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The Omnibus

A Cultural History of Urban Transportation

Elizabeth Amann

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Paris, 2022

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Snails on the Omnibus

It is raining (omnibus stories almost always start in times of rain). A 'non-descript' man, without an umbrella, runs after an omnibus. In his arms, he holds a large grey paper bag. The conductor pretends not to see him ('Omnibus conductors are *farceurs* in times of rain'). When he finally does get on, dripping wet, the other passengers are annoyed. A woman complains that he is ruining her silk dress and asks him to put his wet bag on the floor. Not long after, a lady observes a snail climbing up her skirt. Another appears on a male passenger's boot. (In times of rain, snails emerge from their shells.)

The passengers wonder who has introduced the snails on board: 'Fourteen "not I" are heard. Only one passenger has said nothing'. It is the man with the paper bag. When they examine the suspect article, they find that it is pierced all over: 'Two hundred of those corniform beings had broken their chains and were regaining, their sacks on their backs, the land of freedom'. With the other passengers' aid, the man begins to collect the snails in his hat, but the beasts, who have now tasted freedom, continue to escape. Soon the passengers are laughing hysterically, and the driver, who has no idea what is going on, wonders whether he should be taking them to Charenton (an insane asylum). The only passenger who is not amused is the lady in the silk dress who pulls the cord to stop the omnibus. She does so, however, with such force that the driver falls from his seat, jerking the omnibus to a sudden halt and jolting the woman onto

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the hat, which she crushes along with all the snails. The story ends with a legal battle, the woman suing for damages to her silk dress and the man reclaiming his hat and snails.

This anecdote, which first appeared in the legal journal *Le Droit* in 1837, had a surprising afterlife.[1] Not only was it reprinted in newspapers from England and France to Switzerland, the United States and Algeria, but it was also reworked in very different ways and with a surprising variety of animals.[2]

In 1850, the caricaturist John Leech, perhaps playing on his own last name, published in *Punch* an image of an omnibus full of women in distress (Fig. 1.1). The caption reads: '*Chorus of Unprotected Females.* Conductor! Stop! Conductor! Omnibus-Man! Here's a Gentleman had an Accident and broke a jar of Leeches and they're all over the Omnibus!'[3] In an 1856 novel by Paul de Kock, the offending item is a bag of maggots brought on board by an angler.[4] In yet another version, the beast is a live lobster, who pinches a female passenger's dress. As in the original

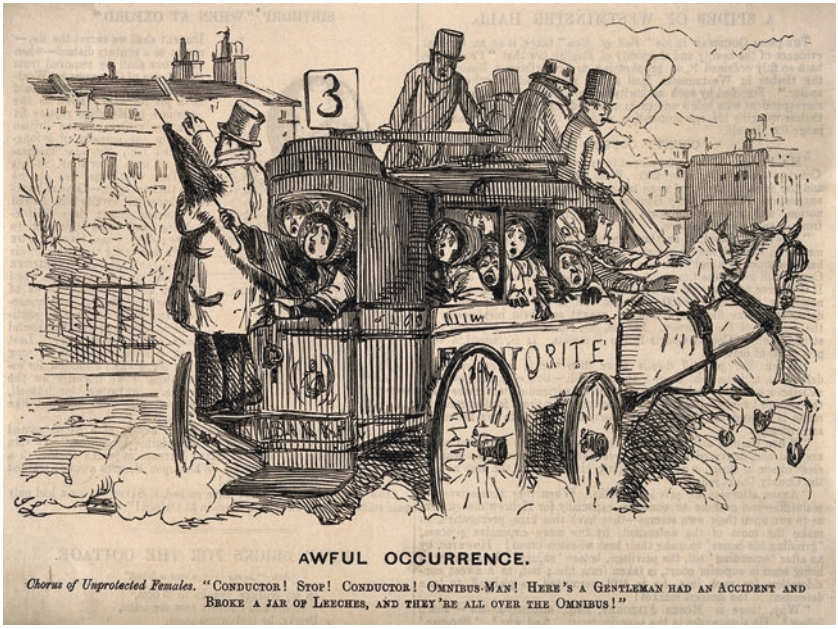

Fig. 1.1 John Leech, 'Awful Occurrence'. Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark

anecdote, the tale ends at the *commissariat*, the man reclaiming his supper and the woman refusing to sacrifice her skirt.[5] The story served not only as a comic tale but also as an erotic vignette. In Gustave Cane's 'Le Tramway de Charenton' (1893), a young man is flirting with an attractive brunette on a tram when a neighbour points out an enormous snail climbing up her skirt with 'its horns all out'. Taking inspiration from the creature, the young man escorts her to a private room in a restaurant, where they hunt 'the interesting beast' together.[6]

Years later, the poet François Coppée, in an elegy for the last horse-drawn omnibus, would shrug off the anecdote as the type of 'innocent bawdiness [that] made our parents laugh'.[7] Its persistence, however, suggests that its subject was not entirely trivial. The introduction of omnibus services in Paris in 1828 and in London the following year radically expanded access to horse-drawn transportation, making it affordable for a much wider range of residents. As rival companies emerged in both cities, the omnibuses quickly developed into a *system* that comprehended the entire metropolis. By 1829, according to one estimate, 80 per cent of Paris lay within half a kilometre of an omnibus line.[8] Just as the snails on the omnibus are liberated from their narrow confines, the new services, which represent the origins of urban transit, allowed many city dwellers, particularly less affluent ones, to travel for the first time beyond their immediate neighbourhoods and to explore the rest of the city. As an article in *Paris, ou le Livre des cent et un* (1834) points out, 'Before the omnibus, every neighbourhood of Paris was a city; the Omnibus has made a city of all of Paris'.[9] As a result, the population began to mix in unprecedented ways. Suddenly, a French writer joked, the '*rive droite* [was] invading the *rive gauche*, it's the Madeleine rushing toward the Bastille, it is the North hurling itself on the South'.[10] Observers of the early tram would similarly point to its unifying effect, its ability to 'create a mysterious link among a thousand families, who until now, each parked in its respective neighbourhood, neither saw nor knew one another'.[11]

Omnibus and tram services expanded not only access to capitals such as Paris, London, and Madrid but also the cities themselves. As lines and routes multiplied, new neighbourhoods developed on the periphery, which were often healthier and less congested. It was no longer necessary for labourers, artisans, and employees to live in the city centre near their workplaces. Nor was it necessary for entrepreneurs to concentrate their operations in a single location: a 'master', observed one French writer, could now 'jump over spaces, overlook tasks at any moment; he is

everywhere; one thinks he is far away; he is there; thanks to the Omnibus, Paris has become an immense workshop where one can wander through all the rooms, urge on the work [and] monitor distribution, without, as it were, leaving one's home'.[12] As an observer of the first urban transit service in Madrid put it, 'the centre is everywhere'.[13] Many nineteenth-century commentators welcomed this decentralisation, which increased the supply of affordable housing, reduced mortality rates, improved hygiene and served as a 'guarantee of public order', depriving 'the spirit of agitation' of 'easy ears'.[14]

This new mobility and contact, however, often resulted in uncomfortable social interactions among passengers of different ranks, who suddenly found themselves rubbing shoulders in stifling and claustrophobic carriages, which were as Jennifer Terni notes among 'the most socially mixed spaces' in Paris.[15] The contrast between the 'nondescript' man with his humble bag of snails and the woman in the silk dress—described as *ventre de biche*, a delicate shade of light pink—points to the tensions between social classes that could develop on the omnibus. The story captures not only the freedom and mobility but also the awkward confinement of the experience. Although the passengers like the snails find new liberty through the omnibus, they do so only by climbing into its cramped carapace and frequenting the multitudes. The similarity between the tightly packed omnibus and the bag of snails would be illustrated years later in René Georges Hermann-Paul's 1893 lithograph 'Escargots d'omnibus' in which passengers with snail-like hats and chignons climb a snail-like staircase to the roof of an overcrowded omnibus (Fig. 1.2).[16] In both story and image, the passengers are uncomfortably close. This proximity was not only socially awkward but also raised anxieties about theft and contagion. The image of a slimy creature crawling up a leg evokes the fear of infection associated with public spaces.

In nineteenth-century Paris, London, and Madrid, writers and artists often represent urban transit as a space that blurs the divide between public and private. In early depictions, passengers frequently violate one another's personal boundaries, taking up too much room or engaging in inappropriate liberties. In our story, the drenched man with his snails encroaches on others' space and comfort. It is noteworthy that the anecdote first appeared in a legal journal and ends with a lawsuit in which characters defend their property. This tension between the public and private is particularly clear in an 1866 rewriting of the story. When the man enters the omnibus in this version, all the other passengers make room for

Fig. 1.2 René Georges Hermann-Paul, 'Escargots d'omnibus'. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

him except one, an egoist, who does not move his legs. After the snails' escape, the passengers initially seek only to shield themselves, the ladies 'closing their dresses hermetically around their legs, despite their enormous crinolines' and the men 'tucking their pants into their boots', but soon they begin laughing uncontrollably and later help the man to collect his snails. The incident, thus, breaks down the invisible walls that separate city dwellers and creates a common joke and a community of sorts. Like the snails, the passengers come out of their shells. The only one who does not help out is the egoist who instead crushes the beasts with his shoes: 'He alone, locked within himself, did not want to get involved, to play along or to make the slightest movement'. The vignette ends citing Antoine-Vincent Arnault's fable 'Le Colimaçon' (1812) in which the snail becomes a metaphor for a person without friends or family who hides in his own shell and emerges only 'to make horns at his neighbour' (*faire les cornes* in French means 'to trick').[17] The rewriting points to the ambiguity of the omnibus as a social space: what was for some a collective and communal experience was for others one of alienating restraint.

As is clear in the iterations of the story, the hat of snails became a nineteenth-century meme. The omnibus would also become a kind of cliché over the course of the century: in an 1890 story by Adolphe Chenevière, the narrator observes that 'since the world is the world', the vehicle has been 'the subject of thousands of French compositions, and there is perhaps no one among us for whom that fortuitous gathering of human beings in a rolling cage does not recall an assignment or extra homework from the good old times'.[18] The omnibus is not only a common place—a shared environment—but also a symbol of the commonplace or the cliché, the tedious assignment we have all handed in. Just as the public conveyances are a space through which anyone can pass, a commonplace is a figure, discourse, or story that anyone can fill (the term *topos* comes from the Greek word for 'place'; it is a 'place' in language that all speakers can occupy).[19] Indeed, it is not accidental that Raymond Queneau, in his *Exercices de style* (1947), takes an ordinary encounter on a Parisian bus as the subject for his 99 experiments in styles and modes. Urban transit is a common place ideal for commonplaces, one that can accommodate heterogeneous discourses.

The goal of this book is to trace the commonplaces of nineteenth-century urban transit and the manifold ways in which writers, artists and commentators filled and occupied them. The omnibus and tram gave rise to a vast body of cultural representations that took many forms—stories,

songs, plays, poems, novels, satires, newspaper articles, treatises, etiquette manuals, vaudevilles, pamphlets, caricatures and paintings—and include works by many well-known artists (Bonnard, Cassatt, Cruikshank, Daumier, Degas, Delondre, Egley, Grandville, Picasso, Pissarro, Zorn, etc.) and authors (Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, François Coppée, E. M. Forster, the Goncourt brothers, J.-K. Huysmans, Amy Levy, Guy de Maupassant, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Benito Pérez Galdós, Arthur Rimbaud, Émile Zola, etc.). Unlike cultural representations of the railroad, however, these texts and images remain largely unexplored. Based on the consideration of over three thousand visual and literary representations, this book reconstructs and analyses this understudied corpus in order to understand how the omnibus and horse-drawn tram function in the cultural imagination of the nineteenth century.

This study focuses mainly on three cities—Paris, London, and Madrid—which illustrate different patterns in the development of public transportation. Early in the Second Empire, the Paris omnibus lines were consolidated into a single monopoly, the Compagnie Générale des Omnibus, which dominated urban transit for the rest of the century and resisted the introduction of competing services such as the tram and metro. In London, in contrast, the omnibus companies vied with one another throughout the century. Thanks to this competition, other forms of transportation were introduced relatively early (whereas the London Underground was inaugurated in 1863, Paris would have to wait until 1900 for its Métropolitain). Finally, Madrid is an example of the late and uneven modernisation in peripheral cities. Its first system of urban transportation, introduced in 1871, was not the omnibus but the tram. In the nineteenth century, the omnibus and tram differed very little: both relied mostly on animal traction (horses or mules), and the carriages were quite similar. The only real difference with the tram was the introduction of rails, which by reducing friction, allowed horses to carry over twice as much weight. In this book, therefore, I examine representations of both the omnibus and horse-drawn tram (horsecar). The study ends at the beginning of the twentieth century when the tram lines were electrified and omnibuses were replaced by motor buses. While the Underground became an important form of urban transit in London, it differed from the omnibus and tram in that it segregated its passengers into classes. As the interest of this study is the experience of social mixing on collective transport, the cultural representations of the Underground will not be a central focus. As I argue in the epilogue, the early literature of the Metropolitan Railway is best considered, as its original name suggests, as an extension of that of the train.

This study complements a growing body of scholarship that examines the history of modern social spaces. In recent years, very important work has been done on the restaurant, the beach-side resort, the retail centre, and the apartment building among others.[20] More specifically, this book contributes to the burgeoning areas of mobility and transport studies, which explore the practices and infrastructure of travel and movement, as well as their cultural representations.[21] Within this field, a number of studies have addressed the cultural history of the train and railway station.[22] More recently, several studies have explored literary representations of the Underground.[23] Horse-drawn transportation has generally received less attention, though the stagecoach has been the object of several recent works.[24]

While the omnibus and horsecar have been examined from the perspective of economic, urban, and transportation history, the impact of these new social spaces on the cultural imagination remains underexplored.[25] With the exception of a few essays, the impact of the early tram in Madrid has been almost entirely unstudied.[26] In the past two decades, several studies of the omnibus in literature have appeared in the French and British contexts, but they tend to focus on small subsets of texts. Ana Parejo Vadillo and Lorna Shelley have examined the representation of the omnibus by fin-de-siècle women writers.[27] Jennifer Terni has explored the sociological impact of the early omnibus in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, drawing on literary texts, and a recent article by Nicole Vilkner analyses the relation between music and the early omnibus in France.[28] An insightful 2019 study by Masha Belenky focuses primarily on a subgenre of French texts that capture the heterogeneity of the omnibus, offering a series of 'micronarratives organised around the flow of passengers on and off the vehicle', which are often narrated by sort of 'omnibus *flâneur*', a voyeuristic passenger who is an experienced observer of the space.[29] Belenky refers to these works as 'omnibus literature', but it is important to note that this is but one variant of the vast repertoire of nineteenth-century representations of the omnibus in literature. As will become clear in the next section, urban transit is depicted in a wide variety of ways in texts and images of the period.

Adopting a comparative perspective, this study seeks to give a sense of this heterogeneity and the ways in which representations differ from one context to another. It addresses the following questions: How did the omnibus and tram function in the cultural imagination of the nineteenth century? What sorts of stories, anecdotes, and episodes are set in this

space? How do literary and cultural representations of these vehicles differ from those of other forms of transportation? And how does the omnibus function as a metaphor or symbol in the period?

Cultural Representations of Urban Transit: Metaphors and Variants

To give a sense of the literature of urban transit, it will be useful to consider briefly several recurrent metaphors in nineteenth-century discussions of the space. One of the most common is that of the museum or exhibit. In Wilkie Collins' novel *Basil* (1852), the narrator-protagonist describes the omnibus as a 'perambulatory exhibition-room of the eccentricities of human nature'; Louis Ulbach, in his *Guide sentimental de l'étranger à Paris* (1878), represents it as a 'living museum' where one sees 'varied types, originals and caricatures that chance brings together'; and the Spanish writer Carlos Frontaura compares the tram to 'an exhibit of very curious figures'.[30] Other writers evoke a more hallucinatory experience, describing the omnibus as 'a kaleidoscope, albeit painted in somewhat dingy hues' or as a 'true rolling magic lantern, in which so many and such good grotesque figures pass successively'.[31] The focus in all these passages is the variety, eccentricity, and singularity of the passengers' appearances. Like the paintings in a museum, the omnibus is perceived here as a series of silent images.

A related metaphor is that of the panorama, a type of circular painting that gave the spectator the feeling of being at the centre of a scene. This metaphor usually appears in descriptions of the *impériale* (the rooftop seats of the omnibus), which was introduced in the middle of the century. Ulbach describes it as a 'moving panorama', and Samuel-Henry Berthoud praises it for unfolding before passengers' eyes a 'double panorama of the streets'.[32] Whereas the museum metaphor is usually applied to the interior of the vehicle, the image of the panorama evokes the urban space as it is perceived by outside passengers. As with the image of the exhibit, however, the emphasis lies on the perception of particularities, of unique features of the cityscape.

Another common metaphor for the omnibus is the theatre, which suggests a more auditory experience. In an 1829 letter, the German prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau compared the Parisian omnibus to a 'representation at the Variétés [a popular theatre]' and its passengers to vaudeville characters.[33] The analogy, however, is perhaps most developed in an 1831 sketch by Ernest Fouinet:

> A profound comedy, a drama of powerful interest, a malicious vaudeville […] Oh ambulatory theatre, rolling comedy, you need no prompters, Nature plays this role for your actors! They have no make-up, no disguise: they are spectators of one another, they play their roles while seeing themselves play, always as in the world, and they all pay thirty cents to amuse the public and to amuse themselves. What better dramatic school than the omnibus? There, simple and natural language, unexpected twists and turns, sudden catastrophes.[34]

Whereas the museum metaphor suggests a division between the viewer and the object viewed, the passengers in the theatre metaphor are at once actors and spectators. Notably, both Pückler-Muskau and Fouinet associate the omnibus with vaudeville and with the comic types associated with this genre. Indeed, unlike the museum metaphor, which underscores eccentricity and singularity, the theatre analogy tends to focus on social types, figures encountered elsewhere. Jules Lovy, for example, describes the omnibus as 'a rolling theatre where types are abundant', and a British article from 1891 observes that 'one need hardly go beyond a London omnibus for all types. One will see the comedy-drama of life pretty fully represented in a day's omnibus'.[35] Finally, the theatre metaphor differs from the museum analogy in its emphasis on behaviour, action, and speech. In an 1897 children's story, a girl at the back of an omnibus observes with delight the humorous interactions among passengers: a struggle for space between two fat people, a boy who wipes his dirty shoes on an old woman's dress, a well-dressed lady who recoils at a fish merchant and a man who asks how far it is to his daughter's house but does not know the address. The omnibus, she concludes, is a *guignol*, a puppet show.[36]

Still other writers compared urban transit to a book, an image that combines the silent observation of the museum metaphor with the narrative impulse of the theatre analogy. The French journalist Lucien Griveau, for example, likens the experience of the omnibus to that of being surrounded by 'closed books' which he longs to open, stories he will never read.[37] In this instance, the metaphor suggests the illegibility of appearances; the narrator wishes to understand his fellow passengers but is unable to do so. Other writers, however, represent the omnibus as an open book that can be deciphered. In an 1884 article in a French women's journal, readers are encouraged to read not just newspapers and books but also their fellow omnibus passengers: 'What a book human physiognomy is when one knows how to decipher it!'[38] Unlike a traditional book, however, the omnibus must be read quickly, for just as one is on 'the first line of a page that is becoming interesting', the subject may get off.[39]

Museum, panorama, theatre, book… These metaphors suggest some of the main differences among omnibus texts. In my research, I have identified a series of variables that can be used to analyse representations of urban transit as well as transportation literature more generally:

1. **Interior versus exterior focus**: Whereas the book, museum, and theatre comparisons focus on the inside of the vehicle—passengers' awkward interactions and peculiar physiognomies—the panorama analogy evokes their observation of the outside world. The *impériale* made possible a sedentary form of *flânerie* that allowed riders to discover new neighbourhoods and to see the city from a different (and often defamiliarising) vantage point.
2. **'Sound off' versus 'sound on'**: The distinction between the museum and the theatre entails an opposition between silent and auditory experiences of urban transit. Some authors depict the omnibus as a community in which passengers of various classes share cigarettes, advice, and small talk. Sometimes, it serves as a frame for storytelling or is a place in which conversations are overheard. In other works, in contrast, the omnibus is an uncomfortably mute space and becomes a text of sorts—a series of visual signs devoid of voice—that the passenger seeks to read.
3. **Legible versus illegible space**: 'Sound off' descriptions of the omnibus may in turn be divided into legible and illegible visions of the space (the opposition between the open and closed book). Some nineteenth-century works seek to help readers to decipher the omnibus by analysing the physiognomies of common passenger types. Belenky has pointed to the figure of the 'omnibus *flâneur*', a voyeuristic narrator-passenger who purports to be 'an excellent interpreter of social clues'.[40] Other texts, however, emphasize the unknowability of the space and its occupants and underscore the gap between appearance and reality.
4. **Fleeting versus recurrent**: Marie Bersier warns that one must read the 'book' of the omnibus quickly before the 'interesting page' descends. As in this description, omnibus texts often focus on fleeting encounters, glimpses of people who will never be encountered again. Urban transit, however, could also be represented as a more predictable and familiar space. As city residents moved away from the centre and began to use omnibuses and trams as part of their daily commute, they started to recognise fellow 'regulars' and to observe them over time.

5. **Small world versus large world**: Texts that evoke 'regulars' and a steady community of commuters suggest a vision of the omnibus as a 'small world'. Some works (particularly early ones) depict the space as one in which coincidences—felicitous or otherwise—abound. Passengers come across long-lost friends; debtors find themselves sitting next to their creditors; and a young man escorting a *grisette* runs into his disapproving father. Such texts reduce the vastness of the city, representing it as a familiar and recognisable space. Other texts, however, portray the omnibus as a random slice of a massive metropolis where passengers encounter individuals whom they will never meet again and whose lives and stories they can only guess at. Often the 'large world' vision evokes the melancholy and alienation of modern urban life.
6. **Disengaged observation versus direct participation**: Whereas the museum analogy suggests a distance between the observer and the object of observation, Fouinet's use of the theatre metaphor confuses the opposition between spectator and spectacle: all the passengers are at once actors and audience. The observer in omnibus texts is sometimes an aloof and detached figure but at other times participates or attempts to intervene in the story.
7. **Zooming in versus zooming out**: Finally, representations differ in the scope of their focus. As mentioned before, Belenky has drawn attention to a series of texts in which the object of observation shifts from one passenger to another.[41] In many other works, however, the narrative zooms in on a single passenger who stands out from the group. We can thus distinguish between texts that adopt a more panoramic approach—zooming out and surveying the diversity of vehicle—and others that are more focused in scope and evoke a specific interaction or individual.

The pages that follow will examine the different ways in which these characteristics manifest themselves and are combined in cultural representations of the omnibus and tram in the nineteenth century. The examples analysed are generally selected either because they are representative of the most common memes surrounding these spaces or because they offer noteworthy or intriguing literary or artistic appropriations of these commonplaces.

The initial chapters have a contextual function. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the history of nineteenth-century urban transit and of the various attempts to introduce (and resist) innovation in the face of competition. It also traces how the perception of the service in both life and literature changed over the course of the century, as the vehicles, initially associated with modernity and romanticism, came to be seen as a force of stagnation and a symbol of more prosaic or realist literary forms. The third chapter surveys the commonplaces and recurrent jokes around urban transit in the comic literature of the period. In the process, it gives a sense of the practicalities and physical experience of the vehicles for early passengers and analyses the anxieties about modernity implicit in these humorous motifs. Chapter 4 then turns to the sociability of the space as it is represented in nineteenth-century literature and visual culture. Specifically, it considers the social composition of early omnibuses, the experience of female passengers, the etiquette of the space and its impact on *mœurs*, and the extent to which urban transit was considered a public or a private domain.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 examine how the space functioned in the cultural and literary imagination of the period. Chapter 5 explores the use of the omnibus and tram as a political metaphor. Curiously, the omnibus became in the nineteenth century a symbol of both the government and its overthrow. Numerous early images offer allegorical representations of the 'omnibus of state', drawing on the tradition of the *char de l'état*, but the vehicles, which were sometimes tipped over to build barricades, also became a symbol of revolution and the struggle for freedom and equality. Chapter 6 then considers urban transit as a site of desire. Though sometimes dismissed as prosaic or unromantic, the omnibus was often represented as an erotically charged space in popular texts and images. This chapter explores a series of bawdy motifs about urban transit and offers a taxonomy of six types of love stories set on omnibuses and trams: the fleeting, the illegible, the iterative, the double, the transactional and the inverted. Chapter 7 turns to the omnibus as a space of social observation. Many nineteenth-century texts evoke awkward encounters between rich and poor passengers. This chapter explores the different ways in which the social other is evoked in these works and how class difference is interpreted. Chapter 8 considers urban transit as a space of knowledge and exploration. Almost as soon as the omnibuses were introduced, they began to be used not simply as a means of transportation but also as a way to discover both the city and oneself. On the vehicles, passengers engaged in

tourism, *flânerie*, character observation, eavesdropping, voyeurism, and literary creation. This chapter examines the different forms of insight and inspiration that passengers draw from the space in nineteenth-century representations.

The epilogue of the book contrasts the literature of the omnibus and tram with those of other forms of transportation that co-existed with them—the stagecoach or *diligence*, the cab or *fiacre*, the train, the Underground and the riverboat—and attempts to define the distinguishing characteristics of the literature of the omnibus and tram.

Notes

1. *Le Droit: journal des tribunaux*, 15–16 May 1837, 2015. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
2. The story appears in the *Gazette de France*, 17 May 1837; *Le Constitutionnel*, 18 May 1837; *Supplément au Journal de Saint-Quentin*, 28 May 1837; *Bulletin colonial*, 12 June 1837; *Feuille d'avis de Neufchâtel*, 17 August 1837; 'A Paris Omnibus on a Wet Day', *Spirit of the Times*, 30 September 1837, 257; Charles Charbonnier, *Les Petites Causes peu célèbres* (Paris: Librairie classique de Périsse frères, 1847), 64–71; *Anecdotes instructives et amusantes: le volontaire, le chapeau d'escargots et la robe ventre de biche, le pont du diable* (Bordeaux: Maison des Orphelins, 1850), 18–24; *L'Industrie*, 10 April 1859; 'Chronique', *Petit journal*, 6 March 1866, 2–3; 'Une scène en omnibus' in *Les Soirées amusantes* (Paris: C. Dillet, 1874), 49–54; M.L. Veuillot, 'Les Escargots', *L'École de la famille*, 1 October 1880, 226–27; and 'An Adventure in a French Omnibus', *The Leisure Hour*, April 1884, 249.
3. 'Awful Occurrence', *Punch*, 23 March 1850, 120.
4. Paul de Kock, *M. Choublanc à la recherche de sa femme* (Paris: V. Benoist, [1878]), 4–5.
5. Charles Leroy, 'L'Homard cru', *La Gaudriole*, 12 March 1899, 166–68.
6. Gustave Cane, 'Le Tramway de Charenton', *La Gaudriole*, 8 October 1893, 226–27.
7. François Coppée, 'Croquis parisiens: L'Omnibus', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, 7 September 1902, 147.
8. Jennifer Terni, 'The Omnibus and the Shaping of the Urban Quotidian: Paris, 1828–60', *Cultural and Social History* 11:2 (2014): 240, fn. 103.
9. Jules Sandeau, 'Chaillot' in *Paris, ou le Livre des Cent-et-un* (Paris: Lavocat, 1834), XIV, 370.
10. J. Lovy, 'D'où viennent les rhumatismes?: C'est la faute des omnibus', *Le Journal pour rire*, 26 March 1853, 5.

11. Alfred Séverin, 'Une promenade en tramway', *Le Figaro*, 24 September 1870, 164.
12. 'De l'influence des omnibus sur les habitans de Paris', *Le Voleur*, 20 October 1829, n.p.
13. Manuel Fernández y González, 'El tranvía', *La Academia*, 23 January 1879, 42.
14. 'Honeycomb', *The Ladies' Cabinet*, 1 August 1854, 110; Fernández y González, 'El tranvía', 42.
15. Terni, 'Omnibus and the Shaping', 221.
16. René Georges Hermann-Paul, 'Escargots d'omnibus', *L'Escarmouche*, 24 December 1893, n.p.
17. 'Chronique', *Petit journal*, 4 March 1866, 2–3.
18. Adolphe Chenevière, *Contes d'amour* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1890), 286.
19. As Roland Barthes explains, the *topos* tends to be 'somewhat empty […] half coded, half projective'; each of us 'can fill in this code according to his own history'. *The Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 5.
20. See, for example, Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000); Alain Corbin, *Le Territoire du vide: l'Occident et le désir du rivage (1750–1840)* (Paris: Aubier, 1988); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000); Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998).
21. See, for example, the Palgrave series 'Studies in Mobilities, Literature and Culture' and the journal *Mobilities.* Recent work in this area within the field of nineteenth-century literary studies includes Larry Duffy, *Le Grand Transit Moderne: Mobility, Modernity and French Naturalist Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994); *Moving Forward, Holding Fast: The Dynamics of Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, eds. Barbara T. Cooper and Mary Donaldson-Evans (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997); Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840–1940*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). In *By Accident or Design: Writing the Victorian Metropolis* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), Paul Fyfe deals with the representation in *Sketches by Boz* of the chaos on London streets as omnibuses and hired coaches proliferated in the 1830s, but his focus is more the changing urban experience than the omnibus and its literature.
22. See, for example, Marc Baroli, *Le Train dans la littérature française* (Paris: Éditions N. M., 1964); *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the*

Machine Ensemble, eds. Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007); Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001); Remo Cesarini, *Treni di carta: l'immaginario in ferrovia, l'irruzione del treno nella letteratura moderna* (Genova: Marietti, 1993); Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999); Anne Green, *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011), 35–64; Lily Litvak, *El tiempo de los trenes: el paisaje español en el arte y la literatura del realismo (1849–1918)* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1991); Juan Carlos Ponce, *Literatura y ferrocarril en España* (Madrid: Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles, 1996); Jeffrey Richards and John M. Mackenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 340–83; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railroad Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986); and Paul A. Youngman, *Black Devil and Iron Angel: The Railway in Nineteenth-Century German Realism* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2005).

23. See David Ashford, *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013); David L. Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005) and *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800–2001* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007); and David Welsh, *Underground Writing: The London Tube from George Gissing to Virginia Woolf* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2011).
24. On the mail coach and stagecoach, which transported people and goods between cities, see Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016); Carsten Meiner, *La Carrosse littéraire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008); and Jonathan H. Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).
25. The classic histories of the Paris and London omnibus are Nicholas Papayanis' *Horse-drawn Cabs and Omnibuses in Paris: The Idea of Circulation and the Business of Public Transit* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996) and T.C. Barker and Michael Robbin's *A History of London Transport: Passenger Travel and the Development of the Metropolis, Volume I. The Nineteenth Century* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1963). On the Madrid tram, see Antonio López Gómez's *Los transportes urbanos de Madrid* (Madrid: CSIC, 1983).
26. See my 'Reading (on) the Tram: Benito Pérez Galdós's "La novela en el tranvía"', *Orbis Litterarum*, 69:3 (2014): 193–214; 'Plotlifting: The Transposition of French Stories in the Nineteenth-Century Spanish Press',

Forum for Modern Language Studies, 52:3 (2016): 293–310; 'Tram Flânerie: Streetcar Impressions of Nineteenth-Century Madrid', *Confluencia*, 32:2 (2017): 167–77; '*En tranvía*: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Collective Transportation in Madrid', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 95:8 (2018): 983–98; and 'Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera's "La novela del tranvía" (1882) and the Literature of Urban Collective Transportation', *Symposium* 72:4 (2018): 185–97. See also Vanesa Rodríguez-Galindo, 'On and off the Tram: Contemporary Types and Customs in Madrid's Illustrated and Comical Press (1874–1898)' in *Visual Typologies from the Early Modern to the Contemporary: Local Contexts and Global Practices*, eds. Lynda Klynch and Tara Zanardi (New York: Routledge, 2018); and *Madrid on the Move: Feeling Modern and Visually Aware in the Nineteenth Century* (Manchester UP, 2021).

27. Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Lorna Shelley, '"Buses should … inspire writers": Omnibuses in fin-de-siècle Short Stories and Journalism' in *Transport in British Fiction*, 136–50.
28. Terni, 'Omnibus and the Shaping', 217–42; Nicole Vilkner, 'The Opera and the Omnibus: Material Culture, Urbanism and Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 32:1 (2020): 90–114.
29. Masha Belenky, *Engines of Modernity: The Omnibus and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2019), 47, 63. See also her articles 'Transitory Tales: Writing the Omnibus in Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Dix-Neuf*, 16:3 (November 2012): 283–303; and 'From Transit to Transitoire: The Omnibus and Modernity', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 35:2 (2007): 408–21.
30. Wilkie Collins, *Basil: A Story of Modern Life* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), I, 96; Louis Ulbach, *Guide sentimental de l'étranger dans Paris* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1878), 57; Carlos Frontaura, 'El tranvía', *La Risa*, 22 January 1888, 10.
31. George Augustus Sala, 'Inside London', *The London Journal*, 9 July 1859, 411; L. M., 'L'Intérieur d'un omnibus', *The Court Magazine and Monthly Critic*, 1 August 1838, 31.
32. Ulbach, *Guide sentimental*, 58; Samuel-Henry Berthoud, *Fantaisies scientifiques de Sam: Reptiles, Mammifères, Oiseaux, Physique, Chimie, Industrie* (Paris: Garnier, 1867), 248.
33. Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, *Mémoires et Voyages du prince Pückler-Muskau* (Paris: H. Fournier jeune, 1832–33), 213.
34. Ernest Fouinet, 'Voyage en omnibus, de la barrière du Trône à la barrière de l'Étoile' in *Paris, ou le Livre des Cent-et-un* (Paris: Ladvocat, 1831), II, 61–62.

35. Jules Lovy, 'Les Types d'omnibus: croquis à la course', *Journal pour rire*, 22 April 1854, 6; 'Society in an Omnibus', *Hearth and Home*, 1 October 1891, 637.
36. *Livre des petites filles, recueil de monologues* (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1897), 109–14.
37. Lucien Griveau, 'En omnibus', *Journal des demoiselles*, February 1883, 48.
38. C. R., 'Intérieurs d'omnibus', *La Femme*, 1 July 1884, 100.
39. Mme Eugène Bersier [Marie Bersier], 'Compagnons de route: de Paris à Paris', *La Femme*, 1 April 1895, 55.
40. Belenky, *Engines of Modernity*, 76.
41. Belenky, *Engines of Modernity*, 47.

CHAPTER 2

Between Modernity and Regression

Historians and critics often represent the omnibus as a symbol of modernisation: as the 'emblem of the accelerated movement of progress', as 'the icon of the modern imagination' and as one of the 'engines of modernity'.[1] This view is echoed in some nineteenth-century texts: Edmond About, for example, called the omnibus a 'chariot of progress', and Eugène Sue, in *Les Mystères du peuple* (1849–1856), contrasted the 'time of the red monks' with the 'time of the omnibus'.[2] Such rhetoric, however, was generally more common in discussions of the train than in those of the omnibus. As the novelty of the conveyances wore off, indeed, nineteenth-century writers tended to emphasise their backwardness and inertia. By the early twentieth century, omnibuses were considered 'antediluvian phenomena', mocked as 'primitive, archaic, barbarous', 'obsolete and almost ridiculous', 'a souvenir of the ancient ages of the Earth', and 'the stubbornness of a past that did not want to die'.[3]

This chapter offers a brief overview of the history of the omnibus and tram in the nineteenth century and the ways in which they were perceived in both literature and life. As will become clear in the first section, the fledgling transportation services, much like the omnibuses themselves, moved forward but in a halting way: their introduction revolutionised the urban experience but companies often resisted innovation and improvements, engaging in in-fighting and obstructionism and sacrificing comfort

E. Amann, *The Omnibus*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture,
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and convenience to profit. The second section examines how the perception of urban transit changed over time as the public began to take it for granted, and the vehicles became part of the 'body' of the city. The final section explores how this evolution is reflected in the shifting use of the omnibus as an aesthetic metaphor. Whereas the earliest coaches were identified with a swaggering and disruptive romanticism, the service gradually became associated with humbler and more prosaic literary currents.

Innovation, Competition, and Monopoly

The first omnibuses were introduced in Nantes in 1826 by Stanislas Baudry, an entrepreneur who ran a flour mill powered by steam on the outskirts of the city. As one of the by-products of the mill was hot water, Baudry decided to open thermal baths and offered a coach service to transport Nantais from the city centre to his establishment. As the legend goes, the vehicles picked up passengers in front of a store run by one Monsieur Omnès, which was playfully named Omnes Omnibus (something for everyone), whence the name omnibus. Nantes residents soon began to use the service not only to go to the baths but also to travel to other points along its route, which gave Baudry the idea of using his omnibuses as a form of transportation within the city. A year later, he would create a similar service in Bordeaux.[4]

From the outset, Baudry also had his eye on Paris, but his 1826 application to establish an omnibus company in the capital was refused by the prefect of police, Guy Delavau, who feared the vehicles would block traffic. Delavau may also have seen 'a political danger' in coaches open 'to all classes of society'.[5] When Delavau was replaced by the more liberal Louis Marie Debelleyme, however, Baudry received authorisation to operate up to a hundred coaches, which led to the inauguration of the first omnibus service in Paris, the Entreprise Générale des Omnibus (EGO), which ran between Bastille and Madeleine with vehicles pulled by 3 horses and seating 14 passengers.[6]

Baudry's idea was quickly imitated by a rival company, the Dames Blanches, which began to operate in 1828 and adopted the same trajectory from Madeleine to Bastille. The *dames blanches* drew their name and inspiration from an 1825 opera by François-Adrien Boieldieu based on several novels by Walter Scott. Painted a 'dazzling white' with ornate gold lettering and drawn by white horses with blue and gold crests, the vehicles featured panels representing scenes from Scott's novels, mirrors in which