Transports of Delight: Pastoral, Nostalgia and Railway Travel in Post-WWII Genre Fiction

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Abstract

In the mid-twentieth century, Britain's railways underwent a range of significant developments. A transport network that, in many ways, had not changed substantially since the Edwardian period, was transformed by events such as widespread route closures, a diesel revolution, and the growing popularity of private motoring. This paper aims to examine how the significance of railways in British literature of this period changed as a result, with particular focus upon two areas of genre fiction: crime and detective fiction, and children's literature. I am particularly concerned with the ideals of heritage and preservation which emerged in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and how these encouraged the presentation of railways in a more sentimental light than had previously been seen. Most importantly, the paper examines in depth the genre fiction of the mid-twentieth century, seeking to identify the ways in which the work of authors such as Agatha Christie, Enid Blyton, and the Reverend Wilbert Awdry displays a continuity with, and nostalgia for, the interwar and Edwardian periods.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

In Agatha Christie's *The ABC Murders* (1936), Hercule Poirot is called upon to investigate a series of baffling murders. Each corpse is discovered with a copy of the ABC railway guide placed beside it, and this motif provides Poirot with a vital clue to the psychology of the criminal: "The choice of the A B C suggested to me what I may call a *railway-minded man*." (Christie, *ABC Murders* 177) Poirot asserts that this is a typically masculine trait, remarking that "[s]mall boys love trains better than small girls do." (177) These remarks are suggestive of a culture which perceived a fascination with railways as being typical, perhaps even natural, especially in the young. This was to change in the decades following the Second World War, however. For instance, David Kynaston quotes from a 1960 edition of the topical discussion programme *Any Questions?*: "What was the best future for British Railways? 'People are just not any longer railway-minded. They're just put upon, and upset, and the sooner we get rid of them the better.'" (Kynaston, *Modernity Britain* 478) This perception of Britain's railways as being in a state of irrevocable decline transformed the position they held within popular culture. In particular, the Edwardian era, which witnessed a peak in the railways' dominance, came to be regarded as a nostalgic ideal: an ideal powerfully evoked by seminal texts such as E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906), to which Poirot himself refers in *The ABC Murders*.

It is possible to trace the changing condition of Britain's railways through their representation in genre fiction, for, as Jeffrey Richards and John M. Mackenzie observe, "it has been popular culture rather than serious literature which has most enthusiastically taken up the railways" (Richards and Mackenzie 343). What is especially noteworthy, however, is the tendency for popular culture to make use of railways in ways which speak to a particular zeitgeist. This is clearly demonstrated by children's literature, which Michael Freeman identifies as being "quick to encompass the technology of the railway, using its example to teach the alphabet and as a means of addressing the altered perceptions that railway travel invited" (Freeman 23). Similarly, crime fiction of the interwar period is replete with depictions of luxury travel on land, sea and in the air, suggesting the fascination with prestige travel and technological prowess which recurs throughout literature of this period; indeed, Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig have observed that "[f]or many young people sport and speed were the keynote of the early 1930s." (Cadogan and Craig, *You're a Brick* 264) Closely attuned to this atmosphere of "sport and speed" is Agatha Christie, who evokes a beguiling ideal of travel in detective novels such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). Contrasting with such

evocations of glamour, however, is the far more prosaic reality of the challenges being faced by Britain's railways, which, as David Trotter notes, were striving to "convince potential customers that trains were not only faster than automobiles, and more direct, but also safer, and more comfortable." (Trotter 221) These trends continued after the Second World War, with an explosion in private motoring ensuring that the passion for railways displayed by children's literature and crime fiction appeared increasingly outdated.

In particular, the profound fascination with railways shown by *The Railway Children* is all the more striking in that this novel belongs to the last period in which railways truly dominated Britain's transport ensemble. This is made clear by Derek H. Aldcroft's analysis of the economic challenges faced by Britain's railways, in which Aldcroft remarks that "[t]he First World War marked a turning-point in the fortunes of Britain's railways. Until then the railways retained a near monopoly of inland transport" (Aldcroft 27). Following the First World War, Britain's railways were transformed by the Railways Act of 1921, which has been described by Michael R. Bonavia as "a compromise measure, falling short of the full unification and nationalisation which had been contemplated" (Bonavia 1). Under the terms of the Act, the railways were consolidated into four private companies: the Great Western Railway (GWR); the London, Midland and Scottish (LMS); the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER); and the Southern Railway (SR). The challenges faced by each of the four companies were acute. A point of particular concern lay in increasing competition from road transport; as Bonavia puts it, "the point is sometimes made that the railways seriously underestimated the extent of future competition from the private car." (Bonavia 53) Whereas Edwardian novels such as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) had figured the car as a novelty and a plaything of wealthy Edwardians, the interwar period was one in which road transport increasingly challenged the dominance of the railways.

These criticisms are supported by Sean O'Connell's examination of the growth of private motoring: "An elite activity in Edwardian Britain, car use by 1939 extended to approximately one in five families." (O'Connell 11) O'Connell calls our attention to the unique properties of the car: it "gave its owners a degree of independence", as well as "mobility and speed", and "[t]hese attributes of the car dovetailed neatly with the values of middle-class society" (79). Hence, the car served as a potent symbol of the values and aspirations of "middle-class society" in a way which the train could not. This contributed to the difficulties faced by the railways throughout the interwar period, which Aldcroft summarises as "a situation of

declining profitability". (Aldcroft 27) Consequently, the Second World War served to virtually exhaust an already strained railway network, and Aldcroft remarks that "[p]olitically it was fairly generally agreed that the railways were in a badly run-down condition at the end of the war and that they required a radical overhaul." (105) This "radical overhaul" was to be delivered through the complete nationalisation of the railways, which were to be overseen by the newly created British Transport Commission (BTC). Kynaston observes that "the arguments [in favour of nationalisation] seemed unanswerable", with "the examples of major, palpably enfeebled industries like coal mining and the railways as clear proof that private enterprise had failed" (Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* 14). It is therefore apparent that the symbolic associations of railways had shifted considerably. By the end of the Second World War, they were chiefly associated not with speed or industrial superiority, but with decline and neglect.

These connotations are particularly significant in that fictional representations of railways often reflect something of the national character – or, perhaps more accurately, how the nation wishes itself to be perceived. Antonia Lant's observation makes this clear:

> In terms of the cinema, the train was one of realism's most powerful icons, established with 1930s documentary filmmaking, particularly through *Night Mail*, and rife with connotations of working-class male labor, industrialization, and specifically British invention. (Lant 193)

Certainly, the 1936 documentary film *Night Mail* showcases the potential of railways to serve as a symbol of "specifically British" industrial power, with Scott Anthony's remark that "[t]he workers are portrayed as the nation's nervous system" making apparent the possibility that railways might be used as a device with which to communicate a particular conception of the nation (Anthony 21). It is all the more significant, then, that by the mid-twentieth century, Britain's railways were seen as conveying an unfavourable impression of the nation's standing. A particularly striking example of such criticism is found in a speech given by Hugh Dalton, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in December 1947: "This railway system of ours is a very poor bag of assets. […] The railways are a disgrace to the country." (qtd. in Haresnape 46) Similar claims were to recur throughout the 1950s, and Geoffrey Dudley and Jeremy Richardson have observed that the slow pace of modernisation was a cause for concern: "By 1954, the BTC was sure that Britain was falling well behind other countries in the development of diesel and electric services and the continued reliance on steam." (Dudley and Richardson

38) Thus, behind many criticisms of Britain's railways lay nationalistic anxieties centred on a belief that the nation was seen to be falling behind other countries.

Emerging from these criticisms is a sense that nationalisation did little to resolve the challenges faced by a superannuated railway network which had not changed substantially since its Edwardian heyday. Aldcroft calls our attention to this stasis, remarking that "despite the antiquated nature of the railway system after the war the Commission made little attempt to draw up long-term plans for modernizing it until well into the 1950s." (Aldcroft 152) This lends weight to Ian M. Carter's claim: "Britain's railways were nationalised in 1947, but their Victorian machine ensemble survived remarkably intact. The 1955 Modernisation Plan changed that." (Carter, *British railway enthusiasm* 113) Hence, it is clear that the British railway network of the late 1940s and early 1950s had much in common with that of the late Victorian or Edwardian period. In fact, it may be argued that this sense of continuity encouraged a sentimental view of this "Victorian machine ensemble", as well as the individualistic traditions fostered and maintained by the private railway companies. The longevity of these traditions lent them a reassuring sense of familiarity, which was disrupted by the rapid onset of modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Inaugurating that process was the BTC's Modernisation Plan. Kynaston notes that "the strategy made obvious sense, whatever the undoubted widespread emotional attachment to steam," and that "[p]ress reaction was generally positive, if somewhat sceptical of the ability of the ossified BTC to deliver change." (Kynaston, *Family Britain* 442). Seen here is a conflict that would influence representations of railways in popular culture: the tension between the widely-recognised need for change, and a popular "emotional attachment" to an older image of transport.

A growing belief that railways no longer offered the answer to Britain's transport needs contributed to this tension, as evidenced by Dudley and Richardson's observation that the unveiling of the Modernisation Plan "coincided with the government's commitment in February 1955 to commence construction of a motorway network and spend more on roads generally." (Dudley and Richardson 39) Such a commitment is significant in that it reveals not only the emergence of a "lighter and more optimistic public mood", as Dudley and Richardson put it, but also that the road lobby would reap the rewards of this expansionist attitude while the railways took on "the 'image' of a transport mode whose halcyon days lay in the past." (39) Consequently, there emerged a tendency to regard the "halcyon days" of the railway – often envisioned in terms of the late Victorian or Edwardian eras, when the railways' dominance was

at its most complete – with nostalgic fondness. This nostalgia was further fuelled by the rapidity with which modernisation transformed Britain's railways, and this, in itself, speaks to a prior failure to acknowledge the need for change. Kynaston, for instance, calls our attention to the underlying issue of "crippling underinvestment, […] reflecting the failure of politicians and mandarins to face up to the need for an extensive modernisation programme." (Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* 461) Although the Modernisation Plan represented an attempt to implement such a programme, it did not meet with success; indeed, Aldcroft describes it as being "hastily conceived and ill-thought out" (Aldcroft 155). As such, these faltering and long-overdue attempts at railway modernisation could do little to discourage those who framed Britain's railways in terms of decline. Rather than envisaging a future in which such attempts were successful, popular culture typically looked backward, eulogising the ideals associated with private ownership.

Contributing to the widespread perception of decline was the fact that the car served as a status symbol in a way which could not be rivalled by railways. Dudley and Richardson emphasise this contrast: "For millions of people, therefore, buying a car was commensurate with casting aside the 'second class status' of a public transport user." (Dudley and Richardson 48) In the late 1950s, as Kynaston makes clear, such consumerist attitudes were counterpointed by concerns surrounding "the underlying relative health of economy" and a popular sense of "post-Suez decline", of which the railways could be seen as symbolic: "It was not difficult to find symbols of decline, but arguably the creaking railway system was as resonant as anything." (Kynaston, *Modernity Britain* 405-406) The following decade would see far more radical efforts to resolve the problems of a "creaking railway system". Among the changes implemented from 1960 onwards was the abolition of the British Transport Commission in 1962; the railways would instead be overseen by the British Railways Board, whose first chairman was Dr Richard Beeching. Beeching was tasked by Ernest Marples – the Conservative Minister for Transport from 1959 to 1964 – with the streamlining of services, and this led to the publication of the two-part report, *The Reshaping of British Railways* (1963). This report proved highly controversial; public discourse concerning Britain's railways throughout the 1960s would be dominated by the widespread closures for which the report called.

Beeching recommended these closures with the intention of transforming Britain's railways into a profitable concern. However, Dudley and Richardson contend that, while the

Beeching report "was intended as a highly 'rational' plan," the "policy of mass closures instilled in the public imagination the 'image' […] of the railways themselves as an old and dying industry withering away" (Dudley and Richardson 32). In this way, the closures appeared to confirm an existing impression of the network as being in a state of perpetual decline, and so further encouraged nostalgia for an imagined heyday of the railway. Writing in 1963, for example, Clifford Sharp identified some criticisms of Beeching's strategy: "There are many […] who believe that even this is going too far, and who would, presumably, like to see the railways preserved in all the glory of their Victorian abundance." (Sharp 180) A nostalgic yearning for this ideal of "Victorian abundance" was also encouraged by the decline of steam, which had been a constant of the British railway scene for decades. The replacement of steam by diesel and electric traction was well underway by the early 1960s, and had been completed by August 1968. This rapid transition prompted a strong emotive reaction, described by Neil Cossons as "a wave of nostalgia quite without precedent." (Cossons 129) Given that numerous texts had responded strongly to the steam locomotive – one of the most immediate visual symbols of industrialisation, as well as a potent source of visual and auditory spectacle – it is inevitable that this particular "nostalgia" should also have manifested itself in popular culture.

On the whole, then, it can be seen that the face of Britain's railways changed dramatically throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The difficulties which were apparent during the interwar period were exacerbated by the pressures of the Second World War, and, by the mid-twentieth century, it was a popular convention that Britain's railways were not only in a state of decline, but also reflecting poorly upon the nation's character. This contrasts sharply with the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, during which the railways most completely dominated Britain's transport scene. More importantly, the events of the 1950s and 1960s – from hasty modernisation and mass closures to mounting deficits – served to encourage yearning for a nostalgic ideal: an imagined era when the railways were prouder and more reliable. Summarising this phenomenon is Carter's remark that "[f]or eighty years British railway history has been a story of decline, of contraction at a slower or faster rate. […] The dominant tone has become elegiac." (Carter, *Railways and culture* 17) This sense of "decline" and "contraction" contrasts sharply with the symbolic associations of railways in earlier periods; *Night Mail*, for instance, showcases how railways might serve as a symbol of modernity and expansionism, of an advanced technology strengthening a nation by bringing its inhabitants closer together. Superseding such messaging is the "story of decline" which has been told and retold in British popular culture, with several texts of the mid-twentieth century reflecting an

increasingly nostalgic perception of railways. More specifically, such feeling tends to manifest itself as part of a wider nostalgia for the Edwardian period: a perhaps inevitable consequence of the fact that several authors and commentators of mid-twentieth century Britain were raised during, or close to, the Edwardian era.

Genre fiction of the first half of the twentieth century typically features railways in the background, as an unassuming and widely accepted facet of everyday existence. In contrast, the 1950s and 1960s feature a new tendency to speak of railways in the "elegiac" tone which Carter identifies, as a technology or way of life receding into the past. While it might be assumed that this was primarily a response to the mass closures recommended by Beeching, there were, in fact, a number of route closures throughout the 1950s, prior to Beeching's appointment. For example, Kynaston quotes from a letter written to the *Merthyr Express* following the cessation of passenger services between Abergavenny and Merthyr Tydfil in January 1958:

> The trains passing by have formed part of our lives. […] To many on-lookers we may seem perhaps sentimental and a little foolish, but that sad last train with its even sadder whistle as it graced the track for the last time was the end of something in our lives which will never be replaced. (qtd. in Kynaston, *Modernity Britain* 100)

The closure of a station or railway line may inspire a nostalgic reaction, owing to a potent sense of the railway as being fundamentally "part of our lives." This is particularly true of rural areas: with local railway lines being accepted as part of the landscape, a nostalgic conception of the countryside was extended to envelop these lines. Consequently, the closure of stations or lines in more isolated rural areas produced a potent "sentimental" reaction which framed such closures as the severing of a vital lifeline, as "the end of something in our lives which will never be replaced."

This attitude is part of a broader tendency in British literature to portray the countryside as somehow distinct from, and preferable to, the city. Raymond Williams articulates this tendency in *The Country and the City* (1973), examining "sentimental and intellectualised accounts of an unlocalised 'Old England'" (Williams, *The Country and the City* 10). In particular, Williams calls our attention to the fact that "the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred" have "their location in the childhoods of their authors, and this

must be relevant. Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offend." (12) Thus, Williams demonstrates "how often an idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of childhood", a "structure of feeling" which "is then converted into illusory ideas of the rural past" (297). Crucially, however, Williams goes on to make the observation that this process of conversion is not necessarily confined to the "rural":

> …we have had enough stories and memories of urban childhood to perceive the same pattern. The old urban working-class community; the delights of corner-shops, gas lamps, horsecabs, trams, piestalls: all gone, it seems, in successive generations. These urban ways and objects seem to have, in the literature, the same real emotional substance as the brooks, commons, hedges, cottages, festivals of the rural scene. (297)

Railways are by no means exempt from the "pattern" which Williams describes. On the contrary, many of the branch lines which were closed in the 1950s and 1960s have acquired this "real emotional substance", to such an extent that their loss is regarded as a diminution of "the rural scene."

The small size of the pastoral community has played a major role in making this development possible. As Williams puts it, "it is still often said […] that a country community, most typically a village, is an epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships." (Williams 165) In particular, Williams acknowledges that such a community "is smaller in scale; people are more easily identified and connected within it; the structure of the community is in many ways more visible." (165-166) Williams does, however, take care to point out that "[i]n the village as in the city there is division of labour, there is the contrast of social position, and then necessarily there are alternative points of view." (166) Even so, this perception of the country community as being smaller and more directly knowable is significant in that it may also be applied to railways. In comparison with an urban terminus or a busy commuter line, the country railway is smaller in scale and has less direct impact on the landscape; is staffed by fewer people; and tends to see slower and more infrequent train services. As a result, the country railway is more easily romanticised, and its staff and infrastructure are more likely to be perceived as a vital part of everyday life. Above all, the train, being a particularly public mode of transport, offers more opportunities for social interaction than the motor car, and this is especially potent where

the country community, with its sense of "face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships" is concerned.

The Ealing comedy film *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953) makes this potential apparent, echoing Williams' reflections upon the symbolic associations of the country community. In this film, a group of villagers attempt to run their local railway line themselves while competing with a bus company. *The Titfield Thunderbolt* presents a sentimental, comic narrative in which the railway line is successfully saved from closure – a narrative which, Christine Geraghty observes, is "both stultifying and rebellious" (Geraghty 56). The message of the film is most clearly expressed in a passionate speech given by the Squire:

> Open it up to buses and lorries and what will it be like in five years? Our lanes will be concrete roads. Our houses will have numbers instead of names. There'll be traffic lights and zebra crossings, twice as dangerous. […] All we're asking for is the chance to keep our train running. (*Titfield* 19:00-19:30)

Seen here is a belief that the railway line is vital to the local community, which, the film suggests, must be sealed off from the transformative effects of road transport. Throughout *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, in fact, the railway is sublimated into a nostalgic ideal of English rural life. It is an approach which fails to impress Charles Barr, who concludes that this is a "toy train" serving "a cosy rural community […] going round in circles, protected from the world outside." (Barr 159) The image of "a cosy rural community" is no innovation, however; rather, it is part of a longstanding tradition which has been clearly identified by Williams.

What is noteworthy about *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, then, is that it portrays the railway as a fundamental part of this idealised community. Indeed, the 1950s and 1960s would see widespread efforts to actualise a similarly nostalgic ideal of transport and its position in relation to the community. Transport historian Brian Haresnape notes that an "industry" grew up around this interest, citing an emerging "wave of nostalgia" as well as "the greatly increased leisure time many people now experienced, with a shorter working week and longer holidays." (Haresnape 157) Haresnape's words point toward a connection between railways and "leisure time" which is especially significant: although there was nothing new in train travel being undertaken as a leisure activity, the desire for such an experience was now being informed by an undercurrent of nostalgia. The steam railway offered a temporal, as well as a geographical escape from everyday life. Thus, the nostalgic feeling toward Britain's railway heritage –

particularly those routes and stations located within the countryside – found a notable manifestation in the emergence of a preservation movement. In fact, the Talyllyn Railway, the first railway in the world to be preserved and run by volunteers, was a major source of inspiration for *The Titfield Thunderbolt*. It can therefore be seen that the new interest in preservation and restoration had a direct influence upon popular culture.

In literature of the period we detect this nostalgic response to the changing condition of Britain's railways, as evidenced by the Reverend Wilbert Awdry's "Railway Series" of children's books. Several of Awdry's later books draw upon contemporary events, commenting on the modernisation of the railways and the appearance of the first heritage railways in Britain. Indeed, Awdry was, at one point, a volunteer on the Talyllyn Railway, which was the inspiration for a number of stories. In his tenth book, *Four Little Engines* (1955), Awdry introduces the Skarloey Railway, a fictitious equivalent to the Talyllyn Railway. The book also features an elderly steam locomotive, Skarloey, who, in the concluding story, is cast as the hero of the hour. After a long period of disuse, a crisis forces him to return to service:

> "You were right, Sir," said Skarloey to the Owner that evening, "old engines can't pull trains like young ones."
>
> The Owner smiled. "They can if they're mended, Old Faithful," he said, "and that's what will happen to you, you deserve it." (Awdry 62)

We notice here an echo of the "make do and mend" philosophy associated with wartime, contrasting with the consumerist mood which is seen as emerging during the 1950s. More importantly, however, this scene typifies an attitude toward steam which was to become increasingly prevalent during the 1960s. In contrast with the novelty of diesel and electric traction, the steam locomotive was typically imaged as "Old Faithful": a reliable and long-lasting workhorse, given a reassuring sense of tradition and familiarity by its longevity and simplicity.

The widespread longing for an imagined heyday of the railway, consequently, found its most potent symbol in the steam locomotive, which, for many, appeared to encapsulate the nostalgic glamour of this imagined ideal. Fictional depictions of British railways often return to an era in which steam remained the dominant form of traction; this is most obvious in the case of crime fiction. As the infrastructure and imagery of the railways in the days of steam

provided authors of crime fiction with opportunities which were disrupted by modernisation and the decline of rail transport, numerous adaptations of "Golden Age" detective fiction have, perhaps inevitably, endeavoured to recreate an nostalgic ideal of the railways in an earlier period. The position of railways in children's literature, by contrast, is less clear. Although Awdry's "Railway Series" lasted into the early 1970s, the longevity of this series makes it an outlier. As children's literature of the Edwardian period reflected a fascination with the technology of that time, so children's media of the 1950s and 1960s typically reflects a new zeitgeist, revealing the interest generated by the space race and the growth of atomic technology. On the whole, then, it can be seen that the state of railways in genre fiction encompasses a multiplicity of representations. While popular opinion held that the railways were in a state of decline, numerous texts responded and elaborated upon this decline; some went so far as to offer idealistic conceptions of the national landscape, in which the railways were deeply rooted.

Chapter 1: Nostalgia, Anxiety and Transport in Detective Fiction

At Bertram's Hotel (1965), one of the last novels featuring Christie's Miss Marple, presents the reader with a striking critique of the commodification of nostalgia. The titular establishment is a hotel which seems to offer a picture-perfect recreation of Edwardian domesticity: "Inside, if this was the first time you had visited Bertram's, you felt, almost with alarm, that you had re-entered a vanished world." (Christie, *Bertram's* 8) Set against this nostalgic representation of the Edwardian age is Christie's portrayal of a mail train robbery, and Bertram's appears to offer a refuge from crimes such as these. In reality, however, the hotel is an elaborate façade which serves as the headquarters of a criminal syndicate. The connection between the hotel and the train robbery illustrates the unreality of Bertram's: it is "a beautiful performance. But it *was* a performance–not real." (244) For Neil McCaw, this blurring of the "line between fiction and reality" is further emphasised by the fact that Christie's portrayal of the train robbery is "a barely disguised recycling of the infamous true-life history of the Great Train Robbery" (McCaw 51). Christie contrasts this sensational crime with oblivious passengers' reaction to the delay: "In their compartments, passengers grumbled to each other that the railways were not what they used to be." (Christie, *Bertram's* 82) But then, this is yet another confirmation of the novel's message. Nothing is what it used to be.

The comparison of Bertram's to a "performance" is key to understanding Christie's novel. Considerable effort has been expended in perfecting the hotel's simulation of "Edwardian England" (8); this is a deliberate appeal to nostalgic perceptions of an earlier age, as evidenced by the hotel manager's remark that "there are a lot of people who come abroad at rare intervals and who expect this country to be–well, I won't go back as far as Dickens, but they've read *Cranford* and Henry James" (14-15). Here, Christie's usage of literary allusions draws the reader's attention to the artifice of the hotel; Bertram's is intended to conjure up quintessential ideals of Englishness and Edwardian domesticity, rather than to present a fully authentic historical recreation. This is further underlined by the remark that it "has got to *look* Edwardian, but it's got to have the modern comforts that we take for granted in these days." (15) The fact that these "modern comforts" underlie a surface layer of period authenticity reveals the superficiality of the hotel and its appeal to nostalgia; while the hotel may strive to create an immersive experience for its guests, they would not wish to experience the everyday reality of Edwardian life. What makes this insistence upon a specifically "Edwardian" appearance all the more significant, however, is the initial description of Bertram's, which

informs the reader that "[b]y 1955 it looked precisely as it had looked in 1939–dignified, ostentatious, and quietly expensive." (Christie, *Bertram's* 7) While the hotel strives to offer its guests a specifically "Edwardian" atmosphere, it simultaneously looks "precisely as it had looked in 1939". From this, we may infer that the world of 1939 was not, at least on the surface, too far removed from that of the Edwardians.

Such a conclusion is given weight by Colin Manlove's claim that "whereas the Britain of 1939 would have been broadly understandable to the Britain of 1909, by 1969 it had become quite alien." (Manlove 81) It is precisely because of this clash of values that a nostalgic reproduction of the Edwardian period, such as that found in Bertram's Hotel, should have such potency. For those who regarded the world of the late 1960s as "alien" and unpredictable territory, there would be considerable appeal in the sense of retreating into a more "understandable" way of life. Certainly, this may go some way toward explaining the nostalgia for the Edwardian period which frequently appears in genre fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, with various texts being seen to contain echoes of this age and its literature. Christie's later novels are no exception. Indeed, Cadogan and Craig have asserted that Christie "was happy with the social arrangements of the pre-war era and these lent a certain clarity and simplicity to the detecting process. It isn't until the early 1950s that a note of disenchantment occurs" (Cadogan and Craig, *The Lady Investigates* 168). *At Bertram's Hotel*, however, sees this sense of "disenchantment" with the contemporary counterbalanced by an insistence that the past cannot truly be revisited. This message is clearly voiced by Miss Marple, who, while admitting that the hotel "seemed wonderful at first", insists that "that one can never go back, that one should not ever try to go back–that the essence of life is going forward." (Christie, *Bertram's* 185) While the past may appear "wonderful" in retrospect, Christie ultimately chooses to stress the need for a forward-looking perspective.

Whatever value the hotel may possess, then, is negated by its artificial nature. While Miss Marple may praise Bertram's for the effectiveness of its reproductive efforts, this does not prevent her from declaring that it cannot be allowed to last: "It is like when you get ground elder really badly in a border. There's nothing else you can do about it–except dig the whole thing up." (235) McCaw stresses this emphatic refutation of period nostalgia, arguing that the novel "is fundamentally concerned with the differences between the idealized Edwardian world of Christie's youth and a later-century England, a rejection of ultimately unsustainable mythologies of Englishness." (McCaw 52) In turning away from this "idealized Edwardian

world", however, *At Bertram's Hotel* clashes with the pattern set by Christie's final novels, in which the author is seen to retreat into, rather than reject, this world. Indeed, Marty S. Knepper has observed that Christie's final novels are concerned with murders which have occurred in the distant past, allowing Christie to "comment […] on changing times" and to "include details from her personal past" (Knepper 72). Knepper also identifies this incorporation of personal details as a weakness of these novels; while these "descriptions of Christie's past" may "pleasantly evoke a romanticized Victorian/Edwardian childhood," Knepper argues, "too often they are too long and fail to move the mystery plot forward." (72) There is therefore a sense that these final novels – most particularly *Postern of Fate* (1973), the last novel completed by Christie before her death – are beset by a loss of authorial control, with Christie's focus on the mystery element being diverted by the nostalgic appeal of the past.

While Christie may have presented a critique of period nostalgia in *At Bertram's Hotel*, then, this is not maintained by her subsequent novels. In fact, Cadogan and Craig go so far as to suggest that Christie's later novels are marked by a gradual decline in quality:

> Narrative control began to slacken at about the same time as the mode became plainly inappropriate to the spirit of the age. *The 4:50 from Paddington* (1957) is the last Miss Marple novel that can rank with the best of Christie. (Cadogan and Craig, *The Lady Investigates* 170)

The novel praised by Cadogan and Craig, *4:50 from Paddington*, sees a friend of Miss Marple, Mrs McGillicuddy, witness a murder committed aboard a train running parallel to hers. What is particularly striking about *4:50 from Paddington* is that it is one of the last Christie novels in which railways are given a truly prominent role, and it may be argued that this is because the usage of railways in detective fiction was itself becoming "inappropriate to the spirit of the age." Indeed, this is the impression conveyed by Robin W. Winks' declaration that "[i]ntricate calculations arising from railway timetables […] no longer matter, for trains do not run on time." (Winks 8) Seen here is an implication that the perceived decline of the railways has diminished those qualities which might motivate authors of detective fiction to use the train as a setting for crime. This is all the more significant in that detective fiction has tended to utilise railways in a manner which rests upon the assumption of a well-organised and closely regimented machine ensemble.

It is inevitable, for one thing, that "railway timetables" should be given close focus. Measurements of time and space are often key to the solution of a mystery, as evidenced by Laura Marcus' observation that "[t]he standardization of time, which directly resulted from railway travel, is clearly central to a genre dependent on establishing alibis and times of death." (Marcus 66) In detective fiction, where the time taken to traverse a particular distance may prove or disprove an alibi, the railway journey has obvious potential as a narrative device. This emphasis on temporal detail is also part of a broader tendency to emphasise seemingly trivial facts and details, which may be invested with new meaning by the detective's interpretive powers. George Grella calls our attention to this characteristic, identifying the prevalence of "charts, diagrams, timetables, maps, plans, and other concrete evidence" in detective fiction as "indicating the English tradition of empirical thought." (Grella 101) Grella goes on to claim that the point of contrast between the English and American schools of detective fiction lies in the suggestion of "a world that can be interpreted by human reason", meaning that the detective's "universe seems explainable, the typical cosmos of English fiction, unlike the extravagant and grotesque realities of the American novel." (101) Thus, the close attention paid to otherwise trivial details in detective fiction serves to characterise the setting as a reassuringly understandable world in which everything is ultimately "explainable", and in which rigorous timekeeping may prove essential to the process of detection.

As a result, detective fiction frequently tends toward an idealised representation of the railway machine ensemble. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for the detective to make use of railway timetables in solving a mystery without it being assumed that such documents provide an accurate reflection of reality; thus, detective fiction often presents its readers with a world in which it may indeed be assumed that trains will run on time. We are therefore confronted with the suggestion of a highly organised world, shaped by the patterns of machine-based systems such as those of the railways. Such a suggestion is reflective of broader trends in detective fiction. Earl F. Bargainnier, for instance, contends that "detective fiction creates its own "reality,"" and that this is "probably the reason that detective novels of the 1920s and 1930s seem so little dated. They exist in their own world, which knows not change." (Bargainnier 9) Bargainnier attributes this sense of an unchanging world to the fact that "[t]he author's, and reader's, sympathies must be on the side of law and order," noting that "[a] continuously changing society, often confusing and frightening, is not one in which good and evil can be markedly differentiated as they are in detective fiction." (10) These claims are echoed by Heather Worthington's argument that contemporary readers' anxieties were

assuaged by "the clue-puzzle form, with its rigid structures, carefully defined rules, satisfying closure, frequently serial detective and its representation of a static society that contrasted sharply to the rapidly changing reality of the interwar years" (Worthington 116). While it may be argued that detective fiction of the interwar period served a consolatory function, however, the role of the "clue-puzzle form" in the years following the Second World War is far more uncertain.

Indeed, this particular model of detective fiction was by no means confined to the interwar period. As Stephen Knight has observed, several "classic writers of the so-called 'golden age' went on writing in their familiar modes well after 1939"; while the emotive term "Golden Age" carries an implication that the interwar period produced the genre's most successful novels, Knight concludes that "[t]he alleged 'golden age' is no more than another competing sub-genre with its own audience and patterns" (Knight, *Detection, Death, Diversity* 86). Indeed, these claims are supported by Christie's later novels, which demonstrate that the "clue-puzzle form" was not ended but rather altered by the Second World War. Knight, for example, contends that while Christie "maintained her tricky plotting," her later novels "darken somewhat, recognising changes in class mobility […] and the country's new dependence on America" (135-136). Thus, Christie's post-war fiction reveals how the "sense of security" expected of "Golden Age" detective fiction may have been disrupted by an increasing awareness of the changing social order. Under such conditions, it would appear that the place of railways in detective fiction was becoming increasingly uncertain; at the very least, there is the sense of a growing disparity between contemporary attitudes of railway travel and the manner in which detective fiction typically portrayed the railway machine ensemble. This contrast is best demonstrated by the novels and short stories of Freeman Wills Crofts, who frequently utilises the railway timetable as a tool with which to construct a mystery and its solution. Among the corpus of Golden Age detective fiction, in fact, Crofts' work best demonstrates the close affinity which the genre may have for railways.

One example of his meticulous approach is the short story "The 8.12 from Waterloo" (1955), in which Crofts emphasises the process of patient inquiry that must be undertaken in order to confirm Inspector French's theory: "Wearisome to those taking part, it would be ten times more wearisome to recount in detail." (Crofts 76) In Crofts' fiction, detection primarily relies on the observation of key details and a lengthy process of "wearisome" inquiry, with a recurring theme being that "the stress of murder clouds the mind and leads to oversight." (76)

T. J. Binyon emphasises these traits, stating that Crofts' specialty is "the unbreakable alibi, often built up, with virtuosity and imagination, from the railway timetable. His plots are put together with the care and precision of an engineer" (Binyon 82). Certainly, the idea that Crofts is more an "engineer" than a writer is key to understanding his work. In many of his stories, the identity of the culprit is immediately apparent; the narrative is therefore preoccupied with an orderly progression toward the proof of their guilt. What is especially noteworthy about Crofts' detective stories, however, is that they are so frequently "built up," as Binyon puts it, "from the railway timetable." His characters inhabit a world in which the efficiency of the railway machine ensemble is so complete that the detective may readily call upon its timetables in order to disprove even a seemingly "unbreakable alibi". Hence, Carter argues that, in Crofts' fiction, "the railway machine ensemble's oiled efficiency stands for a calculable and predictable modern world." (Carter, *Railways and culture* 224) The rigidity of Crofts' approach, then, suggests that it could not be adapted to reflect a reality in which the railways were no longer perceived as representative of the "modern world."

It would not be unreasonable to assume that Crofts' representation of a railway system characterised by "oiled efficiency" might have some nostalgic appeal for those lamenting the perceived decline of the railways. There is, however, an apparent drawback to Crofts' approach; arising from his repeated usage of the "unbreakable alibi" device is a strong sense of predictability, made apparent by Christie herself. In *The Clocks* (1963), Poirot assesses a range of fictional crime authors; one of these, "Cyril Quain", is evidently a fictionalised version of Crofts (Christie, *Clocks* 148). While Poirot praises his "intricate" and "elaborate" technique, he also remarks that "one book of his is almost exactly like another." (148) In spite of these veiled criticisms, however, the extent to which Christie's own approach diverged from that of Crofts is debateable. This possibility is made apparent by Knight's examination of a Christie novel; remarking upon "[t]he dry, objective writing and use of brisk dialogue", Knight asserts that these features serve to obscure "the intrinsic artificiality of the plots." (Knight, *Form and Ideology* 123) More importantly, Knight goes on to claim that "[t]he narration sounds so much like a train timetable we accept it, without considering its unlikely intricacy and naivety." (123) It is particularly striking that Knight should use the image of "a train timetable" to describe the manner in which Christie's narrative proceeds. Indeed, it may even be argued that the typical detective novel is inherently mechanistic in form, with its orderly progression from the establishment of a mystery to its solution; like the train, the detective novel is expected to follow a timetable, a predetermined sequence of events.

A key point of difference between Christie's approach to detective fiction and that of Crofts is, however, suggested by the foreword to Christie's 1936 novel, *Cards on the Table*. Here, Christie informs the reader that there are four possible culprits, and that "any one of them" may be the guilty individual; hence, she remarks, "[t]he deduction must, therefore, be entirely *psychological*, but it is none the less interesting for that, because when all is said and done it is the *mind* of the murderer that is of supreme interest." (Christie, *Cards on the Table* n. p.) While timetables and alibis are not necessarily absent from Christie's fiction, her detective novels are typically preoccupied with a "*psychological*" view of crime. Determining the personality and motivation of the guilty individual is often integral to the process of detection. This particular approach is exemplified by the significance which Poirot assigns to the ABC railway guide in *The ABC Murders*: here, the value of the railway timetable lies not in its contents, but in what its usage suggests about "the *mind* of the murderer". Proceeding from the cultural assumption that "[s]mall boys love trains", Poirot concludes that the choice of a railway guide is indicative of a juvenile mind (Christie, *ABC Murders* 177); this association, in turn, leads him to the murderer, Franklin Clarke, whom he has already described as "a boy at heart." (105) Seen here is a process of detection based upon intuitive reasoning, contrasting sharply with the "wearisome" enquiries seen in Crofts' stories. This "*psychological*" approach to detection is all the more significant in that it may have a marked effect upon the role played by railways in Christie's fiction, as evidenced by *The ABC Murders* and other Poirot novels.

Various modes of transport may become sites of crime in the Poirot novels, with examples ranging from the air liner in *Death in the Clouds* (1935) and the river cruise in *Death on the Nile* (1937) to the luxurious express trains seen in *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928) and *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). By setting the action aboard a moving vehicle in these novels, Christie imposes a number of highly advantageous restrictions upon the narrative. These constraints are made apparent by Bargainnier, whose commentary on "[t]he advantages of a limited space isolated for the action of a detective story" includes the observations that such a setting not only "limits the number of suspects", but also ensures that "all of those present in the closed circle can become suspects, for generally known to one another, they offer a multiplicity of motives." (Bargainnier 22) In Christie's novels, then, transport settings often serve as confined spaces in which a limited number of suspects with varied motivations may be encountered, allowing for a lengthy narrative shaped primarily by the interplay between

these characters. Further emphasising this tendency is the fact that the novel, in comparison to the short story, offers greater potential for the introduction and gradual elimination of a range of suspects. Hence, the contrast between Christie's approach and that of Crofts is particularly apparent; while Christie may utilise the train as a setting in several of her novels, she tasks her detectives with challenges which cannot be resolved simply by the use of railway timetables. Therefore, we may not necessarily look to Christie's fiction for portrayals of a supremely efficient railway machine ensemble.

The nature of these challenges is most clearly demonstrated by *Murder on the Orient Express*; here, the train emerges as a space in which, as Bargainnier puts it, "the entire system of a closed society is encapsulated." (23) What is particularly striking about Christie's usage of the train in this novel is that the titular express is brought to a halt by a snowfall; with the train's progression through time and space cut off, it becomes apparent that its narrative function is dictated chiefly by its nature as a physical space. The separation of the train from the outside world is given particular emphasis by Chris Ewers, who points out that "the only experience of space is inside the compartments of the train. The novel suspends the train, a symbol of ineluctable time, and turns the supposed "nonspace" of transit into a "place."" (Ewers 104) Across the course of *Murder on the Orient Express*, in fact, the train becomes a stage upon which a carefully crafted narrative unfolds, as evidenced by Nicholas and Margaret Boe Birns' observation that "Hercule Poirot comes to realize that he has been an audience of one for a careful series of performances." (Birns 122) This development is not without precedent. Marcus, for instance, has noted that the "spatial structures of the closed compartment and the corridor-less train" are an integral part of mysteries which depend heavily "on the seemingly inexplicable movement of people or objects into and out of an enclosed space which moves through space and time at an unprecedented rate." (Marcus 70-71) It is because the train offers such a range of opportunities for misdirection or concealment that it may become a site of performance, presenting the detective with a staged narrative which their interpretive powers must distinguish from reality.

However, Christie's redefinition of the train as a "place" in its own right also has the effect of calling the reader's attention to the appeal of this luxurious setting. Throughout the interwar period, in fact, Christie's novels often convey the sense of prestige which might be associated with international travel during this era; *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, for instance, conjures up "the wonderful velocity always displayed by the Compagnie Internationale des

Wagons-Lit" (Christie, *Blue Train* 78). Such portrayals of luxury travel have been re-contextualised by the passage of time, as suggested by Irene Kahn Atkins' review of the 1974 film adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Claiming that "the real protagonist of the film is the train," Atkins notes an emphasis on "the abundance of food being loaded aboard", and contends that "the food is really the true symbol of the opulence and elegance of pre-war European travel, just as the dining car is the focal point of social contact." (Atkins 209) This review closes on an argument that the film "happens to reflect the best of all periods for cinematic retrospect, the early 1930s, that last stronghold of naïve optimism before World War II." (212) Certainly, Christie's later novels offer adaptors fewer opportunities for such lavish portrayals of "opulence and elegance". In the years following the Second World War, private motoring grew increasingly popular, and, as Haresnape observes, "[t]he airlines were snatching an increasing slice of the prestige travel market between London and Paris" (Haresnape 70); against such a backdrop, depictions of prestigious express trains would have appeared increasingly inappropriate. Consequently, the settings of novels such as *Murder on the Orient Express* have now come to represent what is seen as a lost ideal of luxury travel.

A comparison of *4:50 from Paddington* with these earlier depictions of train travel, indeed, makes apparent the shifting state of railways in detective fiction. In contrast to the luxurious express trains of *The Mystery of the Blue Train* and *Murder on the Orient Express*, the novel begins with a journey aboard a mundane commuter train: "The 4.50 was not much patronized, the first-class clientele preferring either the faster morning express, or the 6.40 with dining car." (Christie, *4:50* 6) This contrast can be partly attributed to the fact that *4:50 from Paddington* features not Poirot but Miss Marple, a slightly later creation and an older character. The effect of casting such a character in the role of investigator is made clear by Cadogan and Craig, who, in examining "[t]he old-lady detectives' approach", find that "through them the authors can express a simplistic view that "old-fashioned" virtues are still the best." (Cadogan and Craig, *You're a Brick* 311). Certainly, Miss Marple may be summarised as the product of an earlier age; the character is described by Bargainnier as "a tall, slender, dignified late-Victorian of great shrewdness who solves twentieth century crimes." (Bargainnier 67) Miss Marple herself acknowledges this connection to the "late-Victorian" in *The Body in the Library* (1942): "My nephew Raymond tells me […] that I have a mind like a *sink*. He says that most Victorians have. All I can say is that the Victorians knew a good deal about human nature." (Christie, *The Body in the Library* 206-207) Here, we recognise some of the defining characteristics of the Miss Marple novels: not only the preoccupation with "human nature"

which characterises the process of detection, but also the fact that Miss Marple views contemporary affairs through the lens of an earlier age.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that many of Christie's later novels should provide a commentary on social and economic change from Miss Marple's perspective. In *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962), for instance, it is shown that while the "old world core" of St Mary Mead remains intact, the village street has been changed by "immediate and intemperate modernization." (Christie, *Mirror* 11-12) More importantly, Christie appears to frame such change as an inevitability: "You could blame the war (both the wars), or the younger generation, or women going out to work, or the atom bomb, or just the Government – but what one really meant was the simple fact that one was growing old." (Christie, *Mirror* 11) Here, post-war change is seen through the eyes of a Victorian figure: a view coloured by Miss Marple's awareness that she herself is "growing old." The full significance of this presentation is explained by Bargainnier's claim that there is a "dual, even contradictory, quality in Christie's personality" which manifests itself as "a nostalgia for a gracious past, with a clear-eyed amusement at its follies, and an acceptance, however regretful, of the necessity for change." (Bargainnier 32) This acceptance of "change" seems unusual in detective fiction, as evidenced by Victoria Stewart's observation that "when seen as taking a "reassuring" role in the face of social and historical change, detective fiction, especially of the "Golden Age" variety, is condemned as conservative and resistant to change." (Stewart 102-103) While Cadogan and Craig's claims might suggest that Christie's view of the "social and historical change" following the Second World War is a "simplistic" one, her later novels present a regretful acceptance of this change rather than an outright resistance.

The changing condition of the village, as seen in the Miss Marple novels, is particularly significant in that the country community is an especially potent site of nostalgia. In fact, McCaw goes so far as to argue that "a mourning of the loss of (an albeit imagined) English continuity" may be seen in "the post-war Marple novels" (McCaw 46). McCaw cites *They Do It With Mirrors* (1952) in support of this argument, identifying "a growing questioning of the validity of the overarching Edenic rural stereotype of the English village" (McCaw 47). Certainly, it is this "rural stereotype" which is invoked by the friend who requests Miss Marple's assistance: "Why you have such a poor idea of human nature, I can't think – living in that sweet peaceful village of yours, so old world and pure." (Christie, *Mirrors* 13) As with

other Miss Marple novels, however, *They Do It With Mirrors* challenges the image of the "sweet peaceful village":

> 'Maybe, Jane,' she said, 'that St Mary Mead of yours isn't quite the idyllic retreat that I've always imagined it.'
>
> 'Human nature, dear, is very much the same everywhere. It is more difficult to observe it closely in a city, that is all.' (16)

This belief that "[h]uman nature […] is very much the same everywhere" recurs throughout the Miss Marple novels, reinforcing what Knight has identified as Christie's "capacity to realise in formulaic, repeatable mode a sense of personal unease and possible danger that emerges even in – especially in – a world secluded from social and international disorder." (Knight, *Detection, Death, Diversity* 92) If human nature is the same everywhere, then the violent intrusion of crime may occur anywhere – even in the country community, which is often framed in terms of pastoral innocence.

By challenging the stereotypical image of the "old world and pure" country community in this way, the Miss Marple novels lend weight to McCaw's assertion that "[i]n the post-war context the village-green mythology of Englishness was becoming absurd, set against the backdrop of the doubt-ridden austerity of the nation" (McCaw 47). It is not only in "the post-war context" that detective fiction may question this "village-green mythology", however, as suggested by Cadogan and Craig's claim: "Agatha Christie is simply concurring with Conan Doyle's observation that horrid passions may rise as easily on the village green as in the heart of Soho. Of course she is out to make the most of the contrast between cosiness and cupidity." (Cadogan and Craig, *The Lady Investigates* 164) Evidence of this parallel is offered by Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" (1892), in which we find Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson travelling into the countryside by train. Here, Holmes voices a "belief […] that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside." (Conan Doyle 345) It is this belief which is echoed by the Miss Marple novels; in particular, Holmes' claim that "crime" may be more easily concealed in "these lonely houses, each in its own fields" (345) is reflected in Miss Marple's remark: "The things that go on in a pure peaceful village would probably surprise you." (Christie, *Mirrors* 13) While both the train and the countryside may be regarded as sites of nostalgia, then, there is a long-established tendency for detective fiction to challenge these

sentimentalised perceptions by portraying such environments as vulnerable to the eruption of violent crime.

While novels such as *Murder on the Orient Express* or *4:50 from Paddington* portray the train itself as a site of crime, detective fiction may also challenge nostalgic perceptions of train travel by other means. In particular, it may be suggested that a railway journey into the countryside – an image which typically conjures up a bucolic and unhurried conception of travel – cannot actually remove the traveller from the disorder associated with the urban landscape. Holmes' insistence upon the "impunity with which crime may be committed" within an isolated rural setting, for instance, serves to undercut the "enthusiasm" which Watson feels at having departed "the fogs of Baker Street." (Conan Doyle 345) The train does not offer the prospect of escape to a more innocent and well-ordered landscape; rather, it is a necessary means of arriving at the location in which the mystery is to unfold. Similarly, *They Do It With Mirrors* sees Miss Marple taking a train to reach Stonygates, the college she has been asked to investigate. What is especially striking about Christie's depiction of the journey, however, is that Miss Marple is seen to effect a performance; as an elderly woman travelling alone, she has taken care to convey a particular impression of herself: "So difficult nowadays – not many porters. I get so flustered when I travel." (Christie, *Mirrors* 21) Being "rather more shabbily dressed than was her custom", in fact, Miss Marple chooses to play the role expected of her – that of "a charming helpless-looking old lady" (21). In this scene, we find a reminder that the Miss Marple novels may convey a particular experience of travel; the character's age and gender invite a particular set of expectations, contrasting with those which might be imposed upon a Poirot or a Holmes.

In projecting the outward appearance of a "helpless-looking old lady", Miss Marple utilises a technique which recurs throughout Christie's detective novels. Both Poirot and Miss Marple may take advantage of their own status as outsiders by purposely encouraging a stereotypical perception of themselves in order to mask their efficacy as investigators. As Birns and Birns put it, "Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot […] depend on an innocuous façade not only to lull those about them into a false sense of security but also to surprise the reader with their almost ruthless perspicacity." (Birns 128) Yet a distinction is made between the two characters, as Birns and Birns go on to claim that "Miss Marple is far more socially assimilated than the always-bizarre Poirot." (130) The notion of Miss Marple as being "more socially assimilated" is supported by the presentation of travel in the Miss Marple novels, which often contrasts

sharply with that offered by the Poirot novels. In *4:50 from Paddington*, for instance, Mrs McGillicuddy finds herself harshly treated by the railway machine ensemble:

> 'I'm travelling first-class,' said Mrs McGillicuddy.
>
> 'You didn't say so,' grumbled the porter. His eye swept her masculine-looking pepper-and-salt tweed coat disparagingly.
>
> Mrs McGillicuddy, who *had* said so, did not argue the point. (Christie, *4:50* 6)

The difficulties encountered by Mrs McGillicuddy in making herself heard are further emphasised when, on reporting a murder, she is met with disbelief. Ewers stresses this lack of consideration, remarking that "when women make train journeys, they experience the train as a male space. Mrs. McGillicuddy struggles to be treated with respect" (Ewers 106) Here, the railway machine ensemble is framed in terms which are not particularly conductive to nostalgia. Rather, it is portrayed as a distinctly "male space" which is tedious and difficult to negotiate.

This sense of the train as being a "male space" is not the only factor which may complicate the experience of travel. Mrs McGillicuddy's journey is subsequently interrupted by the appearance of a train running parallel to hers, in which a stranger is briefly visible: "His hands were round the throat of a woman who faced him, and he was slowly, remorselessly, strangling her. Her eyes were starting from their sockets, her face was purple and congested." (Christie, *4:50* 7-8) While Ewers asserts that the lack of respect afforded to Mrs McGillicuddy "prepares us for the sight of a man killing a woman" in such a fashion (Ewers 106), it may be argued that Christie's mundane portrayal of the railway journey serves to make this intrusion of violent crime all the more shocking. It is particularly unusual, in fact, that Christie should offer such a graphic portrayal of murder, as evidenced by Rosemary Johnsen's observation that "crime fiction often begins with the main fact accomplished—the murder—and proceeds with a retrospective bent" (Johnsen 24). It is unusual that the reader should be allowed to witness the murder as it unfolds, and Miss Marple's later remark that "[i]t's usually circumstantial evidence" (Christie, *4:50* 217-218) makes this clear. More importantly, her first instinct is to recreate Mrs McGillicuddy's experience by making the same journey herself: "I should like to see for myself […] the *terrain* of the crime." (20) While this journey provides Miss Marple with valuable first-hand experience, Christie reminds the reader that "the next step involved action – a good deal of action – the kind for which she herself was physically unfit." (28) With

Miss Marple's mobility thus limited, it is apparent that the experience of travel may be restricted by age as well as gender.

As Cadogan and Craig put it, Miss Marple "has become the next thing to an armchair sleuth." (Cadogan and Craig, *The Lady Investigates* 170) Certainly, the limitations imposed upon characters such as Miss Marple and Mrs McGillicuddy contrast sharply with the experience of travel seen in many of the Poirot novels. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, for instance, a personal connection with M. Bouc, the director of the line, ensures that Poirot is able to secure a berth aboard the train, despite being told that it is "full up tonight" (Christie, *Murder* 31). Significantly, Poirot is also empowered by his own reputation, to such an extent that he is given full control of the investigation by M. Bouc: "I know your powers. Take command of this investigation!" (66) In *Murder on the Orient Express*, then, the train is established as a luxurious and well-furnished space which Poirot navigates with relative ease; as a result of such portrayals, the train has lent itself to nostalgic evocations of luxury travel in cinematic and televisual adaptations. This particular realisation of the train contrasts sharply with the more prosaic world depicted by *4:50 from Paddington*, in which the railway as a space is less readily accessible. It is not only in a post-war context, however, that the sphere of the train may be understood in chiefly masculine terms. We may find in *4:50 from Paddington*, in fact, an echo of Dorothy L. Sayers' *Strong Poison* (1930), in which Miss Climpson – who, because of her status as an elderly and unmarried woman, is directly comparable to Christie's Miss Marple – undertakes a train journey of her own, and similarly experiences the train as a "male space".

Strong Poison sees Miss Climpson dispatched to Westmorland to obtain evidence on Lord Peter Wimsey's behalf. In a letter to Wimsey, Miss Climpson relates her own experience of the train journey, praising his "kindness in insisting that I should travel *First Class*," and declaring that "after the *uncomfortable* travelling which I had to endure in my days of poverty, I feel that I am living in almost *sinful* luxury!" (Sayers, *Strong Poison* 190) It has been observed by Gill Plain that, while Miss Climpson may be a "remarkably active" figure, "her agency remained subject to the whim of her employer" (Plain 27), and this is borne out by the fact that Miss Climpson is only able to travel in "luxury" because of the wealthy Lord Peter's patronage. It is also noteworthy that Miss Climpson should recall sharing the carriage with a male passenger; she notes that, while the "carriage was *well* heated – indeed, *too much* so and I should have liked the window down," but this was prevented by "a *very* fat businessman […]

who *strongly* objected to fresh air! Men are such HOTHOUSE PLANTS nowadays" (190). Although Sayers' prose is humorous in tone – as evidenced by the epistolary format, containing all the quirks of Miss Climpson's style – this reinforces the sense of the train as a "male space". While Poirot may occupy a privileged position, gaining control over the investigation – and, in effect, the space of the train itself – female travellers such as Miss Climpson or Mrs McGillicuddy must contend with a range of obstacles and minor inconveniences.

It would therefore seem that the limitations imposed upon the elderly female traveller have changed little since the interwar period. It is worth noting, however, that in Miss Climpson's letter, Sayers also presents a recognition of the increased freedom available to female travellers during the interwar period:

> I had *no* difficulty in getting a comfortable room at the Station Hotel, *late* as it was. In the old days, an *unmarried* woman arriving alone at midnight with a *suitcase* would hardly have been considered *respectable* – what a wonderful difference one finds today! I am *grateful* to have lived to see such changes, because whatever old-fashioned people may say about the greater *decorum* and *modesty* of women in Queen Victoria's time, those who can remember the old conditions know how *difficult* and *humiliating* they were! (190)

In Sayers' detective novels, indeed, it would appear that "the old conditions" have persisted. Examining Sayers' presentation of England in the years following the First World War, Robert Kuhn McGregor and Ethan Lewis contend that she "well understood that the system of gender roles emerging in the postwar world was very much a relic of Victorianism, however far women may have gone in stretching social taboos." (McGregor, Lewis 62) It is this sense of interwar gender roles as "a relic of Victorianism" which informs Miss Climpson's perspective; through her letter, Sayers challenges the nostalgia which the "old-fashioned" may feel for "the old conditions" by stressing "how *difficult* and *humiliating* they were!" In particular, the image of an "*unmarried* woman" travelling "alone" is framed in terms of independence rather than vulnerability, contrasting with the gendered anxieties which frequently surround the female passenger in Victorian popular culture.

While Sayers may adopt a light-hearted, epistolary approach in relating the details of Miss Climpson's train journey, then, this report satirises the nostalgic perspective which would eulogise "the greater *decorum* and *modesty* of women in Queen Victoria's time". In this, we may detect a slight contrast with Christie, who, Bargainnier claims, "continued to hold

Edwardian, if not Victorian, attitudes towards moral and social values." (Bargainnier 194) A key point of difference lies in the fact that Sayers writes against the backdrop of the interwar period, whereas Christie's later novels are informed by an awareness of the socio-economic changes which followed the Second World War. Indeed, Bargainnier asserts that "a fear of and for the modern world, with an expected concurrent nostalgia for an earlier, simpler, and "more moral" society" runs through Christie's later novels, accompanied by a "distrust of modern youth." (194) While Christie may display an evident nostalgia for the Victorian or Edwardian eras, however, *4:50 from Paddington* makes it apparent that this does not prevent her from recognising that "the modern world" has seen a shift in gender roles. A broadening of the opportunities available to women in a post-war context is made apparent by the character of Lucy Eyelesbarrow, whose career, Ewers argues, "highlights the dissolution of traditional roles." (Ewers 108) The novel emphasises her freedom: "She could pick and choose and she did pick and choose. She enjoyed her life very much and found in it a continual source of entertainment." (Christie, *4:50* 30) In Lucy Eyelesbarrow, then, Christie depicts a character whose agency serves to suggest an increased potential for young women to "pick and choose" in the context of postwar England.

This sense of freedom is further emphasised by the fact that Lucy Eyelesbarrow is seen to play the role of investigator, assisting Miss Marple in solving the mystery. Having established the need to locate the body of the murdered woman, Christie transfers the action to Rutherford Hall, a country estate which Lucy Eyelesbarrow is required to infiltrate. It is here that Christie makes apparent her recognition of the changing social order: the house is in decline, and is "ringed round with building estates and small suburban houses." (Christie, *4:50* 32) Indeed, the house seems to have been all but deserted by the Crackenthorpe family, leaving only Emma Crackenthorpe and her elderly father: "It's a big house, I'm afraid, and inconvenient. Of course we only live in a portion of it – my father and myself, that is. He is rather an invalid." (35) Ewers stresses this sense of fragmentation: "While the train *de luxe*, a type of moving hotel, brings people together, the commuter train has the effect of disconnecting people. In *4.50 from Paddington*, it is the city that attracts most of the male characters." (Ewers 107) For Ewers, then, *4:50 from Paddington* portrays "a grammar of travel that favours the urban" (107). Indeed, the majority of the novel takes place within Rutherford Hall, while the train is instead seen hurrying "along the main line" which surrounds the house (Christie, *4:50* 40); this creates an image of constant activity which underlines the quiet decline of an establishment that cannot move with the times. The proximity of the railway line to Rutherford

Hall emphasises the extent to which the forces of modernisation have encroached upon it, both literally and figuratively.

Certainly, Rutherford Hall is cut off in a very literal sense; Lucy Eyelesbarrow, referring to its "queer isolation", describes it as "an island bounded by railway lines." (Christie, *4:50* 45) In a figurative sense, the house is also cut off from the modern world as it recedes further into the past. *4:50 from Paddington* calls the reader's attention to the deteriorating condition of Rutherford Hall, offering a portrait of decay which is made all the more significant by the country house's status as a focal point of nostalgia. In particular, the landscape of post-war England would see the country house acquire a dramatic new potential for nostalgic realisations of national identity; as Valerie Krips has observed, "the country house was to be one of the chief objects of postwar conservation and heritage." (Krips 3) Beyond the context of "postwar conservation and heritage", the country house also has the potential to symbolise a broader nostalgia for the socio-economic conditions of the interwar period, as Ross Macdonald's remarks on detective fiction make clear: "Nostalgia for a privileged society accounts for one of the prime attractions of the traditional English detective story and its innumerable American counterparts. Neither wars nor the dissolution of governments and societies interrupt that long weekend in the country house" (Macdonald 181). Both the country house and the train, then, are potent sites of nostalgia. Within the sphere of detective fiction, these spaces may serve to represent a "privileged" and well-organised society which has been carefully insulated against change or disorder.

4:50 from Paddington does not, however, offer any guarantee of Rutherford Hall's continued survival. The novel ends with Miss Marple speculating upon Emma Crackenthorpe's future; should her father die, Miss Marple suggests, "she'd go on a cruise or perhaps to stay abroad" (Christie, *4:50* 221). This not only demonstrates the potential of transport technology to draw people away from the house – thus reaffirming its decline – but also reinforces the novel's preoccupation with the roles played by women in the changing context of post-war England. While Lucy Eyelesbarrow may represent, as McCaw claims, "the resourcefulness and sheer potential of modern femininity" (McCaw 48), this serves to further emphasise the limitations imposed upon Emma Crackenthorpe, who is restrained by her aging father and the responsibilities of managing an increasingly decrepit country house. Hence, *4:50 from Paddington* reinforces the sense that the "long weekend in the country house" was indeed coming to an end. Arguably, this recognition of the changing condition of the upper middle

classes is part of a broader trend in detective fiction; given that many of the dominant features of the "Golden Age" detective novel are typically perceived as responses to the anxieties of the interwar era, it appears inevitable that the patterns of the genre should begin to shift in later years. Winks, for example, asserts that the Second World War "did enhance our sense of the evil people do, and in doing so turned the detective novel more toward violence than ratiocination, more toward personality than plot." (Winks 8) Detective fiction, therefore, appears to have turned away from the highly structured plotting associated with the "Golden Age" detective novel, and toward the sense of a more unpredictable and less assured world.

In particular, it can be said that the "Golden Age" form of detective fiction was challenged by the perceived disappearance of the social order underpinning it, as exemplified by the decline of the country house and its inhabitants. Certainly, Christie's recognition of the decline of the upper middle classes lends weight to Winks' claim that "[t]he cloistered pre-war world is gone" (Winks 8). Yet it may be argued that detective novels – even those of the interwar period – cannot truly present a "cloistered" world to begin with. Identifying "a residue of unease at the end of most novels of crime and detection," Indeed, Warren Chernaik suggests that the sense of security offered by "Golden Age" detective fiction is illusory: "Guilt can never be entirely dissipated, the criminal Other never cordoned off, the potential for the sudden eruption of that which is most feared brought wholly under control." (Chernaik 106-107) Crucially, detective fiction typically conveys an impression that there is no space from which this "potential" is completely absent. The train, the country house, and the village have historically served as sites of nostalgia; yet all of these environments have witnessed the "sudden eruption" of crime in a variety of detective novels and stories. Ironically, however, the intrusion of crime may not necessarily prevent such sites from continuing to serve as focal points of nostalgia. The train is no exception. Alongside the alluring portrayal of interwar luxury in Christie novels such as *Murder on the Orient Express*, there is a more general sense that "Golden Age" detective fiction now offers the reader a world in which railways are seen as nostalgically embodying lost ideals of reliability and modernity.

The enduring popularity of Christie's detective fiction – the Poirot novels, in particular – can, in part, be attributed to this potential for nostalgic representations of transport technology. Cinematic and televisual adaptations of detective fiction have repeatedly capitalised on this potential; these adaptations may, in turn, further emphasise the sense of artificiality associated with detective fiction, as evidenced by Michael Innes' short story,

"Murder on the 7.16" (1956). The story features a film set – including an elaborate reproduction of a railway carriage – in which an adaptation of a mystery story, originally published in "one of the evening papers", is being shot (Innes 354). The producer of the "thriller" is full of praise for the authenticity of this set: "You should see it when we're shooting the damned thing. The diorama, you know. Project whole landscapes on that, we do. They hurtle past. And rock gently. It's terrific." (353) Indeed, it is later revealed that the murder was the result of a "funny joke" gone wrong (357): the murderer was led to the film set and made to believe that he was aboard a real train. Much like the hotel seen in *At Bertram's Hotel*, then, the film set is an elaborate reproduction with a highly convincing exterior which belies its artificial nature. A blurring of the lines between fiction and reality therefore becomes the key to Innes' story, which serves as a reminder that detective fiction often revolves around the creation of elaborate set-pieces which may obscure the distinction between fiction and reality. Although such set-pieces are highly artificial, they may also underline the sense of detective fiction as being removed from reality, and so reaffirm the genre's potential for nostalgic re-enactments of an earlier age.

As well as the changes made necessary by the translation to a different medium, in fact, adaptors may rework a text in order to suit the requirements of a later period. For instance, Knight's remarks on the popularity of Christie's fiction includes the claim that "the recent films and television series lay heavier stress on period nostalgia than on the mystery itself." (Knight, *Detection, Death, Diversity* 93) Similarly, McCaw's reading of *At Bertram's Hotel* contends that there "is no such self-knowing critique of nostalgia evident in Miss Marple adaptations" (McCaw 52). Rather, McCaw suggests, such adaptations often take place within a "never-never land of cinematic/televisual Englishness" (McCaw 52) These arguments are given greater weight by the fact that such a "never-never land" often seems to serve as a refuge from post-war uncertainty. This type of setting is not necessarily restricted to adaptations of detective fiction, as evidenced by the Ealing film *The Ladykillers* (1955). The film depicts a gang of criminals who stage a robbery at King's Cross railway station, and come into conflict with the elderly Mrs Wilberforce; in its presentation of this conflict, Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards contend, *The Ladykillers* emerges as "an irreverent farewell to England – that England of the Conservative mid-1950s" (Aldgate and Richards 159). Certainly, Mrs Wilberforce herself is a relic of the late Victorian period; while nostalgically recollecting her "21st birthday", for example, she recalls that "someone came in and said the old Queen had passed away. Then everyone went home, and that was the end of my party." (*Ladykillers* 09:58-10:18) The clash between Mrs Wilberforce and the criminals can therefore be read as embodying a tension

between tradition and modernity, encapsulating a set of anxieties similar to those which recur throughout Christie's later novels.

The tumbledown interiors of Mrs Wilberforce's house, for instance, not only reflect the character of its occupant in embodying a sense of inherited heritage and long-lasting tradition, but also create a sense of temporal confusion. In fact, Aldgate and Richards go so far as to identify the house with a microcosm of England itself, "stuffed with Victorian *bric-à-brac* and suffering from wartime subsidence." (Aldgate and Richards 161) The house is also located above a tunnel mouth, overlooking the railway lines near King's Cross. Thus, the imagery of the railway is integral to the film; the sights and sounds of passing trains are often incorporated by director Alexander Mackendrick into moments of tension or conflict, resulting in a heightened sense of drama. This technique is most clearly seen in the film's final act. As the criminals begin to turn upon one another, they are killed off in increasingly rapid succession, and their bodies are dropped into passing trains. In this way, the film's climactic action becomes a series of movements in which the criminals descend from the house to the level of the railway, and are swallowed up by it. In fact, they are transported from the world of the film so conclusively that they seem never to have been there at all. This results in a final comic twist: as Mrs Wilberforce attempts to explain the situation to the police, they assume that her story is nothing more than a dream, and inadvertently leave her to keep the stolen money.

This conclusion indicates a clear parallel with *4:50 from Paddington*, in which Mrs McGillicuddy is initially treated with condescension as she struggles to make police and railway employees believe her story: "I have had a nap, but if you think this was a dream, you're quite wrong. I *saw* it, I tell you." (Christie, *4:50* 8) More importantly, however, the fate of the criminals emphasises the extent to which *The Ladykillers* serves as an articulation of post-war cultural anxieties. Barr, for instance, perceives this as "a compulsive process of the *absorption* of the dynamic by the static, of change by tradition, of the new by the old, which is the essential pattern of postwar British history" (Barr 172). Furthermore, Aldgate and Richards see the criminals as a set of archetypes representing "those elements in 1950s society that constituted the forces of dissidence around which the youth culture was to coalesce" (Aldgate and Richards 162). Such a reading enables the climax of *The Ladykillers* to be seen in a new light. Because the criminals' bodies are carried away by train, the railway is effectively a means of transporting these "forces of dissidence" away from the world of the film. It is a product of the traditional order which Mrs Wilberforce herself represents, as evidenced by Barr's

observation that her house is sited near St Pancras station, "a monument of Victorian Gothic." (Barr 170) While the five criminals of *The Ladykillers* represent voices of post-war dissent, then, the film works to contain and make safe these influences.

On the whole, *The Ladykillers* represents a nostalgic vision of mid-1950s England held in stasis. Its ties to Victorian or Edwardian England are reassuringly recognisable and, while the forces of modernity and dissent are acknowledged, they are safely packed away by the film's conclusion. Set against these is the figure of the elderly spinster who maintains past values and traditions even in the face of a shifting present, thus providing a comforting sense of continuity. There is, in fact, a striking parallel between the characterisation of Mrs Wilberforce and that of Miss Marple, another late Victorian figure whose moral views are sharply contrasted with those of post-war society. While the criminals of *The Ladykillers* ultimately do away with themselves, however, Christie's post-war novels are unable to offer a similarly straightforward resolution. Rather, they exhibit continued anxiety regarding the very forces which remain nascent in the world depicted by *The Ladykillers*. Noting an absence of "sexuality" and "youth" in *The Ladykillers*, Aldgate and Richards proclaim that "the cultural revolt of the late 1950s was to be characterised by those elements of sexuality and youth that are suppressed here." (Aldgate and Richards 194) This same "cultural revolt" is seen to trouble Christie, with Bargainnier asserting that "the first novels expressing her fears of youth appear in the 'fifties." (Bargainnier 195) These tendencies culminate in Christie's final novels, in which the author retreats further into the past rather than attempting to engage with the contemporary; whereas *At Bertram's Hotel* sees Miss Marple rejecting a nostalgic reproduction of the Edwardian era, Christie's final novel, *Postern of Fate,* is one in which the mystery element is all but superseded by an uncritical nostalgia for this same period.

In particular, *Postern of Fate* is preoccupied by extended recollections of "what they call Edwardian times or Victorian times." (Christie, *Postern of Fate* 89) Here, there is a sense of the "Edwardian" and "Victorian" periods as being almost interchangeable. We are confronted with a nostalgia for an unlocalised ideal of the past – rooted in the era in which Christie herself was raised – rather than a specific historical reality. *Postern of Fate*, consequently, evokes a sense of nostalgia for the late Victorian or early Edwardian childhood which is far from uncommon in British literature. Seth Lerer, for instance, notes that "C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and A. A. Milne had Edwardian childhoods," and that "the feel of so much of their fantasy […] takes us back to a time before the First World War" (Lerer 257). At

times, it seems that this nostalgia for the Edwardian inflects even the relationship between crime and transport technology in Christie's novels. In particular, her interwar fiction often recalls the ways in which the Edwardian period, as Lerer puts it, saw "trains, automobiles, and airplanes burst upon the childhood imagination" (Lerer 272). At the very least, enthusiasm for transport technology often seems to carry a sense of childishness in Christie's novels. In *Hickory Dickory Dock* (1955), for instance, a disparaging comment is made by Miss Lemon: "Grown men being so silly! But there, that's men all over. Like the model railways they go on playing with." (Christie, *Hickory Dickory Dock* 7) To spend time with "model railways" is dismissed as "playing"; an interest in railways, it appears, conjures up the innocent enthusiasm associated with childhood, and cannot therefore be regarded as a legitimate past-time.

Much more striking, however, is the direct reference to the Edwardian period made by *The ABC Murders* (1936), in which Franklin Clarke recalls re-reading "a book of E. Nesbit's that I used to love" (Christie, *ABC Murders* 100), foreshadowing the revelation that Clarke is the murderer. In summing up the case, Poirot emphasises "the boyish mind […] shown by his taste in fiction–I have ascertained that there is a book in the library called *The Railway Children* by E. Nesbit." (182) Thus, Christie illustrates the "boyish" nature of the culprit by referring to one of the best-known evocations of transport technology in Edwardian literature. Hence, Christie suggests that a fascination with trains is not only associated with masculinity but also typical of young children. In contrast, *4:50 from Paddington* opens with Mrs McGillicuddy reflecting upon the day's purchases, including "the space gun for Robby" (Christie, *4:50* 7). It seems that boys' imaginations are now captured by science fiction rather than railways, reflecting an era in which Britain's railways were popularly regarded as being in a state of decline. This sense of decline has ensured that the railways are now identified primarily as a site of nostalgia, rather than the face of modernity: a shift which has had a marked impact upon representations of railways in detective fiction. Christopher Daley, for instance, cites the "success of crime fiction set in the enclosed carriages of steam locomotives" in order to support his claim that "British railway writing has struggled to go beyond the energies of the steam age." (Daley, n. p.) Against the background of post-Second World War England, the train apparently travels in a circle, endlessly revisiting nostalgic evocations of prestige and comfort.

Chapter 2: Train Travel, Heritage and Adult Anxiety in Children's Literature

Postern of Fate begins with the characters sorting through a collection of antique children's books while recalling "the joys of the past" (Christie, *Postern of Fate* 16). This exploration of the past continues when Tuppence searches through "a lot of toys that seem to have been shoved away […] probably years and years ago" (89), including an antique rocking-horse which, it is later revealed, contains hidden papers vital to the solution of the mystery. By foregrounding the exhumation of the past and the exploration of childhood relics in this way, Christie echoes a major concern of British children's literature from the 1950s to the 1970s. As Krips has observed, securing "an appropriate orientation to the present in terms of the past" is "a signal feature of British children's books post-war." (Krips 52) This quest is complicated by the tendency of children's fiction to conjure up idealised spaces defined by their orderliness and predictability: a tendency accentuated by machine culture in late Victorian and Edwardian fiction. Strikingly, post-war children's fiction asserts that such realms must be left behind; while it is essential to remember and commemorate the past, it is suggested, the self-contained and mechanically predictable nature of these spaces is a hindrance to personal growth. It therefore appears inevitable that enthusiasm for the Edwardian railway world should fade from children's fiction. Reflecting the changing condition of Britain's transport networks in the 1950s and 1960s, the railway dwindles from a symbol of modernity and technological prowess to another forgotten toy.

In the field of British children's literature, the name of Enid Blyton in particular has become a commonly accepted shorthand for predictability and conservatism. Sheila G. Ray, for instance, cites the view held by educational psychologist Nicholas Tucker "that Enid Blyton serves a useful purpose. Children need Blyton for the same reasons that adults read Agatha Christie when they want to dip into something well-ordered and predictable." (Ray 103) As with the Golden Age detective novel, this comparison suggests, Blyton's novels offer reassuring narratives in which the existing societal order is reliably safeguarded against disruption and change. It is precisely this quality which is criticised by Cadogan and Craig, who go so far as to condemn Blyton's mystery and adventure stories for their "nursery-world tidiness" (Cadogan and Craig, *You're a Brick* 338). It must be noted, however, that Cadogan and Craig's analysis of Blyton's output is an incomplete one; as David Rudd points out, they "inexplicably omit some of Blyton's key works – her school stories." (Rudd 109) In particular,

Rudd argues that Blyton's "Malory Towers" series offers "an alluring, predominantly female world" which lies beyond "the bounds of patriarchy"; a world which "aims to bring out the best in its pupils" (126-127). While this space may have "nursery-world" characteristics, it can only be inhabited temporarily, and the emphasis on personal growth identified by Rudd serves to remind us of this fact.

The allure of Blyton's world is further strengthened by the sense of community which pervades the series from the outset. In *First Term at Malory Towers* (1946), Darrell Rivers reflects that she is "lucky […] to be having Malory Towers as my school-home for so many years." (Blyton 11) Here, the term "school-home" clearly indicates that the value of the school is defined in personal as well as academic terms. The appeal of such a space is encapsulated in Manlove's argument that children "like a world which is largely predictable, as real life often is not, and a system whose parameters are known", and that these qualities are offered by the boarding school story, which offers "not only the routine of school itself, but the sense of a self-contained and organised community" (Manlove 185). While the "self-contained" nature of the school may be appealing to child readers, however, it also results in a sense of the school as being detached from adult reality. This sense of separation is evidenced by Ray's suggestion that the poor literary reputation of the genre may be due to the fact that "a child's view of school is so far removed from that of an adult that it is impossible to write a novel […] which is equally valid at both levels." (Ray 195) What is offered by the boarding school story is a familiar and well-ordered community which is engaging to child readers but unacceptably idealistic from an adult perspective.

Significantly, the gateway to this community, the "school-home", often takes the form of a train journey. At the beginning of many boarding school stories, Pat Pinsent remarks, the train journey is a device with which "new girls are introduced and friendships between old pupils are renewed. The journey marks the boundary between home and school" (Pinsent 12). Traversing this "boundary" is, for many child characters, a rite of initiation: the railway station marks the site at which they are separated from parents or guardians for the first time. Following this rite of initiation, the passengers are transported to the "school-home", an organised community with a hierarchical structure; strikingly, the predictable nature of this community reflects that of the train, an enclosed structure which progresses through time and space in a prearranged manner. Thus, it can be argued that the train is effectively a microcosm of the school itself. For one thing, Pinsent notes that the space of the train "marks the transition

between the parental territory (as it exists in time and space) […] and the teacher/pupil territory" and is therefore "a kind of liminal time-space zone" (Pinsent 13). Although characters within this "liminal" space have not fully transitioned into the world of the school as yet, they may be given their first taste of school routine and hierarchy.

Antonia Forest's *Autumn Term* (1948), the first in a series of novels featuring the Marlow family, offers a noteworthy example of this process of transition. Forest, according to Pinsent, "uses the train chronotope more creatively than some writers" by not only introducing her leading characters to the reader but also having Nicola Marlow stop the train to retrieve a lost pen knife (Pinsent 16). Here, a teacher's intervention provides the reader with an introduction to school discipline: "Where another mistress would have allowed the episode to rest until they reached school and a certain amount of privacy, Miss Cromwell attacked immediately" (Forest, *Autumn Term* 18). Forest therefore exploits the narrative possibilities of the train journey in order to induct the reader into the dynamics of the school. The consequences of Nicola's actions reverberate throughout the rest of the novel, in fact; it is later reported that stricter "train rules" have been imposed upon the students: "It won't be a bit entertaining any more with staff all over the place watching" (238). The train therefore indicates the dual nature of the school space; while there is a certain kind of freedom afforded by the absence of parental authority, there remain figures tasked with "watching" and maintaining order. Although pupils may seek to test their boundaries, then, there is ultimately an expectation that they will mature as characters and contribute to the standing of the community rather than disrupting its order.

The train therefore serves to carry characters into an environment with an impetus to personal development. Indeed, Pinsent argues that the school itself often appears to be "a kind of additional character in the book, moulding its pupils […] into its own ethos." (Pinsent 13) This tendency has a gendered dimension. Cadogan and Craig, for instance, call our attention to the longevity of the girls' school story, remarking that it "flourished between the wars, when old values and traditions were being reasserted in new guise," and "survived more or less unchanged until after the second world war [sic]." (Cadogan and Craig, *You're a Brick* 178-179) This is not to say that the boys' school story did not survive into the post-war period; the first novel in Anthony Buckeridge's *Jennings* series, for example, was published in 1950. The *Jennings* series, however, is an outlier, belonging to a type which Cadogan and Craig believe to have been in decline by the late 1920s, attributing this to the notion that male readers were "less disposed to accept an unrealistically glamorous view of school life" (179). This contrasts

sharply with their preceding argument that female readers "tended to think of school – particularly boarding school – in terms of freedom from the home as well as a later freedom of choice." (178) In spite of the expectation that students will follow a certain "ethos", then, the boarding school story appears to have offered female readers of the interwar period a tantalising, if temporary, prospect of "freedom".

The train, then, acquires new significance in the girls' school story. To board the train is to be transported beyond the reach of a masculine social order, as evidenced by Blyton's Malory Towers, in which Rudd identifies a "state of freedom [which] is more desirable than a return to the Patriarchal Fold." (Rudd 131) In the second half of the twentieth century, however, this sense of "freedom" is undercut by what Manlove regards as the genre's "increasing irrelevance to the English social fabric." (Manlove 185) The persistence of the train journey as a narrative device in the boarding school story, contrasting with what Pinsent describes as "the likelihood that pupils in more recent times will have been delivered by car to their schools" (Pinsent 12), lends weight to the claim of "increasing irrelevance". At the very least, it is one way in which the boarding school story's idealistic representation of the "school-home" has been made to appear increasingly outmoded. Certainly, the school stories of authors such as Blyton and Forest are late survivors of a type which had peaked during the interwar period; indeed, Ray goes so far as to argue that Blyton's "school stories […] represent a final peak of achievement for the genre." (Ray 196) On the whole, the boarding school story, in its post-war manifestations, can be seen to hark back to the Edwardian period in a way that goes against the broader trends emerging in children's fiction from the 1950s to the 1970s.

L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953), in which the adult Leo Colston looks back upon an Edwardian childhood, showcases this sense of continuity. These recollections include an account of a train journey from school, which vividly evokes the "ecstasy of escape" associated with the train: "It was a saloon of a kind not found now, upholstered in deep red plush, the seats facing each other the whole length of the compartment. […] Joy shone on every face; playful punches were exchanged" (Hartley 27-28). While Hartley vividly conjures up the experience of the Edwardian schoolboy, from the euphoric sense of release to the "playful" camaraderie of their peers, the description of the coach as being "a kind not found now" reminds the reader that this particular experience of travel belongs to the past. This lends weight to Cadogan and Craig's argument that, while some "better-known school stories have survived", they "are best read with sympathetic recognition of the fact that they are products

of another era." (Cadogan and Craig, *You're a Brick* 205) In contrast, writing at a later date allows Pinsent to observe that the apparent decline of "the boarding-school story, in both its male and female manifestations" is "only a temporary 'blip' before the revival most amazingly signalled by J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter saga" (Pinsent 17). The "scarlet steam engine" (Rowling 71) seen in this "saga", however, is a deliberately anachronistic image that serves to delineate the boundary between the natural and supernatural worlds. Consequently, the fact remains that the train journey is another of those features of the boarding school story which stand out as "products of another era."

The train journey also serves to complete the distancing of the boarding school from reality by transporting its characters into spaces which, as Pinsent observes, "are not only detached from ordinary society, but also by their nature patronized by the upper class and the upper middle class" (Pinsent 14). The reader is therefore presented with a highly selective view of society, which is reinforced by the idealised landscapes in which many boarding school stories are set. For example, Forest's *Autumn Term* sees her protagonists walking along a "wood-fringed road" (Forest, *Autumn Term* 26) to Kingscote School, which is located near a cathedral city in the south of England and commands a "pleasant flowery garden" (27) as well as a sea view. Similarly, Blyton's Malory Towers is located in Cornwall and has "the most gorgeous view over the sea" (Blyton 7). Rudd calls our attention to its "romantic associations", including the fact that the school is "likened to a castle, set against the backdrop of the sea in North Cornwall – similar to the Arthurian Camelot at Tintagel" (Rudd 123). As suggested by these mythological associations, such "gorgeous" landscapes have the potential to conjure up a reassuring conception of English national identity. The boarding school story also makes it clear that the train plays a major role in making these landscapes accessible and, consequently, more readily available for commodification.

Malory Towers in particular reflects a broader trend towards the rural in Blyton's fiction. The Famous Five books, for instance, are described by Rudd as conveying a powerful "discourse of Englishness", with the "countryside" being "seen to epitomize the true England" (Rudd 91). Rudd goes on to argue that, "while the signifier 'Blyton' itself evokes a conception of Englishness, it is essentially a secure, cosy environment that is being constructed," and that "this homeland is set against all that is Other" (92). As in the Golden Age detective novel, then, "Englishness" is defined in opposition to an imagined "Other"; this is seen most clearly in Blyton's mystery and adventure stories, in which her child characters play the role of detective,

bringing culprits – many of them adults – to justice. In the process, the setting is presented by Blyton as being particularly conducive to childhood development. As Rudd puts it, "[r]ural England is seen as the perfect nursery in which the Five can flex their moral and mental muscle." (Rudd 98) This not only lends strength to Cadogan and Craig's accusation of "nursery-world tidiness", but also recalls what Manlove identifies as the "old pastoral-idyllic mode from which children's fantasy is now trying to move on." (Manlove 92) Crucially, railways have a greater role to play in this "pastoral-idyllic mode" than might initially be assumed.

The extent of this role is most apparent in Edwardian children's literature. Humphrey Carpenter has identified "two streams of children's literature, which divided in about 1860 and never really came together again until the 1950s." (Carpenter, 15) One of these is "the breezy, optimistic adventure story"; the other is a "fantastic strain of writing" which "dealt largely with utopias, and posited the existence of Arcadian societies remote from the nature and concerns of the everyday world" while "commenting, often satirically and critically, on real life." (15-16) These "utopias" and "Arcadian societies" are usually pastoral in nature; in Edwardian fantasy, consequently, forms of technology such as railways or automobiles frequently appear as an intrusion of "the nature and concerns of the everyday world" into the idyllic pastoral retreat which the author has carved out. This is most apparent in *The Wind in the Willows*, which Manlove believes to be "the purest idyll, because the most pastoral, among Edwardian children's fantasies" (Manlove 49). Grahame depicts a leisurely and attractive way of life, as evoked in Rat's description of life on the River: "It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing." (Grahame 15) Rat's words clearly suggest that this pastoral lifestyle is the best possible form of existence, a peaceful and unchanging way of life in which each character's responsibilities are clearly defined.

Standing in opposition to the stillness of the River Bank is Toad, whose ever-changing fixations reflect his craving for speed and novelty: "Travel, change, interest, excitement! The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing!" (32) This desire for new experience eventually manifests itself in a particularly chaotic form, as a mania for the motor-car. Lerer goes so far as to suggest that the intoxicating appeal of new technology dominates the novel, declaring that "here the vision of Edwardian England lies less in garden-party photographs than in the technological inventions that would captivate the fancies of the rich"

(Lerer 263). Certainly, Toad's imagination is seen to be captured by the motor-car; he is immediately "spellbound" (Grahame 44) by this answer to his craving for novelty and excitement. This is not, however, the only form of transport capable of stimulating the imagination. As Lerer argues, Toad's mania echoes the "technological supernaturalism" of railways in *The Railway Children* (Lerer 271). Initially, Nesbit's characters have no particular interest in trains:

> They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever thought about railways except as a means of getting to Maskelyne and Cook's, the Pantomine, Zoological Gardens, and Madame Tussaud's. They were just ordinary suburban children… (Nesbit 1)

For Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis, the train belongs to the "ordinary", and its significance is defined solely in terms of the locations to which it can transport them. This view is seen to change across the course of Nesbit's novel, as the children's imagination lends the train a new significance and transforms it from the "ordinary" to the extraordinary.

The children's first glimpse of a train speeding past their new home is particularly significant. Lerer sees this train as "shattering the still complacency" of Edwardian domesticity in a "scene [which] strikingly resonates with Toad's first vision of the motorcar, for both evoke the ways in which technology can inflame the passions." (Lerer 272) Whereas such "passions" are things to be resisted in Grahame's novel, however, Nesbit goes on to depict the children as developing an affection for the railway. The routine of the railway, in fact, is entwined with the daily routine of the children: "They began to know the hours when certain trains passed, and they gave names to them." (Nesbit 42) In this way, the trains are brought to life by the children's imagination; for instance, the "9.15 up" is dubbed "the Green Dragon", and Phyllis muses that "if it were a really real dragon, we could stop it and ask it to take our love to Father." (42-43) The dangers of the railway are not entirely elided, though, as evidenced by the scene in which the children narrowly avert a railway accident. Here, the train is presented in a new and frightening perspective: "The front of the engine looked enormous. Its voice was loud and harsh." (114) Yet we are told that Bobbie "used to wonder whether the engine itself had not heard her." (114-115). Even here, the imagination asserts itself, as Bobbie imagines that the engine has a will of its own. Throughout Nesbit's novel, a wide range of desires and associations are fixed upon the train, which is continually brought to life by a sentimental imagination.

Indeed, Troy Boone contends that both *The Railway Children* and *The Wind in the Willows* "acknowledge the inescapable fact of urban industrialism and are concerned to invent a pastoral that is cut to the measure of machine culture." (Boone 81) In particular, Boone's analysis of *The Railway Children* focuses upon its "sentimental benevolence […] that in fact reinforces the power of the middle classes to supervise the working poor." (94) In this way, Nesbit's presentation of the railway communicates a simplistic understanding of the social order in which the concerns of industrialism are highly abstracted. This description of Nesbit's "sentimental" tone is also reflected in Carpenter's belief that the child characters are kept in a state of ignorance by Nesbit, "partly to achieve the book's climax, but also, one feels, because she likes to shelter children from the real world." (Carpenter 135) For Carpenter, this ignorance extends to the book's sense of morality, as the discovery of "the possibility of gross injustice in the adult world" is not given close focus, and the children do not "experience any real hardships during their supposed poverty" (135). Nesbit's presentation of the railway, then, serves to subtly reinforce existing class divisions while conjuring up the powerful effect of the railway upon the Edwardian imagination. This effect is made clear by the novel's opening paragraph, which makes a distinction between "railway children" and "ordinary suburban children": to belong to the "suburban", it would appear, is to be "ordinary", while the industrialised world of the railway is implicitly framed as extraordinary. While this extraordinary world may inspire a potent fascination, however, it must be admired from a distance.

In particular, the extent to which Nesbit shields her characters from "hardships" reinforces Boone's claim that one of her primary morals is that "however attractive the railway itself is to the children, they must maintain a proper distance from that which is mechanical and working-class" (Boone 97). Hence, Nesbit's novel not only asserts that the world of the "mechanical and working-class" is distinct from that of the "suburban", but also suggests that this separation must be carefully maintained. The result is what Carpenter identifies as a "cocooning of children from the real world" (Carpenter 136). At times, the "real world" threatens to intrude upon the novel, as evidenced by the disappearance of the children's father; he is taken away by men who, it is revealed, "had come to arrest him, charging him with selling State secrets to the Russians – with being, in fact, a spy and a traitor." (Nesbit 195) Here, we recognise a suggestion of geo-political anxieties which reveals a world beyond the domestic sphere to which the children have been accustomed. Yet this crisis has been tidied away by the

conclusion of the novel, in which the railway is the means of reuniting Bobbie with her father: "'Oh! my Daddy, my Daddy!' That scream went like a knife into the hearts of everyone in the train" (265). With this emotive reunion, Nesbit reaffirms a sense of her novel as framing the railway in principally sentimental terms; the difficulties which have temporarily separated the children from their former lives of "suburban" domesticity are neatly resolved by the train pulling into the platform.

Seen primarily through the eyes of Nesbit's child characters, whose perspective is heavily sheltered, the railway is made to suit middle-class conceptions of national identity. Echoes of this sentimentalised presentation, which is often more palatable than the historical reality of the railway, may be found in a number of later texts. Certainly, it is possible to argue that there is a nostalgic appeal in the ability to perceive railways as Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis do: not as a mundane means of travel, but as something exciting and extraordinary which is abstracted from the concerns of everyday life. This is supported by the fact that enthusiasm for railways continues to be associated with childhood well into the 1950s and 1960s; in particular, Carter observes that "[f]rom the war's end until at least 1960 train spotting was British boys' default leisure activity." (Carter, *British railway enthusiasm* 267) Children's literature does not fail to take account of this prevalent trend. In *Just Like Jennings* (1961), for example, Buckeridge's Darbishire is "eager to collect engine numbers and things" (Buckeridge 14). Nor is this trend confined to post-war texts; an obsession with railways is the defining trait of Tony Morland, a character in Angela Thirkell's *High Rising* (1933). What such examples have in common is the association of railway enthusiasm with male characters, recalling Poirot's remark that "[s]mall boys love trains better than small girls do." (Christie, *ABC Murders* 177) This gendered assumption further reinforces the sense of exclusivity which envelops the presentation of railways in fiction. Seen throughout children's literature is a recurring implication that a passion for railways is socially acceptable only in young boys.

The other message which arises from this association of railway enthusiasm with childhood is the notion that such enthusiasm is a juvenile trait which must eventually be outgrown. In particular, it is significant that representations of railways in children's literature frequently invite comparison with Edwardian texts such as *The Railway Children*. Lerer, for one, sees a love of technology as being emblematic of this period, calling our attention to "that side of the Edwardians" which is characterised by "a fascination with the newfangledness of fast technologies, but also with the need to dress those fast technologies in cloaks of artifice."

(Lerer 268) This ultimately lends weight to Lerer's argument that the Edwardian period is, in a sense, representative of the state of childhood in general, as he contends that "[a]ll children", like the Edwardians, live on "a cusp […] between the memories of their comfortable youth and the fears of the future; between machines that work as playful toys and those that morph into weapons" (273). The adult reader, having outgrown the ability to see machines as "playful toys", nevertheless retains a sense of nostalgia for such idealised representations. As a result of this nostalgia, genre fiction insistently returns to the sentimentalised "cloaks of artifice" in which the Edwardian period covers technologies such as the railway.

A sense of continuity with the Edwardian period's attitude toward transport is particularly apparent in Forest's *The Ready-Made Family* (1967), a novel in which *The Railway Children* finds an unmistakeable echo. In this novel, elder sister Karen's marriage to Edwin Dodd, a widower with three children, causes consternation as the Marlows struggle to reconcile themselves to the Dodds; the experiences of the three Dodd children, who must adjust to a new setting while coping with the loss of a parent, invites comparison with those of Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis. The similarities are further emphasised by Charles Dodd's liking for the railway, described in the following novel, *The Cricket Term* (1974), as "a passion for trains." (Forest, *Cricket Term* 19) This "passion" is continually made apparent in *The Ready-Made Family*, even during a major scene in which Forest's characters narrowly prevent a railway accident. As the children attempt to flag down the train, Forest's prose evokes a vivid sense of danger which culminates in Nicola's fear that Charles has been killed, as "newspaper words like *crushed* and *decapitated* stood hideously in her mind" (Forest, *Ready-Made Family* 142-143) until she finally discovers that he is safe. The whole scene is the most obvious parallel with *The Railway Children* which Forest's novel has to offer; just as in Nesbit's work, the "passion" that children may have for railways is counterpointed by the potential danger inherent in such an environment. While Charles' enthusiasm is not diminished by this narrow escape, it is once again suggested that railways are best enjoyed from a distance.

Strikingly, there is a sense of artifice even in the dangers of the railway. In both *The Railway Children* and *The Ready-Made Family*, the narrow prevention of a train accident is the source of sensationalised drama; Carpenter, for instance, believes that the scene in *The Railway Children* is the most notable example of "a series of soap-opera crises" (Carpenter 135). The "soap-opera" nature of the drama which takes place on the railway stands out more clearly in *The Ready-Made Family*; it contrasts with the much more immediate sense of danger

conjured up by the novel's final act, in which Nicola travels to Oxford alone in search of Rose, who has run away from home. The journey initially takes on the appearance of a sightseeing expedition, with Nicola regarding her first glimpse of Oxford from the approaching train as "a sight which, like the Manhattan skyline, should be seen at least once in a lifetime." (Forest, *The Ready-Made Family* 159) While Nicola is initially enthralled by the city and its range of romantic associations, however, this sense of enchantment is quickly dispelled when she finds herself having to rescue Rose from a predatory stranger claiming to be her uncle. Forest evokes a powerful sense of danger which preys upon a particularly adult set of fears, and this is made apparent by Rose's naivety: "I thought if I came, Mummy would be there. Uncle Gerry said so." (184) Children's literature is not always prepared to admit that the experience of travel may carry this kind of risk. While train journeys and separation from parental authority often conjure up enthralling notions of independence and adventure, these may also leave children vulnerable, as Forest makes clear.

Indeed, the usage of transport in Forest's novels makes clear the wide range of associations which the train journey may call forth. The train plays a key role in the series as a primary means of enabling the Marlows to travel between their home and other series; train journeys recur throughout the novels, most noticeably at the beginning of the school-bound novels like *Autumn Term*. This reflects a broader trend seen not only in the boarding school story, but in the wider field of children's literature, where the train journey typically signals the beginning of adventure. Alice Jenkins gives this trend a close focus, remarking that "[t]rain journeys occur at initiatory or climactic moments of large numbers of classic children's utopian fantasies", and that even "after it vanished from the landscapes of the real world as a functional means of transport, the steam train in particular continues to feature in works of fantasy aimed at children" (Jenkins 23). Here, Jenkins' focus upon "the steam train in particular" may suggest an explanation as to the persistence with which Edwardian texts such as *The Railway Children* continue to resonate in later periods. Although railways in general evidently offer a wealth of narrative potential, the steam locomotive seems to possess a particular allure, as evidenced by Jenkins' identification of "a particular symbolic resonance in the motif of the steam train that enables it to act potently in the landscapes of fantasy." (30) Thus, it may be argued that later texts are nostalgically drawn to the world of the late Victorian or Edwardian railway, a space in which the dominance of steam is most complete.

The tendency towards nostalgia in representations of the railway has become more prominent from the 1950s onward, as Britain's railways underwent a range of significant changes which lend weight to Nicholas Daly's claim that "the train can also now be redolent of pastness, of a more leisurely, almost pastoral, transport era" (Daly 113). In particular, it can be argued that steam is now seen as emblematic of a vanished way of life. Richards and Mackenzie, for instance, claim that, until the 1960s, "the structure of the railways and the nature of railway work had remained recognizably what it had been in its heyday." (Richards and Mackenzie, 241) This continuity was abruptly severed by the changes which Carter identifies as producing "new policies of conservation" alongside a widespread nostalgic response: "As British railways declined from their Edwardian peak, enthusiasts' structure of feeling shifted steadily from celebrating novelty to mourning loss." (Carter, *British railway enthusiasm* 110) Thus, the development of Britain's railways from the 1950s to the 1970s produced a strong nostalgic feeling for the perceived "heyday" of the railways: an era which has a potent symbol in the steam locomotive. This preoccupation with "mourning loss" is not, however, exclusive to railway enthusiasm. Rather, it can be seen as reflecting a broader preoccupation with the past and with emerging anxieties surrounding memory and preservation – a preoccupation which reveals itself with particular clarity in children's literature.

The 1950s to the 1970s are typically identified as a second golden age in British children's fiction, and it is a concern with the past which is the defining feature of this group of texts. A "typical plot of this period" is identified by Carpenter as being one in which children "stumble across some feature of history or mythology", and "are drawn into it, usually at their own peril, and in consequence achieve some kind of spiritual, moral or intellectual growth." (Carpenter 217-218) Such narratives reveal the way in which children's fiction of the second golden age interrogates and challenges the view of childhood presented in the first. In fact, Krips posits that the second golden age is preoccupied with the child's capacity to confirm and maintain the memory of the past:

> Both the books of the first golden age and those of the second are the product of periods of transformation and renewal, but while in the early period the children within the books provided a refuge from adult life, those of the second are far more likely to be pressed into service as a conduit to a past. The details of the relation to the past that the books represent have thus changed: the child is no longer an escape, but a resource. (Krips 62)

Hence, it may be seen that children's fiction of this period is dominated by a pattern in which the past breaks upon the "well-ordered and predictable world" of the child, with the resulting disruption speaking to adult anxieties concerning inheritance and the fallibility of memory.

Krips also calls our attention to the way in which the ideal of childhood conjured up by the books of the first golden age has endured in the memory, arguing that this "childhood remembered […] represents a past that, while constantly escaping us, is nevertheless omnipresent." (9) It is particularly telling that Krips chooses to illustrate this conception of the past by quoting from the opening line of *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." (Hartley 7) This novel is preoccupied with a failure of memory; the retrospective narrative in which Hartley's protagonist looks back upon an Edwardian childhood can be seen to encapsulate many of the concerns found in children's literature of this period. This serves as a reminder of the overlap between literature aimed at children and adult literature concerned with childhood. In particular, it can be suggested that the children's literature of the first golden age was chiefly the product of adult authors writing to satisfy their own desire for a return to childhood; Carpenter contends that "childhood itself seemed a Golden Age to many of these writers, as they set out to recapture its sensations" (Carpenter, n. p.). Further emphasising this quality is Carpenter's later remark, concerning "*Alice*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Peter Pan*, even the Beatrix Potter stories," that "a full appreciation is only possible by adults." (205) This reflects Krips' claim that childhood in the first golden age serves primarily as a "refuge from adult life"; there is a sense of childhood as existing not for its own sake, but for the benefit of adult audiences.

Consequently, *The Go-Between* is all the more striking in that it is a novel which critiques the self-centred tendencies of adulthood; when the young Leo is exploited by the adults in his life, this results in a traumatic experience that is the reason for his later suppression of memory. The experience remains hidden until the adult Leo happens across his old diary, a reminder of the childhood memories which he is reluctant to confront. This challenge is all the greater for the long period of time in which they have been suppressed: "I had kept them buried all these years, but they were there, I knew, the more complete, the more unforgotten, for being carefully embalmed. Never, never, had they seen the light of day" (Hartley, *The Go-Between* 19). Yet Leo ultimately resolves to read through the diary, which is a kind of archaeological record; Hartley's novel charts the difficult process by which he unearths "buried" memories and so confronts his own trauma. In following this process, the reader is drawn into a sample

of Edwardian childhood which has been recorded in detail. As Leo reads, he is concerned to accomplish his own "resurrection" (20). *The Go-Between*, then, is concerned with the exhumation of the past. While this may involve a struggle with painful memories, it remains necessary to draw the past out into the light of day, to make it comprehensible and recoverable. Only then is it possible to move on.

Children's literature of the second golden age often involves a similar struggle to unearth and recover the past, with the eventual aim of moving forward, and this endeavour endows the railway with new narrative possibilities. In particular, Jenkins' examination of "[t]he railway train as a motif […] in children's fantasy literature" notes that it "insulates characters from the landscapes they traverse and […] temporarily extracts them from the laws of cause and effect that determine the rest of the fantasy world." (Jenkins 26) As the boarding school story shows, this is one aspect of the train's ability to inaugurate adventure by transporting characters into a new realm which operates in a different way to the one they have left behind. A new realisation of this potential, however, is offered by Richard Parker's *The Old Powder Line* (1971), in which the "foreign country" visited by the train is the past. In this novel, the young Brian Kane discovers an anachronistic steam-hauled train that is capable of travelling in time. Time and space run together: as the train travels further along the line, so are its passengers transported further back in time. As Manlove puts it, this narrative conveys the message that "all linear time, symbolised by the old railway line itself, is still potentially 'there,' still joined up and alive, and that our habit of making the present our sole window on reality is only a habit." (Manlove 124) In Parker's novel, then, the familiar imagery of the train journey is used to communicate the notion that the past is no less tangible or "alive" than the present.

Emerging from this notion is the danger of looking back, of becoming overly fascinated with the past. Across the course of Parker's narrative, in fact, several characters become literally trapped in the past, and Brian's friend Arnold Mincing ponders: "The more I think of it… tell me, why are we all so obsessed with the past? It's rather as if an explorer on the edge of an unknown jungle were to walk backwards" (126). The message is further emphasised when time travel is likened to "some sort of drug" (126), and Parker's novel ultimately carries a message that the "fascination" of the past – which is especially tempting for those who wish to revisit their own childhood, as Arnold does – is dangerous. Seen here is an acknowledgment that the past is "alive" and potentially reachable, but also a moral concerning the necessity of

proceeding forward into the "unknown". Indeed, Brian is given no choice; the journey he undertakes during the novel's climax proves to be his last, with the line being "wound up" (133). The cessation of the train service serves to underline Parker's moral, a reflection of what Carpenter has identified as "the unvarying emphasis throughout English children's fiction at the time on *growing up*, on coming to terms with the real world." (Carpenter, 218) In this way, children's literature of the second golden age argues against the nostalgia for childhood conjured up by the first, as well as a more general desire to dwell in the past. Its characters must, as in *The Old Powder Line*, escape from the past and return to the present.

Evidence of this trend is found in Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), which, according to Carpenter, is "a rewriting of *Peter Pan*" in which Tom comes to accept "what Peter Pan can never accept: that Time must be allowed to pass, and growth and even old age must be accepted as necessary and even desirable" (Carpenter 220). What is particularly telling is that Pearce invokes the old tropes associated with the railway journey, only to shut them off. This occurs during Tom's final encounter with his playmate Hatty, who, by this time, is a grown woman; we are told that Tom "had been hoping for an empty railway compartment for that long, private, explanatory talk with Hatty" (Pearce 196). But this does not happen. Instead, Hatty drives home with her friend and romantic interest, and, by the end of the trip, Tom has faded from her vision: "Hatty saw one other besides herself, and that was young Barty." (196) Not only does Pearce make it apparent that Hatty has grown apart from Tom, but she also denies him the railway journey which he had seen as a possible means of prolonging his time with her. This reaffirms her moral that he cannot remain in the past forever; while Tom does eventually have an "explanatory talk", it is with the elderly Mrs Bartholomew, following the revelation that she and Hatty are one and the same. Significantly, however, Krips responds to Carpenter's analysis of the novel by identifying Pearce's earlier novel, *Minnow on the Say* (1955), as a "necessary precedent." (Krips 52) For Krips, *Minnow on the Say* is "a narrative of detection." (53) Like *Tom's Midnight Garden*, crucially, it revolves around a preoccupation with past events; it is a retrospective narrative.

Krips therefore compares the role of the child characters to that of the classical detective: an attempt "to reorder a plot of the past, to take the unintelligibly fragmentary and make of it an intelligible whole." (53) Krips' comparison between the child and the classical detective makes clear the role which the child is typically expected to play in texts of the second golden age: they must recover fragmentary evidence of the past and, in doing so, incorporate

it into a satisfying narrative which can be carried forward into the future. It is all the more significant, then, that the 1960s in particular should witness new efforts to do precisely what the detective cannot do: "relive the past as experience" (54). Krips asserts that this decade is characterised by a "determination to break with the past", contributing to "a sense of heritage in danger [which] was gathering force" (71). Examples such as the controversy surrounding British Rail's redevelopment of Euston Station – including the demolition of the Euston Arch, a major landmark – prove that the Victorian industrial architecture of the railways was counted amongst the "historic buildings" thought to be imperilled. Significantly, this reaffirms the force with which new ideologies of heritage and preservation asserted themselves, and Krips calls our attention to the increasing popularity of heritage recreations: "From the 1960s on, the tendency to create environments in which the past could be "visited" increased exponentially. Few museums resisted it, theme parks thrived on it, and so too did the stately home." (93) These "environments" strive to create the impression that the past may be relived once more; the objective is not just to exhume the past, but to bring it to life once again.

Mirroring *The Old Powder Line*'s concept of a train that transports its passengers into the past in a literal, physical sense, heritage recreations of railway history offer a metaphorical journey in time. To enter such a recreation, in other words, is to step back in time. Yet the authenticity of such recreations may be contested by historians such as John H. Yates, who laments that "personal nostalgia […] has been the driving force behind all too much transport conservation." (Yates 123) Significantly, Yates also remarks that "[m]ost of the preserved railways were set up by people re-creating the scenes of their childhood" (123). This sense of childhood nostalgia generated by the heritage railway industry has been carried over into popular culture. For makers of cinematic and televisual productions, heritage railways are highly convenient in that they offer an authentic period setting – or, at least, a setting which gives the impression of historical authenticity. Shortly after its establishment, for instance, the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway was used in the filming of the 1970 film adaptation of *The Railway Children*. Mackenzie and Richards have praised this "delightful" adaptation, remarking that it "created on celluloid an Edwardian idyll which captured much of the magical appeal of steam trains and railway lines for children." (Mackenzie and Richards 373) Here, it can be seen that the Edwardian narrative has been re-contextualised by the passage of time. The film adaptation appeals not only to young audiences, but also the nostalgic adult seeking a recreated "Edwardian idyll" where idealised representations of "steam trains and railway lines" are preserved in aspic.

Literary fiction has also gone some way toward encouraging the monetisation of heritage, as indicated by Kynaston's comment that "in May 1945 there appeared two books that in time would fuel a nostalgia industry: Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* […] and the Rev. W. Awdry's *The Three Railway Engines*." (Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* 62) Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* – which seems, in its own way, to anticipate the movement toward conservation of country houses inaugurated by the National Trust – is here set against *The Three Railway Engines* (1945), the first in the "Railway Series" of children's books. Written by the Reverend Wilbert Awdry, this series eventually numbered some twenty-six volumes published from 1945 to 1972; hence, the combination of the books' subject matter with the long period of time over which the series was written ensures that it serves, in part, as a record of the changing state of Britain's railways. Freeman, however, argues that the series symbolises "the residual power of the Victorian railway in the contemporary imagination" and continues "a tradition of social and economic reproduction begun at the dawn of the railway age." (Freeman 244-245) Despite the longevity of the series, then, its nature indicates a continuity with the children's literature of earlier periods. While the content of the books gradually evolves to reflect contemporary concerns, Awdry's style suggests that the series is very much rooted in the Edwardian or even the late Victorian era.

In Rudyard Kipling's short story "·007" (1897), for instance, the reader encounters a newly built steam locomotive whose idealistic expectations are confounded by the drudgery of railway work: "The boys in the shops where he was built used to read wonderful stories of railroad life, and ·007 expected things to happen as he had heard." (Kipling 52) Here, Kipling's self-reflexive reference to "wonderful stories of railroad life" indicates the tendency of late Victorian and Edwardian fiction to lend the railway a particular intrigue, translating it into the "wonderful". Lerer summarises this process by remarking that "[w]riters of the Edwardian age transformed vehicular machines into live creatures." (Lerer 272) Strikingly, Lerer goes on to argue that there is something "characteristically Edwardian" in the way that "the Thomas the Tank Engine stories […] blend the animated animal tale with the mechanical." (272) In bringing his machine characters to life, then, Awdry invites comparison with Edwardian narratives such as *The Railway Children* or Kipling's short story. This connection is also realised in the sense of a highly structured and predictable world which pervades Awdry's stories. Indeed, this is clearly accentuated by the setting of the railway, with its many rules and

structures. The characters are not only defined by the roles they play in relation to the railway, but also seen to occupy a hierarchical structure with Awdry's "Fat Controller" at the very top.

There is, therefore, a sense of continuity with what Julia Briggs sees as the "[c]lass distinctions [which] pervade Edwardian fantasy writing quite as strongly as they do more naturalistic texts" (Briggs 24). Crucially, the pervasiveness of such class "distinctions" supports Briggs' claims that children's books "express with particular clarity their society's sense of itself and its structures," and may come to appear outdated as a result of the "social assumptions" contained within (24). Awdry's books are seemingly no exception: Margaret Mackey, for example, contends that the world of the books is "identifiably Blytonesque, both in content and tone", and that its defining qualities "could come straight out of Blyton's Toyland. It is easy to look at these books and recognise all that was rigid and class-bound about postwar Britain." (Mackey 42-43) Once again, Blyton is used as a convenient shorthand for certain qualities which are seen as detrimental to children's fiction: not only predictability, but also rigidity and the promotion of values seen as belonging exclusively to a past era. Certainly, it may be argued that Awdry's stories have lasted in the public imagination for the same reasons as those of Blyton or Christie: they conjure up the impression of a "well-ordered and predictable" world. It is particularly telling, for instance, that John Churcher regards the earliest books as conveying the impression "that these skilfully differentiated characters […] are pupils in a public school for trains." (Churcher 48) Like the boarding-school story, Awdry's series offers readers the prospect of escape to a self-contained and well-organised community.

If the setting of Awdry's books begins as a kind of "Blyton's Toyland," however, it gradually ceases to be such. The development of the books is guided by the author's desire to lend the stories an air of verisimilitude; as Brian Sibley's biography, *The Thomas the Tank Engine Man* (1995), puts it, he and his brother George Awdry fleshed out the setting of Sodor, "linking the fictional with the factual" (Sibley 159). As a result, the characters' place in the world becomes increasingly uncertain. In *Toby the Tram Engine* (1952), for instance, "cars, 'buses and lorries" threaten the existence of a rural line: "People come to see Toby, but they come by 'bus. They stare at him. "Isn't he quaint!" they say, and laugh." (Awdry, *Toby the Tram Engine* 6-8) Here, it is apparent that contemporary concerns have begun to intrude upon the world of the stories; this story in particular is a reflection of the extent to which the railways' dominance was shaken by the rising popularity of road transport. There is also a foretaste of the "nostalgia industry" which would commodify the steam locomotive as a "quaint" curiosity.

Despite fuelling such an industry, ironically, Awdry's stories continually rebel against such notions by asserting that the technology which was so compelling to the late Victorian or Edwardian imagination still has practical value. This concern is made particularly pressing by *Duck and the Diesel Engine* (1958), which features the first appearance of diesel traction in the series. With this development, Awdry draws the stories even further away from their Edwardian antecedents and into the realm of the contemporary.

Across the course of the series, a range of diesel characters are added to the cast of the stories, suggesting that even the Island of Sodor is incapable of fully resisting modernisation. The development of the stories also reflects the emergence of "heritage" concerns and the growing number of preserved railways in Britain. This does not go unnoticed by Churcher, who remarks that "Awdry increasingly used his stories to advertise railway preservation societies" to the point that "occasionally even the intended audience appears to have been railway buffs rather than children." (Churcher 48) One heritage railway to be promoted in the stories was the Bluebell Railway, which features prominently in *Stepney the "Bluebell" Engine* (1963). Here, we find reminders that, as Carter puts it, "steam's supercession by diesel and electric traction doomed the Victorian steam railway's life world." (Carter, *British railway enthusiasm* 268) Awdry conjures up the loss of this "life world" in highly emotive terms, contrasting the disposal of steam locomotives with the founding of heritage railways such as the Bluebell: "'The Bluebells' are kind people who want to save engines. They've made a place in England called 'The Bluebell Railway'. Engines can escape there and be safe" (Awdry, *Stepney the "Bluebell" Engine* 8). In Awdry's stories, then, we find a particularly potent manifestation of the nostalgia driving concerns such as "heritage" and transport preservation. The salvaging of industrial relics is framed not just as a desire to maintain communication with the past, but as providing "escape" and safety for the anthropomorphised machine characters; thus, the Island of Sodor is now imaged as a retreat from modernity.

These overarching concerns – the onset of dieselisation and the desire to promote and sustain the heritage railway industry – recur throughout the later books, coming to a head in the twenty-third volume, *Enterprising Engines* (1968). From the outset, this volume directly addresses the changing state of Britain's railways:

> "Cheer up, Gordon!" said the Fat Controller.

> "I can't, Sir. The others say I've got boiler-ache, but I haven't, Sir. I keep thinking about the Dreadful State of the World, Sir. Is it true, Sir, what the diesels say?"
>
> "What do they say?"
>
> "They boast that they've *abolished Steam*, Sir." (Awdry, *Enterprising Engines* 6)

Gordon's reference to "the Dreadful State of the World," while mock-pompous, is inseparable from the sense of topical commentary which pervades Awdry's later books; indeed, 1968 was the same year in which steam-hauled services were officially ended by British Rail. As Carter puts it, Gordon is "lucky to have escaped being cut up for baked bean cans." (Carter, *British railway enthusiasm* 268) The spectre of modernisation remains evident in the following story, "Super Rescue":

> The two diesels surveyed the shed. "It's time, 7101," said one, "that we took this railway over."
>
> "Shsh, 199! It's *their* railway, after all."
>
> "Not for long," persisted 199. "Our Controller says, 'Steam engines spoil our Image'." (18)

Here, Awdry satirises the nationalised British Rail as superficially concerned with its own monolithic "Image". The two diesels have no names, only numbers, and are depicted in Peter and Gunvor Edwards' accompanying illustrations as bearing a uniform British Rail livery which contrasts sharply with the distinctive, colourful appearances of the Sodor characters.

Enterprising Engines also features the story "Escape", in which a runaway steam locomotive, Oliver, is rescued and brought to Sodor. This confirms the impression of the fictional island as a refuge from modernity, and it is later reported that the character has been set to work on a new line. There is a particularly telling line in the boast "We *re-open* Branches," (56) which appears to be a retort to the Beeching closures. Yet there is also a concession to modernity – albeit a limited one – in the form of 7101, who, we discover, has been given a home on Sodor. 7101 is also given a personal name, "Bear", and he remarks: "Having a name means that you really belong." (54) The notion that a diesel character may "really belong" on Sodor, the supposed retreat from modernisation, indicates the extent to which 1960s modernity has taken hold of the stories. Alongside these changes, however, there is a reassuring declaration of continuity. The message of *Enterprising Engines*, and of Awdry's stories in general, is best summarised in a speech given by the Fat Controller: "Please tell everyone […] that whatever happens elsewhere, steam will still be at work here. We shall be glad to welcome all who want to see, and travel behind, *real* engines." (46) An impression of

continuity and stability is contained in the assertion that "whatever happens elsewhere, steam will still be at work here." In a sense, this comforting message is typical of children's literature, much of which conveys a sense of its characters as immune to change.

Recalling the anthropomorphism of Edwardian fantasy, then, the books evoke a past era in which Britain's railways were dominated by the steam locomotive. Above all, the series encapsulates the anxieties surrounding heritage, transport and memory throughout children's literature from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the face of transport modernisation, the survival of "*real* engines" is championed. The Island of Sodor ultimately emerges as a nostalgic realm in which there will never be a demand for "heritage" facsimiles of a lost past, because that past can never be lost to begin with. This development is summarised by Sibley:

> What in its earliest manifestations was a reassuring image of all that is safe and secure in childhood, had now come to represent an adult haven: a place where a man might avoid, or at least ignore, the worst aspects of change… (Sibley 262)

However, the avoidance of "change" is also a tendency seen in many long-running children's series. During the interwar period in particular, Manlove notes, "[w]riters tended to stay in a niche, or else be confined to one […] because they gained a mass readership which liked the 'formula' and the 'attitude' of their books," resulting in "a degree of conservatism and intellectual comfort" as "[b]ooks became variations on a theme, and the reader entered a created world where the mind could be at home." (Manlove 54-55) Thus, a long-running series featuring the same character or group of characters offers a reassuring familiarity; to revisit such a series is to come "home." This notion of homecoming contributes to the sense that authors such as Awdry or Blyton offer comfortingly "well-ordered and predictable" worlds.

The longevity of some series, in fact, is such that the characters seem ageless. An example is found in Forest's books: despite the fact that the last novel featuring the Marlow family, *Run Away Home* (1982), appears almost forty years after the first, the characters age by only a few years over the course of the series. The resulting sense of temporal dislocation is intensified by the fact that, while Forest consistently updates the series' cultural references, the fundamental nature of the characters changes little. Even after a surface layer of modernity has been applied to the setting and cast, they remain resolutely rooted in an earlier age. A similar impression is conveyed by Richmal Crompton's *Just William* books; although the series

lasts until 1970, the core of the main character – the archetype of the 1920s schoolboy – is essentially unchanged. It is possible to explain this lack of temporal specificity as a necessary product of narrative convenience, with the author maintaining a certain formula for as long as it has an audience. This also suggests that, as with Christie, the specific reality of the characters is less important than the roles they play in relation to one another – or, perhaps more accurately, the roles they are expected to play. In children's literature, however, the agelessness of the characters takes on a particular significance, as it lends the adult reader a sense that the characters cannot grow up alongside them.

This is a potent source of nostalgia which underlines the reality that, for the adult reader, revisiting the literature of childhood offers a highly personal journey into the past. This is emphasised in Krips' discussion of the children's book as object, which cites Beatrix Potter's books as an example. Noting that they were published during an era commonly "represented as the idyllic period before World War I", Krips contends that the merchandise based on the books "produce[s] a nostalgic reference to more "innocent" times and places." (Krips 40) More generally, the continuing popularity of the books of the first golden age of children's literature is stressed by Krips, who states that "for the remembering adult, the books associated with childhood […] brought childhood back" and contends that the books of the first golden age may not be "given up by those adults for whom they are conduits to the past. They have become objects of heritage" (44-45). Echoing the desire of the authors of the first golden age to revisit an idealised version of childhood, then, these texts appeal to the "remembering adult" reader seeking to reconnect with their own childhood. This phenomenon is by no means exclusive to books of a certain period. Like Potter's books, Awdry's engine stories remain in circulation and have been extensively commodified. Because the books trace and comment upon the changing condition of Britain's railways over more than two decades, they not only inspire a personal sense of nostalgia in those adults who remember and recognise the stories, but also serve as a record of societal and technological changes which now belong to a past era.

As one of the best-known representations of the railway in children's literature, Awdry's stories show clearly how such representations have been invested with new meaning by the perceived decline of Britain's railways in the mid-twentieth century. Children's literature has a well-established tendency to conjure up idealistic, well-ordered realms which, as with the Golden Age detective novel, suggest a social order that is reassuringly insulated against change. Railways play a complex role in such realms; they may threaten them, or, as in

the boarding school story, be the means of reaching them. However, a new layer of associations has been added to this mixture, with texts such as *The Railway Children* or Awdry's stories producing a "nostalgic reference" to what is seen as the glorious past of the railways. The resistance to modernisation seen in Awdry's work also reflects a broader tendency in genre fiction, with authors such as Christie expressing a potent nostalgic feeling for the Edwardian period precisely because it was seen to be rapidly fading from the reach of memory. Set against these trends is a new movement in children's literature in which, as Carpenter puts it, the past serves "as an enrichment of the present. If Arcadias are visited, the journey is made for the benefit of present and future." (Carpenter, 220) With its emphasis on looking to the future, this movement implicitly refutes period nostalgia and continually stresses the inevitability of change. It is particularly telling that this theme is reflected even in Awdry's stories, as 1960s modernisation encroaches upon the "adult haven" created by the author. The reshaping of Sodor's railways not only holds up a mirror to British railway history, but also hints at the growing distance between the literature of the second golden age and its Edwardian predecessors.

Conclusion

The subtext of Poirot's reflections on the theme of "a *railway-minded man*" in *The ABC Murders* is especially potent, speaking to long-standing cultural assumptions (Christie, *ABC Murders* 177). Beneath Poirot's insistence that a fascination with trains suggests a boyish, perhaps even "undeveloped" (177) mind, is the striking implication that to be "*railway-minded*" is to be childish. This is not the only example of such an implication to be found in British genre fiction; nor was it the first time Christie herself had made such a suggestion. In fact, these remarks concerning "[s]mall boys" and trains echo a scene in an earlier Christie novel, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934). Here, Roger Bassington-ffrench, who is suspected of murder, has brought his young nephew Tommy a "Hornby train", planting a seed of doubt in the mind of Frankie Derwent: "After tea, Roger played trains with his nephew. […] Surely this wasn't the sort of man to push people over cliffs! This charming young man couldn't be a cold-blooded murderer!" (Christie, *Evans* 97) Christie uses the image of playing "trains" to convey an impression of innocence: a man who indulges a small boy's passions in this way, it seems, cannot possibly be a criminal. Thus, Christie not only suggests that a toy train is a highly desirable gift for any boy, but also exploits the sense of childlike innocence which is frequently associated with a love of trains. It is this association which underlies much of the nostalgic feeling that has come to envelop railways in genre fiction. By presenting readers with idealistic portrayals of Britain's railways in the days of steam, genre fiction not only suggests a better-organised and more predictable world, but also offers the prospect of revisiting childhood: a period during which trains might be regarded as playthings rather than unpredictable and potentially dangerous machines.

It is for this reason that nostalgic recreations of Edwardian technology – such as that offered by the EMI film adaptation of *The Railway Children* – are especially powerful. As Lerer argues, the Edwardian period was characterised by "a sense […] of living in the toyhood of the future. The airplane and the motorcar were technological advances seen as playthings of the wealthy and the curious. There was an "infancy" to such technologies" (Lerer 254). There was also an "infancy" to Britain's railways, which were at their peak throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. During the Edwardian period, in particular, the railways were firmly established as part of Britain's transport ensemble, and had yet to be challenged by the economic difficulties of the interwar years or the devastating after-effects of two global conflicts. Hence, there is considerable appeal in revisiting the "toyhood" of this age. This

appeal is not, however, limited to recreations of the Edwardian period itself. In many ways, genre fiction of later periods has inherited the tropes and preoccupations which recur throughout Edwardian literature, not least its fascination with technology. Texts such as *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Railway Children* continually find their echo in the works of authors such as Blyton, Christie or the Reverend Awdry; even as late as 1967, we find a homage to *The Railway Children* in Forest's *The Ready-Made Family*. Yet this inheritance may also be contested, as evidenced by Christie's rejection of an idealised recreation of Edwardian domesticity in *At Bertram's Hotel*. In stressing the unsustainability of this recreation, as well as its nostalgic appeal, Christie points to a growing tendency in post-WWII genre fiction, which frequently stresses the need to move forward.

An examination of the roles played by railways in genre fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, then, reveals that this is a site of competition. In literature of this period, we may encounter a multiplicity of responses to the legacy of Edwardian genre fiction. Authors such as Blyton and Christie, who reputedly promised their readers a well-ordered and fundamentally safe world, can be seen as having perpetuated forms first established during the interwar period, writing in ways which recall the values of their own childhoods. In contrast, texts such as Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* revisit, interrogate and rework the forms and values of Edwardian children's fantasy, acknowledging the value of memory while ultimately stressing the need to move forward. This range of responses is especially significant in that it speaks to the broader debate concerning the lines along which post-war reconstruction was to proceed. Railways, in particular, were at the forefront of this debate, and it is often difficult to examine representations of railways in genre fiction of the period without detecting some trace of cultural anxieties surrounding heritage and preservation. Emerging from railway nostalgia, in fact, is another in the series of "successive Old Englands" identified by Williams (Williams 12). Echoing Williams' commentary on "how often an idea of the country is an idea of childhood" (297), we may conclude that the idea of railways is often an idea of childhood, standing for an imagined past in which everyday life was reassuringly well-ordered and predictable: a past in which trains ran to time, as they are frequently expected to do in detective fiction.

Indeed, Krips calls our attention to the challenges posed to "assumptions about a unified past and national identity" by a complex and varied range of "postwar shocks", including the fact that "Britain was entering an era of deindustrialization" (Krips 20-21). This, Krips points

out, shaped the iconography of heritage: although "the countryside remained of particular symbolic significance in heritage representations, industrial power was also eulogized as part of what the nation had inherited (and lost)." (21) This is the basis of Krips' argument for a multifaceted image of heritage:

> By the 1960s, then, "heritage" in Britain was responding to a loss of traditional ways of being and knowing in industrial, as well as rural, communities, in factories and coal mines, country houses and castles, and intergenerational relationships. Heritage thus became a hybrid… (22)

This "hybrid" conception of national and personal heritage is also reflected in literature of the period. In particular, it is notable that several authors of the mid-twentieth century had been raised during the Edwardian era, and that much of their work seems to hark back to this era. The nostalgia expressed in such texts, it can be argued, is not expressed solely in terms of industrial or pastoral, but is a "hybrid", defined by a more general longing for the "ways of being and knowing" which these authors recall from their own childhoods. Consequently, the emergence of a nostalgic attitude toward the railways can be recognised as dovetailing with broader cultural trends, motivated by part by an inescapable recognition that post-war society had changed dramatically in comparison with earlier periods.

The Reverend Awdry's series of engine stories clearly showcases this emerging nostalgia. If Britain's railway heritage cannot be fully safeguarded against change, then Awdry's Sodor offers the next best thing: a fictional realm in which steam is forever preserved. In some ways, the nature of this realm is reflective of broader trends in children's literature. For example, Manlove observes that "[f]rom 1946-49 a dominant motif in children's fantasy is the idea of an idyllic retreat that must be protected – doubtless carrying over from the war." (Manlove 75) Manlove goes on to cite Awdry's stories as an example of this phenomenon, remarking that they belong "[i]n a class all of their own – and eventually in an invented country all of their own" (76). Under the influence of contemporary events, this "invented country", Sodor, takes on a range of shifting associations. This process of stylistic evolution suggests that visions of "pastoral-idyllic Britain" may be reshaped in service of the emerging nostalgia for railways and machine culture, revealing the extent to which genre fiction has moved beyond the preoccupations of Edwardian fantasy. While it may be true that there is a somewhat timeless quality to Awdry's earliest stories – his first book, *The Three Railway Engines,* could easily have been written during the Edwardian period – the same cannot be said of his later stories,

which, by commenting on events such as the diesel revolution of the 1960s and the efforts of British Railways to redefine its image in corporate terms, firmly root themselves in contemporary events.

More importantly, while the Railway Series may depict "an idyllic retreat that must be protected", it is ultimately one founded upon a love of railways and machines in general, in contrast with the unchanging pastoral ideal evoked by Edwardian fantasy novels such as *The Wind in the Willows*. It is admittedly true that Edwardian novels such as *The Railway Children* and *The Wind in the Willows* demonstrate the power of technology to arouse interest and even passion; although *The Wind in the Willows* seems to frame a pastoral-idyllic stillness as the best and most desirable form of existence, Carpenter notes that "Grahame did not actually dislike machines for themselves – he speaks of having 'a sentimental weakness for the night-piercing whistle', and even of 'the enchanted pages of the railway A.B.C.' The trouble is that they were not enchanted enough" (Carpenter 122). Grahame's desire for an iconography more "enchanted" than that of the machine age is made apparent throughout *The Wind in the Willows*, which, while making clear the temptations posed by "the machine age", ultimately posits that such temptations must be resisted. What is truly important in Grahame's pastoral-idyllic world is the potential for creative activity held by the River Bank. In contrast, Awdry's engine stories are described by Manlove as "a celebration of the world of machines" (Manlove 77). Whereas Edwardian authors such as Grahame sought to retreat from "the machine age", Awdry celebrates and eulogises it.

There is a sense of this contrast as being typical of broader developments in genre fiction, particularly a turning away from the specific mode of pastoral associated with Edwardian fantasy. Carpenter, for instance, remarks that the "case *can* […] be made for the First World War as the cut-off point between the classic children's books and the present day," adding that "[i]t must have been harder to dream up River Banks and Never Never Lands after the experience of the Somme." (Carpenter 210) Yet the sentimental attitudes seen in Awdry's later books also exemplify the more specific tendency, seen from the 1950s to the 1970s, to frame railways in increasingly nostalgic terms. This nostalgia may take on a range of forms. On the one hand, it may manifest itself as a yearning for what is seen as a lost ideal of speed and glamour, and this is frequently answered by cinematic and televisual adaptations of detective fiction. On the other hand, it may be rooted in a romanticised ideal of the countryside railway, which is often linked to the sense of railways as being a more leisurely and more

aesthetically pleasing form of travel than road transport. The latter is particularly significant because it suggests that there is space within the pastoral-idyllic realms of fantasy for railways. In other words, the symbolic connotations of railways have shifted; the train has been increasingly commodified as embodying a slower, more genteel pace of life, while the motor car has superseded it as a symbol of technological progress.

This shift is part of a familiar pattern, with the hostility toward the motor car reflecting the hostility that greeted the first appearance of railways in the pastoral landscape. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's remarks upon the reactions of Victorian authors toward industrialisation are particularly telling: "As long as the pre-industrial methods and their forms of work and travel were the dominant ones, a Carlyle or Ruskin or Morris would never have thought of seeing them in an esthetic light" (Schivelbusch 121). As Schivelbusch puts it, the representation of these "old forms […] from an esthetic and romanticising viewpoint" reveals "less about those forms themselves than about general attitudes towards industrialisation." (121) Certainly, this "process of romanticisation" can be seen once again in the commodification of Britain's railways as sites of nostalgia; it is precisely because they are no longer the "dominant" forms of work or travel that they can portrayed in sentimental terms. We are therefore confronted with a yearning for that which has passed beyond the reach of the present, emphasised by the tendency to present the decline of Britain's railways in terms of the disappearance of a particular way of life, or the loss of traditional skills and occupations. Although several texts may find themselves frustrated by the impossibility of recovering such ideals, this does not diminish the ever-present compulsion to return to the past. Indeed, Manlove contends that "across the 1950s and 1960s we have seen the gradual replacement of the pastoral with the past, as a value in children's fantasy." (Manlove 115) Whereas Edwardian fantasy typically sought refuge in pastoral-idyllic secondary worlds, then, there is now a new trend which calls upon the past in order to make a comprehensible narrative of the present.

These tendencies lend an additional weight to the nostalgic sentiments in which Britain's railways are increasingly enfolded. Railways are a highly compelling aspect of Edwardian iconography; as such, they are endlessly sought after, invoked or recreated in genre fiction of the 1950s and 1960s. This is all the more significant in that genre fiction has often presented its readers with the beguiling promise of an idealised world in which everyday life is better organised and identity may be more coherently defined. Railways, with their connotations of reliability, organisation and timekeeping, offer considerable potential in not

only reinforcing the impression of these secondary worlds as being well-organised, but also offering a sense of these fantastical realms as being grounded in reality. There is, however, another layer of potential associations; in genre fiction, it is often suggested that a love of railways is inherently juvenile, and that a fascination with trains is natural in children – such as those of Nesbit's story – but less so in adults. Poirot's insistence in *The ABC Murders* that a fascination with railways signifies a boyish or even "undeveloped" mind is one example of this trend (Christie, *ABC Murders* 177). Indeed, the fact that Poirot should cite *The Railway Children* itself in his summation of the case serves to highlight the extent to which the attitudes expressed toward railways by Nesbit have resonated with later generations. There is ultimately a sense, in fact, that a nostalgia for railways is also a nostalgia for childhood itself – for the children's stories and toys that commodify railways, and for the well-organised world conjured up by texts such as *The Railway Children*. It is not only the inherited preoccupations of Edwardian genre fiction, but also a broader debate concerning preservation and industrial heritage which has set this nostalgia in train.

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