NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

ISSUE 14.1 (SPRING 2018)

Terror and Liberation on the Railway in Women's Short Stories of 1894

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<1>The year 1894 has a special place in the history of cultural debate about women's liberation in the United Kingdom. The early part of the year saw a raging debate in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*—ignited by B. A. Crackanthorpe's essay, "The Revolt of the Daughters" (January 1894)—over just how much emancipation should be afforded young women. After this debate had simmered down a bit, the term "New Woman" exploded into popularity from May 1894 onward(1). It was employed across a range of leading magazines and newspapers to name—and, often, to mock—both real and fictional women whose attitudes, behaviors, and fashions challenged usual expectations of demureness and deference to men's rules, authority, and superiority. And, at the very end of 1894, of course, one of the literary "New Women" who would live longest in readers' imaginations, Sue Bridehead, was introduced in the serial version of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Among the characteristics associated, by supporters and detractors alike, with New Women like Sue Bridehead was the desire and ability to travel independently. The New Woman was thought to be perfectly comfortable traveling about on city streets and country lanes with little worry and without a chaperone. She pined to visit other countries and continents, perhaps even wishing to go on the Grand Continental Tour herself, like her brothers or male cousins. She also was closely associated with new modes of transportation, first bicycles and then automobiles.(2)

<2>However, it is also the case that a mode of transportation that by the 1890s was already more than fifty years old—the railway(3)—frequently featured in artistic and literary portrayals of the New Woman. In this essay, I explore the connection between feminist debate, including debate over the New Woman, and the train carriage, keying in on three women writers' portrayals of their female characters' experience of sexual threat in short stories from that crucial year of 1894. Robert Dingley and Christopher Matthews, respectively, have shown that the train carriage operated in earlier Victorian fiction as a "locus of desire" and an incubator for "love at first sight" (Dingley 111; Matthews 425). For Matthews, the self-contained mobile space of the train at mid-century was the perfect new site in which (male) authors could have their heroes fall in love with unknown women whom the men would later wed. In doing so, these writers replicated but also made modern—faster, more efficient—the older preferred site of the drawing-room. Dingley reveals the pornographic undertones of Victorian treatments of

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love by unveiling connections between sentimental portrayals of love in the train carriage and pornographic literature of the time that featured sex scenes set in train compartments. Building on these two critics' approach to the railway, marriage, and sex, I argue that in 1894 the train carriage became useful as a symbol—negative in some writers' minds, positive in others'—of the power of heterosexual male desire to control and direct women's sexuality for the needs of a patriarchal society.

<3>Two of the three stories treated here, Margaret Oliphant's "A Story of a Wedding Tour," serialized from 30 June–3 July 1894 in *St. James's Gazette*, a daily newspaper, and George Egerton's "Virgin Soil," published in her December 1894 collection of fiction, *Discords*, portray the sexual endangerment of new wives within train carriages. However, they ultimately reveal the transformation of their heroines into strong, independent women—New Women in all but name(4)—through the same vehicle, the train compartment. The third story, L. T. [Elizabeth Thomasina] Meade's "A Horrible Fright," printed in the *Strand* in October 1894, employs its woman-in-danger-on-a-train plot to a quite different ideological end: it highlights women's somatic vulnerability in the public space of the train and strongly questions the advisability of young women's autonomous mobility. Whereas Oliphant's and Egerton's stories embody the hopefulness of the New Woman discourse of the 1890s by envisioning women's successful use of the technological marvel of the steam engine to escape from sexual tyranny experienced within the family—it is their own husbands, after all, whose sexuality threatens them—Meade's "A Horrible Fright" works with the more familiar narrative of danger from an unknown man. In so doing, it questions the growing feminist consciousness of how *the family itself* represented a prime source of women's oppression. Oliphant and Egerton participate, in these particular stories at least, in what late-Victorian literary reviewer and Roman Catholic priest W. F. Barry termed the "literature of women's revolt."(5) Their train-focused tales also illustrate Kate Krueger's recent theory that women writers used the emerging short story form to "challenge [. . .] cultural codes" through "depicting normative spaces as sites of crisis" (2). In contrast, Meade's story contributes to the developing "rhetoric of resistance" to women's liberation that helped achieve the near-extinction of positive portrayals of the New Woman in fiction by the end of 1895.(6)

<4>The protagonists of "A Story of a Wedding Tour" and "Virgin Soil" are both naïve young women on the cusp of married life with worldly, self-centered men. Oliphant's Janey is a "very pretty" and "humble little girl" adopted into the family of her father's business partner, Mr. Midhurst, after her parents' deaths (302; 303). Florence (or "Flo"), Egerton's heroine, is "a young girl, with the suns of seventeen summers on her brown head" (145). Florence's new husband, Philip, though "florid, bright-eyed, loose-lipped, [and] inclined to stoutness," has impressed Florence's mother with his wealth, "good" position, and excellent social connections (145). Similarly, Janey's intended, Mr. Rosendale, though a "thick-set little" businessman with a "strain of Jewish blood," has plenty of money and influence to impress Janey's adoptive parents (303). Neither teenaged heroine has much, if anything, in common with the New Woman at the start of her respective story; each is conventional, with little experience of the world outside

the home and with no particular inclination to flout society's gender expectations. However, they both become radicalized, so to speak, through their experience of marital sex as forced sex—which in both stories is associated with the honeymoon journey by train. In his lecture *Des Espaces Autres, Hétérotopies* ("Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias"), Michel Foucault proposed the honeymoon train as one example of what he called the "heterotopia"—a space/place that functions outside of normal expectations, rules, hierarchies and categories and also outside of normal time (thus also being heterochronic). Heterotopic spaces, Foucault said, have "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."(7) He specifically identified a subset of heterotopias as "crisis heterotopias," in which people undergo extreme transformation. He offered the honeymoon journey—one that often, he noted, took place on a train—as a prime example of the crisis heterotopia: "For girls, there was, until the middle of the twentieth century, a tradition called the 'honeymoon trip' [. . .]. The young woman's deflowering could take place 'nowhere' and, at the moment of its occurrence the train or honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers" (para. 9). In both Oliphant's and Egerton's stories, the train becomes a crisis heterotopia, a moving space in which a new bride experiences an intense transformation through trauma that ultimately enables or forces the birth of personal freedom.

<5>The Rosendales, in "The Story of a Wedding Tour," embark on a wedding journey by train only a few days after their wedding. We learn that Janey has already developed an utter disgust toward sex with her husband. "I am afraid," the narrator says, "that Janey, being young, and shy, and strange, was a good deal frightened, horrified, and even revolted, by her first discoveries of what it meant to be in love" (302). When we see the couple in a carriage of a night train traversing France, we already know that Mr. Rosendale has, after their marriage, "overwhelmed her with caresses from which she shrank in disgust, almost in terror" (303). At this particular point in time, she stares at him, asleep in the train carriage, with a mixture of curiosity, dread, and repugnance: "She was in the full bitterness of these discoveries when the strange incident occurred which was of so much importance in her life. [. . .] Janey, pale and tired, had been contemplating for some time the figure of her husband thrown back in the corner opposite, snoring complacently with his mouth open, and looking the worst that a middle-aged man can look in the utter abandonment of self-indulgence and rude comfort" (304). This "self-indulgence," Oliphant hints, involves imposing his desires on his new wife despite her physical loathing for him.

<6>The threat that Mr. Rosendale's body and desire pose to Janey's bodily autonomy is only obliquely alluded to in this train scene, while Egerton more intimately reveals the heterotopic honeymoon train carriage as a site of forced sex. The train is where the virgin bride, Flo, experiences sex as a surprising and injurious assault that initiates her into a miserable marriage. From the opening lines of the story, Egerton portrays the bridegroom, Philip, as a self-satisfied, vain man eager to get his wife alone, not out of love for her as an intelligent companion but from sexual desire. He presses her to go away from the small wedding celebration at her

mother's house as quickly as possible, and he evidently begins their physical relationship in the private, horse-drawn carriage that takes them to the train station. Egerton writes of the conclusion of this short trip: "[T]he girl jumps out first; she is flushed, and her eyes stare helplessly as the eyes of a startled child, and she trembles with quick running shudders from head to foot. She clasps and unclasps her slender, grey-gloved hands so tightly that the stitching on the back of one bursts" (147). She seems to know just what the rest of the honeymoon journey by railroad will involve—his sexual advances and her own terrified acquiescence to them. This knowledge is also apparent in the way their boarding of the train is described, in one of Egerton's hallmark present-tense passages:

> Then the train runs in; a first-class carriage, marked 'engaged,' is attached, and he comes for her; his hot breath smells of champagne, and it strikes her that his eyes are fearfully big and bright, and he offers her his arm with such a curious amused proprietary air that the girl shivers as she lays her hand in it. (147-8)

With his fire-like breath and "fearfully big and bright" eyes, the bridegroom is like a dragon of medieval lore, eager to snatch an attractive maiden from the society and friends she holds dear. He is helped by modern technology to capture and take away his prey, and the carefully chosen word "proprietary" reminds readers that a husband still had many legal means of controlling his wife's body, even in the seemingly progressive 1890s.(8)

<7>The sexual assault that happens inside their honeymoon carriage is not portrayed overtly; instead, Egerton draws two suggestive veils over the scene. There is a literal veil, provided when Philip pulls down the carriage's window shade. Then there is a metaphorical or stylistic veil, as Egerton supplies an extended ellipsis to represent a temporal gap in the text—essentially the "nowhere space" of traumatic transition from maid to matron, from virgin to non-virgin:

> The bell rings, the guard locks the door, the train steams out, and as it passes the signal-box, a large well-kept hand, with a signet ring on the little finger, pulls down the blind on the window of an engaged carriage.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Five years later, one afternoon on an autumn day, when the rain is falling like splashing tears on the rails, and the smell of the dust after rain fills the mild air with freshness, and the white chrysanthemums struggle to raise their heads from the gravel path into which the sharp shower has beaten them, the same woman, for there is no trace of girlhood in her twenty-two years, slips out of a first-class carriage; she has a dressing-bag in her hand. (148, original ellipsis)

Egerton, known as a pioneer of the strategic use of ellipses,(9) here utilizes a visually-striking ellipsis to make it seem as though a youthful, pretty Florence enters the train and then leaves it soon afterward broken down and mentally defeated (a shorthand, I would argue, for Florence's rape by her husband on the honeymoon journey). Egerton cleverly substitutes objects in the

physical environment for Flo's body so as to allow readers to understand what happened to her body in the veiled and locked compartment. The rain splashes like the tears that Florence likely cried in the carriage and the "white" flowers do their best to bloom despite being "beaten" down by the "shower" of rain.

<8>Some scholars who have written about this story, including Elaine Showalter in one of the earliest scholarly analyses of Egerton's work, focus on Florence's rage against her mother for leaving her ignorant about sex, implying that Egerton unfairly shifts the blame for sexual violence from men to women.(10) However, I believe that Egerton does strongly indict patriarchy as an overarching *system* by highlighting the railway company's complicity in the sexual terrorizing of the young woman. At least three male company officials are involved in ensuring that there is a space in which marital rape—not illegal in the 1890s(11)—may occur. So long as men finance the railroads, control them through Parliament and through stockholders' boards, and staff virtually all railroad occupations(12) Egerton suggests, women will continue to be vulnerable to male sexual violence, even from their own husbands, on board trains. Egerton's critique is not, in contrast to what Anna Despotopoulou claims in her recent book, *Women and the Railway*, just an attack on a generalized sense of the "train" as the victimizer. It is not simply that Florence, as in Despotopoulou's description, "realises that trains, with their privé carriages, act in collusion with marriage practices that physically subjugate woman" (174). After all, trains *cannot act on their own*; they are not alive. It is the *men* who run and operate the railroad companies that act as agents enabling women's somatic availability to men, and it is these men that Egerton holds responsible for Florence's fate. When Philip and Florence first arrive at the station, the husband consults with the male "station-master," evidently asking about a private carriage, and the station-master complies with his request: "He [Philip] has called to the station-master, and they go into the refreshment-room together; the latter appears at the door and, beckoning to a porter, gives him an order" (147). The station-master, whose very title indicates his own proprietary authority over places and people, is part of a surveillance network that ensures the woman is transformed from virgin into wife properly through sexual consummation of the marriage. The "guard" who "locks the door" just before the train pulls out of the station, the porter,(13) and the unknown male worker(s) who attached the first-class carriage at the station-master's request all help provide and police the space of forced marital sex.

<9>Guards' conscious role in making train carriages spaces where women's bodies were available for men's sexual desires can also be seen in other texts, both literary and journalistic, from the mid-1890s. For example, a guard is crucial in a train scene in *Jude the Obscure*(serialized 1894-1895), where Jude and Sue are "put into a compartment all by themselves" by a guard who thinks that "they [are] lovers" (Hardy 141).(14) The same sort of scenario occurs in a strange short story called "A Little Mistake," by Thomas Ablethorpe, printed in the humor journal *Pick-Me-Up* in June 1894. There, a guard locks in a man and woman who have been courting for a few weeks. The irritated female character, Diana, "crie[s] impatiently" to her companion: "Why did you tip that guard to lock us in?" (188). And the more

well-known humor magazine *Punch* printed an anonymouscartoon in October 1896 that showed train guards' potential role in sexual assault. The illustration, captioned "FOR LADIES ONLY. 'RESERVED CARRIAGES,'" has a figure who says, "I have known railway officials allow men to jump into [ladies' carriages] at the last moment before the train starts, with a mutual wink at each other and a very objectionable grin." These examples remind us that male guards had a great deal of control over the bodies of train passengers. The distribution of people among the various carriages was not achieved by some sort of automated system that would ensure rules were followed, nor by the passengers themselves. Human beings, among them male guards, station-masters, and porters, managed the spaces and determined the arrangement of bodies within them. As Ian Carter has said in an essay on gender and trains in crime fiction: "Men controlled women in this life world [the world of the railway]. Women entered on suffrance, and on men's terms" (54).

<10>The spaces where "Virgin Soil" suggests married sex happens—inside the horse-drawn carriage, inside the train, and inside the home—remain private and cut off from the reader's vision, but not from the reader's imagination or curiosity. The choice not to have the narrator and reader enter these spaces may have a political meaning, for the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed significant movements for opening up sealed off spaces—especially the home—to government supervision, surveillance, and aid.(15) For example, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, chartered in 1889, operated on the seemingly radical idea that children should not be subject to hidden violence in the private home, and anti-vivisection groups were trying to make visible the concealed spaces of scientific laboratories where animals were suffering.(16) Similarly, prison reform advocates wanted private prisons opened up to surveillance so as to shed light on and then ameliorate the poor condition of prisoners.(17) By a kind of inversion, Egerton's story makes a similar point—if her fellow citizens could only see the relations of men and women in places like the honeymoon carriage or the family home, they might be disturbed enough by the abuse and degradation of women that they would fight against men's patriarchal control over women. Part of the solution, Egerton suggests, will be convincing women like Flo's mother that such violence does happen behind walls and veiled carriage windows. These newly enlightened women just might form a group in solidarity with abused women to protest against the men (like railroad officials) who collude together in keeping those spaces locked up and opaque.

<11>The Victorian honeymoon was meant to aid in work the wedding ceremony had already begun—the merging of separate individuals into one physical and legal identity. As Helena Michie remarks, "For all of its enforced leisure, the honeymoon did—or was supposed to do—the difficult cultural work of sexual reorientation: for women, from a female body indicatively singular, virginal, and asexual, to a body perhaps desiring and legibly sexual" (234). In Oliphant's and Egerton's stories, as I have shown, this transition is revealed as a traumatic one that involves a mobile space, the train carriage, under the control of men. Each writer, however, allows her wife-character ultimately to halt that enforced transition and reverse-engineer her way into an autonomous and separate identity—again by means of the railway. Each heroine

uses a train to create herself as a new individual not bound to or subsumed within a man's identity and physical being. In Florence's case, the realization that she can escape via train happens only after she has rejected a horrifying potential solution—the murder of her own husband.(18) She moves beyond those homicidal feelings to a determined resolution to remove herself physically from the spaces that he owns, and she feels no regret about leaving her husband via the railway. She tells her mother, "I have no remorse, no prick of conscience at the step I am taking; my life must be my own. [. . .] I am not going back" (154). The last line of the story shows her "tak[ing] the train in the opposite direction" from her husband and their home (162).

<12>Janey's escape from her husband's physical control begins through no active step of her own but then becomes something she fully and consciously chooses. As the train the married couple has been traveling in overnight slows to approach a station, the sleeping Mr. Rosendale jolts awake. Confused and groggy, he bustles out of the train with some of their luggage, not realizing that this station is not their final destination. Also confused, Janey neither gets out of the train with him nor thinks quickly enough to call out to him to return to the carriage. The doors close surprisingly fast, and she watches as her husband frantically tries to catch up to the carriage as the train is pulling away.(19) The last part of him she sees is "his face, fully revealed by the light of the lamp, convulsed with rage and astonishment" (305). Initially, she fears that he will catch up with the train and punish her physically—"Her first sensation was fright, a terror that she was in fault and was about to be crushed to pieces in his rage" (305). When she realizes that she is truly alone in the carriage and that he will not be able to overtake her right away, however, we see the train carriage transformed from a space of containment and fear to one of refuge and retreat: "Was it possible that for the first time since that terrible moment of her marriage she was more safely by herself than any locked door or even watchful guardian could keep her, quite unapproachable in the isolation of the train? Alone!" (305).(20) She rides on, takes a room at a hotel near the next station, and decides to take the radical step of leaving her husband:

> A sudden energy of resolution seized her. She put on her hat again, and as she looked at herself in the glass encountered the vision of a little face which was new to her. It was not that of Janey, the little governess-pupil; it was not young Mrs. Rosendale. It was full of life, and meaning, and energy, and strength. Who was it? Janey? Janey herself, the real woman, whom nobody had ever seen before. (309)

Thus, the train that was supposed to turn her into a docile subject-wife instead has turned her into a version of the New Woman. She chooses to take a train going in the opposite direction from where the wedding journey would have taken her and her husband, and she settles in a small French town under an assumed name. Earning a living through doing needlework and teaching English and music, she lovingly rears the boy, John, whom she had conceived during the single week she was with her husband. Even when her husband suddenly appears again in the town ten years later—roaring by on an express train, from which he spies his absconded

wife—she is able to maintain her independence because he dies of a heart attack brought on, it appears, by the shock of having seen her.

<13>A significant but previously unremarked innovation on Oliphant's part in this railway tale is her metaphorical assignment of gender to trains. It is this gendering, I believe, that allows Oliphant to reconcile the fact of the train as a dangerous trap for women with the opposing idea of the train as liberating technology. She essentially makes the oppressive express train *male* and the liberating regional train *female*. The express, or *rapide*, sounds dangerous in many of the narrator's descriptions: It "rushe[s] through [. . .] pass[ing] like a whirlwind, [. . .] screaming and roaring into the tunnel, making too much noise with the rush and sweep of its going to permit the shout of the passenger to be heard" (314-315). In contrast, the regional train is the "most friendly, idle, gossiping little train," for it "seem[s] to stop at the merest signal-box to have a talk" (310). While the first-class carriage of the *rapide* was a site of sexual threat for Janey, the second-class carriage in the local train brings warmth and belonging: "She got into a second-class carriage in which there were already various country people, and especially a young mother with a baby, and its nurse in a white round cap with long streaming ribbons. Janey's heart went out to these people" (310). This expansion of her love is the opposite of how her heart and body had shrunk from her husband in the express train. In its all-female traveling population and its feminine attributes, the regional train becomes almost a woman-only paradise or utopia, providing a space for women's self-development set apart from what Oliphant portrays as the pushing, punishing world of men.

<14>Both Janey and Flo turn out to be much stronger and more resilient than either seemed to be when she first married, and each ultimately embraces some key principles associated with the figure of the "New Woman." Yet they are not strident in their principled stands and neither woman fits the caricatures of the manly or bossy New Women in the mid-1890s press. Such is not the case, however, with the protagonist L. T. Meade created for her short story, "A Horrible Fright" (October 1894). Meade adapted her story from an earlier, anonymous tale, "Remarkable Adventure," that was first published in *Railway Adventures and Anecdotes*, one of the many compendia of jokes, anecdotes, and light-hearted stories sold at train bookstalls for the entertainment of passengers. That earlier story, "Remarkable Adventure," features an unnamed and rather ordinary female narrator telling of a curious experience she had while traveling from Paddington Station to Reading on an express train. "[A] strange-looking young man with remarkably long, flowing hair," she says, had entered her carriage and asked her to cut his hair and beard—using her own scissors from her work-bag—during the short train ride (146). Though the man seemed, at first, "disturbed and wild," perhaps even insane, he was also respectful and polite. He said, for instance, "I do not wish to threaten you, young lady, and I think, besides, that I can trust your kind face" (147). She complied with his requests, and the man left the compartment at Reading sporting his transformed look and thanking her for her "kind and courageous conduct" (147). As policemen rushed up to the train, he walked coolly past them, unrecognizable as the man for whom they were searching. Only after he

disappeared into the crowd did the narrator learn that he was a criminal on the run, wanted by the authorities for "commit[ing] a forgery to an enormous amount" (147).

<15>The narrator of Meade's adaptation, in contrast, immediately establishes herself as an intellectual and athletic New Woman-type—practically a parody of the type, in fact. She proudly states that she attended Girton College, one of two women-only residential colleges at Cambridge at the time. She nostalgically recounts a childhood spent roaming independently about her neighborhood with her "own special horse" pulling her own "little pony carriage" (426). She also claims to be "great at all kinds of out-door sports and games," boasting that she was "the champion player of the tennis club" and that "at the present time [she is] successfully getting up a lady's golf club" (426). She sums up her modernity and New Woman credentials by saying, "In short, I think I may truly say of myself that I represent the average, up-to-date, well-educated, rather strong-minded, nineteenth-century girl" (426). The protagonist's name, Virginia, also suggests she is a virgin; this is important because Meade never suggests that her character is the sexually liberated type of New Woman, the "Woman Who Did" (to use the title of Grant Allen's shocking novel of the following year, 1895). Instead, the heroine is meant to be taken as a sexually inexperienced young woman, which heightens the terror for readers who are meant to fear for her innocence during events chronicled in the story.

<16>Virginia's ordeal on the train in "A Horrible Fright" functions both as punishment for her sense of independence and as warning for female readers about the need to respect the spatial limits placed on them as women who need good men's protection from bad men. The long preamble to the actual events on the train seems intended to point out the strong contrast between this young woman's *belief* that she does not need protection from men and the *reality* of her extreme vulnerability as a womanutilizing public transportation without a chaperone. In this way, the story participates in the backlash to feminist support of expanded freedom of movement for girls and young women in the 1880s and 1890s. Much discussion of women's rights in the early 1890s focused on whether or not young women in cities like London should have latchkeys and be able to go about unchaperoned, and there are examples in the press of young women—sounding much like Meade's Virginia—claiming their right to move about with perfect freedom and without harassment. One such young woman was Gertrude Hemery, who in a response to B. A. Crackanthorpe's aforementioned essay in the *Nineteenth Century*, "The Revolt of the Daughters" (January 1894), claimed almost total freedom from familial control:

> I am only eighteen years old, and can boast of a latchkey, and am never chaperoned; and, speaking from my own experience, I think I may venture to assert that any young girl who takes the moulding of her life into her own hands, and asserts her right as an individual to the exercise of individual thought and action, will never have the occasion to regret the step. She will attain an experience of the world that will strengthen her character, bring out all her graver, nobler qualities, and render her a being well worthy "man's" respect and reverence. (Hemery 286)

Meade’s story seems, in part, a reaction to these sorts of claims that young women might benefit from—and certainly wouldn’t be harmed by—a “mild sort of *wanderjahre* period [. . .] during which they, too, [. . . can] get occasional glimpses of the landscape beyond the family domain” (Crackanthorpe 266).

<17>Virginia boasts of her love of traveling fast, saying “I like the feeling of being whirled through space in an express train going at the top of its speed” (427). However, she ends up with significant reasons to regret this autonomous and fast mobility. When her grandfather invites her to visit him in Dublin, Virginia insists—despite warnings from her parents—on taking the “night mail from Euston,” by herself, to Holyhead, in Wales, where she will board a ferry for Ireland (426). Not thrilled at the potential exposure of his daughter to insult, her father accompanies her to the station and begs her to “go in one of the ladies’ carriages,” but she quickly nixes this idea, retorting, “Now, *do* you suppose I am likely to do anything quite so old-maidish?” (426, original emphasis). Virginia even rejects an empty carriage in favor of riding in a compartment that already contains two elderly men: “I led my father to a carriage where two old gentlemen had already comfortably established themselves” (426). Through this action, she tries deliberately to show her father that she does not fear men, thereby acting as the quintessential “militant daughter of the nineteenth century” (Jeune 280). She also has already announced that she has never had “patience with those squeamish girls who think every man who sees them must offer them either admiration or insult” (428). Though aware of the potential for sexual danger, then, she clearly refuses to recognize male sexuality as a serious threat.

<18>Because of a series of unexpected happenings, Virginia ends up sharing a carriage with just one lone, young man for most of the night-time ride to Holyhead, resulting in a traumatic encounter. One reason she ends up alone with the man is that she does not follow the advice of a friendly, protective guard who tries to help her travel alone in a compartment after the train’s first stop. It is important to note that this guard is the very opposite of the sneaky, colluding guards discussed earlier—he seems keen to defend women’s virtue. “Perhaps,” he says to Virginia, “you’d like me to lock the carriage door, miss? The train is not too full to-night, and I can manage it” (428). When she points out that someone else has already put some belongings in the carriage, he says he will gladly “put those things in another carriage,” but she refuses his offer (428). The owner of the “things” in the compartment, a young man, returns to the carriage after the guard has walked away, but Virginia does not exit the carriage nor ask the guard for help. Instead, she only laughs and puts on a “cheerful” look as the train leaves the station (428).

<19>Virginia quickly becomes uncomfortable when she realizes that the “big” and “fairly good-looking” man in her compartment will not stop staring at her (428). Virginia tries to avoid the man’s stare, but she finds herself forced to look up from her novel when he begins taking things out of his “large black bag”:

> The man in the opposite corner had opened his black bag, and taken from it a pair of large, sharp-looking scissors, and also a razor. When I glanced at him he had opened the razor, and was gently and dexterously sharpening it on a leather strop which he had fastened to one of the buttons of the window. He met my eye as I met his, and smiled grimly. (428)

The man's "grim" smile gives a decidedly horrifying edge to his actions. Combined with his methodical—even if "gentle"—sharpening of the razor, it might bring to readers' minds the various forms of physical and sexual assault (including rape) that had long been part of the journalistic discourse on train travel. The man's statements seem, for instance, like a belated fleshing out of the possibility for interpersonal violence envisioned in the pages of *The Sporting Gazette* back in 1863: "Imagine [. . .] the feelings of any lady who has taken her place in the 'limited mail,' and directly after starting at the rate of fifty miles an hour finds herself alone with a man, or even one of her own sex, from whose reticule, bag, or pocket the muzzle of a revolver peeps or the point of a dagger gleams!" ("The Dangers of the Rail" 643). The passenger's black bag and its contents would likely, too, have invited contemporary readers' reflection on the horrific series of woman-murders that had taken place in the Whitechapel area of East London only six years before the publication of Meade's story. Even though a black bag was, of course, an ordinary object carried by all sorts of men and women in the nineteenth century, it had a special, and ominous, symbolism at that time because newspaper and magazine accounts of the 1888 murders frequently mentioned the "black bag" or "little black bag" said to have been used by the so-called "Jack the Ripper" to hold his tools of dissection.(21)

<20>The story's events repeatedly show Virginia how foolhardy she was to think she could travel perfectly safely, somehow magically insulated from sexual danger. Even the word "fright" in the title shows how ill-prepared Virginia is for this threat because of her New Woman attitudes. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud explains the difference between fright and anxiety, emphasizing the lack of preparedness as a key factor in the former state: "'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. [. . .] 'Fright,' however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise" (Freud 12). Meade highlights Virginia's fright constantly, and she repeatedly uses words such as "shuddering" and "agitated," which we associate with the physical and mental experience of fright. For example, Virginia says, "[H]ow my heart thumped! how those basilisk eyes seemed to pierce through me, and fill me with sick loathing and abject horror!" (426; 430). Furthermore, Meade puts several speeches in the mouth of the male antagonist that can only rachet up the intensity of the scene and remind readers of the protagonist's unexpected vulnerability. The man tells Virginia, for instance, "I should be frightened if I were in your position. You are alone in a railway carriage with a man who could strangle you and throw your dead body on the line if he felt the least inclined to do so" (428).(22) Of course, the unspoken message is that he could rape her with impunity, too.

<21>Meade creates suspense around the question of whether or not Virginia will knuckle down to the man's commands to shave his face and cut his hair. It is ironic, given her insistence to her father and the railway guard on having her own way in the choice of train compartment, that she must now comply with a male stranger's instructions. In fact, the language the man uses makes him sound much like a Victorian parent reminding a daughter about cultural and religious expectations for girls' obedient behavior. When Virginia says the instruments he shows her "could do [her] mischief," the man says "they will, too, unless a certain young lady does *exactly*what she is told" (429, original emphasis). Meade makes sure the reader doesn't miss the crucial reduction of the independent New Woman to silent obedience and a shrinking physicality—the opposite of the somatic trajectory we saw with Florence and Janey. Virginia repeatedly uses the language of submission and obedience, saying, "I *obeyed*, and *crouched* back in my corner, trembling in every limb"; "I *obeyed* him without a moment's hesitation"; and "[I was] now completely *meek* and *subdued*, and *obeyed* his last direction without a word" (430 and 429, emphasis added). Unlike the female narrator in the earlier story, "Remarkable Adventure," who is perfectly capable of speaking to the policemen who rush up to the train at the end of its run, Virginia is completely silent at the end of the story. She says nothing to the policemen who arrive seeking the fugitive.

<22>This silencing of the voluble and educated New Woman is especially interesting in light of the fact that the *Strand* was to print, just shortly after the appearance of "A Horrible Fright," an illustrated article entitled "Muzzles for Ladies." The piece lays out, in prose and in multiple illustrations, the history of bridles or "branks" used in England as punishment for female gossips, scolds, and blasphemers. The anonymous writer begins his (or her) historical tour with an invocation of contemporary debates about women's rights, especially as they appeared in 1894. "The emancipation of women from the oppression of men and from the thraldom of conventionality," the writer says, "being just now a favourite theme [. . .], the occasion may be an appropriate one for the purpose of recalling an article of headgear which was frequently worn by the fair sex, throughout this country, in the 'good old times'" (485). The article bears on its final page a rather startling image. Captioned "Present Day" [Figure 1], it shows a fashionable 1890s woman wearing a simplified version of such a bridle and then explains what this figure is meant to show:

Figure 1. “Present Day.” From “Muzzles for Ladies” (489).

> The last time the scold’s bridle was publicly used was at Congleton in Cheshire in 1824; but, in the words of an eminent statesman, “many things have happened since then”; and it would create no small sensation if at the present time we were to meet a *fin-de-siècle* lady, as in our concluding illustration, led through the streets by a burly policeman, wearing one of these uncouth implements, because, forsooth, she had ventured to raise her voice in defence of her rights, or had spoken too plainly to an overbearing and tyrannical husband. (489)

Though the writer may be expressing sympathy here with the women’s movement and saying that women should not be subject to these devices, the article’s overall tone and the plethora of illustrations of the branks and bridles might work for some readers of the *Strand* to normalize the history of such physical silencing. Some among the *Strand*’s mostly male readership(23) may well have felt a twinge of nostalgia upon seeing these illustrations, for they were used to seeing pronouncements in the press about the supposedly never-ending stream of speech from those annoying New Women. As *Punch* had said earlier in the year (May 1894), “There is a New Woman, and what do you think? / She lives on nothing but Foolscap and Ink! / But, though Foolscap and Ink form the whole of her diet, / This nagging New Woman can never be quiet!” (“The New Woman” 153).

<23>Meade’s story, I contend, employs the trauma of near-rape on the train to strike back at the figure of the New Woman and to constrain female mobility while also encouraging docility and obedience. In reading the story in this way, I consciously align myself with interpretations of Meade’s work as more anti-feminist than feminist. Meade had a complicated relationship to *fin-de-siècle* feminism, for though she took leadership roles in the Pioneer Club (an association of professional women interested in the advancement of women) and contributed fiction to its journal, *Shafts*, she also espoused conservative outlooks on women’s roles and rights in much of her fiction (Bittel 2). Some very recent critics have suggested that Meade’s sensitive portrayals of independent female characters and her probing of girls’ and women’s

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modes of survival in a hostile world likely encouraged female readers to think in new ways about women's roles and capabilities. An influential articulation of this position can be found in Tina O'Toole's recent assessment that "Meade's rebellious characters are made attractive to the reader, and engage narrative sympathy even though they break the rules that are also seen as desirable in these fictional school communities. Thus, there is a dispersal of identification at work, which makes available emancipatory models for girls and young women" (49). The prevailing critical view, however, is that Meade's fiction is fundamentally conservative in outlook, encouraging female readers to stick to typical Victorian scripts for female happiness (unselfishness, fulfillment of duties, chasteness, and marriage).(24) The female protagonists in Meade's dozens of novels for girls often share with the New Woman a rejection of frilly clothing, a love of independent travel, and an eschewal of the need for family support. They also, however, ultimately learn a lesson, communicated when the protagonist's pranks and independent actions put herself or her loved ones in danger, about the need to listen to authority figures and rein in the propensity for independent action. Each protagonist experiences an intensely traumatic event—such as having a close friend kidnapped by gypsies or nearly dying while boating during a thunderstorm(25)—that chastens and subdues her. In similar but more adult-oriented fashion, the protagonist in "A Horrible Fright" learns her lesson, as I have shown, by experiencing extreme fear at the possibility of murder or sexual assault in the same vehicle—the train—that other women in short stories from 1894 used to find freedom. Helen Bittel's judgment that Meade encouraged the female readers of her school-girl fiction to "heed the advice of protective adults and remain within the safety of the domestic sphere" is perfectly transferrable to "A Horrible Fright," if we substitute "protective men" for "protective adults" (5).

<24>Jack Adrian says that Meade's story "must surely have touched a nerve amongst the portion of the *Strand*'s readership that was female" (130). If he is right, what kind of nerve would it have touched? Perhaps the story prompted young women readers to re-think their free movement about cities and towns and in the nation as a whole; perhaps it made them vow not to travel alone on a train, especially at night. In fact, a female reader's response could have been similar to the real-life reactions of fear by women, then and now, who remove themselves from public streets as much as possible at night or when a serial killer or serial rapist is said to be operating nearby.(26) Just such a female evacuation of the streets had already happened during the period of the Whitechapel murders. One woman living in London at the time later recalled the terror of going out in the streets, even in the West End: "[We were] terrified and unbalanced [. . .] by the murders. It seemed to be round the corner, although it all happened in the East End, and we were in the West; but even so, I was afraid to go out after dark, if only to post a letter" (qtd. in Walkowitz 224).

<25>The presence of Meade's story as a late-in-the-year articulation of how the New Woman could be warned away from her counter-cultural mentality and independent way of life shows how conversation about feminism and women's rights never proceeds in a neat fashion, progressing ever upward in an enlightening arc toward liberation. Oliphant's and Egerton's

progressive-minded narratives of 1894 had to compete with more conservative stories like Meade's, and it is almost certain that Meade's backlash story in the *Strand* would have reached more readers, overall, than either Oliphant's or Egerton's story, given that the popular magazine already had a circulation of around 300,000 in 1894 (Chan 60). "A Horrible Fright" takes the fears of and revulsion against the aggressive and harmful male sexuality that Oliphant and Egerton associated with the honeymoon train and employs them instead as tools with which to warn and chasten (female) readers. But these stories do not only show us how pioneering rhetoric was met with a strong backlash that likely contributed to the virtual disappearance of progressive New Woman fiction by the end of 1895.(27) Recognizing the importance of the train carriage as a key debated symbol in the *fin-de-siècle* fight over women's rights also helps us understand later examples of backlash to women's advancements(28), from the negative portrayal of career women in 1980s films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) to the harassment of feminist culture critics via social media today (especially through rape memes), a kind of harassment that seeks to undermine third-wave and fourth-wave successes for women in the areas of sexual autonomy and vocal engagement in the public cultural sphere.

Endnotes

(1)See Ellen Jordan for a classic investigation of press usage of the epithet "New Woman," and see Stetz and Walls for more recent research into the term's origins. For New Woman fiction, see both Ardis and Richardson and Willis. Nelson's anthology of primary materials related to the New Woman is also an excellent source of information about the term's employment.(^)

(2)Marks makes a strong case for the association between New Women and new, fast modes of transportation, especially the bicycle. For the New Woman and the automobile, see Ramsey; for the New Woman and the underground railway, see Vadillo.(^)

(3)The first passenger trains ran in the Midlands in the late 1830s. See Freeman and Schivelbusch for thorough introductions to the Victorian railway system and its impact on thought and culture.(^)

(4)I should note here that Egerton claimed never to have written a "New Woman" character: "I have never yet replied to myself in a satisfactory way—to the question what is she [the New Woman]?—I have never met one—never written about one. My women were all the eternally feminine—old as Eve—the term seemed to me to be one of those loose, cheap, journalistic catch words" (qtd. in Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, 164).(^)

(5)Barry claimed, in a long literary review article of July 1894, that "[t]he literature of woman's revolt would fill libraries" (312).(^)

(6)The phrase "rhetoric of resistance" is used by Walls in her essay about the New Woman and the "rhetoric of modernism," but I have flipped her original use of it; where she used it to refer to a body of literature in the 1890s that was opposed to feminist views, I have re-purposed it to

label the literature of the time that opposed *anti-feminist* views (299). As regards the extinction of positive New Woman fiction, Sally Ledger notes *Punch*'s declaration, on 31 Dec. 1895, of "THE END OF THE NEW WOMAN," as she shows that New Woman fiction, while plentiful up through that point in time, "dwindled dramatically" after it. She mainly blames Wilde's trial in May 1895 for this decline, but there most likely were other factors at work as well (24).(^)

(7)Michel Foucault discussed his concept of the heterotopia in a lecture given in 1967 that he transformed into an article for *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuities* in 1984 entitled "*Des Espaces Autres*. *Heterotopies*."(^)

(8)Even in the 1890s it was unclear how much legal control a man had over his wife's body. An important legal case at the time, Regina v. Jackson, often referred to as the "Clitheroe case," brought passions on both sides to the fore. Jackson had kidnapped his estranged wife off the street and kept her locked up in his house. The original ruling said that this action was perfectly legal, but the decision was reversed at a higher level. For more information about the case see Shanley 177-188.(^)

(9)See, for instance, p. xv of Martha Vicinus's "Introduction" to the Virago single-volume reprint of Egerton's two short story collections, Keynotes *and* Discords.(^)

(10)For example, in *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter says that "'Virgin Soil' [. . .] is an encounter between a mother and daughter. The daughter has come home to accuse her mother of destroying her life. The chosen husband is a philanderer and lecher [. . .] Yet it is the mother whom she comes to revile. The graphic emotion of the story comes through clearly enough; yet the rhetoric cannot disguise the falseness of the situation. Why not an encounter between husband and wife? What was the mother to have done? It seems that we are to believe that, having known the facts of life, the daughter would not have associated herself with a man physically unattractive to her" (213-214).(^)

(11)See Hasday and Bourke on the history of marital rape in Britain and the United States. Also, see Franey 161-2 for a discussion of feminist responses to marital rape at the *fin de siècle*.(^)

(12)Michael Freeman offers the following relevant information on gender and railway employment: "It was a vocation almost exclusively for men: at the 1851 Census, there were just 54 female workers recorded for the whole industry" and "As late as 1891, *Chambers's Journal* remarked that female railway clerks, very common on the Continent, just did not exist in Britain" (181).(^)

(13)Regarding porters, it is telling that Janey, in Oliphant's "A Story of a Wedding-Tour," realizes after her escape from her husband how lucky she is that no porters interfered to stop her: "Again she laughed guiltily; but then got very grave again trying to count up all the chances—how some porter might have noticed and might betray her" (312-3).(^)

(14)Despotopoulou interprets Hardy's guard's actions not as generally indicative of male control over railway spaces but as a sign of the guard's acceptance of supposedly loosened

moral strictures and expectations in the 1890s: "[T]hey are taken for lovers and given an empty compartment all to themselves by a guard who acts in collusion with the new sexual mores that the railway contributed in slackening" (154). A similar apology for a guard's action can be found in Heikkilä's analysis of Oliphant's "A Story of a Wedding Tour." At the time of Janey's escape from her husband (discussed later in this essay), a guard operates on behalf of the institution of marriage, for he tries to arrange for Janey to register at a hotel near the station so that Mr. Rosendale will be able to find her easily. Though Heikkilä deems the guard "chivalrous," we also might call him an unwitting colluder with surveillance on married women (41).(^)

(15)See Surridge, Chapters 1, 4, and 6.(^)

(16)For discussion of the antivivisection movement and privacy, see Lansbury.(^)

(17)On prison reform, see Wiener.(^)

(18)In the long conversation she has with her mother about the philandering and disgusting Philip, Flo says, "[I] shiver at the touch of his lips, his breath, his hands, my whole body revolts at his touch; [. . .] when he has turned and gone to sleep, I have watched him with such growing hatred that at times the temptation to kill him has been so strong that I have crept out of bed and walked the cold passage in my bare feet until I was too benumbed to feel anything" (Egerton 160).(^)

(19)An anonymous magazine story, "A Night in a First-Class Railway Carriage," from about twenty-five years before "A Story of a Wedding-Tour," has a similar scene of a new wife unintentionally traveling on without her husband after a stop at a train station in France during a wedding tour (see Byerly 185-7 for further discussion of this story). Perhaps Oliphant had read this story. It is also the case, however, that she herself had on at least one occasion been left behind, accidentally, by a train. In a letter to her son in August 1883, Oliphant recounted one such incident: "At Brussels, at the first station we came to, I got out on the score of the *vingt minutes d'arret*, and was left behind by my train! But fortunately it had only gone on to the Midi station, and after sitting for an hour and a half—5.30 to 7—watching the Flemish folk crowding to the early trains, I got on and recovered my carriage and all my belongings again" (314).(^)

(20)Janey's reaction to becoming separated accidentally from her husband through the closing of the train's doors is remarkably similar to the way in which Mrs. Mallard responds to reports of her husband's death in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"—a story that was likewise first published in 1894. Likenesses between the two stories and the timing of their publication may be worth further investigation, as would be the uncanny similarities between Mrs. Mallard's response to her husband's death and Lady Car's reaction to her husband's demise in another piece of Oliphant fiction, the 1883 novel *The Ladies Lindores*.(^)

(21)See Chapter 7 ("Jack the Ripper") in Walkowitz for excellent discussion of the atmosphere of fear that existed during the time of the killings as well as of the press focus at the time on the

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“black bag” and tools used by the killer to mutilate the victims. Walkowitz notes that during the time of the murders some working-class inhabitants of Whitechapel harassed those who carried black bags, suspecting that they might be responsible for the murders: “[T]hey believed the Mad Doctor theory and popular antagonism toward regular doctors was intensified by the recent anti-vaccination movement. Anyone walking around with a little back bag was in trouble” (214).(^)

(22)This scenario echoes a real-life train crime from four decades earlier in which a young woman named Isabella Lawrence was pushed out of a third-class carriage by a man named Thomas Law along the Leeds Northern Railway line. Lawrence’s body was “found lying across the rails” with “her head [. . .] fearfully crushed and mangled.” See “Suspected Murder on a Railway” (Oct. 1854).(^)

(23)Winnie Chan notes the *Strand*’s male readership, quoting Reginald Pound, the *Strand*’s penultimate editor, as saying in his memoir that “while posing as a family magazine, *The Strand*primarily appealed to men [. . .]. Some issues went to press with no story or article of compelling interest to women” (68).(^)

(24)For instance, Christopher Pittard contends that Meade’s popular medical stories, especially *The Medicine Lady* (1892), portray women as dangerous usurpers in male fields and cordon off certain types of behavior and expertise as appropriate only for men and other types as suitable for women. Arguing for a more feminist reading, Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has positioned Meade as a writer who laid for herself “feminist tasks” and who, in her *Sorceress of the Strand* series of 1902-3, “reclaim[ed] the popular, misogynist ‘poison panic’ for feminist purposes” (97).(^)

(25)These particular circumstances happen in *A World of Girls: The Story of a School* and *A Modern Tomboy: A Story for Girls,* respectively.(^)

(26)See Pain, Valentine, and Letherby and Reynolds for excellent discussions, within the field of human or cultural geography, of women’s fears of venturing out at night or of using public transportation. Walkowitz also discusses these fears in the Victorian period specifically.(^)

(27)See Ledger 24.(^)

(28)The intensity of the backlash to second-wave feminism in the United States is captured vividly in Susan Faludi’s influential book, *Backlash*. The present-day backlash to third- and fourth-wave feminisms has yet to be corralled and examined in a full-length study like Faludi’s, but the beginnings of such an analysis can be found in some of the essays in Superson and Cudd.(^)

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