explorations

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"Everybody's private carriage." Omnibus Travel in Victorian Literature

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Abstract. Introduced into the streets of first Paris and then London in the late 1820s, the omnibus quickly became a popular and convenient means of urban transport. But as many historians of culture note, the omnibus connecting different points in the metropolitan space, was a space in its own right, with a range of complications and complexities. Its interior constituted a peculiar enclave within a larger communal space and thus made its passengers experience - and negotiate between - freedom and constraint, convenience and discomfort as well as anonymity and intimacy. Using omnibus scenes in the works of such writers as Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala, or Amy Levy, I shall examine some of the above-mentioned aspects of the conveyance. Most specifically, I shall look into the complexities of the visual interactions between the omnibus passengers as well as those between the passengers and the urban environment outside the vehicle.

Key words: *omnibus, Victorian urban space, gazing, empowerment, inside, outside*

The omnibus, a nineteenth-century invention, was at the vanguard of modernity, responding to the rapid expansion of towns and the ensuing demand for efficient mobility. It became an immensely popular conveyance, and, as one Victorian writer put it, "a very important social feature in . . . metropolitan habits" (Garwood 1853, 199-200). As such, it naturally received mention in Victorian fiction, journalism as well as visual arts. But many of the representations of the omnibus indicate that in contemporary consciousness, it functioned as far more than a convenient means of transport and was, in the words of Nicholas Daly, "a vehicle heavily freighted with social meaning," (2015, 94) not least because it allowed different social classes and sexes to occupy the same tight space, even if only in passing. Democracy, emancipation, transitoriness, and ordinariness are only some examples of the omnibus's impressive symbolic load (see Belenky 2007; Daly 2015).

In its representation of contemporary life, realist fiction of the Victorian Age could not do without mention of various means of transport, eagerly incorporating them into the stories, but usually giving them an instrumental, and so inconspicuous role. In many instances, they make a humble transitory presence in literary works as vehicles the characters board, sit in and disembark or as conveyances which simply go past, constituting obvious familiar components of the modern ever so busy street life: movement, noise, congestion. And so, we, too, take them for granted, but as Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries remind us, quoting H. G. Wells, in the Victorian Age not only the trains, but also cabs, hansoms, and omnibuses were vehicles of novelty, new additions to and new transformers of, especially, city practice (2015, 1).

The omnibus which early on makes an appearance in Wilkie Collins's second novel *Basil* at first sight seems to be in service of realism, just a feature of modern life; after all, this is the original, later abandoned, subtitle of the work: *A Story of Modern Life.* On his return from the city to the family residence in an unnamed part of London, the eponymous character happens to see an omnibus, and, rather than walk back or take a cab, he opts for this means of transport. The choice is not entirely accidental, the omnibus hailed "[i]n the idle impulse of the moment" (Collins 2008, 27) is soon explained as a preferred conveyance, yet the preference has little to do with mobility, comfort or efficiency. As an aspiring writer, Basil sees in the omnibus ride an excellent prospect of "studying characters of all kinds" (Collins 2008, 27) and hopes to put the observations to good, that is literary, use: "I had often before ridden in omnibuses to amuse myself by observing the passengers. An omnibus has always appeared to me, to be a perambulatory exhibition-room of the eccentricities of human nature. I know not any other sphere in which persons of all classes and all temperaments are so oddly collected together, and so immediately contrasted and confronted with each other. To watch merely the different methods of getting into the vehicle, and taking their seats, adopted by different people, is to study no incomplete commentary on the infinitesimal varieties of human character -- as various even as the varieties of the human face" (Collins 2008, 27).

This playful perception of the omnibus - which is here completely dissociated from its primary function, that of transportation - is grounded not only in Basil's alleged literary sensibility but also gentility. A man of leisure can take delight in an occasional, controlled, use of the *public* vehicle, which is appropriated for his own idiosyncratic, *private* purposes, be it the game of observation or the thrill of democratic confusion. Collins makes Basil relate here to the social and cultural specificity of the omnibus already contained in its name, hence the emphatic repetition of the determiner "all." In her excellent article on the cultural significance of the Parisian omnibus, Masha Belenky recalls the origin of the name Monsieur Baudry happened to find for the novel conveyance: "The omnibus owes its name to the inscription on a millinery shop, in front of which the first urban coach would stop. The shop belonged to a Monsieur Omnès whose motto was "omnès omnibus" (Omnès hats for everybody) . . . Baudry found the name "omnibus," meaning "for all," particularly appropriate for his vehicle, and so the omnibus was born" (2007, 409). Unsurprisingly, various early histories of public transport dwelled on the aptness of the name of the vehicle that was egalitarian in its character: "The unclassical reader must understand that omnibus is the plural of *omnis* in Latin, meaning "all"; in plain English, a "carry-all" for those who are willing to pay for a ride" (Stratton 1878, 437). Already in 1833, in one of the earliest sketches featuring the omnibus ride for the subject Ernest Fouinet repeatedly exploits the comprehensiveness

built into the name of the conveyance: "The omnibus is life, the world, the public, man – everything, in short; its Latin name tells you so," he explains at the onset of his urban adventure (1833, 170).

In Collins's novel, it is, however, less the assortment of all *classes* than the assortment of all *temperaments* that holds the attraction for Basil. The omnibus ride has the status of an optical adventure during which he hopes to amuse himself with studying passengers who form this heterogeneous, accidental group, too ephemeral to be contemplated as a whole. The emphasis is therefore on the individual: face, expression, attire, manners. In the first edition of the novel, the quoted above passage concluded with the declaration Collins later deleted: "Riding in an omnibus was always, to me, like reading for the first time, an entertaining book" (2008, 275).

Riding, reading, and, presumably, writing that the omnibus journey entailed was by 1852 a somewhat established practice. Of course, Collins uses here reading in the sense of observation, and many, particularly male, passengers converted the omnibus to an optical device almost from the moment of its appearance in the cities in the late 1820s. It is a natural development in that the situation of enforced passivity leaves the passengers with very few occupations at their disposal; employing one's gaze helped cope with the tedium or social inconvenience of travel. Many historians of culture will invoke at this point Georg Simmel's retrospective comment, in which he argues that modern urban transport creating situations of anonymity, privileged the visual: "Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another" (1921, 360). Walter Benjamin who put this remark in circulation, to such an extent that it is almost always quoted indirectly, added that "This new situation was, as Simmel recognized, not a pleasant one" (2006, 69). And yet when one looks into some nineteenth-century accounts of omnibus rides, there is little evidence of this discomfort. Rather, what is predominantly stressed and relished is the opportunity for "just looking," though of course the pleasure of unrestrained observation of fellow passengers is monopolized by men; interestingly, Simmel does not propose any gender-related discrimination.

Charles Dickens is quick to praise the omnibus in this respect; comparing it to earlier public conveyances, he sees it as superior to its predecessors because the "field for amusement and observation" it can afford is remarkably "extensive" (1854, 83). Because it operates within the space of the city, and so goes a relatively short distance, taking up and putting passengers in any part of the town, "sameness there can never be. The passengers change as often in the course of one journey as the figures in a kaleidoscope, and though not so glittering, are far more amusing" (Dickens 1854, 83). Naturally enough then, the omnibus rides became the subject of similar sketches, lightweight vignettes focusing on physical appearance, manners, and attitudes displayed by the passengers, in the form of popular physiognomies and physiologies, small-scale feats of interpreting urban faces and surfaces. Physical appearance would be obligatory material on which urban observers rehearsed their eye and wit to produce pieces of urban portraiture, in which descriptions of faces, dress, manners, speech - combined with speculations as to the social and vocational identities - chronicled contemporary public life.

Chapter XVI in *Sketches by Boz* constitutes such a scene-cum-portrait piece in which the narrator's eye moves from one person to another, registering in particular the manner in which they function in the confined space of the carriage. Dickens's narration takes a

curiously decelerating pace as the original excitement at the variety and change involved in an omnibus ride, or vivacity provoked by the behavior of one of the passengers, - "a little testy old man," "extremely impatient," (1854, 84) wanes and, here indeed, a sense of unease described later by Simmel is felt: "Conversation is now entirely dropped; each person gazes vacantly through the window in front of him, and everybody thinks that his opposite neighbor is staring at him" (Dickens 1854, 85). Even though this seriousness does not last, as the passengers disembark and go their separate ways, hoping to communicate the amusement they had on the omnibus to others, it introduces a valid point. It is a somewhat critical and contradictory point too, specifically in a piece which, after all, feeds on the unsolicited observation of others.

In an almost contemporary French sketch, which relates an omnibus ride across Paris, the practice of observation is openly declared to be an exercise of power. Interestingly, in his account Ernest Fouinet cannot resist the mention of democracy, so frequently brought forward in connection with the tell-tale name of the conveyance: "Omnibus means for all. The omnibus is therefore, the sanctuary of equality. I saw a footman, a peer of France, before the question of the hereditary peerage was raised, a stock-broker's wife, and a cook wench, enter the same vehicle, each paying thirty centimes. They had the same rights, and were there for the same purpose – a true instance of equality. They were all seated next to each other – the livery side by side with the black coat and cross – the coarse cotton gown side by side with silks and ribbons. But here equality stops" (1833, 197-198). So Fouinet warns the readers not to be carried away by the appearance of quality which the omnibus bestows on its passengers. Paying the same price, sharing the same space of the carriage and more or less the travelled distance, they are merely equal in their travelling experience. Democracy is but a transient situation. Social imbalance is ultimately always redressed by speech which reveals differences in manners and education, as well as "faculties and feelings," (Fouinet 1833, 199) though it has to be pointed out that no such discriminating power is accorded to dress.

But another territory where equality does not hold is the field of observation for the omnibus may expose its passengers to an unwelcome scrutiny, which clearly is a breach of etiquette and democracy. Fouinet's narrator very thinly disguises the fact that rather than particular sights of Paris his omnibus journey is to afford, he prefers to turn his gaze inwards and study his fellow passengers: "I took my station on the cross seat at the bottom, where I could make my remarks with more ease, as I had everybody under my eye. I was therefore president, a term applied by omnibus passengers to the one who assumes that seat (1833, 180). Visual empowerment is accorded by the privileged vantage point, but, of course, more importantly by the gender of the spectator. Founeit declares himself to actually enjoy *absolute* power of vision: "As president I saw everything that passed. As leader of the orchestra and manager of the dramatic company in the omnibus not a look or gesture escaped me" (1833, 182-183). Nonetheless, the privilege of unlimited observation comes with possessiveness: sights and impressions that his position allows him to collect can be shared only as long as *he* chooses to communicate them.

That it seems to be all about observation of the temporary companions becomes clear when most passengers leave the vehicle and an emptyish carriage re-directs the observer's gaze. This turning point may be actually occasioned by two factors: loss of interest in the, by now familiar, passengers who can no longer offer any new stimuli (the observation reaches a dead-end of sorts) or a less crowded interior, which may mean that

only now the passenger can have an unobstructed view, and so he can properly see the world outside. But when the ride comes to an end, the narrator's comments leave no doubt that although the journey was long and took him through so many different places, the only location that truly mattered was that of the interior of the vehicle.

In her seminal study *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, Ana Parejo Vadillo identifies nineteenth-century "[m]ass transport facilities" as "tools of modernity, which the passenger used to inquire about modern life," (2005, 27) "observe the urban panorama," (24) and "watch the kaleidoscopic spectacle of the metropolis, its buildings, the masses, its restless and transient life" (2005, 33). However, in accounts such as the ones adduced above, we see strangely little of this preoccupation with the city, in fact we are struck by their insistent exclusion of the external world as an object of contemplation. The impression that is created then is that of the disengagement from the surroundings, as if the omnibus ride - despite its taking place across the city - put that very city under temporary erasure. Or maybe not at all, maybe it equated the city with its crowds, whose diverse participants the vehicles endlessly processed on their many routes.

In many instances, the narratives suggest this choice of the close range and the contemplation of the interior, i.e. its human contents, as determined by the material conditions of travel: confusion and, particularly, congestion. Overcrowding as an obligatory discomfort the writers highlighted meant not only physical proximity, being trodden upon, poked and prodded by umbrellas or canes or jostled by crinolines, having to suffer the presence of children, parcels or bundles, let alone exposure to often disgusting smells. One other inconvenience that it generated, which was however seldom listed, was that combined with the longitudinal arrangement of seats, i.e. parallel to windows, the congestion significantly shrank the passengers' field of vision, forcing them to turn their gaze onto the fellow passengers. Forcing may not be an adequate word here, for there is virtually no tone of regret at being denied the view of the streets, as if it were a convenient difficulty, an alibi for an adventure in voyeurism.

Still, if the omnibus is considered as an optical apparatus, it is a complex one, offering its passengers also such perspectives which do allow the visual engagement with urban substance. And so, in 1862, George Augustus Sala tells his male readers "Never ride inside an omnibus" (218). From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, it has become a popular practice, and here the so-called "knife-board" arrangement of seats, running along the side of the vehicle from one end to the other, was actually an advantage. In his recommendation of the top deck, Sala himself might have taken the cue from Charles Manby Smith, who in an earlier sketch enthused: "There is a great deal of the world to be seen in the inside of an omnibus, as those who are accustomed to ride in them very well know, but there is still more to be seen on the outside. The 'knife-board,' . . . is a point of eminence from which everything going forward below and around can be plainly seen. We have ourselves made from this point some curious surveys of men and things which we could not possibly have made in a less elevated position, or which did not, like that, afford us an ever-moving panorama of social life and action" (1857, 230-231). Smith's example is curious, indeed: thanks to his seat on the roof and the slow speed of the vehicle crawling along the narrow street, he can, willy-nilly, look into a string of rooms in which the tradesmen take their supper and decide on the prosperity of that class. Casual observation generates here a socio-economic conclusion, and the omnibus passenger, a social spectator, becomes an inadvertent social investigator.

To women the upper deck was not available as "the vehicular ascent" (Sala 1862, 219) up the steep stairs was difficult and could compromise their modesty. Therefore, the roof, early on, was an all-male preserve, affording possibilities of a panoramic observation only to them. Sala discovers that from this vantage point the observation is panoramic and panoptic[1]: "Finally, you have the inestimable advantage of surveying the world in its workings as you pass along: of being your own Asmodeus, and unroofing London in a ride from the White Horse Cellar to Hammersmith Gate" (1862, 220). He evidently plays here with the then popular Asmodeus formula, by making the roof of a *public* conveyance a means of the unroofing of *private* space. The sketch unfolds to deliver examples of voyeuristic invasions of intimate space, the roof of the omnibus allows the observing passenger to disregard the official barriers of privacy: elevated windows, upper floors, backyards, etc.

What "the inquisitive pedestrians" cannot see because of "sullen brick walls" (Sala 1862, 220) becomes available to him, in the act of visual empowerment, yet not once does he describe himself as an inquisitive *observer*. It is as if the eminent vantage point gave the observer impunity: the acquisition of all-seeing powers cancels any ethical reservations as this empowerment becomes voyeurism, most blatantly demonstrated in the mention of "a demure maiden lacing her virgin bodice before a cracked triangle of a looking-glass, at an attic window" (Sala 1862, 220). The familiar "all" of the omnibus is here relocated in that it no longer concerns the passengers it carries, but "all" of the metropolitan human world that can be viewed from the top of the conveyance. So he claims to see people representing a wide range of ages, professions, and social classes in their, just as varied, respective homes: a married couple, a servant-maid, lords and ladies, children and domestics, all engaged in different private activities: some of them, such as quarrelling, flirting, dressing, evidently not meant for any witnesses. But enlarged as the passenger's vision may be, the real point of its interest is, once again, the interior rather than the outside world of the streets.

Extolling the range of vision the roof of the omnibus facilitates, the observer smoothly moves on to the similarly delightful variety that can be found in the streets, and it is here that Sala's flippant sketch goes even more off the beaten track, when he suggests that the more entertaining and enlightening spectacle is provided not by pedestrians, but by "men and women who are continually passing beneath you in carriages and in cabs; ... and in carts and barrows. Varied life, troubled life, busy, restless, chameleon life" (1862, 220). Once again, his visual engagement with the city is peculiarly refracted. He argues here for the completeness of experience that various vehicles enclose, and even though the Asmodean gesture is not mentioned any more, the observer must clearly be engaged in the process of unroofing no longer houses but, at least some, conveyances. Curiously, the sketchy depiction of the situations that the interior of various means of transportation is a setting for takes a serious social turn. Here is a relevant a fragment: "Sweethearting in cabs and carriages; passionate appeals for mercy; men brawling and fighting; lunatics being borne away to captivity; felons, shacked and manacled to the chin, being taken to jail, and perhaps to death, by stern policemen and jailers ... "the fatal accident" on its way to the hospital, lying all bruised

[1]The phrase "a panoptic and panoramic gaze" is a borrowing from Erica Diane Rappaport, who used it in a different context, with reference to Lucy Snowe, the protagonist of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (2000, 116).

and bloody across the policeman's knee; the octogenarian in his last paralytic fit, and the mother suckling her first infant" (Sala 1862, 220-221).

This is a veritable cross-section of society, representing all ages of man as well as a greater range of experience, not confined by the social make-up of a particular street or neighborhood that the omnibus traverses. People are viewed (or rather imagined) not in their domestic business, but removed from it, in their transit to all sorts of places or institutions, in all sorts of attitudes, conditions, and emotional states. It is a strange sequence of images, "dramas on four wheels," (Sala 1862, 221) which by pointing at the many uses of urban vehicles - love, violence, insanity, crime, disease, death, and birth - develop a heavy-handed equation of transport and life. Sala may emphasize the tragic component metropolitan traffic contains, but steers clear of any elaborate reflection, or maybe he is exempt from it by the principle of mobility. After all, the "sights" provided by the imaginatively unroofed cabs and carriages are informed by superficiality; it is for a reason (though mostly in the spirit of playfulness) that Sala names these "vehicular panoramas - the unconscious show-vans" (Sala 1862, 221).

In keeping with the dynamics of the panoramic display as well as the metropolitan rhythm of life, there are other socially superior vehicles that take over the streets, offering "a far pleasanter spectacle," which involves members of "the first-class genteel circles" (Sala 1862, 221), who go out to dinner. This allows the narrator to engage in other subjects related to the fashionable social life of London, and the omnibus itself as well as the spree of observation it enabled begin to lose prominence and visibility. Eventually, the passenger gets off the bus, enters the London Tavern to carry out his social observations in a new environment. After all, this is the idea of Sala's enterprise - *Twice Around the Clock*: *Or, the Hours of the Day and Night in London* - to chronicle a variety of London life within twenty-four hours, and so his narrator simply moves on. The playful tone prevails, but the vignettes that are now churned out become more particular and more animated. The omnibus comes and goes: in Sala's piece, it never is more than a feature of contemporary urban life, and a convenient possibility to give another twist to the Asmodean formula.

While there is something blasé about Sala's appreciation of the omnibus, the exhilaration with which the conveyance fills Gertrude Lorimer in Amy Levy's novel *The Romance of a Shop* (1888) is unmistakably genuine. It is a memorable episode which no analysis of Levy's work ignores, not least because it has an equally celebrated poetic companion piece *The Ballad of an Omnibus* (1889). Actually, the novel makes several references to urban transportation, and at one point Gertrude having watched her sister disappear "to the underground railway," herself opts for "mounting boldly to the top of an Atlas omnibus" (Levy 1993, 86). This brief episode acknowledges the proliferation of modes of public transport in late Victorian London as well as their easy availability to passengers of modest means: Phyllis and Gertrude are modern independent women confidently partaking of metropolitan mobility, to an extent to which their sparse money permits it. Levy privileges the omnibus and almost literally elevates it, by locating the female passenger on the top deck of the vehicle, as she has Gertrude reason to herself: "Because one cannot afford a carriage or even a hansom cab, ... is one to be shut up away from the sunlight and the streets?" (1993, 86). Juxtaposing underground tunnels and enclosed carriages with the access to air, and above all, unrestrained vision, Levy's female passenger aspires to a more comprehensive freedom, paradoxically allowed by a conservative relationship of movement to time and space. More modern and

quintessentially urban, the railway underground, connecting so many different nodes of the metropolis, most radically disconnects its passengers from the city across which they move. Choosing the top of the omnibus, Gertrude chooses air, unrestrained vision, and – above all, the city with which she wants to engage.

While the omnibus, in operation since the late 1820s, is a well-established conveyance, Levy gives a faint hint of transgressiveness that may be attached to its use, when she describes Gertrude as "mounting *boldly* [emphasis added] to the top" (1993, 86). Celebrating the panoptic pleasures the ride on the top of the omnibus enabled to male passengers, Sala hoped that eventually "arrangements are made (and why should they *not* be made?) for hoisting ladies in an easy-chair to the breezy roof," adding that this is how things are done "on board a man-of-war" (1862, 219). Likewise, an anonymous article published in a 1862 issue of *Chamber's Journal* – contemporary to Sala then – written from a female passengers' perspective concludes with the hope that the rumored innovations will soon be implemented so as "to enable ladies to 'ride' outside" (1862, 35). Two decades later improvements were made, though not as fussy or decorous as Sala had imagined: iron ladders were replaced by curved staircases which women could negotiate more easily. There was another woman-friendly innovation in the shape of so-called decency screens which shielded the passengers' ankles from the exposure to the male gaze. While the travel on the roof had been technically facilitated and increasingly practiced by women for several years, the aura of impropriety did not dissipate yet, as the emphatic adverb "boldly," which Levy employs here, indicates. The transgression at work concerns not just the not entirely ladylike act of ascending to the top, but rather visual emancipation that comes in its wake.

In the 1880s this empowerment was additionally reinforced by another technical improvement: on the upper deck of the omnibuses there appeared garden seats arranged in horizontal rows as opposed to older longitudinal knifeboard seats. This resulted in affording the passengers, as the article entitled "The 'Bus" stressed, "a pleasant, airy mode of seeing London street life" (1890, 303). The reconfiguration of seats offered fewer voyeuristic possibilities we saw Sala exercise: the gaze was no longer directed at the buildings, private houses included, lining the street. Now the observer, facing the direction of travel, could enjoy, as Ilona Dobosiewicz describes it in relation to Gertrude's experience, "the free vistas of urban spaces" (2016, 123). For women the benefits from riding on the top of omnibuses went beyond the enlarged vision, they were now liberated from the oppressiveness of the interior, the oppressiveness created both by physically experienced congestion and morally felt etiquette, which demanded they should not look at other people, while leaving them constantly exposed to the impertinent gaze of male strangers. With no roof or windows confining and containing her, Gertrude can almost immerse herself in the metropolis, as if seen and felt anew: "She contemplated the familiar London pageant with an interest that had something of passion in it" (Levy 1993, 86). In the process, she can "become one with the city" (Vadillo 2005, 73). Although Vadillo makes this particular observation when commenting on *The Ballad of the Omnibus*, it well captures the intensity of Gertrude's exhilaration.

When Gertrude chooses vision, she, of course, chooses also visibility. If the top of the omnibus means that one could better see the surroundings, it also means that one would be better seen by others. It is precisely this heightened visibility that is at the center of the different episode in the novel:

> One bright morning towards the end of January, Gertrude came careering up the street on the summit of a tall, green omnibus, her hair blowing gaily in the breeze, her ill-gloved hands clasped about a bulky note-book. Frank, passing by in painting-coat and sombrero, plucked the latter from his head and waved it in exaggerated salute, an action which evoked a responsive smile from the person for whom it was intended, but acted with quite a different effect on another person who chanced to witness it, and for whom it was certainly not intended. This was no other than Aunt Caroline Pratt, who, to Gertrude's dismay, came dashing past in an open carriage, a look of speechless horror on her handsome, horselike countenance. Now it is impossible to be dignified on the top of an omnibus, and Gertrude received her aunt's frozen stare of non-recognition with a humiliating consciousness of the disadvantages of her own position. (Levy 1993, 105)

It is another scene in the novel which involves a comparison, this time explicit, of two different conveyances. Here, it is a class rather than gender related juxtaposition in which there are surprisingly many similarities: both vehicles carry women, both move fast – as indicated by the requisite verbs "career" and "dash" – in both the women are exposed to the elements: there is no roof "on the summit of a tall, green omnibus," and Aunt Caroline Pratt's carriage is open. And yet it is only Gertrude who is stigmatised, both by her respectable relative and to a degree by herself, as she acknowledges that the top of the omnibus compromises one's dignity. Whether it is everyone's or specifically woman's dignity remains unexplained, but one may assume that the displeasure felt by Gertrude's aunt comes from her niece's becoming too public a person in a public vehicle. It may be less the use of the conveyance itself, and more succumbing, and with relish, to the exposure its upper deck gives rise to: not only is Gertrude visible to a young man (that he is an acquaintance does not matter), she returns his gaze and responds to his pantomime, which everyone can see. She is an object of a spectacle and makes a spectacle of herself. Thanks to public transport she is at liberty to move across London, but she unwittingly encourages others, i.e. men, to take liberties with her.

Impropriety, felt by some women, combined with appropriation, felt by some men, who treated the female passengers' presence on the upper deck as the usurpation of not just public space, but specifically *men's* space and all related privileges: freedom, vision and power. In the 1898 issue of *Pearson's Magazine*, W. L. Alden's complains: "On the top of the 'bus you suffer from an excess of women ... women on the outside of a 'bus are decidedly out of place. They are not comfortable themselves and they are the cause of discomfort to men" (quoted in Shelley 2015, 145). Alden goes so far as to propose a placard banning women from climbing the stairs, he hopes that eventually "the roof would *naturally* . . . become monopolised by men" (quoted in Shelley 2015, 145).

At the end of the century it was not women atop of the 'bus who were "out of place," but Alden's remonstrance. The protagonist of *A Man from the North*, Arnold Bennett's novel published in the same year as Alden's piece, was merely stating a social fact, when he "saw [women] sitting in hansoms and private carriages and on the tops of omnibuses, niched in high windows, shining in obscurity of shops, treading the pavements with fairy step" (1911, 247). The omnibus makes an occasional, subdued, appearance in the novel, as one of many means of transportation Richard Larch uses to make his various journeys across London, yet interestingly, despite his repeatedly proclaimed literary ambitions and agonized search for literary subjects, he somehow fails to see public transport as a means

of exercising his powers of observation and turning these observations into a sketch or a story. It is not that no observations are made, but they have a personal, occasionally bitter, flavor for as he acknowledges conspicuous presence of women in public space, it is mostly to complain of their inaccessibility. They may be tantalizingly close or even brush against him, yet the rigors of the etiquette "prevented him from meeting them! When he saw a promising girl in a bus, why in the name of heaven should he not be at liberty to say to her, 'Look here, I can convince you that I mean well; let us make each other's acquaintance'?... But convention, convention! He felt himself to be imprisoned by a relentless, unscaleable wall" (Bennett 1911, 228).

Urban transport evidently contributed to women's increased presence in the public sphere and therefore, Lynne Walker notes, "helped normalize" their participation in metropolitan life (1995, 76). Consequently, their travelling on the upper deck of the omnibus became eventually disconnected from any implication of defiance or impropriety. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Peter Walsh recollects his rides with Clarissa (which would have taken place at the turn of the twentieth century) as a means of exploring the metropolis and collecting "queer little scenes, names, people from the top of a bus," (Woolf 1996, 167) in the fashion of Victorian physiognomists. This flashback places the conveyance in a metonymic relation with adventure, exhilaration, youthful insouciance, as well as perceptive and creative energy. But above all, freedom. It is on the mundane bus "going up Shaftesbury Avenue" that Clarissa declares to feel "herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat, but everywhere" (Woolf 1996, 168).

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