

Plan suggested for *Dossier 24* on Trains

Intro:

[Introduce the docs:] An episode from the biography of George Stephenson, a railway pioneer & engineer (Smiles wrote others - Cf. his biography of John Murray, the famous editor) dealing with the dramatic inauguration of the Liverpool to Manchester railway line, one of the first lines ever in the world; an excerpt from a famous novel by D. H. Lawrence, set in the Midlands, about the aftermath of the deafening passing of a train; & a stern painting showing two sedate young ladies in a carriage.

[Indicate what your angle of approach will be:] The omnipresence of means of transportation in literature & the arts, and the impressive variety of uses to which they are put.

[Indicate the plan you'll follow – slowly, clearly, fully.] 1st, trains as a 'phenomenon' whose novelty quickly vanished (habit); yet as far as artists are concerned, an endless source of inspiration; maybe because trains & all means of transportation help them to convey a wide range of metaphors.

1) A novelty which quickly wore away.

- The two written docs stress how surprising the sudden appearance of the train (the new means of transportation) was / a train (any train) can be. Huge crowds gathered ('multitude' 4, 'many thousands' 12) + formal inauguration featuring political personalities (government & House of Parliament). Sense of **wonder & amazement** in both those texts: a true spectacle ('eagerness' 5, 'great national event' 7) due to the 'incredible speed' 33 reached at the time [1830]). Contextualize this & allude to the grip of the Airbus 380, or of space shuttles, etc. on the minds of our own contemporaries. In stark contrast with the painting where closed setting, passivity & utter lack of excitement.
- A similar kind of amazement visible in the mare's reaction to the train's clanking noise & power. An **overpowering presence** which exercises a sort of fascination on the horse, with an obvious parallel between the train's power over the mare & the horse rider's magnet-like effect on Gudrun Brangwen. In other words *all* means of transportation seem to exert some kind of magic influence over us. Cf. Gothic use of horses, cars in today's cinema, etc.
- Hence the idea that this fascination stems from the **destructive power** of trains even more than their beauty, novelty, or revolutionary technical advances. This is made obvious by the accident in the Smiles excerpt, where one of the MP's legs gets crushed under the train wheels, but also in the novel: not only the one-legged man (how did he lose his leg? A train? In a war?) but also the deafening noise the train makes & the irresistible fear it arouses in the mare.
- Also something we feel in the picture. **Dehumanisation of beings vs. glorification of machines** (locomotives given names like 'Northumberland' & 'Rocket' + endless series of glorious feats they accomplish). Conversely humans are like fish out of water in such an environment: much formality in the Egg painting (clothes & attitude), sombreness, silence, boredom, no interest whatsoever in the landscapes that rush by, etc. Amazement has vanished, and the force of habit has taken its place.

2) An enduring treasure-trove for artists.

- Yet the inauguration is an **incredible scenario**, as if right from the start fate had made clear **the role that trains would play** not only in literature, but in the arts in general. Fear, panic, violence, blood + little twist in the scenario: the MP (Huskisson) was the PM's (Wellington) enemy of sorts ('some coolness' 24). The questions the reader asks himself: The PM's feelings during & after? Was the MP framed/set up? An assassination?! Allude to other famous trains in literature & the arts: Hogwarts Express, Agatha Christie & the Orient Express, Anna Karenina's suicide, cowboys & the Far West, etc.
- Likewise a similar episode in the Lawrence excerpt allows the narrator to create a tense scene that builds **towards a vertiginous**

climax. Underline the strength of his adverbs: inevitably 20, magnetically 24, slowly & heavily 29, mechanically 46. Also many similes: 4 like's & also 4 as if's (5, 16, 19, 22, 23, 27, 31, 32, 33, 39, 45, 48). Obviously a theme which inspires writers & allows them to make use of literary devices (Cf. also the alliteration in 'spun & swerved' 27 → bits of lyricism here). Creates a **psychological tension** (like electric shocks) which reveals much about the characters: 'poignant dizziness' 40, Gudrun momentarily hates her sister 'bitterly' 42. Cf. E. M. Forster would use *cars* to reveal the same electric tensions & inner dramas.

- Conversely, works like the Egg painting **show that a story can be created around a void** since the viewer must add meaning to the story & interprets it in a personal way: Who are the two young ladies? Embarrassed strangers thrown together by chance? Sisters (like the Brangwen girls)? Where are they off to? Where from? Purpose of their trip? Why not speaking? (some coolness between them here also)? Why such a pent-up, austere atmosphere?

3) A powerful metaphor.

- More interestingly, this forces the viewer to see trains as metaphors. Here **metaphor for life's possibilities & choices**. Here young women at the start of their adult lives. Train going left or right? A metaphor for chance, or fate? Or does this symbolize two sides / facets of the same person? (bored vs. lively, passive vs. awakening, primitive interests / food vs. more intellectual pursuits / reading, merely living vs. making the most of life?, etc.) Feeling of oppression, uselessness & aimlessness of Victorian lives lived inside vs. glimpses of natural beauty which humans tend to pass by unawares.
- Smiles's episode also shows that **human lives are controlled by commercial / mercenary interests**: the inauguration had to go on for the sake of the company's finances & the well-being of the shareholders. The value of human life pales in comparison.
- In sharp contrast with these sedate or commercial pictures, Lawrence **explores human sexuality** & flirts with censorship. His scene contains obvious sexual innuendoes, erotic double entendres & imagery: why a *mare*?, erotic pleasure 8, Gudrun's attraction to Gerald's roughness 13, the train between the banks 15 (Cf. Hitchcock!), the back & forth movements that the text is rife with (16, 23, 31, 35, 37, 38), 'seemed to penetrate to her heart' 40, 'so powerful & naked' 43, 'she's bleeding' 50 + **sadistic pleasure** (29, 36) → a sort of **rape & loss of virginity** (the opposite of the white flower in the painting). Also a metaphor for male control (train & horse rider) over female elements (the Brangwen sisters 'pressed back into the hedge' 22 & the mare). Hence also a meditation on **gender**.

Conclusion:

[Summarize:] A striking way to show the **implications of technological breakthroughs**, not only in our daily lives (we have grown accustomed to trains, cars, planes, etc.) but also in all the arts. Soulless mechanical strength & devices strike our imagination today just as much as they did people living in the 19th century. Cf. nuclear weapons, *La Bête humaine*, futurism, etc.

[Branch out:] This is certainly due to their built-in ambiguity: can be indifferently used for good (*progress*, the well-being of humans) or evil (destruction, domination). Therefore the soullessness of machines is also our own – a reminder that life & death, good & evil vie with each other in all things human.