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Railways of Desire: Prus – Freud – Grabiński¹

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The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive's wheels and pistons.

G. Bataille, "The Solar Anus"²

1.

In 1841, before the first iron tracks were laid in the Kingdom of Poland, writer, educator, and popular humorist Teofil Nowosielski published a laudation in honor of the railroad arguing without irony that the invention "would have a great impact on love."³ Nowosielski's facetious article shows clearly that the railway figured sexually almost from the start. The humorist rightly suspected that railways would not only connect distant cities and

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1 In Polish the title reads "Pociąg seksualny: Prus – Freud – Grabiński." The Polish word »pociąg« is a homonym that denotes both »a railway train« and »drive« – as a concept in psychology.

2 Georges Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1933*, ed. and trans. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6.

3 Teofil Nowosielski, "Koleje żelazne i parowe," in *Humoreski* (Warszawa, 1841) as cited in Wojciech Tomasik, *Inna droga. Romantycy a kolej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012), 123. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

stations, but also entice passion and bring closer the bodies of spatially separated lovers. It was a fully accurate diagnosis even though it predated numerous tales of train travel, including such notable examples as Stefan Grabiński's erotically charged short stories ("In the Compartment" or "Chance," among others), or the Skierniewice passages in Bolesław Prus's *The Doll*. The railway soon became an "icon of modernity"⁴ symbolizing the vast range of social, economic, and industrial transformations of the nineteenth century and played a significant role in man's psychic life. It facilitated communication by shortening the physical distance between the desirous lovers but, first and foremost, it put into motion the complex machine of discourse which enabled fascinating journeys into the depths of the human psyche.

It seems that the desire to be closer to the woman he loved motivated Wokulski to plan the train journey from Warsaw to Krakow with his fiancé, Izabela Łęcka, her father Tomasz, and the profligate Kazimierz Starski. For that purpose he rents the saloon carriage, where the passengers are supposed to spend comfortably several hours. The railway plays an important role in Prus's novel, argues Wojciech Tomasiak, as it contributes both to the realism of the presented reality and to the psychological depth of the characters:⁵ Wokulski travels by train for business, usually sleeping through the majority of the journey. Trying to escape his love for Izabela, he sets out for Paris from the Warsaw terminus of the Warsaw-Vienna railway route, and on the way back (hoping that Łęcka reciprocates his feelings), he departs from Gare du Nord. After the return to Warsaw, the protagonist goes – also by train – to Zaslawek, where he and Izabela spend their happiest moments together. Clearly, the railway becomes an important element in his economy of love, as it takes Wokulski closer and moves him away from the object of desire.⁶ But it is the aforementioned journey to Krakow (which for the main protagonist

4 Wojciech Tomasiak, *Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej* [*The Icon of Modernity: The Railway in Polish Literature*] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo UWR, 2007).

5 Wojciech Tomasiak, "O jednym przypisie do *Lalki* (którego nie ma)" ["On one (nonexistent) footnote to *The Doll*"] in: *Pociąg do nowoczesności. Szkice kolejowe* [*The Train to Modernity: Railway Sketches*] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2014), 117–136. Tomasiak focuses largely on the technical aspects of "railway realism" and its psychological consequences. His valuable remarks should be complemented, however, with a commentary on the medical (psychiatric) aspect, which is the focus of the present article.

6 See also Jerzy Sosnowski, "Czas żelaznych potworów," ["The Era of Iron Monsters"] in *Szybko, szybciej. Eseje o pośpiechu w kulturze* [*Fast, Faster: An Essay on Haste in Culture*], ed. Dorota Siwicka, Marek Bieńczyk and Aleksander Nawarecki (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1996). In his analysis of Prus's *The Doll* and Żeromski's *Homeless People*, Sosnowski views the passenger as a "place where great passions are released," including the "erotic ones" (135).

ends suddenly in Skierniewice) that seems especially important. In the saloon carriage, Wokulski overhears Łęcka talking to Starski in English about the engagement medallion which she has lost. At that point, the journey acquires an additional level of signification for the deeply hurt protagonist. Trying to come to terms with the painful truth of the overheard confession, he becomes acutely aware of the train's shuddering:

For some moments he heard only the rattle of the wheels, and noticed that the carriage was swaying. "I never felt a carriage sway so before," he told himself.⁷

This reaction is intertwined with the sensation of shock caused by the speed of the racing train. Wokulski feels as if he is about to faint or as if a railway disaster is about to happen.

A mist veiled Wokulski's eyes. "Am I losing consciousness?" he thought, grasping the strap by the window. It seemed to him the carriage was beginning to rock and that it would be derailed any moment.⁸

Sudden disappointment resulting from Izabela's overheard confession, intensified by the swaying of the carriage, leads to a state of nervous tension bordering on panic.

[...] he was forced to admit that there's something worse than betrayal, disillusion and humiliation.

But - what was it? Yes: travelling by train! How the carriage was shuddering... how it was rushing along. The shuddering of the train made itself felt in his legs, lungs, heart, brain; everything inside him was shuddering, every bone, every fibre of nerve...

And this rushing onwards through limitless fields, under the enormous vault of sky! And he had to travel on, God knows how much further... Five, perhaps even ten minutes...

What was Starski, or even Izabela? One was as bad as the other... But this railroad, this railroad... and this shuddering.⁹

7 Bolesław Prus, *The Doll*, trans. David Welsh (Budapest, London, New York, Central European University Press, 1996), 567.

8 *Ibid.*, 576.

9 *Ibid.*, 577.

The vibrations and the speed of the train influence the nervous system of the passenger. The mechanical excitements, including the experience of shock, lead to a series of hysterical reactions.

He felt he would burst into tears, begin screaming, smash the window and jump out...

He shut his eyes, clenched his teeth, gripped the edge of the seat with both hands; sweat burst out on his forehead and streamed down his face, and the train shuddered and rushed along... Finally a whistle was heard, then another, and the train stopped in a station.¹⁰

Tomasik argues that the train journey is for Wokulski first and foremost a somatic experience permeating “every fibre of nerve.” The trauma he experiences results not only from the overheard conversation between Łęcka and Starski, cruel and hurtful, but also – perhaps to an even greater degree – from the awareness of being trapped in a passenger car, locked by the conductor from the outside.¹¹ Wokulski’s hurt feelings mix with the fear of a railway disaster and take the form of a neurosis whose symptoms continue increasing with every passing hour despite the fact that he has already left the train: the protagonist wanders aimlessly along the tracks, hallucinating and plagued by racing thoughts. The tension of the nervous system causes also several somatic symptoms characteristic for neurosis whose description in the novel is both realistic and medically accurate. They include impaired vision in one eye, piercing pain in the chest accompanied by the conviction of approaching death as well as trembling of the entire body; he is saved from the wheels of an oncoming train by Wysocki, the railway watchman. But also Wokulski’s morning return from Skierniewice deserves a closer look. He suffers from temporary amnesia and cannot recall leaving the train. “In Warsaw, he didn’t come to himself until he was riding in a droshky on Jerusalem Avenue. But who had carried his valise for him and how did he get himself into the droshky? This he did not know, and it didn’t even matter to him.”¹² Following the tragic events at the Skierniewice station, Wokulski shuts himself off, becomes apathetic, loses his sense of time, and Dr. Szuman suspects that he suffers from neurasthenia.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 577.

¹¹ Tomasik, “O jednym przypisie,” [“About a Footnote”], 120.

¹² Prus, *The Doll*, 597.

¹³ Wokulski’s neurotic personality was described by Jan Tomkowski in “Neurotyczni bohaterowie Prusa,” [“Prus’ Neurotic Heroes”] in *Mój pozytywizm [My Positivism]* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1993), 131-173.

This neurasthenic anxiety may originate from an urge, a drive – a hypothesis substantiated possibly by the sense of jealousy the protagonist experiences while watching Starski and Łęcka engaged in an intimate conversation and acting as if Wokulski was not there. Watching their affectionate exchanges while he himself remains hidden, or rather, watching the reflection of the scene in the car window, Wokulski feels like an intruder who accidentally witnesses a love scene. Analyzing his own dream,¹⁴ one which, significantly, took place on a train, Sigmund Freud recalls a similar, although not identical, event. In the dream, Freud enters the carriage where a rather elegant middle-aged couple ignores his greeting; throughout the journey they continue to ignore the unwanted guest. Freud interprets this scene as “a somewhat extravagant phantasy that my two elderly travel companions had treated me in such a stand-offish way because my arrival had prevented the affectionate exchanges which they had planned for the night.”¹⁵ He explains his own attempt to take part in their conversation as a reference to “a scene of early childhood in which the child, probably driven by sexual curiosity, had forced his way into his parent’s bedroom and been turned out by his father’s orders.”¹⁶ The scene witnessed on the train approaching Skierniewice places Wokulski in a similar position. His anxiety related to being excluded from an affectionate exchange could be read therefore as a repetition of a traumatic scene from childhood where the child is punished for its sexual curiosity.

Numerous elements of “psychiatric realism” in Prus’s novel seem to confirm Dr. Szuman’s diagnosis. We could thus assume with a degree of certainty that the suddenly interrupted train journey, combined with other circumstances of the protagonist’s love life, contribute to the manifestation of the neurotic trait in Wokulski’s personality. The question is: could all of this have been conceived without the invention of the railway?

One could also look here at Karol Borowiecki’s journey from Berlin to Lodz in Reymont’s *The Promised Land*. Having learned about a fire in the factory, Borowiecki rents a special train to Aleksandrów and change to the “extra-train” to Lodz via Skierniewice and Koluszki. The prolonged railway journey increases his agitation: “the nightmare of anxiety continues, persistent, burying its thin claws in every nerve, every center and tearing away ever more

14 Paweł Dybel presents an interesting interpretation of this dream in “Pociąg do stacji Holthurn” in *Okruchy psychoanalizy. Teoria Freuda między hermeneutyką a poststrukturalizmem* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 133-152.

15 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, Vintage: 2001) Vol. 5, 458.

16 *Ibid.*, 459.

painfully.”¹⁷ This nervous journey results in a symbiotic union of man and machine: Borowski’s psyche merges with the impetus of the locomotive, sensing the work of its mechanism, and in turn, the machine appears to recognize the protagonist’s anxiety. Reymont, one of the most insightful observers of modernity who had also personal connections to the railway environment, presents the boundary between human and machine as being quite blurry.

Both of the above examples seem to confirm that the railway became a framework for expressing intense emotions: fear and anxiety (as well as erotic bliss). Having reached Lodz, Borowiecki shows barely any emotions looking at the burnt-down factory: “not a single nerve quivered in sorrow, all nervousness, all fears and anxieties which had rattled him on the train, vanished confronted with the sight before his eyes.”¹⁸ One could hypothesize that progressive industrialization shaped a new kind of sensitivity typical of modern man.

2.

The aim of this article is to discuss the ways in which progressive industrialization and mechanization – embodied most fully by the nineteenth century invention of the railway – influenced the human psyche, resulting in the emergence of knowledge about drives (instincts) determining human life. Consequently, human psyche started to be conceived as a device which operates according to complex mechanisms; Sigmund Freud used the notion of “psychic apparatus”¹⁹ comparing the human psyche to a “compound microscope or a photographic apparatus.”²⁰ I believe that a prototype for several images of human psychic life can be traced to the steam engine and the locomotive, which were responsible for the development of the dynamic aspect in psychoanalysis: upon the invention of the railway, motion became an obsession of modernity and at the same time, it was the key element in how the psychic apparatus functioned. Already in 1844, Polish novelist and diarist Anna Nakwaska, witnessing the steam locomotive depart from Wrocław Station, wonders in awe: “How many insights and philosophical observations are provoked by this power of nothingness which is not identical with the

17 Włodzimierz S. Reymont, *Ziemia obiecana* (Wrocław, Ossolineum: 2014), 746. (Here and further in the article based on the Polish edition of the novel - A.W.)

18 Reymont, 756-757.

19 See “psychic apparatus” in Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London, Karnac Books, 2006), 358. Further in the essay referred to as SP.

20 Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 5, 536.

power of steam and which puts other powers into motion?”²¹ The “power of nothingness” derived from steam and able to animate iron giants must have amazed not only those who traveled by train. The iron railway, just as the human psyche, hid numerous mysteries which mesmerized contemporaries and demanded to be explored.

The discourse surrounding the railway was of interest to engineers and railway professionals, but it also shaped human thought, reflected in literature, philosophy, sociology, law, and medicine. Walter Benjamin noted that the shock caused by technological progress and increased mechanization of life in the nineteenth century became one of the most poignant experiences of modernity: “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.”²² Traffic also played an important role as it involved “the individual in a series of shocks and collisions.”²³ Analyzing the mental life of city inhabitants, Georg Simmel emphasized the “swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli.”²⁴ Everyone wondered about the influence that the railway and the perception of motion (experienced now with an unprecedented intensity) may have on the human organism, especially the human brain and the nervous system. Etienne Trillat, for instance, posits that increasing mechanization and the invention of the railway in particular paralleled the increase in the number of trauma cases where symptoms resembled neurological hysteria.²⁵ Thus, the development of the railway and the resulting threats lead also to the invention of new psychological disorders. All nineteenth century theories of neurosis argue that anxiety is the price the modern citizen needs to pay for taming nature in the name of technological development and civilizational progress.²⁶

It should be emphasized that almost simultaneously with the emergence of the railway, a specific railway discourse emerged and influenced the language of medical discourse describing human life processes through the categories

21 A. Nakwaska, “Wspomnienia krótkiej podróży 1844 roku” [“Memories of a Short Journey in 1844”], *Pielgrzym 1845* [*The Pilgrim 1845*], Vol. 1, 223–224, in Tomasiak, *Inna droga*, 133.

22 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Selected Writings: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 328.

23 *Ibid.*, 328.

24 Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson (Chicester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 103.

25 Etienne Trillat, *Historia hysterii*, [*History of Hysteria*] trans. Zofia Podgórska-Klawe, Elżbieta Jamrozik (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1993), 131.

26 K. Kłosińska, “Teorie neurozy,” [“Theories of Neurosis”] in *Powieści o “wieku nerwowym”* [*Novels about “the Neurotic Age”*] (Katowice: “Śląsk”: 1988), 10–39.

of dynamics and mechanization. The invention of the steam engine had also other further reaching consequences which contributed to the perception of the human being as a machine fueled by energy. Therefore, I believe that the railway discourse, especially the concepts of “railway neurosis” and “traveler’s fugue,” believed to be prototypical forms of male hysteria, played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis. Additionally, they shaped the literary discourse of the railway tales of Stefan Grabiński, who was one of Poland’s most courageous “engineers” of the human psyche: his phantasmal world of railroad adventures was undoubtedly influenced by the notion of moral panic related to the unpredictable results of technological development, which his contemporaries feared would be the end of human civilization. One of the most telling reactions of panic to the invention of railway was expressed by Hungarian philosopher Max Nordau, author of *Degeneration* (1892), a work famously criticizing the state of European civilization at the end of the nineteenth century. In his vision of decadent modernity, Nordau suggests that each manifestation of industrial development and every human act submitted to mechanization degenerates the human nervous system and the entire organism, resulting in a “wearing of tissue”:

Even the little shocks of railway travelling, not perceived by consciousness, the perpetual noises, and the various sights in the streets of a large town, our suspense pending the sequel of progressing events, the constant expectation of the newspaper, of the postman, of visitors, cost our brains wear and tear.²⁷

In a comprehensive analysis of several medical and legal texts from the second half of the nineteenth century focusing on the issue of railway disasters and their consequences (which manifest not only as physical damage, but also neurotic symptoms), Ralph Harrington outlines the dark side of the railroad which:

with its speed, power and danger, was a focus of nervous and psychological disorders; the neuroses associated with the shock of the railway’s appearance in the landscape, the exhaustion and sensory disturbance of the journey, the catastrophe of the railway accident, were all aspects of the railway’s potency as a focus and agent of the destructive, destabilizing, degenerative energies of technological modernity.²⁸

27 Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London, William Heinemann, 1895), 3.

28 Ralph Harrington, *The Neuroses of the Railway: Train, Travel, and Trauma in Britain, c. 1850-c. 1900*, (PhD diss. University of Oxford, 1998), 225-226. Available at: <http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:28dfe6cd-64ea-4924-a7bd-234c002c0fae>, accessed November 10, 2017.

3.

Analyzing the connection between the invention of the railway and the work of Sigmund Freud's, Laura Marcus posits that the former shaped not only the assumptions of psychoanalysis, but also Freud himself. Already as a child, he feared the railway.²⁹ Trying to locate the source of this fear, Marcus looks at Freud's experience of leaving Freiberg in Moravia (Příbor in today's Czechia) where he was born and spent the first years of childhood, which was interrupted when the family had to move house. He traveled with his parents first from Freiberg to Leipzig, and then to Vienna. At the station in Wrocław he saw a lit gas lamp through the window of the train and believed he was in hell. The second part of the journey, from Leipzig to Vienna involved sharing the bedroom with his mother. Seeing her naked at night awakened his libido. Marcus believes that these events were responsible for Freud's railway phobia and significantly influenced his theory of the Oedipal complex. Freud's fear of the railway took the shape of obsessively imagining a missed train which is why as an adult he always showed up at the station at least an hour before departure. Freud himself explains this fear as a consolation for another kind of anxiety, the fear of death related to the image of a departing train.³⁰

The railway plays an important role also in his analysis of little Hans's case. The boy lived with his parents in Vienna (near the Northern Railway) and they often traveled by train to Lainz and Gmunden. One of the first images awaking the young patient's anxiety connected with sexual curiosity was the sight of the locomotive: "When he was at the station once (at three and three quarters) he saw some water being let out of an engine. "Oh, look," he said, "the engine's widdling. Where's it got its widdler?"³¹ the boy asks. With time, the autoerotic interest in having a penis was repressed, tied to the fear of horses: Hans once saw a stallion whose large organ made him scared. The fear of horses expanded to include street traffic, and later also the railway. It was strongly connected to an event described by Hans's father:

This morning Hans again thought something to himself: "A street-boy was riding on a truck, and the guard came and undressed the boy quite naked and made him stand there till next morning, and in the morning the boy gave the guard 50,000 florins so that he could go on riding on the truck."

29 Laura Marcus "Psychoanalytic Training: Freud and the Railways," in *The Railway and Modernity. Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford: Peter Lang: 2007), 155-157.

30 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 5, 385.

31 *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, 9.

"The Nordbahn [Northern Railway] runs past opposite our house. In a siding there stood a trolley on which Hans once saw a street-boy riding. He wanted to do so too; but I told him it was not allowed, and that if he did the guard would be after him. A second element in this phantasy is Hans's repressed wish to be naked."³²

As he analyzed the boy, Freud noted that "Hans's imagination was being coloured by images derived from traffic [*der Verkehr*], and was advancing systematically from horses, which draw vehicles, to railways. In the same way a railway-phobia eventually becomes associated with every street-phobia."³³

He found a similar structure in Dora's second dream whose scenery was also related to the railway:

I was walking about in a town I did not know. I saw streets and squares which were strange to me... Then I went to the station [*Bahnhof*] and asked about a hundred times: "Where is the station?" I always got the answer: "Five minutes." I then saw a thick wood before me which I went into and there I asked a man whom I met. He said to me: "Two and a half hours more." He offered to accompany me. But I refused and went alone. I saw the station in front of me and could not reach it. At the same time I had the usual feeling of anxiety one has in dreams when one cannot move forward. Then I was at home. I must have been travelling in the meantime but I know nothing about that."³⁴

In an explanatory footnote explaining the significance of the railway station in the patient's dream Freud emphasizes the ambiguity of the word *Verkehr* (meaning "traffic," "intercourse" but also "sexual intercourse") and notes that the station is used for purposes of "Verkehr," becoming a "psychical coating in a number of cases of railway phobia."³⁵ These two cases share an important similarity: fear of the railway signals repressed thoughts about sexual activity. In Freudian psychoanalysis, railway-related symbolism is a part of sexual topography where the station (or the tunnel) symbolizes the female genitals and the train - the penis. Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan return to this aspect of Freud's thought in their works.

³² Ibid., Vol. 10, 83.

³³ Ibid., Vol. 10, 84.

³⁴ Ibid., Vol. 7, 94.

³⁵ Ibid., Vol. 7, 99.

There is another striking similarity between these two cases, namely, the presence of a stranger near the railroad tracks. In Hans's fantasy, he is represented by the street-boy evoking thoughts about nudity, and in Dora's dream it is the man in the wood whose offer to help she rejects. What function does this character serve in the fantasy? Does he have anything in common with the figure of the "mad traveler" and the concept of *automatisme ambulatoire* from Sigmund Freud's already mentioned dream (which I will return to later in the text)? Did Hans and Dora encounter at some point a mad wanderer possessed by the desire for motion? An unambiguous answer will not be easy. There exist, without a doubt, connections between the work of the dream and the traveler's fugue. Dora's dream also includes also an interesting element of amnesia: she does not recall the way home from the station and the train journey is repressed. A similar amnesia characterizes two literary "mad travelers" in the state of dissociative fugue: Tadeusz Szygoń and Stanisław Wokulski.

In the context of the signaled ambiguity of *Verkehr*, it may be interesting to look at the Freudian theory of drives (instincts),³⁶ both in its primary and secondary form, which will also indirectly suggest an answer to the question of potential influence of the railway on the development of psychoanalysis. The notion of drive (instinct) can be found already in Freud's early psychoanalytic writing, its general definition introduced in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) and summarized in a later work, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (*Triebe und Triebchicksale*) (1915) In both texts Freud uses the German word *Trieb* denoting motion and impulse but also pressure, which clearly indicates a direction. Freud's basic belief was that human behavior is directed by various drives (instincts) which have their sources (*Triebquelle*),³⁷ random objects (*Objekt*)³⁸ and aims (*Triebziel*),³⁹ that is satisfaction. Freud argues that the essence of drive (instinct) lies in pressure (*Drang*):

By the pressure of an instinct we understand its motor factor, the amount of force of the measure of the demand for work which it represents. The characteristic of exercising pressure is common to all instincts, it is in fact their very essence.⁴⁰

36 For a commentary on the English translations of "Trieb" as "drive" and "instinct" see for instance Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 214. (A.W.)

37 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 424.

38 *Ibid.*, 273.

39 *Ibid.*, 21-22.

40 Freud in Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 330.

The example above proves that Freud, without a doubt, imagining the work of drive (instinct) relied on the basic notions of dynamics where the concept of motion plays the key role. Following Freud, Laplanche and Pontalis define drive (instinct) as a “dynamic process consisting of a pressure (charge of energy, motricity factor) which directs the organism towards an aim.”⁴¹ Their definition concretizes pressure as a “charge of energy, a motor determinant,” in other words as a force which propels. One of the consequences of the dynamic notion of drive is also the notion of inhibition defined by Freud as “the expression of a restriction of an ego-function.”⁴² One could therefore assume that in psychoanalysis, parameters, such as motion and inhibition describing the work of a steam locomotive, constitute key properties of the human psychic apparatus which performs work as arduous as pulling train carriages.

The sexual instinct or drive (*Sexualtrieb*)⁴³ has a special place in Freudian theory, since it has various sources and aims as well as random objects; it is defined in opposition to self-preservation instincts (*Selbsterhaltungstrieb*)⁴⁴ whose aim is to satisfy the needs associated with the bodily functions necessary for the preservation of the individual. Freud emphasizes the fluctuating fate of the sexual drive which is essentially disordered and unpredictable. It can therefore lead to sexual pleasure or shift and become its opposite (hatred, sadism),⁴⁵ or be redirected against the person experiencing it in various forms of self-punishment; sexual drive can also be repressed, inhibited, and sublimated. Freud refers to the energy animating the sexual instinct as “libido.” He modified the original theory of drives in a later work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), by distinguishing two opposite drives: the “death drive” and the “sexual drive.” *Sexualtrieb* and *Selbsterhaltungstrieb* are part of the principle of life personified by Eros while all drives aiming at destruction or self-destruction are elements of the death drive represented by Thanatos.

Freud imagined the sex drive as “a certain sum of energy forcing its way in a certain direction.”⁴⁶ We can thus assume a similarity between the figure of the iron railway and the theory of drives. The first and most obvious anal-

41 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 214.

42 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 20, 89

43 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 417.

44 *Ibid.*, 220.

45 *Ibid.*, 399-400.

46 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (NY: Martino Fine Books, 2013), 125.

ogy can be found in the “pressure” exerted by libido, the “energy” animating both the human and the steam engine. Drives, like a rushing train, are always directed somewhere, have a source and aim, even if the latter is to be achieved via various routes. The analogy runs even deeper and touches upon a conviction popular in the late 19th century that an unrestrained sexual drive combined with a lack of inhibitions may cause a disaster, encapsulated by the metaphor of a train speeding out of control.

In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud presents an interesting argument which may shed more light on the analogy between the sexual drive and the railway: in his discussion of sexuality in children he claims that the sex drive has its source in excitation. He focuses especially on the physical stimulation, “rhythmic mechanical agitation of the body,” related to the pleasure experienced while traveling by train:

The shaking produced by driving in carriages and later by railway-travel exercises such a fascinating effect upon older children that every boy, at any rate, has at one time or another in his life wanted to be an engine driver or a coachman. It is a puzzling fact that boys take such an extraordinarily intense interest in things connected with railways, and, at the age at which the production of phantasies is most active (shortly before puberty), use those things as the nucleus of a symbolism that is peculiarly sexual. A compulsive link of this kind between railway-travel and sexuality is clearly derived from the pleasurable character of the sensations of movement. In the event of repression, which turns so many childish preferences into their opposite, the same individuals, when they are adolescents or adults, will react to rocking or swinging with a feeling of nausea, will be terribly exhausted by a railway journey, or will be subject to attacks of anxiety on the journey and will protect themselves against a repetition of the painful experience by a dread of railway-travel.⁴⁷

This observation helped Freud formulate a more general thesis that “the pleasure derived from sensations of *passive* movement is of a sexual nature or may produce sexual excitation.”⁴⁸ Movement (in this case, of the train) is a stimulus for the human sexual drive, as evidenced by the case of little Hans: his primary fascination with the locomotive is repressed and transforms into a fear of traffic and trains in general. It seems that the source of Wokulski’s fear of the railway may also have its origins in repressed sexuality.

47 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 7, 202.

48 *Ibid.*, 202.

An interesting manifestation of children's fascination with trains discussed by Freud can be found in a series of five surviving photographs of locomotives taken between 1899 and 1900 in Zakopane and Lviv by 14-year old Stanisław I. Witkiewicz.⁴⁹ A perceptive commentary on his fascination with the railway and its influence on Witkiewicz's work can be found in Wojciech Tomasiak's analysis of *The Crazy Locomotive*, where the author quotes the artist's father who claimed that "Stasiek just entered the stage of love for the steam engine" and "found his ideal in the locomotives which he now adores and photographs." Witkiewicz's photographs are a testimony to the emerging artistic sensibility of the painter, but they are also an interesting case of train-spotting⁵⁰ whose underlying psychology is related to the Freudian concept of sexual drive. Further, the child's fascination with trains should be juxtaposed with Witkiewicz's adult fear of mechanization symbolized by the figure of the "crazy locomotive," borrowed – Tomasiak argues⁵¹ – from the stories of Stefan Grabiński, but rooted in the experience of modernity. In the light of interpreting mechanical agitation in Freudian terms, the artist's fear may be a symptom of repression.

Freud's passage concerning the mechanical stimulation of drives indicates that he was familiar with medical studies on the phenomenon of "railway neurosis," also known as "railway spine." He must have encountered the condition during his practice in Charcot's Salpêtrière hospital between 1885 and 1886 – notably, the clinic also treated cases of male hysteria caused by railway disasters and frequent accidents suffered by railway workers which attracted doctors and lawyers between 1886 and 1885.⁵² Their interest stemmed from the rising numbers of lawsuits against railway companies brought by the victims of train wrecks demanding compensation for the physical and mental suffering caused by accidents. Analyzing the impact of those accidents on the

49 They belong to the first photographs taken by the artist, preserved as glass plates and stored by Muzeum Tatrzańskie in Zakopane. Reproductions can be found in Ewa Franczak, Stefan Okołowicz, *Przeciw Nicości. Fotografie Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza* (Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), il. 73, 74, 76o78.

50 An unusual pastime which involves watching trains and registering their names and numbers as well as photographing and filming them. Interestingly, although train-spotting is commonly believed to be a men's hobby, the first evidence of such behavior can be traced to 1861 and the 14-year old Fanny Johnson who kept a diary with the names and numbers of the Great Western Railway trains. (I have learned about this from the *Train-spotting* exhibition held at the National Railway Museum in York between 26.09.2014-15.03.2015.)

51 Tomasiak, *Ikona nowoczesności [The Icon of Modernity]*, 131-138.

52 Trillat, *Historia hysterii [The History of Hysteria]*, 131-138.

human nervous systems, medical examiners attempted to create a systematic classification of railway-related conditions: important contributions in the field include the work of British and German doctors, such as John E. Erichsen, Herbert W. Page, and Hermann Oppenheim, who investigated physical injuries but also injuries to the psyche in patients who suffered no physical damage but exhibited hysteria-like symptoms.⁵³ Freud returns to this issue in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he talks about “traumatic neurosis” (*Traumatische Neurose*)⁵⁴ combining the notion of “railway neurosis” – used in psychiatry and neurology – and the “war neurosis” whose mechanism was recognized in the traumatic experiences of soldiers wounded on the fronts of the Great War. Wolfgang Schivelbusch believes that the concept of traumatic neurosis understood as “a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli”⁵⁵ is generally reflected in Freud’s notion of how the mechanization of life (including the invention of the railway) influenced human psychic processes and perception.⁵⁶

4.

Connections between the literary world of Stefan Grabiński’s short stories collected in *The Motion Demon* and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis seem rather obvious. They were indicated by the author himself when he discussed the genesis of “Engine-driver Grot” referring directly to concepts such as the work of dreams or psychic trauma in an attempt to explore “in a clinical fashion” the motives of his mad engine-driver.⁵⁷ Four decades later, Grabiński scholar Artur Hutnikiewicz located the source of the dynamic concept of being, found in *The Motion Demon*, first and foremost in Henri Bergson’s philosophy, and in Freud’s psychoanalysis. The iron railroad and its symbolism of motion revealed to the writer a yet unknown and mysterious area of the human psyche which was closely tied to fantasizing. In fact, Katarzyna Kłosińska notes, rather than madness and insanity, several of Grabiński’s tales explore

53 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, “Railroad Accident, »Railway Spine« and Traumatic Neurosis,” in *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1986), 134–149.

54 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 470.

55 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 18, 31.

56 Schivelbusch, “Stimulus Shield: or, the Industrialized Consciousness,” 159–170.

57 Stefan Grabiński, “Z mojej pracowni. Opowieść o Maszyniście Grocie. Dzieje noweli – przyczynek do psychologii tworzenia,” *Skamander* 2 (1920): 109.

fantasizing which resists madness revealing the reality of desire.⁵⁸ Thus, the scenery of the railway becomes a privileged phantasmal space for the writer. Hutnikiewicz argues that:

Grabiński liked the railway, enjoyed traveling by train, he even wanted, for some time, to become a railroad worker. Working on *The Motion Demon*, he studied thoroughly the reality of the railway life. Its mysteries were revealed to the writer by his brother in law and engineer, Wiktor Sankowski. Grabiński interviewed several railway workers, spent hours at the station in Przemyśl tracking train traffic, learning about the techniques of driving the locomotive, getting lost in the labyrinth of tracks and switches in order to absorb and become satiated with the aura of this strange and up until now unknown life.⁵⁹

“Engine-driver Grot” is a story where Grabiński pays a symbolic “tribute to the clinical motive” related to psychic trauma.

For Grot’s ideal was a frenzied ride in a straight line, without deviations, without circulations, a breathless, insane ride without stops, the whirling rush of the engine into the distant bluish mist, a winged run into infinity. Grot could not bear any type of goal. Since the time of his brother’s tragic death a particular psychic complex had developed within him: dread before any aim, before any type of end, any limit. With all his might he fell in love with the perpetuality of constantly going forward, the toil of reaching ahead. He detested the realization of goals; he trembled before the moment of their fulfillment in fear that, in that last crucial moment, a disappointment would overtake him, a cord would break, that he would tumble down into the abyss – as had Olek years ago.⁶⁰

The nervous agitation of engine-driver Krzysztof Grot, manifested as an obsessive fear of the train stopping at a station – which could be read as a classic inhibition with regard to the satisfaction of a drive – is in fact the consequence of a psychic injury related to the trauma of war and to witnessing the death of

58 Krystyna Kłosińska, “Stefana Grabińskiego *Kochanka Szamoty*, czyli o tym, jak mężczyzna rodzi kobietę,” in *Fantazmaty. Grabiński – Prus – Zapolska* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2004), 13-57.

59 Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Twórczość literacka Stefana Grabińskiego (1887-1936)* (Toruń – Łódź, PWN: 1959), 149.

60 Stefan Grabiński, *The Motion Demon*, trans. M. Lipinski (Ash-Tree Press: 2005), electronic edition.

his brother, Olek. In other words, “Engine-driver Grot” is a story where war neurosis meets railway neurosis.

Grabiński must have been familiar with the notion of railway neurosis as it appears in several of his train tales. Its symptoms are exhibited by Godziemba (“In the Compartment”), Agapit Kluczka (“The Perpetual Passenger”), and Zabrzeński (“Chance”), but the general atmosphere of nervousness affects almost all of the writer’s protagonists who travel by train. However, Grabiński’s notion of the “railway neurosis” acquires a clearly erotic aspect, related to the concept of “mechanical agitation” known from Freud.

Godziemba’s railway neurosis manifests through a special kind of excitement caused by the speed of the train:

Godziemba was a fanatic of motion. This usually quiet and timid dreamer became unrecognizable the moment he mounted the steps of a train. Gone was the unease, gone the timidity, and the formerly passive, musing eyes took on a sparkle of energy and strength. [...]

Something resided in the essence of a speeding train, something that galvanized Godziemba’s weak nerves – stimulating strongly, though artificially, his faint life-force.[...]

The motion of a locomotive was not just physically contagious; the momentum of an engine quickened his psychic pulse, it electrified his will—he became independent. ‘Train neurosis’ seemed to transform temporarily this overly refined and sensitive individual into someone who exhibited a beneficial, positive force. His intensified excitement was maintained on an artificial summit above a frail life that, after the retreat of the ‘fortunate’ circumstances, descended into a state of even deeper prostration. A train in motion affected him like morphine injected into the veins of an addict.⁶¹

Like a drug, traveling by train stirs the waning, otherwise weakened life force of the “chicken-hearted wallflower” triggering the transformation from a “notorious daydreamer” into a conqueror; from a boy into a man. The railroad intensifies sensation and opens up a space for new experiences: “Godziemba liked riding trains immensely and repeatedly invented fictional travel goals just to opiate himself with motion.” On one such journey he meets a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Rastawiecki. He becomes especially interested in the young engineer’s wife, Nuna, who evokes in him an “irresistible attraction,” one which is difficult to explain as “she did not fit his ideal” and “one couldn’t call her beautiful.” Godziemba, who “was by nature rather cool,

⁶¹ Grabiński, “In the Compartment,” in *The Motion Demon*.

and in sexual relations abstinent," catches the bashful, flirtatious look of the woman which enkindles "a secret fire of lust within him." At one point, their knees touch. Perverse rubbing, intensified by the rhythmical shaking of the train, or (to use a Freudian term) mechanical agitation, awakens in both a dormant "sex demon." When the engineer falls asleep wearied by the monotonous journey, Godziemba and Nuna embrace behind a partition. Lost in passion (described in much detail) they do not see the husband who, now awake, attacks the rival. A violent fight ensues and Rastawiecki meets his death under the wheels of the train, pushed from the platform between the coaches. Upon leaving the train and joining the station crowd, Godziemba abandons the woman he had seduced. Rejecting the role of the victor, he resigns from being a man and returns to the state of fearful exhaustion typical of the dissociative fugue: "A maddened flight ensued along the back-streets of an unknown city..."

The example of Godziemba, who becomes a man only when he travels by train, confirms Herbert Sussman's intuition that, in the nineteenth century, male sexuality became thoroughly redefined as a result of technological developments and civilizational progress related to the rise of industrial capitalism.⁶² Sussman postulates that the industrial revolution produced new forms of masculine identity and that the steam engine played a particularly important role in the process: replacing the power of male muscles, it devalued older models of masculinity rooted in agrarian culture and the ancient cult of the body. Referencing the work of Anson Rabinbach,⁶³ who asserts that the formulation of the laws of thermodynamics in the 19th century changed the image of the body now seen as an engine (*motor*), Sussman argues that the male body is a living machine and the steam engine its most meaningful symbol.⁶⁴ Within this framework masculinity does not function independently but is created in relation to the machinery of the modern world. One could even say that masculinity is a spatial event inscribed in the

62 Herbert Sussman, *Masculine Identities. The History and Meanings of Manliness* (Santa Barbara, Praeger: 2012), 80-99.

63 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1992).

64 The notion of the "living machine" appeared already in Sussman's earlier book, *Victorian Technology. Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (Santa Barbara, Praeger: 2009). In the chapter titled "The Living Machine and the Victorian Computer" he outlines the Victorian concept of the human body as a machine which blurs the boundaries between the human and the mechanical. The Victorians often viewed machines as living creatures, often human-like (evidenced for instance by the practice of naming locomotives and ships), and – conversely – they saw human bodies as machines.

architecture of the modern city-arcade now made of iron. Walter Benjamin believed that it was precisely the arcades that gave birth to a new “kind” of man (in terms of gender), the *flâneur*.⁶⁵ For little Hans, initiation into masculinity accompanied leaving the house and joining the movement on the streets. In Grabiński’s short stories, the world of the iron railroad creates and sustains identity, confronting masculinity with new challenges that the modern man is unable to meet. This is because the world of iron machines is contrasted by Grabiński’s weak, neurasthenic protagonists who seem to be crippled outside the reality of the railway tracks. Outside, they live like amputees. The railroad returns their dignity and becomes a prosthetic for masculinity.

5.

In order to explain the concept of dissociative fugue, we must return to Freud and a certain “twilight” episode he experienced on a train journey. At some point, Freud awakens from a daydream and realizes that he is in a different car than the one he originally got on. Yet, he cannot recall changing cars and concludes that he must have done it while he was dreaming.

How did I suddenly come to be in another compartment? I had no recollection of having changed. There could be only one explanation: I must have left the carriage while I was in a sleeping state – a rare event, of which, however, examples are to be found in the experience of a neuro-pathologist. We know of people who have gone upon railway journeys in a twilight state without betraying their abnormal conditions by any signs, till at some point in the journey they have suddenly come to themselves completely and been amazed by the gap on their memory. In the dream itself, accordingly, I was declaring myself to be one of these cases of *automatisme ambulateur*⁶⁶

He experiences amnesia, as Dora did in her second dream, and explains it with the phenomenon of *automatisme ambulateur*. The concept must have seeped into Freud’s thought from a lecture by Jean-Martin Charcot, who in 1888 became interested in the traveler’s (dissociative) fugue, a state known also as dromomania and described first by Philippe Tissié in his doctoral dissertation

65 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press: 2002).

66 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 5, 457.

entitled *Les aliénés voyageurs* (1887) and devoted to the case of Jean Albert Dadas, a Bordeaux gas-fitter born in 1860. It is also possible that Freud learned about Dadas's case from Tissier's later work, *Les rêves, physiologie et pathologie* (1897), which discusses the question of dreams and Freud rather generally references in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

In his thorough discussion of Dadas's case, Canadian philosopher of science Ian Hacking claims that Dadas was the first diagnosed example of the "mad traveler" (*fugueur*) whose colorful biography supplied psychiatrists with ample material for the study of male hysteria.⁶⁷ At the age of twenty-six, Dadas was admitted to the Saint-André hospital in Bordeaux as a result of disorders related to his obsessive compulsion to travel. He caught the attention of a young medicine student, Philippe Tissier, who with the help of hypnosis diagnosed and described a disorder manifesting itself through repeated and compulsive attacks during which the patients, often suffering from blackouts or amnesia, left home and with no apparent reason went on unplanned journeys to unknown places. "Mad travelers" were mostly unable to explain their motivation nor describe the events of those journeys and tended to "wake up" in a strange town, highly anxious and unpleasantly surprised by their current situation and location. They often broke the law as they traveled without valid tickets, money, or identity documents and sometimes, upon waking up, could not recall who they were and where they came from. But they did not look like madmen or beggars, seeming perfectly fine on the surface with their impeccable clothing, and they rarely displayed any symptoms of their obsession. Unless they attracted the attention of the police, mad travelers remained unnoticed and melted with the crowd. Hacking also notes that the cases of the traveler's fugue in the 19th century were highly correlated with class and gender: "mad travelers" were usually male and belonged to the working or lower middle classes. Dadas's case seems especially interesting here even though it is hard to tell which of his experiences were real (he suffered from amnesia), and which were produced by the interaction between the doctor and the patient (several pieces of information resurfaced as a result of hypnotic suggestion). Based on the information found in Tissier's dissertation, Hacking reconstructs Dadas's case history and argues that *automatisme ambulatoire*, classified as illness thanks to Tissier and Charcot, became a classic example of madness and male hysteria in the era of modernity. Although hysteria was usually interpreted as

67 See Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); the monograph contains several passages of Tissier's dissertation translated to English.

the body language of female powerlessness, the dissociative fugue became the body language of male hysteria.⁶⁸

The figure of the “mad traveler” who suddenly and with no apparent reason leaves his home guided by some unknown and irresistible drive and travels compulsively to a distant place became an inherent element of the railway world in the 19th century, as evidenced by Freud’s own dream or the mysterious “street-boy” seen by little Hans. It appears also in *The Motion Demon* – Stefan Grabiński’s railway cycle – in the eponymous story, and in “The Sloven.” Both tales feature the character of Szygon travelling by train without a valid ticket; in “The Sloven” he catches the attention of an equally mysterious ticket controller, Błażek Boron, a thoroughly unpleasant man and lover of trains, possessed by the passion for motion.

Fundamentally, Boron couldn’t stand passengers; their “practicality” irritated him. For him, the railway existed for the railway, not for travelers. The job of the railway was not to transport people from place to place with the object of communication, but motion in and of itself, the conquest of space. [...] Stations were present not to get off at, but to measure the distance passed; the stops were the gauge of the ride, and their successive change, as in a kaleidoscope, evidence of progressive movement.⁶⁹

Boron’s dislike, or even contempt toward the passengers comes from the “practicality” of their travel resulting from the need to relocate. Boron’s ideal is embodied by a “nameless vagabond” traveling “without a penny to his name” and “with no specific aim, just for the hell of it, from an innate necessity to move.” This “mad traveler,” to use Tissie’s terminology, takes the form of “an individual named Szygon” who travels without a ticket “between Vienna and Trieste,” “apparently a landowner from the Kingdom of Poland,” one “certainly rich,” or so Boron assumes. Others see him as a lunatic but “according to Boron, if he was mad at all, then it was a madness with panache.” When asked where he was going “he answered that in point of fact he himself didn’t know where he got on, where he was bound for, and why.” He confessed only: “I have to go forward; something is driving me on.” Boron sees Szygon as a perfect traveler, one of “these rare pearls in an ocean of riff-raff.”

But the longest literary description, or rather, the most detailed literary study of the dissociative fugue that I know of can be found in “The Motion

68 Ian Hacking, “»Automatisme Ambulatoire«: Fugue, Hysteria and Gender at the Turn of the Century,” in *Modernism/Modernity* 3 (2) (1960): 31-43.

69 Grabiński, “The Sloven,” in *The Motion Demon*.

Demon,” where the character of Szygon makes another appearance. Found “in one of his famous »flight« phases,” in “an almost trance-like state” he travels on a train rushing from Paris to Madrid.

In any event, there was in Tadeusz Szygon’s improvised rides a certain mysterious and unexplained feature: their *aimlessness*, which entailed a strange *amnesia* towards everything that had occurred from the moment of departure to the moment of arrival at an unknown location. This emphatically attested to the phenomenon being, at the very least, puzzling. [...]

Most interesting of all was surely Szygon’s state during these “flights” – a state almost completely dominated by subconscious elements.

Some dark force tore him from his home, propelled him to the railway station, pushed him into a carriage – some overpowering command impelled him, frequently in the middle of night, to leave his cozy bed, leading him like a condemned man through the labyrinth of streets, removing from his way a thousand obstacles, to place him in a compartment and send him out into the wide world. [emphasis T. K.]

Grabiński’s description of the protagonist’s psychic state during the train journey teems with important details indicating without a doubt that we are dealing with a case of the traveler’s fugue (*automatisme ambulatoire*) translated, in fact, by the author quite literally as “flight” (Lat. *fugue*) and described as “almost completely dominated by subconscious elements.”⁷⁰ The crucial symptoms include: compulsive and aimless travelling, a somnambular trance, complete amnesia, estrangement from reality, anxiety upon waking up, and a sense of alienation.

What is the force that drives Szygon? Why is he tormented by the “motion demon” and what is its nature? Grabiński tries to answer these questions indirectly, using the logic of periphrastic indeterminacy: the motor behind the action is a kind of “dark force,” an “overpowering command.” The “motion demon” who haunts Szygon and drives him to visit all those places is clearly a literary paraphrase of *automatisme ambulatoire* which Grabiński must have been familiar with, just as he must have been familiar with the concept of railway neurosis. In the phantasmal world of his tales, two syndromes revealing the dark side of the modern experience of masculinity (“railway neurosis”

⁷⁰ The Polish text also mentions automatization, absent in translation: “a state of almost complete automatization, almost completely dominated by the subconscious reference.” [A.W.]

and “traveler’s fugue”) interweave to reveal a gripping, dramatic, and socially repressed image of male hysteria. A compulsive flight from oneself in the form of railway wandering signals the presence of repressed, drive-related content. In Freud’s psychoanalysis, the desire for flight is a key, perhaps even a paradigmatic metaphor for repression. In Szygon’s case, the desire takes the form of the dissociative fugue. Naturally, “flight is of no avail, for the ego cannot escape from itself.”⁷¹ The repressed drives return in the shape of heightened anxiety sending the protagonists blindly forward onto their next journey. Grabiński’s railway almost always takes the passengers to the sphere of the unconscious, and the motion is an allegory of the drive.

6.

In the discourse of psychoanalysis, the railway is a telling example of the symbolism of sex and the gendering of space.⁷² This is evidenced most explicitly by two passages from the writings of Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan. Let us first take a look at an excerpt from *Écrits*:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. “Look”, says the brother, “we’re at Ladies!”; “Idiot!” replies his sister, “Can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen.” [...] For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings.⁷³

In her analysis of Lacan’s example, Virginia L. Blum notes the emergence of a fundamental metafiction, namely, a “train ride to gender” where the shaping of the subject’s gender identity is presented as a railway journey ending as the train reaches the terminus which signifies the completion of the process of gender symbolization.

In Lacan’s story, the train journey concludes with selecting gender. Gender becomes the journey’s destination and the names of the stations, LADIES and

71 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 14, 146.

72 I base this part of my argument on Virginia L. Blum “Ladies and Gentlemen. Train Rides and Other Oedipal Stories,” in *Places Through the Body*, ed. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (London - New York, Routledge: 1998), 197 - 209.

73 Jacques Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud,” in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York, Routledge, 2005), 115-116.

GENTLEMEN, chosen respectively by the boy and the girl, reveal themselves as objects of desire. The choice of doors made by the boy and the girl means both a choice of gender identity and of the object of desire. Consequently, a space is established from which the subject (having made the choice) is banned forever. This is because the choice of the object can be read also as a sign prohibiting entry to the “country” inhabited by “other” bodies. Lacan’s model is thus clearly based on a heteronormative structure: the subject’s choice determines also the choice of the opposite as the object of desire.

The train’s arrival at the station can be thus understood as reaching the heteronormative aim, in other words, as complete, finished symbolization. However, reversing Lacan’s argument, one could ask what would happen if the train stopped not in the “right” place, but a little further away or a little closer, and the boy saw the GENTLEMEN sign while the girl the LADIES? What would happen if the train took a different route, derailing the Lacanian model of desire? A train which does not reach its destination signifies an impossible symbolization, and consequently, the possibility of a different desire, one located beyond the heteronormative logic of identity rooted in the Oedipal complex.

Blum discusses this possibility in her interpretation of Melanie Klein’s report on the case of a four-years old autistic patient named Dick. In one of the key passages Klein writes:

I took a big train and put it beside a smaller one and called them “Daddy-train” and “Dick-train.” Thereupon he picked up the train I called “Dick” and made it roll to the window and said “Station.” I explained: “The station is mummy; Dick is going into mummy.” He left the train, ran into the space between the outer and the inner doors of the room, shut himself in, saying “dark” and ran out again directly. He went through this performance several times. I explained to him: “It is dark inside mummy. Dick is inside dark mummy.” Meantime he picked up the train again, but soon ran back into the space between the doors.⁷⁴

In her analysis, Klein pays special attention to the boy’s inhibitions in the process of symbol-formation (symbolization) resulting from “the lack of any affective relation to the things around him, to which he was almost entirely indifferent.”⁷⁵ Dick showed no interest in objects and people, he even shunned

74 Melanie Klein, “The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego,” in *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945* (New York, The Free Press, 1975), 225.

75 *Ibid.*, 224.

toys, unable to understand their meaning or purpose. The toy train was an exception: “he was interested in trains and stations and also in door-handles, doors and the opening and shutting of them.”⁷⁶ Klein’s therapy for the little patient involved encouraging him to develop the ability for symbolic representation understood as establishing relations with the objects in the outside world. The train example shows that Dick’s entrance into the symbolic world happened through activating or verbalizing the Oedipal content. Commenting on the case, Lacan notes the brutality and violence of Klein’s method to realize the therapeutic goal.⁷⁷ Under the guise of play, Dick is identified with a small train-penis reaching its destination – the station symbolizing the body of the mother. This Oedipal identification defines Dick’s sexual identity basing on the conflict with the “Daddy-train.” In this gender economy, Blum argues, “the mother’s body is the passive station in relation to the boy’s active locomotion – his train-identity.”⁷⁸ However, she stresses Dick’s repeated escape into the dark space between the outer and the inner doors of the room, which she interprets as a refusal to enter the Oedipal system based on a binary model of gender. Dick’s resistance to the choice of doors made, for instance, by the boy and the girl in Lacan’s “station tale,” is a resistance to the Oedipalized gender. Dick chooses the space between the doors, one outside the binary order, a “third” place beyond the logic of the inside and the outside, located in a pure reality (in the in the Lacanian sense) which resists linguistic and symbolic differentiation.⁷⁹

Trains in Grabiński’s short stories never reach their destination, straying onto unknown tracks, stopping suddenly mid-way or at uncharted stations, disappearing and appearing out of nowhere. Most get derailed and if they do reach the terminus, they come to a halt too early or too far ahead (“Engine-driver Grot”). Railway disasters and all kinds of traffic disturbances, often irrational, become a testimony to a complete failure of symbolization, a proof that the craving which disturbs it is, so to say, multi-track and aimless. The story of engine-driver Grot who “felt a natural dread of stations and pauses”

76 Ibid., 224.

77 See Jacques Lacan, “Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954” trans. John Forrester (New York, London, W.W. Norton & Company), 68-70.

78 Blum, “Ladies and Gentlemen,” 201.

79 Lacan notes: “Melanie Klein differentiates Dick from a neurotic by his profound indifference, his apathy, his absence. In fact, it is clear that, for him, what isn’t symbolised is reality. This young subject is completely in reality, in the pure state, unconstituted. He is entirely in the undifferentiated.” Lacan, “Freud’s,” 68

perfectly captures the desire that evades “closing” and fixture in the process of symbolization.

The same happens in *The Doll*: Wokulski’s journey is a journey abruptly interrupted, an unfinished symbolization thwarting all intentions. His train does not arrive at the terminus (Cracow), stopping mid-way in Skierniewice. The protagonist does not achieve the planned goal: to become closer to his fiancé. From that moment on, he gradually moves away from Izabela and in the end, by taking a train destined, probably, for Moscow, “takes flight” again, a flight from which he is unlikely to return. Just like the protagonists in Grabiński’s tales, Wokulski is “derailed” by a desire overshadowed by the death drive. “Give me an aim... or death,” he cries dramatically as he escapes to Paris: “Who will listen to me in this machinery of blind forces I’ve become the plaything of?”⁸⁰ This machinery of blind forces is, in other words, a pure drive which could be visualized as a rushing locomotive steering Wokulski into the embrace of death. Suffice to say that Dr. Szuman compares him to a broken steam engine:

A steam-engine is not a coffee-grinder, you know, but a huge machine: but when its wheels break, it becomes a useless object and is even dangerous. In your Wokulski, there is such a wheel, that is rusting and breaking down...⁸¹

Let me reiterate: Wokulski is a man-machine, whose mechanism of masculinity is faulty – it jams and breaks down all the time.

Translation: Anna Warso

⁸⁰ Prus, *The Doll*, 385.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 308.