

# Railway Discourse



# Railway Discourse:

## *Linguistic and Stylistic Representations of the Train in the Anglophone World*

By

Esterino Adami

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Railway Discourse: Linguistic and Stylistic Representations of the Train  
in the Anglophone World

By Esterino Adami

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Esterino Adami

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0624-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0624-4

This book is dedicated to my father,  
who taught me to love words and trains.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	ix
List of Abbreviations .....	xi
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Introduction .....	1
Aims, Materials and Methods	
Chapter One.....	9
Railway Cultures and Railway Discourse	
1.1 Why the Railway? Trains of Thought, Trains of Imagination .....	9
1.2 The Train and the Wor(l)d: Language, Discourse and Text.....	16
Chapter Two .....	27
Calling at Crime Fiction: Paula Hawkins' <i>The Girl on the Train</i>	
2.1 The Railways and Crime Narratives .....	27
2.2 Structure and Characters in <i>The Girl on the Train</i> .....	32
2.3 The Text in/on the Train .....	34
2.4 Trainspotting and Point of View.....	39
2.5 Movements, Sounds and Perceptions of the Railway .....	45
2.6 Concluding Remarks .....	51
Chapter Three .....	57
Architext, Metaphor and a Train Bound for Dystopia	
3.1 Trains in Fantasy, Imagination and Science Fiction .....	57
3.2 Graphic Narratives and Speculative Railways .....	65
3.3 "There Travels a Train that Never Stops" .....	67
3.4 Metaphors, Personification and Architexts .....	72
3.5 Concluding Remarks .....	83

Chapter Four .....	87
Writing the Train: From Postcolonial Fiction to Travel Literature	
4.1 The Railway in the Indian Context .....	87
4.2 Language of the Railway in the Indian Subcontinent .....	93
4.3 The Train in Indian Fiction .....	97
4.4 Case Study: <i>Around India in 80 Trains</i> .....	104
4.5 Concluding Remarks .....	113
Chapter Five .....	117
Conclusions: Departures, Arrivals, and New Destinations	
5.1 Trains Galore .....	117
5.2 On Tracks, Again .....	123
References .....	131
Index .....	145



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Railway-related expressions in western and eastern languages.....	18
Table 2: Verbs denoting movement perception of the train.....	48
Table 3: Mappings of CM SOCIETY IS A TRAIN.....	73
Table 4: Zonal railways in India.....	91



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The narrative texts used as case studies in this book are cited in abbreviated form as follows:

- AIET                    *Around India in 80 Trains*, by Monisha Rajesh (2012)
- TGOTT                  *The Girl on the Train*, by Paula Hawkins (2015)
- S                         *Snowpiercer*, written by Jacques Lob and illustrated by  
Jean Marc Rochette, English translation by Virginie  
Selavy (2013 / originally published 1984)

Full bibliographical details are listed in the References.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the reviewers who carefully read, went through and commented on a previous draft of my study so as to help me develop my argumentation in a more intelligible way.

I am also indebted to a number of people who helped and supported me in a variety of ways: they are too many and I do not provide names here but they do know who they are. Several colleagues at the University of Turin and from other Italian or foreign universities encouraged me incessantly to carry on with this project, in spite of its superficial eccentricity and the question “what do trains have to do with language?” that I often received. They helped me to reflect and develop ideas, notions and interpretations of railway discourse and its metaphors during informal talks and official engagements like seminars and conferences that I managed to organise at my University, over the last years.

My students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels were a source of stimulus and they showed to be interested in the main theme of the book, often identifying, discussing and commenting on examples of railway texts.

I was very lucky to have the patient support of my family and friends, in Italy and other countries as well. They really made an effort in putting up with me, in particular during the writing phase, and I am very grateful for this.

I would also like to thank Cambridge Scholars Publishing and their editorial team, who assisted me in the technical aspects of the book preparation.

For my investigation of railway discourse I benefited from the financial support of my Department (Humanities, University of Turin), thanks to the project “Ricerca Locale 2015 quota B - Railway cultures: metafore, simboli e testualità dell’immaginario ferroviario nel mondo anglofono”, which allowed me to travel, organise and attend seminars.

Researching for this book gave me the chance (and the pleasure) to study at various libraries and educational centres, such as the British Library in London or the Search Engine at the National Railway Museum in York, visit several railway museums in Italy, the UK, India and elsewhere, visit or discover railway-related sights (for example the Royal Room in the main terminus station of my city, which used to be utilised by the Royalty during their journeys in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and travel extensively, of course by train and sometimes even on narrow gauge and minor lines. All these experiences contributed to the shaping of my work and my vision of the train trope, which as I argue constitutes an important conceptual component and stylistic device across discourses, genres and texts, to construct, convey and represent meaning.

# INTRODUCTION

## AIMS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

My first contact with the world of the railways was during my childhood, as my father collected model trains and had two very large model rail layouts that my brothers and I set up during the festive season, with much happiness and enjoyment. Needless to say, railways are since associated with positive emotions and feelings for me, although I am not a fanatic trainspotter. Then, after toys, I started using railways, i.e. travelling by train in Italy, Britain and many other countries in Europe and in the world. And I remember most of the rolling stock I have journeyed with and tried over the decades, from the so-called slam-door trains in Britain, still in use at the beginning of the early 1990s, and the narrow gauge lines in Wales, England, Germany and northern Italy, to the Golconda Express running between Secunderabad and Gunter (India), the Javelin service on the High Speed 1 route between London and the South East coast of England and the brand-new state-of-the-art high-speed trains like Italo or Frecciarossa, linking the north and the south of my country. Childhood memories of playing with trains and the idea of travelling contribute to the development of railway imagination, but I concede that this is an autobiographical note and a personal story, feeding and enhancing my approach to and conceptualisation of trains. In this book, on the contrary, I aim to study railway discourse by investigating texts and the effects these generate in readers.

Trains appear in a variety of literary and non-literary texts, cultural products and discourses, but they also impact on our everyday and mundane experiences such as the practice of commuting to work or the high-speed rail travel whilst on holiday, and there are also scientific studies on the hypothesis of the psychological rail factor, a notion used to “express a higher attraction in terms of higher ridership of rail-based public transport” (Scherer and Dziekan 2012: 75-76). The railway also characterises more dramatic contemporary scenarios, as in the televised scenes of miserable migrants boarding “trains of hope”, escaping from their devastated countries and in search of better conditions of living. As a cultural object and symbol, the train has lent itself not only to various

fictional and lyrical genres (Ceserani 2002; Dotoli *et alii* 2015; Manley 2014; Wurst 1990), *in primis* detective and crime stories, from the classic examples of Agatha Christie (and George Simenon in the Francophone world) to the more recent best-selling case of Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* (2015, made into a film in 2016), but has also worked as a device able to represent and convey certain visions or ideologies, a means that literally and imaginatively carries values and connotations. I totally side with Revill (2012: 12) when he affirms that “the railway continues to be a cultural medium freighted with both utopian flights of fancy and everyday local attachments”. Why has the train emerged as such a significant symbol in much writing and production, in particular across Anglophone cultures, since its very birth? Of course there are a range of answers to this question and they all suggest the chief historical impact of the railways on human societies, over almost two hundred years, and even people who do not travel by rail regularly can recognise its prominence in many aspects of life.

Such considerations inform the background and premise of this study, which is aimed at the exploration of railway cultures in the English-speaking milieu by focusing on a selection of texts, authors and discourses. By “railway cultures” I refer to contexts in which the train symbol is meaningful, complex and representative, and I use a plural form to indicate different contexts and domains in terms of geographical area, generic status and temporal collocation. In particular, emphasis will be placed upon the fruitful interconnection between culture(s) and language (Kramsch 1998). But one of the main key words here will be the notion of “discourse”, for which several definitions have been proposed. Both Leech and Short (1981: 209) and Bradford (1997: 56), for example, view discourse as the realm of linguistic communication in terms of transaction between the subjects involved in the verbal exchange, namely speaker and hearer. Therefore it is a sort of an interpersonal activity that may also be influenced, sometimes even regulated by a social or cultural aim. Instead, Matthews (2014: 108) highlights the aspects of genre and language behaviour. However, according to the critical models provided by Bakhtin and Foucault, and following Mills (1997, in particular chapters 1 and 2) and Wales (1995: 129-131), I will here adopt a wider and more fluid definition of this concept in order to denote the production of railway-related meaning via a network of languages, texts, relations and other systems and to accommodate a range of different cultural phenomena.

Moreover, as I explain in the following pages, my focus will be on English language contexts, although I will sometimes broaden the scope of my investigation to include references from other non-Anglophone



environments in order to detect further connections and echoes. Given the wealth of materials, writers and settings under scrutiny in this book, the methodology embraced relies on the interface of different disciplines by adopting (and adapting) tools and theories from a series of fields such as cultural studies, stylistics, postcolonial critique and literary studies, as I will illustrate below.

Of course I am aware of a number of book-length publications (both scholarly and informative) dedicated to the railway world. Some of these (especially the academic ones) have the merit to examine the cultural, textual and sometimes linguistic representation of trains in various genres and discourses such as literature, cinema and non-fiction (see for example Carter 2001; Ceserani 1999, 2003; Cooper 2011; Dotoli *et alii* 2015; Revill 2012), rather than merely focusing on the mechanical features and engineering of the railways. However, it seems to me that in spite of such body of studies, the railway topic has not been tackled in depth with the aid of literary-linguistic tools: hence stems my intention to focus on and detect the layers of meaning of the train and the railway in various sources from some areas of the Anglophone context. Bearing in mind the breadth of the “railscape” imagination, i.e. the numerous contexts in which trains and railways play a central role, as well as the range of perspectives that such a research project allows, a word of caution is necessary in delineating my work. My purpose here is to investigate railway symbols, often constructed through metaphors and other rhetorical devices, in a selection of texts, in a multidirectional perspective in which I adopt and adapt various scientific analytical approaches spanning literary studies, narratology, linguistics and postcolonial critique. Evidently I have to claim a subjective principle in the choice of materials to scrutinise, which in cognitive terms is grounded on my knowledge of the world and interaction with railway texts and discourses. Apparently the diversity in terms of genre of the materials I intend to investigate (respectively: popular crime novel, graphic narrative and travel literature) labels them as possible examples of paraliterature (Ricci 2013), i.e. those text-types like genre fiction, mystery, comics books, pulp fiction typically marginalised by the monolithic criteria of the canon. However, although the samples utilised for this research might superficially appear eclectic or idiosyncratic, there are specific reasons for choosing them, since for me they mirror and exemplify some sides of the multifarious nature of the railway imagination, which is able to penetrate and transform different genres.

Naturally this study could have been structured in many other different ways by looking at the train trope in different genres, from cartoons, songs and films to videogames and advertising, or along other thematic threads,

for instance by considering the possible connections between the railway symbolism and other areas, such as gender (e.g. the notion of gendered space extended to trains and stations), ideology (e.g. the rhetoric of railway development as a strategy to unify and rule a country), politics (e.g. the establishment's attempt to use the railway as a consensus-generating tool), education (e.g. the spread of educational materials or narratives linked to the railway), geography (e.g. the regulating function of railways in mapping countries and territories) and so forth.

The main tools of the interdisciplinary orientation I have taken up aim to balance my investigation, as they rely on textual objectivity and linguistic evidence rather than the mere formulation of associations or suggestions, however attractive these might be. Operating at the edge between different fields, in particular language and literature, my *modus operandi* will be based on the interconnection of various theories and frameworks, consistently drawing on and combining stylistics, linguistics, postcolonial discourse, literary studies and cultural studies. It is my belief, in fact, that scholarly work nowadays cannot ignore the complexity of cultural phenomena, and consequently the same research object can and should be observed, and studied, from different angles in order to gain more insights and generate a better understanding of the topic under investigation.

The contexts and materials I consider in this study belong to the Anglophone world, with one notable exception in chapter four (i.e. a graphic novel originally written in French) as I will explain later on. I would like to stress how these texts mainly pertain to cultures, including postcolonial realities, in which the English language is central. The complexities of English, its manifold, ubiquitous and to some extent controversial power, add a wealth of layers of meaning to the railway theme, for instance when we consider how the “politically correct register” has transformed “passengers” into “customers” or why the archaic word “bogie” referring to a train carriage is still used in the Indian subcontinent. These and many other similar points once again bring to the fore the centrality of language in communication and interaction, and in a parallel fashion testify to the role and symbolism of trains in human culture. To deal with the variegated domain of railway discourse, my examination will adopt an interdisciplinary perspective that draws from fields such as literary criticism, postcolonial discourse and cultural studies, but it will privilege the frames and tools of stylistics, a wide, thought-provoking and cutting-edge discipline that innovatively utilises contributions from many areas, ranging from classic rhetoric and narratology to psychology and cognitive science. Concerned with the study of language choices and the

effects these generate in readers approaching texts and discourses, stylistics (Black 2006; Bradford 1997; Douthwaite 2000; Gavins 2007; Jeffries and McIntyre 2010; Leech and Short 1981; Nørgaard *et alii* 2010) here will permit us to explore how the emblematic gist of the railway imagery is linguistically elaborated, constructed and perceived by authors, narrators, readers and other subjects involved in the process of meaning production and reception.

The first chapter introduces the field of railway discourse and discusses its cultural rootedness. The rest of the book is organised via single specific case studies dedicated to different cultural products, which also make up a broader detection of railway discourse and are supported by framing sections about their contexts and genre characteristics. Chapter two is devoted to railway crime narratives and considers the bestselling novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015) by Paula Hawkins, chapter three moves to the domain of science fiction and focuses on the dystopian graphic story *Snowpiercer*, whilst chapter four analyses railway travel literature across the Indian subcontinent and looks at the travelogue by Monisha Rajesh, *Around India in 80 Trains* (2012).

Chapter one introduces the topic and the macro-area of investigation, along with some methodological premises. It emphasises the centrality and pervasiveness of the railway imagination emerging throughout a range of domains, from language to literature and cinema, and beyond. This part also argues for the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to and investigation of the subject matter: whilst it identifies in the broad field of stylistics the most suitable tools and frameworks for detecting and unearthing railway metaphors, symbols and texts, it also acknowledges the contributions offered by other disciplines such as literary studies, postcolonial discourse and cultural studies. To demonstrate the relevance of the railway topic, the chapter starts from and problematizes the very building blocks of texts and discourse, namely words, in particular those pertaining to the lexical field of the railways. The richness of this type of terminology can be easily found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2017), which reveals the concrete, tangible but also suggestive and poetic dimension attached to trains and railways, with many citations from the different times and contexts. In other words, this introductory chapter lays out the theoretical foundations of the overall research and precedes a series of chapters that constitute specific case studies dealing with selected materials and issues pertaining to the railway imagination.

The second chapter takes into consideration one of the most frequent fictional renditions of railway discourse, namely the crime story happening on a train, or connected with the image of the train, and to pursue such

goal it addresses the narrative ramifications of a very successful recent novel: *The Girl on the Train*, by Paula Hawkins, whose plurality of viewpoints obfuscates a linear plot and challenges the reader to disclose meanings and truths. In the text, the persistent, almost obsessive, reference to the train seems to interrogate, distress and mesmerise characters and readers as they all have to negotiate a series of questions. How reliable is the gaze that you have from the window of a train compartment that frames your perspective or is it simply a kind of voyeuristic effect *à la* Hitchcock? And do the onomatopoeic sounds of trains running along old creaking rails remind one of something sinister or threatening? Can the traffic of incessantly passing trains be compared with the stream of thoughts one has in a state of concentration, absent-mindedness, or sleep but also intoxication or hallucination? Updating the plentiful genre of railway crime literature, the novel here upon investigation acquires postmodern and intertextual tones too, but it also subtly plays with the style deployed by the ambiguous narrators in their effort to persuade, provoke or baffle the reader. My examination will discuss Hawkins' narrative architecture (Bradford 1997; Leech and Short 1981; Rimmon-Kenan 1983), and in particular will trace the working of viewpoint, figuratively linked to the idea of trainspotting, the construction of a multiple focalisation that manipulates reliability through the use of *verba sentiendi*, i.e. verbs expressing feelings, thoughts or other subjective sentiments (Fowler 1996: 170; Jeffries 2010a: 120), the rendition of perception via different types of modality and other textual features as well.

The following chapter (chapter three) starts by reviewing the persistent image of the railway in fantasy and science fiction, whose rich repository ranges from Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Celestial Railroad*, Charles Dickens' short story "The Signal-Man" and Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* to *Thomas the Tank Engine* in the books by Wilbert Awdry and his son Christopher, the fierce anthropomorphised train Blain the Mono created by Steven King and the "Train of Thought" from the film *Inside Out*, or the renowned Hogwarts Express in the Harry Potter saga. In many cases we can observe a process of "demonisation" of the train (Ceserani 2002), by which certain monstrous, scaring and weird characteristics are projected onto the portrayal of fictional trains. The central point of chapter three is that the train and the railway can function as important structural elements in this type of writing, as they trigger peculiar connotations: they are real and "magical" means of transport, often shuttling between worlds and dimensions, but they also imply some kind of transformation, progress (or regress in certain cases), becoming textscapes that both entertain and

engage readers in a variety of ways. This chapter will use as a case study *Snowpiercer*, a graphic novel originally authored in French and now translated into English, to carry out an investigation into the patterning and symbolism of the train as a device of dystopian architext (Stockwell 2000). More precisely I argue that one of the possible interpretive keys lies in the recurrent manifestation of the cognitive metaphor SOCIETY IS A TRAIN and its subtypes such as THE BODY IS A TRAIN, by which the target domains of SOCIETY and HUMAN BODY respectively are mapped from the source domain of the TRAIN to represent a living, organic system, made up of different but integrated parts, and by extension the way in which different human subjects constitute society. As a key structural element, this train image is akin to the complex abstract system metaphors put forward by Kövecses (2002), for instance with the conceptual metaphor SOCIETY IS A MACHINE, which fits appropriately in railway discourse. Likewise, attention will be dedicated to the implementation of a particular type of metaphor, i.e. personification. I will look at how the train is personified and conceived as an almighty deity, which allows humans to escape the great freeze, and which might distantly echo the worship of the Italian Futurists for the machine at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

With chapter four, the scope of the research is enlarged in various directions since it addresses the railway world of the Indian subcontinent and looks at a different text-type, that of travel literature. By following Aguiar's pivotal study (2011), the chapter inscribes the paramount symbol of the train seen as a vehicle for the expression of both material and immaterial Indian culture, i.e. not only the infrastructures linking the remote regions of a huge territory, but also the positive (and sometimes negative) images, connotations and ideas attached to the railways. Notable literary examples include postcolonial novels such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (2006, originally published in 1956), in which the train is depicted as death machinery that collaborates with the massacres and carnages of Partition (1947), or Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2003), whose women-only carriage becomes a space of female reflection and emancipation. However, in this chapter, the focus will be on the contemporary scenario, with the case of Monisha Rajesh's *Around India in 80 Trains*, a travelogue that describes and gives voice to the geographical, social and cultural dimension of Indian Railways, whose motto "Lifeline to the Nation" grandiloquently reinforces messages of social cohesion and national unity. The way in which writers and readers conceptually and linguistically negotiate the experience of travelling by rail, and implicitly problematize the sphere of identity of those subjects involved in the journey, will be teased out via different analytical tools, such as the

narrative construction of the train experience, the linguistic study of train naming, the embodiment-based metaphors for the railways and the triggering of various text worlds. All these aspects are relevant in the travelogue authored by Rajesh. The chapter will also offer some linguistic and sociocultural considerations on the evolution of the genre, within a diachronic perspective (Mukhopadhyay 2014) and in the light of competition for primacy between English and Indian languages.

The concluding chapter five draws some final remarks on the construction and perception of railway discourse in its many genres, as it emphasises once again how language, literature and culture at large appropriate the image of the train and turn it into a powerful metaphor to convey meanings and allusions. The heterogeneous variety of materials and data taken into consideration in the various chapters (such as novels, comics, and travel literature, and their connections with dictionaries, metro maps, and websites too) confirm the key position of the railway in human cultures, as they provide a summary of the possible values attributed to the train in different times and places: modernity, escapism, welfare, expectations, but also escape, exile, tension and in some cases even fear and death. The closing chapter also elicits and encourages further research in this field, possibly with new critical tools.

All aboard, all aboard then, and full steam ahead!

# CHAPTER ONE

## RAILWAY CULTURES AND RAILWAY DISCOURSE

### **1.1 Why the Railways? Trains of Thought, Trains of Imagination**

Anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories.

(Paul Theroux, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, 1975)

Will customers please refrain from running, skateboarding or cycling, smoking, sumo wrestling, teleporting, flying while at our stations.

(A poster advertisement on a Virgin Trains carriage, 2014)

I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train.

(Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895)

Globalisation feels like a runaway train, out of control.

(Gordon Brown, 2016)

Railway termini are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass out into adventure and sunshine, to them, alas! we return.

(E. M. Forster, *Howard's End*, 1910)

I want to kiss you in Paris

I want to hold your hand in Rome

I want to run naked in a rainstorm

Make love in a train cross-country

(Madonna, "Justify my Love", 1992)

The variegated and slightly bizarre collection of opening citations above offers only a handful of the possible linguistic and stylistic renditions of the railway across genres and discourses, as elaborated by novelists, politicians and artists in a variety of different social, historical and cultural contexts. For me, it is evidence of the pervasiveness of the railway theme

in culture, in particular the cultures of the Anglophone world, considering that the railways were invented in Victorian England, with the first line between Stockton and Darlington opening on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1825, and then “exported” to the imperial periphery and other countries worldwide. In Italy, for example, the first railway line opened in 1839, covering a distance of 7.25 kilometres stretching between Naples and Portici, in the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. In China, on the other hand, the railway construction took place relatively late, during the Qing Dynasty at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to some initial cultural resistance and concern about the noise, steam and devastation caused to the landscape.

Not only is the train a recurrent trope in many creative literary and non-literary domains in these contexts, but it is also significantly entrenched in the linguistic code, as proved by railway-based idiomatic phrases and metaphors frequently found in English, and other languages too, as I shall argue later on. All the quotations above portray different aspects of the train imagery: for Theroux the train encapsulates a wealth of cultures, encounters and narratives, whilst in the Virgin Train poster the text creates hyperbolic puns and humour with what one is not allowed to do in a station. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s statement triggers a rather transparent metaphor of globalisation in terms of runaway rolling stock. The Wilde extract reads like a kind of provocative aphorism regarding the private and intimate space once attached to train journeys, but the excerpt by Foster on the contrary foregrounds the potential of the train to transport people, physically but also emotionally, towards new destinations and experiences, perhaps providing a feeling of freedom that reverberates in the Madonna song too.

Undoubtedly the railway theme traverses a constellation of different cultures, societies and contexts and thus constitutes a huge research terrain, but in order to carry out my detection coherently I will explicitly look at English-language materials and references, although occasionally I will slightly broaden the perspective and use a comparative view, i.e. by taking into account some travel literature by the Italian author and journalist Federico Pace (2008; 2016) and the poetics of the train journey he puts forward. As already stated, I will concentrate on texts originally written in English so as to be able to mine authentic linguistic and literary data. But I will allow myself one main exception, comprising the 1980s French graphic novel *Snowpiercer* (Legrand 2013; Lob 2013), now available in English translation. In this case, my choice is justified not only by the innovative metaphorical potential granted to the futuristic and dystopian train of the story, but also by the idiosyncratic nature of the material considered, a graphic narrative that spans, blends and constructs



meaning from an amalgamation of components such as portions of text, images, metaphors, colours and others, which collaboratively and fruitfully enhance the railway imagination.

As a matter of fact, the railway, sometimes also referred to as the “permanent way” due to its tracks-based structure (the pairs of rails laid on the sleepers, or ties in American English), has represented a crucial social and cultural element over the last two centuries. Often it has been linked to important historical or dramatic events, from the first manifestations of the Industrial Revolution in Britain to its eruption in the American context. But it also permitted to articulate discourses of modernity, symbolism and power, not only in its tentacular infrastructural organisation (i.e. with the rail lines being extended to the faraway territories to conquer the wild west of the United States and enlarge the world of the frontier), but also in its ontological dimension, i.e. the sense of dynamism of travelling subjects versus the fixity and restrained conditions pertaining to the tracks. As Marx (1964: 191) writes:

By 1844 the machine had captured the public imagination. The invention of the steamboat had been exciting, but it was nothing compared to the railroad. In the 1830's the locomotive, an iron horse or fire-Titan, is becoming a kind of national obsession. It is the embodiment of the age, an instrument of power, speed, noise, fire, iron, smoke – at once a testament to the will of man rising over natural obstacles, and yet confined by its iron rails to a predetermined path, it suggests a new sort of fate.

Covering a spectrum of values and meanings, the railway has functioned as a metaphor of mobility, transformation and progress, as well as the conceptualisation of a vehicle or system for the diffusion and circulation of words and ideas (Bradley 2015; Carter 2001; Ceserani 2002, 1999; Freeman 1999; Marx; 1964; Pala 2015; Parks 2014).

Linguistically portrayed and stylistically imagined, trains and railways have thus played an important function in building up texts and discourses in various domains and genres (both literary and non-literary), from cinema, fiction and music to biographies, political speeches, tourism and advertising (Carter 2001; Dann 1996; Manly 2014; Theroux 2006, 2008). It is undeniable that the railway and the train constitute two important signs of the imagination, in Britain and in many other English-speaking contexts as well, including, for example, postcolonial territories such as Southern Africa (Wright 2010). The railway imaginary moreover is particularly relevant in the Indian subcontinent, since trains started operating here very early and were seen as symbols of varied nature: modernity, progress and welfare but also death and destruction during the

Partition period (Adami 2013; Aguiar 2008, 2011; Bond 1994; Kerr 2003; Leer 2001; Rajesh 2012).

To some extent, the railway trope constitutes a kind of provocative allegory even in those genres that deal with other themes. In the realm of cinema, for instance, we can include films as diverse as *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007, directed by Wes Craven) with its evocative images of the Indian train, or the controversial Danny Boyle films *Trainspotting* (1995) and *T2 Trainspotting* (2017), in which the quintessentially British pastime of watching and photographing trains that run by is darkly turned into a metaphor of drug-induced devastation, with the suggestion of figuratively getting lost on some unknown tracks or in tunnels. I shall discuss trainspotting as a metaphorical and structural stratagem for the construction of narrative discourse in the next chapter.

Since their appearance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the railways have been popular and have attracted attention, sometimes even in contradictory terms, being both detested and praised during the Victorian era, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a whole, with their double image of peril and destruction of pastoral nature on the one hand, and the overwhelming symbol of progress and modernity on the other (Bradley 2015; Carter 2001; Ceserani 2002; Daly 1999; Freeman 1999; Marx 1964; Pala 2015). The huge popularity of a certain “railway vein” of literature is traditionally tied to world authors as diverse as Dickens, Tolstoy, Zola and others, whose richness of railway metaphors and images has received scholarly interest and attention. In reality, fictional and non-fictional publications concerning trains and railways have always existed, circulated and still abound in the English-language milieu: for example today non-fictional railway writings reflect the passion and enthusiasm of experts and fans of steam locomotives or narrow gauge lines, or they investigate historical issues or serve as a support for the rediscovery of cultural heritage, or tourism discourse, with works devoted to scenic routes, vintage locomotives and the history of minor lines. Anglophone writers are particularly fascinated by the image of the railway, and such a cultural phenomenon even includes expatriates, as in the case of Tim Parks, an English novelist and academic who settled in Italy during the 1970s and authored *Italian Ways. On and off the Rails from Milan to Palermo* (2014), a non-fictional account of the train network in Italy, thus enhancing the significance of railway discourse once again.

Nowadays the interest in trains, rolling stock and trams too is further increased with the promotion of railway (or more generally public transport) museums in many countries, and of course the web is another possible channel for discussing, researching and disseminating initiatives, projects and research on the railway theme. TV programmes on trains are

very popular, especially in Britain, and suffice it to mention Michael Portillo's BBC series such as *Great British Railway Journeys* (2009), *Great Continental Railway Journeys* (2009) and *Great American Railway Journeys* (2016), with a new project titled *Great Indian Railway Journeys* currently being developed. Besides, the flourishing of blogs, Facebook pages, dedicated websites and other social media, including much video material available on YouTube, concerned with this mode of transport and its several dimensions, witnesses the fact that trains are still perceived vividly in the collective imagination, as they revive memories through the idea of steam trains of the past but also more subjective feelings attached to toy trains and our early years of life. Also, trains indexically 'point' to the future, with the development of high-speed lines in many parts of the world, and in thus doing they depict improvements to welfare and social conditions at large.

The railway theme might superficially appear odd and peculiar, but in reality it has given rise not only to a large creative production, but to an extended critical bibliography as well. I will now briefly review some examples of both categories. In parallel with an abundance of creative productions dedicated to the railway by single authors, we also find various anthologies in which the train is viewed as the unifying theme. As an illustration I can to mention three examples of such a category. Manley's (2014) collection features poems and extracts from long fiction and poetry, ranging from Thackeray and Conan Doyle to Mark Twain, T.S. Eliot and Bill Bryson, thus dealing with various text-types. A peculiar kind of these anthologies is *The Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories* (Bond 1994), which once again displays the prominence of the railway metaphor in the Indian subcontinent thanks to excerpts by colonial and postcolonial writers like Kipling, Steel, Husain and Banerjee. The image of the railway also drives the uncanny and unsettling narratives edited by Rix (2013), which draw from and hybridise the genres of contemporary fantasy and science fiction. With their specific rhetorical and stylistic qualities, these three volumes are a testimony of the popularity of the train trope, appealing to different typologies of readers and projecting a myriad of meanings.

On the critical side, Carter's (2001) volume offers a comprehensive approach to railway discourse seen against the backdrop of modernity, i.e. as a figurative mechanism influencing and reshaping society and culture. Carter mainly takes into account the situation of Britain, but also includes investigations of other important European railway novels, such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877) and Zola's *La Bête Humaine* (1890), to examine the 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative construction of railway symbolism. The

seminal book by Ceserani (2002), with its suggestive title (in the original *Treni di carta*, literally meaning *Paper Trains* to indicate trains created by writers on the pages of their works), carries out a detailed analysis of railway cultures and literatures by looking at a number of European and American authors and follows a semiotic approach that acknowledges the role of the structural parts of the railway, including the lines, tracks, stations and so forth. This book constitutes an important tool to decipher the railway imagery, also with regard to its threatening echoes and weird connotations that are evoked in the domains of fantasy and science fiction. Returning to the specific context of Britain, Beaumont and Freeman's (2007) volume addresses the impact of the train in society and its outcomes, whilst Sellwood and Sellwood (2013) observe how from the Victorian time onwards the phenomenon of criminality touches upon the railway world too, as murders take place not only in stations or near tracks, but in particular within the enclosed space of train compartments. But very often the study of railway discourse coincides with or includes a discussion of the notion of modernity with its epochal changes: the papers that constitute the volume edited by Beaumont and Freeman (2007) are oriented towards such a goal. In a more comprehensive way, a recent and rich study by Bradley (2015) tackles the sociocultural and sociohistorical importance of the train in Britain by discussing a number of issues, such as railway crime cases, the creation, nationalisation and subsequent privatisation of lines across the country and the role played by certain stations.

Scholars have also worked on specific geographical areas of the Anglophone world: for example Aguiar's (2011) *Tracking Modernity* explores the sense of railway imagination in the Indian subcontinent and puts forward important interpretations of how such a symbol has characterised both colonial and postcolonial cultural flows, traversing literature, cinema and society. This innovative book convincingly demonstrates the cultural alliance between the train and India within the emergence of modernity and mobility. The same point is supported by the contributions contained in Srinivasan, Tiwari, and Silas (2006) that celebrate the (hi)stories of Indian Railways. Other critical works tend to develop the theme from different angles, for instance with a more historical focus, as in the case of Spiers (2015), who documents and deals with the key function of the train in the overseas territories as a material and immaterial aid to the ideologies of colonialism. Davies and Wilburn (1991) label this view as "railway imperialism". These studies prove the key importance of the railways in the discursive construction of many Anglophone contexts, including the ex-colonies. Of course I am here

concerned with studies addressing the English-speaking world, but many other areas or countries have been taken into account. The rich collection of articles edited by Dotoli, Selvaggio and Canu Fautré (2015) for example covers a multitude of linguistic, literary and cultural areas, from Spain to Germany and Italy, but it focuses on the French-language world in particular to offer an innovative critical reading of the train *topos*. Another interesting volume, on the other hand, is represented by Cooper's (2011), which is dedicated to the train in Brazil and which scrutinises an assortment of railway-related genres and works such as literature, paintings, films, songs and even museums.

Before I start delving into the linguistic domain of railways, it is perhaps worth recalling the set of analytical frames I will frequently use in my examination. As already anticipated, my stylistic toolkit includes, but is not limited to, important notions such as metaphor, foregrounding, defamiliarisation, evaluative language, deixis, point of view, modality and ideology (Black 2006; Bradford 1997; Douthwaite 2000; Fludernik 2006; Leech and Short 1981; Martin and White 2005; Nørgaard *et alii* 2010). In particular, some of these concepts will be considered not only in their traditional value as defined by classic rhetoric, narratology and literary studies, so that for example deixis indicates the reference system for person, space and time and metaphor is viewed as an embellishing figure of speech, but rather as notions innovatively refreshed by the principles and tools of cognitive poetics such as embodiment, conceptual metaphors, experientialism and prototypicality (e.g. Gavins 2007; Jeffries and McIntyre 2010; Sorlin 2014; Stockwell 2003, 2012). In this light, emphasis is placed upon the mental operations carried out for the production and reception of language structures functioning in texts. Yet we also need to recognise that several of these frameworks may be overlapping, offering different and integrating perspectives on the same research objects. Stylistic and linguistic methods of analysis such as deictic shift theory, schema theory, text world theory and others share, at least partially, notions and tools, and in my study, rather than stick to one of these valuable but nonetheless limited approaches, I will try to combine a range of them in order to uncover the particularities of railway discourse. As a whole, the aid provided by a cognitive poetics approach leads to an attempt to better grasp and scientifically comprehend how these stylistic means have been built up, which effects they engender and how they operate as readers navigate through texts.

## 1.2 The Train and the Wor(l)d: Language, Discourse and Text

The world of the train displays a marked linguistic dimension, which is anchored to a specific lexical field or specialised discourse, governed by sets of parameters and conventions (e.g. Adami 2013; Gotti 2005), but is also present in the so-called common core vocabulary (Carter 2004: 115-119), i.e. the type of lexis typically employed by speakers for casual conversation. Many languages indeed coin and employ set expressions, proverbs and sayings based on or referring to the context of trains: in English the word “railway” (rail + way) was first used in 1812, whereas the term “railroad” (rail + road), initially used in the field of mining since 1757, was extended to passenger and freight trains as of 1825. American English tends to favour “railroad”, a lexeme that brings to the fore the linguistic question of separate inheritance, because originally it was a synonym of “railway” in British English as well (Melchers and Shaw 2003: 23). Evidence of such a double lexical set is also in the writing of canonical authors: for instance Dickens utilised both terms, especially in his non-fictional descriptive work, journalism and travelogues like *Pictures from Italy* (1846). However, “railway” and “railroad” eventually emerged as specific indexes of the two widest-spread varieties of English in the world. Interestingly, between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in America the metaphorical construction “underground railroad” was created, and subsequently lexicalised, to designate a secret network of routes and hiding places to help the African slaves escape from the states of the south to those of the North and Canada, where slavery was not legal. As I shall argue later, the expression triggers conceptual references to motion, and figuratively transformation (i.e. from slavery to freedom), and as such counts as a form of cognitive metaphor (Ponterotto 2015). Such a figurative device appears in a range of fictional and non-fictional contexts, with many examples in the literary field including *Flight to Canada* by Ishmael Reed (1976), *Beloved* by Tony Morrison (1987) and *Harriet’s Daughter* by Marlene Nourbese Philip (1988). I will return to this significant allegory in the last chapter, in which I offer a preliminary discussion of the novel *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (2017).

As a whole, English displays copious railway-related collocations, and lexicalised expressions such as “off the rails”, “to be on the right/wrong track”, “let off steam”, “the end of the tunnel”, “to hit the buffer” or “bells and whistles” are just a handful of possible examples in English. The entries for “railway” and “train” in the *English Oxford Dictionary* online