



Introduction

Shakespeare said, ‘All the world is a *stage*.’ we say, ‘All the world is an *omnibus*.’
George W. M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London*

In 2013, experimental poet Jacques Roubaud published *Ode à la ligne 29 des autobus parisiens*, a volume of whimsical poems that takes us on a journey through Paris aboard a bus crossing the city eastward from the Gare Saint-Lazare to the Porte de Montempoivre.¹ Inspired by the poet’s own experience of urban locomotion and his long-standing fondness for Parisian cityscapes, the volume is organised in six cantos and thirty-five stanzas corresponding to the thirty-five stops along this particular bus line. Roubaud treats us to a panoply of imaginative strategies in order to convey the sensorial and social richness of the bus-riding experience. From inventive spelling and visual rhymes to ingenious uses of typography (the poems are printed in green, red and blue ink), a broad variety of topics and a dizzying choice of volume covers (six!), *Ode à la ligne 29* playfully connects literary innovation with urban modernity, in all their kaleidoscopic multiplicity.

The city bus is an apt metaphor for urban diversity, a sum total of human experiences contained both within the cramped space of the vehicle and between the book’s covers. But the tradition of engaging public transportation as a way to invoke a cultural moment, to grapple with a multitude of central themes of the time, and to experiment with literary form did not begin with Roubaud’s *Ode*. In fact, cultural fascination with public transport emerged at the same time as the first vehicle of mass transit – the omnibus – was launched in Paris in 1828 (Plate 1). A horse-drawn public conveyance, the original omnibus accommodated up to fourteen passengers and travelled along assigned routes. The name *omnibus*, from the dative plural of ‘all’ in Latin and signifying ‘for everybody’, was particularly well suited to a vehicle open to any passenger regardless of class, gender or rank. The only requirement was the ability to pay a modest fare of 30 centimes.



Figure I.1 'Enterrement du dernier omnibus'. 11 January 1913.

From the day the first omnibus rolled on to the Paris streets in April 1828 until it was decommissioned with great fanfare in January 1913 (Figure I.1), different forms of popular culture seized upon the omnibus as a subject of interest. Scores of texts and images – including newspaper articles, literary city guides, short stories, *physiologies* and other works of urban observation, vaudevilles, poems, a popular board game (Plate 2), caricatures, postcards, songs and even a piano variation – featured omnibus travel. What accounted for this cultural obsession, and what does it tell us about nineteenth-century French society and its preoccupations? *Engine of modernity* sets out to answer these questions by considering ways in which the omnibus was imagined and deployed in popular literature and visual culture to express key themes of modernity in nineteenth-century Paris.²

As the first vehicle of mass transit in Paris, the omnibus radically changed everyday life and transformed the relationship of city dwellers to urban space. But for many nineteenth-century French writers, the omnibus was much more than a mode of transportation; indeed, it served as a powerful storytelling device through which they represented the city in transition, explored evolving social dynamics of class and gender, and reflected upon literary practices. It wasn't only that there was a flood of literature in the mid-nineteenth century about the omnibus: many works adopted what was structurally original about this new feature of urban life as an organising principle, combining narrative innovation with social commentary. In his pioneering work on the railway,

Introduction

historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch convincingly demonstrates that transport technologies profoundly altered perceptions of distance, time and space.³ What makes the nineteenth-century Parisian omnibus distinct is that it also helped shape the cultural production of the period, as writers harnessed the vehicle's salient qualities, such as mixing diverse elements and bringing together varied perspectives within the same space, and put them to literary ends.⁴ In the documents I consider here, the omnibus quite literally represented a fluid cultural moment; omnibus literature, like the real-life public transit experience, offered snapshots of everyday life, capturing its provisional, transitory and fragmented nature. In short, it is through the omnibus that many nineteenth-century authors grappled with emerging urban modernity.

Modernity at a horse's trot

It may seem paradoxical to refer to the omnibus as an 'engine of modernity', because, after all, this horse-drawn vehicle was not a radical technological innovation, unlike the steam locomotive, introduced in France in the 1840s. Although, as historian Peter Soppelsa demonstrates, the horse was construed as a form of modern technology during the nineteenth century, the omnibus in this respect did not differ significantly from other horse-drawn vehicles that populated city streets at the time.⁵ And yet its arrival on the streets of Paris – and in the pages of popular literature – served as the motor for a fundamental cultural shift in how people perceived the city, society and the literature that sought to represent them. The omnibus became inseparable from concepts associated with 'the modern', such as motion, spectacle and flux, all of which were key to understanding not only the rapidly changing Parisian landscape but also an increasingly complex French society. As we shall see, the omnibus ushered in modernity on several levels: it changed material conditions of urban life, created radically new modes of sociability and inspired innovations in literary form.

To be sure, 'modernity' is a complex and multivalent concept that eludes a straightforward definition. Modernity refers to moments of rupture and change, both as historical and aesthetic categories. In Baudelaire's famous formulation, modernity also resides in the tension between what is permanent and what is transitory: 'La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable'⁶ (Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable). Until recently, the notion of historical modernity in relation to nineteenth-century Paris was associated with Haussmannisation, the massive reconstruction of public urban spaces and of the city's infrastructure in the 1850s and 1860s, as well as the advent of capitalism, technological innovations, modern forms of commerce and the concomitant

Engine of modernity

changes in social relations and culture. Yet recent scholarship has convincingly argued for dating nascent Parisian modernity to the years of the July Monarchy.⁷ For example, H. Hazel Hahn suggests that cultural transformations associated with modernity emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century: 'Much of what would comprise the modernity of the Second Empire, such as café culture, preceded the transformative urban changes and needs to be placed in the broader context of the evolution of both the urban fabric and the urban imaginary.'⁸ The omnibus and the cultural production it inspired exemplify this early manifestation of modernity.

Another useful concept in thinking about representations of the omnibus in literature and visual culture is what Sharon Marcus calls 'cultural modernity'. Marcus provides a useful distinction between 'cultural modernity' and a more historically determined 'chronological modernity'. Cultural modernity encompasses two central characteristics: first, it is an attitude, an awareness of the self as modern, and a celebration of innovation; second, it is characterised by privileging social spaces of spectacle. Cultural modernity does not depend solely on the physical transformation and modernisation of urban spaces. Rather, it involves the perception and representation of a phenomenon as new, a self-conscious understanding of one's moment as radically departing from what preceded it.⁹ The documents I examine in this book reveal a remarkable awareness of the omnibus as the embodiment of the new.¹⁰

To begin with, the omnibus represented a major advance in urban locomotion, one that allowed Parisians of any social class to traverse the capital in comfort and at a speed the majority of them had never experienced. The omnibus not only facilitated getting to and from work, but it also promoted commercial and entertainment activities, such as shopping and going to the theatre.¹¹ Although, as I mentioned above, the omnibus itself was not a technological innovation, its presence on the Paris streets was among the considerations that drove urban planning. The increased traffic and congestion caused by these large conveyances informed urban planners of the need for broader streets in a modern metropolis, a problem addressed by urban renovation works under Napoleon III during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this way, the omnibus was a motor of dramatic urban change.

Beyond its impact on the physical aspect of the city, the omnibus fostered new social practices in the urban environment. Sociologist Georg Simmel attributed changes in the ways city dwellers related to one another to the introduction of public transport:

Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses,

Introduction

railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in situations where they had to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.¹²

The configuration of vehicles of mass transportation imposed distinctive physical and visual closeness upon passengers. A space of gender and class mixing, as men and women of different classes shared the narrowly confined space for the duration of a trip, the omnibus generated unprecedented forms of sociability among urban dwellers. And so the omnibus became an ideal social laboratory for urban observers interested in contemporary ways of life. If the latter part of the century was dominated by the 'boulevard culture' of theatres and cafés (as Vanessa Schwartz convincingly demonstrates), as well as the department store that came to epitomise class mixing associated with modernity, it was the omnibus that arguably played this role during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.¹³

Yet this imposed physical proximity of men and women from different social classes was met with ambivalence and a degree of anxiety among contemporary commentators. Textual and visual representations of the omnibus range from celebrations of the vehicle's class and sex inclusiveness, hailing it as a harbinger of progress, to indictments of the vehicle as a dangerous threat to the existing social order. The omnibus became both a daily practice and a visual symbol that brought city dwellers together at the same time as it underscored that which separated them.

But what made the omnibus truly unique was the innovations in literary forms it inspired. The omnibus was a storytelling device through which the urban writers I study conveyed the intricate texture of Parisian society on the cusp of modernity. If the omnibus was a fitting metaphor for a cultural moment marked by radically changing social and cultural practices, it was also an ideal vehicle for a nascent popular literature – the very literature that aimed to represent Paris and its inhabitants – to convey new ideas about the city and the complex composition of a changing French society. Urban writers found the omnibus such an appealing a topic because they recognised its powerful figurative and self-reflexive potential. For them, it became both embodiment and symbol of cultural modernity, a signal of the advent of the new. To writers concerned with deciphering and understanding city spaces and city dwellers, the omnibus offered unrivalled possibilities for urban observation, social commentary and storytelling. The omnibus was a setting through which to make sense of new forms of sociability and to grapple with cultural anxieties associated with different aspects of change: opportunities for social mobility, class mixing, the increased presence of women in public spaces and the promises and perils of the democratisation of public life. Perhaps even more importantly, many writers adapted the vehicle's intrinsic characteristics for literary use.

Engine of modernity

A number of innovative features particular to the omnibus as a mode of transport appealed to contemporary writers. The diversity of passengers gathered within the enclosed space of the vehicle reflected an ever changing multiplicity of backgrounds and perspectives that characterised the modern city. Many works about the omnibus took up this idea of mixing diverse elements as an organising principle, for they often combined different genres within the same volume. For example, Charles Soullier's 1863 *Les Omnibus de Paris* offers a detailed and deeply erudite history of the omnibus, a poem exalting the vehicle's virtues alongside a daily omnibus schedule, and a list of stops. Other texts were authored by multiple writers, each bringing a distinctive style and perspective. The 1854 *Paris-en-omnibus*, for example, co-written by journalists and popular writers Taxile Delord, Arnould Frémy and Edmond Texier, contains a great variety of tones, registers, styles and genres, from satirical sketches to factual historical accounts, philosophical musings and slapstick vignettes. Another feature of the vehicle deployed in omnibus literature was episodic narrative. In works such as Emile Dartès's 1894 *Contes en omnibus*, a volume of short stories that centre on a passenger or a group of passengers, the beginning and the end of each tale are delineated by the length of the character's ride. Here the very nature of an omnibus ride supplies a narrative structure.¹⁴

While other forms of urban public transit were introduced throughout the nineteenth century – the tram, the *bâteau-omnibus* and, at the turn of the century, the metro – none had as strong an impact on the cultural imagination of the era as the omnibus. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, it not only provided popular literature with a narrative vehicle through which to present a wide range of social issues, but it also drove the popular literature itself. This literature emerged just as the city of Paris was undergoing dramatic changes.

A city in transition

Although the systematic reconstruction and modernisation of Paris spearheaded by Napoleon III did not get underway until the early 1850s, changes that would ultimately transform the French capital from a medieval city into a modern metropolis began much earlier in the century. Historians agree that Haussmann's reconstruction project did not represent a radical break from the work that was accomplished during the first half of the nineteenth century; rather, it built on developments and ideas of urban planners going back to the First Empire.¹⁵ As readers familiar with Balzac know, the Paris of the 1830s and 1840s was already a city on the cusp of modernity, characterised by increasing traffic, speed, congestion, crowds, fragmentation of urban experience and a sense of flux. Reflecting on the multifaceted and increasingly mobile and disjointed character of the city in his quintessentially

Introduction

Parisian novel of 1833, *Ferragus*, Balzac famously described Paris as a ‘monstrueuse merveille, étonnant assemblage de mouvements, de machines, de pensées, la ville aux cent mille romans’¹⁶ (a monstrous marvel, a stunning assemblage of movements, machines, and ideas, a city of a hundred thousand novels). Here Balzac captures some of the key terms that defined modern Paris, a city of paradoxes (‘monstrueuse merveille’), characterised by movement and the presence of the menacing yet exhilarating machine, a city as a producer of narrative.

A dramatic upturn in the number of vehicles and people contributed to the impression that life in Paris was speeding up. The population of Paris doubled during the first half of the nineteenth century, and this influx was accompanied by an acceleration of industrial and commercial activities. The introduction of the omnibus in 1828 was part of the early modernisation taking hold in Paris. The concepts of speed and change, both real and perceived, were key to the city’s transformation. As Priscilla Ferguson notes, ‘The modernity commonly ascribed to nineteenth-century Paris is rooted in this sense of movement, the perpetually unfinished, always provisional nature of the present and the imminence of change.’¹⁷ This modernisation was happening not only on the streets of Paris, bustling with people and vehicles, but also in the minds of contemporary writers. In his 1834 essay ‘Les voitures publiques’, in *Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle*, Louis Huart offers a telling commentary on the accelerating speed of modern life:

Il semble que de nos jours on vive plus vite que du temps passé; l’activité fiévreuse qui anime le Parisien ne lui permet plus de supporter la marche paisible de ces moyens de transport qui convenaient aux siècles précédents, siècles tout froids, tout compassés, qui s’accommodaient parfaitement de cette monotone lenteur; aussi tout le monde aujourd’hui va-t-il en voiture.¹⁸

(It appears that nowadays we live faster than in the past. A feverish activity that animates Parisians prevents them from accepting the peaceful pace of modes of transport that suited previous centuries, which, cold and prim, adapted to the monotony of slow speed. And so, today everyone moves about in a carriage.)

For Huart, the intensification of the pace of urban life stems directly from the growing number of vehicles that criss-crossed the streets of Paris:

Lorsque je vois le nombre de voitures qui circulent incessamment dans les rues de Paris, je m’étonne toujours d’une chose, – c’est de trouver encore des piétons sur les trottoirs. Fiacles, cabriolets, diligences, tilburys, calèches, landaus, omnibus, voitures à six chevaux, tout cela se rencontre, se croise, se heurte, s’accroche, se décroche, se renverse nuit et jour dans les rues de cette ville, surnommée depuis long-temps le *paradis des femmes*, et qui mérite encore, à bien plus juste titre, son autre surnom d’*enfer des chevaux*.¹⁹

Engine of modernity

(When I see the number of carriages circulating incessantly in the streets of Paris, there is only one thing that surprises me – it's that we still find pedestrians at all. Hackney cabs, cabriolets, stage-coaches, tilburys, barouches, landaus, omnibuses, carriage with six horses – all these vehicles run into each other, cross paths, collide, pick up, drop off, and knock over day and night in the streets of this city that has long been called 'paradise for women' and that also deserves its other nickname, 'hell for the horses'.)²⁰

Huart's very phrasing, a chaotic piling up of vehicle names and verbs of motion in rapid succession, mimics the frenetic texture and rhythm of modern urban environment, and textually reproduces the image of hopelessly congested streets dominated by constant movement and chaos. By stylistically replicating the features of the modern city, Huart's text itself becomes a site of modernity.

Similarly, in her weekly column in *La Presse* from June 1837, Delphine de Girardin lamented that the abundance of vehicles and the speed with which the city moves have destroyed the pleasures of walking, and pointed her finger at the omnibus as the emblem of this unwelcome change:

La promenade est impossible; il y a peine de mort pour le flâneur; l'*Omnibus* et la *Dame blanche* ont envahi la cité; ils la traversent dans tous les sens; on ne marche plus, on court; chaque habitant de la ville insensée semble avoir derrière lui l'Euménide vengeresse qui le poursuit. Qu'est-il devenu, cet être aimé des dieux, chéri du poète, béni du pauvre, cet inconnu que chacun veut séduire, cet indifférent qui vous apporte l'espérance malgré lui, cet être indéfini que l'on appelle le PASSANT?²¹

(Strolling became impossible: a *flâneur* risks his life; the *Omnibus* and the *Dame blanche* have invaded the city; they criss-cross it in all directions. One no longer walks – one runs instead. Every crazed city dweller appears to have a vengeful Eumenides chasing after him. What ever became of him, that being so beloved by gods, cherished by poets, blessed by beggars, that stranger that everyone wants to seduce, that indifferent person who gives you hope despite himself, that hard-to-define creature called the PASSERBY?)

Speed and change continued to be powerful motifs in urban literature well into the second part of the nineteenth century, and the omnibus was often cast as an agent of these new developments.²² In the early years of Haussmann's reconstruction project, authors of literary guidebooks both marvelled at and lamented the way the city was changing beyond recognition before their very eyes. In his preface to Edouard Fournier's 1854 *Paris Démoli*, for example, Théophile Gautier writes that new urban practices cannot develop and flourish without changing the physical aspect of the city: 'Le Paris moderne serait impossible dans le Paris d'autrefois. Où passaient la mule de l'homme de robe et le cheval de l'homme d'épée entre deux murailles qui se touchaient presque,

Introduction

faites donc circuler l'omnibus, ce Léviathan de la carrosserie, et ces voitures si nombreuses s'entre-croisant avec la rapidité de l'éclair!' (The modern Paris could not exist within the walls of old Paris. In streets where in the olden days a priest's mule or a gentleman's horse squeezed between walls so narrow they almost touched, now let circulate the omnibus, this Leviathan of carriages, and other vehicles passing each other with lightning speed.) Speed, the hallmark of the changing city, demanded a new spatial organisation to accommodate what Gautier calls 'son activité effrénée et son mouvement perpétuel'²³ (frenetic activity and perpetual movement). Furthermore, the omnibus and other vehicles are themselves depicted as agents of change, as it is their presence in the streets that propels the modernisation of the city. The use of 'Leviathan' to describe the omnibus conveys the ambivalent way in which Gautier and many of his contemporaries perceived this vehicle and the modernity it represented: at once monstrous, formidable and awe-inspiring. Unlike Baudelaire, who famously bemoaned the destruction of the old Paris in 'Le cygne' and other poems ('Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie/ N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,/ Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie' (Paris changes! But nothing in my melancholy has moved! New palaces, scaffoldings, old neighbourhoods, everything is becoming allegory for me²⁴)), Gautier embraces the dramatic transformation of the city and the acceleration of the pace of life while acknowledging its disorienting and troubling effects on urban dwellers.

In another contemporaneous publication, also co-edited by Gautier, we see not only an awareness of the frenetic pace of change but also a desire to capitalise on the city's constant transformation for both literary and commercial gain. In a semi-ironic introduction to the lavish *Paris et les Parisiens au XIXe siècle*, published in 1856, during the first phase of Haussmannisation, Gautier explains that a new guidebook – his guidebook – is absolutely indispensable given the constantly changing aspect of Paris, a topic that never ceases to renew itself:

En effet Paris est la mine inépuisable, le sujet toujours neuf, le thème sur lequel l'antiquaire, le philosophe et le poète peuvent broder à l'infini; c'est un modèle aux aspects multiples et que chaque peintre saisit à sa manière; et puis que de Paris différents dans Paris! . . . Quelle diversité ondoiyante! quelle physionomie mobile! A chaque heure il faut faire son portrait: celui d'hier ne ressemble déjà plus.²⁵

(Indeed, Paris is an inexhaustible mine, a subject always new, a topic that the antiquarian, the philosopher and the poet can embellish endlessly. It is a model with different facets, one that every painter depicts in his own way. And what's more, so many different Parises within Paris! . . . What fluctuating assortment! What changeable appearance! Paint it every hour: its portrait from yesterday no longer resembles at all what it is today.)

Engine of modernity

Gautier even provocatively suggests that after a short four-to-five-year absence, a Parisian would not recognise his own city: ‘il trouvera le nouveau Louvre fermant cette vaste place du Carrousel encombrée naguère de baraques et d’échoppes; il cherchera des îles de maisons anéanties, des rues dont il ne reste pas même la trace’²⁶ (he will find the new Louvre marking the edge of the vast Place du Carroussel, formerly cluttered with shacks and shops; he will search for houses that were wiped out, streets that disappeared without a trace). Gautier’s introduction reflects both a desire to arrest the constantly changing reality through and in writing and an acknowledgement that this goal is unattainable.²⁷ Paris has changed so irrevocably that even native Parisians would be hopelessly lost without the help of this timely new guidebook:

Ainsi vous comprenez que *Paris et les Parisiens* arrivent vraiment à l’heure; il faut un guide même à l’indigène pour se reconnaître dans sa ville. N’allez pas, de grâce, consulter quelque livre vieux d’un an, il vous tromperait; vous y liriez des choses aussi arriérées que si c’était un bouquin piqué de vers et ranci dans sa couverture de parchemin jaune; il en est de la physionomie des villes comme de la physionomie des hommes.²⁸

(Thus you realise that *Paris et les Parisiens* is a timely book. Even a native needs a guidebook to find his way in the city. And for heaven’s sake, don’t consult some old volume that’s a year old – it will deceive you. There you will find things that are just as outdated as what you see in an ancient tome with a rancid yellow parchment cover consumed by worms. Faces of cities are just like faces of men.)

While Paris literature written during the years of Haussmannisation responds to a particularly acute sense of change, literature of the two previous decades already showed a keen awareness of the city in the process of transformation. And, in fact, this leitmotif of the impossibility of fixing urban change on the page remains a constant until the end of the nineteenth century. In the Preface to his 1900 *La Locomotion à travers le temps*, the prolific writer, journalist, cultural critic and bibliophile Octave Uzanne laments the fleeting nature of ‘progress’ (and, by extension, of ‘the modern’) that characterises transportation (but also fashion and book technology, his other interests) and that the notion of ‘the contemporary’ is impossible to pin down on paper:

Hélas! Sur un sujet d’aussi rapide évolution progressive que celui-ci, il est impossible d’écrire le mot *fin* ou d’envisager une *conclusion* satisfaisante. Le progrès du jour à peine enregistré est déjà vieux le lendemain. Nous ne saurions nous flatter d’avoir fait dans nos derniers chapitres de l’histoire contemporaine. Lorsqu’on traite de la vitesse, on devient rétrospectif et aussitôt distancié par le fait même qu’on s’arrête.²⁹

Introduction

(Alas! When writing on a topic that evolves as rapidly as this one, it is impossible to write the words *The end* or to envision a satisfactory *conclusion*. The progress of today, barely recorded, becomes obsolete the next day. We won't pretend that what we have written in these chapters is contemporary history. When you are writing about speed, you become retrospective and distanced from your topic by the very fact that you stopped writing.)

Like his predecessors of earlier decades, Uzanne considers public transport in general, and the omnibus in particular, as the epitome of transformation, even as this mode of transport itself becomes outmoded.

Such changes to the physical aspect of the city occurred in tandem with political turmoil and dramatic transformations of the fabric of society. Over the course of the nineteenth century, France experienced six different regimes (including two monarchies, two empires and two republics) and was rocked by two revolutions, a coup d'état and a violent uprising. These political cataclysms were accompanied by a move from a traditional economy to a capitalist industrial one, as well as by profound shifts in social structures and hierarchies (initially upended by the French Revolution). Money, rather than lineage, emerged as the major determinant of one's status, and the bourgeoisie established its economic, political and cultural power. The new topography of Paris reflected these shifting social structures, as different neighbourhoods became firmly associated with particular social groups (for instance, the area of the Chaussée d'Antin was inhabited by the newly enriched banking and industrial bourgeoisie and represented modernity, while the Faubourg Saint-Germain belonged to the ancien régime aristocratic elite and symbolised distinction).³⁰

And yet the boundaries between these sections of Paris were consistently challenged and blurred as circulation increased throughout the city, just as the boundaries between different social groups were becoming increasingly fluid and unstable. The omnibus stands as the embodiment of these urban, cultural and social developments because it pushed the limits of topographic and social divisions on several levels. While its interior became a site of class mixing (and ultimately a space of social equalising), the vehicle itself traversed diverse social worlds as it made its way through different sections of the city, subverting, in a sense, topographic segregation by class. Indeed, one of the first omnibus lines, the Madeleine–Bastille, exemplified the social diversity that the omnibus came to represent, as it joined together two parts of the city that seemed worlds apart: the neighbourhood of Bastille was working-class, while the area of Madeleine was associated with wealth and power. Just as the Madeleine–Bastille line was emblematic of the tensions and contradictions that defined Paris throughout the nineteenth century, the entire history of the omnibus service is inextricably bound up with the city's history.

Omnibus: a history

Until the seventeenth century, the only vehicles circulating in Paris were private carriages. Emblazoned with their owners' coats of arms, carriages were a major status symbol whose function was not only to ferry their aristocratic passengers but also to publicly and spectacularly display their wealth and social position.³¹ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, a number of public vehicles for hire, such as *chaises à porteurs* (sedan chairs), existed in Paris for those who were unable to afford the luxury of a private carriage but wished to travel in the city other than on foot.³² Beginning in the eighteenth century, small carriages, such as *fiacres* (horse-drawn taxicabs), *cabriolet* and *coucou* (light, two-wheeled vehicles pulled by one horse), could be hired for a day or for a few hours.³³ *Fiacres* persisted until the end of the nineteenth century, when they were replaced by motorised taxicabs.

The ancestor of the nineteenth-century omnibus that most resembled it was a short-lived *carrosse à cinq sols*, the first mode of urban public transportation in Paris, devised and developed by Blaise Pascal in collaboration with the Duc de Roannez. Pascal and Roannez were given a monopoly by King Louis XIV to start an urban transit service in Paris. Significantly, the original royal decree did not impose any limitations on the social class of people who could take advantage of the *carrosses à cinq sols*. The service was launched on 18 March 1662 and originally deployed twelve carriages. They travelled along fixed routes, followed a schedule, accommodated up to eight passengers and two employees and were pulled by four horses. The cost of a ride, according to Joan Dejean, was twenty-four times less than the cost of renting a vehicle for hire. Like their nineteenth-century successor, the *carrosses à cinq sols* were open to both men and women.³⁴

The new service was enormously successful with all Parisians, and soon five different lines were criss-crossing Paris, including a circle line along the perimeter of the city. The drivers wore red and blue, the colours of the city, and each vehicle was marked by a number of *fleur-de-lis* corresponding to the number of the line. This urban transit service was heavily advertised on posters plastered throughout the city: the omnibus circulated not only literally on the roads but also visually in print.

Although the service was originally intended for people of all classes, it quickly became apparent that wealthy and privileged passengers did not feel comfortable being in close proximity to passengers of a lower class. Dejean describes how privileged Parisians would board the vehicle, pay for all the seats and direct the driver not to accept any other passengers, thus reserving the entire *carrosse* to themselves. Under pressure from upper-class Parisians, the Parliament issued a new regulation excluding lower-class passengers: 'les soldats, pages, laquais et autres gens de livrée, même les manœuvres et gens de

Introduction

bras, ne pourroient entrer lesdits carrosses³⁵ (soldiers, pages, domestic servants, as well as manual labourers would not be allowed on board of said carriages). The reaction was swift and violent, as members of the excluded groups attacked the carriages the very day the new edict was issued. A new regulation severely punishing such attacks put an end to violence, but the *carrosses à cinq sols* never regained their initial popularity and went out of circulation in the 1690s.³⁶ Parisians would have to wait until 1828 to see a truly public transit service come into existence. Nineteenth-century commentators often alluded to the restrictive nature of the *carrosse à cinq sols* to praise the social inclusiveness of the omnibus service.

The omnibus came to Paris at a time of immense population change, especially among the working and lower-middle classes. The number of Parisians increased from 550,000 in 1800 to 700,000 in 1830 and reached one million in 1846, the city acquiring between 16,000 and 25,000 new residents every year between 1840 and 1850.³⁷ Since many workers lived on the periphery but worked in the fashionable centre of the city, a vehicle capable of transporting large numbers of people and travelling along fixed routes was urgently needed. Moreover, as readers of Balzac's *Le père Goriot* will recall, Parisian streets were covered with an extraordinary amount of mud and sewage, and getting around without a vehicle was exceedingly unpleasant. Three hundred requests were submitted to the Paris *préfecture* in 1828 alone by companies wishing to start an urban coach business, which shows the pressing need for such a service. However, all requests were initially rejected because the authorities feared (with good reason) that a large vehicle of this kind might aggravate rather than solve the already severe traffic problem by creating even more congestion on the overcrowded narrow streets of pre-Haussmann Paris.³⁸

Eventually, however, the need for public transportation led the authorities to approve the first omnibus service, launched by Stanislas Baudry, a former colonel in Napoleon's army and a successful businessman. Baudry had first opened an urban coach service in Nantes in 1826, initially to transport residents from the city centre to a bathhouse he operated on the outskirts. He noticed that although not many residents frequented the bathhouse, the urban coach service was widely successful. A shrewd entrepreneur, Baudry grasped the commercial potential of urban public transportation. Having achieved success with his coach service in Nantes, he decided to try for a bigger, more lucrative market in Paris. After a new police prefect authorised Baudry to create an urban coach company in the capital, he launched L'Entreprise générale d'omnibus, and the first *voiture omnibus* appeared on the streets of Paris in April 1828 (Figure I.2). The omnibus owed its unusual name to the inscription on the milliner's shop in front of which the urban coach station was located. The shop belonged to a Monsieur Omnès, whose motto was 'Omnès omnibus' (Omnès hats for

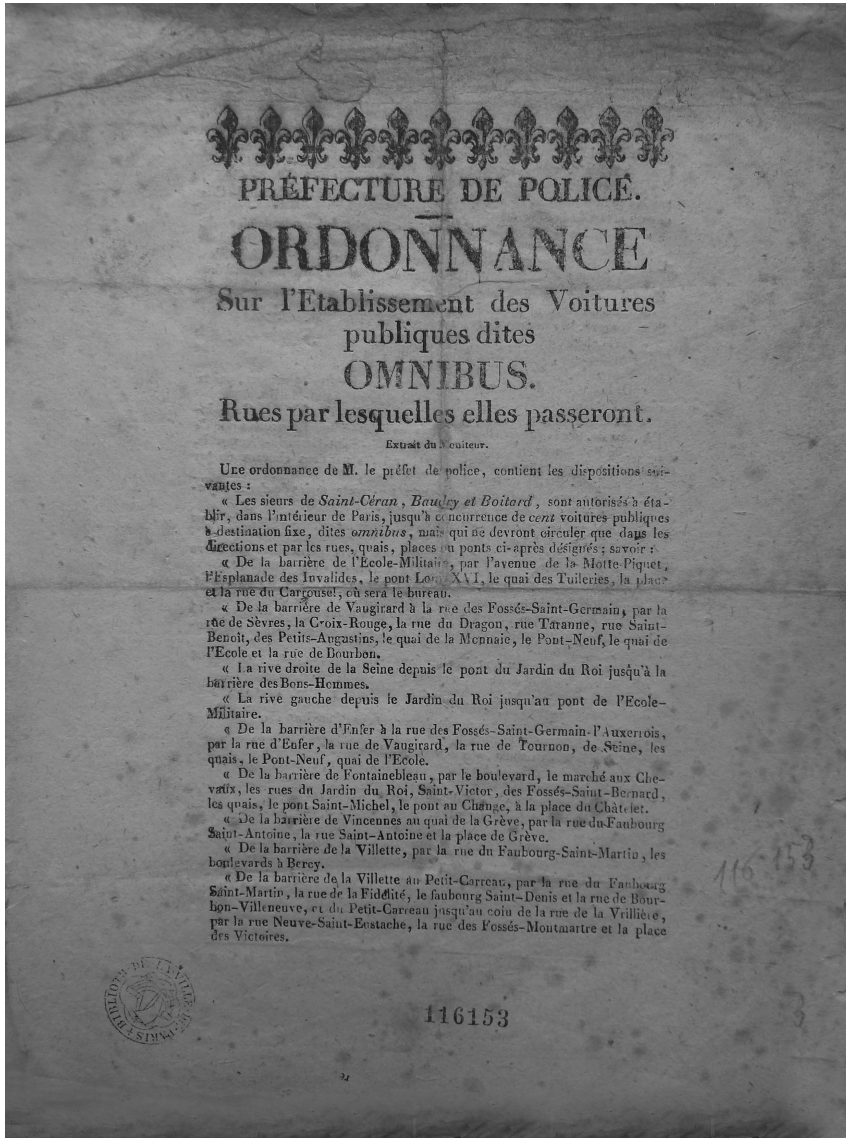


Figure I.2 'Ordonnance sur l'établissement des voitures publiques dites omnibus'. 1828.

everybody). Baudry found the name 'omnibus' – 'for everybody' – particularly appropriate for his vehicle, which he intended for passengers of all social classes.

In an 1867 article on 'Les voitures publiques' published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, Maxime Du Camp describes the first omnibuses as 'lourdes

Introduction

voitures dont la forme extérieure rappelait celle des gondoles³⁹ (heavy vehicles whose exterior shape recalled that of gondolas). Baudry's vehicle accommodated fourteen passengers and was initially pulled by three horses. It travelled along fixed routes and had no pre-assigned stops. The driver announced the omnibus arrival by sounding a trumpet with the help of a pedal, and passengers signalled their intent to board by flagging down the vehicle. In addition to the sound of the trumpet, the omnibus wheels, covered with metal bands, also made considerable noise when rolling on badly paved streets.⁴⁰ It was the low cost of the omnibus relative to vehicles for hire that made it particularly attractive: the original fare was 25 centimes (going up to 30 centimes shortly thereafter), which was much cheaper than the fares for private carriages: 1 franc 25 for a *cabriolet* or 1 franc 50 for a *carrosse* ride.⁴¹

Initially, however, the omnibus service was only a moderate commercial success: although it was extremely popular with Parisians, and the demand was great, using three horses proved to be unprofitable. Baudry and his associates redesigned the omnibus to make it narrower and longer with two more seats inside, and the new vehicle was pulled by two horses instead of three, making it less unwieldy and more cost-effective.

Several other omnibus companies soon opened, boasting catchy names such as 'Dames Blanches' (the terminal was in front of the theatre playing a popular opera of the same name), 'Les Algériennes' (in reference to the military campaign in Algeria about to begin), 'Les Sylphides', 'Les Gazelles', 'Les Ecossaïses' and 'Les Tricycles'.⁴² There was also 'Les Carolines', named in honour of Princess Caroline, Duchess de Berry, who had made a 10,000-franc wager with the king that she would ride in a new vehicle. She not only won the bet but also contributed to the popularity of the new conveyance.⁴³ The attractive names, a marketing strategy evoking the feminine, the ephemeral, the mysterious and the exotic, obviously clashed with the reality of the gigantic, unwieldy and somewhat monstrous vehicle itself. They point toward an enduring association of the omnibus with female sexuality, and as we shall see in subsequent chapters, in popular literature and visual culture across the nineteenth century the omnibus was often construed as a site of erotic adventures and women's transgression. We may wonder whether it was the impressive new conveyance itself or the seductive names that in 1828 inspired a sixteen-year-old fledgling composer and piano virtuoso Charles-Valentin Alkan to write a variation for piano called 'Les Omnibus', dedicated to the 'Dames Blanches'⁴⁴ (Figure I.3).

By the end of 1829, ten new companies ran 264 omnibuses in Paris, each transporting a total of 300 passengers a day. By 1838, the number of omnibuses had increased to 409. A system of free transfers (*correspondances*) between different lines, introduced in 1834 by L'Entreprise générale d'omnibus, was an important



Figure I.3 Charles-Valentin Alkan, 'Les Omnibus', variation for piano in C major. 1828. Frontispiece.

improvement, and from 1840 passengers could transfer between lines run by different companies, as we can see in contemporary maps (Figures I.4 and I.5).⁴⁵

Another innovation, aimed at increasing omnibus capacity, was the establishment of the *impériale*,⁴⁶ or the upper deck, in 1853. The *impériale* had fourteen seats at 15 centimes (i.e. half the regular price) and was initially open only to men. Women were excluded because it was deemed unbecoming, if

Introduction

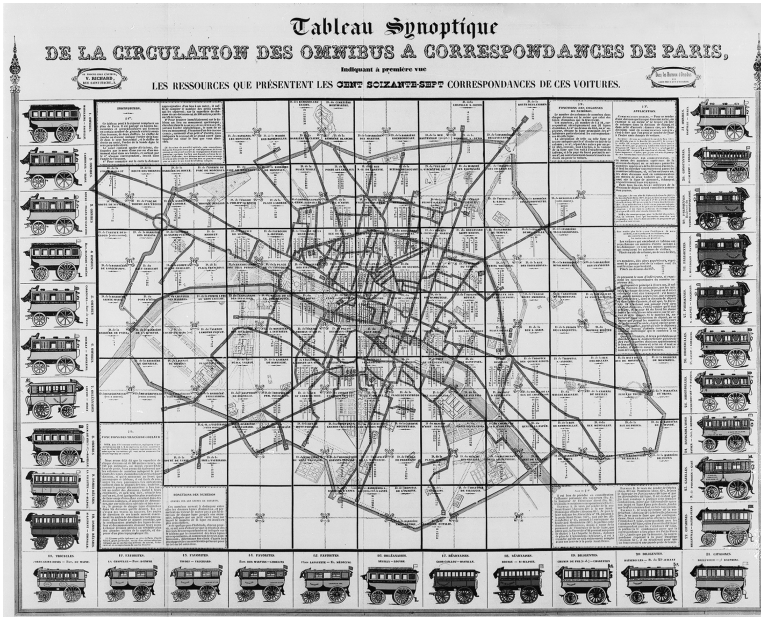


Figure I.4 Tableau synoptique de la circulation des omnibus à correspondances de Paris. 1840.

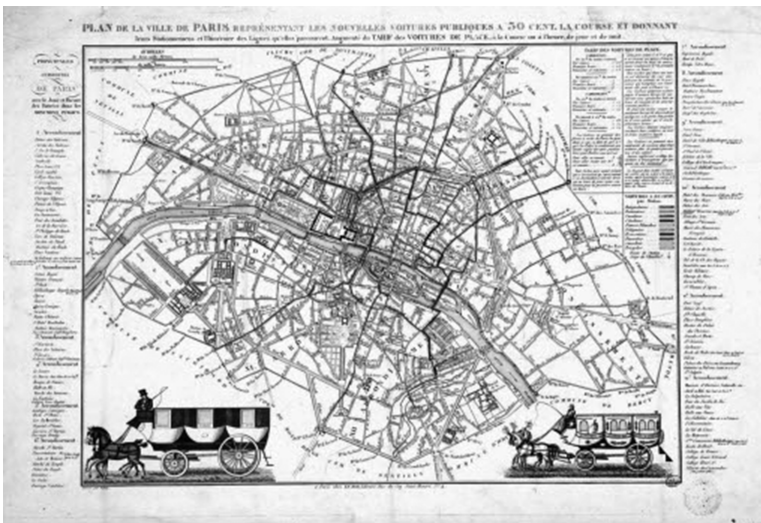


Figure I.5 Plan de la ville de Paris représentant les nouvelles voitures publiques à 30 centimes la course. 1829.

Engine of modernity

not impossible, for them to climb the precarious ladder leading to the upper deck, and because their skirts were particularly voluminous at the time.⁴⁷ Moreover, the exclusion was due to the perception that women were more fragile than men and would not be able to withstand the hardships that often befell the *impériale* passengers.

Indeed, the inconveniences of riding on the upper deck, exposed to the elements, became a favoured satirical subject for artists such as Honoré Daumier and others. In one caricature, Daumier depicts a man attempting to climb on the *impériale* by stepping on another passenger's head (Figure I.6). Several images portray the misery of an *impériale* ride in torrential rain (Figures I.7 and I.8). In Figure I.7, the caption plays on the word 'complet' ('full') ('Quinze centime un bain complet . . . Parole, c'est pas payé!' (A full bath for 15 centimes . . . a real bargain)). In a similar vein, a caricature by Cham shows a man carrying on his shoulder an *impériale* passenger who is frozen stiff (Figure I.9). But, despite these shortcomings, the new addition allowed a larger swathe of the population access to the omnibus. The *impériale* was considerably more affordable, and it alleviated some of the crowding aboard the vehicle.

Yet the original omnibus service was marred by serious problems and inefficiencies. The main issue was that the numerous companies wished to run their lines in the centre of the city, where they could attract the largest number of passengers, creating unnecessary competition and congestion, while the less urbanised areas on the city periphery were neglected.⁴⁸ According to Papayanis, for example, only two of the first ten lines run by L'Entreprise générale d'omnibus served the Left Bank, while other lines concentrated around the commercial and political centres of the Right Bank.⁴⁹

This imbalance was remedied only in 1855 when, on Haussmann's orders, all of the omnibus companies were consolidated into one privately run transportation monopoly, La Compagnie générale des omnibus (CGO). In addition to streamlining the service, the consolidation, part of Napoleon III's move toward centralisation and uniformity, was prompted by several interrelated factors. The construction of broad boulevards as part of the rebuilding and modernisation of Paris facilitated circulation of large vehicles, and the continuous population growth in Paris, as well as the upcoming universal exposition of 1855, which would bring scores of visitors into the city, necessitated an updated transportation system.

The CGO obtained the exclusive right to operate urban transportation in Paris for the next three decades and brought numerous improvements to the public transit service. The monopoly was especially useful to the public in that multiple lines were established outside the city centre. When Paris expanded dramatically in 1860 by annexing neighbouring villages such as Auteuil, Passy, les Batignolles, Montmartre and others, the CGO obtained the exclusive concession to operate in these newly incorporated areas, thus ensuring a more



Figure I.6 Honoré Daumier, ‘Le mauvais côté des nouveaux omnibus’. *Le Charivari*, 4 September 1856.

equitable distribution of the transportation services. By 1861, the company ran twenty-one omnibus lines throughout the city and possessed 500 vehicles and 6,700 horses (the latter number grew to 17,500 a few years later, the largest private cavalry in the world).⁵⁰ According to David Harvey, the number of omnibus passengers more than tripled between 1855 (the date of the merger) and 1860, when it reached 110 million per year (Plate 3).⁵¹

The CGO dominated the Parisian transportation market well into the second half of the nineteenth century. During the Second Empire, the only other

Engine of modernity

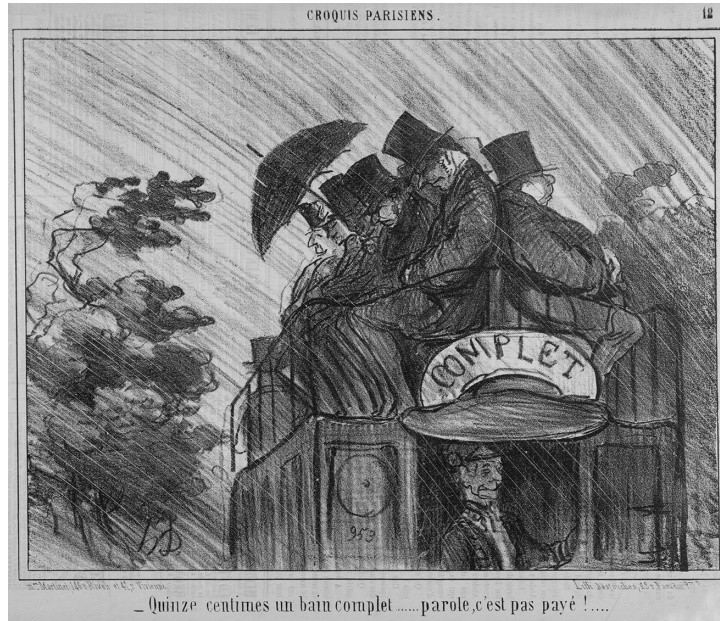


Figure I.7 Honoré Daumier, 'Quinze centimes un bain complet. . . parole, c'est pas payé! . . .'. *Le Charivari*, 30 August 1856.

mass transportation available to Parisians was the boat. In the 1870s, the tramway service launched in 1854 was further developed alongside omnibuses. New omnibus models were also introduced: in 1878, a large forty-passenger vehicle was inaugurated, and in 1888–89, a thirty-passenger omnibus was added to the fleet.⁵² The *impériale* became more accessible thanks to a better-designed spiral staircase (*un escalier hélicoïdal*), and women were allowed entry from the late 1880s. By this time, large crinoline skirts had gone out of fashion, and it became both physically more manageable and socially more acceptable for a woman to ride on the upper deck. Yet despite these innovations, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century the omnibus service began to show signs of wear, and its deficiencies became more visible, as we can glean from the press from the 1880s to the 1900s. Problems included inadequate service, overcrowding, long waits, an ageing fleet and poor treatment of horses. The CGO rejected repeated requests from the city administration to modernise the service, and frequent labour disputes resulted in strikes by CGO personnel.⁵³

The horse-drawn omnibuses (*les omnibus hyppomobiles*) lasted into the second decade of the twentieth century, coexisting for several years with newer

Introduction

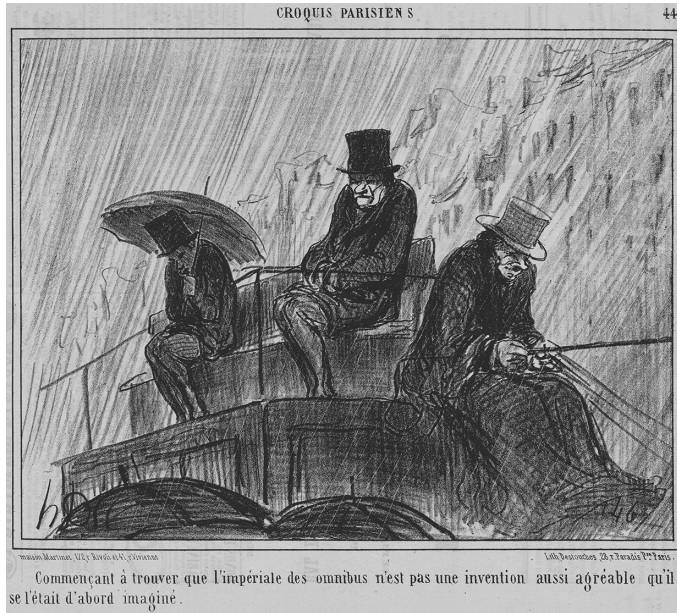


Figure I.8 Honoré Daumier, 'Commencant à trouver que l'impériale des omnibus n'est pas une invention aussi agréable qu'il se l'était d'abord imaginé'. *Le Charivari*, 10 February 1858.

means of transportation, such as the automobile, the metro (opened in Paris in 1900) and motorised buses (*omnibus automobiles*), launched in 1905.⁵⁴ When the last horse-drawn omnibus was finally decommissioned in January 1913, it was accompanied on its final journey with great pomp by huge crowds wishing to bid farewell to what had been a fixture of the Parisian landscape for nearly ninety years. Major newspapers carried the story on their front pages (Figures I.1, I.10 and I.11). The procession, described in several newspaper accounts as 'funérailles' (a funeral), featured an omnibus from the La Villette–Saint-Sulpice line, one of the last lines to run horse-drawn vehicles. Nearly 100,000 Parisians came to pay their last respects to the omnibus, along with a cortège of automobiles. The vehicle, filled to capacity and surrounded on all sides by people of different ages and social classes, was decorated with flower wreaths and memorial messages, such as a poster with a horse's head and the word 'merci' written on it, and a note that said 'Sic transit gloria equi.'⁵⁵ The event was bittersweet, as the headline in *La Presse* indicates: 'Feu l'Omnibus enterré joyeusement'⁵⁶ (The late Omnibus buried joyfully). If the first omnibuses were depicted as flighty females, at the end of its distinguished career the vehicle was personified as a loyal employee who has fulfilled his duty to society, as one newspaper account suggests: 'L'omnibus meurt en loyal serviteur



Figure I.9 Cham, 'Les nouveaux omnibus du boulevard pendant l'hiver'. 1840.

après une carrière bien remplie. Nous lui devons un souvenir très ému⁵⁷ (The omnibus dies a loyal servant, following a fulfilling career. We remember him/it fondly).

With echoes of another famous funeral, that of Victor Hugo in 1885, the omnibus travelled on its final journey surrounded by grateful crowds propelled by excitement, affection and nostalgia for the vanishing world it represented. While by 1913 the omnibus was outmoded and inefficient as a mode of transport, the enthusiasm and sheer size of the crowds accompanying it to its final resting place testified to its privileged place in the cultural *imaginaire*. In a particularly fitting postscript, most of the retired omnibus fleet was used for scrap metal during the First World War. The final passing of the vehicle, which embodied so many of the nineteenth century's key concerns, thus became linked to the pivotal event that marked the end of the long nineteenth century.⁵⁸

A route map to the book

The omnibus stories I present in this book are drawn from a broad range of works of popular culture created during the years of the vehicle's operation (1828–1913). The material I consider includes numerous works of popular

Introduction



Figure I.10 'L'enterrement de "la dernière" omnibus'. *Excelsior*, 12 January 1913.

50 Ans - Brevé de Paris, n° 1484

LE NUMERO 5 CENTS

LE 12 JANVIER 1913

EMILE DE GIRARDIN
 DIRECTEUR
 544, rue Montmartre, Paris (9^e)
 POUR LES ANNONCES A L'ÉCRAN
 A. LAURENT, 10, rue de Valenciennes, Paris
 Téléphone : 101-10

LA PRESSE

Édition de 1913

Une Cérémonie Militaire -- Une Manifestation Parisienne

La Garnison de Paris Passée en revue par le Général Michon LA REMISE DES CROIX



Le Sénat et le Congrès
 Les députés des armées de grande guerre ont tenu hier matin, à la Chambre, une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Sénat a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

Le Sénat, hier, a discuté le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée.

Feu l'Omnibus enterré joyeusement

UNE MANIFESTATION ORIGINALE



La Remise des Médailles

Le général Michon, le ministre de la Guerre et le général de Castelnau ont assisté hier à la remise des médailles de la guerre aux soldats de la garnison de Paris. Le général Michon a remis les médailles à un grand nombre de soldats qui ont été décorés pour leur bravoure pendant la guerre.

Les Négociations Balkaniques

La situation générale en ce qui concerne les négociations balkaniques reste incertaine. Les négociations entre la Serbie et l'Autriche-Hongrie continuent, mais sans espoir de succès immédiat.

Le Sénat et le Congrès

Le Sénat a tenu hier une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

Roumains et Bulgares

Les relations entre la Roumanie et la Bulgarie restent tendues. Les négociations pour la paix continuent, mais sans espoir de succès immédiat.

Une sortie à Taraboch

Le ministre de la Guerre a fait une sortie à Taraboch. Il a inspecté les troupes et a encouragé les soldats pour leur bravoure pendant la guerre.

Bulletin du Jour

Les nouvelles de la journée. Les négociations balkaniques continuent. La situation en France est calme. Les élections municipales ont eu lieu dans plusieurs villes.

« AU PRINTEMPS »

Le général Michon a fait une sortie à Taraboch. Il a inspecté les troupes et a encouragé les soldats pour leur bravoure pendant la guerre.

Le Sénat et le Congrès

Le Sénat a tenu hier une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

Les Victimes de « Massena »

Les victimes de la bataille de Massena ont été honorées. Les noms des soldats qui ont été tués pendant la bataille ont été inscrits sur une plaque commémorative.

Le Ruban Rouge

Le général Michon a fait une sortie à Taraboch. Il a inspecté les troupes et a encouragé les soldats pour leur bravoure pendant la guerre.

Intervention des Poissons

Les poissons ont été utilisés pour la nourriture des soldats pendant la guerre. Les poissons ont été distribués aux soldats qui ont été blessés pendant la guerre.

Le Sénat et le Congrès

Le Sénat a tenu hier une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

La Question des Utes

La question des Utes a été discutée. Les négociations pour la paix continuent, mais sans espoir de succès immédiat.

Le Sénat et le Congrès

Le Sénat a tenu hier une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

Le Sénat et le Congrès

Le Sénat a tenu hier une séance extraordinaire pour discuter le projet de loi relatif à la réorganisation de l'armée. Le Congrès a tenu une séance correspondante l'après-midi.

Figure 1.11 'Feu l'Omnibus enterré joyeusement'. Front page of the iconic newspaper *La Presse*, reporting on the 'funeral' of the omnibus, 12 January 1913.

urban literature (some well known and others that my research has uncovered), articles from the nineteenth-century press, fiction by both canonical and lesser-known writers and representations of the omnibus in popular visual culture. My aim is to unearth the cultural valence of the omnibus contained in this rich and wide-ranging archive. From chapters in celebrated literary guidebooks such as

Introduction

Paris, ou le livre des cent-et-un and *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* to the less familiar *Physiologie de l'omnibus* or *Paris-en-omnibus*, from Emile Zola's canonical novel *La Curée* to novellas by the then immensely popular but now forgotten Paul de Kock, and from caricatures by renowned artist Daumier to lithographs by anonymous artists, omnibus literature and visual representations offer a unique perspective on cultural perceptions of the everyday. They also provide a distinctive view into the social dynamics and tensions generated by new forms of sociability among men and women of different classes, as well as changing urban practices.⁵⁹ In considering these sources, I do not privilege canonical over popular literature or fiction over non-fiction. Rather, I examine these works on a continuum that offers a deeper understanding of the cultural imaginary of the time.⁶⁰

Engine of modernity consists of two parts. Part I, 'Omnibus literature in context', theorises the sub-genre of what I am calling 'omnibus literature' and explores specific textual strategies associated with it. Part II, 'Class, gender and locomotion: social dynamics on the omnibus', is organised thematically and focuses on two central concerns in the omnibus corpus: representations of class and gender. Part II throws into relief the deeply ambivalent attitudes about the omnibus during the long nineteenth century and, by extension, about the modernity this mode of transport represented in French culture.

Chapter 1, 'Modernity in motion: omnibus literature and popular culture in nineteenth-century Paris', introduces the omnibus literature and places it in the broader context of popular literary and print culture of the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. Omnibus literature comprises works that not only take on public transportation as either subject or setting but also are characterised by shared formal features such as episodic narrative, collaborative authorship and multi-genre texts. In order to establish omnibus literature as a sub-genre, I draw on the concepts Margaret Cohen developed in her analysis of panoramic literature.⁶¹ Features such as multiple authorship, micronarratives and heterogeneity were part and parcel of these types of literature as a whole. However, I argue that in the case of the omnibus literature, these features stem directly from its subject, one that generated innovative modes of writing. Thus, Chapter 1 establishes specific ways in which the omnibus provided a literary model for works of popular literature such as Edouard Gourdon's *Physiologie de l'omnibus* (1842), Louis Huart's 'Les voitures publiques' from *Nouveau Tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle* (1834), *Paris-en-omnibus* (1856) and the vaudeville play *Un omnibus ou la revue en voiture* (1828), among others. The narrative form of omnibus literature mirrors the vehicle's capacity to capture the multiplicity of urban experiences.

Chapter 2, 'Transitory tales: reading the omnibus repertoire', examines specific textual strategies and patterns of representation found in the omnibus literature. The corpus that I examine is an eclectic group of texts that includes works of panoramic literature, conduct manuals, city guides, literary guidebooks and popular songs. Despite their generic differences,

Engine of modernity

these texts share thematic patterns and features that were developed and recycled across a broad range of works of popular literature spanning the nineteenth century. This chapter also introduces several recurring social types associated with omnibus literature, such as ‘the omnibus flâneur’ (an omniscient first-person narrator-passenger) and characters associated with omnibus labour, such as the conductor and the driver, all of whom figure in numerous works of popular literature. By analysing these features of omnibus literature, the chapter brings to the fore some of the central themes of nineteenth-century urban modernity: alienation, legibility of urban space, social mobility, anxiety about new technologies and new modes of labour.

Part II focuses upon ways in which cultural documents used the figure of the omnibus to navigate complex social dynamics of class and gender. Close readings of a variety of examples from popular literature and visual culture reveal that the omnibus was a multidimensional and often ambivalent symbol of modernity, one whose meaning was not permanently fixed but, rather, shifted and evolved. If some works celebrated the omnibus as an embodiment of progress, others deployed it to express anxieties about social change, such as class mobility and the increased visibility of women in public spaces. Part II also highlights how cultural representations of the omnibus constructed its different mythologies, which often departed from the lived experiences of contemporaries.

In Chapter 3, ‘Circulation and visibility: staging class aboard the omnibus’, I consider the omnibus as a central urban site where class relations and class identity were articulated, debated and contested. It is no coincidence that in a key scene in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, a barricade is constructed using an overturned omnibus. This powerful image, capturing the symbolic power of the omnibus as an embodiment of revolutionary spirit, appears in a number of nineteenth-century texts. Contemporary writers noted that the name *omnibus* was particularly well suited to a mode of public transport that was by law open to everyone regardless of class, rank or social standing. In theory, the omnibus incarnated democratic promise, class equality and French Republican values. Yet a careful analysis of contemporary documents shows that the omnibus was a much more ambivalent class signifier than heretofore believed. While some works hailed it as a symbol of progress and democratic potential – a space in which social distinctions were erased and all passengers were treated equally – others bemoaned that the omnibus fell short as a vehicle of equality. Finally, some documents reveal a profound anxiety about class mixing aboard the omnibus, which for many symbolised the upending of existing social hierarchies. The omnibus was thus a locus for engaging with both class aspirations and class anxieties. Some urban observers perceived social mobility as a promise; others saw it as a dangerous challenge to the social order.

Chapter 4, ‘Moral geographies: women and public transport’, focuses on representations of female passengers and the ways that popular literature and

Introduction

visual culture grappled with gendered perceptions of public spaces. The omnibus was among the few public sites where men and women could legitimately share close quarters without violating rules of propriety. Yet in many documents the omnibus was portrayed as a site of female sexual transgression. Its narrow interior encapsulated the tensions and ambiguities surrounding women who were out and about in the city. We can see this concern about women's presence on public transport in an 1856 satirical lithograph by Charles Vernier depicting a man awkwardly making his way to his seat through a sea of gigantic crinoline skirts that have invaded the omnibus interior. In addition to poking fun at women's fashion, the image suggests the women's lack of respectability and their low social standing by linking them to Notre-Dame de Lorette, an area of Paris associated with prostitution (Figure I.12).

From young bourgeois maidens flirting with their seatmates to kitchen cooks holding baskets with suggestively spilling produce, from prostitutes soliciting clients to adulteresses giving assignations to lovers, and from pregnant women delivering babies to wet nurses exposing their voluminous bosoms, representations of female passengers highlight, beyond their frequent comic effect, a profound unease about the collapse of boundaries between public and private spheres, and about women's newly found visibility and freedom of



Figure I.12 Charles Vernier. 'Entrée dans un omnibus, rue Notre-Dame de Lorette'. *La Crinolonomanie*. 1856.

Engine of modernity

urban locomotion. In this chapter, I offer an analysis of a mythology that linked female omnibus passengers with transgressive sexual behaviour in texts by well-known authors such as Emile Zola and Guy de Maupassant as well as lesser-known writers such as Gourdon and Delord, in addition to works of visual culture.

Finally, in the Epilogue, I consider how two later nineteenth-century texts – Zola's department store novel *Au Bonheur des dames* (1883) and Fortuné du Boisgobey's murder-mystery *Le Crime de l'omnibus* (1881) – illustrate the power of the omnibus as a symbol of ambivalence toward modernity, even during a time when the vehicle itself was becoming obsolete. In these novels, the omnibus stands for anxieties surrounding multiple facets of modernity, such as rapidly expanding capitalism, the intrusion of the machine in everyday life and urban alienation. These texts demonstrate that literature and other cultural forms continued to use the omnibus as a prism through which to examine pressing concerns of the time – long after the vehicle itself ceased to be a novelty. A text by Octave Uzanne from 1900 provides a counterpoint to these novels' vision.

In the chapters that follow, I chart ways in which the omnibus operated as an 'engine of modernity' in nineteenth-century Paris. As a material reality, the vehicle contributed to the transformation of city spaces and the development of new urban practices. As a concept, it encapsulated numerous aspects of the modern urban experience: fragmentation, circulation, spectacle, urban alienation and flux, among others. As a literary form, the omnibus both reflected and shaped innovation in writing during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a period that saw the emergence of mass-market literature and the popular press. The omnibus was not only an engine of transport, of urbanisation and of commerce: it was also one of cultural change and social anxiety. Like a refracting mirror, the omnibus provided nineteenth-century popular culture with new ways to represent and to navigate the world.

Notes

- 1 Jacques Roubaud, *Ode à la ligne 29 des autobus parisiens* (Paris: Attila, 2013).
- 2 I use the term 'popular literature and culture' here not in the French sense ('littérature populaire', i.e. referring to the social origin of the cultural documents' producers) but rather to mean what might be called middlebrow literature and visual culture addressed to and consumed by a broad range and number of consumers.
- 3 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
- 4 In an excellent recent study, Anne Green similarly argues that the changing material world, including new forms of transport, shaped the literature of the time. My book expands on this idea with a focus on a different corpus and timeframe. See Anne Green, *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* (London: Anthem Press, 2011).

Introduction

- 5 Peter Soppelsa, 'The instrumentalisation of horses in nineteenth-century Paris', in Rob Boddice (ed.), *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). Soppelsa discusses what he calls the instrumentalisation of horses – 'transformation of horses into tools' (p. 246) – in the context of the nineteenth-century Parisian urban economy, in which the horse became a crucial 'powering machine' (p. 245).
- 6 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le peintre de la vie moderne', in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 335.
- 7 On rethinking the concept of modernity in relation to nineteenth-century France, see the following studies: David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Mary Gluck, *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Karen Bowie (ed.), *La Modernité avant Haussmann: formes de l'espace urbain à Paris, 1801–1853* (Paris: Editions Recherches, 2000). Much of this work builds upon, expands or contests Walter Benjamin's pioneering work on nineteenth-century Paris, modernity and the rise of consumer culture.
- 8 Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*, p. 62.
- 9 Sharon Marcus, 'Transparence de l'appartement parisien entre 1820 et 1848', in Bowie (ed.), *Modernité avant Haussmann*, pp. 397–8.
- 10 It is worth noting that the word 'omnibus' (designating the vehicle) was also a nineteenth-century neologism, so the idea of 'the new' was inscribed in the name itself.
- 11 On the connections between public entertainment and public transport in the 1830s, see Jennifer Terni, 'A genre for early mass culture: French vaudeville and the city, 1830–1848', *Theater Journal*, 58:2 (2006), 241–8.
- 12 Georg Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life', in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds), *The Blackwell City Reader* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 11–19.
- 13 Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 19.
- 14 I will analyse these texts and their features in greater detail in Chapter 1.
- 15 See in particular Nicholas Papayanis, *Paris before Haussmann* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) and David H. Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France 1840–1847* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). See also Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*.
- 16 Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus*, in *Histoire des treize* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1988), p. 79.
- 17 Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 35.
- 18 Louis Huart, 'Les voitures publiques', in *Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle*, vol. 4 (Paris: Madame Charles-Béchet, 1834–35), p. 164.
- 19 Huart, 'Les voitures publiques', pp. 161–2.
- 20 A reference to a French proverb: 'Paris est l'enfer des chevaux, le purgatoire des hommes et le paradis des femmes' (Paris is hell for the horses, purgatory for men and paradise for women).

Engine of modernity

- 21 Delphine de Girardin, *Chroniques parisiennes*, Jean-Louis Vissière (ed.) (Paris: Des femmes, 1986), pp. 110–11. Caps are in the original.
- 22 For an insightful reflection on the concept of speed in the nineteenth century and ways in which it shaped fiction, see David Bell, *Real Time: Accelerating Narrative from Balzac to Zola* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
- 23 Théophile Gautier, 'Préface', in Edouard Fournier, *Paris Démoli* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1883), p. v. Gautier's preface was added to the second edition published in 1855, a year after the initial publication in 1854.
- 24 Baudelaire, 'Le cygne', in *Ceuvres complètes*, pp. 98–100.
- 25 Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas, Paul de Musset *et al.*, *Paris et les Parisiens au XIXe siècle* (Morizot: Paris, 1856), p. ii.
- 26 Gautier *et al.*, *Paris et les Parisiens au XIXe siècle*, p. ii.
- 27 Behind these statements, there is also undoubtedly a desire to benefit financially from this trend. A city and a society in flux were certainly profitable for writers who wished to capture and explain contemporary life and to do so over and over again.
- 28 Gautier *et al.*, *Paris et les Parisiens au XIXe siècle*, p. ii.
- 29 Octave Uzanne, *La Locomotion à travers le temps, les mœurs et l'espace. Résumé pittoresque et anecdotique de l'histoire générale des moyens de transports terrestres et aériens* (Paris: Librairies Paul Ollendorf, 1900), p. x.
- 30 Anne Martin-Fugier provides an excellent explanation of the symbolic meaning of each of the four *quartiers* associated with different strata of high society (*le monde*): la Chaussée d'Antin, Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Faubourg Saint-Germain and le Marais. See *La Vie élégante, ou, la formation de Tout-Paris 1815–1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), pp. 100–12.
- 31 For a lively history of early transportation in Paris, see Joan Dejean, *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), especially chapter 6, 'City of speed and light: city services that transformed urban life', pp. 122–43.
- 32 In this section, I draw upon both nineteenth-century histories of public transport in Paris and contemporary scholarship. The following works have been particularly useful in drafting this overview of the history of the Parisian omnibus: Eugène d'Auriac, *Histoire anecdotique de l'industrie française* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861); Maxime Du Camp, 'Les voitures publiques dans les rues de Paris', in *Revue des deux mondes* (15 May 1867); René Bellu, *Les Autobus parisiens, des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Delville, 1979); Marc Gaillard, *Du Madeleine–Bastille à Météor: histoire des transports parisiens* (Amiens: Martelle, 1991); Marc Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens: de Blaise Pascal à nos jours* (Le Coteau: Horvath, 1987); Roger-Henri Guerrand, *Mœurs citadines. Histoire de la culture urbaine, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Edima, 1992); Nicholas Papayanis, *Horse-Drawn Cabs and Omnibuses in Paris: The Idea of Circulation and the Business of Public Transit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Henri Zuber, Sheila Hallsted-Baumert and Claude Berton (eds), *Guide des sources de l'histoire des transports publics urbains à Paris et en Ile-de-France XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998).
- 33 Gaillard, *Du Madeleine–Bastille à Météor*, p. 12.
- 34 Dejean, *How Paris Became Paris*, p. 127.

Introduction

- 35 Quoted in d'Auriac, *Histoire anecdotique de l'industrie française*, p. 250.
- 36 There seems to be no specific evidence as to when the *carrosses à cinq sols* ceased to exist. Dejean reports that the Duc de Roannez sold his stake in the company in 1691, but according to nineteenth-century historians, it appears that the service went out of fashion sometime after 1677. This is also the date cited by Gaillard. See Gaillard, *Du Madeleine-Bastille à Météor*, p. 10.
- 37 Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 77.
- 38 Papayanis, *Horse-Drawn Cabs*, p. 58.
- 39 Du Camp, 'Les voitures publiques', 342.
- 40 Bellu, *Les Autobus parisiens*, p. 11. This inconvenience led to the creation of the tramway service in 1854. The tramway, shaped like an omnibus and also horse-drawn, ran on rails. However, the tramway service did not gain in popularity until the 1870s.
- 41 *Almanach des Omnibus, des Dames blanches et autres voitures nouvellement établies . . .* (Paris: Lenormant fils, 1829) provides further details about the pricing: for *cabriolets*, for example, the cost per trip between 6 a.m. and 12 a.m. was 1 franc 25; at other times, the first hour was 1 franc 75, and the second hour and following 1 franc 50.
- 42 Guerrand, *Mœurs citadines*, p. 120; Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens*, p. 18.
- 43 Robert Hénard, 'Les Omnibus', in *Magasin Pittoresque* (January 1898), 348.
- 44 I thank Hugh MacDonald for bringing Alkan's work to my attention. Charles-Valentin Alkan, 'Les Omnibus', variation for piano in C major (Paris: M. Schlesinger, 1828). Alkan (1813–88) was a child prodigy who became one of the greatest virtuoso pianists of the 1830s and 1840s. During this period, Alkan belonged to the same artistic circles as Franz Liszt, Frederic Chopin, George Sand and Victor Hugo. Despite his early fame, he withdrew from public life after 1850 and spent the rest of his life in relative obscurity. www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Alkan-Charles.htm, accessed 9 June 2017.
- 45 Papayanis, *Horse-Drawn Cabs*, pp. 65–7; Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens*, p. 18.
- 46 In the seventeenth century, the word *impériale* designated the top of a carriage, perhaps because the ornate roof evoked the imperial crown. In the nineteenth century, the word designated by analogy the upper deck of a public vehicle.
- 47 The introduction of the *impériale* in 1856 coincided almost exactly with the fashion craze for very large hoop skirts. Such skirts made riding in a public conveyance extremely cumbersome, and they certainly made it impossible for women wearing crinolines to negotiate the narrow winding ladder leading to the upper deck. For more on crinoline-wearing female passengers, see Chapter 4.
- 48 It was apparently due to the pressures of fierce competition and floundering business that Baudry committed suicide in 1830 by shooting himself in the head in front of his stables (Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens*, p. 18).
- 49 Papayanis, *Horse-Drawn Cabs*, p. 63.
- 50 Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens*, p. 22.
- 51 Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, pp. 113–15.

Engine of modernity

- 52 Gaillard, *Histoire des transports parisiens*, p. 43.
- 53 For newspaper accounts of these disputes, see the uncatalogued press clippings found in the department of 'documents éphémères' at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.
- 54 The CGO developed an interest in autobuses (*omnibus automobiles*) from 1905. The first steam prototype vehicle was put in service in July 1905 on the Montmartre–St Germain line, and then in December of the same year, on the occasion of the Salon de l'Automobile, the CGO put in place a regular autobus service consisting of nine vehicles. For a complete history of the bus service in Paris, see Bellu, *Les Autobus parisiens*; on the first autobuses, see pp. 13–33.
- 55 'Il n'y a plus d'Omnibus à Paris' (12 January 1913).
- 56 *La Presse* (12 January 1913).
- 57 André Lang, 'L'omnibus se meurt! L'omnibus est mort!'
- 58 For a brief analysis of the omnibus 'funeral', see Peter Soppelsa, 'The end of horse transportation in Belle-Époque Paris', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 24:1 (2017), 113–29.
- 59 In considering different types of discourse together, I follow in the footsteps of scholars such as Priscilla Ferguson, Christopher Prendergast and Sharon Marcus, whose pioneering work on nineteenth-century Paris and its cultural production changed the way we approach representations and meaning of urban spaces. See Ferguson's seminal *Paris as Revolution*, Christopher Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) and Sharon Marcus's *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
- 60 My book is in dialogue with a growing scholarship on literary representations of different forms of transport in modern British literature, including a recent volume edited by A. Gavin and A. Humphries, *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840–1940* (London: Palgrave, 2015), and Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
- 61 Margaret Cohen, 'Panoramic literature and the invention of everyday genres', in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 228.