and their innovation was not necessarily a niche past-time, but part of popular discourses that constructed Victorians' understanding of the engineering and infrastructural feats that facilitated their modern communication system.

Furthermore, the mailbag apparatus complicates some of the distinctions between infrastructure and movement that mobility theorists utilise. As explored in the introduction to this thesis, John Urry and Mimi Sheller articulate infrastructures as 'highly embedded and immobile' components of mobility.[47] However, the mailbag apparatus completely counters the idea of embeddedness and immobility of infrastructure — this is an infrastructure all about exchange and mobility. The mail train aligns more closely with Lauren Berlant's assertion that infrastructure is defined by 'use and movement'.[48] The mailbag apparatus was not depicted as a stationary node, but was imagined and understood as an active and invasive component of a complex network of infrastructure. In Stretton's *Chambers's Journal* article above, for example, the timings associated with

[44] Stretton, 'The Travelling Post-Office', 45.
[45] Stretton, 45.
[46] Thomas, 'Chamber's Journal', n.pag.
[47] Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2006): 210. Sage Journals.
[48] Lauren Berlant, 'The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (June 2016): 393. Sage Journals.

the movement of the mailbag apparatus are closely tied to the landscape outside of the fast-moving train:

> The guard looks out for the familiar object, such as bridge, river, cluster of trees, by which to tell his whereabouts [….] A moment of waiting, and then all the machinery acts its assigned part properly: the pouch disappears […] with a whack; the latest arrival lands in our net with another.[49]

Periodical literature constructs postal infrastructures as neither 'embedded' nor 'immobile'; instead, the mail flies past the embedded signals of the landscape before releasing 'all the machinery' of the mailbag apparatus. Indeed, it operates with such rapidity, that the mail pouch 'disappears' into the darkness while another pouch hurls itself into the carriage.

However, the rapid mobility of this infrastructural contraption also makes it dangerous, and it threatens the stability of the sorting tender. Periodical literature frequently describes the moment when mailbags enter the TPO as thunderous and even calamitous. An excellent example of this comes from an article entitled 'Christmas Eve on the Travelling Post Office', published first in the *Daily News* and then in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1892. This article operates in the tradition of periodical articles on 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office', explored in detail in Chapter One, and utilises Christmas as a backdrop through which to examine the scale of postal circulation through the railway. The operation of the mailbag apparatus is emphasised as violent, noisy and even threatening:

> A strong net hung out near the station [that the mailbags] are intended for has scooped them up and they are left far behind. At the same instant, by another aperture, one or two similar burdens of letters have been hurled in upon us like thunderbolts, that seem to shake the train from end to end, and might be a certain death to anyone in their way, as though they were cannon balls.[50]

As the letter bags ricochet into the carriage 'all and sundry keep out of the way of the bombshells of love-letters [….] [t]hat the miscellaneous world outside is about to hurl upon us, and which will come booming out of the net with terrific thuds'.[51] 'Christmas Eve on the Travelling Post Office' depicts the outside world as invading the space of the TPO and threatening the stability of the inside the tender. In their edited collection, Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman describe mobility routes as 'seething space[s] pulsing

[49] Stretton, 'The Travelling Post-Office', 45.
[50] Anon, 'Christmas Eve on the Travelling Post Office', *The Daily News* December 26, 1892. 3. British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900.
[51] Anon, 2.

with intersecting trajectories and temporalities'.[52] Though discussing mobility rather than infrastructure, their language is helpful here for thinking through how the intersection between mail tender and mailbag apparatus is not smooth and frictionless, but rather a tumultuous collision. Here, the mailbags 'seem to shake the train from end to end', and are suggestive of the parodic 'hit-ives' which we saw at the beginning of this section — as the mail infrastructures exchange the mobile cargo of mailbags, they are associated with violence and threaten the interior mode of the sorting tender.

The nodal mobility of the mail train has an impact on the depiction of the interior of the TPO. The interior of the sorting tender must reflect both the stoppages of the train and the facilitation of mailbag exchange via the apparatuses en route. In 'The Post Office on Wheels', published in *Chamber's Journal* in 1889, the relationship between the exterior mobility and internal function of the TPO is made abundantly clear. The narrator describes the pigeon-holes, which are:

> Fixed nearly up to the roof [....] into which ordinary letters are divided into sets, numbers consecutively from 1 to 45, and one sorter works each set. The numbers of the boxes are in accordance with a prescribed plan, each number representing the names of certain towns, and into such boxes the letters for those towns are sorted.[53]

There is a fascination with the interior of the TPO, and how its internal infrastructures facilitate the logistics of mailbag exchange at speed. Furthermore, this interior is shaped by 'certain towns' en route, emphasising how the relationship between mobility and infrastructure is closely aligned here. Indeed, the article goes on to explain how the 'prescribed plan' is carried out: 'when the mailbag for [Rugby] is despatched the box is empty. It is then used, say for Crewe, and when the bag for that place is gone the box again becomes empty'.[54] In a similar logic to the compartmentalised map discussed earlier, moving past centres of population and the handing off of mail bags sees an adjustment to the internal infrastructures of the sorting office.

Moreover, this interest in the infrastructural layout of the TPO is present even in the late-nineteenth century. In 1894, an article entitled 'The Railway Mail' was printed in the popular boy's journal *Boy's Own Paper*, published by the Religious Tract Society and designed to appeal to a readership of boys through genres like adventure fiction.[55]

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[52] Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011),190.
[53] Anon, 'Post-Office on Wheels', *Chambers's*, 235.
[54] Anon, 235.
[55] Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History*, 1855-1940 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 31.

In this article, the mail train presents an exciting environment for exploration, and multiple images of steam engines appear throughout the text. Here the narrator details the interior alongside the work of those sorting inside:

> such a show of racks and pigeon-holes you will see nowhere else: such dealing and shuffling and stamping and gathering into and out of that battery of organization will be worked up as soon as the train starts, that you will begin to think you are in a dream.[56]

The sonic quality of the labour on-board the TPO — 'shuffling', 'stamping', 'gathering' — is reminiscent of the explosive 'hit-ives' referenced earlier in this chapter. The internal infrastructure of the TPO is conceptualised here through a militarised spectacle of machine-like labour.

Additionally, periodical articles emphasise the interior of the TPO as both utilitarian and featuring compensatory architecture for those working on-board. For instance, while Stretton's 'The Travelling Post-Office' tells the reader that at the station, the TPO's 'interior looks warm and cheerful with its row of bright-burning moderator lamps', the narrator also cautions that they 'must abstain [...] from imagining anything like luxury in the internal fittings'.[57] Furthermore, an article from 1893 in *Chums*, an expensive boys' monthly magazine targeted at an upper-middle-class audience, asserts that one side of the carriage 'is largely padded in leather [with] innumerable brass hooks down its length'.[58] In an 1865 article 'The Travelling Post-Office' in *The London Journal*, one of the most popular weekly penny fiction newspapers, the narrator describes the purpose of this padding and reassures their readers that the pigeon-holes 'as well as the two ends of the office, are well padded over, to secure additional safety to the officers in the event of any accident. In fact, the whole office is as safe as it can well be made'.[59] Additionally, an 1889 article entitled 'With the Mail Bags' — published in *The Graphic*, a rival paper to *The London Illustrated News* — concurs: 'Seats in the carriage there are none, all doorways, table edges &c., are cushioned with leather, guarding against possible bruising and abrasion caused by the eccentric oscillations of the carriage'.[60] It

[56] W. J. Gordon, 'The Railway Mail', *The Boy's Own Paper*, January 20, 1894, 251. Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
[57] Stretton, 'The Travelling Post-Office', 44.
[58] Boyd, *Manliness*, 36; Anon, 'A Run with the Mail Van', *Chums*, January 11, 1893. 276. Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.
[59] Andrew King, *The London Journal, 1845-83* (London: Routledge, 2019), 3; Anon, 'The Travelling Post-Office', *The London Journal* 41, no. 1046 (February 25, 1865): 117. British Periodicals.
[60] C. J. S, 'With the Mail Bags: A Run with the Special Night Mail from Euston', *The Graphic*, December 21, 1889, 755. British Periodicals.

is not only the mobility of the mail that shapes the interior of the postal infrastructure, but also by the need to protect those bodies inside from any movement that may impinge on their ability to work. We shall see more of these potentially vulnerable bodies in the next sections of this chapter.

Before we turn to these bodies, I want to examine a final facet of the depiction of the infrastructural arrangement of the mail train. Namely, the importance of external signifiers to the postal logic of the TPO's mobility. In order to facilitate the sorting of letters into pigeon-holes and boxes, the external signifiers of letters become central to the job-at-hand. For Kate Thomas, 'epistolary fiction […] gave way to postal plots, in which literary interest lay not in the interiors of letters, but rather their outsides: the letter became inverted'.[61] The depiction of letters within the space of the TPO exemplifies Thomas's assertion about the importance of, and interest in, the exterior properties of postal letters. Just as the uniformity of postal letters facilitated the speedy sorting in St. Martin's le Grand, which we saw in Chapter One, so too did they facilitate the speed of postal letter sorting on-board the TPO. As 'The Post-Office on Wheels' elucidates: 'there are some thousands of letters which have come from the London office still to be disposed of [...] but every minute there is a perceptible diminution of their numbers' into their appropriate pigeon holes.[62] However, articles on the TPO also relish in the ideal of an imagined heterogeneity in paradox to the homogeneity created by the railway tracks. In Stretton's 'The Travelling Post Office' the individuality of the postal letters is developed in tandem with the train's movement through a particular locality. The narrator asserts that 'almost every town has its distinctive kinds of letters', and goes on to list the individual markers of different localities.[63] Those from the manufacturing town 'are almost entirely confined to sober-looking advice-cards, circulars, prices current, and invoices, generally very similar in kind and appearance, in good-sized envelopes, with very plainly written or printed addresses'.[64] However, the letters from:

> an old country town [are] little, quiet, old-fashioned-looking things [....] Now we are among the coal-districts, and almost all the letters have a smudged appearance, making you imagine that they have been written by the light of a pit-candle [....] whilst this with the letters looking so unexceptional and orthodox, is

[61] Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.
[62] Anon, 'Post-Office on Wheels', *Chambers's*, 235.
[63] Stretton, 'Travelling Post-Office', 46.
[64] Stretton, 46.

> from an old cathedral town; and this, again, is from a fashionable place, with finely scented, perfumed billets.[65]

Stretton's fanciful gesture here imagines the individual communities in contrast to their circulation by an infrastructure system that operates through homogenisation. Ruth Livesey argues that the stage and mail coach became an imaginary mobility that signified the 'portable attachments to localities [....] but it also threatens to strip such localities of their meanings in tension with a more metropolitan national modernity'.[66] The mail train carries with it this tension, played out here in Stretton's tongue-in-cheek imaginary locality. Though the infrastructure the narrative depicts *actually* relies on the homogenised external signification of address and pre-payment on the envelope, it is instead playfully utilised to foster an imagined heterogeneity and individuality of locality.

In John Hollingshead's article, entitled 'Right through the Post' and published in *All the Year Round* in 1859, this delight in an imagined heterogeneity is fostered by the narrator literally becoming a letter: 'I became a letter—a highly privileged, registered letter—thanks to Mr. Page, the Inspector-General of Mails. I was sent to the post in the hands of a boy—a boy who had often posted my letters, and who now posted me'.[67] Like pleasures gained from imagining the letters that pass through the many hands of the sorters before landing on the breakfast table, which we saw earlier in this section, the narrator relishes thinking about being posted by 'the hands of a boy', and travelling as a registered letter through the mail network — perhaps a tongue-in-cheek mockery of Ruskin's famous assertion that to travel by the railway is 'very little different from becoming a parcel'.[68] As the narrator becomes the mail, the article collapses the metaphorical structures around this travel — this narrator does not travel 'like' the mail, but as the mail.

As the reader follows the narrator/letter on his journey from the boy's hands and into the sorting carriage of the mail train, the article fosters a sense of heterogeneity. For instance, it imagines the tones of the letters sorted by the clerks as a reflection of their outwards appearance: 'letters with narrow black borders, that show how death has distinctly appeared to some household [...] letters with the whitest of envelopes, which

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[65] Stretton, 46.
[66] Livesey, *Stage Coach Nation*, 7.
[67] John Hollingshead, 'Right Through the Post', *All the Year Round; London*, no. 8 (June 18, 1859): 190. British Periodicals.
[68] John Ruskin, 'Modern Painters III', in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Vol. 5. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 307.

tell of something more cheerful than the grave'.[69] As they list all the different places and reasons the letters appear in the post, the narrator constructs markers of individuality:

> Letters from country grocers to their London merchants, which smell of tobacco, cheese and tea; dead letters from the country post town, done up in a funeral black bag, and money-order communications encased in a large coarse envelope, the colour of golden orange; neat little pink notes from Lady Fusbos in the country to the Hon. Miss Busfos in town, one posted close upon the other, and the latter rendering the former null and void; letters from country lawyers about rents and land, addressed in that unmistakeable clear hand which is recognized as the law clerk's with a half a glance.[70]

Hollingshead's article does not find individual communities within the external signifiers of the postal envelope but relishes in imagining that we can recognise an individual by the manner of their participation in postal circulation. The narrator here reconstructs the different types of people from their letters in the mailbag: from Ladies to lawyers' clerks, they imagine reading individual traits based upon the external signifiers of letters. Furthermore, the colours of golden orange indicate 'money-order communication', while 'neat little pink notes' travel speedily from one woman to another and nod towards the simultaneous presence and absence embodied by the postal letter. However, the joy of these imagined individuals is partly invested in the fact that they are imagined. Thomas argues that 'the cultural discourse that figured the Post Office as an instrument of dissemination developed the idea that a body — and the discursive reflection of a body — in motion ceased to be discrete'.[71] However, it is possible to recreate these bodies in the imaginative eye, and thus reinsert the individuals writing these letters back into would-be homogenising infrastructures of the mail train.

2. The Influence of the Travelling Post Office on Medical Discourses

The unique infrastructures of the mail train discussed so far, influenced medical texts and discourses in the 1860s that have been seminal to the conceptualisation of the railway's impact on the nineteenth-century body. In this section, I uncover the importance of the mail, and workers on the Travelling Post Office, to the medicalisation of the body on the railway in the 1860s. Furthermore, I analyse the infiltration of such medical discourses in newspaper and periodical articles, especially in relation to the 'madman' on the railway. As conceptualisations of speed on the railway were grounded

[69] Hollingshead, 'Right Through', 192.
[70] Hollingshead, 192.
[71] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, 92.

in the mail, I argue that this infrastructure became uniquely placed within the Victorian cultural imaginary to explore and elucidate anxieties about the railway and ill-health.

The eight-part report 'The Influence of Railway Travel on Public Health' was first published in *The Lancet* between January and March 1862, and is considered to be seminal to mid-Victorian medical debates about railway spine and the physiological strain of travelling on the railway.[72] While scholarly attention has been paid to this series of articles, there has been less attention to the significant inclusion of a report by Dr Augustus Waller Lewis, Principal Medical Officer for the General Post Office.[73] *The Lancet* series utilises Waller Lewis's report on the impact of postal work on sorters and mail guards on-board TPOs as a practical case study (with what we might call a large dataset and semblance of a control) of the potential impact of railway travel on the body. As the report asserts:

> if we now seek for further accurate information as to the practical influence of railway travelling upon the health of those constantly on the rail, it is obvious that the results may be looked for in relation to travelling *employés* of the railway companies, and of the General Post-Office.[74]

Waller Lewis was a public health reformer before he worked for the General Post Office, and worked with the General Board of Health on outbreaks of cholera throughout the country as well as the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers on sanitary conditions in London.[75] In 1855 he was appointed the first Medical Officer of the General Post Office, and in 1873 was made Chief Medical Officer as the medical needs of the institution expanded.[76] As well as advocating for social housing for Post Office workers and small-pox vaccinations, Waller Lewis also brought in fitness tests for postal workers, particularly letter carriers. His report for *The Lancet* reflects his interest in, or medicalisation of, what bodies are deemed fit for service — it details conclusions drawn

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[72] Ralph Harrington, 'The Railway Accident: Trains, Trauma, and Technological Crises in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, eds. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 39-40.
[73] See Amy Milne-Smith, 'Shattered Minds: Madmen on the Railways, 1860–80', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 21–39. Oxford Academic; Daly, 'Railway Novels'; Mathieson, '"Flying from the Grasp": Embodying the Railway Journey', in *Mobility*, 57–86; Schivelbusch, 'The Pathology of the Railroad Journey', in *Railway Journey*, 124–29.
[74] The Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health. From "The Lancet."(London: Robert Hardwicke, 1862), 55. Internet Archive.
[75] David R. Green, 'Waller Lewis, Augustus (Bap. 1816, d. 1882), Public Health Reformer and Chief Medical Officer at the General Post Office', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2018, n.pag. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-112239.
[76] Green, 'Lewis, Waller Augustus', n.pag.

about the types of bodies best fit for work on-board the TPO. Furthermore, Waller Lewis draws some of these observations out in order to make conclusions about who is generally suited for travel on-board the railway. What might be an industrial disease affecting workers' health could also be happening less visibly to passengers on-board these trains.

Waller Lewis begins his report by detailing the particular infrastructural arrangements of the TPO. For instance, he reports that 'the total number of persons employed in the travelling department of the Mail-office, when complete, is above 300'; the average length of a journey is 170 miles, or 5 and a half hours; and the highest speeds are reported between London and Dover: 'this journey is done at a rate of forty-four miles an hour, *stoppages included*'.[77] Importantly, Waller Lewis maintains that the speed of the mail train has an impact upon those bodies working on-board:

> The greater [...] the speed, the more injurious are the effects on persons [....] There is more vibration and more oscillation at a high speed than when the train is moving more slowly. While personally carrying on the investigation above alluded to, I have sometimes been so shaken as to have experienced considerable difficulty in preventing the act of vomiting. The oscillation has at times been so great that I have been quite unable to stand steadily without holding on by some fixed body.[78]

While Waller Lewis, like any good scientist, does not extrapolate any broad bodily conclusions based on his own nausea-filled journeys, he does recommend that passengers should not travel on a train with a full stomach. These kinds of recommendations are consistently at work in Waller Lewis's report, moving from specific, industrial labourer issues on-board the mail tender to that of passengers more generally. These recommendations also suggest the significance of his report within the context of *The Lancet*: the illnesses contextual to the labouring bodies on the TPO sit within a logic of wider implications on travelling bodies.

Importantly, Waller Lewis details the different types of bodies required for the different areas of work on-board the TPO. While David Green et al. have noted that 'Waller Lewis considered that railway travel in general had little or no impact on the health of this group of workers', he attributes this lack of impact to employing the right *kind* of bodies for different roles on the TPO.[79] Regarding the work of sorters, for instance, he suggests that tall people are less suited for the roles of travelling duties

[77] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 62, 63. Emphasis original.
[78] Waller Lewis, 65.
[79] David Green et al., '"The Postman Wears Out Fast": Retiring Sick in London's Victorian Post Office', *The London Journal* 44, no. 3 (September 2, 2019): 188. Taylor & Francis Online.

'than a more wiry individual, with little superfluous fat. I should be inclined to reject all candidates for travelling clerks and sorters who exceed 5 ft. 9 in. in height, or who weigh less than 8 ½ stone, or more than 10 ½'.[80] He also asserts that: 'All candidates [...] are subjected, as part of their examination, to the test of the dynamometer, and I usually reject those who cannot exert a pulling power of at least 150 lb'.[81] Here, then, Waller Lewis classifies what type of bodies are suited to mail train labour without conceding to an ailment. Furthermore, Waller Lewis sees a difference in experience between those who board the train with a healthy body and those who work on-board with existing conditions. He reports that he has examined:

> some sixty or seventy of the travelling sorters, for the express purpose of reporting as to their physical fitness for railway duties [....] some stated that they had never been so well in their lives. A considerable number replied that they had not had an hour's illness since they had commenced railway duty.[82]

However, those 'who are more weakly and delicate, or whose physical conformation is not adapted for receiving a constant succession of slight concussions, — the effect of railway locomotion,— suffer more or less severely'.[83] This suffering includes, for Waller Lewis, nausea, giddiness and loss of appetite, as well as pain, stiffness and cramp and diseases of the lungs.[84] While constant high-speed railway travel might not have an injurious effect on most workers, there are some bodies unsuited to this kind of mobility.

Significantly, however, Waller Lewis identifies the environment of the TPO as the root of these symptoms. For instance, concerning pain, stiffness and cramp, he concludes that he has 'found these effects much diminished by supplying for the use of our officers elastic caoutchouc mats, which intercept nearly all vibration'.[85] He also argues that the lack of ventilation in sorting tenders results in the aggravation of lung conditions: 'all diseases of the lungs and air-passages are much increased in severity and quickened in their progress by the dust, draughts, and extremes of temperature incidental to railway travelling'.[86] Thus, Waller Lewis suggests changes to TPO tenders in order to curb the effects of the carriage, such as mats and a second roof. The construction of the TPO has an impact on the working of the bodies inside it; the potential

[80] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 64.
[81] Waller Lewis, 64.
[82] Waller Lewis, 66-7.
[83] Waller Lewis, 67.
[84] Waller Lewis, 68.
[85] Waller Lewis, 68.
[86] Waller Lewis, 68-9.

failings of this infrastructure — built here with mail, rather than males, in mind — can have implications on the functioning of the human body.

Indeed, one of the more dangerous elements about working on-board the nineteenth-century mail train was the mailbag apparatus. We have seen the mechanisms of this infrastructure in the previous section, but its use also had an impact on the mail guards operating it and the sorters inside the carriage. While this bodily impact is seen frequently in periodical articles on the mail train, which we shall see more of in the next section, the apparatus does not feature prominently in Waller Lewis's report — possibly because he cannot easily extrapolate the effects of the apparatus onto passenger travel. However, he does detail that:

> The mail guards are employed [...] in working the mail-bag apparatus as the train flies by in the different second and third class stations at which [it] does not stop. These duties require the possession of considerable muscular power by these officers, and consequently larger and stronger individuals are best fitted to discharge them.[87]

His assertion here is mindful perhaps that mishaps with the mailbag apparatus led to injury and occasionally death on the mail train. Indeed, newspapers disseminated these dangers throughout the nineteenth century. A search on British Library Newspapers for 'mailbag', 'apparatus' and 'accident' between 1835 and 1902, brings up over 1300 results. An article from the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* in 1874 details the death of the mail porter James Robert Clews, who was struck by an up express while proceeding down the line with mailbags for 'purpose of placing them upon the mailbag apparatus'.[88] The *Berrow's Worcester Journal* reported an inquest at Windsor, which took place after the death of Albert Latchford, a letter sorter on the Bristol train from Paddington. When operating mailbag apparatus the 'deceased delivered two pouches containing the mailbags, and was about to drop another, when he fell out of the carriage'.[89] Furthermore, the danger associated with the mailbag apparatus was not limited to postal workers. For instance, the 'Strange Mail Bag Accident' from the *Cheltenham Chronicle* in 1899, details that 'for some unexplained cause the suspended bags went crashing against a carriage window before the net was reached, smashing it to splinters', and

[87] Waller Lewis, 63-4.
[88] Anon, 'Shocking Accident on the Trent Valley Railway', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. April 20, 1874. 4. British Library Newspapers.
[89] Anon, 'Working of the Postal Mail Apparatus', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, December 12, 1896. 11. British Library Newspapers.

injuring several gentlemen with 'flying glass'.[90] Another article, from the *Edinburgh Evening News* in 1889, briefly discusses the conclusion of court action brought against the Caledonian Railway for damages after a passenger was 'killed by her head coming in contact with the mailbags suspended by the side of the railway'.[91] The company, the article tells us, was able to convince the court that this was the deceased's fault for 'projecting her head recklessly' out of the carriage window.[92] The infrastructure of the mailbag apparatus was disseminated in newspaper discourses as one that did not heed the bodies of sorters, guards or even passengers, and posed a potential threat to those not behaving with due diligence on-board the train.

Indeed, the medicalisation of mail train travel is not only seen in *The Lancet* but appeared, sometimes contradictorily other medical texts from the period. For instance, in a series of articles entitled 'Hurried to Death', first published in the *Medical Times and Gazette*, and republished in 1868, Alfred Haviland discusses the perils of living life too quickly, especially on the railway.[93] In the case-studies chosen to exemplify the assertion that railway travel posed a danger to the body, the mail appears as a danger to healthy bodies. One Mr Wm. Searles, a fishmonger and fruiterer, Haviland explains, regularly caught the mail train from Chelmsford to Billingsgate Market. On Friday, March 1st, 1868, he left his house a 'hale, hearty young man' but died on the return journey.[94] This death is brought on, the case study claims, because Searles was 'obliged to run the latter part of the way to the station, and had just got into a second-class carriage, when the train started'.[95] The other occupants of the carriage 'observed that the deceased appeared greatly distressed, as if he had been running very fast'; he is said to have 'opened the carriage window, and looked out for a few seconds, "making a ruckling noise in his throat and nose", [and then] began to slide down between the two seats'.[96] When one of the occupants goes to help him, he finds him 'to be dead; a little froth came from his mouth; his face was very dark'.[97] Even the act of travelling quickly for the train is considered a

[90] Anon, 'Strange Mail Bag Accident', *Cheltenham Chronicle*, July 8, 1899. 6. British Library Newspapers.
[91] Anon, 'The Mail Bag Railway Accident', *Edinburgh Evening News*, October 29, 1889. 4. British Library Newspapers.
[92] Anon, 4
[93] Alfred Haviland, *'Hurried to Death', or, A Few Words of Advice on the Danger of Hurry and Excitement: Especially Addressed to Railway Travellers* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1868), 11. Internet Archive.
[94] Haviland, 50.
[95] Haviland, 50.
[96] Haviland, 50.
[97] Haviland, 50.

dangerous strain on the body. In another case-study, the Right Hon. Charles Manners Sutton, Lord Viscount Canterbury, died from an attack of apoplexy while travelling on the Great Western Railway night mail on Saturday, July 18th, 1845. Haviland explains to the reader that the Lord Viscount 'kept up a lively and most agreeable conversation during the journey'.[98] Despite the individual being in 'perfect health', then, the relentless speed of the nightmail is too much for his body to bear. Compellingly, the individuals only appear to have been healthy before death in case-studies involving the mail train — other deaths seem to stem from preconditions and bad health. According to Haviland's case-studies then, the mail train seems to hold a distinct potential to cause grievous harm to otherwise healthy bodies, perhaps due to the specific conditions of speed and direct travel not associated with regular passenger trains.

Perhaps more startlingly for the mid-nineteenth-century traveller, the mail train was also associated with an anxiety that the railway had the potential to turn men into 'madmen'. In her detailed analysis of the panic surrounding the reporting of madmen on the railway in the 1860s and 1870s, Amy Milne-Smith argues that this period was 'awash with fears about the violence and danger on the railway'.[99] For Milne-Smith, doctors, such as those writing for *The Lancet*, warned of the impact of the 'intense vibrations of the railway carriage, the speed of travel, and the danger of traumatic accidents', which, she shows, were thought to disturb men's physical and mental health.[100] Her article analyses the newspaper reporting of attacks by 'madmen' on railways, arguing that they intersected with contemporary anxieties about 'technology, failed masculinity and increasing rates of madness'.[101] However, Milne-Smith does not distinguish that most of the trains featured are mail and express trains. An article from 1874, entitled 'A Madman's Leap from a Railway Carriage', in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, details an 'extraordinary robbery [that] was perpetrated on the Great Northern mail-train'.[102] In this article, a robbery takes place on the 50 mile stretch between Peterborough and Carlton — it reports that the culprit leapt from the carriage as the train travelled at 60 miles an hour. In an 1876 article, ironically in *Exeter's Flying Post*, passengers travelling to catch the Irish mail packet from Chester are alarmed by a violent fight and attempted

[98] Haviland, 54.
[99] Milne-Smith, 'Shattered Minds', 21.
[100] Milne-Smith, 21.
[101] Milne-Smith, 21.
[102] Anon, 'A Madman's Leap from a Railway Carriage', *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, December 12, 1874. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900. 382.

suicide.[103] In another article in the *Illustrated Police News* in 1872, witnesses on the platform at Bedford find a compartment of the Scotch mail covered with blood, reporting that 'the carriage had the look of a slaughterhouse' after a man, being conveyed to London by a sheriff's officer, slit his own throat with a razor having attempted to murder the escorting officer.[104] Meanwhile, in 1872, the *Sunderland Daily Echo* published a story of a 'struggle […] of the most savage nature' taking place in a third-class carriage of a late-night 'special mail train'.[105] If, as Milne-Smith contends, 'men were seen as particularly susceptible to being driven mad by external triggers', then the placement of these susceptible bodies on mail trains is arguably a significant context.[106] Here, anxieties about speed, (mis)communication and deviance from an efficient norm intersect. In a system that relies on the diligent working of postal bodies, and which medically categorises them according to their labour, madness seems the most extreme deviance from a disciplined norm.

Furthermore, though Milne-Smith notes the importance of the speed of the train and its lack of stoppages, she does not link the association of these with the particular infrastructures of the mail train. However, as I have already shown through this chapter, the lack of stops on the mail train was both widely known and discussed. Indeed, as one article entitled 'A Madman on the Rail' from the *Dundee Courier* in 1864 melodramatically asks 'what better opportunity could Turpin himself have desired' than a 'run of say eighty miles, or, [...] of an hour and a-half [...] without a single stoppage'?[107] This article then details an incident on a night express train (which we can safely presume to be a night mail) from King's Cross station to Peterborough, on which a sailor threatens both his own life and that of others. First published in the *Scotsman*, and then circulated amongst local and regional newspapers, including the *Western Daily Press* and the *Birmingham Daily Post*, this news story repeatedly focusses on the relationship between the particular mobility of the express and the behaviour of the distressed passenger. They explain, for instance, that '[t]his train [...] makes the journey from London to Peterborough, a distance little short of eighty miles, without a single

[103] Anon, 'A Madman in a Railway Carriage', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post and Cornish Adviser*, November 29, 1876, 7. British Library Newspapers.
[104] Anon, 'A Madman in a Railway Carriage', *The Illustrated Police News*, August 4, 1872, 2. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.
[105] Anon, 'Madman in a Railway Carriage,' *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, January 5, 1875, 2. British Library Newspapers, Part III: 1741-1950.
[106] Milne-Smith. 'Shattered Minds', 28.
[107] Anon, 'A Madman on the Rail', *Dundee Courier*, August 8, 1864, n.pag. British Library Newspapers.

stoppage'.[108] The reprinted concern constructs a relationship between the mobility of madmen on-board the mails and the newspaper articles themselves. We can not only understand the violent actions of the 'madmen' as aligned to the infrastructural mobility of the mail, but the very recirculations of such newspaper stories as aligned to these communication infrastructures. The mail train's infrastructural mobility, involving high speeds and lack of stoppages, was the same infrastructure that allowed for the rapid circulation of printed news across Britain.

The relationship between mail trains, the aggravation of 'madness', and the circulation of 'madmen' in newspapers, is repeatedly constructed in this period. In one particularly disturbing report, two gentlemen on the night express train from the north are threatened and accosted by a madman. Multiple regional and local newspapers again repeat this story, including the *Birmingham Daily Post*, the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, and the *Fife Herald*. They report that a:

> tall, ferocious looking person, with a huge beard and moustache, [was] wildly running along the carriage steps [….] Among other strange movements, he looked into the compartment in which the two gentlemen were sitting, and bursting out into a kind of hysterical laugh, he asked them who the d—l they were'.[109]

This article holds the train's speed and the man's madness in sync. As the train comes into its first station, the gentlemen call the attention of the guard but 'as if having "method in his madness", he was then quietly seated in his carriage and was allowed to proceed on the train'.[110] As the train leaves the station, the man begins his antics again: 'the train was proceeding at a very rapid pace, during which the man was seen to skip along the carriage steps backwards and forwards'.[111] The madness of this man embodies the momentum of the mail: held in deliberate stasis as the mail slows down, but becoming mobile when the express picks up speed. We can think back here to the assertion by Waller Lewis that men who are of a 'more weakly and delicate' constitution, or those who 'exceed 5 ft. 9 in. in height, or who weigh [...] more than 10 ½' are unsuited to the repeated 'concussions' caused by the mail.[112] The broad or delicate men who litter these narratives of madmen reinforce an idea that only certain males are suited to travelling

[108] Anon, 'A Madman in a Railway Carriage', *Birmingham Daily Post*. August 8, 1864, 6. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.
[109] Anon, 'A Madman in a Railway Train', *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 12, 1865, 2. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900.
[110] Anon, 'Madman in a Railway Train', *Birmingham*, 1865, 2.
[111] Anon, 2.
[112] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 64, 67.

alongside the mails. Popular discourses in this period tie the potential for (male) madness explicitly to the movements of the mail.

3. Transforming Bodies and Infrastructures on the Mail

Following the importance of the mail to discourses of health and ill-health on the railway, Section 3 argues that popular periodical literature utilised the potential for mail infrastructures to impact the body. The *imagining* of working postal bodies on-board mail trains, I argue, plays with the potential for discord between bodies and infrastructures; this discord garners not so much a disciplining of the labouring bodies on the mail, but a reciprocity that has the potential for the transformation of both bodies and infrastructure.

In the article 'The Post Office', published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in 1884, the narrator finds an anxious pleasure in the idea of all sorts of letters mingling together on the high-speed railway. The narrator watches the work of the railway postal workers, and sees 'letters flying hither and thither, and realise[s] the numbers of hands through which they pass, the many combinations and rearrangements to which they are necessarily subject'.[113] These 'numbers of hands' imbue these letters with a tantalising multiplicity. In Stretton's article, 'The Travelling Post Office', from *Chambers's Magazine* in 1861, letters of all classes scandalously mingle together:

> The same sort of variety that marks Society, here marks its letters: envelopes of all shapes and sizes; handwriting of all imaginable kinds, written in all shades of ink, with every description of pen [….] They are all mingling, for a few hours at any rate, in common fellowship—tossed about in company, honoured with the self-same knocks on the head, sent to their destination locked in loving embrace and sometimes […] exceedingly difficult to part at all.[114]

This extract wonderfully demonstrates Thomas's contention that the circulation of letters through the Post Office allowed everyone to be connected to anyone, creating 'queer interfaces and reverberations'.[115] Thomas's idea of queer reverberations are felt in Stretton's article as the letters 'stamped with the escutcheoned signet of an earl', the 'initials of a plain John Brown', and others 'plastered with cobblers' wax', cosy up with one another in a homosocial 'loving embrace'.[116] The language used here is latent with the implications of travel aboard the mail — from 'tossed about in company' to 'knocks

[113] Anon, 'The Post-Office', *English Illustrated* (1884): 299.
[114] Stretton, 'Travelling Post-Office', 46.
[115] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, 4.
[116] Stretton, 'Travelling Post-Office', 46.

on the head', the efficient postal service of the mail train is tied to the body as these letters experience the touch of their companions and their journey becomes embodied. These articles' interest in the 'loving embrace' experienced by letters as they travel through railway postal infrastructures raises questions about the depiction and role of the body on-board the mail. For Rubenstein, Bruce Robbins and Sophia Beal, infrastructures can be conceived through their 'boringness' and 'unsexiness'; however, nineteenth-century popular literature on the mail train suggests that excitement, danger and tantalising transgressions were more associated with postal infrastructures in this period.[117]

Moreover, the idea of the impact of speed on those travelling and working on-board mail trains is not only medicalised as a potential danger but also explored with excitement in literary renditions of mail train journeys. In 'The Travelling Post-Office', the relentless speed and noise of the mail train is continually emphasised. Indeed, Stretton depicts a sense of sensorial overload. The noise and movement, or, as Waller Lewis would say, oscillations, of the mail train, overwhelm the narrator:

> O, the blackness of darkness! Trees fly past like great gaunt spectres, and every object is weird and dismal-looking [….] We are content to shut our eyes upon this scene, and listen to the sorting as it proceeds—to the *rat-tat* as the letters fall into boxes opposite [….] One moment we are clattering down a hill, and the sorting partakes, to some extent, of the same tear-away speed [….] in all which cases, not only is our own equilibrium a source of difficulty to us, but we see that things proceed but smoothly among the letters, which refuse to go in at all, or go in with a spirited evolution, fluttering outside, and them landing at their destination upside down, or in some other way transgressing official rules in such case made and provided.[118]

I have extracted this at length because of its attention to the body on the mail. We have both the bodies of the uninitiated narrators here, who wish to 'shut [their] eyes' upon the Gothicised, 'weird' darkness outside the TPO, and those of the sorters, whose constant '*rat-tat*' indicates the relentless nature of their work. The relationship between these bodies and the mail train is not quite Foucauldian here — they are not disciplined to behave in a particular way by the train; in fact, the train seems to be working against them. The train's 'tear-away speed' disrupts the 'equilibrium' of the narrators and the sorters, whose letters begin to gain autonomy and mis-sort themselves. This passage relishes in the discordant and disruptive relationship between infrastructure and body;

[117] Michael Rubenstein, Bruce Robbins, and Sophia Beal, 'Infrastructuralism: An Introduction', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 4 (December 29, 2015): 578. Project Muse.
[118] Stretton, 'Travelling Post-Office', 45.

the speed of the mail, enacted by order of the Postmaster General, works to confound the labour of the officials inside the TPO, causing a transgression of the 'official rules' of the postal work.

In Hollingshead's 'Right Through the Post', which I also analysed in Section 1, the mailbag apparatus is one of the ways in which the narrator relishes in the unique, and potentially transformative, activity of the mail tender. When the train reaches its first mailbag apparatus, the narrator signals the skill of the mail guard through the uniqueness of his relationship with the landscape outside of the train:

> He is an experienced guard, familiar with every river, bridge, and point, who knows, by the sound of the roaring and clattering train, at what moment to "let down the net, and put out for delivery" […] The shutter of the large single window-hole is pushed down in its groove, and a gust of cold night air, laden with the scent of the earth and grass, and trees, comes freshly into the hot and busy carriage. The guard looks out along the dark line of rising and falling hedges, and through the trees at the low horizon, for some expected signal light, and then proceeds to the door, which he pushes back in its side groove.[119]

This extract typifies a marked difference between passenger transport and the experience of working in the sorting tender. Scholarship on the Victorian railway has argued that passengers experienced passivity on-board the train. Daniel Martin, for instance, has noted that 'a sense of [the] simultaneous shrinkage and expansion of space [...] turned the railway compartment into a strangely timeless, dislocated space of passive mobility'.[120] Furthermore, in her examination of the famous train journey in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), Mathieson argues that the passing of landmarks signals a disconnection from the landscape: through the window 'visions appear close to the touch but are to be at a "deceitful distance", just beyond reach'.[121] Here, however, the outside landscape infiltrates the TPO: the 'gust of cold night air' enters the sorting tender with the tangible scents of 'earth and grass, and trees'. The guard's work is emphatically reliant on his understanding of the landscape. In the world of information transportation then, the traditional relationship between railway passenger and landscape is decidedly more overt, and exchange is possible between the two.

However, the use of the mailbag apparatus is not a benign or harmonious event. In Hollingshead's article, the mail guard is an active participant in this infrastructural exchange, but is also potentially put in danger by the fierceness of the mechanism. The

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[119] Hollingshead, 'Right Through', 191.
[120] Daniel Martin, 'Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Review* 34, no. 1 (2008): 137. Jstor.
[121] Mathieson, *Mobility,* 71.

guard ‘reach[es] out his arm through the window of the carriage [and] fastens the packed mail’ onto an iron bar; and ‘with this operation, he returns to the open window, where he pushes down the mechanical arrangement, which forms a projecting receiving net, and which sounds, in its descent, as if the whole carriage were falling to pieces’.[122] While the guard works with dexterity and intent, Hollingshead draws attention to the potential danger and disruption caused by the exchange of mailbags and invests in the hyperbole of the carriage ‘falling to pieces’. Indeed, the mailbags enter the carriage with their own force:

> The machinery of the railway acts upon the machinery of the carriage; the one bag drops into the roadside net [...] at the same instant, several bags come tumbling into the carriage net, as if from the moon. Before the guard has hauled them all in, dragged up the net, and shut the fresh night air once more, the whole train has shot half a mile beyond the place where the Railway Post-office has [sic] affected this advantageous exchange.[123]

Not only does the description of the 'machinery of the railway act[ing] upon the machinery of the carriage’ succinctly undermine Schivelbusch’s assertion that the railways were conceived of as one homogenous entity, the entry of the mailbags further disrupts the carriage. Mechanical infrastructures punctuate the depiction of this disruption — ‘roadside net’, ‘ditch’, ‘carriage’ ‘carriage net’, ‘whole train’, ‘Railway Post-office’ —, as does bodily labour — ‘hauled’, ‘dragged’ ‘shut’. This is an operation in which bodies work actively to facilitate the dangerous exchange of mails via the apparatus at speed. This periodical depiction, then, further complicates a reading of all railway travel as passive and disciplined, and there is almost an excitement and admiration for this efficient though dangerous infrastructural innovation.

The excitement and admiration for this infrastructural innovation were also of interest to the adventure theme of boys’ magazines. In ‘A Run with the Mail Van’, seen in Section 1, the moment when the mailbags enter the TPO is crowded with the language of danger and excitement. The narrator waits in anticipation for the operation of the mailbag apparatus: ‘It was nervous work all the same, and as the time neared I found myself getting more than excited [....] We are all ready, and we wait for the crash’.[124] The narrator’s excitement in this build-up is for the violent crash of mailbags as they enter the tender through the apparatus:

> I thought for a moment that the whole side of the carriage had come in. We seemed to roll and tremble, there was a sound of tearing and ripping; before I

[122] Hollingshead, ‘Right Through’, 191.
[123] Hollingshead, 191-2.
[124] Anon. ‘Run with the Mail’, *Chums*, 277.

> knew where I was the two arms had been released and the bags had disappeared. In the same moment two other bags of a like kind had come whirling into the carriage. Here they flew, there they flew, there was a mighty dodging of heads, some quick execrations, the ringing of the bell ceased, the net was shut up with a bang—we had made our first collection.[125]

The article treats the nervousness and violence created by the mailbag apparatus with a childish glee. While Rubenstein, Robbins and Beal have discussed the 'boringness' and 'unsexiness' of infrastructure, quite the opposite becomes true.[126] Far from 'unsexy', the effective operation of the mailbag apparatus generates excitement among the mail (male) workers in the carriage, and, far from 'boring', enter the tender with a violence, and even autonomy, that causes those same workers to eff and blind. There is a sense here that the mail train and mailbag apparatus, and the relationship between these mechanical infrastructures and those working inside, is transformative and transgressive, making excitable boys out of the hard-working men in the mail's infrastructure.

4. Collisions and Communicative Paralysis in *John Marchmont's Legacy*

While the ins and outs of rapid postal exchange on the mail could transform working bodies, the mail train's rapidity intensified concerns around railway collisions and crashes. By analysing Braddon's sensation novel *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1862) alongside Waller Lewis's medical reports on the impact of mail train crashes, I demonstrate that the novel's concern with communication and communicative paralysis are held metaphorically in the key catalyst of the plot, Edward's injury in a mail crash.

Braddon's sixth novel revolves around the inheritance of Marchmont Towers within the dispersed Marchmont family. The narrative follows four core characters, John Marchmont, Mary Marchmont, Edward Arundel and Olivia Arundel, whose personal loves, hatreds and decisions lead to a series of disasters, which are carefully manipulated by the novel's villain, Paul Marchmont. As Tamara Wagner argues, 'the novel at first sketches a Gothic scenario', which revolves around the inheritance of a family castle and the 'premonition' of Paul's villainy.[127] The text is tied together through a series of intersecting relationships that overlap and complicate each other; Edward and Olivia, for instance, are cousins, and Olivia is ferociously in love with Edward.

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[125] Anon, 277.
[126] Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal, 'Infrastructuralism', 578.
[127] Tamara S. Wagner, 'Silver-Fork Legacies: Sensationalizing Fashionable Fiction', *Women's Writing* 16, no. 2 (August 1, 2009): 315. Taylor & Francis Online.

However, when it becomes clear that Edward does not return her love, Olivia marries the ageing John Marchmont in a marriage of convenience — John thinks she would make an appropriate stepmother and friend to his daughter, Mary. Important plotlines for my analysis of the catalytic mail train crash include Mary's inheritance of Marchmont Towers after John Marchmont's death; her uncle Paul's desire to inherit the estate; Mary's and Edward's elopement and clandestine marriage in London; and Olivia's passionate, and destructive, love for Edward, which is dicisively manipulated by Paul to divide these two characters.

Though scholarship on Braddon's sixth novel has demonstrated that the novel signals a critical shift in her writing, to a narrative driven by characterisation over plot, there has been relatively little scholarly attention to this text.[128] While Karen Odden has briefly noted the railway crash in *John Marchmont's Legacy* alongside other sensation fiction railway crashes, such as Wilkie Collins *No Name* (1862) and Braddon's *Henry Dunbar* (1864), she does not note the potential significance of the mail to this train's crash.[129] Furthermore, in his compelling and detailed analysis of topologies and dispossessions in the text, Saverio Tomaiulo interrogates Edward's traumatic dispossession in relation 'to the undisputed symbol of Victorian technological advance: the railway'.[130] Though he goes as far as to utilise John Ruskin's statement comparing travelling by railway to becoming a parcel, and also draws alignment between Edward's subsequent illness and *The Lancet*'s articles on railway health, Tomaiuolo does not draw any link between the metaphorical significance of the mail, nor Waller Lewis's work with Travelling Post Office officials.[131] It is my contention here that the *mail* train crash impacts the communication between all the characters of the text, and becomes a catalyst and metaphor through which Braddon can explore broader themes of connectivity, communication and circulation.

Taking place around a third of the way through the novel, the mail train crash marks the severing of a union of marriage between the young Mary and the novel's soldier hero, and friend of Mary's late father, Edward. The crash comes after a climactic moment of catharsis in the text: Mary escapes the oppressive Marchmont Towers,

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[128] Karen M. Odden, '"Reading Coolly" in *John Marchmont's Legacy*: Reconsidering M. E. Braddon's Legacy', *Studies in the Novel* 36, no. 1 (2004): 22. Jstor.
[129] Odden, 'Clayton Tunnel Rail Crash', 33.
[130] Saverio Tomaiuolo, '*John Marchmont's Legacy* and the Topologies of Dispossession', in *In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 48.
[131] Tomaiuolo, 'Topologies of Dispossession', 48-54.

overseen by her embittered stepmother, Olivia, and Edward follows her to London, where the young couple subsequently marry without parental or guardian consent. It also follows an idyllic honeymoon in Hampshire, where the lovers are painted in pastoral scenes of flowing rivers and thatched inns. However, despite their remove, the haven is intruded upon by a letter from Edward's mother, explaining that his father is gravely ill and calling their son to his bedside. Due to the impropriety of their marriage, Mary stays behind as her new husband boards an 'express [that leaves] Southampton for the west at eight'.[132] It is a subsequent failure of communication and railway safety signals that that leads to the mail train's crash with a slow goods train:

> A signalman had mistaken one train for another; a flag had been dropped too soon; and the down-express had run into a heavy luggage-train blundering up from Exeter with farm-produce for the London markets. Two men had been killed, and a great many passengers hurt, some very seriously. Edward Arundel's case was perhaps one of the most serious among these.[133]

Significantly, as the narrator describes the crash, she signals themes that will become vital to the narrative arc of the novel: it is an accident of miscommunication that leads to this catastrophic event. Furthermore, the crash works to create a communicative severance with Mary, who disappears as a narrative voice entirely from this point.

Before turning to the long-term manifestations of the crash on the narrative of *John Marchmont's Legacy*, I wish to pause briefly to examine the physiological implications of this crash on Edward, and its alignment with research by Waller Lewis, which we saw in Section 2. Waller Lewis notes that during his time as Chief Medical Officer 'there have been several collisions and accidents of other kinds in which mail trains have been involved', though he also remarks his relief that while a considerable number of men had been injured, there had only been one fatality. [134] However, he observes that 'nearly every case the injury received has been concussion of the head, spine, or nervous system generally'.[135] Importantly, he explains that the similarities between 'nearly every case' include '[d]isturbed and diminished sleep, frequent starting when dozing, dreaming of collisions, noises in the ears, feverishness, feeble pulse, much pallor, or, on the contrary, frequent flushing, and constipation'.[136] Nicholas Daly has argued that concerns over the health of the general railway traveller focussed on

[132] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213.
[133] Braddon, 215.
[134] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 71.
[135] Waller Lewis, 71.
[136] Waller Lewis, 73.

the experience of 'small regular concussions'.[137] Equally, Jill Matus demonstrates that in the 1860s, medical tribunals created an increasing demand for 'the phenomenon of accident shock', in which those suffering had sustained no discernible physical injury.[138] However, Wallace Lewis's investigation and case studies here suggests the long-term ramifications of a crash taking place at speed, and he repeatedly notes that the most discernible long-term injury is concussion.

Moreover, though Wallace Lewis observes that in most cases these symptoms ease in either 'a few days to four or five months', he also identifies that, '[i]n a few cases there has been some amount debility and nervousness left behind; and in still fewer, loss of flesh, which sometimes has not been recovered for a considerable period'.[139] The ramifications of a mail train crash are, for Wallace Lewis, medicalised, physical, and sometimes long-term, though certainly caught up in questions of nerves and shock. Notably, Edward's injuries echo and mirror those described by Waller Lewis in his report: he suffers from a fractured skull, coma and concussion, which has a long-term impact on his bodily health. While Waller Lewis notes the efforts to round-off and pad 'every sharp angle of woodwork', undertaken to prevent 'mischief to the officers [...] in the case of collision', Edward potentially experiences this highspeed crash without a guard of 'well-padded cushions' on '[e]very hard portion of internal fittings'.[140]

The reader first discovers Edward's survival of the crash as he travels aboard another express train that 'glared like a meteor in the grey flog; the dismal shriek of the engine was like the cry of a bird of prey'.[141] Here, Braddon immediately emphasises the changes wrought on Edward's body:

> This was a young man with a long tawny beard and a white face,—a very handsome face, though wan and accentuated, as if with some terrible sickness, and somewhat disfigured by certain strappings of plaister, which were bound about a patch of his skull a little above the left temple.[142]

The image of Edward is so unlike the handsome boy with 'the glitter of reddish gold in his hair, and the light in his fearless blue eyes' that he is almost unrecognisable.[143] The text's hero, who was once fighting 'treacherous Indians', is now 'enveloped almost to

[137] Daly, 'Railway Novels', 469.
[138] Jill Matus, 'Trauma, Memory and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection', *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2001): 418. Jstor.
[139] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 73.
[140] Waller Lewis, 73.
[141] Braddon, *John Marchmont's*, 225.
[142] Braddon, 225.
[143] Braddon, 71.

the chin in voluminous railway-rugs, but in spite of these coverings shuddered every now and then as if with cold'.[144] Indeed, Waller Lewis also notes that a common symptom:

> to almost all cases of injury from concussion [is] that the individual who has suffered therefrom is intolerant of railway motion for some little time thereafter [....] I generally recommend that he begin by taking short journeys at first.[145]

Not only does Braddon utilise Waller Lewis's noted symptoms of 'frequent starting when dozing', 'feverishness', a 'feeble pulse', and 'much pallor', she also notes his discomfort with railway travel.[146] Braddon highlights the physical and psychological effects of Edward's mail train crash, 'enveloping' (perhaps an allusion to the mail train) the hero in the indicators of decline and emasculation. Indeed, Braddon further underscores Edward's decline through her emphasis on his physical strength in Volume 1; hardly a person of nervous disposition, Edward is perhaps someone whom one would think could recover quickly. Indeed, Edward's long-term ill-health following the crash comments on the collision here between mechanised 'progress' and the frailty of human bodies caught in such infrastructure.

Significantly, the crash not only impacts Edward's physical and mental health but has a deleterious impact on his ability to communicate with other people. Prior to his crash, Edward is described as being 'fresh, radiant, noisy, splendid', and having an 'extraordinary vivacity'.[147] However, on-board the express, the young man fails to illicit any other reaction apart from alarm in his fellow passengers:

> There was one first-class passenger in that Lincolnshire express who made himself especially obnoxious to his fellows by the display of an amount of restlessness and superabundant energy quite out of keeping with the lazy despondency of those around him.[148]

Indeed, the narrator discloses to the reader that several of his fellow passengers entertained 'serious thoughts of changing carriages when the express stopped midway between London and Lincoln'.[149] Anna Despotopoulou and Matthew Beaumont have both argued that the lack of corridors between carriages made compartments a site of entrapment, one particularly conducive, for Despotopoulou, to the crime of sexual assault; here, this lack of escape is compounded by the mail train, which, as we saw in

[144] Braddon, 225.
[145] Waller Lewis, 'Health of Travelling Post Office Officials', 73.
[146] Waller Lewis, 73.
[147] Braddon, *John Marchmont's*, 23, 25.
[148] Braddon, 225.
[149] Braddon, 227.

Sections 1 and 2, often travelled with prolonged gaps between stops.[150] The passengers' discomfort echoes the depictions of 'madmen' on the railway in newspaper discourses — the narrator no longer depicts Edward as a strapping young man, but one whose erratic behaviour alienates those around him.

Furthermore, not only a seeming madman on the railway, when he arrives at Marchmont Towers to find that Mary has disappeared in the four months of his convalescence, Edward meets coldness from his cousin Olivia, and even her servant, Barbara. As he questions Barbara on the disappearance of his wife, Edward struggles to read her blankness: 'The woman turned to him with a blank face, whose expressionless stare might mean either genuine surprise or an obstinate determination not to understand anything that might be said to her'.[151] The mail train, then, not only has a physical impact on Edward's body, but has implications for his ability to communicate, both because he is no longer a 'vivacious' boy, but also because he struggles to read the blankness of those around him. Indeed, on his first meeting with the novel's villain, Paul Marchmont, Edward is irritated by his blasé coolness:

> This man's cool imperturbability [...] which seemed [...] the plain candour of a thorough man of the world, who had no wish to pretend to any sentiment he did not feel, baffled and infuriated the passionate young soldier.[152]

Edward's complete inability to read Paul here, and his own bubbling emotions, are compounded by the fact that the location in which the two meet — in a boathouse converted into an artist's studio — is the very place where Paul has imprisoned the pregnant Mary. In a cruel irony, the need for the rapid communication facilitated by the mail train eradicates Edward's ability to communicate effectively. Though arriving as the hero at Marchmont Towers, Edward is unable to pick up the clues to Mary's whereabouts, and, as he begins to believe the aspersion of her suicide, he falls into a paralytic state, and is forced into the role of observer.

In his bid to inherit Marchmont's Towers off his niece Mary, Paul moves quickly to systematically cut the ties of familial connection between Edward, Mary and Olivia. Perceiving Olivia's love of Edward, Paul manipulates her 'weakness' so that he can use

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[150] See Anna Despotopoulou, *Women and the Railway, 1850-1915*. Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 23 and Beaumont, '"Railway Mania": The Train Compartment as the Scene of a Crime', in *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble*, eds. Michael J. Freeman and Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) 125-53.
[151] Braddon, *John Marchmont's*, 271.
[152] Braddon, 262.

her as his 'tool'; Olivia helps Paul spread the rumour that Edward is dead, and, later, that Mary has committed suicide — a rumour that the public, Edward, and even the reader, begin to believe. Furthermore, Olivia is forced into a parallel state of uncommunicativeness. When Edward returns from illness, he finds Olivia unresponsive to his pleas for help against Paul:

> The open drawers of the davenport, the littered scraps of paper and loosely-tied documents, thrust, without any show of order, into the different compartments of the desk, bore testimony to that state of mental distraction which had been common to Olivia Marchmont for some time past. She herself, the gloomy tenant of the Towers, sat with her elbow resting on her desk, looking hopelessly and absently at the confusion before her.[153]

Like Edward, then, the mail train crash has become the catalyst for the communicative paralysis of Olivia. Tomaiulo identifies the 'parasitic and paralysing *locus*' as Marchmont Towers, which he articulates as a Gothic setting of dislocation, which serves as the 'epitome of epistemological paralysis' affecting Victorian society.[154] Here, however, this paralysis and dislocation is not only signified through the Gothic, 'panoptic' architecture of Marchmont Towers but also through the metaphoric significance of the paralysis — or even destruction — of communicative infrastructures in the novel. Importantly, dislocation and miscommunication are also signified here through Olivia's letter and newspaper strewn office, which echoes the potential image of letters and newspapers scattered by the mail train crash.

This communicative paralysis is also made evident by the reader's continual estrangement from the action of the plot. The narrator deliberately cuts communication ties between the reader and Mary, severing us, as well as Edward, from the real action of the novel. This estrangement means that the reader is inclined to assume that the young bride has committed suicide upon seeing a fraudulent newspaper obituary for Edward, also posted and set into circulation through the infrastructures of the mail train.[155] Wagner has noted the importance of John Marchmont's premonition of Paul's villainy to the construction of the Gothic in the text; however, the authenticity of this premonition also works to convince the reader of other textual premonitions.[156] The narrator indicates throughout the first half of the text that Mary is destined for a tragic end. Importantly, however, such premonitions are constructed around Mary's looks:

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[153] Braddon, 284.
[154] Tomaiuolo, 'Topologies of Dispossession', 43.
[155] Paul's fraudulent newspaper obituaries reminds any Braddon reader of Lady Audley's notorious behaviour in her most (in)famous sensation novel.
[156] Wagner, 'Silver-Fork Legacies', 315.

> it is only her face in which the earnestness of premature womanhood reveals itself in a grave and sweet serenity very beautiful to contemplate. Her soft brown eyes have a pensive shadow in their gentle light; her mouth is even more pensive. [157]

Claiming that certain female martyrs had the look of their 'Fate' in their eyes, the text suggests that a character can be 'read' by their external signifiers. In an echo then of the links between envelopes and correspondents seen in Section 1, the narrator initially plays on the assumption that Mary's fated trajectory may be legible from her looks.

The novel explicitly sets up the possibility of a tragic and martyr-like death for Mary, even when her prospects seem on the rise. When multiple characters attest to her suicide, the reader begins to believe their testimony. Indeed, the narrative follows Edward's paralytic experience in Lincolnshire, where he can only *watch* Paul from a distance — his body rendered incapable of action. For Daly, *Lady Audley's Secret*, with its twisting plot of lost letters, luggage and trains, is a novel that 'sees […] mobility reach its full blown form'. [158] *John Marchmont's Legacy*, however, cuts characters and readers off from the mobility routes of circulation and information. The mail train crash is both catalyst and metaphor for the communicative diversion and interception between the hero and heroines of the novel. Indeed, it is only when these communicative ties are healed, bridged by Olivia's sensational interruption of Edward's second wedding day and confession that he is committing bigamy, that information can circulate, and Mary's whereabouts is discovered.

5. Feminised Disruption on the Mail in *Lady Audley's Secret* and 'No. 4 Branch Line: The Travelling Post Office'

I turn now to the male bodies at-risk from hyper-feminised villainesses on mail trains in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Hesba Stretton's 'No. 4 Branch Line: Travelling Post-Office', which appeared in *Mugby Junction*, the famous 1866 Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*.[159] I argue that the use of postal infrastructures by Lady Lucy Audley and Miss Anne Clifton — both bearing false identities — directly contests the stability of the masculinity of those men they manipulate along the way. The mail train, I argue, figures as a significant metaphor in these texts, signalling the disruption

[157] Braddon, *John Marchmont's*, 54-55.
[158] Daly, 'Railway Novels', 473.
[159] Not to be confused with her article 'The Travelling Post-Office', published in *Chamber's Journal*, in 1861, which I analysed in Sections 1 and 3.

of gendered ideals. Martin persuasively argues that, in *Lady Audley's Secret,* 'railway time' signals that the 'mobilization of women [is] a threat in need of fixing [...] because of the discrete and hidden circulations of women'.[160] Here I build on Martin's reading of the role of the 'railway body' in Braddon's novel by paying attention to the mail and express trains that enable the eponymous anti-heroine's mobility. I aim to show that, as women utilise the masculinised spaces of the mail, they disrupt gendered ideals. By comparing Lady Audley's use of the mail to that of Mrs Forbes, I argue that the mail became a site of anxiety about the feminine dangers to those masculine, but fragile, postal bodies that we have already seen so far in this chapter.

Hesba Stretton's contribution for *Mugby Junction*, 'No. 4 Branch Line: The Travelling Post-Office' (hereafter 'No. 4 Branch Line') is framed through the timetabled infrastructure of the TPO. [161] In this narrative, a mail train sorter is manipulated by a beautiful young woman, who steals confidential government papers from the sorting tender and disappears into the night, or, more specifically, into Camden. Notably, 'No. 4 Branch Line' sits within the figurative infrastructure of *Mugby Junction*, Dickens's authored and edited collection of short stories for the Christmas special, revolving around the railway infrastructure of the junction. This included Dickens's framing narratives, the 'Barbox Brothers' and 'Barbox Brothers and Co.', based around Mugby, as well as five 'Branch Line' stories. While Charles Dickens's 'No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman' has received significant scholarly attention, less has been paid to other short stories in the text.[162] Notably, however, Nicola Kirkby persuasively argues that the scheduling of the narratives through the 'timetable' of a contents page offers 'a partial glimpse into the uneven, proximate relationality between the stories that together simulate a railway junction.[163] Kirkby's deft comparison of the contents of *Mugby*

[160] Martin, 'Railway Fatigue', 132.
[161] Norris Pope notes that 'Mugby' is a thinly veiled allusion to Rugby. Rugby was also an important central node for the Travelling Post Office, and one of the places that mail trains stopped to exchange large numbers of mailbags ('Dickens's "The Signalman" and Information Problems in the Railway Age', *Technology and Culture* 42, no. 3 (2001): 436–61. Jstor.).
[162] Much analysis on 'The Signalman' has focussed on the trauma at the heart of this ghost-story, especially in relation to Dickens's infamous experience in the Staplehurst railway accident in 1865. Particularly, Matus compellingly argues that the experience of trauma is intimately connected to the ghost story in 'Trauma'; while David Ellison considers the temporal relationship with trauma in the text in 'The Ghost of Injuries Present in Dickens's *The Signalman*', *Textual Practice* 26, no. 4 (2012): 649–65 and James Mussell explores the disruption of temporal linearity through faulty communication in '"Seeking Nothing and Finding It": Moving On and Staying Put in *Mugby Junction*', in *Replication in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Julie Codell and Linda K. Hughes, 231-247 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2018).
[163] Kirkby, 'Railway Infrastructure', 149.

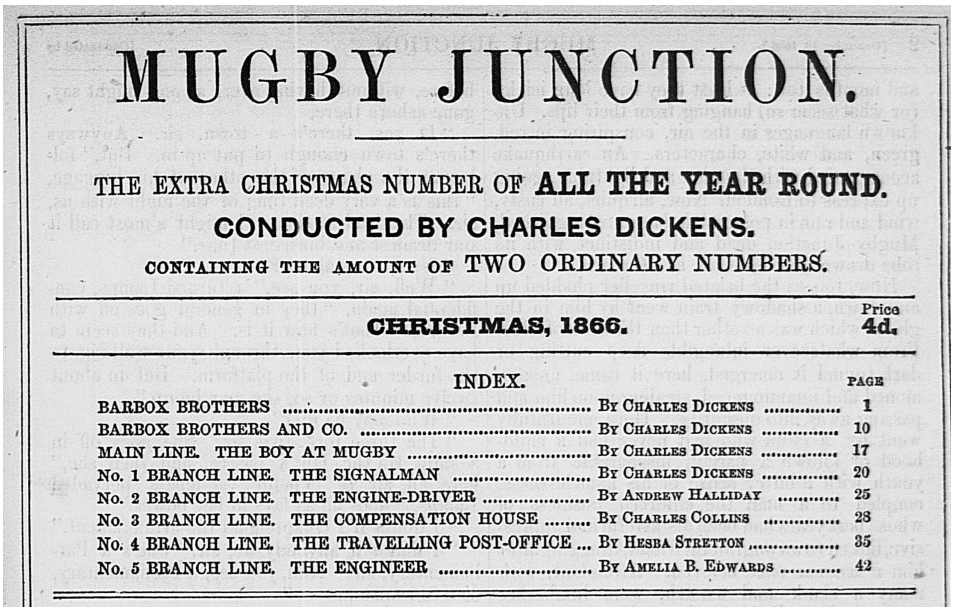
Junction to the detail of railway timetables also aligns with Stretton's frame of the mail train. The addition of the TPO makes perfect sense to the railway timetable, as popular and accessible railway guides, such as *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*, frequently distinguished mail trains from regular services (see Figure 16 and Figure 17). Indeed, Stretton's sorting narrator, Frank Wilcox, is keen to align his narrative within the schedules of the mail:

> Many years ago, and before this Line was so much as projected, I was engaged as a clerk in a Travelling Post-office running along the Line of railway from London to a town in the Midland Counties, which we will call Fazeley. My duties were to accompany the mail-train which left Fazeley at 8.15 p.m., and arrived in London about midnight, and to return by the day mail leaving London at 10.30 the following morning, after which I had an unbroken night at Fazeley, while another clerk discharged the same round of work; and in this way each alternative evening I was on duty in the railway post-office van.[164]

Here Frank frames the short story within the schedules of the TPO. The 'Line' of the railway looms as a true noun alongside the 'Travelling Post-office', while exchanges on are firmly aligned with the timetables of the mail. Indeed, his entire routine, his hours of sleep and waking, are shaped by the infrastructural shifts of the mail train.[165] Stretton's narrative is framed not only by 'Mugby Junction', but also by the scheduling of mailbag exchanges and the relentless timetable of such work on the health of the body.

Significantly, Stretton consistently describes Frank Wilcox's postally timetabled body as nervous and excitable. In describing his first experience of working of the TPO, Frank emphasises the effects of the mail train's speed on his body: 'At first I suffered a little from a hurry and tremor of nerve in pursuing my occupation while the train was crashing along under bridges and through tunnels at a speed which was then thought marvellous and perilous'.[166] Despite claiming that the journey now seemed monotonous, Frank also attests to the thrill of the 'marvellous and perilous' mail infrastructures. Indeed, his 'tremor of nerves' afflicts him throughout the story. When he realises that the

[164] Hesba Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line: The Travelling Post-Office', in *Mugby Junction*, ed. Charles Dickens (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), 155. Project Gutenberg.
[165] David Green et al. analyses the working conditions in the Victorian Post Office; they argue that postal workers in the 'later nineteenth century [...] complained of chronic sleep deprivation and irregular meal times and the impact this pattern of work had on their health' ('"Postman Wears Out"', 185).
[166] Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line', 155.



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THE EXTRA CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF **ALL THE YEAR ROUND.**

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CONTAINING THE AMOUNT OF TWO ORDINARY NUMBERS.

CHRISTMAS, 1866. Price **4d.**

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Figure 16. Charles Dickens, 'Table of Contents: Mugby Junction'. *All the Year Round* 16, no. 400 (December 22, 1866): 1. Dickens Journals Online.

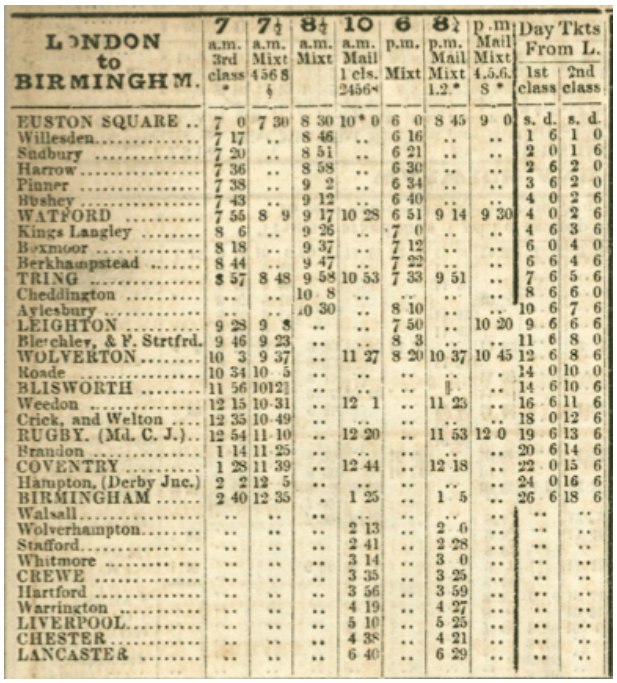
confidential government documents are missing from the sorting office, he claims that he 'never felt nearer fainting than at the moment' and, when faced with the judgement of the Postmaster-General complains:

> of an ever-increasing difficulty in commanding my thoughts [….] I had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, nor closed my eyes for thirty-six, while, during the whole of the time, my nervous system had been on full strain.[167]

Frank's body, like those of the men on the speeding expresses we have seen so far, buckles under the stress. Importantly, from the opening, the text identifies his sorting on the mail as the foundation for these failing nerves. These fractured nerves effeminise him and, in a room full of top-tier postal officials, he feels dizzy and lightheaded: 'I fancied there was a stir and movement at the table, but my eyes were dim, and in another second I had lost consciousness'.[168] Though not quite threatening a descent into madness like the madmen we saw in Section 2, Frank's body is a victim of the relentless speed and work of the mail train, and his bodily demise is caught up with feminine plotting and a search for an answer to a disappearance.

Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was first published in serial form from 1861-1862 and caused a furore amongst critics and readers due to its sensational plotline involving

[167] Stretton, 172.
[168] Stretton, 174.



LONDON to BIRMINGHAM.	7 a.m. 3rd class *	7½ a.m. Mixt 4 5 6 8 §	8½ a.m. Mixt	10 a.m. Mail 1 cls. 2 4 5 6 *	6 p.m. Mixt	8½ p.m. Mail Mixt 1.2.*	p.m Mail Mixt 4.5.6. S *	Day Tkts From L. 1st class	Day Tkts From L. 2nd class
EUSTON SQUARE ..	7 0	7 30	8 30	10 * 0	6 0	8 45	9 0	s. d.	s. d.
Willesden	7 17	..	8 46	..	6 16	..	..	1 6	1 0
Sudbury	7 20	..	8 51	..	6 21	..	..	2 0	1 6
Harrow	7 36	..	8 58	..	6 30	..	..	2 6	2 0
Pinner	7 38	..	9 2	..	6 34	..	..	3 6	2 0
Bushey	7 43	..	9 12	..	6 40	..	..	4 0	2 6
WATFORD	7 55	8 9	9 17	10 28	6 51	9 14	9 30	4 0	2 6
Kings Langley	8 6	..	9 26	..	7 0	..	..	4 6	3 6
Boxmoor	8 18	..	9 37	..	7 12	..	..	6 0	4 0
Berkhampstead	8 44	..	9 47	..	7 22	..	..	6 6	4 6
TRING	8 57	8 48	9 58	10 53	7 33	9 51	..	7 6	5 6
Cheddington	..	..	10 8	..	..	..	..	8 6	6 0
Aylesbury	..	..	10 30	..	8 10	..	..	10 6	7 6
LEIGHTON	9 28	9 8	..	..	7 50	..	10 20	9 6	6 6
Bletchley, & F. Strtfrd.	9 46	9 23	..	..	8 3	..	..	11 6	8 0
WOLVERTON	10 3	9 37	..	11 27	8 20	10 37	10 45	12 6	8 6
Roade	10 34	10 5	..	..	..	..	..	14 0	10 0
BLISWORTH	11 56	10 12	..	..	..	..	..	14 6	10 6
Weedon	12 15	10 31	..	12 1	..	11 23	..	16 6	11 6
Crick, and Welton	12 35	10 49	..	..	..	..	..	18 0	12 6
RUGBY. (Md. C. J.)	12 54	11 10	..	12 20	..	11 53	12 0	19 6	13 6
Brandon	1 14	11 25	..	..	..	..	..	20 6	14 6
COVENTRY	1 28	11 39	..	12 44	..	12 18	..	22 0	15 6
Hampton, (Derby Jnc.)	2 2	12 5	..	..	..	..	..	24 0	16 6
BIRMINGHAM	2 40	12 35	.	1 25	..	1 5	..	26 6	18 6
Walsall	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Wolverhampton	..	..	..	2 13	..	2 6	..	..	..
Stafford	..	..	..	2 41	..	2 28	..	..	..
Whitmore	..	..	..	3 14	..	3 0	..	..	..
CREWE	..	..	..	3 35	..	3 25	..	..	..
Hartford	..	..	..	3 56	..	3 59	..	..	..
Warrington	..	..	..	4 19	..	4 27	..	..	..
LIVERPOOL	..	..	..	5 10	..	5 25	..	..	..
CHESTER	..	..	..	4 38	..	4 21	..	..	..
LANCASTER	..	..	..	6 40	..	6 29	..	..	..

Figure 17. *George Bradshaw. Bradshaw's Monthly Railway and Steam Navigation Guide for Great Britain, Ireland and the Continent*, 164: March 1st, 1847. Internet Archive.

bigamy, attempted murder, arson and secret-identities. The novel follows Robert Audley as he attempts to trace the mysterious disappearance of his beloved friend George Talboys following the death of his wife, Helen Talboys (whom Robert discovers to be Lucy Audley). The narrative arc of *Lady Audley's Secret* relies on the speed with which Robert Audley can travel around the country — he travels on express and mail trains eleven times through the novel and manages to miss two mail trains, which slows down the progress of discovering what has happened to his friend George. Indeed, the mail facilitates and frames George's disappearance. When Robert asks his housekeeper whether George has stayed in his apartments the night following his disappearance, and rebukes her for asking if 'anything [had] happened to the poor, dear gentleman?', Mrs Maloney wishes to tell a horror story of her own:

> Mrs. Maloney would have related to him the history of a poor dear young engine-driver, who had once lodged with her, and who went out, after eating a hearty dinner, in the best of spirits, to meet with his death from the concussion of an express and a luggage train.[169]

[169] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (London: Penguin, 2012), 99-100. It is noticeable that this is almost precisely the same circumstances as the mail train crash in *John Marchmont's Legacy*.

A ‘death from the concussion of an express’ frames the beginning of Robert’s search for his missing friend, an image that continues to haunt his endeavour. Indeed, having told Robert that George had travelled down to Southampton on the mail at one o’clock in the morning, and left at two for Liverpool by another mail, George’s father-in-law ‘looked very grave. “Do you know, Mr. Audley,” he said, tapping his forehead significantly, “I sometimes fancy that Helen's death had a strange effect upon poor George”’.[170] George’s reckless travel on the mail is constructed around the health of his manly (or not), body, either by the threat of death from concussion aboard high-speed trains or through his potential mental ill-health. These opening associations are further emphasised by Robert’s discovery of a half-burned telegram in Captain Maldon’s fireplace: ‘“—alboys came to —— last night, and left by the mail for London, on his way to Liverpool, whence he was to sail for Sydney.” The date and the name and address of the sender of the message had been burnt with the heading’.[171] Lucy Audley has sent down a telegram warning of George’s plan for escape, utilising her deft understanding of postal infrastructures (there is only one form of communication quicker than a mail train) in order to warn her father of George’s movements. Yet, luckily for her, the speedy line of communication also baffles Robert, obscuring the critical details that he needs to track down the sender and thus retaining its anonymity.

Robert’s continued use of mail trains exacerbates two latent fears: the fear of the railway’s impact upon the body, and the potential for communication and information to go awry. For Martin, *Lady Audley’s Secret* continual reiteration that Robert’s bodily fatigue is due to railway travel: ‘serve as reminders of the economic and scientific fact that industrial bodies like Robert’s are always necessarily on the verge of breaking down’.[172] Martin argues that the association between the novel’s ‘railway bodies’ and madness, allows Braddon ‘to conceptualize the ideology of bourgeois masculinity as a process of continual nervous and physical exhaustion’.[173] However, Robert is arguably also shaped in the novel by the homogenising force of the express and mail trains on which he travels. Though the novel ends with Lady Audley’s incarceration in a ‘maison de sant’, the threat of madness before this point is firmly and repeatedly associated with Robert’s travel on mails. Indeed, one of Lady Audley’s key lines of self-defence against Robert’s accusations is to spread the pernicious rumour that he must be mad.

[170] Braddon, *Lady Audley’s*, 101.
[171] Braddon, 104.
[172] Martin, ‘Railway Fatigue’, 148.
[173] Martin, 133.

Furthermore, these exhausted bodies are also postal: Braddon's association of bourgeois masculinity with nervous and physical exhaustion is as tied up with networks of information as it is with the railway. After Robert catches the express to London and unexpectedly finds Lady Audley on her way back to Essex — she has travelled down to break into Robert's rooms in order to steal her letters to George — he immediately has fears about his mental state:

> "Has she baffled me by some piece of womanly jugglery? Am I never to get any nearer to the truth, but am I to be tormented all my life by vague doubts, and wretched suspicions, which may grow upon me till I become a monomaniac? Why did she come to London?".[174]

Robert's speedy travel on the express collides with his lack of information about Lady Audley and results in Robert's fear for his own sanity.

Indeed, other texts make use of the idea that feminised and deviant mobility can defy the 'spectacle' and signifiers of the mail train. In Henry Cholmondeley-Pennell's 'The Night Mail North' (1862), feminised bodies also disrupt the path of the masculinised nightmail. As the train speeds away from Euston Station, an exclamation rings in the poem: '"*My daughter*!!"'.[175] However, the poem's speaker laughs at the voice that calls out for his daughter:

> Ha! too late, too late,
> She is gone, you may safely swear;
> She has given you the slip, d'you hear?
> She has left you alone in your wrath,—
> And she's off and away, with a glorious start,
> To the home of her choice, with the man of her heart,
> By the Night Mail North![176]

Here, then, the disruptive possibilities of the mail are emphasised through the form and subject of the text — once gone, the chances of finding the fleeing daughter diminish, and the mail train facilitates her disobedience, as it does Lucy Audley's. Indeed, the communication potential of the mail train is inverted, instead becoming the means of severing communication and facilitating the whims of their flighty feminine passengers.

Unlike Robert then, Lady Audley utilises communication and travel networks with agility and knowledge. She is capable of harnessing the intersections of these mobility networks in order to preserve her new identity from both George and Robert. From forging an obituary of Helen Talboy's death in *The Times* and planting a telegraph

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[174] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 159.
[175] Henry Cholmondeley-Pennell, 'The Night Mail North', in *Puck on Pegasus*, 6th ed. (London: John Camden Hotten, 1869), 99, lines 29.
[176] Cholmondeley-Pennell, 'Night Mail North', 99, lines 30-36.

message to herself so that she could leave Audley Court without meeting George, to beating Robert home in order to steal back her letters, Lady Audley proficiently takes advantage of these entangled networks in order to preserve her new-found position. As Robert helps her into the carriage, he 'spread[s] her furs over her knees, and arrange[s] the huge velvet mantle in which her slender little figure was almost hidden'.[177] Here, packaged in a luxurious, feminised parcel, Lady Audley leaves Robert on the platform wondering if he is a monomaniac — for how could so small and fair a creature understand and disrupt the complexities of these networks? For Mathieson:

> the depiction of travellers "enveloped" in various pieces of material embodies the notion of the traveller-as-parcel; travellers not only occupy the same position as parcels and goods but, in their representational rendering within rugs and other concealing clothing, literally become parcels that are bound, packaged up.[178]

As Lady Audley travels away, enveloped in her furs, she also carries away the information that Robert needs to understand who she really is — she becomes parcel of letters, and keeps her contents confidential and hidden from Robert. However, if this chapter has demonstrated anything, it is that to travel as a parcel is not necessarily a metaphor aligned with a quiet or uneventful journey, nor, indeed, mental stability.

Lady Audley's use of and association with the information and travel networks of Victorian Britain leaves her naive to the discourses of madness which we have seen in Section 2. When she accuses Robert Audley of madness, she suggests that stagnation is the cause of his potential monomania: '"What is one of the strongest diagnostics of madness — what is the first appalling sign of mental aberration? The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of reflection is interrupted"'.[179] However, as Robert's own questioning has made clear, the novel explicitly aligns madness with mobility (and a mobility which is largely facilitated by mails). As the narrator ponders after Robert has stepped off an express and into a cab:

> We are apt to be angry with this cruel hardness in our life—this unflinching regularity in the smaller wheels and meaner mechanism of the human machine, which knows no stoppage or cessation, though the mainspring be forever hollow, and the hands pointing to purposeless figures on a shattered dial [….] Madhouses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger […] when we remember how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day.[180]

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[177] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 158.
[178] Mathieson, *Mobility*, 83.
[179] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 311.
[180] Braddon, 224.

Here, the text points to the importance not only of regular travel but also of mechanical work, to a growing madness that is suggested to be gripping the country. Lady Audley's association with speedy travel, and the unrelenting work of covering up her past identity, indicates her own potential for madness. The speeding body on the mail train, then, is one poised between sanity and insanity, and is a space of liminality for both masculine and feminine bodies.

In *Mugby Junction*'s 'No. 4 Branch Line', the feminine disrupter of the route is described in uncannily similar terms to Lady Audley: 'the most noticeable thing about her appearance being a great mass of light hair, almost yellow, which had got loose in some way, and fell down her neck in thick wavy tresses'.[181] Alike to Lady Audley in her appearance and her charms, the text describes Miss A. Clifton as a 'small slight creature' and 'childlike', and her femininity is an asset that threatens the stability of the Post Office sorting tender.[182] Like Robert, Frank is enraptured by Miss A. Clifton's childish, and excessive, femininity. Her presence invokes a very bodily response, one associated with the excitement of fast travel and sensorial overload: as Anne answers positively to Frank's question of whether she knew he would be on-board, she does so 'with a smile that made all [his] nerves tingle'.[183] Frank even asserts that the excitement of her presence causes 'a sudden confusion coming over me, I was sorting the letters at random'. [184] Anne's feminine charms and puerile good looks, a mirror of Lady Audley, disrupts the masculinised work of sorting aboard the TPO. Not only does her presence cause Frank to become feminised and flustered, but she manipulates his confused state in order to steal government papers from the van. After drawing her attention to the foreign dignitary's dispatch box, Frank tells the reader that:

> I added a certain spooney remark, which I do not care to repeat. Miss Clifton tossed her little head, and pouted her lips; but she took the box out of my hands, and carried it to the lamp nearest the further end of the van, after which she put

[181] Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line', 159.
[182] Stretton, 159. Notably, in Ellen Wood's short story 'Going Through the Tunnel', first published in the first series of *Johnny Ludlow* (Wood's pseudonym) in 1874, the narrator specifically explains to the reader that the train is not an express, and therefore does make multiple stops along the route. Featuring another performative woman who utilises her femininity in order to rob those in her compartment, the text's assertion that this is not an express is perhaps a nod to those mail femme-fatales who preceded her. (*Sisters in Crime: Early Detective and Mystery Stories by Women*, ed. Mike Ashley, 33-53 (London: Peter Owen, 2013)).
[183] Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line', 161.
[184] Stretton, 161.

> it down upon the counter close beside the screen, and I thought no more about it.[185]

Here, Frank is too caught up in his 'spooney' remark and Anne's pouting lips to pay attention to her movements. She is then able to remove the dispatch box from its usual circulation and place it in a location convenient for her to remove. Despotopoulou has persuasively demonstrated the charged potential of the railway carriage; she also argues that sensation fiction utilised railways because they 'facilitate[d] both the blurring of identity and physical space on which the sensation plot depended and the consequent subversion of gender conventions through female transgression'.[186] Here, the masculinity of these postal bodies is one that is liable to disruption from the hyper-feminised body of this villainess; the space of the mail train, then, exaggerates the subversive powers of feminine bodies and implicates this subversion in information as well as transport infrastructures.

It is significant that Anne Clifton and Lucy Audley, both capable of traversing postal networks, do so by manipulating the external signifiers assigned to them by mid-Victorian society. As we have already seen, external signifiers are of vital importance to the homogenising work of masculine bodies on the mail — it is their role to sort through and understand the circulation of an item purely by reading the external signs of the envelopes. For Thomas, fiction interested in the 'impersonal machinery' of the reformed Post Office is 'overwhelmingly interested in the exterior, rather than the interior of letters, and this function prizes post-letters for their material ability to document human interaction by bearing traces of their own origin and passage'.[187] Both Robert and Frank operate on the premise that it is possible to understand someone from their exterior, and Lucy Audley and Anne Clifton use this assumption to their advantage by manipulating information seekers to take them at face value. Just as Robert questions his sanity as he sets-off the defiant but childishly pretty Lady Audley on the express, so too does Frank indignantly defend Anne Clifton when his colleague initially suspects that she has taken the dispatch box: '"She couldn't have carried off such a bulky thing as that, without our seeing it. It would not go into one of our pockets, Tom, and she wore a tight-fitting jacket that would not conceal anything"'.[188] Anne's close-fitting, feminine clothes cannot 'conceal anything', and Frank gullibly reads them on a surface level. Significantly, it is

[185] Stretton, 162-3.
[186] Despotopoulou, *Women and the Railway*, 42.
[187] Thomas, Postal Pleasures, 83.
[188] Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line', 166.

only when Robert scratches the surface of these external signs, literally peeling away the railway labels on one of Lucy's old bonnet-boxes, that he is able to firmly prove that his '"uncle [...] has married a designing and infamous woman"'.[189]

Importantly, both of these narratives utilise the mail network in order to contain these infamous mobile women. *Lady Audley's Secret* conveys Lucy Audley to a *maison de sant* in Belgium, while 'No. 4 Branch Line' exiles Mrs Forbes to Egypt and then Malta. Stretton's narrative ships the new Mrs Forbes (a.k.a Miss Clifton) and Mr Forbes to the postal office in Alexandria on the overland mail route (which we will see more of in Chapter 4). However, the world turns out to be a small place, when Frank, unknowing of the connection between the Forbes and 'Anne Clifton', travels out to look after the postal office following news that Mr Forbes is seriously ill. Notably, Kirkby has interrogated the metaphoric frame of *Mugby Junction*, noting that, unlike the material junction, the fictional junction:

> As a conceit for a railway junction, [...] loses structural integrity through the slipperiness of its metaphoricity. Attending closely to railway infrastructure exposes the pronounced tension between techno-deterministic form and uncontainable imaginative content in Dickens's junction collection.[190]

Kirkby cites Stretton's 'Branch Line 4' as one of the expansive stories that derail *Mugby*'s ties to the junction, posting the reader to the Post Office headquarters of London, as well as to Alexandria, Egypt. However, as the structure of this thesis suggests, a global perspective of the British mail is almost inevitable. This expansiveness is, then, an indication of the structural integrity of Stretton's mail train-framed narrative, in which global exchange and expansion are critical formative and figurative structures for its journey. As Frank takes control of the British postal office in Alexandria and improves circulation, so does he discover Mrs Forbes and the story of her postal betrayal (for the benevolent cause of love and marriage). Even as the narrative closes by exiling the newly widowed Mrs Forbes to a convent in 'Malta, where she would still be under British protection', it places her in another key stopping point on the mail route to India — Malta was visited by British mail packets weekly, to which infrastructure I turn in the next chapter.[191] Stretton's narrative, then, never leaves behind the structure of mail networks, and her deviant character is continually aligned with and mobilised through such postal infrastructures.

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[189] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 259.
[190] Kirkby, 'Railway Infrastructure', 153.
[191] Stretton, 'No. 4 Branch Line', 186.

Finally, scholarship that has discussed Lady Audley's containment has tended to focus on her dispatch beyond 'the track of all railway traffic', but has not acknowledged the importance of mail routes to this exile.[192] Not only do Lady Audley and Robert travel on the famously rapid mail train between London and Dover, they also travel by diligence from Brussels to Villebrumeuse (the diligence was another name for the mail coach, and associated with the better roads that made this form of travel more efficient).[193] Though Lady Audley is exiled from the railway routes, she has not been placed beyond the reach of the post. It is my contention and conclusion here, then, that, though it seems that the narrative neatly ties up its loose ends, the placement of this feminised, and dangerous, postal body on a key mail route, like Mrs Forbes's posting to Malta, in fact leaves these ties loose. Indeed, as Robert receives the 'black-edged letter, written upon foreign paper' from the maison de sant with news of Lady Audley's death, the reader may be left in discomfort at his happy acceptance of the external signifiers of a postal note sent from the home of an infamous usurper of external signifiers and postal infrastructures.[194]

Conclusions

The mail train, then, complicates the scholarly picture of railway mobility in the nineteenth century, adding nuance to a field that has had the tendency to flatten and homogenise such experiences. The speed and rapidity of the mail, as well as its specific infrastructures, were significant to Victorians' understanding of high-speed railway travel in popular, medical and literary discourses. Attending to the specifics of such infrastructure has demonstrated its potential for transformation and disruption to the healthy body. This association becomes a critical narrative device for Braddon in *John Marchmont's Legacy*; here, the mail train crash acts as a catalyst and metaphor for the communicative interception between the key characters of the novel. Furthermore, the mail train becomes central to Braddon's and Stretton's construction of the hyper-feminised proto-femmes fatales of *Lady Audley's Secret* and 'No. 4 Branch Line' respectively. Here the mail's association with homogenous sorting and rapid travel

[192] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 413. See for instance Martin, 'Railway Fatigue'; Tabitha Sparks, 'To the Mad-House Born: The Ethics of Exteriority in *Lady Audley's Secret*', in *New Perspectives on Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, eds. Jessica Cox, Carol V. A. Quinn, and Andy Wible, 19–35 (New York: Brill, 2012).
[193] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 413. See Headrick , *Information,* 187 and Klaus Beyrer 'The Mail-Coach Revolution: Landmarks in Travel in Germany Between the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *German History* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 379. Oxford Academic.
[194] Braddon, *Lady Audley's*, 479.

mobilises feminine characters that continually, and expertly, resist readings through external signifiers. Indeed, the significance of the mail train in these texts points to the global reach of mail infrastructures in the literary imagination, to which this thesis now turns.

CHAPTER THREE

Infrastructure, Imperialism and the Nineteenth-Century Steam Packet

> *The time which such [steam] vessels would require to procure, take in, and discharge cargoes, would render punctuality and regularity, two things indispensably necessary in all mail communications, quite impracticable [….] Steam-boats carrying mails and passengers should be the mail-coaches of the ocean, limited as mail-coaches on land are to cargoes, and as near as possible to the tonnage pointed out in the following pages.*
>
> — James MacQueen, *A General Plan for a Mail Communication by Steam* (1838).[1]
>
> *Queenstown, on the Irish coast, is the port where the liners coming from the United States drop their mailbags off on their way past. The letters are taken to Dublin by express trains always ready to leave. From Dublin, they travel to Liverpool on high-speed steamers—thus beating the fastest ships of the ocean-going companies by twelve hours. These twelve hours saved by the post from America, Phileas Fogg wanted to save as well.*
>
> — Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872).[2]
>
> *If Robinson Crusoe were living abroad at the present day his residence would be sure to be visited by English ships for water or orders; R. Crusoe, Esq., would be appointed postmaster of his lonely island, and would regularly receive a mail-bag with letters and despatches for passing vessels.*
>
> — Anon, *'Ocean Mails', The Graphic*, September 16, 1876.[3]

In 1837, as debates on uniform penny post were gaining traction and the first Travelling Post Offices started running on British railways, James MacQueen, a plantation manager in Grenada and anti-abolitionist, presented a plan for an imperial network of steam packets to the Post Office and Admiralty. The following year he published a pamphlet entitled: *A General Plan for a Mail Communication by Steam between Great Britain and the Eastern and Western Parts of the World*. Post abolition, MacQueen saw the development of an expedited and reliable global communications network as essential for Britain's prospects in the global economy, and here he explicitly ties the

[1] James MacQueen, *A General Plan for a Mail Communication by Steam, Between Great Britain and the Eastern and Western Parts of the World* (B. Fellowes, 1838), 1. Project Gutenberg.
[2] Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* trans. William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 187.
[3] Anon, 'Ocean Mails', *The Graphic*, September 16, 1876, 282. British Periodicals Online.

mail-packet to the British imperial mission. A successful communications network, MacQueen tells the reader, 'gives to every nation an influence, a command, and advantages such as scarcely any thing [sic] else can give', and he argues that it would have an influence surpassing that which 'the direct application of mere physical power can obtain to any government or people'.[4] These steamers, carrying mail, passengers, and limited amounts of cargo, MacQueen asserts, flattering the efficiency of postal infrastructures and the authorities to which he appealed, could become 'the mail-coaches of the ocean'.[5] MacQueen became one of the founders of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, which signed a mail contract with the Admiralty in 1840 to provide the service of two steamships per calendar month, from the English Channel to the West Indies.[6] In 1837 the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company won the contract to carry mails from Britain to Lisbon, and Gibraltar, and in 1840 they became the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) when they took up the contract into the Mediterranean to Malta and Alexandria.[7] Samuel Cunard, of the Cunard Company, won the transatlantic mail contract from Liverpool to Halifax and Boston in 1839.[8] Importantly, as they held a duty to transport the mail in a timely and scheduled manner, steam packets also offered passengers reliable and rapid transport across the world, and thus became the chosen vessels of those who could afford them.

Through this chapter, I demonstrate that the steam packet had an important place in the literary imagination, and was tied to broader discourses and practices regarding international communication and British imperialism. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the bodies who travelled alongside information packets on these global networks were implicated in both the discourses of British imperialism that revolved around the steam packet and the mutable, 'foreign' spaces of the world's oceans. Carrying mails, coals and small amounts of light but valuable goods as cargo, steam packets offered scheduled travel for passengers travelling to across the world.[9] From 1840, the Admiralty

[4] MacQueen, *Mail Communication by Steam*, 1.
[5] MacQueen, x.
[6] 'Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. West Indies Contract. Postage collected at Foreign ports by HM Consuls acting as Packet Agents' (1841) POST 29/29B, Postal Museum Archive, London.
[7] 'Peninsula Steam Navigation Co. Contract for mails, Falmouth, Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon, Cadiz and Gibraltar' (1837) POST 29/23D, Postal Museum Archive, London; Jonathan Stafford, 'A Sea View: Perceptions of Maritime Space and Landscapes in Accounts of Nineteenth-Century Colonial Steamship Travel', *Journal of Historical Geography* 55 (2017): 69-70. Science Direct.
[8] Peter J Hugill, 'The Shrinking Victorian World', in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 77.
[9] See Anyaa Anim-Addo, '"With Perfect Regularity throughout": Hybrid Geographies of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company', in *Water Worlds: Human Geographies and the Ocean*

awarded these ships the prefix RMS, or Royal Mail Steamship, and they became an essential component of maritime infrastructures. Moreover, they appear throughout nineteenth-century British novels: offering George Talboys the opportunity to travel to escape his wife in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) or bringing the unfortunate Henry Dunbar back to Southampton from India in her later book *Henry Dunbar* (1864). They facilitate Lucy Snowe's journey to Belgium in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and would facilitate Marie Melmotte's journey to America if she had the chance in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875). In their ability to transport British bodies abroad, steam packets were a vital part of the infrastructure, and a connecting force, for British imperialism.

This chapter adds to scholarship which, despite the steam packet's importance in both the everyday lives of people and literary imaginations in the nineteenth century, has not yet taken into account the crucial differences between steam packets and general passenger and merchant ships, and their potential as an imaginative space. Scholars such as Margaret Cohen have demonstrated the importance of the steamship as the primary means of transportation in the nineteenth century; Cohen argues in *The Novel and the Sea* (2010) that 'ships transported information, along with people and goods, and remain[ed] one of the most efficient means of global communications until the invention of the telegraph'.[10] Importantly, this chapter demonstrates that, contrary to Cohen's assertion here, steam packets remained the primary means of transporting lettered information across the globe until the late-nineteenth century, and retained their importance alongside the alternative means of communication offered by the telegraph — which I tease out in Sections 3 and 4. For Sophie Gilmartin, 'connection with the sea was almost unavoidable in the Victorian period [….] Many families would have had a relation at sea, on a voyage of emigration, in the navy or merchant marine'.[11] However, Gilmartin does not mention the vital role that packet ships — as distinct from and overlapping with merchant or navy ships — played in the nineteenth-century as a maritime infrastructure. I aim to show, as she argues about other maritime vessels, that

(Oxford: Routledge, 2014) 170; Freda Harcourt, *Flagships of Imperialism: The P&O Company and the Politics of Empire from Its Origins to 1867* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 69; Crosbie Smith, *Coal Steam and Ships: Engineering, Enterprise and Empire on the Nineteenth-Century Seas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 131. Cambridge Core.

[10] Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3-4.

[11] Sophie Gilmartin, '"The Perils of Crossings": Nineteenth-Century Navigations of the City and Sea', in *The Sea and Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Literary Culture*, eds. Steve Mentz and Martha Elena Rojas (New York: Routledge, 2017), 85.

packet ships also facilitated a 'material connection with the ocean through international trade [which] became [a] constant daily procession of indispensable necessities'.[12] In the case of steam packets, these necessities included lettered communication, parcels, periodicals, and newspapers.

Furthermore, for John MacAleer, 'the sea routes along which people, goods, and ideas travelled — the sinews of the British World in this period — provide some of the most interesting examples of reading on the move'.[13] McAleer's study of reading on-board ship raises questions about letters on the move: who were passengers writing to once on-board ship? How did practices around the global circulation of letters provide new opportunities for imagining the world? As Steve Mentz has argued:

> even inside the relatively constrained geographic, linguistic, and cultural borders of nineteenth-century Anglophone literature, responses to the ocean teem with mind-stretching diversity and mutability.[14]

Geographers have also researched the imaginative potential of the ocean: Anyaa Anim-Addom, William Hasty and Kimberley Peters argue that 'shipped mobilities' 'open up new spatial imaginaries for mobilizing a vision of the world that moves beyond the constructed borders of the nation-state, promising a more fluid way of conceptualising territory and interconnection'.[15] The steamship not only offered imaginative potential in the nineteenth century but was embedded in the cultural understanding of movement across the globe.

Steam packet lines, I demonstrate, were among the first to pioneer regularised steam technology, and mail tenders were an essential part of the creation of nineteenth-century steamer lines. The steam packet's importance in both maritime history and the day-to-day exchanges of passengers and communication across the world has ramifications for their significance in the cultural imaginary. Utilising primary sources from The Huntington Library, the Postal Museum Archive and online databases, this chapter transforms our understanding of the steam packet's significance in nineteenth-century literature. This chapter's first section will unpack how the steam packet developed in the early-nineteenth century, and how it rose to prominence on

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[12] Gilmartin, 'The Perils of Crossings', 85.
[13] John McAleer, 'The Empire Reads Back: Travel, exploration and the British World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Edinburgh History of Reading: Modern Readers,* eds. Mary Hammond and Jonathan Rose (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2020*)*, 136.
[14] Steve Mentz and Martha Elena Rojas, 'Introduction: The Hungry Ocean', in *The Sea and Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Literary Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.
[15] Anyaa Anim-Addo, William Hasty, and Kimberley Peters, 'The Mobilities of Ships and Shipped Mobilities', *Mobilities* 9, no. 3 (3 July 2014): 340. Taylor & Francis Online.

international steam routes across the world in the 1830s and 1840s. These routes, I demonstrate, were made possible by the construction of key infrastructures which were financed by mail contracts with the Admiralty. I further establish the steam packet's role in the imperial imaginary of Victorian Britain by examining examples from popular texts, including periodical articles, travel literature, guide-books, imagery, and pamphlets. I aim to uncover both the importance of these infrastructures to international transport and communication, and the myriad ways in which it signifies in a range of nineteenth-century texts. Indeed, I argue that the structural racism of Victorian imperialism shapes the emergence of packet infrastructures in travel literatures.

Building on this picture, I uncover the steam packet's significance in two nineteenth-century novels famous for their concern with travel and imperial mobility. The steam packet, I aim to show, plays a complex role in the imperial imaginary of Jules Verne's 1873 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*. I argue that packet networks structure Verne's French construction of Phileas Fogg's 'English' round-the-world trip and come to exemplify the Brit abroad. In contrast to his servant Passepartout's 'French-ness', Phileas's 'English-ness' offers him the theoretical opportunity to circulate the globe with ease. However, the travel novel, I also demonstrate, is an ideal heteroglossia through which to interrogate the multiplicities the steam packet's metaphorical significance. This aligns my argument with important recent scholarship on imperial media and communication that emphasises the reciprocity associated with imperial communications. While I demonstrate the steam packet's role in both creating and constructing imperial ideologies, I am also attentive to the multiplicities of narrative at work with these infrastructures. Notably, David Finkelstein's study on roving printers in the nineteenth century considers 'what was transmitted back through "imperial" circuits and networks'.[16] Moreover, in her monograph on early-twentieth-century media and communications in India, Chandrika Kaul investigates the reciprocal relationship between communication and media, and imperial 'soft power' and mass nationalisms.[17] The significance and power associated with exchange, and what could be 'transmitted back through "imperial" circuits', is vital to my reading of Bram Stoker's late-nineteenth-century modern-Gothic *Dracula* (1897) in the final section of this chapter. Here, fluid,

[16] David Finkelstein, *Movable Types: Roving Creative Printers of the Victorian World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 5.
[17] Chandrika Kaul, *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience: Britain and India in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4-6.

boundary-crossing travel is reimagined through the journey of the Transylvanian vampire. By contextualising Dracula's journey as a Gothic echo of Fogg's very-British mutiny on-board the *Henrietta*, I argue that steam packets become one of the key signifiers for the blurred temporal boundaries in *Dracula*. Indeed, the regularity of imperial excursion held in the image of the steam packet are a site of threat: once established, the steam packet schedules could become Gothicised as self-perpetuating and monstrous, enabling all sorts of bodies to travel all over the globe.

1. 'Mail-Coaches of the Ocean': The Significance of the Nineteenth-Century Steam Packet

The 'packet' has an important but often historically side-lined role in the history of maritime steam technology. During the nineteenth century, the concept of a steam packet became simultaneously more homogenous, as government contracts legalised the terms on which a ship could carry mail, and more heterogeneous, as 'packets' — i.e., a ship that carried mail — were increasingly conflated with steamships which carried passengers. This conflation was largely because, as we will see, the packets were prestigious passenger liners, carrying mails and passengers across the world. This section initially outlines a history of the use of packet ships in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, before moving on to the development of steam on packet lines in the 1830s and 40s. I aim to uncover the relationship between the private and public in steam packet development — the stress of an unrelenting postal network looms large in the development of steam packet infrastructures. Finally, I explain the impact these infrastructures had on mass-passenger travel and the steam packet's importance in developing conceptions of regular and speedy travel. I focus here on establishing the importance and creation of steam packet infrastructures; so, while the bodies of passengers remain implicit in my thinking, the infrastructures carrying them are at the forefront of my analysis.

The term 'packet boat' came into use in the early-seventeenth century: the name derived from the fact that packet boats originally carried packets of state letters overseas.[18] While in the early-seventeenth century, the packet boat's status as a carrier of state-letters meant that they risked interception from privateers from competing nations like France and Holland, by the mid-seventeenth century conditions were more

[18] Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 160. Open Stacks HE6935.R6, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

stable and two mails a week were being sent to the continent. [19] This included important commercial and political cities such as Paris, the Hague, Brussels, Cologne, and Hamburg. In the eighteenth century, Falmouth became the primary packet port for services to the Iberian Peninsula and Atlantic colonies. As Howard Robinson argues, its extreme westerly position and the castles of Pendennis and St Mawes 'made its anchorage […] one of the safest in the country'.[20] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was also possible to send letters on vessels other than packet ships, and these were known as 'ships letters'. Letters could be handed into the Postmaster at any port where the vessels cast anchor. It was not until the emphatic enlargement of the packet service after the Napoleonic wars that this method of international lettered communication became superseded by postal networks.[21] During the periods of war with France between 1793 and 1815, international packet lines to the American continent and the West Indies became strategically critical for the sending of intelligence. Packets during this period were armed, and under strict orders to safe-guard the mail: if there was a danger of enemy ships capturing the mails, mail bags were to be weighted and thrown overboard.[22] As soon as France and Britain declared peace in 1815, the Post Office renegotiated packet lines between Dover, Calais and Ostend.[23] The development of the packet, then, is tied to its importance as carrying state documents overseas, as well as its association with wartime intelligence.

The historical expansion of mail packet lines in the nineteenth century is difficult to pin down as their development was uneven, and shaped by multiple competing and coordinating forces. However, historical scholarship on steamships has largely ignored packet development. As John Armstrong and David Williams have argued, 'in Britain the steamship preceded the railway by almost twenty years, [and] its diffusion was much more rapid than the railway'.[24] This rapid development took place on smaller, national lines, rather than international lines, notably between Holyhead and Dublin. Early steamships utilised a combination of steam and sail, and continued to do so until the

[19] Robinson, 160.
[20] Robinson, 163.
[21] Robinson, 163-5.
[22] Robinson, 174.
[23] Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (Liverpool: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964), 117. Open Stacks HE6935.R62, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[24] John Armstrong and David M. Williams, 'The Steamship as an Agent of Modernisation, 1812-1840', in *The Impact of Technological Change* (Liverpool University Press, 2011), 166. Jstor.

late-nineteenth century. However, it goes unmentioned in Armstrong's and Williams's historical analysis that it was the postal network which pioneered steamship technology.

The Post Office utilised steam engines as a maritime technology on short routes, such as between Holyhead, Liverpool and Dublin; Milford Haven and Waterford; Donaghadee, Port Patrick and Belfast; and Weymouth and the Channel Islands.[25] The decision by the Post Office to build and manage their own steam vessels seems to stem from institutional scepticism about using competitor, and private, steam vessels as packet ships.[26] The Saint George Steam Packet Company of Liverpool and the Dublin City Steam Packet Company (presumably named with a view to secure the packet tenders) had petitioned the Post Office department to accept a tender for the carrying of mail between Dublin, the Isle of Man and Liverpool. However, the Post Office refused:

> The most decided objection, however, is to be found in the principle of entrusting the practical part of a Service of such extreme importance to the Commercial Interests of the Country to any private Individuals, however respectable they might be. There […] could not be that inducement to perform the Service which the General Post Office must have […] those Mails would only be a secondary object with […] Private Passage Vessels.[27]

The Post Office's refusal to entrust public letters in the hands of private enterprise coincided the decision to commission steamships, the *Lightning* and *Meteor*, to take up the mail route between Holyhead and Dublin in 1821. While the Post Office was building steamships to facilitate national postal circulation and to combat private competition, the government transferred international packet-ships lines to the Admiralty in 1823. The Admiralty had suggested that they could utilise naval sailing sloops as mail packet-ships during peace-time.[28] In just over ten years, this approach would change fundamentally, as the infrastructures and technology for long-distance steamships developed and concern over the Post Office's expenditure were raised by Parliament.

Preceding the questions raised about the relationship between the state and private transport created by the Travelling Post Office, the steam packet generated debate about the role of the free market in state-controlled communications: is international post something that needs to be protected by the state or is it a private endeavour? Moreover, where does the Admiralty fit into this picture? After the Post Office invested in its own steamships for shorter national and international routes, they faced

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[25] Robinson, *Carrying British Mails*, 117.
[26] Robinson, 120.
[27] 'Extract from a Paper transmitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer', (October 11, 1822). POST 29/9. Postal Museum Archive, London.
[28] Robinson, *Carrying British Mails*, 115.

public backlash. In 1830 and 1836, two Reports of Commissioners found the establishment of Post Office steam packets unnecessarily expensive, and in contradiction to precedents followed since 1788.[29] Indeed, in a parliamentary debate on 26th June 1834, Robert Wallace — who later became a key parliamentary voice in favour of the uniform penny post — admonished the Post Office for 'erect[ing] an immense establishment of steam packets' in contradiction to the 'three Commissioners of Inquiry'.[30] He told the House of Commons that the Post Office had built their steamboats 'in a most extravagant manner', and in direct competition to local ventures: 'the result of the monopoly of the Post Office had been the ruin of two out of three families who had embarked their property in the company'.[31] Following the recommendations of the Report of Commissioners into the Management of the Post Office in 1836, the Government transferred all remaining packet services run by the Post Office to the Admiralty.[32]

This transference of Post Office packets to the Admiralty coincided with the race across the Atlantic by Isambard Kingdom Brunel's *SS Great Western* and the British and American Steam Navigation Company's *SS Sirius* — as both ships made it to New York and back in record time, long-distance steamship travel became a viable option for British mails. Able to run whatever the weather or prevailing winds, and therefore throughout the year, the steamship offered international mail services a reliability that could not be achieved by sail alone. As the Admiralty opened tenders for packet routes to private companies, 'the private [steamship] companies [such as the Peninsular Navigation Company, the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and the Cunard Company] were eager to carry the mails on advantageous terms, since several lines wanted the business'.[33] Mail tenders also offered the prestige of the title — especially when the prefix Royal Mail Steamship came into use in 1840 to denote ships carrying the Royal Mail — and guaranteed income throughout the year, regardless of passenger numbers or goods carried. In their bid to retain mail contracts on the terms most advantageous to the service, steamship companies had to invest in regularity and safety, which would have been less important if not for the safety and expeditious

[29] Robinson, 122.
[30] House of Commons Debate. 24. Cols 864-865. June 26, 1834. *Hansard*. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1834/jun/26/post-office#S3V0024P0_18340626_HOC_38
[31] HC Deb. 24. June 26, 1834.
[32] Robinson, *Carrying British Mails*, 122-3.
[33] Robinson, 122.

transmission of the mail. As Peter Hugill has argued, a central part of Samuel Cunard's success was due to the fact that 'most transatlantic mail was financial information, so the safety and regularity particularly stressed by Cunard mattered'.[34] The historian Freda Harcourt has argued that the numbers and quality of ships invested in by P&O 'were geared to the mail service, not to commerce: P&O built expensive steamers because the Admiralty would not allow it to carry mails otherwise, and each vessel had to be able to carry arms'.[35] Furthermore, Crosbie Smith argues that the Admiralty and the Post Office dictated the need for more rapid travel: 'demands for faster communication and greater punctuality, rather than simply by public demands for more rapid passages, or by company desires to show off their latest steamers'.[36] The regularity and safety demanded by the network of the mail drove steamship companies' investment; the steamship lines which became famous for passenger transport grew out of the need for rapid global communication.

Early contract negotiations between the Postmaster General, the Admiralty and private steamship companies demonstrate the central role of the mail to the schedules and practices of steamship lines. In a letter from the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in 1841, the Directors of the Company defer to the regularity demanded by the state:

> I am desired by the Directors of this Company to acknowledge the receipt of your letter […] by which the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty decline entering into the proposition made by the Directors […] objecting to any partial commencement of the company's Contract unless it would ensure a fortnightly despatch without inflicting serious injury […] upon the Public Service, the Directors respectfully submit whether it might not be advisable to postpone the commencement until a sufficient number of the Company's Vessels can be got ready, to carry the whole plan into operation at once.[37]

Punctuality was so central to the new mail tenders that the service could not begin unless it was ready to carry mails fortnightly to the West Indies. Similarly, in the negotiations of

[34] Hugill, 'The Shrinking World', 77.
[35] Harcourt, *Flagships*, 68; Ships were designed to carry arms in case there was need for their redeployment as naval ships during times of conflict. In peace-time packet ships were not armed. It is also worth noting that by the late-nineteenth century, iron-hulled screw-ships were seen as too vulnerable to enemy attack for use in military battles. The Southampton SeaCity Museum 'Southampton Story' exhibition (July 2019) notes that steam-packet ships were so successfully deployed as troop and hospital ships in the Boer War that they were used in the same way in the First World War, and Southampton became the official troop port in both these conflicts.
[36] Smith, *Coal, Steam and Ships*, 9.
[37] 'Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. West Indies Contract' (1841) POST 29/29B.

the conditions of the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company's contract in 1837, the Post Office and Admiralty demanded that the company:

> Convey the mails once a week from Falmouth to Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon, and Gibraltar, on such days as the Postmaster General for the time being may direct [….]
>
> The company not to permit their vessels to be detained or delayed by stopping any longer than is necessary [….]
>
> The vessels to proceed on their respective voyages as soon as the mails are on board; and not to carry so much freight as will impede the conveyance of the mail with due expedition.[38]

From this early contractual exchange, it is clear that by entering into a mail contract, a steamship company was rescinding their rights to schedule their own ships to the Postmaster General, and that the mails retained paramountcy over cargo and passengers. Like the mail train in Chapter Two, the Post Office also prioritised the mobility of the mail on steam packet routes without heeding the steamship companies' need for profitable journeys made possible by the fares of passengers.

However, the association of the mail with regular, safe and rapid ocean travel is not only found in the contractual arrangements between steamship companies and the Admiralty. They also shaped how steamship lines advertised themselves to passengers. From the instigation of steam packet lines in the 1840s, their position as carriers of 'Her Majesty's Mails' was used as a specific advertising tactic in steamship company and agent pamphlets, posters and brochures. The Wheatley, Starr and Co. Agents advertised the *Great Mail Route Direct to California and British Columbia* in 1861 (see Figure 18). Their poster advertises their passenger fares via the West India Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and the Pacific United States Mail Steam Ship Company, claiming this to be the 'shortest, cheapest and only reliable route'.[39] Furthermore, P&O pamphlets and handbooks from 1888 and 1900 also declare the company to be 'Incorporated by Royal Charter', aligning the P&O with its relationship with the Royal Mail (see Figures 19 and 20). In the 1888 pocketbook, held in The Huntington Library, P&O details its routes specifically through their alignment with the mail. In its information on 'Lines and Routes', it specifies that:

> The Company is under contract with Her Majesty's Government for conveyance of Mails to **India, China** and **Australia [**….] The steamers conveying these Mails

[38] 'Peninsula Steam Navigation Co. Contract for mails' (1837) POST 29/23D.
[39] *Great Mail Route Direct to California and British Columbia* (Wheatley, Starr & Company: London, 1861). Rare Books 470471, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

> are despatched from and return to London, thus affording passengers the choice of being conveyed either by sea all the way or across the continent.[40]

This relationship is further highlighted in a section entitled 'Continental Communication and Stopping Places', which labels the steam packets *as* mails: 'The Indian Mails are despatched from **London** every **Friday** at 8 p.m., and the **China and Australian Mails** by P & O., every **alternate Friday**, arriving at **Brindisi** 1 a.m. on **Monday**'.[41] This language collapses the infrastructures and technology of the steamship into the mail. The mail was an essential discursive component of how steam packet companies and

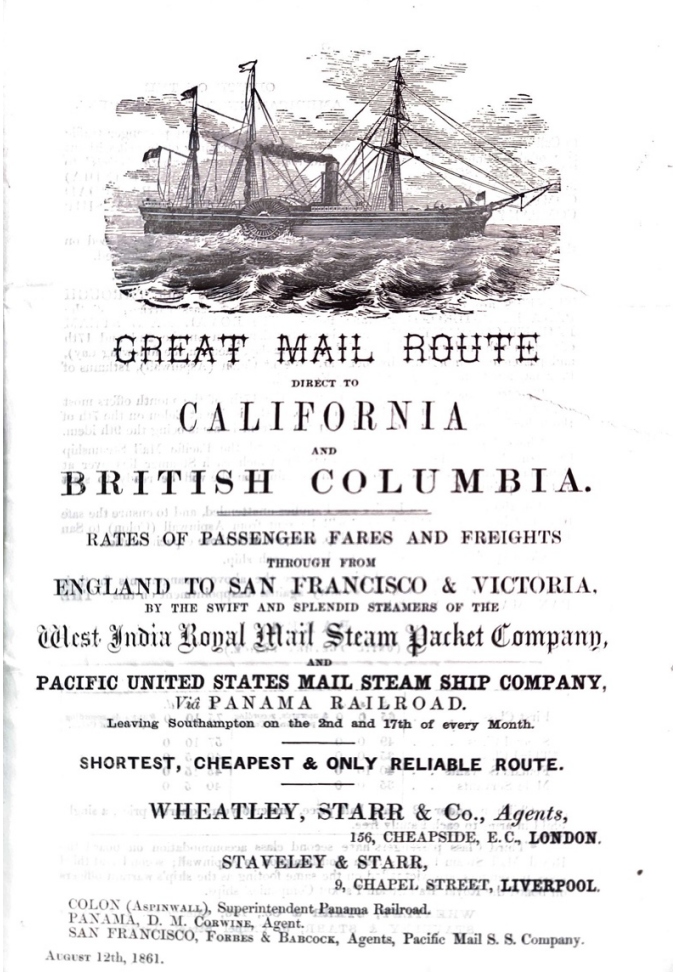

Figure 18 *Great Mail Route Direct to California and British Columbia* (London: Wheatley, Starr & Company, 1861), no. b1407132, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

[40] *Travellers P & O Pocket Book* (London: Nissen & Arnold, 1888), 55. Rare Books 486058, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Emphasis original.
[41] *P & O Pocket Book*, 58. Emphasis original.

agencies were advertising and conceptualising their lines to potential passengers. [42] It is difficult to say exactly what customers understood by this mail ship boast, but we can think about how the inclusion of mail infrastructures and timetables fosters a sense of travelling on a network created for postal circulation. It is a boast about the speed, reliability and safety of the mail.

In the 1850s, a Select Committee on Packet and Telegraphic Contracts reviewed contractual issues with the Admiralty; these included accusations of corruption after the Admiralty awarded a contract to the 'untried and incompetent novices' of a Galway Line, over that of the well-established Liverpool, New York & Philadelphia Steamship Co, of William Inman.[43] Following the Select Committee's report, the Government returned the control of packets to the Post Office in 1860. Martin Daunton notes that the Treasury suggested the Post Office should take into account that 'contracts should be made with dependable firms so that an "apparent saving" did not place commercial and imperial interests at risk as a result of irregularity'.[44] During this period the imperial and commercial enterprises facilitated by steam packets were given new precedence in the tendering of mail contracts with the Post Office. It was an endeavour that moved away from the arming of mail ships for combat — which had been crucial to successful mail circulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — to the vested commercial and imperial endeavours facilitated by the communications network. As MacQueen predicted, these lines came to have a global influence that surpassed that which 'the direct application of mere physical power can obtain to any government or people'.[45] Kaul utilises Joseph Nye's term 'soft power' in regard to the importance of media and communication to the Raj in the early-twentieth century — specifically Nye claims that 'hard' and 'soft' power are related and reinforce each other, and that soft power has 'the ability to get "others to want the outcomes you want" through co-option rather than coercion'. [46] MacQueen utilises a similar language of cultural 'co-option', rather than

[42] The advertisements in the back of 1878 *Official Guide and Album of the Cunard Steamship Service* took the association between these steamship lines and the communication network one step further by utilising postal imagery to sell their wares. The Carte d'or Champagne Company's advertisement page features postcards including the French address of the wine, as does the Gustave Gibert's Champagne company. *Official Guide and Album of the Cunard Steamship Service* (London: Sutton Sharpe, 1878), 250 and 253. Rare Books 486911, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[43] Martin J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015),160.
[44] Daunton, 161.
[45] MacQueen, *Mail Communication by Steam*, 1.
[46] Kaul, *Communications*, 4.

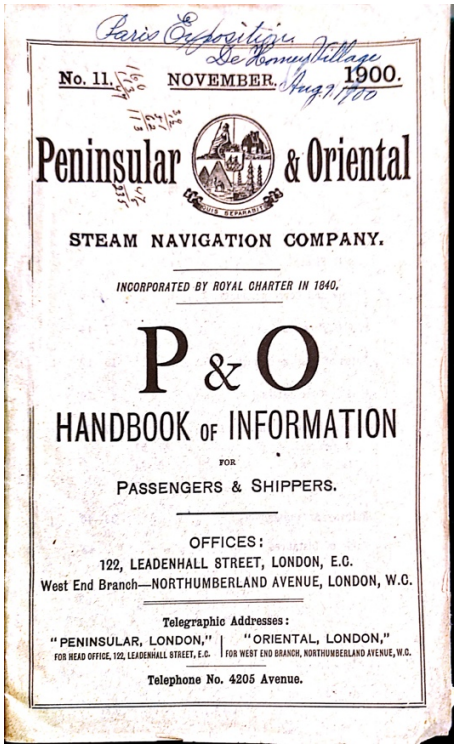

Figure 19. *P&O Handbook of Information* (1900), Box 154, Folder 17_1, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

'coercion'. The steam packet, then, can be read as a proto-soft power strategy in nineteenth-century British imperialism.

Having given an extremely brief overview of some of the key changes which took place in the creation of steam packet lines, it is pertinent here to raise the question of the telegraph. As signalled above by the 'Select Committee on Packet and Telegraph Contracts', the telegraph and steam packet were conceived of as partners in the global communication networks. As the telegraph became an increasingly important global communications network, the steam packet retained its place alongside it as a means for lettered communication. Packets were an essential infrastructure that operated alongside the fast-moving telegraph to transfer information across the globe and to British colonies. Letters were still a vital form of communication as the telegraph restricted the number of words that could be sent. As Roland Wenslhuemer argues: '[t]elegraphy only allowed for brief and to-the-point messages that were often transmitted separately from longer and more detailed information sent by post'.[47] Richard Menke

[47] Roland Wenslhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.

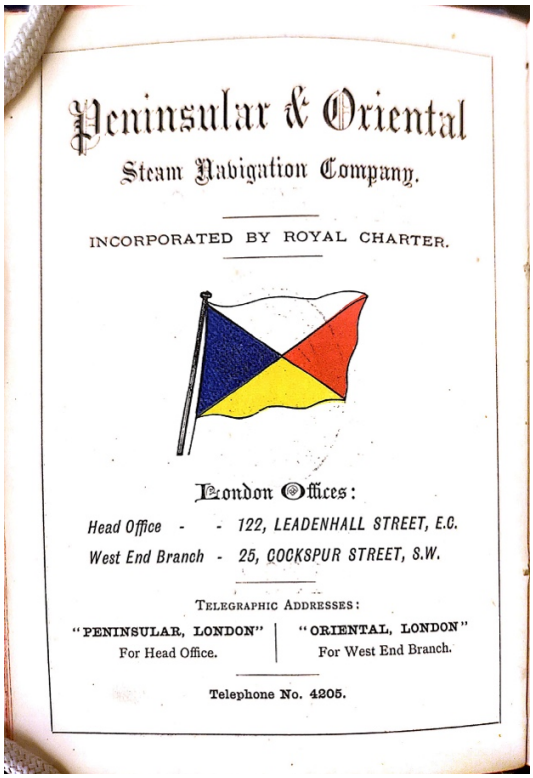

Figure 20. *P&O Pocket Book* (1888) Rare Books 486058_5, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

argues that the 'building of roads and railways and the construction of overland telegraph lines' meant that 'news could now travel with ease around each of the colonies, helping to create a sense of national community'.[48] However, steam packet ships should undoubtedly be added to this list — their routes shaped the infrastructures of international communication lines, including telegraph lines. Steamship companies were not only required to build coaling infrastructures along their routes — a necessity which instigated territorial conflicts, such as Aden — but also other vital infrastructures. As Smith has argued, steamships required:

> considerable property on shore, including head offices in London or Liverpool, offices and agencies in principal ports, hotels and repair facilities and feeder vessels bringing passengers and freight from more remote places [….] [Royal Mail Steam Packet Co., P&O] and [Pacific Steam Navigation Company] adopted the method of contracting with small independent sailing vessels to ship British coal to stations overseas.[49]

Moreover, in contemporary depictions of these communication lines, the steam packet routes almost figure as telegraphic routes. The 1893 Handbook for the P&O, labels

[48] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008),16.
[49] Smith, *Coal Steam and Ships*, 11.

steam packet routes as 'Lines of Communication carried by the steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company' (see Figure 21).[50] For Kaul, 'the telegraph network […] attained maturity and became, for the first time, a viable medium for mass commercial use and an invaluable asset in imperial defence'. [51] As the straight lines stretch across the global oceans in the P&O's handbook, we can begin to conceptualise how the infrastructures of the global steam packet routes were as much a part of an imperial defence system as the telegraph.

As this chapter turns to consider the construction of imperial discourses around the British steam packet, it is worth noting that British steamship companies competed on a global stage for the metaphorical rank of the Blue Riband for record average speeds. While the P&O, Cunard Line and Collins Line remained dominant on the global stage throughout the nineteenth century, they faced considerable competition from international packet lines. In France, the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique and the Messageries Impériales plied important international routes to South America. The German subsidised company Norddeutscher Lloyd, or North German Lloyd, became a critical line on the transatlantic route in the 1850s. Meanwhile, American companies, such as the White Star Line and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, maintained their place in global mail and passenger routes. These steam packet lines appear throughout this chapter, especially where they have implications in the discursive construction of British maritime dominance.

2. 'Great ocean pathways': Steam Packets and the British Imperial Imagination

Though it seems trite to assert that nineteenth-century steam packet line played a vital role in the imperial imagination, it is worth considering their place in the construction of the British nation as imperial and global. In Benedict Anderson's significant conceptualisation of the construction of nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (1983), he considers the newspaper as pulling together spatially distant stories, which fosters a sense of national unity. The stories' unity on the pages of a newspaper, he argues:

> are simply calendrical coincidence. The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection — the

[50] *Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company, Royal Mail Steamers, Guide Book for Passengers* (1893). ephJHK, Box 154, Folder 17, f.149, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[51] Kaul, *Communications*, 4.

> steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time. Within that time, "the world' ambles sturdily ahead.[52]

Anderson's assertion that newspapers construct a sense of shared, homogenous time will resonate with my exploration of how the packet was imagined as creating a nation (here imperial Britain) as bound through time and date; this is not only through lines of shared communication but also due to the importance of and adherence to a shared timetable. However, steam packets, I show through this next section, speak to and complicate Anderson's reading of 'homogenous, empty time'. By considering a range of imaginative and material encounters with mail packets, including travel narratives by Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, I demonstrate that, while the packet's regularly scheduled mobility constructs a sense of timetabled time, their mobility across the world also contests any tangible sense of homogenous time. Instead, steam packets seem to exemplify the multiplicity of experiences of time on global communication routes.

Many nineteenth-century depictions of the steam packet exemplify the significant role it played in facilitating scheduled passenger travel across the globe. As schedules now regulated these routes, maps effectively visualised and imagined the global networks of the packet. In James Wyld's publication of 'The Atlantic Steam Packet Chart' (1842), the lines and distances travelling by steam packets from Britain to North America and the West Indies are depicted with meticulous detail and labelled as 'the Line of Communication'.[53] Wyld was 'Geographer for Her Majesty the Queen and H.R.H. Prince Albert', and famous for his 'great globe', exhibited in Leicester Square between 1851 and 1861. [54] His packet map demonstrates the imaginative potential of creating and visualising the routes of the steam packet: steamships could travel against prevailing winds and currents, and quickly cover the vast distances between Britain and North and Central America. For Jonathan Stafford, steamship technologies marked 'the disenchantment of nature as a sovereign force [….] To a state of knowledge, of certainty, which was expressed in temporal terms'.[55] One review of Wyld's map published in *The Literary Gazette* in 1843, claims that '[t]he Atlantic is now traversed with so much

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[52] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 33.
[53] James Wyld, cartographer, *The Atlantic Steam Packet Chart* (London: James Wyld Geographer to the Queen and H.R.H Prince Albert, 1842). Maps 978.(21.) British Library, London.
[54] Elizabeth Baigent, 'Wyld, James, the Younger',*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 28 May 2015. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30131.
[55] Stafford, 'A Sea View', 73.

Figure 21. *Lines of Communication Carried on the Steamers of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (1893), Box 154, Folder 17, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

certainty and speed by these fine vessels, that parties may safely engage themselves to dinner across its wide expanse, appointing day and hour, as we do in London visits'.[56] Steam packets, with their routinised schedules and contractual demand for quick and efficient travel, can be seen as a vital part in this reimagining — one in which route-ways, ocean currents, and stoppages could be mapped with the knowledge and certainty that Stafford identifies.

Additionally, pamphlets for steam packet companies frequently used maps to illustrate their reach. As seen in Figure 21, these maps also depict the globe-girdling lines that connected an Anglo-Saxon 'motherland' to all parts of the world. The map here operates to reinforce the steam packet's role in traversing the globe. This reinforcement is reflected in other forms, as newspapers and periodicals detailed the exact times and

[56] Anon, 'The Atlantic Steam-Packet Chart', *The Literary Gazette*, March 26, 1842, 215. British Periodicals.

rates of travel from Britain to destinations around the world. A feature published in the *Leader and Saturday Analyst* in October 1858, explains in detail the journey times and speeds facilitated by steam packets between Britain and 'far-flung' locations: Buenos Aires is 37 days away on a steam packet averaging 7 ¼ mph; Hong Kong takes 51 days to get to, travelling 7 ¼ mph; while Sydney takes 55 days travelling by steamer at 9 ¾ mph.[57] Packets appear in nineteenth-century ephemera as connecting Britain with the globe through sheer rapidity. In 1867, the San Francisco publisher Turnbull and Smith published *Sketch of the New Route to China and Japan by the Pacific Mail Steamship Co*, which proposes new journey times and demonstrates the global connections facilitated by steam packets:

> The proposed length of the voyage from England to Hong Kong by this route is fifty-four days, divided as follows:—
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | From Liverpool, Southampton or Havre to New York, | 11 days. |
> | " New York, to Aspinwall, | 7 " |
> | " Isthmus transit, | 1 day. |
> | " Panama to San Francisco, | 12 days. |
> | " San Francisco to Yokohama, | 17 " |
> | " Yokohama to Hong Kong, | 6 " |
> | Total | 54 " |
>
> Yokohama to Shanghae [sic], by another Company's ships, 4 1/2 days.[58]

For Anim-Addo, 'the arrival of post and passengers by steamer at island ports of call [in the Caribbean] was "intimately woven into the everyday routine" in colonial port towns'.[59] We can see further evidence in this *Sketch* that steam packet routines were 'intimately woven into the everyday routines' of ports all across the world. The steam packet's mapping in popular pamphlets demonstrates that regular, global travel was understood as facilitated by steam packets and, subsequently, mail lines.

Moreover, steam packet routes were facilitated by the mail trains which I explored in Chapter Two: their routinisation was made possible by the connective lines of mail routes across Britain. A port's place in the network of the mail depended on its

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[57] Anon, 'Mail Steam Packet Lines', *Leader and Saturday Analyst*, October 23, 1858, 1138. British Periodicals Online.
[58] *Sketch of the New Route to China and Japan by the Pacific Mail Steamship Co.'s Through Line of Steamships between New York, Yokohama and Hong Kong, Etc.* (San Francisco: Turnbull & Smith, 1867), 4. British Library Digital Content
[59] Anyaa Anim-Addo, '"The Great Event of the Fortnight": Steamship Rhythms and Colonial Communication', *Mobilities* 9, no. 3 (3 July 2014): 371.Taylor & Francis Online.

connection to the network as a whole. Southampton, for instance, overtook Falmouth as the steam packet port on the English Channel due to the closeness of its connection to London through the South West Railway mail route. In a pamphlet from 1859, arguing the potential for Milford Haven to become a steam packet port, Alfred Brett argues that now the town is connected by the railway, it can compete with the large shipping ports of Southampton, London and Liverpool:

> The completion of these railways will bring Milford Haven in direct communication with London, with the manufacturing districts, and with the whole net-work of the rail throughout England, Scotland and Wales; and will place her on an equality, at least, as regards mail, passenger and goods traffic — time being as much an element of calculation as distance — with any port in the Kingdom. [60]

Though Milford Haven did not reinstate itself as a central node in the infrastructure of the steam packet, the completion of the railway allows Brett to argue that the town has the potential to facilitate steam communication. Its position as an accessible entry port for transatlantic purposes makes it, for the author, a potential node in the network. The maps in the pamphlet include railway lines as well as potential steam packet lines: 'we shall append a map of the Haven, founded on the Admiralty Chart, an outline of the relative positions of Milford and Panama, and a map of the Railway communications'.[61] Railway 'communications' then, are integral to the success of the mail port and how these routes work together are central to the circulation of mail globally.

Despite its association with speed and regularity, the steam packet should not be imaginatively flattened to signifying only speed. It is important to note that, though many of the steam packet depictions I uncover in this chapter view the packet from the perspective of a passenger on a journey or holiday, packet lines were also important as infrastructures which facilitated emigration, particularly to North America and British colonies, such as Australia and India. In the 1850s, the increased space for passengers in screw steamers (as opposed to paddle steamers) meant that packet lines became essential for emigrants seeking First, Second or Steerage class tickets.[62] The income from emigrant passengers became vital to packet ship companies in the mid-nineteenth century, as the British Post Office and Admiralty tightened the subsidies awarded for the

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[60] Alfred Bret, *Importance of Milford Haven as a Mail Steam Packet Station, for Panama, and Other Oceanic Services* (London: Edward Stanford, 1859), 4. Digital Store 8247.b.69.(7.) British Library, London. Milford Haven had been a mail packet town until 1823, when the introduction of steamships changed the infrastructures needed to make a port town a viable option for steam.
[61] Brett, 11.
[62] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 166.

carriage of mail. In the USA (whose government spent less on subsidies for mail ships than the UK), the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's success was largely down to global migration patterns: the company's inception, running steam packets from New York to Grey-town, and then from Panama City up to San Francisco, coincided with the 1852 gold-rush to California. Their use on the emigration route to California cemented the company financially. In her travel narrative of her journey from Boston to San Francisco, Sarah Merriam Brooks recalls the hordes of emigrants on-board the Pacific Mail Steamship Co.'s ship: 'Adams had taken great pains to get this particular berth […] and here I was with apparently no berth at all [….] The noise and confusion, the ringing of bells, the shouting of all to come onboard […] so upset me'.[63] This is not the calm, weather-defying sea venture promised by the steamship, but one thronging with the sonics of mass emigration.

Furthermore, when facilitating the mobility of emigrants, the steam packet most clearly demonstrates its ability to transmit 'back through "imperial" circuits and networks' as Finkelstein might argue. When facilitating emigration, packets become associated with the 'noise and confusion' that Brooks complains of in her travel book. Figure 22

Figure 22. Robert Seymour, *Liverpool and Dublin Steam Packets* (1832), Prints & Drawings, case 93, shelf A, box 115, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

[63] Sarah Merriam Brooks, *Across the Isthmus to California in '52* (San Francisco: C. A. Murdock & Co., Printers, 1894), 13-4. Rare Books 1136. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

shows a caricature by Robert Seymour of the facilitation of stereotyped Irish immigrants by 'Liverpool and Dublin' steam packets. Dated between 1830 and 1832 this, like the 'March of Intellect' depicted in Chapter One, caricatures the association between speedy communication lines and the speedy transmission of vilified Irish immigrants to British shores. The packet was not only a heralded Andersonian keeper of international time and date but also circulated global migration. The interconnectedness between mail lines and immigration and emigration routes will remain important as I turn to the use of the steam packet in the novels of Verne and Stoker.

Additionally, the ability of the mail packet to facilitate and imagine British imperial hegemony remained a recurring theme in nineteenth-century discourse, and it was effective. James Belich argues that that expansion of European countries through colonisation took three forms:

> [N]etworks, the establishment of ongoing systems of long-range interaction, usually for trade; empire, the control of other peoples, usually through conquest; and settlement, the reproduction of one's own society through long-range migration.[64]

As Belich argues, these three forms continually overlapped, and it is also clear that the steam packet is a striking example of enacting all three forms at once. They simultaneously established far-reaching networks that worked to exchange information effectively; they helped reinforce British control in colonised countries by carrying troops and military intelligence; and they facilitated emigration and the spread of 'British values'. In 1853, the *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* published an article on the 'Foreign and Colonial Mail-Packet Service'; in this article global postal circulation and Anglo-Saxonism are conflated:

> The only nation that is like to succeed in establishing the ocean mail-packet lines is America; from which it would appear that the Anglo-Saxon race—who are probably destined ultimately to people the principle portions of the globe—are alone capable of keeping a footing, as it were, on the great ocean pathways.[65]

As well as offering a means of control in colonial countries, the mail-packet was also effective as an imaginary line through which to foster connections and shared superiority among the Anglo-Saxon race. As Kate Thomas explains, the term 'All Red Routes' was used to describe Britain's postal routes, and later telegraph networks, and became a symbol of homosocial blood bonds. For Thomas, it created a sense that 'Anglo-

[64] James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21. ACLS Humanities Ebook.
[65] Anon, 'Foreign and Colonial Mail-Packet Service', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, September 13, 1851, 175. British Periodicals Online.

Saxonism helped by postal networks can overcome geographical boundaries and distance'.[66] Though Thomas is looking at these routes slightly later in the century, we can see their precursors in this extract from *Chambers's Journal* — mail-packets had the imaginative potential to reinforce conceptions of Anglo-Saxon 'superiority' across a colonised globe and create a tangible sense of connection between distant countries in the British Empire.

This complex communications network became a crucial signifier in an imperialist discourse which fostered an ideal global community founded on shared values and advocated that only British paternalism can morally uphold such a community. MacQueen, the founding member of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, from whom we heard at the beginning of this chapter, began his campaign to establish the steam packet route to the Caribbean in order to re-establish and cement British control in colonies emancipated from slavery. As Anim-Addo argues, after making a living in the British Caribbean through slavery, 'MacQueen hoped that steamship communication between Britain and the region would mitigate post-emancipation instabilities, particularly by promoting commerce'.[67] Though parts of his pamphlet utilise jingoist language concerning Britain and power, much of his discourse also advocates a proto 'soft power' that seeks to, paradoxically, create a sense of shared values alongside British paternalism:

> Laying open such a communication would do more to people, to cultivate, and to civilise the world, than any other effort — then all other efforts made by the world at large, when combined and brought together. No nation in the world is so deeply interested in seeing a proper communication through the best of the changes pointed out laid open, as Great Britain; and no other nation could so well undertake it as she can.[68]

For MacQueen, a mail packet communication network would create the opportunity to retain control over the mobility of information in economically-important colonies in the Caribbean, and also effectively reinforce the conception of the British, or, more specifically, English, race as superior in intelligence and civility. MacQueen's pamphlet exemplifies the discursive lines across shared 'British' values and British paternalism that the steam packet could metaphorically cross.

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[66] Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156. Oxford Scholarship Online.
[67] Anim-Addo, 'With Perfect Regularity throughout', 163.
[68] MacQueen, *Mail Communication by Steam*, 100.

In alignment with MacQueen's construction of a British paternalism, popular literature imagined the British steam packet as facilitating the spread of British values to the culturally 'other'. This facilitation can be seen both in MacQueen's epigraph, and in an 1876 article published in *The Graphic* — quoted in the epigraph of this chapter — which reimagines the civilising force of the mail-packet through the infamous coloniser, Robinson Crusoe:

> If Robinson Crusoe were living abroad at the present day his residence would be sure to be visited by English ships for water or orders; R. Crusoe, Esq., would be appointed postmaster of his lonely island, and would regularly receive a mail-bag with letters and despatches for passing vessels. Mr. Friday would probably act as assistant postmaster […] for letters, newspapers, and ocean mail steamers are the civilisers of mankind.[69]

Here, an imagined nineteenth-century Crusoe becomes integrated into the postal system, even as it is stuck on a desert island — the reach of the nineteenth-century postal network is emphatically global. Friday also becomes a part of these infrastructures, which work to 'civilise' the indigenous man. As Jules Verne notes in his novel *Topsy Turvey* (1889): 'But there are no desert islands left nowadays—the English have taken them all'.[70] *The Graphic*'s article ends with a prolonged exultation of the steam packet's position as this civiliser, claiming that the Ocean Mail Packet Service is:

> the life-blood of foreign commerce. It has contributed and will contribute to the spread of law and liberty-loving race of people [and] enable all civilised races of mankind to have social, commercial, and intellectual intercourse with one another.[71]

The steam packet circulates the 'life-blood' of British values and modernity across the globe, and becomes a rhetorical trope through which to imagine, describe, and justify the British imperial mission, connecting periphery to the 'civilised' bloodline of the motherland.

As an imaginative infrastructure that fostered and facilitated British paternalism through the empire, the steam packet could also codify different forms of travel as inherently British and white. Anthony Trollope utilises this codification in his travel book *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859). Notably, he wrote this memoir while assessing the postal network of the Caribbean in 1858.[72] In this text, Trollope racially

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[69] Anon, 'Ocean Mails', 282.
[70] Jules Verne, *Topsy-Turvy* (1889), Quoted in and trans. Arthur Evans, 'Jules Verne's English Translations', *Science Fiction Studies* 32, no. 1 (March 2005): 94. Depauw University Libraries.
[71] Anon, 'Ocean Mails', *The Graphic*, 283.
[72] Julian Stray, 'Antony Trollope: Pioneer of the Postal Service', *Cross Post*, 14, no 1 (Autumn 2011): 94. Open Stacks, Postal Museum Archive, London.

codifies specific methods of travel as white, 'rational', Anglo-Saxon bodies travel aboard the steam packet. In contrast, the bodies of Afro-Caribbean people, as well as Spanish and French colonisers, are held in perpetual stasis by 'inferior' technologies. Though Trollope is pro-abolition throughout the text, he labels the refusal of the Afro-Caribbean people to engage in labour that British authorities had previously forced them to undertake as slaves with the racist stereotype of laziness. Critics have discussed the racial tensions and hypocrisy at work in Trollope's depiction of Afro-Caribbean people, who had won emancipation in British Jamaica, but were still subjugated under slavery in Spanish colonies. Despite emancipation, the British still held deep-rooted racism against Afro-Caribbean people, and this racism is explicitly at work in Trollope's text. As James Buzard argues, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* consistently ascribes racial divisions to providential power:

> Always and everywhere, the ["inferior" race] should service and the ["superior"] command; the one supplied the brawn, and the other brains and drive. Yet a major theme [of this] travel book [….] Was that the dark man was reneging on his part of the providential bargain.[73]

Furthermore, Robert Aguirre demonstrates that though Trollope 'remains wary of US power, he also echoes western industrialists and railway promoters in representing dark-skinned locals as obstacles to the mobility of goods, persons, and mail'.[74] It becomes clear in Trollope's text that his aim as Postal Surveyor is postal efficiency in British colonies in the Caribbean, but also that this aim is being facilitated and shaped by racist structures that prioritise the white man.

Moreover, postal routes were so intrinsically associated with racial divisions in post-emancipation areas of the Caribbean, that the Post Office reported that emancipated Afro-Caribbean people withheld their labour in facilitating postal circulation. In 1840, a letter from the Post Office to Viscount Palmerston, Foreign Secretary, explains the difficulties of postal circulation from post-emancipation British Caribbean to Spanish-colonised Caribbean islands where slavery was still legal. The agent writes:

> At the Havana it becomes a much more serious affair from the fact that white men and even free men of colour refuse to perform such services as have heretofore been usually performed by slaves [….] the Mails from England & from the Bahamas were brought to the Havana on the 11th Inst. by the Mail boat "Sarah Anne" of Napau, which happens to be navigated exclusively by men

[73] James Buzard, 'Portable Boundaries: Trollope, Race, and Travel', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 32, no. 1 (1 March 2010): 9. Taylor & Francis Online.
[74] Robert Aguirre, '"Affairs of State": Mobilities, Communication, and Race in Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 37, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 15. Taylor & Francis Online.

> of colour of free condition, and these free British seamen, each under these extraordinary circumstances, were not suffered to land with the mails; so that the master and the Officer in charge are obliged to borrow the assistance of white sailors from a neighbouring ship, to carry the bags on shore to this Consulate.[75]

Noticeably, the ship seems to foster a heterogeneous community, in which multiple ethnicities operated British ships. As Ray Costello argues in *Black Salt* (2012), during imperial expansion in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, sailors from 'the African Diaspora under British rule [as well as] black seamen from South Africa and Somalia [and] non-British territories [...] were to be found on British merchant ships'.[76] The diverse community on-board ship is a markedly different space to on-land postal routes, which retain their associations with slavery for both white and free black men. The running of mail from packet ships in the Caribbean held a historical and symbolic violence against black bodies, one that we have seen coursing through MacQueen's conception of mail steam communication. However, as this note to the Foreign Secretary demonstrates, from the perspective of the British Government, emancipated people protesting their freedom from slave-labour were obstacles to the effective circulation of information in the West Indies.

Significantly, Trollope utilises the infrastructures of the packet in order to signal the immobility of Caribbean bodies in contrast to the mobility of western Anglo-Saxon bodies in *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*. The opening sentence establishes the immobility of the vessel in which Trollope finds himself passenger:

> I am beginning to write this book on board the brig [….] At the present moment there is not a puff of wind, neither land breeze nor sea breeze; the sails are flapping idly against the masts; there is not motion enough to give us the command of the rudder.[77]

Berating his cluelessness at being 'duped' into travelling on-board an inefficient sailing boat, Trollope asserts that the best way to travel in the West Indies, is to do so via St. Thomas, a steam packet port:

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[75] F Turnball to Viscount Palmerston, letter, 18 Dec 1840, 'Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. West Indies Contract. Postage collected at Foreign ports by HM Consuls acting as Packet Agents', POST 29/29B, Postal Museum Archive, London.

[76] Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), xviii. Jstor; Costello also notes that as the technologies of the steamship changed, so too did the labour of black men on ships (and not often for the better); it was assumed that African and West Indian men were more suited to the 'environment of the hot engine room' than their white counterparts (Costello, xviii).

[77] Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1999), 5.

> From Demerara to the Isthmus of Panamá, you go by St. Thomas. From Panamá to Jamaica and Honduras, you go by St. Thomas. From Honduras and Jamaica to Cuba and Mexico, you go by St. Thomas. From Cuba to the Bahamas, you go by St. Thomas—or did when this was written. The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company dispense all their branches from that favoured spot.[78]

The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and its infrastructural hub of St. Thomas, Trollope asserts, offers the most 'respectable, comfortable, well-to-do route' in the Caribbean — he explicitly links the route of the mail to the comfort of those white 'well-to-do' bodies travelling across the West Indies. By opening the text with such a sharp contrast between mobile and immobile bodies, and the infrastructures that allow such bodies to be mobile, Trollope sets up the racial binaries that he comes to express later in the text. Significantly, the mail perpetuates these binaries.

Furthermore, the mail also becomes a route-way that facilitates what Buzard calls the 'portable boundary of racial identity'; Buzard argues that 'for the English traveller of Trollope's day, to move inside the portable boundary of the Anglo-Saxon race was to carry one's own "little England" everywhere one went'.[79] When regretting the decision to take the cheaper option of the sailing boat, Trollope identifies the elements of travel on-board the *RMS Atrato* that he now misses:

> Oh, for the good ship 'Atrato', which I used to abuse with such objurgations because the *steward* did not come at my very first call; because the *claret* was only half *iced*; because we were forced to close our little *whist* at 11 p.m., the *serjeant-at-arms* at that hour inexorably extinguishing all the lights! [….] What would I give for the 'Atrato' now; for my berth, then thought so small; for its *awning*; for a bottle of its *soda water*; for one cut from one of all its *legs of mutton*; for two hours of its *steam movement*! And yet it is only now that I am learning to forgive that withered apple and that ill-iced claret.[80]

The 'good ship' Arato is a good ship because it creates what Buzard describes in his analysis of Trollope's travel writing. The mail ship encourages travellers to engage with travel as an opportunity to recreate — if, to Trollope, not very successfully — a little England in spaces across the world. Indeed, we can further conceptualise steam packets as aligned with John Plotz's portable property. For Plotz, such objects export and produce 'a sense of identity that travels without decaying, and also without spreading out, that is successfully exportable and yet potentially not diffusionist'.[81]. Though Plotz is discussing the status of objecthood here, his assertion that such

[78] Trollope, 6.
[79] Buzard, 'Portable Boundaries', 9.
[80] Trollope, *West Indies*, 7. Emphasis my own.
[81] John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 20-1.

property is not 'diffusionist' resonates with Trollope's construction of the steam packet here. Though the steam packet offers a poor emulation of a little England, it is one that remains firmly white and Anglo-Saxon, while non-Anglo-Saxon bodies travel on tired sailing boats. The steam packet, then, becomes one of the mechanisms through which the travelling English recreate their own England wherever they travel, 'creating an *enveloping* little England abroad'.[82]

Significantly, though the steam packet was constructed as regular, and operating without heed to the elements, these ships were not entirely free from the potential 'violent whims of the sea' that are associated with the maritime and its imaginary construction. For Cohen, sea fiction, in particular, can be seen as 'unmoored from divine authority, [and] the heroes of sea fiction perform their capacity to negotiate the edges of the unknown, expanding, chaotic, violent, and occasionally beautiful sublunary realm'.[83] Her reading raises the question of whether the spaces of steam packets, with their scheduled, circulatory, and globalised mobility, were also imagined as traversing this chaotic, sublunary realm. In an early example of steam packet use, the narrator of an article from *The Literary Chronicle* in 1825 finds himself on-board a steam packet headed to Ireland from Liverpool. In this article, the arrival of a storm interrupts the pleasant events of the evening:

> One of those gales, not unfrequent at this season, began to collect, and gathered force with the approaching darkness,—the winds swept hollowly over the "vastly deep,"—the masts and the shrouds crackled,—the vessel heaved with violence,—and the turbulent waves began to hold a violent contention with its mighty wheels; the metamorphosis of countenances was wonderful, and the progress from smiles and chats to pale despondency and silence, to any but a suffering spectator, would have formed a most amusing exhibition.[84]

Though significantly earlier than the articles we have seen so far, this is a marked moment in the early history of the steam packet in which it is not depicted as emancipated from the limitations imposed by nature, but beholden to the Gothic storm that overtakes the ship. Or, to be more specific, *travelling* on-board this packet is not experienced as being emancipated from nature. Instead, those on-board experience the adverse effects of nature on their bodies: 'Our stomachs', the narrator tells us, 'as if in revenge for the severe duty we had imposed on them, shewed a most rebellious spirit,

[82] Buzard, 'Portable Boundaries', 6. Emphasis my own.
[83] Cohen*, Novel and the Sea*, 3.
[84] A Lost, 'The Steam-Packet', *The Literary Chronicle*, 15 January 15, 1825, 43. British Periodicals Online.

and caused the speedy emigration of some of their contents'.[85] The rewriting of 'speedy emigration' here explicitly plays with the rhetoric associated with the steam packet and undercuts the ideal of steam as operating in the face of all weather.

Brooks also describes her experience of intense seasickness on the first leg of her journey to California via Greytown, Panama. Having been placed with three families in a one-family state-room (as another group has stolen her booked berths), Brooks, her child and the other women experience debilitating seasickness on-board the Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamer.[86] Brooks describes this with visceral detail, especially considering that she published her travel narrative some 40 years after the purported event. She describes the onset of seasickness during dinner with her daughter:

> I took Lena and found my way to my room, too sick to do anything but creep into our berth, as we thought for a little while, but which neither of us left for two days and nights [….] We had come into the Gulf Stream, and, of course, a much warmer climate, and found the garments we left in New York in anything but comfortable. I was wondering whether I should make an effort to get up and dress, or lie quiet and die easy.[87]

Brooks creates a sense of claustrophobia here: she shares one small berth with her sick child, and is unable to move for sickness to change out of her winter clothes into those more appropriate for the heat of the Caribbean. It is only when friends force her to go out on-deck that Brooks begins to improve; she counters the discomfort and close-quarters of the state-room by sleeping on-deck each night.[88] The steam packet, then, had the potential to immobilise white, Western bodies, even while facilitating their movement. Despite the rhetoric of imperial advancement, the steamship was still a ship, liable to difficult weather and bodily intrusion.

Indeed, in some articles, the steam packet itself is depicted as a monstrosity of another, oceanic world. In 'Ocean Mails', from *The Graphic*, the sheer enormity of the steam packet renders it a monstrosity. Initially 'huge, heavy sacks' are transferred from the mail train by 'stalwart dock labourers on-board a monster steamer'.[89] Later, the narrator again considers the sheer quantities of lettered communication transferred by steam packets:

> The great majority of bags contain newspapers, books, and other printed matter. A ton of letter bags consists of about sixty thousand letters, and a ton of

[85] Lost, 43.
[86] Brooks, *Across the Isthmus*, 16.
[87] Brooks, 16-17.
[88] Brooks is able to sleep on deck all night because she meets an acquaintance and her husband, who is able to act as chaperone to Brooks and her daughter.
[89] Anon, 'Ocean Mails', *The Graphic*, 282.

> newspaper bags of about ten thousand newspapers. Nearly a hundred monster mail steamers, worth five million pounds sterling, manned by ten thousand seamen, engineers, firemen, waiters, and other servants, and running a distance of two million miles annually, are owned by the Southampton ocean mail packet companies.[90]

Here, the size of the steam packet and the sheer quantities of written communication transported by them become incomprehensible. Furthermore, the packet's heterogeneous community that becomes homogenised into 'ten thousand seamen' and timetabled synchronicity that allows it to travel 'two million miles annually' renders it monstrous. The slippages between the steam packet's potential as homogenous and heterogenous create a sense of otherness and a monstrosity out of the communications infrastructure.

'The Mail-Packet Town' by John Capper, published in *Household Words* in 1855, roots the monstrosity of the steam packet in its relationship to the 'otherness' of the sea. Capper tells the reader that, in the distance, 'a puff of smoke and a black hull of a ship are perceptible', and as the 'gigantic Magdalena' speedily makes her entrance:

> A score or two of shoremen halloa to a score or two of sailors; and, after a great deal of hard swearing, coaxing, and struggling, they have lassoed the ocean monster by means of hempen ropes, then they pass heavier cables round the capstans and the ship is made prisoner.[91]

The steam packet emerges from the ocean as a monster to be tamed and made prisoner by those on the shore. This language counters the imagery and rhetoric surrounding the mail packet that we saw at the beginning of this section. In this article in *Household Words*, the rhetoric surrounding the steam packet, which heralded it as part of Anglo-Saxon modernity, is undermined, and instead, the steam packet seems to belong to another world.

Additionally, depictions of packets became further complicated by the fact that they transported mail and bodies of all nationalities all over the empire, including Britain. As the narrator watches the boxes in 'Ocean Mails', he comments on the myriad of global locations to which they are addressed: 'names as Bombay, Hong Kong, Point de Galle, Aden, Melbourne, Hobart Town, Aukland, &c., and I soon discovered that an Overland Indian and Australian Mail was being shipped'.[92] While Capper's article depicts Southampton as a multinational hub:

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[90] Anon, 282.
[91] John Capper, 'A Mail-Packet Town', *Household Words* X, no. 250 (January 6, 1855): 503. Dickens Journals Online.
[92] Anon, 'Ocean Mails', *The Graphic*, 282.

> The neighbourhood of the Southampton docks is now crowded with eating-houses, restaurants, Oriental, American, Dock, Temperance, and Railway hotels, hotels Francais, and Spanish fondas. Amongst the seamen of the East and Wester India and American steamers, are great numbers of negroes, lascars, creoles, Arabs, mulattoes, and quadroons.[93]

Capper's tone here is not wholly negative about this multi-nationality; however, the article makes space to list, catalogue and identify the multiple nationalities and races that can be seen and heard in Southampton Docks. This multiplicity and heterogeneity of cultures depicted in the 'Mail-Packet Town' of Southampton resist the branding of steam packets as simply bringing homogenous Anglo-Saxon culture to 'uncivilised' countries across the world. Instead, the steam packet is a force for breaking the boundaries of imperial homogeny and bringing heterogeneity to British shores.

Furthermore, in Charles Dickens's *American Notes* (1842), the mail packet facilitates his journey from Liverpool to America; however, the mail ship does not operate with a smooth mobility, especially for its passengers. The opening lines of the travel book initially play into the patriotic ideal of the steam packet. Dickens explains that he has been allocated a 'state room […] on board the Britannia steam packet, twelve hundred tons burthen per register, bound for Halifax and Boston, and carrying her Majesty's mails'.[94] Despite his gushing surprise at being allocated staterooms, these berths were also tiny — Brooks's dismay at her overcrowded and claustrophobic stateroom is testament to how small these rooms were. Moreover, upon viewing the majesty of the RMS packet, Dickens imagines the reactions of all who look on: 'every finger is pointed in the same direction; and murmurs of interest and admiration — as "How beautiful she looks!" "How trim she is!" — are heard on every side'.[95] Despite the packet's spectacle, however, the passengers have to wait, irritably, in the fog, while the mails are loaded:

> To and fro, to and fro, to and fro again a hundred times! This waiting for the latest mail-bags is worse than all. If we could have gone off in the midst of that last burst, we should have started triumphantly: but to lie here, two hours and more in the damp fog, neither staying at home nor going abroad, is letting one gradually down into the very depths of dullness and low spirits.[96]

The mobility of the passengers is marred here by the very infrastructure that is meant to facilitate it. Instead of grandly steaming out of the port once aboard, the passengers must wait until the final shipment of mail is aboard the ship. These differing mobilities

[93] Capper, 'Mail-Packet Town', 502.
[94] Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.
[95] Dickens, 14.
[96] Dickens, 18.

collide in Dickens's opening chapter on his travels in America and are suggestive of the different experiences of bodies aboard the postal ship. While Dickens experiences immobility as a passenger — underpinned by the pathetic fallacy of the stillness of the fog — the mail experiences consistent mobility and prioritisation.

Moreover, the ship itself comes to be inflicted by the weather; Dickens experiences the utmost discomfort on his journey to America (so much so that he would return on a sailing ship). Three days into the voyage the ship is confronted by a 'heavy sea […] and a head-wind', which, though affecting the bodies of those passengers on-board, Dickens imagines as impacting the body of the ship:

> Imagine the ship herself, with every pulse and artery of her huge body swollen and bursting under this maltreatment, sworn to go on or die. Imagine the wind howling, the sea roaring, the rain beating: all in furious array against her. Picture the sky both dark and wild, and the clouds, in fearful sympathy with the waves, making another ocean in the air. Add to this, the clattering on deck and down below; the tread of hurried feet [….] every now and then, the striking of a heavy sea upon the planks above.[97]

The steam packet becomes fallible to the difficult weather at sea, and 'she' comes to embody the pain and discomfort felt and performed by the passengers and those who work on-board. The steam packet then, as well as operating within a rhetoric of order, imperialism and Anglo-Saxon supremacy, also has the potential to become a disordered and heterogeneous space, especially for passengers.

3. 'We expect to land in Egypt within a mail service of seven days from London': Travelling the World with the Mail

I turn now to a sustained reading of the steam packet in literary fiction concerned with imperialistic travel. Infrastructures of international post routes shape Jules Verne's famous depiction of an Englishman travelling across the world in *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872). By uncovering the importance of the postal infrastructures surrounding the steam packet, this section argues that the postal networks to and from Britain become an essential way of monitoring distance and time in contemporary travel guides on round the world trips — in particular, those published by Thomas Cook and the Union Pacific Railroad Company. I argue, then, that Phileas Fogg's character and the form of the normal suggest the centrality of the postal network to this imagined journey. This section reveals the mail routes that both facilitate and hinder Fogg's

[97] Dickens, 26 and 27.

'English' travel around the world, arguing that Verne's French perspective works to undercut the British imperial rhetoric of their maritime dominance.

As Phileas Fogg formulates his infamous £20,000 bet with his gentlemen's Reform Club, his friend John Sullivan explains the itinerary required for a 'tour du monde' in eighty days: 'Yes indeed, good sirs,' confirmed Sullivan, 'Eighty days, now they've opened the section of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway from Rothal to Allahabad. This is the calculation done by the *Morning Chronicle*'.[98] The following table appears in the original French version of the text:

De Londres à Suez par le Mont-Cenis et Brindisi, railways et **paquebots**	7 jours
De Suez à Bombay, **paquebot**	13 "
De Bombay à Calcutta, railway	3 "
De Calcutta à Hong-Kong (Chine), **paquebot**	13 "
De Hong Kong à Yokohama (Japon), **paquebot**	6 "
De Yokohama à San-Francisco, **paquebot**	22 "
De San-Francisco à New-York, railroad	7 "
De New-York à Londres, **paquebot** et railway	9 "
Total	80 ".[99]

I use the original French here to highlight the use of 'paquebot' throughout this timetable (Verne uses the term throughout the text). This is usually translated into English as steamer or steamship. However, the word derives from the English word 'packet-boat' or 'packet-ship', and is used to designate ships that carried mail.[100] I do not want to claim anything against William Butcher's excellent, recent translation of Verne's text, which I will be using as my English translation throughout this section (in fact, it is suggestive of the ubiquitous-ness of mail packets as steamers).[101] However, this translatory slippage from 'paquebot' to steamship points to the argument I want to make in this section about

[98] Verne, *Around the World*, 19.
[99] Jules Verne, *Le Tour Du Monde En Quatre-Vingts Jours* (Paris: J. Hetzel et Cie., 1878), 13. RB 751430, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Emphasis my own.
[100] This slippage makes the Google Translate of the French Wikipedia page for 'paquebots' interesting reading as, due to this slight and common mistranslation, the page seems to claim that steamships were first used in France in the seventeenth century. This side-note to add to the argument that 'paquebots' have an important and distinct history and signification to other steamships.
[101] Arthur Evans gives an excellent explanation of the translatory problems Jules Verne's texts have faced, including that poor nineteenth-century translations are still in circulation today, and are the most prominent reason why Verne is still not acknowledged as an influential, adult-fiction author in Britain and North America. See 'Jules Verne's English Translations'.

Around the World in Eighty Days: the route Verne's characters follow relies on the infrastructures built to circulate information. Moreover, it also raises questions about Verne's text: what was the shared cultural exchange between France and England exemplified by packet-boat/paquebots? What can this translation issue tell us about the importance of the packet to the construction of 'Englishness' in Verne's central, travelling character? And can revisiting this text with 'paquebots' in mind elucidate something that may have been missed otherwise?

Anglo-French relations undoubtedly shaped the development of British packet ships. The timetables, destinations and home-ports of British steam packets were continually changed based on periods of peace and war throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In his early, but comprehensive, work on the development of the British Post Office, Howard Robinson explains the interchange between Franco-Anglo mail routes:

> Between wars, the postal service with France was carried on under terms made with the French postmaster general. In 1698, for example, such a postal treaty provided for mails twice a week between London and Paris [….] English boats carried English mails to Calais and French *paquebots* delivered the French mails at Dover.[102]

As noted in Section 1, war and peacetime relations with France continued to affect packet ships into the nineteenth century. During the period of war with France from 1793 to 1815, the mail packet's expansion to take up routes to the West Indies and the American continent made their ability to send intelligence to naval fleets vital to war strategy.[103] Moreover, Verne's round-the-world narrative of 1872 followed key developments in communication infrastructures for France. As Peter Sinnema has shown, *Around the World*:

> followed on the heels of two distinct technological break-throughs strategic in the expansion and solidification of the European empire: the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, a Franco-Egyptian-financed venture in which Britain soon secured a controlling interest; and the completion of the British-built railway across India in 1870.[104]

The Suez Canal was not only a technological break-through but an engineering feat that centred on a Franco-Anglo competition for control of a critical information route-way through Egypt. Britain had completed its railway across the Isthmus of Egypt in 1853

[102] Robinson, *British Post Office*, 161.
[103] Robinson, 173.
[104] Peter W. Sinnema, 'Around the World without a Gaze: Englishness and the Press in Jules Verne', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 36, no. 2 (2003): 136. Jstor.

and was opposed to a French-controlled canal being engineered across the country. Verne's text itself then is shadowed by a communications race among some of the major imperial powers of the globe. It is, therefore, prescient to consider Verne's novel in the postal contexts that provide a backdrop for his text.

Verne's British, or, more accurately, English hero, takes a decidedly postal route around the world. Fogg sets off with his servant Passepartout overland to Brindisi, through the Suez Canal to Aden and then to Bombay (Mumbai) — essentially following the overland mail route, which I discuss in the next chapter — across India to Calcutta (Kolkata), from there catching numerous steam packets to get to Japan and San Francisco, overland across America and then across the Atlantic. As he gathers his small amount of belongings to embark upon this trip, Fogg deliberately picks up his '*Bradshaw's Continental Railway, Steam Transit and General Guide*, which would provide him with all the information he needed for his travels'.[105] The *Bradshaw's Guide* becomes one of the key methods through which Fogg plans his trip, and would have specified the complex interchange of railways and ships which Fogg needs to manoeuvre in order to win his bet. The *Bradshaw's Continental Railway, Steam Transit and General Guide* during the period Verne was writing included sprawling and complex timetables of train times across Europe. Importantly for me here, these Bradshaw guides also detail the movements and timetables of 'steam packets' across Europe, listing the different mail companies through which one could travel. Steam packets are listed from pages 187 to 218 in the 1866 edition, and from pages 302 to 333 in the 1875 edition; they also further specify the best mail packet companies on which to travel in a particular country.[106] For Edmund Smyth, 'Verne's novels do indeed contain a vast amount of information culled from the science of his day, including engineering, astronomy, physics, geology and oceanography'.[107] The insertion of the Bradshaw guide becomes part of the construction of realism in Verne's text, emphasising it as a journey that could, in the very near future, actually be achieved. As soon as he packs his bag with his Bradshaw, Fogg is ready to negotiate the networks of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, and the Cunard Line.

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[105] Verne, *Around the World*, 23.
[106] *Bradshaw's Continental Railway, Steam Transit, and General Guide, for Travellers Through Europe* (London: W.J. Adams, 1866), 187-218. Google Books; *Bradshaw's Continental Railway, Steam Transit, and General Guide, for Travellers Through Europe*, no 330 (London: W J Adams, 1875), 302-333. Google Books.
[107] Edmund. J. Smyth, 'Verne, Science Fiction, and Modernity: An Introduction', *Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 4.

Furthermore, the importance of postal networks to round-the-world travel was not restricted to Verne's fictionalised journey, or to Bradshaw's Guides. In Thomas Cook's *Letters from the Sea and from Foreign Lands* (1873), advertisements for round-the-world tickets to India and America feature mail lines as their preferred routes for passengers:

> Mssrs. COOK, SON & JENKINS, as agents for the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, are in a position to issue these "All Round the World Tickets" [….] The quotations for the Atlantic portion of the voyage are given by the Tickets for the Cunard and Inman Lines.[108]

These famous mail steamer lines are an integral infrastructure through which Cook, Son & Jenkins can operate their round the world tour. Moreover, in a pamphlet from 1871 entitled *Around the World by Steam*, advertising the Union Pacific Railroad Company in San Francisco, global travel is explicitly linked to communication networks:

> To-day [a traveller or business man] packs his portmanteau for a run around the globe, transacts important business, and is back in his office in London or New York in ninety days, after having enjoyed an agreeable tour, in which he is always in communication with the chief centres of business by telegraph and steam post routes.[109]

The key to successful round the world tours is the ability to travel alongside the mails. As the Railroad Company advertises 'The Pacific Mail Steam Ship Line [which] forms a connection with the Pacific Railway [creating] a through-line from California to Japan and China'.[110] In order to travel quickly and efficiently, and to remain connected to home, one must travel with the post on-board mail ships. The Union Pacific Railroad Company even details that 'from Yokohama a branch steamer will convey passengers and mails, immediately on their arrival from San Francisco, to Hioho, Nagasaki and Shanghai'.[111] Indeed, Verne's text directly mimics this language of scheduling: '[Yokohama] is an important port of call for the Pacific. All the steamers put in here to pick up and set down post and travellers from North America, China, Japan, and the Malaysian Archipelago'.[112] The schedule of the mail becomes intertwined, and an essential timetabling factor, in rapid journeys across the world.

In addition, the letters from Thomas Cook, written while at sea, are suggestive of the ways in which the shipping times of the steam packet negotiated understandings of

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[108] Thomas Cook, *Letters from the Sea and from Foreign Lands: descriptive of a Tour Round the World* (London: Routledge, 1998), 110. British Library, London. Capitals original.
[109] *Around the World by Steam via, Pacific Railway. [With a Map.]* (London: Union Pacific Railroad Company, 1871), 4. General Reference 10027.bb.5., British Library, London.
[110] *Around the World by Steam*, 19.
[111] *Around the World by Steam*, 19.
[112] Verne, *Around the World*, 119.

maritime time. In these letters, Cook consistently imagines his journey through the schedules of the mail packets. When travelling from San Francisco to Japan, the content of Cook's letters changes in relation to the routine of the steam packet: ‘But I must stop. The mailbag is being closed in the expectation of meeting a returning steamer to-night. I hope to write to you again from the “Land of the Rising Sun”’.[113] The ability to trans-ship ocean mail bags means that Cook has to adjust his letter’s timing to the routines of the packet, and his relationship to the new places he visits is tied up with their connectedness to his correspondents.[114] For instance, when they do not spot the Pacific Mail Steam Company ship for the transhipment of mailbags, Cook’s letter must travel with him to Yokohama before it can be sent back through America. This route taken by the mail makes it possible that the correspondent will receive a later letter before they receive the former and creates an acute sense of the distance between Cook and Britain. As Cook writes: ‘This long interregnum of communication with home and friends would convince me, if nothing else did, that we are really and truly a very long way at sea’.[115] This letter not only constructs time and date according to Anderson’s idea of homogeneity but also frames Cook’s sense of dislocation and estrangement. Furthermore, it is only when Cook reaches a position of nearness via mail that he feels a closeness to home: ‘We are now nearing Aden, and then about five days will carry us over the Red Sea, and we expect to land in Egypt within a mail service of seven days from London’.[116] The distance and time taken for the mail to travel home become the measure by which Cook can judge his distance in space. Mail infrastructures are both an indication of connection and temporal closeness, but also of disconnection and dislocation.

This negotiation of maritime time and space through relationships with postal routes is also present in American Loring Converse’s 1882 lettered travel book *Notes of What I Saw, and How I Saw It: a Tour Around the World including California, Japan, China etc.* Like Cook, he too has to hurry in his writing of a letter due to an approaching steam packet travelling in the opposite direction:

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[113] Cook, *Letters from the Sea*, 55.
[114] Trans-ship is a verb meaning to transfer from one ship to another (commonly denoting cargo), but mailbags and passengers could also be trans-shipped between steam packets at sea in the nineteenth century. The OED dates the first use of the term to the eighteenth century, “tranship, v.”, *OED Online*. June 2020. Oxford University Press.
[115] Cook, *Letters from the Sea*, 56.
[116] Cook, 62.

> On the third Friday out, the captain announced that it was probable we would meet the steamer from Yokohama to San Francisco, and I am hurrying this letter so that, if we are so fortunate, I can send it by that vessel, thus saving perhaps fourteen days in its delivery.[117]

Though Converse's perspective is an American one, it mirrors that of the British Cook and the imagined Englishman Fogg. The ability to send a letter through the transhipment of mail bags saves time in its delivery, and Converse demonstrates an explicit knowledge of the time saved here. In a later letter, he tells his reader:

> I was mistaken in saying on leaving Japan that the letter then written would be the last that would reach you by the way of California. This, however, is the last that will go that route [….] My next letter will be carried with us to Ceylon and there posted, to go ahead of us by way of the Suez canal and Liverpool [….] The purser is calling out "Mail for Japan" and I must close.[118]

On his round the world trip, it is necessary for Converse to understand, negotiate and manipulate the complex timetables of global mail networks in order to expedite his letters home. For Anderson, the mutual, connecting line between the spatially divergent stories in a newspaper, provides a homogeneity to time: '"the world" ambl[ing] sturdily ahead'.[119] However, while Converse's and Cook's intimate knowledge of postal circulation routes comes to shape their understanding of their place in the world, and their distance from home, this is shaped around a multiplicity of times, rather than Anderson's homogenous date and time.

In the same way, the schedules of the mail coordinate the bodies of characters travelling across the globe in Verne's novel. Verne continually pauses on the details of the schedules of the steam packets, highlighting how their mobility impacts upon the text. When we discover that Passepartout is alone on the *Carnatic*, and headed to Yokohama without Fogg or Mrs Aouda, the narrative pauses between the telling of his 'depression' in order to elucidate the infrastructural mechanisms which determine the *Carnatic*'s mobility (which we saw above): 'On the 13th, the *Carnatic* entered Yokohama Harbour on the morning tide. This town is an important port of call for the Pacific'.[120] Furthermore, earlier in the novel, we are told of the fuelling stations through which the Peninsular and Oriental steamship must pass:

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[117] Loring Converse, *Notes of What I Saw, and How I Saw It: A Tour Around the World Including California, Japan, China Etc.* (Bacyrus: Forum Steam Printing House, 1882), 52. Rare Books 43555, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[118] Converse, 154.
[119] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33.
[120] Verne, *Around the World*, 119.

> The following night, the *Mongolia* entered the Strait of Babel Mandeb, whose name is Arabic for Gate of Tears; and, the following day, the 14th, it stopped over at Steamer Point, on the north-west side of the Port of Aden. Here it was due to stock up with fuel again.
>
> This nourishment of steamship boilers is a serious matter at such distances from the centres of productions [….] It is necessary, in fact, to establish depots in several ports on faraway oceans, with the coal costing as much as £4 a ton.[121]

The text works to weave these infrastructural details into the narrative of the story. Infrastructures become as crucial to the text as its characters, interrupting plot developments to demonstrate the interconnectedness between the logistical requirements of this journey and the course of the narrative itself.

For Jonathan Grossman, time becomes a key indicator of relationships in *Around the World*, and he argues that Fogg is able to enter into a relation with time in order to move his body around the world.[122] He further argues that:

> this man who puzzles everyone by being the most uncommunicative of men, represents […] a relocation of meaning from the communication system (to which, as an avid newspaper reader, he silently, dutifully attends) to the temporal and spatial coordination of his mobile body that is the business of the passenger transport system.[123]

However, as this chapter has shown so far, this passenger transport system is entirely caught up in the communications network — the two are not at odds but work together throughout the text. When Fogg and his team finally approach Britain, having missed the mail and traversed the Atlantic on an ageing mercantile steamship, he decides to land at Queenstown (Cobh) in order to travel with the mail:

> Queenstown, on the Irish coast, is the port where the liners coming from the United States drop their mailbags off on their way past. The letters are taken to Dublin by express trains always ready to leave. From Dublin, they travel to Liverpool on high-speed steamers—thus beating the fastest ships of the ocean-going companies by twelve hours. These twelve hours saved by the post from America, Phileas Fogg wanted to save as well.[124]

Here again, the infrastructural route-ways of the post interrupt the narrative, and Fogg's prerogative is to travel with it. To travel alongside the mail from Queenstown to Liverpool is to travel along the quickest route, and only the infrastructures of the post can facilitate this speedy mobility.

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[121] Verne, 41.
[122] Jonathan Grossman, 'The Character of a Global Transport Infrastructure: Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*', *History and Technology* 29, no. 3 (1 September 2013): 250. Taylor & Francis Online.
[123] Grossman, 250-251.
[124] Verne, *Around the World*, 187.

Viewing the text from a postal perspective allows us to read the 'uncommunicative', rational body of Phileas Fogg more productively. The narrator continually emphasises Fogg's mechanical nature, and introverted rationality: 'He was not travelling, he was describing a circumference. He constituted a heavy body moving in orbit around the terrestrial globe, following the rational laws of mechanics'.[125] The rationality of Fogg's movement, as well as 'relocating' himself from a communicative to a temporal and spatial coordination, as Grossman argues, also sees him perfecting his process of moving like the mail through these postal infrastructures. For Sinnema, Verne's novel 'represents an unlikely hero whose very lack of interest in the outside world makes it possible for him to traverse the globe as if he were a mere automaton, measuring time and space according to an internal and inscrutable mechanism'.[126] The automatic, temporal nature of Fogg's travel is evocative of Hill's idealised machine-like postal bodies which we saw in Chapter One — Fogg must travel with the rationale of a parcel, not simply as Sinnema's 'internal inscrutable mechanism'. This is notable in the disinterestedness Fogg seems to take in his journey, and the profound interest and discussion taking place in London — '[i]t is impossible to describe the anxiety the whole upper strata of British society lived in for three days. Telegrams were sent to America and Asia asking for tidings'.[127] The gentlemen of London eagerly await Fogg's body as he circulates on postal infrastructures across the globe.

Fogg's need to account for himself at every postal port he encounters further nuances my reading of his postal travel. Despite the gentlemen of the club claiming that they will accept Fogg's word 'as a gentleman', he insists on getting a visa at every stop along the route; through the logic of travelling along a postal route, he must be stamped as he goes, and accounted for at every stop.[128] Upon reaching Suez, Fogg visits the consulate in order to ask 'the consul to kindly put a visa' in his passport; at Aden, Fogg and Passepartout again leave the ship as 'the gentleman wished to have his passport stamped'; at Calcutta, Fogg leaves the steamer 'with his regular pace marking the seconds like a pendulum of an astronomic clock, he headed for the passport office'; at San Francisco, he again leaves to have his passport stamped at the consulate.[129] Like the letters that passed through agents and consulates at postal ports, stamped and

[125] Verne, 48.
[126] Sinnema, 'Around the World without a Gaze', 141.
[127] Verne, *Around the World*, 197.
[128] Verne, 24.
[129] Verne, 32, 42, 44, 135.

sorted, Fogg too holds a postal proof of his journey — Fogg is accounted for and countersigned in his journey through the major postal ports of the world.

In many ways, postal time becomes implicated in the form of the novel itself. One of the key methods through which postal time presents and arranges the text is through free indirect discourse. The narrative voice often follows characters other than Fogg, such as when Fix plies Passepartout with alcohol and opium, or when Passepartout is subsequently stranded in Yokohama. Grossman convincingly argues that Verne's narrator continuously draws the reader's attention to 'the novelistic convention of retrospective synchronization [….] through direct addresses to the reader ("But, where was Fix at this moment?")'.[130] For Grossman, the novel is self-conscious in its 'willingness to withhold knowledge of the plot trajectories of others as events unfold such that the reader comes to rely on the narrator's clarification'.[131] I want to push Grossman's argument further here and suggest that what he describes as a spatial-temporal synchronicity created by the passenger system which Fogg traverses is also one that mimics the exchange of information associated with the mail. Though the narrative does temporarily elide events of the plot, it relays the information concerning these events with the temporal delay associated with the exchange of letters. When Fogg and Aouda magically appear at Passepartout's acrobatic act, the reader is unaware of how they have got there. This information is delayed until the opening of the next chapter when the narrator tells the reader:

> What had happed off Shanghai is easy to understand. The *Tankadère*'s signals had been spotted by the Yokohama steamship. Seeing a flag flying at half-mast, the captain had steered towards the little schooner. A few moments later, Phileas Fogg paid his passage at the price agreed by putting £550 into skipper John Bunsby's pocket. Then the honourable gentleman, Mrs Aouda, and Fix had climbed on board the steamer, which had immediately set sail for Nagasaki and Yokohama.[132]

Much like the opening of Cook's letters, in which he berates the delay in his letters sent back across America, Verne's narrator delays the action of the plot, and the reader discovers this action in the matter-of-fact narrative voice of a letter writer.

Furthermore, the withholding of knowledge of the plot's trajectory becomes a way to embed the reader within the postal temporal time-frame that coordinates the mobility of the characters in the novel. When Fogg leaves Aouda and Inspector Fix in order to

[130] Grossman, 'Global Transport Infrastructure', 256.
[131] Grossman, 256.
[132] Verne, *Around the World*, 128.

save Passepartout and two other passengers from the 'Indians' who attacked their train across America, the reader is left with Fix. The inspector remains huddled on the station platform, mulling his idiocy at letting the man whom he believes to be a bank robber leave his sight. This immobility affects the novel's temporal routine, slowing down time and the speed of the narrative to a standstill:

> Night fell, and less snow came down, but the cold increased. The most intrepid gaze could not have contemplated this immense darkness without fear. Absolute silence reigned over the plain. No birds flew past, and now wild animals prowled nearby to trouble the infinite stillness.[133]

It is at this communicative impasse, then, that Verne's novel crawls to a standstill. Without information on the action of the novel, Fix and Aouda remain immobile in the inert landscape of the American prairies, and the reader with them. Furthermore, when Fogg does return — as the reader has no doubt he will — the text relays information about his escapade through the pragmatic voice of a newspaper 'intelligence':

> There had been a fight ten miles south of Kearney. A few moments before the detachment had arrived, Passepartout and his two companions were already struggling with their captors; the Frenchman had knocked three out with his fists, when his master and the soldiers came rushing to their help.[134]

Like the information concerning the action on-board the *Tankadère*, the narrative relegates potentially exciting siege against kidnappers to a concise four-line description that elides most of the action. Verne relays this action in the form that mimics a traveller's letter, or a telegraph. Information aligns with mobility in *Around the World*, and a lack thereof renders the narrative inert and the reader in the dark.

Around the World's production of postal temporality is also central to its depiction of an English protagonist travelling around the British Empire. Though Fogg independently gets his passport stamped at each port en route, he does not *need* to get it stamped — the route to India was passport-free for British citizens during this period. In many ways, this is a novel about understanding the 'English' psyche, as created through the production of imperial 'Englishness' abroad. As Ian Baucom argues: 'Over the past 150 years the struggles to define, defend, or reform Englishness have, consequently, been understood as struggles to control, possess, order, and dis-order the nation's and empire's spaces'.[135] The narrative implicates Fogg's mechanistic, postal journey around the world in the imperial rhetoric surrounding the steam packet, which

[133] Verne, 169.
[134] Verne, 170.
[135] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of* Identity (Princeton University Press, 1999), 3. Jstor.

we saw in the first part of this chapter: to travel as a British citizen via postal routes is also to exert an imperial privilege. This imperial privilege can be traced in Fogg's relatively smooth sailing and Passepartout's difficulty in travelling; Passepartout holds a French, not a British, passport, and struggles to travel in Fogg's efficient, postal manner. For Sinnema, Fogg and Passepartout often find themselves in places 'of *unheimlich* surrealism in which the imposition of western technology simultaneously jars with and transforms a distinctly oriental environment'; this happens in India, Hong Kong, Yokohama and even San Francisco.[136] To travel Mssr's Cook, Son & Jenkins's Around the World Tour, is to create 'little Englands' abroad, and travel with the entitlement of imperial authority.

However, the scheduled and regulated infrastructures of the mail liners make them both an advantage and a liability in Fogg's travel. The first ship Fogg travels on-board is 'the line *Mongolia* [….] She belonged to the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company and was [….] one of P. & O.'s quickest ships, and had always exceeded the regulation speed [….] Between Brindisi and Suez'.[137] Waiting at Suez is the impatient Fix who asks the Consul when the ship is expected; he receives the measured reply that the ship has come 'From Brindisi, where she picked up the mails for the Indies. She left at 5 p.m. on Saturday'.[138] The mail ship's timetables and accountability lead the rogue inspector into the path of Fogg, where he proceeds to cause mayhem. Packets also become a liability because they always travel with the circulation of the mail as the priority cargo: at Hong Kong, Passepartout is prevented by Fix from telling Fogg that the next ship, the *Carnatic*, will leave sooner than expected due to the completion of the ship's repairs. With the repairs completed, the mail steamer does not stay longer than necessary in the port of Hong Kong, and Fogg misses the connection. Near the end of his journey, Fogg is racing to reach the mail ship, the *China*, bound for Liverpool:

> the train pulled up in the station on the right bank of the river, in front of the pier for the Cunard Line steamers—otherwise known as the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. The *China*, bound for Liverpool, had left 45 minutes before![139]

The postal rhythms of the *Mongolia*, the *Carnatic* and the *China* mean they must leave and make stops to a routinised schedule, paying no heed to Fogg's bankrupting bet. While the mail networks offer a vital infrastructure for Fogg's journey, then, the rigidity

[136] Sinnema, 'Around the World without a Gaze', 146.
[137] Verne, *Around the World*, 27-8.
[138] Verne, 29.
[139] Verne, 176.

of their scheduling makes the logistics of his journey incredibly tight. Packet ships are liable to delay due to technology failures, but they also operate on their own terms: once a ship's repairs are finished, or the loading of mails is complete, they leave the ports and imperial passengers behind.

Furthermore, Verne's narrator often points out the defects in British steamship technology, especially in comparison to French ships. Though most of the lines Fogg travels on are British, the narrator admonishes P&O's steam packets in relation to their French counterparts:

> The passengers, most of whom were seasick, should have blamed the boat for their fatigue. The reason was that P. & O. ships on the China Seas route [….] are in fact highly inferior […] in construction, to the designs used by the French Service, such as the *Imperative* and the *Cambodge*. According to the engineers' calculations, these two ships can take on board a mass of water equal to their own weight before sinking, but the P. & O. boats, the *Golconda*, *Korea*, and *Rangoon*, can absorb less than a sixth of their own weight before dropping to the bottom.[140]

Verne's narrator not only betrays a sense of his French allegiance here — thereby emphasising the French perspective from which 'Englishness' is constructed in this text — but also indicates some of the debates concerning State investment in steam packets during this period. While it had been the policy of the British Government to reduce investment in steam packets during this period, the Second Empire in France (1852-1870) were embarking 'upon a widespread and generous system of subsidies to mail steamers'.[141] As John Haskell Kemble argues, there were not only subsidies paid for the mail early in its history; even 'in 1868 the government guaranteed 5 per cent interest on the capital of the Compagnie Général Transatlantique, one of the largest companies, allowed it to issue bonds, and advance it cash with which to build steamers'.[142] The imperialist rhetoric, which emphasised 'British' packet dominion, is undercut by Verne here and shown to be at odds with the experiences of those bodies travelling on-board. Unlike the investment which guaranteed the smooth sailing of French steam packets, the relative lack of investment in British ships makes them inefficient, *especially* for those bodies which react with seasickness on-board.

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[140] Verne, 89.
[141] John Haskell Kemble, *Mail Steamers Link the Americas, 1840-1890* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945), 479. Rare Books 490755, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[142] Haskell Kemble, 479.

As we saw in Section 2, though the mail ship holds the possibility of an imperial hegemony and ease of travel only afforded to white, usually male, bodies, they are also liable to changes in course and schedules, and travel purely on the whims of the mail. This adherence to the demands of the mail becomes significant in Verne's text, in which the travelling British body becomes liable to the whims and problems of the global mail network. Furthermore, Verne's distinctive, French perspective on this imperial travel is also able to exemplify it as a construct: French steam packets are upheld — with some justification — as more technologically sound.

4. Imperial Infrastructures and Monstrous Voyages

The selling points of mail infrastructures, namely their unique punctuality and regularity, which necessitates Fogg's use of them for his temporally significant journey around the world, become a site of threat in Bram Stoker's late-nineteenth-century vampire novel *Dracula* (1897). In this text, the space of transportation becomes Gothicised in Count Dracula's sinister journey to England. As the Captain's log, copied into a newspaper article, attests, the ship's vampiric cargo not only leads to the disappearance of men, but engulfs the ship in an endless fog and bad weather, leaving the crew at their wit's end: 'Two days of fog, and not a sail sighted [....] We seem to be drifting to some terrible doom. [...] Men are beyond fear, working stolidly and patiently, with minds made up to worst'.[143] Though Dracula does not travel on a steam packet, the ship's ill-fated journey raises a series of questions about methods of transport and communication in the text: what is the schooner's place in the technologised modernity of *Dracula*? Is its journey, and that of Dracula, significant to other communicative modes in the novel? Are the signifiers of the mail still relevant in the late-nineteenth century? Through this section, I uncover the complexity and importance of postal infrastructures in *Dracula,* particularly those of maritime mail, arguing that these infrastructures are a significant method through which the text explores and negotiates temporality and modernity. By comparing Dracula's travel to that of Phileas Fogg, I argue that Dracula's mutiny becomes a Gothic echo of Fogg's 'English' travel. In *Dracula*, steam packet infrastructures are made monstrous as they facilitate the safe and regular transport to bodies seeking passage to and from Britain. It seems fitting that the imagery of packet infrastructures that could render bodies sick and discomforted, and that had a historical association with the

[143] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* ed. Glennis Byron (Plymouth: Broadview, 2000), 118.

violence of imperialism, should be utilised in the expedition of an undead, violent and vampiric body to British shores.

In a parallel to Phileas Fogg, the novel's eponymous antagonist is also able to travel with a liminality and borderlessness; like Fogg, Count Dracula travels for self-preservation, and to explore the limits of modernity. Scholarship concerned with the rendering of modernity in *Dracula* has emphasised the importance of the relationship between communication networks and the antagonistic tasks of Count Dracula and the 'Defenders of Light'. As Anne DeLong has argued:

> cutting-edge Victorian communication technologies […] serve to create intimate and immediate bonds among the novel's protagonists. But these same technologies also mimic and duplicate the dehumanizing aspects of the mass cultural reproduction of texts.[144]

For readers who view such technological innovation as dystopian, she argues, communication technology 'is the vampire'.[145] Furthermore, Erik Butler, an utopian in DeLong's view, argues that Dracula's use of '"snail mail" [cannot] compete with the data-processing network [facilitated by typewriters and telegrams] that Mina administrates and Van Helsing oversees'.[146] Though my argument will complicate Butler's assertion that Dracula uses 'snail mail', he notes the importance of communication networks to the endeavours of the text's characters. The interrogation of communication in Stoker's novel is a part of its construction of, or questioning of, modernity and mass communication for Butler and Delong.

Furthermore, scholarship also points to the importance of the body to the communicative apparatuses utilised both by the characters and the form of the novel itself. Communicative devices are spoken into, written by and circulated through hands, and read over with eyes. For Raj Shah, the simulacrum created by the mass-production technologies used to generate the text itself 'places it in the service of circulation and substitution, ironically foreshadowing Mina's own vamping'.[147] For Shah, the role of mass-production technologies — such as the carbon paper used by Mina Harker to type up the diaries and journals of the 'Defenders of Light' — is akin to the mass-

[144] Anne DeLong, 'Communication Technologies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Utopian or Dystopian?', *Bram Stoker and the Late Victorian World*, eds. Matthew Gibson and Sabine Lenore Müller (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 103.
[145] DeLong, 'Utopian or Dystopian?', 103.
[146] Erik Butler, '*Dracula*: Vampiric Contagion in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 121.
[147] Raj Shah, 'Counterfeit Castles: The Age of Mechanical Reproduction in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Jules Verne's *Le Château Des Carpathes*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 440. Project Muse.

communications systems that place lettered information into circulation.[148] Laura Otis further argues that Dracula and the 'Defenders of Light' use opposing but mirrored communication systems to further their pursuit. She argues that Dracula's activities mirror those of the 'Defenders of Light', or indeed vice versa; the difference, she suggests, is that Dracula relies:

> on corporeal rather than technological connections […] the two systems correspond in a great many way. Both carry out the activities of a vast nervous system, perceiving, encoding, transmitting, recording and recalling information.[149]

Thomas persuasively argues that the 'All Red Routes' of the late-nineteenth-century global telegraph cables becomes a trope in *Dracula* which transforms the 'language of blood ties into a prosthetic kinship relation, appropriate given that bureaucracy of empire was held together by mobile homosocial bonds'.[150] Dracula's network is, then, distinctly corporeal: by writing himself into the flesh of Lucy and Mina, Dracula is able to set up a wireless network through their bodies. My reading of *Dracula* aims to further the critical discussion of communication and the body in the text, by focusing on the network that Butler disparagingly calls 'snail mail', and revealing its importance to the form and narrative of this text.

Scholarship has often overlooked lettered communication in *Dracula* in favour of the wireless and telegraph. However, mail routes remain essential to the journeys undertaken throughout the text and are as vital as the telegraph to its construction of modernity. Furthermore, they shape the temporality of the novel as letters track dates and journey times throughout the novel. Letters create links with the past that shape the sense of modernity created in *Dracula* in tangible ways. Critics have often quoted the following from a scene in which Harker explores the castle and falls into the hands of voluptuous vampiric brides; immediately before his seduction, he finds himself: 'Sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter'.[151] As he imagines a communication method that could connect him with the outside world, he ponders his diary's shorthand:

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[148] It is worth noting here that Shah also draws a link between Verne and Stoker. He draws parallels between the interrogation of original and simulacrum in *Le Château Des Carpathes* and *Dracula* respectively, arguing that both texts reflect a 'yearning for authenticity vis-à-vis the simulacrum in their representation of perverse attempts to reinvest mechanical reproductions with the aura of the absent originals'. Shah, 'Counterfeit Castles', 442.
[149] Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 197.
[150] Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, 149.
[151] Stoker, *Dracula*, 67.

'It is nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance'.[152] This has become a defining sentence in *Dracula*, with critics citing it to emphasise the text's embeddedness and investment in modernity. However, it is followed by a more sinister sentence that emphasises the past's place in the present: 'And, yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere "modernity" cannot kill'.[153] In this passage, temporal time-frames coalesce as the ancient and the modern collide and intermingle, and the past reaches into modernity as something undead. As Harker ponders this presence, it is notable that the letter becomes a catalyst for his discovery.

Furthermore, mail routes become a key signifier through which the text depicts the 'ancient' and othered landscape of Transylvania as tangibly connected to modernity. We can see such signification at work in Jonathan Harker's opening journey to the East. As he cannot travel by train from Bistritz, Harker journeys on the 'diligence' — a term used, as we have seen in the last chapter, for European mail coaches — to the Borgo Pass, where he is picked up by a mysterious coach, which the local people seem to fear.[154] For Stephen Arata, setting Dracula's castle in Transylvania places the text in context with the 'Eastern Question', which was widely discussed in the popular press in the 1880s and 90s: 'The region was first and foremost the site, not of superstition and Gothic romance, but of political turbulence and racial strife'.[155] He argues that by 'problematizing those boundaries' between the West and the East, 'Stoker probes at the heart of the culture's sense of itself, its ways of defining and distinguishing itself from other peoples, other cultures, in its hour of perceived decline'.[156] Harker's arrival into Transylvania on a mail diligence immediately points to this overlap between Occident and Orient, self and other, and, importantly to me here, present and past. For Ruth Livesey, the mid-nineteenth-century stage and mail-coach in realist novels convey a specific past, but one that has a presence in the era fast-moving steam-trains. However, importantly, she argues that these novels signal a 'possibility of a nation knitted together by the affect of a strongly felt local belonging'.[157] The diligence is potentially doing some

[152] Stoker, 67.
[153] Stoker, 67.
[154] Stoker, 34.
[155] Stephen D Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies,* 33.4 (1990): 627. Jstor.
[156] Arata, 'Occidental Tourist', 627.
[157] Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

significant, if understated, work, in raising questions about the place of the nation in an increasingly connected world. It is not just that Harker is able to travel to the Eastern Other of Transylvania, or that the diligence is an archaic method of travel in an age of steam communication; this diligence connects the Eastern Other to the Occident. This older form of communication becomes part of globalised route-ways that allowed for the swift transportation of letters and people and it is part of the connective infrastructures that allow Dracula to travel with such ease to the imperial centre of London.

The text further develops this sense of connectivity between archaic and modern communication networks through Harker's perceived connection to home. It is important to note that Harker cannot communicate with Mina during his stay in Castle Dracula, not because of the disconnection of this Gothicised Transylvania from global mail networks, but because Dracula holds Harker prisoner, and deliberately mis-sends and intercepts his letters. As David Sandner argues, 'Count Dracula […] readily appropriates the methods of the rational present in the service of the irrational past'.[158] For Sandner, Dracula represents 'not only the irrational past, but the irrational present, the possibility of an evil malignancy in modernity itself'.[159] Significantly, Dracula demonstrates a thorough and attentive understanding of the global communications network of the mail, and can instruct Harker on when to backdate his letters so that he would be presumed missing in travel, rather than from Dracula's castle:

> Last night the Count asked me in the suavest tones to write three letters, one saying that my work here was nearly done, and that I should start for home within a few days, another that I was starting on the next morning from the time of the letter, and the third that I had left the castle and arrived at Bistritz. I would fain have rebelled [….] therefore pretended to fall in with his views, and asked him what dates I should put on the letters. He calculated a minute, and then said:—
>
> "The first should be June 12, the second June 19, and the third June 29."
>
> I know now the span of my life. God help me![160]

Instead of functioning as an apparent Other in a backwards and uncivilised country, Count Dracula operates as a savvy manipulator of international postal communication networks — he is clearly capable of utilising this skill to connect himself with 'modernity' and to gain the upper-hand in his plan for a vampiric future. These letters construct

[158] David Sandner, 'Up-to-Date with a Vengeance: Modern Monsters in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Margaret Oliphant's "The Secret Chamber"', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 8, no. 3 (1997): 299. Jstor.
[159] Sandner, 'Up-to-Date with a Vengeance', 299.
[160] Stoker, *Dracula*, 72-3.

Harker's life-span in a Gothic reworking of the temporal time-frames created by nineteenth-century mail networks.

Furthermore, maritime mail infrastructures in *Dracula* operate under the surface of the text but nevertheless remain apparent in the journeying of the characters. In this late-nineteenth-century utilisation of global communication networks, infrastructure seems to operate much more like Michael Rubenstein et al.'s 'invisible, forgettable ambiance', operating with a frictionless ease that renders them invisible.[161] For instance, when Mina travels to Buda-pesth to find her fiancé Jonathan Harker, she writes to Lucy Westenra, confirming her safety and her discovery of Jonathan. Mimicking many nineteenth-century international letters, she first divulges her method of transport:

> My dearest Lucy,—I know you will be anxious to hear all that has happened since we parted at the railway station at Whitby. Well, my dear, *I got to Hull all right, and caught the boat to Hamburg*, and then the train on here. I feel that I can hardly recall anything of the journey, except that I knew I was coming to Jonathan.[162]

Significantly, Mina is able to 'catch' the boat from Hull to Hamburg — indicating that it is a steamship, and most likely a regularly running packet. Hull was an important connecting mail link to Hamburg and other German ports. Not only did the Leith, Hull & Hamburg Steam Packet Co. operate throughout the nineteenth century, but the port was also an essential node on transmigrant routes. Feeder ships would transport migrants to ports such as Hull, from which they would travel to Liverpool or Southampton in order to catch larger steam packets to America and Australia (see Figure 23 for an example of a transmigration timetable).[163] Regular steamships from Hull also facilitated transmigration via packet via Hamburg.[164] Mina's journey, then, is tied up with the facilitation of emigration via steam packet lines, and the ability to 'hardly recall anything of the journey' partly facilitated by the smooth operation of transport and communication infrastructures.

Steam packets also have a temporal presence in the international letters posted in the text. When John Seward first implores his old friend and colleague for help, namely

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[161] Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal, 'Infrastructuralism', 585.
[162] Stoker, *Dracula*, 139. Emphasis my own.
[163] 'Transmigration via British Ports', The Ship List, last modified December 26, 2006.
[164] Whitby itself appears in Edward Mogg's maps of 'the tracks pursued by Packets in their passage to the several outports of the continent'. We can think of these areas of north east England as connected by packets to European cities, rather than simply backward or cut-off from these circulations. Please see Edward Mogg, cartographer, *Mogg's Map of Steam Navigation*, 72 miles = 70mm (London: E. Mogg, 1850) Cartographic Items Maps 1101.(8,), British Library.

Til Amerika i 14 Dage

Inmans Kongelige Engelske Post-Dampskibe.

Udvandrere, som løse Billet hos Undertegnede, blive fremdeles befordrede fra Liverpool med

Post-Dampskibe.

Afgang fra Christiania:					Ankomst til Hull:		Afgang fra Liverpool:			Ankomst til New-York:	
Dampskibet „Oder"	19de	Marts	Kl. 3	Efterm.	Mandag 22de	Marts.	Dampskibet City of London	24de	Marts.	Løverdag 3die	April.
— „Argo"	26de	—	- 3	—	— 29de	—	— City of Brooklyn	31te	—	— 10de	—
— „Oder"	2den	—	- 5	—	— 5te	April.	— City of Baltimore	7de	April.	— 17de	—
— „Argo"	9de	—	- 5	—	— 12te	—	— City of Paris	14de	—	— 24de	—
— „Oder"	16de	—	- 5	—	— 19de	—	— City of Anwerp	21de	—	— 1ste	Mai.
— „Argo"	23de	—	- 5	—	— 26de	—	— City of London	28de	—	— 8de	—
— „Oder"	30te	—	- 5	—	— 3die	Mai.	— City of Brooklyn	5te	Mai	— 15de	—
— „Argo"	7de	Mai	- 5	—	— 10de	—	— City of Baltimore	12te	—	— 22de	—

og **derefter** fra Christiania hver **Fredag** hele Aaret.

Priserne ere de samme som hos ethvert andet respectabelt Selskab, nu for Tiden til New-York 33 Spd. 90 ß. Norske Opvartere og fri Kost hele Veien til New-York. Landstigningspenge beregnes ikke. Ingen Transportomkostninger af Tøi.

Gjennemgangsbilletter udstedes til **Chicago** og til samtlige Steder i **Veststaterne** i Amerika.

Christiania i Marts 1869.

H. Heitmann,

General-Agent for Norge.

Figure 23. Advertisement, 'Inmans Kongelige Engelske Post-Dampskibe' ('Inmans Royal English Post Steamer) (1869). Norway-Heritage.

the German physician Abraham Van Helsing 'M.D., D.PH., D.LIT., ETC., ETC', he does so via a letter. Van Helsing's reply, also by letter, establishes some of the associations with temporality and distance created by sending letters overseas, which we have seen so far:

> My good Friend,
>
> When I have received your letter I am already coming to you. By good fortune I can leave just at once, without wrong to any of those who have trusted me [….] Have then rooms for me at the Great Eastern Hotel, so that I may be near to hand [...] for it is likely that I may have to return here that night. But if need be I shall come again in three days, and stay for longer if it must. Till then goodbye, my friend John.
>
> VAN HELSING.[165]

Here, the international letter constructs time in a way reminiscent of the letters of Thomas Cook, or, indeed, Fogg's timetabled travel. Not only does it demonstrate the rapidity with which the letter is sent, but Van Helsing's broken English is also evocative of how packet letters construct temporalities of both letters and travelling bodies: 'When I received your letter I am already coming to you'. The infrastructures of mail packets, mail trains and train terminals and hotels all operate underneath Van Helsing's letter, facilitating his travel and communication from Amsterdam to Britain. Notably, Van Helsing inserts a memory of wound — read: blood — sucking into the letter: 'you suck from my wound so swiftly the poison'.[166] Butler argues that this is indicative of the ways

[165] Stoker, *Dracula*, 148.
[166] Stoker, 148.

in which Van Helsing is 'a double of Dracula and effectively a vampire himself'.[167] However, it is also an example of how mail circulation is tied up with blood circulation in this text. As Nick Groom argues: 'Textual exchanges, too, are circulations of information that parallel the transference of blood'.[168] Van Helsing's letter, tied up with blood and bodily circulation, is constructed by and mobilised by packet regularity and rapidity.

It is also important to note that steam packets were still being invested in during the late-nineteenth century, despite the successful laying of submarine telegraph cables in the 1860s.[169] In 1897, the same year in which Stoker published *Dracula*, the German steam packet company Norddeutscher Lloyd launched the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*; the ship had been seven years in the making and boasted four funnels, making it the largest ship in length and size that had ever been launched. On its maiden voyage to New York, the steamer won the Blue Riband for the fastest journey across the Atlantic, in 5 days 22 hours 45 minutes.[170] The Norddeutscher Lloyd company had engineered the first viable four funnel ships, and the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* became one of four such ships that heralded a new age in luxury passenger steamers. Though passenger travel was as important to these ships as mail infrastructure, speedy communication and flexibility of use were integral to the threat that these ships posed to a constructed British maritime dominance. As *The Belfast News-Letter* reported:

> The new vessel, which is stated to be the largest and fastest steam-ship in the world, is destined for the New York service. She is, moreover, constructed so as to be available for use as an auxiliary cruiser in the German navy. The new vessel is 625 feet long, or more than twenty feet longer than either the *Campania* or *Lucania*, the Cunard leviathans.[171]

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[167] Butler, 'Vampiric Contagion', 118.
[168] Nick Groom, 'The Count, *Dracula*: Smoke and Mirrors — Pen, Paint and Blood', *The Vampire: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 180.
[169] Not only were steam packets still being invested in during the late-nineteenth century, there was an international effort to introduce a Universal Postal Union and Imperial Penny Post. Proponents of international fixed-fees for postage emphasised the paternalistic ideal utilised by uniform penny post reformers in the 1830s. Please see Tim Walsh, 'Globalization, Posts, and the Universal Postal Union: A Functional Critique', in *Current Directions in Postal Reform*, eds. Michael A. Crew and Paul Kleindorfer, 293-308 (New York: Springer Science + Business Media, 2000); Douglas Howland, 'Japan and the Universal Postal Union: An Alternative Internationalism in the 19th Century', *Social Science Japan Journal* 17, no. 1 (2014): 23–39. Oxford Academic; Keith Jeffery, 'Crown, Communication and the Colonial Post: Stamps, the Monarchy and the British Empire', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 45–70. Taylor & Francis Online.
[170] 'S/S Kaiser Wilhelm Der Grosse, Norddeutscher Lloyd', Norway-Heritage, accessed November 28, 2019, http://www.norwayheritage.com/p_ship.asp?sh=kaiwi.
[171] Anon, 'Foreign Intelligence', *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 5, 1897, British Library Newspapers.

This German fleet was considered a threat to the British conception of its maritime dominance. In a report in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper praises the establishment of a new 'line of 20-knot mail steamers to Canada', in competition with the Norddeutcher Lloyd Company: 'The damage such a ship, with her immense coal supply, could inflict upon our commerce is simply incalculable, and we have not a warship or an auxiliary cruiser which could overtake her'.[172] This really was a 'monster steamer' and marked a new period in maritime technology and shipbuilding practices, which would eventually lead to the construction of the ill-fated (or poorly managed) RMS *Titanic* by the White Star Line.[173] Mail steamers were becoming giganticised as the need for faster mail and more luxurious passenger travel increased.

The technological development generated by German packet lines brought debates about the place of Britain in the globalised communication network to the fore. It is telling then, that maritime spaces set the scene for Dracula's entry to England, and becomes a key Gothic-space in the text. Significantly, maritime spaces blur traditional and mythical lines of passage with those of modernity. Notably, Whitby is a place where past and present abut, especially within the context of the maritime. For instance, the 'steamers *Emma* and *Scarborough*', which make 'trips up and down the coast' for day-trippers indicate the town's importance to local tourism. Yet this is juxtaposed by the old mariner Mr Swales's remembrance of the ghosts of mariners past: 'Why, I could name ye a dozen whose bones lie in the Greenland seas above," he pointed northwards […] Do ye think that all these men will have to make a rush to Whitby when the trumpet sounds?'.[174] The text most chillingly confirms this slipperiness of boundaries between past and present when the schooner sails into Whitby as if a steamer with a dead man at the helm.

Dracula's journey on the *Demeter* typifies the intermingling between the past and present, mythical and modern. For Emily Alder, the space of the ship in *Dracula* becomes a microcosm of the Gothic themes at large in the novel, including liminality, transgression and claustrophobia. She argues that the ship 'in transit is constantly shifting on a shifting surface, self-contained and often out of communicative reach, functioning between lands, nations, or systems of governance, especially in times before

[172] Anon, 'Current Topics', *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph,* July 12, 1897, 5. British Library Newspapers.
[173] A factor in the circumstances that drove the poor management of the RMS Titanic was the White Star Line's determination to achieve a Blue Riband for fastest travel across the Atlantic.
[174] Stoker, *Dracula*, 98-9.

modern telecommunications'.[175] She also demonstrates the importance of the ship's name to the signification of liminality — Demeter, the Goddess of the Harvest, saves her daughter Persephone from the underworld and Hades, and is therefore associated with the liminal planes of life and death. The ship, then, becomes a particular site through which questions of boundaries, or lack thereof, can be explored and Gothicised.

I would add to Alder's reading, however, by suggesting that the route the sailing ship follows allows it to both pass through mythical sites *and* to follow modern packet routes — the ship's route-way enacts the coalescence of ancient and modern. The initial route of the ship begins in the Black Sea, and the Captain meticulously logs the key sites which it passes: Bosphorus, Dardanelles, Cape Matapan and the Straits of Gibraltar. In Greek mythology, Bosphorus is the site which Io, having been raped by Zeus, crosses to Egypt in order to escape the wrath of Hera. Io is associated with the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Syrian goddess Astarte — she has been considered as an example of the cultural interchange between the ancient West and East. Dardanelles is also known as Hellespont, famous as the strait through which Leander swims to visit Hero in secret. Furthermore, Cape Matapan was a site associated with the underworld in Ancient Greek mythology, and the Strait of Gibraltar with the Pillars of Hercules. Importantly, however, as the sailing ship enters into the Strait of Gibraltar, it also enters the route of P&O steam packets. Significantly, once past Gibraltar, the vampire's powers seem to grow stronger: it is here men face hellish storms and begin, one by one, to disappear. As it follows the P&O mail route past Gibraltar, to the Bay of Biscay and into the English Channel, the liminal powers of Dracula become apparent. It is only when sailing along the route of British imperial power that Dracula's vampiric appetite awakens. The Gothic maritime works here, then, to blur and hybridise ancient liminal spaces and modern steam routes held dear to British imperialism. If, as Alder argues, the ship becomes a microcosm of the Gothic themes of the rest of the novel, the emphatically modern ocean mail route-way is as essential to the creation of the Gothic in *Dracula* as the sites of Ancient Greek mythology through which it passes.

In order to interrogate Dracula's journey on-board the schooner, the *Demeter*, it is useful to consider the mutiny in Verne's *Around the World*. So invested is Fogg in travelling along global mail infrastructures that, having missed the steam packet, the *China*, at New York, he endeavours to make a packet out of a merchant ship. While the

[175] Emily Alder, 'Dracula's Gothic Ship', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* no. 15 (2016): 6-7. Irish Gothic Horror.

ship's belligerent Captain grudgingly takes on four passengers at two thousand dollars 'a person' for passage to Bordeaux, Fogg makes himself, Aouda, Fix and Passepartout 'precious merchandise' instead of passengers.[176] However, not comfortable being simply 'precious merchandise', Fogg endeavours to instigate a quiet (and very English) mutiny a mere 30 hours of being on-board: 'he had so cleverly manœuvred with his banknotes that the crew of sailors and engineers—a slightly shady crew, on rather bad terms with the captain—were entirely his'.[177] Mutiny complete, Fogg is able to steer the *Henrietta* 'for Liverpool', and thus place himself on the same course as the Cunard mail packet he had initially endeavoured to catch.[178] Furthermore, in an effort to keep up the rapid pace of a mail ship, Fogg not only burns all the coal on-board — which would have enabled the ship 'to get from New York to Bordeaux at low steam' — but also burns the wood of the ship itself: 'One can imagine how much dry wood needed to be consumed to keep the steam at pressure. That day the poop, deckhouse, the cabins, the crew's quarters, and the orlop deck all disappeared'.[179] Indeed, as we have already seen, so closely does Fogg match his course with the mail, that he lands in Ireland order to travel overland with the mail to Liverpool.

Fogg's mutinous adventure, turning a merchant vessel into a ship operating with the 'punctuality and regularity' of a mail packet, has a curious Gothic echo in Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Having shipped himself as merchandise of 'boxes of earth' on-board a schooner, the *Demeter*, Dracula also undertakes a mutiny on-board the ship (again quiet, but certainly more violent than Fogg's) in order to take control of the ship's mobility.[180] So too does Dracula consume vital components of the ship, here crew and steersmen rather than wood. Compellingly, while Fogg does not kill in his shipboard consumption, Verne describes the '*frenzy* of *demolition'* in which 'the rails, the bulwarks, the dead-works, and most of the deck were *devoured'*.[181] Furthermore, the *Demeter* behaves with an uncanniness as the ship navigates the storm into the port of Whitby. Widely reported in the 'polyglot' of communication devices utilised to recount the story — Captain's log, letters, newspaper articles — the schooner is able to change direction and speed into port despite the prevailing winds:

[176] Verne, *Around the World*, 179, 180.
[177] Verne, 181.
[178] Verne, 181.
[179] Verne, 184, 186.
[180] Stoker, *Dracula*,118.
[181] Verne, *Around the World*, 186. Emphasis my own.

> Between her and the port lay a great flat reef [...] and with the wind blowing from its present quarter, it would be quite impossible that she should fetch the entrance of the harbour [….] The rays of the searchlight were kept fixed on the harbour mouth across the East Pier, where the shock was expected, and men waited breathlessly. The wind suddenly shifted to the north east […] and then, *mirabile dictu*, between the piers, leaping from wave to wave as it rushed at headlong speed, swept the strange schooner before the blast, with all sail set, and gained the safety of the harbour.[182]

The ship behaves as if propelled by steam technology, disregarding the terrible storm and the dangers of the coastline. In his mutinous action on-board the sailing vessel, Dracula — in a strange mirroring of Fogg's transatlantic mail-focussed mutiny — turns the vessel into a steam packet: following the imperial route of the P&O steam packets and driving into port without heeding the prevailing winds. The regularity and rapidity, for which Fogg seeks to mimic the infrastructures and routes of the mail, become warped here, rendered Other and monstrous. Here, the packet infrastructures and routes become implicated in 'transmitting back through "imperial" circuits', to quote Finkelstein, the invasive undead to British shores.

In its construction of Gothicised communication and transportation infrastructures, *Dracula* creates an uncanniness, and even horror, by having its eponymous vampire utilise these infrastructures on his own terms. During his retreat to Castle Dracula, the Count posts himself on-board the sailing ship *Czarina Catherine*; significantly, the 'Defenders of Light' follow the ship as if it is operating as a steamship, and one operating with the regularity of a steam packet. As Van Helsing describes the defenders' journey, he invests in the vampiric sailing ship's regularity:

> The *Czarina Catherine* left the Thames yesterday morning. It will take her at the quickest speed she has ever made at least three weeks to reach Varna; but we can travel overland to the same place in three days. Now, if we allow for two days less for the ship's voyage, owing to such weather influences as we know that the Count can bring to bear; and if we allow a whole day and night for any delays which may occur to us, then we have a margin of nearly two weeks. Thus, in order to be quite safe, we must leave here on 17th at latest.[183]

Van Helsing's planning here sounds much like Phileas Fogg's deductions for his trip circulating the globe; following the pattern of movement and use of infrastructures undertaken by Dracula's first journey, Van Helsing presumes that he can track the ship using a methodology for steamships. Mina's telepathic communication with the vampire also suggests that he is travelling in this way: 'At sunset she made the usual hypnotic

[182] Stoker, *Dracula*, 112. Italics original.
[183] Stoker, 364.

report. Wherever he may be in the Black Sea, the Count is hurrying towards his destination. To his doom, I trust!'.[184] However, the telegrams from London — directed to the only character who has the wealth for overseas telegrams, Lord Godalming — comment that there is 'no further report' of the ship; and it seems the vampire may have given them the slip.[185] When the telegram finally comes confirming that the '*Czarina Catherine* [was] reported entering Galatz at one o'clock today', the 'Defenders of the Light' have to rethink their plan and chase the vampire further.[186] Here, then, the vampire rescinds the modern networks that he had usurped in his journey to Britain, preferring to slip past his antagonists than to keep to record, Blue Riband time. With the proliferation of steam packet infrastructures in popular culture, which I have considered throughout this chapter, we can presume that many contemporary readers would have recognised Dracula's dexterity at utilising modern communication networks, which here also extends to an understanding of when to avoid these infrastructures.

Conclusions

In a text that has been consistently analysed through its investment in communication technologies, and blurring of boundaries, the global networks of steam-packets are underlying and crucial infrastructures which scholarly analysis has neglected. As I have shown, their traces in the text explain the uncomfortable relationship between the modern and the ancient, and the vampiric ability to collapse the two make Dracula's journeys difficult to trace and to understand for the nineteenth-century protagonists. At a historical moment in which steam packet ships were receiving renewed technological investment, and in which global postal networks were becoming increasingly democratised, anxieties concerning global communications become Gothicised within this text. My reading of Dracula's mutinous journey alongside Fogg's mutiny on the *Henrietta* shifts our understanding of the importance of this scene in the signification of Dracula's entry to Britain. In *Around the World*, increased connectivity and circulation is heralded, and parodied, as a sign of British imperial might. In contrast, in *Dracula*, the same 'progress' in connectivity, circulation and (blood)ties confounds and confuses the imperial hegemony constructed through the packet. Here the packet's association with speed and regularity, and imperial violence, are recast into threats against Britain.

[184] Stoker, 378.
[185] Stoker, 378.
[186] Stoker, 378.

Dracula's concern with connecting the periphery with the centre, and disarming the division between the two, leads us into the next, and final, chapter of this thesis, in which I further explore the themes of imperial connectivity through the overland mail route. These routes saw the connection of the different material and metaphorical infrastructures we have seen so far: here steam-packets, mail trains, mail runners and internal bureaucracy operate together in order to facilitate global information route-ways. Indeed, the next chapter will end with Dracula's mesmeric counterpart, the Beetle, whose operations as a communicative reverse colonialist outdo those of even the vampire.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 'Overland Mail': Exchange Through the Isthmus

> *I therefore [propose] what I deem a rational and proper plan to establish the intercourse with India by steam navigation, and thus bring India, as it were, one half nearer to this country in all that respects the transit of letters, passengers, and valuable freight.*
>
> — Thomas Waghorn, *Steam Navigation to India, via Egypt and the Red Sea*, 1835.[1]
>
> *The day is not far distant when, by a combination of railways and steam vessels, the distance between England and India, measured by time, will be shortened to eight days, and when that once fabulous country will thus be actually annexed to the Western World.*
>
> — Karl Marx, 'The Future Results of British Rule in India', 25 June 1853.[2]
>
> *I knew that a cargo of passengers for Australia had reached Cairo that morning, and were to be passed on to Suez as soon as the railway would take them.*
>
> — Anthony Trollope, 'George Walker at the Suez', 1861.[3]

In 1835, Thomas Waghorn would address a pamphlet to the merchants of Liverpool, espousing the virtues of establishing an overland mail route to India. In this pamphlet, Waghorn claims that the current state of timetabling meant that this route was not yet quick enough, and proposes a 'rational and proper plan' to initiate a more expedited connection. Waghorn — an apparent postal pioneer, entrepreneur and notorious self-promoter — took much of the credit for inaugurating the new route across the isthmus from Alexandria to Suez, and his rhetoric of speed and connectivity between the nations of Britain and India would become repeated time and time again. In the epigraph above, Waghorn emphasises this progress as one of steam, acceleration and communication which, he argues, will bring India 'one half nearer to this country'.[4] It is in this vein that Karl Marx addresses the importance of India to British socialism. Though he challenges

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[1] Thomas Waghorn, *Steam Navigation to India, via Egypt and Red Sea* (Liverpool: T. Kaye, 1835), 4. Jstor.
[2] Karl Marx, 'The Future Results of British Rule in India by Karl Marx', *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853. Marx and Engles Archive.
[3] Anthony Trollope, 'George Walker at the Suez', in *Tales of All Countries* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), 262. Internet Archive.
[4] Waghorn, *Steam Navigation to India*, 4.

the narrative of capitalist imperialism in India, Marx invests in a metaphor of literality with the overland mail: the once-foreign India will be 'actually annexed' to Europe in both distance and in 'civilisation'. This word, 'actually' drives at the materiality of this annexation, proving the idea of a 'once fabulous' India redundant. Aligned with Rowland Hill's mechanical efficiency, which we saw in Chapter One, these mid-Victorian discourses flatten and homogenise the multiple infrastructures that facilitated information communication with the British Empire, which included steam packets, mail trains and the bodies of mail runners. In doing so, they eliminate the bodily experience of transit on the overland mail.

Significantly, for the purposes of this chapter, Waghorn's hyperbolic conflation of three sets of cargo traversing this route — letters, freight and passengers. For Waghorn, all three travel the overland route with a frictionless mobility. However, passenger travel, both material and figurative, seems to paint a different picture. In Anthony Trollope's short story, 'George Walker at the Suez' (1861), the conflation of the passengers of the overland mail with 'cargo' diminishes their autonomy as they are 'passed on to Suez as soon as the railway would take them'.[5] On this journey, passengers do not experience travel by the mail as frictionless, India is not 'actually annexed' to Britain, and the journey is 'sandy, hot, and unpleasant'.[6] Through the course of this chapter, I examine the implications of these competing rhetorical tropes on the travelling bodies that sought passenger travel on the overland mail. What happened when Trollope's 'cargo of passengers' made this trip alongside the mail? What was it about the overland mail to India that captured the popular imagination as a route that combined mail and passengers? Furthermore, what exactly happened when bodies, imagined and real, travelled along the overland mail route? I analyse both fictional and non-fictional accounts of the overland mail, in order to establish how nineteenth-century popular culture explored the discomfort and disruption of passengers' bodies who, by travelling on this route, became secondary to the fast-moving information network of the mail.

The fascination with and prominence of this route in popular culture, as this chapter explores, exemplifies the importance of such international mail infrastructures in Victorian popular culture. The first section of this chapter analyses how popular culture, from periodical articles and newspaper features to panoramas and boardgames, celebrated the particular postal logic of the overland mail route. I argue that overland

[5] Trollope, 'George Walker', 262.
[6] Trollope, 264.

infrastructures framed conceptualisations of travel through the British Empire around the timetabled scheduling of the mail. Building on the work of my previous three chapters, I demonstrate that this timetabled and nodal travel diminished the distances between the West and East, and this had implications for bodies travelling between the centre and periphery of the empire in this period. As I show in Sections 2 and 3, these bodies disrupt the simplistic and homogenising rhetoric that we have seen in the hyperbole of Waghorn and Marx. Through Robert Browning's poem 'How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' (1848) and Anthony Trollope's short-story 'George Walker at the Suez' (1861), I analyse how bodies become disruptive to the idealised notion of frictionless mobility on the overland mail. Furthermore, I explore how satiric characters in Charles Dickens's 'Some Account of an Extra-Ordinary Traveller' (1850) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1845) disrupt binary differentiations between East and West. Instead, British bodies travelling on the mail foster an uncomfortable portrayal of a 'little England abroad'.[7]

Expanding on the discomfort of British bodies abroad, I examine the depiction of overland mail runners in Trollope's 'Returning Home' (1861) and Rudyard Kipling's 'The Overland Mail' (1886). The significance of bodily mail infrastructures in these pieces lies in their association with native bodies and cultures — these mail runners disrupt an imperialistic rhetoric, like that above, that construct international British postal infrastructures as an extension of Anglo-Saxon efficiency. The native runners depicted in these texts are not only integral to international postal infrastructures that keep British colonials in touch with the motherland, they also come to signify an Anglo-Saxon alienation. This leads me to the final section of this chapter, in which I consider the significance of heterogeneous overland mail infrastructures in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897). In this late-nineteenth-century text, I argue, the legacies of the anxieties and pleasures associated with the overland mail are Gothicised in the eponymous, hybrid villainess. It is the legacy of the overland mail route that made possible the hybridised, communicative and invasive creature of Marsh's popular Gothic novel.

Seminal scholarship on postcolonialism has framed my analysis of the overland mail's material and metaphorical role in constructing (and subverting) British imperial power in the Middle East and India. Edward Said's famous and important analysis of Orientalism's construction and representation of the East and far East informs my

[7] James Buzard, 'Portable Boundaries: Trollope, Race, and Travel', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 32, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 6. Taylor & Francis Online.

analysis of the various depictions of Egypt and India. Furthermore, the co-ordination of infrastructures on the overland mail route were associated with the 'modernity' wrought by British imperialism, which was perceived to shrink the distance between the West and Occident, and the East and Orient. Indeed, for Homi Bhabha, the ambivalent, in-between 'Third Space of enunciation [...] makes the structure of meaning and reference and ambivalent process'.[8] He argues that 'it is the "inter" — the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space — that carries the burden of meaning of culture'.[9] As we shall see in this chapter, the overland mail garners its meaning by virtue of being 'in-between'. Its ambiguity is a central aspect of its cultural significance: the overland mail is both imperial, yet run by native bodies; built for mail, yet nearly always depicted through its ability to carry bodies; travelling through an orientalised East, yet constructing a portable Britishness in the spaces between imperial centre and periphery. In an echo of the heterogeneous and ambivalent picture of postal infrastructures I detailed in previous chapters, the overland mail cannot and does not operate as a homogenising and frictionless facilitator of empire. In fact, it often acts as a metaphor through which the period explored the discomfort and alienation of white Anglo-Saxon bodies in overseas colonies.

As explored in my Introduction and Chapter Three, there has been rigorous and important scholarship on the relationship between mobility routes, infrastructures and the construction of the imperial nation in Victorian Britain. Charlotte Mathieson's examination of the 'representation of global spaces' in the Victorian novel has been foundational to my reading of the overland mail and its mobilisation of mail and passengers.[10] Mathieson argues that the presentation of the ease of global travel in the British novel 'contributed to the production of the world as readily and easily within reach of Britain'.[11] This ease of travel not only reproduced the imperial status quo — Mathieson contents that it also worked to 'reveal a substantial underpinning presence of global space as essential to the place of the nation'.[12] The global, then, was arguably a central part of the nation-place of Britain. Furthermore, Marian Aguiar has demonstrated that the infrastructural project of the railway in India worked to justify colonial rule through its

[8] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2004), 37.
[9] Bhabha, 38.
[10] Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 125.
[11] Mathieson, 124.
[12] Mathieson, 125.

'temporal precision' which signified imperial modernity.[13] The construction of large-scale infrastructural projects overseas 'modernised' colonised countries according to the *British* ideal of modernity. As Mark Rubenstein argues, state infrastructures are partially emblems of 'the violence of the imperialist mentality or the modernizing thrust of modern nation-states'.[14] My aim with this chapter is to build upon this critical scholarship, by contributing an original insight into how the co-ordination of international postal infrastructures functioned to construct and complicate conceptions of British imperial travel and communication.

It is worth noting here that the overland mail did not only run through Europe and Egypt. During the mid-nineteenth century, the 'overland mail' came to refer to various grand, trans-national routes — the term became a readily identifiable icon of complex, multi-infrastructural route-ways beyond the initial overland mail route through Egypt. In the 1850s, the USA began to develop an overland mail route to connect East and West America. As overland journeys were so gruelling and dangerous in America, a letter sent from the East Coast to California would have to travel via steamship to Central America, and then cross overland via the Panama isthmus by mail runner before travelling again by steamship to California. This is the route followed by Sarah Merriman Brooks's narrative, which I discussed in Chapter Three and of which we shall see more in this chapter. With attention to the various overland routes available, this chapters utilises narratives concerning overland routes in India, Panama, and Costa Rica, as well as Egypt. Furthermore, the overland mail route also ran across Europe via different routes — one from Calais to Marseilles, another across Belgium to Marseilles, and finally through Germany and Austria to Trieste or Brindisi in Italy (which is the route chosen by Phileas Fogg, as seen in Chapter Three). My concentration on overland routes beyond the European mainland risks flattening a constantly evolving series of routes across the Continent. At the beginning of its establishment to the mid-nineteenth century, the overland mail route was contested, with multiple courier companies asserting that their route across Europe was more efficient and rapid than the rest. These multiplicities played a part in the construction of this infrastructural route-way in the popular imaginary, despite the hyperbolic rhetoric, exemplified by Waghorn and Marx above, that attempted to homogenise the international infrastructures of the mail.

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[13] Marian Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 12.
[14] Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 16.

1. The Postal Logic of the Overland Mail Route

The overland mail route became a scheduled element of British imperial travel in 1845, when the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) took up the government mail contract from the Red Sea to Ceylon, Madras and Calcutta.[15] As P&O already held the contract to Gibraltar, Marseilles, and Alexandria, this new contract meant that the company now had a monopoly on all mail travelling to and from Britain, India and China because the Post Office and P&O could schedule the timetables of steamships to allow for the most expeditious transport of mails. While the route became associated with the speedy exchange of the mail, it also became synonymous with the most up-to-date information and intelligence. The multiple postal infrastructures of the overland mail route amalgamate the postal logics we have seen so far in this thesis. This route-way, we will see, compounds the pleasures and anxieties associated with the postal logic of the speed, confidentiality and nodal points of the mail.

Throughout the 1840s and 50s, the 'Overland Mail' intelligence would become a staple feature of many newspapers, from *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer*, to *The Stirling Observer* and the *Hereford Journal.* These segments, often inserted on broadsheet pages alongside further 'foreign news', contained information about Britain's military stakes in China and India. The 'Overland Mail' articles exemplify Chandrika Kaul's claim that there were 'close and reciprocal links between media and imperialism' — this communications network facilitated the flow of military intelligence from one corner of the empire to its imagined centre.[16] Moreover, their form attests to the specific postal logic of the overland mail route; they are speedy, succinct and confidential. These articles use clipped sentences to convey information about India and China, and begin by informing the readers upon which mail the intelligence was sent:

> The latest dates are—Alexandria, 31st August, Calcutta, 19th July, Ceylon 4th July [….] Manilla and Mauritius 1st June, Scinde [sic] 25th June, and Singapore 12th June. The London mail of June 7th reached Bombay on the 9th July.[17]

> We have received, by Extraordinary Express, our Indian Overland dispatches, bringing us letters and papers from Bombay to the 15th of October; from Calcutta to the 8th of October; from Alexandria to the 7th of November; from Delhi to the 1st of October; and from Hong Kong to the 1st September.[18]

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[15] Freda Harcourt, *Flagships of Imperialism: The P&O Company and the Politics of Empire from Its Origins to 1867* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 57.
[16] Chandrika Kaul, *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.
[17] Anon, 'Overland Mail', *The Examiner*, September 14, 1844, 583. British Periodicals.
[18] Anon, 'The Arrival of the Overland Mail', *The Standard*, November 22, 1845, 5. British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900. Emphasis my own.

These opening paragraphs highlight the postal nature of their intelligence. The different dates of the incoming mail, travelling backwards from Alexandria to Singapore, emphasise their travel from port to port via steam packet. The lack of sentence structure and use of lists to create meaning is suggestive of the speed of their transference to the respective newspapers, while the reeling off of dates in this list form signals the timetabled logic of news from the overland mail.

Furthermore, *The Standard* deliberately emphasises the exclusive nature of their overland mail intelligence: '*We* have received […] *our* Indian Overland dispatches, bringing *us* letters and papers'.[19] By using possessive pronouns, *The Standard* highlights the exclusivity of their news from the Far East. The overland mail was used to convey the most up-to-date information from the furthest, and most contested, corners of British imperialist expansion. The use of the 'Overland Mail' feature to discuss the latest military news aligns with Said's reading of Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer. Said argues that Cromer imagines British imperialism as operating with both a 'seat of power in the West, and radiating out from it towards the East a great embracing machine, sustaining the central authority'.[20] Alongside this central machinery, a specialist or a 'local agent [...] does the immediate translation [....] "Local interests" are Orientalist special interests, the "central authority" is the general interest of the imperial society as a whole'.[21] The 'Overland Mail' dispatches exemplify Cromer's logic of translating 'local concerns' into the 'general concerns' of the authority, here represented by newspapers in mainland Britain.[22] However, these texts also highlight the circulatory nature of this particular type of postal mobility — each piece of expedited mail travels through nodes on the map of the overland route and from a particular point in the mail's schedule. The 'Overland Mail' segments of the 'Foreign News' construct an imperialistic authority within the postal logic of the infrastructural co-ordination of the mail route.

In *Household Words*, the 'Overland Mail' was also used to discuss the most immediate news from China, India and Afghanistan. Moreover, in 1851, Robert Bell published an extended piece called 'The Overland Mailbag,' which links the overland mail to the globalised circulation of the Victorian empire. Catherine Waters has established the importance of the circulation of goods in *Household Words*; she argues that these globalised goods 'are given a narrative form in which the movement of

[19] Anon, 'The Arrival of the Overland Mail', 5.
[20] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Classics. London: Penguin, 2003), 44.
[21] Said, 44.
[22] Said, 45.

commodities becomes a form of sociability between peoples and nations'.[23] 'The Overland Mail Bag' is linked to this type of narrative form, in which goods, or in this case, the mail, move across the globe with agency. Here, Bell urges his readers to pay more attention to the complex political crisis arising in India from the threat of invasion from Russia. The narrative of 'The Overland Mail Bag' is indicative of the postal logic of the newspaper features, and Bell uses the form of narrative to push this logic further.

This piece deliberately plays with the format of the 'Overland Mail' newspaper features discussed above: Bell uses the first section of the narrative to establish the path the mail has taken, and then the rest of the article is given over to the details of politics. Bell continually reiterates both the distance the mailbags have come and the 'other' cultures they have seen. The very paper of the mail becomes imbued with the 'mysterious' scents of India: the news 'comes journeying over mountains and seas with the plague-spots and spices of the East in its leaves'.[24] The British and Western intelligence becomes permeated with the signifiers of the East and is orientalised. Furthermore, the journey that comes to change the fabric of the mail itself highlights the circulatory nature of the post, which must travel a distinct path in order to connect itself to the network of the British Post Office.

By imbuing the very paper of the mail with the scents of the Far East, Bell highlights the lines of circulation drawn by exchange on the overland mail. Bell encourages the reader to 'spread out before him a map of India', and to speculate on both 'the mysterious music of a climate abounding with invisible life [and the] kingdoms and empires protected by our alliance, or preserved in their equilibrium by the neighbourhood of our authority'.[25] As the reader flattens the globe before them, the information route-way also flattens the distance between India, Persia, Afghanistan and Europe. What is more, this flattening enables the reader to justify Britain's military presence and 'authority' in the East. If the circulation of commodities in *Household Words* is indicative of sociability between different peoples and nations, as Waters argues, then, alternatively, the information circulated via the overland mail here institutes the authority of the British Empire.

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[23] Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 103.
[24] Robert Bell, 'The Overland Mail Bag', *Household Words* IV, no. 88 (November 29, 1851): 229. Dickens Journals Online.
[25] Bell, 229.

Strikingly, Bell also plays with the representation of these overland mail dispatches, which contradicts the rationale of modernity seen in the similar rhetoric of Waghorn and Marx at the beginning of this chapter. The opening of this piece contends that Indian mails arrive 'every fortnight, or thereabouts—*not always regularly*, for there are winds and tides, and other contingencies, by land and water, that *obstruct the progress* of *keels and wheels*'.[26] This opening dramatically undercuts the distance-shrinking rhetoric utilised to describe the transport technology of steam that drove the use of the overland route — Bell instead utilises the imagery of sailing ships and mail coaches, which produce irregularities in the transportation of the mail. Furthermore, in Bell's introduction, colonial India is presented as marred by ancient conflicts that only the British can assay. India, Bell would have his readers believe, is ancient and complex by virtue of being perpetual and clan-based: 'let him endeavour to realise to himself the vital energies that are wakened up into perpetual conflict in those distant scenes, the collisions of class and clan, the struggle for power, the feuds and jealousies'.[27] This

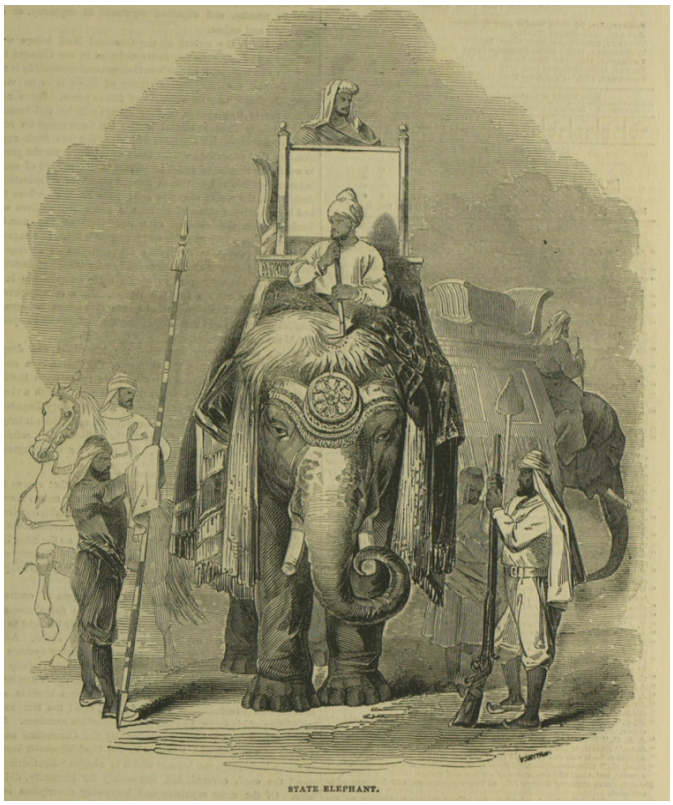

Figure 24. Anon, 'State Elephant', *Illustrated London News*. January 6, 1844, 88. The Illustrated London News Historical Archive.

[26] Bell, 229. Emphasis my own.
[27] Bell, 229.

Figure 25. Anon, 'View of the Canton River' and 'Chinese Soldier', *Illustrated London News*. February 11, 1843, 9. The Illustrated London News Historical Archive.

imagery brings the ancient and the modern into collision — between India and Britain, and the overland mail and a more archaic form of transport. In Bell's article, the overland mailbag becomes a symbol of diminishing distance which collapses the boundaries between past and present.

This collapsing of space and time can also be seen materially on the pages of *The Illustrated London News*. Some of their 'Overland Mail' features use engravings of the areas from which the 'intelligence' has travelled. As Figures 24 and 25 demonstrate, these illustrations offer an incredibly romanticised vision of Egypt, China and India. Images of a Maharaja riding his ornate elephant and a Chinese soldier in the landscape of the Canton River, for example, offer a representation of an ancient, orientalised ideal in contrast to a modernising and progressive Britain — one partly symbolised here by the mass-produced and uniform printed pages of the article circulating through mail infrastructures. As in Bell's piece above, the juxtaposition of these 'archaic' images alongside the most up-to-date and expedited information works to flatten the distance between Britain and the East:

> The mail which brought the intelligence annexed was despatched [sic] ten days earlier than usual, in order to avoid the monsoon which was about to set in, and therefore the news was not brought up to so late a date as might be expected.[28]

[28] Anon, 'The Overland Mail', *Illustrated London News*. February 11, 1843, 132. The Illustrated London News Historical Archive.

> The Indian Mail has arrived, with letters and papers from Bombay to Dec. 1. The principle items relate to the prevalence of great sickness in the two newly acquired possessions of Hong Kong in China. Peace prevails throughout British India, although the preparations for war were busy.[29]

These features emphasise the most up-to-date information of British rule in the East, yet the pictures alongside them conflate modernity with an archaic past. *The Illustrated London News* does not depict the impending war in British India, or the most up-to-date images of colonised Hong Kong, but instead orientalised images of China and India. The insertion of these images not only romanticises the East but also materially enacts the performance of the overland mail itself: it adheres to a postal logic, which can flatten the distance between East and West, modern and archaic.

I wish to establish one further feature of the postal logic of the overland mail before turning to the bodies that traversed its infrastructures. The overland mail travelled

Figure 26. Henry Fitzcook, 'Frontispiece', *The Route of the Overland Mail to India*. Britain, 1850. Book 29805, Bill Douglas Archive.

[29] Anon, 'The Overland Mail', *Illustrated London News,* January 6, 1844, 5. The Illustrated London News Historical Archive.

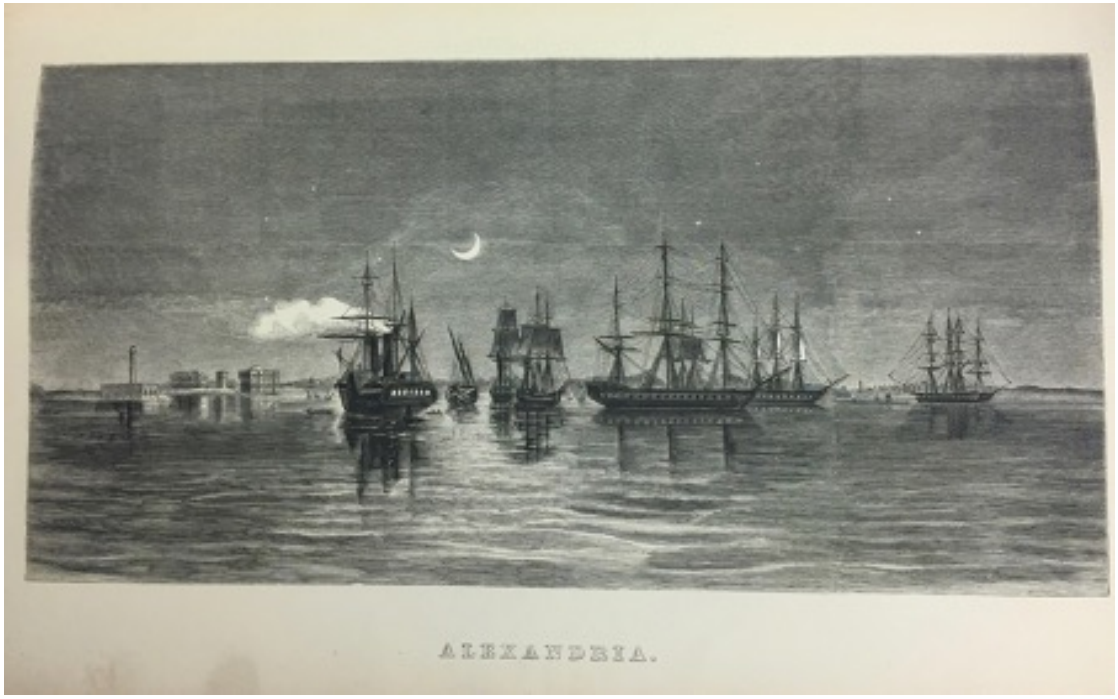

Figure 27. Henry Fitzcook, ‘Alexandria’, *The Route of the Overland Mail to India*. Britain, 1850. Book 29805, Bill Douglas Archive.

from Southampton to Alexandria via multiple routes: the P&O steam packets carried the mail via Gibraltar and Marseilles, while other courier services travelled across France and Belgium. However, they all featured stopping points and exchanges. From Marseilles, all routes travelled through Alexandria, and from there overland to the Suez, before continuing by steam packet to multiple cities in India and China. The nodes and mooring points in the network of the overland mail were as much a part of its postal logic as the speediness of the route. In 1850 the Royal Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street would show a diorama entitled ‘The Overland Route of the Mail from Southampton to Calcutta’, which was rapidly followed by Albert Smith’s ‘Overland Mail’ panorama at Willis’s Public Rooms in St James Square — which received rave newspaper reviews. These dioramas also went on to tour Britain, suggesting that the mail route was part of the popular imaginary. As John Plunkett has shown, these dioramas networked the globe and created a cultural understanding of the mythology of the overland route. Plunkett argues that the overland mail route’s appearance in panoramas and other forms of popular culture, such as ‘shows, letters, articles and prints, exemplifies the fascination

with Britain's position at the heart of a global commodities and trading network'.[30] I would further argue that they exemplify a fascination with the postal logic of this information route. We can understand from the booklet companion to these shows, that the routes of the dioramas explicitly follow that of the mail, pausing at scheduled nodes en route — including Gibraltar, Marseilles, and Calcutta. As Figures 26 and 27 show, 'The Overland Route of the Mail' details each node and the scenery the traveller is likely to witness – emphasising both the journey and specific experience of the route-way of the overland mail. Each image inflects the show with the pauses and pitstops that shaped travel on the mail route; thus encouraging its viewers to understand not only the spectacle of the foreign landscape but also the stopping points of the route itself.

These nodal points acted as points of collisions and contestation. *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* published a short story entitled 'Effect of the Arrival of the Overland Mail at Cairo' in 1848. This narrative takes place in the mooring point of Cairo — where the overland mails from India and Britain collide in their crossings. The narrator, Mrs Romer, highlights the bustle of this nodal point:

> at no time a very quiet place, it was absolutely hurried into hysterics the day before yesterday, by the arrival of two overland mails […] both depositing for a few hours their respective live cargoes.[31]

As these two mails meet, they 'deposit' their 'live cargo' — a compelling dehumanisation — and the two groups of passengers collide: one set with 'the world before them, and everything tinged with the bright hues of hope!' and the other with 'wan and sallow face and broken-down form' on their way home.[32] However, central to this short narrative is a Miss D—, who is travelling out to India to be married. Upon arrival at this mooring point, she receives a letter from the homeward bound mails 'announcing to her the death of [her intended], and recommending her not to proceed beyond Cairo'.[33] The nodal point of Cairo becomes a site where the infrastructures of the communications network facilitate collisions between information and passengers travelling to and from India. In this article, this collision both brings two very different groups of people together and

[30] John Plunkett, 'The Overland Mail: Moving Panoramas and the Imagining of Trade and Communication Networks', in *Commodities and Cultures in the Colonial World*, eds. Supriya Chaudhuri, Josephine Mcdonagh, Brian H Murray, and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge, 2018), 47.
[31] Anon, 'Effect of Arrival of the Overland Mail at Cairo', *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, June 1848, 662. British Periodicals.
[32] Anon, 662.
[33] Anon, 662.

provides the opportunity to receive information and expedited mail, however tragic, before the next leg of the journey.

We can further see the prevalence of such postal logic in the popular board-games which followed the overland mail route. Some of these used the images from the panoramas themselves, and emphasise the route-way of the mail. 'A Tour Through the British Colonies, and Foreign Possessions,' first published in 1853, follows the long route past the Cape of Good Hope, but players can opt to take the quicker overland mail route through Egypt if they are lucky enough to land on Marseilles.[34] A game entitled the 'Dioramic Game of the Overland Route to India' (1852-63) features a linked series of images, the player must roll a specific amount in order to move.[35] Its game itinerary is embedded in a route that was highly scheduled, in which mails were collected and returned at specific ports. In this way, the postal logic of the overland mail route plays a part in a cultural imagining of the journey. This is a route in which the prerogative of the mail is paramount; all goods, letters, passengers, panorama viewers and board-game players following this route-way were bound by the schedules and influences of its postal timetable.

2. Disruptive (and disrupted) Bodies and the Overland Mail

The overland mail, then, shaped the narrative form of popular non-fiction with a postal logic, which allowed its readers and viewers to understand travel along this route within a specific temporal and infrastructural framework. However, what exactly did this mean for bodies which travelled along this route? How is their travel implicated within the scheduled, speedy logic of the overland mail?

Robert Browning's 'How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' (1845) ('Good News'), has been read as layering an archaic form of travel, horseback, with the driving rhythm of the steam present. John Picker argues that the poem's publication during the 'Railway Boom' of the 1840s centres it in a landscape that was being transformed by new infrastructures. For Picker, 'Browning's poem creates a horse-

[34] John Betts, 'A Tour Through the British Colonies, and Foreign Possessions', London, 1853. E.2650:1 to 3-1953, V&A Museum, London.
[35] William Sallis, 'Dioramic Game of the Overland Route to India', London, 1852-1863. E.181&A-1947, V&A Museum, London.

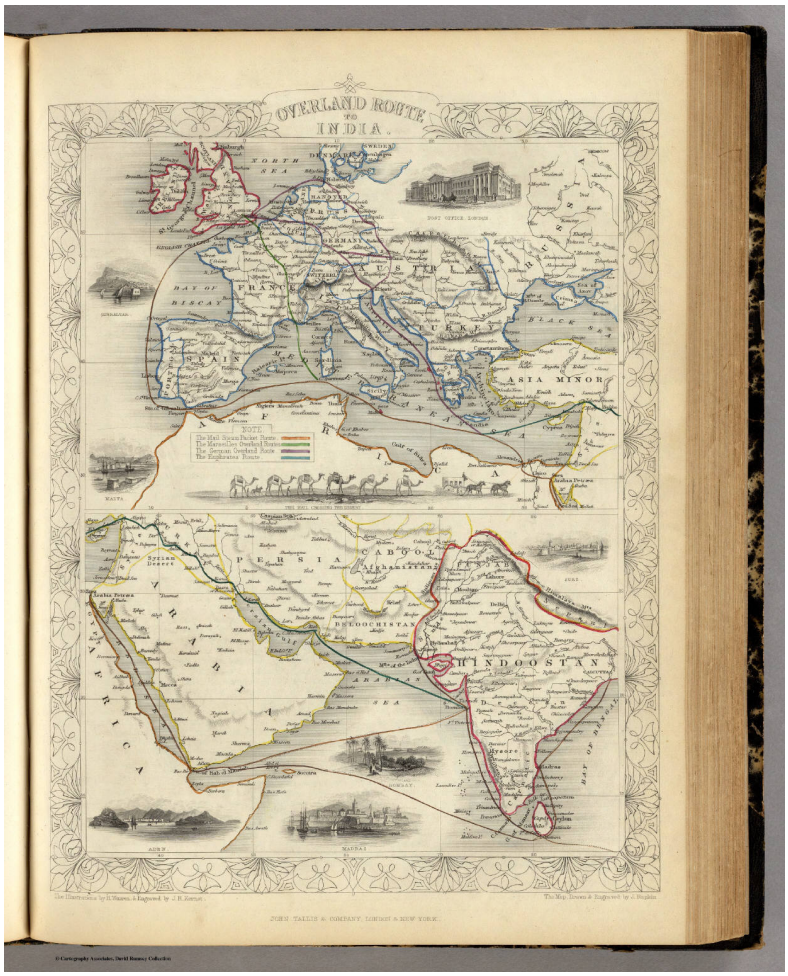

Figure 28. Martin, R. M., John Rapkin, and Warren, *Overland Routes to India and China*, New York: J. & F. Tallis, 1851. 0466030. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

powered history that never happened in order to reflect on the bewildering rhythms of a steam-powered present'.[36] However, Browning's poem can also be understood as implicated in the postal logic of the overland mail route. By reading the poem from this perspective, we can further understand the trials of the journey on the bodies of the horses that fall along the way. The composition of this poem is linked to global information route-ways: at the time of writing, Browning was travelling from Gibraltar to Trieste on the way to Venice. As the map in Figure 28 shows, the mail route travelled overland either from Calais to Marseilles or through Belgium from Ostend to Trieste. The latter route was one that Waghorn, as an agent to The Austrian Lloyd's Company, was

[36] John Picker, 'Aural Anxieties', in *The Victorian World*, ed Martin Hewitt (London: Routledge, 2012), 613.

in the process of promoting; he claimed that the courier company's route from Ostend to Trieste was a far more 'rapid and efficient route'.[37] Remarkably, in a later letter to Elizabeth Barret-Browning in 1846, Browning asserts that the route to Trieste was only '"£12 and £15" by Mr Waghorn's Bill'.[38] Though Browning wrote this letter after the composition of the poem on the steamship to Trieste, the discussion of Waghorn's overland route here is a compelling example of how the infrastructures of postal communication shaped international travel.

Furthermore, the content of the poem draws on the association the overland mail had in delivering the most up-to-date information concerning the military. Comparatively, as the information travels across the Belgian overland route, Browning uses a galloping rhythm and rhyming couplets to drive the poem forward, implicating it in the speedy transference of military intelligence associated with the overland mail. The driving rhythm of Browning's poem reflects the speed of steam-powered information infrastructures:

> 'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
> Lokeren, the cocks crow and twilight dawn'd clear;
> At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
> At Düffeld, 't was morning as plain as could be;
> And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
> So, Joris broke silence with, 'Yet there is time!'[39]

The meter mix of iambs and anapaests creates the rhythmic pattern of the horses' gallop past particular places at specific times. They start at moonset, move on to Lokeren as the cock crows, at Düffeld the riders recognise morning and reach Mecheln to find the time. Through its content and its timetabled travel, Browning's horses become implicated in the postal logic of the overland mail.

However, Browning deliberately uses horses instead of steam to transfer the expedited news of the war. Though the poem's anapaests mimic the driving rhythm of the steam train (or mail train), the narration focuses on the body of Rowland the horse, who continues to gallop despite the poem's unbending rhythm. Indeed, the naming of this horse is perhaps a nod to the machine-like qualities Rowland Hill expected of

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[37] Thomas Waghorn, *Overland Mails to India, China, Etc: The Acceleration of Mails, Once a Fortnight, Between England and the East Indies, and Vice Versa* (Smith, Elder, and Company, 1843), 26. Google Books.
[38] Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, August 25, 1846, in *The Browning Letters*, 1. http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/4371.
[39] Robert Browning, 'How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix', in *Robert Browning Selected Poems*, ed. Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 39, lines 13-18.

Britain's postal sorters and runners after the inception of the uniform penny post, which we saw in Chapter One. However, the poem quickly becomes littered with the dying bodies of the other horses:

> — for one heard the quick wheeze
> Of her chest, saw the stretch'd neck and staggering knees
> And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
> As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.
> [….]
> And all in a moment his roan
> Roll'd neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone.[40]

As these horses fall, the galloping meter falters and stalls over their bodies. These horses fail to keep up with the rhythm of the mail train and mechanical circulation that drives the poem forward, and their deaths disrupt the canter of the cadence. 'Good News' focuses on the bodies that carry this information, colliding them with the ferocity of speed of the steam-powered presence. However, though these bodies are important, they are only important as they carry the news. Those that inevitably stumble and fall are left behind — the poem continues to gallop on till the end. As the bodies of the horses fail to keep up with the steam that powered the overland mail route, they disrupt the driving rhythm of the poem and emphasise the difficulties for bodies travelling along the newly established postal network.

This disruptive travel would become a part of fictionalised accounts of travelling via the mail into the overland route's heyday. In 1861, over twenty years after the establishment of the overland mail, Anthony Trollope published the short story 'George Walker at the Suez' in *Public Opinion*. This short story follows the particularly dreary narrator on a sojourn and small adventure through Egypt. The eponymous George Walker has been sent in exile to Cairo by his scheming business partners. Encountering a friend on the way to Australia, Walker travels with the family to the Suez and is stuck there for a week. During his stay, one Mahmoud al Ackbar mistakes the narrator for a different Sir George Walker, an error which leads George to smoke a hookah made of amber with the important al Ackbar and nearly join him and his entourage on a sight-seeing cruise. However, this journey is interrupted when al Ackbar discovers the mistaken identity and forces Walker to walk through back-alleys and back-doors lest his presence further distress the pride of the 'Arab gentleman'.

[40] Browning, 'Good News', 40, lines 33-36, 43-44.

In this short story, Walker is often held in specific stasis while others move about him. As he stays-over in Cairo and Suez, the cities become sites of temporal mobility and moorings. These cities, instead of being visited in their own right, become nodal points on the journey to final destinations. Walker states:

> I should perhaps have explained that the even tenor of our life at the hotel was disturbed some four times a month by a flight through Cairo of a flock of travellers, who like locusts eat up all that there was eatable at the Inn for the day [….] This flock consisted of passengers passing and repassing by the overland route to and from India and Australia.[41]

Here Walker describes the temporal break between the movements of people as exacerbated by the punctuality of the route-ways through Egypt. International postal infrastructures shape the rapid and in-sync mobility of the locus-like passengers. The passengers move with repetitive speed: by 'passing and repassing', their timetabled movement erodes at the sense of this space as a city, instead cultivating it as a mooring point in a much larger, globalised network. This timetabled, scheduled movement leaves gaps in the city's Western populace. Furthermore, the passengers here do not figure as human but as locusts — they disrupt and disturb the cities as they travel along the mail route. As British emigrants and travellers pass through these gateways with timetabled promptness, the infrastructures available to allow them to stay become empty as the latest steam packet, run by P&O, leaves the port.

As discussed in Section 1, the panoramas of the overland mail imagined this journey as both progress and a series of breaks. Particularly when crossing through Egypt, panoramas focused on the stoppages in the journey at Alexandria, Cairo, the Middle Station in the desert, and Suez. Exemplified in Figures 26 and 27, the viewer of the 'Route of the Overland Mail' diorama sees a series of bodies halted at various stops along this postal network. What we are able to witness in Trollope's short story are the spaces left behind when these bodies move on. The scheduled movement of passengers leaves openings and empty spaces in the city, through which Trollope emphasises Walker's discontinuity, loneliness and discordance in his stasis:

> I [...] went out and stood at the front door, or gate. It is a large house, built round a quadrangle, looking with one front towards the head of the Red Sea, and with the other into and on a sandy, dead-looking, open square.[42]

Walker's position as motionless in cities that specifically facilitate movement on-mass, allows him to grudgingly experience empty spaces.

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[41] Trollope, 'George Walker', 262.
[42] Trollope, 264-5.

Trollope would have been aware of the postally scheduled movement of passengers through Egyptian nodal cities as he had worked to co-ordinate these infrastructures. In 1858, the Post Office sent Trollope to Egypt as a postal surveyor both to make the transport of mails from Alexandria to Suez more efficient, and negotiate a deal with governing officials about the transfer of the mail on the soon-to-be-completed railway. Before P&O built the railway from Alexandria to the Suez, mail was traditionally carried across the desert by camel and later by omnibuses. We can glean some information about Trollope's role in the securing of the mail contract for the railway both from his *An Autobiography* (1883) and from R. H. Super's study, *Trollope in the Post Office* (1981). During this mission, Trollope is reported to have energetically measured the exact distance travelled by camels, and the time it took, comparing it to that of the trains. He concluded that it should take twenty-four hours once the mails had been delivered by steam packet to Alexandria to transfer them to the Suez. This proved a sticking point when the Egyptian Official, Nubar Bey, insisted on forty-eight hours for this transfer to take place.[43] In his autobiography, Trollope claims that this position was a result of intervention by P&O who had paid for the building of the railway — the extra time allowing the company to comfortably transport (profitable) passengers as well as the mails.[44] As Howard Robinson has argued in his formative work on international mail routes, P&O was 'interested in keeping down the speed of the mail transit across Egypt so that the P&O freight might cross at the same time as the mails, and depart on the same ship'.[45] In *An Autobiography*, Trollope claims that through sheer stubbornness he is able to induce Bey to concede to twenty-four hours for the transfer, thus prioritising the transfer of the mail over that of the passenger.

Indeed, the question of how long it should take for mails to travel across the desert in relation to passenger 'cargo', was a point of debate for the Post Office before the P&O company took up the mail contract from Suez or the railway was constructed across the desert. In a letter to the Secretary to the Postmaster General, Colonel William Leader Maberly, in September 1839, the Post Office Agent at Alexandria, Henry Johnson, explains the scheduling of the mail across Egypt:

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[43] Robert H. Super, *Trollope in the Post Office* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 36

[44] Super, *Trollope*, 36; Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 155-156.

[45] Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (Liverpool: George Allen & Unwim Ltd, 1964), 169. Open Stacks HE6935.R62, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

> With regard to the Plan adopted for the transit of Mail through Egypt, I have to state that on the arrival of the British Packet, the Mail is landed and despatched without delay to Cairo, on Donkies [sic], except during three Months of the Year, August, September, and October, when in consequence of the overflowing of the Nile, it is sent by water the whole way [....] In the dry season it generally gets to Cairo in 48 hours, there it is immediately placed on Camels and forwarded across the desert to Suez in about 26 or 28 hours, where if a Steamer is waiting it is put on board at once, in order that the Packet may start 72 hours after the Mail is on board, This time is allowed to enable Passengers to come up.[46]

I have quoted this letter at length in order to demonstrate the complexity of intersecting infrastructures and mobilities here. In 1839, season changes to the landscape shaped postal infrastructures across the Egyptian desert. Though travelling as part of Waghorn's 'rational and proper plan', much of this infrastructure was still beholden to the antagonistic weather of the desert.

Furthermore, the mail is delayed by three days at Suez because of the time it takes passengers to travel across the same distance. This delay becomes a source of concern to the Secretary to the Postmaster General, Colonel William Leader Maberly, who wrote a letter of complaint in October to the 'Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company', who managed the packets from Suez to India before the Admiralty awarded the mail contract to P&O. He protests that 'it appears that after the Mail forwarded from Alexandria to India is put on-board the Packet at Suez, it is detained at that part 3 days to give time for the arrival of Passengers'.[47] This, Maberly asserts, causes 'a most serious delay of the Indian Correspondence' and he impresses the Directors that he hopes 'that orders may be issued to put a stop to this practice'.[48] Before the relative homogenising of packet routes from the Suez, then, the Post Office understood and managed the myriad postal infrastructures operating across the overland route with the assumption that they should be scheduled to expedite the mobility of the mails as a priority.

In 'George Walker at the Suez', the significance of this secondary position of passengers and the speediness of this route-way, allows Trollope to play with the relative position of passengers on the overland mail route. Walker consistently figures passengers moving through the overland route as sent — they become subsumed by the postal network. When Walker first begins to discuss the movement of passengers

[46] H Johnson to Colonel W L Maberly, September 3, 1839, in *Alexandria Packet Agency* (1840), POST 29/28B, Postal Museum Archive, London.
[47] C. L. Maberly to J. C. Melvill Esq, October 4, 1839, in *Alexandria Packet Agency* (1840), POST 29/28B, Postal Museum Archive, London.
[48] C. L. Maberly to J. C. Melvill Esq, September 3, 1839, POST 29/28B.

through Egypt, he describes them in terms of economic exchange: 'I knew that a cargo of passengers for Australia had reached Cairo that morning, and were to be passed on to Suez as soon as the railway would take them'.[49] Later, when travelling with the Robinson family to the Suez, the description of travel is littered with metaphors of exchange which dehumanise and package the travel experience. They are 'moved' from one form of transport to another, Walker is 'thrust into' an omnibus, and they travel on a 'conveyance'.[50] As they traverse the different networks of information, passengers and cargo, the bodies of those on the overland route move in a kind of hybridity, caught up in alternative and privileged networks of exchange. For Caroline Levine, realist fiction in the nineteenth century 'asks us to perceive anew what we thought we already knew but did not perceive well enough. It defamiliarizes'.[51] Moreover, while Levine argues that infrastructures are likely to go unnoticed until they 'disintegrate', she also argues that 'the novel takes up the challenge of conveying experience as not exciting or exceptional, but frustratingly routine'.[52] Though Trollope's form here is the short story, his realist fiction invests in the mundanity and routine of the overland route; it is not because the infrastructures 'disintegrate' that they become visible and visceral to the bodies travelling on-board in this text. Instead, it is because they are working with the mundanity of routine, which equates to the speed required to transfer the mails, that these infrastructures become visible in the language of the text.

Above all, the experience of travel is not a comfortable one. Walker stresses that the journey, even on the railway, was 'sandy, hot, and unpleasant […] the dust was a great nuisance'.[53] Once on the omnibuses, the discomfort becomes even more acute, 'these omnibuses were wooden boxes, placed each upon a pair of wheels, and supposed to be capable of carrying six passengers […] On the first going off I was jolted right onto Mrs. R and her infant'.[54] These infrastructures are clearly not created with passengers in mind; instead, they aim to convey all goods, or 'cargo,' as quickly as possible. While the railway slowly trundles along a half-built track, the wagons are all about speed: they get 'dragged through the sand', and the boxes 'went as fast as the

[49] Trollope, 'George Walker', 262.
[50] Trollope, 264.
[51] Caroline Levine, '"The Strange Familiar": Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 4 (December 29, 2015): 589. Jstor.
[52] Levine, 591.
[53] Trollope, 'George Walker', 264.
[54] Trollope, 264.

beasts could be made to gallop'.[55] Walker experiences disparate forms of transportation infrastructure that are ultimately not made for kinaesthetic bodies. As Trollope stubbornly pursued in his meeting with Bey and emphasised by Browning's galloping horses, the overland mail prioritised the exchange of mails, communication and information over that of the living body. Indeed, the bodies that traverse this route-way experience an abrasive and harsh environment cannot move as neatly nor as uniformly as the mails.

3. Lieutenant Waghorn's Bouncing Body and the Extraordinary Travels of Mr Booley

In an article on an 'Overland Mail' panorama, *Punch* gleefully claims that it is possible to put a panorama around the world, and relishes in the 'wonderfully cheap and wonderfully quick' nature of travelling by panorama.[56] It at once idealises and satirises being in Egypt through the panorama: 'we should stop for a whole day at Malta—and to tarry for a whole night at Cairo, walking and mooning about, reading the *Arabian Nights*'.[57] This article also includes an image of Punch himself, as seen in Figure 29, dressed in an orientalised Egyptian costume, complete with parasol and camel. In this dioramic production of the mail, travel seems to be easy and frictionless as the audience moves seamlessly between Regents Street in London to the Sahara Desert and across it. However, this seamless travel, and Punch's happiness, is only made possible by the panorama; in reality, the overland mail route did not offer such ease for travellers. Through this section, I compare two satiric travelling bodies who almost ride as passengers on the overland mail. I first focus on Mr Booley, a repeated character who first appeared in 'Some Account of an Extra-Ordinary Traveller' in *Household Words* in April 1850, arguing that his inappropriate travelling body emphasised the new closeness between Britain and the Far East. I then analyse the depiction of Lieutenant Waghorn, whom we have already met, in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (hereafter *Notes of a Journey*) (1845). I argue that Thackeray's satire of overland mail travel to Egypt functions by emphasising the blurring of cultures between the East and West.

[55] Trollope, 264.
[56] Anon, 'Putting a Panorama Round the Earth', *Punch*, May 25, 1850, 208. Punch Historical Archive.
[57] Anon, 'Panorama', 208.

PUTTING A PANORAMA ROUND THE EART

RAVELLING is now-a-d
cheap, that it is br
within the means o
meanest pocket. A
starting from Burli
Arcade, could easily
round the world for
shillings.

If this cheapness sp
much further, the lo
and dearest journey
shortly be from Hung
Bridge to Paddingto
2*d*.

We have enjoyed
cheap excursions
We have visited every
ter of the universe at
tian Hall—have been s
up with the North P
MR. BURFORD in Lei
Square—have emigrat
New Zealand, and
brought back again i
than two hours by
BREES—and know
feature of every river
has had its likeness taken on a piece of canvas, not more than three
long. We have enjoyed all these little trips, and thought them wo
fully cheap, and wonderfully quick—but it seems that travelling
then in its stage-coach days of infancy. Paintings now move wit
rapidity of steam—and an artist, who has anything of the quickn
the fox with his brush, will paint you a Panorama, long enough
round the Globe, in less time almost than ARIEL boasted of putt

Figure 29. Anon, 'Putting a Panorama Round the Earth', *Punch*, May 25, 1850, 463. Punch Historical Archive.

In April 1850, Charles Dickens opened *Household Words* with 'Some Account of an Extra-Ordinary Traveller' who, at the age of 65, has accomplished an 'extraordinary amount of travel' — travel, that is, via the panorama.[58] In this adventurous travel narrative, Mr Booley is able to brave the freezing Arctic, sail the Mississippi river, traverse the Australian bush and New Zealand, as well as travel along the overland mail route. Strikingly, his journey on the overland mail takes place over one paragraph. As Mr Booley travels via the nodal points of the overland route, he passes by Malta, Gibraltar, Grand Cairo, Suez, Ceylon and Calcutta in the space of two sentences. Mr Booley's overland journey flies by in an instant, especially in comparison to the extended descriptions of his journeys through other areas of the world. This speeding up of pace enacts the rapidity of the mail route itself, punctuated by moments of stasis along the route.

[58] Charles Dickens, 'Some Account of an Extra-Ordinary Traveller', *Household Words*, 1, no. 4 (April 20, 1850): 73. Dickens Journals Online.

However, this performance of travel is juxtaposed by Mr Booley's body, a body which should, in the humour of the article, indicate an incapacity for travel. His corpulent and ageing body is the readers' first indication that this is not a body fit for travel — it is fit only for England. Dickens takes great care to explain Mr Booley's body and its ineptitude for travel:

> In person, MR. BOOLEY is below the middle size, and corpulent. His countenance is florid, and he is perfectly bald, and soon hot; and there is a composure in his gait and manner, calculated to impress a stranger with the idea of his being, on the whole, an unwieldy man.[59]

This description of Mr Booley's body focuses on his unwieldiness and his inability to be contained, whether from corpulence or perspiration. Waters has observed that the humour in this piece lies in 'the blurring of the distinction between representation and reality produced in the panorama'.[60] I would further argue that this blurring between representation and reality allows Dickens to place an 'unwieldy', burdensome body onto the most difficult travel routes in the world and allow him to travel the route in only a paragraph.[61] Indeed, part of the humour here is the mundanity and speed with which the text passes over Grand Cairo, Suez, Ceylon and Calcutta — the narrative does not pause to orientalise these Eastern cities, yet spends extensive portions of the text in the Arctic and America. As this account blurs the distinction between representation and reality, it pushes the representation of the overland mail's, and the corpulent Mr Booley's, speed beyond the ridiculous and into the mundane. Such panoramic travel also has the potential to blur the boundaries between East and West. The 'Overland Mail' features of *Punch*

produce humour by exaggerating the eradication of space and time created by the postal logic of the route. In 1841, an 'Overland Mail' feature claims that it has been delivered by 'private electro-galvanic communication' and 'this rapid means of transmission carries despatches [sic] so fast that we generally get them even before they are written'.[62] This 'Important News' article pushes the diminished space/time to new extremes, creating humour through hyperbole. In a segment satirising the popularity

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[59] Dickens, 73.
[60] Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 73.
[61] Dickens, 'Extra-Ordinary Traveller', 76.
[62] Anon, 'Important News from China', *Punch*, August 28, 1841, 74. Punch Historical Archive; The Punch Historical Archive labels 'Canton' as the author — I presume this to be a mistake, and that 'Canton' at the end of the article is used to denote the place from which the dispatch was purportedly sent.

of the panorama shows that Mr Booley travels on, *Punch* also emphasises the blurring of boundaries posed by travel on the overland mail:

> We find, from the Overland Mail, *via* Regent Street and Charing Cross, that the successful generals, Grieve, Absalon, and Telbin, have just made a very brilliant addition to our valuable possessions in that interesting quarter. They have made themselves masters of the Taj Mehal [sic], with all the valuable treasures it contains: and the spot is now daily visited by hundreds, who are attracted to Waterloo place, just as they might be to the plains of Waterloo.[63]

In this tongue-in-cheek article, the East literally abuts, overtakes, and merges with the West as the 'Overland Mail' travels through famous London sites to its dioramic home on Regent Street. The generals here, Grieve, Absalon and Telbin, were the painters of the 'Overland Route of the Mail from Southampton to Calcutta' and, in this article, the trio gain treasures not from India, but from the wealthy areas of London where these panoramas were being shown. Indeed, the feature blurs the relationship of 'Overland Mail' segments with military news with the cultural entertainment of the panorama. Furthermore, there are hundreds of people caught up in this circulation who are no longer travelling to the tourist site of Waterloo, Belgium but gathering in their hundreds to travel along the overland mail in Regent Street.

However, while Mr Booley and the hundreds of bodies on Regent Street travel abroad from the comfort of London, other travelling bodies cannot escape the English as they travel on the overland route. Thackeray's satire, *Notes of a Journey* (1856) demonstrates an uneasiness with these Brits abroad — those who travel fashionably do not meaningfully experience the cultures of Othered countries. Thackeray frames his tour to Israel and Egypt around travel on the mail: the journey issues from 'Cornhill', the economic epicentre of an increasingly colonised world, and Thackeray, tongue-in-cheek, suggests that it is an ideal trip for 'young, well-educated men entering life […] after that at college; and, having their book-learning fresh in their minds'.[64] Importantly, the young man's journey is facilitated by mail infrastructures — Mr M. A. Titmarsh boards a 'Peninsular and Oriental Company' ship, which, as we know, operated both the steam packet infrastructures to and from Egypt and had built the railway across the Egyptian desert to expedite mails to and from Suez. As these infrastructures opened up tourist travel to Egypt, its cities become filled with the travelling bodies of those on the mail. When in Egypt, Mr Titmarsh is unable to engage with his constructed ideal of Egyptian

[63] Anon, 'Punch's Overland Mail', *Punch*, May 10, 1851, 118. Punch Historical Archive.
[64] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1846), xiv. Internet Archive.

culture: there were no 'harems,' 'magicians,' or 'dancing girls,' the narrator complains, merely England and 'her pluck, manliness, bitter ale and Harvey sauce'.[65] This description exaggerates the masculine body of English travellers, though really they are no different to Mr Booley who 'has never laid aside the English dress, nor departed in the slightest degree from English customs'.[66] Moreover, Mr Titmarsh only encounters constructed English masculine bodies in Cairo. Instead of facilitating travel into the heart of the culturally Other of an orientalised Egypt, the mail infrastructures instead facilitate the eroding of divisions between East and West, constructing what we saw in the last chapter as an 'enveloping little England abroad' in Grand Cairo.[67] In other words, the overland mail not only imaginatively brought the Orient into the centre of London but facilitated the movement of white, British, bodies to the East. Instead of experiencing another world, Thackery depicts the portable Englishness which we saw in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, the narrative highlights that these hundreds of English bodies are following the postal logic of the overland mail route. They frequent the Hotel d'Orient in Cairo: 'every fortnight […] twice a month, at least, its sixty rooms are full'.[68] The postal bodies bring England with them, and subsume the local culture of which Mr Titmarsh should be learning. Thackeray's satiric use of metaphorical overland mail infrastructures is aligned with Bhabha's analysis of 'cultural antagonisms and articulations'; these subvert the 'rationale of the hegemonic moment and [relocate] alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiations'. [69] For John Urry, the hybrid body, powered by complex networks of objects, technology and sociality, can 'remake landscapes and townscapes through their movement'. [70] The hundreds of bodies travelling in-sync across nineteenth-century Egypt seem to be a combination of these two hybrids. By contingently bringing together multiple forms of technologies and the socialities of 'Englishness', these bodies can transform the cultural experience of the Egyptian townscape. Furthermore, this hybrid transformation creates a site where the clear-cut divisions of East and West are undermined by bitter ale and Harvey sauce.

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[65] Thackeray, 258.
[66] Dickens, 'Extra-Ordinary Traveller', 73.
[67] Buzard, 'Portable Boundaries', 6.
[68] Thackeray, *Notes of a Journey*, 255.
[69] Bhabha, *Location*, 177-8.
[70] John Urry, *Mobilities*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 48.

Thackeray further develops a sense of the eroding of divisions between East and West through a hyperbolic veneration of Thomas Waghorn's success in establishing the overland route. The narrative depicts, tongue-in-cheek, Waghorn as a conqueror, more ferocious and successful than Napoleon Bonaparte:

> But what are [Napoleon's] wonders compared to Waghorn? Nap. massacred the Mamelukes at the Pyramids: Wag. has conquered the pyramids themselves; dragged the unwieldy structures a month nearer England than they were, and brought the country along with them. All the trophies and captives, that ever were brought to Roman triumph, were not so enormous and wonderful as this.[71]

This segment repeats and pokes fun at the hyperbolic, nature-defying rhetoric we have seen already at the beginning of the chapter. Waghorn's conquest is one of peace and engineering triumph, which Thackeray takes to the extreme. Thackeray achieves this through the literal breaking down of distance between England and Egypt, as the pyramids, symbolic of an ancient, Eastern other, physically dragged one month nearer to England, eroding the boundaries between East and West.

Furthermore, Thackeray uses the body of Waghorn to play with and ridicule the poported speed of British communication with the East. Waghorn's body itself becomes symbolic of the mail and travels with the hyperbolic rationale of its postal infrastructure:

> Lieutenant Waghorn is bouncing in and out […] He only left Bombay yesterday morning, was seen in the Red Sea on Tuesday, is engaged to dinner this afternoon in the Regent's park, and (as it is about two minutes since I saw him in the court-yard) I make no doubt he is by this time at Alexandria or at Malta, say, perhaps, at both [….] If any man can be at two places at once […] Waghorn is he.[72]

Waghorn's body traverses the world with the postal logic which we have seen enacted on the pages of newspapers and periodicals. Though he travels quickly, he must stop at the ports of Bombay, Alexandria and Malta; though in two places at once, these two places must be nodal points in the infrastructure of the overland mail. Again, Thackeray creates a hybridised body, and consistently frames his mobility through the infrastructures of the mail. Thackeray emphasises the hyperbolic, hybrid and postal travel of Waghorn's body, whose speedy circulation simultaneously upholds the rationalising mission of empire, while also challenging simple ideals of deep division and distance between the East and West.

As we have seen through this section, travel on the overland mail was not only imagined as a route which disrupted the body. By travelling with the rationale of the mail,

[71] Thackeray, *Notes of a Journey*, 259.
[72] Thackeray, 256.

many mid-nineteenth-century bodies became hybridised, and contingently brought together the cultures of the East and West. As these two areas of the globe were diluted and interspersed by the hybridised postal bodies of the overland mail, the route-way offered an opportunity to subvert geographical divides. Through satirising and exaggerating the postal logic of travel on the overland mail for comic effect, the breakdown of the divide between an Eastern Other and a Western self is demonstrable from the earliest inception of the overland route.

4. Running the Overland Mail

However, though some bodies can quickly bounce between Bombay and Regent's Park, the overland mail remained a dangerous and uncomfortable journey for most bodies. The preface to Mr Albert Smith's *A Handbook to the Overland Mail* asserts that the book 'has been compiled with the intention of furnishing the public with a few of the more practical details' of travel from Suez to London.[73] However, this handbook also finds entertainment in depicting, in graphic detail, the toll that the overland mail route took on the white, British body. Within an account of her stay at a rest station, another node in the rationale of the mail, Mrs Griffiths describes the great nuisance of flies: 'The flies were in such myriads as to defy description. The table, walls, ceiling, and floor, literally swarmed with them'.[74] Griffiths narrates her feelings of disgust, exhaustion and weakness through this 'excerpt' from her diaries: 'My eyes were very weak from the cold in my head, and they crawled into them in such a dreadful manner'.[75] Important to me here is the feminisation of such bodily exhaustion — her husband seems quite at home. Mr Albert Smith's handbook, then, imagines the frail, feminised, English woman as experiencing her body most painfully on this journey on the overland mail route.

Through this next section, I analyse the bodies of runners that carried the mail along the overland route and those English bodies which remain out-of-place. I demonstrate that the mail runners in Anthony Trollope's short story 'Returning Home' (1861) dictate the speed of networks to and from Britain and the empire. I then develop an understanding of the implications of infrastructures which came to signify the connections between Britain and empire in the latter half of the century. Rudyard

[73] Albert Smith, *A Hand-Book to Mr Albert Smith's Entertainment Entitled the Overland Mail* (Published for the author, 1850), n.pag. BD036923, Bill Douglas Museum, Exeter.
[74] Smith, 16.
[75] Smith, 16-17.

Kipling's 'The Overland Mail' (1886) expands the route from Europe and Egypt into central India. However, when Kipling published the poem in 1886, there had been critical developments in communication networks across Britain and the empire. As discussed in Chapter Three, while the Suez Canal was completed in 1869, the British Post Office continued to use the railway across the desert for another two years before they agreed upon a contract.[76] By 1886, the telegraph network had attained maturity and used both commercially and as an invaluable asset of imperial defence; and railway systems had expanded, especially in India which acquired the fifth largest railway network in the world.[77] This consolidation of information technology begs the question: why is Kipling writing about 'The Overland Mail' at all? Through my analysis, I demonstrate that the association of the overland route with rapid postal communication across the empire endured into the late-nineteenth century. Ultimately, the bodies of the mail runners, both in Kipling's India and Trollope's Costa Rica, become symbols of the networks of empire. However, these native mail runners also become part of a broader metaphor which utilised the overland mail not only to signify the blurring of boundaries between the Other and the Occident but to suggest the tension between coloniser's body and the colonised landscape.

Anthony Trollope's short story 'Returning Home' was first published in *Public Opinion* in 1861, and then in the second edition of *Tales of All Countries*, along with 'George Walker at the Suez', in 1863. This short story narrates the dangerous journey of a couple and their child through the jungles of Central America, from San Jose, Costa Rica, to Greytown. The position of the couple is highlighted as imperial as the narrator ponders that 'it is the destiny of our race [i.e. Anglo-Saxons] to spread itself over the wide face of the globe'.[78] However, this journey is ultimately about not returning home: after a terrible journey through the jungle, Fanny Arkwright is killed in a horrific accident

[76] This detail is noted passenger books for P&O in 1888 and 1893. The *Traveller's P&O Pocket Book* details that the 'British Post Office and Government opposed to the Canal, declined that P&O should use it without a reduction in their subsidy [....] 2 years later the contract was established with the Government by the Company relinquishing £20,000 per annum' *Travellers P & O Pocket Book* (London: Nissen & Arnold, 1888). 39. Rare Books 486058, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The passenger handbook from 1894 also that the Post Office only agreed for P&O to use the canal if 'the Company made large reductions in its subsidy. This dispute continued for two years before a settlement was arrived at, in the end resulting in a new contract being entered into', *Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company, Royal Mail Steamers, Guide Book for Passengers* (London: Printed for the Chicago Exhibition. 1893), 13-14. ephJHK, Box 154, Folder 17, f.149, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[77] Kaul, *Media*, 4.
[78] Anthony Trollope, 'Returning Home', in *Tales of All Countries* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861), 301. Internet Archive.

and her husband Harry returns instead to San Jose with their child, unable to face the family in England.

Significantly, the narrative codifies the dislocation, stasis, and unease of the 'coloniser' through the infrastructures of the mail. As the couple travel, the narrative draws attention to the Arkwright's experience of danger and discomfort in the wet, muddy and 'primeval' jungle; yet, it is the mail runners that they need to be wary of — if the runners overtake them, the boat down the river and the steam packet at Greytown will leave without them. These runners appear to have the skill and strength to manoeuvre through the jungle in a way that the British bodies simply cannot:

> On the next day about noon the post did pass them, consisting of three strong men carrying great weights on their backs, suspended by bands from their foreheads. They travelled much quicker than our friends, and would reach the banks of the river that evening.[79]

Here, Trollope emphasises the 'strong men' who carry the 'great weight' of the post, remarkably suspended from their foreheads. They run the overland mail quickly and efficiently, and they do not find the constant rain and knee-deep mud an issue but run with an almost inhuman strength to facilitate the mobility of the mail.

Furthermore, Trollope undertook this same journey while on a postal mission in the West Indies, which he narrates in his travel book *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859). Like the Arkwrights, Trollope also competes with 'the post' to get to the 'Serapiqui' [sic] river:

> Three men passed us with heavy burdens on their backs. They were tall, thin, muscular fellows […] one of them was apparently of nearly pure Indian blood. It was clear that the loads they carried were very weighty [….] This was the post; and as they had left San Jose […] after us, and had come by a longer route […] they must have travelled at a very fast pace.[80]

Trollope conflates the bodies of these strong men with the post — they are 'the post'. Furthermore, he highlights one man as being 'of nearly pure Indian blood'; the post belongs here not the struggling bodies of the British gentleman but to the muscular, speedy, native 'fellows' of the jungle. However, the post here defies the technology propounded by imperialistic rhetoric; instead, native bodies keep the information of empire mobile.

The travelling bodies of the English cannot keep up with the native mail runners, whose expertise keeps the communications network, and thus the functionality of the

[79] Trollope, 'Returning Home', 313.
[80] Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999), 303-4.

British empire, in motion. Though it is the destiny of the British to 'spread itself out over the wide face of the globe', they remain dislocated and static through the course of the text:

> The traveller has before him the simple task of sitting on his mule from hour to hour […] but at every step the beast he rides has to drag his legs out from deep clinging mud, and the body of the rider never knows one moment of ease.[81]

The rider is forced to sit still while the journey is made by the mules, and must achingly compensate for the donkeys' clumsy mode of moving. The white bodies do not know a 'moment of ease' and instead are forced to pay attention to their cumbersome bodies. The mobility of the mail, which moves swiftly along international post routes, carried by effective and highly-skilled native bodies, aggravates the discomfort and dislocation of the labouring British colonials.

Indeed, in Sarah Merriam Brooks's account of travelling to California via the overland route across Panama — the steam packet portion of which I analysed in Chapter Three — the myriad of white, emigrating bodies experience acute discomfort and even death. The journey up the river and over mountains by mule leaves these bodies variously sick with 'fever and thirst'.[82] So acute is the discomfort that

> Tree, fern and flower failed to draw our minds from our exhausted bodies—exhausted from heat and want of proper food and starved of sleep. I remember nothing of that day but a dreadful consciousness of those conditions.[83]

While much of Brooks's narrative borders on the sensational, with native men drawing knives frequently throughout the text, the landscape of Panama emphatically renders the bodies of white emigrants in distress. This is especially evident when she observes an 'elderly person [eating] pickled onions and [drinking] vinegar' only to 'deliver up to Mother Earth her own again' that evening.[84] Even the consumption of a usual diet brings discomfort and illness to travelling bodies in the jungle. While Brooks asserts at the end of the narrative that '[i]f days were dark, I would rather have them here than elsewhere, and if bright, they were all the brighter for being in California', one cannot help but wonder if the reason for lack of return is the discomfort and danger of the journey itself.[85]

Furthermore, in Trollope's 'Returning Home', the female body is rendered particularly static. The body of Fanny Arkwright is held in literal paralysis through the

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[81] Trollope, 'Returning Home', 301, 308.
[82] Sarah Merriam Brooks, *Across the Isthmus to California in '52* (San Francisco: C. A. Murdock & Co., 1894), 40. Rare Books 1136, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[83] Brooks, 42.
[84] Brooks, 40.
[85] Brooks, 79.

final stages of the journey. She is forced to allow herself to be lifted into the saddle of her mule and her husband observes 'that ever and again she would have slipped forward from her mule and fallen, had not the man by her side protected her with his hand'.[86] In the end, the guides make her a 'litter with long poles [so that] she never again was lifted on to the mule'.[87] Finally, her death by drowning concludes the dislocation of the white female body while in the network of the mail. Fanny Arkwright travels in the boat with the mails which, in a freak accident, capsizes and drowns her. While her husband is also unable to travel as quickly as the post runners, it is the feminised body of Fanny, like that of Mrs Griffiths above, that suffers the brunt of pain and discomfort while travelling via the postal network of the mail. The story ends with her permanent stasis — her body buried in the jungle. The overland networks that traversed the empire are extremely inhospitable to the English (and feminine) imperialist here, yet strikingly yield to the native bodies of the post.

Rudyard Kipling's 'The Overland Mail (Foot-service to the Hills)' (1886) explicitly connects the larger imperial network of the British Mail route to the body of the mail runner. However, the very presence of a running body amid the technological advances of the late-nineteenth century creates an ancient and thoroughly Indian network in the midst of the 'modern' British Empire. Much like Browning's much earlier poem, 'The Overland Mail' depicts the adventure of a brave mail runner, who carries the post from the mail train to those English 'exiled' in the heat of the summer months to the mountains. Kipling focuses on the heroically athletic and bodily act of carrying the mail across an inhospitable terrain. He uses anapaests in sexian stanzas to drive the speed of the poem forward, reinforcing the strength of the mail runner and his ability to overcome animal, topographical and weather dangers posed by the Indian jungle. Through these stanzas, the mail carrier's body becomes implicated in the network of the post:

> The bags on his back and a cloth round his chin,
> And, tucked in his waistband, the Post Office bill:--
> 'Despatched on this date, as received by the rail,
> '*Per* runner, two bags of the Overland Mail'.[88]

[86] Trollope, 'Returning Home', 311.
[87] Trollope, 312.
[88] Rudyard Kipling, 'The Overland Mail (Foot-Service to the Hills)', in *Departmental Ditties and Other Verses*, (London: George Newsnes Limited, 1899), 50, lines 9-12. Hathitrust. Emphasis original.

In the last four lines of this stanza, the Indian mail runner bears the emblems of the British Post Office; this consists of the bags that he carries and the cloth around his head and, importantly, the bill slipped into his waistband which dispatches him from the mail train on a particular date and at a particular time. The driving rhythm towards and emphasis on the final line, accentuates the speed of the 'Overland Mail' and strength of the runner. The body here becomes implicated in signalling loyalty to the British crown and the British communications system: 'While the breath's in his mouth, he must bear without fail'.[89] Furthermore, every other stanza finishes on the line 'In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail!' — the poem drives to this final line, and the emphasis is most definitely on the connecting communication routes between Britain, the Empress, and India.[90] The extension of the overland mail into India through the mail runner codifies the closeness between the 'Motherland' of the empire and the most inhospitable areas of India.

Arguably, this depiction of the overland mail runner is complicit in a form of erasure. As the runner's body becomes caught up in the communications network of the overland mail, which is part of the British Post Office and run 'in the name of the Empress', the history of Indian mail runners, or dauriyas, becomes subsumed to the British Post Office. As Chitra Joshi has demonstrated, there was a complex system of mail runners in India before the British East India Company began to 'legitimize' these routes:

> Traditions of running as couriers existed among castes like the *Kahars* in north and east India, *Pattamars* in the south, and *Mahars* in the west. Runners who were drawn from such different groups had precise knowledge of routes, and an ability to negotiate difficult terrain.[91]

As Joshi explains, the East India Company co-opted native communications runners at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[92] Though Kipling's poem does emphasise the risks of the jungle to the runner, something that the pre-colonial system of mail runners also embraced, it also enshrines the runner's body with the British hallmarks of the postal system. As established above, the mail runner's body is codified with emblems of the Post Office: the 'jingle of bells', the 'Post Office bill', tucked into his belt.[93]

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[89] Kipling, 50, line 13.
[90] Kipling, 50-1, lines 6, 18, 30.
[91] Chitra Joshi, 'Dak Roads, Dak Runners, and the Reordering of Communication Networks', *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 2 (August 2012): 170. Cambridge Core. Italics original.
[92] Joshi, 174.
[93] Kipling, 'Overland Mail', 50, lines 7, 8.

Furthermore, he carries the mail to 'We exiles', or the British colonial community.[94] This letter carrying is about connecting the British with the British, erasing the body of the Indian runner in the process. As a poem written as part of a collection of poems on the departmental bureaucracy of British India, and circulated as part of the postal network that was central the work of empire, 'The Overland Mail', seems to emphasise the position of the 'civilised' British in a dangerous and 'primaeval' India, rather than simply celebrating the mail runner.

However, there is a complication and simultaneity here. 'We exiles' emphasises the poem's narrator as separate to the Indian runner whilst simultaneously subsuming his body into the British Post Office. This simultaneity inclines me to agree with Zohreh Sullivan who, in his book *Narratives of Empire* (1993), argues that Kipling's work 'problematize[s] the breaking point of boundaries, […] there is an awareness of other multiplicities that strain against [British imperialistic rhetoric] and resist its control from within'.[95] Boundaries and borders remain ambivalent in this short 'ditty', problematising my reading above that the Indian mail runner's body is simply erased by the British postal system. The signification of the runner's body remains ambivalent. As well as being codified as part of the Post Office network, the poem also highlights that he is a native Indian: 'Fly the soft-sandalled [sic] feet, strains the brawny, brown chest'.[96] It is this brown, Indian body that connects Britain to home. As we have seen, the ability to traverse different networks, both of mobility and meaning, creates a site of hybridity. It is this state of hybridity that can allow for the subversion of 'the rationale of the hegemonic moment', creating space for displacements and realignments.[97] There seems to be a disjoint here between a need to retain the boundary between 'we', the 'exiles' and 'they', the Indian runner, and an admiration and willingness to bring to Indian mail runner fully into the arms of the British postal system. The overland mail runner puts pressure on the boundary between Anglo-Indian and Indian divides, and instead the multiplicities at work in the everyday circulations of empire — which inevitably take place in the large, sprawling network of the overland mail — resist simplistic imperial rhetoric.

[94] Kipling, 50, line 4.
[95] Zohreh. T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8. Cambridge Core.
[96] Kipling, 'Overland Mail', 51, line 22.
[97] Bhabha, *Location*, 255.

Furthermore, the landscape of the information network is one which, like the native who runs the Costa Rican mails, is one only the Indian mail runner can traverse. The poem codifies the landscape as Other and dangerous, and this immerses the runner in the history that Joshi establishes — it takes a particular strength and knowledge to cross an inhospitable jungle, knowledge that has been created through a long history of Indian mail runners. The jungle is filled with the dangers of tigers, robbers, ravines and rivers, yet the tenacity of the postal runner can overcome them all:

> Is the torrent in spate? He must ford it or swim.
> Has the rain wrecked the road? He must climb by the cliff.
> Does the tempest cry "halt"? What are tempests to him?'.[98]

Echoing the primaeval Costa Rican jungle of Trollope's 'Returning Home', the Indian jungle here proves entirely inhospitable to the exiled English in the mountains; only the muscular body of the Indian mail runner can overcome and navigate it. Furthermore, as Simon Potter has argued, it was the more recent communications technologies of the overland telegraph and undersea cables that helped to 'sustain imperial identities and an overarching sense of Britishness' abroad.[99] In depicting the physicality of the body of the Indian mail runner moving through the inhospitable jungle, Kipling undercuts the prominent late-nineteenth-century discourses which emphasised the technologisation of communication infrastructures. As we have seen in the previous chapter, letters were still a vital form of communication in the late-nineteenth century, despite the growing network of the telegraph. In Kipling's poem, not only is lettered communication still vital for the exiles in the hills, but the ancient dak mail runner is a key component of the infrastructural network of the Post Office. Here the Empress of India's postal system is transferred out of the hands of the bureaucratic Post Office, and into that of the brown mail runner, simultaneously part of the network and beyond it.

Moreover, Kipling initially constructed the body of the text as postal, undermining the bureaucratic publishing procedures of imperial India. Kipling wrote the collection when he had returned to India following his education in Britain, and was working as a journalist in the Lahore, Punjab. Here, McBratney notes, he was 'observing and writing about official and indigenous life in north-west India', and this period of his life was 'based on an intimate relationship with India'.[100] *Departmental Ditties* was Kipling's first

[98] Kipling, 'Overland Mail', 50, lines 13-15.
[99] Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.
[100] John McBratney, 'India and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, eds. Howard Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 24, 30.

collection and, as Shafquat Towheed has noted, the collection travelled from literary periphery, of specifically Anglo-Indian readership, to a cultural core.[101] Towheed further explains the remarkable publication history of the text:

> The book was presented to its gazetted readership as an official departmental envelope [….] There were no headlines, no page numbers, no title page […] no attempt to present it as a conventional text.[102]

This first presentation of the text used the circulation network of the mail to market the book, which Towheed notes was both unusual and bureaucratically risky. By masquerading the book as Indian mail and circulating it in this way, the very body of the text became imagined as postal — Kipling wanted his reader to believe that it had circulated through the official information network of the British Empire. However, the book's actual circulation was in contestation to these overarching networks: *Departmental Ditties* simultaneously worked as a champion of the bureaucratic information networks of the empire while seriously undermining their efficiency.

The bodies of these mail runners then, particularly that of Kipling's 'Overland Mail' runner, become caught in a wider conception of British postal routes and its global empire. Their bodies seem to become subsumed into these networks, and they do not behave as normal bodies but, like the horse Rowland, are able to behave almost mechanically, or beyond the bounds of normal bodies, in order to run the mail through the most inhospitable forests in the world. Indeed, they operate with Rowland Hill's ideal of mechanised efficiency. However, though both of these narratives emphasise the importance of the imperial mission, they also upset a simplistic understanding of the white body within this mission. They also throw into question the role of 'native' in the globalised landscape of the British empire. The bodies of the white British in Trollope's 'Returning Home' cannot fulfil the purpose of returning; instead, they are thrown into stasis and dislocation by the ancient postal routes of the forest. In Kipling's poem, the British remain 'exiled' to the hills and their only connection to Britain relies on the brawny, brown body of the skilled Indian dauriyas. Though the body is in many ways subsumed to the rhetoric of empire, it simultaneously stands against it, emphasising the inability of the white man to traverse these ancient jungles. Kipling's poems connects the brown, muscular postal body that can traverse the primaeval forests of India to the heart of the

[101] Shafquat Towheed, 'Two Paradigms of Literary Production: The Production, Circulation and Legal Status of Rudyard Kipling's *Departmental Ditties* and *Indian Railway Library Texts*', in *Books Without Borders, Volume 2*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 126. Springer Link.
[102] Towheed, 'Two Paradigms', 126-7.

British Empire — the Empress and the mail — in a way that disrupts easy boundaries between the self and Other. The simultaneity of the mail runner's body as imprinted with the post yet also emphatically Indian assembles a hybridised body within the British postal system, creating a tension within a text that has the potential to be read as an uncomplicated piece of British Imperial propaganda.

5. Postal Bodies and Overland Mail Invasion

British popular culture celebrated Thomas Waghorn as the pioneer of the overland mail route well into the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. One memorial from *The Times* in 1900 proclaims that it was Waghorn's overland mail route that led to the building of the Suez. Importantly to me here, the overland route still figures as the first in a series of technological achievements that brought the East much closer the West:

> With our electric telegraphs, our rapid steamships, and our regular mail services *via* the Suez Canal, performing the journey from England to India in about 15 days, it is difficult to realize that when Waghorn started his epoch of reform the shortest time within which one could hope to reach or communicate with any part of India was four months.[103]

Even in 1900, popular newspapers were discussing the overland mail route with the rhetorical hyperbole that we witnessed in the early-nineteenth century. A different article in *The Times* from 1884 states that the overland mail was central to 'throwing open the portal of the East to the commerce and civilization of the West'.[104] We can understand the overland mail as continuing to act as a metaphor for the disrupted boundaries been the self and Other into the late-nineteenth century. As the route-way of the mail shrank distance and time, the 'native' body became hybridised as simultaneously Other and British as it traversed alternative networks of exchange. It is my contention that these hybridised bodies of the overland mail remained latent in public imagination into the *fin-de-siècle*. The overland mail, I contend, remained prominent as an image of British imperialism; the mail was both part of the capitalist and 'civilising' rhetoric of Britain's relationship with its empire, but also signified the rapidly diminishing boundaries between motherland and empire. By investigating this tension in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, I aim to shift our understanding of the place of the orientalised occultist in the imperial, and postal, heart of the empire.

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[103] Anon, 'The Thomas Waghorn Centenary', *The Times,* June 20, 1900, 4. The Times Digital Archive.
[104] W. P. Andrew, 'The Memorial to Waghorn', *The Times*, March 15, 1884, 5. The Times Digital Archive.

In Marsh's Gothic-invasion novel, the Beetle's knowledge of British communication routes defies a reading of this Gothic novel as purely concerned with degeneration and the cultural Other. The Beetle instead operates as a point through which Marsh can create an expansive thrill of blurred boundaries between East and West. Initially outselling Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), *The Beetle* follows the up-and-coming politician, Paul Lessingham — a man haunted by an Egyptian priestess who can transform into a mesmeric and killer beetle. It is told from the perspectives of four characters: Robert Holt, a homeless man who becomes remotely controlled by the mesmeric power of the Beetle; the rational and masculine scientist Sydney Atherton, almost resistant to the powers of those 'demon eyes'; Marjorie Linden, a rebellious 'New Woman' who is hypnotised and abducted; and, finally, the 'Confidential Agent' Augustus Champbell.

There has been a resurgence of critical interest in this text, which has revealed its significance and complexity. Kelly Hurley examines the depiction of the ab-human, female and Oriental sexuality and monstrosity of the Beetle, while Roger Luckhurst analyses the cultural importance of the themes of mesmerism and trance at work in the text.[105] Victoria Magree also demonstrates the 'at home' threats of gender and class instability, which, she argues, leads the 'New Woman', Marjorie, and working-class 'degenerative' Robert, to be more susceptible to the mesmeric forces of the Beetle.[106] As seen in Chapter Three, Stephen Arata famously and persuasively argues that *The Beetle*'s contemporary *Dracula*, 'enacts the [*fin-de-siècle*'s] most important and pervasive narrative of decline, a narrative of reverse colonialism'.[107] In many ways, *The Beetle* offers an equally paranoiac novel, in which the 'liminal man-woman-goddess-beetle-Thing' compels the degenerative Western men and women to subjugate themselves to her will and 'perverted' sexuality.[108]

However, this 'beetle-Thing' is not only codified as Oriental and Other. It is highly significant that the Egyptian priestess and Oriental Other escapes on the mail train out

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[105] Please see, Kelly Hurley, 'Uncanny Female Interiors', in *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle*, 117–41 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Roger Luckhurst, 'Trance-Gothic, 1882–97', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, 148–67 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) Springer Link.
[106] Victoria Magree, '"Both in Men's Clothing": Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Critical Survey* 19, no. 1 (2007): 63–81. Jstor.
[107] Stephen D. Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 623. Jstor.
[108] Luckhurst, 'Trance-Gothic, 1882–97', 160.

of London to kidnap Marjorie, having previously outrun officials.[109] Though this mail train is not explicitly linked to the overland mail, the Beetle's position as an Egyptian creature and her knowledge of British transport connections, make this postal transport suggestive of the broader infrastructures of information transport. It is the scientist, Sydney Atherton, who brings the reader's attention to the fact that the chase for the Beetle is following a mail train:

> "Yes," said the Inspector, "I'll clear the way. I've wired down the road already.
>
> Atherton broke in.
>
> "Driver, if you get us into Bedford within five minutes of the arrival of the mail there'll be a five-pound note to divide between your mate and you".[110]

Though Marsh does not tell the reader how exactly the Beetle found her way to English soil, it is compelling that the narrative includes the detail of her fleeing on the mail train bound for Southampton, the hub of P&O packets travelling to Egypt. This detail places the Beetle's mobility firmly within the infrastructures of rapid British postal routes, and it signals that the infamous overland mail route may well have facilitated this creature's movement to Britain.

The Beetle decides to travel out of London on what she knows is the most efficient and expeditious route, the mail train. What follows is a collusion of all 'Western' technologies of modernity, train timetabling, telegraphy and communication networks, in order to catch up with this unlucky mail. Initially thinking they have cornered the Beetle through the modern technology of the telegraph wire, the English-men find she has escaped:

> Passengers by 7.30 Southampton, on arrival of train, complained of noises coming from a compartment in coach 8964 [...] An Arab and two Englishmen got out of the compartment in question, apparently the party referred to in wire just to hand from Basingstoke [....] Arab gave up three third singles for Southampton, saying [that they] did not want to go any farther.[111]

The Beetle is able to manipulate the train timetables and the time taken to send and receive telegraphs in order to put further distance between herself and British officialdom. Furthermore, the Beetle-priestess-woman-Thing can outrun the rational males who pursue her, consistently leading them down dark-alleys and dead-ends, remaining frustratingly out of reach. In behaviour that counters a reading of the Beetle as intrinsically Orient and Other, she navigates the complexities of British rail with

[109] Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* (London: Penguin English Library, 2018), 352.
[110] Marsh, 352.
[111] Marsh, 322.

considerable ease and foresight (jumping off the initial line to Southampton, and travelling to St Pancras to travel north via the mail). As Fred Botting argues, 'Gothic texts operate ambivalently: the dynamic inter-relation of limit and transgression, prohibition and desire suggests that norms, limits, boundaries and foundations are neither natural nor absolutely fixed or stable'.[112] Echoing a literary history that used the overland mail to contest simplistic boundaries between the East and West, the body of the Beetle navigates multiple communication networks with an ease that creates ambivalent boundaries between the Occident and Orient in the cityscape of London.

Indeed, the Beetle is a creature who traverses different communication networks with agility. She understands the importance of speedy communication to empire-building and works to disrupt the lives of the imperialistic heroes. Lessingham and Atherton are emphatically engaged with the broader perspective of the British Empire: Lessingham through his high-ranking political position, and Atherton as the inventor of the 'System of Telegraphy at Sea' and a new genocidal gas.[113] By the late-nineteenth century, after the Anglo-Egyptian war of 1882, Britain was, unofficially and temporarily, occupying Egypt in an ambiguous relationship that led many to ask 'the Egyptian question'.[114] The Beetle, like Dracula, undermines the political rhetoric of New Imperialism, darkly utilising a mesmeric capability in order to forego technological modes of communication and prey on the bodies of these famous imperialists. By hypnotising her victims and taking control of their bodies, she creates her own invisible network of communication across the different bodies she possesses. Thus, the orientalised Beetle is able to create her own communication networks in the heart of civilised London, thrillingly merging the Orient and the Occident.

Above all, it is the Beetle's body that builds on the literary history of the overland mail route as a site of hybridity. She is figured as hybrid throughout the text. Notably, she remains of ambiguous gender: at the beginning of the text, Holt is confident that she is a man because 'it was impossible such as creature could be feminine', yet her nudity reveals to Atherton that he 'had been most egregiously mistaken on the question of sex'.[115] Furthermore, she can change forms from human to non-human and, in her beetle shape, is difficult to grasp: 'the colouring was superb, and the creature appeared

[112] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd ed, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2014), 9.
[113] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 89.
[114] Ailise Bulfin, 'The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 54, no. 4 (2011): 412. Project Muse.
[115] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 18, 144.

to have the chameleon-like faculty of lightening and darkening the shades at will'.[116] Finally, I would add that her ability to traverse ancient and modern mobilities of communication adds another facet to this hybridity. In being able to extend her reach through hypnotic lines of connection as well as traversing the express and mail trains through London — even sending a letter before her arrival to her landlady — the Beetle is marked as a hybrid being of both antiquity and modernity. Luckhurst persuasively argues that the novel is filled with the 'circulation of terminologies between mesmeric remote control, telepathic hypnotism and tele-technologies, and the intermixing of the Oriental arcana and Occidental modernity'.[117] I would build on this argument by suggesting that the mesmeric qualities of the Beetle embodies communications infrastructure that hold the potential to collapse time and space, and erode boundaries between East and West. This hybridity between ancient and modern forms of communication — the bodily and the technological — is an aspect of the overland mail's postal logic which we have seen throughout this chapter. The Beetle's telepathic communication, her hybridised beetle/woman/man body, and her use of communication networks is a product of the overland mail infrastructures, that had, throughout the nineteenth century, connected and diminished the distance between the British Occident and the Egyptian Orient.

Moreover, Marsh specifically places the past transgression that haunts the character of Paul Lessingham on the mobile infrastructures of the overland mail. As in Thackeray's satire, the affordable route-ways opened up by the overland mail (organised by P&O steam packets) facilitated the young gentleman's trip to Egypt. In his reluctant retelling, Lessingham confides in Champnell, that after he left school, he decided to travel: 'instead of going either to Oxford or Cambridge, I went abroad. After a few months I found myself in Egypt — I was down with fever at Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo'.[118] Lessingham's stay in the Shepheard's Hotel places him within the infrastructures of the overland mail route. During his stay in Cairo, Trollope's George Walker also stays at the Shepheard's Hotel and witnesses the movement of passengers on the overland mail through this node. Lessingham is also in a position of stasis in a hotel used to facilitate travel, imprisoned in a sick room while he recovers from a fever. However, unlike Walker, Lessingham leaves his hotel room and ventures 'unaccompanied' into the 'native quarter

[116] Marsh, 143.
[117] Luckhurst 'Trance-Gothic', 161.
[118] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 252.

[…] eager for something which had in it a spice of adventure'.[119] As Lessingham travels into the 'native' areas of the city with a naïve concept of a romanticised adventure, he is bewitched by a beautiful singer, ensnared by the mysterious Egyptian seductress, and kept prisoner in her temple of 'nameless horrors'.[120] Lessingham's stay at the Shepheard's Hotel places him within the context of the overland mail route and, though found in the back alleys of Cairo, the thrill of Children of Isis is arguably that they are operating under the nose of the 'civilising' power of the British mail. Furthermore, as we find out, this occultist, orientalised woman is perfectly capable of travel on-board the mail.

Finally, I would argue that the extreme bodily pain experienced by her victims is indicative of the white body being unable to traverse along the communication routes that 'natives' travel through with ease. The body of Robert Holt is forced to endure sexual assault and humiliation while under the paralytic trance of the Beetle. However, he is also compelled to run across the breadth of London in order to steal from Paul Lessingham. As Luckhurst argues, he becomes a 'remote control body'.[121] This pace brings him acute bodily discomfort and pain:

> I was wet — intermittent gusts of rain were borne on the scurrying wind; in spite of the pace at which I had been brought, I was chilled to the bone; and – worst of all! — my mud-stained feet, all cut and bleeding, were so painful […] that it was agony to have them come into contact with the cold and slime of the hard, unyielding pavement.[122]

While in the communication network of the Beetle, Holt must follow her expedited pace and mechanised manner which renders him alike to the bodies of native overland mail runners which I discussed in Section 4. However, his 'degenerate' body, as indicated by his being homeless and a jobless clerk, cannot cope with the exertion and causes him substantial bodily pain. Holt's white, fragile body is alienated from the cityscape of London as the white bodies of Arkwrights and Anglo-Indians are exiled in the colonial junglescapes of Costa Rica and India. In this way, the Gothic-postal body of the Beetle not only throws into question the position of the Orient in London, but also that of the Occident in the (postal) heart of the British Empire. While she can traverse the London communication and travel networks with ease, those white bodies in her clutches are

[119] Marsh, 252.
[120] Marsh, 259.
[121] Luckhurst, 'Trance-Gothic', 160.
[122] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 41.

forced to travel in pain and discomfort, not unlike the white bodies who travelled along the overland mail route.

The depiction of an Eastern Other is undoubtedly through an extremely racist lens, and the disgust her othered, insidious body exerts on the narrators is a substantial part of the Gothic thrill of this text. I would also argue that it is her closeness to the Occident as well as her being 'other' to it that creates part of this Gothic excitement. The text frequently seizes upon the body of the Beetle in order to render her abject to the reader. The narrators frequently use objectifying language to describe her: 'the skin […] was saffron yellow [….] The cranium […] was so small as to be disagreeably suggestive of something animal'.[123] Furthermore, the text describes her as having 'the most awful, hideous, wicked-looking face I had ever pictured even in my most dreadful dreams', and continuously throws her gender into question until she is seen naked by Atherton.[124] However, her use of both the globalised symbol of the overland mail route, as well as her own communicative network, throws into the question the boundaries of the Occident and Orient throughout this text. What is terrifying and thrilling about the Beetle then is not so much that this mesmeric creature could exist, but that this creature is capable of manipulating the information route-ways that had been so central to Britain's imperial growth. Without the overland mail, as a material infrastructure and literary metaphor for the imagining of collapsing boundaries between East and West, a creature like the Beetle could not exist in *fin-de-siècle* London. Her body is a very product of the imperial, space and time collapsing, infrastructures of the mail.

Conclusions

Through the course of the nineteenth century, the overland mail came to symbolise the global reach of the British Empire. However, this image was leaned upon by popular literary authors; as an infrastructure connecting East and West, the overland mail also became a mobility route that blurred boundaries, upsetting simplistic narratives of a civilising and hegemonic empire. This chapter has demonstrated the different ways in which the portrayal of the overland mail route was framed by a postal logic, which could be exaggerated and explored in order to unrest the rationale of empire. It brought the modern and ancient, the distant and neighbourly, into collision with one another, materially and metaphorically eroding space and time. Indeed, the postal logic of the

[123] Marsh, 18.
[124] Marsh, 246, 144.

overland mail would become a site which Trollope and, later, Kipling would use to suggest alternative narratives of the imperial mission — narratives which emphasise the stasis and dislocation of white bodies on the overland mail, and the infrastructural integrity of the 'brown, brawny' native postal bodies who facilitated the global postal network. Despite the hyperbolic rhetoric of Waghorn and Marx, the overland mail would become an infrastructural route-way that emphasised the multiplicity and hybridity of globalised information and passenger circulation. This trajectory can be seen as culminating in the *fin-de-siècle*; though new communication technologies rendered the overland mail route effectively redundant, the symbol of the route remained latent in the popular imaginary. The communicative, hybrid body of the Egyptian Beetle emerges from this literary legacy as a Gothic incarnation of this blurring of boundaries — a postal body that defies the boundaries of distance and time.

CONCLUSION

> *At NINE o'clock of a gusty winter night I stood on the lower stages of one of the G. P. O. outward mail towers. My purpose was to run to Quebec in "Postal Packet 162 or such other as may be appointed": and the Postmaster-General himself countersigned the order. This talisman opened all doors, even those in the despatching-caisson [sic] at the foot of the tower, where they were delivering the sorted Continental mail. The bags lay packed close as herrings in the long grey under-bodies which our G. P. O. still calls "coaches".*
>
> Rudyard Kipling, *With the Night Mail: A Story of 2,000 A.D.*, 1905.[1]

First published in the *McClure's Magazine* in the US in November 1905, and in *The Windsor Magazine* in the UK in December 1905, Rudyard Kipling's *With the Night Mail: A Story of 2,000 A.D.* follows the journey of the transatlantic mail plane powered by 'Fleury's Ray' from London to Quebec.[2] This short story creates and climbs aboard the mail infrastructures of an imagined airborne future. The narrator boards the plane from 'one of the G.P.O. outward mail towers' and the mail plane is distinct in an environment where multiple infrastructures intersect: 'There is nothing here for display [….] Liners and yachts disguise their [gas] tanks with deception, but the G.P.O. serves them raw under a lick of official grey'.[3] Moreover, these infrastructures are simultaneously futuristic and shaped by the infrastructural arrangements we have seen through this thesis. The plane is called 'Postal Packet 162'; inside the air ship, '[t]he [mail] bags lay packed close as herrings in the long grey under-bodies which our G.P.O. still calls "coaches"'; and the air packet only leaves 'when it is filled and the [postal] clerks are on board'.[4] Furthermore, when the plane lands in Quebec, it is 'dropped to the Heights Receiving Towers twenty minutes ahead of time and there hung at ease till the Yokohama Intermediate Packet could pull out and give us our proper slip'.[5] This imagery is highly reminiscent of the steam packets we saw in Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which we saw in Chapter Three. The visibility of their nineteenth-century forbears

[1] Rudyard, Kipling, *With the Night Mail: A Story of 2,000 A.D. (Together with Extracts from the Contemporary Magazine in Which It Appeared)* (New York: Double Day, Page & Co., 1909), 3 Rare Books 14302, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[2], Kipling, 3, 17.
[3] Kipling, 3, 8.
[4] Kipling, 3, 5.
[5] Kipling, 57.

certainly has echoes in Kipling's early-twentieth-century portrayal of twenty-first-century postal infrastructures.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the nuances and complexities of nineteenth-century postal infrastructures had a significant place in the cultural imaginary. Building on seminal infrastructural and mobilities scholarship, particularly that of Levine, Rubenstein, Kirkby, Ewers, Grossman and Livesey, I have demonstrated that the infrastructures of the mail were a highly visible component of nineteenth-century culture. This visibility is evident from the imaginative significance of the 'heart' of the Post Office of St Martin's le Grand and the panoramas and boardgames which utilise the imagery of the overland mail route, to steam packet advertisements that emphasise their association with the Royal Mail and the Bradshaw and Fowler timetables that detail mail train routes. Though Kipling imagines an otherworldly future of air packets, it is one constructed out of the infrastructures I have unearthed and analysed in this thesis.

'Postal Bodies: Imagining Communication Infrastructures in Nineteenth-Century Literature' has worked to challenge a scholarly narrative that has invested in the imagining of communication infrastructures as mechanised, frictionless, disembodied and homogenous. By reinserting the cultural importance of the postal body into the scholarly picture, I have demonstrated that these infrastructures were not only plural and liminal, but interactive and shaped by the messiness of bodily interaction.

I have drawn on a multiplicity of literary and material sources, from novels, sketches and the periodical press, as well as institutional reports and contracts, newspaper and periodical articles, timetables, and advertisements, in order to uncover the importance of embodied postal infrastructures in the nineteenth-century imaginary. The pervasive nature of postal infrastructures, and their association with regularity and reliability, shaped their use in the daily lives of Victorians. Indeed, the temporal significance of postal time to embodied experience has had a thematic significance through all four of my chapters, from letters shaped by the multiple deliveries and rapid sorting systems in London, explored in detail in Chapter One, to the liminality of distance and time shaped by the exchange of mail in international waters, as revealed in Chapter Three. Postal infrastructures, I have demonstrated, shaped imaginative responses to the mail, as well as broader ideological and political questions about Victorian Britain. These questions became more urgent within the context of international postal infrastructures, as demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four.

However, Kipling's twentieth-century imagining of twenty-first-century international postal infrastructures suggests a shift in the cultural significance of communication networks: here infrastructural intricacy, complexity and power eclipse the body. Indeed, apart from the postal clerks, the Captains, engineers and the narrator, there are no other passengers on-board. Instead, passengers travel on a 'Planet Liner' in a completely separate line of travel — only postal packets can fly at 5000 feet.[6] Kipling's *With the Night Mail* exemplifies a shifting culture in the early- twentieth century, in which postal infrastructures not only concede their importance to the growth of the telegraph and telephone but also become more hidden and less associated with passenger travel. Mail trains, for instance, were run at night and no longer carried passengers. By 1936, the infrastructural complexity and invisibility of the night mail would become of such interest that the GPO film unit directed an eponymous documentary on the night mail's journey from London Euston, including music by Benjamin Britton and poetry by W. H. Auden.[7] Furthermore, advertisements and passenger guidebooks for famous steam packet lines, including P&O and Cunard, began to advertise for cruise holidays through the Caribbean and Mediterranean, as their investment in passenger travel increased and their need to advertise for journeys alongside the mail decreased.[8] My thesis has provided one part of the critical story concerning communication infrastructures, but questions still remain. How long did mail contracts remain an essential component of income for private transport firms? How long into the twentieth century was passenger travel associated with mail routes? What are the legacies of the Victorians' cultural and imaginary interest in postal?

The heterogeneous, and indeed contradictory, depictions and understandings of postal infrastructures that my thesis has detailed counter the rhetoric of Hillite mechanisation, the timetabled schedules of the mail train, and use of the steam packet and overland mail as imaginative emblems of imperialism. Instead, kinaesthetic bodies complicated the frictionless mobility exemplified by the ceaseless circulation of lettered communication. As explored in detail in Chapter One, periodical literature not only

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[6] Kipling, 28, 24

[7] Harry Watt and Basil Charles Wright, *The Night Mail* (London: GPO Film, 1936) https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-night-mail-1936-online.

[8] This trend is seen clearly in packet company advertisements in the John Haskell Kemble Commercial Maritime Ephemera Collection, 1855-1990 (ephJHK) at The Huntington Library. While guidebooks and advertisements in the nineteenth century emphasise the relationship between the steamship lines, such as P&O, Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and Cunard, and the mail, this becomes less important to the advertisements of such lines from circa. 1925. However, more sustained research is needed to map this shift.

imagined the relentless circulation of mail through St Martin's le Grand as mechanised; instead, bodily metaphors became a key imaginative medium through which to explain the workings of the sorting house. The medicalisation of sorters on-board the Travelling Post Office, and the importance of this theorisation for passenger travel, exemplifies the disruption and disorder garnered by rapid, postal travel on railway transport.

Furthermore, the relentless regularity of steam packets and overland mail routes disrupt kinaesthetic bodies on international travel routes. Steam packets, explored in detail in Chapter Three, become emblems of white, Anglo-Saxon mobility, but their routinisation and regularity centres around postal transit. Bodies travelling the globe become secondary to the mail in the autobiographical travel accounts of Sarah Merriam Brooks, Anthony Trollope and Charles Dickens, and the imagined global travel of Phileas Fogg and Count Dracula. The uncomfortable and subordinated transit of postal bodies on international mail routes culminates in this thesis in the coordinated infrastructural route of the overland mail. In Chapter Four, I demonstrated the alienation of white bodies fostered by the international mail routes. The coordinated and rapid transit across the Egyptian isthmus, as well as internal overland routes in India and Costa Rica, serve to alienate white bodies from the colonised landscape they traverse. While in the mid-nineteenth century this alienation becomes a point of satire, by the late-nineteenth century the subordination of white bodies to colonised landscapes and self-perpetuating mail routes could be reimagined in Gothic form in *The Beetle* (1897).

While this thesis has mainly focused on British literature in the nineteenth century, it lays the foundation for further scholarship on the impact of such infrastructural project on global literature. Finishing this thesis within the context of Black Lives Matter raises questions about perspectives beyond white, anglophone literature. Further research is needed to understand how international postal infrastructures, which both materially and imaginatively facilitated British imperialism in the nineteenth century, functioned for people who were experiencing the adverse effects of such 'soft power'. These experiences and perspectives include, for instance, the native people who were employed by the British Post Office and steam packet companies to run the mail in more remote areas of the empire. However, though I have not been able to engage with such perspectives within the scope of the thesis, I have been attentive to how the multiple imaginary metaphors that emerged out of these imperial infrastructures were shaped by

a racist ideology which consistently prioritised the experiences of white bodies.[9] These infrastructures were not 'beyond race', but both literally and figuratively shaped, and were shaped by, structural and scientific racism in the nineteenth century.

There are tangible and very human connections to these transport and communication infrastructures that I hope to have drawn out and drawn upon in this thesis. I wish to end my conclusion with a family story often retold at gatherings. In 1886 my Great Uncle Roy's 'Nanny Whiteside' was sent to Liverpool from New York on a Cunard steam packet at the age of four. Her mother had died in childbirth along with her new-born sibling, and her father, who had travelled to Denver, Colorado with the gold rush, decided that he could no longer look after her. Roy's Great Grandfather sent Betty to England to be brought up by her Aunt in Pilling, Lancashire. Remarkably, he sent Nanny Whiteside alone, in the care of two strangers he had found boarding the ship. He asked them to look after her until she came to Liverpool, and described the dress her Aunt would wear to pick her up at the docks. Though this is probably one of many stories of children being 'sent' home in the nineteenth century, it remains a story that my Great Aunt and Uncle often tell. How could a father send such a small child in the care of strangers on the long journey from New York to Liverpool? Indeed, its mixture of potential mundanity and remarkableness signals the multifaceted way in which travel on mail lines, especially international mail lines, was utilised and experienced in the nineteenth century. Without the reliability and relative safety fostered by such communication lines, Nanny Whiteside's father could not have put her on a ship guaranteed to land at Liverpool within a specific timeframe and therefore enable his child to be picked up by her Aunt.

This thesis has consistently demonstrated that bodies 'being sent' are never quite as simple as they seem. Though Nanny Whiteside did return to England safely, my Great Uncle and Aunt did not discover the story of her journey until Roy's mother's death and the inheritance of letters between her Grandfather and Great Aunt. Indeed, they found

[9] Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong have called for Victorian Studies to engage in 'a more robust historical and theoretical account of our objects of study that will more properly attend to the whiteness (as white supremacy) that structures our field's scholarly and social practices'. Though this thesis does engage in the whiteness, and white supremacy, at work in international communication lines, there is further scope for engagement that re-centres issues like 'migration, diaspora, overlapping imperial oppressions, settler colonialism, and [...] other complicated "intimacies" (and intimate violences) of global exchange and racial capitalism'. Please see 'Undisciplining Victorian Studies', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 10, 2020. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/undisciplining-victorian-studies/.

out that Nanny Whiteside's father only travelled to America with the gold rush because he had, scandalously, 'got another woman pregnant' in the village. This is a small, and familial, exemplar of the kinds of stories I have sought to examine in this thesis. Bodies — imperfect, emotional, and kinaesthetic — muddle the clear rhetoric of national and international communication lines. Bodies travel with stories, ideas and dreams, whether they be utopian or dystopian, which further complicate an idealised, disembodied communication network that we have grown used to in the twenty-first century. Instead, nineteenth-century communication infrastructures were shaped by the complexity, messiness, and unruliness of heterogenous travelling bodies.

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