

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award- Writing the Train: Accounts of Railway Travel

Project Title				
Writing the Train: Accounts of Railway Travel				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	Nottingham Trent University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	National Railway Museum			
Website URL	https://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>Trains have long been a popular form of transport but the diverse voices of those who travel on them are under-represented in accounts of railway journeys. This research project recovers the writings of those who are marginalised in dominant literary forms. It asks what railway journeys mean for the overlooked.</p> <p>Whereas academic studies of railway journeys in fiction or in travelogues tend to prioritise works by professional authors such as Charles Dickens and Paul Theroux, this PhD will engage with the non-fiction writings of railway workers and of passengers who have no literary pretensions. It will examine unpublished and neglected published accounts, especially those within lesser-studied forms of print, such as railway company magazines. The resulting thesis will close the gap between the social experience and literary record of travel.</p> <p>Despite the long history of railway travel, the literary and popular image of it does not capture the range of travellers. This project will attend to variables of class, education, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and health. The research will expand the academic and public understanding of how train journeys are experienced and how they are written about.</p> <p>Railway studies concentrate largely on technical or cultural histories or on the cultural contexts and representations of trains. In literary studies, attention is usually on descriptions of train journeys. While this has resulted in valuable work, voices that remain subordinated include those of railway staff, middle- and working-class passengers who are not professional authors, and migrants and refugees. This partnership between the National Railway Museum and NTU's Centre for Travel Writing Studies offers a unique opportunity to uncover and publicise such voices in order to understand from their writings what the railway is to them.</p> <p>The award-holder will present the findings, and exchange ideas and information, at academic and public-facing events at the NRM, NTU and elsewhere. Contact with other institutions with relevant holdings (the British Library, National Archives, regional railway museums) and contribution to the UK reading experience database at http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/index.php will be encouraged.</p> <p>The appointed research student will be expected to combine archive work with close, theoretically informed readings of published and unpublished texts; awareness of historical and local contexts; and knowledge of technological advances relating to the railway, print processes, and forms of communication. At NTU, under the guidance of Professors Youngs and Thacker, the researcher will develop an advanced knowledge of relevant studies and theories of travel writing and of space, modernity and mobility. Working with the NRM team, the researcher will explore the museum's archives, whose holdings include diaries of famous and more obscure engineers (e.g. Robert Stephenson and Nathaniel Grew respectively); travellers' manuscript accounts (e.g. D. Beckwith, William Buckle) and letters home from European destinations (e.g. by H. Bird and Chambers). The breadth of the National Collection will allow the award-holder to weave the material world of the railway journey into their work.</p>				

The project's key research questions, which align closely with resources at the NRM and will inform public engagement activities, seminars and workshops, are:

- i) How is writing about travel shaped by experiences of train journeys?
- ii) How do new technologies of travel and communication affect travel accounts?
- iii) How does attention to the diversity of passengers and to social shifts challenge common assumptions about train travel?
- iv) How do writings by railway workers and by passengers who are not professional authors alter our understanding of train journeys and railway literature?
- v) How do manuscript accounts of train travel differ from published accounts?
- vi) How do magazine accounts of train travel differ from long-form narratives?
- vii) How are current concerns about the climate emergency, sustainable transport, and Covid-19 reflected in writings about train travel?

Indicative outline timetable:

Year 1

Intensive readings in railway and travel writing studies and in primary works. Literature review. Exploratory research in NRM archives. Drafting and revision of two chapters. Visits to Midlands railway heritage museums. Establish website.

Year 2: Research in Cook's and other relevant archives to complement ongoing NRM archive work. Readings in modernity, space and mobilities theory. Advanced readings in railway history. Co-organising a day-seminar at NRM. Drafting and revision of two chapters.

Years 3-4: Completion of final chapters. Revisions. Outreach including a session at Nottingham's Bromley House Library. Submission of journal article. Opportunity to co-edit a special issue of *Studies in Travel Writing*.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Professor Tim Youngs
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	Tim.Youngs@ntu.ac.uk