

TUESDAY TALK_October, 2023

Reading on the Move: Railway and Literature

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Abstract

The English society of the Victorian period encountered double trouble in the form of the emergence of the new reading public, comprising working-class men, women and adolescents and the expansion of the public railways network throughout the country. When perceived from the vantage point of the present times, both developments marked the modernization of the English culture, but to the Victorian public, they were unprecedented and hence unfamiliar sources of anxiety.

The new reading public was regarded as uncouth and irrational beings who did not have the training to peruse the 'highbrow' ideas of Geoffrey Chaucer, Aristotle or David Hume. But this newly literate reading class emerged with their own sets of reading choices, expectations and requirements most of which were disregarded and derided by the cultural stalwarts of the period like Charles Mudie or H. L. Mansel. They required reading materials that would be comprehensible to them and a space of reading which would provide them with the time and scope to peruse reading matters of their choice without censorship.

In the meantime, the railways which emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century, had interlaced the entire country by the middle of the Victorian period and became one of the most popular means of conveyance for the public, irrespective of their socio-economic status who could now reach places faster and at a relatively cheaper rate. The railways, in fact, not only transformed the communication system of the country but also introduced a new pseudo-public space for the Victorians. To begin with, this unique space did not emerge with a preconceived notion of public/private dichotomy thereby enabling the travellers, hailing from different economic backgrounds with distinct cultural dictums to accord multiple functions and meanings to the space. Besides, the railway speed condensed the customary sense of time and distance and dissolved the pre-established practice of communication among the fares. The railway travellers, unknown to each other and afraid of potential railway accidents or crimes required a substitute to divert their attention.

As a result, the passengers started carrying different types of reading matters like newspapers, novels, journals, periodicals or magazines on their journeys. These reading matters became “surrogate” landscapes for the passengers who could no longer enjoy the vista outside the moving train and failed to converse with their fellow travellers due to various apprehensions. The increasing popularity of railway reading and the escalating number of railway passengers eventually led to the establishment of railway bookstalls. They became regular suppliers of a variety of reading materials, many of which were, physically and thematically designed to meet the reading environs of a railway carriage, much to the chagrin of the Victorian intelligentsia. Nevertheless, the railways became one of the most effective means to democratize the practice of reading in the Victorian period. The railways did not merely revolutionize the country’s transportation network but also refashioned its cultural landscape by spreading the practice of reading and rapidly, among all corners of society.



Speaker

Hedonic Hunger-Hunger for pleasure

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Abstract

Our relationship with food is a complex phenomenon between our physiological needs, psychological motivations and social influence. Since ancient time, the primary motive behind food consumption was to maintain the calorie need and to prevent starvation. But in modern time, most of the food consumption was driven by pleasure rather than actual calorie needs. The term 'Hedonic Hunger' refers to a state where an individual experience recurrent feeling, thoughts and urges to consume highly palatable foods for the sake of pleasure in absence of physical hunger. Living in an obseogenic environment where cheap, energy dense foods are omnipresent, it is possible that hedonic hunger can overrule the homeostatic eating activity. Animal literature is reviewed indicating that there are several factors including lifestyle, food environment, social unacceptance, smelling of food, food advertisement and negative mood which may be creating an appetitive counterpart to the psychological effects of hedonically driven activities. Increasing levels of hedonic hunger is the principal concern worldwide as it has adverse effects on specific diseases especially obesity. Obesity is associated with a number of risk factors for various diseases including Type II diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, sleep apnea, fatty liver and so on. Also most obese children and adolescents faces social refusal, prejudice and negative stereotyping and such experience may cause negative psychological impact on self-image, self-esteem and moods which may result in mental instability including stress, anxiety and depression.

The Power of Food Scale (PFS) was developed as a quantitative measure to assess hedonic hunger and rated on five point Likert scale. PFS consist of 15 items assessing preoccupation with highly palatable foods across three distinct domains-Food availability scale, Food Present subscale and Food tasted Subscale. PFS total and subtotal scores are derived from summing the item scores and dividing by the number of items. According to Self Determination Theory (SDT), two types of motivation exists- Autonomous Motivation and Controlled Motivation. Hedonic hunger is strongly associated with habit. Self-control, dietary modification and habit play a crucial role in suppressing hedonic hunger. However, it is important to understand that we have the power to transform our relationship with food by trying to acquire joy and pleasure beyond eating highly palatable food. By enjoying hedonic food in moderation and addressing any limiting beliefs around food, we can develop a healthier approach to eating.



Speaker