Introduction

How did the novel come to be entangled with large-scale public infrastructure in nineteenth-century Britain? Sixteen years after the first purpose-built passenger railway opened in 1830, an anonymous writer for *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* pondered the formal compatibility of railways and fiction. 'One half of the romantic stories of the country are more or less connected with stage-coach travelling', the author muses, 'but the railway, with its formal lines and prosaic punctuality, appears to be almost entirely given up to business'.[1] By claiming (however hyperbolically) that 'one half' of 'romantic' stories in the 1840s work through stagecoach infrastructure, this author puts the untapped potential of railway travel under the spotlight. Yet the exact proportion of fictional references to popular transport is less important than public perception of plotlines and travel as closely intertwined modes. There was an inevitability about novelists exploring the possibilities of passenger railways in fiction. The *Chambers's* author optimistically looks forward to such a point in the future: 'by and by, when our ideas get time to adapt themselves into the hurry-skurry of the rail, adventures, we have no doubt, will be picked up at every station, and denouements found at every terminus'.[2] Yet the creative entanglement of railway infrastructure and fiction involved more than a waiting game for 'ideas . . . to adapt themselves'. And on the page and in practice, railways are more than 'modes of getting along', vehicles for adventures, or platforms for staging denouements. As public-facing industrial systems, enlivened by public use, they developed in multifaceted ways with long-standing implications for literary culture. Redeveloping novel form in the railway age was an imaginatively ambitious and demanding project.

Railway Infrastructure and the Victorian Novel investigates how novels adopted, adapted, and redirected railway infrastructure as it developed during the steam age. From the 'dire disorder' of the 'unfinished and unopened railroad' in Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), to

residents' concern that the railways were 'going to cut Lowick parish into sixes and sevens' 'in the absence of any precise idea as to what railways were' in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872): many of the most memorable railway episodes in nineteenth-century novels were more concerned with infrastructure than locomotion.[3] Why, then, do canonical authors including Dickens, Gaskell, Trollope, Eliot, Hardy, and Forster go to such lengths to incorporate detailed depictions of trackside space into their works? Finding formal synthesis between railway and novel infrastructure required imaginative labour, and an understanding of common ground between fictional and technological logistics. Indeed, as I trace through the early chapters of this book, it took time and public engagement for the social infrastructure of railways to take root. In 1849, Thomas De Quincey complained that 'the crowds attending at a railway station have as little unity as running water, and own as many centres as there are separate carriages in the train'.[4] While coherence and predictability may have been an ambition for track-bound activity, public-facing elements of railway infrastructure were collaboratively negotiated. Fictional invocations of railway space, I suggest, became gradually imbricated into railway construction and operation as the nineteenth century wore on. Beyond deepening parallels between railways and narrative, throughout this book I uncover how print infrastructure – production and circulation, periodical publication timetables, public discussions concerning plotlines, and terminus bookstalls – entered into a feedback loop with novel form. Literature shaped public infrastructure, which in turn shaped the way stories could be told.

Many of the authors featured here share an interest in the railways beyond that of an occasional traveller. Dickens's recovery from a railway accident at Staplehurst in 1865, during which he 'worked for hours among the dying and the dead' has been well documented, as has Anthony Trollope's Post Office work, particularly to expedite mail in Ireland via railways.[5] George Eliot's investments in domestic and international railway infrastructure are central to Nancy Henry's incisive analyses of the author's significance.[6] Thomas Hardy was an apprentice architect between 1866 and 1867, tasked with removing human remains from St Pancras Old Church to clear the way for a railway line.[7] Each of these trackside encounters exposes dimensions of the railwayscape that cannot be perceived while journeying, and each of the authors studied here imaginatively employs such perspectives in fiction.

In my pursuit of the ways in which formal aspects of railway infrastructure become integrated into and eventually shape novel infrastructure, I am

more interested in the habitual than the exceptional in print and railway culture. With the exception of E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, each of the novels examined here was first released serially, whether in self-standing parts or within a periodical magazine. It would be an overstatement to say that the nineteenth-century periodical press parallels railway infrastructure directly, but they do share some key similarities. Each channels different kinds of information – factual or imaginative – through largely predetermined infrastructural routes and each engages an ever-shifting public. Incidental readers would be more likely to depend on signposts within a magazine when perusing an issue than those already well adjusted to the rhythm and tone of a particular title.[8] Such textual orientation corresponds to the relative competence of frequent passengers compared with those making a one-off journey on a particular stretch of railway line. In both instances indexes and timetables might both aid and confuse navigation, though it is much easier to correct one's course in a periodical than when lost on the railways. Serial titles were published at timetabled intervals, though, as with the railways, the release of a new issue did not always correspond to the advertised time.[9] For Mark W. Turner, the 'periodicalness of periodicals' produces 'distinct and overlapping temporalities in print media [that] suggest and construct different socio-cultural understandings about time'.[10] Regular periodicity, like a regular train timetable, was a fiction that took work to sustain, and public expectations that a new instalment of a magazine would arrive on time contributed to editors working to ensure its timely release. Railway infrastructures in serialised fiction might introduce even further temporal confusion, even amidst the depiction of apparently standardised time. On the railways and in print culture, adhering as closely as possible to prescribed standards depended on collaboration though quite complex 'live' networks, and standardised operations were often precariously maintained.

Increasing popularity of multiplot fiction by the mid century, and the consequent restriction of plotlines in later works, mirrors the railway mania of the 1840s and more modest expansion in later years. Whereas Dickens produced lengthy multivolume works including *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield* around the mid century, and Trollope carried his characters through multigenerational series, by the 1880s, Hardy distilled the novel into something less universalising. Peter K. Garrett's argues that 'by elaborating and refusing to resolve . . . incompatible meanings, multiplot novels . . . come to "mean" themselves, to present not a direct vision of the world but a dramatization of the process and problems of making sense of it'.[11] Self-referentiality aside, this emphasis

on 'process and problems' resonates with systemic aspects of railway infrastructure under consideration here. A single narrative line might tell us a little about how intricate novel mechanisms can become, but in running several concurrent plotlines, multiplot novels provide insight into the capacity of the form. Multiplot novels and railway networks are complex systems, and both, I suggest, can be better understood by exploring the relationship between the two. Different genres put new technologies to different creative uses, and particularly rich scholarship has explored the relationship between railways and sensation fiction on the premise that such travel opened up a new sensorium that complemented the thrilling pace of sensation plots.[12]

To read infrastructurally is to interrogate the imaginative groundwork that underpins the macro and micro machinations of fiction through the steam age. My ambition throughout this book is therefore to move beyond direct thematic connections, and to show how thoroughly infrastructures of the railways shaped the Victorian and Edwardian literary imagination.[13] *Railway Infrastructure and the Victorian Novel* therefore explores fiction concerned with the machinations of daily life in a railway age, whether this concern is directed towards industrial, social, or political circumstances. This means straying beyond novels plotted directly around railway space, or works where the railway looms large in even figurative terms. For that reason, I set aside works where track-bound mobility serves as a central conceit in a fantastical narrative that is in all other respects set far from the thoroughfares of nineteenth-century life. To cover sufficient ground in understanding novel infrastructure, I also set aside a rich corpus of poetry, except to evaluate the structural impact of their reverberation through long-form fiction as the century wore on. Works excluded on these bases are James Anthony Froude's allegory, 'A Siding at a Railway Station' (1879), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad* (1846), and Samuel Butler's dystopian fantasy, *Erewhon: Or, Over the Range* (1872). In their plodding regularity, novels such as Anthony Trollope's Palliser series are far more fitting for this study of infrastructure than the jolts and starts of sensation fiction and what Matthew Beaumont has described as 'railway phantasmagoria'.[14] One exception to this approach, is my inclusion of Dickens's co-authored 'Mugby Junction' (1866) for its entanglement with questions of multiplot logistics both in terms of distinct yet notionally intersecting plotlines, and the conversion and diversion of different authorial styles. As Jonathan Grossman notes in *Charles Dickens's Networks*, 'narratological complexities' brought into focus through passenger transit invite logistical attention to the multiplot temporality of 'meantime'.[15]

I approach multiplot slightly differently to Grossman here, exploring it in terms of system management, rather than converging individual itineraries, and adopt a wide critical lens to understand how and why apparently 'fixed' conventional plots change over time.[16] For this reason, I have also included infrastructural analyses of works that are relatively fleeting in their attention to railway engineering, but intensely engaged with structural change in how stories can be told. What can we learn from George Eliot's shaking up of novel infrastructure in *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, about the adaptability of seemingly fixed trackways for characters in realist novels? If multiple railway lines provide a greater range of connectivity, and produce greater revenue than a single track, then what is to be gained by dispersing a story across different narrative strands? Why, in a system that enables mass mobility, should certain plotlines matter more than others and what alerts us to their status? What does narrative concurrency offer that concentration cannot?

Through nineteenth-century literature, and subsequent scholarship, railway infrastructure has come to serve as a critical touchstone for understanding the mechanisms of novel form. Fredric Jameson adopts railway terminology in *Antinomies of Realism* when he argues that there are: 'two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in storytelling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect. A new concept of realism is then made available when we grasp both these terminal points firmly at one and the same time'.[17] Jameson's initial distancing of storytelling and representation of affect oversimplifies literary development, but his imaginative framework does highlight the imbrication of infrastructure into critical theory. He mixes metaphors and short-circuits a linear, end-to-end conceptualisation of realism that corresponds to the railway when he invites us to critically 'grasp both these [now electrical] terminal points' at once. For Jameson, exposing the infrastructural mechanisms that conceptually underpin literary production makes new creative critical responses to form possible. Novel infrastructure might be understood with reference to components both internal and external to each novel, including plot and multiplot, narrative trajectory, and setting from within; and serialisation, print culture, and circulation from without.

Before the mid century, the shape of Britain's merging and emerging railway networks remained to be seen. In practical terms, the tracks had to be imagined, drawn up, and constructed before the railways could carry any traffic. Similarly, to integrate a new mode of transport in literature, writers would need to be reasonably certain that readers would recognise some of that system's processes, and that their own grasp was secure. Technical details of

these infrastructures could be lost in transit from the physical to the figurative, resulting in, for example Tennyson's famous misconception of the iron railway lines as the 'ringing grooves of change'.[18] Yet such imprecision remains powerful in affective terms, conveying that, for Tennyson, the soundscape was more fascinating than physical specifications. On the other hand, constructing social elements of such infrastructure was in part a textual enterprise. Detailed descriptions appeared in railway guides and journalism, preparing new travellers for the formalities of railway travel, and these could circulate well beyond the physical limits of any given line. For example, news of an engineer's death on the 1830 opening of the Manchester and Liverpool line travelled much further than the tracks themselves.[19] Fictional and journalistic accounts could frame public perception, and a traveller undertaking a railway journey for the first time might do so with an already-mediated, varyingly accurate notion of what to anticipate on arrival at the station. My object in separating infrastructure from moving trains in this book is to demonstrate how seemingly fixed components framed nineteenth-century experiences of and responses to locomotive mobility. Each of the railway structures that I interrogate here is a recognisable part of public-facing operations, rather than behind-the-scenes arrangements. From new to established termini, each structure helps shape the railway imaginary – a shared set of cultural associations and metaphors opened up by this transport mode – both in and beyond the nineteenth century. Speculation about the consequences of railway development also serves as a historicising touchstone in fictional representations of life in the 1830s and 1840s. Benjamin Disraeli dramatises such emphasis on historicism in *Sybil* (1845), with one character declaring that 'the railway will do as much for mankind as monasteries ever did'.[20] Railway architecture left diverse impressions, particularly among those preoccupied with the moral implications of public aesthetics. Stations, which for John Ruskin represent 'the very temple of discomfort' in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, were to be lauded by Théophile Gautier as 'cathedrals of new humanity . . . the meeting points of nations'.[21] Not one of these poignant reflections features a moving train but each enriches our understanding of how a sense of the railway imaginary developed in the nineteenth century. Railway stations share traits with seaports, customs houses, and post offices, but in their merging of public and industrial space, mobility and fixity, stations quickly develop into architectural genre in their own right in the mid nineteenth century, whose closest parallel, I suggest, could be found in realist fiction.

Realist novels often put stations, lines, and junctions to uses only obliquely related to travel. Whether directly or indirectly, the literary works I explore here offer sustained engagement with railway infrastructure.

Such works can provide a much richer sense of the relationship between railways and culture than pithy but relatively isolated observations made by Tennyson and Ruskin. Imaginative representations of railways provide a starting point for this investigation, but my main concern is how novels think *through* and theorise railway infrastructures. Do the social and procedural dynamics of waiting rooms, ticketing systems, interim stations, and junctions open up new affective dimensions in literature? Are any fictional processes inhibited by railway infrastructure? Do railway infrastructures in fiction enhance or restrict the kinds of stories that can be told? How attentive are writers to the specifics of railway infrastructure, and why? To address any of these questions we need to look at depictions of operational railways in literature: systems that carry passengers *and* plots, raise logistical dilemmas, and persist throughout the novel.

Scaling an Infrastructure

In the 1840s, railway construction across Britain was piecemeal. Industrial non-locomotive railways had operated for some time in mines and timber mills, but these had little widespread impact on the way that people moved and met in daily life.[22] Prior to passenger railways, stage and mail coaches formed the main modes of public transport within Britain, complemented by urban omnibuses, river ferries, and, to a lesser extent, canals. Many of these continued to operate in practice and in the public imagination throughout the railway age, as Ruth Livesey has stressed.[23] Indeed, in the nineteenth century, as today, a single journey could often involve a range of different modes of mobility: a traveller might walk a short distance before taking a horse-drawn hackney cab to the station, join a train to another town, then board a mail coach onwards to a destination beyond the railway's reach. My investigation of relatively fixed railway components – the trackside, station buildings, and junctions – therefore entangles my discussion with parallel and competing infrastructures as passengers and goods transferred from one mode of movement to another. On the other hand, there was much to distinguish railway culture from other transport logistics systems. The permanent way built to facilitate locomotive travel obstructed horse-drawn traffic: it could impede long-established lines of communication even as it expedited others. In my emphasis throughout this book on trackside perspectives, I explore how writers harness tension between connectivity and controlled access when staging a scene just off the rails.

Despite prevailing associations between railways and industrial rationality, the railways were far from homogeneous. Since I investigate imaginary engagement with an emergent technology, I bring 'the railway' as a concept into dialogue with the mosaic of systems built during the period. Lines erected by different companies were designed to different specifications, so there was no guarantee that different networks would be mutually compatible. For example, it was a matter of contention that Great Western Railway ran on a wider gauge than other networks operating throughout Britain, meaning that traffic from other networks could not use these lines as through routes.[24] This difference in gauge is perhaps the most prominent example, but throughout Britain micro-incompatibilities between different companies and diverging interests prevented disparate lines from merging into something resembling a national network. Established in 1842, the Railway Clearing House sought to counter this. This organisation undertook the logistically gruelling task of encouraging different railway companies in Britain to begin to work together.[25] The Clearing House brokered a series of reciprocal arrangements between companies operating lines in similar areas to better facilitate through traffic. By doing so, they began to unpick operational monopolies on particular routes that undermined the railway's physically connective capacity. Gradually improved (if somewhat forced) cooperation between companies simplified journeys for passengers. Thanks to the Clearing House, passengers stopped having to buy multiple tickets for routes that ran on tracks belonging to more than one company.[26] While the Clearing House's formation may not have nationalised the railways, it did help the travelling public begin to perceive the railways as a continuous system. I begin this study with Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), which was published just as the Clearing House's efforts took effect and contemplates how far the new technology uprooted other modes of social connection. As the century progressed, the sense grew that one could join the railways at any station and travel to any other node on a national grid. The railway was not a continuous network but imaginatively it was often treated as such.

The physical extent and imagined potential of Britain's railway networks inform this book's geographic scope. Although railways could physically link distant Scottish villages with civic and industrial centres, they did so unevenly, converging around large cities like London and Manchester, and embedding particular routes between ports including Liverpool, Glasgow, and Bristol and industrial hubs. The novels I examine in *Railway Infrastructure and the Victorian Novel* provide similarly uneven access to Britain's topographies, and as a result urban and

suburban space feature much more prominently than rural localities. While Ireland was part of the United Kingdom during the nineteenth century, Irish railways do not form part of this study, since they did not physically link up with the networks that ran between disparate localities in mainland Britain. This was not for want of trying. Ambitious work on a line from Chester to Holyhead began in earnest as a strategic measure to reinforce the Act of Union that had passed at beginning of the nineteenth century by securing routes to and through Wales.[27] From Holyhead, passengers could cross the Irish Sea by ferry and continue to Dublin. And the engineering principles that shaped railways could travel much further than the physical lines, with British engineers and logisticians contributing to Irish railway construction and the development of lines in Continental Europe.[28]

British railway investment of the period also extended to imperially driven projects overseas. The ideological and social impacts of such ventures are best understood through a culturally specific critical lens. Marian Aguiar makes a persuasive case for such practice in her monograph on India's railways when she argues that 'the rhetoric of colonial modernity depended on stasis' and points out that Michel de Certeau's conceptualisation of the railway carriage as a 'rational utopia' cannot be reconciled with colonial railway practice.[29] While such railways in practice fall beyond the scope of *Railway Infrastructure and the Victorian Novel*, I do examine how British print culture framed such projects within imperialist discourse as a means of defining the imaginative extent of British railway infrastructure. Within Europe, geography inhibited the physical expansion of British railways; on an island the tracks could only stretch so far. Yet ambitious engineers sought to overcome this in the late nineteenth century by developing plans to connect Britain and France through a Channel Tunnel. If built, such a link would physically connect French and British railway infrastructure and blur distinctions between different systems built out of quite different ideologies. However visionary, such projects could be curbed by questions of compatibility, and I investigate literary and artistic perspectives on British and French railway lines to understand how nationally determined imagined railway infrastructure could be.

Railway Paratexts

Novels represent and think through aspects of railway infrastructure that are difficult to articulate in short-form media, but they were and are also textually

entangled with printed and written matter that supported railway operations. Tickets, timetables, printed guides, and luggage labels all circulated with and contributed to the circulation of traffic. Companies produced printed regulations, gathered logbooks of activity on the lines, and kept minutes of planned developments.[30] Workers' associations circulated material of their own on professional standards, temperance unions, and educational pursuits.[31] Posters, trade cards, and printed advertisements sought to monopolise passengers' containment in railway space by vying for their attention.[32] Railway and literary commerce were entangled further in the form of station bookshops, with the best known of these, W. H. Smith, selling newspapers, popular fiction, pamphlets, and other literary works from 1848 onwards.[33] Since my focus throughout *Railway Infrastructure and the Victorian Novel* is the entanglement of railway and novel form, I interrogate railway paratexts that convey a sense of narrative, including maps, timetables, and illustrations. Cartographers struggled to produce maps that suited railway companies' needs. Philip S. Bagwell documents this in his account of the Railway Clearing House's selection between a *Bradshaw's* 'skeleton map' (that only offered distances for the most direct route), and a 'highly satisfactory' offering from clerk, Zachary Macaulay (that was too expensive to print in bulk).[34] Producing such maps was a process of trial and error, and one complicated by the formal limits of cartography. Junction diagrams produced by John Airey for the Railway Clearing House shed light on the operational control of particular nodes in Britain's entangled railways, and I weave these into my analysis of fiction by Gaskell, Dickens, and Trollope in Chapters 2 and 3. Timetables, meanwhile, both describe and dictate activity on the railway networks, forming their own kind of fiction, and putting pressure on characters' movements through each of the novels examined throughout this book.

In many ways, timetables pose the opposite challenge to maps; columns of destinations and times bear very little resemblance to corresponding routes and suppress mediating distance or topography. Charles Dickens satirises the disorientating experience of using a *Bradshaw's* timetable in an 1851 story for *Household Words*. He depicts the travelling Mr Lost's confusion when confronted with the sole information in a railway guide pertaining to his chosen destination:

> They encountered the following mysterious characters:
> WARE TU 6
> No farther information could be obtained.[35]

No amount of further scrutiny can wrestle 'farther' meaning from the timetable; these hieroglyphs can only be understood with reference to